



EVE LANGLAIS

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Published 2010

ISBN 978-1-59578-779-8

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Liquid Silver Books
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Blurb

Institutionalized at a young age after the breakup of her parents, Ella's always heard voices. Even worse, the voices in her head like to act. She thinks she's crazy and destined to be a patient for life until the night she meets a vampire and for the first time in her life, the voices shut up.

Zane just wants to enjoy his usual blood buffet, instead he runs into a wisp of a woman who makes him feel emotions he thought long dead. Rescuing her from the insane asylum, he brings her home, determined to assuage his lust; a plan that is foiled by ghostly voices more determined to keep her pure than a steel welded chastity belt.

Together they discover Ella might not be as crazy as everyone thinks, but even as they discover her innate power, someone from her past wants to hurt her. Will crazy and undead prevail against covetous evil? And most important of all, will the voices ever allow them to indulge in the desire that consumes them?

Prologue

The voices in her head whispered slyly and dared her to ask. Ella knew she shouldn't. Her parents didn't like to know what her invisible friends told her, but she found herself curious as to the answer. "Daddy, why do you kiss the lady?" she asked innocently as she ate her bowl of Fruit Loops.

Her father looked at her over his newspaper and frowned, a look she was familiar with. "What are you talking about?"

"The lady that works in your office. Why do you kiss her and take off your clothes?"

The clattering of dishes made Ella turn her head. She saw her mother looking at her with a white face.

"Who told you such dirty things?" her mother asked in a tight voice. Ella cringed at her expression, and wished she'd kept quiet.

"The voices in my head told me. They say daddy's cheating, but I don't understand the game."

The crack of her mother's hand across her face didn't surprise her, but it still brought tears to her eyes. The murmuring voices in her head quieted—too late. Her mother said not a word, her eyes spoke for her. She pointed towards the stairs and Ella bolted for her room.

The voices she'd always heard in her mind didn't speak at all for the rest of the day, which sucked because it meant she heard every scream and cry as her parents fought—again. At seven, she didn't understand what divorce and betrayal meant, but she quickly learned. Her parents split up that same night and less than a month later, Ella clutching a ragged teddy, entered her first institution where she learned a whole bunch of new words like multiple personalities and psychosis. She also learned it wasn't just her parents who didn't care if she cried; neither did the bevy of nurses and doctors who tried to fix her.

Ella never saw her parents again, but at least she wasn't completely alone, the voices in her head kept her company.

Chapter One

Years later

The damned voices woke her out of a sound sleep.

“Run! He’s gonna eat you.”

“Evil. Evil. Evil.”

“Stupid girl. Move before he gets you.”

A new voice also joined her regular cacophony with just one simple word it repeated over and over. *“Sleep.”*

Ella rolled her eyes. She had been sleeping. Stupid voices. Couldn’t they make up their minds? But now that they had her conscious, they told her to look and see what had frightened them. They drew her attention to a shadow that moved through the ward. She sighed. *Great, another product of my warped mind.* Treating them like the child that cried wolf, she ignored their warnings to flee, because after all, this wouldn’t be the first time her friends in the attic of her mind had made her see things and laughed when she reacted.

Slowly, the ghostly shape flowed from bed to bed, dipping down low and then rising again to move onto the next bed and its sleeping occupant. Ella found herself watching in fascination, ignoring the fevered pitch of the voices screaming at her to hide. *This is the most realistic hallucination I’ve ever had. Maybe I’m still sleeping.*

The shadow finally reached her bedside, and startled, Ella realized that she stared at someone quite real, although perhaps not human. For the first time in her twenty five years of life, the loud chatter in her head abruptly stopped.

“Sleep.”

The command not spoken aloud, echoed in her now empty mind, but Ella had finally learned after many painful years of mistakes to ignore the commands of the voices that constantly tried to guide her.

“Who are you?” she asked instead of closing her eyes. She cocked her head to one side in curiosity. The figure, dressed, she noticed, in a dark cloak that blended with the night, drew back and did not answer.

“Are you real?” Ella reached a hand out and her fingertips briefly touched the silky edge of his cape. The darkness of the ward made his face indistinct, but she drew in a sharp breath when she saw a pair of eyes flare red for a second.

“What are you?” she breathed. A part of her knew she should be scared, the voices that had been her companions for so long sure were, yet this change in her monotonous life intrigued her. *Finally something new.* She found herself strangely drawn to the stranger and she wished she could see his face. Discover if he were young or old. She desperately needed to see if he was the savior she’d dreamed would one day arrive to sweep her out of a world she did not belong in. That prophecy of long ago, not yet fulfilled, was what had kept her sane for all the years of her incarceration. She’d long ago learned, she could not escape on her own.

Finally, the stranger spoke in a low disgruntled voice. “Why is it you don’t sleep?”

“Why should I?” she answered back pertly.

“I need to leave.” He swirled abruptly, and panic suffused her.

“No, please wait. Don’t go.” Ella hopped out of bed, the short white gown of the institution barely covering her knees. She almost collided with him when he turned back towards her.

“Foolish girl. Do you seek to die? Count yourself lucky I am feeling merciful this eve.”

Ella tilted her head and tried to read his expression, but the gloom in the ward only allowed for brief glimpses of hard planes. “Die? That’s a little drastic don’t you think? I don’t intend to tell anyone about your visit.”

She heard a loud sigh. “Do you really think anyone would believe you if you did?”

Ella smiled mischievously. “I guess not. After all I am nuts. For all I know you’re not really here.”

“Oh, I’m here unfortunately,” he grumbled. “Why do you not fear me like a normal human should?”

“I’m not normal,” she retorted. “Would I be here if I was?”

The chuckle took her by surprise and spread an unexpected warmth through her.

“Why are you here?” he asked.

“I hear voices,” she replied honestly. “And sometimes I see things.”

“What do the voices say?”

“Actually, they shut up when you arrived. That’s never happened before, and I’ve got to say, it’s kind of nice.”

“Glad to be of service.”

The low timbre of his voice did strange things to her tummy. It made her feel hot and tingly, pleasantly so. “Who are you and why are you here?”

“It’s best you don’t know.”

The sound of a key scraping in the lock of the door for the ward made him curse. “I must leave.”

“Will you come back?” Ella heard the pleading tone in her voice and while it annoyed her, she knew she wanted to see him again.

“Probably not.” With a swirl of his cape, he melted into the shadows.

The door to the ward swung open and a bobbing flashlight shone in the room. Ella scurried back to her bed and pulled the covers over her head.

A moment later, the night nurse, who acted more like a guard, left. Ella knew the mysterious visitor had gone as well for the voices came back in a wild rush.

“He’s gone. Evil creature.”

“Oh, hush,” she told them. “I found him rather pleasant.”

“Bloodsucker. Stealer of souls.” The voices went on a rant.

Sighing, Ella settled down and amidst the wails and cries in her head. Used to the noise in her mind, she fell asleep, dreaming of a tall dark stranger with an indistinct face. Dreams that left her hot and strangely aching. Dreams that saw her finally leaving the institution and living a normal life.

* * * *

Zane stared up at the psychiatric institution in consternation. *What just happened in there?* Never before had he encountered a human that could resist his beguilement. Never before had he met a mortal who intrigued him. In one night and in one petite, frail

woman, he'd found both. He already knew he could never return here, a shame for this place had provided a perfect feeding ground, if a somewhat drugged one. The girl had to be new. He'd been using this blood buffet for years and never encountered her.

As he stalked through the shadows back to his home, he tried to erase her image from his mind. Even in the dark, with his enhanced eyesight, he'd caught every detail from her ash blonde hair hanging jaggedly below her shoulders to her rosebud mouth pursed in curiosity instead of fear. Her eyes, a blue so clear as to be almost translucent, had stared at him in fascination instead of dilating in fear. The shapeless garment that all the patients wore had clung to her body, revealing pert breasts with high pointed nipples, rounded hips and he'd even smelt arousal. The blood he'd ingested rushed and converged in a one location, painfully so. *Lusting for a slip of a girl. Why now after all these years? I know better than to play with my food.* Speaking of eating, she smelt like no human he'd ever encountered before. Different, yet enticingly so.

Zane cursed. Why could he not stop thinking of her? She was a human, a mere mortal, and below his notice. She and the others of her kind served one purpose only—dinner. Although he'd bet judging by her sweet aroma, she'd be tastier than most.

Chapter Two

Ella sat with her legs over the arm rest of the chair, twirling her hair with one finger. The voices in her head yacked away, but she ignored them as she thought of the man, or was he a phantom, from the previous night.

“Ella, are you listening?”

Coming back to the present, she gazed upon her new doctor. She’d transferred here two days ago when her old institution had finally shut down for health reasons-AKA mold in the walls.

“I’ve been reviewing your file,” said Dr. Peters, a man in his early thirties with already receding brown hair and small round glasses. “It says you’ve been hearing voices all your life.”

“As far back as I can remember,” she confirmed, restraining a sigh. Each new doctor was the same. First, they asked her questions they knew the answer to. Then they started a new regime of drugs—most of which would have made Jim Morrison, just one of her many voices, smile vacuously—none of which had any effect on her. Her attic friends wouldn’t allow it anymore, that or she’d grown resistant. Only one thing, or should she say person, had managed to quiet the constant noise in her head and she had no idea if she’d ever see him again.

“I’d like to try a new direction with your treatment. How would you feel about stopping all the meds?”

That caught her attention and she almost fell off the chair. “Really? Why would you do that?”

Brown eyes reflecting a concern she’d rarely seen, stared into hers. “Let’s talk honestly here. The medications you’ve been given have not affected your hearing of the voices, am I right?”

Ella nodded.

“There’s no point in you taking them then is there? I propose instead of trying to overpower the voices with drugs that instead we teach you to live with them. From what I’ve read, you’ve made good progress with that already.”

“He wants something. Don’t trust him.” The voices seemed to agree on this unanimously. So of course, she ignored them.

“Sounds good, Dr. Peters. When do we start?”

“Right now.”

The rest of the session passed quickly as they discussed what the voices wanted of her and how she should respond. Easy answers—ignore, ignore, ignore. She didn’t bring up, and neither did the doctor, the occasional incidents where the voices had physically manifested. Perhaps like some of the others, he didn’t believe in the impossible. Those small acts of violence she had no control over were the reason time and time again, she’d found her pleas to be released ignored. What a shame that while her voices seemed capable of brewing mischief, they couldn’t apply themselves to helping her escape.

But perhaps she could leave the hospital legally. Dr. Peters seemed optimistic, more so than her other physicians. Although some of the questions her doctor asked had seemed odd. Like how many voices did she hear? Were they always right in their

predictions? Ella answered honestly. Lying, she'd discovered, ended up becoming too complicated after a while. Heck, she had a hard enough time keeping track of the truth with the constant whispering in her mind. She'd never understood why she'd even been labeled crazy in the first place. So what if she heard things no one else could, did it count for nothing that she was always right? Every prediction of the voices spot on, a pity most couldn't handle the truth. However, the problem remained that once in the system, it became almost impossible to leave.

When her therapy session ended without her imaginary friends throwing anything—yet—she thought upon her favorite fantasy. Leaving the hospital and going out into the real world. It amazed her that Dr. Peters seemed willing to even entertain the notion that she might learn to function well enough with the voices that she could eventually leave the hospital. The idea of leaving the confining walls of the institution both frightened and exhilarated her. *What would it be like to walk real streets? To shop and interact with people who had no psychological classifications? To fall in love.*

She couldn't help picturing her dark visitor of the previous night. *Is he the one? The one I dreamt of long ago when I first entered the sterile walls of my first asylum? The one destined to help me escape?* Lost in her reverie, she didn't dodge the pinch to her ass cheek in time. Pretending nothing happened, for no one ever believed the crazy girl over a staff member, she couldn't admit to surprise. This type of thing was appalling common, but it did annoy her. She knew what it meant. Not that it frightened her. Her voices excelled at protecting her from this kind of thing.

The guard, not the same one of the previous nights, placed himself in front of her. He smirked and licked his lips. Ella didn't show him the shudder she felt inside. Nor did she fear his implied threat. He'd learn soon enough that the voices didn't tolerate his type.

"Pig," they echoed in agreement.

But unfortunately, any action her attic friends took would probably affect Dr. Peters plan to rehabilitate her. And that really pissed her off, sending the voices in her head into a spinning frenzy that manifested in her hair, floating around her head for one ghostly moment.

The fantasy was nice while it lasted though, she thought with a sigh.

* * * *

Zane cursed himself all kinds of stupid when he found himself back at the mental institution the next night. He couldn't even blame it on hunger as he'd fed, quite satisfyingly too, on a pair of muggers.

So why did he find himself perched on the windowsill of the dormitory she resided in? The dirty glass made it hard to peer in, as did the bars which, while effective for keeping patients in, were no deterrent for someone with his *special* abilities. He hesitated though, not liking the loss of control he exhibited. He cared nothing for mortal matters. He cared naught for human women. Thus, he should not be here.

About to leap back to the ground, he stopped as he heard the door to the ward click and the soft thud of footsteps. No flashlight preceded the intruder and Zane peered inside, his enhanced eyes taking in the white uniform of the night orderly as he swaggered in the direction of the bed holding the occupant that refused to leave his thoughts. Unease spread through him. *She's in danger.* Not one to question his instincts, he applied himself to listening ready to aid her if need be while pushing aside the question as to why he felt

the need to be her champion.

