



ANASTASIA MALTEZOS

WHEN THE
SUN
SETS

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The man who saved her continued to hold her firmly in his grip as he looked down at her face.

“Are you all right?”

Cat looked up at him, ready to thank him for saving her life, and felt her breath catch in her throat. My God! It was her fantasy man. The man was gorgeous, she thought in a daze. He had longish black hair, eyes the color of the midnight sky, and a mouth that oozed sensuality. But it was his skin that made her stare at him. It was smooth and translucent, almost as though there was a faint glow about him. He had the face of an angel, a dark angel, because everything else around him was black. A black coat, black hair, black eyes. Even his mood seemed...black.

Cat couldn’t find her voice. “I’m...I’m fine. Thank...thank you.” Their gazes locked, and she caught the look of recognition on his handsome face. Had she met him before? “You saved my life,” she whispered.

When the Sun Sets

by

Anastasia Maltezos

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

When the Sun Sets

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Dedication

To: Richard Pothier

Chapter One

Disgusted, Tobias Knight tossed the vampire killer on the floor, before scanning the thread bare apartment. As a four hundred year old vampire, who had seen it all, nothing shocked or surprised him, but then his gaze caught the book on the coffee table. His body stiffened in disbelief.

He grabbed the book, clenching his jaw, and stared at the picture of the woman on the jacket. Tobias felt his cold, unfeeling heart jolt, his gut clench, and his breath stop. He held the book tightly, his knuckles showing white, as his heart and mind warred with the picture of the lovely lady. *It couldn't be. After all these centuries, Seraphina couldn't be alive, could she?*

His beautiful Seraphina.

Gone for over three hundred years, she'd left him alone to live as the undead for centuries—with nothing but torment and anguish in his cold heart. No, that wasn't true. He felt hate. Hate for the Granger clan who had mercilessly killed his beloved.

The Granger at his feet stirred, moaning under his breath. Tobias cast a harsh look at him. His vision grew so dark he viewed the killer through a black haze. His heart was cold, his blood like ice in his veins, the last of its warmth gone the day Seraphina died.

"Where did you get this?" Tobias asked, his tone deadly calm.

The Granger's face twisted with hate. "Doesn't matter, demon bastard. We're already on her trail. Very soon we'll send her straight to hell where she belongs." He coughed and hacked, trying to get some

air back into his lungs. He spat blood from his swollen lip. "The demon bitch has come back from the dead, but she won't last long in this life. She's only a mortal now and all we have to do is snap her little neck."

Logic warred with Tobias. He knew the woman couldn't be Seraphina, but a small part of him wasn't so sure. And that small part surprised him into feeling a more human emotion. Hope. Besides, he had seen enough in his long life not to question anything. Werewolves, shape shifters, witches—they all existed, and he wasn't about to discount reincarnation.

He stared at her picture, not particularly bothered by the man still gasping at his feet. This Granger couldn't harm him. He was as useless and annoying as a gnat.

The modern day Seraphina's name was Cat Luster, and she was a writer of paranormal erotica. His lips curled with wry amusement. The modern day Seraphina was not unlike his Seraphina of the past. Vampire lovemaking was the ultimate in pleasure and passion. And three hundred years hadn't helped him forget the height of ecstasy of their past lovemaking.

He stared at Cat Luster's sky blue eyes beneath delicately winged brows, and sensual lips and felt a discomfort in his lower limbs—the past rushing forth. Her face was a replica of Seraphina's, and he couldn't tear his gaze away. Her hair, the same color, pale blonde curls that fell past her shoulders, the teasing look in her eyes, and a hint of a smile on her mouth made Tobias wonder again at the Granger's words.

Had she returned? Was this Seraphina? He doubted it, but he couldn't help feeling he needed to warn her of the Grangers' plot to kill her. After all, this woman, this Cat Luster, was a mere mortal. She didn't have the immense strength and powers of a

vampire to protect herself. Tobias sighed heavily—he had to find her and save her. He stared back at the picture and frowned darkly. This woman was an innocent and he had to protect her. He ignored the annoying human feeling resurfacing in his chest. Hope. There had been no hope in his life for centuries. No light, only darkness, and the quicker he found her and helped her change her life into one of anonymity, the quicker he could return to his dark, morbid existence.

He knelt by the man and grabbed his chin, jerking his now frightened face up to his. “Where is she?” Tobias asked, focusing on the man’s eyes.

“Go to hell, demon.” The Granger spat more blood on the floor. “She’s as good as dead now. It’s only a matter of time before my brothers find and kill her.”

Tobias grabbed the man by the collar and raised him off the ground. The Granger flailed and gasped in the air as Tobias continued to focus on his wide eyes. “I said where is she?” He growled.

The man struggled, but the effect of Tobias’ strong will and mind thoughts caused his body to go still.

“You have a choice,” Tobias began quietly, staring deep into the man’s eyes. “Use your free will and tell me where she is. Or I will make you tell me what I need to know.” He hated looking into the minds of these killers. They were an evil, vicious lot and their hate for his kind felt like fire burning through his soul.

“Never.”

Dammit! Tobias grimaced, narrowed his eyes, and concentrated.

The man went limp. His mind grew foggy, his vision blurred, and Tobias felt a stab of arrogance. He knew the killer knew of his immense powers. His mouth twisted. This Granger knew he had the power to alter thoughts and control minds. His victim

fought Tobias' control, and failed miserably. Tobias continued to plough and dig with his mind until he found what he needed.

He tossed the Granger back onto the floor.

"Be thankful I'm sparing your life. If I ever see you again, I won't be so forgiving."

The man looked relieved and shocked all at once. "You're going to let me live?" His words came out in a croak.

Tobias laughed, but it lacked warmth and humor. Slowly he lowered himself before the man and pressed a hand to his already throbbing temple. He hated doing this. He hated it because it always gave him a damn headache afterwards. "Hardly. A man living without his memories is hardly living, is he?"

The Granger's face contorted with panic and fear. He opened his mouth to scream, but it was too late. Tobias' eyes had already locked into his, and he proceeded to empty the man of all his memories.

She squirmed as he poured a small amount of lotion on her belly. Slowly, and without taking his dark gaze off hers, he rubbed the lotion all over her stomach and breasts. She felt like she was going to burst into flames at his searing caresses. She tugged at the silken rope binding her arms and legs at the bedposts. Kelly wasn't sure this was such a good idea. This lotion was everything Chad had said it would be and more. A sex enhancer. A lotion made to increase your lust and desire a hundredfold.

"Please, Chad, I can't wait..." she said huskily.

Cat leaned back in her seat and stared at her computer screen. Writing erotica always aroused her, and she smiled as she reread what she'd just typed.

Catherine Lancaster, aka Cat Luster as her fans knew her, saved her work, and then shut off her

computer. It was getting late, she had made a lot of progress today with her latest book, *The Sex Potion*, and it was time for bed.

She brushed her teeth, slipped out of her clothes, and crawled into bed naked. The three-room cabin—her agent's—was dark, quiet, and cozy. All she could hear was the howling wind of snow and sleet outside. It was a cold night, but the rustic cabin was heated, and Cat felt all comfy and toasty in bed.

She thought about her agent, Melanie Crawford, who was also her dear friend, and smiled. What would she do without her? When Mel heard Cat's fiancé had broken their engagement because Cat's visit to her doctor for a physical had confirmed she could not have children, she'd suggested Cat finish her latest erotica away from the city. The country cabin was nestled deep in the woods, miles away from civilization and any reminders of her fiancé.

Cat had jumped at the chance. Nursing a broken heart had made finishing her latest book an almost impossible task. Staying at Mel's cabin had seemed like a good idea and now she realized it had been the best solution.

She'd been here only a week and already she'd completed chapters four and five.

Her ex flitted before her eyes and she frowned. Resentment and anger flared up inside of her, and she pushed him back into the dark recesses of her mind—where he belonged. Mel had been right. Simon Holtfrew was not for her. They had wanted different things and at the end of the day it was better they had ended it now instead of later with a divorce.

A feeling of gloom and sadness surrounded her, but not because of Simon. Her heart felt heavy because of the shocking news she couldn't have children. She loved children and the thought of never having a child stabbed at her heart.

She shifted uncomfortably in the bed. It

wouldn't do going to sleep depressed so she did what she always did when she felt down and needed to lift her spirits. She thought about *him*. Not Simon. *Him*. The fictional, fantasy man her overactive imagination had conjured up since her first erotica book.

A small smile began to play about her lips as she thought of him. She was already starting to feel a bit better. She closed her eyes against the soft glow of light the snow-veiled moon filtered against the walls and pictured him.

She'd thought about him for years. Even when she made love with Simon, her fantasy man always invaded her mind. Cat had never told anyone about him. She couldn't. They would think she was crazy.

He was a private part of her heart and mind, and all the dark, sensual, sexy thoughts of him helped with her creative flow—enabling her to write one best seller after another—erotica tales with paranormal twists.

Her fantasy man was tall and muscular, with longish, thick black hair, and brilliant dark eyes. He had the face of a ruthless warrior, all angles and shadows, with thick, black lashes and a fierce expression. Her mind's eye flickered over his strong jaw, prominent eyebrows, and a mouth so beautifully sculpted, it looked both cruel and sensual at the same time.

Her fantasy man was all male. Ruthless, strong, masculine, with an energy that consumed her femininity with a mere, searing glance from him.

He epitomized virility with such intensity, Cat sometimes felt the crazy notion she had met him somewhere before.

She slipped her hand beneath the covers and slid it slowly over her warm flesh as she pictured him in her mind.

"You're so beautiful," he whispered hoarsely within her imagination, his deep, sultry voice

tantalizing her nerve endings.

Her hands went over her breasts and she sighed. In her mind, it was her fantasy man touching her breasts. He fondled her, caressed her, and stroked her. She imagined his strong, muscular body over hers, his hot kisses on her neck, his hands working their magic over her heated body.

The screeching sound of the cabin's pipes expanding and contracting snapped her out of her reverie, and she opened her eyes.

A sense of loneliness pervaded her limbs and settled in her heart. She always felt sad when she thought of him. For a long time, she had so wanted him to be real, but she knew the difference between make believe and real life. And her fantasy man was all make believe. A product of her sensual, overactive, wild imagination.

Turning onto her side, she sighed, and fell asleep—her last thoughts of her dark, dangerous, warrior and how he filled a deep part of her that had always seemed empty

Chapter Two

Cat woke up the next morning feeling refreshed and energetic. She always woke up in good spirits after a productive writing session. She stretched lazily before she got out of bed. The snow had stopped, but the sky was overcast and dull.

She showered, changed into jeans and a warm, brown sweater, and made her usual breakfast of toast and coffee. She had two chapters left to write on *The Sex Potion* and at the rate she was going, she would have them done by the weekend.

She glanced at the bundle by the fireplace and noticed she was running low on wood. The nearest town was a good fifty miles away, and Cat decided she would take up the morning to fill up on supplies. When she returned she'd work on her book.

Thank God Mel had had the foresight to leave the keys to the black Hummer. Otherwise, she didn't think her own BMW was going to make it through the winding, snow packed roads.

She put on her warm parka, pulled on her boots, and grabbed the keys. If all went well and the roads weren't too bad, she would be back by lunchtime and could get down to work.

The drive took longer than expected because of the snow and icy patches, but within the hour she parked the vehicle in front of the town's general store. It was a quaint little place, with little stores lined up along Main Street and Christmas lights decorating the trees and shrubs along the walk. She smiled as she got out, realizing she would have loved to live in a quiet town like this. Ever since her break up with Simon, and with no real family or friends in

the city apart from Mel, nothing really held her back. She wondered if she should give the idea more serious thought.

She crossed the street and purchased her wood. She carried it out of the store and without warning, a heavysset man walked right into her. Cat dropped all the wood, feeling a flash of annoyance at him for not looking where he was going.

"I'm sorry, Miss. Here let me help you." The stranger bent down and started arranging the wood into a pile before he picked it up.

Cat smiled stiffly at him. "It's no trouble. I should have been watching where I was going."

The man didn't return her smile, his expression rigid and cold. She frowned slightly when she noticed his gaze darting behind her. He looked anxious, excited.

"My fault, Miss, let me help you get this to your car. It's the least I can do." His offer carried a curious thread of resentment beneath its tone.

He was probably having a hard day. Surely he didn't think it was her fault they ran into each other? "My car's just across the street." She noticed the man's eyes continue to dart behind her. He carried the wood to the curb and paused, waiting for Cat to cross the street.

"Where is it?" He asked abruptly.

She started to feel uncomfortable. This man was obviously not in the mood to help her and she made a move to take the wood from his hands. Maybe her earlier annoyance with him hadn't been misplaced, she thought testily. "It's the black Hummer. Here let me take that. You're very kind to want to help me, but I can manage."

He took a step back and gave her a hard glare. "No. It's...it's the least I can do."

Cat's discomfort fled and she shrugged, deciding a few moments of this man's time wasn't going to kill him. "Fine. The car's this way."

She crossed the street and began walking to the Hummer while she looked in her purse for her keys. She heard an engine roar as a woman's scream hung in the air and Cat looked around to see a truck barreling its way towards her. She froze, realizing from her peripheral vision that the man carrying her wood was still on the curb.

"Look out!" A woman from the sidewalk yelled.

The truck loomed closer. Panic and shock filled her legs with lead and she couldn't move. Suddenly, a dark shadow moved with lightening speed towards her, lifted her in powerful arms, and carried her off to the side as the truck sped over the spot she had been standing on.

The man who saved her continued to hold her firmly in his grip as he looked down at her face. "Are you all right?"

Cat looked up at him, ready to thank him for saving her life, and felt her breath catch in her throat. My God! It was her fantasy man. The man was gorgeous, she thought in a daze. He had longish black hair, eyes the color of the midnight sky, and a mouth that oozed sensuality. But it was his skin that made her stare at him. It was smooth and translucent, almost as though there was a faint glow about him. He had the face of an angel, a dark angel, because everything else around him was black. A black coat, black hair, black eyes. Even his mood seemed...black.

Cat couldn't find her voice. "I'm...I'm fine. Thank...thank you." Their gazes locked, and she caught the look of recognition on his handsome face. Had she met him before? "You saved my life," she whispered.

His face took on a grim look—darkening the hypnotic glow on his skin, and he looked over her shoulder and glared at the man holding her wood. "Drop it, Granger," he said in a soft tone.

Frowning, Cat looked at the heavyset man who

carried her wood and watched him drop everything to the ground. Her frown deepened. Did they know each other?

"It's not over, Knight," the heavysset man spoke harshly. "You and your demon bitch will soon go back to hell." Without saying anything else, he jumped into the silver, four-door sedan that skidded to a halt beside him. The car sped away, leaving Cat thoroughly confused, dazed, and not a little afraid.

She stared up the stranger, frowning. "What was that all about? Do you know him?"

