



SHIELA STEWART

Penetrating
THE
DARKNESS

BOOK 6 IN THE DARKNESS SERIES

Penetrating the Darkness

by Shiela Stewart

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Penetrating the Darkness
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*For my husband, William,
who brings light into my life every day.
You give me strength when I am weak,
encourage me when I am down, and you
always know how to make me laugh.
Without you I would be lost.*

CHAPTER ONE

Jacob's Cove, 2026
Eleven months of Darkness

Dusty Ryder. His name was Dusty Ryder and he was twenty years old. His parents were Alan and Eleanor Ryder. He had two sisters, Alana and Leah. He was going to attend MIT to become a biologist. His name was Dusty Ryder and he wasn't going to give in.

On his dingy, worn out cot, Dusty chanted his name over and over again, reminding himself he was still alive and that he was somebody. He wouldn't let them win. They would not beat him down. He was stronger than that. His mind was stronger than that. But it was so tempting to just give in, to slip into a comatose state, to tuck his mind away to a better place where animals didn't torture and starve and beat humans, where there was bright sunshine, green grass and a warm summer breeze...

He knew that was exactly what they wanted.

So he fought to stay sane, to keep even a small portion of himself alive.

He shivered in the cold cell he'd been kept in for months now, knowing it did him no good to ask for a blanket. The purpose was to make him as uncomfortable as possible so he would eventually break.

He wished he'd never stopped to help that broken-down car on the side of the road. But the young woman had been all alone and it had been night. It would have been wrong of him to have just driven

off, leaving her there all alone. Dusty wished he'd known it had all been a ploy to capture him. That three vampires waited in the trees, ready to jump him. He hadn't even known the creatures really existed.

He knew differently now.

The jingle of keys startled him. As Dusty curled in a ball, tucking himself as tightly to the wall as possible, the door swung open.

No, not him. Please, anyone but him.

"Hello, my boy."

The door clicked shut with an echoing sound that lingered in his mind long after it was closed. He refused to look up.

"I'm told you're refusing the blood that is being brought to you."

Don't look into his eyes, don't acknowledge him, and maybe this time he will go away.

Yeah, right.

The bed creaked, giving way to the pressure of the body sitting on the foot end. Dusty inched a little closer to the wall, wishing desperately that he could melt into it.

"Have they told you what happens to vampires if they don't feed?"

He didn't care. He just wanted the ugly man to go away.

"Have you ever seen a drug addict go through withdrawal? It is very similar, only the lack of oxygenated blood in your system causes your mind to go a little crazy. Because the moment you drink in a vampire's blood, it takes over, killing off the human blood that remains in your system. Vampire blood has less oxygen, hence the sickly gray color. As long as you drink in blood, your body is okay but the instant you cut off the supply, your body goes into a state of frenzy and starts killing off brain cells. And if that weren't bad enough, your lust for blood grows tenfold encouraging you to do anything to get it, including ripping open a human to drain it as quickly as possible. It is not a pretty sight."

Dusty cringed when the icy fingers touched his face. He was helpless when those fingers lifted his chin.

"Is that what you wish to have happen to you, my boy?"

"I'm not your boy," Dusty spat defiantly despite the fingers that cut into his flesh a little harder.

"Oh, but you are. The instant you drew my blood into your veins you became mine. It has been some time since I was treated to virginal blood. Yours was exactly what I needed to rejuvenate myself after that infidel, Fritz, kept me drugged and locked away. I feel so much stronger now and I wish you to feel the same way."

Dusty fought the urge to cry out when the nails cut through his flesh.

"Now, will you accept the blood that was given to you, or do I have to resort to more violence?"

"Go to hell!"

"So be it."

His hand was jerked up and pinned against the wall...by a knife. He screamed.

"Now, do you wish to drink or shall I do the same to the other hand?"

The bile rose in his throat but Dusty quickly swallowed it back before responding. "Go to hell!"

"Have it your way."

This time he wasn't able to swallow fast enough. When the knife was jammed into his other hand, he pitched over and spewed the acid from his stomach. His throat was on fire, his hands, still pinned to the wall by knives, burnt with an intensity that had his vision blurring.

A hand came across his face, jarring him out of his daze.

"Drink?"

"Please. Why are you doing this to me?" The time for bravery had long since passed.

"Because I can. Drink?"

Dusty was a coward, deep inside he knew that, but it didn't stop him from giving in. He was tired of the pain. "Yes."

"Wonderful."

The arm was thrust against Dusty's mouth and he dutifully bit down on the flesh to break through to the vein. He drank like a man gone thirsty in the desert. He couldn't help himself.

With each pull from the vein, he felt himself slipping away.

His name was Dusty Ryder and he had given in. ***Felicity came to this room so often in hopes of feeling some sort of connection to the woman who had been held there. Each time she was disappointed. She didn't know how long ago it had been since the woman had been held here. If her mother were to catch her in this room again, she would receive the same punishment as last time. She hated it when her mother put her into a coma. Each time her mother did that, she woke up years older. The last time she had been caught here, she had been ten. Now, it seemed, she was a woman.

The oddest thing was, she felt like a woman. Where the years between went or how she had the mindset of a woman was beyond her.

But it was.

This wasn't the first time.

Often, Felicity sat alone in her room desperately trying to recall any part of her life as an infant, a toddler, adolescent, but she always drew a blank. It was as if it didn't exist. Oh, she had some memories, but they were so scant that she often wondered if they were memories or if she'd made them up to make herself feel better.

The memory of the woman in the cell wasn't a figment of her imagination. She knew that for certain. The woman's voice had been so pleasant and she had been so kind. And...she was Felicity's real mother.

Felicity wandered around the tiny cell, wondering what the woman had looked like. Her mother, Rajana, had told her stories of her birth mother, horror stories, but Felicity doubted their validity. She was a pretty good judge of character, she had to be, living in the Realm, and the woman in this cell hadn't seemed evil.

Still...all the stories she'd been told could not be ignored.

Trinity Ford was an evil woman with designs to take over the Realm at any cost. Or so Rajana constantly told Felicity. She had to wonder if that part was true, considering Trinity had broken into the Realm some time ago—time was so mixed up to her—wanting to take over. Her mother had told her all about the young vampire woman whom her son, Basil, had taken as his. How she had died for her lover, trying to protect him from his evil father, Avadur. How Rajana had felt sorry for her son and had granted Trinity a new life, complete with new powers to help defeat Avadur and Chaos. Instead, Trinity had taken hold of her new powers with the design to use them against the Vampire Queen, Rajana. Trinity destroyed anyone who got in her way to reach the Realm. She even brainwashed Basil into thinking it was for the best. All these stories about her parents were disheartening. Felicity had no idea what to believe.

That was why she wanted to meet the woman herself, to get her own answers. If only her mother would allow it.

Perhaps there might be a way.

Her mother had always said there was no way to leave the Realm unless she granted it. But if Trinity and her friends had found a way in, how hard would it be to find a way out? Felicity had to try.

She left the room feeling as she hadn't in a very long time. Hopeful.



The blood coursed through his veins. Though it repulsed him, he couldn't deny enjoying the feeling of euphoria. It sickened him that he'd drunk from his tormenter, more so with himself for giving in. But he was so tired of being tortured, teased, and kept like a dog.

The door to his cell opened and he cringed, hating himself for it. When he saw the vile man who had made him a vampire enter the room, he fully expected more torture.

"I am going to reward you, my boy."

Guarded, Dusty waited.

"I am going to let you out of this room for a while. How does that sound?"

Like a dream, but Dusty was skeptical. "Really?"

"Truly." As he sat down on the cot, Dusty shifted a smidge further away. "I thought it might be nice if you were to join us for a meal."

"Us?"

"My followers. It's been a while since we had a gathering. Given the fact that I've been missing lately. But I digress." He waved it off with a flick of his hand, then stood. "Care to join me?"

If it was a trick, Dusty would deal with it, but he certainly wasn't going to pass up an opportunity to possibly break away. He stood, giving a nod of his head. "I would love to."

"Excellent."

When his tormenter knelt down at his feet, Dusty prepared himself for the worst.

"This is simply a precautionary method."

He snapped something around Dusty's ankle, tight enough to make him wince, then pressed a button. The device beeped twice before a green light began to flash. Dusty had an idea what had just happened but kept his fury to himself. "A tracker?"

"Indeed. You are a smart one." He stood, smiling, resting a hand on Dusty's shoulder. "I am going to enjoy having you around, my boy."

"My name is Dusty." As long as he had a name he was still somebody.

"Is that your birth name?"

Dusty nodded, keeping his chin up. "It was my grandfather's name as well."

"Hmm....I think I would rather call you Destroyer. Yes, I rather like that."

Dusty didn't, but he stayed silent. "And what do I call you?" Besides pig?

"Chaos. I once had an average human name but my maker wanted me named Chaos. I much prefer the name over what my parents gave me."

Okay, he'd play. "What was the name your parents gave you?"

"Clovis." Chaos shuddered.

Dusty bit his tongue and tried desperately not to laugh. Okay, so Chaos was a better name. Still, Dusty liked his real name.

"Shall we, Destroyer?"

Dusty tightened his jaw and nodded.

Chaos led him from the room. As he walked through the building where he'd been kept for months now, Dusty made a mental note of every nook and cranny along with every exit. Even if he had a tracker on him, it wouldn't stop him from attempting to escape.

"Ah, they are ready for us. Right this way, Destroyer."

Cringing, Dusty followed Chaos to the row of tables in a room that looked like an auditorium. Crowds of creatures sat at the tables and as he and Chaos entered the room, all eyes turned to them.

"Everyone, welcome our newest member. Destroyer."

The cheers of welcome rang out from everyone in the room and Dusty did his best not to scream out that his name was not Destroyer.

Chaos led him to a chair near the front of one of the tables and, taking the seat, Dusty was engulfed by huge arms of some sort of beast-like character to his left.

"Welcome aboard, Destroyer."

"Thanks." He hated that name. Pulling away, he searched the room for familiar faces. In the early days he'd been held in a cell with several other people. He wondered if any of them had survived. Not seeing them in the room, he deduced that either they had been killed or were still being held somewhere.

"I wish to thank everyone here for helping me regain my strength during my downtime. Giving me this young man has done wonders for me." Chaos looked down at Dusty with a wide smile. "And I know I will continue to grow stronger in the coming weeks. I would also like to thank all of you for keeping my whereabouts a secret. Thanks to the Dark Mystics, the cloaking spell is holding strong. So join me now, for a drink in celebration and to our future."

Everyone lifted wine goblets and when the beast beside him nudged his arm, Dusty picked up his own glass.

"We will rule this city in no time."

Dusty drank the bitter wine, wondering how soon he could make a break for it.

CHAPTER TWO

It was too quiet. Trinity didn't like quiet. She wanted something to distract from her thoughts of rescuing her daughter from the Realm. It was all she could think about since Rajana had snatched her newborn daughter from her arms only moments after birth. In the week since she'd been in the Realm of Mystics, held captive by Rajana before being rescued by Cooper, Trinity was feeling a tad bit anxious. But she understood why Starla, their resident witch, wanted to take a break. It had been a hard spell for her, especially the one Basil and Cooper had performed. She'd gathered the strength from every person in the room but the energy she'd taken from Basil and Cooper had been the fuel to allow her to break through to the Realm. It had drained Starla and she needed some time to recuperate.

In the meantime, Trinity was left feeling anxious and some of that anxiety might be remedied if only she could find some action. Why the hell was it so quiet out on the streets? Where were all the animals that had destroyed what had once been a beautiful city? It was a far cry from beautiful now, thanks to the monsters who were attempting to claim it. Since Chaos' ritual involving the blood of five innocent young girls had been performed to bring back the epitome of all evil, Avadur, nothing had been right. For nearly a year, the city had been cast in darkness, the human residents had flown the coop—rightfully

so—all plant life had died, and every creature had come to stay in Jacob's Cove. They'd done nothing but cause havoc and now no one was around.

She didn't like it one bit. It spelled trouble. If they were huddled inside of whatever home they'd taken upon themselves to invade and call their own, it meant they were planning something.

And with Chaos on the loose...well, that spelled even more trouble.

"Didn't I tell you not to go out on the hunt alone?"

She acknowledged Basil, the love of her life, the man she hoped to marry soon, with a mild grunt as she kept walking. She should have known he would come after her.

"I know you're restless, my fiery princess, but—"

She stopped short, turning to him. He was one of those men who took the breath away of any woman who gazed upon him, and Trinity had done plenty of gazing in the nearly eight years they'd been together. His jet black hair came to his broad shoulders. He had the stunning good looks of a god with crystalline blue eyes that when he sent them in your direction, made your knees quiver. She loved him with all her heart. "What did you just call me?"

His brow curled and even though it would make most men look grumpy it only added to Basil's dark good looks. "Fiery princess?"

"Yes. You haven't called me that in...shit, I can't remember how long it's been."

"You asked me to stop calling you that when we broke up," he reminded her, slipping a lock of her hair behind her ear.

Only because it had hurt to hear him call her that after he'd slept with another woman. "We're back together now and for future reference—" she grabbed hold of his shirt front, yanking him right up to her face, "—you ever pull crap like that again, I will castrate you and shove your member up you—"

"Whoa, okay, I get the point. Shit, Trinity, I thought we got past this."

"We did. It just needed saying." She kissed him before releasing him.

Rearranging his jacket, Basil smiled as he spoke. "Does that mean I can call you my fiery princess again?"

She sauntered off, pretending not to care one way or another, even though she was smiling from ear to ear. "Whatever. It's your choice." She jumped when he appeared in front of her. "I hate when you do that."

"I know." Now he grabbed hold of her shirt front, drawing her up to his face. "I love you, my fiery princess."

She couldn't hold back her grin. "I want to get married as soon as the sun comes back. I want a ceremony in the backyard, facing the mountains, at sunset, with gardenias all around us."

His head tipped to the side and only the left corner of his mouth curved up in a smile. "Well, someone's been thinking."

"I have." She slipped his fingers from her shirt and continued walking. "And I figure seven years together is a long enough time to get to know each other. It's time we made it official."

"I agree."

She stopped and so did he. "You do?"

"Save that for the wedding day." He smiled, running his index finger along her cheek. "Truth is, I've wanted it for some time. I just wasn't sure how to approach it."

"Well, approach it already. I want a ring and not some huge gaudy-looking thing either. Something small, tasteful...then again, a huge diamond would do a lot of damage if used properly." She lifted her fist, curling it, imagining a huge rock on her finger as she slammed it into some slimeball's face. "But I'd be constantly cleaning the blood and body parts off it. Smaller is better," she decided.

Taking her fist in his hand, he caressed her knuckles with his lips. "As you wish. Now, what are you doing out here alone?"

"Brooding." She shrugged, continued walking. "I know Starla needs time, but—"

"I'm eager to do the spell as well."

She turned her head as she walked. "The more time we waste, the older our daughter gets. I was only in the Realm for hours Earth time, yet it was days for me. It's been nearly a month since she was born. If we wait much longer....well..." She simply sighed.

"She will still bond with you, my love." He took her chin in his hand, stopping her. "You are her mother and she will know that."

"Will she? What if Rajana's done something to her? God, Basil, I have no idea what she is doing to my baby. Just thinking about it makes me want to rip her head off. Rajana," she added when his brows lifted. "We have to find her before it's too late."

"I know, and we will." He kissed her before releasing her. "I promise."



Dusty had to admit that having a full belly for a change was an incredible feeling. Since being captured he'd been fed a variety of disgusting things that couldn't be considered food, or starved for days. Being able to eat as much as he wanted without having it taken away was a beautiful thing. But he was still guarded. He fully expected that at any time he could be hauled back to his cell. Given the company, being in his cell right now had its benefits.

He wasn't used to crowds, preferred working and being on his own, most of the time. But even if he did enjoy the company of crowds, he wouldn't like this particular group. Not only were they filthy beasts who preferred their meat raw, their blood warm, and their music loud, but they were vulgar and rowdy. And if the guy next to him elbowed him one more time Dusty was going to stab his fork into that guy's twitching left eye.

"Ain't that right, Destroyer?"

When the elbow came towards him, again, Dusty shifted just out of his reach, wrapping his fingers around his fork. *One more time, you creep.*

"Our new recruit needs to be initiated," Chaos spoke up as he stood. "And tested. Take him out on a hunt. Use one of the fleshies as bait." He rested his hand on Dusty's shoulder, giving it a squeeze. "And remember what you wear on your ankle, my boy."

How could he forget? The damn thing was cutting into his skin.

"Behave, and you will be allowed to come and go as you please."

Oh goodie. Wasn't he the luckiest hostage ever?

He was elbowed again only this time Dusty didn't hide his annoyance. "You do that again, Slasher, and I'll rip your arm off and slap you with it."

The whole room roared with laughter. The big, beastly guy next to him ruffled Dusty's hair playfully. It wasn't a pleasant experience.

"You kill me, kid," Slasher laughed, ruffling Dusty's hair a little more.

Yeah, he'd like to. Where that came from he wasn't sure. He wasn't a killer. He'd never so much as thought about murder or harming anything living. Take a deep breath, Dusty reminded himself to calm down.

"Come on, let's take you out and see what you can do."

He was lifted, literally, off his seat by the brute and set on his feet. Dusty's jaw ached with the tension of clenching it.

"And, boys," Chaos lifted a finger as he spoke, "do take him downtown. We don't need certain people sniffing around here should you become noticed."

"Yes, sir," Slasher acknowledged, dragging Dusty along as he left the room. "You and me, kid, are gonna be best pals."

Not if he could help it. But Dusty kept up the pretense, smiling despite the desire to strangle him.



Felicity stayed in her room, grateful her mother was occupied with the scary demon man they called Avadur. She'd only seen glimpses of him, but they were enough to guarantee she would never set foot near his confinement area. He was a scary man with eyes that looked calm until he smiled. She'd seen him smile at her mother when she'd gone to speak to him after her birth mother had escaped with her friends. And he had scared the breath right out of Felicity. She didn't know how long he'd been there, only that her mother had often warned her never to venture near his confinement area. Warned her that he was a man who held no regard for any life, even that of his own kind, and would eat her up if she got in his way. Literally.

So Felicity had decided she would stay as far away from him as possible.

Sitting in her room, on the floor that was as soft as her bed, Felicity played with her powers. She had been told often enough by her mother that she was very strong, that her powers could be volatile if she didn't use them carefully. Her mother had schooled her proficiently when it came to her powers, but there were things her mother didn't show her that Felicity knew she had the ability to do. Such as glowing, though she wasn't too sure what good such a power would do. Another ability she had was the power to make the air ripple. Again, she wasn't sure what purpose that had, but it was fun to experiment with it. She liked to watch the things in her room vibrate about as she caused the ripple. The one mistake had been attempting it in the bath. Water had spewed up in a turbulent vortex that had soaked the entire room. She'd made busy work of drying the place, which hadn't been too bad when she used her powers to stir up air.

So she continued to experiment. *If all I have to do is think something and it happens, couldn't I think to break free and it will happen?*

Rubbing her hands together, Felicity decided to give it a try.



He'd never been to Jacob's Cove before, but as Dusty was driven away from the place he'd been held, he was shocked to see the ruins of the city. Houses were burnt, charred yet still managed to stand

ground on their foundations. Garbage littered the streets, cars flipped over, windows shattered, trees dead.

The darkness didn't surprise him. He'd heard enough talk to know that some sort of spell had been cast to cover the city in darkness, though at first he'd laughed it off, until day after day he witnessed the darkness without a single day of sun. The city was deserted now, all but for the animals that ruined it.

What a shame.

"This spot should work." The driver pulled over, coming to a stop at the curb.

When the car doors opened, Dusty was pushed out. The car behind them came to a stop and the doors opened up. He watched as two vampires yanked a young man from the trunk, then dragged him to the sidewalk. Dusty didn't recognize the boy, but he looked to be no more than fifteen, at best. What were they going to do with him?

"Destroyer, meet your prey."

They shoved the young boy towards him and Dusty tried to back away. He was pushed forward and the terror in the young boy's eyes made him sick. "I'm not going to hurt you," he reassured the frightened lad.

"The hell you're not."

Slasher lifted the boy's arm and Dusty saw the knife in his hand but before he could stop what was about to happen, the brute sliced into the kid's arm.

The scent of blood permeated the air, tingling his senses.

"Taste him."

The arm was shoved towards his face and though inside Dusty cringed, his tongue slid out to sample.

"Good, now find him. Run, kid."

The young boy was released and he ran as if his life depended on it.

It did.

"Whatcha waitin' for, Destroyer. Go get him."

"Where's the challenge. He can still see the kid."

Did they want him to do what he thought they wanted him to do? Slasher grabbed hold of Dusty's arms. "You still taste him, right?"

Dusty nodded absently.

"Good, hold on to it." He lifted his head, looked up ahead, then back down at Dusty. "Now, go get him."

"What?"

"Get him."

"You want me to chase him?"

"Yep. You taste his blood and should be able to smell it as you go on your search. Come on, Destroyer, earn your name."

Slasher pushed him forward and Dusty thought this might be the perfect opportunity for him to break away. He started jogging, looking behind him occasionally to see if they would try to grab him. When they didn't, he picked up his pace. He heard a snap that sounded a great deal like a wire short circuiting, only five times as loud. Covering his ears, he turned just as a bright light split the darkness in the sky overhead.

CHAPTER THREE

Dusty dove behind a turned over car, covering his head. He heard shouts from the men behind him, more crackling before everything went silent. He waited a bit before taking his hands off his ears. Carefully, he inched over to peek around the car. Seeing Slasher along with the other creatures get to their feet, Dusty kept behind the car, still not sure what was happening.

"What we got here?"

"She looks real pretty."

"Maybe she's an angel, dropping from the heavens like she did."

"Looks ripe to me. Smells fresh too."

Curiosity getting the best of him, Dusty shifted from behind the car, keeping low to the ground in hopes he wasn't noticed. He ducked behind another vehicle, peering around the edge to see who they were talking about.

He heard whimpers that sounded distinctly female.

"Aw, look, she's scared. We should hold her and make her feel better."

Dusty watched as Slasher moved forward and lifted someone up. He caught a glimpse of something white with feet kicking out. He moved closer, wanting to get a better look.

"Ooh, she feels real soft."

He saw her now, a frail-looking woman dressed in some sort of white dress with hair as dark as the night that came just past her waist.

And the beasts were having fun with her.

"Leave her alone," he bellowed, bravely standing up from behind his hiding spot. Her eyes met his, a blue so beautiful he was lost in them. What happened next left him stunned.

She began to glow — there was no other explanation for it. A white light began to shimmer off her and as if it burnt him, Slasher dropped her quickly and backed away. When she began to glow brighter, burning his eyes, Dusty ducked down behind the car. He heard the screams, all male, ricocheting off of the vacant buildings around him, bouncing off of the pavement and filling the air.

Then it all went silent.

Dusty inched his way to the edge of the car. Slowly he lifted himself into a crouched position and looked out over the hood. All he saw was a bundle of white curled in a ball on the sidewalk. No signs of any of the animals that had surrounded her.

What the hell?

She moaned.

Looking around, he didn't see anyone else. He moved out from behind the car, slowly making his way towards her. As he got closer, he smelled burnt flesh. It stung his nose, so he pulled his arm over his mouth and nose as he inched forward.

He sidestepped around a pile of ashes on the ground. A sparkle of silver caught his attention and he recognized it as the ring Slasher had worn.

The girl whimpered, drawing his attention. "Um...are you okay?" She jumped when he spoke, startling him. "It's okay. I'm not going to hurt you." He held his hands up as she spun around to face him. Her eyes were almost hypnotic.

"You called out to stop them," she spoke softly.

He blinked away his daze. "Yeah. Um...are you okay?"

"They wanted to harm me."

"Yeah. Do you know what happened to them?"

"They were going to hurt me. I didn't mean to do it, but they frightened me and when I get frightened sometimes I have difficulty controlling myself. I didn't mean to hurt them."

Her voice was like a dove's song. Soft and soothing. He felt drawn to it. He looked down at the piles of ash, then back up at her. "Did you...kill them?"

"I was frightened and then they started to scream and it frightened me even more. They all just crumbled."

He looked down at the piles, his brow lifting "You turned them to dust." He whipped his head up to her. "Please don't do that to me."

"I would never—I never meant to—they frightened me—" Her head jerked to the side at the sound of a crashing trashcan in the distance.

She ran to him, into his arms, and he was compelled to hold her as she stared with fright. "It's okay. Probably just cats or a dog."

"You'll protect me? Please, don't let me harm someone else."

"Okay, just stay calm." He had to get her someplace safe. Looking around, he saw one of the few buildings that wasn't charred or broken down and decided it would do. "Come with me." She clung to him so he started walking across the street to the building. "What's your name?"

"Felicity." She quivered in his arms.

"My name is Dusty. It's a pleasure to meet you, Felicity." He tried the doorknob, found the door open. He gave it a shove before he stepped over the threshold. A mouse scurried across the floor, Felicity shot her hand out, squealing, then the mouse went poof. "Holy shit!"

She dove into his arms, hiding her face in his neck and began to sob.

"Okay. Okay, just stay calm." What the hell had she just done? She'd pointed at the mouse and it vanished. It just disappeared.

"I'm frightened, Dusty."

Was she ever! She was shaking worse than a leaf on a very unstable tree in a wind storm. "It's okay. You're safe now."

She lifted her head, looked into his eyes. "You will protect me, Dusty?"

"Yeah...I'll protect you. But first, I need you to lighten your hold on my neck." The girl may be thin but she sure had a firm grip.

"But I'm frightened."

"I promise if you let go, I won't let anything happen to you. Okay?"

She nodded, then slowly pulled her arms free.

"Great, thanks." He looked around at his surroundings. Being able to see in the dark was still something he was getting used to. It looked like some sort of medical clinic. There were rows of chairs, a wide window to the side with filing cabinets lining the area at the back. To his left he saw a list of doctors' names on a black plate by a door leading to the back area somewhere.

Yep, it was a clinic.

"We need to barricade the door so no one can come in." He wasn't proud of it, but he squealed like a girl when the chairs flew towards the door, piling one on top of the other. "Holy shit!"

"Will that work?" she asked softly.

"Hell yeah! You have some wicked powers." Though he had no idea how such things were possible, he was absolutely fascinated. "What are you?"

"I was born from two vampires, one of which is the sole heir to the original vampires. My mother, Rajana, is the queen of all vampires and reigns from the Realm of Mystics. Her powers are greater than mine."

He was dumbfounded and didn't have a clue what she was talking about. "Vampires have a queen?"

"Two, actually, though my birth mother is more of a princess but is called the queen by those who live here."

"You have two mothers?"

She nodded, her long black hair falling like a cloak over her shoulders. "I was taken away from my birth parents after my birth for my protection. According to my mother, my birth mother is the epitome of evil but I'm finding that hard to swallow as when I spoke to her, she seemed genuinely decent and I sensed no harmful auras coming off of her."

Wow, she sure could talk. Not that he minded. The sound of her voice was really soothing, soft, like a whisper from an angel. "I think I need to sit down." He jumped when a chair slid over, coming to a stop directly behind him. "I definitely need to sit down."

"The color of your face is fading. Are you feeling all right?"

"About as all right as a person can be after seeing a woman glow and objects fly across the room on their own."

"I've startled you." She knelt down at his feet, the white dress she wore pooled around her like cloud of silk. "Have you never seen such things before?"

"Never. Heck, a few months ago I didn't even know vampires existed."

"But you are a vampire."

"True, but I wasn't always a vampire. I have never seen anyone actually move objects with their mind. This is fucking phenomenal."

"That's profanity."

He looked up at her and again was drawn in by her eyes. "Yeah, sorry. I don't swear often but it just came out. Hey, I don't suppose

you could figure out a way to make this thing disappear?" He lifted his ankle, tapped on the tracker.

"What is it?" She took his foot in her hand and closely examined the bracelet.

"It's a tracker." When she looked up at him, confused, he explained. "It's an electronic device meant to keep track of the person wearing it. A really bad guy put it on my ankle to keep track of me. If he finds out I've escaped, he'll hunt me down and lock me back up in a cell."

She gasped, her big blue eyes going wider. "He wishes to jail you against your will? I can't have that. You are my protector, Dusty."

In the time it took him to blink, the tracker was gone. All that remained was a red ring around his ankle. "I could kiss you right now. Thank you."

"Kissing is an intimate embrace between two lovers."

"Right. It was only a figure of speech. Okay, so we have one door barricaded, but we need to see what other accesses there are to this place. The more secure the better."

"I could evoke a protection spell over this domicile that would prevent anyone other than ourselves from entering."

His brow shot up. "You can do that?"

"I can, and I will, to keep us safe. Is that what you wish me to do, Dusty?"

"Yeah. That would be great. A spell? That's like witch stuff, right?"

"Magic, yes. I will need silence and a moment to concentrate."

Dusty held his hand out, took a step back. "Have at it."

"Pardon me?"

"Go for it. Do it. The spell," he explained at her look of confusion. "I'll just be over here." Walking to the back of the room, Dusty waited while she did her thing.

Felicity was a strange one. An incredibly beautiful strange one. She had a naïve quality to her, an innocence about her that was rather appealing. Not to mention those funky powers of hers. He would have never believed it if he hadn't seen it for himself. She was amazing.

Then he remembered the piles of ashes on the ground around her and the bodies that had once been.

She was amazing, but a little scary to boot.

"There you go. We are protected."

"Just like that? How do we know it works?"

"You do not believe me that it will work?"

Shrugging, he slipped his hands in his jean pockets and noticed just how filthy he was. "It's not that I don't believe you, but we won't really know it works until someone tries to break in here. I need a shower and a change of clothes." He just hoped there was a shower in this place that he could wash up in.

"Where are you going?" she asked when he started off towards the door that led to the back area.