"I'd leave if I were you," she said sounding not the least bit frightened.

Crazy human. Zane shook his head at her brave words, even as he applauded them.

"I'm the one who gives the orders around here, not you," said the night nurse pompously.

"Please, you should go before you get hurt." She sounded almost apologetic and Zane wondered at her words. *Does she know I'm here? Is she expecting me to save her?*

"Be nice to me and maybe I'll be nice to you."

She sighed. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

The sound of a zipper was unmistakable, and that combined with the conversation made him see red. A cold rage descended over him. *She's mine.* Turning his body to mist, he drifted through the bars and screen of the opened window and rematerialized in the room. In mere seconds, he'd grabbed the would-be rapist around the throat and lifted him off the ground.

"Filthy excuse for a human," he growled, squeezing the meaty neck of the orderly. He cared not if he killed him. Human scum such as this did not deserve to live and walk the earth, not when he was forever confined to stalking the night. Some might call his reaction ironic, for he fed after all from the same patients this orderly preyed upon. However, Zane drew the line at terrorizing and torturing. On the contrary, when he fed, his vampiric enzymes offered a measure of relief to the insane, a quietness of the madness that ailed them. But that wasn't the only reason he hated rapists. It was because of low lives like the orderly in question that his own sister had killed herself so long ago, unable to live with the shame of having her virtue sullied.

Annoyed with the painful memories that surfaced, Zane squeezed tighter.

* * * *

Ella held her breath in astonishment as her night visitor of the previous day appeared out of the dark like an avenging angel. With a strength she could barely comprehend—but that excited her—he took care of the orderly before the voices could.

"You came back?" she whispered, the delight evident in her tone while warmth spread through her limbs.

"Good thing I did," he said sounding angry. For her? What a novel concept. "What would you like me to do with this scum?"

Ella blinked. Do? What could they do? The orderly was sure to tattletale. Even had her voices acted, Ella would still be in a bind.

"What can we do? He's going to tell them you came and I'll be put in solitary."

"And what would you have preferred? That I let him rape you."

"Oh, the voices would have stopped him. They might have driven me crazy, but they don't let anyone hurt me."

Her shadow savior snorted. "You really are nuts aren't you?"

Usually hearing it said so baldly didn't bother her, but for some reason hearing it from him made her sad. "Yes. Yes, I am."

She heard him curse then with a thump, the body he'd held suspended all this time crumpled to the floor.

"Did you kill him?" She'd be in a lot of trouble if that were the case. No one would believe her if she told them a stranger had entered the ward and done it. Course, the fact

that she lacked the strength to choke a full grown man of his size wouldn't cross their minds. People were funny that way.

"He's not dead, just unconscious." He sounded disgruntled as if he'd preferred the former.

"Oh." Unconscious meant that eventually the night orderly would wake up in a foul mood, and if he ran true to previous men of his like, he'd take it out on someone.

"Come with me," said her shadow suddenly as if coming to the same realization.

Ella sucked in a breath. *Did I just imagine what he said?* She wanted to read his expression, see if she could understand his meaning, but the gloom kept him faceless. "What? You want me to go with you?" A flicker of excitement that she tried to ignore for fear of disappointment, flared to life. "Where will we go?"

"How about out of here? You want to leave don't you?"

Ella stared at his wide cloaked shape in shock. Leave? Had the time for the prophecy arrived? She wanted to believe he could get her out, but the sad truth remained, once a person entered the institution, short of a miracle, they never left. Not to mention there were an awful lot of locked doors on the path to freedom.

"Well?" asked the stranger impatiently.

"But how? The doors are locked and there are orderlies keeping watch. And besides, where will I go once we escape?"

He sighed. "Trust me, I can get you out and as for the where, I guess you can stay with me until we find you a place of your own. Now, are you ready to meet the real world?"

Holding out his hand towards her, he waited for her answer. The voices had quieted at his appearance, so she only had herself to rely on—a first. Without even thinking about it, she slipped her hand into his. That simple touch sent a jolt of awareness through her body and her heart sped up.

Ready or not world, here I come.

Chapter Three

Zane didn't know what prompted him to make the offer, and even as he maneuvered her in the dark of the mental hospital, his keen senses guiding them out and away from those that patrolled, he questioned his own sanity.

Maybe all that crazy blood I've ingested over the years has made me nuts. Why else would I be saving a girl who doesn't deny she hears voices and said voices would have saved her from rape? And even crazier, why the hell would I tell her she can stay with me?

But even as he thought this, he wouldn't change his decision. He hadn't liked the danger that bastard nurse had posed at all. If he'd left her behind, who would have protected her in the daytime or when he hunted? He didn't understand why he cared about her well being, but he couldn't deny the rage and ... possessiveness he felt. *I look at her and all I can think is she's mine.* Getting her out of here to explore these unexpected and strange feelings seemed the most logical choice. And if he didn't like the answers, he could always just eat her. But to his shock instead of seeing himself biting into the smooth, white expanse of her neck, he pictured himself between her white thighs, lapping at her sweet core while she cried out. Zane thanked the darkness hid his instant and very evident erection.

What a shame he couldn't dematerialize them both to exit the same way he'd entered, the trick didn't work on other beings. Using some of the special skills—some would say magical—that he'd acquired over the years, he unlocked the doors that stood in their way. He weaved them a path through the shadows that avoided the humans that kept watch, the rich scent of their blood and life force a beacon he could sense from a distance. But as they approached the side door the night staff kept unlocked for their smoke breaks, he cursed under his breath. Around the corner from them and steps away from freedom, two burly fellows stood in the way. Eventually they'd discover the girl missing, but he preferred it happen once they were far away.

He bent down to whisper to her. "Stay here for a moment." She clung to his hand, the fine bones of her fingers tucked around his, spreading warmth through his undead body. A warmth which did nothing to alleviate his still aroused state. "I need to take care of those two guards."

Biting her lip—something he hoped to do to her later—she let go of his hand and hugged herself. Her pose suggested nervousness, but the brightness in her eyes suggested excitement.

Zane went around the corner and focused on the two humans ahead of him.

"You will go outside and have a cigarette. It's quiet outside. You will see and hear nothing. You will not remember these commands. Go."

As if in a Jedi trance—a phrase that Zane had picked up watching *Star Wars*—the two staffers eyes glazed over and pivoting, they headed out the door.

"Come," he beckoned her. She peered around the corner then came forward and tucked her hand into his. Her trust in him made him want to shake her and say "*Don't you realize you should fear me?*" Instead of castigating her, he tightened his grip on her hand.

Zane led her through the door to the night outside. The two orderlies smoked without

speaking and didn't even turn their heads to look at them. He had to drag the girl who stared open mouthed at the entranced guards. He could see the question in her eyes, but he shook his head at her before she could voice it.

When they reached the wall, he turned her to face him. "Hold my shoulders," he ordered as he placed his hands on her waist and drew her into his body. His big hands spanned the slimness of her waist easily, and the thinness of her gown made him realize how close he was to touching her warm skin. Even more shocking, the scent of her arousal wafted up to him, like the most decadent of perfumes. *She desires me.* That simple fact shocked him and lust roared through his body. Had he not learned the art of control, he would have taken her then and there like a rutting beast. But he had a bed at home that would be more comfortable, not to mention they hadn't left the grounds of the institution yet. With a coiling of power, he levitated them, her slight weight not even taxing the innate magic he'd acquired as one his vampiric gifts.

He heard her gasp as her feet left the ground and her fingers clutched him tighter. Tucked into his body, she could surely feel the evidence of his desire, yet she didn't remark upon it.

"You can fly! How marvelous." Her obvious enthusiasm made him smile. She definitely did not react like most humans would.

"I can do *many* things," he whispered in her ear, his loins tightening when she shivered in his arms.

As soon as they hit the ground on the other side of the wall, he let go of her and she stepped back, but he could still hear—and feel—her heart racing.

"Now what?" she asked gnawing her lip while looking around her. She looked like a seductive wraith in the dark with the faint illumination of the moon making her skin glow translucently while her hair glimmered a pale silver. A moon goddess come to life, and his for the taking. A desirable one whose seductive curves were enhanced by the thin gown she wore. He longed to latch his mouth around the pert nipple that poked through the fabric.

Cursing under his breath at uncontrollable thoughts, Zane pulled out his key fob and hit the unlock button. Lights flashed in the darkness. "Now, we get out of here."

And I introduce you to the mattress in my bedroom.

* * * *

The voices finally returned just before she got into the car with her rescuer. They spoke quickly.

"Stupid girl. What are you doing?"

"Run while you can. Quick before he eats you."

"Freedom at last!" said one with cackling laughter.

She ignored them all except her own voice in her mind which pointed out an interesting fact that she voiced as she clambered into the car. "I just realized something. I don't even know your name. I'm Ella."

He tilted his head towards her and she caught the gleam of teeth as he smiled.

"Hello, Ella. My name is Zane."

Zane. Ella like the sound of it, but the niceties out of the way, she now had a more important question, one that the voices in unusual tandem had shouted at her before shutting up. Well two, but she figured that asking him to take care of the warmth that

suffused her would be better done with action than words. “Are you a vampire?”

The car swerved slightly, and she clutched at the armrests, startled as well as unused to being driven.

“Why do you say that?” he finally replied tightly.

The voices had quieted since she’d gotten into the car and Ella licked her lips, determined to tell the truth, but knowing, just like all the others, he wouldn’t like it. “It’s the voices in my head. They told me.”

“Really,” he said flatly.

“I’m sorry. Is it true what they say? Do you drink blood? Is that why you were there the other night? Feeding?” The flood of questions poured from her and only when she realized he hadn’t responded to any of them did she taper off, uncertainly. *I really just don’t know when to shut up*, she thought sadly as she waited for him to freak like everyone in her past had when she spoke truths they thought secret.

“I will answer your questions, Ella of the voices, but in return, you will answer some of mine. Agreed?”

He isn’t mad? She smiled in the darkness of his car. “Sure.” Ella had nothing to hide. He already knew the world considered her nuts. Anything else he wanted to know would pale in comparison.

“Very well. In answer to your first question: yes, I am a vampire.”

Ella bounced in her seat. “Oh, my god. That is so cool. Are you like hundreds of years old? Do—.”

* * * *

“Slow down,” Zane said with a chuckle and a shake of his head. Her lack of guile and obvious lack of fear intrigued him and her obvious arousal at his simple presence just increased his lust for her. He couldn’t get home quick enough, but he’d give her the answers she wanted in the meantime. He had no fear of her sharing them, for now that he had her in his possession, the only way she’d leave would be in death. “I believe you already gave me a list of questions to answer. Let us start with those. As a vampire, I drink blood to survive. Human blood, that is. I try not to kill my victims in order to not draw attention to myself. I use places like mental hospitals and long term facility care places for patients in comas and whatnot to feed myself when I’m in the mood for variety. I spread my feeding among multiple humans, most of whom can’t talk or if they can, are considered crazy if they do.”

“Ooh, so would you have bitten me had I not talked to you the other night?” She sounded breathless and the scent of her arousal filled the car. *So sweet.*

“That was the intention, yes. Now, your turn. How long have you been institutionalized?”

“Forever.”

Her answer took him aback. “You jest?”

“Okay, not forever. Since I was seven years old. The voices made me ask my dad why he was cheating on my mom. Needless to say, that didn’t go over well. My parents split up and neither wanted me, so they had me put away. I’ve been there ever since.”

Zane who’d seen quite a bit in his lifetime—lots of it not pretty—found himself horrified at the callous disregard her parents had shown her. “How old are you now?”

“Twenty-five.”

So young in comparison to him. “So you’ve always heard these voices?”

“As far back as I can remember. Sometimes they do things, too.”

“Like?” She’d implied previously that the voices she heard could act, but surely that claim was a part of her madness.

“Enough about me. Your turn again. How old are you?”

Zane grinned at her. “Very old.”

She cocked her head and looked at him, her eyes going slightly out of focus. “Three hundred and twenty seven.”

Once again, the car swerved and Zane shot Ella a look. *How did she guess?* “Why that number?”

“It’s what the voices say.”

“I thought you said they went away.”

“They have, but when I asked them just now, one of them answered.”

A giggling thought made him say, “Are you sure you’re crazy?”

Ella giggled. “What would make you think I wasn’t? Only crazy people hear voices.”

“Okay, let me ask you a different question. Are the voices always right?”

She didn’t immediately answer and he looked over at her and saw her looking at her hands clasped in her lap. She finally replied softly. “They’re never wrong. It’s why I get into so much trouble.”

The sadness he heard made him want to hurt someone, make that a lot of someones. Although why he even cared eluded him. An idea formed in his mind, *What if she’s not crazy?* He suddenly decided he would take her to see a friend of his to test a theory.

But first things first—a fuck then a suck.

They’d reached his home. A sprawling mansion hidden behind a gated wall that opened as he approached. The long drive led right up to the house and he parked in front of the steps and quicker than a human could, exited the car and opened the door on her side.

Anticipation made his blood quicken and his loins tighten. It wouldn’t be long now. Soon he’d have her naked in his arms and hopefully this obsession he had for her would dissipate.

He looked forward to the seduction even as the thought of returning to his boring, lonely existence troubled him.