He kept his arms around her as he looked down. His eyes seemed darker, more brilliant, as he stared deeply into her gaze and she felt her limbs grow curiously weak.

"Yes," he said deeply.

Cat tried to pull away, but his hold on her was firm. "You can let go of me now."

He set her back on her feet, removed his arms from around her waist, and ran a rough hand through his hair. "It's not safe for you here. You must come with me."

A thread of fear started to crawl up her spine. "Are you telling me that truck was trying to run me over?"

"Yes."

"And you know that man?"

"Yes."

Irritation coated her words. "Can you give me more information than one word replies?" She looked around for a policeman. "I'm calling the cops." She reached into her purse for her cell phone.

He grabbed her hand to stop her. "Don't. Cat, I'm here to help you, not harm you."

"You're serious, right? That man tried to kill me? Why?" Her voice rose and then escalated with fear.

"They've been following you."

"I don't understand."

“This could be a case of mistaken identity, but now I’m not so sure,” he murmured in a deep, hypnotic tone, his dark, smoldering gaze running over her features. He seemed disturbed, almost surprised at some private revelation. The hazy clouds moved, and a ray of sunlight fell on them. He seemed to flinch, his jaw tightening, and Cat frowned as she watched him cast an irritated look at the sky.

She looked around her for anyone who could help her get away from this crazy man. She heard the distant sound of a police siren. “Why have they been following me? And how do you know my name?”

He tossed a quick glance toward the sound of the police siren and gave her a dark look. “We have to leave. I can’t explain everything to you here. We’ll go back to your cabin.”

Her fear turned to panic. Did this man know where she was staying? She heard the siren grow closer and felt a stab of relief when a cop car stopped a few feet away from her.

“I don’t know who you are, but you obviously know me. And right now I want you to leave me alone before I tell the cop to arrest you for attempted murder.” Was he an overzealous fan, she thought? It happened to Cat in the past when fans became aggressive and sent threatening mail to her post office box.

The man reached for her cheek and looked deeply into her eyes. “No, you won’t, Cat,” he said quietly.

She wanted to tell him to leave her alone, but she couldn’t speak, staring up into his dark gaze, his pupils so black they looked opaque. She felt a strange peace envelope her as the cop neared her side. A veil of calm draped over her body and soothed her tension away. Pacifying her, relaxing her, making her feel safe and secure. Her mind warred with the heady calm surrounding her, and a small

recess at the back of her mind jolted in surprise. His eyes. Oh my God, he was doing this to her.

"Miss, we got a call there was a possible hit and run. Are you all right?" The policeman asked.

The stranger put his arm around Cat, and she continued to feel mesmerized, drugged, as if her actions weren't her own and someone or something was in complete control over her. Cat looked up at the cop and smiled stiffly. "I'm...I'm fine. This man saved me. I didn't get a look at the truck's license plate, but—"

"The plate was 674RT3," her rescuer told the cop. "It was a two door, blue, ninety eight Ford, and had a dent on the passenger door."

The cop jotted everything down in his black notebook. "Thank you. I'll run this through dispatch and see if we can come up with anything."

"I appreciate it."

Cat couldn't speak. She couldn't move. She tried to get the cop's attention with her eyes, but he was looking at the stranger, asking him if he got a good look at the driver.

"Where can we reach you?" The cop asked him after jotting more notes in his pad.

"About fifty miles out at 675 Newberry Road. The phone number is 555-9078."

Cat would have gasped if she hadn't felt so leaden and trapped. The cop went back to his patrol car and left. Slowly, she felt her body return to normal, and she gasped for air as she stumbled out of his arms.

My God, what had he done to her?

"Don't come any closer—"

"Cat, wait—"

"No. I'll scream."

She ran to the Hummer and jumped into the driver's seat. She had to get out of here. And when she returned to the cabin, she was going to pack her bags and leave. He knew where she was staying and

she didn't want to wait around for him.

Nervously, she glanced at her rear view mirror and saw the stranger where she left him, his tall, muscular frame motionless as he watched her start the Hummer. Another ray of sunlight hit him, and she frowned as he covered his face and disappeared from sight. She floored the gas.

The drive back was a blur. Cat tried calling the cops on her cell phone, but she couldn't get a connection, and she threw the phone in disgust on the seat beside her. What a perfect time to lose service. As soon as she reached the cabin she went straight for the landline. It was dead.

Cat panicked. She turned on her computer and gaped at the black screen. Dead.

"This isn't happening," she whispered brokenly.

Relieved, she noticed the lights worked, the stove, the radio, everything—except the items she needed to communicate with to the outside world.

She gasped, placing a shaky hand on her mouth as she ran to lock the front door, checked all the windows, and scrambled through Mel's cabin as she grabbed all her things and threw them in her suitcases. By the time everything was packed a good thirty minutes had passed, and her heart raced a mile a minute.

She carried her bags to the door and stepped outside, locking the door behind her. With her heart lodged in her throat, she carried her bags to her BMW and threw them in the trunk. Fumbling with her keys, she managed to unlock her door, and fall into the driver's seat.

She turned on the ignition. Nothing. The engine rolled and rolled without starting. She attempted to start the car again and still nothing.

"Damn it." She took a deep breath to calm her frayed nerves.

She would have to take Mel's Hummer. After a few minutes gathering her bags and tossing them

into the Hummer, she turned on the ignition and the same thing happened. The engine rolled and rolled and didn't start. Paranoia settled in. Cat didn't think this was a coincidence, and she jumped out of the Hummer and ran to the hood. She popped it open and saw the hatchet job someone had done to the engine. Her heart skipped a beat and she looked around her, her eyes wide with fear.

And then she saw him, the heavyset man who had bumped into her earlier. He held a gun in one hand and a sharp wooden stake in the other. Cat screamed as he raised the gun and pointed it at her.

Terrified, she ran behind the Hummer as the man fired a shot. It missed her and hit the windshield of the Hummer—shattering it into a thousand pieces.

Oh my God! She was going to die! This wasn't happening, she thought wildly. "What do you want?" She yelled from where she crouched behind the Hummer.

She heard him crunching through the snow as he made his way to her. She had no where to hide, nowhere else to go. What was she going to do now? She couldn't outrun a bullet. Cat saw her life flash before her eyes and whimpered.

He stood over her, and she looked up at his face, her lips trembling with her unspoken plea. The man stared at her with such malevolent hatred, her legs gave way and she fell on the snow.

"Why are you doing this to me? What do you want?"

He tucked the gun into his pocket and raised the stake. "To rid the world of foul, evil creatures like you. And after I kill you, Tobias Knight will be next."

"No!" She screamed, shrinking back with terror. At the back of her mind, she registered the heavyset man had called her rescuer Knight.

The gun-baring lunatic came closer, his expression darkening with hate and rage as he

raised the stake higher. "Die, bitch."

Cat felt her heart stop when a flash of darkness swooped down on the man. She choked on a gasp. It was the handsome stranger who'd saved her. Tobias Knight. Cat didn't have time to register where he had appeared from or how he moved so fast. All she could do was gape at him as he grabbed the heavyset man by the hair and pulled his head all the way back.

"It's over, Granger," he growled.

His face glowed with danger, his eyes flashed fire, and he opened his mouth— baring two long, pointy incisors. Something dark and sinister registered at the back of Cat's mind, but she couldn't believe the implication. His eyes were wild with rage as he bit down on the man's neck. The reality of what she had just witnessed made Cat lose any last shred of sanity she had left, and she screamed at the top of her lungs.

She caught another movement from behind Tobias and saw two other men coming into view. A young man in a dark parka and an older man wearing a thick blue coat. They both carried crossbows with wooden stakes.

"No. Father!" The younger man yelled. He pointed the crossbow at the handsome stranger.

"Look out!" She couldn't contemplate why she was helping a...a...tremors shook through her...a vampire? What else could he be? Who had two-inch long fangs and moved like lightening? And what about the glow around his face? That eerie, pale, radiance that made his skin gleam. And earlier, when he had done some weird kind of mind meld thing with her and she couldn't speak to the policeman? Cat began to hyperventilate as she watched the terrifying scene unravel before her eyes.

Tobias let the limp body of the heavyset man fall to the ground and spun around to the young man pointing the crossbow at him.

Dangerously close to having a heart attack, she gaped at Tobias' pale face and bloodied mouth. He looked more animal than human, wild and dangerous, and he growled at the two men.

"I didn't kill him," he began harshly, "but he will be out for a few days. Take his body back to where you came from and hope you never see me again, because the next time you do, I will kill you."

In disbelief, Cat watched him spring with inhuman speed towards the men and disarm them of their weapons. She gasped, watching him return to the heavyset man's body as he lifted him with one hand off the ground and flung him at the two men.

"Go back to your family, Grangers," he growled. "Tell the Elder he did not accomplish what he wanted. And tell him," he added harshly, his eyes narrowing dangerously, "if any one of you ever comes within a hundred feet of this woman, I will kill you with my bare hands. Go. Tell him."

The two men whimpered and scampered away, carrying the unconscious man, their faces pale from fright. They disappeared around the cabin, and Cat heard an engine start and peel away.

She couldn't breathe. She felt faint and weak and knew she was close to passing out. She fought for air in her lungs, struggled to stand, and failed miserably as she felt her body sway, the light dim before her eyes. The last thing she saw before she fainted dead away was Tobias Knight bending down towards her, lifting her into his arms, his incisors gone.

Her fantasy man was a vampire, she thought with an odd calm as she slumped her head onto his shoulder, a strangled moan escaping her lips.

Chapter Three

She felt the same hypnotic veil around her body again as a pair of strong hands undressed and place her in bed. A blanket covered her body.

“Sleep now. We will talk when you wake up.”
The beautiful, deep voice said quietly.

Cat didn't know how, but she did fall asleep

Cat stirred from her dreamless sleep and opened her eyes, frowning at the strange sound coming from the living room. The sound was a mixture of thuds and fabric being ripped. A cold sensation swept through her limbs.

“What the—“

Disoriented, she glanced at the clock on her nightstand. It was well after midnight. Something at the back of her mind nagged her, taunted her to remember, and she slipped out of bed, glancing down at her naked body. She frowned. Cat always slept in the nude, but for some curious reason she couldn't remember getting ready for bed. She reached for her white, satin robe and made her way into the living room.

The strange noise persisted, and she wondered if one of the shutters on the windows were loose again.

And then she stepped into the living room and saw him. She froze as all the terror and fright she had experienced earlier came crashing back into her mind, leaving her breathless.

He was standing near the fireplace, ripping and tearing firewood with his bare hands as he placed them on the rack. She watched him visibly stiffen, drop the wood, and slowly turn around. Cat felt her

heart skip a beat as he ran a dark, narrow gaze over her appearance. His eyes felt like fire on her skin, leaving a trail of heat from the top of her head to the tip of her toes. She had the strangest feeling he was undressing her with his eyes and she felt an odd, inexplicable sexual awareness run between them.

"I retrieved your wood from the curb," he offered slowly, his gaze dropping to her breasts.

"Oh," she replied huskily, feeling like Alice tumbling down the rabbit hole. "Who are you?"

"Tobias Knight."

She gulped. She had meant to ask him, *what* are you? "Are you...you're a vampire." She couldn't believe she had just announced it as calmly as mentioning the weather looked like rain.

"Yes."

The knowledge left her feeling strangely calm. "What do you want with me?"

He wasn't wearing his black coat, and her gaze flickered over his towering physique clad in a black shirt and black pants. Her first thought was how huge this man was, six foot three inches of muscle and strength and again she felt fear.

Suddenly, a strange, eerie calm surrounded her, as though invisible hands soothed her fears away. She darted a nervous glance at the front door. The invisible hands continued their path along her shoulders, down her back, around her waist, up to her breasts. Cat gasped. She was dreaming. This couldn't be real. A tremor shot through her body as her breasts were fondled. Her bones were melting, and she moaned softly.

Tobias's stare held hers, and her blood pounded in her ears. Her heart raced, and the invisible hands continued to work their magic until she calmed down.

A sensation of fire moved lower until it reached the spot where her legs met, caressing her, and she nearly collapsed at the sweet ecstasy his touched

invoked. Tobias's expression shifted and Cat watched the fierce, ruthless look cast a menacing shadow across his face. An imperceptible groan from deep within his throat reached her, and she gasped.

Grim determination stalked his face, and he strode to her and grabbed the collar of her robe. Roughly, he shoved the robe over her shoulders and let it drop in a pool of satin to the floor. Cat wasn't afraid. She felt the hypnotic veil of the invisible hands draw her towards him. He lifted her naked body into his arms.

"Is it really you?" His voice was a husky baritone.

She wanted to ask whom he was talking about, but she couldn't find her voice. She leaned her head onto his massive shoulder and closed her eyes, inhaling his male scent, filling her lungs with his musky, woodsy sweetness. She could feel his eyes on her naked flesh and sighed. Cat liked this dream.

He carried her to the bedroom and placed her on the bed. She ran her gaze over his towering physique, his expression fierce with need and desire, his clenched jaw. She felt a tremor of anticipation as his dark gaze roamed over her body, her peaked breasts yearning for his touch.

This was a dream. How else could she explain the hypnotic, trancelike state she was in? And how could she explain her fantasy man here in the flesh? How could she explain any of it? The fangs, the crazy men who tried to kill her, her fantasy man who was now watching her with a look that left her breathless?

Yes, she was going to like this dream very much, she thought. "Take off your clothes," she said huskily.

"Say my name. Say it," he ground out.

Cat felt a flicker of fear. "Tobias," she whispered.

His expression softened slightly, and he began

to remove his clothes. Cat lay back in awe as she watched his masculine splendor revealed. His body was magnificent. All muscle and brawn, with a powerfully built chest and chiseled arms. His legs were long and well built, and his sex stood erect, a powerful looking member that made her doubt she could receive its size.

The only other man she had ever had sex with was Simon, and he didn't even compare to this man's virility. Fear took on a new form for her, and she started to feel the hands work their magic again with her body, her heart, her mind. Only this time they felt like they were withdrawing.

"When I take you, I do not want you under my spell. I want you to come to me willingly."

As the bone melting touch slowly retreated, she watched him lower his body over hers and panic settled in. Fear replaced calm, alarm replaced passion, as reality slaked its cold truth. Terrified, she realized her fantasy man was going to rape her.

She opened her mouth to scream, but his punishing kiss silenced the sound. His body was warm and firm over hers, his lips bruising hers, and she struggled beneath his weight. She tried pushing him away, but it was like an ant pushing an anvil and in frustration she pounded his back. He didn't relent. His kiss was deep and furious and she felt his hard member press up against her heated flesh.

He grabbed her hands and gripped them firmly over her head as he raised his head and looked down at her face. "Don't fight me. We have both waited too long for this."

