



An ancient vampire, an ancient grief...a love that makes his blood sing...

Midnight Playground, Book 2

London, 2069

Aleron is ancient, powerful, immortal...a vampire who idles away his time playing at his favorite haunt, Midnight Playground. His favorite toys: beautiful young men. His game: BDSM, experiencing through the minds of his partners the sensations he can no longer quite feel himself.

The one thing he has vowed to avoid at all costs is love, especially for a woman. In a hundred years he has never been tempted to break that vow—until a lovely mortal woman enters his dungeon to watch him play. And his blood hums the ancient song of long-forgotten desire.

Raised in the Indian slums of London, exotic dancer Meeraj enters Midnight Playground a woman with nothing left to lose, numb to all but the most extreme forms of stimulation. As she watches Aleron's blood play, she knows only his razor-sharp skills will satisfy. And she catches an odd mental glimpse of the grief that shadows his heart.

From their first touch, they are caught up in a whirlwind of exquisite agony that releases their emotions from the weight of the past. Exposing them to risks they've both fought to avoid. Love...and loss.

Warning: Where to begin...? Sex with ancient vampires, sex with hot young men. Spanking, bondage, whips and chains. Biting, stroking, blood and pain. Grief and fear and love again...Hallelujah and amen!

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Bloodsong

Eden Bradley

Dedication

This book is for all my readers who kept asking for Aleron's story. Writing his romance has been a touching and gratifying gift for me. Thank you for falling in love with Aleron in the same way I did.

Chapter One

London, 2069

Aleron Chrestien Veillantif de Ambroise had drunk from the most beautiful of humans, male and female alike. He had slept with too many to count in his three hundred years of existence, played with them in the BDSM dungeons of Europe. He had even made a few of them—all male—his companions, offering them the treasured Turning Kiss. But never had he seen anyone like the woman who had just walked through the heavy iron doors to the dungeon rooms of Midnight Playground, the most exclusive vampire sex club in London, and his second home.

She was exquisite. A long sheaf of waving black hair, shining like Indian silk around her shoulders. Her eyes burned golden in the low light of the club. Not that dim lighting hampered his vision in any way, but something about her eyes... They were extraordinary. They gleamed as though she were a vampire herself, although he knew from her scent she was human.

She smelled like flowers.

He breathed her in. Something inside him answered. A low, keening shiver. An itch in his palms. The sensation of the night air running over his skin like satin.

He had to have her.

Still, he stayed where he was, pausing to stroke the rounded shoulder of the heavily muscled Scotsman he had bound in chains to a St. Andrew's cross, the seven-foot tall wooden X that was Aleron's favored form of restraint equipment. He glanced down, telling himself he should focus on the task at hand. But the handsome redheaded and bearded Calam was an experienced bottom, and they had played together several times. Even after having whipped him for an hour, the powerfully muscled human male was fine—panting, his large cock beautifully engorged, his wide back pressed against the wooden cross. Lost in subspace, aroused but serene.

Aleron leaned his weight against one of the thick wooden slats, letting the edge of it bite into his side. He welcomed the sensation, something that wasn't quite pain, yet not quite *not* pain. As a vampire, and especially one of his age and strength, pain was almost abstract to him. Which was why he so often chose to play in the dungeons. To bring sensation to others, sensations he could no longer feel completely himself. Except for the Bloodsong, that thrumming sensation like music in the veins, at the edge of hearing, like some distant, ethereal flute playing. Something vampires felt only during BDSM play together, only when there was pain and sex involved. The Bloodsong was the vampire equivalent of the endorphins

humans experienced during pain play, and sometimes during bondage or sex. He would not feel the Bloodsong tonight with Calam, but tuning into his mind, feeling what he felt through that veiled distance, was enough. Lovely.

But this woman...to play her...he could think of nothing else.

Yes, to have her in the dungeon. To bind her, to feel her flesh warming beneath my hands, beneath the leather floggers, the whips, the canes...

She moved with the grace of some jungle creature, her dark hair catching the light, her eyes flashing. Her generous mouth was a lush red slash in a face that was all high cheekbones and golden-brown skin. Exotic. Magnificent.

She turned as she walked through the highly decorated room, the heels of her black, thigh-high boots clicking as she moved over the marble floors. She seemed almost framed by the marble-paneled walls, the enormous, ornate, gilt-trimmed mirrors, the plush red velvet upholstery on the settees placed around the edges of the room. In her skin-tight red leather dress, she fit in perfectly, as though she were part of the elegant architecture. But when he inhaled a little more deeply, he could smell the scent of the streets on her, the mustiness of the tube stations, the damp pavement from walking the broken and ravaged London sidewalks, a faint edge of spices—curry, coriander—so subtle no human could have detected it. And beneath it all, the faint scent of gunpowder. A woman wise and brave enough not to go out unarmed in the rough London of these times, although he knew the guardians of the gated club would have taken any weapons from her when she entered. Not that it mattered. A vampire of his age was nearly invincible. No human would dare come here with anything but the ultimate in pleasure and a chance at immortality in mind.

She was watching him, the gold of her eyes shifting as she moved from light to shadow. He loved these Eastern women, their exotic looks, the bit of accent even among those born and raised here in London, their gorgeous golden skin. And this one...his cock was going hard already, simply seeing her walk across the room.

His hand still on Calam's shoulder, he saw it when her gaze caught on his, when she raised her chin a few notches. How lovely, how enticing, that she wasn't afraid of him. It wasn't simply an act. He'd have sensed it if it were.

He nodded to her, smiled, sending a silent invitation. But it was all about the simple, human art of flirtation. He didn't use the power of the vampire glamour to pull her to him. No, this one must come on her own.

She kept that golden gaze on his face as she drew closer, and her scent came more powerfully to him. He inhaled once more, breathed her in, separating her scent from Calam's heated skin, the keen edge of his desire. The woman was aroused, her heart beating with excitement. He could feel it like some sensual punch to the gut. But she never showed it in her calm expression.

Calam moaned softly and Aleron tore his eyes from the woman, but not before he noticed that she'd taken a seat on one of the velvet settees nearby, watching them. She crossed her long legs and sat back, her pose almost too casual. Oh, she was cool, this one.

She wanted a show, did she? He would gladly give her one.

He turned his attention back to Calam, keeping the woman at the edge of his vision. He ran a hand down the front of the man's body, seeking out every hard plane on his taut, muscled torso, as well as the welts from the long leather flogger Aleron had been using on him right before the woman entered the club.

The woman. Sleek golden beauty... Unbelievable how lovely she was. He could reach into her mind, send her his name, find out hers. But he resisted, torturing himself a little.

Focus.

Calam's gray eyes were shining, his pupils enormous. His lush red lips, framed by his close-cut red beard, were parted. Aleron leaned in and kissed him, his tongue slipping into his mouth. Calam moaned quietly. When Aleron stepped closer, he felt the man's erection twitch against his thigh.

His cock strained against his leather pants, harder for knowing the woman watched. He pressed his hips in, Calam's cock caught against his rock-hard thigh. He could feel the pulse of the man's desire. He pressed harder, knowing it hurt, knowing Calam loved it, wanted the pain.

He snaked a hand behind Calam's neck, pinching the skin there.

"Tell me what you desire, Calam," he demanded. "Tell me what you come to me for."

"I come to you for pleasure, Aleron. To become lost in the beautiful pain of your touch." His brogue was thick, his voice low and breathless. He was no less masculine for his submission, this one. No, he was absolute male, and it was his strength that made him so attractive to Aleron.

"Excellent answer."

He pinched harder, felt Calam's body, his cock, go rigid.

"Ah...yes..."

"And did you enjoy your whipping?"

"Yes, Aleron, Very much."

"Do you need more? Because I think you do. I think you need it hard. Harder than before. Faster. Rougher. You can take it, can't you, Calam? You're strong."

"Yes. I can take it. I want it."

Aleron stepped back, picked up a wide leather slapper made of two flat lengths of heavy black leather as long as his forearm. He pulled back then let his arm come down, the slapper hitting Calam across the front of his powerful thighs with a loud crack. Calam moaned softly. He could take more, Aleron knew. He paused, scenting the air, wanting to know without looking that the woman was still there, that she was intrigued by what she saw. And she was.

Smiling to himself, he hit Calam again, watched with some satisfaction a vein throbbing in his engorged cock. A beautiful cock, the flesh red and swollen, enormous. He lowered his free hand and stroked the tip, making Calam groan aloud. Then he flicked it with his finger, and pleasure shimmered through his body as the bound Calam tried to arch into his touch.

“Ah, patience.”

He flicked again, watching Calam’s muscles go rigid as he tried to maintain some control of his movements. He gave him a moment to calm himself, then went to work with the slapper, the leather landing in a series of hard smacks on his thighs, his chest, his shoulders. Calam was moaning, panting, his cock throbbing harder, and Aleron could sense his pleasure, knew his pain. And all the while he felt the presence of the dark woman in the shadowed corner nearby as though she were standing right beside him, making Aleron’s blood hammer like thunder.

Meeraj watched, her pulse humming with desire. She could not believe her luck. That one of *them*, the vampires, had noticed her only moments after she’d entered the club for the first time.

It had taken her over a year to find a way in. Not that a single year was long in the overall scheme of things. It often took others much longer, and they never accepted any human over the age of thirty. At twenty-five, she understood she only had so many years left to explore this, her fondest fantasy—to be with them, to perhaps become one of them, although that part had never mattered to her as much. She didn’t care about eternity. What mattered was what she could experience right *now*.

He was beautiful, this vampire. Tall and muscular, but not overly so, with broad shoulders and long, lean legs encased in black leather. His face was angular, the bones strong, his skin like stone. She could see it even from where she sat, watching him with the human male, who was beautiful in his own way. He wasn’t tall, but was gorgeously muscled, his naked body striped with angry red welts, straining against the heavy chains holding him to the cross. The chains suited him. He looked powerful enough to break any ropes. His cock was huge, straining as much as every other muscle in his body. His masculine face was a perfect study in the exquisite agony of pain and pleasure. She could see why the vampires would desire him, love him. But he was not what interested her. Fascinated her.

It was the vampire. Only him.

His mouth was lush, but pale. He must not have fed recently. His short, spiky white-blond hair and brilliant, piercing blue eyes made him look tough, a bit evil. That and his cool, hard demeanor. She understood right away that he was very old. And that despite his age, his immortality, his utter maleness, he was just like her. Shut down. Loveless. Content to be so.

Truthfully, he was one of the most beautiful beings she had ever seen.

She’d seen vampires close up a few times, but never one like him. His very hardness drew her as much as his physical beauty, making her body warm all over, trembling with need already.

He was lashing the man with the slapper, harder and harder, and the redhead seemed to love it, was completely lost in sensation. When the vampire reached between his thick thighs to stroke his cock, the man went a little wild, bucking as much as he could against the restraints. The vampire stroked faster, and Meeraj went wet, absolutely soaked, simply watching.

If only it were me, bound for him. Under his touch, under his command.

He had large hands, her beautiful vampire. She loved watching his grip around the handle of the leather slapper. Loved even more the sight of his hand around the man's cock. She loved the power that emanated from him.

She hated that she felt so desperate for him to want her.

She shook it away, the fear, the desperation and focused on the scene before her, on her own raging desire, careful to keep her features still. To keep her façade composed. But when the vampire paused to lock his icy blue gaze on hers, she went warm and loose all over.

She had several brief moments to understand that she was slipping into subspace already, with nothing more than his gaze on hers. And to fight off that odd feeling she had whenever she was at the dungeons, when she allowed herself to submit to anyone, to give herself over. So different from who she was in her everyday life—in control, walls up against any possible threat. But she couldn't hang on to that thought now. She couldn't hang on to anything but the soft arm of the plush settee and the look in the vampire's eyes.

Absolute power. Absolute command. A need as fierce as her own.

"Come to me," he demanded of her, his voice a low whisper laced with a faint French accent.

Her breath caught. She rose to her feet and stepped forward.

Aleron held his hand out to her as she approached. He was aware of Calam's patient anticipation, the rise in his excitement as the female approached. His own body was responding, his mind absolutely in a tumble as she drew nearer.

Whatever was wrong with him?

He forced himself to calm, to look into her golden eyes.

"You like to watch," he said softly.

Yes," she answered, her voice a soft, breathless whisper.

He smiled. "Then watch us, my beauty."

He led her to a small, velvet-covered stool a foot or two from the cross to which Calam was bound, and held on to her hand as she seated herself. Her posture was perfect, rigid yet graceful. And although her face was calm, he could hear every sharp intake of her breath. He could smell the soft, feminine fragrance of her desire, like perfume in the air.

He didn't want to let her hand go. But he did.

Turning back to Calam, he forced his mind to focus.

“Calam. You’re still hard and eager, but you need to be worked up again, don’t you?”

“Yes, Aleron.”

“And you’ll enjoy being worked in front of this lovely woman, won’t you?”

“As it pleases you, Aleron.”

“Of course.” He stepped closer to him, trailed one finger over his wide chest, stopping to pinch his nipple, a hard, punishing pinch. He smiled when Calam’s cock jumped. “But it will please you to perform for her.”

“Yes.”

Aleron pinched again.

“Yes, Aleron...she’s very beautiful.”

“After I whip you, feed on you, you’d love to fuck her, wouldn’t you?”

“Ah, yes...”

“We shall see. Because I’d like to fuck her myself. Or perhaps you. Or perhaps both.”

“Oh...” Calam groaned, his cock absolutely rigid, the head darkening.

Aleron stepped back then, and taking up a heavy suede flogger, began a steady whipping across the front of Calam’s body—his chest and arms, his thighs and calves, even the tops of his feet, which he knew Calam loved. Calam was moaning, his hips arcing into the air. Aleron read his pain, tracking it, focusing in and backing off when it really got to be too much. Even a man of Calam’s size and musculature could only take so much. He was only human, and couldn’t handle what another vampire could.

He kept it up, the even, steady strokes of leather upon flesh. Calam became more and more excited, his pleasure rising, his cock pulsing. And all the time she sat to one side, watching. He could feel her. Sense her. Smell her. Hear her blood hammering with need in her delicate veins.

He was sinking into the rhythm of it now—the flogger, the two beating, human hearts, the sharp scent of lust, of blood beneath the skin, begging for him.

He moved in until his leather-clad thigh was pressed against Calam’s, positioning himself so the woman could watch. He reached down to take the man’s thick cock in his hand once more, heard his gasping intake of breath. He stroked once, from base to tip, his fingers tracing the ridge below the swollen head. His own cock was almost as hard, simply handling Calam. And knowing that she watched them, that he would have her next, made him even harder.

Patience.

Yes, knowing was enough for now. Almost.

“You are going to come for me, Calam,” he commanded.

“Yes, Aleron...now...”

“Not quite yet.” He stroked again, harder, faster, felt the heat of Calam’s cock surge in his palm. He leaned in until his cheek rested on Calam’s, whispered, “I’m thirsty tonight. First you will slake my thirst. Then you will come for me, and for this lovely creature so ardently watching us. She wants to see you come as much as I do. She wants to see me drink from you.”

He sensed the acceleration of her heartbeat, felt Calam’s do the same. His cock hummed with desire. His tongue was prickling with need, his body too hot. He was aching with the need for blood, the need to come, the need for human flesh. The pulsebeat of his need was an ancient and sometimes terrible thing. Tonight it was almost unbearable. But he was old enough to bear it, and he would. Until he truly could not stand it any longer.

He fisted his hand tighter around Calam’s big cock. He could feel how close he was, knew he couldn’t hold back any longer. He raised his face, his cheek nuzzling the leather cuff that held Calam’s wrist. His tongue flicked out, touched the pulse point just below the heavy cuff. Calam groaned. Aleron opened his mouth, then inhaled the fragrant heat of his skin.

“Please, Aleron,” the man begged.

Aleron smiled to himself, and bit.

