



# BLOOD AND ALCHEMY

DRONE VAMPIRE SERIES

STEPHANI HECHT

Reunited with his clan and having found his mate, Drone Vampire Nolan only wants to settle in at his new home and start his happily ever after with his formally evil warlock, Donavan. But one can never rest easy when they are part of the supernatural world. A lesson Nolan learns the hard way when his clan comes under threat from a group of rogue demons. Soon he finds himself struggling to stay alive, while at the same protecting Donavan from his own good intentions. It doesn't make things easier on Nolan that Donavan's brother and cousin have developed the nasty habit of blowing up anyone who pisses them off.

Then Donavan's relations make the mistake of offing the wrong demon and things become more perilous than ever. Will Nolan be able to save the love of his life and his clan? Or will he be forced to make the most heart wrenching decision ever and have to pick one over the other?

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BLOOD AND ALCHEMY  
THE DRONE VAMPIRE CHRONICLES BOOK 11

BY

STEPHANİ HECHT

## DEDICATION

*To Jake and Riley. Your aunt loves you.*

## CHAPTER ONE

Blood covered everything. It coated the stone walls, leaving behind thick crimson streaks. It splattered the ceiling of the cave, the small red droplets seeming to mock Donavan with their macabre presence. It mixed in with the dirt under his feet, forming a pink, gloppy paste that stuck to his boots.

Most of all, it filled the air. The sweet, metallic scent invaded his nostrils, before traveling to his lungs. Gagging and horrified, he tried to breathe through his nose, but that only made it worse, for then he tasted it. Foul, yet warm from the waning life still lingering through it. While unpleasant, the flavor was regrettably was not foreign.

He covered his mouth with one hand, desperate to not remember the all-too numerous times he'd felt the hot trickle of blood running down his throat. Any more than he tried not to remember the screams of those who had given up the unwilling sacrifice. The innocents killed for no good reason other than the fact that a coven

wanted more power.

*This is my fault. I should have found a way to stop this, to save them. Not just the innocents either, but Lachlan and Ian. The things they'd been forced to see...to do and all because I couldn't protect them.*

Even though everything inside him screamed not to, he moved deeper into the cave. As the lighting grew worse, the stench of blood grew stronger, the rancid scent of decay gradually mixing in, eliciting another gag from Donovan. He still pressed forward, for while he knew that something horrifying lurked inside cave, he also knew that he couldn't run away either.

As he moved forward, the smears on the walls eventually took the shape and forms of ancient letters and symbols. Fear clenched his stomach as he recognized them as spells used in some of the most evil, ancient magic practiced. A cold chill danced down his spine as he made out the symbols of pain, sanguinary and death. Even if his practiced eye had not already told him the blood was fresh, that writing alone would have let him know that someone had recently been killed in the cave.

*But who and why?* Before he stepped foot inside the stone walls, he'd recognized the cave from the grounds of his childhood home, the Doyle coven. He, his brother and cousin had grown up playing inside the narrow passageways and caverns. He intimately knew every dip, bend and curve of the

place.

What didn't make sense is why his adult self had been drawn here. The Doyle sect was no more. Not since the dark coven, the Ninth, had come and all but decimated them. Donavan, Ian and Lachlan were kept alive, but only so they could be forced into the Ninth's fold, to become their unwilling soldiers.

The only reason why the three of them had agreed to go along with it had been because of their sisters. As captives of the Ninth, the women were at mercy of the evil coven. If Ian, Donavan or Lachlan so much as belched in the wrong direction, they'd been promised their siblings would be killed as punishment. That would be after the Ninth had slowly tortured the women first. A shiver went through Donavan as he recalled some of the methods of torture his new coven liked to adopt. Horror-filled incidents that would forever haunt his nightmares.

That still didn't explain why Donavan currently walked through this gore infused cave. It was almost as if the Ninth themselves had compelled him to visit, but why would they bring him back to his home coven, unless...

Panic clawed at Donavan's chest as he gasped, "No."

Instead of walking with caution, he now took off a dead run for the center clearing of the cave.



Each one of his pounding footsteps seemed to be echoing his earlier denial, *No! No! No! No!*

Even as he made that plea, Donovan realized it would be too late. They'd brought him here for one reason only—to make him suffer. Nothing would cut him more than for the Ninth to hurt those he loved the most.

His mind immediately went to Bianca, his sister. With the same raven hair and dark eyes as he and Ian, she'd already broken more than her fair share of hearts in the coven. A beauty both on the inside and out, she showed promise as a powerful witch.

Then his thoughts shifted to his cousin Lachlan. This would destroy the gentle, kindhearted warlock. Lachlan adored his two older sisters more than anything. They'd inherited the same twinkling blue eyes as him. They'd always been so kind to Donovan and Ian, too. Even when the boys had played pranks on them.

Donovan finally reached the entrance to the cavern. His body broke out in a cold, clammy sweat in anticipation as to what lay ahead of him. *Not the girls, please. Take me instead.*

A sob tore from his throat as he heard it, the thick *splat, splat, splat* of blood falling at a steady rate. At first Donovan couldn't find the source. His gaze scanned the entire interior of the stone room, but all he saw was the small ceremonial fire in the

center. Even though the flames had been extinguished, several red embers stilled glowed within the ash. A large, white chalk pentagram covered most of the floor, the center of the design marred with several puddles of blood.

Then he looked up and a cry of anguish filled the room. Hanging several feet above him were the bodies of his sister and two female cousins. They were clad only in the barest strips of black ceremonial clothes, most of their mutilated flesh exposed. In some macabre twist to the already terrifying scene, the Ninth had hung them by their ankles. The women's arms stretched down to the ground, almost in a silent plea for mercy.

Even though a part of him knew it was too late, Donovan still tried to use magic to free them. It didn't work though. No matter how many times he waved his hand or what spells he yelled out, the chains holding them up refused to budge.

Donovan let out another cry, this one laced with anger. For magic had failed him when he needed it the most. He glanced down at his palms that had once buzzed with powerful energy. Now they were as dead as the bodies above him.

"Why?" Donovan yelled, even though his enemy was no longer within earshot. "We did everything you asked of us. Why them? If you were angry about something, then why not just kill us instead?"

Of course no answer came. The only sounds in the cave were the continuing splatter of blood and his broken sobs.

Donavan jerked up, a scream stuck in his throat. For a moment, he didn't know where he was, still believing himself to be in the caves, until his frantic gaze told him otherwise. While the room was cloaked in darkness, the small green numerals from the alarm clock gave him enough light to make out now familiar shapes, a simple dresser, a straight-backed chair and the door leading to the small attached bathroom. A wave of relief washed over him as he slowly realized he was safe and in the quarters he shared with his mate, Nolan.

Not that Donovan had ever been in the cave...at least not after the Ninth had initially taken him away. He certainly hadn't seen his sister's body either. He'd only been told of what happened to her when the Ninth wanted to see him suffer. After they'd delivered the news, they'd thrown him into one of the many paranormal prisons. He, Ian and Lachlan had all rotted away in there until Nolan had come into their lives.

It was Nolan's Drone vampire clan and allied coven who had rescued them. The vampires had brought them back to their new dwelling in Pontiac and reluctantly taken in the trio of

warlocks. Not that the clan's hatred or distrust was new or even unexpected. Long ago, Donavan had resigned himself to the fact that civilized society would never accept him again. Donavan glanced down at the hated tattoos marring his wrists. Made up of black scrolls with red swirls throughout them, they marked him as a member of the most despised and feared dark coven, the Ninth.

Not that Donavan, Ian or Lachlan had ever wanted to be part of those fuckers. They'd only done such in a desperate attempt to protect what remaining family they had. In the end, they'd even failed with that. Regret sliced through him as he recalled how young his sister had been. How she'd been so vibrant and full of life.

His gaze searched for and locked into the one thing that could bring him comfort in a time like this—Nolan. The vampire continued to sleep, completely oblivious to Donavan's distress. That didn't surprise Donavan much though. The dark circles under his mate's eyes spoke of his exhaustion. Donavan frowned, worried not for the first time, that Nolan had never fully healed from the injuries he received during captivity.

Nolan slept on his stomach, the sheet pulled up to his waist. The white fabric stood stark against his tan skin. Donavan had asked him once how a vampire managed not to be pale since they never

saw the sun. Nolan had shrugged and replied that as Drones, their bodies forever maintained whatever conditions they had been at the time of transformation. Which explained why Nolan still looked eighteen even though he now was in his early twenties.

Even though it had been over an hour since they last made love, droplets of sweat still clung to Nolan's back. Donavan yearned to dip down and lick away the moisture, but he didn't want to risk waking Nolan. So instead, he allowed his fingers to slowly caress Nolan's, soft, blond locks. Since Nolan loved to have his hair played with, there would be less chance the caresses would rouse him. Donavan allowed himself to take some comfort in the silky sensation running over his hand. While Nolan didn't style his hair that long, the ends just reaching his collar, there was still enough for Donavan to play with, an activity he indulged himself with quite frequently.

Nolan's plump lips were slightly parted, revealing the tips of his fangs. At one time the sight of them would have revolted Donavan. Vampires, both Drone and Pure Born, had a nasty history with magics like him. The only reason why the two groups got along now was out of sheer desperation. All his life, Donavan had been taught that vampires were vile and lower class. Now as he gazed at Nolan's fangs, however, all he could

think about was the sheer bliss that always accompanied a bite.

A soft moan slipped from Donovan's mouth as his cock swelled to life. At the same moment, the already present bite marks on his neck began to throb. Almost as if they were sending out a plea as well. It would be so easy to wake Nolan and take him. Hell, Nolan would welcome the intrusion. He liked fucking just as much as Donovan. More so lately as the vampire seemed nearly insatiable at times.

Donovan raised his hand to shake Nolan awake before he changed his mind and let it drop. They would have plenty of time for fun later and Nolan really did need his rest. Although he'd been trying to hide it, Donovan could tell by the way the vampire kept pinching the bridge of his nose and rubbing his temples that he still suffered from headaches. Another clue that maybe Nolan hadn't totally healed. Donovan decided that the first chance he got, he'd talk to Dahlia, the clan doctor.

Better yet, he'd ask Lachlan. His cousin was the best warlock healer around. He may be awake, too. While it was still early for the Drones to be up, warlocks weren't hampered by that whole sun issue. As a result, they tended to be alert and moving around during the day.

Donovan slid out of bed, then quietly dressed in black workout pants and a green t-shirt, before

stealing from the room. On the way out, he gave one more glance at Nolan. Donovan's heart did a strange fluttering as a wave of love washed over him. Even though they'd been officially mated for a month now, it still amazed him that someone as sweet and compassionate as Nolan could care for someone like him.

After one last look of longing, Donovan gently closed the door and started down the winding hallways to where most of the magics were housed. Once a large, sprawling office complex, the building had been abandoned when the original owners had fallen victim to the economy. When the Drones and their aligned coven had been forced to leave Detroit and come to Pontiac, they'd taken over the complex and were in the process of converting it to fit their needs.

As predicted, he only encountered a small handful of vampires. So things remained mainly deserted until he got to the section of the building set aside for the witches and warlocks. As he passed the other magics, he got his fair share of sneers and dirty looks. Not that he expected differently. A white coven that was led by a warlock named Ethan, they all despised the Ninth. While Ethan had at one point studied under the Ninth, they excused their leader's transgressions since he got out before he took the final steps that would have made him a full member.

He resisted the temptation to glance down at those hated tattoos on his wrist. The ones that screamed just how deep he'd fallen into the Ninth's taboo rituals. As he reached the door to Ian and Lachlan's quarters, Donovan fought a fresh wave of anger as he noted how they'd been tucked into a room that was as far away from the others as possible.

*Jesus! What more does Ethan and his lily-white clan want? We've already explained that we were forced into the Ninth and we've sworn allegiance to his clan. We even agreed to the prick binding fifty percent of our magic. Even if we did want to be bad, little warlocks, we wouldn't have the juice to do anything against another magic.*

Just as quickly as the anger came, it dissipated and he let out a sigh. No sense in dwelling on those negative thoughts. It's not like they were going to change any time soon. Donovan had the distinct feeling that they could be living with the coven for years before even an inkling of trust was tossed their way. He ignored the jeer a passing warlock threw his way and knocked on the door. To his surprise, nobody answered. He tried again, wondering if perhaps they were still sleeping. Still no answer. He frowned, after the years they'd spent in the paranormal prison, none of them slept deeply, so there was no way they wouldn't hear a knock. That meant they had taken off somewhere.

"Shit," Donovan muttered under his breath.



This had all the potential to become a very bad situation. If it had been merely Lachlan missing, then Donovan would have assumed the healer had just gone to the cafeteria for a quick bite or something. Ian missing was a whole different bag of worms, however, because his brother liked nothing better than to cause trouble.

Donovan still faced the door when he heard squishing footsteps behind him. Like the sounds a pair of sneakers make after their owner stepped into a puddle. He cringed because he just knew that the sound meant bad news. He didn't need his magic to predict that either, not when he had nearly a whole lifetime of experience to fall back on.

"Please, don't let it be *that* bad," he pleaded with the Goddess. Not that he expected her to actually listen to him. Not when she'd long turned her holy back on Donovan and his coven.

He pivoted and bit back a foul curse at the condition he found Ian and Lachlan in. They were both in their new coven's uniform of dark leather pants and matching hooded top. The leather was trimmed in dark green. That's not what upset Donovan, no it was what covered said uniforms. At least a gallon of blood and guts. Although, going by the bright blue coloring of the blood, it came from something not human. So maybe that was a silver lining, as small as it may be.

"I can explain," Ian said, raising a hand, the movement sending a splattering of goo in Donovan's direction.

While they shared the same dark looks and tall build, the slime slicked back Ian and Lachlan's hair and made them seem almost smaller and less intimidating. Normally the three of them were nearly identical in looks, except for the color of their eyes. Donovan and Ian had dark brown, where Lachlan's were blue, like his birth father.

"Can we explain this away?" Lachlan challenged, his brow furrowed in an expression he always took when feeling guilty.

Ian rolled his eyes. "Of course we can."

"I don't think so," Lachlan persisted.

"Yes, if you keep your yap shut and let me do all the talking."

"Isn't that what got us in this mess in the first place?" Lachlan pressed his lips into a tight smirk before adding, "Pun intended."

"Yeah, I figured as much and it was pretty lame, even for you," Ian snapped.

"That's not nice, especially since I told you where their weak spot is."

"What weak spot and on whom?" Donovan demanded, already developing a pounding headache.

"Nobody," Ian said.

"Rictus demons," Lachlan replied at the same

time.

Donavan silently recited a meditation chant as he fought not to do something foolish, like strangle both of them. "Please, tell me you didn't blow up some demons in Ethan's territory."

"We didn't blow up some demons in Ethan's territory," Ian dutifully chanted.

