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THE VAMPIRE'S BRIDE

Amarinda Jones



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EROTIC ROMANCE



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THE VAMPIRE'S BRIDE

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the lovely, noble and crazy Maverick. Thank you for wandering into my life.

THE VAMPIRE'S BRIDE

AMARINDA JONES

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Chapter One

“Oh, what are you doing here?” The last person Josephine McDonough wanted to see on her wedding day was this man.

“A white dress? After all we shared together?” Alaric leaned against the wall and surveyed her. “Really, baby?”

No, no, no. This can't be happening. Not now. I am over you, damn it. “Don't baby me, vampire.” This auburn-haired vampire was not going to get in her way. It had taken too long to get over him.

He spread his hands and grinned, two long fangs nestled on either side of a row of perfect white teeth. “I never did anything to you that you didn't enjoy, mortal.”

That was true. Sex with Alaric was amazing. However, there was more to life than fantastic sex. *I am getting married today. I will get married today.* Josephine bunched her hands into fists to stiffen her resolve. “Alaric—”

“Josephine—” He mimicked her tone.

“At the risk of sounding repetitious, what the fuck are you doing here?” She hadn't seen him months. Josephine wasn't about to allow this vampire back into her life. He made it messy and complicated. *I'm thirty-two years of age, damn it. I need normal and boring.*

“You're getting married. Where else would I be?”

The smile he gave her made her tremble. Only Alaric had the power to make her shiver with a simple glance. Josephine ran her hands down the cool white satin of her wedding gown. “Why now?”

“I can’t believe you’re marrying someone other than me.”

For a moment Josephine was speechless. Was he really that dense? Had Alaric no concept of how badly he’d hurt her when he walked out of her life?

“You never asked me to marry you.” Once, maybe she would have. *Maybe*. But not now. Too much time had passed. *And I want more than a part-time lover with his own agenda.*

Alaric pushed off from the wall and moved towards her. “Did you want me to?”

Yes...no...fuck, I don’t know. “If I have to make you propose, then it’s not the same thing. Besides, it’s not like there was any commitment between us.” Pinning Alaric down was like trying to pin jelly to a wall. And, it had nothing to do with the whole vampire thing. That was the least of Josephine’s concerns. Although he was a vampire and longevity was their forte, Alaric was not good at focusing on anything for any length of time. Except Maverick House, of course. He loved it more than her. That Gothic, aging pile of stone and mortar once more reminded Josephine of the fickleness of this man. Maverick House had always meant more to him than her.

“We were damn good together.” Alaric reached out to touch her arm.

The last thing Josephine wanted was to feel any part of him against her. No man’s touch could heat her up as Alaric’s. He was her downfall. “Marriage is more than sex.” She took another couple of steps back.

“What’s sex like with Dimmy?”

Josephine rolled her eyes at his words. “My fiancé’s name is Jimmy.”

“And?”

"Everything doesn't revolve around sex." Jimmy was good and sweet, and more importantly, normal. His passions didn't send him off on crusades for justice like those of Alaric.

"He hasn't fucked you?" Alaric arched his eyebrows in surprise. "What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing." It was all her. Unlike being with Alaric, Josephine had felt no wild need to jump into bed with Jimmy, and he had told her he respected that. At first that had thrown her somewhat. Josephine loved sex. That Jimmy wasn't as ardent was hard to get used to. However, she was sure once they were married that issue would resolve itself. Above all, she wanted to be loved exclusively for herself without competing factions getting in the way, and Jimmy loved her.

"What's wrong with *you* then, baby?" Once more Alaric advanced on her.

Josephine then made her first mistake. She pushed him away. Her hands met his chest, and a rush of heat shot up her arms. *Oh, bad move.* Josephine tore her hands from his body. "Nothing is wrong with me, vampire." She stepped back once more, the backs of her legs hitting the bed behind her. The bride's room was supposed to be just that, a place for her to dress and ready herself without interruptions. Of course most brides didn't have a vampire ex-lover who could appear out of thin air.

"Why are you marrying him then? He could be pathetic in bed." Alaric's green eyes never left hers. "You know we were always fantastic together."

Oh, yes. Flashbacks of long, hot, steamy days and nights with Alaric on her and in her invaded her mind. The overwhelming impulse to close her eyes and relive that heat was hard to fight. But Josephine knew she had to. "I faked it with you."

This made Alaric laugh. "Liar."