"To find a shower and see if anyone left any clothes behind." Something that he could actually wear without looking like a complete dork.

When she followed directly beside him, he was mildly curious but figured she was curious as well. He walked from room to room, looking in the cabinet drawers, only finding examination sheets and gowns. There was no way in hell he was going to be caught alive or dead wearing one of those piss yellow examination gowns. Heading to the back of the facility, he pushed open a door labeled *Medical Employees Only*.

He nearly drooled at what he found.

"Oh, mommy. I am home." Before him was a state of the art laboratory, complete with all the modern instruments.

"I'm confused. This is your home?"

He could tell by the absolute seriousness on her face that she wasn't joking. "No, I don't live here. It was a figure of speech. I love performing experiments and examining the human body, including the genetics that make up the whole. I'd planned to go to a special university for gifted learners. I was going for my Bachelor's in Biological Engineering with a goal of investigating infectious diseases."

She stared at him blankly.

"I wanted to find out what makes people sick and see if I could cure it."

"Ah... You would do that in such a place as this?"

"Well..." he laughed as he moved through the room. "This is a smaller version of what I would be working in, but yeah, it would look like this." As he moved through the room he realized just how much he missed his beakers, microscopes, and books. What he wouldn't give to be able to do some experiments.

"Interesting." Felicity walked about the room, picking up items as she passed and examining them.

As eager as Dusty was to get back to his normal life, he knew that part of him had changed. He wasn't normal anymore. He was a

vampire. Would he be able to go back to his old life? What would his family say when he told them? How was he going to tell them?

He jumped when Felicity touched his shoulder.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to startle you. Is this what you came in search for?"

She held up a white lab coat, though it wasn't exactly what he had in mind, he supposed it would do. He could always wash his clothes and wear the lab coat while they dried. "Yeah, it'll work for the time being. Now to find a shower or someplace I can wash up." Seeing a washroom at the back of the lab, he decided it was better than nothing. He walked into the room, she followed. "What are you doing? You can't come in here with me. This is private." He gave her a gentle shove, then closed the door, locking it behind him.

He was going to enjoy this immensely.

CHAPTER FOUR

This place was so odd. Standing in the room filled with glass jars and strange metal objects, Felicity wondered what it was a person would do with all of these items. Experiment? She wasn't familiar with that term. Or infectious diseases.

She heard water running from behind the closed door and decided Dusty was doing what he had expressed. Washing himself. She had to admit he did look rather scruffy and in need of a bath. His clothing was in sad shape as well. The jeans he wore were torn and worn in the knees. His shirt was filthy with blood and other bodily fluids that made her wonder how it was they came to be there.

She wondered how she could obtain such items of clothing that she'd seen other wear. Felicity gave her silky gown a tug, frowning. For so long now she had longed to be rid of the filmy garment, but her mother always insisted it was the appropriate wear for the Realm. Well, she wasn't in the Realm now, was she? If she wanted to blend in with the normal civilization, she surely should dress the same.

Felicity wondered if her mother had figured out she was missing yet and if so, had she attempted to find her? Felicity could only hope the spell she had cast would do as she hoped, keeping her mother inside the Realm. All she wanted was some time to discover who she

was and who the people were who had given life to her. Was it so wrong for her to want to see if the ones who had created her were as evil as her mother stated?

If her birth mother had such evil blood in her veins, did that mean as a child of such evilness, she would inevitably become bad as well?

Felicity had to know.

When the door opened, she turned to see Dusty exit. He looked cleaner, his curly hair was now damp and clinging to his round head, and he wore the white jacket she had given him. His legs, however, were bare along with his feet.

He looked better now that he had cleaned up.

"I feel so much better."

"You look better. Were you not able to wash before today?"

"The last time I washed was probably a week ago and to call that a shower is a joke. They washed me down with a fire hose."

"They?"

"The creeps who kidnapped me and held me hostage." He shook his head, waved a hand in the air. "But that's over now and I am not looking back. I need pants."

"As do I. I would like to wear clothing like yours. Do you know where I could obtain such items?"

He gave her a baffled look, the corner of his mouth curving up slightly. "Um...a clothes store but I doubt anything's open...or maybe they are. I don't know. I've been locked up for months."

"How horrible for you." Feeling compelled to comfort him, she took him in her arms, stroking his back gently. He smelled fresh, clean, and the fragrance that came off of him was quite pleasing.

"Yeah...thanks." He patted her back, then pulled away. "Let's see if there are some scrubs lying around."

"Scrubs?"

"Medical clothes. Never mind. Just follow me."

She did as he instructed. When he began looking through drawers, she wondered what it was he was looking for. He cheered and held up an item of clothing in a soft blue.

"These will do until my jeans are dry. Now, let's see if there are some in here for you."

She watched as he scrounged through the drawer, pushing aside items of clothing until finally pulling up an item in yellow.

"These have a tie-up waist which should work perfectly for you. The shirt might be a bit baggy, but it'll do."

She took the clothes from him, set them on the table beside her, then began to release the buttons on her dress.

"What are you doing?"

"Disrobing so I can put on these other garments." She continued undressing.

"Whoa there." He laid his hand over hers, stopping her. "You can't just undress in front of me."

She cocked her head to the side in confusion. "Why not?"

"It's just not right. You should go into the washroom and change."

She didn't understand why but did as he asked. Closing herself in the room, she stripped from her dress. Tossing it on the floor, she hoped she never had to wear it again. She dressed in the yellow pants and shirt, then looked at herself in the mirror and decided she liked what she saw. Aside from the river of hair that spilled from her head, down her back. She was so tired of the length of it and wished she could be rid of it.

Stepping from the washroom, Felicity panicked when she couldn't see Dusty in the room.



Trinity sat in the circle, knees crossed, hands folded up, eyes meeting Basil's. She should have known he wouldn't let her try this one alone. Not after the last time when she'd been taken captive by Rajana. She didn't mind having him along for the ride. Four eyes were better than two.

And maybe if she was lucky she would get a chance to see him kick his mother's ass. Cooper had told her about the fight between mother and son and she only wished she had been there to see it. Though it couldn't have been an easy thing for Basil to do, given the fact that the woman was his mother. Still...Rajana had taken their child—

"Trinity."

She jumped and shook her thoughts away. "What?"

"Keep your mind open. You've got enough lines in your forehead to make up a road map. Relax."

Pursing her lips, she told herself to calm down, to stop thinking and just concentrate on her breathing. Yet she couldn't. "I need a few minutes." She stood, giving her arms a shake.

"If you're not ready to do this, Trinity, we can do it another time."

She shook her head at Starla, then stretched her back. "I just need to de-stress myself."

"Why are you so nervous, my love?" Basil asked, standing with her and laying his hands on her shoulders to ease out the tension with mild strokes. "We've done this before."

"I know. I know." She lowered her voice. "But what if she overpowers us? I had no control when she took me over. What if she does that to both of us?"

"Not to worry, sweetheart, I'll keep her occupied while you go in search of our daughter." He laid his lips on hers, left them there a moment before pulling away. "Now, relax."

She sat back down with him in the circle and did her best to relax. Closing her eyes, Trinity drew in several deep breaths, then turned to Starla. "Okay. I'm ready."

"Perfect. Now concentrate on your breathing. Deep breaths, in and out—"

"Nix the in and out. Remember what it did to me last time?" It hadn't relaxed her but instead had aroused her. "We'll stick with counting them."

Basil grinned, gave her hands a slight squeeze. "Maybe later we can practice—"

"Concentrate on now," Starla interrupted with a shake of her head.

"Yes, ma'am," Basil snickered, then closed his eyes and began deep breathing.

Following him, Trinity began to count each breath. She told herself to stop worrying, to let the anger she felt towards Rajana go and just relax. She heard Starla chanting her little verse of entry into the Realm like an echo at the back of her head. Feeling incredibly relaxed, Trinity let her body go. A warmth surrounded her like a warm blanket on a chilly day, and her body became incredibly light and airy. Then she felt something akin to an engine revving inside of her. It began to build and build until she felt every ounce of her vibrate.

"Trinity!"

She heard the screams and her eyes flew open. With the white light surrounding her, she thought she was in the Realm. Until she saw Starla throw a blanket over Basil and usher him swiftly from the room.

Finally she recognized where she was.

At home.

"What's going on?" She stood up, the light following her. "What the hell." Looking at her hands, she saw that it was coming off of her.

"Shut it down, Trinity!" Basil hollered from another room.

She was lit up like a Christmas tree, yet she didn't feel the heat.

"Shut it down!"

"I don't know how?" She didn't even know how she was doing it, much less how to stop doing it.

"Try relaxing. Take some deep breaths. Try telling your body to shut it off."

Oh sure, if it was that easy—but as she thought it, the light disappeared, taking the vibration with it. Lifting her hands, she was baffled by what she had just done. "It's gone." She turned just as Basil and Starla reentered the room. She gasped when she saw the blisters on Basil's face. "What the—did I do that?"

"He needs to see Cooper. These wounds are bad." Starla helped him to the sofa where Basil collapsed.

"Basil..." Trinity rushed to his side while Starla went in search of Cooper. She took his hand in hers, wincing at the blisters all over his skin. "Oh, God. I am so sorry."

"You have a lethal power there, darling. You give new meaning to fiery princess." His blistered lips curved up only faintly.

"I didn't mean..." She turned when Cooper rushed into the room. "I didn't mean to do it. I don't even know how I did it. Fix him, Cooper. Please." If he was scarred, she would never forgive herself.

Kneeling at Basil's feet, Cooper lifted one of Basil's hands to examine the blistered skin more closely. "And you say this was caused by Trinity lighting up?"

"Yes." Starla laid her hand on Trinity's shoulder. "She didn't even know she was doing it."

"But I did." Trinity stood, angry with herself, more so, angry with Rajana for giving her these powers that she had no idea how to control half the time.

"And it was only a moment?"

Starla nodded at Cooper.

"Very potent indeed. You'll need to rest, but first you'll need to soak in a bath. I'll grab my ointments after we have you settled in the water." Standing, Cooper turned to Trinity. "It is not your fault."

"Yeah, right."

"It's not your fault, Trinity," Basil croaked out, lifting his blistered hand to her.

"Did the light come off of me and burn you? Yes, so I would have to deduce it was my fault. I hate these fucking powers. Why did she give them to me without telling me how to use them?"

"Because she wanted us to have a child with her abilities."

He had her attention.

"Why else would Mother have done it? I told you once I was sure she had this all planned out long ago. I even have my suspicions that she allowed the Dark Mystics to release Avadur."

"But why?" Trinity sat at his side now, completely entranced with what he was telling her.

"He should get into the tub."

"Yes, yes, right." Giving herself a mental slap, she stood, holding her hand out to Basil. Carefully, she helped him to his feet. "I'm sorry seems so—"

"Unnecessary." Basil gave her a smile. "It's not your fault," he reiterated a little more firmly.

Along with Cooper's help, she guided him up the stairs to their bath. No, it wasn't entirely her fault because she had no idea she even had that power, but that aside, it had still been her who had burnt him.

And she would never forget that.

CHAPTER FIVE

Felicity's bare feet slapped on the cold tiled floor as she raced down the corridor in search of Dusty. Where could he have gone off to? Had something happened to him? Had someone broken in, broken through her spell and taken him hostage? He'd said a very bad man was after him. Maybe the man had caught up with him.

She rammed into him as he stepped out of a room to her left, sending them both tumbling to the floor. He landed on the bottom, she on top.

"Oh mercy! I thought you had been captured or someone had harmed you or you had fallen and harmed yourself. I am so glad you are all right." She kissed his cheeks repeatedly.

"Um...no, I was just gathering some supplies."

She noticed a scattering of pointy tubes and flat glass plates strewn on the floor around them. "Supplies?"

"Yeah," he grunted as he shifted her to the side, then got to his feet. "Hey, you look good in those scrubs. Yellow is really your color."

Sitting on her rump, she glanced at her clothing and decided though they weren't quite what she had in mind, they would do. She would still like to try a pair of those dark blue pants Dusty had worn when she first met him. "What will you do with these supplies?" She took Dusty's hand as he helped her to her feet.

"First, I'm going to draw my own blood, then examine it under a microscope to see what's changed since I became a vampire. Then... well...I'll go from there." He gathered up his items and headed back down the hall.

Felicity followed right behind him, fascinated to see what he was going to do. He gathered more items, tied something around his upper arm. Taking one of the pointy tubes, he jabbed the end into his arm. "What are you doing?" She rushed to his side, determined to stop him from hurting himself.

"I'm drawing my blood so I can look at it under the microscope," he informed her as the gray liquid slid into the glass tube.

"I do not understand what you mean by that. Doesn't that hurt?" She was cringing just looking at it.

"Not really. The initial poke lasts only a few seconds."

He connected another tube to the top of the one on his arm and set the full one aside. When that one was full, he pulled the tube from his arm and set it all on the counter. It was rather fascinating.

She pulled up a chair to watch him work.

"This is a microscope." He pointed to a black metal object with a long cylindrical shape aimed down at a flat piece of glass. There were dials and buttons and it all looked very confusing to her.

"What do you do with it?"

"I take a sample of my blood, like this." He pulled out a sharp instrument much like the one he had jabbed into his arm and inserted it into the tube of blood. He drew some up into the tube, then pulled the pointy end out and pressed it to the glass plate on the microscope. "Now, I look into this end," he pointed to the top, "and see what my blood looks like."

"Why do you need to look into that tube to see what your blood looks like when it is right there for you to see?" She didn't understand his logic.

"It magnifies whatever you look at so you can see the molecules... and I'm losing you. Here, look through this."

Doing as he asked, she put her eye to the top of the microscope and saw the blood through the tube. "Fascinating."

"Now watch."

He pressed some buttons which had the image before her changing, growing. "Wow. That is incredible."

"Isn't it? How is it you've never heard of a microscope? Didn't you use one in school?"

She drew herself away from the image to look at him. "I did not attend school. My mother taught me all I need to know."

"Oh, so you were home-schooled. Cool. Didn't she teach you chemistry?"

What he asked baffled her. "I do not know what that word means."

"Chemistry? You don't know what chemistry is? Where are you from, Mars?"

"I told you, I am from the Realm of Mystics."

His brow lifted up beneath the curl of his hair. "Okay, so where is that?"

"It is a heavenly dimension for vampires to live after death has taken them."

Dusty pushed back from the microscope, tilting his head at her. "For real?"

"I would not lie to you, Dusty."

"Bizarre. I never knew there was such a place."

"You also never knew vampires existed or that creatures could possess magical abilities," she reminded him.

"True. Man, this is all so weird. Wait, does that mean you're... dead?"

She flinched when he poked her arm with his finger. "I am most certainly not dead. I am as alive as you."

"Then how come you live in a heaven for dead vampires?"

She didn't like the tone in his voice. "I live there with my mother who took me into her home to protect me from my evil birth mother."

"But you're alive." He poked her arm again.

"Please stop doing that. Yes, I am alive. The living have been known to reside in the Realm for protection."

"This is all so bizarre. So you come from an evil mother, but what about your father?"

She spoke as he continued to look into his microscope. "My mother tells me he is brainwashed by my birth mother and he does only as she asks."

"Sounds like a scary woman."

He pressed some more buttons, turned a dial. She had no idea what he was doing. "Yet I have my doubts. When I spoke with my birth mother, she seemed so nice, so genuine, and I could not feel any bad vibes coming off of her."

"Looks can be deceiving."

"I never saw her, only heard her. She was locked in the seclusion cell and I could not enter it."

He lifted his head, gave her a baffled look. "Okay, I'm a little confused. If your birth mother is locked up in this Realm place, why are you here looking for her?"

"She escaped with the help of some of her consorts."

"Right. Okay, I think I have it. Can I draw some of your blood to compare with mine?"

His jump in conversation confused her as did many things he said. "You wish to stick me with that sharp implement?"

"It won't hurt. Trust me."

"I do trust you, Dusty. You saved me and you protect me." But allowing him to jab her with that sharp instrument was a little scary.

"Great!"

He pushed from his chair in a rush, startling her. As he ran from the room, she sat in her chair, staring at the sharp object he'd left lying on the desk. When he'd inserted it into his arm, it hadn't seemed to hurt him. Still...

"Here we go."

She jumped and her pulse skyrocketed. "I'm not sure I want that device inserted into my arm."

He sat down in front of her and his eyes took on a sober, serene look that comforted her a great deal. "I promise you, Felicity, I won't hurt you. Give me your hand." When she hesitated, he let out a long breath. "Trust me."

Cautiously, she held her hand out to him. When she expected him to use the sharp object on her, he merely pinched her skin. "Ouch."

"It will feel no different than that. The pain is gone, right?"

She nodded.

"That's what the needle will feel like. Will you allow me to draw your blood now?"

Since it hadn't hurt her when he'd pinched her, Felicity saw no reason not to allow him to jab her. Holding out her arm, she gave him her approval.

"Perfect."

When he took a long rubber string and tied it around her upper arm, she asked, "What are you doing?"

"This will allow the vein in your arm to plump which will make it easier for me to draw the blood from it."

He tapped her arm with his fingers several times, then picked up the needle he'd brought with him and pressed it to her arm. "Ouch." It hurt a little more than the pinch but not so much that she needed him

to remove it. She watched as her blood filled the tube. Soon he untied the rubber around her arm and pulled the needle from her arm, pressing a soft cotton ball to the wound.

"Hold this here for a few minutes to stop the bleeding."

She pulled the ball away, held it out to him. "It is healed."

"Holy cow, you heal fast."

"I have excellent regenerative abilities. Do you not?"

"Well, not as good as yours but yeah, I heal fast. Okay, let's take a look at your blood." He held the tube up. "It's not gray like mine, but not red either. Kind of a mix. Weird."

She waited as he squeezed a small amount of her blood on another glass plate, then looked into the top of the microscope.

"Holy shit!"

She jumped. "What?"

He pulled his eye away and stared at her with a shocked expression. "Your blood glows."

CHAPTER SIX

With the water at the perfect temperature and the ointments Cooper had supplied in the water, Trinity helped Basil into the tub, then sat at the edge while he soaked. It still shocked her that she had done this to his body, that she had the power to cook his skin, essentially, much in the same way the sun did. Only her power was far stronger than that of the sun.

"This feels wonderful."

"Is it painful? Of course it is. What a stupid thing to ask," Trinity chastised herself. When he touched his hand to hers, she actually jumped.

"Stop blaming yourself. I already told you you're not to blame."

"Yeah, and I told you that was bullshit. What if I do that again, only the next time you can't escape?"

He squeezed her hand, shaking his head. "In the months since you were given these powers, have you ever torched me before? No, so stop worrying."

"Why did it happen this time?"

He shrugged. "Not sure. What were you thinking of when you went into your trance?"

"The same thing as last time. I tried to concentrate on my breathing, which wasn't as easy this time because I was pissed at Rajana for

taking Felicity and for—oh shit. I felt my body vibrate.”

“How do you mean?”

“Inside.” She stood now, needing to pace off her frustration. “Like an engine was revving inside of me and with each deep breath the engine revved a little more. I felt light, though, airy, and I thought I was relaxed but apparently...I wasn’t.”

“Interesting. So anger is the trigger. Odd though,” Basil continued as he sunk a little deeper into the warm water, “when you came back to life, you were glowing, but it wasn’t the same. Then it was more of a shimmer coming off of you much like an aura.”

“Because I wasn’t angry. I felt peaceful. Okay, so as long as I don’t get angry while in a trance everyone is okay.” She felt marginally better with that, but still...she had burnt the man she loved. “Feeling any better?”

“Nearly a hundred percent. I might feel even better if you joined me.” He grinned in the sly, seductive way that always managed to get her heart pounding and her pulse fluttering.

“Not a chance. You need to heal. I’m not taking the chance I might pop one of those nasty blisters and leave you with a scar.”

“I was under the impression women thought scars were sexy.”

“Not when she’s the one who inflicted it. Tell me what you meant by Rajana possibly planning this all from the beginning.”

“You’re changing the subject.”

“Yes, I am.” She sat down on the floor near the tub and waited.

Basil let out a long breath before he began. “All these years my mother has hinted to me that it would be nice for our race if I fathered a child. It annoyed her that I used protection but, well...I wasn’t ready to become a father and I surely wasn’t about to father a child with a woman I wouldn’t be spending my life with.”

“Aw...how sweet.” Leaning over the edge, she kissed him and let out a screech when he pulled her into the water with him. “You’re going to—”

“To hell with my blisters. You’re all I need to help me heal. You might want to remove your clothing though,” he snickered.

Shooting him a nasty glare, she shifted off of him and began undressing. “Carry on.”

“I believe when I met you and took you as mine in the truest way—”

“Made me a vampire and took my virginity all at once,” she supplied as she tossed her soggy shirt to the floor.

"Right, and maybe she thought I would decide to finally father a child."

"But neither of us was ready. I certainly wasn't ready." She sent her jeans falling with the damp shirt.

"Exactly. You were still quite young and, dear God, you are ravishing."

She backed away and sat at his feet between his legs. "Finish your thoughts first, Basil."

"Spoilsport. We were taking too long," he continued as he played with her feet now resting on his crotch. "So she found something to speed it up. Planting the ritual for Chaos to find."

"But how could she know Avadur would kill me?" She sighed. He had such wonderful hands.

"I'm not entirely sure she expected that but I think what she thought is that in the face of danger, we might forget about protection and act recklessly. I love your feet. They are so cute."

She pursed her lips, then gasped when he bit down on her toes. "Behave. Okay, so when Avadur killed me—"

"When you stepped in front of me to save me from my father's wrath," he reminded her and licked the spot he had just bitten.

He definitely knew how to get her juices flowing. "Yeah...you're playing dirty." He knew just how sensitive her feet were.

"Yes I am," he laughed wickedly.

"Rajana saw it as the perfect opportunity to bring me back to life so we would fuck like rabbits and produce a child."

"With the added benefit of having her powers. There is no other reason I can see as to why she would have given you her abilities."

Trinity narrowed her eyes at Basil from across the tub. "Maybe she just saw me as worthy of having her abilities and kicking some evil ass."

"My mother could care less about evil. Why would she want you to destroy her own kind, our kind? No, she had other plans."

Trinity sat up, kneeling between his knees and took hold of his member despite the wince when she closed her hand tightly around him. "You're not helping yourself, ace."

"Yes, darling, she saw you as a fierce warrior worthy of her abilities. Want to lighten your grip now? That part of my anatomy is a little tender."

She released her grip and he smiled. "Thank you."

"So she had it all planned. Did she plan to take Felicity right after birth too and if so, why?"

"I was taken from her before she had a chance to really groom me to take over should anything happen to her. I think she saw this as the perfect opportunity to remedy that"

Trinity's heart ached for her daughter and was filled with anger towards the woman who had taken her away from them. "The longer Felicity's with your mother, the more Rajana can turn Felicity into her. We have to get her, Basil. Now. We need to finish the spell."

"Yes, on that note." He pulled the tie from her hair, releasing it to flow over her bare breasts and onto the water. "The entry way to the Realm is locked."

"What?"

"Starla was kicked back when she attempted it. There is some sort of spell blocking entry to the Realm. She doesn't know what but she's going to ask around. When we can, we will try again."

"Rajana did it. Damn her!"

Taking her into his arms, he soothed her anger with gentle kisses to her brow. "We won't stop until our daughter is safely back in our arms."

Taking comfort in Basil's arms, Trinity hoped they weren't too late.



"What do you mean my blood glows?"

Dusty had never seen anything like it in all his life. "Here, check it out for yourself." He turned the microscope towards her, waiting as she looked inside. "See," he said when she gasped.

"How is that possible?"

"Well, either you sucked back a few gallons worth of radioactive material or...it's just magic. I'm going with the latter. Jeez, this is so weird." He just had to see it again "This is incredible. I need to do some comparisons." He'd need to grab another vamp, test their blood against his and see the differences. But how? It wasn't like he had super powers or was more than moderately strong. Then the idea came to him.

He turned to her, keeping his voice soft. "How would you like to help me out while I help you find your parents?"

She toyed with the ends of her hair, twirling it around her hand, then releasing it. "In what way?"

"I just want to see if all vampire blood is the same, but to do that I need another vampire to test from. Do you think you could use those powers of yours to grab a vamp and bring him back here?"

"Couldn't you just ask another vampire to allow you to test their blood?"

If it was that easy, he wouldn't have asked. "See, the thing is...I'm worried this bad guy who held me against my will for the past few months might have his people out searching for me. If I could get you to grab someone and bring them back here, no one would know it was me."

"I cannot go out there alone. It is too scary and dark. What if someone attempts to capture me?"

"Well, all you have to do is use that glow technique and incinerate them."

Her mouth dropped open. "Are you asking me to harm someone? I cannot do that." She stood up, backing away.

"Not on purpose, but if you were in danger you could do it."

"I will not."

All he was doing was freaking her out and that wouldn't get him what he needed. "Okay, don't worry about it. It was just a thought." He pushed from his chair, rolling his neck. "Why don't we start looking for your parents? Do you know their names?"

"Trinity and Basil."

"Seriously?" She simply shrugged. "Small world."

"You know my parents?"

"Not personally, no, but I've heard their names more than once. The people who captured me talked about them all the time. They really didn't like them much."

"Oh..." Her voice took on a sad tone.

"Yeah. I'd overhear them talking about how the two and their friends were always trying to kill them."

"Oh, my!" she gasped, her hand coming up to her mouth.

"Yeah...but, that doesn't mean they're bad people." And he really should have kept his mouth shut. Still...if her parents were as bad as he'd heard, maybe she was better off not knowing them. "Tell me something, Felicity. When you find your parents, what are you going to do?"

"Talk to them. Get to know them."

"Then what? Do you plan to go back to this Realm place, or are you going to stay here?"

She tilted her head to the side in contemplation. "I hadn't really thought about it. I simply want to know my parents. I suppose I'll decide after I meet them."

He just hoped meeting them wouldn't be a mistake on her part.
"Okay. Well, if that's the case, I can tell you I know where they live."

Her icy blue eyes flew wide open. "You do?"

"Well, sort of. They live in a castle somewhere on the outer limits of the city."

"Are there many castles in Jacob's Cove?"

"I have no clue. I'm not from here."

"Oh... How will we find this castle?"

"I guess we go for a drive."

"A what?"

"A drive. In a car. Tell me you've been in a car."

"There are no...cars in the Realm. What is a car?"

Wow, she really didn't know a lot. "I guess you're in for a treat."
Now all he had to do was find one and they were set.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Felicity wasn't too sure going out in the dark was such a good idea, but as long as Dusty was at her side, she felt a little safer. It was so different from what she was used to. Every sound was unfamiliar and scary. The barren trees looked ominous and eerie. The dilapidated building looked spooky and cold. She couldn't understand how anyone could live in such a place that lacked warmth and beauty.

"Why would anyone want to live here?"

"Yeah, I'm with you there. It's not a very nice place to be, but I guess when you're a blood-thirsty creature of the night it's just the right place to be."

It was odd to her how he always spoke of their kind as if he wasn't part of the race. "Aren't you one of us now?"

"I'm human. I will never be a blood-thirsty animal. Look in the windows and see if anyone left the keys in the ignition."

"I do not know what that means." She jumped at a noise, racing into Dusty's arms.

"It's okay. It was probably just a cat or something. I forgot, you don't know what a car is. Okay, you see that big metal object with four wheels sitting on the road there? That is a car."

"Oh, an automobile. I've seen those. Though I've never had the pleasure of riding in one, I have always dreamt of doing so one day."

"Today is your lucky day, Felicity. Cars can't run without keys. Do you know what keys are?"

"They are what is used to engage the vehicle, also used to open homes and buildings."

He smiled. "Yeah. When they're used to engage a vehicle they're starting an engine that runs the car. If you look inside the car windows, you'll see a big round wheel on the driver's side. On the side of that wheel should be keys, if someone left them behind. I'll check this car; you check the one behind it."

"I would rather stay with you." She didn't like being away from him, especially in this dark, scary place.

"We won't be that far apart. You'll be fine." He glanced into his vehicle, pursed his lips, then moved on. "One of these cars has to have a key."

"What if one doesn't?" She glanced into the vehicle behind his.

"Well...I guess we keep looking. Or I could try and hotwire one."

"This vehicle is broken." She stepped around the shattered glass on the ground. "What do you mean by hotwire?"

"No point checking it. Whoever broke into it would have stolen it if there had been keys in the ignition. Hotwiring is something you can do to start a car. All you have to do is go under the dashboard, find the right wires, and hope for the best."

"I'm still confused."

"Here, maybe I'll give it a try and show you."

He jumped into the broken car, laying across the front seat. His hand began doing something beneath the wheel. Curious, Felicity climbed into the seat beside him and watched him work.

"I think I've got it."

When the car began to roar, she jumped out, taking several steps away. The sound was deafening. "Is it supposed to sound like that?" she shouted over the rumble.

"Sounds like the muffler's been enhanced."

She was utterly grateful when the car stopped making noise and Dusty climbed out from inside the car.

"We'll try another car. This one would draw too much attention."

"That would not be good."

"You're telling me."

He headed to another car. This one at least wasn't completely broken, though the back windows had been smashed in. She stood a little further from the car than the previous time, ever watchful as Dusty did whatever he did to get the vehicle started. It was so silent, every

little sound seemed to echo forever in the dark coldness. Wrapping her arms around her body, Felicity wished Dusty would hurry. She didn't like being here among the broken shops and garbage-littered streets that smelled of death and decay.

"Got it!" he cheered as the car began to purr. "Much better. Hop in."

Cautiously, Felicity walked to the car and, opening the door, slipped into the seat beside him. She watched Dusty fiddle with something under the seat that sent his chair moving forward, then back again. Wondering if this was what was supposed to be done in a car, she imitated his actions. She figured out quickly enough that doing so awarded her more comfort in her seating area or less if she moved the seat forward. She adjusted it so that she was comfortable. Turning to Dusty, she wondered why he was staring at her so intently. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No, no, it wasn't that. I was just thinking how pretty you are."