"Really?" Donovan replied, allowing himself to feel a sliver of hope.

"No, we blew them to fuck and back." Ian grinned, showing how proud he was of that fact.

All the hope fled to be replaced with anger and a bit of exasperation. "Then why in the hell did you just tell me that you didn't?"

"Because you told me to." Ian gave Lachlan a can-you-believe-this-moron look.

"Does Ethan or the Drone leader, Eric, know that you killed demons on their turf?" Donovan reminded himself that he loved his brother...well, at least he did most of the time.

Ian thought for a second before shaking his head. "Must have slipped my simple, evil warlock mind."

The problem was that at times Ian could be considered evil by those who didn't know him like Donovan and Lachlan did. Hell, there were times where Donovan wondered if Ian would have left the Ninth had it not been for he and Lachlan. That was something that Donovan rarely

let himself dwell on let alone voice aloud. There were moments where he caught Lachlan shooting speculative glances Ian's way though, so Donovan realized he wasn't the only one with doubts.

"You know we're not supposed to kill anything without their approval," Donovan said. He only hoped this mess didn't get them booted. Ethan and Eric barely accepted them as it was. While they could easily find someplace else to live, the separation would be hard on Nolan. Drones tended to become very attached to their clans.

"In all fairness, the demons did take us by surprise," Lachlan informed in a calm voice. More than once he'd played mediator between the brothers.

"When the little monsters attacked, I didn't have time to call my two new daddies and ask for permission either," Ian added in a snarky tone.

"That still doesn't mean you had to blow the fucking things up. You could have used a basic first level spell to restrain them," Donovan pointed out, wondering if any of his lectures ever breached Ian's thick skull.

"Have you seen the claws on those things? Not to mention the long, freaky looking fangs. Plus, they had really bad breath," Ian protested.

"Great, I'll just go into Ethan's office and ask him to please forgive my brother because he has an insane phobia of halitosis."

"Hala-who-sis?"

"It means stinky breath," Lachlan told him.

Ian pulled a face. "Then why in the hell didn't he just say so?"

Now Lachlan rolled his eyes. "Yeah, how could Donovan ever think that you'd actually understand words that were over five letters long?"

"I know plenty of big words," Ian started to tick off on his fingers. "Murder, torture, homicide, maiming, bludgeoning, garroting and mayhem."

"Don't forget crazy as fuck," Donovan added, still fighting to control his temper.

"I'm not crazy, I just accept who I am," Ian replied darkly as he cast a nasty glance at a group of passing warlocks. "Don't judge me because I don't embrace white magic like these nancies."

There lay the problem. While all three of them had been tutored in the dark arts, only Ian seemed to embrace them. More than that, he actually admitted that he craved the surge of power that came with it. While that kind of mentality helped them in prison, it could very well spell disaster in civilized society.

Donovan groaned as he spotted Ethan coming their way. The warlock didn't appear happy either, going by the scowl on his face and the rigid set of his spine. It seemed like he was looking for somebody to rip apart and Donovan and his

relations would do quite nicely.

Donavan didn't know what annoyed him more about Ethan, the blond haired, blue-eyed folksy appearance, or the fact that things were always so black and white with him. In Ethan's perfect world, there was no gray and Donovan and his kin often lived in that color.

"I still can't believe the fucker is half-vamp now," Ian wrinkled his nose in disgust, almost as if he could actually smell that part of Ethan. As far as Ian was concerned, the only good vampire was dead one. He'd only recently accepted Nolan into their fold and that had only been for Donovan's sake.

Donavan let out a sigh. Great, just what he needed a pissed off Ethan and a snarky Ian, this was going to go over just peachy. "Just let me do all the talking and keep your yaps shut."

Even as he issued that order, Donovan knew there was no way in hell Ian would ever obey it.

## CHAPTER TWO

“Hey, Ethan,” Donovan called brightly, as if he weren’t standing next to two idiots covered in gore.

“What the fuck happened and what in the hell is all over their uniforms?” Ethan demanded, getting right to the point.

“Charm and a little bit of *Axe* body spray,” Ian retorted, already breaking Donovan’s keep-your-yap-shut order.

Ethan’s sharp, blue-eyed gaze flicked over Ian and Lachlan, before a low growl rumbled from his chest. Donovan didn’t have to be on intimate terms with the guy to know that reaction didn’t bode well for them. “Nice try, but I can tell it’s demon blood.”

“Hey, that’s impressive. How did you know?” Ian replied.

Ethan opened his mouth slightly and showed a glimpse of fangs. “The enhanced sense of smell that comes with these told me. Now what I don’t

know is why two warlocks who claim to be serving under me would do something so stupid as to kill one of our few remaining allies.”

Donavan almost nodded in agreement. Lachlan flushed and lowered his head. Ian just glowered back at Ethan.

“They started it,” Ian protested in a hard voice.

Donavan barely restrained himself from shooting him a disbelieving glare. How could Ian possibly think that argument would wash in any other setting save for a playground? Next he would be saying he decimated the demons because they had made fun of his outfit.

“What Ian is trying to say is they were attacked and had to defend themselves,” Donavan rushed out, desperate to smooth things over. If he could have, he would have hit Ian with a silent spell. That wouldn’t work now because, not only was it a high level spell that would require all of his powers, but Ian had learned to deflect it a long time ago.

“Is that true, Lachlan?” Ethan demanded as he drilled Lachlan with a hard stare.

Damn it! It hadn’t taken Ethan long to find the weakest link in their group. While Lachlan would never purposefully give them up, he had to be the shittiest liar this side of the country. Sure enough, Lachlan dropped his eyes again before he started to nervously shuffle his feet.



"Well...kind of...I mean, sure...those demons were out for blood," Lachlan stammered.

"But was it yours?" Ethan demanded.

Lachlan shot them an apologetic look. "No, he was trying to eat a dog."

"So let me get this right, you risked shattering the treaty I signed with the demons because of some mutt?"

"It was a cute mutt. He had big brown eyes and everything," Ian pointed out.

"I don't give a fuck if it was goddamn Lassie herself. Need I remind you three that the only reason our clan and coven can even stay in Pontiac is because the demons have agreed to let us? This is their turf and they can throw us out on our asses any time they want."

Donavan sighed. No, Ethan didn't have to remind them of that. If they were booted out, the Pure Born Vampire Regulation Force, or VRF as they were called, would be on them like flies on a corpse, too. Since Eric's clan had declared war on the VRF, almost every member had a huge bounty on their asses. Most of Ethan's coven did, too.

"It's bad enough we had to evacuate Detroit when the VRF took control of the city. We don't need to lose this home, too," Ethan snapped.

"Sorry," Lachlan and Donovan mumbled.

Ian rolled his eyes. "That treaty you have with the demons doesn't mean shit."

Lachlan groaned while Donovan contemplated strangling his brother. When would the jerk ever find his off switch?

Ethan cocked his head to the side and asked, "What is that supposed to mean?"

Shit! Now that Ethan had actually demanded an answer to that, there would be no shutting Ian up.

Sure enough, a knowing smirk spread out over Ian's lips. "It means that you really should have stuck around long enough to graduate from *Black Magic U* because you obviously didn't learn about the little war that's been going on with the demons."

"Have you been sniffing pixie dust? There is no war."

Ah, but there was. Even though Ian could be a jerk, he never had the wrong info when it came to stuff like this. More than once Lachlan had called him the Perez Hilton of the paranormal world.

"For the past few years the two biggest demon factions have been fighting over who gets to be king of the hill," Ian informed Ethan.

"Bullshit. If that were true then everyone would know about it. There is no way the demons could keep something this big secret," Ethan snapped.

"Demons have always kept their business real close to their scaly chests," Ian countered. "Not only that, but most of the fighting has been in Hell

and it's not like we have a personal invite to that area. So most of mayhem and bloodshed has been out of sight."

"Ian may be an ass in his delivery, but he's right" Donovan cut in.

"If it's such a secret, then how in hell do you three know about it?" Ethan challenged.

"Because unlike you, *Beaver*, we did graduate from *Black Magic U*," Ian drawled. "In fact, we even get the alumni newsletter. Although to be fair, it's mostly their way of getting donations. It gets so tiring after a while."

Donovan made a slicing motion with his hand. "What my brother is trying to say is the Ninth knew about it because they sold their services to both sides of the demon sects. Even though they'd already tossed us into the prison at that point, some of the coven elders would still come to Ian from time to time for advice."

"Let me guess, their loyalty would shift with whoever happened to be paying the most at the time," Ethan said bitterly. "What I don't get is why Ian agreed to help the Ninth after all they did to your family. Ian doesn't help those he likes, let alone sworn enemies."

"Sometimes it helps to have pull in certain situations," Ian snapped.

"In other words, the Ninth could use their influence to make things better or worse for you in

prison, so you had no choice but to play along," Ethan surmised.

"Someone give the warlock a gold star." Ian grimaced as he rubbed his cheek. "Can we go and take a shower now? The demon guts are starting to dry and it's making me itchy."

"Tough shit. Suffer," Ethan bit out without one ounce of remorse.

At that moment, Donavan found some respect for the leader. It took a strong person to stand up to Ian and Ethan did it without showing the least bit of hesitation. Ian blinked in confusion a few times, for once at a loss for words. Since he had the reputation of being a batshit crazy, homicidal, badass he wasn't used to having someone other than Lachlan or Donavan get in his face. Donavan would have laughed if the situation had been less tense.

"Not cool, *Beaver*. It's not nice to leave your minions in discomfort," Ian finally retorted.

Donavan noticed some of the meanness missing from his brother's tone.

Ethan turned his full attention to Ian. "You know a lot of people have compared you to Dante."

"Who the hell is that?" Ian continued to scrub at his face, his mouth pressed into a tight grimace of discomfort.

"He's one of the few Pure Born vampires living

in our clan."

"Well, do you think I'm like him? Are all the others right about me? I'm just dying to hear some words of wisdom from the great Ethan."

"At first I would have said yes, but the more I get to know you, the more I see how different the two of you are."

"Really? And how is that?"

"While Dante may be rough around the edges and have a smart mouth, you're just plain mean."

"Ouch, you wound me," Ian drawled sarcastically as he put a hand to his chest. "And after I protected Nolan while he was in prison."

"Let's not shit each other, the only reason you did that was because Donovan cared for him. Otherwise you would have never thought twice about some wounded, sick vampire."

Lachlan and Donovan exchanged nervous glances. While they would never admit it aloud, everything Ethan said had a ring of truth to it. Ethan had more to deliver though.

"You want to know what the most screwed up thing about you is?"

"Please, that way I can add it to my Facebook page. Nothing annoys me more than an incomplete profile," Ian shot back.

"You're not psychotic or suffering from PTSD or something, you're simply evil, and the worst part is you're that way just because you like the

high that comes with it.”

Ian grinned, wickedly. “You ought to know, boss, since you used to live with Ninth. Just like us.”

“But unlike you, I didn’t embrace their lifestyle. I think if it weren’t for Ian and Lachlan, you would have never left,” Ethan said, taking a step closer.

Donavan quickly moved between the two warlocks before it came to blows. “But he did leave. Which is a good thing, because you may need him.”

“What for? You and Lachlan have the same training as Ian,” Ethan pointed out.

Donavan exchanged another round of uneasy glances with Lachlan. Did he dare admit the truth to Ethan or would it just make things worse? In the end, Donavan decided to fess up. “Because Ian specialized in demon studies.”

“Why am I not surprised?” Ethan replied.

Ian gave a proud grin. “And that’s how I know the treaty you supposedly signed isn’t worth the paper you use to wipe your ass with. Because I’d bet my last cream donut that you only signed it with one sect.”

“Obviously, yes, since I didn’t know there was more than one group of ruling demons.” A tick developed in Ethan’s jaw.

“Oh, so the *Beaver* is going to need the big, old

meanie after all." Ian nearly danced around in excitement.

Donavan shot him a warning glare, but of course his brother ignored it.

He sunk even lower in his display of juvenile behavior when he began to chant, "Ethan needs me. Now he loves me. I'm simply irresistible to him."

Ethan shook his head and asked Donovan, "Is he always like this?"

"Pretty much. Actually, he's toning it down some for you," Donovan replied, his gut clenching in mortification over his brother's behavior.

"He is the best at demonology though," Lachlan added, as always trying to be helpful.

Ian stopped chanting. "So does this mean I can go take a shower? I'm beginning to smell real gamey here."

"Sure," Ethan gave a huge, fake smile, "right after you wash the vehicles in Brenden's convoy."

"No fair," Ian frowned. "That has to be a dozen big ass trucks. It will take us all day."

"Then you better get moving. Take Lachlan with you since you two seem to like working together so much." Ethan gave a dismissing wave of his hand.

Ian looked like he wanted to argue, but Lachlan shook his head. After giving a woe-is-me sigh, Ian allowed Lachlan to drag him off into the direction

of the parking garage.

After they'd left, Donovan waited for Ethan's next bombshell. He didn't have to be a physic to know that the coven leader had more on his mind. Finally Ethan blurted, "Believe it or not, I'm beginning to trust you."

Donovan couldn't have been more shocked had the Detroit Lions won the Super Bowl. He blinked stupidly a few times before venturing, "You do?"

"Yeah, and Lachlan, too."

"So why are you still binding half of our magic?" On instinct, Donovan flexed his fingers, only to feel the same muffled energy.

"Because I don't trust Ian and I'm afraid he'll find a way to use your powers to his advantage. Take tonight for example, there is no way Lachlan would have blown a group of demons up had it not been for Ian's influence."

"I can control Ian," Donovan argued.

Ethan cocked a brow. "Can you?"

Donovan opened his mouth to fire off a *hell yes* only to clamp his lips together when he realized that would be a lie. As much as it killed him to admit, he could no more control Ian, then one could the weather. Guilt and a bit of nausea slammed into Donovan for thinking so harshly of his own blood, but there was no way around it. Ian had been a handful before the Ninth attacked their childhood coven. Now that he'd spent so



much time immersed in dark magic, he was downright dangerous. Add in the baggage he still carried from prison and the guy was damn scary.

"If you earn his trust, Ian would die for the coven," Donovan said with certainty. For all Ian's faults, once he decided to be loyal to someone, he never changed his mind.

"I actually believe that. Nolan told me that one of the reasons he survived the prison was because of Ian's protection."

Donovan felt a surge of love for his mate. While Ian may not be Nolan's favorite person, he obviously had sung the warlock's praises to Ethan. Donovan made a mental note to think of some way special to thank his mate.

"Give Ian some time," Donovan advised. "He's suffered a lot in the past and not just at the hands of the Ninth. He lost his mate to a vampire attack years ago and he never really recovered from it. Before Nolan, Ian couldn't even stand to be around vampires and now he's having to live with a clan full. While we all admire and respect Eric and everyone living here, it's still an adjustment."