* * * *

Even in the dark, Ella could see Zane’s home was impressive. She’d watched her share of movies and shows over the years, severely censored, of course, to avoid inciting the other patients, so she knew what she looked at wasn’t the norm for most people. But then again, Zane wasn’t a normal person. *He’s a vampire.* The idea titillated her. She’d read Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, a gift from a nurse who’d smuggled it into her. One of the few people she’d encountered who’d treated her like she was just a regular person. Sadly, they’d transferred Nurse Kelly and the books had stopped, but Ella had never forgotten the dark tale of the being who survived on blood—and who loved.

Zane took her hand and tugged her up the steps to the grand wooden doors. As if by magic, they swung open and she stepped inside at his urging. Turned out it wasn’t magic but a real butler who’d opened the door, almost as fantastical. Ella suddenly shy, stepped closer to Zane, his electric presence making her feel better as the elderly gent who’d let

them in looked her over with dispassionate eyes. She'd become used over the years to people looking right through her.

"Hendricks, this is Ella. She will be staying here for a while. Please advise the staff that I want her treated with the utmost courtesy. Also, she'll require meals, so ensure the kitchen is stocked."

Unused to nice treatment, Ella's cheeks bloomed with color as he gave orders to his servant. She knew she should be more leery of his kindness, but while a part of her understood Zane's vampiric state should frighten her, she couldn't help but trust him. *He is the savior from my prophecy. How can I not trust him?* Besides the warmth that suffused her whenever she found herself in his presence felt too good to be wrong.

"Will that be all, Master?" asked the sober butler.

"Yes, you may retire." Zane turned to face her but with a curse, pivoted around. "Hendricks," he called.

"Master?" said the servant who stopped before going through the door he'd opened.

"Clothes. Ella will need clothing. I trust you can ensure she is outfitted properly?"

"As you wish." With a bow and speculative look at her, Hendricks left them alone.

Ella found herself tongue tied, baffled at his actions and afraid she'd say something to ruin this dream—and even more afraid the voices would do something to ruin it. She looked up at him, and for the first time got the full impact of his face.

Oh, my god, he's gorgeous. And finally she had a face for her dream savior and lover.

Piercing black eyes held hers, framed by decadently long lashes. His face defined the term chiseled with a strong, square jaw, a straight aristocratic nose and a surprising olive complexion, if a pale one. She found herself transfixed from his slightly ruffled black hair, to his full lips that quirked in a smile.

"Enjoying the view?" He raised a brow at her and grinned even wider when she blushed hotly. She caught a glimpse of white teeth, and more interestingly, two pointed canines.

But back to her initial thought before he'd distracted her with his good looks. "You don't have to do all this."

Zane frowned at her. "I know I don't. I choose to. Now come. Let me show you my home." With obvious pride of possession, and while holding her hand which made butterflies flit in her tummy, Zane gave her a tour of the house from the magnificent and cavernous living room, to the mystifying and gleaming kitchen. A conservatory, library, massive dining room and even larger reception room took up the first floor. On the second floor, there was an entertainment room with a television so big she wondered how they'd gotten it in the room. A multitude of guest bedrooms lay behind a hallway of doors, each sumptuous and larger than she'd ever imagined someone needing. Finally, he showed her a bedroom draped in reds and blacks, its bed massive and a huge window with heavy drapes pulled back to let in the moonlight. His room, she surmised as she spotted the silken robe lying across the bed.

Pulling free of his hand, she wandered to the middle of the room and ran a finger down the satiny comforter on the bed. The voices came back in a rush.

"Oh, dear girl, you've entered his lair."

"Stake him."

Ella's brow crinkled at the conflicting commands. The voices quieted abruptly when

Zane grabbed her by the arms.

“Are you okay?”

“I am now. My little friends upstairs don’t like you, and they were just letting me know.”

“They stop talking when I touch you?” he asked, the grip on her arms loosening and sliding so that he held her in a loose hug.

It didn’t even occur to Ella to push him away. The soothing relief his touch brought from the voices, not to mention the heat that infused her body, made her cling to him tightly. “Actually so long as I’m fairly near you they shut up.”

“Then we’ll have to ensure you stay close to my side,” he said in a low voice.

Ella looked up at him, startled. Hooded eyes looked down at her. Zane brought a hand up and with one finger, stroked her lips. Light headed and mesmerized by his touch, Ella’s lips parted. As if this were a signal he’d waited for, his head dipped down. Closing her eyes, she waited for her first kiss.

And oh, the fire it ignited.

Gently he brushed her mouth, sliding his lips across hers. Ella, inexperienced but curious, and desiring for the first time in her life, tentatively pressed back. His arms tightened around her and he deepened the kiss, his lips tugging and tasting hers. The flick of his tongue made her gasp and he used it to his advantage, slipping his tongue into her mouth to twine with hers. Ella’s knees buckled, but he held her up, crushing her against his hard body, igniting a fire between her legs. Ella vaguely understood what was happening. She’d seen patients coupling with each other or the orderlies, she’d just never indulged herself. She’d never wanted to touch someone like she did Zane.

A sharp canine nicked her lip and she tasted the metallic tang of her blood, a flavor that seemed to enflame Zane for he moved them backwards in the direction of the bed even as his hands pulled at her flimsy gown.

Eager even in her uncertainty, Ella knew she needed to tell him before things went any further. She just hoped it wouldn’t make a difference.

“Zane,” she panted pulling away from his eager mouth.

“No more questions, Ella. I want you and I can smell your desire.”

His words made her tremble. *Wanted*. She could feel the proof against her lower belly and her reciprocal desire in the wetness that made her panties wet. But, he needed to know. She hoped he’d consider what she had to say a gift. “I want you, too. I just wanted to say, I’m glad you’re going to be my first.”

* * * *

Zane froze a hairsbreadth from her lips even though his body screamed at him to claim her—and not just with his cock. He had to have misunderstood. “You’re a virgin?”

She nodded at him and smiled. “The voices never let men get near me, not that I ever wanted them to before you. And I know we just met and all, but you make me feel ever so wonderful. I know it’s going to hurt a little, and I’m fine with that. I just thought I should warn you.”

Zane withdrew his hands from her and backed away in shock. He couldn’t decide if he liked this unexpected development or cursed it. *Untouched*. *Pure*. The savage in him exulted and clamored to claim her, to put his undeniable mark on her flesh. But to his surprise, a shred of humanity he’d thought lost forever rose up and admonished him to

leave her be. How dare he sully her? After what she'd been through, she deserved better. A chance to live, something he could never give her.

He backed away from her, trying to forget the taste of her blood on his tongue when he'd nicked her, the softness and yielding of her body in his arms. He tried to ignore the sweet smell of her arousal. With a curse, he turned from her clear blue eyes, unable to face the uncertainty and questions that clouded them.

A fluttering touch at his back and he whirled, grabbing her hands. "No," he said firmly.

"I don't understand. Is it because I'm a virgin? I would have thought you'd be pleased." She appeared confused, and he longed to kiss her and show her much her words enflamed him.

"Why would you want to gift me with that? You do realize I am a creature of the night. I am not human like you are. I could drain you of your blood and not feel a moment's remorse."

"Oh, I get you're not human, but I don't think you'd kill me." She pressed her palms up against his chest and looked up at him with eyes that shone with trust. A look that made his heart hitch. "I might not be experienced, but I know you desire me. I want this, Zane. Please."

Zane groaned at her plea, the burning touch of her hands through the fabric of his shirt making him forget his reasons for abstaining. "I do want you. But it is very possible that I will lose control." In the throes of passion, the breaking of her maidenhead and the purity of the blood released ... it would be beyond pleasurable, and dangerous. And here she almost begged him to do it.

"Will you bite me?" she asked as she slid her hands up to his shoulders and again, stepped closer to him.

"Probably," he whispered, mesmerized by her, his lust close to overwhelming his reason.

"Does it hurt?" she asked licking her lips, the sweet musky scent of her arousal floating in a cloud around them and making it hard for him to remember why this was a bad idea.

"Only for a second, then you'll experience unbelievable bliss."

"Then take me." Tilting her head back, she exposed the long length of her neck. Zane trembled, his usual cynicism and mastery of all situations blown away by her simple trusting act.

Leaning forward, he let his lips graze the skin she offered, the pulsing of her vein making him groan. He sucked on her neck and she moaned. Wrapping her in his arms, he lifted her and moved her towards the bed. He wanted to be inside her when he bit her, her sweet life's blood pouring on his tongue as he plunged his cock inside her sex.

Something hit him on the back of the head and letting her go, he whirled, looking for the intruder that dared invade his private quarters—and interrupt his seduction.

No one appeared nor did he sense anyone, but that didn't stop the objects in his room from lifting on their own and sailing at him.

What the hell?

Chapter Four

Ella watched in frustration as the voices in her head took action. “Stop it!” she cried causing Zane to look at her oddly.

“Run while he’s distracted.”

“We’ll save you from his debauchery.”

But I want this, she thought with a growl at her constant companions.

“The voices are doing this?” asked Zane blocking the lamp that flew at him and crashed to the floor.

She nodded her head and sighed. *Great, now he’s probably going to tell me to leave. I finally find someone who interests me and doesn’t treat me like a freak and my little friends had to ruin it. Happy now?* she snarled at them.

Laughter sounded and, startled, she looked up to see Zane chuckling even as he dodged more missiles.

“What’s so funny?” she asked crinkling her face in confusion.

“This,” he said whirling to bat down the books that sailed at him with flapping pages. “I mean, in my youth we had iron chastity belts, but this is new. And entertaining.” He smiled at her with sharp teeth, not at all bothered by her voices’ poltergeist act.

The voices didn’t like his attitude either and alternated between sulking and wailing. Getting up off the bed, she walked over to him and he opened his arms, letting the last few missiles hit him so he could offer her a haven to bury herself into.

With an exasperated sigh, the voices shut up and the remaining missiles dropped to the floor. Ella rubbed her cheek against the soft linen of his shirt, his male scent, part cologne, part him, making her want to purr—among other things.

“I think we’d better wait to indulge in our passions else the maids might quit at the mess they have to clean up.”

Ella made a moue that he couldn’t see but apparently sensed. “Never fear. I have a theory about your little friends, and if I’m right, you will be mine very soon.”

Ella’s body flushed with pleasure at his words and he groaned, tightening his arms around her.

“Aaah, Ella, you make me want to tempt a concussion.” His lips brushed the top of her head, and she snuggled tighter against him. “Come, I will show you to a bedroom so you might rest, for the night is coming to a close.”

“Can’t I stay with you?” she begged. “Please. I don’t want to listen to the voices.”

He hesitated. “Very well. But I warn you, once the dawn lightens the sky, I will become as a corpse, my heart almost stopping and my skin becoming chill. You may find this frightening.”

“I don’t care. Please, Zane, let me sleep with you.”

This time he didn’t answer, just swept her up and carried her to the bed. Pulling back the covers, she slid into satin sheets and waited for him to join her, ignoring the voices that gibbered in her head. With a smile, Zane stripped, his linen shirt getting tossed on to a chair and showing off a muscular torso with almost no hair. Blushing when his hands tugged at the button of his pants, she turned her head, but she still heard his chuckle and the rustle of fabric as he removed his slacks.

The light in the room went out and he slid into bed beside her. His hands, cooler than earlier, reached out to touch her, and he didn't have to tug her much for her to snuggle herself against him, the voices silenced at his touch. She rested a hand over his heart that beat slowly and she relaxed.

For the first time in a long time, she understood what it felt like to belong somewhere, and how enjoyable having a mind of her own was.

Vampire or not, I want him. I will find a way to have him and stop the voices from interfering. I won't let them ruin this for me.

* * * *

Zane listened as her breathing evened out and she slipped into a deep slumber. Her hand lay over his heart while her head nestled in the hollow of his shoulder. A multitude of emotions battled in him, from exhilaration at her closeness, to trepidation at the trust he put in this woman he barely knew, to simple awe. For the first time since he'd turned, he'd found someone who looked upon him as a man and protector, who trusted him and wanted him. Holding her close as he felt the life leave his body, he dared to dream. Dream for a life where the loneliness he'd suffered since his turning no longer existed. He just hoped he hadn't misjudged her. It would suck to wake up with a stake in his heart.

* * * *

The beeping of his pager woke Dr. Peters up. Rubbing his face and groping for it on his nightstand, he read the text message and cursed.

Within the hour, he had the night orderly in his office.

"Tell me again what happened," ordered the doctor coldly.

The man named Jimmy fidgeted in the chair. "I was just doing my rounds, you know. Then, someone jumped me and choked me 'til I passed out." Jimmy rubbed at the purple bruises on his throat, marks too big to have been caused by one slip of a girl. A girl that was now missing.

"You were found lying by her bed."

Jimmy's eyes slid away from Dr. Peters. "I, um, heard something and was checking it out. That's when the guy jumped me."

Dr. Peters slammed his hand down on the desk, the loud crack making Jimmy jump. "Liar! Did you really think I didn't know about your night time activities? I've turned a blind eye to them, but you were specifically warned to stay away from the girl and you disobeyed me."

"I wasn't. I swe—" Jimmy's eyes bulged as he clutched at his throat, gasping for air.

Dr. Peters smiled coldly. "Because you couldn't keep it in your pants the girl is missing. I don't like liars and people who fail me. Enjoy yourself in hell." Jimmy's eyes rolled up in his head and he fell with a loud thump off the chair and onto the floor.

Dr. Peters got up and stepping around the warm corpse, left his office and signaled the man who waited outside.

"Sir?"

"Take care of the body. Then gather some men. I want the girl found."