The blood was hot in his mouth, elemental, earthy. And behind the blood was the flavor of the man’s flesh, sweet and salty all at once. He pulled in the first mouthful, swallowed, saw into Calam’s mind.

He was picturing the woman. It hit Aleron like some sort of shock, to see her this way as he drank from Calam’s wrist. It was almost as though she were there with him, drinking, stroking the man’s hard cock. She was in his head, somehow.

His mind was going dark. He struggled to hang on, to Calam’s mind, his sensations, which were thrumming through his body. He had that keen humming sensation that happened only when two vampires engaged in pain play, his veins heating, singing. The Bloodsong. It was *her*, he was certain of it.

But she was human.

How? When it wasn’t even her he played. When he wasn’t even touching her.

And human.

Human!

But he couldn’t stop, his cock like a hammer between his legs, pulsing and heavy. He felt Calam weakening, knew he’d had enough. Had to fight the raging desire to keep drinking, drinking, until the man was empty.

No.

Meeraj was breathless, weightless. She could *feel* the vampire, could almost see his thoughts. A lovely female face that was hers, yet not hers. Who was she? She could feel his desire, like some primal thing he

kept barely caged. Frightening. Irresistible. And beneath it, a great sadness that threatened to overwhelm her.

Tears streamed down her cheeks, and her pussy throbbed with heat as she watched the vampire, the human's cock in his fisted hand as he continued to pump. The man was thrusting his hips, his body glistening with sweat. And the vampire's mouth latched onto his wrist, sucking, sucking.

I want you...unbearable...

Were those her unspoken words, or his?

The redheaded man's muscled body went rigid, he cried out, and came, spurting between the vampire's fingers. Her body, her sex, clenched. Her mouth opened in shock as a climax rippled through her, pleasure shimmering over her skin, trembling in her belly.

She clutched the edges of the stool, her head spinning. The vampire pulled his mouth from the man's wrist, a few droplets of blood lingering on his lips. He licked them away then licked the man's wrist, his tongue as delicate as a cat's. She felt it as though he was licking at her damp slit. That cool, lapping tongue.

She moaned, her sex still pulsing.

The vampire turned to look at her. His blue eyes were blazing, almost entirely black now, his pupils enormous. As she watched, his cheeks went pink, his lips red, as the blood filled him.

He was beautiful. So beautiful it nearly hurt to look at him.

She had never wanted anything—or anyone—so much in her life.

She was shaking.

He smiled, a brief, crooked lift at one corner of his lush mouth, his sharp eyeteeth gleaming in the dim light. Another wave of need swept through her. She couldn't even begin to understand what had just happened.

She drew in a deep breath, then another, forcing herself to calm while the vampire let the man out of the handcuffs, half-carried him to the velvet settee she'd been sitting on earlier.

Two human female attendants dressed in red leather corsets and short black leather skirts, heavy chrome collars around their pale, graceful necks, were there immediately, wrapping the man in blankets, giving him a glass of water to drink. The vampire stepped back, watched for several minutes, then he turned to her.

His gaze was just as startling from several feet away, just as intense, as though magnified, somehow. Her sex gave one more squeeze, still full and aching. She took in another long breath, stilling herself as she'd trained herself to do.

Control.

Yes, always. Until she chose to give it up, to give it over to another.

She was going to give it over to this vampire. Tonight. Tomorrow. Whenever he demanded it of her. She'd done it already, coming for him with nothing more than that window into his mind, his play partner's

sensations. She'd heard about such things. Had wondered if the rumors were true. Came to the Midnight Playground anyway, because it didn't matter. She was here. He wanted her. She didn't need to know anything else.

Chapter Two

Aleron stood, looking at her. She was stunning, this woman. This mortal woman who had somehow managed to get inside his head without him inviting her. Who had managed, in all her mortal simplicity, to make his blood sing.

It shouldn't be possible. The Bloodsong that was the vampiric response to pain play only ever happened between vampires. Never in his three hundred years had this happened to him. Not with a human. And he knew it was her, not Calam, who had caused it. It was *her* response, the intensity of their mental connection, made the instant he'd seen her, that had his blood humming in his veins.

He looked over his shoulder, making certain the two young slave girls were caring for Calam properly. They were pretty enough. They would never be here if they weren't. But he only had eyes for *her*.

She watched him, her lovely face wary now. He liked that, that she was a bit off balance, this strong woman. He liked the scent of her nerves skittering over her sweet skin.

He didn't like that she made him feel the same way. Yet it intrigued him. He hadn't felt like this over a woman, over anyone, in a long, long time.

Not since...but no, he wouldn't think of that now.

Emeline.

No.

He focused on *her* once more, on those shining eyes that were a glowing, metallic bronze, the luster of her golden skin, the high, rounded curve of her cheekbones. Her blood beating at her temples, at that tender spot at the base of her long throat. He drew in her scent. Flowers again. Desire. Female come between her hot thighs.

Yes...

He stepped closer, held out his hand. "I am Aleron."

She took it in hers, her mortal warmth seeping into his hard, cool flesh.

"Meeraj."

"A beautiful name."

She simply nodded her head, as if his compliment were her due. So calm in the face of all that had happened already. On the outside, anyway. He knew better.

"Your first time at Midnight Playground?" he asked.

"Yes. I only received my invitation a few nights ago."

“And who is your sponsor?”

“Her name is Nissa.”

“Ah, I know her well. Quite well. I’m surprised she didn’t mention you to me.”

“Why would she have?” Meeraj asked, again, coolly. As if being in the presence of a vampire didn’t intimidate her at all.

“Nissa would know you would appeal to me.”

“And?”

“And you do.”

She smiled then, her teeth a row of flawless white. He could see in his head those teeth bared in ecstasy, her head thrown back, her eyes closed. He could see his own teeth bared to drink from her...offering her The Seeking Kiss...

She waited, watching him. A small ripple of nerves ran up his spine.

Unusual.

Yes, but he wouldn’t allow that to throw him. Perhaps it had simply been too long since he’d had a woman. It had been months since he had given Hex over to Nissa, and she was the last woman he had taken. Men were always easier, in every way. Easier to obtain. Easier to dispose of when he was finished with them, without any drama on either part. Women were emotional creatures and he was...not. It had been a very long time since he had allowed himself to be anything more than fond of his female partners.

A hundred years.

Why was he thinking of this now? With this superb creature before him.

He reached out, stroked one finger down her bare arm. Skin as silky smooth as it looked, and a small, lovely shiver from her.

Perfect.

“Meeraj, would you like a drink?”

“No, thank you. I don’t drink.”

“Tell me what you are here for.”

“I am here for the unique experience of sex with a vampire. Isn’t that what we’re all looking for, we humans who come here?”

“Yes, of course. What else?”

He had to know if there was more to it for her. Other than her scent, she was difficult to read. She was strong, so strong he had no idea of the extent of her submissive tendencies. And submission was something he would never force or trick anyone into.

“I am here to see if any of your kind finds me fit for The Seeking Kiss. I want that, to experience that bliss. To experience all that I can. To become closer to your kind.”

“And the Turning Kiss?” He was challenging her. The Turning Kiss, that long, long drink which would transform a human into one of his kind, was not a requirement of those who came to Midnight Playground, and was rarely offered. He was testing her, perhaps.

“I understand that for many it’s the ultimate desire. But it’s not as important for me. Maybe I don’t know what I might be missing.”

“You don’t seem at all afraid, of any of it.”

Meeraj lowered her long, black lashes. They brushed against the faint pink flush on her cheeks, the first outward sign that she was truly affected by being there.

“I’ve been accused before of being...contained.”

He laughed. “So have I.”

She raised her eyes to his once more, the gold burning through him.

“Which is one reason why I hoped to be invited to play in the dungeons here. It helps me to let go.” He saw her jaw tighten, her fingers unconsciously clench. “It’s the only time I can.”

He watched her closely, saw the pulse beating in her throat. Yes, she was more worked up than he’d originally thought. Why hadn’t he noticed? He was too distracted by her beauty. Her rigid strength.

If this woman were a vampire, she would be one to rival my own power...

But he was getting ahead of himself.

And she was talking about the dungeons, about his favorite sexual arena—BDSM. That exchange of power, of pain, soaring sensation that opened the doorway into a person’s soul. Intense when played between humans and vampires. An almost dangerous force when played between vampire and vampire. The Bloodsong overwhelming...and why had it happened with this woman watching? He had to find out. He had to find out how much more intense it would be when he played her. And he intended to.

“Have you done this before? Bondage? Pain play?”

She nodded. “Yes. It’s something I’ve been interested in for several years. I’ve only ever played with other humans, of course. But I’ve experienced it from both sides, top and bottom. I’m a performer, and my specialty is fetish performance. So the leather and the exhibitionism, the ropes and the whips, are nothing new to me. Only this is new. Being here. With someone like you.”

“Do you understand what this sort of play means with a vampire?”

“I’ve heard about the intensity of it. About the bloodlust that often comes with it.”

“The bloodlust is dangerous,” he warned her, watching her carefully. She still wasn’t afraid. “It’s the one thing that can wrench control from one of my kind. You understand that you could be risking death?”

She nodded once more. “All of that was in the papers I signed before coming. I have no family left. I have nothing to lose but a life which has become too ordinary for someone like me.”

“I don’t know what you might mean by that—someone like you. But you can tell me later. I find I am eager for play.”

He realized then he'd been holding onto her hand the entire time, his grip probably crushing her fingers a bit, yet she had never even winced.

Oh yes, a worthy opponent. A worthy partner. And so damn lovely he couldn't wait to get started. To get his hands on her. To contain the power of who she was. To elicit a response from this cool, cool human female.

Enticing. Irresistible.

"I'm ready for the dungeons," she told him. "I'm ready for anything."

He smiled at her, and the tips of his sharp eyeteeth caught the light, glinted. Meeraj shivered, trying not to let it show.

To be with one of them. To give herself over to a being of such strength and power...she may even, for the first time, be able to let go completely. In a way she had never allowed herself before. Maybe this would allow her to *feel*, deeply, truly, in a way she hadn't since she'd lost the last of her family.

Jai. Her mother. And Dev, finally. But she couldn't think of them now. Not here.

She steeled herself, shook off the moment of sentimentality.

Aleron tipped her chin with his fingertips, gazed into her eyes. His were a startling blue, icy, flawless. She was surprised to see pain buried there, deep in the wide, black pupils. Was even more surprised at the answering twinge in her chest.

Stop it. Calm down.

"Meeraj." He said her name as though he were experimenting with the way it rolled off his tongue, lyrically, with his French accent. "Tonight will be different from anything you have experienced before. No matter how many times you have played at the dungeons with other mortals. With me, you will only ever be the bottom."

"Of course."

Yes, that was exactly what she wanted. Impossible to see it any other way with him, with a being of his power. The ultimate in domination.

"And once you hand yourself over to me, you are entirely under my command, my control. There are no safe words. We play by pure instinct. By agreeing to come with me now, you are agreeing to The Seeking Kiss, to my drinking your blood. And at my whim, offering your body, your blood, to others."

"I understand, Aleron. I understand, and I am here for exactly this."

The excitement was building within her at his words. The desire flowing like molten heat through her body. Her mind was beginning to spin.

I am really here. This is truly about to happen.

Perhaps she was in a slight state of shock. She wasn't sure what was happening to her. She'd thought nothing could shock her. Not after the lean, hard life she'd led, living in one of the toughest neighborhoods

in London, working her way up as an exotic dancer. She'd started in the lowest of clubs, those that had chain-link fences protecting the girls from their audience. The better clubs had bulletproof glass. The best clubs, where she worked now, had no barriers of any sort.

That's where she'd seen the vampires. They came on occasion, slumming it, she supposed, in the human quarter. They could certainly afford the fees. She had never been touched by one. But the moment she'd seen her first vampire up close, she had craved that stone-cold touch. Had wanted to brush up against that power.

And now, here she was.

"Come to me then, Meeraj."

It wasn't a question.

Aleron looped an arm around her waist as she stood. Though his hand had been cool to the touch, his body was surprisingly warm. Hard as the marble-paneled walls, still, but almost warmer than any human's, as though he burned with fever.

"You are mine for tonight. We will be very good together, you and I," he whispered to her.

His breath was like a cooling breeze in her hair, making her shudder with heat and need and the tiniest edge of fear. But she wasn't about to stop. This was it, her darkest fantasy come to life. On shaking legs, she let him lead her to the large wooden cross. It seemed enormous to her now, towering over her, even over him.

Aleron.

Had she ever imagined the vampires would be this utterly beautiful up close? Had she ever imagined the way her blood ran hot, nearly steaming through her veins, along with an exquisite anticipation she could hardly bear?

He pulled her in close to his side, and she melted into him, her mind emptying out already. He smelled like stone, clean and hard and solid. Pure, somehow.

"I am going to strip you. And then I will chain you to this cross, just as I did the handsome Calam. And you will love it, won't you, my beauty?"

He caressed her cheek, his cool touch making her shiver.

"Yes," she whispered.

Oh, she would enjoy it. Lose herself in it.

She was lost already. And at this moment, she didn't care if she never found her way back.

Aleron stepped away from her, turned his head and nodded his chin. Out of the shadows came the two young women who had been attending to Calam earlier. They came up, one on either side of her, and undressed her so quickly she didn't have time to think about it. Their quick little hands were like tiny caresses on her skin, lighting her up with need, making her feel oddly cherished. They took off her dress, her bra, her panties, which were soaking wet already. They took her silk stockings, her high black boots.

She was left in nothing but her earrings, a pair of delicate silver hoops that had been her mother's, and her long black hair falling around her shoulders.

Aleron stood, watching her closely, and a slow smile spread over his face. She was shivering, but not with cold. No, it was a need so fierce she could barely contain it. She wanted to sink to her knees before him. To kiss his hands. To be allowed to touch him.

God.

God had nothing to do with this.

Aleron reached out, laid his hand on her cheek, swept it down until he cupped her chin, raising it a few inches.

"You are so elegant," he told her, his voice low. "So very beautiful. But the women here are all beautiful. You are...something special."

A small shiver at his words.

She had never in her life wanted to please anyone the way she did him. She had never been that truly submissive with anyone, male or female.

His hand slipped down, over her collarbone, and she thought she might die happily right then, simply from his touch. Except that she needed to really feel him too badly.

He leaned in, his lips only inches from hers. His breath a sweet whisper against her mouth.

"I can feel your excitement, Meeraj. I can hear the gasping edge to your breath. I can sense the racing of your heart, the heat in your body. In your lovely pussy."

He stroked her breasts, and she surged into him.

"Ah, your nipples are hard for me. Perfect."

He bent his head, and she felt the hot lash of his tongue on one distended nipple.

"Oh..."

He drew it into his mouth, his tongue sweeping across it. She was flooded with heat—her breasts, her pussy. Her legs were weak.

Aleron pulled away. "You are shaking, my darling. We can't have that. Best to steady you now."

He took her wrists and held them over her head, backing her into the cross until she felt the smooth wood pressed against her spine. As he fastened the leather cuffs about her wrists, she felt strangely safe, cared for.

The sound of the chains sliding across wood as Aleron adjusted them was like some primal music in her ears. She loved the idea of chains, the heaviness of them. The medieval feel to them. They seemed so *tough*, for want of a better word. So hard. As hard as the vampire's skin.

Yes...

Her arms were spread wide on the enormous X. Aleron bent and gently spread her thighs. He bent lower, clasp ing each of her ankles in thick leather restraints attached to longer lengths of chain bolted into the floor. She loved being bound like this. Feeling open to him, completely at his mercy.

She didn't know if he possessed any. She didn't care.

He rose to his feet and ran his hands over her body—her sides, her thighs, then back to her breasts. She tried to arch into him, but the chains were pulled too tightly for her to move more than a few centimeters. Her nipples ached. Her pussy ached. Her very skin ached for his touch.

"I am going to whip you now. You'll like that, won't you?"