Donovan tensed, expecting an angry outburst. After all, Ethan was mated to a vampire, instead he got the second shock of the evening when Ethan nodded.

"I can understand that. I used to feel the same way. Not that I'm proud of it."

A sigh of relief passed through Donovan's lips as he realized they wouldn't be getting the boot just yet. He decided that was a sign for him to make an exit. "Do you need me to go and help Ian and Lachlan?"

"No, I want you to go out patrolling with me and Brenden. If there is some froggy demon activity going on, I want to find out about it before it literally comes back to bite us in the ass."

Donovan nodded, trying to hide his surprise. In all the time he'd been with the coven, this marked the first time he'd been sent out on an actual mission. "Sure thing, just tell me when you're ready to go out. I promise I won't let you down."

## CHAPTER THREE

Nolan got lost twice on his way to the workroom. Disgusted with his stupidity, he tried hard to ignore the anxiety that also nagged him. After being home so long there wasn't a good reason for him to still be getting lost. Sure he could chalk it up to lack of sleep, but he knew it would only be an excuse.

He rubbed his burning eyes as he bit back a curse of frustration. Damn, that Bikor bite and damn the VRF for poisoning him in the first place.

Part of his torture when he'd been captured had been when they allowed a Bikor demon to bite him. Since their saliva carried a toxin, Nolan had been rendered temporarily blind. Once he returned to the clan, Dahlia had administered the antidote and, while he'd got his vision back, things were far from hunky dory.

Even though Nolan could now see, he'd been plagued with migraines, blurry vision and memory lapses. He knew that he should go back

to Dahlia, or at the very least let Donovan know, but Nolan had been too afraid.

If Eric got wind that Nolan was still having trouble, the clan leader would pull him from all his duties. Nolan simply couldn't allow that. As one of the best hackers in the clan, they required him now more than ever. The war with the VRF was getting more intense every day and they needed every computer geek they had to ensure that they maintained communication with other clans and allies.

Nolan also helped out in the weapons department. While he wasn't a wiz at manufacturing and development like Brenden, his team leader, Nolan still knew more than most of the other clan members.

Nor could he let Donovan know that he still suffered from the bite. The warlock tended to be overprotective at times. Plus, Nolan didn't want to add more to his mate's problems. It was already enough that Donovan had given up half his powers and put up with hatred every day, just so they could be together. The last thing he needed was more worries on top of that. Nolan felt sure that eventually he'd get back to normal anyhow. Vampires were rapid healers, this particular venom just must be especially complex or something.

As he walked through the drab, gray corridors,

Nolan couldn't help but miss their previous home, a converted warehouse in Detroit. This new dwelling seemed more cramped and clinical. He tried to tell himself that it was because they really hadn't had the time to convert things to their specifications, but a part of Nolan suspected that this new place would never feel like home.

It had been a hard shock when he'd been rescued to find out that his clan had to evacuate Detroit. When Nolan had escaped the VRF the first time, several years ago, Detroit had been the only place where he'd felt safe. Now that it had been ripped away from him, he felt exposed and vulnerable.

A sharp pain stabbed him from behind his eyes and he stopped walking, a hiss of pain slipping past his lips. Fuck, not another headache. The damn things were beginning to become a daily occurrence.

"Hey, you okay?" a soft voice asked him.

Nolan glanced up and saw one of his fellow team members, Toby. Yet another thing that had altered during his captivity. Before Nolan had left, Toby had been one of the few humans living at the clan. All that changed when Toby had been attacked by a former clan member named Raven. She'd been in a jealous rage because Toby's vampire brother had claimed a mate and she'd taken it out on the then helpless human. While the

bitch had died for her transgression, it had been too late to stop Toby from turning. What really sucked about the whole thing is Toby had made it perfectly clear that he never wanted anything to do with vampires, let alone become one.

Toby had been tall and muscular as a human, now as a vampire he had even more bulk. So much so that he probably was one of the biggest guys in the clan. Now that he'd truly become *one of the family*, he'd really embraced his role as a Drone soldier, wearing his dark hair in a short military cut and always having a weapon strapped to his side. Not that Nolan blamed the man for being cautious. If it had been him who had been attacked in what was supposed to be a safe place, he'd probably be the same way.

"Yeah, I just have a headache," Nolan said, pasting on a fake smile.

Toby's frown showed he didn't buy it. "You've been having a lot of those lately."

"No, I haven't."

"Don't bullshit me. I've been noticing the way you've been rubbing your temples and wincing whenever there's a loud noise," Toby persisted.

Nolan's heart froze with dread. Had he been that obvious and if so, who else may have noticed? He started to deny it, but realized that Toby would see right through him. "Please, don't say anything to anyone else, especially to Donovan."

"Why not? Isn't he your mate?"

"Yes, but if he finds out, he'll only be worried and he has enough to deal with already," Nolan pleaded.

"Then just go to Dahlia and have her check you out. She is the clan doctor."

"If I do that, she'll go to Eric and he'll pull me off duty," Nolan argued, striving to keep his voice down. It would be just his luck that somebody would overhear their conversation and go tattling. One of the downfalls of clan life was that it was near impossible to have a private life.

"She can't do that. Aren't doctors supposed to protect their patient's confidentiality?"

"Maybe human doctors, but not Drone ones. The clan comes before everything else, so she would be duty bound to report it Eric." Nolan swallowed hard, before voicing his newest fear. "In fact, most any other vampires would report me."

"Is that your off handed way of asking if I'm going to run to Eric?" Toby asked drolly as he crossed his arms over his massive chest.

"Maybe," Nolan hedged, his heart beating so hard there was no way Toby's enhanced vampire hearing could miss it.

"Don't worry, your secret is safe with me."

When Nolan started to thank him, Toby held up a finger. "On one condition."

"What?" Nolan narrowed his eyes in suspicion.

While Toby wasn't as big of a smartass as the rest of the team, the condition could still be something outlandish. The last time Nolan found himself indebted to someone from their group, he had to spend a week doing Cherish's laundry. Since she had not one, but two mates, that had meant a ton of work.

"If it continues, I want you to see some kind of healer. I don't care if it's a magic, werewolf or frigging harpy. Just so long as they make sure you're okay."

"Deal," Nolan agreed quickly. Secretly, he hoped it wouldn't come to that. His stomach clenched at the mere thought of a harpy, slapping on a pair of latex gloves before telling him to bend over and cough.

"I was just on my way to the workshop. Are you coming?" Toby asked.

Nolan nodded, grateful to have someone lead the way. He'd never admit to Toby that he'd also been suffering from memory loss though. Nolan had a feeling if Toby knew about that added bit of information, he'd insist that they see a healer immediately.

When they walked into the large, open room, it relieved Nolan to see that only a handful of the team was already present. When they all got together, they tended to be loud and that's the last



thing his head needed at the moment. The soft, lull of eighties music came from one of the many computers lining one wall. Nolan smiled, glad that at least that remained the same.

Once a group of misfits who just hung out together and were dubbed the *Dork Detail*, Nolan's friends had become one of the clan's most important teams. Not only could most of them handle their own in a fight, but they developed some of the most fierce weapons used in the supernatural world. Hence the reason the Pure Born government was so keen to capture them above all other Drones. Nolan knew the VRF still had to have their panties in a wad over him escaping from prison a month ago.

A shiver went through Nolan as he thought of the other reason why his escape may have caused some anger. Corbin, the head of the VRF had been the one who'd turned Nolan when he'd only been eighteen. Ever since, Corbin had taken a sadistic interest in Nolan, both because of his superior hacking abilities and for other, more gut clenching reasons. Before he'd left for Detroit, Nolan had suffered greatly under the VRF leader's hand.

When Nolan had been recaptured seven months ago, Corbin had thought he'd be as easily able to break Nolan as before. When Nolan had shocked him by refusing, the leader had ordered the Bikor to bite. After that, he'd thrown the then

hopeless and blind Nolan into the paranormal prison in order to *soften him up*. If it hadn't of been for Donovan protecting him, Nolan could very well of died in that pit, or even worse be under Corbin's rule again.

"You sure you're okay?" Toby's caring voice broke into Nolan's troubled thoughts.

Nolan forced himself to shake off the bad memories. No sense in dwelling on them since he couldn't change them or the affect they continued to have on him. While the nightmares came at less frequency now that he had Donovan for support, Nolan didn't think he'd ever be over that period of his life right after his transformation.

Toby's vampire brother, Micah, was hunched over a rocket launcher. He waved at them as they walked in. As usual, Toby ignored Micah, not even glancing his brother's way. It was no secret that Toby blamed Micah for him being turned into a vampire and he held a major grudge over that fact. Nolan had heard they hadn't spoken in months.

Part of Nolan wanted to yell at the brothers to get their heads out of their collective asses. The VRF had killed all of his family and Nolan would do anything to see them again. So the fact that Toby and Micah insisted on holding onto this feud pissed Nolan off.

"How long are you going to keep ignoring

him?" Nolan challenged Toby.

"When did it become your business?" Toby snapped back, going over to a set of half constructed Sunlight Grenades.

"Since both of you are my friends," Nolan pointed out gently.

Toby shot him an irritated glare. "Leave it be. It's not like Micah and I are arguing over something small, like forgetting a birthday or something. Thanks to him, not only am I a vampire, but so is our sister, Sydney."

"Sydney, was willingly turned so she could be mated to Eric," Nolan reminded him. "Micah didn't force her to do that anymore than he forced Raven to attack you. While she may have been fixated on him, he never once encouraged her attraction."

"If he hadn't shown up all fanged up at my mother's doorstep, then we would have never been sucked into this damn world. Thanks to his little stunt, the VRF targeted us for elimination and we were forced to come live here."

"I agree he should have never gone home. There's several reasons why Drones are forbidden to contact their human families and your situation is one of them. Still, you can't keep blaming Micah."

"Watch me," Toby growled.

Nolan thought the Drone was being a bit of

dick, but he held that opinion to himself since they were friends. Instead, he asked, "Have I ever told you how I got turned?"

"No."

He took in a shaky breath. Whenever he thought back to that horrible night, the terror always felt so raw and fresh. Nolan wondered if it would ever fade over time. Vampires were immortal, so he would have several years to heal. After a second of contemplation, he decided that it probably never would, even if he lived to be a thousand.

"I was eighteen when they turned me." He swallowed hard against the lump in his throat.

"Who? Was it a group of feral vampires?"

Toby's question wasn't a dumb one since many Drones were the result of feral vampire attacks. Not many sane Pure Borns would lower themselves to turn a human and before recently, Drones faced death if they turned someone without the VRF's consent. Yet another example on how, the Pure Borns looked down on Drones, treating them like second class citizens and denying them even the most basic civil rights. Hence the rebellion.

"No, lucky me had the privilege of being turned by the VRF themselves. Better yet, it was Corbin, their leader who did the honors," Nolan replied tightly, his gut churning at thoughts of the

blond, Pure Born vampire who had been his tormentor.

"Why did they pick you?" Toby asked, his gaze softening with concern.

"I've always been great with computers and hacking into places where I shouldn't be. I got way too cocky and started targeting government systems. I stumbled across the VRF's and you know all too well what happens to humans who discover their existence."

"So, why didn't they just kill you outright?" Toby held up his hands. "Don't get me wrong, I'm glad they didn't eliminate you. I just don't understand why they spared you. I may be new to this world, but even I realize the VRF aren't known for having mercy."

"Corbin was impressed with my hacking skills and decided I could be put to good use. The rest of my family, however, was a different story. I had to watch as they slowly slaughtered my parents, younger brother and sister." Nolan noted his hands were shaking so he hid them in the front pocket of his black uniform pants.

"Oh, my God," Toby breathed, his eyes wide with horror. "What happened after that?"

He would have to ask that. Nolan briefly closed his eyes and took a deep, steadying breath before continuing, "They took me back to the VRF headquarters, strung me up in the center quad and

whipped me within an inch of my life. I was told later that most vampires don't survive it, let alone humans like I still was. I was nearly done for when they finally cut me down. After that, Corbin turned me and proceeded to make me his personal bitch."

"You mean he started to force you do computer work for him, right?" Toby reached out and gently touched Nolan's arm.

"That and then some. One of Corbin's kinks is that he likes to keep some Drones that he's turned close by to attend to all of his needs." Nolan prayed Toby got all the meaning behind that statement because he sure as hell didn't feel like going into deep detail about that part of his life.

"Shit, I'm so sorry to hear that."

Nolan breathed a sigh of relief when he saw no disgust in his friend's gaze, just a gentle understanding. Shame from that chapter of his life had led Nolan to only share with a select few, Eric and Donovan being top of the list.

"Corbin pretty much ignored me in that aspect since he liked to be around females more, but there were times..." Nolan trailed off, a shame choking him up.

"It's okay, you don't have to go on. I get it," Toby soothed.

"For the longest time I didn't fight back because I figured I deserved it," Nolan finally managed to

get out.

Toby gaped at him. "What would ever make you think that?"

"Because it was my fault my family was murdered. If I hadn't been a shit and hacked into those systems, the VRF would have never targeted us."

"That's stupid. The VRF is responsible for that, not you," Toby argued, just as Nolan had suspected he would.

"Yet, you blame Micah for what they did to your family," Nolan pointed out. "I don't get why you insist on continuing this feud with him. If I had my family back, nothing would keep me away from them."

"Ouch, not cool." Toby jerked his hand away and took a step back.

"It's true though," Nolan persisted, hoping his action wouldn't cost him their friendship.

"You were only a kid. Plus, Micah had already been turned and he knew full well what kind of fallout could have come from his actions," Toby retorted, his eyes growing stormy with anger.

"True, but I know I may have fallen under the same temptation had my family still been alive. He loves you guys and from what I hear, he'd just gone to your father's grave to say goodbye when your sister stumbled upon him. Micah didn't purposely make contact with you."

"It's because of Micah that Sydney and I are blood drinking animals," Toby snapped, his voice so loud the rest of the team glanced their way.

A pained expression passed over Micah's face, but he made no move to enter into the conversation.

"So now you're immortal, have superior strength, enhanced senses and are forever young." Nolan cocked his head to the side, mocking deep thought. "How stupid of me. You're right, that's just terrible."

"We're also homicidal monsters," Toby roared.

Nolan snorted. "Please, we don't even begin to compare to the human race in that department. If you don't believe me, just watch an hour of CNN. Not a day passes by where they don't report some story that shows who the true monsters are."

Several anxious moments passed as Toby stared him down. Nolan tensed, not knowing if an attack would be coming his way. A cold sweat broke out over his body as a wave of adrenaline danced through his veins. While he knew he could hold his own against most foes, Toby was pretty damn big. Nolan didn't relish the idea of tangling with the guy.

"You really suck," Toby finally said. He tossed down a tool and stormed out of the workroom, not sparing Nolan or Micah a parting glance.