Dr. Peters left. No one would dare disobey him or they'd face the consequences. He

strode through the halls to the ward Ella had disappeared from. The patients with whom she'd shared the room moved for the night so he could do some investigative work of his own.

Standing with his legs slightly spread, he lifted his arms up and closed his eyes. He drew on the power he'd stolen from another. The gibbering of voices screamed as he pulled on the force that animated them. A cool wind blew through the room and when he opened his eyes, he watched the bleary movie of Ella's departure. His eyes widened slightly in surprise at the cloaked being that had choked his man. His lips tightened in anger when he saw how eagerly Ella departed with the indistinct stranger.

The image faded and Dr. Peters, more commonly known as Marcus in the magic circles he frequented, cast another spell.

A smoky form coalesced in front of him, writhing as if in agony, but Marcus held the spirit he'd called tightly, even as the sweat beaded on his brow.

"I want the name of the man who took her."

The ghost grimaced. "Man, there was no man."

Marcus frowned. His stolen magic was siphoning out of him quickly, he needed an answer now. Twisting the binding, the spirit he'd summoned screamed. "Answer me the truth," Marcus ordered.

"I speak truly," whimpered the soul that had once been a man, but now found itself caught in limbo and at the mercy of those like Marcus who could harness their energy for their own use. "The creature you see is not a man, but a soul stealer."

Marcus frowned. "Explain."

"You would know them as vampires."

Marcus in his surprise lost his hold over the ghost which immediately dissipated into the ether he'd pulled it from.

A vampire. A prize as great as Ella. But now, how to find him? Perhaps one of his magical grimoires at home, many dating back thousands of years would have more information for him. A tracking spell would be nice.

Excitement made him smile, not a pretty sight, but one which Ella thankfully didn't see else she might not have slept so soundly.

Chapter Five

Ella woke to dead silence. Literally. Her constant mind companions absent, the body she lay against cool to the touch, and the heart beat that had put her to sleep, absent. Had she been made of weaker stuff, she might have cried out, but Ella had spent most of her life in a place where death seemed more normal than some of the things she'd seen and experienced. Easing out from his loosely draped arms, she sat up in the bed.

The room would have been pitch black had it not been for a small bedside lamp that hadn't been there when she went to sleep. Its soft light lit the features of her unlikely rescuer. In repose—or should she say death—his features had softened. The harsh, cynical lines she'd noted smoothed away and displaying his actual youthfulness. Well at least in looks. He'd implied he was quite old, something the voices had confirmed, and she assumed that his diet of blood was part of what kept him looking young. What she still hadn't figured out was why the voices disappeared when she touched or got too near to him. And yet they'd come back, in action at least when they thought he would be seducing and biting her. Was there something about Zane that blocked them or, judging by their erratic rants, frightened them. *Is my mind manifesting the fear I should feel? No, that makes no sense because I honestly don't think I have anything to fear from him.* A connection, make that an awareness, existed between them. Their fascination with each other seemed mutual, and having lived a sheltered life for so long Ella didn't intend to question or stop it.

I am finally getting the chance to live—perhaps find love? Love, an emotion she'd longed for all her life. She wondered what it would feel like. *Is Zane, a vampire, capable of that emotion?* Or, an even better question, would he allow himself to?

Her bladder made its presence known, and as much as she wanted to stay cuddled by his side, she knew she had to take care of it before she embarrassed herself.

The voices invaded her mind as soon as she moved away from the bed.

"Now's your chance. Leave while he sleeps."

"Stake the evil one."

"Ware the doctor."

The doctor comment caught her attention. *What doctor?* she asked, but the voices just babbled and she ignored them. She opened several doors in his room before finding the bathroom.

His en suite gleamed, a thing of marble and mirrors with a huge tub. After relieving herself, she looked in the mirror and cringed. Her hair, a washed out blonde color, circled her head in a snarly mess. Eyeing the tub, she decided a bath was called for. His bedside clock had shown the time to be early afternoon. If he held true to most legends, he wouldn't rise for a few hours still.

Stripping out of the hated hospital gown, she stuffed it in a garbage can. She'd wear nothing before she'd put that thing back on.

The hot water she sank into closely resembled heaven, and she closed her eyes, humming happily, as she soaped herself, the babble of voices unable to ruin this moment of blissful serenity. She only vaguely remembered baths from her youth. At the hospital, it had always been quick showers, closely supervised by staff. Her lack of prudishness

was probably what saved her from screaming when the bathroom door opened, and an expressionless Hendricks entered with a pile of clothing which he lay on the bathroom counter.

Looking at a point well above her head, he announced. “When milady has finished her bath, breakfast awaits her downstairs.”

Ella bit her lip to hold in her giggles at his stiff posture as he pivoted and left. She soaked in the bath a few more minutes before yanking the plug and getting out. She wrapped herself in a decadently plush towel that smelled like spring. Rubbing herself dry, she took a peek at the clothes Hendricks brought her. There were pair of lace red panties that made her blush, but she pulled them on anyway. A pair of slim fitting track pants with a matching zip up sweater and a white t-shirt completed the rest of her outfit, their stiffness attesting to their newness. They fit a bit loosely, but having only ever worn the very used and ugly garb of the institution, she smiled in delight. Padding back out to the bedroom in socked feet—yes, Hendricks had even remembered those—she gnawed her lip indecisively. The room still lay in a thick gloom and Zane slept like the dead. Ella stifled a giggle, but couldn’t stop the growl of hunger that sounded loudly.

Trepidation in her step, she crossed to the door that led to the rest of the house. The voices seemed to like this plan for they still exhorted her to escape. Ella didn’t plan to leave, but she did need to eat, so taking a deep breath, she left Zane’s room in search of the breakfast Hendricks said waited for her.

She noticed the hallway had no windows, but evenly space lighting chased away the darkness. She followed the corridor back to the stairs. The main floor didn’t seem to have the same ban on natural light as the upstairs did, for she walked down into sunlight, and she blinked. Peering through the windows, she could just see the sun setting, the sky a rainbow of colors.

As if he’d just materialized out of nowhere, Hendricks appeared at her elbow. “If milady would follow me.” The butler led the way to the giant dining room she’d seen in her previous night’s tour.

One lonely plate with a silver dome sat on the immense wooden table’s surface. Hendricks held out the chair and looked at her, but Ella hesitated.

“I don’t suppose there is somewhere a little less fancy to eat is there?”

Hendricks arched an imperious brow, and Ella blushed. “I’m sorry. I guess I should thank you first for the clothes. I’ve never owned anything so fine before. And as for eating, I don’t want to be any trouble.”

Before Ella could seat herself at a table meant for royalty, Hendricks face softened. “I was about to have bite myself in the kitchen. Would you prefer to join me there?”

“Oh, please.” Ella’s face brightened and before Hendricks could change his mind, she snagged the domed plate, while Hendricks grabbed the utensils and glass of juice.

She followed him back to the kitchen where she perched herself at the counter. Hendricks wasn’t the only one to join her, a plump matron with rosy cheeks and a smile also bustled over.

“So you’re the lamb the master’s brought home. My name is Anna. I am the cook and housekeeper.”

“My name is Ella, ma’am.”

“Ma’am. Goodness child, call me Anna. Do you mind if I ask how you came to know the master?”

Zane hadn't told her to keep quiet, and the voices seemed to like his two servants for they shouted no warnings; on the contrary, one of them hummed a happy song. "Zane saved me and said I could stay here 'til I was settled."

"Saved you from what lamb?"

"The mental hospital."

Hendricks went into a choking fit beside her and Anna quickly rounded the counter to pound on his back. Wheezing, he looked at her with piercing eyes. "Are you crazy then?"

"Apparently," said Ella shrugging. "I hear voices."

Anna's eyes lit up. "How fascinating."

"Not really," grumbled Ella. "They tend to be noisy and get me into trouble."

Anna chuckled. "But I'll bet life is never dull though. Now that you are free what do you intend to do?"

"She's going to accompany me on an outing to test a theory."

"Zane!" Ella jumped off her stool and ran to him enthusiastically, his arms opening just in time for her hurtling body.

* * * *

Zane could see the flabbergasted looks on his employee's faces. They'd been with him a long time and he knew first hand this was the first time anyone had every shown such obvious enthusiasm for his presence. *And I like it.*

When he'd woken and she hadn't been there, he'd almost left the room in a naked rush to look for her. Only the thought of what his people would say if they saw him rushing about like a crazed man looking for her had made him stop long enough to dress. He'd also had to use the back ways to avoid the still setting sun streaming through the windows.

His arms hugged her back and he scowled at the grin on Anna's face, a scowl that widened when she mouthed, "About time."

A busy bodying mother hen, sometimes he wondered why he kept her around even as he knew he'd never get rid of her.

Ella smiled up at him, and even though he knew they watched, he couldn't resist dropping a light kiss on her lips and tasted the sweetness of the strawberry jam she'd eaten. He immediately regretted his hasty act for his body immediately responded in a most obvious way that Ella noticed with widening eyes. Apparently her friends upstairs did too, for the pots hanging on the rack above the counter rattled in warning.

Zane sighed, a sound Ella echoed.

Reluctantly, he let her go, but he did twine his fingers around hers, knowing that even that simple touch would keep her voices at bay.

"Where are we going?" she asked with a sweet smile that made Zane want to throw her over his shoulder and carry her back to his room. He knew she wouldn't protest and the migraine and bruises from the missiles would pale in comparison to the pleasure he knew awaited. But he needed to find out if his theory had merit.

"I want you to meet an acquaintance of mine."

"Sure," she agreed readily. "Does this have to do with my voices? Because I'll have you know I've tried every drug there is out there with no effect. You're the only thing that's ever stopped them."

“Wait and see,” he answered mysteriously. “Now, why don’t you get changed into something glamorous while I have some dinner.”

Ella brow furrowed. “Dinner? Oh, do you mean you’re going to bite somebody?”

Hendricks snorted.

Taken aback at her easy acceptance of something that made most humans cringe, he stammered a reply. “Er, yes. I’ll be back shortly.”

Zane wondered at the look of disappointment on her face as he called for someone from his stay at home menu. All vamps kept a few sheep around for when they didn’t have time to hunt. In return, he took good care of them.

But even as he drank from Cherise, after sternly warning her not to play with him like he usually allowed, he wished it was another neck he sank his teeth into.

* * * *

Anna was the one who helped her dress glamorously like Zane had asked when Ella admitted to not knowing how.

“Where does he find people to bite?” she asked as Anna brushed and coiled her hair on her head, another new experience for Ella who’d only ever washed and brushed it.

“He keeps a few willing folk around for eating, but usually he prefers to hunt and keep his menu varied.”

“Oh.” Ella quieted as an unfamiliar feeling suffused her. She didn’t like the idea of Zane biting someone else. His lips touching their skin, and to her anger, possibly another woman’s. Her agitation made the voices in her head churn and she heard Anna gasp.

As soon as Ella realized she’d riled her attic friends up, she clamped down on her mind and the objects floating above the vanity crashed.

“Sorry, Anna. Sometimes the voices in my head get a little hyper.”

“Well that little display certainly explains the master’s bedroom.”

Ella blushed. “Sorry about that. Zane kissed me and they didn’t like that.”

Anna chuckled. “Well, we can’t have that now, can we? I’m sure the master will find a way to get those voices to behave. Now take a look and tell me what you think. It’s not perfect, but it will do for the night and as soon as we can arrange it, we’ll have a hairdresser come to the house and style your hair.

Ella turned to look in the mirror and lost her breath, for staring back at her was a princess. “Who is that?” she asked.

“The most beautiful woman to grace this house,” said Zane coming up behind her and resting his hands on her shoulders peeking out daringly from the top of a gown that bared too much white skin.

Ella couldn’t turn from the vision in the mirror, entranced with the smoky eyes, coiled hair with wisping tendrils and pink rosebud lips. On some level she realized it was her, but a version of herself she’d never imagined.

Tears pricked her eyes and she found herself turned on the seat with Zane dropping to his knees in front of her. “Why do you cry?”

“Oh, Zane, you’ve been so wonderful to me. What if this is all a dream? I’m a crazy girl. Things like this don’t happen to people like me. I’m afraid of waking up.”

Gentle fingers brushed at her lashes, wiping the tears before they ran and he leaned up pressing his lips to hers softly.

“Welcome to your new life Ella. This is only the beginning.”

Lacing her fingers into his, he helped her stand and with a dashing smile, took her to meet his mysterious friend.

Ella didn't care where she went. *So long as he's with me, I'd follow him anywhere.*

Chapter Six

Zane found himself entranced by Ella. She'd been pretty before in a little match girl kind of way, but now with her hair elegantly coiffed, a light application of makeup, and a gown that showcased her slender, yet shapely, figure, she was breathtaking. It took quite a bit of will power not to bury his face in the smooth expanse of her exposed neck, and a moment's trepidation flashed through him at the thought of where he planned to take her. Perhaps he should have dressed her like a nun, but the hiding of her neck would have been an insult. A slap in the face to the one he went to for aid that said "I don't trust you." Of course, he didn't trust anybody, not even himself at times, but the fact remained, in order to play the game that his kind indulged in out of boredom, he had to put Ella at risk. It would have been better if he'd been able to mark her the night before. Then again, his inability to do so was what now led to their current outing.

Damn. I only met her a few days ago and already my life is so much more complicated. But complicated or not, he would change nothing. The anticipation that coursed through his body was more addictive than any human drug. *For the first time since my turning, I am alive.*

"Where are we going?" she asked seated next to him in his convertible.