"Stop!" Gasping, she stared at his brilliant dark eyes, her heart pounding in her throat, her mind racing towards madness as she felt her enflamed body tingle with sexual awareness. "Don't...don't do this."

"Is it truly you, Seraphina? Tell me it's you," he said hoarsely.

"My name is Cat," she replied, feeling a spurt of ridiculous annoyance.

"Yes. You are Cat," he countered, his voice dropping to a lower timbre.

Cat panicked as his eyes bore down on hers, his expression ruthless and fierce. "You said you wanted me to come to you willingly. I'm not willing. Now get off me!"

A satisfied gleam entered his brilliant, dark gaze. "I can feel your body flaming with my touch. I can hear your heart beating with excitement. My little erotica writer. When I saw your picture on your book jacket I refused to believe it was possible." He bent his dark head and took her breast in his mouth.

She couldn't help but moan with pleasure, tossing her head from side to side. Oh my god, she was enjoying this. This man was forcing himself on her, and she was actually enjoying it. She tried to free her trapped hands from above her head, but he kept his grip firm, bruising her wrists.

"Please. Don't," she pleaded.

"You are mine. You have always been mine. And after tonight we will never be separated again."

"You're crazy. No."

But her body was saying yes. Her body shook and trembled with need. He freed her hands and cupped her face, bringing his mouth down to covers hers in a hot, passionate kiss. Against her own volition, she opened her mouth and their tongues met, his plunging deep. Cat gave up as an overwhelming rush of need invaded her limbs. She felt crazed, out of control, passionate as her mind separated from her body, her only thought to satiate the need overpowering the fear she'd fought. She slid her arms around his shoulders, and he groaned hoarsely against her lips. This was sheer madness, she thought, feeling dazed, alarmed, and turned on all at once.

She despised her body's treachery, loathed

herself for ignoring what her mind was struggling to tell her. Fight. She couldn't. She felt powerless. Cat knew she was not acting like a woman who wanted this to stop. She freed her mouth from his and gasped.

"I...said...no!"

She felt him stiffen and groan hoarsely against her bruised mouth, burying his head into her neck.

"I only want to be one with you again," he said huskily. "Why are you not coming to me willingly?"

She steadied her breath. "Your forced seduction is rape in my book, mister." She heard the strangled moan escape from deep within his throat, and she stiffened, bracing herself.

Slowly, he withdrew his body and looked down into her eyes. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you."

"You did. Now get off me and leave," she said, sounding braver than she felt.

His dark, mesmerizing gaze dipped to her neck, and he clenched and unclenched his jaw. "We will do it your way for now. Until you are ready."

Relief coursing through her veins, Cat shut her eyes and waited for him to get up. Instead she felt him grab a fist full of her hair and brought her head back. He dug his teeth into her neck.

She felt the fire spread from her neck to her limbs, making her body flare to life. She squeezed her eyes, arching her neck in shock at the surge of pleasure coursing through her nerve endings. She soared to the heavens and then plummeted to earth as wave upon wave of ecstasy washed over her, the final spasm leaving her depleted and spent. When it was over, she half sobbed and half moaned against his chest.

With a tenderness he had not shown until now, he turned on his side, bringing her with him in his arms, and ran a hand over her face.

"Sleep, my love. Tomorrow we start our life all

over again.”

Had he just called her my love? This wasn't love. This wasn't even sex, she thought in a daze. Yes, she'd just climaxed, but he had never entered her.

She felt her body slip into a deep, dark chasm soothing and lulling her limbs into sleep. Her last thought was, did this man just bite her neck?

Chapter Four

It was still dark outside when Cat opened her eyes. She felt curiously alive and strong and—sore? She jackknifed in an upright position as the memory of what happened washed over her.

Cat winced.

Shock left her senseless. He wasn't even a stranger. He was a vampire! She flung the covers off her, pulled on her jeans and sweater and marched into the living room. She found Tobias sitting on the couch, staring into the crackling flames of the fireplace. His expression was grim and he looked deep in thought.

"We need to talk. Now," she began as made her way towards him. Upon closer look, she noticed he didn't look too well. He looked almost pasty, and his eyes lacked their usual luster. Concern came unbidden, softening her fury. "Are you all right?" she asked, surprising her.

He turned to her, his gaze flickering over her. "I need to feed, but I don't want to leave you here alone."

Cat frowned. "I can cook you something to eat if you're hungry." She stiffened. Was she concerned? This man almost raped her, and she was concerned? She should just let him starve.

He gave her an odd look. "Cat, I need to feed on blood."

"Oh." She backed away from him a bit. "Well, don't get any ideas."

He sighed heavily and leaned his head back on the sofa as he ran a hand over his face. "I don't feed on humans, Cat. I feed on animals. And not enough

to kill them.”

“How...how altruistic of you.”

He gave her a half-hearted smile. “Actually, if I don’t feed soon, I will be a very dead, altruistic vampire.”

She had been prepared to give him a piece of her mind for accosting her earlier, but her concern for him grew. “Go out into the woods. You won’t be able to give me answers if you’re dead, will you?”

He rose slowly. “They will return. I don’t want to leave you alone.”

“Who? Those crazy men who tried to kill me?”

“Yes. The Grangers. Vampire killers.”

“I see.” With grim determination on her face, she went to the front door and opened it. “I need answers and I need them fast. And I don’t want you pulling anymore of that hypnosis garbage you’ve been doing on me either. Go feed. I’ll be here safe and sound when you return.”

Cat watched him rub a hand at the back of his neck, his brows furrowed in a dark frown, and she knew he struggled with her suggestion. “Please. I...I don’t want you to die,” she added. “Even though I could kill you for what you almost did to me earlier,” she muttered under her breath.

He raised a dubious brow. “What did I do to you? You may have told me no, but your body was telling me yes. I behaved the only way I knew how with you, Cat. We belong together and there is nothing that will stand in my way from having you by my side—forever.”

Forever? He just met her. Even though her heart felt curiously warmed by his admission, she pursed her lips. Was she the one who was crazy? Had she just—for one split second—actually contemplated a forever with this man? She opened the door wider. “Please feed and come back so we can talk.”

“I won’t be far. If the slightest thing should

happen, scream and I'll be back in an instant."

"I know. You move quick."

He nodded and made his way out the door, glancing back at her with a weary, uncertain look on his face. Cat shut the door and went into the bathroom. She was hungry too, but she needed to check on something first.

There they were. His bite marks, she thought staring at the mirror. Two pink points on her neck. Her jaw clenched in anger. If he had turned her into a vampire without her consent she was going to drive her own stake through his heart.

Damn it! Of all her luck. A man she was wildly attracted to and he was one of the undead. She marched into the kitchen and pulled out a half eaten tuna sandwich from the fridge. From what she knew of vampires—from books in any case—was they couldn't eat real food. She took a healthy bite, chewed, and swallowed. Her hunger pains disappeared and relief washed over her, realizing the sandwich was going down well.

Maybe he hadn't turned her into a vampire? Maybe he just tasted her?

Cat couldn't believe the crazy thoughts she was having and went back into the living room and sat on the couch. She had a hundred questions for him, and the sooner he helped her understand why this was happening to her, the sooner her sanity would return. Ten minutes later he walked through the front door.

His skin now held a healthy glow, and his eyes looked more brilliant and alive. "Thank you," he said quietly as he took the seat next to her on the couch.

Cat took a deep breath. "Okay. Start talking."

He clasped his hands on his knees in front of him and nodded slowly. "The explanation begins over three hundred years ago. There was a woman, Seraphina Granger—"

"You called that crazy man Granger."

Tobias nodded. "Seraphina was their ancestor. She looked a lot like you. Not completely, but the resemblance is striking. I met her and we fell in love. I turned her into a vampire and for ten years we were very happy until her family found her and drove a stake through her heart. I was too far away to do anything about it. Even with my vampire speed I couldn't reach her in time, but my unusual sight allowed me to see it all happen." He paused and a muscle twitched along his jaw, his throat working with emotion.

"I witnessed Seraphina die a horrible death. Watched her father, Clive Granger, drive the stake through her heart. Suffered gut wrenching horror when he hacked her body to pieces with an axe. I saw her beautiful face and body slowly disintegrate right before my eyes."

Cat gasped. "Her...her father killed her?"

"Yes. And if the plague hadn't consumed him a few months later, I would have killed him myself."

His face was grim as he fell silent, and Cat wondered if he was going to continue. "What happened?" she prompted gently.

"She had been out picking roots and herbs for her garden—she was a healer—and they surrounded her with other members of their clan. I could hear her pleading with them to leave her alone. My hearing is more pronounced than a human's, and I heard her tell them she was happy with me, and I wasn't the monster they thought I was. Seraphina believed all creatures deserved a chance to live. She didn't belong in that family. She never hurt anything in her life." He paused and swallowed hard. "I could tell she didn't want to hurt them. She still loved her father and brother and when her father made a pretence wanting to make amends with her and hug her, she ran willingly into his arms." Tobias grimaced, as if in physical pain. "He drove the stake in her heart before she knew what

happened.”

Cat gasped. “Oh my God!”

Tobias nodded grimly. “And then I saw him pull an axe and...and finish the job. I have never felt more helpless in my life. I watched her body disintegrate. By the time I was close enough, the Grangers had disappeared, and I was too stricken with grief to follow them.”

“Did you pursue them later?”

“No. Seraphina wouldn’t have wanted that. She still loved her family and I loved her enough to respect her wishes. Her father died of the plague a few months later and rumor had it her brother was killed in a battle. He had amassed a large Granger following, infiltrated a vampire nest, and never made it out alive. Everyone assumed he died because no one ever heard from him again. I have been alone since—until I saw your picture on your book jacket.”

She tried to ignore the heated look he gave her, but failed and her heart quickened. “You...you fell in love with a Granger, a mortal enemy.”

“Irony, isn’t it? Yet, it couldn’t be helped. Soon after meeting her I was helpless to her charms. Seraphina was not only a vision of loveliness, she was kind and full of passion. She embraced all living things.”

“How did you meet?”

“At a village market. I saw an old woman steal an apple and the merchant was yelling for the authorities when Seraphina showed up and helped the old woman by paying for the merchant’s entire bushel. The old woman sobbed her gratitude, and Seraphina smiled and went on her way as though saving an old woman’s life was all in a day’s work. So, I followed her. All day. She bought food and wares from the market and delivered them to homes of people who were in desperate need of help.”

“I can’t believe she was a Granger.”

Tobias nodded solemnly. "I stopped her and we talked. For a few days I would meet with her and help her on her many treks in the fields looking for the right herbs to cure whatever maladies ailed the villagers and we grew closer. I learned from our talks, that although she loved them, she felt alienated from her family at a young age. Her father and brother rarely spent time with her, and she was often left on her own."

"When did you tell her you were a vampire?"

"She found out before I could tell her. She'd heard her clan was going to kill a vampire, and she followed them. She wanted to see for herself if vampires were as evil and vile as her father had tried to drill in her head. She hid while she watched her brother drive a stake through a sleeping man's heart. Before she could do anything, her family disappeared and she tried to save the man's life. But it was too late. I arrived just as she was pulling the stake from his chest and tried to stop the flow of blood." Tobias grimaced. "That man was a friend of mine."

"How terrible." She placed a trembling hand to her lips.

"She knew we weren't evil because by that time she was already in love with me." He clenched his jaw. "She decided she couldn't live with her family anymore and wanted to be with me. So I changed her and we had ten beautiful years together—until her family found her."

"How...how could they kill their own family member?"

"They felt she was no longer their own. That she was evil. And they wanted to help ease her soul into heaven. The Grangers are a very religious clan, and they believe vampires are the spawn of the devil."

"Are you?" She braced herself for his response.

"No. We're still human, but of a different race. We have an aversion to the sun, a skin disease—

your doctors call it solar dermatitis—so we only go out when it's overcast. We prefer the night and sleep during the day. We have powers, unusual strength, need blood to survive, and live forever. Only two things can kill us. A wooden stake through the heart and not feeding for a day. What you've read about vampires is mostly fiction. The sleeping in the coffins, the disintegrating into ashes at sunlight, turning into bats, are all the work of fiction. Even the turning. When a human turns into a vampire, there's no writhing, fanfare, or fireworks. It's instantaneous." He gave her a moment to let everything sink in. "The Grangers have been killing vampires for generations, and I'm afraid I'm the biggest target on their list."

"Because of Seraphina."

"Yes. And now you're in danger because they believe you are the evil reincarnation of Seraphina."

Cat had so many questions. So many things she needed to understand and her expression must have told him so because his face took a grim turn.

"It all started with Seraphina's mother," he began. "She was a very beautiful and kind woman, but her husband usually left her alone while he went out preaching to anyone who would listen to him. Clive Granger was what you would call a modern day evangelist. Only back then, he wouldn't televise his sermons, he would stand on a crate in a field with hundreds of people in attendance. You have to realize, a few hundred years back, there were many threats and the people needed someone to look up to. To believe there was hope. There was the plague, poverty, famine, and numerous unexplained deaths where the victims were drained of their blood."

"Vampires," she whispered.

He nodded. "The evil ones. They left no one unscathed. They killed newborns, children, women. Clive preached it was the Devil at work. That he walked the earth and his followers, the vampires,

were the living dead. His followers needed hope. They needed saving and they clung to him as though he was the voice of God.” Tobias paused, his jaw clenching. “One day, while he was out with his son on another sermon, Rianna, his wife, was at home with their infant daughter, Seraphina. You...*she* was just a baby, barely out of her mother’s womb. A small band of evil vampires happened on Rianna’s keep and tried to kill her and Seraphina, but another vampire arrived in time to save them. His name was Victor.”

“Oh my,” she whispered. What an incredible story. Cat felt like she was right in the middle of an Anne Rice novel.

“Victor would go back to the keep when Clive and his son were out and spend time with Rianna. They fell in love.” He gave Cat a dark look. “Rianna left Clive and her children to be with him. Their love for one another was powerful and nothing could hold them apart. She asked Victor to turn her so they could live together forever.”

“How could she leave her children?”

“She felt they were better off with their father. Rianna didn’t want to turn them unless they wanted it, and they were too young to know or understand the vampire life. Seraphina was only eight months old at the time and her brother, Quinn, was ten. Clive told them their mother died of the plague.”

“She didn’t, did she?” Cat asked quietly.

“No. Clive banded a group of followers, found and killed her. After he drove a stake through her heart, he beheaded her, and presented her head at his next preaching. He declared the evil dead could be killed, and he recruited a group of men—vampire killers—to keep the villagers safe. At this point, Clive had such rage and hate for my kind at turning his wife that he went from preacher to murderer. He justified killing my kind by saying he was ridding the world of the living damned.”

“How do you know all this?”

He paused for a split second, grimacing. “Victor was my brother, Cat. And our kind would go to Clive’s meetings under disguise.”