After Toby left, Nolan let out a pent in breath



and nervously ran a hand through his hair. *That situation could have gone better.*

Micah nervously bit on his bottom lip. "I'm really sorry you got caught up in our mess."

So was Nolan, but he didn't voice that for fear of making Micah feel even worse. Nolan gave a dismissive wave of his hand. "It's no big deal. I'm sure you'd do the same for me."

When Nolan had first come to the clan, he'd instantly clicked with Micah. Since they'd both been relative newcomers, they'd bonded as they became acclimated to living a Drone life. Later when Toby had come, Nolan had become close to the then human, too, because he reminded Nolan of Micah in so many ways. Not just because they were brothers either. Both men had a deep-seated need to do right and that was something that Nolan admired because it was so rare.

"Yeah, I would do the same for you." Micah came over and embraced Nolan.

Nolan hugged him back. As he tried not to get too worried over the fact he'd pissed Toby off, Nolan took some comfort that at least his headache had faded. He knew it would only be a matter of time before it came back though.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Donavan walked into the workroom to find his mate in another man's arms. He paused, his hands clenching in fists. At the same time, he berated himself for being so stupid. It's not like Nolan ever gave him a reason to doubt his devotion. If anything, the vampire had gone out of his way to show his undying love to Donovan. That still didn't mean Donovan liked seeing another male touch what belonged to him.

"Don't worry, they're just buddies. Micah has a mate, too," Ethan whispered.

"Was I that obvious?" Donovan asked as he resisted the strong urge to go over there and separate Nolan from the other male.

"Yeah," Ethan replied in a perfectly clear *duh* tone. "The way you were growling gave you away."

"I wasn't growling," Donovan protested, even as he doubted his own words.

*Oookay*, Ethan mouthed.

Nolan must have sensed them coming in because he stepped away from the other vampire and grinned at Donovan. "Hey, what are you doing here? You told me you were avoiding this place because you couldn't stand hearing *Vienna Calling* one more time."

"I dragged him here," Ethan volunteered.

"Hey, I'm not complaining. I like having him close by." Nolan licked his lips as he eyed up the bite marks on Donovan's neck.

While the move came off as sexy, a small twinge of worry hit Donovan. Maybe he was just being worried over nothing, but Nolan seemed to be having to feed a lot lately. Most Drones his age would need to feed maybe once a day tops, but lately Nolan had been blood hungry two or three times a night. Once again, Donovan vowed to himself that before the night was over he'd have a talk with Lachlan. Maybe he was worrying over nothing, but when it came to Nolan, Donovan didn't want to take any chances.

"Pull in your fangs, that's not what we came here for," Ethan drawled.

"Oh," Nolan pressed his lips together in a slight pout. "Then what did you need?"

"We were about to go out on a mission and I thought you might want to come along," Donovan offered.

A bright smile spread out over Nolan's face, the

gesture doing funny things to Donovan's stomach. Call him a sap, but he lived to see Nolan happy. Now he understood why some warlocks actually died for their mates. He knew he sure as hell would gladly sacrifice himself to keep Nolan safe.

"I haven't been patrolling in a couple nights. It would be great to get out. These guys in here are getting to be old hat."

The few team members in the room voiced their outrage that Nolan could actually be sick of their company. Nolan ignored them as he approached Donovan. "Are we leaving right away, or do we have a few minutes to prepare first?"

The lustful gaze Nolan shot him let Donovan know the vampire didn't mean getting supplies rounded up.

Ethan must have received the same message because he let out a snort of disgust. "You have ten minutes and then I expect both of you in the garage."

"You got it, Ethan," Nolan said, his heated gaze never leaving Donovan.

Before the coven leader had even left, Nolan grabbed Donovan by the front waistband of his pants and started to lead the way to the bathroom. Donovan's body instantly responded, his cock hardening in anticipation. Even though he'd taken Nolan numerous times in the past twenty-four hours, a hunger filled Donovan's bloodstream as

he eyed up his mate's perfectly shaped ass. Donovan didn't think he'd ever tire of the sight.

Donavan would have argued for a more private place, but he knew Nolan had a bit of an exhibitionist side to him. Even so, a part of him was shocked Nolan picked that moment to get frisky. From what Donovan had seen and heard, Nolan always presented himself as professional and a quickie didn't fit that description.

Not that Donovan could refuse him. Especially when Nolan tossed a look of pure lust at him. Nolan's fangs had dropped, so the tips hung over his bottom lip, adding more to the wicked picture. He gave Donovan one last seductive smile before leading him into the bathroom.

No sooner had Donovan shut the door behind them and Nolan was on him. He cupped Donovan's face and stood up on tiptoes so their mouths could meet in a hard, brutal kiss. Donovan grunted in pain when Nolan's fangs sliced through his bottom lip, cutting it open. He didn't stop the kiss though, hurt or not, it felt like sheer heaven to be tasting Nolan's sweetness.

Nolan let out little whimpers as he began to greedily suck at the blood. Donovan found himself wishing for those fangs to be sinking into his neck. It didn't matter anymore that Nolan had just fed hours ago, all Donovan cared about was feeling that brief piercing pain and the sheer bliss that

always followed. More than once, he had an orgasm just from being fed upon.

"Ian was right," Donovan gasped as he felt his fly being undone.

"Really?" Nolan asked, not really sounding too interested. He slowly lowered Donovan's pants until the warlock's cock sprang free.

"Yeah, he said I'm becoming a real fang whore."

Nolan paused, his eyebrows rising in amusement. "Is that such a bad thing?"

"I'm sure Ian could think of a thousand reasons why it is, but right now I'd be pressed to name one."

"That's a very good answer." Nolan dropped to his knees and gazed up at Donovan. "I think you deserve a reward."

"Oh God, yes, please," Donovan hissed as he threaded his fingers through Nolan's hair.

"Wow, begging, too. I'm going to have treat you extra special," Nolan crooned before he ran his tongue, oh-so-slowly, along the underside of Donovan's shaft.

Donovan groaned, his eyelids fluttering shut. "It's always good with you."

Nolan treated him to some lazy swirls on the head of his cock. "Damn, I could fuck you every moment of the day."

That Donovan could believe, with the way

Nolan had become such a horn ball lately. It was all Donovan could do to keep up with the vampire. Nolan's tongue darted out again, this time twisting a path along the entire width of Donovan's erection. All the while, he never once nicked Donovan's tender flesh with his extended fangs.

"You're so good at this," Donovan praised.

"What can I say? I love to suck cock."

A wave of jealousy surged through Donovan. While he knew it was unwarranted because Nolan had never been anything but faithful, Donovan couldn't help but think of the embrace he'd walked in on just moments before. He tugged slightly on Nolan's hair and tipped the vampire's head back to they could lock gazes. "You only suck my cock now, right?"

Neither fear nor anger flashed through Nolan's eyes, just a flare of passion that showed he loved Donovan's alpha streak. "Just you, I promise. How could anyone even begin to compare to this perfection?"

Nolan reached up and cupped Donovan's balls to indicate what he spoke of. Pleasure whipped through Donovan, erasing the last bit of anger. "Sorry, I didn't mean to be one those jealous, idiot types. I just kind of lost it when I saw someone else touching you."

"That's okay, I would probably react the same

way if I saw another warlock pawing you up.” Nolan gave Donovan’s balls a gentle squeeze. “Now are you going to let go of my hair so I can get at you?”

As soon as Donovan released him, Nolan struck. Instead of taking Donovan’s cock into his mouth though, Nolan used his fangs. They sunk deep into Donovan’s inner thigh, just inches from his dick.

Donavan yelped, then moaned as bliss slowly took over. Nolan’s lips felt almost like a lover’s caress as they worked against Donovan’s skin, slowly sucking in deep drags of blood. The pleasure grew to almost painful proportions as Donovan’s cock began to pulse in time to Nolan’s drinks.

Nolan’s hands reached around to grab Donovan’s ass, his hold so firm it almost hurt. Donovan knew he’d probably have bruises by the time they were done, but damned if he could find it inside himself to care. Nolan continued to take in hard pulls, his throat making greedy gulps that echoed through the small room. Donovan started to feel a bit lightheaded and knew he should pull Nolan off, yet at the same time, he didn’t want it to end. Then just as he started to see spots, Nolan licked the wounds closed and quickly transferred his lips to Donovan’s cock.

“Oh, Goddess,” Donovan cried out.



The blood had made Nolan's mouth hotter than normal, the lingering blood mixing with saliva and providing for a thick lubricant. Nolan worked it good, too, his cheeks hallowing out as he sucked Donovan in hard.

"That's it, take it all in," Donovan urged as he cupped the back of Nolan's head.

Nolan hummed around Donovan's dick, before starting a fast, almost frantic rhythm. Donovan swayed slightly on his feet, still a bit dizzy from blood loss, it only made the pleasure seem more intense though. Besides, he knew from past experience his warlock body would quickly recover. This hadn't been the first time they'd gotten carried away during a feeding.

Donovan grunted as Nolan's fingers dug in deeper, his nails scoring skin. At the same moment, Nolan looked up at him. That's all it took, once glance into his mate's passion infused gaze and a hard orgasm slammed into Donovan.

"Fuck, yes," Donovan gasped as his cock emptied into Nolan's mouth.

Nolan managed to swallow most of it, but some spunk still trickled down his chin, mixing in with the blood already streaked there. Donovan let out a low growl as he hoisted Nolan to his feet.

"Look at how messy you are," Donovan chastised before he started to slowly lick Nolan's face clean.

The taste of his own blood and semen already had Donovan's cock stirring again, despite the fact he'd just come. Nolan let out a throaty laugh as he looked down. "Damn, I love that my mate is an immortal. They can always get it right back up."

"Turn around and lower your pants," Donovan ordered gruffly.

A sinful smirk came over Nolan's swollen lips. He grabbed a small tube of lubricant out of his front pocket and pressed it into Donovan's hand. "Here, we're going to need this."

Donovan stared down at it, once again surprised. "Since when do you carry this with you all the time?"

Nolan lowered his pants to his thighs and turned his body to the wall, bracing his hands shoulder width apart. Glancing over his shoulder, Nolan said, "Ever since I bonded with the hottest warlock I've ever seen."

The bonding mark on Donovan's neck tingled in response. A bite wound permanently scarred into his flesh, it basically marked him as Nolan's property. A few months ago, the mere thought of carrying such a mark would have repulsed Donovan. Now it made him hard with need.

Donovan popped open the tube and squeezed some lubricant over his fingers. Tossing the lube to the side, he pressed his chest to Nolan's back. Nolan immediately arched, his ass rubbing against

Donavan's erection. Donovan leaned down, so he could whisper, "Stay still, it's my turn to be in charge."

"But I need to come," Nolan whimpered, his eyes bright from the high vampires always got when they drank from a magic.

"And you will, but not until I say." Donovan started to work one finger in and out of Nolan's tight hole.

"I want you so bad, it hurts," Nolan protested.

"Guys always say that," Donovan added another finger.

"No, it really does hurt," Nolan whimpered, but this time it came out as a sound of distress instead of rapture.

"It'll be even worse if I fuck you before you're ready," Donovan argued, his heart thumping in worry.

What in the fuck was going on? Donovan may not have that much experience in Drone behavior, but even he knew this wasn't the norm. It almost seemed as if Nolan were in agony and the only way he could get relief was through sex. That couldn't be it though, only certain demons suffered from that type of infliction.

"It'll hurt worse if you don't," Nolan cried out, his face growing alarmingly pale.

Donovan reluctantly pulled out his fingers and used the rest of the lube to slick himself up. He'd

be damned if he didn't take at least that precaution. Nolan let out groan as he bit his bottom lip so hard, his fangs cut into his skin. Twin trails of blood fell down his chin.

"I love you," Donavan said by way of apology right before he surged inside Nolan.

Nolan cried out and Donavan almost hesitated until he saw the expression of relieved bliss on Nolan's young features. "Yes, Donavan, just like that."

Donavan still tried to take things slow, but Nolan would have none of it. He reached back and grabbed onto Donavan's thighs, forcing him in deeper. When Donavan continued to try for caution, Nolan let out a hiss, "Fuck me already. I'm not human so it's not like you can break me."

"Great, just what I need, a bossy bottom," Donavan grouched, but he began to pound into Nolan.

"Yeah, that's it," Nolan moaned, his head falling back against Donavan's chest.

The new position gave Donavan a great view of his mate's, long fangs. How could he have ever thought of them as unattractive? They represented the wild, predator inside Nolan that Donavan loved to unleash.

As always, Nolan's body squeezed Donavan's cock just perfectly. Almost as if the Goddess had made them for one another. If Donavan had

allowed himself to trust in fate and all that crap, he would have believed that maybe she had intended for him and the vampire to be mates. It would explain away the almost instant attraction they'd had for one another.

Donavan reached around and grabbed Nolan's cock. As he began to quickly stroke the shaft, he said, "You can come now."

"Thank you," Nolan replied, his voice thick with passion.

It took exactly two more passes of Donavan's hand and Nolan came with a loud cry. Donavan joined him, his cock pulsating before releasing hot waves of cum inside the vampire's ass.

Nolan rested his forehead against the wall, a look of utter contentment on his face. "Shit, babe, that was amazing."

Donavan placed a kiss on the back of Nolan's sweaty neck. "I aim to please."

Nolan laughed. "You did that and then some."

Even over the wonderful fuzzy sensation of I-just-had-sex, Donavan still felt an edge of concern. "Hey, are you feeling okay?"

Nolan gave him a goofy grin. "Of course I am, I just had the best orgasm of my life."

While Donavan wanted to press the issue, he held back. Surely Nolan would let him know if something serious was going on. They were mated now and that meant they shared everything with

each other...well, almost everything. While Donovan had revealed most of the stuff he'd done while living with the Ninth, he still had some skeletons buried well in the back of his closet.

"I love you so damn much," Nolan said before he craned his head back for a kiss.

As Donovan allowed himself to get lost in the sensation of Nolan's mouth, he told himself that everything was okay. Even though a nagging voice in his head argued otherwise.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Toby rushed outside to the parking lot at the back of the building before he did something rash, like punching a wall or lashing out at somebody. He prayed that if he put some distance between himself and the others, that maybe he'd be able to rein in his building anger. Unfortunately, the unseasonably warm October air did little to soothe the fire burning inside him and he let out a grunt of irritation. Couldn't anything go his way?

His foot caught on one of the many cracks marring the ancient asphalt and he almost fell. Luckily he caught himself at the last moment or else he could have added tripping like a dumbfuck to his list of bad things happening to him.

He walked to the edge of the property and curled his fingers around the chain link fence as he gazed out over the Pontiac skyline. As always, the sight of all the big buildings, smog and rushing

traffic made him feel so alone and insignificant. Even though the city was much smaller than Detroit, it still dwarfed his hometown of Linden.