He had the sexiest chuckle. It made her shiver. "You'll never know."

“Oh, I know.” Alaric reached out and took hold of her left hand. “So why Dimwit?” He tapped one finger on the diamond in her engagement ring.

“Jimmy—and because he’s sweet and gentle and he loves me.” Could Alaric feel her trembling? In her mind, she wanted to call it nervous lust that she could easily get over. In her heart, Josephine knew it was so much more than that. But Alaric was not for her. *I cannot be second choice in his affections.*

“I love you.”

The words sounded sincere, and as much as Josephine wanted to believe them, belief was not something she could give in to with Alaric. Sexy vampires, while great lovers, did not make commitments as mortals did. Their lives were lived out over centuries. They evolved differently. Time was not a critical issue to them. Josephine knew Alaric would never settle. He never had to.

“You say you love me, but I haven’t seen you in eight months.”

“My life is complicated.” His fingers moved up to her wrist.

Josephine knew he could feel the uncontrolled beat of her heart. “Fighting your cousin over an old, useless house is not important.”

“Maverick House is not useless. It holds great power. I have to fight for it—it’s my birthright.”

“As it is your cousin Richard’s.” Both men were vampires. Josephine knew neither would give up until one of them had an exclusive hold of the house. How they were going to do that she didn’t know. They had been fighting over Maverick House for centuries. *Richard*. Josephine could not suppress the thrill of excitement at his name. While Alaric had enslaved her body and soul, Richard had toyed with her in such a delightful way. Two cousins, both vampires and yet each completely different in personality. Alaric took her with passion and hunger. And Richard? He took because he could, and Josephine craved the idea of being taken against her will. Not that it ever was. It was just a game she and Richard played. She pretended to fight him, while he controlled her any way he could.

Although Alaric was jealous, he never stopped their hot little games. Alaric understood sex and what she had with his cousin. He knew no one person could truly satisfy another. With Richard, it was all about being fucked. With Alaric, it had been love. She licked her lips and contemplated both men in her mind.

“Still hung up on my cousin?”

“Jealous?” That Alaric still was thrilled her. *Whoa! Focus, woman. You're supposed to be getting married, not fucked.*

“No.”

“Or is it that he has more claims to the house and that annoys you?” Josephine had no idea who had what claim, nor could she care less.

“I'm older by one hundred years, so it's my home.” Alaric's other hand caught at her waist.

Josephine closed her eyes for a moment and willed herself not to press her body into his. “I don't care.” *I really don't want to care, so stop making me try to.*

“You do.”

Her eyes snapped open. Desire was going to get her nowhere. “No, not anymore. I want stability, not some petulant playboy vampire who's only around when he wants sex.”

Alaric pressed his body against Josephine. “Remember how it felt when we were together? How you used to wrap your legs around my waist and cry out as I filled you time and time again?”

Josephine swallowed hard. She was wet with need. His words and his body were igniting dangerous memories. “You left me.” Both cousins disappeared from her life. It had dented Josephine's pride greatly. *Thank God Jimmy is normal—maybe at times boring—but I'll know what to expect.*

“You should have waited for me.”

There was a look of reproach in his eyes that surprised her. Alaric was never one to admit weakness. “I did, but then I got sick of

waiting.” Her ass was suddenly on the bed. Josephine knew what would happen next. *If I allow it...and I can't. I won't.*

“So, you’re going to marry Dimwit out of spite?” The movement of Alaric’s body gently forced her back.

“Yep, pretty much.” It was difficult to sound hard and determined when she was breathless with need. She reached out to his upper arms as her back hit the bed.

“I knew it.” Alaric followed her down, his body coming to rest on hers. “You’re such a bad liar, baby.”

Josephine had always loved the feel of his weight on her body. She instinctively parted her thighs. It had been so long since she had been filled with cock. *How I have missed it. How I have missed him.*

“You know nothing. You can’t walk back into my life and expect everything to be the same, vampire.” Her words would have been more convincing to them both if Josephine hadn’t arched her pelvis up to meet his.

Alaric’s hands started pushing up the white satin of her dress. “You have always been mine, baby.”

I am. “I was, but things change.” The cool rush of air on her upper thighs was a delicious contrast to the heat of the man above her.

“You’re not his.” Alaric ripped her lace knickers off. “He’s not been inside you. He’s never felt you tremble and cry out when you’ve come. He’s never tasted the sweetness of your pussy.” Alaric’s hands stroked the soft skin of her inner thigh.