Her head was spinning. “So they killed Seraphina’s mother and then they found your brother and killed him, too?”

“Yes, but they didn’t kill him. He killed himself. My brother was too grief stricken after Rianna died and he didn’t care. I believe he wanted to die. He couldn’t live without her. So when Clive’s men found him, he didn’t put up a fight. I was out that day and when I returned I found his body.”

“You...you met Rianna?”

“I lived with her and my brother for the few months they were together. She was a lovely lady. So like the woman Seraphina was to become. Rianna made me promise if anything were to ever happen to her and Victor, I was to keep an eye on you—on her daughter and make sure she was safe. She always feared Clive didn’t love his daughter. He never held her, never showed her affection. He only spent time with his son, taking him on his preaching trips and working very hard to mould him in his image. Rianna used to argue almost daily with Clive, telling him to allow his son to be a boy and not fill his head with heretics.” He paused, his handsome face softening. “I stood by my oath and watched Seraphina grow up. The first time I approached her was that day at the village market I told you about.”

Something didn’t add up. “After all these centuries, only Seraphina’s descendants are alive. How could they remember me...er, I mean...Seraphina?”

Tobias shook his head. “I’ve been wondering the same thing. There were no portraits of Seraphina. And anyone who was alive three hundred years ago has long since died.” His frown deepened. “I’m afraid that’s one question that’s been plaguing me since I

discovered their plot to kill you.”

The Elder sipped blood from his goblet, as he watched his two men lying on the floor at his feet. Imbeciles! The mission had been so simple and they botched it up. He should have killed that bitch himself.

Turning away from their corpses, he went to the hidden panel by the bookshelf and pulled a lever. The wall opened, exposing his stash of blood. Carefully, he placed his goblet on a shelf and pushed the lever. The wall closed.

For three hundred years, the Elder had been returning to the Granger clan, insinuating his place at the helm, leading his tribe towards the ultimate goal of annihilating the vampire race. Not an easy task since he had to hide from his own people—his ancestors—that he was, in fact, a vampire. The enemy. A spawn of the devil.

For three hundred years, he had suffered and agonized the blasphemy of his fate. He'd thought about killing himself many times but never found the courage nor the strength to do so. Until one day, he realized being a vampire could serve him well. He would live forever, long enough to see the vampire race die. Disappearing every few decades from the clan was not only an easy task, but an essential one as well. He could not have his family grow old while he remained young. They would ask too many questions.

And returning to the clan every few decades and reinstating himself as their leader was easier still. His father, Clive Granger, had taught him well. The Elder carried the two dead bodies towards the stairwell that led to the basement furnace. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.

He would tell his clan they died in battle. And he would send two others to finish the job.

That bitch and her demon lover had to die. His sister. Seraphina.

Quinn swore roughly under his breath.

Chapter Five

Cat went over everything Tobias told her. And she was having a hard time believing any of it. How could she? These things only happened in movies and books.

She felt a frisson of fear. “And you really think I’m the reincarnation of Seraphina, don’t you?”

“Yes. I wasn’t sure at first, but when we made love and I felt your response to me I knew you were Seraphina. My brother was the one who explained the vampire love to me. He said it consumed you, connected you to the other person in a way you could never deny or ignore. He said the lovemaking went beyond the physical, connecting two souls with mere thought.”

How could she tell him she had acted wantonly and her passionate response to him had nothing to do with her being his dead, vampire wife?

“Technically, we didn’t make love, Tobias.”

His lips curled sardonically. “Technically, we didn’t go all the way—in human terms, but we did make love. Your response when I tasted you confirms that.”

She touched her neck and drew in a shaky breath. “Did you turn me into a vampire?”

“No. I wanted to, but I knew that decision would rest on you.”

“And you’ve been single for what—three hundred years?”

“Give or take a few decades, yes.”

“Unbelievable,” she whispered. She shook her head and tried to think straight. “Tobias, we have great chemistry. That’s all. I’m not Seraphina.”

“Why? Do you not think there is such a thing as love lasting an eternity? You write romance novels. Are you not a romantic?”

“I write erotica. I write about sex, Tobias.”

“You write about passion, need, desire. You write about what it was like for us.”

She remained silent, mulling over everything he had said. She couldn't deny what he told her about himself was the truth. Hadn't she seen for herself how he had moved like lightening, how he'd bared his fangs, and how he had super human strength?

Cat didn't know how to take everything else he said. Her problem was assimilating all this wild and unimaginable information. “So does this mean I will always be in danger from the Grangers?”

“I am afraid so. They will stop at nothing to kill you. However, if I were to turn you into a vampire, at least you will have the strength to protect yourself and our children.”

Cat grew cold. “What did you say?”

“You will be able to protect yourself and our children.”

That's what she thought she heard. Cat froze. “I can't get pregnant.” Her head began to spin. “I have two lazy ovaries that don't produce eggs.”

“Cat, you can and will have my children one day. Making love to a vampire or turning has a healing effect. Any ills or ailments someone suffers disappear. My life force will awaken your dormant womb.” He gave her a pointed look. “If a vampire can change a mortal, why can't you believe we can create life from lazy ovaries, as you put it.”

His mouth twitched, but Cat didn't see the humor. She rose—choking on a sob. “Stop it! Don't...don't say anymore.” If what he said was true, he could give her the biggest gift she had ever wanted all her life. A child. Children! Plural. Cat couldn't believe it and she placed a hand on her belly.

She turned to face him. "Would my child be a vampire?"

"Our child," he said, rising to meet her. "And I don't know."

"So what are you going to do now? What happens next?"

"We must leave. My home is in New York. It's very safe and we will be very happy together."

A nervous laugh escaped her mouth. "Hold on there. I'm not going anywhere with you, Tobias. I...I don't even know you."

He placed two strong hands on her shoulders and drew her towards him. "You do know me. You know my touch, my love, and my kisses. That will suffice for now until you feel love for me. I have waited over three hundred years. I can wait a few more days."

She wanted to laugh. "You expect me to fall in love with you in a few days?"

"Yes."

"And how do you expect to accomplish that?" She was stunned at his level of arrogance.

"By helping you remember."

She crossed her arms over her chest. "I don't believe in reincarnation, Tobias. I'm Cat, not Seraphina. And as much as I admit you're a very sexy man and I'm attracted to you, looks and great sex alone are not enough to make me fall in love with anyone. Not anymore." She drew her shoulders up. "I already tried that with a gorgeous attorney and that ended in heartache."

"He wasn't right for you, Cat."

"Oh. And you are?" She retorted, angrily. Not at Tobias, but more with her string of bad luck when it came to men. "You're a vampire. You drink blood. And you kill people."

"I've never killed anyone in my damned life," he spoke harshly, his eyes narrowing. "Even when I came face to face with Seraphina's father a few days

before he died, I didn't kill him. I wanted to, but I didn't. I let the plague consume him." He paused, his expression darkening with the haunts and anguish of his past. "I'm not saying all vampires are good. We're just like humans. There's good and bad people in every race."

A muscle worked along the strong column of his throat, and she knew he was getting angry, but she didn't care. Ever since she met him, someone had tried to kill her, he practically raped her, and she felt like she was going crazy. She chewed her lower lip, instantly regretting her thought of rape. He hadn't forced himself on her, she admitted reluctantly. He *had* stopped. She couldn't, however, forget how her body reacted to his touch. She felt the heated flush of shame on her face.

Cat stiffened. "I'm sorry, but I can't see myself falling in love with you. Vampires are not my thing."

"I'm a man, dammit!" He ground out. "I'm not an animal." His face darkened grimly, his eyes glowing ominously, his beautiful mouth thinning menacingly.

He grabbed her by the shoulders and jerked her against his body. Cat gasped and tried to push him away, but he was immovable.

"What are you going to do?" She asked, frightened, realizing she had pushed him too far.

"Nothing. I am going to make you feel," he muttered roughly, bringing his head down to hers.

Their lips met and Cat froze. No way. Not again, she thought, willing her body to remain stiff and unresponsive.

He ran his hands over her back drawing her closer to his hard frame. Cat closed her eyes and tried to take her mind off what his kiss was doing to her. She fought the weakness in her limbs, the flutter in the pit of her stomach, the heady warmth his mouth incited.

Tobias forced her lips apart, and his tongue

meshed with hers. With a mind of their own, her hands found their way over his arms, up around his shoulders, to his silky, long, black hair, and she felt her body dissolve into a pool of need.

Without any strength left to fight him, she felt her body crumble and kissed him back, moaning softly against his mouth. She felt him stiffen, and she heard the low groan from deep within his throat as he brought her body closer to his. She could feel his arousal, and Cat basked in the heady, tumultuous feelings coursing through her veins.

It was all so primitive, so ancient. Soft against hard. Female against male.

At the back of her mind, she wondered about his statement she'd been writing about their passion, their desire for each other, and a small part of her wanted to believe it. Her fantasy man was real. He was here and she was in his arms and oddly enough she didn't want to let go. It felt too good being in his arms. Too right, even though her mind screamed—this is wrong. Not to mention insane, unbelievable, and ludicrous. But the truth was there. And she couldn't deny it. She couldn't deny the way she felt. She didn't want to let go of him.

"You don't have to let go," he murmured against her mouth, and she gasped softly.

Cat pushed away from him and gaped at him. "Do you read minds?"

"Only yours. When vampires mate with their one true love, they mate for life and a connection that transcends the physical and emotional binds them for all eternity. Their hearts beat as one. Their minds work as one. Their souls live as one."

She grew nervous. "Does that mean you'll be reading my mind all the time? I'll never have any privacy?"

"Only when I want to. And as I wanted to find out how you were feeling just now, I decided to take a small look."

"Don't do it again," Cat said firmly hoping he wouldn't make a habit of looking into her thoughts. Oh my God! Was she actually contemplating being with this man?

He took her hand and brought her to stand in front of the fire, and then pulled her down to sit next to him on the thick, burgundy rug. He looked at her, and she nearly gasped at the beauty on his face. The firelight illuminated his eyes, his skin—giving him an ethereal, other worldly look.

"I cannot tell you how relieved I am that I have found you, Cat."

"You are?" She felt mesmerized by the warm glow around them.

"I am."

Their gazes held and she felt like she was drowning, fighting for air. "You're not hypnotizing me again, are you?"

"No. Why?"

"Never mind."

He put his hand around her neck and kneaded the knot on her shoulder. "You're too tense," he murmured. He was still aroused, his eyes blazing with desire, and Cat knew she was losing the battle.

"Tobias, what's it like living forever?" She asked, trying to take her mind off what he was doing to her shoulder and more precisely what he wanted to do to her. It hung thickly in the air between them. The need. The passion. The desire.

"Lonely."

"How old are you?"

"Four hundred years old."

He played with her hair and ran his hand down her arm, grazing the side of her breast. She gasped. "How...how did you turn into a vampire?" He was weakening her. Making her limbs melt.

"My brother turned into a vampire first. We were very close and he couldn't bear the thought of watching me grow old and die so he turned me."

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"Me, too. It's been over three hundred years and I miss him still. Our parents died from the plague when we were very young and it was just the two of us. He was older than me and I looked to him as a father." He paused. "Cat, you need to be sure you want this. Being a vampire is very lonely. Any bonds or ties you form with people go away and you remain behind, alive, missing them."

"Like you with Seraphina."

"Yes. Like me with Seraphina, but I found you," he added quietly.

She ignored the last part. "What...what are you going to do if I decide not to turn into a vampire? Won't you remain young, as you are now, and I turn old and eventually die?"

His face turned grim. "I will not live without you, Cat. If you decide to stay human, I will be with you, watch you grow old, and right after you die, I will walk directly into the Grangers lair and allow them to kill me."

Cat gasped. He would die for her? "You can't do that." The last thing she wanted was his death on her conscience, which didn't make sense because she'd already be dead and dead people didn't have a conscience. Cat grimaced. My God. Even her thoughts were beginning to sound crazy.

"I will not live without you, Cat. I cannot go through what I've been through the past three hundred years. Missing you has all but destroyed me."

She heard the anguish, the pain, the tortured regret in his voice, and her heart began to thaw. Compassion welled in her breast for this man. Despite his strength and powers, he seemed lonely and lost. He was six feet three inches of muscle and strength, but she sensed the young man in him, the man who lost his parents, his beloved brother, the woman he loved dearly, and all those long, lonely

centuries.

She took his hand. "I'm sorry, Tobias."

His gaze flickered to her lips and he nodded. "I know you are. You were kind over three hundred years ago, as you are now."

"Tobias, I already told you I don't believe in reincarnation. I'm sorry. I truly am. It's...it's a coincidence I look like Seraphina. I don't feel like I'm her."

"All I know is I love you and I know in my heart you love me still. I can feel *your* heart beating right now, your blood pulsing in your veins, your breath reaching out and bringing life back into my soul. A vampire feels that only with their one true love. And you are my one true love."

This man's words could melt an iceberg. And she realized with surprise she was sitting in front of a very romantic vampire—fangs, danger, arrogance and all.

Without thought, she leaned forward, and said softly, "Seraphina was one lucky girl." And she kissed him on the mouth.

It was an impulsive act. A gesture of sympathy. An act of compassion for a man who had suffered and lost, but the moment she felt him stiffen and heard him suck in a harsh breath, she knew she'd made a mistake.

Chapter Six

He wrapped his arms around her, their lips still locked, and pushed her back on the thick, burgundy rug. Cat felt his weight over hers as he deepened the kiss.

She felt her heart race, her pulse beat, her body weaken, as he swept her away to a place where she felt they were the last people on earth. Nothing stood between them. Not time, not space, not the Grangers—nothing. And for a split second she realized she could fall for a man like this. Their physical connection was too strong and powerful to ignore. His warm, firm mouth breathed fire into her veins, and she couldn't believe how much she wanted him.

How could she feel so strong for a man she had just met yesterday? Her need for him bordered on outrageous—she couldn't fathom turning away from any of his advances. It was something she couldn't explain nor describe. It felt like an ancient, primitive urge deep in her soul—compelling her to touch him, kiss him, make love to him.

She heard the crackle of the fire as its flames flickered and swayed in the fireplace, and she felt her body mirroring the fire, flickering and swaying with each seductive touch of his hands, each hypnotic pull of his mouth.

He pulled his mouth away and looked down at her, his eyes glowing like the dark embers in the fireplace. "I want to show you how we used to make love. How the vampire love is powerful and how two souls can soar together with love and ecstasy beyond the stars and further."

Vampire lovemaking? Cat was almost afraid to say yes. How could there have been anything sexier and more sensual than what she had already experienced with this man?

"Trust me." His words a deep, hypnotic drawl.

"I trust you," she whispered. And she did, she realized with a start, knowing instinctively he would never do anything to hurt her. He had done nothing but profess his love for her since the moment he met her and had risked his own life to save her.