A lump worked its way into his throat as he thought back to his childhood home that had been burned when the VRF had tried to eliminate his family. Then, as always, his mind locked onto the fact that it had been Micah who'd drawn the VRF there.

Toby waited for the usual surge of anger that followed whenever he allowed himself to dwell on that topic, but it didn't come. Instead, he felt a deep sense of sadness and a bit of regret. It had been Micah's home, too and until Nolan had all but pointed that out, Toby'd forgot.

A broken sob ripped from his chest as he thought back to all the times he caused Micah hurt in the previous months. Of how he'd turned his back on his brother all the times Micah had tried to apologize. *God, I've been such an ass to him. I don't know if he'll ever be able to forgive me.*

For the first time, Toby admitted to himself that it hadn't been Micah he'd been angry at all along. It had been the new, twisted and fucked up world that Micah now represented. The one that had danger lurking around every corner, actual monsters under the bed and an iron-fisted government that would like nothing more than to see all of them eliminated like a house full of



roaches.

He got so lost in his thoughts, he almost missed the soft footfalls of someone approaching. Then his heightened sense of smell picked up the pungent scent of herbs that accompanied so many magics. He glanced up, expecting to see Ethan or one of the other warlocks from his team. When he saw Blaine standing just feet from him, Toby almost forgot to breathe as shock and a healthy dose of desire slammed into him.

"It's not safe to be out here alone. Even though we've been assigned this property by the demons, that doesn't mean something else couldn't attack you," Blaine warned.

The tall warlock looked damn good, but then he always did. With dark hair that curled slightly below his collar and deep, brown eyes, the man had served front and center in several of Toby's fantasies. While he wore the same black and green uniform as the rest of the coven, it seemed to fit him so much better than any of the other warlocks. The leather molded to the man's muscles in just the right way.

"Blaine?" Toby croaked out stupidly.

Not that he didn't already know who stood in front of him. Although Blaine may have an identical twin brother named Kale, Toby never got the two mixed up. While he liked to think it was because of some deep, cosmic connection between

the two of them, the rational part of Toby knew it was because Kale smiled whereas Blaine never did.

"Why do you act so shocked?" Blaine slightly cocked his head to the side, his expression as serious and foreboding as ever.

"Because the entire time I've lived here, you've never initiated a conversation between us," Toby blurted.

What may have been an actual smile briefly ghosted over Blaine's lips. "I guess I haven't."

"So why are you doing it tonight?" Inside Toby's head, a voice screamed, *Don't ask why, stupid, just be happy that he's actually noticing you for once!*

"After your conversation with Nolan, I thought that maybe you could use someone to talk to."

"You heard all that? I didn't even notice you were there."

"Past experience has taught me that it's sometimes better to blend into the background, so I really don't call attention to myself when I walk into a room."

That answer was both so vague and yet telling at the same time that for a second, Toby felt at a loss for words. Then his confused mind honed in on something else Blaine had said.

"You came out here to talk to me?" He winced when the question came out with childlike

wonder. Yeah, that was going to earn him big man points.

"You have trouble believing that?" Blaine stepped a little closer, his scent nearly overwhelming Toby, but in a good way.

"Not to be rude, but kind of. You've never been the talkative kind. I've always thought that was Kale's thing." Toby pressed his back to the fence, so he didn't give into temptation and reach out to touch Blaine.

Blaine hitched a thumb over his shoulder. "Would you prefer if I went in and got him? I know you two are pretty friendly."

"No," Toby rushed out. Now that he actually had Blaine engaged in a conversation, Toby would rather lose a limb than for it to end. "And Kale and I are just buddies, nothing more."

Toby cringed as he silently kicked himself. Now why did he have to go and say something so revealing? He may as well hire an airplane to fly overheard with a banner that read, *Toby has the hots for Blaine*.

"I know, Kale already told me."

"Oh." Did Toby dare hope that Blaine had cared enough to ask Kale about their relationship?

As soon as that hope rose, Toby slapped it down. He needed to remember that this was the first time that Blaine had even looked his way twice so to think the warlock gave a damn who

Toby hung out with was a huge stretch.

"Nolan was right, you need to forgive your brother," Blaine advised.

Disappointment hit Toby like a physical blow. So this was all about Micah. Blaine could care less about Toby. He should have known better. Everyone in the clan and coven just loved Micah and thought he could do no wrong. It was a wonder they didn't erect a damn shrine for the jerk. "Yeah, because we wouldn't want poor Micah to be sad."

"Actually, I think you need to do it because I'm sick of watching you wallow in your own pity party."

Toby's mouth dropped open in shock. "What did you just say?"

"That you need to stop feeling sorry for yourself. At first it was kind of understandable, but now it's getting old."

"Who the fuck asked you?" Toby snapped, hot or not, the warlock had no right butting his nose into situations that weren't his business.

Blaine shrugged as he took another couple steps closer. "Nobody. That still doesn't change the fact that you need to get over being turned into a vampire."

"You're right. What's the big deal? Other than, I have to drink blood in order to stay alive, I have a hair trigger temper and I can't even take a fucking

day off to go to the beach because the damn sun will fry me."

"Actually, the sun turns vampires into a puddle of ooze. You don't burn up like they show in movies." Blaine gave a put up sigh as he moved in tighter. Placing a hand on either side of Toby's head, the warlock held onto the fence and leaned forward until their faces were inches apart. "Damn Hollywood never could get the facts right about our world. Take magic for example, I don't know of any kids that were sent away to some castle-like boarding school to learn the craft."

Toby gulped as his heart began pounding in his chest. This all had to be a dream. It wouldn't be the first time, Blaine had invaded his sleep. Toby nervously licked his lips as he became fixated on Blaine's mouth. It would be so easy to lean forward and kiss the warlock. Sure, he may strike Toby down for being forward, but at least he'd get his dying wish.

"How about cars? Do you guys bewitch them to fly?" Toby asked, his body drinking in the warmth from Blaine's chest.

"Do vampires sleep in coffins?" Blaine smiled...he actually frigging smiled for the first time since Toby had known him.

"Only the kinky ones," Toby replied.

That earned him a laugh. "And how would you know that?"

"Lots of hours invested in deep research." Toby didn't know what floored him more, that they were flirting with each other or that they were managing to keep straight faces while using such cheesy pick-up lines.

"I'd love to see how you gather your research."

"Come back to my room and I'll show you," Toby suggested, surprising himself with his boldness.

He almost let out a cry of distress when he saw the familiar, cold mask slide back over Blaine's face. The warlock abruptly pulled back and stepped away until they were several feet apart. "You don't have any idea how much I wish I could, but it's not a possibility."

"Why?" Toby rubbed his chest. As soon as he lost the warmth of Blaine's body, it felt as if his heart had turned to a block of ice.

"It's not that I don't want to." Blaine ran a hand over his face. "Ever since I first spotted you walking into the old clan dwelling, I've wanted you."

"You have?" Toby couldn't recall a time when he'd been surprised so many times in such a short span. It almost made his mind spin from the constant back and forth emotions. Almost like his brain was the ball in some demented tennis match.

"Hasn't it been obvious?" Blaine demanded angrily.

"Uhh...what should have clued me in? The way you've mostly ignored me, only paying attention long enough to address me as *The Human* or *The Foundling*?" Toby snorted. "You're right, how could have I missed it?"

"Damn it, all I've been able to think of is how much I want you."

"You sure have a sucky way of showing it," Toby retorted, getting a little pissed himself. What the fuck did Blaine think he was, a mind reader?

"It's all I've been able to do not to jump on you every time we're in the same room. Especially when I catch you shooting that fuck-me-please stare my way."

"Then why haven't you?"

"Because I can't," Blaine snarled.

"What do you mean, *you can't*?" Toby demanded, his voice laced with desperation. It had almost been better when he'd believed that Blaine hated him. To know the attraction went both ways, yet something still prevented Blaine from acting on it, felt like sheer torture to Toby.

Blaine gently cupped Toby's cheeks. "I wish I could tell you, but it's something I can't share with anyone. Not even Kale. Just know it was a huge mistake and I've never regretted it more than I do right now."

"Isn't there some way that we can work around this?" Toby felt as if his heart were being ripped

from his chest.

"Believe me, if there were, I would do it." He fanned his thumb over Toby's skin. "That's why I want you to make amends with Micah. I know all this stuff happening in your life is overwhelming and scary. It kills me to watch you facing it alone."

Then before Toby could argue, Blaine jerked his hands back and walked away. For the longest time, Toby didn't move, rooted in place as his hopes crumpled like the dry autumn leaves littering the parking lot. After what seemed like forever, the door opened again and Toby's heart swelled with hope, only to crash when he spotted Micah.

"It's not safe being out here by yourself," Micah chided softly as he shoved his hands into the front pocket of his black cargo pants.

"If I only had a dollar for every time I've heard that," Toby muttered.

"Huh?" Micah wrinkled his nose in confusion.

It was a gesture he'd used ever since they'd been kids and at that moment, it made Toby feel closer to his brother.

"Nothing, it's just someone else gave me that same warning a few minutes ago," Toby explained, not going into deeper detail.

Micah frowned. "Are you okay? You seem pretty upset and not just because you're still pissed at me."



*No, I'm not because I'm pretty sure I'm in love with Blaine and he just told me nothing could ever happen between us. I can handle being turned into a monster and having the VRF hunting me down like a dog, but I don't think I'll ever be able to recover from this. Toby forced himself to smile. "I'm fine."*

"It's okay if you're upset by what Nolan told you. I've never heard some of those details of his past before, so I didn't realize how bad he had it. My own transformation wasn't a walk in the park, but it still doesn't compare to what he went through." Micah lowered his gaze, as if ashamed.

"How were you turned? I know what you gave me was a very condensed version and I've always wondered what you left out, but was too afraid to ask."

Micah glanced up, his eyes haunted. "Are you sure you really want to know?"

"No, but go ahead and tell me anyway." Toby's gut clenched in dread. While he may have spent the better part of the past seven months pissed at Micah, the mere thought of anyone harming him filled Toby with anger and sadness.

"I was kidnapped by a group of feral vampires."

"What for?" Toby asked although he already had a sickening suspicion.

"Some packs of ferals like to keep around live food sources. The ones who caught me had accidentally killed their last meal ticket and decided

I would make a good replacement. So they dragged me back to some old farmhouse they were squatting at and threw my sorry ass down in the storm cellar."

"How long were you there?" Toby's voice hitched a bit.

"Nearly a year," Micah supplied dully. "I was almost dead when one of the females decided to turn me."

"Is that when you escaped and burned the house down while the ferals were still inside it?" Toby asked, for once not blaming his brother for his actions.

"Yeah, so I guess that makes me a monster after all. Just like you've thought ever since you found out I was a vampire."

"If that makes you a monster, I'm one, too, because if they were still alive I'd hunt them down and make them suffer in the worst way for what they did to you," Toby rasped.

Never before had he felt so guilty or low. Blaine had been right, Toby had been throwing himself some lame, self-pity party. All along, he hadn't suffered through half of what Micah had. What's worse, until just then, Toby had been feeling too sorry for himself to even ask Micah about his transformation.

Micah let out choked sob. "I'm so sorry for dragging all this home to you, Mom and Sidney. If

I could, I'd go back and change what I did that night I came back to Linden."

"I'm the one who should be sorry. Nolan was right when he said I should be thankful to have you in my life. I've been a complete ass to you."

"I deserved it."

Toby rushed over to his brother and wrapped him in a tight embrace. "No, you didn't. If me being a vampire is what it takes to have us all together as a family, it's a small price to pay. Will you ever be able to forgive me?"

"Of course. You're my big brother, I'll always love you," Micah declared before returning the hug.

Toby allowed himself to take comfort from the hug, knowing that while he may never be able to have Blaine, at least he could count on his family to be there for him. Never again would he take Micah for granted.

## CHAPTER SIX

Nolan felt much better as he and Donovan walked to the garage to meet Ethan. The headache that plagued him since he'd woke up had faded and he had a small buzz that always came after drinking his mate's magic infused blood. His steps were much lighter and he even allowed himself to admit that the new dwelling wasn't *too* bad. It did have carpeting in places and the children and family units were now further away, so they didn't have to worry about watching their language and stuff anymore.

As they walked into the huge bay that served as a garage, he almost laughed when he spotted Ian and Lachlan scrubbing a Range Rover. They were both covered in some kind of slimy looking substance and neither one of them appeared happy. Ian kept letting loose long strings of curse words, his upper lip curled into a snarl. Lachlan worked in silence, his mouth pressed into a tight grimace.

"What are they in trouble for?" Nolan asked, not needing to be told they were assigned their current task as punishment.

"They were out, playing around and blew up a demon." Donovan sighed, casting them a jaded glare.

"Again?" Nolan blurted. He winced when Donovan shot him a suspicious look.

"What do you mean, *again*? What have they been up to?"

Nolan hedged, he'd only recently become on friendly terms with Ian. The last thing he wanted was to make things tense between them again. On the other hand, he couldn't very well keep things from his mate either – his current illness aside.

"They went out a couple nights ago and got into a scuffle. From the sounds of it, that encounter pretty much ended the same way it did tonight, minus the slime," Nolan admitted, praying he didn't get the pair in worse trouble.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" Donovan demanded angrily.

"Because I didn't think it was a big deal. They only blew up a couple ghouls. Nobody wants those around, not even the demons who run this city. They were probably grateful to Ian and Lachlan."

"What is it with them and blowing things up?" Donovan spat as he shot a murderous look at the

pair. Ian flipped him off in return. Yeah, Nolan could really feel the love coming from that family. He couldn't wait to see what Thanksgiving and Christmas would be with them around.

Nolan shrugged. "Ian said that with his powers partially bound, it's the most efficient way to kill things."

"Sad as it is, that's true. Without our full magic, we can't call on fire or something else that would be more...clean. However, any first level warlock would be able to blow something up." Donovan smirked. "It must be killing Ian that he has to resort to that method, too. He's always considered the spell so beneath him."

Despite Donovan's pleasure at this cousin's predicament, Nolan knew the warlocks didn't have any real malice for one another. With everything they'd gone through, the trio had always watched each other's backs. Shit, the only reason that Ian and Lachlan had even agreed to join Ethan's coven was because of Donovan. Had it not been for the whole I-have-a-mate now, Nolan had no doubt the warlocks would be much happier making their own way in the paranormal world.

"Make sure you boys get the rims, too. I want those vehicles perfectly clean when I get back," Ethan called as he came walking up.

Ian flashed a look of pure irritation while

Lachlan merely nodded. A healer by training, Lachlan had always been the more levelheaded of the bunch. Nolan frowned as a thought occurred to him. Why had Lachlan even been out when he should have been in the infirmary where his skills could have been put to good use?

"Why isn't Lachlan working with Dahlia?" Nolan demanded.