When his finger touched her clit, Josephine knew she was lost. It had always been this way between them. One touch and she was helpless. “Go away.” Even as she said the words, Josephine moved her hands down to the zipper of his trousers.

“I need you, baby.” Alaric’s fingers joined in with hers to work to free his cock.

Josephine’s hand curled around his dick as it jumped free of its restraints. To her, there was nothing as lovely as the hot, pulsating feel of Alaric’s cock. Not even chocolate could compete with the long

shaft and full, luscious head of his dick. She longed to lick and suck it until he came in her mouth. Her eyes locked with his. The raw passion she saw surprised her. Alaric was never one to give much away. The hunger that emanated from him excited her.

"You've never needed me." She guided the head of his cock to her cunt. *To hell with it. I need this just one more time.* There was no need for foreplay. Josephine had been wet and ready from the moment he had appeared. She lifted her legs to wrap around his waist.

Alaric pushed his cock inside her. "You know that's not true. It's been a long, lonely eight months, two weeks, and three days."

He had counted? That was so sweet. "I'm sure you had plenty of female company." Not that it mattered at that moment. The steady thrust of cock into her body was all that mattered.

"I've had no one," he growled against her lips.

Josephine looked at him in surprise. "No one?" How was that possible? Alaric was a sexually charged being who could make her come with a single look. She grabbed his ass to push his cock farther inside.

"How can I when it's always been you?" Alaric pulled his dick out and shoved back in hard. He smiled as Josephine moaned. "Vampire legend says once you've found your true love no one else can ever replace her."

As much as she wanted to believe that, the whole months-of-separation thing made that difficult to understand. "How inconvenient for y-y-you." The last word came out choked as she tried to catch her breath and keep up with the pace.

Alaric brushed the hair from her face and leaned in to nuzzle her neck. "You have no idea how much I wanted to fuck you, baby."

It was not the most romantic thing he could have said, yet Josephine felt her heart beat with excitement at the thought. "So why didn't you?" She had been so lonely without him. His fangs scratched lightly against the skin of her throat. Josephine remembered the last

time they sliced into a vein. The sweet, hot rush of heat as he sucked on her neck had made her dizzy. *I want that again.*

“My life is—”

“Complicated.” Josephine finished his sentence. She sighed. Being with Alaric was always going to be problematical. The vampire thing was not even the issue. As easygoing as he was in some things, he was complex and perverse in others. “You’re a pain in the ass.” She slapped the butt in question.

Alaric smiled. “Yes, but we’re good together, and you know it.”

He was right. There was a sweet, sexy madness being with Alaric. He made her hot and crazy with need like no other. While Jimmy was safe, Alaric was a roller coaster. “You know what?”

“What?”

“I need cock—your cock. Let’s just do this and walk away.”

Alaric stopped and looked at her. “You know that’s not possible.”

Yes, she did. It had been madness to think one quick fuck could solve all their problems. It only created new ones. But need was more powerful than logic. “You complicate everything.” *As do I. In so many ways, we are perfect together.*

“I know.”

“You are so wrong for me.”

“So you keep telling me.”

“And bad.” So bad but in the most lovely and delicious way. “Why aren’t you moving?” She had the fullness. She wanted the friction.

Alaric chuckled and began his thrusts into her once more. “You like it when I’m bad. You like it when I’m inside you—fucking you.”

Oh, fuck yes. “Harder.” Josephine wanted to walk away from Alaric feeling like she had been shagged within an inch of her life.

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

That was sweet. But she needed more. “I want an orgasm.” Playing with her own clit did not compete with what a man could do.

“Oh, you’ll get that, baby.” Alaric pulled his cock out.

“No...” Josephine whimpered. Alaric responded by backing away and then dropping his head and fastening his mouth onto her clit. “Oh my G-G-God.” She clawed at the bedding beneath as Alaric licked and sucked at the soft pink folds of her pussy. Josephine no longer cared about her wedding dress or the muted sound of voices outside the bride’s room. All she wanted was to come with Alaric’s mouth on her cunt. His fangs were no impediment to her enjoyment. Alaric was too practiced a lover to let them scratch the delicate skin. Josephine’s hands caressed his head as he lapped at her flesh. He was devouring her, and Josephine was more than happy to be on his menu. She spread her legs wider, needing everything he had. Her body twisted on the bed, her pelvis pushing up into his face as the beginnings of an orgasm hit her. She panted and moaned, vaguely aware she called out something to do with Alaric and love, but in the heat of the moment, she was not conscious as to what that was.