He reached for her sweater and drew it up slowly over her head until it lay on the floor behind her, leaving her naked from the waist up. The heat from the fire warmed her flesh, but the heat in his dark gaze engulfed her in flames.

Her jeans came off next and she lay naked on the rug.

"Are you ready?" His gaze raked her body.

"Yes."

"Tell me you love me."

She felt an odd headiness overcome her as she gazed up at his face. He was doing something strange to her again. Something strange with his eyes. Although he sat next to her, not touching her, she felt his hands everywhere. "I...I can't..."

His gaze darkened, his skin glowed, and an aura surrounded him like a sheer veil. "Do you like what you're feeling?" He asked, his dark beauty glinting with a ruthless passion she found both thrilling and frightening at the same time.

The invisible hands were on her breasts, on her belly. And lower, she could feel his mouth on her silken folds. She arched her back and bit back a whimper. "Yes," she gasped.

"Can you feel this?"

Simultaneously, she felt his warm tongue on her breasts and in between her legs, and she writhed and moaned. "Yes. I feel it. All...all of it."

A satisfied gleam entered his eyes. "Only true

vampire love can work this magic, Cat. You love me, that's why you can feel it." He stood and began to remove his clothes in quick, rough movements. "Say it. Say you love me."

The hands she couldn't see were everywhere, and she nearly screamed with longing. She wanted more. She wanted his *real* hands, his skin on her skin, him filling her.

He leaned closer. "I love you. And I want to be one with you."

Then she felt *his* welcome touch, flesh on flesh, his mouth trailing hot kisses over her face, shoulders, breasts. He brought his knee between her legs and made room for his strength to fill her in one hard, searing thrust. Cat cried out as she arched her back and ran her hands over his back, matching his passionate movements.

Tobias trembled, and she closed her eyes and reveled at the blissful peak his body was bringing hers to. "This is insane," she whispered huskily. "We don't even know each other."

"This is love." He growled into her neck. "Insanity is not knowing the difference."

His body tightened and stiffened as he moved faster and with one final thrust, he pushed himself deep inside of her and groaned.

Cat felt like she was flying, soaring through the sky, going higher and higher, until she came careening down, as wave upon wave of ecstasy crashed over her.

She might not be in love with this man, but her body definitely responded to his. Perhaps too much. And she had no inclination nor desire to analyze her maddening desire for him. It felt right. It felt good. And she knew Tobias meant everything he told her. He loved her. Desired her. Needed her. But that didn't leave her any closer to solving her internal dilemma. Should she commit to this man or should she run tail and hide from him forever?

They lay in each other's arms, the only sound in the room the crackling fire. He rolled to his side and brought her with him. "I'm too heavy."

"You're perfect," she whispered without thinking. And he was, she thought suddenly, the realization hitting her like a ton of bricks.

He wasn't ruthless or mean or dangerous. He was warm and romantic and loving. He was sensitive and soft and compassionate. She recalled how he hadn't killed the heavysset man. Rather, he had knocked him out for a few days. And Tobias would die protecting her, she realized. Cat kept her eyes closed and sighed brokenly. She felt deeply confused and hated how her heart and mind warred against one another.

Her fantasy man was everything she had thought he was and more.

"Tobias?"

"Mm."

"Why do you love me so much?"

He kissed the top of her head. "I love you because you are kind and generous and passionate. I love you because your sweet smile fills my days with hope. And I love you because you're filled with goodness and bring a smile to everyone you meet. I love you because you are you, because you are beautiful."

"You should be a writer. I have a feeling you would make a killing in the romance genre," she murmured.

His big chest rumbled with amusement. "I leave the writing up to you, Cat. You're more like Seraphina than you think. She was a highly sensual woman, too."

She didn't want to be compared to Seraphina so she chose to ignore his last comment. She punched him softly on his arm. "So that's why you want to be with me. You love my erotica." She smiled softly, enjoying their lighter mood. "You should read my

latest book, *The Sex Potion*. It's sinful. It's about a lotion a man discovers that's supposed to intensify and enhance the sexual awareness between him and his girlfriend. Kind of like the vampire love we just made."

"There's a difference between sex and passion, Cat. What we have is passion. It throbs in our blood for one another. It robs us of our sanity. It makes all our thoughts disappear except for the need to unify our bodies into one soul."

"Oh, that's what it was. And here I thought I was just wildly attracted to you."

"That's a start. The love will come."

Cat stiffened. Would it? She couldn't deny her growing attraction to this man and the more she got to know him the more she actually liked him. She felt comfortable with him. Safe and secure.

"Tobias?"

"Mm?"

"You told me earlier making love to a vampire can make a woman pregnant or turning can heal a woman's inability to have children." She swallowed hard. "Did...did you just make me pregnant?"

"I can feel my life force awakening your body, flowing through your womb, breathing life into your veins."

She couldn't breathe. A part of her wanted so desperately to believe him. And how could she not? Wasn't everything he told her the truth? Had he ultimately given her the miracle of life?

Cat let her body rest within his and felt the steady rise and fall of his chest. His breathing became even, and she soon realized he was falling asleep. She closed her eyes, listening to the soothing sound of the fire, feeling the comforting warmth of his body.

"Tobias?"

"Mm."

"Do you know how vampires came to exist?"

He sighed, bringing his arms tighter around her. "There are numerous folklores and legends alive from all over the world and I'm sure you've heard some of them. No one knows for sure what is the truth, but I've met some very old vampires who have been around so long they say they met the first vampire. The oldest vampires have the most powers. Vampires inherit the powers of the person who turns them. My brother was turned by a powerful vampire and when he turned me, I acquired his gifts."

"Like your power to read minds."

"Yes."

"Tell me about the first vampire."

"I was going to, but you keep asking me questions." He kissed the top of her head. "I'm afraid it's a sad, sordid tale. Somewhere in Europe around the start of the Middle Ages, a man made a pact with the Devil to save his wife's life. She was dying of a blood disease, and he tried everything to save her. He was a man of the Church, and he prayed daily to God to save his wife, but nothing happened. She grew more ill and was close to death's door until he lost his mind and swore at the heavens for forsaking him. He denounced God and turned to the Devil, begging and pleading with him for help. He was willing to trade his soul for his wife's life. And that's when he heard a voice in his head. It told him to cut his wife's throat and drink her blood to rid her body of the disease. She would be reborn as the Queen of the Damned and they would live side-by-side forever. But the Devil had a wicked mind and as soon as the grieving husband did as he was told and his wife was reborn, the Devil transformed him into a man-wolf."

She rose from his arms and gave him an astonished look. "The first vampire was a woman and at the same time the first werewolf was born?"

"Yes."

It was hard enough to believe in vampires, now

she was supposed to believe in werewolves, too?
“Do...do you know any werewolves?”

There was a pregnant pause. “Yes. Back in New York, I’m a silent partner with a man named Lucas Wilde. We own a nightclub called *Full Moon*.”

Cat froze. “And...and he’s a werewolf?”

“Yes,”

“And you’re telling me this now?”

“We haven’t exactly met under normal circumstances. It’s not like you asked me what I did for a living.”

Her heart fluttered. “You’re right. Sorry.”

“Don’t be. I can imagine what you’ve been going through since you met me.”

Her voice quivered when she spoke. “It hasn’t been easy.”

He drew her back down in his arms. “We’ll talk more tomorrow. For now, let’s rest. We have a lot to decide.”

Cat tensed. “Tobias, I can’t move to New York with you. I have a life in Maine. A home, a job.” She felt him stiffen.

“Is there anyone special waiting for you?”

“No.”

“Family?”

“No. I was orphaned at ten and went to live with my grandmother. She died when I was twenty-one and I’ve been on my own ever since.”

“You miss her.”

She shrugged self-consciously. Her grandmother was someone she didn’t like talking about. “Actually, I don’t. Let’s just say things weren’t perfect when I lived with her. She wasn’t your average warm, loving grandmother.”

“I see.”

“I can’t complain, though. If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t have buried myself in books to get away from reality. When all the other kids were playing, reading and writing were my favorite pastimes. I

entered a short story contest when I was seventeen and won. Soon after that I wrote my first full length novel, got published, and the rest is history. Cat Luster was born."

He gave her a quizzical look. "What was your short story about?"

She couldn't look him in the eye. "A vampire love story."

"I see."

Cat stiffened. "I may not read minds, but I know you well enough to know you're thinking it was my subconscious with my past life that made me write it."

His look was innocent enough, but Cat wasn't buying it. "I never suggested it."

"No, but you thought it."

He sighed wearily. "Cat, at some point you need to entertain the thought that there is some truth to what I believe." There was a heavy pause. "Never mind. I've waited this long to find you, I can wait a bit longer for you to believe me."

Her laugh was strained. "You may have to wait forever."

He gave her an unfathomable look. "I'll wait. We belong together." His mouth tensed. "At least come to my home for a visit. We can leave tomorrow morning. We'll take your car and you can stay with me for a few days."

"I have to finish my book. My deadline's next week."

"I have state of the art technology at home, an office overlooking Manhattan, and privacy. I'll give you the time to work."

New York. Cat was tempted. She'd lived in Maine all her life and always wanted to visit the Big Apple. "I don't know."

"Think of it as a small vacation. And New York is filled with so much culture, people from all walks of life, and entertainment—you may find your

inspiration for your next book.”

Now Cat was more than tempted. She’d planned to stay at Mel’s cabin another week to complete her book. Why not complete it in New York? “I might take you up on that offer.”

“It’s done, then. We leave in the morning.”

She laughed. “I said I might, I didn’t say yes.”

He rose, taking her hand and helping her up. “Your heart is already set. I can feel it. Come, let’s go to bed. We’ll get up at sunrise and leave. Besides, the Grangers are not letting up and I need to be around you to protect you.”

Her light mood dimmed as fear settled in her breast. “Thanks for reminding me.”

He shot her a concerned look as he led her into the bedroom. “I’m sorry, Cat, but I can’t express enough how dangerous this clan is. They’ll think nothing of killing you as a mortal because they believe you’re Seraphina.”

She slipped into bed beside him, and he gathered her into his arms. Her mind took another turn as she caught a glimpse of the full moon through the sheer drapes. “Your sleep schedule is all shot since you met me. You haven’t slept once during the day.”

There was a glimmer of a smile on his lips. “I’ll fix that when I get home. At least the weather’s been overcast and the sun hasn’t affected me.”

“Is it really that bad?”

“It can be. The rash, the blisters, the peeling. It won’t kill me, but it can scar me for life. In my case, forever. Vampires cannot heal from the effects of the sun.”

She felt a rush of concern thinking about his beautiful face being disfigured. “Maybe we should leave at sunset.”

“Your BMW has tinted windows. I’ll be fine.”

Cat felt a flash of relief. If he didn’t seem overly worried, then she shouldn’t. Tobias struck her as the

kind of man who didn't leave any stones unturned, who was in complete control of his destiny, and someone who didn't leave anything to chance.

"All right. If you're sure."

"I am," he replied and held her close. "Now sleep. We have a long drive ahead of us tomorrow."

She felt the steady rise and fall of his chest, inhaled his male, masculine scent, felt the strong beat of his heart beneath her hand, and closed her eyes. She was going to New York. To his home.

Cat couldn't deny the excitement she felt at the prospect of seeing where and how Tobias lived. The thought left her feeling curiously pleased and slowly she drifted off into sleep.

Chapter Seven

The next morning arrived with a dim sky and more snow. While Cat made her usual toast and coffee for breakfast, Tobias went out into the woods to feed and she mulled over what he told her once they'd awakened.

There were others like him where he lived, and they lived in a tight knit community where they rose and fell as one. They looked after each other. They protected each other. Vampires, the good ones in any case, had an unwritten code unto themselves. To protect humans and it was a code they followed faithfully. Tobias had also explained how they all kept low profiles and contributed to society with normal jobs. Policemen, lawyers, doctors, no profession was without a vampire in its midst.

Cat had listened with fascination, and the fascination continued. Had she ever come across a vampire on a cloudy day and not realized it?

She also learned Tobias was very wealthy. He had remarked dryly how he'd had over his four centuries accumulated quite a large nest egg, spoke six languages fluently, and owned a yacht called *The Seraphina*. He played the piano, violin, and guitar. Painted in his spare time—*when* he had spare time—and liked to listen to classical music.

The more she discovered about him, the more ensnared she became.

Could she do it? Could she leave the life she knew behind her and be with her vampire lover and live forever? If the last couple of days were any indication, she knew boredom was never going to be an issue.

Cat touched her stomach. He had told her she was pregnant, but she didn't feel any different. She sighed wearily and wondered if she'd made a mistake in believing him. Disappointment was one thing she could do without and expecting the one thing she wanted most in the world, a child, only to have her hopes dashed on her next monthly cycle left her feeling torn. She so wanted to believe him.

Suddenly, in the midst of her whirling thoughts, a deafening sound came from the living room, making her jump. She sped to the other room and screamed—the front door was blown off its hinges. Cat smelled gunfire in the air.

Her heart raced as she saw two men enter. Her heart stuttered as she watched them pull Tobias over the threshold, and then dropped him on the floor. The ground moved beneath her. Blood poured from his shoulder, and his face was eerily pale, ashen, his beautiful eyes lackluster as he looked up at her with a mixture of grief and rage.

"Run, Cat," he said hoarsely. "Get the hell out of here."

The younger man pointed a gun at her.

"This bitch isn't going anywhere, animal. I have her right where I want her."

"Tobias!" Cat didn't think about the gun being pointed at her. She ran to his side and dropped at his feet, putting her hand up to his cheek. She felt her eyes brimming with tears. One tear slipped and fell. "No," she whispered brokenly.

Their gazes held. His regretful. And she let her tears fall.

The older man swore under his breath. "Kill them. Now," he yelled at the younger man.

Cat knew she had to do something and do it fast. "How? What happened?"

"He was about to feed, smiling like some sick, evil bastard. I shot him before he could bring the fox up to his mouth," the young man spat disgustedly.

Cat kept her gaze fastened on Tobias's eyes.

"I was thinking about you the whole time," he said hoarsely. "I wasn't paying attention to the sounds around me because I was thinking of you and how happy I was."

The light began to dim from his eyes. Tobias was dying. Panic settled around her breast, and she felt short of breath. He had lost a lot of blood and she needed to get him to a hospital fast. A new fear arose. Would the doctors even know what to do? Was his vampire biological physique different from humans?

"I'm sorry, Cat," Tobias said brokenly. "I failed you as I failed Seraphina."

The older man yanked her by the hair and she yelped, her scalp burning as she sprawled backwards on the floor. Tobias bellowed his fury as he struggled to his feet. "Don't touch her, you bastard. I'll kill you."

"Tobias!" Cat scrambled to her knees. She knew what she had to do and the thought scared the hell out of her, but she didn't have a choice. Their lives depended on it. Struggling to take a calm breath, she looked up at the two men, her tone pleading. "Please, let me hug him one last time. Please, before...before you kill us."