A hot shaft of desire went through her like fire in her veins. "Yes, Aleron. Please."

He pulled away, and she could see his wicked smile.

He turned his back a moment to take some implements from a rack on the wall beside her. When he turned to her once more he had an evil-looking cat-o-nine-tails in one hand and a fur glove on the other.

Her breath caught in her throat. And in her mind was one word, running through again and again, an endless loop of begging—*please, please, please*.

He ran the long leather tails of the whip over her skin, and she breathed in the tangy scent of it. She was shivering all over, need pouring through her like a hot tide. When he laid the other hand between her breasts, the fur soft against her skin, his hard palm beneath the fur holding her down against the wooden cross, something inside her went loose, absolutely limp. It was as if the last shred of resistance melted beneath his touch.

He began with the whip, letting it cascade over the skin of her thighs, her stomach. It was lovely at first, a gentle caress. Then harder, but still doing nothing more than bringing the blood to the surface of the skin. Harder still, and she could feel the sting of the leather, like some sharply sensual kiss. And in stark contrast, the soft pleasure of the fur between her breasts.

He worked in an even rhythm, gradually building in speed and intensity. She watched him, his face concentrated as he watched the motion of his own hand. Beneath the silk of his white shirt, she could see the movement of his long, lean muscles. Saw the tendons flexing in the back of his large hand. And all the while he kept the fur-covered glove on her body, the sensation a lovely foil to the stinging kiss of the whip.

The pain was building. Along with it, desire rose in her body, filled her, until her breasts, her pussy, were swollen, needing release. The release of his touch. The release of real pain.

"I know what you need, Meeraj," he said to her.

The whip came down harder on her in a flash, truly hurting now.

Her head buzzed with the release of endorphins, making her dizzy. Dizzier still when he stroked her with the fur glove, that soft gliding over the undersides of her breasts, her ribs, her stomach. Her clitoris was aching, hurting, even though he hadn't touched her there, or maybe because of it.

"Aleron, please..."

“Please what? What do you need that I’m not anticipating?”

“I need... I need you to touch me.”

He laughed then, his tone low and wicked. “I am touching you, little beauty. I will touch you more. You want my hand on your hot little slit, is that it? Ah, yes, I know it is. You’d like my mouth there, as well. My cock. You should know that my intention is to make you wait. Even though it hurts me nearly as much.”

He stepped in then, thrust his strong thigh between hers, pressed close, closer, until the leather of his pants brushed her pussy lips. He shifted, and she could feel the hard ridge of his cock through the leather.

“Ah God, Aleron... You torture me.”

He laughed again. “Yes.”

He stepped back, shaking off the glove, tweaked one of her nipples sharply, and she thought she could almost come just from that. If he would only do it again...

He did, tucking the cat-o-nine under one arm and using both hands on her.

She was writhing, moaning, immediately. The heat rose between her thighs, her clit pulsing. Pain. Pleasure. Unbearable.

“Not yet,” Aleron ordered.

She bit her lip, holding back the first waves of the climax that threatened to come crashing down on her.

“Not even now,” he said, thrusting one hand between her thighs and right into her burning pussy.

“Oh!”

He pumped into her.

“Do not come, Meeraj. You will take it.”

She moaned, pleasure burrowing deep.

“Tell me, Meeraj.”

“Yes,” she whispered. “I will hold it back. I will take what you offer me, Aleron.”

“Then take this, the Seeking Kiss, my beauty.”

With his other hand he grasped her long hair, buried his fingers in it, pulling her head back. Then he bent over her throat. That single moment before his lips touched her seemed to last an eternity, anticipation burning through her, engulfing her like a flame.

“Aleron...”

His teeth sank in.

It was like a pair of hot needles at first. Then it was pure pleasure.

It began as a low hum. Then it grew, until it was piercing, shimmering like light in her veins, the edges sharp, like that first edge of orgasm, yet different, somehow. Like a sound she couldn’t quite hear.

And images pouring into her head at a thousand miles an hour. Faces, male and female. The scents of leather, smoke, skin, sweat, perfume, blood, sex.

Sex.

Ah, yes...

Then sensations, hers and not hers. The fluttering touch of a hand on her skin, the plunging thrust of a cock insider her, in her pussy, her ass. Luscious red lips, kissing her mouth, her breasts, her thighs. The taut pull of rope on her wrists, the crack of a whip on the flesh of her buttocks. Pain and pleasure, sensation and sensation. And behind it all that deep sorrow she'd glimpsed in him earlier.

A face.

Lovely. Heart-shaped, the pouting mouth like a doll's. Her eyes were gray, like the storming sky. Her skin like fine, pale porcelain. Soft, warm. Human.

She saw the face and felt...love. All-consuming. Long past, yet present still. Hurting.

The pain burrowed deep, into her chest. Into her heart. She was drowning in it.

"No!"

She was back in her body instantly, Aleron pulling his mouth from her neck. The pleasure was still there, her sex pulsing. But her chest ached so.

Aleron buried his face in her hair.

"I am sorry," he whispered.

She wouldn't have expected that from him—for him to apologize for anything, ever. She felt vaguely shocked by it. But even more so by what she'd seen as he drank from her.

She became aware then of the dull ache in her neck. But it didn't matter to her.

How could she still be on the verge of coming, yet wanting to cry?

One tear escaped, and Aleron, his blue gaze locked on hers, wiped it away with his thumb.

"I'm sorry," he said again.

She shook her head, unable to speak, too full of the strange mix of desire and emotion.

"Inexcusable," he muttered, his mouth moving closer, until she could feel his breath on her cheek.

"No, Aleron. Please don't. It's fine... But I need you."

"Yes," he said quietly, his voice a low hiss.

He moved his hand between her thighs, slipping two fingers deep into her pussy, his thumb circling her clitoris. She let out a long breath as pleasure surged through her.

"Are you going to come, my beauty?"

"Yes...yes..."

She arched her hips into his hand, his fingers a lovely torture, bringing her to the edge. He bent his head once more and latched onto her neck. She felt the hot pull of her blood into his mouth. Her blood

began to thrum, to sing—or perhaps it was his—the tone rising, higher and higher, hard and fast, as his hand moved between her thighs.

This time there was nothing but the purest pleasure, fierce, driving all other thoughts away. Heat and need and base animal pleasure roared through her as she came into his hand. Into his mouth on her neck.

She writhed, panting, then screaming as the pleasure built impossibly.

“Aleron!”

Her hips bucking, it went on and on—pleasure, the lovely pain of his teeth in her flesh. Sensation upon sensation as he pumped his hand between her tensed thighs.

When it was over she was left shaking, barely conscious. All she knew was the clean stone-like scent of Aleron, the strength of his hard hands as he took her from the cross and carried her to some dark corner, laid her on his lap. The last thing she saw was his face over her, his eyes blazing with blue fire. Then, all went black.

Chapter Three

What was wrong with him?

Aleron held Meeraj on his lap. He was filled with questions.

Why the Bloodsong? She'd felt it this time. Dimly, perhaps, but it was there. Did she know what it was? He didn't think so. He hadn't caught any understanding of it in her mind. And why wasn't he able to control the flow of thoughts into her mind? It should be up to him what she could read. He knew exactly what she'd seen, and it had taken him too long to rein it in.

Emeline.

Why was she on his mind so much now?

Nissa had had a faint glimpse of her, as well, when he had been with Hex and Nissa together. Before they had loved each other, and he had released Hex from his companionship bond so they could be together. He'd been better able to control it with her, though. Why was it so difficult now?

Something about being with women...perhaps he was better off with men, even for sex, for play. Was he weakening with age? Vampires always grew stronger as they grew older. Physically, anyway. He had heard of those who grew too world-weary, who lost their minds to centuries of sorrow and experience piled upon experience, until it overcame them. But it happened only to the truly ancient ones, those as old as his friend and sometimes lover, Ever, one of the vampires who ran the club. He had lived a thousand years, perhaps more. No one really knew. He was the most beautiful of the vampires in Aleron's mind. They'd been together a number of times over the years.

Ever.

Perhaps that was what he needed. To share this woman with another of his kind. To distract him from these thoughts and doubts.

But later.

Meeraj was warm in his arms, her breath a panting gasp, still. He tuned in, felt the final tremors of her climax shivering in her body.

He was still hard. Wanting her.

Her eyes were closed, her dark lashes brushing her flushed cheeks.

Amazing, how beautiful this woman was. He'd never seen this kind of lush, flawless beauty in any mortal. She was absolutely perfect.

She stirred, her eyes fluttering open, and that exotic golden gaze burned into him.

Oh yes, he needed her.

“Meeraj.”

“Yes...”

He said her name once more, perhaps simply to ground himself. “Meeraj. I need you now.”

“Oh, yes. Please.”

She smiled, and he felt the surge of blood in her veins. He could still taste her on his tongue. Lovely. Sweet. Intoxicating.

He pulled his shirt off, and her skin against his was almost too much. His cock throbbed with need, and he couldn’t get to her fast enough, suddenly. He laid her back a bit roughly on the settee, yanked open the fly of his pants, and pulled his cock out. It was rock-hard in his hand, pulsing.

With a growl he parted her thighs, and she opened right up for him. He saw the glint of her pussy, the pink wetness between the shaved lips in the dim light of the club. Desire was a hard flash in his system. Need like an electric current.

Need her!

He spread her pussy lips with one hand, and still holding his cock with the other, thrust into her.

She cried out. She was like a wet satin fist around his cock. She could take him, his size, his hardness.

Pleasure rolled over him, like needles pricking his skin, deep into his belly, his cock. Unbelievable, how this woman felt to him.

He began to fuck her, long, hard punishing strokes. Faster and faster, and he had to sharply remind himself that she was only human. The blood lust was trying to take over, and he wanted her blood, craved it. He knew if he drank from her now, while his cock was inside her, he would surely kill her.

Just fuck her...fuck her...yes...

She was shivering beneath him, and he could sense her pleasure rising. In moments she was coming again, her pussy clenching hard around his cock. It almost set him off—his orgasm, the nearly hysterical edge of the blood lust. He bit his lip, held it at bay.

“Meeraj,” he ground out. “I need to hurt you.”

“Yes...”

He took one wrist and held it over her head, his grip tight, bruising. With his other hand he twisted one nipple until she cried out. He tuned in, felt her pain, her pleasure. He twisted harder.

She was coming again, crying out, panting.

“Aleron!”

He couldn’t do it, couldn’t hold back any longer, or he would really hurt her, damage her. He let himself come, his cock, his body, convulsing as pleasure stabbed into him. Like knives. Like teeth. Exquisite and sharp and he never wanted it to end. He was *feeling* more than he had for a hundred years.

“Meeraj...”

Emeline.

No!

It was Meeraj beneath him, surrounding his cock, her breath hot on his stone-cold cheek. Who was making him come so hard he could barely stand it. Who was creating this mind-fuck.

Despite that, he had to have more. He wasn't sure at this moment how he could ever get enough.

Meeraj was only vaguely aware of being dressed, put into a heavily armored car that was pure luxury inside. Then nothing, until she was being carried up a flight of stairs, Aleron's hard arms holding her close.

He was hard as stone all over. And yet, she felt his warmth, the breath in his body. That was all she could think of now. Except that she was with him. It didn't matter where.

Another long dreamtime, where she saw once more that lovely female face. And then it was as if that face were her own, and Aleron was there with her, beneath a star-filled sky, holding a cup of wine to her lips.

She awoke to a dim light behind her closed eyelids, unable to move at first, unable to even lift her lashes. There was a deep languor in her body, and she ached in several places, but beautifully so.

Where was she?

She opened her eyes.

It was a large room with soaring ceilings. A long row of tall windows ran along one wall, the dim light of morning peering through curtains made of some sheer, gossamer fabric. Outside, she could see the dark green of trees, the somber gray of the London sky. It was quiet here, wherever she was. There were no sirens, no yelling, no subtle rumble of crowded streets.

Inside, the walls were done in damask, a wide cream on cream stripe, the furnishings were all heavy wood, antiques. Beautiful. Intimidating, after her mean upbringing.

Her fingers clenched, and she found the rich softness of velvet beneath them—a midnight blue coverlet on the enormous, plush bed she lay in.

She drew in a breath and caught the scent of old stone, the faint fragrance of her own blood on his lips...

Aleron.

He stood to one side of the high bed, dressed in nothing but his formfitting leather pants. His pale, bare feet made him look more naked to her than his bare chest, which was leanly muscled, the skin gorgeously white. Like satin. Like fine china.

He was staring at her, his blue eyes dark, glittering dangerously. Her sex gave a hard squeeze.

"I was watching you sleep," he said quietly, so that she had to strain to hear him. "It's something I often do with humans, since I cannot quite sleep myself. I find it fascinating. Romantic, even, in some odd way. But having lived for so long, we develop odd habits."

He seemed almost to be talking to himself, but she had questions.

“Aleron, how old are you?”

“Too old, perhaps. I have lived this life for three hundred years, and as a mortal before that for just over thirty.”

She paused, absorbing what he’d just told her.

“Does that upset you?” he asked.

“No. I... I’m simply trying to take it in, the idea of a three-hundred-year-old being. Everyone knows the vampires live nearly endless lives. But thinking of it in the abstract and applying that idea to someone standing before me are two entirely different things. I don’t mean to insult you.”

“No, of course not.”

“I’m trying to figure it out. I’m still a bit out of my head, I think.”

He took two quick strides and sat on the bed beside her. “Are you all right?”

“Yes.” When his pale eyebrows drew together she was quick to smile. “I’m just...coming down from last night. But I’m fine. Wonderful. I swear it.”

He smiled back at her, then, and something inside her chest went warm and loose. When he picked up her hand, turned it over and placed a soft kiss in the center of her palm, her sex clenched, went damp.

“Are you hungry, my beauty? I gave you some wine when I brought you here, but you should have some food, as well, after the Seeking Kiss.”

“I only want you,” she told him, surprised at the honesty of her words. She didn’t feel the need to hide her desires from him, as she did with other men. There was no point with him—he could read her too easily. It was freeing. It made her feel stronger, somehow.

He kissed her wrist, and her blood surged against his hard-soft lips, as though wanting to be drunk once more. His tongue darted out, licking the skin, and he raised his startling blue gaze to hers. He paused, her wrist to his mouth. She could see the desire burning there, feeding on her own. She could see that whispering tinge of sadness still. She could see the years he had lived in the wide, black pupils. As her heart hammered, anticipation and desire like some wild aphrodisiac, he smiled. The smile spread, until it was clearly a baring of teeth, his fangs gleaming, stark white. Powerful. He gently sank one sharp tip into her skin.

She moaned.

Pleasure ran like fire through her veins. Her pussy throbbed.

One tiny drop of blood pooled. She swore she could smell it, sweetly metallic. But still he didn’t bite all the way into her flesh.

She wanted him to. Craved it. She waited, her head spinning as she sank into subspace, that lovely, floating place where she gave herself over to him. To his command.

Aleron.

"I want to drink from you," he whispered, his breath warm and cool all at the same time against her aching skin. "I want to eat you up. I want to taste you. To fuck you. To have you in every possible way."

"Yes..." she breathed.

Everything happened in an instant. She found herself roughly turned over onto her stomach, her face pressed into the sheets, his body over hers. He held both her wrists behind her back in an almost crushing grip. She loved it, gloried in the sensation of being completely overtaken. Overpowered.

His fingers swiped at her soaking pussy, and she tried to surge back into his touch.

"Still," he demanded.

Then his hand parting the cheeks of her ass, his fingers sinking into that tight hole.

"Oh..."

He pressed a little deeper, and she drew in a breath against the pain. But the pain itself was pleasure, shimmering over her skin, shafting deep into her body. Her pussy was empty, needy. Yet his fingers in her ass were exactly what she wanted, needed.

"Breathe," he told her. "Take it, Meeraj. I know you can. You will. For me."