Alaric lifted his head momentarily, his eyes meeting hers. “I know, baby. I know.”

Josephine pushed his head back down, aware of the chuckle of satisfaction from her lover. She was coming, and she wanted Alaric’s mouth on her clit as she did. “O-O-Oh, Alaric...” Josephine panted and gasped as the most amazing feeling tore through her body, making her shudder and shake and cry out. She held on to Alaric and rode out the feeling, never wanting it to stop.

Alaric slid up her body and kissed her nose. “I take it you needed that.”

“Oh yes.” Josephine needed him like oxygen. *How have I been breathing without him for this long?* She felt his hard cock against her thighs. Josephine loved sucking cock. It was knowing that Alaric would be out of control under her mouth and hands turned her on. Her eyes locked with his. “May I?” Josephine knew he would know what she meant.

Alaric stood up, his dick bobbing with excitement. “I will die if you don’t.” He held out his hand to her.

“You’re a vampire. You can’t die.” Josephine took his hand. As she stood, her icy white gown fell in limp folds down around her ankles. She was dressed for one man, but taking another. *I’ll worry about that later. I need cock now.*

He watched as she dropped to her knees before him. “Figure of speech, and I can technically die if—”

“Shut up, vampire.” Josephine fisted his cock, wrapped the other hand around the top of his thigh, and licked the spongy tip. She felt the muscle tense in his thigh. She licked some more. He groaned, his fingers running through her hair. This is what she loved. Alaric at her mercy. It was an intense, sweet power that thrilled her. Josephine sucked the head of his dick inside her mouth, her hand curling around his shaft. She knew exactly what Alaric liked. A slow suck yet a fast handjob. The competing sensations drove him wild.

Alaric closed his eyes, and his head dropped back as he gave in to the feeling. “A-Ahh, baby—”

Josephine’s mouth never left his cock. She wanted him to come. She loved the taste of him. Maybe it was unladylike to say. Maybe ladies didn’t admit to liking dick. Josephine didn’t care. This was all about making Alaric lose control. Josephine quickened her hand’s pace as it rubbed back and forth over the smooth, hard flesh. She heard the low growl in this throat, and Josephine knew it wouldn’t take long for him to come.

“Stop.” Alaric pushed at her shoulders. “I need to taste you.”

Josephine knew what he wanted. Part of her craved it. Part of her knew she would be doomed once more if his fangs sunk into her neck. His shiny cock popped out from between her lips. “Alaric, I—”

“Baby, I need you.”

The desperate look in his eyes matched the mad desperation she felt. She wanted all of him as he wanted all of her. *Just one more time. Let me feel the passion with him once more.* Like a junkie, Josephine rose to her feet and let him guide her to the bed. She was dazed with lust and need. Alaric mounted her body once again. His

cock plunged into her cunt. Josephine knew what would happen then. Her eyes met his. She nodded. There was no need for words. Each knew what the other wanted. Each knew that only they could provide the satisfaction the other craved. Josephine wrapped her legs around his waist and rolled her head to the side, presenting the pale white flesh of her neck. "Please—"

"Thank you." Alaric's mouth descended on her skin like that of a lover. He kissed, he licked, and he sucked as his fingers linked with Josephine's and raised them above her head.

She knew what would happen next. Josephine stopped breathing for a second as his fangs sliced into her throat. She gasped at the surge of warmth that spread through her body. There was no pain, only a soft, tingling heat that melded their bodies together. As his mouth sucked on her blood, Josephine felt his body begin to move in time with his mouth. It was sex, but it wasn't. It was more than that. It was a joining like no other. Hearts pounded, and the essence of whom each of them was flowed from one to the other. She never wanted it to end. *How the hell have I lived without this? Without him?* The orgasm when it came was different and more intense. It was not just physical. It was emotional on a level too few humans could understand. Josephine was crying. She always did when Alaric made love to her like this. She knew that he would say nothing of her tears, for he understood the bond they had shared.

Alaric unlinked their hands and wiped a stray teardrop from her face. He was still inside her. "That was good." He rolled from her body and onto his side.

It was fucking amazing. "Yes." The cool air was like a slap of reality. She looked down at her dress. She was no longer—well, she never had been—the pristine bride. Her dress was wrenched up to her thighs, and her silk stockings were laddered. The smell of sex perfumed the air. She was sated yet dazed. All Josephine wanted to do was roll into Alaric's arms and rest against his body and not think.