The looks that passed over Ethan and Donovan's face said enough. A hard rush of anger hit Nolan, causing him to let loose his own barrage of curses. "They won't let him work there, will they?"

"It's not Dahlia who has the issue," Ethan rushed out.

"Then who is it?" Nolan spat.

"Whenever Lachlan tries to help in the infirmary, nobody will allow him to treat them," Donovan supplied.

While his voice sounded calm enough, Nolan still caught the brief flicker of hurt that passed over his dark eyes. "Because he used to be in the Ninth?" Nolan asked, even though he already knew the answer.

"Yeah," Donovan said curtly.

"Those judgmental, condescending assholes," Nolan seethed, angered on behalf of his mate. Hadn't Donovan, Ian and Lachlan proved themselves when they protected and saved his ass

in that damn prison? What more did the clan and coven need, a notarized note that proclaimed the warlocks as reformed?

"You need to cut everyone some slack. It's not as if the Ninth have the reputation of being puppy dogs," Ethan said.

Nolan turned on him. "And you know Donovan and the others were forced into that coven. They didn't join because they wanted to or were trying to gain more power."

Ethan's glance flicked down to the tattoos marking Donovan's wrist. "Yeah, but the Ninth have made so many enemies and instilled so much fear in our society that some have trouble accepting that fact."

"Then they're no better than the Pure Born vampires who look down on us Drones because we used to be human," Nolan countered, his hands clenching into fists.

"You need to give them some more time to come around. Once they get to know Donovan and the others, I'm sure the rest of the coven will see how much they have to offer," Ethan soothed.

Donovan blinked a few times. "You actually think that highly of us."

"Of you and Lachlan, yes. The jury is still out on Ian."

Nolan wouldn't allow himself to be so easily swayed though. "In the meantime, we have a



highly trained healer fucking washing trucks. It's not right, Ethan."

"I agree with you, but right now there's nothing I can do to change the coven's feelings."

"You're their leader, make them stop being such pricks," Nolan snarled.

He'd never been one to confront somebody in a leadership role, much preferring to sit back and take orders. When Donovan's feelings were at stake though, Nolan found he couldn't hold back. He'd always heard vampires were very protective over their mates, and now he was experiencing that urge first hand.

"Even the best leader can't make people change their views of others. At least not right away," Donovan cut in. "There's really nothing Ethan can do."

"It's not fair." Nolan couldn't remember a time where he'd been so angry. Not even the time Dante had caused their computer system to crash when he'd downloaded some bad porn.

"It's okay. We're used to it." Donovan pulled Nolan into a tight embrace.

"You shouldn't have to be. You're just as much a victim of the Ninth as the rest of the coven," Nolan protested.

He buried his face into his mate's chest, letting the warlock's familiar scent soothe some of the anger away. They stayed that way until a few

more vampires joined them. Nolan pulled away and bit back a groan of dismay as he saw who would be coming along on the mission, Brenden, Dante and Jeremy.

Brenden was the only one who didn't cause Nolan to want to run in the opposite direction. As his team leader, Nolan respected the blond-haired vampire with soft blue eyes. The sweet, boy band good looks were deceiving though, for Nolan had seen Brenden take down an empusa with nothing but his claws and fangs as a weapon.

No, it was Brenden's mate, Dante that made Nolan cringe. Whereas Brenden was even tempered and soft, Dante had a smart mouth with an attitude to match. He also had a mean streak a mile wide when provoked. Even his appearance intimidated, his dark hair slicked back stylishly and his sharp-eyed gaze never missing anything. While he didn't give off the same nasty vibes that Ian did, Nolan never got a warm and fuzzy feeling from the vampire either.

The third vampire, Jeremy, wasn't quite as bad. While he may be a mess when it came to battle skills, at least he didn't have an attitude a city block wide, like Dante. If anything, Jeremy tended to fade into the background a lot. Everything about him was so normal and average, from his mousy brown hair to his grey eyes. The only time Jeremy ever stood out from the rest of the Dork

Detail was when it came to movie quotes. Nobody knew flicks like that guy.

"Oh Goddess, is that who they're sending you out with, Donavan?" Ian yelled across the garage. "You're so dead."

Dante gave Ethan a droll stare. "Are you sure I can't kill him? I'll leave the other two alone and just go after the mouthy one. I promise."

"That's not funny to joke about," Nolan cut in quickly before Ian decided to add his two pennies. If both he and Dante started firing off their traps, there was no guarantee things wouldn't get bloody.

"Who said I was kidding?" Dante replied dryly as he glared in Ian's direction.

"Be nice, Dante," Brenden cut in as he put a restraining hand on his mate's arm.

"Yeah, listen to Blondie. You need to be a good, Fang Boy," Ian taunted.

Dante snarled, his incisors lengthening in aggression. "You are so lucky you're under Ethan's protection or else you'd find out it isn't a good thing to fuck with me."

A jolt of confusion went through Nolan as he wondered what Dante meant by *under Ethan's protection*. Sure Ethan had taken the trio into his coven, but it had been begrudgingly and with harsh stipulations. As far as Nolan knew, Ethan hadn't gone so far as to order the three warlocks

as off limits. He darted a glance toward Ethan, to see if the coven leader shared his confusion, but the man's face remained impassive.

Ian made shaking motions with his hands. "Oooh, the big, bad vampire is so scary. Please, I've stomped on worse things while I've been drunk."

Nolan stifled a cry of dismay. Nobody taunted Dante that way...not if they wanted to live. Sure enough, Dante snarled and made a move toward him, but Ethan held up a hand. "You know I can't let you do that."

Normally Dante would tell someone to go fuck their ultimatums, but Ethan was a brother of sorts to the vampire. Dante brought himself up short, although he continued to growl low in his throat like a caged animal.

"Ian, stop causing problems or else I'm coming over there to kick your ass myself," Donavan barked.

Ian looked like he wanted to argue with that, but in the end, he clamped his lips shut and went back to work.

Lachlan waved and gave the group an apologetic wave. "Have fun storming the castle."

Jeremy let out a loud gasp as a huge smile spread over his face. "Think it'll work?"

Lachlan grinned back. "It would take a miracle."

When everyone gaped at the pair, Jeremy supplied, "It's quotes from the *Princess Bride*."

"Oh, I loved that movie," Dante exclaimed.

Now all the looks of shock were directed his way. That was except for Jeremy, who continued to stare at Lachlan, like a teen would check out the star football player. Lachlan studied Jeremy right back, the interest clear in the warlock's gaze.

Dante shrugged, "What can I say? I'm a sucker for fairy tales."

"He's not lying either. I think I've been forced to watch that movie a dozen times," Brenden added with a hefty roll of his eyes.

"Let's get going before we lose more night hours," Ethan grunted.

Nolan once again cursed the fact vampires were hindered by the sun. While magics, like Donavan, didn't have to worry about time limits, he and his clan mates had to always work with one eye on the clock. Well, all magics but those like Ethan who were half-vampire, too.

A twinge of regret hit Nolan. By taking Donavan as a mate, Nolan had forced the man to live by the same fucked up schedule. While he'd long ago stopped yearning for the ability to function during daytime, he wondered if Donavan ever missed it.

Then his gaze drifted over to Ian and Lachlan. They, too, had given up so much for Nolan. Even

with all the hatred being flung their way, they continued to live at the clan and all so Nolan could feel safe within familiar surroundings.

He worried that the clan and coven would never be able to fully accept the three warlocks. If so, would Nolan have the strength to leave his clan for his mate's sake? His gut turned a lazy flip at the thought of having to face such a wretched decision. While a vampire's bond to his mate was strong, so was their connection to clan. It was something that came naturally to Drones. The need to protect and cohabitate with their own kind, seeming to be inclusive with the fangs and blood thirst. If pressed, Nolan couldn't come up with one Drone who chose to live alone. Even the feral ones hunted in packs.

They all armed up and left on foot. For a while, Ethan took the lead and they all followed in silence. Since nobody from the Dork Detail really was known for being mute, the quiet didn't last for long, however.

"What are we looking for?" Jeremy asked as his gaze scanned the litter-strewn streets.

"Trouble," Ethan replied curtly.

"I don't think that's going to be a problem in this city. If we don't run into someone from our world, I'm sure we'll find something bad in human form," Dante mused.

Nolan silently agreed with him. Budget cuts

had forced the city to lay off a majority of their police force. As a result, the crime rate had shot up. It didn't help matters the city was already on edge since it resided next to a hellsmouth. Whenever humans got close to that much supernatural activity, their emotions tended to bounce around. Add in very little law enforcement to rein in the loose cannons and things got worse.

"It's not the humans I'm worried about right now," Ethan said.

"You should be. From what I've seen, they can be the worst monsters out there and I've been around a whole hell lot longer than you," Dante drawled, ever the optimist.

As a Pure Born, Dante had been alive a while, too. Nolan could only imagine some of the things the vampire must have witnessed. While up until recently Drones had a very short life span, thanks to the persecution of the VRF, Nolan had heard of some Pure Borns living to be hundreds of years old. He wanted to ask Dante how old he was, but Nolan bit his tongue. Dante tended to be closed mouthed about his past.

That did make him wonder about Donavan though, Like most immortals, magics aged very slowly. So while Donavan may look to be in his twenties, he could very well be decades old.

"How old are you?" Nolan asked him.

"Way too elderly for our sweet, itty, bitty

Nolan," Dante called back.

Nolan shot a rude gesture his way. "Fuck off, you know I'm older than I look."

Dante gave him a slow wink and smiled to show he hadn't meant to offend. It was common knowledge that Nolan's youthful appearance was a sore topic.

"I've never really kept track," Donavan frowned, his brow furrowed.

"Didn't your parents throw you birthday parties?" Jeremy seemed appalled that Donavan's childhood may have been lacking in that department.

"Sure, but I lost track of the years during my time with the Ninth and it's not like the prison handed out calendars or day book planners either."

"Just give me an estimate then," Nolan urged. He realized there was still so much he didn't know about Donavan.

Donavan scratched his head. "I guess in human years I would be around forty."

Jeremy cocked a brow. "*Human years?* Is that opposed to dog years."

Donavan chuckled. "No, it's just magics don't really get caught up in day and months. We usually keep track by observing the passing of seasons. Since I spent the better of the past twenty years locked up in a coven or prison, I haven't



been able to track time like I did growing up."

"So, is anyone going to tell me what we're hunting tonight or do I have to work in suspense?" Jeremy demanded.

"We're looking for demons," Ethan supplied.

Jeremy pulled a face. "Not to be a jerk, but that's pretty nonspecific. This is Pontiac, the demon capital of the world."

"It's a specific kind we're looking for though," Donovan cut in. "They're called Cladist Demons. They're pretty common in this area, so it shouldn't take us that long."

"Do they have long, grey hair and green scaly skin?" Jeremy asked.

Donovan nodded. "Yeah, and they have some wicked claws, so make sure to stand back if you stumbled over one."

"Are those claws black and dripping with poison?" Jeremy gulped.

"How did you know? Have you been doing research on demons or something?"

Jeremy shook his head. "Not exactly, it's more like a crash course."

He pointed to a darkened garage, connected to an abandoned house. A low growl filled the air right before a demon launched itself at them.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Donavan rushed forward in an attempt to put himself between Nolan and the oncoming danger, but the demons were already on them. Several green, scaly creatures emerged from the shadows and surged toward the team.

A wave of nausea hit him as he got a really good look for the first time at this particular breed of demon. Even though they had human-like faces, the beasts walked on four spindly legs, their claws making rapid, *clack, clack, clack* noises on the blessedly otherwise deserted street.

One lunged at Nolan. Donovan felt his blood freeze as the demon's sharp claws made a swipe at his mate's face. The toxin the demon carried was ten times stronger than a Bikor's and almost instantly deadly to all types of species. Nolan drew back in alarm before he brought his gun up. Jamming the muzzle to the demon's skull, Nolan fired.

The demon screamed in protest as brain matter

and green blood went flying, showering half of the team. The demon staggered for a few more steps before it collapsed heavily to the street. Donovan allowed himself a smile, proud of his mate's display of viciousness.

"Eww..eww...eww," Jeremy danced around as he looked down at the gore covering his black uniform.

"Sorry," Nolan called, even as he shot another demon.

A third demon must have figured out Jeremy to be their weak link. It let out a cry of triumph as it charged. Donovan yelled a warning, but the building noise of the battle drowned out his voice. Moving with sheer of desperation, he lifted his hand to use magic, only to have weak, blue ball of energy shoot off. It hovered feebly in the air for several seconds, before it fell to the ground, much like the deceased demon.

"Fuck, this really sucks!" he yelled at no one in particular.

The demon was closer now, the thing practically breathing down Jeremy's neck. The small vampire noticed the danger, but instead of responding, he froze. Heart pounding, Donovan fumbled with his gun. Since he'd been trained in magic and not firearms, he was slow on the draw.

A bright stream of fire shot past him and hit the demon square in the chest. It let out an ear-

splitting shriek before it erupted into flames. Donovan let out a sigh of relief as he looked over his shoulder just in time to see Ethan lower his hands.

"Wow," Donovan muttered. He'd always sensed a great source of magic in Ethan and there had been rumors of the warlock's gifts. Until that moment, Donovan hadn't realized just how powerful Ethan truly was.

Ethan turned his attention to the rest of the demons, incinerating each of them one by one until only a sole survivor remained. The demon tried to scamper away, but Donovan quickly yelled at a basic binding spell to hold it in place.

"Thanks," Ethan said, as he flexed his fingers. Whenever a warlock called on a lot of power, it lingered and often left an unpleasant tingling sensation.

"It's the least I could do," Donovan replied. Never before had he felt so useless and weak. He couldn't even take out one fucking demon. They may as well stick him in the loser circle with Jeremy and the two of them could lament together over their lame gun handling skills.

"Sorry, Brenden," Jeremy said, his face turning red.

"I know you are," Brenden soothed. "You'll just have to put in some extra time in the gym."

In the short time Donovan had been around the

clan, he'd never once seen Brenden raise a voice to those who served under him. Instead, the vampire usually used kind words and encouragement to get results. Going by the success rate of the team, Brenden's approach worked quite well.

"I'll work with him some tomorrow night," Dante offered.

"Thanks," Jeremy mumbled, still flushing.

Donavan felt for the guy. As a kid, he'd often failed at his lessons and he knew how sucky Jeremy felt.

"Don't be so hard on yourself. Cladist demons are known for their stealth. They specialize in sneak attacks and are damn good at it. I've seen high ranking magics fall to them," Donavan said, trying to make the poor vampire feel better.

He just thanked the Goddess that Ian wasn't around to call Donavan out on his bullshit. Only half of what he'd said about the Cladist demon was true. In fact, they were one of the lower ranking residents of hell. They were more often messengers or used for grunt work. Despite the powerful venom in their claws, they almost never engaged anyone in battle like these poor fucks had done.