"Thank you." She felt her cheeks heat up and looked away. "I like the way you look as well."

"I used to have blue eyes, not as crystalline as yours though. I miss them."

"I like the color of your eyes. It goes well with your hair." He had such a cute round face, attractive, and the way his long eyelashes fanned over his eyes gave him a sleepy quality she found pleasing.

Realizing she found him attractive made her only warmer.

"Yeah...well...I hate them. I should look into contacts when I get home. Crap!"

"Where?" She shifted in her seat to look for the excrement and saw nothing.

"Not literally. It's a swear word I use way too much according to my mother and that's why I said it. I haven't called home. Like I even know what I'm going to say to them. 'Hey Mom, it's me, Dusty. Guess what? I'm a vampire now. Think you could put away the crosses and hang dark shades on the window?' Not going to happen."

"You do not like being a vampire much, do you?"

"I hate it. I had a good life—or was on the road to having a good life—when I was nabbed and turned. If I could reverse what happened to me, I would in a heartbeat."

She didn't see why he would hate it so much. There really wasn't anything wrong with being a vampire. "You can still have a good life despite being a vampire."

"Yeah, right. Seatbelt."

"Excuse me?" She jumped when he reached over her. "What are you doing?"

"Seatbelt," he informed her, holding up a strange-looking metal object with wide straps attached to it. "You have to wear it. It's the law. It'll help protect you if we get into an accident."

"Oh..." She felt even warmer now that he'd reached across her, especially since his arm brushed over her breasts. "I would prefer we not get into an accident."

"Yeah, well, me too, but shit happens. Okay, here we go. Man, it's been a while since I've been behind the wheel. I missed it."

She squealed when he sped forward at a fast pace that pushed her body to the seat. Gripping onto the seat, she wondered if his intent was to get into an accident. "It's fast."

"Yeah...I like fast."

"I'm not so sure I do. Oh mercy, everything is moving by so quickly." The houses and streets blurred as they sped past them.

"Okay, I'll ease up. I need to take this baby out on the highway. It has guts."

"Vehicles have innards?" How odd was that?

He laughed as he fiddled with the dials on the front of the plate that held the steering wheel. "Not literally. It's a figure of speech. It means it can move. You watch out your side. I'll do the same on mine and see if we can find this castle your parents live in. How cool is that, though, hey?"

"Cool?"

"You don't know very many phrases, do you? When someone says something is cool, it means they like it or it's exciting."

"I see. Yes, I suppose living in a castle would be...cool." The word was actually entertaining and she decided she would like to use it more often. "Where do your parents live?"

"Springfield. It's quite a distance from here. I was on my way to college when I was taken."

"College?"

"It's a school. You see anything yet?"

Everything was dark and dreary and cold. Nothing like the beauty of the world her mother had shown her in images. In the distance, she saw shimmering light illuminating the most glorious-looking dwelling she had ever seen.

A castle.

"Ahead, to my right. Oh my, would you look at how big it is?" And the closer they came to it the more she was in awe. "I bet it is

beautiful when the trees are in bloom and the grass is green." She could just imagine it, imagined herself running barefoot across all the plush land, laughing and playing.

Something she had never had the chance to do.

"I'm not sure I can do this."

Dusty slowed at the tall iron gates hanging open and turned to her. "Second thoughts about meeting the parents?"

"Yes." Just thinking of it made her chest tighten. "I'm not ready. I'm just not ready."

"No problem. We know where they are now, so whenever you feel ready...we can come back."

She remained silent, nodding as Dusty turned the car around and headed back into the city.

Felicity feared she might never be ready.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Felicity sat quietly as Dusty drove them back to the clinic. The ride from her parents' castle hadn't been a long one, yet it had felt as if it had taken forever. She felt tired, achy, and sad. She missed her mother...missed the beauty of her home, missed the warmth that had once surrounded her.

Here, it was so cold, so dark...so hard.

Maybe she should have just gone into the castle, introduced herself to her parents, and gotten it over with. Then she could have sent herself home and continued on with her life. If what she had really could constitute living. Sure, she loved the warmth, the brightness, the serenity, but...she longed for company, to talk with others, to interact. Much like what she was doing with Dusty.

If she went back home, she wouldn't be able to see Dusty. That thought alone made her heart ache.

"Home sweet home."

Her mind cleared and she saw that they were parked near the place they were staying. Though she couldn't agree with Dusty's sentiment of it being sweet, it was a home. For now.

"You've been so quiet. I imagine you've got a lot on your mind," he said after they exited the car.

She did, and acknowledged Dusty's statement with a nod. But just as she was about to speak, a man jumped out at them, eyes wild, claws primed.

She screamed and dove behind Dusty.

"Oh...shit."

"Make him go away." She clung to him for dear life.

"Yeah...okay...how?"

Felicity cried out when the animal-like man charged at them and, with a mere thought, froze him to his spot.

"Holy hell!"

"We need to hurry inside, then I'll release him." Tugging at Dusty, she dragged him to the entryway.

"How did you do that?"

"I just did. Come on, Dusty. I don't like it out here." Thrusting the door open, she pulled him inside, slamming the door behind her. She let out a long breath and relaxed. She screamed, jumping forward at the pounding on the door.

"I thought you said you put a spell on this place to prevent anyone from entering?" Dusty asked as he hurried to the door to hold it shut.

Taking a few deep breaths, she told herself to calm down. She was safe. "I did. He won't be able to enter." But he sure could cause a commotion with his fists. He was pounding on the door in a rapid succession that sounded like drums. "Trust me, Dusty."

Cautiously, Dusty stepped away from the door. When the pounding ended, he ran to the window to peer outside. "He's leaving."

"Good." She paced the floor, feeling worked up and tense. "Why is everyone in this city so eager to attack?"

"Because they're animals out for blood. Humans aren't like that but since this place is filled with beasts, the humans stay away. Smart move if you ask me."

"We all lived in harmony once. Vampires and humans," she explained when he gave her a baffled look. "Why is it we can't all live the same now?"

"Because some big bad vampire dude decided he wants to take over and make the city his."

"I will speak with my mother and have her take care of him." She realized that by doing so she would have to return to the Realm and she knew the instant she did, her mother was going to punish her. She didn't want to be placed in stasis again. Every time she was put

to sleep she woke several years older. She couldn't understand why her mother would do that to her. Why she would age her? Yet every time she had asked her mother, she had only received an answer of "It's for the best". Why was it for the best that she was older, that she wasn't allowed to have a childhood? She didn't even know when her birthday was.

She jumped, her pulse pounding when Dusty laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Sorry. Didn't mean to freak you out. You kinda drifted off. What were you saying about your mother?"

"It doesn't matter. She wouldn't be able to help anyway." It made Felicity think. Her mother knew of the darkened city, yet she had done nothing about it, nothing to stop it. Why? Felicity was finding she had so many questions yet none of them were being answered.

She crouched down on the floor, pulling her knees to her chest, wrapped her arms around her legs and began to cry.

"Oh...man...don't cry. Jeez...I don't know what... Man."

She took comfort in his presence when he sat down beside her. Leaning against his shoulder, she sobbed.

"It's okay...I...uh...did I say something wrong?"

"Oh no." She lifted her head. "It isn't you that has made me cry." He wiped the tears from her face and the touch of his fingers on her cheek created a warm tingly sensation deep in her belly.

"I don't get why you're crying."

"I'm so confused." She sniffled, and the tears continued to fall down her face. "My mother has always told me that my birth mother was evil, yet when I met her, I felt no ill intentions from her whatsoever. Yet every time I've asked my mother questions about my birth mother, she's put me in a stasis and changed my age."

He wiped her face again. "She did what?"

Felicity liked the way he touched her, the way his fingers brushed along her damp cheek so delicately. And the way he looked at her with those big yellow eyes of his filled with compassion. "I never really had a childhood. My mother aged me. I'm not sure how she did it, but she puts me to sleep and when I wake I'm years older. She never gives me answers and it's so frustrating."

"I'm...not sure I know what you mean. How is it possible to age a person?"

She dashed her own tears aside now, angry at herself for letting them fall. "As I said, I don't know how she has managed it, but she

has. Weeks ago I was only ten. My birth mother came to the Realm and after she left, I asked my mother about her, and once again, my mother refused to answer me. She is always cryptic. She took me for a walk and the next thing I remember is waking in my bed...like this." She ran her hands out over the length of her body.

"Seriously? She made you...age?"

Felicity bobbed her head up and down. "I have very few memories of my childhood. I have dolls I don't remember getting, or how old I was when I received them. And I have all these thoughts inside my head now that I never had before. I was a child only weeks ago and now I'm a woman complete with womanly...thoughts." Looking at him now those thoughts turned to desire. "I've never been kissed."

"Oh..." He cleared his throat. "Wow."

"Would you kiss me, Dusty?"

"I don't know..." He cleared his throat again, fidgeting on the floor where they sat.

"Your face is growing pink."

He slapped his hands on his cheeks. "Yeah...well...that happens when I'm flustered."

"Why are you flustered? I only asked you to kiss me."

"Yeah...well... Jeez."

"Have you never been kissed before, Dusty?"

His face grew even redder. "Of course I have. I've kissed a woman."

"Then what is the problem?"

"Yeah...well...." He stood up, jammed his hands in the pockets of his pants. "You just don't ask someone to kiss you like that."

She stood as he was now and walked to him. His red face and stammer confused her. "So I should just kiss you without asking?" If that was the case, no problem. She leaned towards him, her lips puckered.

"No, asking is good."

"I am confused. You tell me not to ask you, then tell me asking is good."

"It is confusing. Everything about men and women is confusing."

"I don't see why. I've seen humans pressing their bodies together in lust. I've never done that with a man either. Would you do that with me, Dusty? Would you kiss me and have sex with me?"

He laughed, which baffled her, and paced the room, running his hands through his curly hair. "Jeez...how often does a guy have this opportunity? And here I am freaking out."

"Are you asking me a question?" If so, she had no idea.

"No. I was babbling to myself." He turned to her, drew in a long breath, then let it rush out. "Sex is an intimate thing, like you said earlier about kissing."

"Yes, and I wish to be intimate with you now, Dusty." Stepping up to him, she took his hands in hers and leaned in to allow him to kiss her. When he hesitated, she pursed her lips. "Do I not appeal to you? Am I not someone you would like to kiss?"

"Man...yeah, I want to kiss you and, yeah, I'm attracted to you, but—"

"Then what is the problem? Kiss me, Dusty." She closed her eyes, leaning her face towards him, and waited. She felt his breath as it caressed her mouth, and when his lips brushed hers, she quivered. She had envisioned being kissed so many times and now it was finally happening. He released her hands to take her in his arms. She wrapped her arms around him and sank into the sensation of his warm lips on hers.

Her body felt warm and she was terrified she wouldn't kiss properly and when he tilted his head, she tilted hers in the opposite direction. She followed his moves, doing what he did with his lips and hoped she was doing it right.

She liked kissing.

Leaning into him, their bodies pressed together, she felt his hands caressing her hair. It was both soothing and stimulating. She followed his actions and slid her fingers through the curls on his head. They were so soft.

She felt something hard pressing against her abdomen and she was baffled by what it was. Lowering one hand, she reached down between them and placed her hand on the hardness.

He moaned and the vibration against her mouth tickled.

It felt odd, jutting out of his body...and then realization hit. She was touching his penis. She'd never touched one before. She'd seen them when she'd looked out from the Realm to see what the world was doing without her and she'd seen what women did to the organ and how the men would react.

She slid her hand inside his waistband, but before she could reach it, he pulled away.

"Whoa..."

"Is something wrong?" She was enjoying herself and she wished he would come back and kiss her some more.

"You're just moving a little fast."

"I could slow my motions down if that's what you wish." She inched back towards him.

"That's not what I meant. I just think maybe we should slow things down between us...and I can't believe I'm saying this."

"I liked kissing you, and touching you. Didn't you like what I was doing?"

He ran a hand through his hair as he moved back an inch. "Yeah, I liked what you were doing, but that's not the point."

She stepped towards him, he backed away. "Don't you want to have sex with me, Dusty?"

"Of course I do, but I don't want you to regret it when we're done."

She took his hands in hers to keep him from backing away again. "Why would I regret it?"

"Because you rushed into it with a stranger."

Head cocked to the side, she replied, "You are not a stranger, Dusty. You are my friend, my protector."

"Still..." He kissed her lightly, then pulled away. "I think we should go slow."

She sulked after he walked away. She didn't want to go slow. She wanted to know what it felt like to have his body inside of hers, to have him caress the intimate parts of her body.

"I'm beat. I'm going to pick a room and catch a nap."

The instant he left the room, Felicity felt the fear creep into her like a slow fog. Hurrying to catch up, she wondered what it would take to convince him she was ready now.

"What are you doing?"

"I wish to take a nap with you."

"Felicity," he sighed, "you really need to learn not to be so afraid of everything. You're safe here." Taking her hands in his, he pressed a soft kiss to her lips, then hopped up on the bed.

He curled onto his side, facing the wall, and she stood there, sulking. She wanted to join him, to sleep beside him, to have him kiss and touch her again. Instead, she sat down in the chair across from his bed and watched him sleep.

CHAPTER NINE

Chaos was constantly disappointed by the imbeciles he called his men. Wasn't there one creature on this earth that was as intelligent and as loyal as he was? Oh, how he missed Magnus. Now there was a loyal soul.

Pacing his room, Chaos wondered what it would take to have one loyal subject who would stick with him to the end. Either they ran off on him or were taken away, and it seemed more and more he was losing his men to Trinity and Basil.

Infuriated, Chaos picked up the chair near the window and flung it across the room. The action did little to curb his rage. What he wanted was to rip the eyeballs out of Trinity and Basil, then pour salt in their wounds and watch them flail about on the floor in agony. And that was only the beginning of what he wished he could do to the both of them.

To find out Daniel had gone over to their side grated. Chaos had thought better of the young man, but he supposed blood would always prove to be thicker than water. Given the fact that Daniel's twin brother fought on Basil's side, it stood to reason Daniel would follow. Still... He supposed he should have taken him back when Daniel had locked him up in the cell. He had, after all, found him and saved him from Fritz's bizarre jail. Yet Chaos couldn't help but mistrust the boy.

If he'd gone to his brother once, odds were he would do so again and again and again.

Chaos just couldn't risk that.

So he'd let him go.

Then there had been Destroyer. Oh, how he missed his blood. It had been so pure, virginal, and had filled him like nothing had in a very long time. Now he too was gone.

And four of Chaos' best men with him.

Chaos had a real good idea what had happened to them, why they hadn't come back. Basil and Trinity had taken them. Again they foiled his plans. And once again, he was in hiding. Sure, he had the protection spell given to him by the Dark Mystics to mimic that he was not in Jacob's Cove, but it didn't prevent his men from giving him up. They would, he knew that for a fact. They always did. So he was left to hide, once again. Only this time, no one knew where he was. He simply couldn't trust anyone these days.

Just as soon as he was back to himself, he was going to take care of his enemies, Basil and Trinity. And this time, no one was going to stop him.



She took him in her hands and stroked him with soft, silky skin. Her fingers were long and delicate and surrounded him. With each stroke, he felt himself rising to the conclusion. Her mouth was eager, her lips were soft, and with each kiss she stroked him a little faster.

He slid his hand beneath her shirt to cup her breast. She was full, round, and her nipple was taut and ready. He twirled it between his finger and thumb, and when he did, she moaned against his lips. He felt it slide into his gut, then shoot straight to his loins.

His teeth caught her lip and the taste of her blood on his tongue was like ambrosia. She pulled her mouth free, angling her neck to him in invitation. He slipped her long, black hair aside and the vein at the side of her neck pulsed for him.

Lifting his upper lip, he bit into her neck, piercing the skin and drawing in her blood. Her hand quickened as he sucked on her vein. He drank and drank and still he felt starved. When her hand went lax, he looked down to see she had collapsed over him. Pulling his teeth free, he gave her a nudge and when she rolled over, staring up at him with white eyes, he screamed.

"Are you all right?"

Her voice filled his head and as his vision cleared from his sleep, he saw Felicity standing over him, her fall of satin hair fanning her beautiful face. His loins ached for her, but more, his hunger called to take.

"I...I want to bite you." The room began to sway when he sat up. "I...don't feel well."

"You look pale."

He jumped when her hand touched his face. He could hear her blood pumping in her veins. "I think you need to leave."

"I will not leave you," she stated emphatically.

"If you don't leave, I may just bite you." He knew without a shadow of a doubt he would.

"Then have me." She thrust her hair aside and bared her neck to him.

"I can't." He wanted to get away, but she was right in front of him and all he saw when he looked at her was her veins and those beautiful blue eyes calling to him.

"Why not? It is only blood and you and I both need it to survive. Take my blood and I will take yours."

He wanted, oh how he wanted. Still... "I don't want to bite you, Felicity. I never want to bite a human."

She stroked a hand over his cheek and the look in her eyes was so touching he felt it grip his heart.

"Dusty, it is part of who we are. You need to accept that. Take me." She crawled up onto the bed and leaned closer, exposing more of her neck.

His body ached for her. He'd never felt anything like it before. He actually felt as if he was being torn apart from the inside out. And it seemed that each pump of her heart, each pulsating rhythm of her blood, beat in time with his own. He needed her, there was no denying it.

But to take?

Her teeth grazed the skin on his neck near his shoulder. He flinched when her teeth sank into his vein and for a split second he was reminded of the man who had drunk from him last.

He felt her hand on his chest as she pulled the blood from his vein and it shot his pulse through the roof. Pushing Chaos from his mind, Dusty looked down at her vein...then dove.

She twitched, a faint squeak slipping from her mouth as she sucked on his vein. But the instant her blood touched his lips he was

gone. Taking hold of her arms, he held her in place as he drank in her blood.

Her blood was like satin touching his lips and as smooth as silk and as it slipped into his body, he felt a high he had never felt before. He pulled her down onto him as he drank from her and she from him. Her body rested on his, her hands on his chest, touching lightly. He could feel the press of her breasts against his chest. And he felt himself go hard.

He had a thought to pull away, but then she spread her legs over him and pulled at his neck even harder. His blood began to heat up and the taste of hers changed. It took on a stronger, tangier taste he found he liked even more. He wrapped his arms around her body, holding her tight to him, and began to pump his hips into her.

He could feel the heat emanate from between her legs, drawing him in even more. When she matched his gyrations, he thought his eyes might cross.

They drank from each other while their bodies rocked against each other in perfect rhythm. Then he felt the familiar burst of adrenaline accompanied by an orgasm and knew there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Releasing her neck, he pulled her tighter against him and let himself go with a hearty groan. When she released his neck and began pumping against him even harder, he knew she was about to explode.

Holding onto each other, they cried out as the orgasms rippled through them.



Dusty didn't know what to think of what had just happened. But he did know that his body didn't ache anymore, which was a relief. Still, he'd drunk blood from Felicity, and he'd had an orgasm while doing so.

She'd had one too.

He could taste her blood on his tongue, a taste that was nothing like that of Chaos' blood and he noticed he felt much more invigorated now than he ever had drinking from his jailer. Was it because she was a woman? Or was it because her blood was different? He remembered how her blood had glowed under the microscope.

She lifted her head to look down into his eyes. "Are you sated now?" Her hair fell like waves of satin over her shoulder, surrounding her face. Her body, still pressed to his, was warm and wet and his first instinct was to kiss her.

So he did.

He felt himself harden as their lips merged and their juices mingled. Breaking the kiss was not an easy task, but he knew if he didn't, things were going to get mighty heated. He had to make sure she was okay, first.

"Did I take too much from you?"

Her eyes drooping in a dreamy look, she shook her head. "I could give you more if you need."

Oh, he wanted more, but not only her blood. "I'm good. Um... what happened between us when we drank—"

"Was incredible," she finished with a bright smile. "I've never felt anything like it. You are my first. I have never had anyone drink from me, or me from them. But I'm not quite sure I understand why my body shivered as it did or why I seem to be wet...down there." Her eyes slid down, then back up to him.

Oh boy. "Um... It was an orgasm. You've never had an orgasm before?"

Head cocking to the side, she replied with confusion, "I do not know what that is."

Oh boy oh boy. "Okay...an orgasm happens when a person is stimulated...down there. I take it you've never masturbated—I can't believe I just asked you that." How embarrassing.

"I do not know what that is either."

Great. "Oh jeez. Didn't your mother tell you about self-gratification? Didn't she have the sex talk with you?"

"We never spoke of sex. I only know of such things from watching the humans. Often I would sneak off and do a spell to see what the world was like. My mother would not have approved if she had known I did such things. I have seen many humans interacting as we did, only with their clothing removed. We should have removed our clothing."

He wanted nothing more. Still... "Yeah, well, another time maybe. When you watched those people interacting, did it ever make you feel funny inside? Down there?"

"Yes, it did, but I was never sure why."

"Well, it's called arousal. Seeing other people engaged in sex can be stimulating to the observer. Did you ever touch yourself when you were watching them?"

She blushed. "Is it wrong if I did?"

"Not at all." He brushed her hair aside, amazed at how soft it really was. "It's a natural act for all human beings. Even animals do it."

When you touched yourself, didn't you ever shake like you did now? Orgasm?"

"No, never. I liked the way it felt when I shook." She smiled so sweetly it took his breath away. "Could we do that again so I can feel that sensation once more?"

Man, you have a willing party here all but begging you to take her and you're hesitating. What is your problem? "Soon, maybe."

"Have you ever...masturbated?"

His face had to have turned three shades of red. "Um...yeah, I have."

"So you've interacted like this with other females?"

"Uh...no. You're my first."

Her brow curled. "You have never been with a woman in a sexual manner?"

Yeah, okay, why not just broadcast that? "No, never."

"So you are a...virgin...as well?"

There came the fourth shade of red. "Yes. I really need to go wash up." Rolling her aside, he slid from the bed, and left the room. Grabbing a fresh pair of scrubs, Dusty hurried to the washroom to clean up.

All he wanted right now was to bury his head in the dirt.

Or bury himself in Felicity.

CHAPTER TEN

Trinity missed the Digital Domain. Sure, she loved living with Basil at the castle and wouldn't change it for a moment, but she missed working. Since the darkness had taken over, she'd pretty much neglected her other job as a programmer and web hostess. As she stood in Jonah's office, she felt the need to get back to her normal life.

She had a feeling that might never happen.

Sitting behind his cluttered desk, Jonah hung up the phone, then gave his attention to Trinity. "Starla will be down shortly. So...how you been doing?"

She thought of Jonah like a brother and since he'd been turned into a vampire she felt even closer to him. Despite the fact that she felt enraged with the fact that Chaos had turned him. "I nearly killed Basil and if you cheer I will freeze you and leave you hanging for a week."

Jonah sneered, narrowing his yellow eyes at her. "I'm past the whole wanting Basil dead. He makes you happy and—if you tell him this I will hurt you—he's not so bad after all."

"That really stung, didn't it?"

"Worse than a million bees," he laughed. "How'd you nearly kill him and why?"

She pulled up the rickety chair at the side of the room, took a seat. "We were trying to get back into the Realm and I have no idea how

it happened but I apparently went nuclear and nearly fried him to a crisp."

"Holy crap! Is he okay?"

She nodded and the lump in her throat began to form again. "I have no idea how I did it, but I did and it scares the shit out of me, Jonah. What if I do it again, only next time, he can't get away fast enough, or you, or anyone else?"

"Considering you've never done it before, I would have to say we all feel safe. What were you doing when it happened?"

"I was relaxing like Starla told me to do. Nothing out of the ordinary, nothing different than the last time I did it. Well, except I was royally pissed at Rajana, but aside from that I was fine."

"Well, once upon a time your royally pissed attitude would have gone relatively unnoticed, unless of course you beat the crap out of someone. Now, you have all these funky powers. Royally pissed can be lethal."

"Yeah, tell me about it. I hate these powers." She pushed from her chair. "I would give anything to have them taken away from me and I can't believe I just said that. Fuck." She grabbed a handful of her hair and tugged. "I am such an idiot, Jonah."

"No, you're not, and stop pulling at your hair before you go bald."

Releasing her hair, she dropped her hands to her sides and let out a long breath. "I should know better than to make claims like that. Saying something similar is what cost me my daughter."

"To find me." Jonah stood, placing both palms on the desk. "If you hadn't signed that paper to save me you would still have your daughter."

"I thought we were past this."

He shrugged one shoulder while he grabbed the cane resting on the side of his desk. "It's always there, in the back of my mind. If it hadn't been for me, she would still be here."

"Don't go there. Let's place the blame where it's deserved. Chaos. He's the root of all of this and as soon as I find the bastard I am going to take great pleasure wringing the life out of him." She turned as Starla came into the room. "Have you got anything?"

Starla shook her head, somberly. "My mother and the High Priestess Essema have no clue what is blocking the entryway. But whatever is blocking it is preventing Rajana from leaving as well."

"Get out? She's locked in there? Holy hell." Wasn't that perfect... until Trinity reminded herself that her daughter was locked in there

with her. "Avadur did something similar to her when he took Basil away from her. I believe he was helped by the Dark Mystics. Maybe—"

"No!" both Starla and Jonah said at once.

"I was only going to suggest we talk to them about it and find out what kind of spell was used."

"It's too dangerous, Trin."

"This is my daughter we're talking about, Jonah. She's locked in there with Rajana and Avadur. I have to get her out of there before they corrupt her."

"And we will, but not by going to the Dark Mystics." He took her hand in his, giving it a squeeze. "I know it's hard for you. We will save her, but not by going through the Dark Mystics."

"My mother did say that something came through it a few days ago. Right before it was locked up."

Trinity turned to Starla with utter curiosity. "Really? Like what?"

"She didn't know, only that it was powerful, or had to be in order to seal up the Realm. She did say that whatever came through landed here in Jacob's Cove."

"Get out! Well, shit. We have to go out and do some investigating. I have to know what came through and how they managed it. Thanks for the tip, Starla. Catch you both later." Trinity vanished before either had a chance to reply.

She needed Basil's help to search the city.



Taking Dusty's lead to clean up in the washroom, Felicity entered after he was finished. Though she wished the room had a tub she could lounge in for an hour, she made the best of what she had. The towel was rough and scratchy and she wondered how anyone could use it on a daily basis. The soap smelled odd, medicinal, but she used it anyway. Once she had finished washing, she changed her clothes. Before leaving the room, she frowned at her image in the mirror. Her hair was looking worn and needed cleansing. She just didn't know how she would be able to do that without a tub of water. She'd have to find a way, and soon.

Leaving the washroom, she found Dusty sitting on a stool, leaning over the microscope. His hair was damp and she wondered how he'd managed to wash it.

Seeing him sitting there stirred something deep inside of her that curled like a fist in her belly. She remembered how it felt laying on

top of him. How his arms had cradled her, stroked her hair while he sucked on her neck. How his hips had moved up and down against her pelvis. The way his hard member had pressed into her made her feel tingly inside. She wondered what it would feel like against her naked flesh.

"Crap!"

She jolted out of her thoughts to see Dusty push from his chair with a frustrated look on his face. She felt something gooey inside of her melt as she looked at him.

"My blood is still the same."

Taking a deep breath, she walked to him. "What are you doing?"

He ran his hands through his hair, scattering tiny droplets of water in his frustration. "I thought since I felt invigorated after drinking from you that maybe my blood would glow like yours. But it's still the same as it was before."

"Why did you expect it to be different?" He smelled fresh, much like the medicinal soap but on him it gave off a different fragrance she found she rather liked.

"I don't know. I just thought if I ingested your blood it would show up in mine. No big deal. Look, I'm getting hungry. I think we need to go out and look for some food."

"Out...there?" She thumbed towards the door, indicating outside.

"Yeah. There should be some sort of grocery shops around here and hopefully they're not all picked out."

She suddenly felt rather ill. "Out there, in the dark?"

"Yes. Did anything bad happen to us last time we went out?"

"That crazy man came after us," she reminded him and remembering the crazy man made her feel a little more sickly.

"And you took care of him, didn't you? We'll be fine, Felicity. Besides, we have no choice...or at least I don't. I need to eat. If you don't want to go out there, I can go alone—"

"No!" she blurted out rather harshly, then caught herself. "Sorry. I do not wish to be here alone. I will go with you." Even if it meant being terrified.

"Okay, let's roll."

"When we return and you've eaten, can we lie together naked and make ourselves orgasm?"

He choked, coughed, and choked some more.

"My goodness. Are you all right?" She patted his back while he coughed wildly.

"Yeah..." He cleared his throat. "I...I'm just not used to a woman asking me that."

"Why not?" She followed him through the hallway to the front entrance.

"I told you, I've never had sex before."

"Right. Did you not want to have sex with a woman before now?"

His hand paused at the door and she wondered if he was afraid of stepping out into the darkness as well. He chuckled. "It's all I practically think about now."

"Then why have you never engaged in sexual activity with a woman before?" Hardly noticing the darkness, Felicity followed Dusty to the car they had ridden in before.

"Man, the embarrassment just keeps coming. It's not as easy as that, Felicity."

She climbed into the passenger's side while he sat behind the steering wheel. "Why not? If you want to engage in sexual activity with another person you should just do so."

"If only it was that simple. A person has to be attracted to the other person and vice versa for them to have sex. It has to be mutual."

"Did you not find a mate you were attracted to?"

"Oh, I found plenty. It was the other way around. The women I liked didn't like me in the same way."

He started them moving and she barely noticed.

"That is preposterous. What woman wouldn't find you attractive?" She certainly did, especially those big eyes of his and all that curly hair. He had a nice, smooth face, round and gentle. She saw no reason a woman wouldn't find him attractive.

"Where have you been all my life?" he chuckled.

"I've been in the Realm. Would you like to lie naked with me when we return?"