"Oh, yes, for you... Anything for you, Aleron."

She forced her body to relax, and his fingers worked their way past that first tight ring of muscle. It burned. It felt wonderful. She was going down hard, the ass play sending her hurtling into subspace as the endorphins flooded her body, her mind.

He worked her with his fingers, and all she was aware of was the exquisite sensation, the imprisonment of her arms behind her, the scent of clean linens mixed with the pure scent of Aleron's ancient skin, and the sound of his sharp, panting breath.

Pleasure built, spiraled. She needed more.

He pulled his hand from her abruptly, and it came down hard on her ass, the smacking sound echoing in the room. Then again, and again, each slap bringing a stinging pleasure, a burning pain.

Tears stung her eyes. She needed him, needed more. Yet it was too much. Pain and pleasure and that yawning emptiness in her body.

Aleron...

He kept spanking her, his fingers digging into her wrists. She didn't care about the pain. She only wanted to feel him inside her.

"Aleron," she gasped. "Fuck me, please."

"Ah, to hear you beg me..."

He was on her then, his hard body over hers, pressing her into the mattress, her breasts crushed against the sheets. He released her arms, and she had one moment to draw them over her head before he was inside her. He gave one thrust, and his beautiful cock was buried in her aching pussy. He pumped into her, over and over, pleasure as hard and pummeling as his cock.

“Ah, Meeraj... I’m going to come.”

“Yes, do it.”

There was an animal growl, then his teeth sinking into the side of her neck. The pain was savage at first, then faded away as he drank from her. She saw it all again—men and women and Emeline and the starlit meadow. Pleasure and sorrow, years upon years. The pleasure in her body rose, like the stars in that velvet-dark sky, soaring. Until she broke with it, her climax a thundering white heat. She was burning, coming. Coming and coming.

The blood scent was wild in her nostrils, that strange singing in her ears, stronger than ever before, making her veins hum, her body vibrate. Aleron’s body was melded to hers, part of her, his thrusting, hard cock pulsing with his own sharp pleasure, then his climax as he came, yelling her name.

“Meeraj! Ah!”

One final shaft of pleasure, searing her, marking her forever.

His.

The world was fading fast, her vision going black.

Aleron whispered to her, “Stay with me, Meeraj.” Then, more urgently, “Don’t go away. Fight it. Stay with me.”

She struggled, but it was like being dragged under by a heavy tide.

Vaguely, she felt him turn her over, pull her into his arms. Then a glass of wine at her lips.

“Drink.”

She wanted to. But she was distracted by the memory of Aleron holding her in the field at night, the sky a dark vault overhead. She was naked, the cool night air tickling her skin, the scent of lilacs everywhere. They always bloomed in the spring. He knew how she loved them. He brought her here, to this meadow near their home in Lyon, each year. Her beloved Aleron.

“Come back to me, Meeraj.”

“Emeline.”

Her own voice was so soft she could barely hear it. But she knew that wasn’t right. Emeline?

“Meeraj!”

Sorrow in his voice. She could barely stand to hear it.

“Meeraj, open your eyes. Do it now.”

She tried, but her eyes were so heavy. She wanted to be in the meadow, with him.

“I am right here, Meeraj. You will obey me.”

Yes, of course she would. She wanted to. *Needed* to. And he was right there with her, after all.

With great effort, she opened her eyes. Aleron was bent over her, his expression tortured. He was more beautiful than ever. She loved him so.

Her heart stuttered.

Loved him?

She hardly knew him. It was *her*, Emeline, whoever she had been to him. She was *inside* her head. She felt light, as though she were only tenuously connected to her body.

“Aleron?”

“Drink the wine, Meeraj.”

He held the cup for her, and she sipped. It was something dark and rich, sweet on her tongue.

“Mulled wine,” he told her. “The herbs will restore you.”

She drank more, gradually reconnecting with her body, coming up out of that dark dream-place. Became more aware of his solid arms around her, the stone-hardness of his body that no longer seemed unusual to her.

“Better?” he asked.

“Yes. Thank you.”

He stroked her hair from her face, his hand gentle.

“I did not mean for you to see that. To feel it.”

“Who was she?”

His face went blank, so quickly she barely had time to absorb the change. It was as though a shadow had come over his eyes, his lips, his jaw, tightening. He pulled away from her, only the tiniest bit, but she could feel the distance.

“Aleron, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to intrude. It just happened. I’m sorry.”

Tears gathered in her eyes. She wasn’t quite sure why. It seemed to be his pain she felt, his loss. And perhaps some of it was her own, that momentary loss of his closeness. Why should that affect her so? She was still too disoriented to figure it out.

“Don’t be sorry. It’s not your fault. It’s mine.”

She shook her head. “No. You can’t blame yourself for your grief.”

He turned his head away to stare out the window, but his fingers curled around her waist where he still held her.

“This is something I do not share with anyone. It is mine to bear.”

“Aleron... I’ve lost too. I understand.”

“Have you? Have you felt these same things?” he asked, his voice a whisper.

The tears burned, and she let out a small, uncontrollable sob.

He turned back to her, his eyes that lovely, brilliant blue.

“I’ve made you cry,” he said regretfully, his hand coming up, his fingers brushing at the corner of her eye. “Beautiful tears. Beautiful girl. I don’t want you to cry now. Tell me why you’re so sad.”

“I’m sad for you. And for me. It’s not pity, Aleron. Won’t you tell me about her?”

He paused, watching her. But there was life in his face once more, his eyes unshuttering, even if his jaw was still held tight.

“Tell me first. Tell me who you’ve lost, Meeraj.”

“Everyone.”

Chapter Four

“It started with my father,” she said, the words cutting unexpectedly on their way out. “He was gone before I was born. No one is certain what happened to him. He could have been killed. He could have run off. He worked for the Resistance, so it could have been anything. My oldest brother was next. He was walking me home from school. He was shot and killed in front of me.”

A hard knot was forming in her stomach

“How old were you?” Aleron asked.

“Twelve. Jai was just sixteen. But that neighborhood is rough. Camden, where I grew up, where I live even now. Those things happened all the time there. They still do.

“My mother we lost when I was seventeen, to cancer. There are no doctors, you know, when you’re poor. She kept working until she couldn’t walk any longer. For us, my brother and me. And then Dev... I lost Dev to the Resistance last year, to the government soldiers. They brought his body to me. There were witnesses. Not that it mattered by then. He was dead. Like the rest of my family. This is why I came to you. To the Midnight Playground. Do you understand? Nothing can frighten me.”

She didn’t realize there were tears pouring down her cheeks until Aleron lifted a corner of the fine, white sheet to wipe them away.

“So much sadness,” he said, his gaze intent on her.

“No more than your own, Aleron.”

“Yes.”

They sat together in silence for several minutes.

“It’s your turn,” she said.

He nodded, took her hand in his and held on tightly. He turned to the window once more, his profile like gorgeously chiseled stone. His skin was poreless, gleaming in the morning light. The sunlight coming through the windows caught on the pale tips of his lashes, and she could see for the first time how long they were.

“Her name was...Emeline. I believe you know that already.”

“Yes.”

“She was from a family of noble French blood, although by those years no one put much stock into such things. A woman of great intelligence, great beauty. I fell in love with her the moment I saw her, in

that meadow full of lilacs... She'd fallen from her horse. Even though her ankle was badly sprained, she didn't cry. She was independent. Fiercely so. Brave."

He stopped and held so perfectly still he looked as though he were a statue.

He said softly, "She loved me."

When he raised his head and turned back to face her, Meeraj saw such grief in his eyes it hurt to look at him.

"Of course she did," she said.

"Not enough to spend eternity with me. But no, that's not fair. She simply valued her human life too much. I cannot blame her for that. Not my Emeline."

"What happened?"

"I offered her the Turning Kiss, but she refused to take it. I spent a lifetime with her, watching her age, always remaining young myself. She tried to send me away a few times, but I would never go. I was as stubborn as she was. I loved her as she loved life."

"It must have been difficult, to watch her decline. I saw it, with my mother."

"Perhaps this is why I can tell you these things. I haven't spoken her name out loud for a hundred years. I haven't told anyone about her. Those who caught glimpses of her during the Seeking Kiss have never dared to mention her to me."

"I did more than see her, Aleron," she said.

"I know."

"Can you tell me about the meadow?"

"Ah."

His fingers tightened around her hand once more, hard and hurting, but she drew in a breath. She would bear it for him.

"She loved that place. She always said it belonged to her. I took her there to die. This is what you saw. Our last night together."

"Aleron, I'm sorry!"

She was crying again. She couldn't help it. There was so much love, so much pain, in his voice. She felt it in her blood, in her heart. And with it was her own. The old pain of losing Jai, her mother. The still fresh pain of losing Dev.

"Aleron, how is it that I could have thought I've dealt with all of this already, that I've moved beyond these things? And for you, a hundred years later, the loss is still fresh."

"When you live this long a life, Meeraj, it all melds together. Memory becomes...a bit confused. Or perhaps it's our sense of time. I understand how long it's been since I've seen her. Yet in my heart it was only yesterday. And in that same way, although we met only yesterday, it feels as though you have been with me for a hundred years."

His face was perfectly serious. And although she didn't have his long life, she had that same strange sense, as though they had known each other a very long time.

She dared to reach for him then, to touch his face. It was smooth beneath her fingertips. He caught her hand, kissed the palm, then her fingers, warming her.

"Perhaps there is some reason to the world, after all," he said. "I've never believed it before. And I must admit that I'm surprised there are still things to learn. Arrogant of me. The arrogance of a long life. Perhaps it is inevitable to feel we know it all, we immortals."

She smiled at him, happiness like a gentle heat seeping under her skin. She had expected adventure when she'd gone to Midnight Playground. An overload of the senses. An escape. She had never expected this.

His eyes were drawing her in, deeper and deeper. She couldn't look away. She looked closer, found the striations of icy silver among the blue, the midnight ring around the brilliant iris. And deeper, to the emotion there, to the glimpse into his soul he was allowing her.

She felt touched in a way she never had in her life, that he would share this with her, and her alone.

She felt *chosen*.

Her chest was knotting up, but the tears dwindled, faded away. She didn't need to cry anymore. She simply needed to be with him. And because it was him, because it was her, she knew she could have the tenderness she suddenly craved, and the harshness and the command her body always desired.

His hand snaked around the back of her neck and he drew her roughly to him. His mouth came down hard on hers, his tongue opening her up, slipping between her lips. His kiss was hard, demanding. Perfect.

He kissed her harder, bruising her lips, and she moaned into his mouth as he laid her down on the bed. He stripped off his leather pants in an instant. Drawing her arms behind her, he pressed her down into the bed, and she sank into the softness of the thick mattress. He laid his body over hers, like granite upon her flesh, yet warm, alive, the weight of him holding her arms tight beneath her. The scent of him, fleshy with her blood in his veins, filled her head. It was like perfume to her—his body, her blood.

He spread her thighs, and his hard cock was pushing between the swollen lips of her cleft. She spread wider, taking him in.

He pushed deeper, until he was buried to the hilt. Until she felt him at the entrance to her womb. He thrust, hard and punishing. She took him in, loved it, as pleasure shivered through her system. Another rough thrust, then another, his hips grinding into her. Her shoulders ached, her arms still pinned beneath her body. But she loved being rendered helpless in this symbolic way, even though with the power of his ancient, vampiric body, he was immeasurably stronger than her.

Desire came in wave after wave, building, cresting. With each sharp plunge, his cock drove pleasure deeper, into her belly, her sex. Her clit was pulsing, waiting in blissful expectation for his hips to piston into her, to press onto that swollen nub of flesh.

He was kissing her as hard as he was fucking her. His tongue, his cock, were driving deep. One rocking thrust and the bed crashed against the wall behind them. Another and there was the sound of breaking glass as the bedside lamp crashed onto the floor. She hovered at the edge of climax, waiting for him.

Aleron pulled his mouth from hers. "Come, Meeraj."

"With you..."

"Yes, now!"

He plunged into her, his hips bruising, his pelvic bone slamming into her clit. She came, shattering, brilliant, blinding, like a thousand stars in the night sky. As she shuddered, Aleron tensed all over, his hips thrusting sharply, his hands going into her hair, pulling hard.

"Ah...Meeraj!"

He called her name into her hair, then crushed his cheek to hers, hard and bruising and everything she needed from him.

She was still shivering, tiny tremors of orgasm trembling through her body, when he whispered to her, "Stay with me."

"I will," she told him. "There is no place else I'd rather be."

She had been with him for two weeks. He'd never kept a woman with him for so long, other than Nissa. Even then he'd kept Nissa for Hex. He didn't want to question himself about why he was doing this. He was far too old for those kinds of mind games. He simply wanted her with him.

He'd never met anyone like her. She was an independent thinker, yet utterly submissive to him when it came to sex. She was tireless when it came to the BDSM play, letting him whip her for hours, spank her, then fuck her all night long. She was nearly as tireless as he was, in his immortal strength. And each time he felt the Bloodsong, more subtly than he would with another vampire, but it was there. Unmistakable. He hadn't discussed it with her, even though he knew she'd felt it, too. He couldn't bear to question why it was happening. He was afraid to know the answer.

In between, they talked. About nearly everything. He'd told her about his mortal life, about growing up in the Paris of the 1740s, the son of a successful merchant. He'd told her about Marie-Jean, the woman his father had forced him to marry, whom he did not love, and who died in childbirth a year into their marriage. He hardly remembered the cold woman for whom he had never felt anything. Then his transformation, the moment when he had received the Turning Kiss, at one of the earliest vampire clubs in Europe, long before the Midnight Playground had existed.

They hadn't spoken again about Emeline. Meeraj seemed to feel that in revealing Emeline to her, he had said enough. And even in the little he'd said to her that first day, it *was* enough. He would never forget

Emeline, but he felt as though his grief over her had loosened, that he was finally beginning to be able to separate himself from its constant and tenacious grasp.

He loved watching everything Meeraj did. He loved to see her eat—the food disappearing between her lush lips was a sensual experience in itself. He loved to watch her as she was now, lounging in the bath, her heavy, dark hair piled on top of her head in a lovely, silken tumble. He sat quietly on a stool as she ran the sponge over her golden skin, the metallic gleam of her eyes peeking from beneath her half closed lids. His cock was hardening already. But he needed to let the woman bathe, to have a few moments' rest.

"You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen," he told her, not for the first time, and she smiled at him, as lazily as a cat.

There was a feline grace about her. In the movement of her hands, the way she stretched in bed in the mornings when she woke. She didn't seem to mind that he watched her almost constantly, that he couldn't take his eyes from her.

They hadn't returned to the Midnight Playground. Tonight he planned to take her there.

"Are you looking forward to playing at the club tonight?" he asked her.

"Yes, very much."

"Something in me craves that small thrill of performing in front of an audience. I believe you have the same need."

She opened her eyes. They were glittering with excitement. "You know me already, Aleron, You know I love it, all of it. I'm ready for anything you ask of me. I want it."

He stood, taking in the sight of her hardening nipples visible beneath the layer of foamy white suds. "Are you ready right now, Meeraj?" he asked quietly.

She smiled, lowered her lashes. He loved that she went so easily into subspace, so naturally.

He knelt on the floor beside the tub and rolled up the sleeves of his white silk shirt. "Open for me," he commanded.

She leaned back, pulling her knees up and spreading her thighs.

He reached down into the warm water, slipped his fingers into her slit and with his thumb he found the hard nub of her clit, already swollen.

"Ah, you are ready for me."

She sighed softly. "Yes. Always."

He pushed two fingers into her pussy, found the walls slick and tight. He pressed onto her clitoris, began to make hard circles. Her hips arched into his hand, and she was moaning, panting instantly. When he pinched her nipple, her hips rose, and she cried out.

"Settle, Meeraj."

She took a long breath and stilled herself. He pinched again. This time she only gasped, not moving, her nipple rock-hard between his fingers, her clitoris nearly as hard.