Just feel. And she would have had the sound of organ music not started up at that moment. Josephine sat bolt upright. Reality hit.

“Fuck! We shouldn’t have done that.” She started scrambling off the bed.

“Hey, where are you going?” Alaric made a grab for her leg.

Josephine avoided his hand. “Crap! I’m supposed to be getting married.” She said it more for her benefit than his. He had come there deliberately to stop her from getting married. She had been determined to not let that happen. That had been the plan. That had been shot to hell with one hot look from the vampire.

Josephine stumbled over to the mirror. *Egad!* Her hair was a tangled mess, her lipstick was anywhere but on her lips, and her eye makeup was smeared and feral-looking. The skin on her neck where his fangs had been was red and swollen. There was no blood. It looked like a love bite.

“I look like I’ve been shagged within an inch of my life.” The organ belted out a couple of strangled chords. “I hate organ music.” She tried in vain to fix her hair.

“It’s only really good for funeral parlors, and even then it makes me yawn.” Alaric slid off the bed and fastened his trousers up. He looked pleased with himself.

Josephine was tempted to yell at the smug-looking vampire behind her, but the thing was, it wasn’t just his fault, and they both knew it.

“You can’t marry Dimwit now. It’s bad form to fuck another man on your wedding day.” He walked to where she stood.

Josephine turned on him. “You made me!”

“You grabbed my cock and used words like ‘harder.’”

“Tacky of you to mention that.” She gave up on her hair and started to pull at the satin folds of her skirt. They were screwed beyond repair. “And I am getting married.” She needed to get the vampire out of her blood. *Marrying Dimwit—I mean Jimmy—will do that.*

"You certainly are. To me."

"You?" That was the last thing Josephine expected. Alaric was all hot, naughty sex with no commitment. "Don't be ridiculous. You may be immortal, but you suck at forever."

"Is it just because I'm a vampire?"

Josephine poked her finger into his chest. "No, it's because you have no sense of commitment."

"There's been no one but you. God knows there are times I wanted to, but—"

"But?"

"I kept seeing your face and feeling you under me, and I could think of no one but you. You are my true love."

Josephine rolled her eyes. "What a load of bullshit. You just want me because another man has me."

Alaric lifted and shook his finger. "He hasn't had you yet, and nor will he. Now, let's go."

"What? Go? I'm staying right here." Josephine wasn't about to be ordered about by any man, let alone one who had made no attempt to see her in eight months.

"You're not marrying Dimwit. I need you with me, baby. Clearly you cannot be left to your own devices. You go off and try marrying the first boring man you come across."

"How did you know I was getting married?" Why had he appeared after all this time?

"I hear things." Alaric wrapped an arm around her waist.

"So this is a possession thing? You want me just because another man does. "

"No, I want you because you are mine."

Josephine barely refrained from delivering a lecture on the perils of being a male chauvinist pig. "What about Richard?" There had to be more to this than just sex and ownership. Nothing was ever so simple with Alaric. Besides, if she fell back into line with Alaric, Josephine knew she would run into Richard. Had he thought about

that? There was no way she could promise she wouldn't lust after the other vampire.

"He's chasing some woman he thinks he's in love with. It's the perfect time for us to take possession of Maverick House."

Richard and another woman. *Interesting*. It might be worth going back to Maverick House just to see that. But in the end, Josephine knew, both cousins wanted two things—first and foremost, Maverick House, and second, available pussy without any real commitment. "So this is just about who gets the house."

"Yes and no—I want you both."

Of course he did. Alaric always wanted everything at once. "Well, I'm not going." She dug her heels in.

Alaric swore at the sound of knocking at the door. "We don't have time for this." He snapped his fingers, and they disappeared.

Chapter Two

Two years ago

Maverick House was enormous. That was the first impression Josephine got every time she saw it. Set in the tree-filled grounds beside the Brisbane River, the house was a presence all by itself. It stood as if it were impervious to all and belonged to no one. The sandstone façade and the high gabled roof did not fit any particular time period Josephine was aware of, and certainly not with the solid timber colonial houses that were built at the turn of the nineteenth century. Maverick House was Gothic and stood out as if daring others to make something of it.