"This is the weirdest conversation I have ever had."

She didn't understand him. "It is not so weird. It is a simple question. Do you wish to lie naked with me or not?"

"Look, having sex for the first time is a big deal, for a girl mostly."

"Why?" He fiddled with a knob and some sort of music began to play. She found the beat of it rather interesting.

"Because you're giving away something of yourself that is precious. Your virginity. When you agree to have sex for the first time, you are allowing your partner to take that precious part of you away."

"Where would you take it?" Not that she truly knew what he meant but she didn't want to look stupid.

"Not physically. I can't believe I'm having this conversation." He drew in a deep breath, running his hand over his face. "Look, when I...put my...penis inside of your...vagina, I pop your...oh man...I pop your cherry."

"My what?"

"Oh man..." He ran his hand over his face again. "This is a conversation your mother should have had with you."

"Yes, well, she didn't." It annoyed her that she hadn't. Felicity wished she knew more about men and women and how they interacted and why. "So I am asking you what I need to know because I wish to engage in sexual activity with you."

"Hey, check this out, there's a store and it looks like it's been broken into a few times."

He swerved to the front of the store and hurried from the car.

"Why will you not answer me, Dusty?"

"Because, it's embarrassing. When we get back I'll look through the offices and see if there's a medical book lying around for you to read up on. Okay? But for now, let's grab some food."

She didn't understand why it was embarrassing. It seemed natural enough when she'd watched couples pressing their bodies together and they didn't look embarrassed at doing so. Although, they'd had a pained expression on their faces. "Will it hurt?" she asked while following him as he grabbed some sort of metal contraption on wheels.

He let out a long breath before replying. "It might."

"Oh..." She wasn't sure she liked the idea of pain. "But orgasming with you earlier wasn't painful. It was delightful." She sighed, remembering how her body had felt, the warmth that had accompanied the shiver and the surge of energy that had spilled from her.

"It's not painful to orgasm. But the first time can be painful." He loaded things in the metal contraption as they walked through the store.

It was in utter disaster, cans and packages lay strewn everywhere as they walked along the rows. "Why is the first time painful?"

"I told you, I'll find you a book to read up on. Man, they really picked this place over. I guess we'll have to make do with...canned soup and dry noodles."

Staying quiet as he loaded up on food supplies, Felicity was baffled as to why he wouldn't just tell her what she wanted to know. When he seemed satisfied by what he had gathered, she went along with him to the exit of the building. She couldn't wait to get back to their home so she could get the information she needed.

"Hold it right there."

She jumped behind Dusty and squealed. Peering over his shoulder, she saw a tall woman with long, red hair and a handsome gentleman with black hair that came to his shoulders, standing in the doorway.

Something inside of her told her they would not harm her.

"One more move and you'll both be dust."

Maybe she was wrong.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Dusty held up his hands. "Look, all we want is some food and no trouble."

Felicity said nothing but instead wrapped her arms around his body and held onto him for dear life.

"You two look awfully young to be on your own. Where are you from?"

That voice, Felicity knew that voice. Though she had no idea about the face, the voice was unmistakable. It was a little raw, but soft. Just like the woman in the cell.

"Like I said, we don't want any trouble. Just let us pass and we'll be out of here in no time."

"Trinity?" Felicity managed, still clinging to Dusty.

The woman cocked her head to the side. "Yeah. Do we know each other?"

That was definitely the voice. Relaxing, Felicity released her grip on Dusty and slid beside him. "My name is Felicity. I believe I am your daughter."

Trinity tilted her head a little more but before she spoke, the gentleman stepped up. "I don't know what you think you're pulling with that but it isn't funny. I think the two of you need to come with us."

"No!" Dusty stepped back, taking Felicity with him. "Look, she didn't mean what she said. We just want to get out of here and go back to where we've been staying. Okay?"

"I said that because it is the truth." Daringly, Felicity stepped away from Dusty's side and held her head high. "My name is Felicity and I believe you are my birth mother."

"That's impossible," Trinity blurted out, shooting a nasty glare at Felicity. "I only had one child and that was only months ago. I don't know what you think you're—"

"Months?" She knew her mother had aged her, still, it had been more than months. Maybe she was mistaken. "Is your name Trinity Ford?"

"Yes, it is, but you are not my daughter."

"We need to take them in, lock them up until we get some answers."

Felicity turned her attention to the dark gentleman. "Lock us up?"

"They want to kidnap us or something, Felicity. We need to get out of here. Do your little freeze thing and let's go."

"Freeze thing?" Trinity inquired.

"She has phenomenal powers and she's not afraid to use them. Right, Felicity?"

She didn't want to use her powers on this woman she suspected of being her mother. But when the gentleman stepped closer to her, she had no choice.

"Basil!"

Felicity's eyes flew to the woman. "He isn't being harmed. I only set him in a temporary stasis. He can hear us, he can breathe, and feel. What did you call him?"

"Basil. He's my...soon to be husband." Trinity ran to his side, taking his face in her hands. "I can't release you, Basil. I don't know what she did but I can't release you." She spun around, eyes fierce. "Release him."

"My father's name is Basil." Was this possible? Had she finally met her birth parents?

"We need to get out of here, Felicity. Now!" Dusty tugged at her but she held her ground.

"My birth father's name is Basil and my birth mother's name is Trinity. I live in the Realm of Mystics with my mother, Rajana."

Trinity froze.

"I was taken upon my birth to the Realm and that is where I have lived all this time."

"Felicity?"

"Yes."

"It can't be you. How is this possible? You should be a baby." Trinity's voice wavered with emotion.

"I should, but I am not. Look into me and you will see." She felt her birth mother enter her mind and she felt the gasp when the truth was told.

"Promise me you will not attempt to take me without my consent and I will let you free," she said to Basil and heard him agree inside her mind.

"He can't answer you, how do you know he won't take us?" Dusty asked fearfully.

"Because I can hear his thoughts." She released Basil and looked him square in the eyes as she spoke. "Hello, Father."

"Holy fu—dge, Basil. It's her." With tears in her eyes, Trinity stared at her daughter. "It's our girl."

"Felicity." Basil reached out for her hands but she pulled them away. "I won't hurt you."

"My mother tells me otherwise."

"I am your mother," Trinity demanded, wiping her tear-streaked face. "Not her."

"You are the woman who gave me life, who birthed me, but you are not the woman who raised me."

"Only because she stole you from me." As Trinity moved towards her, Felicity froze both her parents to their spots.

"We need to get out of here." Grabbing Dusty's hand, she tugged him to the doorway. He dragged the cart with him as they left the store.

"Those are your parents. Are you just going to leave them like that?"

"I will release them when we're far enough away." She couldn't believe it. She had finally met her parents and yet she was running away from them. She was a coward.

As they drove away, she released her spell, then watched out the window to make sure they didn't follow her.

Her heart ached the whole way home.



"That was our daughter," Trinity said as she and Basil searched. She couldn't believe it, but it was true. She'd not only seen inside her daughter to know the genetics matched but she felt the connection.

Her blood, Basil's blood was mixed with the woman claiming to be their daughter. Woman. "How is it she's that old? I know time moves more quickly in the Realm, but still. She has to be at least...over eighteen."

Basil shrugged. "My guess would be close to twenty and I have no idea how it can be. But with my mother, I'm not surprised."

It took a fair bit of effort to keep up with Basil's quick steps, but Trinity managed it. "Her hair is black, like yours, and she has your eyes." And she was beautiful. Trinity felt the tears welling up and stopped where she was. "And she's all grown up."

Basil stopped as Trinity sat down on the sidewalk where she was.

"I never had her as a baby and now she's a grown woman and I still can't have her."

He sat down beside her, running his hand along her back. "We'll find her, my love, and we'll get behind all of this."

"She's so tall, so thin, so...beautiful and who the hell was that with her?"

"And out comes the protective mother," Basil laughed as he pulled her into his arms. "We'll find her and we'll get all the answers we need."

"I hope you're right." Though she stayed hopeful, Trinity couldn't help but feel broken-hearted by it all.



"You've been awfully quiet since we left the grocery store."

Sitting on the uncomfortable chairs at the back of the clinic where Dusty liked to look through his microscopes, Felicity nibbled on what Dusty called potato chips. They were interesting, a bit sour and her tongue was getting a bit raw, but it felt good. She'd never eaten anything like this before.

And he was right. She had been quiet, only because she had been thinking. "My mind is scattered with thoughts that refuse to sit still at the moment."

"About your parents?" He dug into the bag between them.

"Yes. She is very pretty, don't you think?"

"Oh yeah," he admitted through a mouthful.

"And my father... What a handsome fellow he is. My hair is dark like his. I often wondered what he looked like."

"Your mother didn't tell you what he looked like?" Dusty grabbed another handful from the bag.

"She only said he was very handsome and resembled his father a great deal. I always wondered who I got the dark hair from since my mother has very light hair."

"Yeah, and your birth mother has red, though I don't think it's real."

She tilted her head at him. "How could her hair not be real?"

"Not her hair, but her hair color. Women dye their hair all sorts of colors these days. It's a chemical process that strips your hair of its color and changes it to whatever color you want," he explained before continuing to eat the salty treats.

"How odd." She couldn't imagine changing her hair color.

"How come you wanted to get away from them?"

She took the bottle he offered her and after seeing him take a sip from it, she decided it couldn't be half bad and took a sip. She nearly choked on the acidic liquid when it hit her mouth.

"Careful." He patted her back.

"What is this?" Holding the bottle out, she gave it a cursory look.

"Soda pop. The first time you have one is always the hardest, but you get used to it."

She wasn't too sure about that but something he said reminded her of their earlier conversations. "Will you tell me about sex now?"

He choked on the swallow in his mouth and she did for him what he had done for her. She rubbed his back.

"You are a forward girl, aren't you? Okay, I'll go look for that book."

"Why can't you just tell me? All I want to know is if it hurts. When I've observed humans during sexual activity it looks as if it is painful to them. Their faces get all scrunched up and they scream and cry. It seems most painful to the female." Despite that she still wanted to know what it felt like. She wanted to feel that euphoric sensation she'd felt earlier with Dusty.

"Oh...that. No, they're not really in pain. They're enjoying themselves."

How could that be? "They look as if it pains them."

"You'll understand when you have sex."

"Wonderful." She handed the bottle to him and, standing up, pulled her shirt over her head and tossed it onto the chair beside her. "We will do it now."

"Holy man..." he stammered and dropped the bottle in his hand. It fell on the floor and spilled all over the rug with a frothy foam.

"Where shall we have sex?"

"Man...man..." He wiped a hand across his mouth as he stared at her breasts.

"Would you like me here?" She stripped out of her pants.

"Oh boy, oh wow."

"Perhaps the bed you slept in earlier?"

"Yeah...uh...a bed would be great." He stood, his mouth gaping open.

"Wonderful." Grabbing her clothes, she hurried to the room he'd slept in and hopped up onto the hard bed. It was rather small, and not at all comfortable, but she supposed it would do. When he entered the room, rather slowly, she held her hand out to him. "Will you join me now?"

"Oh, jeez..."

"What is the problem?" He looked pale, and his face was perspiring.

"I've never done this before."

"Neither have I. We will learn together." She smiled and kept her hand stretched out to him.

"Man...oh boy...okay...I can do this." Pulling the shirt over his head, he tossed it beside hers, then slowly undid the string at the waist of his pants.

Her eyes drifted down as he let his pants fall. "Oh...my..." He stood before her, completely naked, his member dangling down between his legs. She swallowed the lump in her throat and suddenly felt a little ill.

He climbed up onto the bed beside her. "We can stop any time you want. I hope."

"Okay." Felicity nodded, her body beginning to heat up. "I like the way your body looks."

"I...uh...like yours too. Okay, I am just going to come right out with it and tell you I am so freaking nervous I may not last more than a few minutes—okay, who am I kidding, seconds. Man..."

Their bodies brushed against each other and the feel of his bare skin on hers created tiny little bumps on her skin. "I am nervous as well, but I don't know what you mean when you say you won't last."

"It could be over in seconds," he explained in a rushed breath.

"That does not seem very long."

"Oh, I feel much better now."

"Wonderful." Because she was curious what his penis would feel like, she took it in her hand and felt it growing in her palm. "That is amazing. How do you lengthen it like you did?"

"I don't...well...my body does. It's a normal reaction when I'm aroused, just like you get wet when you're aroused. Can I touch you?"

"By all means. I would also like you to kiss me. I like the way you kiss."

His smile made his eyes twinkle. "Yeah. Great." Moving towards her, he laid his lips on hers.

In her palm he grew even harder and when his hand touched her breasts she felt a warm, bubbly sensation erupt inside of her. Then his hand slid down her belly, to the swatch of hair between her legs. The instant he touched the heat she gasped and clutched onto him a little tighter.

"Want me to stop?"

"No." She wanted more, so much more. "I want to meld with you as couples are meant to."

"Are you sure you're ready?"

She nodded, though inside she felt a little queasy.

"Okay."

He climbed on top of her and her heart began to flutter.

Felicity felt the pressure of his weight on her, the press of his hard member near the tip of her vagina and for a brief moment she thought she might pass out. Her heart was hammering so hard beneath her chest she was sure Dusty could feel it. But when he looked into her eyes, she felt as if she could drown in the emotion she saw in him.

Though she had seen couples engaging in sexual activity, she had no idea what she was supposed to do now.

"Spread your legs," Dusty whispered to her as he hovered over her.

A little shaky, she did as he asked. When he put his legs between hers, the tip of his member brushed the warmth and it sent shivers cascading deep inside of her.

"I'm going to get you ready now, okay?"

She nodded, though she had no idea what he meant. When he slid his hand down between them and touched her private area, she nearly told him to stop. The feeling of euphoria took her over as he rubbed her moist skin.

"Does that feel good?"

"Oh yes. Very good." The more he rubbed the better she felt. She began moving her hips, pressing her flesh to his hand in eager anticipation of more.

"Do you want me to make you come first?"

"I do not know what that means."

"Orgasm."

"Yes. I like to orgasm," she panted with eagerness while her hips moved to the rhythm of his fingers.

In a slow, soft embrace he kissed her lips while his hand worked between her legs. She felt so hot, so...energetic, like she could crawl out of her skin. She wanted him to stop but wanted him to do it faster. When his mouth left hers, she nearly begged him to kiss her again, until he placed his lips over her breast. Her back arched while his tongue swirled her nipple and when he began to suck she felt the heat spear right through her.

"Yes, yes, yes..." she shouted, her body bucking wildly as the euphoria shot through her. She felt her body convulse inside and out and ripple, ripple, ripple.

Then she felt the tip of his penis pressing to the heat. As he captured her eyes, he pressed himself inside.

"Oh..." She felt pressure as he spread her open, as he slipped inside.

"This might hurt a bit. Tell me to stop if it gets to be too much."

She took his face in her hands, drew his mouth to hers. While they kissed, she felt him pushing even deeper. She moaned, wanting him to stay where he was and not go any further, but then he spread her legs apart with his hands and with one last thrust, he was inside.

"Oh....my..." It burned, it hurt, but as he started moving inside of her the pain subsided to be replaced with an interesting sensation she couldn't quite explain.

"I...don't...think I can...stop now," he panted, his hips thrusting inside of her, his face crunching up.

"Are you in pain?" She didn't want him to be in pain.

"Not at all. Oh man...I'm going to come."

He grunted, thrust once more inside of her before falling on top of her. She could feel him twitching inside of her and it was the oddest sensation.

"Did you orgasm?"

"Yes," he blew out. Lifting up on his arms, he looked down at her as he spoke. "Are you okay? Did it hurt a lot?"

"Only for a moment. I like the way you feel inside of me." And she didn't mind keeping him there.

He smiled with a warmth that went straight to her belly. "I like being inside of you too."

"Can we keep doing this? I like the feeling."

This time he laughed. "I don't think I have more in me right now. Oh man...shit...crap."

He pulled out and climbed off of her and she desperately wished he hadn't. Though she felt full and a little achy down below, she wanted him back where he'd been. "What is the matter? Are you in pain now?"

"No. Damn." He ran a hand through his hair.

She liked looking at him standing there before her, completely naked, his member weeping against his leg. He had a thin frame but his body was well developed.

"We didn't use protection."

"Use what?"

"Protection. A condom. It's a protective method to prevent venereal diseases and pregnancy."

She had no idea what he was talking about aside from the pregnancy. "That is when a child grows inside of the woman's womb."

"Yeah, which happens when two people have sex without protection to prevent it. Man...I should have thought before I did it."

"Perhaps next time we could use this protection you speak of. I like looking at you naked, Dusty."

His face went pink as he looked down at his body. "Um...thanks." Scooping up his pants, he began to dress.

"I would like to have sex again."

His head came up quickly and his eyes went a little wider. "Right now? I...uh...I can't right now. I need some time...to...just some time. Okay? We can do it again later. Oh wow, how long have I waited for this moment?" His laughter threw her for a moment, then she began to laugh with him.

"I'm going to go to the washroom and clean up."

She watched as he left the room and, rolling onto her side, sighed. She felt absolutely delightful.

Closing her eyes, she drifted off to sleep.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Long before he even knew the true meaning of sexual intercourse, Dusty had fantasized about girls. He'd loved the way their bodies curved, how they smelled, how they acted...everything about them he enjoyed. And as a young man, early in his teens, he would lie in his bed at night and picture girls in his head, naked, and masturbate. He'd wondered what they would feel like and as he grew into his teens the curiosity intensified. He'd always been a little on the shy side when it came to women—actually, he'd been a down right chicken shit—which explained his being a virgin at the age of twenty.

He'd always been a loner—okay, a geek—which made it even harder for him to approach girls. He'd never known what to say to them. And now that he had one interested in him, he was sitting in a laboratory while she was lying on a bed, naked and ready.

Was he insane?

Apparently.

He glanced down at his crotch and the sagging dick between his legs reminded him he needed some regenerative time. He wished, though, he would have been able to last a little longer. Next time.

Next time.

There was most definitely going to be a next time. Smiling, Dusty pulled the microscope closer to look into the lens. His blood was still

the same. Had he wished that his blood would glow like hers? Yes. Even better, would be if his blood was the way it had been when he'd been human. If only he could change it back.

Would it be possible?

Pushing from his stool, he ran to the cooler at the back of the room and thrust the big steel door open, keeping his fingers crossed that there were some samples left for him to use. When he saw the trays of tubes filled with red blood, he almost cried.

His blood had been red once.

Grabbing two flasks, he ran from the cooler and back to the microscope. Opening the top, he dropped a small amount of blood onto the slide, then slid it into place before looking into the eyepiece.

Yep, everything looked good.

Poking himself in the finger, he dropped some of his blood—that dull gray color was enough to make him puke—onto another slide. He replaced the sample with his blood and looked into the eyepiece. What a difference. It was obvious his blood now lacked the oxygenated cells that his blood had contained before he was a vampire. What would it take to put it back to the way it was supposed to be?

While he stared at his dull, lifeless blood, ideas began to percolate.



Leaving Basil to continue his search of the area where they had seen their daughter—and that was still something she was getting used to—Trinity stopped in on Jonah. She couldn't wait to tell him her good news. When she didn't find him in his office, she went upstairs to his apartment.

She heard the commotion, the rapid fire of voices and she wondered what was going on. She didn't bother to knock—given it had been her apartment not so long ago—and found Jonah, Raven, Dante, Gypsy, and Danny shouting out random words as Starla stood before them, acting like a fool.

"What the hell is going on?"

"Charades," Jonah supplied. "Join in. Oh—candy. Is it candy?"

Starla tapped her nose rapidly, then began gesturing with her arms like some crazy fool.

"Candy corn!" Dante shouted out and Starla jumped up and yelled, "Yes!"

"You've all lost your minds." But it was entertaining to see them together having fun. There hadn't been much fun lately. "I have some good news, but if you're busy I can always come back another time."

"Good news? We like good news," Jonah encouraged her to continue.

"Felicity is back." She felt as giddy as...well, a new mom.

"What?"

"Where is she?"

"How did you get her back?"

"Oh my God, you must be thrilled."

Each question came at her rapid fire, nearly knocking her off her feet. Deciding to answer them in the same manner, she responded, "Felicity is back. I don't know where she went. She ran off on us. We didn't get her back, we just found her in a grocery store, and yes, I am beyond thrilled." Everyone went silent. "Oh, did I mention she's an adult now?"

"What?"

"I think your hearing is going, Jonah. I said," Trinity shouted, "she is an adult now."

"I heard you, smartass." Jonah rolled his eyes. "What do you mean she's an adult? I think you need to start from the beginning and fill us in."

Trinity pulled up a chair from the kitchen and, sitting, told them all about her and Basil's encounter in the store with their daughter. When she was finished, all eyes locked on hers with a dazed look.

"You're sure it's her?"

She nodded at Dante's question. "Perfectly."

"This is so weird," Gypsy sighed.

"I know. Believe me, I know. My daughter is back. Can you believe it? And she's a woman. Wow, I suddenly feel really old."

"So you have no idea where she is now?"

Trinity turned to Raven with a shake of her head. "Not a clue, and that is one of the reasons I'm here. I need your help to find her."

"How do we find someone when we have no idea what she looks like?"

"Picture me younger, with long, black hair—and I mean long, right to her butt—and blue eyes like Basil's. I don't think they'd be far from the store, or at least I hope. Basil's out scanning the area but the two of us can only look in so many places. I need your help." She held her breath, waiting.

"Where do we start?" Jonah asked as he got to his feet with the aid of his cane.

"Thank you." She stood and, walking to Jonah, gave him a huge hug. "Miller and Fifth. Make sure to take the two-ways so we can all

stay in touch." She turned to Starla now. "I'm wondering if it was her that came out of the Realm. Is there any way you could look into it?"

"I could go to the area my mother said the anomaly took place and see if I pick anything up."

"Good, do that. Danny, go with her. Everyone," she paused, taking a long breath, "don't scare her. She seems fragile. If you see her, call me and tell me where you are and I'll go to her. Got it?"

"Loud and clear, boss." Dante saluted her with a smile. "Congrats."

"Save it for when she's found. Let's go."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Felicity woke feeling incredibly content. Stretching her arms over her head, she rolled over to find she was completely alone. A little jolt of fear prickled inside of her at not seeing Dusty anywhere. Slipping off the bed, feeling a little sore, she rushed from the room in search of him.

"Dusty? Where have you gone?"

"Back here," he called out and she followed his voice.

"Oh, there you are. I got worried when I woke and you weren't there. What are you doing?" He turned in his seat and she saw his eyes go wide as he looked at her.

"Where are your clothes?"

"I...uh...I guess I forgot to put them on. I was worried when I woke and you weren't there. I rather like this feeling of freedom." It felt nice not to have constrictions on her body. She sauntered towards Dusty noticing he was once again working with the microscope. "What are you looking at now?"

"You...I mean..." He cleared his throat. "Blood. Comparing human blood with my own. You really should put something on."

She looked over at him and saw his face had turned a ripe shade of pink. "I like not wearing clothing." She noticed the tent in his pants. "Maybe your body wishes fewer restrictions on it as well."

"Yeah..." He ran a hand over his mouth. "Man...I love the way your hair falls over your body. Especially like this. It sort of fans over your breasts and...well...lower and kinda hides what's beneath. It's very hot."

She stood beside him, glancing down at herself and decided he was right. And if that was the case, why did she need clothing? Glancing up at him, she saw the same look in his eyes now as he'd had when he'd first seen her naked. "Are you aroused by me like this?"

"Oh yeah..." he laughed nervously.

"You would like to have sex again?" She was more than ready.

"Hell yeah—no, wait!" She climbed onto his lap, straddling him. "Oh man."

"You are erect. I can feel it against my —"

"Yeah...but we shouldn't do it again without protection. Jeez, why do I have to be so damn responsible?"

"Is that a question for me?" If it was, she had no idea how to answer it.

"No. I was just thinking out loud. We need to go shopping."

"But I like sitting here. We could go after we orgasm."

"Oh...man..." Dusty chuckled, running a hand across his face.

"I like the way you feel pressing against me." She liked it even more when she began to move her body back and forth against his.

"Yeah...I rather like it too. Oh man..." He put his arms around her body and held her in place.

"Will you suckle from my breast like you did before?"

"We shouldn't do this." But as he said it, he leaned forward sucking one breast into his mouth.

"I like that. Yes, I really like that." She began to pump her hips even more, enjoying the hardness pressing into her swollen flesh. She held his head in place as he toyed with her nipple, as his mouth ravaged her, as his tongue flicked. "Yes, yes, I really like that." She continued to gyrate against him, feeling that familiar warmth encompass her body. And like before, she felt it ripple through her as it shook her body.

"Yes, yes, yes!" she screamed as her body gushed with delight. Dusty gripped onto her hips and began sucking even harder on her breast which drove her completely wild.

Her body exploded with delight as he let out a loud grunt. She felt the fluid pool near her apex. Curious, she looked down, noticing his pants were damp.

"You soiled yourself."

"Huh?" he panted.

"Your pants are damp."

"It's semen. It's what happens when I orgasm."

Curious, she stood up and touched the dampness. It felt sticky.

"Interesting."

"Yeah, that is why we need protection. My sperm is what can impregnate you."

"Very interesting. I am damp as well. Do I have sperm?" she asked, sliding her hand between her legs to feel the dew.

"No, only guys have that. I need to wash up. Then we need to get some protection. It might be a good idea if you put on some clothes before we go out."

In one hand she felt his sperm, in the other she felt her own juices. It was odd, how different they were yet how perfectly they matched.



Maybe it was a mistake, but Dusty wanted to walk instead of drive. Anyway, it was only a few blocks from them, he was sure they would be fine.

"When we return after getting the protection, can we have sex?"

"Oh boy." Where was she years ago? "Let's just concentrate on getting the condoms and getting back. Okay?"

"I do not like these...shoes. They hurt my feet."

Dusty glanced down at the white running shoes he'd found in a locker near the change rooms and had given Felicity to wear. They had been a bit small for her, but he'd hoped they would do for now. He couldn't have her walking around barefoot when there was so much broken glass and other debris lying about. "I know. Maybe they'll have some in the drugstore that will fit better."

"I prefer being barefoot."

"Yes, well, unless you enjoy having your feet cut up from glass, you need to wear something on your feet. We're almost there in any case." The couple they'd seen earlier stepped out from behind the building and his protective streak came out.

"What are you doing?" Felicity asked when Dusty stepped in front of her.

"Felicity?"

"Protecting you," he informed her and was determined not to let anything happen to her.

"Those are my parents, Trinity and Basil. They will not harm me." She stepped out from behind him just as they approached. "Hello again."

"We've been looking all over for you, Felicity. Please, don't run away again," Trinity expressed in a hurried tone.

"I was frightened and unsure the last time we met. I am not frightened now," Felicity responded calmly.

"Can we go somewhere, and talk?"

"Perhaps after we've done our shopping for protection and shoes."

"Excuse me?" Basil stepped forward with a challenging look in his eyes.

Shit! "Um...we were going to buy shoes. Shoes," he emphasized, not wanting an angry father to come after him. "Besides, I don't think Felicity wants to go anywhere with you."

"I would like to speak with my parents now," Felicity informed him.

"Are you sure?" Dusty took her aside. "Are you ready for this?"

"Yes. I believe I am, but I would like you there with me."

He wasn't about to leave her alone, not after what she had told him about her parents. Not after hearing all the men where he'd been held captive talk about Trinity like she was some evil force to be reckoned with. "I'll stick with you."

"We could go to our place and talk," Felicity suggested to her parents.

"Um...that may not be such a good idea." Pulling her aside again, he lowered his voice. "They'll know where we're staying."

"Vampires have excellent hearing, in case you didn't know that about yourself."

Dusty shot Basil a narrow look. Yeah, he knew that. Still.

"It's okay if they know where I'm staying. This is what I came here to do. I need to do it now." She turned back to her parents. "We are staying just down the block in that clinic. If you follow us, we can begin our discussion."

"I hope you know what you're doing."

She took Dusty's hand in hers and smiled. "So do I."



Trinity watched her daughter walk away hand in hand with some boy who seemed very protective of her. She had no idea how they knew each other, but she was sure going to find out.

"She said they were going to get protection. You heard that, right?" Basil whispered through gritted teeth.

She nodded. "Do you think he's from the Realm?"

"I think he had better keep his hands to himself where our daughter is concerned."

"It feels so weird. I mean, she's a grown woman and I don't even know her, yet I feel...protective of her. You do too. Isn't that weird, when we don't know her?"

Basil shrugged, slipped a cigarette from his pocket, and lit it up. "Blood is blood no matter what. I'm going to rip his arm off if he doesn't remove it from her waist."

"Behave. I'm scared."

He stopped her, took her face in his hand. "Of what?"

"Of scaring her off. I don't want to lose her again, Basil."

"We won't." He kissed her quickly. "I promise."

As they followed their daughter, Trinity could only hope Basil was right.

Because she couldn't go through losing her daughter twice.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Her legs were shaking. How odd was that? Felicity knew she was safe, she knew there was nothing her parents could do to her that she couldn't handle, yet she was terrified.

They sat in what Dusty called the waiting area, in chairs that were much too hard, and stared at each other. Felicity knew if she opened her mind, she would hear what her parents were thinking, but she wouldn't. She simply didn't want to know what they were thinking, for fear of, well, more things than she could imagine. Instead, she sat across from them, examining the two people who had given her life.

Her mother had a round face with a square chin. She had an elegance to her that was disguised by a pale blue shirt and dark, stiff-looking pants. Her hair was pulled back in a tight tail at the back of her head. She had a slender build that Felicity recognized as being the same as her own.

Her father was an imposing figure with such beauty that it took her breath away. She'd never seen a man more handsome. His hair hung to his shoulders in a river of black satin. His eyes were the same blue as her own and lined with long dark lashes. He had very prominent cheekbones and lips rich with fullness. She had his mouth.