“Are you ready to come, my beauty?”

“Yes...please...”

He let her nipple go, lifted her wrist to his lips, kissed the tender skin there. “Come then, into my hand.”

He pumped into her, his fingers driving deep, and pressed roughly onto her clit. And as he sensed her climax approaching, he bit into her wrist, just a small Kiss, drawing a few drops of her blood into his mouth.

He loved that small shock of utter sweetness that was her blood on his tongue. Loved the jolt of pleasure that was her climax, her pussy clenching around his fingers.

He loved everything about her.

No!

He forced himself to hang on to her until her climax was over, then withdrew as gently as he could, leaving her languid and spent in the tub.

What was he thinking with this woman?

He ran a hand through his hair, realized it was still wet from the fragrant bath water, grabbed a thick, white towel and wiped his hands dry.

He did not love her. Impossible. He no longer knew how to love. He hadn't for a hundred years.

Then why did his chest ache every bit as much as his cock when he looked at her?

Some odd sort of infatuation. Obsession. It had happened to others of his kind. The years wore on, something had to be found to distract one from eternity. And she was so incredibly beautiful...

She was lounging in the warm water, her half-closed lids shuttering the golden glow of her eyes from him. But her cheeks, her breasts, were gorgeously flushed in her post-orgasm daze. He wanted her. Too much.

He leaned against the doorframe, something in him wanting to turn and run. And something even more powerful, more primal, wanting to drag her from the tub, fuck her, drink from her, until she was rendered senseless by one or the other, or both.

With a growl, he turned and strode into the bedroom.

“Aleron?”

He couldn't answer her.

He paced the room, his bare feet scuffing over the fine Persian rug, catching on a scrap of black lace. He bent to pick it up, rubbed the fabric between his fingers. Her discarded panties, torn in his urgent haste. He could smell her all over the tattered fabric, that scent of flowers, of her skin. The scent of arousal. His cock grew unbearably hard.

He was overwhelmed by this woman. It wasn't the hardening of his cock, or the intensity of his climax as he came into her each day, each night. It was more...

Too much. He had to put a stop to this. Had to distance himself, somehow. It was mad, to think he could allow himself to feel for a woman. He had nearly lost his mind the last time, with Emeline...

Never again.

"Aleron, are you all right?"

The sound of water splashing from the other room as she rose from the tub. He could hear the soft whisper of a towel moving over her skin. In a moment he was back in the bathroom, in the steam and the heat and the force of her lush, naked beauty.

Meeraj.

"Meeraj, I have a thought for this evening..."

"What is it?"

He paused, staring at her, his mind moving at a thousand miles an hour.

Distraction, yes. Call the club, talk to Ever...must take care of this immediately.

"Won't you tell me, Aleron?"

"I think not. I'll show you instead. Get dressed, my beauty."

She nodded her head. He could see the fire in her eyes, the curiosity. There was always something about her that was present, in control, even as she submitted to him. But she seemed to sense this would not be a good time to question him.

He left her to finish her preparations and went into the library to make a call to the Midnight Playground, calming a bit as he spoke quietly with Ever. A few minutes later, his car pulled up in front of the house, and they were on their way to the club.

They were quiet on the ride across town. She had dressed in a short, white leather dress he'd had sent over for her a few days earlier. It fit her like a second skin, the stark, pure white a lovely contrast against her dark hair, her golden-brown flesh. Beautiful. He held on to her warm, human hand, too tightly at first, and she made a small sound, and he loosened his grip.

Outside, the darkness of nighttime London was broken by the flash of neon signs. It was beginning to rain, and even through the closed, bulletproof glass of the windows, he could smell the wet pavement of the streets and the sidewalks, mixed with motor oil, exhaust, a whiff of gunpowder and the perfume and offending odors of humanity. He let it distract him from the woman sitting beside him. From his own thoughts.

They pulled up in front of the club, finally. The iron gates with the enormous, twin black and gold dragon's heads that were the insignia of the Midnight Playground clubs all over the world swung open for them. They stopped in front of the still beautiful building, which had once been one of London's finest Soho district structures, the old Palace Theater. It was an imposing place, its bold facade soaring, the high, arched windows making elegant punctuations in the red brick, the colors softened by the years.

Aleron stepped from the car, helped Meeraj out, and led her past the guards, through the outer doors, the inner doors. Inside was the plush environment of the place, which was his second home, and had been for a number of years. It was all black and white marble on the floors and walls, ornate, gilt mirrors hung everywhere, and the most beautiful creatures in the world, both human and vampire.

He could smell the pure blood of the vampires—sweet, clean, with none of the metallic edge of human blood. He could feel a hundred pulse beats of the human hearts, their wild anticipation. He could feel his own.

Meeraj was still quiet, her hand warm in his. She hadn't said a word. She was in subspace already, had been since she'd begun the evening's preparations. He adored that about her. Why was it that tonight he almost wanted her to question him? To argue?

Perhaps because then she would not be quite so utterly perfect for him.

God damn it.

He shook off the thought and continued to lead her across the marble floors, his boot heels ringing in his own ears, hers a softer clicking sound. He took her to the old, elegant elevators that were paneled in silky, polished wood and held plush benches upholstered in heavy brocade. It made him think of the old European hotels of the last century. He had taken Emeline to the finest of them, in Paris, Berlin, Rome, Vienna.

Don't think of her now... Not now!

He focused on the slight motion of the elevator, the hammering of his pulse. Excitement, yes, but what else?

He looked at Meeraj, and she smiled, her lush mouth brilliant, dazzling, and he relaxed a little all over. All except for his pounding, needy cock.

They got off on the top floor.

"Aleron? May I ask...where we're going? I thought the top of the building was for the executive offices. That no one is allowed up here."

"We are going to meet one of the owners of the club. He is called Ever. We are going to be with him this evening."

"Oh..."

"He's very beautiful, my friend Ever. One of the most beautiful of the vampires. One of the oldest. A thousand years, if he is a day, they say, but no one knows for certain."

Her face paled, and he turned to stroke her soft cheek. "Ah, no, don't be afraid. You'll enjoy him. And he will enjoy you, my beauty. I will be there. I won't leave you."

Never leave her...

Stop!

He pulled his hand from her cheek, put it in the pocket of his leather pants for a moment, turned very deliberately away from her.

“Aleron? What is it? Should I not have asked you anything?”

“No. No. I’m only thinking...” He felt foolish suddenly, something he hadn’t felt in several hundred years. “Come. Everything is fine. Let’s go to him.”

He took her arm gently and led her down the long, plushly carpeted hallway, past the rows of wall sconces, the statues and enormous vases of flowers in lit nooks. At the end was a pair of wide double doors, the club’s dragon insignia worked in gold filigree on each one, the eyes glittering red garnets, the tongues snaking red enamel. He could feel her nerves, the shallow intake of her breath. And her excitement, how it had immediately ramped up when he’d mentioned he would share her with another vampire tonight.

He nodded his head to the pair of vampire guards on either side of the doors. They were beautiful, these young ones, a matched pair handpicked by Ever, who he always had nearby. They were tall and slender, their dark hair long and lustrous, their dark eyes glossy. Their lips were a dark red, telling him they’d recently fed.

Meeraj’s grip on his hand tightened as the doors opened and revealed Ever, standing in the center of the room.

“Aleron. And the lovely Meeraj. I’ve been waiting for you.”

Chapter Five

Meeraj's heart was a hammer, her pulse hot and thready, her legs shaky. It had been this way, rising, spiraling, ever since Aleron had told her he was taking her to the Midnight Playground. And more so when he had told her he was inviting another vampire to play with them. But when she saw Ever, her heart nearly stopped.

Aleron was right. This was the most beautiful creature she had ever seen.

He was taller even than Aleron. She could make out his long, lean muscles beneath the close-fitting shirt he wore, the black leather pants that were so common at the club. His arms and legs were long and slender, beautifully made. There was something a bit androgynous about his body, the graceful way he held himself. But it was his face that was so arresting. The almost delicate bone structure, with sharp, high cheekbones, an almost feminine mouth, lush and red and full. Long, silky blond hair was swept back from a high forehead and pulled into a ponytail by a black leather cord, reaching almost to his waist. But it was his eyes... They were coal black, darker than midnight. As glossy and bright as two pieces of polished jet. And he wore his thousand years in the endless, liquid depth of them.

She was to be handed over to him, this ancient vampire who radiated power like a dark cloak. He was to touch her, with his long, beautiful, stone-hard hands. The hands of an artist, a musician.

A vampire.

She shivered once more. Bowed her head, the weight of his aura bearing her down, making her yield instantly.

His light footsteps echoed on the smooth marble floor. Then his hand beneath her chin. Unbelievable, how hard and cool his skin was. Aleron was warm beside her, compared to this being.

"She's even more beautiful than you described, Aleron."

His voice was rich, full, and seemed to carry some distant echo. There was a trace of an accent, but she couldn't make out what it was.

"There is no way to accurately describe such lush beauty, is there, Ever? You must see her for yourself, as I told you on the phone."

"And now, here she is. A gift, this one."

A small laugh from Aleron. "I think so."

"As are you, my friend."

Ever dropped her chin, stepped closer to Aleron, and taking his face in both his hands, kissed Aleron on the mouth.

Terrible, scorching need raced through her as the two vampires kissed. Lush, red lips to lush, red lips. As they broke apart, their faces only inches from each other, she could see the tips of their eyeteeth, small flashes of pure white against the red flesh.

Aleron smiled. Ever smiled back and stepped away. Something frightening in his smile, and yet it seemed sincere to her. Something a bit frightening about him, perhaps—his age, his excruciating beauty.

Was this really happening?

Desire was burning her up already, and it hadn't even quite started yet.

Ever turned to her and took her hand, his harder and colder than she'd expected. Absolutely like stone. Like the marble floors of his office. She breathed him in, that scent of ancient stone that reminded her of Aleron, but so much older. More pure, until it was more a sense than something she could actually smell. She didn't know how to explain it to herself.

"I am eager to taste you, Meeraj. To play with you. I can sense your eagerness. This pleases me. So does your fear."

She swallowed, nodded.

Aleron put a hand to her waist, leaned in and said quietly, "You will obey Ever as you would me, Meeraj. Give yourself over to him. I will be with you every moment. I will be with you both."

She was melting as they each took one of her hands and led her across the wide expanse of marble, past an enormous, ornate antique desk, and through another set of doors behind it.

The play chamber of the owner of the Midnight Playground.

The same black marble panels as the club downstairs, but everywhere were the gilt-framed mirrors, like the hall in the Palace at Versailles she'd seen in books, so that everywhere their images were reflected a hundred times. There were red velvet-covered lounge chairs, spanking benches, high tables with golden cuffs at the corners, hung with golden chains. The bondage frames and St. Andrew's crosses were of intricately carved wood, as was the platform of the high bed in the center of the room. One could fit a dozen people on that bed, an entire orgy. And the whole, enormous room was lit by three chandeliers of ornate crystal hanging from the vaulted ceilings, casting pools of soft silver light.

They took her to the smallest of the bondage frames, a freestanding carved wooden square that was perhaps eight feet tall and eight feet wide, and paused before it.

"We're going to undress you now, my beauty," Aleron told her.

Ever's hand moved over her back, finding the zipper to her dress and drawing it down slowly. "Such pretty, golden skin," he said, as he let the dress slip to the floor, revealing her naked body beneath. "And her breasts... She is perfect. An angel."

She felt her head emptying out, her body light, weighed down only by her own desire, thick in her veins, and the vampire's hands on her. Aleron held her around the waist while Ever stroked her breasts, filling his palms with them, then thumbing her hardening nipples.

"Ah!"

"Yes, you like that, Meeraj. I can feel your excitement. It excites me, too, as much as the sight of your lovely body, your golden skin. As much as the idea of sharing you with Aleron." Ever stroked her breasts, his touch a cool feather on her skin, desire shimmering through her in long, undulating waves. "We have been lovers before, Aleron and I, many times over the centuries. Does that arouse you? Yes, I can see that it does. It does me, as well, remembering. Picturing what his naked body looks like. What his hard cock feels like in my hands, in my mouth. What it feels like when he fucks me."

He was sending images into her head. Aleron standing over him, the sliding of his cock into Ever's ass. The sensations, the sweet scent of vampire blood. Her pussy was soaking wet, needy, pulsing.

"Ah, you enjoy this."

Ever slipped a hand between her thighs, his fingers sliding in her juices. Need was hot and sweet, cutting into her, making her clit pulse. She thought she would fall, but Aleron tightened his grip around her waist.

"Please..." she whispered.

"Please what, my golden angel?" Ever asked, his hand stilling.

"Please...touch me. I want you to touch me. To whip me."

To be played by him...them...Ever and Aleron.

Ever laughed, the sound reverberating around the room, echoing on the marble and the mirrors. "I intend to. *We* intend to, don't we Aleron? To touch you. To whip you. And so much more."

He moved his hand away then, and she collapsed into Aleron's embrace.

"Very good, my beauty," he said, his breath warm against her hair.

Then they took her hands and she heard a small click as the golden cuffs were fastened around her wrists. Long gold chains held her arms out wide on either side, attached to the sides of the bondage frame. They slipped her boots off next, and her ankles were restrained in the same way, so that her legs were spread, as well. She had never felt so vulnerable in her life, but gorgeously so. The two ancient and beautiful vampires stood before her.

Aleron looped an arm around Ever's shoulder. And as she watched, he pulled the older vampire in for a kiss.

Their lips met, briefly, a small kiss, then another. Ever pulled back a few inches, and his tongue, wet and pink, came out to touch Aleron's lower lip.

She could hardly stand it. They were too beautiful, too utterly sensual. She had never seen anything like it.

Her pussy was drenched, her breasts aching, as she watched them. Their mouths were crushed together now, the kiss becoming more urgent, more primal. She pulled against her restraints, needing to feel that she was held firmly in place, that there was something to control this wild, aching need.

They began to undress each other, their clothes coming off in seconds. They stood together, two tall, pale bodies of dizzying, unearthly beauty she could barely comprehend. Long, lean muscles, their skin like the whitest satin, gleaming in the soft light. Their two cocks, both long, hard as silk over steel, the plump and succulent heads pink. Almost touching.

They kissed once more, briefly, smiled to each other before turning their attention to her.

Every nerve in her body came alive with their gazes on her—one pair like a clear blue sky she had only ever imagined, the other bottomless black fire. Her body surged. They came closer.

Four hands on her then, stroking everywhere: her belly, arms, thighs. Unbelievable sensation. She was immediately overwhelmed, her body flooded, her own moans soft in her ears. Then her gasp as Aleron gave her nipples a hard pinch.

“You’re ready for us,” he said.

“I am always ready for you,” she managed to get out. “For whatever you want of me.”

Anything for you...for you both.

Ever’s laughter, soft and smoky. “Oh, you are something, aren’t you? Beautiful girl. And your absolute submission is every bit as gorgeous as your golden body, your exotic face.”

They both stepped away for several moments, leaving her bereft, confused. She was deep in subspace. There was no other option, with these two powerful beings touching her, commanding her. Then she felt the heat behind her.

Aleron.

And the cooler presence of Ever.

One moment of exquisite anticipation, then the sharp crack of the whip against her back.

“Oh!”

Her body melted, pain and pleasure fusing like water. She recognized instantly the difference in the touch of the whip, and knew it was Ever.

The whip came down again, and again. She surged into its kiss, wanting the pain, wanting to please them both. Wanting the pleasure of it all.

It was a hard whipping, her skin going raw quickly. She was panting, her body working to convert the pain to pleasure, her mind flooded with endorphins. Soon, it became too much. Too much desire, sharp in her veins. Too much pain pelting her skin, over and over. Tears pooled in her eyes, flowed down her cheeks.

“Enough,” Aleron said, his tone commanding.

It stopped.