Ethan must have sensed the lie though, because the corner of his mouth kicked up into a half-grin as he cocked a brow.

Donavan gave a half-shrug in response.

Jeremy studied the captive demon closely. "I guess, you do have a point. They do look really mean."

Even the demon didn't seem to buy that comment. It let out a whimper as it rolled its bulbous black eyes. "Max will be a good servant to the warlock," the monster purred in a groveling tone.

Donavan had to hold back a shudder of disgust. Even though the demon had just watched them decimate all of its friends, it was still trying to make a deal to save its scaly hide.

"Did he just say his name is Max?" Brenden scrunched his face up.

"Yeah, they like to take what they think are badass human names. They think it bumps up their street cred." Donovan sighed.

"All demons or just this breed?" Nolan stepped closer so he could peer down on the cowering Max.

"Just this breed. Most of the others don't bother to exchange pleasantries enough to get to the name exchanging part." Donovan wiggled his foot away from Max because the demon had started to lick his boot.

"Why are you keeping this one alive?" Dante asked as he gave Max a look of utter disgust.

"I have a few questions I need answered and Cladist are always the quickest to give up

information."

The demon smiled at him.

Or at least Donovan thought it was a smile. It actually looked more like a grimace of pain.

"Yessssss...Max will tell the warlock what he wants to know."

"There were some Rictus demons spotted in this area earlier tonight. Were they the only ones or are there more?"

The demon shook his head so fast his face became a blur. "No, those kinds of demons don't play here."

"Don't lie to me, Max," Donovan warned. "Unless you want me to throw you to the very warlocks who killed the pack of Rictus demons earlier."

Max let out a sob, his bottom lip trembling. "That wouldn't be nice...not at all."

"Neither is eating stray cats, but it's clear you've been doing that," Dante called over from the garage. He kicked at a stained cardboard box, his mouth curling up. "Boy, I've seen some fucked up things, but this has to take the cake. Who in the hell eats innocent kitties?"

"We were hungry. Besides, I only ate one or two. I wasn't greedy like some of the others," Max wailed.

"I say we sick PETA on his ass. Their punishment would be much worse than anything

we could come up with," Dante suggested.

Max let out an overdramatic gasp. "This PETA must be a horrible monster."

"Only if they catch you wearing fur," Nolan drawled.

Donavan snapped his fingers in front of Max's large nose. "Okay, greenie, focus here. What were the Rictus demons doing in Pontiac? I have it on good authority this is Lucifer's turf, so none of Crocell's crew should be within a hundred miles of this city."

"They come because the big vampires pay them to attack and destroy."

"*Big vampires?*" Nolan echoed with a confused shake of his head.

"He means the VRF," Donovan supplied, slightly disturbed that he understood the batshit crazed demon's logic so easily. "What did they want destroyed, Max?"

"The posers of course," Max replied simply.

"Let me guess, that means us," Nolan surmised as he shot the demon a look that promised murder.

Max let out a raspy laugh that sounded so demented chills ran down Donovan's spine. "Yes, it means the inferior Drones."

"Can we kill him yet?" Jeremy asked, stunning Donovan who'd expected that question to come from Dante.



The demon shook its head again. "I have more to tell you. So much more."

Donavan shifted his weight to the side as he let out an aggravated sigh. "What else of interest could you possibly know?"

"One of the Rictus demons that were killed tonight was Crocell's nephew."

"Oh, shit," Donovan breathed, dread filling his body.

"Crocell is mad. He has decided to wipe out your clan with or without the big vampires' support," Max informed them gleefully.

The entire team just started at each other, all of them stunned stupid. Finally, Ethan asked, "How bad is this Crocell guy?"

"Not even the VRF would dare take him on," Donovan informed him bluntly.

There was no sense in holding back the truth. Not now when things had already gone too far to take back. Damn, Ian for having such a thin temper and damn Lachlan for not reining him in. Now thanks to their little game of explode a demon, both the clan and coven were in danger.

He was so caught up in his troubled thoughts that his connection to the binding spell shattered. Max let out a whoop of delight before scurrying away. Just as he passed Ethan, the demon paused long enough to give the vampire's leg a healthy bite.

Ethan howled in pain and tried to shoot off fire, but stumbled to the side and his aim was off. The flames hit a nearby mailbox, the metal box instantly melting under the heat from the magical fire.

Max moved like a gunshot, his nails making rapid clicking sounds as he beat it. Before anyone had a chance to react, the demon was gone. Ethan let out another curse and bent over to examine the wound.

"Sorry," Donavan offered since it had been he who'd lost control of his magic.

"Don't be. It's my own damn fault for bringing a warlock out here who is only at half-full," Ethan said.

*Hey, buddy, it's not like I asked you to bind fifty percent of my powers, that idea was all yours.*

"Let's just get back to the clan dwelling, so I can report to Eric what we found out. I can have Dahlia check out my wound at the same time." Ethan turned a concerned face to Donavan. "Just tell me their teeth don't carry venom like their claws do."

"No, but we still need to get you treated right away, since you never know where a Cladist demon's mouth has been," Donavan replied, only half-kidding.

Inside his stomach curdled while his heart pounded heavily in dread. Once the others found

out about the special attention they were in store for, would they hate Ian and Lachlan even more? If so, would that be enough for them to exile the two warlocks?

Donavan doubted that he could ever leave Nolan. He loved the vampire more than anything and couldn't imagine even spending a day apart, let alone the rest of their lives. Yet at the same time, he didn't want to lose Ian and Lachlan either. The three of them had been together all their lives and they'd gone through so much in those years. To not have them around anymore was something Donovan didn't even want to ponder over.

\* \* \* \*

As he watched Donovan's bleak expression, Nolan felt as if his whole world was crashing in on him. There was no doubt the warlock believed that Ian and Lachlan would be exiled over this. Frankly, Nolan wondered over the possibility himself. The two warlocks had fucked up big, putting both the clan and coven in jeopardy. Not just the soldiers either, but all the civilians, too.

Nolan yearned to ask Donovan if he would stay behind at the clan. Fear held him back though, because Nolan didn't think he'd be able to stand it if Donovan walked away from their relationship.

Unless...

A stab of pain went through Nolan's chest. Could he be strong enough to leave his own clan? While some Drones had gone the solo route, they'd never lasted long without their clan for support. Then he glanced over at Donovan again and a warm, wave of love rushed through him. Suddenly everything became so clear to him that Nolan didn't understand why he didn't see it before.

He didn't need his clan anymore. At least not for emotional support. He had Donovan for that now and that's all he'd ever need. Nolan stood on tiptoe and pressed a kiss to Donovan's cheek. "You're my clan now."

"I don't quite follow," Donovan said, his voice devoid of hope.

Nolan smiled at him. "Wherever you go, I go. You're all that I'll ever need now. I love you and us living somewhere else is never going to change that."

"Do you really mean that?" Donovan's voice cracked a bit.

"You gave up everything you knew to come here and live with me, the very least I can do is return the favor if need be."

Donovan pulled Nolan into a rib-creaking embrace. "I love you so much. Do you know that?"

“Since you tell me all the time, yes, but don’t let that ever stop you from repeating it.”

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Even though Nolan suggested they call for a pickup, Ethan insisted they make the trip home on foot. He reasoned that they could make the walk in the time it took for home base to send out a vehicle. While Nolan thought the warlock was being stubborn, he kept that opinion to himself.

"If Zeke wasn't off on a reconnaissance mission, there is no way you'd be pulling this stunt," Dante gripped as he half-carried, half-dragged Ethan down the sidewalk.

"But he is, so now there's nobody around to talk some sense into me," Ethan panted, his face pinched with pain.

"You never did have the sense of a centaur's ass." Dante grunted as he shifted his hold on the warlock.

Donavan rushed over to take Ethan's other arm. Nolan tensed, worried Ethan would brush off Donavan's touch. Instead, the coven leader muttered a thanks as he threw an arm over

Donavan's shoulder.

Nolan frowned as he noted the large amount of blood soaking Ethan's pants. "Max really took a hunk out of you."

"Once I get better, I'm hunting the fucker down and blowing his ass up Ian style," Ethan declared.

"So, how much trouble are they going to be in?" Nolan hedged.

"The demons or Ian and Lachlan?" Ethan asked.

"Ian and Lachlan." Nolan tossed a quick glance of concern at Donovan who'd yet to add his input to the topic.

"First off, know that I realize Lachlan isn't the guilty one here. The only thing I blame him for is letting Ian suck him into this mess," Ethan explained.

"So what are you planning to do with Ian?" Nolan held in a breath as he waited for the answer.

"I haven't decided yet."

Before Nolan could push more, they reached the entrance to the parking garage. As soon as they walked inside, all hell broke loose. Several magics rushed forward, some yelling in concern. The only warlocks who hung back were Ian and Lachlan who paused in their work long enough to stare at all the commotion.

"Let's get you to Dahlia," Blaine suggested.

Ethan shook his head. "No, I want Lachlan to take care of me."

As one, the entire group looked over at the warlock. Lachlan's lips parted in surprise as he dropped his sponge with a loud *splap*.

Blaine shook his head, "The wound must be making you delusional. We need to get you the infirmary right away."

"I have perfect control of my mind and Lachlan can heal me right here." Ethan directed his gaze toward the healer. "That is if you have your supplies close by."

Lachlan dumbly nodded. "Yeah, I carry my stuff with me at all times."

Someone brought Ethan a chair and he sat down heavily in it. "Well, let's get to it then."

Nolan bit back a smile as he realized Ethan's intent. By having Lachlan heal him in front of a large portion of the coven, Ethan was showing he trusted and respected the warlock. The flicker of gratitude that went over Donavan's face let Nolan know that his mate had come to the same conclusion.

Lachlan went around the parked vehicles to retrieve his ever-present battered messenger bag before he approached Ethan. Both Lachlan and Ian were still covered with the mess from the earlier battle. It had to itch like hell, yet Lachlan didn't voice any complaints as he knelt down in front of



Ethan.

"Was it a Cladist demon?" Lachlan inquired softly after he'd lifted Ethan's pant leg.

"That's what Donovan said. To be honest, I'm not half as good with demonology as you three." Ethan hissed when Lachlan prodded the wound.

The rest of the magics had fallen silent as they all watched Lachlan work. Nolan knew it probably bugged the normally shy warlock, yet Lachlan looked as composed as ever.

He glanced up at the magics. "Can someone grab me a cloth soaked in warm water?"

"Sure, do you need any oils or herbs mixed in?" Blaine offered.

Lachlan shook his head as he opened his bag. "I have everything I need in here."

As he began to work in silence, Ethan motioned Ian forward. "Donovan said you were the most demon savvy one."

Ian nodded. "I'm probably the most demon savvy warlock period, but only when it comes to society issues and breeds. When it comes to things like venom or toxins, Lachlan's the one to go to."

"What can you tell me about a demon named, Crocell? Donovan was able to give me some information, but I want to know every little detail about the bastard."

"For centuries, Crocell worked for the Powers, a group that policed the angels."

"So are the Powers angels?" Ethan asked.

"No, while they share some of the angels' attributes, the Powers are more vicious and have no compassion. They are made for one thing only and that's to punish others for going against Heaven. The Powers don't care who they destroy in the course of a mission. While humans are off limits to angels and most demons, the Powers aren't so discerning," Ian informed him.

"You mean they would actually attack humans?" Brenden asked.

"You remember the lost colony of Roanoke?" Ian quipped. When everyone nodded, he added, "It was the Powers who wiped them out. Since the Powers are known for cannibalism and flesh eating, you can guess why no remains were ever found either."

A shiver of revulsion went through Nolan. "Wow, so the Powers may be policemen of sorts, but not the good kind."

"You got it. They got so bad that the angel council in Heaven called them back in. Most of them immediately obeyed the summons except for a few who felt they were too powerful to be under the angels' beck and call anymore," Ian said.

"Let me guess, Crocell was their leader," Ethan replied.

"Exactly, and he hasn't looked back since. Since he didn't want to cohabitate with humans, who he

considered below him, he took up residence in Hell. While he had no intentions of being Lucifer's bitch, Crocell knew that if he waited around long enough, the time would come where he could make his move for power. That happened a few years ago when a huge civil war broke out in Heaven. The angels became too busy fighting each other to worry about Hell as much and that's when Crocell struck. Now he and Lucifer are fighting for control."

Ethan shook his head. "I hate to admit it, but I'm impressed at how much you know. How did you manage to get all this information?"

"You'd be amazed at some of the resources the Ninth's library has." Ian gave a tight smile.

"I'm just amazed that angels actually exist," Nolan blurted. "I thought they were a myth made up so we would have something to stick on the top of Christmas trees or something."

Donavan gave him a droll stare. "There's a sea serpent named Snuggles living in the Detroit River, and you've never thought twice about it. Yet someone mentions angels and you get shocked?"

Nolan laughed. "I guess you have a point when you put it that way."

"The peace treaty you signed was with Lucifer and there is no way Crocell is going to honor it," Ian informed Ethan, although this time the

mocking tone was absent from his voice.

"Is that why you killed Crocell's nephew tonight?" Ethan demanded shrewdly.

Ian tilted his head to the side. "What do mean? Crocell doesn't have any nephews. At least not any demon ones."

"That's not what Max claims."

"Who's Max?" Ian shrugged.

"The demon who gave Ethan that." Nolan nodded to the bite wound. "He also claims that Crocell is pissed and vowed to get back at our entire clan because of it."

"Max must have been 'shrooming because there is no way Crocell cares about anyone that much, let alone a demon," Ian argued.

"That still doesn't change the fact that now Crocell has decided that we're his enemy," Ethan countered.

Ian held his hands up in a helpless gesture. "I'm sorry, if there's some way I can fix it, just let me know."

"I have something, it may not fix it completely, but it may buy us some time," Ethan ventured.

"Anything, just name it."

"I want you to gather up a team of warlocks and go out there and put the terror of the Goddess into those demons. I don't care what you have to do, just so long as they end up fearing us more than we fear them. That way they'll think twice

before they attack our home base. While it may not make it so Crocell doesn't attack us, at least it will make that bastard hesitate long enough for us to think of another way to beat him."

After he finished, Ethan waved a hand over the three warlocks.

Donavan let out a gasp as he flexed his fingers.

Nolan's pulse quickened with hope, "Did he just give you all your powers back?"

Donavan nodded, his eyes wide with astonishment. "Yeah, and not just part of them. I have everything now."

Ethan gave Ian a dismissive wave. "Now go out there and do what you love best, raise hell. Just make sure you don't show them any mercy."

Nolan was stunned that Ethan would actually give the trigger-happy warlock that much power. Then his shock went to another level when Ian pulled out a dagger and sliced his own palm. "I offer my blood up as a sacrifice to show my honor for you, Ethan."