And sitting with them now, she sensed nothing remotely close to evil.

Trinity spoke first.

"How old are you?"

"My mother told me I am twenty."

Her birth mother's eyes narrowed. "Rajana is not your mother. I am."

Her father took her mother's hand in his, which touched Felicity deeply. She could see the love he held for her in his eyes.

"Rajana is the woman who raised me and she is the one I call mother."

"Only because she stole you from us," Trinity snapped.

"I was taken from you because you are evil and wish to take her out and reign as the new queen."

Trinity's brow curled. "Is that what she told you?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's a lie."

"Relax, my love." Her father lifted her mother's hand to his lips and kissed it softly before turning his attention to Felicity. "My mother has a way of spinning things to suit her. This has always been her way, but I assure you, neither of us is evil. I promise you, Trinity does not want to take over as reigning queen."

"Damn straight. I hate these powers she gave me and would give anything to be rid of them. She took you from me, from us because she wanted you for her own. She encouraged me to sign you away with a lie then snatched you from my arms only minutes after you were born. If anyone is evil, it's her."

Once again her father soothed with a squeeze of his hand. "How is it you can be twenty years old?"

"My mother made me this old." Felicity ignored the snort from her birth mother.

"How do you mean, she made you this old?" Basil inquired.

"I do not know how she achieved it, but a few short weeks ago I was still a young girl. She took me for a walk and my next memory is waking in my bed at this age. She's done so my entire life."

"She aged you?" her mother gasped.

"What memories do you have of growing up?" her father continued.

Playing with her hair, Felicity thought back to her life. "I recall some things in my youth, but not many. My earliest memory is when I was approximately...five. It is vague, like looking through a foggy window. I was given a doll that had long white hair like my

mother's—Rajana," she corrected when her birth mother snarled once again. "She told me it was my birthday and that each day of my birth I would receive another doll."

"How many do you have now?"

She liked her father's voice. It was a little deep but oddly soothing. "Four. I was recently given one. Just after we spoke." She turned her attention to her birth mother.

"We spoke? When did we speak?"

"I am unsure of the time. You were locked in the cell my mother kept you in. After you left, I asked my mother about you and she told me you were my birth mother. We went for a walk and I woke like this." She held her hands out to her body.

"I think I'm going to be sick." Eyes shimmering, Trinity lowered her head between her knees.

"I'll get you some water." Rushing from his seat, Dusty hurried from the room.

"I did not mean to make you feel ill."

"It's not you, sweetheart. It's what happened to you."

Her father called her sweetheart. Felicity's heart warmed with those words. "I questioned my mother on your evilness. You seemed so nice, so kind and I wondered how someone who seemed sincere could be as evil as my mother—Rajana—proclaimed. And I do not see how she has you under her spell."

Basil tilted his head in confusion as he rubbed Trinity's back. "Is that what my mother told you?"

"Yes. She said my birth mother brainwashed you so you would desert your mother and help Trinity take over the Realm. But I see no signs of a spell on you. I only see love."

Trinity lifted her head and the tears rolled down her cheeks. "You let me look inside of you, to show me that you truly were my daughter. I ask you now. Look inside of me and see the truth. Please."

If it was a ploy to control her, Felicity was prepared for it. As she stepped into her mother's mind, she saw the love Trinity held for the man beside her, and she saw the love Trinity held for her only child. Her heart filled with emotions when she was taken to the moment of her birth and the tears of joy her mother had spilled. She pulled out of her mother's thoughts with tears stinging her eyes.

"Do you see the truth now? I loved you, from the very moment I found out about you. Yeah, I was scared, but I loved you. I love you now. I don't want to take over as queen. All I want is my daughter back. I want you back."

She felt her mother's emotions spill over into her own. "When I came to your cell it was because something called to me. I felt... something pulling at me and when I heard your voice it was as if...I recognized it. It stirred something inside of me. Here." She placed a hand on her heart. "I felt comforted by it, by you, and it was so strong that even after I woke at this age, I felt it."

"There was something about you too, that got to me. After we spoke, I couldn't get you out of my head and I wondered what such a young thing was doing in a place like that. It was you that kept me going, you that encouraged me to hold on, to be strong. Oh, Felicity, if I had known it was you...I came there to look for you," Trinity blurted out through her tears. "We performed a spell so that I could go into the Realm and bring you home. I've been trying ever since you were born to bring you back to us. But Rajana kept blocking us. I can't believe I finally have you back."

She was thrown when her mother rushed to her. Falling down on her knees, Trinity embraced Felicity in a tight hold. Cautiously, Felicity put her arms around her mother. As they embraced, she felt something inside of her click for the very first time.

She felt love wash through her for the woman who had given her life.

"Mother."

"Yes. Yes, I am your mother." Sitting back, Trinity cupped Felicity's face in her hands. "Oh, look how beautiful you are. Basil, look at her."

He sat down beside them and replaced her mother's hand with his own. "More beautiful than anything I have ever seen."

"My father."

"Can you call me Dad?" he chuckled, wiping his own tears away.

"Dad." It slid off her tongue with an odd sensation, but Felicity decided it was something she could get used to. "She talks of you often. Your mother. She wishes she had never let you go."

He wiped his tears, then wiped hers. "It still gave her no right to take you from us."

"Did you lock her in the Realm?" her mother asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I knew if I didn't, she would come after me and take me home. I only wanted time to see my parents, to get to know them, to find out for myself if they were truly evil."

"And now what? What will you do now?" her father asked softly.

Felicity drew in a deep breath. Dusty entered the room with a cup in hand. "I wish to remain here and get to know my parents."

"Oh, sweetie, you couldn't have said anything more precious."

"I guess you don't need this now." Dusty set the cup on an empty chair.

"I want you to come home with us."

"To the castle?"

"You know of my home?" Basil inquired.

"We drove to it some hours ago. I was not ready to speak to you then. I would like to see your home."

"It's your home too," her mother added as she got to her feet. She held her hand out. "I have so much I want to ask you, but it'll wait. We have plenty of time."

Felicity stood, taking her mother's hand. "I have more questions as well." She turned her attention to Dusty and held out her free hand.

"I guess you won't need me anymore, huh?"

She tilted her head in confusion. "I have plenty of need for you. I wish you to come with me to my parents' home."

"I don't think so."

Felicity turned to her father, confused. "Dusty is my protector, he is my friend, my lover. He must come with me or I will not leave."

"Um...it's okay, Felicity. I don't have to go with you."

She released her mother's hand to take his. "I will not go if you remain."

"Felicity—"

"He can come along," her mother spoke up.

"Trinity, I don't think that is such a good idea," her father spouted through gritted teeth.

"I want my daughter home, Basil. If she wants her friend to come along, so be it." She turned to Felicity and Dusty. "You're welcome as long as she wants you."

"That is perfect." Overjoyed, Felicity pulled him closer and kissed him quickly. "Perhaps we can get that protection later."

"Oh man..."

"We need to talk." Basil took Dusty by the arm and pulled him aside.

Confused by her father's actions, she turned to her mother. "Is my father not pleased with my friend?"

"I'll explain it to you when we get home."

Felicity supposed that would have to do.



Dusty wished desperately now that he could slink into the shadows and disappear. The look Felicity's father was giving him could cut the strongest man off at the knees. And he was anything but strong.

Still, he held his back straight, his chin firm as he spoke with the father of the woman he was having sex with.

"How did you meet my daughter?"

Dusty swallowed the lump in his throat and did his best to sound like a sturdy man as he spoke. "I was..." *Don't tell him the truth, you fool.* "I was walking along when this big flash of light came out of nowhere. I ducked behind the nearest car and when the light was gone, I came out to see what it was. And there was Felicity."

"So you decided what a perfect opportunity to take this innocent young woman back to your place and use her as your sex toy?"

"What? No! That wasn't the way it happened." Was he sweating? He sure felt as though he was. "She was terrified. She clung to me, begging me to help her. So I did. All I did was bring her here and promise to keep her safe."

"And why not use her for your own gain? A pretty young woman drops down practically in your lap. Seems to me that would be the perfect opportunity to use her for sex."

Oh man...this was not going to end well for him at all. "Not at first. Man... Look, we're both adults—" He slunk back when Basil narrowed those icy blue eyes on him. "I didn't use her for anything. It's been mutual all the way."

"Mutual or not, you will keep your hands off of my daughter. Got it?"

"Yes, sir." He would agree to eat glass right now so long as it meant he could keep his head.

"Good. Now, the ladies are waiting for us."

Swallowing the lump that was building rather than diminishing, Dusty followed the big, dark, scary man.

What other choice did he have?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The castle was even more grand on the inside. From the very moment of entry, Felicity could only stare at her surroundings. She had never seen anything as lovely as the home her parents called their own.

And she couldn't help but be sad at not having been able to grow up in such a lovely home. What would it have been like to run through these halls, barefoot, knowing it was all hers?

They led her up the grand staircase to the second floor where beautiful red carpet and elegant gold walls lined a hallway. On either side of her were tall doors in beautiful dark wood. She could only imagine what the rooms looked like on the other side.

"We'll give you this room, for now."

As her mother opened the door to her right, Felicity gasped at the elegance before her. She vaguely heard her father say, "Your room is all the way down the hall, boy."

"It is exquisite."

"It's temporary. Until we can get your room in order to how you want it."

"I want this room." Walking further into the room, she was in awe of her surroundings. To her right was a grand bed in wonderful sap-

phire coverings and gold pillows. Over the bed hung a covering, also in sapphire and gold that connected to four large sculpted wooden posts. She had never seen anything like it before in her life. The floor beneath her was in a glorious wood tone that matched the bed posts. Beside the bed, a rug in white looked as if it were made of feathers. The walls were etched in colors of blue, gold and cream. Across from the bed sat a sofa, a chair and to the left a small table with two chairs.

"This is a guest room. You deserve better."

"I want this room." Realizing her rudeness, Felicity turned to her mother with apology. "I beg your pardon. What I meant was, could I stay in this room?"

"For as long as you like. We need to get you some clothes. Where did you get these?"

Felicity looked down at the dull yellow shirt and baggy pants she wore. "Dusty gave them to me to wear. I have never worn pants before."

"Seriously? What did you wear before?"

"Robes of white. My mother—Rajana—said ladies only wore robes of white, but I secretly longed to wear what other girls wore on Earth. What is that called that you wear on your legs?"

"These? Jeans."

"They look stiff."

"They are, but oddly comfortable. We could get you some if you would like. I think some of my pre-pregnancy clothes might fit you."

"I would like that. Where is Dusty?" she asked in a panic, suddenly realizing he wasn't in the room with her.

"I think your father is showing him to his room."

She cocked her head to the side. "He must stay with me, here."

Trinity laughed. "Yeah, that is so not happening."

"Why not? We stayed together before now. He is my protector, my friend, my lo—"

"About that. You might want to refrain from mentioning that all the time. The lover part."

Confused, Felicity followed her mother to the sofa to sit. "Why is that?"

"I think it might give your father a heart attack. Tell me how you met."

Felicity picked up the tiny glass container on the wooden table before her and examined it. "He rescued me when several men came at me. This is beautiful. What do you call it?"

"A candy dish. What do you mean there were men who came after you?"

"Candy?"

"You know...junk food. Sweet treats." Felicity shook her head. "You don't know what candy is?"

Felicity shook her head again as she set the dish back on the table.

"Oh...I can't explain it. It's better if I give you some to try yourself. But we'll do that later. Tell me about these men who came after you."

"I was confused and a little dazed when I touched down. I saw the men charging at me and I was frightened. They began to scream and I closed my eyes and curled in a ball. Dusty came to me then and told me he would protect me."

"What happened to the men?"

The fabric on the sofa was rather interesting. It was soft, but was not cloth. It looked buttery but felt a little stiff. "What do you call this fabric?"

"Leather. What happened to the men, Felicity?"

"I was frightened." She stood now, wishing desperately that Dusty was with her. "I did not mean to harm them. It just happened. I need to be with Dusty. Where is he?" She threw the door to her room open and ran into the hall.

"Felicity. Wait up."

She didn't wait for her mother but instead began opening door after door in her desperate search. "Dusty. Where are you? Where have you gone?"

"Felicity. It's okay. He's just down the hall."

Racing in the direction her mother had pointed, Felicity ran to the door and, thrusting it open, saw both her father and Dusty in the room. She ran directly into Dusty's arms.

"What's going on?" Dusty tucked her safely against him.

"It wasn't my fault. I was scared. Tell her it wasn't my fault," she pleaded against Dusty's chest. Here she felt safe.

"What is going on?" Basil inquired of Trinity.

"We were talking about how she came to be here. She was telling me about some men who came after her, then she started crying and jumped up from her spot. I don't know what's going on."

"Oh...wow...okay. I know what this is about." Kissing Felicity's head, Dusty lifted her chin to speak to her. "It's okay, Felicity. I can tell them but, remember, I won't let anything happen to you."

"I did not mean to harm them," she sobbed against his chest.

"I know. Shh, it's okay. I don't think she knows what she really did, but she's sorry it happened."

"What happened?" Trinity wanted to know eagerly.

"When she came here, there was a bright light. I ducked behind a car, but when I came out—after the light was gone—the men were, well, a pile of dust."

"I didn't mean to do it," Felicity cried, sniffing with her tears. She'd never done anything like that before and she knew she was never doing it again. The screams of the men as they...burned up would stay with her forever.

"Oh, wow. Honey..."

Felicity flinched at her mother's hand as it stroked her hair. "If I could bring them back, I would."

"I know. I know. I'm sorry."

When her mother's lips touched the back of her head, all the pain she felt inside seemed to slip away. Easing out of Dusty's grip, she turned to her mother, smiling through her tears. "You are not evil and I came from you. Then I am not evil either."

"Of course you're not evil. Who would tell you such—Rajana," Trinity growled.

"No!" Felicity dashed her tears away with her palm. "But I thought that if my mother was so evil...or as evil as my—Rajana stated, could it be that I too would become so evil?"

"I hate her for doing this to you."

Her mother's anger surprised her, but it didn't frighten her. "Hate is so ugly and you are truly beautiful. I feel tired. May I take a rest now?"

"Certainly, sweetheart. Why don't I take you back to your room?"

"I would like Dusty to take me," she replied to her father.

"I don't—"

"That would be fine," her mother interrupted, sending a stern look her father's way. "I'll just come along to make sure you have everything you need."

Nodding, Felicity clung to Dusty as he led her from his room.

She never wanted to hurt another human being as long as she lived.



Basil waited impatiently outside his daughter's door, wondering if it would be wrong to install a lock on the door to prevent Dusty

from entering. The boy seemed nice enough, and Felicity certainly was taken with him, but that didn't mean Basil was going to let his guard down. His daughter was relying on a total stranger and until he found out more about the boy Basil wasn't going to feel at ease with him.

When Felicity's door opened and Trinity snuck out, Basil rushed to her side. "How is she?"

"Asleep. It took some convincing to get Dusty out of there. She feels safer with him around."

"Yeah...well...I don't."

Smiling, Trinity stroked a hand over his face. "As much as it pains me to say this, I must point out that she is a grown woman."

"Grown woman or not, she is my daughter and I will not have some sex-starved young man using her for his gain."

"Oh, Basil," Trinity laughed. "What makes you think they're having sex?"

"I heard it from the horse's mouth when I interrogated him at the clinic."

"Oh." She swallowed, then began to sob.

"Oh, love." Tucking her in his arms, Basil led her down the hall to their room. Once inside he sat with her on the bed and let her cry.

"I was robbed of so much. I wasn't even there to talk to my own daughter about sex. I never got to see her grow up into the beautiful woman she is now."

"Apparently, our daughter wasn't given the opportunity to grow up like you or me."

Sniffing, Trinity sat up, wiped her face. "How could Rajana do such a thing? Why would she do it?"

"Because a child is difficult to deal with but a woman is easier to control." He stroked the tears away. "However, I doubt my mother expected her to be so strong-headed."

"She gets that from you." Trinity smiled, touching Basil's face.

"More like you." He kissed her softly, tasting the salt from her tears. "I suspect she is more like you in many other ways."

"You're talking about what she did to those men?"

"Yes. It sounds a great deal like what happened to you days ago."

"I know. And I can understand how she feels."

"I told you, it wasn't your fault."

"I could have killed you."

"But you didn't." He kissed her sullen lips. "And I've recovered nicely. Once our daughter wakes, I think it would be a good idea if

you spoke to her about her ordeal. Let her know you understand what she did and that it was an accident. Perhaps, the two of you can find out how it is you are able to incinerate flesh. This might be a nice asset for us."

"Basil!"

"I simply mean in defense against our enemies. Just think about it. If the two of you could hone this skill—"

"Let's not worry about that right now. For the time being, let's enjoy having our daughter home."

Kissing her once more, Basil held her in his arms but inside he was vowing revenge.

His mother would not get away with what she'd done.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The bedroom was glorious, but Felicity felt no need at the moment to sleep in it. She regretted lying to her mother and pretending she was asleep so she would leave the room. But she wanted to see Dusty and knew as long as she remained awake her mother would stay with her.

Felicity could still feel the touch of her mother's hand on her hair as she pretended to sleep. The emotion she had felt from her mother was incredibly strong and had nearly made Felicity choke up with her own emotion. She was loved by both her parents and the fact that Rajana—and she was no longer going to call her mother, it just wasn't right given what she'd done—said otherwise infuriated her. It was not right what Rajana had done to her parents and as soon as Felicity found a way to confront Rajana, she would. But for now, she wanted to be with Dusty.

Slipping from her bed, dressed in the soft gray, silky nightshirt her mother had given her, Felicity headed down the hall to Dusty's room.

Pushing through his door, she found it empty. "Dusty? Where have you gone, Dusty?" She raced through the room, yanking open door after door and just as she was about to open the last one, it opened and Dusty stepped through the entryway.

"There you are." She threw her arms around him and held him tightly.

"I was just in the washroom. I thought you were asleep."

Releasing him, she tugged him to the bed. "I do not want to sleep alone. I wish to sleep with you."

He tugged his hand free. "Not a good idea."

"Why not?"

"If your father finds out you're here, he's going to kill me."

She gasped. "He threatened you?"

"No, not...no, it was a figure of speech. He'll be really mad if he finds you here. You need to leave."

"I do not wish to leave. You are my friend, my protector, my..."

She remembered what her mother had said. "Why is it not right for me to call you my lover?"

"It's just that people don't like to hear about other people's sex lives. Sex between two individuals is private, between them. It makes some people, especially a parent, uncomfortable to hear about you having sex with someone. They don't want to know their child is having sex and they certainly don't want to hear about it from their child. Okay?"

"That seems silly, but I suppose I can stop referring to you as my lover. I am still not leaving." To prove it, she crawled into his bed and drew the covers over her. She patted the spot beside her.

"Felicity—"

"Do you not want me to sleep with you?"

"It's not that. It's just...I don't want your father mad at me."

"I am old enough to make my own choices, am I not? As are you. What we decide to do is our own business and, as you said, sex is private. We need not tell him what we do."

"Oh man...you're killing me."

"I most certainly am not!" she gasped. "I would never harm you."

"It was a figure of speech. I really need to speak more clearly with you."

"That would be advisable."

"What I meant was I want nothing more than to lie down beside you, and have sex with you—"

"Wonderful." She patted the bed again, smiling. She couldn't wait to feel his body on hers, and in hers, again.

He stood there for what seemed like forever before he finally threw his hands in the air and joined her in the bed.

Fully clothed.

"I wish to feel your flesh next to mine."

"We can't have sex, Felicity."

"Why not?" She wanted to feel that euphoric sensation again but more so, she wanted to feel him touch her, kiss her, love her.

"No protection, remember? Let's just sleep for a bit. When we wake up, I'll head back into the city and get some protection."

She went into his arms willingly and laid her head on his chest. She could hear his heart beating in a slow, hypnotic rhythm and, before she knew it, her eyes began to droop.



Trinity tugged on Basil's arm to prevent him from barging into their guest's room and doing something stupid. They'd both decided to check on Felicity once more before attending to business but when they hadn't found her in her room, both had panicked. Finding her in Dusty's room had been even worse.

"Just calm down," she said under her breath and pulled him away from the room.

"I'll be calm when that young man is far away from here. I never should have agreed to let him stay here."

Trinity stepped in front of Basil, stopping him from entering the room. "She's a grown woman."

"She's only twenty."

"I was only eighteen when you seduced me." That stopped him.

"That was different."

"How?"

"It just was," he grumbled, complete with a sullen look on his face.

"That is the most idiotic response you have ever given. Basil, stop." She halted him and, though he was spitting fire with his eyes, she stayed strong. "She said she and Dusty were going to buy protection. You should be proud she's responsible. You can't stop her from having sex. Please, don't scare her off."

He huffed, turned, huffed some more, then circled back to Trinity. "You came to me willingly," he pointed out with a wag of his index finger.

"And how do you know she didn't go willingly to him? You don't. I know you feel protective of her. So do I. But I also realize that if I try and stop her from being with that young man I may push her away.

A part of being a parent is trusting your child to know right from wrong."

"She was raised by my mother. You think she knows right from wrong?"

"You do."

"Your logic is becoming very annoying."

Smiling, she leaned forward and nipped his lips with her teeth. "I love you too. Trust her to do what's right."

Huffing, he gave in. "All right. I'll trust her. The young man, however, is fair game."

"Oh, Basil." Laughing, she hooked her arm around his and led him back down the stairs.



There was nothing harder than sleeping beside a half naked woman and not being able to touch her. Felicity had one bare leg draped over his, one arm slung across his chest and her bare breasts beneath the silk pressed into his side.

Dusty was hard and aching for release.

What he needed was to get some condoms. And fast.

Carefully, he slipped out from beneath her arm and leg and climbed from the bed. When she rolled over and stayed asleep he let out a sigh of relief. Tiptoeing from the room, he hoped no one was around to see him. He wasn't in the mood for a conversation. Or a confrontation. As he exited his room all he heard was silence. Still quiet, he inched down the stairs—and, holy hell, was this place enormous—and made his way to the front door. Spotting the club leaned up beside the door, Dusty decided it might be a good idea to go out armed.

Clicking the door shut behind him, club in hand, he ran to his car. As he pulled away, he watched the castle fade in the rearview mirror.

He really needed to call his family. They were probably frantic with worry. He'd been gone for months. His mother was probably hysterical by now. Just as soon as he found a working telephone he was going to make sure and call her. What he was going to say, he wasn't sure. But at least he could reassure her that he was fine.

First, he needed condoms.

God! He'd finally had sex. Correction, he hadn't just had sex, he'd had phenomenal sex with a hot, gorgeous chick. Who would have thought? Not him. Damn, he was lucky. Provided Felicity's father

didn't string him up first. Basil had a fierce look, but at the same time Dusty could see the same features in Felicity. The scowl was a definite match between father and daughter. And the hair and eyes, though Felicity's were a little more blue than her father's. But she got her beauty from her mother. Trinity was definitely hot and what the hell was he doing thinking of a woman old enough to be his mother as hot?

Laughing it off, he pulled into the city, scanning for the nearest drugstore. After driving for several blocks, he finally saw one up ahead to his right. Pulling up in front, he took the club and cautiously slid from the car. Scanning the area, Dusty headed inside. It was a good thing the front door was broken off its hinge. He didn't have to worry about opening it. Stepping inside, he looked around and when he found what he had come for, he hurried to the aisle.

Now what kind of condom should he get?

Hell, get them all. Running to the front, he grabbed a shopping bag and hurried to fill it with condoms. He'd decide which ones to use when he was safely in his room. With the bag full, he ran for the door and nearly screamed like a girl when a scrawny-looking guy met him at the entrance.

The guy bore his fangs and Dusty dropped the bag and lifted the club. He swung it out and clubbed the guy right across the head. With a crack, the guy's eyes went wide right before he fell to the floor. The adrenaline pumping inside of him, Dusty told himself not to throw up.

"Shit! Shit!" Grabbing the bag, he ran for the car and throwing it into the back seat, dove behind the steering wheel. Up ahead he saw the vamp was still out cold on the ground. And his mind began to work.

"Should I? Why not? It's only a vamp." Rushing from the car, club in hand, he hurried to the unconscious man on the ground and, hoisting him up by the arms, hoped he didn't wake any time soon. He dragged him to the car, then decided the trunk was the best place for him. Leaving the guy on the ground, Dusty pulled the keys from his pocket and unlocked the trunk. It didn't take much to hoist the scrawny man into it. When the trunk lid was closed, he finally let out the breath he'd been holding.

"Holy hell!" Rope! He needed rope...or chain, something to tie him up with that would hold him. Running back into the drugstore, he searched frantically for something to hold the guy long enough for Dusty to drain his blood and replace it with fresh human blood.

He needed human blood.

Not finding anything strong enough to hold a vampire, Dusty opted for something else. Sleeping pills. Grabbing several boxes, he ran back to the car and tossed the boxes on the seat beside him as he started the car.

How far was the nearest town or city? And would they have what he needed?

No better way to find out than to try.

With an unconscious vampire in his trunk, sleeping pills beside him, and a bag of condoms in the back seat, Dusty sped for the nearest exit.

If he could figure out a way to erase the vampire inside of him, he was damn well going to do it.

At any cost.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Standing in the doorway, Trinity looked on as her daughter slept. She couldn't believe it. Her daughter was home. Albeit she was twenty years old and Trinity had missed her daughter's entire infancy and childhood, Trinity couldn't dismiss the fact that Felicity was here, in her home, where she belonged.

And the instant she found a way into the Realm, Trinity was going to make sure Rajana paid for what she'd done. Not only had the bitch robbed her of her child, but she'd robbed the child of her life as well. Trinity would never forgive her for that.

Closing the door and leaving Felicity to sleep, Trinity took the stairs down to meet with the gang. She'd called them all to tell them Felicity was safe and where she belonged and asked that they all gather. They still had the matter of finding Chaos to deal with.

"How is she?" Basil asked the instant Trinity entered the room.

"Still asleep." She smiled, feeling a warmth inside of her she hadn't felt in a very long time. Looking around the room, she saw the people she now called her family and even if she didn't have the ability to read minds she could tell they were eager to hear all about Felicity's return.

"I know you're all eager to meet her, but that'll have to wait for the time being. Until she wakes up, we have other things to deal with. Chaos."

"I'm still not able to locate him," Starla supplied in a humdrum tone.

"She's been trying so hard to find him through her spells that it's been giving her headaches," Danny, her lover, explained as he rubbed Starla's temples.

"I'm fine, Danny," Starla reassured him with a pat of her hand to his before turning back to Trinity. "Everything I'm getting tells me he isn't in Jacob's Cove."

"Where would he be? Like the guy would want to live where there was sun when he was the one who created utter darkness. I find it hard to believe he's not here," Dante expressed firmly.

"I'm on the same page as you." Trinity began pacing the floor and tried to think. "If you can't pick him up on your spell radar, Starla, what are the odds he's using magic to hide himself?"

"Why would you think that?" Jonah asked, tapping his cane on the floor.

"He uses magic like someone might use the telephone. It's convenient for him and he's done it before. What if he's gone to the Dark Mystics for help?" Trinity shifted her attention to Basil. "Is it plausible?"

"Very much so." He lit a cigarette, ignoring the grunt from Cooper. "I could go see them and find out."

"I don't like you going to them." Trinity waved it off. "Is there any other way we could find out if he's been to the DMs?"

"I could ask High Priestess Essema if she could inquire for us."

"Thanks, Starla, you do that. In the meantime, I think we need to start asking more questions. Time to start up the interrogations. Is the dungeon ready for guests, Basil?"

"I'll have Cooper change the linens and fluff the pillows," he supplied through a puff of exhaled smoke.

"Shall I use the silk linens?" Cooper inquired with a healthy dollop of sarcasm.

"Only the best for our guests."

"Great, let's get on it." Trinity shifted her attention to Jonah. "Any new gadgets you have for us to try out?"

"I've made more electro nets for us to use and I've been tinkering with this funky little handheld blinder the ladies might like to try out."

"Blinder?" Leave it to Jonah to come up with more toys.

"It fits in the palm of your hand with straps that come around the entire hand. It's the size of a golf ball but it packs a wicked punch. All you have to do to activate it is squeeze your hand and it emits a bright light that will blind your attacker long enough for you to immobilize them."

"Trust me when I say it's bright," Raven supplied, blinking her eyes rapidly.

"I warned you that I was working on something," Jonah patted her hand.

"Okay, so that could come in handy. Bring it along with the nets. I don't want to leave Felicity here alone, so we can take turns going out. We'll set up a schedule..." she trailed off as everyone's eyes turned to the doorway. Following their gazes, she saw that Felicity was awake.

"Morning."



Felicity entered the room and all eyes turned to her. She'd heard voices and had thought since Dusty wasn't in the bed with her that he had gone down to speak with her parents. Only problem was, he wasn't in the room.

"Did we wake you?" her mother asked.

"I heard voices. I thought...I didn't mean to interrupt. I'll just go back upstairs—"

"No, it's all right. I want you to meet everyone."

Her mother came to her and, taking her hand, led her into the room. She'd never had so many people looking at her before. It was rather unnerving.

"This is Cooper. He's been a friend of your father's since Basil was a small boy. And this is his wife, Gabriella."

"Pleasure to meet you."

He didn't seem so stiff when he smiled. And the woman was pretty enough. "Pleasure's mine."

"This is Dante and Gypsy. They're good friends of ours."

"Great to finally meet you, Felicity."

The gentleman was very handsome with a darker complexion than the pale young woman next to him with an odd shade of green hair. Felicity smiled at the couple before being led to the next.

"Danny is Dante's brother, twin, actually, but we'll save that story for another time. This is his girlfriend, Starla. She's the one who's been helping us try to find you."

Felicity couldn't see how the two men were twins but she trusted her mother was telling the truth. The woman was a pretty thing with deep red hair and a friendly face. "Nice to meet you."