"We are off to see an acquaintance of mine who may be able to shed some light on your voices."

"Another vampire?" She asked this with the wide eyed excitement of a child inquiring of Santa, her naivety endearing, but so dangerous.

"Yes. Actually there may be quite a few vampires and other beings present. You must promise to stay close to me and not speak to anyone."

"I'll be glued to your side," she solemnly promised. "Anything else I should know?"

"Try not to look anyone in the eye. Most of us have the ability to beguile humans. You won't even realize it is happening."

"Is this like the sleep thing you tried to do to me? The one that didn't work." She smiled at him impishly, her eyes dancing.

Zane almost pulled the car over, he so wanted to kiss her. His lust barely in check since he'd beheld her in her finery, roared to life. He growled. "Yes, just like that, but some of them might be stronger or take you unaware. I'd rather not test and see if you are immune to everyone."

Ella giggled. "I think someone is still upset his little spell didn't work."

"This is no laughing matter, moonbeam."

"What did you call me?" She stopped laughing and looked at him seriously.

"I called you moonbeam because you have the same beauty and glow."

"Oh."

Zane could smell the tears she held in and for a moment wondered at their cause. Then like a sucker punch to the gut, he understood. She'd probably never had a nickname, or at least not an affectionate one. He needed to bring back her smile. Tears and vulnerability would get her eaten alive where they were going. "Moonbeam also suits you because you make me want to get naked and dance in your light."

Silvery bells rang out as she laughed, just as he'd intended. Reaching out to twine his

fingers around hers, he didn't know if he should curse or rejoice at the way she kept drawing out the humanity he'd thought was lost forever.

* * * *

Ella gawked at the mansion they stood in front of. She'd thought Zane's place grand, but this ... this was insane. She clung tightly to Zane's hand and he smiled down at her reassuringly.

Striding up to the massive metal embossed doors, she tried not to trip in the slipper-like shoes Anna had found for her. They'd vetoed heels for Ella had never walked in a pair and they'd both feared she'd twist an ankle.

The double doors swung open at their approach and Zane didn't pause at the entrance, just strode into the well-lit vestibule that gaped around and above them. People milled around, elegantly dressed, talking and smiling, but something about them made Ella shiver. A sense of otherness emanated from them and she caught more than one flash of canine, and in one case, ruby red eyes, as Zane strode through their ranks headed for a specific destination. *Okay, maybe not people after all. And unlike Zane who makes me feel safe, these folk make me wish I were huddled back in the safety of the institute.* She'd have to be crazy to not realize some of these beings were dangerous.

Ella ducked her head and held Zane's hand tightly. She trusted him to keep her safe, but if these things pretending to be human came at them all at once, it would get ugly.

But if she'd found that the crowd in the front entrance gave her the creeps, it was nothing to the chill that went down her spine when they entered the lavish ballroom. A hush fell over the ensemble and Ella blushed, self-conscious, as dozens of pairs of eyes swung to peruse them. Even though she held Zane's hand, one of the voices in her mind finally dared whisper.

"Danger. Danger. Oh, dear child, what have you done?"

What indeed? Finally, Zane stopped his steady march and Ella raised her eyes to see a dais with an ornate throne, like something out of medieval times. Perched on the golden chair, pure power was encased in the form of a young girl. Ella moved closer to Zane, not understanding why this slip of a girl frightened her. She didn't look mighty, but Ella knew without a shadow of doubt that she was the most dangerous thing in the room.

"Zane," said the girl in dulcet tones. "I see you've brought me a gift."

"Not quite, Felicia," Zane said stiffly, his fingers tightening around Ella's. "I've come to ask for your expertise in a matter."

"What? The mighty Zane asking for help? I'm shocked," said Felicia with a titter. She stood up from her throne and took dainty steps down the dais until she stood in front of Ella. Eyes of pure black peered at her, and Ella held tight to her bladder, fear coursing through her. "It will cost you," Felicia finally said.

"It always does," Zane sighed.

"I assume you'd rather we not do this in front of my court?"

"Please."

"Very well" With swinging hips, Felicia led them around the dais to an entrance hidden behind. A man stood guard and he opened the door, never taking his yellow, slitted eyes from Ella. She shivered at the coldness they emitted.

They entered a large office with wall to wall bookcases filled with books, and if Ella's eyes didn't deceive her, scrolls. Zane seated Ella in an armchair and perched on the

arm rest, his long fingers resting lightly on her neck.

Felicia dropped her seductive pose and leaned against her desk facing them. “Where did you find her? I haven’t seen one of her ilk in a long time.”

“Her name is Ella. I found her in a mental institution. She hears voices and they *do* things.”

“I’ll bet they do,” murmured Felicia. “Move away from her, Zane. I will not hurt your protégé, but your very nearness prevents me from fully seeing what I sense she is.”

Ella wanted to protest and ask him to stay close to her. She didn’t understand what was going on, but Zane seemed to think this Felicia person could help with the voices. As soon as he moved, her friends upstairs filled the silent void in her mind. They whispered and gibbered incoherently, their fear palpable.

Felicia’s eyes dilated and Ella forgot to look away. She found herself drawn into those bottomless depths and the voices keened, whirling in her mind. Several thumps and an unladylike curse later, Ella found herself released from whatever spell Felicia had put her under. Ella hugged her arms to herself trying to calm down, and in turn the voices, which in their frenzy, pulled books and scrolls from the walls. The impromptu missiles hovered in the air menacingly.

Irritation marked Felicia’s face. “I might remind you she came to me.” A book sailed at her narrowly missing her head, but Ella realized that Felicia spoke to the voices, not her or Zane. Did that make her crazy, too? Felicia’s face tightened. “I mean her no harm, so stop before I forget my promise of aid and do what you are afraid of instead.”

Instantly the voices quieted and the levitating objects dropped to the floor in a thumping rain.

Ella let out a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding. “I’m sorry. The voices get violent if they think I’m threatened.”

“And the doctors thought you were crazy? Idiots,” Felicia mumbled shaking her head. “I am curious. How many voices do you hear Ella?”

“I don’t know. A lot. I tried counting once, but after the first hundred, I figured what was the point.”

Her words took Felicia aback. “By the dark one, Zane, you’ve found yourself a mighty prize. I don’t suppose you’d reconsider giving her up. I’d reward you handsomely.”

“She’s mine.” He growled the possessive words and Ella smiled at him even though what she really wanted to do was throw herself in his arms and kiss him. She’d wait until they got out of there for that. Zane moved back to her and sat on the arm of the chair again, his hand draped possessively on her nape. “You still haven’t told us what she is.”

“I forgot. You never trained in the arcane arts. Although, even if you had, she is a rarity that few know about. She is an *ánima veneficus*, or in English, a soul sorceress.”

“I’m a witch?” Ella’s brow creased.

“Bah, nothing so crude or petty as that. You, my dear, are a very rare soul sorceress, capable of mighty feats.”

“I’m sorry,” Ella said with a shrug. “I still don’t get it. I hear voices, how does that make me a sorceress?”

“The voices you hear, they are the souls that have attached themselves to you, drawn by your innate ability.”

“You mean,” Ella whispered. “I hear dead people.” Then she laughed. “Oh, that’s

funny. You think I'm psychic?"

Felicia sighed loudly. "Zane, would you make her understand this is no joke."

"Ella, listen to what Felicia says. If the voices are souls, then I'll bet that means you can find a way to control them so that you can have peace even when I'm not around."

"Can you make them go away?" Ella held her breath.

"No and why would you want to? You are powerful child and if your benefactor were anybody but my old friend Zane, I would either capture you for my own use or kill you."

"Oh. So I'm stuck being thought of as crazy then."

"Of course not. Silly girl. You simply need to learn how to control them. From the sounds of it, they attached themselves to you young, a hard thing, I'm sure, especially with no one to teach you. But you are a woman grown now. It is time you took control. Remind these spirits that you are the one in charge."

Felicia made it sound so easy. "And if they don't listen?" Ella had been trying all her life to make the voices shut up, and look where it had gotten her.

"Until you learn how to control them yourself, use Zane to keep them in line."

"What do you mean?" he asked. "The damned things tried to give me a concussion."

Felicia scoffed. "They panicked and you forget who you are, *vampire*. Drinker of souls."

Ella looked up at Zane who had a thoughtful expression on his face. "I'd forgotten about that aspect of our curse. I haven't drained a human since I was first turned."

Ella waved a hand. "Um, do you guys mind explaining to the human over here? What the hell are you talking about?"

Felicia chuckled and Ella shivered, it wasn't exactly a pretty sound. "When a vampire completely drains a human, he can also ingest the soul. It used to be a common practice until our kind finally realized that the spirits we took in became a part of us, permanently. The clashing psyches can often be quite alarming. Some vampires have even gone crazy. Now we simply sip from multiple humans instead of sucking them dry, it's healthier for our sanity. It also makes us less noticeable to human society."

"Okay, I guess I understand that, but how can Zane help me with the ghosts in my head? It's not like they have bodies he can suck dry to get rid of them."

"Aah, but that's just it, you are the body for the souls. If they refuse to listen, then simply let him feed on you. As he feeds, he can draw on his vampiric abilities and siphon spirits from you. Of course, if he takes in too many of them he may go insane, but he can rid you of quite a few spirits before that happens."

"But I don't want him to go crazy. I'd rather keep the voices instead."

Felicia rolled her eyes. "Humans are so emotional. I didn't say he had to, just that he could if the voices refused to obey. Warn them to toe the line and listen, else you'll sic Zane on them. And you'll only need to use that threat until you learn how to control them yourself. You have the power to do so. You just need learn to use it."

To find out she wasn't nuts, just possessed, okay maybe it wasn't an improvement yet, but it sounded like she had a possibility of gaining control of her mind and life. "But how will I learn?" Ella looked at Felicia beseechingly.

Felicia sighed. "Damn Zane, I am not into girls, but even I can feel her pull. I will help you, but, for this you will owe me a favor."

"Done," said Zane.

“I wasn’t talking to you,” said Felicia slyly. “I want a favor from Ella.”

“Sure,” she said.

“Ella, don’t be so quick to say yes. You don’t know what she wants of you yet,” said Zane, concern in his voice.

Ella tilted her face towards Zane’s. “All my life I was told and thought I was insane. For the first time I have the chance to be normal. Well almost normal. I don’t care what she wants. So long as it’s not you, I don’t care.” Ella turned to face Felicia. “What do you want from me?”

Felicia smiled in triumph. “I’m not sure yet. Consider it a favor owed. One day I will collect upon it. Now, I really should get back to my guests. Zane, bring her back tomorrow night when things will be quieter and I will begin her lessons. In the meantime, if the spirits continue to give you trouble when indulging in certain delicate past times, just remember what I said about threatening them.”

With a throaty laugh, Felicia left them.

Ella stood and threw herself into Zane’s arms. “I’m not crazy.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that. You are hanging out with a vampire voluntarily,” he teased.

Ella giggled feeling more carefree than she could remember. Zane’s arms tightened around her and she tilted her face up towards him in time for the kiss.

Hard lips slanted over hers, their electric touch sending a jolt through her body, one that set her heart racing and made wetness pool between her thighs. She clutched at his shoulders, unsure if her legs would hold her. She needn’t have feared. He wouldn’t let her fall. His hands cupped her bottom through her silky gown and he pressed her against him, his erection evident against her lower belly.

“My sweet, and now powerful moonbeam,” he said when he let her come up for air and she wondered—*Do vampires have to breathe?* “You make me forget where we are when I touch you. Come, the night is still young.”

Ella, befuddled, followed when he led her by the hand through the crowd that still filled the ballroom.

The room seemed more packed than when they’d entered. Zane forged through the press of beings who moved out of his way, their curious eyes flicking from him to her. Ella, as instructed, met no eyes, but that didn’t stop someone from snagging her around the waist, ripping her hand free from Zane’s grasp.

Startled, she looked up and only got a brief impression of dark skin and possibly horns before she found herself moved too swiftly to follow behind Zane’s rigid back.

“You dare touch what is mine?” said Zane in a cold, controlled tone.

The demon—for she knew not what else it could be—had obviously been drinking too much, for he laughed. Not a really good idea judging by the anger that radiated from Zane’s whole body.

Quicker than lightening, the demon ended up on the floor, his head hanging at an odd angle and his eyes unseeing. Ella held her breath in shock, while her friends upstairs cheered Zane’s action. Apparently, he’d finally done something they approved of.

The ballroom had gone silent and the press of bodies moved back from them, leaving them in a cleared circle.

Ella knew she should be horrified. Zane had killed someone for just touching her. But, and she might burn in hell for thinking this, she thought it was the nicest thing

anyone had ever done for her. In a perverted way, she also found it romantic. She finally had someone who wanted to protect her. *My very own vampire in dark armor.*

Chapter Seven

Zane pivoted, his body still tense with rage. *How dare someone lay hands on her!* He eyed the crowd and his lip curled back in a snarl. "Anyone else want to touch what is mine?" he demanded, unable to stem his irrational anger.

No one answered, although a few shook their heads and retreated further.

The crowd parted and Felicia stepped into view. "I believe you've made your point," she said dryly. Turning to the guard who'd followed her she said, "Felix, clean up this mess." She turned back to them and shook her head at Zane as if he were a naughty child. "If you're done killing my guests, I shall see you and your woman on the morrow."