"No," roared Tobias as he slumped back down to the ground. His expression shifted to tortured regret. "It cannot end like this," he said brokenly, harshly. "Run, dammit!"

Her heart splintered into a thousand pieces as she felt his anguish and torment. She gave the younger man another pleading look. "Please. Let...let me hug him."

The young man spat on the floor. "Go ahead, bitch. Have your last embrace."

"John, are you crazy?" The older man said roughly. "You know what the Elder said. Kill them swiftly and quickly. He wants no mistakes this

time.”

The young man spat again. “Don’t worry, Kirk. I will kill them swiftly and quickly, and I’ll take great pleasure doing it.” He laughed cruelly. “And then we’ll haul their bodies onto the lake and let the ice break and have their vile corpses disappear forever.”

“You’ll pay for this,” Tobias said, his face paling. “I swear you’ll pay for this.”

Cat felt a fierce need to protect him. This beautiful, dark, sensual vampire who made her life whole, the one man on earth who could give her a child.

She thought about what he’d said, that he’d made her pregnant. Was there a baby growing in her belly? Was there truth to what he said? Instinctively, she placed her faith in him. She thought of a helpless life growing in her belly and a raging fire raced through her veins making her feel a newfound courage and strength. She clenched her fist with a force borne from a maternal instinct to protect. To protect Tobias and her baby. Her nails drew blood on her skin, but she kept her face expressionless. She had to stay calm. There was no time for errors. The lives of Tobias and her child depended on her.

“Do it now, bitch. I can’t wait forever,” the young man yelled.

Gritting her teeth, she slid back to Tobias and wrapped her arms around his shoulders. She brought her mouth up to his ear and whispered, “Turn me. *Now.*”

She felt him stiffen immediately. He drew back sharply and looked deep into her unwavering gaze. She felt his indecision, his shock, and his hope. Her resolve strengthened and she pursed her lips. His eyes flickered and she knew in that moment he saw all the determination and resolve he needed to see. With one swift move, he turned his head into her neck and broke her skin.

The impact shocked her nerve endings, and she had to stifle the scream that rose in her throat. Pain and pleasure coursed through her veins. His life energy bonded with hers, and she felt faint with blissful pain as an intense surge of energy raced through her veins, her limbs, her bones. Her body felt like it was on fire. Her breathing quickened, her heart raced, and she felt power emanating through every fiber of her being. Tobias slowly withdrew and Cat gasped. Courage replaced her fear. Strength replaced weakness. Conviction replaced doubt. And her heightened senses made her feel something else. Something that made her mind reel with mind-blowing awareness.

Oh my God! The baby, the seed of new life growing in her womb and the knowledge staggered her more than the eternal life Tobias had given her. A baby. A beautiful, precious baby. Choking back a sob, she captured Tobias' face in both her hands and stared deeply into his eyes.

"Thank you," she whispered huskily. Their gazes mirrored hope.

She needed to do it now, to try out the vampire skills the turn should have given her. Cat rose to her feet, turned to face the men and then sprung in the air. With her newfound strength and speed, she disarmed them and tossed them against the wall. The older man let out a terrified scream while the young man crouched back in fear.

Cat stood before them, her hands on her waist. "Not so tough now are you?" She asked casually. "Trying to kill someone is against the law, or doesn't the law apply to the Grangers?"

"Bitch," muttered the young man under his breath. "We'll get you. You'll go back to hell where you belong, Seraphina. The Elder won't rest until you and your demon lover are dead."

Cat's temper flared and she moved to his side, grabbed him by the collar, and raised him a foot off

the ground. "My...name...is...Cat!" Again she tossed him across the room. She turned to the older man.

"Let them go, Cat," Tobias said harshly. "They're not worth it. They can't do anything to us now."

She looked at him and noticed his color, his healthy glow was returning. A quick glance to his wound told her he'd also stopped bleeding. Cat almost sobbed her relief. "Tobias?"

"I'm fine now." He must have read her mind because he added, "Your blood. It saved me."

"What do we do with them?" She motioned to the two men.

"We let them go. As we have been doing for centuries. We're not the killers. We're not the evil ones. They are."

Cat nodded and looked at the two men. "You have one minute to get the hell out of here, but remember one thing. I'm not as forgiving as Tobias, so I hope for your sake we never set eyes on you again." Her voice grew hard. "I'm pregnant, and I wouldn't think twice about killing you if it means saving my child."

The men scrambled to their feet and inched their way to the door. Cat balled her hand into a fist, and the men almost screeched as they fell over themselves taking the door.

As soon as they were gone, Cat's mind raced at what had just happened. They almost died, she was pregnant, and...and she was a vampire. There was an almost surreal quality in the air that made her feel the last five minutes hadn't quite happened. That she'd dreamt it all. She turned and watched Tobias rise. Cat couldn't speak. What...what had she done?

"I thought we were going to die," she said numbly.

"We were," Tobias replied gravely. "You saved us, Cat," he added quietly.

"I can feel it. The baby," she said, her legs

feeling curiously weak.

"That's one of the wonderful gifts you've acquired turning into a vampire."

Her head felt woozy, and her vision started to blur. "Umm...I...I don't feel so great."

His mouth tensed. "I know. Immediately after a turning the fledgling vampire must feed, otherwise they will die." In two strides he stood before her.

She collapsed into his arms and gasped for air. "I don't think I'm ready to taste blood."

"Cat, you don't have a choice."

"Can't...can't I drink a V8 or something? A red wine? Does it have to be blood?" She felt her heart palpitate, her breathing quicken, her stomach burn. God, this was excruciatingly painful. "Dammit! I didn't even have a minute to enjoy the fact I'm pregnant. Now you're telling me I have to hunt a squirrel and drink its blood. *Gross!*" A searing spasm in her gut made her double over in pain. She was having a hard time breathing and felt dangerously close to passing out. "And this is what it feels like to live forever? You have to be kidding me. I feel like I'm dying." She groaned as another spasm speared her heart.

Tobias lowered himself to the ground, taking her with him, and placed her gently on his lap. "You will die if you don't drink blood in a few minutes," he said quietly. "Here. Take my wrist. My blood will save you." He brought his wrist close to her mouth. "Please, Cat. Don't fight this. Drink my blood and save yourself," he said, his voice breaking.

She knew if she didn't, she would die. She also knew if she did, she might as well be dead because she couldn't wrap her mind around the thought of drinking someone else's blood. Suddenly, amidst all the pain her body was going through she felt a treacherous cold seep through her veins. She *was* dying. In movies, didn't people always say they felt cold and then two minutes later they died?

Logic won over disgust and she licked her dry lips. Cat stiffened in surprise. She felt the tiny incisors in her mouth. My God! She really was a vampire. The cold in her limbs grew, and she squeezed her eyes shut before sinking her newfound, pointy teeth into his wrist. Drinking his blood beat out dying, and she sucked and swallowed, trying hard not to gag.

After the first sip, she was startled to realize she didn't feel like gagging. His blood tasted amazingly sweet and warm. She drank some more. She actually enjoyed it. It tasted like warm milk with honey. And as she drank her pains subsided, her breathing became normal, and her racing heart calmed.

"That's enough, Cat." Tobias' voice sounded strained and hoarse.

She moaned as she drank some more. My God, she couldn't get enough of him.

"Cat. Stop." He took her by the shoulders and gently pulled her away. "A fledgling vampire's thirst is insatiable and you can drink every last drop in my body."

She licked her lips and felt her incisors gone. "Sorry. Did...did I hurt you?"

Slowly, he smiled. "No." He rose and took her hand. "And don't worry about hunting for animals. We only hunt when absolutely necessary. Back home, my kind keeps a freezer full of blood. All we need is an equivalent of a glass a day to survive and we have doctors who supply us."

"Vampire doctors?"

"Yes." He opened his arms. "Come here."

Willingly she went into his embrace and nestled her face in his chest. "Am I really going to live forever?"

"Yes."

"Won't you grow tired of me?" She couldn't believe she'd just asked him that.

"Not in a million years," he replied in his

beautiful, deep, velvety voice.

He placed a gentle hand to her chin and raised her face to his. He kissed her tenderly. "We need to leave, Cat."

"I'm scared."

"I know."

She covered her face with her hands. "What have I done?"

"What you had to do. I owe you my life. Our child owes you its life." And gently he took her hands and pulled them away from her face. The look he gave her made her limbs melt. "And I love you more because of it. You were very brave."

Her mind raced as he held her in his strong arms. And oddly enough, for the first time, hearing him say he loved her comforted her.

I love you. Three little words that had so much impact.

Chapter Eight

Within the hour, Tobias repaired the front door as best he could, sealed it, packed the BMW, and took the driver's seat. Cat snapped her seatbelt in place and settled back in her seat. She had to call Mel once they arrived in New York to tell her she'd left the cabin. My God. How was she going to tell her the rest of it? Her immortality? Her pregnancy? Her vampire lover?

The drive would take the better part of the day bringing them to Manhattan by nightfall. She leaned back on her headrest and closed her eyes, sighing wearily.

"Are you all right?" Tobias asked with concern in his voice. He tossed her a quick, sideways glance before he pulled onto the small road that would take them to the highway.

She nodded. "As good as can be expected. I'm just trying to figure out how to tell Mel about all this." She gave him a quick look and noticed him grip the wheel tighter. "She's my agent and my best friend."

"Cat, you can't tell anyone."

She frowned. "Tobias, she won't say anything. We can trust her."

He sighed heavily. "Cat, you don't understand. You must keep your new life from every one. For their own safety. The Grangers will assume Mel will eventually turn into one of us and kill her."

Cat gasped.

"I'm sorry, but it's true. The Grangers have murdered humans who've befriended vampires in the past."

“No!”

“Yes. So unless you want to risk your best friend’s life, she must never know about you. Eventually, you must stop seeing her. I can understand that will take time, but it’s something you must do.”

“No,” she repeated, her voice quavering. Mel was all she had, more family than friend, and had been there for her through all her ups and downs holding her hand, helping her mend. How could she walk away from someone who had given her nothing but kindness, love, and encouragement in her life?

“I won’t do it.”

“Cat, if you don’t, you’ll be putting her life in danger. I’m sorry.”

Her stomach dropped. She couldn’t do that. She couldn’t hurt Mel. She loved her like a sister, the sister she never had. “What if we protect her? Keep a close eye on her?”

He shook his head solemnly. “Cat, about a hundred years ago, I met an elderly woman, a human, who befriended me. I was living in England at the time and I happened on her on my way home from a hunt. She was riding in a rather dilapidated carriage, and one of the wheels had broken. I repaired it for her and she invited me to her small, meager home. I would have refused, but it had taken me longer to fix the wheel than I had anticipated and the weather was clearing. I knew the sun would be out soon so I accepted. She was poor with very little food in her home and offered me all she had. I wanted to repay her hospitality and returned the next day with a carriage full of supplies and food.” His voice warmed. “After that it was easy to keep returning to her home. She was a fascinating woman with many stories to tell, and as I was lonely at the time, I kept returning and we became close friends. She never knew I was a vampire.” He fell silent.

“What happened?”

"About two months after meeting her, I arrived at her home and found her dead. Someone had driven a stake through her heart. So you see," he tossed her a dark look filled with anguish, "as much as we want our human friends in our lives, we must let them go. Our code is to protect humans not put their lives at risk."

Cat didn't know what to say. She turned and looked at the wintry, forest scene rolling by her window. Her throat felt dry. He was right. She couldn't risk being responsible for Mel's death. Her mind went back to this morning when she had decided to turn into a vampire and wondered if she knew then what she knew now, would she have made the same decision. Slowly, her hand went to her belly and she felt warmth fill her breast. It was love for an unborn child.

Yes, she would have made the same decision all over again. If not, she wouldn't be pregnant and she and Tobias would be dead.

Having the power to save her child's and Tobias' life made it all worth while.

"Okay," she said numbly. "I'll do it. Just give me some time."

There was a heavy pause. "Try to get some sleep. We'll feed when we get to my home. You can call her this evening."

For a long time, she stared unseeingly at the bare trees, the snow covered terrain, the overcast sky and eventually closed her eyes. Being a vampire, her immortality, Tobias, a child, came with a heavy price.

She felt herself drifting off to sleep and welcomed the oblivion.

Cat knew she was dreaming, but it felt so real. She was in a field, carrying a small basket, and she was picking through the various plant life and shrubbery. The day waxed cloudy and she could feel

the cool air on her skin. She looked down at her attire and noted the long, empire cut dress, pale blue with white lace trimming the edges, exposed a cleavage she never knew she had. She spun around at the sound of a horse galloping towards her. Her heart stopped. It was Tobias looking gallant and magnificent in a black coat. His black mane streamed behind him and his face wore a dangerous frown.

He vaulted off the horse the moment he reached her side and grabbed her by the shoulders. "Seraphina, I've been looking everywhere for you. I told you never to venture off without me."

So she was Seraphina in this dream. Interesting. How had that seeped into her subconscious? "I was looking for herbs to heal Mr. McTavish. His wife told me he still suffers from nerves and hasn't slept. There's valerian in these parts."

Cat stiffened. Was that her voice? It sounded different.

Tobias looked up. "It looks like rain. I'll help you look and we can get back to our keep sooner."

Cat, or rather, *Seraphina* smiled up at him. "Thank you. Then I will go see him quickly and be home by night fall."

Tobias nodded. "Don't forget I have to help the Forresters. As soon as I've repaired their well, I'll come straight home."

Seraphina went into his arms and hugged him. "And then we can have a quiet night to celebrate our anniversary. Can you believe it's already been ten years? What should we do tonight?"

He smiled seductively as his gaze dipped to her abundant cleavage. "I can think of a few things," he murmured deeply and bent his head to take her mouth.

His mouth was firm and warm. Cat moaned softly. Mm, she liked this dream. She dropped the

basket and slid her hands up his arms around his neck, pressing her body close to his. He was aroused.

He deepened the kiss, running his hands up and down her back. And then with a groan he withdrew from her. "You'll be the death of me, Seraphina. I have a mind to suggest we forget the valerian and the Forresters and go straight home."

Seraphina feigned a look of reproach. "And let poor Mr. McTavish suffer another sleepless night?"

He smiled. "Fine. We'll do it your way, but the second I come home I plan to have my own sleepless night with you."

She giggled. "Promise?"

He ran a dark, intent gaze over her face and took her back in his arms. "I love you, Seraphina. The past ten years have been more than I could ask for."

"I love you, too, Tobias."

Cat was surprised at how comfortable she felt saying the words. She did love him. Her heart swelled with emotion, warming her from the top of her head to the tip of her toes. And then in a startling display, she saw the past ten years with him flash before her eyes. The laughter, the warmth, the caring. All the passion and love. She felt breathless.