With that surprising show of alliance, Ian turned heel and left the garage.

Lachlan and Donovan exchanged astonished looks while Nolan just shook his head in disbelief. "I didn't see that one coming."

"You and me both," Donovan added.

Ian worked a few more minutes before he brushed off his hands and stood up. "That should

do it. You'll need to change the dressing a couple times a day. If you want, I can mix up the paste for Dahlia if you like"

"Better yet, you can just do all the medical treatment and that goes for the entire coven. While Dahlia's a great doctor, we need someone versed in the magical arts. I'll talk to Eric about getting you some space of your own in the infirmary." Ethan stood and gave Ian a pat on the shoulder.

After Ethan left, the rest of the gawkers trickled away until it was just Nolan, Ian and Donovan left. Now that the adrenaline had burned off, Nolan could feel his headache coming back. He pinched the bridge of his nose. "If you guys don't mind, I'm going to go get some food."

"How about you tell me what's been bothering you lately instead," Donovan demanded, with a fair share of anger in his tone.

Nolan paused, hand midair, as fear sliced through him. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Do you honestly think I wouldn't notice how you need blood and sex all the time? Or that you've been getting headaches and dizzy spells."

"I thought you liked the sex," Nolan countered in a bid for time to think of a way out of the conversation.

"I do, but when we're doing it ten times a night and you're still moaning for more, I kind of get

worried," Donovan replied.

Lachlan rubbed his temples. "I so did not need to hear that."

Nolan felt a heat come over his face. "Really, Donovan. Why don't you just go announce it over the loudspeaker so my whole clan can hear it?"

"I'm sorry if I embarrassed you by sharing the ins and outs of our intimate life, but I'm worried about you." Donovan came up and put his hands on Nolan's shoulders. "Why didn't you tell me you were having troubles?"

Nolan started to deny it, but the caring and worry evident in Donovan's eyes shattered his resolve. "Because I've already been such a burden on you. Back in the prison, it was you who protected me. Then you gave up everything to come live with others who you knew wouldn't like you. For once I just wanted to take care of my own problems without your help."

"And how exactly are you doing that now?" Lachlan interjected softly. "Have you gone to Dahlia or another healer for treatment?"

"Not exactly," Nolan admitted as he ducked his head. So much for taking care of his own problems.

"You never fully recovered from your prison time, have you?" Donovan pressed.

"No, and it's getting worse, not better. All I want to do is sleep, fuck and feed."

"Don't knock it, Ian's been living by the same motto for years," Lachlan teased as he moved in closer. He cupped Nolan by the chin and tilted his head to the side in order to examine him. "I hate to break it to you, buddy, but you're color sucks."

"What do you think is causing it?" Nolan asked. Strangely, despite the embarrassment of having his sex life broadcasted, Nolan felt a wave of relief that the truth was finally out. After battling this alone for so long, it felt good to share the burdened with Donovan.

"I think it's the Bikor bite," Lachlan said, confirming what Nolan had feared all along.

"I thought Dahlia gave Nolan the antidote right after we were rescued," Donovan argued.

"Yeah, but there is still so much we don't know about this kind of demon because they're so rare. In all my studies, I've only came across a couple of cases and none of them were long-term infections like Nolan had," Ian explained.

"So what can do for him?" Donovan pulled Nolan into a protective embrace.

Nolan drank in the comfort, needing more than ever.

Lachlan thought for a few moments before he gave a slight nod. "I may have an idea. Give me a couple hours to work my contacts."



## CHAPTER NINE

Lachlan walked into the small rundown bar and resisted a shudder of revulsion. Situated on the outskirts of Pontiac, it catered to the supernatural world, and the condition of the building showed it.

To put bluntly, the place was a dive.

Several just-put-together rough-wood tables dotted the drearily lit room. The floor was covered in sawdust and it had nothing do with ambiance. It was simply so the shavings could soak up whatever body fluids may leak onto the ground. The walls were covered in more unidentified substances and deep gouge marks.

Loud disco music competed with the various growls, snarls and tweets coming from the myriad of creatures and it looked like nearly every species was present. One corner table was occupied by a trio of harpies who eyed him with brief interest. Another table held half a dozen werewolves, all them males and living up to their stereotype by

wearing plaid shirts and raggy blue jeans. A couch was occupied by a gargoyle and a werejackal female. The pair didn't seem to notice him, too caught up in a very public sex act.

That just accounted for a few of the patrons, too. Nearly every table, stained couch and bar stool was filled by something that went bump in the night. Lachlan dismissed most to them, his gaze sweeping the interior for his contact. When he finally spotted it, Lachlan felt taken back by how...did he dare say, *normal* the guy appeared.

He sat alone at a table in the far corner of the room. The man could have easily passed for a human with a thin build, soft blue eyes and short, blond hair, although the longbow strapped to his back gave him away as something else. Not that Lachlan hadn't seen humans using a bow and arrow, they just usually opted for something more modern now.

Something told him, that outdated weapon or not, if he dared to cross blondie, the man would have an arrow buried in Lachlan's chest before he could blink. The man gave off a whole, don't-fuck-with-me vibe and judging by the wide birth everyone gave him, Lachlan wasn't the only getting the message.

"Donavan so owes me for this one," Lachlan mumbled as he crossed the room.

In all, the man didn't look like what Lachlan

had expected from an angel. If anything, bow aside, he appeared more as a movie star or model. The angel was beautiful, with highly arched cheeks and sensual lips, but he also wore jeans and a plain looking t-shirt, like any Joe Shmo would.

"You wanted to meet with me?" the angel asked.

Lachlan settled into the chair on the opposite side of the table. "Yes, my name is Lachlan and a friend of mine said you could help me with a situation."

"Nice to meet you. My name is Derel and we'll just have to wait to see if your friend was telling the truth." The corner of the angel's mouth kicked up.

"I'll have to admit, I'm surprised. You don't look like an angel," Lachlan admitted.

"What were you expecting, wings, a halo or maybe a Heavenly chorus following me around and singing my praises?"

Lachlan didn't know if that was supposed to be a joke or not, so he held in his laughter. "Kind of."

"Just like many of the myths are wrong about warlocks, there are many misconceptions about angels." Derel gave him a mock salute with his soda bottle. "Besides, I'm an exiled angel, so that by definition makes me abnormal."

"Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you," Lachlan

rushed out. He needed the angel's help too much to let a careless comment ruin everything.

"Relax, I come from a really big family, so it takes a lot to upset me," Derel assured. "Now why don't you tell me about Nolan?"

Lachlan jerked in surprise. "How do you know his name?"

"I have my ways. Look, since I also already know what's been afflicting him, why don't we just get to the reason you came to me? You want to know if there is a cure for Bikor bites."

"Yes, a vampire doctor named Dahlia gave him an antidote, but I don't think it really did the job."

"That's because it didn't."

Lachlan muttered a curse under his breath. While it had been what he'd expected to hear, that didn't make him feel better. If anything the news made things worse. "So, what will cure him?"

"Let me start by saying Bikor bites are nasty business. They can take down even an archangel and that says a lot. I might also add that Bikor demons are extremely —"

"Rare," Lachlan cut in. "I knew that part. Frankly, I was stunned to hear the VRF had one in their possession."

"The demon must be a captive, since Bikors as a rule can't stand to be around other demons, not even each other," Derel paused, a thoughtful expression going over his face. "Which is probably

why there's not that many around. While demons can't mate, they do band together to protect each other."

"So, how am I going to be able to treat Nolan if there is no real antidote?"

"You need to stop thinking of him as poisoned, at least in the traditional sense. Most individuals think that it's a toxin Bikor demons introduce with a bite, but it's not true."

Lachlan's blood ran cold. "Then what is it?"

"Living parasites that are in essence a part of the Bikor. The longer they live in a host body, the worse it is, too. The parasites start to morph and actually become a part of their host, one that can't just simply be expelled."

"Gross," Lachlan wrinkled his nose up. "So how can I get rid of them?"

"You need to kill the Bikor that bit him in the first place," Derel supplied in a bland tone.

"How am I supposed to do that? If it's still at the VRF headquarters, we're screwed. That place is a fortress."

"I don't know, but you better figure out a way quick. If my predictions are right, then Nolan only has weeks left."

"Shit." Lachlan breathed, his hopes plummeting. How could he come back to Donovan with such dire news?

Derel gave him an apologetic shrug. "I wish I

had something better to give you. I know it must be hard for a healer as great as you to accept."

Lachlan narrowed his eyes at the angel. "How did you know I was supposed to be some great healer?"

The angel pinned him with a stare so probing Lachlan squirmed a bit. "We tend to recognize our own. Even if I'd bumped into you on the streets, one glance would have told me that you're one of us."

"You mean a healer?" Lachlan asked, wondering if crazy was part of normal angel behavior.

"That and then some. If you bothered to look inside yourself, I'd think you'd be amazed at what you found lingering there."

"Yeah, okay." Lachlan pushed his chair back some as he eyed up the exit.

"Who was your father?" Derel asked.

"What does that matter?" Lachlan countered, his heart thudding heavily.

"You just remind me of somebody, that's all. A very close friend that I thought I lost a long time ago. Surly your mother told you something about your father."

Part of Lachlan wanted to tell the angel to go fuck himself, but since Derel had been helpful, he decided to be a bit nicer. "I don't know, my mother said he left before I was born. All she ever

told me about him was that I had his eyes."

"It's too bad that she's not alive so you could ask her about him."

"Why?" Lachlan snapped.

"Because then you could know who you truly are. There's a reason why you were drawn to become a healer. If I had to guess, I would say that it's because you're very much like me and my brethren. In more ways than you can ever imagine."

\* \* \* \*

Donavan rolled Nolan onto his stomach and then thrust into the vampire's well-stretched and lubed ass. Even though they'd just made love a half hour ago, Donavan moaned at the sheer bliss of being inside his mate.

Nolan let out a soft whimper, his hands fisting into the sheets covering their bed. "That feels so good, Donavan."

He ran a palm down the slope of Nolan's sweaty back. "You always say that."

"That's because it's always true." Nolan thrust back greedily.

Donavan got the hint and started to fuck Nolan. They were both tired, so it wasn't a hard pounding, but it would get the job done. Or at least, Donavan hoped so because he didn't think

he'd last much longer. His vampire had pretty much worn him out.

Nolan arched his body into Donovan's thrusts. The movement showing off every one of the vampire's muscles. "I love the feeling of you filling me up," Nolan panted, his face a mask of bliss.

"And I love the way your ass grips my cock," Donovan countered in a teasing tone.

The pleasure had already begun to build, a wonderful buzzing sensation covering his body. It combined with the high he'd been on since getting all his powers back. Donovan tried to hold it back, but he came. He let out a shout so loud that it actually hurt his throat as his cock released within the tight walls of Nolan's hole.

Not wanting to leave Nolan in need, Donovan reached around and began to stroke his mate's cock. After a few passes, Nolan let out another whimper before his cock jerked and hot waves of cum splashed over Donovan's hand.

Donovan pulled out and rolled to his side. It took several moments for him to catch his breath enough to say, "I hope that was enough for you, because I don't think I can go another round."

A sleepy smile crept over Nolan's face. "Did I break you?"

"Almost." Donovan gave Nolan a quick kiss before getting out of bed. "I'm going to clean up



and get dressed. You get some rest."

Nolan must have been worn out, too, because when Donovan returned from taking a quick shower, he found the vampire deep asleep. He took that opportunity to study his mate. A wave of love swept through Donovan. How was it that this sweet vampire had come to mean so much to him in such a short time? There was no doubt in his mind that he'd do anything to keep Nolan safe, even if he had to die to do so.

A knock interrupted his thoughts. Donovan went to answer it and found a very troubled-looking Lachlan on the other side. As soon as he spotted the bleak expression in his cousin's eyes, Donovan's gut clenched. "What did you find out?"

"Let's go to Ethan's office. He and Eric are waiting for us," Lachlan suggested.

"If you're calling both of them in, then it can't be good," Donovan surmised.

Lachlan gave him an apologetic look. "That's because it's not."

It took nearly a half hour for Lachlan to explain the situation to all of them and by the time he'd finished, Donovan felt sick to his stomach. "So, there's no other way to treat Nolan?" he asked for the tenth time.

"No, I'm sorry, but there isn't." Lachlan laid a

comforting hand on Donovan's arm.

Donavan nodded, heavily. "I guess that leaves me with only one option. I'm going to have to break into VRF headquarters and kill that fucking demon."

Eric and Ethan exchanged uneasy glances. "There's no way you can go in there alone and expect to come out alive."

"So be it, it doesn't matter so long as I have a chance to kill the Bikor first."

"Besides, Donovan won't be going in alone," Lachlan added. "I'll be there with him."

Donavan shook his head. "I can't ask that of you. It's basically a suicide mission and we all know it."

"That doesn't matter," Lachlan countered firmly. "We've always had each other's back and that's not going to change now. I'm sure Ian will say the same thing."

"Lachlan's right, we can't let you go...at least not alone," Ethan cut in. "The coven will be right there, too."

Donavan gapped at his coven leader. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, not only do we care for Nolan, but it's time that we show the VRF that we're done running away and cowering in fear," Ethan said, his voice hard with resolve.

"Ethan's right," Eric added. "The clan will be

going in, too. I say we use this opportunity to finally strike a blow to the VRF that all the Pure Borns will feel. I'm done always being on the defensive in this war. First they pushed us out of Detroit and now they're trying to do the same thing here. It's time to show them that we're not going to be shoved around anymore. I've been looking for a good time to up this war some. If we get to save Nolan at the same time, all the better."

"Thank you," Donovan breathed.

At the same time, his soul felt heavy with fear. Donovan knew that if this mission failed, not only could it mean the end to the rebellion, but it would also mean he'd lose Nolan forever.

He also knew that the next few days would be a turning point in their war against the VRF. Win or lose, nothing in their world would ever be the same again.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I know that many of my readers despise cliffhangers and I do apologize. It's just the upcoming battle simply could not be told in a few chapters. Please, don't throw cyber tomatoes my way or call for a pox upon my family. If I could, I would buy you all a great big *My Bad* cake, but since I can't do that, I thought I would treat you to some spoilers, just to show you all how much I truly appreciate your support.

1. Yes, the next book will be about Toby and Blaine. The two will connect more than ever in the upcoming battle.
2. A major character from the series will die in the next book. I won't reveal if it's a vampire, magic or baddie though.
3. Whatever you're thinking about Lachlan and his heritage, is probably right.
4. No, I haven't forgot about Jonas. He will be rescued very soon, but he won't be the same man he was before his capture.

- Stephani

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephani Hecht is a happily married mother of two. Born and raised in Michigan, she loves all things about the state, from the frigid winters to the Detroit Red Wings hockey team. You can usually find her snuggled up to her laptop, creating her next book.

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