Her words started up the buzz of conversation again, although the space around Zane and Ella remained clear. No longer able to delay the inevitable, he turned to face Ella, waiting to see the horror etched on her face as she realized, finally, she had put her faith and trust in a monster.

He groaned when he saw her, her reaction even worse than expected. Her eyes shone brightly, but not with tears. She appeared happy. Smiling, she walked up to him and on tiptoe, kissed him, a chaste kiss that nevertheless made him hard. "Thank you," she murmured.

Shaking his head at his own jealousy and her even odder acceptance of it, he took them back out into the night before he started killing the crowd for even looking at Ella. *My moonbeam.*

Once seated in the car, he turned to her before starting the engine, a crease on his brow. "Why are you not horrified by what I did?" It made so sense. Humans, especially women, cringed in the face of violent death.

"Because you care." She leaned forward and again gave him another butterfly kiss that made him want to take her in the car, bucket seats be damned.

"But I killed him?" he said still baffled.

Ella shrugged. "Are you going to tell me that thing was a boy scout? That if you hadn't been around he wouldn't have tried to hurt me?" When he just looked at her in disbelief, she smiled. "I'm not like other girls Zane. My years in the hospital taught me that in order to not get stepped on, I had to be the baddest of the bunch. Or in my case, the craziest. If people fear you then no one is stupid enough to mess with you. That means doing things that aren't always nice. My voices used to set the stage by levitating and throwing stuff. Their shenanigans are how I remained a virgin and virtually untouched unlike a lot of the other patients. Is killing a little extreme, in my world maybe, but I'd say in your world nothing short of death will gain you the respect you need to stay alive."

Innocent, naïve, but at the same time, wiser than many. What a contradiction she could be. Another one of her many charms, and yet one more reason why he wanted her with a passion that should have frightened him.

Aroused, still somewhat enraged at the temerity of the demon, he decided he needed to calm down before he took her home and unleashed his passion on her. Seeing a Dairy Queen with the lights still on, he pulled in.

"Why are we stopping?" she asked.

“Ever had a sundae?” he asked, holding the restaurant door open for her so she could precede him.

“Isn’t that something with ice cream?” she asked craning to look around with interest.

Her words touched a sad chord in him. Even vampires who had no need of human food knew the taste of a sundae. Deprived of so many things, Zane intended to introduce Ella to the pleasures she’d missed out on starting with a decadent treat.

Zane ordered for her—a true banana split with caramel and cherries to top it. They sat facing each other at the back of the restaurant in the hard plastic booth seats.

Ella looked at the sugary concoction warily, but after the first spoonful, she closed her eyes and groaned. “Oh my,” she said when she finally opened her eyes. “That is heavenly.”

Judging by her moans and smiles, she found the icy treat pleasurable, but Zane watching her obvious enjoyment thought she was the true pleasure. When she licked the spoon, her pink tongue darting out to suck the melting cream, he grew rock hard.

“Let me taste,” he growled.

Chagrined, she showed him the empty bowl. “I’m sorry. I ate it all.”

“That’s okay, that’s not where I want to taste it.” He leaned across the table and cupping her head to draw her forward, claimed her mouth.

She gasped when he licked her lips, the sugar from her dessert still not as tasty as her blood, but definitely arousing.

“Let’s go home.” Holding her hand, he led her back to the car. He took the roads leading home fast. The smell of her arousal filled the car causing the most painful of erections.

Never had a woman affected him so. Made him lose control. Even more amazing, she seemed to share this irrational desire.

When they reached the house, he parked out front and in a flash, had her out of the car. Too impatient to wait, he swung her into his arms and strode up the steps to the door. As if he’d waited there for this moment, Hendricks swung the door open as he reached the house.

“Hi,” chirped Ella even as she blushed a becoming pink.

“Evening master, milady,” said Hendricks who couldn’t hide the twinkle in his eye.

But Zane didn’t care if his servant thought him foolish, the feel and scent of his moonbeam had driven out all the reason in his mind. He only knew he wanted her. Now. Naked in his arms. Crying out his name.

He took the stairs two at a time, cursing the fact his bedroom lay in the furthest corner of the house.

When he dropped her onto the bed, she giggled, then frowned.

“Go away. You heard what the lady vampire said. He’ll eat you.”

Zane didn’t want her distracted by the dratted voices. Palming her ankle, he pulled her towards him on the satiny coverlet and she gasped. He removed her shoes and laid a hand on each of her legs, sliding his hands up her silky, smooth skin.

“Have they shut up or do I also need to warn them?” Zane would suck in a thousand souls at this moment if that’s what it took to claim her.

“They’re gone for now.” She held out her arms, an invitation he could not refuse. First he stripped, removing his jacket and, impatient as he was, ripped the buttons from

his shirt as he peeled it off.

Ella licked her lips and watched him with heavy lidded eyes.

Zane undid the button on his pants, but kept them on. He wanted to be careful to not overwhelm her. Ready, he crawled up onto the bed between her legs, legs which she spread to accommodate him, the skirt of her dress riding up.

Bracing himself on his arms, he leaned over her and found her lips again. They kissed with a frantic passion, her fingers twining and pulling at his hair, while he nudged his erection, still clothed, against the apex of her thighs. She arched back against him, her gasps and moans, nearly shredding what little control he had.

He had to remind himself of her virgin state for his impulse was to push up her dress, rip off her panties and plunge into the wet core that he knew ached for him.

Dragging his lips from hers, he nibbled his way to her neck, kissing the pulsing vein that fluttered under her fine skin. The chill breeze that swept over him, made him move down. There was no need to antagonize the voices. They seemed willing so far to allow them to take their pleasure. The biting could come later.

Her dress stopped his exploration of her breasts. Unacceptable. Tearing the fabric with his teeth, he rent the satiny material, baring her beautiful tits.

The first swirl of his tongue on her nipple had her arching and crying out. Zane grinned in masculine pride and took the pointed nub into his mouth sucking. She whimpered, so he sucked harder.

"Tell me how it feels?" he asked gruffly when he switched his attention to her other nipple.

"Like I'm on fire," she whispered. "Oh, please. I want..."

"What do you want?" he asked, pausing to look at her. She looked so beautiful, her face flushed, and her eyes glazed with passion.

"I don't know what I want. Zane, please." She begged and Zane almost came in his pants at her need.

He slid his hand up her thigh, her skirt bunched to her thighs with all her thrashing. He found the scrap of material that covered her mound and tore it off. He stroked her curls first then delved between her thighs to find her slick folds.

She screamed.

He stroked her again, and she shuddered. Zane slid down her body until he could see her pink flesh. The musky scent of her arousal teased and beckoned him. Placing his hands under her buttocks, he pulled her up to his mouth and tasted her.

Sweet heaven.

At the first touch of his tongue, she came, crying out and trembling in his grasp. But Zane had just started. He parted her slick lips with his tongue and lapped at her, the nectar from her sex energizing him. He found her clit and laved it, digging his fingers into the soft skin of her buttocks as she bucked and cried out, lost in a mindless maelstrom of pleasure.

Zane could have eaten from her all day, she tasted so good, but he knew if he didn't take her now, he'd embarrass himself. Sliding a finger into her sex, he groaned at the tightness of her sheath even as he used his other hand to pull down his trousers.

And that's when the objects started to fly.

Chapter Eight

Amidst the fuzzy pleasure that clouded her mind, Ella heard Zane curse and the wondrous things he did to her body stopped.

She opened her eyes with difficulty and blinked. Then cursed.

“Bloody hell,” she said quickly losing her pleasurable glow as she saw Zane, his pants gaping, under attack. “Stop it,” she shouted. But the voices wailed in her head about keeping her pure and not letting the vampire desecrate her. Ella almost rolled her eyes. So licking her private parts was okay, but actual penetration wasn’t? Stupid ghostly semantics.

Hopping off the bed, she protected Zane the only way she could think of, by covering his body with her own. She wrapped herself around him, or tried to. The man did tower over her, but her shield ploy worked. The aerial attack stopped.

“I’m sorry,” she mumbled against his chest.

Cool fingers titled her chin up and Zane smiled down at her ruefully. “We’ve learned your friends have limits. Apparently your virginity is one of them.”

“No fair. It’s my body.”

Zane hugged her tight. “Soon, my impatient moonbeam. Felicia will teach you what you need to know and no longer will the voices act on your unwilling behalf.”

“It can’t be soon enough,” she grumbled. “Why didn’t you just bite me and suck one of them out? Felicia said that might work.”

“This is going to sound stupidly sentimental and human, but I felt your first time should be real. The bite makes anything pleasurable. I want your experience to be memorable because you feel and want it.”

A surge of affection, dare she even say love, rushed through her and she hugged him tightly. *And he thinks he’s a monster. Boy, is he wrong. I’ve met monsters. He’s a knight in shining armor compared to them.*

With dawn approaching, he led them back to the bed. Ella paused to shrug off the shredded remains of her dress. She’d lost her modesty a long time ago, but she blushed at the heated look on his face. Naked, she crawled into bed with him. Zane, for his part, still wore his unbuttoned trousers.

She snuggled up to him, her hand on the naked skin of his chest, stroking him softly and thinking about the unbelievably pleasurable things he’d done to her before their rude interruption. And while he’d sated some of her curiosity and passion, she still craved. Craved Zane. She wanted to give him pleasure in return, she just wasn’t sure how to go about it. The occasional furtive glimpses she’d seen in the hospital were not exactly pages from a step by step manual for seduction. She decided to try and mimic some of the things he’d done to her. Leaning up, she placed her mouth on his flat nipple.

“What are you doing, moonbeam?” he growled.

“I want to please you.”

“You don’t have to do this. I can wait.”

“But I want to,” she said nipping him. His groan started the fire in her again and she enjoyed herself while toying with his nipples. But what she truly wanted to see and feel lay lower.

Straddling his thighs, she parted his slacks and gasped at the sight of his erection jutting from the top of his briefs.

"Touch me," he groaned.

Tugging his briefs and slacks down with his help, she bared him completely. *Oh, my god.* Long and thick, his cock seemed to pulse. Ella reached out a tentative hand and rubbed the swollen tip of his penis. A pearl of liquid appeared. Emboldened, she wrapped a hand around him and his shaft jerked like a living beast. Zane moaned. She looked up to see his eyes closed and his face clenched tight as if in agony.

Leaning down, the tips of her hair brushing his groin, she licked the tip of his mushroom head, tasting the glistening drop. Zane sucked in a harsh breathe.

Pleased at his reaction and determined to do more, she took him in her mouth, unsure but willing to experiment.

"Moonbeam!" Zane shouted at her hoarsely, his hips bucking. Excitement coursed through her. She liked having Zane out of control. She sucked him awkwardly at first, but she quickly found a rhythm and method that had him thrashing and clawing at the sheets.

"Turn around," he whispered. "Let me lick you at the same time."

Ella shuddered and moisture pooled between her legs. Shifting positions, too aroused to feel embarrassed about this new intimate position, she positioned her moist pussy over his face.

She latched her mouth around his cock again even as his mouth found her core and licked. He gripped her by the buttocks, his tongue laving and sucking at her, and when her pelvic muscles clenched and spasmed in an orgasm that had her screaming around the cock in her mouth, he came finally in a hot jet that she swallowed eagerly.

Loose limbed and sated, she collapsed on him, her face on his muscled thigh. Gentle hands gripped her and turned her until she lay snuggled at his side, wrapped in his arms.

The whirring sound of the shutters closing signaled the arrival of the dawn. But Ella was already asleep in her dark prince's arms.

* * * *

Zane woke to find Ella still cuddled with him, her silvery hair draped on his chest along with half of her naked body.

Tenderness filled him as he stroked the silken skin of her back. He'd known her such a short time and yet, already he couldn't imagine life, or in his case un-life, without her.

She continually surprised him, and not just with her seduction of him the night before, which had surpassed every sexual encounter he'd had in his long life. He loved the fact that she accepted him for what he was. Or had so far. She had yet to experience or see how he fed. Would that be the act that finally toppled the pedestal she'd placed him on?

He didn't want to find out. Easing out from under her, he decided to go feed now while she slept.

Once he could be sure of her affections, then he'd let her see this final aspect of his cursed existence.

Or maybe he'd hide it from her forever so that he'd never have to see the disgust he feared. He wasn't sure his newly discovered heart could handle that.

* * * *

Ella stretched and smiled. Her body tingled, her skin sensitized and aware. Even the slide of the silk sheets against her made her squirm. Zane had woken her body to pleasure and now it seemed, she wanted to indulge again and again.

Speaking of whom, where was Zane? She'd slept soundly and late judging by the shutters that had already opened.

"He's already moved on to greener pastures."

"You are nothing to him."

The voices yammered on and on, trying to plant doubt. She ignored them.

Showering quickly so as to rinse her sticky body, she dressed in a new outfit she found lying on the large wooden dresser. Then she went to look for her lover.

He didn't appear to be in any of the main rooms so she wandered into the kitchen and found Anna along with a host of mouthwatering smells.

"There you are, lamb. The master said you'd waken soon. I'm just finishing up your food for you."

"Where is Zane?"

"Around," said Anna vaguely. "Why don't you go sit in the dining room and he'll join you shortly."

Ella didn't like that answer. She had more than a sneaky suspicion about what Zane was doing and she wanted to roll her eyes at the obtuse way they were going about to make her ignore it. He was a vampire. He had to eat. So logic said he was feeding and the fact they were trying to hide it meant they thought she wouldn't like seeing it.