"Come," he said, taking her hand. "Show me where to look for your valerian."

And then her dream changed. Everything around her disappeared—the fields, Tobias, her basket, and she found herself standing in front of a small keep. She didn't know how or why, but somehow she knew it was Seraphina's and Tobias' home.

And she was surrounded by ten men. There were two in particular she felt a connection to. An older man with graying hair and a younger, handsome man.

Seraphina's father and brother.

And they were all carrying stakes.
Cat screamed and woke up in a cold sweat.

She was panting when she opened her eyes.

"Cat, what is it?" Tobias asked, trying to regain control of the car. Her scream must have jarred him because she cast him a frightened look and noticed his pale, grim face.

"I had a bad dream."

He tossed her a concerned look. "Do you want me to pull over?"

"No." Something was deeply troubling her. She took a deep breath and faced him. "Tobias, did Seraphina die on your anniversary?"

He sucked in a harsh breath and gave her a dark look. "So it has begun."

She grew nervous. "What has begun?"

"Your subconscious is starting to awaken. Vampires remember everything. Even past lives."

Cat frowned. "You mean the dream I just had where I was looking for valerian for Mr. McTavish and you found me in the field really happened?" She was afraid of the answer.

"Yes." He gripped the wheel so tightly, she could see streaks of white on his hands. "I had finished helping the Forresters with their well and was on my way home when I saw what happened."

Cat laughed, but it sounded hysterical. "Right. The stake through my heart and then my father finishing the job with an axe."

"Yes."

She sighed deeply and put her hands to her face. My God. The dream felt so real. More so, how was she able to dream it? Tobias had never told her it had been their anniversary. He'd never mentioned the valerian, the McTavishes, the Forresters. Was it true? Was she Seraphina?

And that brief flash where she had seen her ten

years with Tobias seemed so real. The love she experienced felt real. "Maybe you should pull over. I think I'm going to be sick." The part of her that had been denying what Tobias had been trying to make her believe slowly melted away and the startling truth made her feel weak.

He glanced in the rear view mirror and shook his head. "I can't now. He's back."

She glanced over her shoulder, but saw nothing. No headlights, no movement, nothing. "Who?"

"I'm not sure, but we've been followed the past couple of hundred miles."

The Elder moved with grace and speed through the woods. Thankfully the weather was on his side. Cloudy. He vaulted over boulders, sped across the snow-covered road, and raced through the dense woods. Even though he knew following them on foot was a better camouflage, he knew Tobias sensed him, knew he was not far behind.

Tonight, he was going to kill them. After the last two men came back empty handed, he didn't want any more blunders. Twice he had sent men to kill them and twice the mission failed. This time he would do the job himself.

He sensed his sister's change. That demon bastard had already turned her. Quinn was as powerful a vampire as Tobias, but he didn't want to leave anything to chance. It would be easier to kill her when Tobias wasn't around. He would just have to wait for the right moment. And after he killed his sister, he would wait for Tobias and kill him.

If his father were alive today he would be so proud of him. The demon bastard's brother had taken away his mother and destroyed his father in the process. And then he'd turned his sister into a living dead, a devil worshipper.

Justice would be sweet.

Three hundred years was a long time to make

the Knights pay for what they'd done to his family.

Chapter Nine

Carrying Cat's luggage, Tobias led her into his building. It was a twenty floor high rise in the heart of Manhattan with polished floors, mirrors, and plush seating in the massive lobby. The security guard welcomed Tobias warmly.

"Welcome back, Mr. Knight. Haven't seen you in a few days."

Tobias inclined his head. "Nice to be back, Jarvis. I've been away."

He led Cat to the chrome elevators and within moments they were riding up to the twentieth floor. The elevators opened directly into his penthouse.

Cat gasped the second she walked in. "Wow. What a place."

Tobias smiled. "I'm glad you like it."

"Like it? Who wouldn't?" She looked around at the huge décor of high ceilings, plants, and art. His furniture was set in earth tones, and his hardwood floor gleamed with polish. She glanced at the grand piano in the corner of the living room and the violin set on the side. Even though numerous large doors and pathways leading off to more rooms indicated his home's immensity, what gave Cat the biggest sense of space were the windows. On one side of his huge living room, the wall was made up entirely of a floor to ceiling window that displayed the most extraordinary skyline of New York City. She breathed in a sigh of appreciation.

"What a stunning view."

"Thank you. The windows tint automatically at sunlight."

She walked into the huge room and stopped.

Above his fireplace hung a painting of her wearing the blue lace trimmed dress. The one Seraphina wore on their ten year anniversary.

"Did...did you paint that?" She asked in an awed voice. She recalled him telling her he dabbled in art. Cat couldn't take her eyes off the painting. She looked so happy standing in a field of pretty flowers and green plant life.

"Yes, about two hundred years ago," he replied quietly. "That was how you looked the last time I saw you."

This time she didn't deny she was Seraphina. This time she remained silent staring at the beautiful portrait. After her dream, Cat did a lot of thinking and the more she thought about it the more she realized there could be a lot of truth to what he believed. And now, staring at the magnificent painting, any remaining doubt seemed to melt away.

"It's beautiful. You have a remarkable hand."

"As I mentioned, I've had a few hundred years to hone my artistic craft."

She glanced at the piano and violin. "You mentioned you played the guitar as well."

"I keep the guitar in the sound room. It can get very loud." He put the bags down. "Come into the kitchen with me."

She followed him to another huge room that contained a long center island, maple cabinetry, and granite countertops. His appliances were all stainless steel, and the ceramic tile backsplash set in warm hues gave his kitchen a very pleasant appeal. As his living room, his kitchen décor surprised her. What had she expected? Maybe her subconscious thought he'd live in a dark and sinister looking home straight out of a Bela Lugosi film.

She watched him open his counter depth refrigerator. Curiously, she angled her body to see what it contained. No food. No left overs. No daily staples. Only rows of glass flasks filled with a red

liquid. He pulled one out, set two glasses on the center island, and filled them. "Here," he said. "Drink this."

"Is it what I think it is?"

"Yes."

She eyed the glass distastefully and grimaced. As much as she enjoyed Tobias's blood, she still got the creeps thinking about what she was drinking. She couldn't, however, forget one tiny fact. If she didn't drink it, she would die. "Okay, bottoms up." She lifted the glass to her lips. And again, as before, she enjoyed it. "As long as I keep my eyes closed and pretend it's warm milk with honey, I could get used to it," she remarked dryly.

Tobias set his glass down, grasped her shoulders, and gazed down into her face. His eyes were like black jewels, his skin glowing with an ethereal hue, his mouth sensual. His face looked so beautiful, Cat stifled a gasp.

"Cat, I'm sorry for what you have gone through. If I could have spared you any of this anguish, I would have."

"I know."

"Being a vampire isn't that bad. It's not all doom and gloom. Yes, we have to be cautious with threats like the Grangers, the sun, lack of daily feedings, but there are wonders we can never see as a human."

"Like what?" She laughed, but it sounded hollow. "Do you know what I realized driving here tonight? I'll never lie on a beach again for the rest of my eternal life. I'll never get a tan." She felt a sense of hysteria bubbling over. "I'll never feel the heat of the sun on my face or...or wear flip flops."

Gently he placed his fingers under her chin and lifted her face. "There's beauty in the night. Come. Let me show you." And he bent his head and kissed her on the mouth. It wasn't an earth shattering kiss that left her senseless, but a warm kiss that calmed her.

He took her hand and led her to a small hallway. He opened a door and they climbed a narrow stairwell. At the top, he opened yet another door that led outside to the roof top terrace decked with lawn chairs, a table, flowers and plants.

She gave him a questioning look.

"I try to keep my life as normal as possible. I like to come out here on a clear night when the stars are out and think. I find the night peaceful."

Still holding her hand, he led her to the edge of the rooftop. Cat jerked back. "What are you doing?"

"I want to show you the beauty of being a vampire."

She looked down over the edge of the roof and felt weak kneed. This wasn't beautiful. This was downright dangerous. They could fall. Surely vampires couldn't survive a twenty-story plunge? Could they?

"Uhh...I'm afraid of heights."

Tobias chuckled softly under his breath and held her firmly around her waist. "Not anymore."

And with one swift move, he vaulted—flew really—over the edge of the roof and sailed through the sky with her in his arms. Cat screamed at the top of her lungs.

"You're safe with me," he said in her ear.

Her scream froze as she stared at his handsome profile. Before she could say a word or scream again, they landed on the rooftop of another high rise. "You fly?" She croaked.

"Not exactly. I leap over tall buildings in a single bound."

"So you're faster than a speeding locomotive and can dodge bullets." Oh my God, she was falling in love with Superman. Her thought stilled her. Was she falling in love with him? Her admission warmed her despite the cool air around them.

"In a manner of speaking, yes. And so can you."

She gasped.

“Not yet, but soon enough. It will take time to fully acquire all your gifts.” He brought his arm around her waist again. “I want to show you my favorite spot in New York City.” And he sailed through the air with her, landing at every few rooftops, until she could see it.

The Statue of Liberty in the New York harbor.

Cat squeezed her eyes shut as they flew over the Hudson River and landed in between the crook of the statue’s raised arm and neck. Tobias settled back comfortably and gathered her close on his lap, her back against his strong chest.

“Open your eyes,” he said quietly.

Cat did and looked around. She sucked in an awed breath. The city was beautiful at night with all the lights, the stars framing it, the sparkling water surrounding it. And it was quiet. She could hear the distant sounds of the city, but they were faint, like a whisper of a song filtering through the night.

“It’s...it’s beautiful,” she said breathily.

“I come here often when I feel lonely. Up here I feel surrounded by every single person in the city. I can’t see them, but I know they’re there.”

“Mm,” she replied, leaning her head back. The cool air felt nice on her skin, and his body felt even nicer beneath hers. Comfort and security flowed through her veins, dissolving her earlier hysteria at flying through the air.

He bent his head and kissed her on her neck. Cat sighed. She loved feeling this close to him. With his arms around her, his breath on her neck, his heart beating beneath her.

It would be dawn soon, and the star filled sky would be filled with a rosy hue illuminating the sun’s imminent appearance, signaling their departure. She didn’t want this moment to end.

He gathered her closer to him. “A long time ago I was obsessed with finding a cure for what I’d become.”

"Is there a cure?"

"No and I'm happy now there isn't. I would have never found you if there was."

She nestled deeper onto his chest. "I'm glad, too."

"You are?"

"Yes. I can't explain it, but I feel very close to you. I can't imagine having never met you." She felt him tense beneath her.

"Do you now believe you are the reincarnation of Seraphina?"

Cat stared at the dark, glistening water. "I'm not as opposed to the idea."

"Does that mean you will stay with me?"

She sighed, struggling to make sense of her emotions. "I'm scared, Tobias. I'm a vampire now and you're the only person on earth who can help me get accustomed to my new life."

"I see."

Her heart broke for him. She could tell she'd disappointed him. Hurt him. He had expected her to tell him she wanted to stay with him because she loved him, but she couldn't—not yet. She was petrified of opening her heart to him. She'd opened her heart before and had it shattered.

"I will never hurt you, Cat."

She stiffened in his arms. "Did you just read my mind?"

"I wanted to, but I didn't. I know you're afraid of love. I know that other man hurt you, but you must realize I'm not that man. I'm a man who's loved you for three hundred years."

She felt the back of her eyes prick with unshed tears. "I know."

A small speedboat sped by them, and the sound of its engine jarred their moment. Cat wiggled on his lap. "I'm too heavy. Maybe we should leave."

"You weigh next to nothing. Besides, my body heat is keeping you warm."

Cat stared at the city lights and thought about all the lives going on around her, innocent of the fact two vampires were sitting atop the Statue of Liberty. How did Tobias do it? How had he managed to live all these centuries?

“Tobias, how did you survive for four hundred years? I mean, what did you do?”

“For a living?”

She turned her head slightly and nodded.

He sighed heavily. “Well, in my case it would be livings. Plural. At first it was tough. I had to find jobs where I could work evenings or make my own schedule and work during days when it was overcast or raining. I stayed very long in London and then I moved to the States and settled in places like Seattle where sunshine wasn’t prone to long stretches. At the beginning I worked as a carpenter and then a black smith. With the turn of industrial revolution I had more resources at my hands. I worked evening shifts as a foreman of numerous plants and eventually fell into managing them. By this time I had accumulated enough wealth to go to school. I went to night school so it took me quite a long time to complete my studies. I have four degrees. Engineering, a BA in Computer Science, a PHD in History, and an MBA—“

She snapped around and gaped at him. “You went to University *four* times?”

He shrugged casually. “When you realize you will live forever, you view life very differently. Those thirty years I spent in Universities is nothing compared to the four hundred years I’ve already lived.”

“I see your point.”

“After I completed my studies I went back to work. I invested in stocks and bonds, owned a nightclub at the turn of the century and later, in the fifties, I opened a drive-in. I took a break in the eighties and nineties, and a couple of years ago I met

Lucas Wilde and we went into business together.”

“He’s the werewolf who owns *Full Moon* with you.”

“Precisely.”

She whistled in awe. “Tobias, you’re a fascinating man.”

“Thank you. You’re a fascinating woman,” he replied with a glimmer of a smile on his mouth.

She laughed. “Hardly. What have I done compared to your long list of accomplishments?”

The wind wrestled with her hair, and he tucked a loose tendril behind her ear. “Well, let’s see. From what I know of you, you made your dream of becoming a writer come true. That’s a pretty big accomplishment, Cat. It’s brought you security, wealth, and freedom. And you entertain countless readers with your work.”

He was right. She had accomplished a lot. She shrugged self-consciously. “My stories aren’t for everyone though. The erotic paranormal genre is not exactly something you’d find at the library. I...I gave my grandmother a copy of my first book, thinking she would be proud of me, but she returned it without even reading it. She died a few months later.”

His face turned somber. “You never made amends with her?”

“No. She always hated me because I looked a lot like my mother. She had always been opposed to my father, her son, marrying my mom. My dad came from a wealthy family, and my grandmother always hoped he’d marry someone in his class.”

“I’m sorry, Cat.”

“Don’t be. It took me a long time to realize I couldn’t change my grandmother. I couldn’t make her love me.”

His expression darkened. “You loved her, didn’t you?”

“Yes, at the beginning. I was a child without my

parents and I clung to her for affection, but she kept pushing me away. As I grew older, she became even more cruel and told me how she thought my mother ruined her son's life. She even blamed my mom for their deaths. Mom was driving the night of the accident."

There was a heavy silence as he looked at her, his jaw tightening. "So all the people you've ever loved left you. Your parents, your grandmother, the man who broke your heart. It's no wonder you're afraid to love me."

Cat didn't know what to say. She tore her gaze away from his and stared out into the city's skyline. She felt his finger on her chin and held her breath. Gently he turned her face.