She sighed, pulled in a gasping breath. Aleron came around until he was in front of her.

“You did well, Meeraj.”

He kissed her cheek, her forehead, and her chest ached, needing him. Wanting to please him. Needing *him*.

He pulled back, gazed into her eyes. Some strange intensity in his gaze, but she couldn't make it out. Her head was spinning, her body consumed with desire. Her heart ached for him. He moved in closer, laid his lips on hers. And his hand went between her spread legs, his fingers teasing at her slit. She opened for him, his hot tongue sliding between her lips, his strong fingers sinking deep into her pussy. She moaned into his mouth, her body burning. She melted into him.

Aleron...

The whip took her by surprise, coming down hard across her buttocks. Aleron's hot mouth never let her go as the whipping began once more, his fingers working inside her. Pleasure was like a tide, drowning her, taking her under. All she knew was Aleron's mouth on hers, the kiss of the whip on her flesh, scalding her skin, and the aching throb of her pussy. And something more...that odd humming sensation in her veins she'd felt with Aleron before, as though her blood were hot and moving faster and faster, vibrating in her body. Then making a sound, like the long, drawn out note of a faraway flute. She understood in an instant that it was Aleron's song she heard, but in *her* veins. And it was more powerful than it had been before, until it was a lovely white roar in her head.

The whip stopped at the same moment Aleron pulled away. He held her chin in his hand. “You feel it,” he whispered, awe in his voice, his pale brows drawn together. “The Bloodsong. Impossible that it's happening, yet you feel it too. And I feel it so strongly now... Impossible,” he repeated.

She nodded her head. She didn't understand what it was about, only the overwhelming intensity of it.

“I've known for a while...that it's happening to you. It means something. You are meant to be here with me, Meeraj.”

It seemed a crucial bit of information. But she couldn't think straight. Later...later. All she could think of now was that he'd said she was *meant* for him. Her heart surged, tightened.

She hadn't realized until he wiped a tear with his thumb that she was still crying.

“So, so lovely,” he whispered.

He drew his thumb to his lips, licked her tears from the fleshy tip, licked her juices from his fingers.

“Yes, lovely,” Ever agreed, coming around to stand with Aleron once more. He held Aleron's hand to his lips, pulled the fingertips that had just been inside her body into his mouth and sucked, then let them go. “I can almost taste the flavor of her blood. Almost. I don't want to wait, Aleron. Shall we have her now?”

Aleron nodded, his gaze still locked on hers.

While Aleron watched, Ever unchained her—her ankles, one wrist, then the other. He slipped his arm around her body when she would have fallen, his arm coming under her legs, the other under her back as he

picked her up and carried her to the bed in the center of the room. There, he laid her down against the pillows gently, the velvet coverlet soft on her skin. As he moved back, she had a brief moment to think that it was this, the exquisite contrast of primal need and gentle touch, their absolute command and this odd tenderness, that really got to her.

They stood side by side, a pair of statues, almost too beautiful to look at—their faces, their bodies, their rigid cocks.

“You enjoy the sight of us,” Aleron said. It wasn’t a question, but she nodded her head. “You’d like to see us touch each other, wouldn’t you?”

“Oh, yes...”

He smiled at her, and slipped his arm around Ever’s slender waist, turning until they faced each other. Aleron’s hand smoothed over the ancient skin, his fingers gliding over the tip of Ever’s long, rigid cock.

Ever hissed, his hips arching. Aleron smiled and began to stroke.

Pleasure pulsed in her body as though it were her pussy beneath his caress. She swore she could feel it, the stroking, stroking, the pleasure of the rhythm, his hand coming over the sensitive head. And she realized she was getting Ever’s sensations, the ancient vampire’s pleasure.

She wanted to slip her own hand between her thighs, to ease the knife-sharp need building there. But she would not do it, not with these two. Not unless she was instructed to do so.

Aleron paused, grabbed Ever’s hand and brought it to his own cock, and she watched as Ever’s fingers clasped around that rock-hard flesh, flesh she knew well. Craved. Needed.

Her nipples, her clit, were swollen, throbbing. When Ever stroked Aleron, both their hands moving in time, she thought she would die of yearning, her pussy clenching hard.

She couldn’t wait one more moment.

“Please,” she begged.

They both turned to her, those burning gazes. Then they slid onto the bed, one on either side of her. She thought she might come right then, simply from having them next to her, these two fierce, ethereal figures, all pale flesh and rock-hard cocks and nearly unbearable beauty.

“Hold it back,” Aleron ordered her.

She bit her lip, hard, nodded her head. Another tear fell. There was nothing she could do about it.

“Ah, don’t take it so hard, little beauty,” Ever whispered to her, taking one of her hands and brushing a kiss across her knuckles.

She couldn’t figure it out, how he could be so powerful, so ancient, and so sweet at the same moment. Ever seemed sad to her, in the way Aleron did, only more so. And yet, there was this gentleness about him. And he was so, so gorgeous...like some fallen angel.

Aleron’s hand on her cheek, his fingers tracing her lips, and she could almost forget Ever was there. The hard knot of emotion solidifying in her chest, she lifted her head a little to kiss Aleron’s fingertips.

“My sweet beauty,” he murmured.

His crystal-blue gaze was alive with desire, hot. Yet still, behind all of that, she could see that trace of sadness. If only she could take it away.

“That is not for you,” he said, a shadow flitting across his features.

“Aleron—”

“Shh. Be in the moment. With us.”

Ever’s hand slid across her belly, then lower, and as his fingers found her clitoris, she ceased to think altogether. He pinched with his clever fingers, just hard enough, sending shivers of desire through her, like tiny shards of glass. Aleron bent to take one of her nipples into his mouth, sucking, licking. She was lost in sensation, all thought gone.

Their hands and mouths were everywhere at once—her nipples, her clit, fingers pressing into her pussy. Pleasure rose, surged, a hot tide pounding through her. She was writhing with it, and they were writhing, their hard cocks pressing against her body—her hip, her thigh. She wanted them to fuck her.

“Yes,” Aleron answered her thoughts. “We want you, Meeraj. But first you will come for us.”

He sat and pulled her into his arms, using his strong hands to spread her thighs wide. Ever gave her a small, mysterious smile, his sharp eyeteeth flashing, before he reached back and loosed his hair. It fell around him like a veil, shimmering in the soft light. She reached out to touch it before she could stop herself, paused and pulled her hand back with a gasp.

“It’s all right, Meeraj,” Aleron told her. “Touch it.”

Ever took her hand and helped her to bury her fingers in that satin curtain. It was unbelievably soft, the sensation another layer of pleasure.

“It’s beautiful,” she murmured.

Then Ever bent his silken blond head between her thighs, burying his face in her mound.

His tongue was a lightning-hot flicker at her swollen pussy lips. She fought to hold still. She thought she would come. She thought she might die, just like this—in Aleron’s arms, Ever’s lovely mouth between her thighs, his hair spread out over her naked skin like a blanket of pure silk.

Another small flick, and she groaned.

Then he went to work, his tongue flicking at her hard clit, then licking, harder and harder. He sucked it into his mouth, and Aleron pressed his teeth to her wrist and bit.

She exploded. Heat and pleasure, hot and sharp and shattering her into a thousand tiny pieces. And in her head was Aleron—his face, his hands, the taste of his lips on hers. A hard surge of his heart, for her.

Her.

Not Emeline.

“Oh...Aleron...Aleron!”

She was shaking. But it wasn't over. Ever rose up on his arms, his body between her spread legs. She raised her knees. As Aleron held her, his arms tight about her waist, Ever slid inside her.

He was as hard as though his cock were made of heavy glass, cool and smooth, filling her. Her pussy clenched with the last of her climax, her head still spinning, her thoughts jumbled.

Yes, Ever, beautiful Ever. I want you...

But only because Aleron still held her, because he was there with her, just as he'd promised.

No one had ever kept a promise to her. Not even her brothers, promising to care for her. And no one had made a promise to her since she'd lost Dev.

Ever was pumping into her, and it was impossible to think as pleasure rose in her once more. His body was lovely, powerful, his face frightening, exquisite. She could sense how he held back so he wouldn't let the blood lust take over, so he wouldn't damage her. And Aleron, her guardian angel, holding her safe.

Anything for you, Aleron...

Ever's hips moved, his cock piercing her, driving pleasure into her sex, her belly. Aleron was caressing her breasts, so softly, the sensation gentle and lovely, contrasting with Ever's powerful thrusts.

"Aleron..." she gasped.

"What is it, Meeraj?"

"I'm going to come again... Drink from me...please."

He pulled her hair back with one hand, the other still stroking her hard nipple, and let his teeth rest against the side of her throat. Anticipation was almost as keen and sharp as Ever's heavy cock plunging into her, pushing pleasure deeper and deeper into her body.

"See, Meeraj," Ever commanded. "See my pleasure. Make it yours."

He sent images into her mind: bodies writhing on this very bed, the two dark, beautiful vampires who stood guard outside the doors, their long limbs entwined, their mouths on Ever's cock, taking turns sucking him. Then both of them on their knees, facing each other, only inches apart, their hands fisted around their own cocks, stroking themselves as Ever watched, stroking, stroking. Then pressing the heads of their cocks together as they came onto each other's leanly muscled thighs.

She rose from her dream daze as Ever lifted her wrist to his lips, and she watched, waiting for him to pierce her flesh, to take the Seeking Kiss. Waiting for her climax to overtake her.

Aleron's hand shot out, grabbing Ever's wrist.

"No," he said, his voice quiet, deadly calm.

Ever smiled. "As you wish, Aleron. I am happy to simply fuck your lovely girl." He laid a kiss on her wrist, soft and sweet, and plunged roughly into her. Keeping his gaze on Aleron, he plunged again, a hard, hurting thrust that sent pleasure spiraling into her, leaving her on the edge.

"I'm going to come, Meeraj. Into you, your beautiful body." Ever angled his hips and thrust once more. "Ah, you like this, when I fuck you too hard. You're going to come, as well, little beauty. Come with me."

As he pounded into her, her body surged, and as Aleron bit into her neck, she came once more in a torrent of heat. Ever tensed, cried out, arching into her in hard, punishing thrusts as he climaxed. His come was hot inside her, and he kept stabbing into her, even as his cock softened.

"Ah, beautiful angel," he murmured, his head dropping, his hair falling all around her as her eyes grew heavy, her mind dazed.

Even with the most beautiful vampire bending over her, his cock still inside her body, all she could think of was Aleron.

My Aleron.

Her vision dimmed, went dark.

Aleron felt her go loose in his arms. Ever lifted his head, smiled at him beatifically, then withdrew, rolled onto his side and laid down on the bed so that Aleron could shift her onto the pillows. He knew she'd sleep for hours now. He knew he could still fuck her if he wished. But despite his raging hard cock, he would let her rest. He didn't want to think about why he felt so protective of her. Why he wouldn't let Ever drink from her.

"Aleron, it's your turn," Ever said lazily, his dark eyes half-closed.

"I fear she is spent for the night."

"I am not."

"Ah, it's been a long time, Ever, since I've had you."

"Have me now, then."

Ever had his mysterious, wicked smile on his face. He was beautiful as he knelt on the end of the bed, his cock coming up hard again already, still wet with Meeraj's juices, with his own come.

A knot pulling in Aleron's stomach, deep down.

Don't think of it now. Just fuck him.

"Come on, Aleron." Ever's smile widened into a grin. "Take your turn or I will take mine again."

"Not with her!" Aleron roared, lunging at him.

He had him in a moment, his hands clasped around Ever's neck, pushing him onto the bed on his stomach. Somewhere in the back of his mind he understood that it was happening only because Ever allowed him to do it. The older vampire had ten times his strength. But it didn't matter. All that mattered was kicking Ever's long thighs apart with his knees, parting his smooth buttocks and shoving his cock in.

Ah, he was tight and hot inside, too old and strong to tear at the intrusion. Aleron began to pump.

"Yes, fuck me, Aleron," Ever said, his voice a gasping pant of pleasure already.

Ever was grinding his hips into the mattress, then pushing back against him, taking the pummeling thrusts in a way no human could withstand. Pleasure was a hard, burning lance in Aleron's body—in his cock, his balls, his gut.

He closed his eyes against the sight of Meeraj's unconscious body, focused only on the sensations as he pushed hard into Ever's ass, on the pain as Ever's fingers dug into his thigh, bringing up the blood.

The scent was sharp and acrid, dizzying. He knew what it would be for Ever.

With a roar Ever pushed Aleron off him, and they both went tumbling to the floor. The marble was cool beneath his back, Ever's body cool on top of his, holding him down. The older vampire bent and took Aleron's cock into his mouth, sucking for a moment, then biting into the swollen tip. Pain and pleasure and his mind soaring as Ever drank.

Aleron's mind was filled—the two young vampires, fucking each other, twined together. Then back, to another matched pair, these two with gorgeous ebony skin and gleaming eyes nearly as black as Ever's own. Sensations flooded him—the pleasure of Ever's mouth on his cock, the sensations of these vampires Ever had commanded, tasted, fucked.

He grew weak as Ever drank more. And more. His vision dimmed—his eyesight, his dream sight. And through that chiaroscuro veil, he felt a greater sadness than any he had felt in his lonely three hundred years.

Ever's sadness...

Abruptly, Ever stopped drinking and simply began to suck his cock. Aleron's sight returned as pleasure rose like a wall, then came down on him hard as he climaxed. His hips bucked. Ever held onto him, his hard, ancient hands digging into his thighs. Then Ever pulled back, his hand going to stroke his own beautiful pale, hard shaft, faster and faster, hips pumping, until he tensed, his cock spurting onto Aleron's stomach.

When it was over, Ever smiled at him, that Mona Lisa smile of his. He looked utterly pleased with himself.

"You are a romantic, Aleron."

Aleron smiled back. "And you are a rogue."

Ever stood, held his hand out to help Aleron to his feet, a completely unnecessary gesture. A show of the standing of their friendship.

"Aleron," Ever said quietly. "You love her."

He began to shake his head, but Ever cut him off.

"Do not try to deny it to me. The Bloodsong means something, Aleron, when a human is involved. Even if I hadn't witnessed it myself, I was *with* you. I saw your love for her in the Seeking Kiss. I saw it when you would not let me drink from her."

"Ever... I cannot love another woman. I cannot do it. You know why."

“Yet you do. Are you going to argue the inevitability of the world with me, old friend? You know it as well as I do. You love this woman. This woman—this *human*—who makes your blood sing.”

Aleron looked to Meeraj’s sleeping form, his heart surging, and knew what Ever said was true.

He loved her.

Damn this world. And damn his heart.

But he could not run from the truth any longer.

Chapter Six

Meeraj woke to the rhythmic sound of footsteps on a hard floor. It was dark, and she wasn't sure where she was at first. At the Midnight Playground, still? But the sound was more of shoes on wood than marble, and she didn't feel the hard and ancient chill of Ever's presence.

Ever.

She remembered now what had happened to her, what she had done with the two vampires. Her body shivered. But her heart yearned only for Aleron.

Aleron.

She felt him watching her in the dark. She knew it was him.

"Aleron?"

"I'm here."

"I can't see you."

She heard a small click and the light fixture in the ceiling of Aleron's bedroom came on. She blinked against the light, finally focusing on his tall figure, leaning against the wall by the light switch.

She smiled at him. "You were watching me sleep again."

"Yes."

"How long was I out?"

"Perhaps eighteen hours."

"Eighteen?"

"You played hard last night. I drank deeply from you. I knew you would sleep a long time."

"And you've been watching me all this time?"

"Since I brought you home, yes."

He remained on the other side of the room, and she could see the tension in the set of his shoulders, his mouth.

Tears pooled in her eyes. She didn't know why. She knew only that she needed him.

"Aleron, won't you come to me?"

He was at her side in a moment, kissing her hands, her wrists. "Of course. I'm sorry, Meeraj. How do you feel?"