"And lastly, this is your godfather, my best friend, and co-worker, Jonah."

He stood to greet her and Felicity noticed he needed the aid of a metal device to stand. He had a soft face, kind eyes, and a sweet look about him that put her at ease. When he took her into his arms she was momentarily stunned.

"I've waited a long time to meet you," he said as he released her. "Welcome home, Felicity."

"Thank you, Jonah. What is a godfather?" Everyone laughed, startling her.

"Sorry." Trinity rubbed a hand along her arm in a soothing manner. "Some couples appoint a guardian for their child who will take care of the child if anything should happen to the parents. In this case, Jonah was asked to be your guardian, godfather, if something happened to your father and I."

"Should I call you Godfather?"

"You can call me Uncle Jonah," he instructed and when he smiled the dimples dug into his cheeks.

"Uncle...Jonah. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"I like how that sounds. This is Raven."

A pretty woman with dark hair and deep blue eyes held out her hand. "Nice to see you again. I was the one that delivered you."

"Delivered me from where?"

"She helped me give birth to you," her mother explained.

Felicity held her hand out to the woman. "Thank you."

Chuckling lightly, Raven took the hand. "You are most welcome."

"I am pleased to meet all of you. Now I will leave you to continue your business."

"You don't have to leave, Felicity."

She acknowledged her mother with a nod. "I need to find Dusty. He was not in bed when I woke."

"Last I saw him he was in his room," her mother supplied.

"If he knows what's good for him he left," her father muttered under his breath while smoke fluttered from his mouth.

"Why do you not like him? He has been nothing but kind to me. If it hadn't been for Dusty, I don't know what I would have done."

Her father cleared his throat as he tapped the smoking thing in his hand out in a glass tray on the table beside him before responding. "I

don't know him well enough to like or dislike him, I suppose. I'm just being protective of you." He walked to her now, taking her hands in his. "My father was a psychopathic killer who had no idea how to be a father. I vowed if I ever had children, I would never treat them the way I was treated. I just don't want you hurt."

"Avadur is your father."

"Yes. Please tell me he had no part of raising you?"

"I only saw him briefly once or twice and I did not like him much. He has cold eyes." She lifted her hand to his face and smiled. "Your eyes are warm."

"Thank you." He smiled, then leaned towards her and placed a tiny kiss to her cheek.

"But you need not fear Dusty. He would never harm me and I doubt very much he would ever harm any living soul. Now, if you would please excuse me, I would like to see him." Felicity knew the instant she left the room, the conversation would return. As she headed up the stairs she could hear the voices begin to chatter.

They all seemed nice enough and she was going to enjoy getting to know them better. But first, she needed to see Dusty. Entering his room, she found it vacant and after searching the washroom she decided he wasn't there and rushed back down the stairs. "He's not in his room."

"Oh...well, I'm sure he's somewhere. It's a big house."

She ran to the window and, glancing outside, saw his car was missing. "No, he's left." She spun around. Where could he be? "I need to find him." She vanished in the blink of an eye and reappeared in the clinic. "Dusty? Are you here?" She ran from room to room in a desperate search for him. Not being able to find him, she began to panic. When her parents appeared before her, she actually jolted.

"I cannot find him."

"Oh, sweetie." Her mother took her in her arms and ran a soothing hand along her back. "I'm sure he'll show up sooner or later."

"He said there was a bad man after him. What if this man found him and took him again? I need to find him." It felt as if something was choking her. She had trouble taking in air and her chest felt tight.

"Okay...just relax. Shh," her mother soothed.

"I'll go out and look for him. Okay?"

She nodded to her father as she dashed the tears from her face.

"Did he say who this bad man was?"

She shook her head rapidly.

"Okay." He reached out and rubbed her arm. "You go back to the house and wait for me there. I'll go out and look around for him."

"Thank you." Along with her mother, they sent themselves back to the castle.

If anything had happened to Dusty...she didn't know what she would do.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Wasn't it interesting that sunlight didn't kill him. Though, the boils on his skin weren't easy to overlook. Tying off the last knot, Dusty stepped back from his work and was satisfied that his prisoner was secured enough not to be able to break free, should he wake. And now that he was done with that, he really needed to find something to put on his burned skin.

Rummaging through the many cupboards and drawers, Dusty finally found some lotion he hoped would help. Heading to the wash-room, he applied it to his blistered face and hoped to God it didn't scar. He really should have thought before running off to the nearest town. But he'd been so preoccupied with the plan to get blood that he hadn't thought the sun would be out. It certainly wasn't in Jacob's Cove, though it was nice to know the sun still shone somewhere.

Even if it did hurt like a bitch to be under it.

He applied more lotion to his hands and arms and was glad it hadn't burned through his clothes. He didn't think there would be enough lotion in the place to deal with an entire body rash. Tucking the tube in his pants pocket, Dusty headed back to the lab to check on his prisoner. He'd stuffed enough sleeping pills into the guy to knock him out for a week...he hoped.

He also hoped the blood he was able to grab would be enough. The small town hospital hadn't had much of a supply on hand. His scrubs had come in handy, that was for sure. The lab tech hadn't even balked when Dusty had told him he was there to grab blood for an emergency surgery. He hadn't even as much as looked up when Dusty had entered the room. Bonus on his part. Still, he hoped the three quarts he'd managed to grab would do.

Seeing that his prisoner was still out like a light, Dusty decided he should go back to Felicity's parents' place before she woke. Checking the watch he'd taken from the vamp lying on the gurney, he saw that he'd been gone four hours. He hoped she hadn't woken yet. He knew she'd be worried where he had gone.

And...he rather missed her.

Wasn't it odd that he would miss someone he'd only met days before, yet he didn't miss his family as much? It had been nice talking with them. Dusty had made up his mind to just call his parents after grabbing the blood. He hated having lied to them, but telling your mother that you'd become a vampire over the phone wasn't a good idea. And besides, if things went the way he planned, he might just be rid of this stupid vampire life before the week's end.

Until then, his parents could be pissed at him for deciding to take a detour and have a bit of a vacation before attending school.

Yanking the door open to leave, Dusty nearly shit himself. There before him was Felicity's father, and he looked even more dangerous with a scowl on his face.

"You're back."

"I...uh...yeah... What are you doing here?"

"I came looking for you. Felicity's worried sick and because I love my daughter I told her I would look for you. Let's talk."

He was hustled back into the clinic by his shirt and promptly set down in a chair. Dusty prayed the vamp tied up in the back room didn't wake up while he was being interrogated by an angry father.

"Where were you? And obviously it was somewhere with sun by the mark of boils on your face."

"I...went to the nearest town to call my family." *Stiffen your back, Dusty, and be a man for once.* "Not that it's any of your business." *Oh sure, now you've really pissed him off.* The heated glare Basil sent Dusty was enough to make him wish he could shrink into a tiny dust ball and float away.

"It is my business because my daughter likes you. You're not from here?"

"No, sir." He swallowed hard. *Please don't let him kill me.*

"How did you come to be here?"

"I... was abducted on the highway several months ago."

Basil released him, straightened, then took a step back. "By whom?"

"A bunch of vampires. They locked me up for months before turning me. I finally managed to break free the day Felicity came here so, really, she saved me. If she hadn't made those men disappear, I wouldn't have been able to help her and I would probably—maybe even both of us—be held captive."

Basil paced the floor and Dusty wished he would just accept what he told him so they could go on their merry way.

"Was one of the men who held you called Fritz?"

"Yes."

Basil rubbed his chin. "When were you turned?"

Dusty sat a little straighter, feeling marginally better now that Basil's face wasn't screwed up in a deep scowl. "I think it was a few weeks ago. I have no idea what day it is or what day it was when I was turned."

"Was it Fritz who turned you?"

"No, he ran off somewhere a while back. Everyone said he was afraid Chaos was going to kick his ass and frankly—"

"You know Chaos?"

Uh oh, that look was back. "He's the one who turned me into this and please don't tell me you know him because there is no damn way I am going back to him and if you make me—"

"I'm not sending you back to him, but..." Basil came right up to him again, "you are going to tell me where he is."

"Why? Seriously, man, I will not go back to him. I will fight you—"

"Oh, relax." Basil laid a hand on Dusty's shoulder and pressed him back down into the chair when he stood. "I have no intentions of giving you to him. I only want to kill him."

"Really?" Maybe the guy wasn't so bad after all. "Can I watch?"

The laughter that came out of Basil was highly unexpected. "You might not be so bad after all, kid."

"I'm not a kid. I'm a man," Dusty insisted with a jut of his chin. "If you want my help finding this Chaos guy, you had better remember that."

Basil's dark brows lifted and Dusty was sure that was a look of amusement on his face. "And," the amusement disappeared, "you had better remember who you are talking to."

Oh, he knew. "Yes, sir."

"Now, tell me where Chaos is."

"He's in a warehouse building, but I don't know the location."

"That's okay, I do." He lifted Dusty by the shirtfront, then smoothed it out before responding. "Hurt my daughter and I will have you drawn and quartered. Got it?"

With a look such as the one Basil had in his eyes now, Dusty wasn't about to challenge him. He was pretty damn sure the guy would follow through with the heinous form of punishment once used on criminals. He simply bobbed his head, knowing any words that came out of his mouth now would only sound weak and probably squeaky.

"Good. Let's go."



Felicity was beside herself with worry. Where had Dusty gone off to and why wasn't he back yet? It was also taking much too long for her father to return since stating he would go out looking for Dusty.

"I'm sure he'll be back soon, sweetie."

She wished she could believe what her mother stated. Still, she worried. "What if that evil man took him again? What if he is harming Dusty now as we speak?"

"I'm sure he just had something he needed to do. Come with me. Let me introduce you to something I like to do when I'm nervous or scared or worried or just because."

Her mother led her through the huge house to an area near the back and to the kitchen. She'd been given the tour of the entire house when she and her mother had returned, but Felicity was still astounded by everything around her. She took a seat at the table as her mother instructed and when her mother set a large, dark tower of something on the table, Felicity looked up at her in confusion.

"Cake. Chocolate cake, to be exact. I once nearly ate an entire chocolate cake when I was first pregnant with you. I might have eaten it all if your father hadn't stopped me." She began slicing into the cake while she spoke. "I hope you like chocolate."

"What is cake?" The gasp from her mother startled her.

"You've never had cake?" Felicity shook her head reluctantly. "How is that possible? Didn't you ever get a cake on your birthday?"

"I received a doll on each of my birthdays." She had to admit the scent coming from the cake was intoxicating.

"Never a cake?" Once again, Felicity shook her head. "Unbelievable. What did you eat?"

Her mother laid a slice on a small plate before handing it to her. Felicity took the utensil, responding before she sampled the cake. "I mostly drank blood but occasionally my—Rajana would supply me with meat and vegetables." Using her fork, she sliced into the thick dark cake, then cautiously lifted it to her mouth. The instant it touched her tongue, she moaned in delight.

"Good, isn't it?"

She swallowed, licking the sweet taste from her lips. "It is heavenly."

"I have so much to make up for and this is just the start. We need to take you shopping for your own clothes. Mine are a little baggy on you. Also, you need to tell me how you would like your room decorated."

"I like my room the way it is," Felicity added before shoving more cake in her mouth. She was going to make sure and eat plenty of this sweet delight.

"Well...that might change as you get used to living here. Were you given an education?"

She swallowed, licked her lips. "I have knowledge inside my head, though I have no idea how I came about it."

"I am going to kill her for what she did to you."

Felicity dropped her fork and gasped. "No! You mustn't kill her. Please."

"It was a figure of speech...mostly," Trinity muttered the last under her breath.

"Dusty said the same thing when I asked him to join me in bed unclothed."

"Uh..."

"What is this...figure of speech you both enjoy using?" It was baffling to her.

"It's when you say something you don't really mean, a metaphor or an exaggeration of what you feel."

"Why would you not just say what you mean?"

"Well...sometimes people like to exaggerate things. For instance, I could say that cake was to die for. I don't really mean I would die for it, but it is just that good that I may contemplate it."

Felicity looked down at the cake on her dish and frowned. "It is delicious, but I would not give my life for it."

"Right, which makes it an exaggeration."

"Seems silly to me." But she enjoyed the cake nonetheless.

"Yeah...well..." Trinity cleared her throat. "I need to ask you something and...well...it's a little touchy. Are you having sex with Dusty?"

"Yes."

"Oh...okay."

"Do you have sex with my father?"

Trinity nearly choked on her cake. Swallowing, she took a breath before responding. "Um...yes, but uh...that's not something I really want to discuss with my daughter."

"Why not? Is sex not a natural act between two individuals who desire one another?"

"Yes, it is, but...most kids don't like to know their parents have sex and, well...parents don't like to know their kids have sex."

"Yet you asked me if I was engaging in sexual activity with Dusty." Felicity was very confused now.

"Yes...true, but only because it's my job as a parent to talk to you about sex. Since you've had sex, I take it you don't need the talk. Rajana did give you the sex talk, right?"

"We never spoke of sex. I witnessed sexual activity between humans when I would sneak off to scan the world to see what the humans did on Earth."

Trinity stared at her a moment before responding. "You used to watch people...having sex?"

"I watched them engaging in all sorts of activities, sex being one. Seeing it, however, is not the same as engaging in the act. Though I was a little scared when Dusty and I first came together, the act proved to be minimally painful. I rather enjoyed it." She grinned as she placed more cake between her lips.

"He was your first?"

"Yes, and I was his. May I have some water?"

Her mother stood without speaking, grabbed a glass from the cupboard, and poured water into it. Taking it, Felicity could see the sadness in her mother's expression. "Why does that make you sad?"

"It's not that...well, not just that. I feel sad about everything in regards to you. I wish I was given the opportunity to raise you. I wish I had been able to hold you in my arms while you suckled on my breasts. To watch you crawl for the first time, walk, get your first teeth. I wish I had been able to take you to school or watch you graduate. And...I wish I had been there to tell you all about boys and sex."

Reaching her hand out, Felicity placed it over her mother's. "Perhaps it is not too late to do some of those things."

"I'll never get back what I lost, and neither will you. It angers me that Rajana did something so cruel to you, to all of us. I don't under-

stand why she would take you from me in the first place, but how she could be so cruel as to not even allow you to grow up as a natural human being would." She paused, drawing in a deep breath before continuing. "When I said I wanted to kill her and told you it was a figure of speech, I lied. I do want her dead, but first I want her to suffer like we all have."

"I would think she is suffering now, with me gone and knowing I came here to be with you." Felicity was sure of it.

Trinity smiled, giving Felicity's hand a squeeze. "Good."

The front door slammed shut and both Trinity and Felicity turned to the sound. She felt him then, as if he were in the room beside her. Pushing the plate aside, Felicity stood, a smile filling her face. "Dusty has returned."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

There was something to be said about having a woman throw herself into your arms the instant you stepped foot inside her home. Though Felicity's father stood beside him, growling in a low, feral tone, Dusty wound his arms around Felicity. He was pretty happy to see her too.

"What has happened to you? Your face...it is red and blistered."

Despite the fact that his skin was raw and sore, he relished the touch of her hand on his face. "I was in the sun."

"Oh my, Dusty. Do you not know what the sunlight can do to your skin?"

"I do now. I'm sorry I worried you. I had...some stuff to take care of."

"And now, so do we. But first," Basil stepped between the two, breaking their embrace, "I want a hug from my daughter."

Dusty stepped aside to allow the embrace. Though it wasn't as warm as the one she had given him, Dusty could see Felicity felt comfort as she hugged her father. He supposed the unease came from not knowing your father all of your life.

"Just what I needed. Now, to attend to business."

"I will leave you. Dusty, will you join me—"

"I need Dusty for this business," Basil interrupted with a soothing smile. "There's no need for you to leave."

"But I was always asked to leave when my—Rajana attended business."

"You're not with Rajana any longer, sweetness," Basil reminded her, carefully tipping her chin up with his fingers, then gently placing a kiss to her nose. "In my house, everyone is one." He turned back to Dusty, crooked a finger for him to follow. Dusty did so, reluctantly. "Where is everyone?"

"They left. What's going on?" Trinity asked cautiously.

"We might have a lead on Chaos, but I want everyone here before I discuss it." He took Trinity in his arms. "You know how much I hate repeating myself."

While the two embraced, Dusty inched over towards Felicity and spoke as quietly as he could. "I got the protection while I was away."

"Excellent!"

"What's excellent?" Basil asked, still holding Trinity in an embrace.

"That I called my parents to let them know I'm okay," Dusty spoke up, hoping to God that Felicity didn't say otherwise.

"Oh...okay. Well, we should call everyone. The sooner they get here the better."

"The telephones work here?"

"Sure." Basil narrowed a look at Dusty. "Behave while we're gone."

Dusty took the warning to heart and was damn glad when Basil finally left the room. "He is a scary man."

"My father is not scary," Felicity defended.

"If you say so. Did you miss me?" he asked slyly, risking that he might be seen and took Felicity into his arms for a kiss. He hissed at the pain of the blisters on his lips as they embraced.

"Does it hurt a great deal?"

"I can handle it. You didn't answer my question. Did you miss me?"

"A great deal." She smiled and it sank right into his heart. "I would like to go to my bedroom now and have sex."

"Shh..." He looked around to make sure no one heard. "Remember what I said about sex being private?"

She nodded as she glanced behind her. "Could we go to my room now?" she whispered softly.

"Later. Your dad needs my help with something first. You look cute when you sulk." Despite the pain he knew it would cause him, he drew her closer for another kiss.

"Break it up, you two," Basil bellowed as he entered the room.

"Give them a break, Basil," Trinity chastised, giving his arm a slug. "Come with me, Dusty. Cooper has some ointments that will take the sting out of those burns."

"Who is Cooper?" he asked as he followed her to the stairs.

"An old friend and a doctor. We'll be back in a bit," Trinity called out as they left the room.



Felicity stood in the room, alone with her father for the first time, feeling more than a little nervous. She liked him well enough, but ... she didn't know him. She knew of him, knew the things Rajana had told her about her beautiful son—and now Felicity knew what she meant by his beauty. Still...she didn't know him.

"Your mother told me stories about you as a child," she began, taking a deep breath and telling herself to relax. "She said you were a precocious child."

Basil smiled and the beauty of him shone even brighter. "That I suppose I was."

"Did she enhance your age as well?"

His face took on a sadness. "No, I aged as most regular vampires age. I am so sorry she did that to you, Felicity, and trust me when I tell you she will pay for what she's done to you."

"My mother said as much as well. She longs for the child she never had."

"As do I. We had so many plans for you." He took her hands in his, gently holding her in place. "It wasn't so long ago that I touched you for the very first time, and now you stand before me, a young woman. A beautiful young woman. I had a wish for you when you were born. I wished for you to grow to see the sunlight. That is a wish I mean to keep. If all goes well, Dusty will help us with that."

"Does that mean you like him now?"

Basil smiled again, one side of his mouth curving up a little more than the other. "Like? Let's say I tolerate him."

"He is a good man. He has done nothing but treat me pleasantly."

"I was a young man once as well and I know very well what thoughts he has. Young men, men in general, can be very persuasive

when needed. If he's persuaded you to do anything you're not comfortable with, I want you to feel comfortable telling me."

"He has persuaded me to do nothing I did not want to do."

"Okay."

"He treats me very well, Father—Dad," she amended, remembering what he'd asked of her. "Do not worry."

He chuckled once, tipping his head back. "That's impossible." He looked her in the eyes. "I'm a father of a very beautiful young lady whom any man would die to have."

"I do not wish anyone to die for me."

"It was just a figure—"

"Of speech. Yes, I know. I wish people would just speak clearly so I would be less confused." When the front door opened with several people rushing in, she jumped, diving behind her father in protection. Then she saw that it was her parents' friends, and she relaxed.

"We came as fast as we could," Jonah said eagerly. "What's the emergency?"

"I'll explain it when Trinity comes back down here. In the meantime, anyone want a drink?"

She watched as her father mingled with his guests, wishing with all her heart she could have grown up with him as her father.

She had most definitely missed out on a great deal.



"There, that should help."

His skin felt oddly cool and as Dusty looked into the mirror, he saw the shimmer of the ointment Trinity had applied to his sore flesh. His face looked red and raw but at least it didn't burn like fire any more. "That is some powerful ointment. It's like it numbed my face but not so much that I can't feel it."

"Cooper is a god with medicinal stuff. What did you and Basil discuss before you came home?"

He glanced at her, then pursed his lips as he replied, "If I tell you, he might kill me. I think it would be best if you let him tell you."

"Trust me when I tell you I am a more powerful being to be afraid of than Basil."

Great, now he had two powerful parents to worry about. "I just can't win." Throwing his arms in the air, he paced the large washroom, and that was an understatement. A queen-sized bed and dresser could fit in the washroom, along with the tub, toilet, and sink. "If I tell you, he'll string me up; if I don't, you will."

"I know, we're not being fair to you, are we?"

"No."

"Sucks to be you. Spill."

He was spared by a knock on the door. When Trinity opened it and he saw who was on the other side, he tilted his head in recognition. "I know you." The gentleman before him had come to him some time ago and had promised to save him.

"Sweet heaven. I thought I would never see you again."

"You two know each other?" Trinity inquired.

"This is the young man I instructed you and Basil to rescue." The gentleman turned to him, a smile wide on his face. "It eases my heart to know you were saved."

"Thanks to Felicity. Long story. What a small world. I don't even know your name."

"Cooper Hawthorn. You are the young man our Felicity found to protect her. How wonderful is that?" He beamed a smile that lit his eyes. "Basil asked me to come up and hurry you along," he said to Trinity.

"We were just finishing up."

Saved by the bell, indeed. Dusty exited the bathroom. At least now he was safe. As he came down the stairway he saw a room full of people. Most of them were vampires and he was a little unnerved by that. Despite the fact that he was one too.

He hoped whatever they were going to discuss wouldn't take long. He really needed to get back to his prisoner before the guy woke up.

"You look shiny," Felicity said as she came up to him.

"Trinity put ointment on me. My face doesn't burn as much now."

"Wonderful."

"Let's get this ball rolling." Basil did a quick introduction and Dusty hoped he got everyone's names straight. While Basil explained to the crowd why he had called them and what part Dusty played, Dusty did his best to memorize the names.

The middle-aged-looking, dark-haired man's name was Dante, beside him was Gypsy. Odd-looking hair color, but he wasn't overly fond of green. Then there was another dark-haired man who looked about Dusty's own age whose name was Danny, and the woman beside him with red hair was Starla. To her left was Jonah and his girlfriend, Raven. Out of all of them, Dusty felt most at ease with Jonah. There was something kind in his eyes. Of course there was Cooper

and his wife, Gabriella. Basil seemed very interested in the fact that Dusty and Cooper knew each other.

"When we went in looking for you, you were gone."

"Yeah," Dusty responded to Basil. "I was moved shortly after Cooper showed up. Go figure."

"The place they took you to was the place where Chaos came into play?"

Dusty nodded at Basil. Beside him, Felicity sat quietly. "Yeah, at the warehouse."

"When was the last time you saw him there?"

"The day I was taken out to be initiated by some of his men."

"Initiated?" Dante inquired.

"To prove my loyalty to him I was supposed to hunt down this kid they let loose and turn him into a vampire. I'm pretty grateful Felicity showed up when she did." He squeezed her hand.

"Okay, so I gather the plan is to go check out this warehouse?" Danny asked.

"Yes, but first," Basil turned his attention to Dusty. "Have you fed off anyone since you last fed off of Chaos?"

"Yes." *Please don't ask me who.*

"Damn it. How long ago?"

Crap. Why couldn't he just let it go? "Yesterday."

"Damn it—wait..."

Here it comes. Dusty cringed.

"Who did you feed off of and you had better not say my daughter."

"We fed off of each other," Felicity stated boldly.

Was there a hole he could crawl into?

"It was very stimulating."

Quite a few of the guests in the room chuckled at Felicity's comment but Dusty wished now that instead of crawling into a hole, one would swallow him up. Especially when Basil narrowed his blue eyes on him and growled. Were his eyes glowing?

"On that note," Trinity began, pulling Basil up with her when she stood. "You boys should get going."

At that moment, Dusty was mighty glad for the interruption. Until he realized he was one of the boys.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Felicity found herself surrounded by women. Though she had been reluctant to let Dusty go, she'd been reassured by her mother that he would be fine and that they would occupy her time with some girl talk.

What in the Realm was girl talk?

"So what was it like living in the Realm?" Gypsy asked in what Felicity came to recognize as her usual exuberance.

"It is bright, warm, quiet...and lonely."

"Aw..." Gypsy sighed.

"Did you have any friends in the Realm?"

"I was not allowed to communicate with the others," Felicity explained to Starla. "I was kept in a secluded area of the Realm."

"That is just downright depressing. Well, you're among friends now," Gypsy reassured her with a gentle pat of her hand. "None of us really had any real friends either, until we met each other."

"We have cake, cookies, and potato chips to go with the wine."

Raven and Trinity entered the room with two trays of food that looked both tempting and intriguing. "What is wine?"

"Oh lord, she was deprived." Gypsy grabbed a glass. She handed it to Felicity. "This, you poor girl, is the drink of gods."

"Sip it slowly," her mother advised as she took a seat beside Felicity on the sofa.

The liquid in her glass was red and smelled faintly of berries. With trepidation, Felicity lifted it to her lips to taste. As she took a tiny bit into her mouth she felt the sting of it. But when she swallowed it, she tasted the smoothness and the ripe taste of some sort of fruit. It was interesting to say the least. So she took another sip.

"Careful. Too much too fast will get you drunk," her mother advised while handing her a dish with cake.

"What is drunk?" Felicity took the cake, eager to sample it. If it was as tasty as the last one she'd sampled, she was in for a treat.

"Getting loopy, hammered." Gypsy gulped down half of her glass.

"I don't understand those words."

"She means you'll feel high, your eyesight will blur and you'll have this euphoric sense that makes you feel good," Raven explained, taking her own slice of cake.

"Oh, like when I orgasm." Her mother spat out the wine that was in her mouth and began to choke. "Are you all right?" Felicity stroked her mother's back as she fought to calm her cough.

"She'll be fine," Gypsy reassured with a smirk. "You get to have sex in the Realm?"

"What did I say to you, Gypsy?" her mother stated with a raspy voice. "No talking about sex with my daughter."

"You said that was when she was little and since we never got to see her little I see no reason why we can't discuss it now, given the fact that she's an adult."

"I did not have sex in the Realm," Felicity informed Gypsy, not understanding much of what was being discussed between Gypsy and her mother.

"But you know what an orgasm is?" Gypsy pursued.

"How do you think the guys are doing?" her mother interrupted, then swiftly lifted her glass to her lips.

"I assume they are doing fine," Felicity remarked to her mother before turning back to Gypsy. "I had sex with Dusty. He was my first sexual partner. I quite enjoy having sex with him."

"A woman after my own heart," Gypsy quipped with a broad smile, touching her glass to Felicity's.

"Oh man..."

Felicity didn't understand it when her mother lowered her head to her knees. She thought perhaps she was ill.

"Can we change the subject?"

She realized her mother wasn't ill, but instead, did not want to hear about Felicity's sex life as Dusty had explained.

"I like cake. I think I would like to eat this every day." With that said, a new conversation began and as the talks continued, Felicity noticed her mother felt more at ease.

Perhaps Dusty was right. Parents didn't like hearing about their child's sex life after all.



Dusty was beyond relieved for the conversation that had gone on while they drove to their destination. Though the evil looks Basil kept sending him were enough to make him wither. He feared if the rest of the men hadn't been there, Basil would most definitely follow through on his threat to have him drawn and quartered.

He was too young to die.

"Is this it?"

Turning his attention away from Basil, Dusty looked out the car window at the big building to his left. "Yep, that's the place." When Basil stopped, Dusty grew worried. "Um...we're not going in there, are we?" He really didn't want to be seen by those animals again. Not after the way they'd treated him.

"Not we, me." Basil slipped out of the car.

Before he knew it, everyone else was exiting the car. Not wanting to seem like a 'fraidy cat, Dusty followed.

"What are you planning, Basil?" Dante asked, leaning against the car beside Basil.

"I'm going to go in there and have a look around."

Dusty laughed, which had everyone turning to him. "You're just going to walk in there and look around?" The guy was scary but Dusty doubted very much Basil could manage alone against a dozen or more like him. He was nuts if he thought otherwise.

"Trust me, boy, they won't even know I'm there."

Dusty's jaw dropped when, before him, Basil shrank into a...rat. He actually turned into a rat. "How the hell? Did he just... I think I need to sit down."

"Kid's gonna black out on us."

He wasn't sure which one of the men said it as he slid down the car to land with a hard plop on the cold gravel road.

"Stay with us, kid."

He shook his head clear and looked up at Jonah. "Did he just turn into a...rat?"

"Yep."

"A rat?"

"He likes to change into the canine persuasion, but in cases like this, a rat is best. He can go unnoticed easier."

Dusty stared at Dante with his jaw, once again, dropped. "How is that possible?"

"Basil comes from two of the original vampires who also possess those abilities and a few more. He can transport himself anywhere he wants just like this." Jonah snapped his fingers.

"Shit!"

"Hey, does Felicity have those abilities too?" Danny inquired.

Dusty had no idea. "She can incinerate a person just like that." He snapped his fingers. "And I've seen her make things disappear, but I have no idea if she can change into...things." How weird would that be?

"I'm guessing she can. She's Basil's child after all. How long do you think we'll have to wait for him to come out?" Dante asked, picking up a handful of gravel and tossing it in his hand.

"With Basil, it could be minutes or hours. Might as well make ourselves comfortable, boys."

Beside him, Dante, Danny, and finally Jonah, sat on the ground and stared out into the darkness across the field to where the warehouse sat.

"He can change into anything?"

"Yep," Dante responded.