"Don't be afraid to love me, Cat, I won't go anywhere." And he bent his head.

The moment their lips met, her stiff resolve thawed, and she brought her arms around his shoulders. She sighed against his sensual, firm mouth and felt warmth surround her. She felt safe. She felt secure. She trusted him.

His hands slipped around her waist and he drew her closer to him, deepening the kiss.

And then it was over. Cat stared at him, her expression confused.

"It's going to be dawn soon. We should get going."

"Okay." She avoided his gaze.

"Cat," he said, his deep voice hoarse. "I also want to take you home to make love to you in bed, not on the arm of the Statue of Liberty."

She felt excitement dart through her veins. "Oh."

He brushed his lips quickly over hers and grabbed her around her waist. She gasped once she realized they were going to go sailing through the air again. Her arm went around his waist and she clung to him for dear life.

By the time they arrived back at his place, she was breathless. And then she was breathless for another reason. Tobias kissed her soundly before he led her into the bedroom and before she could catch her breath, their clothes were on the floor, and he proceeded to make love to her with a tenderness that brought tears to her eyes.

After they were spent, he gathered her into his arms and kissed the top of her head. "We should get some sleep. We rise when the sun sets."

She nodded and let the steady rise and fall of his chest lull her to sleep.

Chapter Ten

When she rose at sunset, she saw the glass Tobias had left for her on the nightstand. She could hear the shower running in the adjoining bathroom. Closing her eyes, she gulped the glass down and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

She thought about real food, pizza, hamburgers, fries, and wondered if she could still eat them—just for the taste. She'd have to ask Tobias about that, but something told her he'd say that was yet another thing she would have to give up.

He walked into the bedroom, a huge, white bath towel wrapped around his middle and smiled at her. "I'd say good morning, but in this case it's good evening."

His smile warmed her toes. "I was just thinking, do you ever eat real food?"

"No. The few times I tried at the beginning it didn't go down well."

"So no more coffee and toast for breakfast or ice cream on a hot, summer day, or pizza with double pepperoni and cheese?"

He looked apologetic. "I'm afraid not."

"Don't apologize. The funny thing is I haven't once craved food since I turned. My appetite is kind of shot."

He dressed in black trousers and a black silk shirt. "Cat, I have to go see Lucas over at *Full Moon* for some business details. I want you to come with me."

Cat shook her head. "Sorry. Can't. I was hoping to get some writing done and I wanted to call Mel."

"I will only be with him for an hour."

She thought about how close she was to completing her book. "I really can't, Tobias. I'll be fine here. I noticed you have a security alarm and I won't answer the buzzer for anyone."

He strode to the bed and bent down. "All right. I'll be back in an hour." And he kissed her.

Cat felt a tug of familiarity in the air, as though Tobias kissing her goodbye was something he'd done a thousand times before. Was it the past creeping back on her? His life with Seraphina?

"Stay indoors. Don't step foot outside of here. I have a private entrance I use." He kissed her again and left, leaving Cat staring after his back.

She leaned back on the bed and closed her eyes. First she would take a shower, then she would call Mel, and finally she would work on completing her book. She got out of bed and went into the bathroom. She paused before the mirror and gasped softly. Was that really her? She didn't even have bed hair. Her skin was glowing, her teeth were chalk white, and her lips were blood red. She ran a shaky hand through her lustrous, blonde hair, whispering, "Unbelievable." She'd never looked this good. Not a bad trade off for never touching pizza again, she thought with a smile.

A flash of last night swam before her eyes, and she sighed. What an incredible night, sitting on top of the Statue of Liberty with her devastatingly handsome boyfriend.

But he started to feel more than a boyfriend. Tobias started to feel more like a soul mate, a spiritual companion. She couldn't explain it, but she felt like they belonged together. That sense of familiarity returned warming her insides.

"I'm really falling in love with him," she whispered at her reflection. The admission gave her a sense of relief. Like a burden had been lifted from her shoulders. She felt liberated acknowledging her feelings for him.

She showered, smiling as her thoughts centered around Tobias. When it was time to call Mel, however, she felt a spasm of sorrow. She loved Mel like a sister and knew letting her go was going to be the hardest thing she'd ever have to face, but she had to.

Mel picked up the phone on the second ring. "Hello."

"It's Cat. Hi, Mel."

"I'm so glad you called. I haven't heard from you and I was getting worried."

"Everything is fine. I just wanted to say...hello."

There was a slight pause. "Cat, I know you. You don't sound fine. What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm just tired."

"Start the fire, lie on the couch, and relax with a good book."

"Mel, I'm not at the cabin. I...I met someone and we drove to his place in Manhattan. I'm going to stay here for a few days."

There was a pause on the other line. "Is he a nice guy?"

"Yes," Cat replied automatically. With the exception of being a vampire and turning her life completely upside down, he was a nice guy. "You'd like him."

"When can I meet him?"

"I'm not sure. Soon. I'm going to talk to him about his schedule. He owns a nightclub, and he's pretty busy these days."

"Maybe I can come down for a few days. I'm long overdue for a long weekend."

"No. Er...I mean, not yet. I'm still getting to know him and when I'm sure where this is leading I'll...I'll call you."

"Okay. Cat, if you need anything give me a call."

Cat braced herself. "Actually, there's something I have to tell you and I don't want you to worry."

"What is it?"

"It's the cabin. I...I came home after shopping for wood, and the front door was busted in." She squeezed her eyes, hating that she lied.

Mel gasped. "Oh my God. Are you okay?"

"Yes, but I was so scared the robbers would come back, I called Tobias, the guy I was telling you about, and he told me to pack and said he'd take me to his place here."

"Did you call the cops?"

"No. I wasn't thinking straight, but Tobias sealed the door as best he could before we left."

"No problem. I'll call the cops right away. They may want to talk to you. Can I give them your cell number?"

"Of course. I'm sorry, Mel."

"Nonsense. It wasn't your fault. Besides, I have insurance so don't worry about anything. As long as you're okay, that's all that matters, Cat."

As long as Mel was safe, Cat thought after they got off the phone. And that was all that mattered. It would take time to cut the ties with her, but Cat had to do as Tobias had instructed. She didn't want to be the one responsible for putting her best friend's life in danger.

She leaned her head back on the couch and closed her eyes trying to get rid of the guilt burdening her. She had never lied to Mel. Ever.

She didn't have time to think more on the subject because the front door burst open. She gasped and vaulted off the couch staring at the handsome man strolling into the penthouse. He was a tall, had dark blonde longish hair, and wore a black long black coat. He eyed her with distaste, and Cat felt her heart stop for a brief second.

He seemed very familiar to her.

"It was easy going past security," the man said in a deep voice. "He'll be out for a few hours. Plenty of time to kill you before Tobias returns."

"Who are you?" But she already knew.

Somehow, she knew deep in her heart the connection of familiarity she felt with him ran deep.

"Come now, Seraphina," he drawled. "Don't you recognize your own brother? I recognize you. You haven't changed a bit in three hundred years."

"Quinn Granger."

"At your service.."

She couldn't understand why she wasn't afraid. She felt other emotions whirling in her belly. Sadness. Disappointment. Regret, but no fear.

"What do you want?"

"I already told you I'm going to kill you and when I'm done, I'll wait for your demon lover and kill him, too."

"I won't let you."

He looked impressed. "That's interesting. You are much more confident than the Seraphina from the past. She begged and pleaded with father to spare you and Tobias."

Now Cat felt rage. White, hot rage that made her choke. "And you just stood there and let father drive that stake through my heart." She froze. Where did that come from? Where did all the feelings of anger and betrayal come from? Was her past resurfacing? Was she remembering it all?

"Yes and if you hadn't been resurrected from the dead, I would be home relaxing rather than trying to finish what father started."

Her anger slowly melted away. "Father was disillusioned, Quinn. He was ill and had you by his side since you were a child. Everything he believed in he drilled into your head." She paused, feeling sick. "He turned you into what you are today. A monster."

Quinn's face darkened in anger. "I'm a monster because I was careless on my last raid three hundred years ago and allowed one of your kind to capture me. I begged him to kill me, but he thought turning me would be punishment enough. That bastard was

right.”

“So when you disappeared all those centuries ago, you went into hiding because you turned into a vampire.”

“Yes, and I’ve been returning every few decades and re-establishing myself at the helm of the Granger empire ridding the world of evil creatures like you.”

She shook her head. “How can you say that? We’re just like humans. There’s good and bad in every race,” she said vehemently, using the same words Tobias used on the night they met.

“There are no good vampires.”

She paused, remembering something else. “I think you’re good. Or at least, there’s some good left in you.”

He laughed harshly. “I’m neither. I’m just doing what I was meant to do.”

She frowned. “What? Kill your sister?” She sighed sadly. “Father brainwashed you. He abused you. I...I remember one night I begged you to play with me and you did. Father woke up from his drunken stupor and beat you. You never played with me again.”

“Stop!” He pulled out a strange looking stick from his back pocket. He flicked a button on it and it snapped open into a wooden stake. “I didn’t ask for a trip down memory lane.”

Cat braced herself. She still wasn’t certain of her capabilities. Quinn was, after all, a three hundred year old vampire, almost as old as Tobias, and she was almost certain he was as powerful as Tobias. Did she, a fledgling vampire, stand a chance in battle with him? Cat was afraid to find out.

She tried to buy time. “Er...can’t we talk about this—”

“Enough talking!” And he vaulted through the air, his stake raised.

Cat didn’t even have time to scream as she

watched him spring towards her. She saw her life flash before her eyes as terror numbed her. A sound jarred her and she saw Tobias lunge towards Quinn and grab him by the collar. He hurled him through the air and she watched her brother crumble against a wall.

"So, this is how Seraphina's ancestor's found out about Cat. Quinn Granger," Tobias growled. "It's been a long time."

Quinn spun around, but not before Cat saw him bare two long fangs. "Tobias Knight," he growled back. "You're just in time to see your beloved die—again."

"I don't think so," Tobias said. "Not this time."

Cat couldn't believe how calm Tobias seemed and she drew strength from him.

"You sister," Tobias said, "didn't deserve to die the first time, and she doesn't deserve to die now."

"You both belong in hell," Quinn spat.

"If that's the case, then so do you."

"I thought so, too, for a long time until I realized being a vampire would serve me well with my father's quest."

"You mean killing innocent people?" Tobias remarked dryly.

"Innocent? You two? You're both Satan worshippers. The living dead."

Cat clenched her fist. "That's father speaking, not you. You've never known anything other than what he taught you, Quinn. The hate you have inside is father's, not yours."

Tobias gave her a somber look. "Cat, you're absolutely right," he began slowly, quietly. His gaze locked with hers and she felt heady. "Seraphina was a healer. So are you. Your healing powers can help this situation."

"What the devil are you talking about?" Quinn exploded.

The light went on in Cat's head. Of course! She

stared at Tobias. "What...what do I do?" she asked tremulously.

His dark gaze fixed on hers. 'Touch him,' she heard Tobias's voice say in her head. 'Touch him and set him free. Heal his tormented heart and soul.'

Cat nodded and tore her gaze away from his. She faced Quinn feeling more than a little afraid. Slowly, she walked towards him. Yes, she was frightened, but not for her life. She felt safe knowing Tobias was a few feet away from her. She was afraid for her brother. She wanted to save him and wasn't sure she could. She remembered Quinn as a young boy, playing with her, looking after her, and she knew somewhere, somehow that sibling love was still alive. She looked past his fangs, his hate, his rage, and saw her older brother, a young man who at one point loved his little sister and took beatings for her. Cat swallowed hard. She didn't hate Quinn. She still loved him.

"If you want to kill me, go ahead." She spread her hands wide, walking closer to him. "I won't stop you."

He gave her a skeptical look. "What are you—"

And before he could finish his sentence, she lunged through the air and touched his face. All her fear dissolved as compassion warmed her heart. His life force, his soul flowed through her, and she could see it all. She could see the pain, the disillusion, the fear. She saw his beatings, the incessant teachings, the cruel taunts that he would never make his father proud. Seraphina may have been ignored from her father growing up, but Quinn wasn't. He had been physically and emotionally abused until he had cracked and followed his father's every word.

He had been broken.

And then she healed his pain. She took the hate away, the rage, the heretic beliefs her father had drilled into him. And she did it with love. Her healing power was love, she realized.

When she felt the last of his torment leave his soul, she fell back and Tobias rushed to her and gathered her in his arms. Quinn slumped to the floor. Cat looked at her brother and saw the stunned shock on his face, the regret, the tormenting guilt.

He buried his face in his hands. "What have I done? I...I almost killed you. I...I allowed father to kill you. My little sister."

"You were a child, Quinn. That was all you knew," Tobias said quietly.

Quinn raised a pair of stricken eyes to him and Cat's heart broke. "I've done some very terrible things in my life. How can I ever redeem myself?"

Cat left Tobias's embrace and went to her brother. "You can live and be the man you were meant to be, Quinn. You can start over."

"I...I will need time alone. Away from everyone."

She nodded slowly. "I understand, but I hope you return when you find yourself."

He stared at his sister, his eyes glassy. "I'm sorry," he said hoarsely. "I.. I never...I—"

"Quinn, let it go," Cat said softly. "In this life I'm an orphan with no siblings or relatives. I...I hope you can be my brother one day."

He nodded slowly, his gaze going to Tobias. "You know the Grangers will never stop. Even if I disappear, they'll try to hunt you down. Someone else will take my place at the helm."

"I know," Tobias said, "and I'll be ready for them. I have no more quarrel with you, Quinn. I have my Seraphina back, that's all that matters now."

Quinn nodded and picked up the stake and flicked it back to its original small form. He slipped it in his back pocket and gave Cat a look filled with regret. "I'm sorry for the time we lost, but one day I will make it up to you."

Her eyes burned with tears. "I know."

And he left.

She stared at the empty doorway for what seemed an eternity before she felt Tobias's arms around her. She turned around and pressed her face into his chest. "It's over."

"No, it's just the beginning, Cat. Don't despair. I know he'll come back."

"Do you think he's going to be okay?"

"He's very powerful. Your brother will survive."

She raised her eyes to him. "Thank you for returning my brother back to me." And then she realized a big truth. Even though her life would never be the same, even though she had to make sacrifices, Tobias had given her the biggest miracles. A family. A child. Love. And for that she could never fault turning into a vampire.

"I love you," she whispered.

His gaze softened. "And I will treasure that love forever."

Tobias was right. It was just the beginning and Cat embraced her future with love, faith, and hope.

About the author...

Anastasia Maltezos is an exciting new author in the romance/paranormal genre. She's always been fascinated with love stories that have a paranormal element: vampires, werewolves, witches, and psychics. Now, instead of reading them, she writes them, and couldn't be happier! Her belief is love does conquer all, even when the hero wants to take an occasional nip on the heroine's neck.

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