It seemed a loaded question. She was feeling so much.

"I feel fine. Used." She smiled at him. "But in a lovely way."

He turned her palm over, laid a gentle kiss in the center of it.

“Aleron? I need to ask you something.”

“Anything, my beauty.”

“Last night... It was last night? Something happened to me when Ever was whipping me. That singing in my veins—or yours. I couldn’t tell which it was. It was the Bloodsong, you told me. I’ve heard of it.”

His features shifted, a dozen different emotions seeming to cross his face. His eyes were brilliant, shining with emotion. He said quietly, “Yes.”

“It’s happened before when you’ve played me.”

“Yes.”

“And it’s not supposed to, other than between vampires. Is that right?”

“Yes,” he answered again.

“What does this mean? Other than that I am meant to be with you now, as you said?”

He held onto her wrists in both his hands, but loosely. His gaze was intent on hers. “It means I love you, Meeraj.”

“Aleron...” The tears spilled onto her cheeks. She couldn’t stop them. She didn’t want to. Her chest ached. “Aleron, I love you. I do.”

“Ah, don’t cry.”

He pulled her into his arms, a little too roughly, but she didn’t care. She could feel his warm, hard cheek against hers. He smelled of pure, clean stone, and a little of her own perfume, her own blood. She drew in the scent of him, held it in her lungs. She never wanted to let it go.

“Aleron, what happens now?”

His tone was fierce. “I want you with me always.”

“Yes. I want that, too, to be with you.”

“You will take the Turning Kiss tonight. We will be together forever, my Meeraj. My love.”

He held her tighter, kissed her cheek over and over. She was overcome with love for him. And fear.

To live forever...

He pulled back, holding her shoulders at arm’s length.

“Meeraj, what is it?”

“I... I’m afraid. Aleron, I’m afraid of what living forever means. I didn’t expect this... I didn’t ever really care about it. Eternal life. I came to the Midnight Playground only wanting to be with the vampires. The rest of it never mattered to me. I love you, Aleron, but I need to think about this.”

She saw the shadow come over his face like a door closing.

“You cannot mean this.”

“I don’t know. I need time to absorb the idea. To think about whether or not this is what I want.”

“Meeraj, I have not loved another woman for a hundred years. And she was taken from me by old age. Her life was constantly threatened by disease, accident.” His eyes blazed with a fine blue fire. “Do you have any idea what that did to me? How long it has been since I’ve allowed myself to love again? And it is only now that I am...helpless against it. Against my feelings for you. You cannot mean to question this!”

“Aleron, I must.”

He stood, leaving her empty, cold.

“I cannot do this. Not again,” he muttered, striding from the room so quickly she didn’t have time to think. He was simply gone.

Her heart was breaking. But eternity was far too long for her to even comprehend. She was filled with fear and grief and love for him.

Aleron. Come back to me.

He did not answer.

She’d been at home, in her small apartment in Camden, the same one she had shared with her lost family, for four days. She’d spent her time staring out the window, watching the gangs rove the dirty street below, listening to the shouts, the sirens, the glazed mumbling of the morphies huddled in the doorways downstairs. All of it was familiar, the sounds and sights she had lived with her entire life. After she’d lost Dev she hadn’t been able to let go of the apartment, even when her dancing had earned her enough to move to a better neighborhood. This place was all she had left of her family, the only constant in her life.

The sun was going down outside, and she forced herself to pull the metal shutters tight. It wasn’t safe to leave them open after dark. She turned away, moving around the apartment like a wraith, letting her fingertips come to rest on her mother’s favorite chair, the small Japanese teapot her brother Jai had given her for her birthday shortly before he’d died, the tattered book of Edward Lear verse she and Dev had read together as children.

All of these things had been her comfort over the years. But it meant nothing without Aleron.

She should have kept her mouth shut, worked it out in her mind before she said anything. But he would have known, anyway. And now he was gone.

She could return to his house. To the club. But she was too hurt that he had left her, rather than awaiting her decision.

She knew she’d hurt him. But she’d had to be honest with him. She owed the man she loved that much.

The vampire.

She still wasn’t certain she could choose immortality in order to be with him. She had to see him again in order to know what to do, some sort of confirmation. But if he’d wanted to see her, he would have come.

Perhaps she should go to his house, talk to him. If only she knew exactly what to say.

She was startled by a knock at the door. She grabbed her stunstick from the shelf by the door, holding it tight.

“Who’s there?”

“Meeraj. It’s Ever.”

“Ever?”

His voice was unmistakable. She opened the door.

He looked so tall, so incredibly powerful, standing in the doorway to her small apartment. Unbelievably beautiful.

“May I come in?” he asked, as if he were any other caller.

“Of course.”

She moved back, let him pass, caught a whiff of his endless years. And found it comforting. She closed and bolted the door behind him.

“Meeraj, you look unwell.”

Ever’s black, bottomless eyes watched her carefully, in that way the vampires had, seeing inside her. She knew she could hide nothing from him.

“He left me,” she said simply, pain tearing at her.

“Yes. I believe he’s a fool, Meeraj. I intend to tell him. He has something precious with you. Something we so rarely find, our kind. I don’t mean vampires. I mean those of us who have allowed the endless years to weigh upon us. Who live with regret.”

“Do you live with regret, Ever?”

He turned away, his gaze wandering the apartment. “Yes,” he said softly. “How can I have lived this long without regret? But it’s not too late for Aleron. Before I speak with him, however, I have to know if you will go to him willingly. If you will take the Turning Kiss. If you are strong enough for immortality. I believe you are.”

“Ever... What is it like? I’m afraid of it because I can’t know.”

“It is the greatest of pleasures, the greatest of joys, you will ever know. Greater than anyone can possibly know as a mortal. It is also the greatest sorrow. There is a price for anything in life, isn’t there? And is your current life any more worthwhile? Would you have come to us if it were?”

She shook her head. “No. No.”

It was true. What was she so afraid of? Was she as frightened of allowing herself to love as Aleron was?

“Ever, I want to go to him,” she said, flooded with urgency suddenly.

“Then I will take you,” he said simply. “We’ll go now.”

Aleron paced the library. Dusk was coming, the London fog rolling in like a dark, gray curtain, what was left of the sun filtering through in streaks of orange. Pollutants in the air, and smoke, he knew, but it was lovely nonetheless. He paused in front of the high, paned windows to stare at the sky.

He was trying to distract himself. It wasn't working.

He missed her. So keenly he felt it like a searing pain everywhere. He could not move, could not think, without missing her.

It had occurred to him to return to France, to put some distance between them. Perhaps then he could begin to forget her. But he couldn't bear to be that far from her.

Meeraj.

He ran a hand over his spiky hair, began to pace once more.

He heard Ever before the old, graceful vampire appeared in the doorway of the library.

"Aleron."

"Ever. What brings about this visit?"

"Your misery, my friend."

He caught it then—that scent of flowers and lovely golden skin.

Meeraj.

"She is with you?"

His pulse raced, pain radiating through his chest.

"Yes, but we will talk first, you and I."

"Why did you bring her?"

"So that she can decide."

"I cannot bear it, Ever. You know that. Not after Emeline. I cannot go through this pain ever again."

"You are expecting to."

"Yes! She said herself she is too afraid to take the Turning Kiss."

"She said she was too afraid to make the decision quickly."

"I cannot bear it," he said again.

Ever strode across the room, took Aleron's hand in a crushing grip. "Remember, Aleron, the fragility of human life. Think back to your mortal existence and remember. It is no easy thing to give up. If it was not so precious we would take any who asked."

Ever's dark eyes were blazing.

Aleron raised his gaze to his friend's. "I love her too much."

"There is no such thing as too much."

Aleron felt as though he'd been hit in the chest, a crushing blow. It was several moments before he realized it was his heart opening up, rather than the pain of it breaking.

"You are right, Ever. I have to talk to her."

She was there in the doorway. She looked small, delicate, golden. Beautiful.

He took three long steps and swept her into his arms, buried his face in her neck. He was vaguely aware of Ever smiling that mysterious smile at them as he slipped by, sensed him leaving the house as he carried Meeraj up the stairs to his bedroom. There, he laid her on the big bed, undressed her quickly, tore his own clothes off even faster.

“Meeraj, my love. I must be with you. It doesn’t matter what you choose, I swear it.”

“Aleron.” She was crying again.

“I cannot bear that I make you so sad.”

“But you don’t. You make me happy. I love you, Aleron.”

“As I love you. Forever. No matter how long you are with me.”

“Yes. Forever.”

He felt the certainty in her mind, the image of him giving her the Turning Kiss. He pulled back long enough to look at her. “You are certain?”

“Yes. I want it. To be with you forever. Nothing else is important to me. Only my memories. If you make me immortal, I will have them for eternity. I understand that now. I only needed some time. And then I was afraid it was too late.”

“No, not too late. You’re here. That’s all that matters.”

“Make it happen, Aleron. Do it now.”

He saw the love shining through her golden eyes. She had never looked more perfect to him.

He laid her down on the bed, parted her thighs with gentle hands, moved his body in between them. Leaning in, he kissed her, her lips lush and soft beneath his. He breathed in once more her scent—flowers, her human skin, her human blood. His pulse was a steady beat in his ears. Hers was every bit as steady.

He slid into her, his cock hard, gliding into her slick heat. He was momentarily stunned. By pleasure, by love. She wrapped her legs around his back, her slender arms around his neck.

“I love you, Aleron,” she whispered.

He watched her face as he began to pump into her, watched her cheeks, her breasts, flush with pleasure.

His own pleasure built, soaring through him. Beneath him, he felt her body coil, tense.

“Are you ready, my love?”

Her golden gaze was on his, shining, glossy with her tears. “I’m ready.”

They both knew what was meant. As her body shivered with climax, he bent to kiss her neck, then sank his teeth in.

Her blood was unbearably sweet on his tongue, like nectar pouring down his throat. He felt her pleasure as her body shuddered, and his own peaked, like thunder in his cock, his veins. His body clenched, pleasure cutting deep. And still he drank.

Meeraj, his beautiful girl, *his* girl, his love, went limp beneath him. And he saw in her mind the faces of her family, then his own face. Felt her love for him. Felt her joy.

He pulled away from her and bit into his own wrist, held it over her lips. She latched on and drank.

She was strong, pulling his blood into her mouth, drinking deeply, her fingers coming up to hold onto his hand. And he sent her the images of his long life—his mortal existence, his years as a vampire. Emeline—her face, his love for her. But he didn't feel that pain any longer, only the sweet memory. He would have that for eternity, as Meeraj would have hers. For all his many years, she was wiser than he was.

And now, there was Meeraj.

His.

He gently pried her mouth from his wrist, kissed her lips, tasting his own blood there. Hers was still hot on his tongue. As he watched, she began the transformation. Her lovely skin smoothed, as though a sheet of pale silk had been drawn over it. When she opened her eyes, they were an absolute blaze of gold.

"I never thought you could be any more perfect, my love," he told her. "Any more exquisite."

She smiled, the tiny points of her sharp eyeteeth gleaming.

"I never thought you could be, either," she said, wonder in her voice. "But you are. Everything is...sharper. More beautiful to me. And most of all, your face. The face I love."

"As I love yours, my beauty."

"I feel so different. Yet it's familiar..."

"Because you have felt what it's like to be a vampire through my eyes. My mind."

"There is so much I have to learn."

"I will teach you. I will be with you always. I promise you, Meeraj."

She smiled once more, a dazzling flash of white between her impossibly lush lips. It was more than her exquisite face, her flawless body that he loved. It was her strength, her mind, that indefinable essence that was *her*.

"I know you'll keep your promises. I know it in my heart. That's one of the reasons I could do this. Only with you, Aleron."

"I will always keep any promise I make to you. Always."

"I love you, Aleron. And now I can truly love you forever."

"Forever." He looked into her eyes and saw eternity. For the first time in a hundred years, it was beautiful to him. As she was. "Forever and ever, my love."

About the Author

The author of a number of novels, novellas and short stories, Eden Bradley writes dark, edgy erotic fiction. Her work has been called “elegant, intelligent and sensual”. One erotic novel was recently profiled in *Cosmopolitan*.

Eden appears regularly on Playboy Radio’s Night Calls and conducts workshops on writing sex. When she’s not writing, you can find her wandering museums, shopping for shoes and reading everything she can get her hands on. A California native, Eden currently lives in Los Angeles. You can visit her website: www.edenbradley.com

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The Breeder

Two vampires, one woman, an eternity of love and desire...if only she's strong enough...

The Seeking Kiss

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Midnight Playground, Book 1

London, 2069

For as long as Nissa has known about Midnight Playground, the most exclusive of a world-wide network of vampire sex clubs, she has yearned to gain entrance—and to become one of them. Orphaned and alone from a young age, she has nothing to lose and nothing to stop her from indulging in her darkest fantasies.

Hex and his maker, Aleron, have enjoyed many play partners at the club and have often shared in the euphoria of the Seeking Kiss, that sensual blood exchange between vampires and their lovers. But Nissa's beauty, intelligence and strength is a siren call he can't resist. His desire for her and her willingness to let herself be drawn by their mental pull compels Hex to consider offering to her something he's never given another mortal—the treasured Turning Kiss.

The beautiful vampire pair entice Nissa into an intimate sexual realm beyond her wildest dreams—and she revels in it. But when she finds herself falling for one of the powerful duo, it could mean the end of her deepest fantasies. Or a new beginning she never dared to imagine...

Enjoy the following excerpt for The Seeking Kiss:

Her mind was emptying out. Too much sensation going on to think. Too much of her most treasured fantasies come to life. Was this really happening?

But the tall one pulled out, stepped away from his partner, reached out and took her hand. His skin was hard and cool on the surface, with a strange sort of warmth lurking beneath. He drew her in, and the dark one came to stand behind her, his arms coming around her body. They began to undress her, and it was as though it was all happening in a dream. Except that it was real and she was wide awake, and she knew it. Fantastic.

The tall one stroked her exposed flesh—her collarbone, the top of her breast, and her nipples hardened until they hurt. And all the time she was aware of the dark one's hands on her waist, holding her up, holding her tight to them both. His flesh was a bit softer than the other's, in a way that was difficult to explain, even to herself. So, so beautiful, both of them, and she thought she'd die if they didn't kiss her soon.

"Soon enough," the blond whispered to her, his voice tinged with a French accent.

She heard his name in her head, like some distant sort of echo. *Aleron*. And then the other, the tone gentler, full of smoke, and she'd known his voice would sound just like that. *Hex*.

Their hands were everywhere at once then, stroking her thighs, her stomach, her breasts, the small of her back. Their mouths followed, their lips surprisingly warm as Aleron lifted her arm and trailed kisses down that sensitive skin on the inside of her forearm, Hex kissing her back. Small, fleeting kisses, too fleeting. Pleasure like fire skittering over her skin, making her tremble. Her pussy was soaked, throbbing. Needing.

“We hear you,” Aleron told her quietly.

Hex took her then, turning her in his arms so that she faced him. The masculine beauty of his face was staggering, his eyes so dark they were nearly as black as his hair, with shots of whiskey and amber lighting them, and unbelievably long lashes. His mouth was ripe, the tips of his eyeteeth resting on that lush flesh. She swallowed, unable to speak, to think. He smiled at her, and his smile was like pleasure itself, working its way deep inside her body.

“We know you, Nissa,” he said, his voice that low, husky whisper she’d known it would be. “We know you, and we are here to give you what you need. What you desire. You want *us*, yes?”

She nodded her head, her throat dry, and it was several moments before she was able to speak. “Yes. Yes...”

“And we want you. Beautiful Nissa. Beautiful girl.”

She shivered once more, his words, his voice, almost as lovely as his touch. Then he did touch her, his hands gathering her bare breasts, kneading them gently, then a bit harder. And she leaned into him, sighing with pleasure as he took her nipples between his fingers, pinching, twisting. Oh yes, pleasure and pain and the exquisite knowledge of what they were. Vampires. Immortal. And she had some sense of the eternity of their existence, as though they fed her a bit of it, along with the ghostly sensations of what each of them was feeling.