"And you won't even know it's him," Jonah added. Leaning real close, he spoke in a lower tone. "So I'd watch what you do with his daughter if I were you."

Great, now he had another thing to worry about. He nearly jumped out of his skin when Basil appeared before them. "Jesus!"

"Well?" Dante asked as he, Danny and Jonah got to their feet.

"No sign of him and damn that place is disgusting." Basil waved a hand in front of his face.

"Yeah...I don't think any of them know the meaning of 'pick up after yourself'," Dusty supplied, still eyeing Basil skeptically. "You can change into anything?"

Smiling rather deviously, Basil came right up to Dusty's face as he spoke. "Anything. Scared?"

"Hell yeah." Dusty swallowed the bile threatening to rise.

"Good. Remember that the next time you think about putting your hands on my daughter." He turned to the rest of the men. "I want a daily guard set up here. Just because Chaos wasn't here now doesn't mean he may not show up at some point. Danny, you and Dante can take the first shift. Jonah and I will relieve you in four hours."

"Aye aye, Captain." Danny saluted him.

"I'll take these two home, then come back with the car. Come on, kid."

Reluctantly, Dusty went with Basil. What other choice did he have? But the instant he had a free moment, he was going to head back to the clinic.

He only hoped his prisoner was still there.



Dusty had made up his mind on the drive back to the castle. He was going to explain to Felicity that he felt more comfortable staying at the clinic than in her parents' home. He knew she was going to either beg him to stay or insist she go with him. Though he wasn't sure how he was going to do it, Dusty knew he had to make her see that it was better if they stayed apart for the time being. They could see each other still, he'd tell her, but living together just wasn't going to work. Not until her father felt more at ease with the man her daughter was involved with. Dusty could only hope that it happened soon.

Relieved that Basil wasn't coming into the house, Dusty hurried inside to tell Felicity he couldn't stay. When Jonah clamped a hand on his shoulder, stopping him at the door, he fully expected the lecture he was about to get.

"We're all going to be pretty protective of Felicity. Some of us more than others. I just thought I would let you know that."

Something inside of him gave. "Look, I know all of this. It's practically been pounded into me, so don't worry. I plan to go inside and tell her I'm going to stay at the clinic and not here. That way no one has to worry that I'm going to do anything to harm her."

Jonah stepped in front of him, preventing Dusty from entering the house. "You seem like a nice enough guy, but truth is, we don't know you that well."

"And you don't know Felicity that well either, but I get it. She's family and I'm not. But here's something to think about. If I wanted to harm her, wouldn't I have done it by now? Why would I have helped her find her parents?" Stepping around Jonah, Dusty marched into the house and straight for the stairs.

"She's asleep."

Looking back, he saw the dark-haired woman, Jonah's girl—what was her name?—Raven, coming towards him from the sitting room. "Then I won't wake her." Hurrying up the stairs, he decided just to leave her a note, then head out of here. The sooner the better, he figured. No one wanted him around anyway.

Throwing his bedroom door open, in a grumpy mood, he froze at the sight of Felicity asleep in his bed. His heart tightened and his loins ached. For a brief moment he thought about climbing in beside her.

He decided against it.

Searching the room, through the many drawers in the stands by the bed, he finally found a pad and pen. But in the meantime, Felicity woke up.

"Hi there..." she slurred as she groggily sat up in the bed.

He noticed that she wasn't wearing a stitch of clothing. Damn it, why did she have to be naked? It made it so much harder for him to walk away. "I didn't mean to wake you. Go back to sleep."

"Only if you join me." She patted the bed, giggled, and nearly fell over.

"Are you...drunk?" She certainly seemed it.

"I am intoxicated, yes. And I feel like I'm floating on air." She giggled again and, this time, rolled to the side of the bed closest to him. "Want to fly with me, Dusty?"

He wasn't entirely sure she meant that figuratively. "I think the best thing for you would be to sleep it off." But, oh, it was hard for him to push her away when she was naked and warm and ready for him to take her.

"I do not wish to sleep. I want to have sex with you."

"Whoa there." He grabbed her hand away from his burgeoning hard-on, keeping her at bay. "Trust me when I tell you you'll thank me in the morning...or whenever you wake up because I don't have a clue what time of day it is. Come on, let's get you tucked in."

"I want you to touch me, Dusty. I want you to make my body shiver."

Yeah, so did he. Still... "Just as soon as you have a little nap. There you go, up into the big fluffy bed. That's a girl." Though her hands were groping for him, he held firm as he pulled the covers over her. Then he leaned down and kissed her forehead. "Goodnight, sleepy head."

"G'night, Dusty."

She was out before he stepped away from the bed. With a heavy sigh, he picked up the paper and pen and wrote out his note. He set it on the pillow beside her, then backed from the room, watching her sleep. He couldn't believe how hard it was for him to walk away. And it wasn't just the sex, though that was pretty great. No, it was more. Dusty just liked being with her.

"If you're thinking of sneaking into my daughter's room I would suggest you change your mind and fast."

The last person he wanted to see now was Basil and, as the guy glowered at him, Dusty had a brief thought to just walk away and let it go. But something inside of him said no. "Look, I've put up with your threats because I understand you're only looking out for your daughter, but I'm damn tired of the way you're treating me. I've done nothing to hurt her, only protect her. If I wanted to use her for sex, as you once put it, then I should be inside of that room now, in that bed with your daughter who is lying naked, ready for me to have her, completely intoxicated. But I'm not, and do you know why? Because I'm a decent human being and even after the shit I've been put through these past few months I have still maintained my integrity. You'll be happy to know that I've decided to stay at the clinic instead of here so you won't have to worry about us sneaking into each other's rooms and fucking our brains out."

With that said, Dusty marched past Basil and, without a glance back, left the house.



His jaw clenched, Basil had half a mind to march after the smart-mouthed bastard and wring his neck. Instead, he inched open the bedroom door and sighed at seeing Felicity asleep in Dusty's bed. Entering the room, he walked to his daughter, lightly brushed a hand over her long, silky hair.

He was supposed to have had years to prepare for this moment, to prepare him for the many boys who would come calling for his daughter. Instead he'd been robbed of it. Was it any wonder he was protective of her now? The very moment he meets his daughter for the very first time since her birth, she's got a man at her side. He'd had no time to prepare for the moment. Just bam! She's sleeping with someone.

Sniffing the air, he smelled nothing remotely close to a sexual scent, which meant Dusty had spoken the truth. What he did smell

was the distinct scent of alcohol. Who in the world had given his baby girl alcohol?

Then he saw the note.

Reaching over to the pillow beside her, he took the note and read.

I think it's best if I stay at the clinic. You belong here, but I don't. You'll be safe with your parents. I'll stop by and see you in a few days.

Dusty

Basil laid the note back where it had been placed and, leaning over, kissed his daughter's head.

Leaving her to sleep, he headed to his room where he found Trinity sitting up in bed, reading a book. "Our daughter is drunk."

She laughed, setting her book down. "I know. You should have seen her. She is so funny when she's drunk."

All Basil could do was stare at her.

"What?"

"You gave our daughter alcohol?"

"We had a girls' night while you boys were out doing your manly duties. Besides, she only had one glass of wine. I think she's in love with Dusty."

"Great." He dropped down on the edge of the bed and rested his head in his hands.

"He's her first love...her first...you know..."

"I don't want to know. Damn it, Trinity, it wasn't supposed to be this way. How the hell am I supposed to hate the kid when he's being all noble?" He turned his upper body to look at her. "She's lying in his bed, asleep, passed out more like it, and she's naked, or so he tells me. And he walked away. Didn't lay a hand on her. He left a goddamn note telling her she belongs here with us and that he'll stay at the clinic. How am I supposed to hate him when he does shit like that?"

Trinity laid a hand on his shoulder as she came up beside him. "Nothing about this is fair and it's going to take all of us some time to get used to it. Now come to bed and let me soothe your heart with a nice, sensual massage."

That was his girl. She always knew just the right thing to say to make him feel better.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Dusty drove through the dark streets to his destination. There were crowds of people—animals, rather—in what looked like some sort of fight. He didn't recognize any of them and kept going, hoping none of them came after him. Occasionally, he would see the odd person wandering about, or someone sitting on the front step of a house.

Not one of them was human.

If only he'd left even a week later. He wouldn't have ended up in the position he was now? Or would he have made it safely to his apartment and started his life as a student of MIT? There was no way to go back, but he sure as hell could go forward, and that was what he was planning to do.

Of course, he realized that if he had left a week later, he never would have met Felicity. She was the only bright side to his very dark life right now. Thinking about her made him ache even more. He wished he had stayed and lain down beside her...but it was for the best that he hadn't. Especially after meeting her grumpy father in the hallway. Dusty could admit to himself that he had feared the guy would come after him after what Dusty had said. He was more than surprised Basil hadn't.

Feeling uneasy, Dusty glanced around the car. Basil had said he could change into anything. For all Dusty knew, the guy could be in this car right now.

Damn it, now he was going to be constantly looking over his shoulder. Again.

Pulling into the parking lot behind the clinic, Dusty grabbed the bag of condoms from the back seat and hurried to the door. Once he was inside, he thought about how vulnerable he was now, without Felicity. Was the place still protected, he wondered, or could anyone come in without a problem? To be safe, Dusty decided to jam a chair under each of the doors. It wasn't the best locking system but it was all he had at the moment.

Dropping the bag as he entered the back lab, he hurried to the room where he had left his prisoner and let out a rush of air at seeing the vamp still out like a light, tied to the table.

Or was he dead?

Maybe he'd given him too many sleeping pills. Damn, he'd never thought about that.

Rushing to the body, he laid a hand on his chest to feel for a heart-beat. He felt so much better when he felt the heart beating beneath his palm.

Now, to get started.

He gathered the tubes and needles and buckets he would need to drain the blood from the vamp. Then he gathered the IV bags, needles, and machine, setting them all up beside the table. Thank God his mother was a nurse and he had spent a great deal of his youth at the hospital she worked at, watching her administer IVs. And it didn't hurt that he had an intelligent brain inside his head.

Taking the left hand of the vamp, Dusty tapped the upper part of his hand to get the veins to pop. When he found one that he hoped would work, he pulled out the needle, and tipping the hand back, leaned in closer and slid the needle beneath the skin to the bulgy vein. He felt the pop and hoped it meant he was in the vein. Slapping some tape over the injection spot, Dusty hooked up the first blood bag, then set the dial at five drips per second. He didn't want it going in too fast before he was able to drain a good portion of the blood.

Sliding his chair to the right side, Dusty repeated the procedure on the right hand only this time, instead of connecting it to the IV bag, he led the drainage tube to the bucket on the floor. He opened the valve completely and watched as the sickly gray blood began to slide through the tube.

He sat there for twenty minutes, watching the gray blood drain from the vamp, emptying the bucket when it filled before he turned the red blood up to full. Sliding back, he put his feet up on one of the desks, and waited.

If everything went well, he'd be human again in no time.



Her head was pounding in a steady rhythm that woke Felicity from her sleep. Rolling over, her stomach churned and as she sat up the room around her began to spin. Placing one hand on her head to stop the pounding, the other on her belly to ease it, she noticed she was in the bed alone.

Then she spotted the note.

Holding it close to her face, she read through blurry eyes the words Dusty had written. And on top of her pounding head and rolling belly, her heart ached. He had left her. She vaguely remembered speaking with him but wasn't quite sure if it had been real or a dream. Apparently, from the note, it had been reality.

With the note still in her hand, she hurried from the bed and, standing, felt her stomach rise up to her throat. In a desperate attempt to make it to the washroom before vomiting, she ran as fast as she could to the door. She made it inside and bent over the toilet just in the nick of time.

She was sure she would never want another drop of wine again in her life.

Rinsing her mouth, she dabbed some cold water on her face, then trudged back to her bed. She jolted at seeing her mother sitting there.

"Oh...um...you need a robe."

Realizing she was naked, Felicity walked to the bed and climbed back under the covers. "I left mine in my room."

"Hmmm. So...how do you feel?"

"Terrible. I wish never to drink wine again." Leaning back against the wooden headboard, Felicity vowed to never get drunk again either. It just felt too awful after the fact. "I found this on the pillow beside me. He has left me." With that revelation, the tears began to flow.

"Oh, sweetie..." Taking Felicity into her arms, Trinity stroked her hair. "He just thinks it would be better if you lived apart. You can still see him."

"He did not wish to engage in sexual activity with me before he left. Perhaps he no longer finds me desirable."

Her mother wiped the tears from Felicity's cheeks. "I'm pretty sure that isn't the case. He didn't have sex with you last night because it wouldn't have been right with you being drunk."

"Why not?" Felicity sniffled, taking the tissue her mother handed her and wiping her nose.

"When a person is drunk their inhibitions change, they aren't necessarily thinking clearly. When people are drunk they often do things they regret the next day. Dusty didn't want to take advantage of your condition so he turned you down. It doesn't mean he doesn't want you."

"I would not have regretted having sex with him. I love having sex with him. He makes me feel special." She blew her nose, set the tissue aside, and took another.

"You might not have had regrets, but he might have, taking advantage of you in your drunken state. I have to say, that makes him a pretty decent guy."

She tilted her head and looked at her mother through watery eyes. "It sounds as though you like him now."

"I never disliked him but, yes, this gives him a notch up on my likable scale."

"I do not understand that."

Her mother laughed as she tucked the hair behind Felicity's ear. "I like him."

"What about my father?"

"He's coming around. We need to get some food into your belly and then you'll feel better."

"Can I have cake?"

Her mother laughed. "Maybe something a little less...filling. We'll stick with toast and tea. But first you need to get dressed." She slid from the bed.

"Mother?"

"Yes?"

"I liked your friends."

Her mother's eyes filled with a warmth that sank right into Felicity's own soul. As Trinity handed Felicity her nightgown, she nodded. "They are pretty great."

"But I wish not to drink with them again."

Laughing, her mother kissed the top of her head, making Felicity feel that warmth slide deep into her belly. "I told you to go slow."



Sitting in a circle of his own blood, Chaos called out to the Dark Mystics. He knew what he was about to do would cost him dearly, but it didn't matter, he'd given everything he held dear already. What did it matter if he would be trapped in the bowels of hell, writhing in pain after his death? At least he'd lived as he'd pleased and done as he'd wanted.

The Dark Mystics could have his soul for all he cared.

He felt the chill as it permeated him and he knew they had arrived. Opening his eyes, he looked up into the cold, black eyes of evil. "At your service, my ladies." He bowed in reverence.

"For what purpose do you call to us at this time?"

One dark figure floated in front of him while the other two surrounded him. He could feel their icy breath as it bore down on his head and neck. "I wish a favor."

"Once more a favor? You have given your soul already. What more do you have to give?"

"My servitude. And...the souls of all those who serve under me." He would see to it that they gave to their master even if he had to torture them into agreeing.

"Such a present is a worthy offering. What is this favor you seek?"

"Help me bring down Trinity and Basil." He knew it was a lot to ask, still... "I have tried for nearly a year now to rule our kind, to bring more into the fold, but at each turn, they foil my plans. If they were out of the way, I could rule so much easier."

"And personal feelings play no part in this plan of yours?"

He looked down, then back up into her dark empty eyes. "Did they not keep Avadur from you? Did Trinity not send him back to his wife instead of surrendering him to you? Trinity Ford sent him to the very woman you despise, to the woman who made you what you are when, in all rights, Avadur belongs in your hands and not in Rajana's." He felt the chill slice into him as the Mystic's eyes darkened. He knew he'd hit a button. "I only wish to give both Trinity and Basil to you so that you may deal out the proper punishment they deserve"

"You truly are your master's protégé. Avadur would be proud of you. All right. We will grant you your wish."

"Excellent."

"There was a child born to the two. A child Rajana stole. We wish her soul as well."

"Sounds personal." He cleared his throat when she bore down on him, breathing her frigid breath into his face. "I know not of a child."

“Do you not trust what I say to be true?”

Chaos shivered as the cold sank right to his bones. “I do believe you. Tell me where this child is now.”

“She has come through the Realm to find her parents but she is no longer a child. She is now a woman. You will find her with one of your young men, the one who got away. Bring her to me and I will give you the two.”

“But how will I find her? I have no idea where to look or who I’m looking for. What does she look like?” When they all disappeared, Chaos let out a loud cry. “How am I supposed to bring her to you when I don’t even know what she looks like or where she’s hiding.”

Getting to his feet, he kicked the chair to his left in his fury.

Grabbing his hat, coat, and long, brown wig, he put on his disguise.

Looked like he was going to have to search for her himself.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Her mother had been correct. Food in her stomach did make her feel better, or maybe it was the warm tea Trinity had given her. Either way, Felicity knew she felt better now than she had when she'd woken.

She knew there was one thing that would make her feel even better. Seeing Dusty.

With her destination in mind, Felicity sent herself to the clinic, setting down in the sitting area. When she didn't see him there, she searched the other rooms of the clinic.

"Dusty. Are you here, Dusty?" She continued her search. When she got no response once she entered the laboratory area, she became worried. Then she heard something coming from a room at the back. Cautiously, she inched towards it, fearful of what she might find inside. Placing her palm on the door, which was slightly ajar, she pressed it open ever-so-carefully.

There was a bed and on it a man lay tied up with tubes coming out of his arms. Curiosity getting the best of her, she inched further into the room.

"Felicity?"

She jumped, her heart pounding, and spun around to find Dusty standing in the doorway. Her heart instantly went from erratic fear to

a calm, warm pumping of joy. Hurrying to him, she threw her arms around his neck and sampled the lips she'd been wanting to taste since she woke. Since before she woke.

Holding him in her arms, tasting his lips on hers, feeling his heart beating against her chest was the most incredible feeling she had ever had. Felicity knew there was absolutely nothing or no one that was going to stand in her way of being with him.

Feeling as if she were drunk on his taste, she pulled away, giggling. "I missed you."

"Apparently. I missed you too." He tucked her hair behind her ear. "Do your parents know you're here—wait, how did you get here?"

"No, they do not know I am here and I transported myself." She ran her fingers through his curls, enjoying the sensation of them as it slid along her skin.

"What do you mean you transported yourself here? I wish you would tell your parents where you are because if your father comes looking for you, he is going to be furious."

"You ask too many questions at one time. I will answer the first at the same time as the second." She sent herself back to her parents' home to let them know where she would be.



Dusty stood in his spot, staring at the void of space where Felicity once stood. One minute she'd been standing in front of him, the next...*poof* she was gone. Just like the other times she'd done something magical, it took him a few minutes to get over it.

Hearing the moaning behind him, Dusty turned his attention to the vamp on the table, noticing that he was waking. Couldn't have that now, not until he was sure his procedure worked.

"Why do you have a young man tied to a bed?"

Jumping, Dusty spun around to see Felicity standing behind him. "You can just disappear and reappear anytime you like?"

"Yes. Why do you have that young man tied to the bed?"

"I wish I had that ability. I have him tied up because I'm performing an experiment on him and I don't want him to get away before I'm finished."

"An experiment?"

"I'm draining his blood and replacing it with human blood to see if it will change him back to human. If it works, I plan to do it to myself."

She gasped, one delicate hand coming up to her mouth. "Why would you want to do that? Turn him human?"

"Wha...what's going on?" the boy slurred as he blinked his eyes rapidly.

"I want to turn me human. I'm using him to see if it will work." Dusty grabbed another two sleeping pills and shoved them into the vamp's mouth. Before he could hold his mouth shut, the guy spit them back out. "Crap."

"Why would you want to turn human?" she asked, turning Dusty away from the vamp.

"Because I was a human once and I kinda liked it."

"Do you not like being a vampire?"

"Not really, no." He had to put the vamp back to sleep before he fully woke up. Dusty knew if he did, it was going to be damn hard keeping him tied up.

"How can you not like being a vampire, Dusty?"

"Jesus...what the hell is this? Who the hell are the two of you?"

"What's to like about it?" Dusty held the young man down, or did his best to. "I need blood to live off of. I can't spend time in the sun without being barbequed. My eyes are yellow. They used to be green. I liked green." Even though once he'd contemplated getting brown contacts.

"I like the color of your eyes. And there is much more to being a vampire than that. You grow old very slowly. You will not suffer normal human ailments. You have more strength, just to name a few."

Dusty continued to struggle to keep the young man pinned down. "I liked who I was before I was bitten. This guy here is going to help me get back what I lost."

"So you will deprive him of something he may enjoy for your own gain? I cannot allow you to do that."

"What are you doing? Stop it." Dusty pulled her away when she started ripping the IVs from the vamp's hands. When he disappeared, Dusty stood there with his jaw hanging open. Then the anger set in. "Why did you do that? Where did you send him?"

"Away." She took his hands in hers. "I did it for his benefit. It is wrong for you to hold someone against their will. Is that not what was done to you, Dusty? Were you not taken and turned into something you wished not to be?"

His jaw clenched tightly. Everything he'd done had been for naught. Not only was he out a test subject, but nearly three quarts of blood as well. However, Dusty knew arguing with her would do him

no good. He supposed he could start over and do it again. Only next time he'd be more careful not to get caught.

"You're right. What was I thinking?" he laughed nervously.

"You cannot erase who you have become, Dusty. It is your blood now, it is your soul. If it was so easy to return you to your previous being, drinking in a human's blood would return you to your human form. Once there is vampire blood in your body, it kills off the human. No amount of human blood can change that."

He didn't want to hear that. He wanted to remain hopeful. This wasn't the life he'd wanted. He'd had plans, aspirations of attaining his Bachelor's in Biomedical Chemistry. How the hell was he supposed to do that if he was a vampire?

"This saddens you."

"Of course it saddens me. How would you feel if you were suddenly turned human?"

She tilted her head in thought. "I suppose I would not like it very much."

"Well...that's just how I feel. I wanted to get my degree and work in researching diseases of the human body. I can't do that now that I'm a vampire."

"Why not?"

"How am I supposed to go to school, get my degree, and not let anyone know I'm a vampire? Hell, I can't even tell my parents what I've become."

"Will they not love you now that you are a vampire?"

"I don't know." That wasn't true. His parents were the most loving people he'd ever known. They loved his older sister despite her handicap. Maybe they would accept him the way he was now.

"I think if a parent loves a child, they will love them no matter what they become." Placing a hand on his face, she made his body warm. She was the sweetest thing.

She had such a delicate structure, tiny bones in her face, hands, and shoulders. Her body was tall and willowy, still blossoming into full womanhood. Though her breasts were full, he suspected they had more room to fill in. And he had a sudden compulsion to be there to watch her grow.

"You are so beautiful."

She looked at him with confusion. "You say that with such conviction."

"Because I mean it. I don't think I've ever known anyone as beautiful as you and it makes me wonder what it is you see in me." No, he

wasn't homely, but he was tall and thin, not a muscle to be seen on his body. No one as beautiful as Felicity had even so much as passed a glance his way. Or was it just that he had saved her, had shown her the pleasures of sex? He hoped it was more than that.

"I see a kind man, a handsome man with curls upon his head that feel as soft as satin. I see a man who has a heart of gold." She stroked a finger along his face and he wanted to melt into her. "You are my protector, my lover..." she leaned closer, touching her lips to his, "and my friend."

When she spoke to him he felt like he was the handsomest man on earth. When she touched him, he felt alive. Though he hated what he'd become, he knew if he hadn't, he never would have met her.

Scooping her up into his arms and making her squeal, he carried her to the nearest room and set her on the bed, cupping her face in his hands. Was it stupid to feel love for her? If it was, he would gladly be called stupid.

"I wish I could make love to you in a real bed like the one at your parents' place."

"What is...make love?"

He smiled, taking a handful of her hair—he loved her hair—and playing with it. "It's sex but softer, more romantic."

"Oh. Do you wish me to take us back to my room?"

"No!" That was the last thing he wanted. "I just can't make love to you there. I'll keep thinking your father is going to jump out of the shadows and...never mind. This will have to do. Wait here." He rushed from the room to grab a blanket from the storage closet and when he came back into the room, she was beginning to undress. "I was going to do that." He was disappointed that she had started without him.

"I am capable of undressing myself."

"True, but it's all part of the romance. Let me." Replacing her hands on the shirt, he finished unbuttoning it, slowly. "Your skin is so soft." Wanting to feel it against his lips, he kissed the bare flesh as he released each button. She never wore a bra and that alone was incredibly exciting.

He spread the shirt apart, taking one nipple into his mouth. She moaned, arched her back, and he continued to stimulate her with his tongue while his hands worked on the snaps on her pants. Her fingers twined through his hair, holding him to her breast and he was more than willing to suckle on it as long as she liked. He just hoped he was

doing it right. He'd never touched a breast much less kissed one before her.

Releasing the snap and the zipper on her pants, he pressed her back onto the bed and shimmied her pants below her waist. She began to writhe as he slid the material down. She was wearing panties this time and, oddly, that was arousing to him. He released her breast and, when she whimpered in protest, he kissed her. Then he slid the pants off her legs and dropped them on the floor. He'd watched enough porn in his life and read enough books to know what a woman liked, so he began slowly kissing his way up her body, beginning with her toes.

"That tickles," she giggled.

Smiling, he inched his way up her leg, past her knee, and paused briefly on her thigh. He'd never tasted a woman either. He wondered if she would allow him to do so now. There was no way to find out but to try. Inching her panties down, he dropped them alongside her pants, then spread her legs apart. If he didn't lose it now, he would be amazed. Gliding his hands up along the inside of her thigh, he lowered his mouth to her heat. She smelled so sweet but her taste was heaven.

"Oh...my..."

She wiggled her hips and he knew she enjoyed what he was doing. Using his tongue, he moved along her soft skin, drawing out her liquids, as fine a nectar as he had ever tasted. The faster her hips moved, the faster he kissed.

"Oh my...yes, Dusty. You are going to make me orgasm."

He didn't stop but, instead, drove his tongue deep inside. She bucked wildly and he felt her body convulse over him. As she shook through her orgasm, he drank her up. When she was still and panting, he pulled his shirt off, then slid out of his pants. Taking a condom from his pocket, he slipped it on and crawled up onto the bed.

She spread for him and as he eased in between her parted legs, he took her lips in a heated embrace. He slipped inside while he kissed her and their tongues danced. Moving in a slow rhythm, she matched his speed and together they danced the dance of love.

As his body gushed with his release, she wrapped her legs around his waist and gave him everything and more and when she bore her fangs, he turned his neck and gave himself to her. He felt her teeth penetrating him and it shot straight into his loins. Her vein called to him and as she poured over him, drank him in, he bit down on her neck.

As they savored each other, their surrender was complete.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Basil returned with Jonah, feeling discouraged. He'd left Dante and Danny along with Gypsy and Starla at the warehouse, much to his dismay, to watch for Chaos. He expressed vehemently that they watch the warehouse and not get distracted by their women. Though both men had vowed they would keep their eyes on the building and not their ladies, Basil knew it wouldn't entirely be the case.

Women had a way of distracting a man.

Arriving home, he found Trinity in the kitchen, sitting at the table with a half-eaten white cake on a platter and a slice on her plate. "Tell me you haven't eaten most of that yourself."

"This is my first slice. I'm trying to lose my baby fat, remember?"

"You look fine just the way you are." Sliding her chair out, he leaned over and sampled her lips. He found them quite sweet and tasty. "More of you to love." His hand came up to cup her breast.

"My breasts will shrink whether I want them to or not. Once my milk dries up completely, which I think should be any time. Do you have any idea how hard it is for me being around Felicity, seeing the grown woman she is and knowing my breasts are still lactating for her? I keep thinking I'll get over my hatred for what Rajana did to all of us, but every day it seems to build more and more."

"I know. Is that what this is about?" He jerked his head in the direction of the cake.

"No, well...not entirely. Felicity isn't home and I was feeling—"

"What do you mean she isn't home? Where is she?"

"Calm down, Daddy. She's with Dusty. Before you blow an artery, sit down and relax."

He plopped into the chair with her shove and glared at her.

"You can't stop her from seeing him. Besides, I thought you said he was growing on you."

"Growing, slowly." Basil grabbed the fork from the table and sliced off a thick chunk of cake. "Is it too much to ask that we be allowed to get to know our daughter, to spend some time with her without having to worry that she's falling into the arms of some boy we know nothing about?"

"Welcome to the world of parenthood." Trinity laid her hand over his. "Want some ice cream with that cake?"

"No." He shoved the forkful into his mouth, scowling.

"Any Chaos sightings?"

He shook his head as he swallowed. "Not so far. I doubt even if he were to walk right in front of Dante and Danny that they would notice him now."

"Oh, why is that?" She took the fork back and helped herself to more cake.

He waited for her to finish her bite before taking the fork back. "Gypsy and Starla came along."

"Ah..." She stood up and grabbed another fork. "They're more professional than to let the women in their lives distract them." When Basil shot a look that clearly said, *right*, she amended, "Okay, Dante is, at least. Do you seriously think Chaos will go back there? Dusty got away from him; he won't take the chance of being caught. Why is it Starla can't pick him up on her radar if he's here?"

"I'm betting he has some help from the Dark Mystics." He sighed, taking another forkful of cake. "Do you ever think *to hell with it, let's just get out of here and let the vamps have the city?*"

"Never, and it surprises me to hear you say that." She laid her hand on his, drawing his eyes to hers. "We'll get through this, Basil. I promise."

"I know. I just wish...well...it's pointless since you can't go back." Stuffing the forkful of cake in his mouth, he suddenly realized it had a different flavor than the usual cakes they had in the house. "Who baked this?"

"Gabriella. She's decided to fill her time with baking for us. You should see the freezer. We need to get her involved. She is way too bored," Trinity laughed, shaking her head as she broke off more cake.

Basil toyed with his cake, suddenly not wanting it. "Would you consider having more children?" He lifted his eyes to meet hers, fearful of what she might say.

"Yes."

That was not what he'd expected. "Just like that?"

"Just like that."