Which means he's probably chomping on a girl. Not that the sex of his food source meant anything, but Ella remembered Zane telling her the bite was highly pleasurable. And that fact, along with the continued whispers by the voices, put her in a jealous rage.

There had only been one place she hadn't checked on the main floor and Ella marched there now, the closed door only making her rage simmer more.

The door swung open and hit the wall without her touching it and her hair waved around her head in a frantic dance as the voices chortled in her head.

"She's finally going to kill him."

"Stake the cheating bastard."

Ella walked in and stopped dead and her jealous anger rose a notch as she saw Zane release the woman whose neck he sucked. He turned to face her, a look of horror on his face.

The brunette bimbo he'd fed on lolled on the couch, a look of rapture on her face.

Out of control, the voices acted on her behalf. They levitated the woman up from the couch and slammed her against the back wall. Her drugged look dissipated and she opened her eyes in panic.

Ella strode forward, her burning eyes fixated on the object of her ire.

Suddenly Zane's broad chest blocked her view.

"Ella!"

She looked up at him. "Move away from the slut."

* * * *

Confusion gripped him. When Ella had walked in, he'd thought her fury was a reaction to his feeding. But now, with her words, realization dawned. *She's jealous.*

Zane wanted to laugh. His earlier fear that she would find his feeding habits

disgusting seemed stupid. How could he have thought she'd be horrified? She hadn't batted an eye when he'd killed someone for touching her.

She tried to step around him, but he wrapped muscular arms around her.

"She means nothing to me, moonbeam. She's just a source of blood."

"But she enjoyed it. Enjoyed you," growled Ella, her usually clear blue eyes almost translucent with power, a power he could feel vibrating through her frail frame.

"No more then. If the thought of my feeding on a woman bothers you then I will feed on a man."

Some of the tension left her body and clarity returned to her gaze. "I don't want you to feed on anybody else. You're mine."

Instead of making him balk, her possessiveness pleased him. At the same time though, he heard the hurt in her voice. Zane hated the anguish his need for blood had caused her. "I wish I didn't have to feed on human blood, Ella, but if I don't eat, I will grow weak and die."

Her soft hands came up to cup his face. "I don't want you to stop feeding. I just want you to do it from me. I want to be the one to nourish you."

The breath—what little breath he had in his undead body—left him in a whoosh. His heart swelled and the surge of love, yes love, he felt for this woman made him tremble.

"I will do as you wish. I can go without food for a while. But we'd better get to work on mastering your powers."

"Thank you," she whispered standing on tiptoe to kiss him.

Zane tightened his grasp on her and lifted her so she wouldn't have to crane and returned her fierce embrace.

The truth? The only human he ever wanted to taste again nestled in his arms. Now, they just needed to ensure the spirits didn't kill him when he attempted it.

Chapter Nine

Flopping into a chair, Ella groaned. "This isn't working."

Felicia frowned at her. "The power is there, we just need to trigger your control."

"What do you mean by trigger?" asked Zane, who went to stand behind Ella and massaged her tense shoulders.

"Strong emotions would do it. Once she uses the power, then she'll be able to recognize it and learn to use it when she's calm. But in the meantime, we need to get her angry or scared."

Ella closed her eyes, ignoring Felicia. They'd been at it for over an hour now, and the only thing they'd managed was hysterical laughter in her mind as the voices taunted her. Disheartening was putting it mildly. *And I so want to be able to do this. I've got to get control if I ever want to be with Zane or let him feed on me. I don't want him touching anyone else.*

She reached a hand up and lightly stroked the hand at her nape. He leaned down and kissed the top her head. A moment later, his touch disappeared and she heard a grunt. Ella jumped up and saw Felicia held him pinned to the wall, her teeth bared and inches from his throat.

"What are you doing?" exclaimed Ella.

"All this work has made me hungry," said Felicia shrugging. "You don't mind do you? I've always found Zane to be so *tasty*."

Rage suffused Ella. "Leave him alone."

"And if I say no?" Felicia smiled at her tauntingly before turning back and moving in for a bite.

A cold wind swirled around Ella, but she barely noticed as she took a step, her hair swirling around her head wildly. "Let. Him. Go," she growled.

Felicia ignored her and bit.

And Ella screamed.

Pointing her hands, she grabbed Felicia with ghostly fingers and shook her like a rag doll before tossing her across the room.

Stalking after her, Ella drew in the power she could feel swirling all around her and coalesced it into a giant ball which she pushed with her mind at Felicia.

A thundering crash sounded as her magical blow smashed through the wall of the office into the vacant ballroom beyond.

Familiar arms wrapped around and she smelt Zane's fresh cologne before he whispered in her ear. "I'm alright. You can calm down now."

Suddenly appalled, yet also secretly exhilarated, she turned and buried her face in Zane's chest. "I'm so sorry," she mumbled against the linen of his shirt. "I killed Felicia."

"Ha, you'd have to try harder than that," scoffed Felicia.

Ella turned around and saw Felicia standing there grinning and uninjured. Brushing off her clothes she said, "I thought that might work."

"You mean you did that on purpose?" she accused Felicia.

"I needed strong emotion," Felicia said, shrugging unapologetically. "Jealousy in this case. Now did you feel the power that time? I know you manipulated it," she said,

smiling ruefully at the large hole in her wall.

"I did. I felt it. But it's gone now."

"That's okay. We've made a start. From here on in, it will get easier. Now if you don't mind, I suddenly find myself famished and since you won't share, I must go for some take-out." Flashing fangs, Felicia left them in the mess of her office.

"You did it, moonbeam," said Zane dropping a kiss on her head. "I knew you could."

But Ella wanted more than a chaste kiss. She yanked his face down and planted a scorcher on his mouth, one that had them both panting and flushed in moments.

"Isn't desire a strong emotion?" she said smiling at him mischievously.

Zane couldn't get them home quick enough.

* * * *

Marcus sat naked in his circle of candles, his lean body gleaming with sweat as he chanted the words for the spell he needed to force the souls to obey him. A power that came naturally to the bitch Ella who had escaped him.

But not for much longer. Marcus had found in a decaying grimoire belonging to a black sorcerer of long ago, the spell he needed to locate the missing girl. Once he had her in his control, he already had the spell he'd need to siphon her power. Then, with the magic he'd have at his fingertips, the council of wizards would bow to him.

First though, he had to find the girl.

He continued to chant and follow the ritual steps of the spell to give him control over the spirits that resided in the ether around him. At the peak of the spell, he cut himself and dripped his crimson life force onto the black candle that burned in the middle of his circle.

Souls, drawn unwilling to his dark circle, entered the room and spun, creating a vortex of moans and shadows.

Weak from blood loss, Marcus squinted and croaked out the question.

"Where is the girl Ella?"

Forced to do his bidding, the ghosts caught in limbo showed him where she could be found, and Marcus cackled even as he released the powerful binding that sapped him.

I've got the bitch now.

Chapter Ten

Zane couldn't get them to his bed fast enough. The fact that Ella could be so powerful might have turned most men off, but Zane found her strength exciting. Just another fascinating aspect to a beautifully complex woman.

Now if only she could direct that power long enough for him to finally claim her body and make her his. He thanked the fact that condoms, a revolting invention of this century, wouldn't be needed since, not only did vampires carry no diseases, their undead status made it impossible for them to impregnate women.

Frantic with need, their hands tore at the each other's clothing, buttons popping in their frenzy. Her mouth clung to his hotly and her passionate moans and erratic caresses as she tried to touch him all over at once fired his blood and made him swell hard enough to burst.

He toppled them onto the bed, skin to skin. Her legs parted to allow him to settle himself between them. Her fingers dug into his scalp as she pressed her lips hard against his, her mouth open so that her tongue could dance wetly in with his.

Tearing his mouth from hers, he licked his way down her neck, not even pausing at the vein that throbbed in her neck. He latched instead onto a pink nipple, her cry of delight making his cock jerk impatiently.

He wanted to plunge into her velvety wetness so bad. Even if she couldn't control the souls, he'd fuck her tonight. He could wait no longer and would suffer the painful consequences if need be.

Her breasts quivered under his oral onslaught, the nubs tight as he nibbled them one after another. He let his hand drift down to quest between her legs, her moist juices making him thirsty for something other than blood. Eager to taste her again, he slid down her body, his mouth seeking and finding her molten core.

Laving her with his tongue, he devoured her sweet nectar, his hands holding her down even as she bucked and thrashed. When her first orgasm hit, he slid his finger into her tight sheath almost coming at the exquisite feel of her muscles clenching around his digit.

Applying his tongue to her, he built up her pleasure again, bringing her back to the brink.

Moaning a "please" that he could not ignore, he slid up her body, the thick head of his cock nudging her moist entrance.

A cool breeze blew through the room. But he remained unassaulted. He'd had Hendricks prepare the room ahead of time. No loose objects remained. Frustrated, the spirits pulled at him with ghostly fingers.

"Ella," he murmured, refusing to budge.

Opening passion glazed eyes that shone with power, he felt rather than saw her push away the souls that would prevent their joining.

"Love me, Zane," she whispered.

"Forever," he replied and he thrust into her.

The hands that stroked his back clawed him for a moment as he breached her maidenhead and a chill wind blew across his feverish skin. Zane held his position for a

moment, trying to not breathe too deeply the scent of the blood—the pure blood—he felt trickling. Slowly, he moved inside her, her exquisite tightness almost making him cum. Reining in his desire to pound her and shoot his cream, he stroked her slowly, allowing her to get used to his size. Soon, she forgot the pain of his entry and she clung to him in passion again. Her hips finding his rhythm and matching it.

Increasing his pace, he leaned down and flicked her nipple with his tongue. Faster, he thrust, her whimpering cries building in intensity until with a drawn out scream, she orgasmed around his cock, the tightness of her sex making him bellow in return as he came inside of her, marking her forever more as his.

Shaken by the intensity of their lovemaking, he stared down at her. *There is no denying it. I, a three hundred plus year old vampire, have fallen in love.*

* * * *

“I love you.”

Ella’s breath stopped. Surely she’d misunderstood. Perhaps her mind still played tricks on her. She opened her eyes and saw Zane gazing down at her intently.

“What did you say?”

“I love you, moonbeam.”

Tears brimmed in her eyes and her lips trembled. She wanted to speak. To tell him she loved him too, but her throat closed tight even though she’d craved this moment all her life.

Tender fingers wiped the tears that leaked. “Don’t cry. I know you’ve been hurt all your life and lonely. Never again. I promise.”

Ella still couldn’t speak, but she smiled tremulously and nodded her head.

“Come. Let me bathe the blood off you before I treat you like dinner.”

Ella giggled at his poor excuse of a joke, a laughter that turned into a squeal when he swept her into his arms and carried her into his bathroom.

He ran the water with her snuggled on his lap. Ella could have stayed like that forever. She hugged him, her cheek pressed against his chest and couldn’t believe how lucky she’d suddenly gotten.

A luck that improved even more when he climbed into the bath with her and with dexterous fingers bathed her.

Ella leaned back against him, smiling when his cock, already hard again, nudged her backside. The voices had stayed quiet since she’d pushed them away in the bedroom. And if they knew what was good for them, they’d stay quiet.

Soapy fingers rubbed at her breasts and Ella watched in erotic fascination as he tweaked her nipples until they both pointed proudly from her chest. Slowly, he slid his hand down her stomach into the water, finding and lightly stroking her. Ella’s breath hitched as he rubbed her clit, stoking the fire that hadn’t left her body since she’d met him.

“Get on your knees and grab the edge of the tub,” he ordered.

She didn’t argue, the passion controlling her actions. Her hands gripped the cold edge of the tub as she knelt on her knees which had the effect of putting her bottom almost in his face, right where he wanted her.

Clasping each of her cheeks with a hand, he buried his face between the crevice. Ella shuddered in anticipation. He spread her wide and licked her from her tight puckered hole

to her sensitized clit.

“Oh do that again,” she moaned.

Slowly, he licked her front to back, then back to front. Ella clutched the side of the tub desperately.

“Do you like it when I lick you?” he asked gruffly putting action to his words.

Shuddering, Ella replied.” Yes. Oh, yes.”

Grunting in satisfaction at her words, he delved between her wet folds, nuzzling her sex.

With an oath, he pulled away and Ella looked over her shoulder at him.

“Please, don’t stop.”

“I can still smell the blood of your breaching. I dare not taste you ‘til you heal, else I might not control myself.”

“Then bite me,” she said, wiggling her bottom at him. “I told you that I wanted to be the one to feed you and I meant it. I love you.” She said the words finally, the fierce look of joy on his face jolting her in a pleasurable way.

With no further encouragement, his mouth sucked her plump lips, his tongue spreading her and stabbing at her sheathe. His fingers dug into her buttocks as he kept her spread for his enjoyment. Pleasure coiled inside her, her womb tightening and readying itself to cum again. Taking his mouth off her sex, he replaced it with two probing fingers and as he stroked her wet insides, his lips brushed the tender skin of her thigh. Then he bit her.

* * * *

Immediately she came, keening his name, her pelvic muscles spasming around his fingers as he sucked her and prolonged her orgasm. Zane, in the back of his mind, realized he’d shot his own load of cum, so intense was the rapture that went through him at the taste of her blood. Unlike the small taste he’d gotten previously, this was a thick, undiluted meal, and it went beyond pleasurable right into fucking amazing; mind blowing, and even those words didn’t come close to explaining how it felt.