She blinked, found them both staring at her face—blazing blue eyes and hot liquid brown. Aleron gave the slightest nod of his chin before slipping back behind her, his hard body pressed against her spine, like sun-warmed stone. Hex smiled before lowering his face to hers and kissing her.

God, his lips, like nothing she’d ever felt before in her life. Hard and soft, yielding yet unyielding. Then his tongue, as hot and silky as any human’s, yet sweeter, more pure, somehow, pushing its way between her lips, twining with her tongue.

Love him already...

And the pleasure pushing its way into her body in long, undulating shivers of desire. She was lost in the kiss, in him.

Hex.

Aleron put his hands on her once more, stroking her hips, her thighs, impossible feather-light strokes. She’d never imagined one of *them* could be so gentle. And her sex was lighting up with need, wet and hurting.

When Hex pulled away to look into her eyes once more with that riveting gaze, she whispered, "Please touch me."

Hex's hands came down to cover Aleron's, and together they slipped their palms between her thighs, four sets of fingers brushing the curls there, the swollen lips.

"Ohhh..."

She could hardly believe this was happening.

Don't think. Just feel.

"Ah, so wet for us," Aleron whispered into her hair.

"Yes..."

She arched her hips into their touch, but they pulled away.

"Not yet, not like this," Aleron said. "I want her on the bed. I want her open to us completely."

They guided her, helped her climb onto the high, velvet-covered bed, laid her out on her back. They stood, one on each side of the bed, and she was trembling all over.

Need you. Please.

Aleron's voice was so low she had to strain to hear him. "Yes, Nissa. You shall have us both. And we shall have you. With our hands. With our mouths. With our cocks. And with our teeth. We will drink from you. You will have the Seeking Kiss tonight."

She was shaking so hard she could barely hold still. This was what she'd wanted for so long. And it was happening. Her mind was a tangle of need, sharpened by an edge of fear. What would it really be like, to have them drink from her?

"You are about to find out, beautiful Nissa," Hex told her. His eyes were glowing amber in the dim light, and she felt some of his power in his gaze. Not as strong as Aleron's, but it was there, palpable.

"Yes," Aleron said, "I am older than he is, by centuries. And the Kiss will be different with each of us. But you will love it. You will drown in it a little. But we will care for you. You have nothing to fear."

Their hands were on her then once more, long strokes down the length of her body: her shoulders, her breasts, her stomach and the sensitive skin on the inside of her wrists, until she thought she might die simply from needing them to really *touch* her.

"Please..." she begged.

A small laugh from Aleron. "Ah, she grows impatient."

And before she had a chance to think, his hand was between her thighs, his fingers pushing into her needy pussy.

"Oh!"

Pleasure like a knife, that keen, that sharp, stabbing into her body. Her back arched, she came up off the bed, but Hex was there, holding her down, his hands warm and solid on her hip and shoulder, grounding her somehow.

“Hex... I need you... I need you to kiss me.”

He smiled, his teeth a stunning flash of white, the long canines glinting. Then he lowered his head, his mouth pressing to hers. And his tongue sliding into her mouth, all soft and hot, was like Aleron’s fingers working inside her, pushing, pushing, into her pussy, into her mouth. She was writhing on the bed, her body on that lovely edge already. Her mind was spinning.

Hands held her down, pressing onto her belly, her breasts, her thighs, as the first wave hit her. And Hex’s tongue in her mouth, Aleron’s fingers deep in her sex, pumping, thrusting, until she couldn’t take it any longer.

She cried out as she came, pure ecstasy shimmering through her in glass-sharp waves. Pleasure rose, higher and higher, her body, her mind, filling with nothing but sensation, coursing through her, taking her over. She was yelling, out of control. Lost.

When she opened her eyes she was in Hex’s arms, half lying in his lap as he sat behind her on the bed. She could feel the flawless surface of his chest and stomach against her back, his bare skin an absolute epiphany against hers. Lovely.

Aleron still stood, smiling down at her.

“That was beautiful, Nissa. *You* are beautiful. But the night just begins.”

She agreed to everything but sex. She hadn't counted on his monstrous creativity...

My Fair Monster

© 2008 Lila Dubois

Monsters in Hollywood, Book Two.

Since the day three incredibly hot men in disguise walk into her office and proved Monsters are real, intrepid screenwriter Jane Darby is obsessed with one task: to give the creatures a mythical makeover by writing a revolutionary, blockbuster screenplay. Now if only she can get over her own fear—and get the closed-mouth Michael to talk about his people.

Michael is fascinated by the demur and docile Jane, whose efforts to hold him at arm's length hide an untapped sexual passion—a beast within her waiting to be set free. There's only one way to get under her lovely skin: strike a bargain.

For one week, she agrees to let him do anything, anything, he wants. But Jane's got conditions. First, no actual sex. Second, she has to enjoy it.

Jane's not really worried. What can happen if he sticks to the bargain? After all, she's not really turned on by the idea of Michael tying her down. Or bending her over his knee. Or...

Gulp.

Enjoy the following excerpt for My Fair Monster:

"Oh my God you set me up on a blind date. Was there a roofie in that shot?"

"No, but that's a good idea for next time."

"Lena!"

"Oh calm down! I'm joking, besides, who needs GHB when there's a good DJ?"

"Quit distracting me. What'd you do?"

"Nothing."

"Fine, then I'm going to go dance with that guy."

Lena hesitated long enough for Jane's friends-with-stupid-plan detector to shoot into red, before Lena said, "Dance with him if you want. I just think you could do better."

Jane pulled her friend's face close until they were nose-to-nose. "I know where you sleep."

With that ominously vague threat, Jane left the bar, heading for the dance floor. She stopped on the edge, intending to search for coat guy, but a new song started up. It was rich, with a pulsing back beat. The dancers stopped their wild solo gyrations and came together, the music demanding skin-to-skin contact.

The tingling was back in her fingers, the music pressing into her skin, demanding her recognition, her service. Jane stepped onto the dance floor, and started to move.

Lifting her arms above her head, Jane slide one hand along the fabric casing her limb, wishing it were bare so she could feel the contact. She whirled, planting her feet on the downbeat and throwing her head back.

Something brushed against her back, breaking the rhythm of her dance, but when Jane opened her eyes there was no one close enough to touch her. Like her, the others on the dance floor were lost in the song, touched by music as well crafted as a symphony.

Jane halfheartedly glanced around for coat guy, but gave up when the next hard beat sounded. She bumped her hip to the side and slid her hands over her own breasts, down her belly, to the bare skin of her thighs. She bent, waiting, poised, for the beat to give her a signal. When the music spoke to her Jane snapped up.

Her back slapped into something. Someone.

Hands covered hers, urging her to retrace the path over her breasts to her belly, then hips. He pulled, forcing her ass back against him.

Then they moved as one. Rather than a crude thrusting back and forth—a pale imitation of missionary sex—their duel dancing was rhythmic and subtle, hips moving to the beat. Jane freed her hands from beneath his, needing more. Her fingertips brushed a face, and then his hands captured hers, fingers tight around her wrists, pulling her arms up and back, until they were trapped behind his neck. He held both her wrists in one large hand.

Jane gasped as the position stretched her up, until she danced on her toes. Her breasts lifted, and her partner took full advantage, cupping one breast through her dress. He touched her, fondled her, controlled her.

Jane shuddered and moaned. She turned to look at him, but her arms acted like blinders. She tried to speak but her mouth was dry.

“Just dance.”

She barely heard the words over the music and the rush of blood in her ears. Had she even heard it? Or was the baritone command a figment of her imagination?

His hand left her breast, which both relieved and disappointed her, until it dropped to her bare thigh and headed north, slipping beneath her short skirt to curl around her hip, fingertips brushing the fabric of her thong.

His touch made her aware of her own wetness, and in that moment she wanted nothing more than for him, whoever he was, to touch her, right now. She wanted his finger inside her, long and hard and thick, in one powerful thrust.

The music stopped.

Sound had not stopped pumping from the speakers, no DJ was that stupid, but the song had changed. This new offering was frenzied, with a screaming singer, and too much techno overlay.

Jane snapped from her dance-induced lust-haze. She jerked her arms free of his hold and the man's hot, rough hand slid away from her thigh.

"I knew you loved to...dance." The voice was low, rich and...familiar.

A legend...a myth...a high stakes game that could shatter them both.

Heart of a Huntress

© 2010 Crista McHugh

The Kavanaugh Foundation, Book 1

As one of the oldest surviving vampire hunters in the Foundation, Lana has learned the toughest lesson: success comes at a price. So while the yummy stranger she bumps into at Caesar's trips all her temptation switches, duty comes first. Better to be alone than to gamble with someone else's heart—or her own. Although maybe a one-night stand won't hurt...

Byron has set a one-way course for revenge against the Vegas vampire who murdered his uncle. When he collides with Lana, though, her scent calls to him like a potent aphrodisiac. The only explanation: she's his true-mate. And the timing couldn't be worse. He can't afford any distractions—not to mention it'll be hell convincing her to love someone who sprouts fur and fangs every full moon.

One drink together turns into a daring night of passion. Their erotic interlude ends abruptly with the news that Lana's partner has been abducted by the very vampire Byron seeks. Now Byron has no choice. He must reveal what he is and risk a rejection that could spell his own destruction...

Enjoy the following excerpt for Heart of a Huntress:

His voice almost growled the last sentence, like he wasn't used to people challenging his orders. A shiver coursed down her spine. Normally she didn't like domineering men, mainly because she could kick most of their asses when push came to shove. But Byron looked like the type that could match her, tit for tat. An equal. A challenge. She rattled off the address to her condo just off the Strip and nestled into his arms. It would be a short ride, but she might as well enjoy it while she could.

His arms wrapped around her, warm and comforting. How long had it been since she allowed herself to get physically close to someone like this? She knew getting involved with him was out of the question—too many complications—but would one night disrupt the balance of her life?

"Let me take a look at your ankle."

He slid his hand down her leg and her sex tightened. An amused light shone in his eyes when she met his gaze, like he knew exactly how horny he was making her. And if she wasn't mistaken, he was struggling to contain his arousal as much as she was.

He cleared his throat. "It's already starting to swell a bit. Can you move it, wiggle your toes? Do we need to take a detour by the hospital to make sure it's not broken?"

She followed his commands, wincing as she did. "I think I'll survive. It's just a sprain."

"Good. Anything else?"

"Maybe some bruised ribs," she admitted. Her mind played back the encounter with the last vampire, and a cold chill washed over her insides. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For saving my life. And for taking care of me afterwards." God, she hated to admit she needed help. It gnawed at her gut, but if she had to be rescued by anyone, she would've picked him. "But you need to be careful. You saw what they're like, and from what I overheard, they were setting up a trap."

"For me or for you?"

"Me."

A reckless grin spread across his face. "Then maybe you're the one who needs to be more careful. Maybe you should take someone with you when you hunt."

She glanced up at the driver, wondering how much he'd overheard and understood. "Let's change the subject."

"Of course," he said as he ran one callused hand over her legs and massaged the base of her neck with the other. "What did you have in mind?"

One look told her exactly what he had on his mind. Even if she closed her eyes, the firm ridge in his pants pressing against her thigh made her all too aware of his thoughts. "Are you always this forward with women?"

"Sometimes. Actually, I'd say I've been holding back on you."

"Why is that?"

"Because you're different than most women."

That was an understatement. How many women prowled the streets at night with a wooden stake in their purse?

"You seem to be the type who likes to call the shots," he continued. The sensuous curve of his lips rose into a smile, making his implications clear. He was waiting on her to make the next move.

Her heart raced. One kiss wouldn't cause too many problems, would it? Plus, it might calm the growing curiosity inside her. Before common sense could talk her out of it, she gently brushed her lips against his. They were warm, soft, yielding to hers.

When she tried to pull away, his fingers threaded through her hair. Her breath caught. The hunger in his hazel eyes told her he wanted more than that, and frankly, so did she. This time, when their lips met, she did the yielding. Her mouth parted and his tongue swept in.

Mmm...this is how a kiss should feel. Each sweep of his tongue, each nibble of his teeth, fanned the smoldering fire inside the lowest pit of her stomach. The stubble on his chin grated against her skin, adding a new sensation to her already hyper-aware brain. She curled his short hair around her fingers and held on for the ride, not wanting it to end.

A soft moan formed in his throat and he grew bolder in his advances. The hand on her leg worked its way under her dress. He stroked her seam through her already-soaked panties. Now it was her turn to moan. He repeated the action and she pressed against his hand, urging him to keep doing it, to go deeper next time.

A loud cough interrupted them, and Lana pulled away. The taxi was idling in the driveway of her condominium complex. Her cheeks burned. Had she really been so caught up in making out with a relative stranger in the backseat of a cab that she hadn't realized they'd reached their destination?

Byron's hand withdrew from under her dress. "Let me walk the lady upstairs, and I'll be back in a moment."

"Yeah, right," the driver replied. "Just so you know, the meter's running."

"No problem." He opened the door and scooped her back into his arms. "Got your keys, Lana?"

She searched her purse while she gave him directions to her unit. Despite the fact that she'd been sucking his face a few seconds ago, she couldn't meet his eyes now. Once they entered the elevator, she whispered, "Sorry."

"For what?"

"For acting that way in the cab. I usually have better control over myself."

His laughter echoed off the stainless-steel walls. "So you're saying you don't normally hook up with random strangers?"

"You don't have to say it that way!" She tried to wiggle out of his arms, but he held on to her tighter. "You really don't have to carry me all the way up to my condo, you know."

"What if I want to?"

Although she hated to admit it, she wanted to stay in his arms. For once in her life, she felt less like a tough-as-nails huntress and more like a fairy-tale princess. Of course, what she wanted to do to him didn't belong anywhere near a Disney movie.

The elevator doors opened, and something sank into her stomach like a lead weight. The end of the line. The end of the night with Byron. Why did that disappoint her so much? She should be focused on work, on composing a report to the Foundation about what had happened tonight and researching whoever this Klaus fellow was, but all she wanted to do was taste his lips again. Years of sex deprivation had finally caught up with her.

He set her down in front of her door. "Will you be okay from here?"

No, her mind screamed. He'd left her body aching and needy for more than just a kiss. She should be flattered that he'd left the taxi waiting downstairs, a sure sign that he didn't want just a random hookup with her. Oh, dear God, was he disappointed with her? Had it been so long since she'd kissed someone that she sucked at it? Only one way to find out.

She seized the collar of his blazer and pulled him against her, her mouth devouring his. She tasted traces of the Jack and Coke he'd drunk earlier, along with something more primal, more sexual. Desire.

All semblances of self-control got tossed to the side. He pressed her against the door, pulling her injured leg up until it hooked around his waist and the hem of her dress gathered around her waist. His erection rubbed against her intimate areas, tormenting her with the layers of material that separated them.

He broke his lips away from hers and trailed them down her neck. The combination of his rough stubble mixed with the gentle flicks of his tongue and teasing nips of his teeth nearly sent her over the edge. Who cared if they were humping in the middle of the hallway? She wanted him to fuck her right here and now.

"Lana." He moaned her name like a starving wolf presented with a haunch of fresh meat. His hands cupped her buttocks, raising her ever so slightly so his cock stimulated the exquisitely sensitive nub between her legs.

A shudder ripped through her body. She reached for the door handle, eager to continue this in her bed. Screw the cab waiting downstairs. She'd pay for the running meter at this point, so long as he left her a satisfied and exhausted puddle of flesh when he finished with her.

The door flew open beside her, and if Byron hadn't caught her, they would've landed on the floor in a tangle of limbs. A petite Hispanic woman stared at them with round brown eyes.

Oh, shit, is this the wrong condo?

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