"I never realized how much I wanted to be a father until you became pregnant. I think I would love a house full of tiny children with your attitude."

"Tiny children grow up to be adults with attitude," she reminded him with a smile. "As is the case with our daughter. How many are you thinking? Because a full house scares the hell out of me."

"Three, maybe four."

"Uh...Two more. I can go with two more."

"Six it is," he teased.

"You know damn well I didn't mean six." She slugged his arm, then leaned over the table to him. "Want to get started now?"

"You just want to fill your mind with something other than worry for our daughter." He pushed from the table and held out his hand. "It works perfectly for me."



The streets had changed so much since he'd been out last. As he walked along in his disguise, Chaos was repulsed by the mayhem. He supposed that was what animals did when they weren't reined in by their master. Fritz had done a miserable job as ruler of his people. Just as soon as Trinity and Basil were taken care of, Chaos was going to begin his original plan of ruling the city.

But first, he needed to look for this so-called child of Basil and Trinity's. Couldn't the Dark Mystics have at least given him a little more information on her whereabouts? *"She is with the boy who got away."* What the hell kind of clue is that?"

A moan in the distance caught his ear and as he followed the sound, he saw a young man lying on the ground. There were ropes attached to his wrists. Curious, he inched forward.

"You need to help me."

Chaos stood over the young man. "What has happened to you, boy?"

The young man sat up, rubbing his head. "Some guy hit me over the head and tied me up to a bed and was...I don't know what he was doing, but it involved needles and tubes and there was this woman—she was hot, with eyes so blue they nearly glowed and—"

"What did this woman look like?" He didn't give a damn about the circumstances of this boy's dilemma.

"Hot. Long, black hair and, like I said, her eyes were so blue they nearly glowed. Oh, and she was a vampire but she has some kick-ass powers. She sent me here, don't ask me how but one minute I was on the bed and the next I was here."

Could it be? "And the gentleman. What did he look like?"

"Curly hair, sort of brown but lighter. Vampire, and his name was...Dudley...no...Dusty, that's it. Dusty. Jesus, my head hurts."

Chaos hoisted the boy to his feet by his arm, ignoring the complaints. "Where were you held? Can you take me to the place you saw this woman and boy?"

"I...uh...don't know. I never saw where he took me after he conked me on the head."

Why did everything have to be so damn difficult for him? "Can you at least tell me what this place looked like from the inside?"

"Um..." He scratched his head. "It looked like some sort of doctor's office, lab or some sort of thing."

"Walk with me." Dragging the young man along with him, Chaos wondered if it would be too much to ask for something to go his way just once. "Do you recognize anything?"

"Yeah...sure...I was going to this drugstore to get me some food when he hit me."

What were the odds he was held nearby? Looking around as he walked, Chaos kept his eyes open for a doctor's office or... "Could it have been a clinic?"

The young man shrugged.

Tossing him aside, leaving him to deal with himself, Chaos hurried to the clinic. Maybe things were finally looking up.



He'd heard all about the softness of a woman and how wonderful it felt to have them in your arms, but never did he expect it to feel this good. While Felicity's head rested on his shoulder as she slept, he held her against his body just enjoying the afterglow of a glorious bout of sex.

He was pretty damn sure he had fallen in love with her.

Stroking a hand over her hair, Dusty enjoyed the moment, wondering if it would be too soon to wake her up and engage in more sex. Maybe he should let her sleep a little longer...yet...he was as hard as a rock.

The sound of metal screeching along the floor had him at full alert. Someone was breaking in, which meant her protection spell was no longer working.

Sliding out from beside Felicity, hoping not to wake her, he grabbed his pants and quickly threw them on. Leaving her asleep, he stepped out of the room and froze to his spot.

"Well, hello there, Destroyer. I hear you have something of mine."

Before he had a chance to retort Chaos' hand lashed out, connecting with the right side of his head. He saw stars as he flew through the air to land with a heavy thud on the floor down the hall. The room spun as he attempted to get up. Crawling on his knees, he moved towards the room where Felicity slept. He heard her scream and rushed to the room. He entered to see Chaos punch her in the face and knock her out.

"Leave her alone!" Like an animal, he threw himself at Chaos only to be smacked once more in the head. He flew back, hitting the wall behind him, cracking his head against the concrete. As he slid to the floor, he saw Chaos carrying Felicity from the room.

He fought to keep conscious but lost when the room began to turn black.

He fell face first onto the floor with a thud.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

He had her! He had her!

Now what the hell was he going to do?

With the girl flung over his shoulder, Chaos looked around frantically. He couldn't just walk off with her. Destroyer would surely wake soon and come after him. Not that he was much trouble. Still, the boy would slow him down. Also, what if Basil or Trinity were out and about? If they saw he had their child, they would stop at nothing to get her back. He found a car parked across the street and hoped it was in working order. Racing towards it, the girl flopping on his back, Chaos kept his fingers crossed it would run.

Tossing her into the passenger's seat, he climbed in, saw there were no keys—like he expected there to be any—then crouched over to pull off the case below the steering wheel. Pulling out the wires, he quickly hotwired it. When the car rumbled to a start with ease, he let out a loud cheer.

She moaned. He cringed.

If she woke up, he would surely lose her if what the young boy said was true and she possessed special abilities. Why wouldn't she, being the daughter of two powerful beings. What he needed was something to keep her asleep.

Spotting the drugstore down the block, he raced in the car to the store. Coming to a stop right in the doorway, he slid out and hurried into the store. He rushed to the aisle he wanted and grabbed several boxes of sleeping aids.

That should do the trick.

Racing back to the car, he was delighted to see she was still asleep. Better safe than sorry, he decided as he ripped open the first package. Popping two pills from the foil, he tilted her head back, pulled her mouth open, and dropped the pills inside. He closed her mouth, pinched off her nose, and waited for her to swallow. When she gagged and swallowed, he released her with a smile.

Now all he had to do was set his plan in motion. For that, he would need some help.

Things were finally looking up.



There was a loud ringing that stirred him out of his unconscious state. As Dusty blinked his eyes, he realized the ringing was in his head. Then he felt the pain.

"Oh man..." The room around him swirled and he felt his stomach rise. Knowing anything he did now would result in him tossing his cookies, he leaned his head back and let the dizziness and nausea pass.

Then he remembered how he got in this situation.

Chaos had taken Felicity.

Pushing through the dizziness and nausea, Dusty got to his knees, panting, then his feet. He braced a hand on the wall as the room spun and vowed he would kill Chaos for taking her away.

Staggering from the room, he hurried to the back door and outside. Slipping into the car, he hotwired it, then slammed the door when it rumbled to a start. Though his eyes were blurry, he started himself rolling, desperate to find her.

He knew he needed help and the only people he knew who could do that were her parents. Rolling the windows down in hopes the air would wake him up, Dusty barreled down the road towards the castle.

If Chaos did anything to her... Who was he kidding? Chaos was definitely going to do something to her. That was his character. What Dusty didn't understand was how Chaos had found him or why he would take Felicity and not Dusty.

With his foot heavy on the gas, he sped down the highway. He wiped the blood that slithered into his eyes and turned into the long driveway that led to the castle. Dusty came to an abrupt halt. Leaving the car idling, he ran to the house. He grabbed the doorknob to open it and felt a sharp jolt of electricity shoot into his body. He went down on his knees, his entire body shaking and his insides doing a funky little ditty. As he jerked about on the wooden porch he saw it open and forced himself to stay awake.

"Dusty?"

"Hhhheeee...tookkkk...hhheerrr."

"Get him inside. His head is bleeding."

He recognized the voice as Trinity's long before he saw her. When he was hoisted up, it was Basil who carried him into the house. "Cch-hhaaos...tookkherr. Heee tookkk Ffelicity." Jesus, what had zapped him? He felt as if he'd sucked on a live wire.

"Chaos took Felicity?" Basil bellowed at him, or maybe because Dusty's head was still throbbing and ringing it just seemed that loud.

"Yes." He swallowed and was pretty sure he was drooling. "What the hell happened to me? Wwww why do I ffffeel like I was elec-electrocuted?" Barely getting the words out, he rolled to his side and vomited all over the floor.

"Shit! Get a bucket and a cold cloth," Trinity called out.

"Sorry." Feeling like something worse than shit, Dusty fell back onto the couch he'd been set on and closed his eyes.

"Tell me what happened."

He opened his eyes and Basil was right there. He saw the panic and felt the same inside his gut. "I heard someone coming into the clinic and when I got up to see, it was Chaos. He knocked me out, grabbed her, knocked me out again when I got up to fight him. I tried but...damn it, I should have fought harder." He would never forgive himself if anything happened to her.

Never.

Cooper came into the room carrying a tray with cloths and a bowl and some other things.

"My goodness. You really took a knock to the head. This may need stitches."

"Do you have any idea where he might have taken her?" Basil asked as Cooper dabbed at Dusty's head, wiping away the blood.

Dusty hissed as he responded. "The only place I can think is the warehouse."

"I'll call Dante," Trinity said, rushing from the room.

"I don't understand why he took her and not me. I'm the one he wanted." Dusty did his best not to show just how painful it was when Cooper washed off his wounds.

"He wasn't after you," Basil supplied, pacing the floor, smoke from his cigarette trailing behind him. "He was after my daughter."

"Why would he want her?" Dusty hissed.

"It's a long-standing feud between the three of us. He's responsible for the darkness and he's the only thing standing in the way of returning the sun. We've been after him for nearly a year now."

They all jumped as glass crashed.

Cooper pushed Dusty back down when he tried to sit up. Basil ran to the window and, grabbing something from the floor, ran to the door.

"What the hell is going on?" Trinity asked as she rushed into the room.

"Something came through the window. Basil has gone out to see who threw it."

Dusty couldn't believe how calm Cooper was. He dabbed at Dusty's head while explaining calmly what was going on. Dusty wished he knew the guy's secret because he was a wreck.

"Chaos definitely has her," Basil growled upon reentering the room.

Pushing Cooper aside, Dusty sat up. "Isn't that what I said?"

"Yeah, but this gives it more credence." He held up a cell phone and a piece of paper.

"What does it say?" Trinity ran to his side, worry clear in her voice.

"I have your daughter. I'm willing to negotiate. Her life for both of yours. There's a phone number with it."

"Oh, Basil."

Dusty pushed off the couch.

"You need stitches, young Dusty."

He waved Cooper off. "What are we going to do to get her back?"

"She's not at the warehouse." Trinity sniffled. "I talked with Dante and no one has entered the place since they've been there. We have to find her, Basil."

"We will." He turned to Dusty. "I don't want any crap lies from you. Did you and my daughter engage in sex while she was with you?"

Dusty felt his face heat up. "Yes. But what does that have—"

"Did you feed from each other during the act?"

"Yes." He still didn't know what that had to do with finding her.

"How long ago?"

"I don't know...an hour, maybe two?"

"Have you drunk any blood other than hers since?"

"Jesus, why are you wasting time grilling me? It's time you realized your daughter wants to be with me and that she's a grown woman and that I would never hurt her. I love her," he blurted out much to his own surprise.

Basil spoke very softly now. "I know. I ask because if you recently drank from her, you could detect her and since you drank while engaging in sex, the power of her blood inside of you is tenfold. Add in the fact that she is enhanced in her powers, it should be relatively easy for you to find her. I hope."

"Then tell me how to do it so we can bring her home." The sooner the better.

"First, we need the rest of the gang here."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

She really was a beautiful child. Standing over her, Chaos admired her beauty while she slept. If he was attracted to women, he might consider taking advantage of the naked woman before him. Instead, he draped the blanket up to her neck, then took the chair beside her bed. It would be best to keep an eye on her. He had no idea how long the sleeping pills would work on her.

How was it that Basil and Trinity had a child and he didn't know about it? How long ago had this happened? Was it before the darkness had come? It didn't matter. He had her now and if they wanted her back, they had to agree to his terms.

"I sent the message, Chaos, sir."

Swiveling in his chair, Chaos acknowledged the vampire that entered the room. "Excellent. Now we wait. Who is up for a game of cards?"



Dusty paced the floor while Basil explained everything to the others. They'd arrived within a half an hour of Basil calling them, yet Dusty wished they would stop wasting time and go out and look for Felicity already.

He listened halfheartedly to the conversation around him.

"So it's all set." Basil stood. "We all go out with Dusty to find her."

"How exactly are we going to do that?" Dante inquired.

"I'll get to that after we figure out what Chaos wants. I'm going to call the number and see what he has to say. Is there any way for you to trace it, Jonah?"

"I don't have that kind of technology and, believe me, if I did, I damn well would be using it."

"I had to ask. Okay, I'm going to call."

Dusty turned just as Basil began dialing. "Why are we even wasting time calling him if I can find her myself?"

"We want him to think he has the advantage," Basil explained.

"If we just go out and find her, he won't know what's hit him."

"We're going to do that, but I'm not going to lead you all into an ambush. I want to know what he has planned before we go in."

"Like he's going to tell you," Dusty snorted. This was stupid.

"Trust Basil, Dusty." Cooper laid a hand on his shoulder. "He knows what he's doing."

"Fine, do what you think you need to do. Just tell me first how I can find her. I'm done waiting around."

"I think that's where I come in. Right?" The pretty redhead whose name he'd forgotten stood up.

"Right." Basil nodded.

"How the hell is she going to help?" Dusty grumbled.

"Well, first I need a piece of Felicity's clothing. Something she wore recently would be best," the redhead spoke up.

"The clothing she was wearing before we...well, they should still be on the floor in the clinic. He took her as she was...naked."

"WHAT?"

"Calm down, Basil," Trinity soothed.

"Okay, those would be great."

"Good, we need to hurry." Grabbing the redhead, Dusty raced for the door.



Dusty wasted no time driving back to the clinic. In the process, he found out the redhead's name was Starla and she was a witch. The things he was learning since becoming a vampire. She explained why she needed Felicity's clothes and he didn't bother to hide his skepticism. But she seemed adamant that it would work, so who was he to deny her that? How his blood sprinkled on one of Felicity's shirt was

going to lead them to the area she was being held was beyond him. Still...he was willing to try.

They entered the clinic to find both Basil and Trinity standing in the waiting area. "How did you—never mind. I'll grab her clothes." Though he'd seen it with his own eyes when Felicity had disappeared before him, the whole concept of it baffled him.

Stepping into the room, his gut twisted. They'd had a glorious moment together before everything had gone so wrong. Grabbing her clothes, he hurried from the room. They would have more glorious moments. He was convinced of that.

"Here you go."

Starla took the clothes from him and, setting the pants on a chair, spread the shirt out onto the floor. "I need something to draw your blood with."

"I'll grab a needle from the back." Wasting no time, he ran to the back and there too his stomach clenched. He'd been performing an experiment on a young man no older than himself. What had he been thinking? Felicity had been right. What he'd been doing to the young man had been very wrong. If being a vampire was so horrible, Dusty decided he would find a way to rid himself of it without using innocent lives.

First, he had to get Felicity back.

Grabbing a syringe along with several vials, he ran back into the main lobby. "Will this work?"

"Perfectly, except...um...I'm not sure I can inject that into you," Starla explained with a pained look on her face. "I'm not good with needles."

"I can do it myself. How much do you need?"

"One tube will be enough."

Nodding, he grabbed the rubber tube and tied it around his arm. Then, pulling the needle and container from the sealed compartments, he connected them together. Finding a vein, he shoved the needle into his arm.

"You're pretty good with that. Looks like you've had practice."

"My mom's a nurse. I used to watch her do this all the time. She even let me practice a few times." He wasn't about to tell Basil that he'd recently tried to drain a vampire of his blood to cure him of his disease. When the container filled with his blood, he popped it off, then slid the needle from his arm. He handed the vial off to Starla, tossing the needle and tubing aside. "Now what?"

"Now, I perform my spell."

He watched as she sat on the floor with Felicity's shirt before her. She took the vial of blood and sprinkled it over the shirt. "Goddess of discovery, I ask of you now lead us to the possessor of this garment."

Dusty watched in amazement as the blood that had been sprinkled all over Felicity's shirt began to pool in the center. How it was possible was beyond him. "What does that tell us?"

"Just wait."

Impatiently, he stared at the shirt, then blinked several times as it scattered in a circle near the upper right hand side of the shirt. One trail of blood slid down to the left to pool in a small dot.

"Thank you, Goddess." Starla stood, a smile bright on her face. "This is where we will find her."

"Where? All I see is a circle of blood near the top and a small dot on the bottom. How does that help us?" It had been a waste of time to let her do this and Dusty was furious with himself for allowing it.

"This," Starla pointed to the bottom dot, "is us. This," she tapped the round blood circle near the top, "is the area Felicity is being held."

"Great, so we know an area. Fat lot of good that will do us. We're no better off now than we were before. Damn it, I never should have wasted time with this. I should have just gone out to look for her myself."

Trinity put a hand on his shoulder, calming him. "What would you have done? A house to house search? I know just how you're feeling. I felt the same way not so long ago when Jonah went missing. I want her back too, and this is going to help us find her."

"How?" He just couldn't understand it.

"We know she's being held north from here at approximately seven blocks or so. Now all we have to do is start walking," Trinity explained with a squeeze to his shoulder.

"Your blood and hers are mixed. Fused. As long as you feed from each other, you will sense when the other is present," Basil began to explain. "We know roughly the area she is being held, now all you have to do is let her blood lead us to her."

It was all so weird but, given what he'd seen these past few days, he wasn't going to brush it off. "What are we waiting for?" The doors opened and the rest of the gang rushed in.

"Took you all long enough," Basil chastised.

"Hey, we don't all have your transporting abilities," Jonah stated. "So...do we know where she is?"

"North," Dusty said as he headed for the door. He knew they followed him but said nothing as he marched north. He had no idea

what he was supposed to do and the image of a bloodhound sniffing the air came to mind. Was that what he was supposed to do? Sniff the air?

The first thing he was going to do when he found her was tell her how he felt. He didn't care if she only wanted to be with him for sex, or protection. He loved her and that was all that mattered.

He felt a tingle inside, something...warm. As if his body was a magnet being drawn to its source, he felt a tugging inside. Picking up his pace, he continued forward and something inside of his mind said turn left. So he did. The pull grew stronger. In a dead run, he let his body guide him to his love and, without thinking, he ran right towards the apartment building ahead of him.

He stopped short at the front door as a brute of a man stepped in his sight.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"To get my girl."

"I don't think so—hey, I know you. You're Destroyer."

Dusty cringed at the name. "My name is Dusty Ryder, now get the hell out of my way."

Tipping his head back, the brute bellowed a hearty laugh. "Nice guts, kid."

Dusty was hoisted up by the front of his shirt.

"I think Chaos is going to be mighty glad to see you again."



"Fuck! He's going in. Stop him."

Trinity stopped Basil before he could bolt for the apartment, then pulled him out of sight of the building. "We know where she is now. What good will it do us to run in there? Chaos could do something to her and we both don't want that. Think about it, Basil. We have the advantage now. We know she's in there and all we have to do is transport ourselves inside."

"She's got a point."

Basil narrowed a look at Dante that could have killed. "We still don't know specifically where she is and the instant we set down we'll be detected, if Chaos has more men in the building, which I'm guessing he does."

"True. But we have another advantage. You can change into anything you like inside of there and creep around undetected and I have this neat invisible thing I can do. We have the advantage," she reas-

sured him, then turned to the rest of her gang. "Give us a few minutes, then head to the door. Cause a distraction, start a fight, do something to keep Chaos' men occupied. If all goes well, we'll be back in a few."

Taking Basil's hand in hers, they disappeared into the night.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Dusty had no idea if anyone saw him being carted into the apartment. All he could do was hope they had. He made it clear to the brute that he wasn't impressed with being manhandled up the stairs to the third floor, but he knew his efforts to struggle only amused the guy.

Still, he had to try to be a man.

"I get why Chaos was so taken with you. You've got spunk, kid." Laughing, the brute pushed through the apartment door, dragging Dusty with him. "Looky who I found outside."

Chaos stepped out of a bedroom to his right and, the instant he caught sight of Dusty, he smiled. Dusty lunged at him, only to be yanked back by the brute.

"I like him." The guy beamed, holding Dusty back with one hand.

"So did I...until he deserted me." Chaos walked right up to Dusty and took his face in hand, giving it a hard squeeze. "But I have no use for you now. Dispose of him."

"No!" Dusty lunged at Chaos again, using all of his power to break the hold of the brute. "Where is Felicity? What have you done with her?"

"Your little sweetheart is sleeping peacefully. I can see why you're so taken with her. She is lovely."

"If you touched her, I swear to God I will make you pay."

Laughing, Chaos stepped up to Dusty again. Only, this time, he punched him right in the gut. Dusty went down, gasping and coughing in a desperate attempt to breathe.

"You're more my type than she is and I managed to keep my hands off of you." He knelt down, lifting Dusty's face in his hand. "Though...I had hoped to remedy that after the initiation."

Dusty wanted to vomit. It was bad enough the guy had sucked on his neck, but the thought of Chaos' hands on him was enough to sicken him. "Where is she?"

"Dusty?"

"Felicity?" She sounded so...groggy and it reminded him of when she'd been in his bed, waiting for him naked and drunk as a skunk. "What did you do to her?" He lunged at Chaos again and was taken down with one hard blow to the back. The pain shot into him like a hundred bolts of lightning and, as he went down onto the floor, he caught a faint glimpse into the bedroom. Felicity stood up from the bed, wobbled, then fell back down.

"Felicity!"



"Did you hear that?"

She had and, not giving a damn who saw her, Trinity decloaked and ran up the stairs. Behind her, Basil transformed from the spider he'd been to a man. She burst onto the second floor and, not seeing any guards, turned back. "Check out this floor, I've got the next." Leaving Basil to do what she'd instructed, Trinity ran up the flight of stairs to the next floor. When she threw the door open and saw two men standing down the hall in front of one of the apartment doors, she knew she'd found her daughter.

"*I found her,*" she called to Basil with her mind, not wasting any time as she headed down the hall to the men. "Try to stop me and you'll be sorry."

Like the idiots they were, they came at her. Though she had no weapons on her, Trinity lifted her foot and connected it with a hardy blow to the first vamp's jaw. He fell backwards and the other came charging at her. Using the heel of her hand, she slammed it into his face, then with her other hand, jabbed him in the gut. He went down like a sack of potatoes. She was grabbed from behind by the guy she'd kicked and, without thought, shot a beam of light from her body that scorched him and his pal on the floor.

Shocked at what she had just done, she stepped back, felt the hand on her back and spun around quickly.

"It's me," Basil shouted, his hand held up.

She took a breath and she saw him standing before her. Then she saw the blisters. "Jesus. I could have killed you." She grabbed hold of him and pulled him into her arms.

"You didn't. Let's find our daughter."

The door flew open and they were confronted by a big, burly vamp with a lethal glare.



Her head was spinning but Felicity knew it was Dusty's voice she'd heard. Pushing up from the bed again, baffled by the robe she wore, she shook her head to try to clear it and saw a huge man in a long, brown coat standing in the doorway, facing away from her.

Where was she and what was going on?

"Dusty?"

"Felicity. I'm here."

The man in the coat spun around, and she gasped at the ferociousness in his eyes. There was noise behind him, some sort of commotion and it seemed to frighten him.

He ran at her. Before she could think to vanish, he grabbed her by the throat and, coming up behind her, held her against his chest. "What is going on?" She wished her head would clear already.

Then she saw Dusty on the floor.

"Dusty? What is happening?" She tried to go to him but the man held her even tighter. There was more commotion and her parents rushed into the room. Everything was happening in a blur that spun her head.

"Let her go, you bastard," her mother bellowed.

"I don't think so. Unless you want her harmed, you'll do as I say." He squeezed Felicity's neck even harder.

She felt the fury building deep inside of her and knew if she didn't tap it down, someone was going to get hurt.

"Take them out, boys."

The men charged at her parents, and another went for Dusty. The fury began to build like a raging fire inside of her. She heard the screams and felt the hand around her neck release as the light spilled out of her. "No, no, I have to stop it."

"Get him out of here, Basil," she heard her mother scream and watched her father grab Dusty and run from the room. All around

her, men lay on the floor, screaming in pain. "Take my hand, Felicity. Take my hand!"

"I must stop this before I hurt someone." But the rage inside of her continued to boil. She saw the man who had held her by the throat as he writhed on the floor, his exposed flesh bubbling. She had to stop it before...

"It's okay, take my hand."

Looking up at her mother, Felicity grabbed her hand. "I wish not to hurt anyone."

"He's the reason there is no sun. Do you trust me, Felicity? Do you trust what I am about to make you do is for the better of mankind?"

She felt the peace from her mother wrap around her like a warm blanket and she knew without a shadow of a doubt that what her mother needed from her was for the best. "I trust you, Mother."

"Let it go now!"

Looking into her mother's eyes, she saw as they began to glow. Gripping her hand tightly, Felicity let herself go. All the power, all the fury she felt inside of her came firing out in a huge wave of bright, hot light.

"You...will...not...winnn."

As the light from both her and her mother erupted, the man on the floor along with the others burst into flames and in no more than a blink of an eye, crumbled into dust.

Exhausted, Felicity fell to the floor, her fury spent. Her mother collapsed alongside of her.

"Are you okay? Felicity, talk to me." Her mother took hold of her and gave her a hardy shake.

"I am fine." She felt as if she'd been zapped of all her energy but, aside from that, she felt fine. Perhaps, better than she had in...a very long time. "We had to do that."

"Yes, sweetie, we had to do that."

"I'm not a bad person."

"You're not a bad person." Her mother wiped the tears that streamed down her face.

Her father and Dusty rushed into the room. "Dusty?" Getting to her feet, she ran into his arms. "I was so worried he would harm you, that he would harm all of you. You are my protector, you saved me."

He held her out, wiped a hand across her damp face, and shook his head. "No, Felicity, you saved me. You don't need me to protect you anymore."

Her chest suddenly tightened. "I will always need you. You are my friend, my lover, my...love." She loved him with all her heart.

Taking her face in his hands, he took her lips in a slow, sensual kiss that made her head spin and her heart warm. When he released her, she was smiling.

"I love you too."

"Holy mother of God! The sun, the sun is back!"

Felicity turned to see her parents' friends barrel into the room, then she realized just how bright it was. Turning to the open window at her back, she smiled. "Is the darkness gone?"

Her mother took her hand in hers and held it against her cheek. "The darkness is gone. We did it, my sweet. We brought back the sun."

Dusty wrapped his arms around her and kissed the back of her neck. "You're my hero."

"What did I say about touching my daughter?"

"Basil."

"Just kidding."

Her father took her free hand and, lifting it to his lips, kissed her knuckles. Reaching out, he took her mother's hand in his. Together they were joined as one. "That's my girls."

For the first time in her life, Felicity felt at home.

EPILOGUE

She knew the instant she stepped outside the sun would burn her skin, so Trinity stood on the terrace under the roof of dead vines and wood and admired what had been absent for nearly a year.

Had it really been that long?

Once, as a child, she'd been terrified of the dark, of the monsters that lurked in the shadows of the night. Trinity knew now that the only thing terrifying about the darkness was that it might never end. Anything in the darkness could be dealt with, and it had. They had survived it.

Because she'd been in the darkness for so long, the bright sunlight hurt her eyes. For one moment, she didn't care. Slipping her sunglasses off, she blinked at the brightness of the daylight. Despite the pain, she felt pleasure. There was such beauty in the daylight. Even though the trees had long withered, the grass was brown, flowers were dead, and there were no birds flying in the serene blue sky, Trinity saw beauty.

Soon enough things would be back to normal and she was going to enjoy watching it.

She sensed Basil even before he stepped out onto the terrace. When he came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her, she leaned into him and sighed.

"The champagne has been chilled and now everyone waits for you to begin the celebration."

She held onto his hands and reveled in the moment. "I just needed one more look."

"It's been three hours. The sun isn't going anywhere."

She hoped not. "It's been a crazy year."

"It has at that."

"When I walked in on you while you were boinking another woman, I thought my world had crumbled. I wanted to crawl into a dark hole and die."

He turned her, cupping her face in his hand. "If I had to do it over, I would have done things so much differently."

"We can't go back and, even if we could, who is to say we'd do things better. We've found new friends, had struggles with old ones, and we created a pretty damn good child. In the grand scheme of things, I would have to say we did pretty well. We survived."

He kissed her slowly, softly. When he pulled away, he was smiling. "Yes, we did."

"But this is only the beginning."

"I know."

"This is our city now. It's time the rest of the world realized who we are."

"Might be a tough battle."

She shrugged and slipped a finger along the edge of his hair, feeling the softness of it. "Have you ever known me to back away from a battle?"

"No, my fiery princess, you never would."

"We're going to rebuild Jacob's Cove," Trinity vowed with conviction.

"Damn right."

"We've got a baker slash medical examiner and a florist."

"Cooper and Gabriella. Though it might be best if he chose one or the other. I'd hate to think of him coming from an autopsy to bake me a cake."

"Right." Trinity shuddered. "Dante can open his P.I. shop and be the law. Gypsy can be his...whatever he wants her to be."

Basil laughed, toying with the dangly spiral of gold hanging from her ear. "Starla can open a mystical shop and Danny can help her run it."

"Or he could work with Dante and learn the ropes."

"True. Then we have the nerd—"

"He hates being called that."

"Who will bring this city back into the computer age," Basil continued. "And Raven will tend to the sick and injured. We have it all worked out. Not so hard after all."

"And what about our daughter and Dusty?"

"I'm trying not to think about the two of them together." When she frowned at him, he gave in. "He's growing on me. I'm working on it, okay?"

Smiling, she turned back to the sun and leaned into him. "The sun's back."

"I seem to recall hearing something about that."

"Everything will be just fine now."

"As long as I have you."

Holding Basil tight, Trinity watched as the sun began to set. This day would end, but tomorrow was a whole new beginning.

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