He also found he didn’t need as much for strength to course through him, energizing him like he’d never imagined.

Wrapping a drowsy Ella in a towel, he carried her back to bed and tucked her in. Dawn still lay a few hours away and the blood he’d ingested made him too restless to sleep yet.

“I’m going to work in my office for a bit,” he said kissing her swollen lips.

“Love you,” she murmured closing her eyes.

“I love you too, moonbeam. I’ll see you when the sun sets.”

Leaving her sleeping, he went down to his office, but ran into Hendricks on the way.

“Master, a doctor came calling earlier this eve looking for the young lady.”

“What?” His words sent a chill of foreboding down Zane’s spine.

“He claimed he was Mistress Ella’s doctor and that he was looking for her.”

“You told him nothing?” said Zane sharply.

“Of course, I didn’t,” said Hendricks indignantly. “But as an added precaution, I’ve increased the security around the house and grounds.”

“Excellent. If Ella wakes before I do on the morrow, keep her close to the house. Perhaps, I’ll take her to my villa in Italy for a while. It’s been a while since I’ve visited

my estate there.” Actually the more he thought of it, the more he wanted to take Ella to see his other home. Take her away and show her the world and the wonders it had to offer. “On second thought, I will take her. Please see to the preparations.”

“A sound idea master. I will make arrangements for your departure.” With a short bow, Hendricks took his leave.

Restless, he pondered on what clue he’d inadvertently left at the institution that had led the human doctor here. He could think of nothing, and that worried him.

I will not allow this doctor to take my moonbeam. I’ll kill him first.

Chapter Eleven

Marcus sniffed disdainfully at the guard he'd dispatched. He'd expected better security from a vampire. Make that less human security. If this was all the man had then this would be easier than he'd expected. But just in case the vamp proved to be stronger than his magic, he needed to move faster for the sun had begun to dip.

He debated for a moment, coming back the next day, bright and early. He'd meant to arrive earlier when the sun still sat high in the sky; however, locating the house had proven trickier than expected. The problem with leaving now was the string of dead guards he'd left in his wake that would notify them of this infiltration in short order. With the kind of funds this vamp appeared to have at his disposal, he could have her out of the country in a heartbeat.

Fuck it. He'd snag the stupid girl and be gone before the sun set. Inching closer and closer to the house, he couldn't believe his dumb luck when Ella of all people came out of some French doors at the back of the house cradling a steaming cup.

The power will be mine soon.

* * * *

"Hello, Ella."

She almost dropped her cup of coffee when Dr. Peters came strolling nonchalantly through the hedges that bordered the patio and pool.

"Dr. P-Peters," she stuttered in shock. "What are you doing here?"

"Why I've come to take you back, of course. You didn't really think we'd just let you walk away, did you?" he said smiling, even as he kept approaching.

The voices hissed in her mind.

"Bad man. He wants to hurt you."

"Quick. Someone wake the vamp."

"Run, foolish girl."

Ella cocked her head as she listened to what the voices had to say. Straightening her spine, she regarded the doctor coldly. "Stop where you are."

"Why? I won't hurt you."

"Liar. Did you forget?" She smiled at him, a knowing smile that made him falter. "I hear voices, and they don't like you."

"Smart spirits," replied the doctor and he threw something at her face, something that burned and made her drop to her knees with a cry.

Wrenching hands pulled her arms behind her back and bound them.

"There's no use calling out. The sun hasn't quite set yet, and I've taken care of the staff," taunted Dr. Peters.

Ella cried out anyway. "Zane!"

Dr. Peters slapped her across the face, cutting her lip. Ella could taste blood in her mouth, and it hurt, but she could also sense her power coiling as she and her little friends upstairs got mad.

"You shouldn't have done that," she said in a low voice, pulling in more of the

power, the voices cheering and babbling in her mind.

For a moment, she thought she'd won, but with a chilling smile, Dr. Peters pulled out a lighter and flicked it. The flame burned steadily and as she watched, almost hypnotized, the doctor, pulled out a bottle with a rag stuck in it.

"What are you doing?" she asked nervously, a sickening dread in her stomach.

"Fight me and this Molotov cocktail gets lit and thrown in the house," he said tilting his head towards the open patio door. "What do you think will kill him first? Smoke inhalation? Or will he burn to death?"

"No, don't." Ella held out her hands beseechingly. "I'll go with you, just put the fire out."

"You're not going anywhere," boomed Zane's voice as he stood in the shadow of the door.

* * * *

Zane wanted to bellow and curse at the predicament they found themselves in. He'd heard Ella's cry for help even as he slept. He'd woken instantly and known she faced danger. But watching the unfolding scene, he burned with helpless anger for the menace threatening his love lay out of his reach in dratted sunlight. He tried to take a step forward. Instantly burning pain sizzled through his body and his exposed skin smoked.

"Zane, no," Ella cried. Hissing, Zane took a step back, cursing his impotence.

The man, whom Zane assumed to be the doctor who'd come sniffing around earlier, smiled nastily. "Don't worry. I'll take good care of Ella." He used one hand to pat her on the head where she knelt and the foolish girl didn't look scared, she looked pissed.

A look that turned into rage when the puny man lit a bottle and threw it at the house. Zane wasn't stupid. He knew what a Molotov cocktail looked like. He let the flaming bottle crash over his head, not crazy enough to catch the bottle that would explode. He called out to Hendricks whom he sensed entering the room, out of breath as if he'd run. "Get the extinguisher." *Because I'm getting Ella, daylight or not.*

But in the seconds he'd been distracted, Ella had taken matters into her own hands—ghostly ones. Screaming in rage, she stood with her hands free while her hair floated in a halo around her head. Even more amazing, she floated a few inches off the ground. Zane's heart almost burst with love and his cock with lust, as his moonbeam, energized by her soul companions and looking like an absolute goddess of vengeance, lifted the doctor up kicking and screaming.

"How." She took a step towards him her eyes glowing translucently. "Dare." Another step. "You try to hurt Zane!" She shouted. A flick of her hands and the doctor flew backwards and hit the wall beside the door with a crash. Snaking an arm out and swallowing at the burning pain, Zane snagged the limp form of the doctor and held him up with a snarl.

"You shouldn't have touched her," he said simply and with his other hand, he slashed the good doctor's throat and tossed him to the side.

The he held his arms open for the frail form that hurtled into them.

Chapter Twelve

In the soothing comfort of Zane's arms, Ella's rage and fear began to fade. When she'd seen the doctor throw the bomb, she'd lost her mind. Not an unusual occurrence for her in the past. She still didn't quite understand why Dr. Peters had acted like he did. Nor did she care.

All she cared about was Zane. Blindly, she lifted her lips and sighed in relief as he kissed her, his hands roaming over her body.

"Are you injured?" he murmured in between nibbles."

"No," she whispered back before sucking on his lower lip. "What about the bomb?"

"Hendricks took care of it."

The sound of rending cloth preceded the cooler air on her bared buttocks.

"I need you. Now," he said picking her up. "Put your legs around my waist."

Ella eagerly complied, the throbbing hardness of his cock pulsing against her moist sex.

A wall braced her back, Zane having moved even as he kept devouring her lips.

Big, capable hands cupped her buttocks and he used to them to rub her groin against him, driving her wild.

"Fuck me, Zane," she said impatient.

"Or?" he said, grinding himself against her.

"Or I'll use my new powers to hold you down helpless while I torture you."

Zane groaned. "Maybe later."

Finally, the mushroomed head of his cock probed at her plump lips and when he slid inside, Ella sighed. Deep he went, his thickness stretching her pleasantly and she clenched around him.

Still holding her with an arousing strength, he pumped into her, his rod slipping in and out of her tight sheath, hitting the bottom of her womb and making her cry out.

Faster he drilled her. The pleasure built in her body, a coiling heat that made her clutch at his shoulders tightly.

"Bite me," she gasped.

He buried his face in the curve of her neck, his hips still pistoning and when his sharp teeth broke her skin, Ella screamed.

Wave after wave of bliss rolled through her body, a never ending rapture that left her floating.

With a shudder, she vaguely felt Zane's body go rigid as he spilled inside of her, his own pleasure found.

Arms wrapped tightly around her, he nuzzled her cheek and whispered. "I love you."

"And I'm *crazy* about you," she murmured back.

She joined him in laughter, cherishing the moment and the love she'd found.

And the voices smartly said nothing to ruin it.

Epilogue

Zane left his beloved in the care of Felicia, the person he trusted most next to himself to have the power to keep Ella safe. Oddly enough, his moonbeam and oldest vampire friend had hit it off and not just because of the magic. Felicia said she found Ella refreshing.

It was just as well they'd decided to do a marathon of *Blade* movies for he had other business to attend to. Hendricks had dug up the information Zane had requested and now he stood in front of a small, well-kept home not far from the institution he'd found Ella in.

Unlike the movies and the legends, he didn't need an invitation to enter. His night vision, helped him navigate the cluttered home until he stood over the sleeping occupant—Ella's mother. The bitch who had abandoned an innocent child because she happened to be different.

Ella claimed she didn't care and she understood why her parents had abandoned her. However, Zane knew better. He'd seen the hurt Ella tried to hide when she'd finally told him about her childhood. An eye for an eye he always said. This pathetic excuse of a woman had hurt his moonbeam, and now he would hurt her in return. The father had unfortunately passed away many years before else he'd also be facing Zane's brand of justice.

In seconds, he held her by the throat, pinned to the wall. Her eyes opened and bulged as she gasped for air.

"Well, if it isn't the mother of the year," he drawled sarcastically. "I'm here on Ella's behalf."

The older woman made choking sounds and Zane let up the pressure on her just enough to let her speak.

"Did you have something to say? Maybe how it was cruel to dump your daughter at the asylum and never look back. She was just a little girl," he snarled.

"She's—She's not my daughter."

The words made his eyes widen in surprise then narrow. He took his hand off her throat and let her feet drop to the floor. She staggered and rubbed at her neck.

"Explain," he said crossing his arms over his chest.

Babbling quickly she told him the short tale. In a nutshell, she and her husband were unable to have children of their own. One day, they woke to find a basket on their kitchen table with a sleeping baby girl. Documents attesting they were the parents plus a sum of money had been left with the baby along with a cryptic note.

"Do you still have the note?" he asked, baffled at this strange turn of events.

The woman licked her dry lips. "No, but I remember what it said. 'Guard her well, for the fate of the world may well rest on her shoulders.'"

The message sent a chill through Zane. One he'd ponder later. "You didn't do a very good job of guarding though, did you?" he accused.

"You don't know what it was like. Even as a baby, she was strange. As she got older, it got worse. She could hear voices and the things she claimed they told her. Disgusting."

"So you had her locked up?"

“We did it for her own good. Don’t you see? We had to.” The woman defended her actions.

But Zane hadn’t heard anything that justified their actions. He tried her in the courts of his morality and found her ... guilty.

So he killed her. Welcome to his version of justice.

* * * *

Ella sensed him the moment he stepped into Felicia’s office, so she turned to face him with a smile. As always, when she saw him, even looking so fierce, her heart skipped a beat. *So handsome and all mine.* It still amazed her that someone like him could love her. *But then again, I’m not the girl I used to be or thought I was.*

Drastic was the only word to describe all the major changes in her life. Discovering she had an innate power and, even better, learning how to use that ability, removed her last traces of fear. *Now let them try and lock me away. With my newfound powers, I will never be a prisoner again.*

Ella wondered at the grim look Zane wore as he strode to her, but she forgot everything as usual when he swept her into his arms and kissed her hard. The flames of her desire ignited immediately and she thanked providence when she sensed Felicia leave the room to give them privacy.

But she couldn’t allow the distraction of his lips and her lust make her forget. She pulled her lips reluctantly from his. “I want to show you something.”

“That’s funny, so do I.” He gave her such a masculine grin of pure mischief, she melted, heat pooling between her legs.

“Zane, please. I’ve been practicing all night.”

“What happened to watching movies?” He cocked a brow at her, but she could tell he wasn’t angry.

Ella stepped back from him and closed her eyes. She concentrated and directed what she wanted the energy to do. Slowly, her feet left the floor as she hovered in the air. She opened her eyes and smiled triumphantly at him. “I can float. Now the next time we need to scale a wall, I’ll be able to do it myself!”

* * * *

Zane chuckled at her obvious pleasure in her new ability. “I’d prefer to carry you, personally. Maybe naked next time, if you don’t mind, but I’m happy you’re learning to use your powers.”

As he hugged her tight, he closed his eyes and buried his face in her silvery hair, enjoying the warmth of her presence. He also made a decision.

He’d debated on the ride back from Ella’s mother what he would do or say about what he’d learned. Honestly, the fate of the world bothered him not one bit, but Ella’s did. Forewarned, vigilance would be his new mandate, always alert to possible danger, ready to protect her. *I will let no one, be they man, beast or spirit harm you, my precious love. You and I shall be together ... forever.*

The End

About the Author:

Eve Langlais, who is in her mid thirties, has been married 11 years to a wonderful man who gave her three beautiful, but distracting children aged ten, seven and four. A military brat, she was born in British Columbia but ended up living all across Canada. She now resides with her family, that also includes two cats and a guinea pig, in the historic town of Bowmanville, Ontario. If you want to get to know her better visit her website at <http://www.Evelanglais.com> or friend her on FaceBook.

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