Josephine had stumbled across Maverick House had been two years ago when she had been working the temp job for the solicitors. She had been given the task to drive important papers out from the city office to a client to sign. Problem was, Josephine had not been paying attention to the address, and instead of 101 River Drive, she had ended up at number 131 and Maverick House. Her first glimpse of the imposing structure had her staring in dropped-jaw wonder. Why? She wasn't sure. Maybe it was because the house was so vastly different to anything she had seen before. Maybe it was the fact that a strange sensation gripped at her when she knocked on the front door. Or more likely it was the fact that Alaric himself answered the door in nothing more than low-slung jeans and a smile.

"I...er...ah, I was looking for Mr. Quinn at 101 River Drive." Josephine had commanded herself not to look at the naked male torso before her, but that had been damned near impossible. To not look

would have been wrong. Such male beauty never came her way. She had clutched the folio of papers to her chest and wondered about men and sex and orgasms and wondered why none of them seemed anywhere in her future.

“You have 131 River Drive and me.”

“Oh.” *If only I did have you for just a minute...the things I could do.*

“You don’t want me?”

“Oh, I do—that is, no, er, um...that is, I’m supposed to get papers signed, and you’re not who I thought you were.”

He smiled. “Few of us ever are.”

“That’s true.” Josephine stared at his mouth. Although his lips were kissable, there was something else that caught her eye. His teeth were weird. Just a glimpse was enough to confirm to her even the most beautiful people had flaws, and his were his teeth. Some appeared longer than others.

“Do you want to come inside?” He stepped aside to allow her entry.

“Yes. I mean no.” Good girls—even sexually frustrated girls—did not wander into a gorgeous, unknown man’s house. *Did they?*

“I’m wondering if you’re more intrigued than confused.”

I’m more horny than anything else. It had been months since Josephine last had sex, and even then she could barely remember what it felt like to have a cock inside her. “I should be going.”

“Should?”

“I’m supposed to be working.” The temp jobs were okay. She could leave one and pick up another whenever she liked, but they weren’t stimulating. Not like looking at this man was. *Now if they paid me by the hour to do him...*

“How boring.” He moved inside.

Josephine instinctively followed. “Yeah, it is. What do you do?” She looked around the interior. It screamed money and influence and *What the hell are you doing in here, temp woman?*

"Nothing."

"You don't work?" If not working got you all this, Josephine was ready to take a crack at it as a career move.

"Nope."

"Why not?" It was none of her business, but the idea of being the idle rich appealed greatly to her.

"I don't have to."

"Rich?" And beautiful. *Typical*. She was overweight and average, hence her crummy pay rate.

"Disgustingly so."

"Well, I better go."

"Stay with me."

Josephine was confused. "What?"

"You fascinate me."

"How?" What could this man possibly see in her? They couldn't be less opposite if they tried.

"Because you're fresh and beautiful and you don't realize it."

Josephine understood then. "You're supposed to say no to drugs."

"My name is Alaric, and I only go for natural highs."

"I'm Josephine, and you mean like chocolate?" *I so wish I could marry a man like this or just have marathon sex with him. Whichever came first. I'm not picky.*

"Like orgasms."

Oh yeah, I'm going to have to drive back to the city squirming in my seat. Even the way he said the word made her wet with need.
"Um..."

"Yes?" Alaric watched her with interest.

"The thing is I don't sleep with just anyone." *But, for you, I could make an exception.*

Alaric nodded. "That's good because I don't plan for us to sleep."

Gorgeous and smart. *Thank you, fate, for making me have a lousy sense of direction.* "I meant, you know, sex."

"I know sex very well."

The husky tone of his voice made her tremble. "I bet you do."

He took the papers from her. "Ever met someone you wanted the moment you met them?"

"Yesss." Josephine sighed the word.

"Who?"

"You."

Alaric chuckled. "The feeling is mutual, baby."

Baby? Josephine's mouth was suddenly dry. "Me?" she croaked out.

"Yes." There was no hesitation whatsoever in his voice.

"But I have papers to deliver and stuff."

"Stuff can wait." Alaric pulled her to him.

"Oh..." His body against hers was the best feeling in the world. "You feel fantastic." It probably wasn't the most sophisticated thing to say, but his chuckle made her shiver.

"As do you."

"Really?" *Have I walked into a parallel universe where I'm suddenly desirable?*

"Yes, really." Alaric rubbed her pelvis against hers. "I need you."

No one had ever said that to her before. "This is like a dream."

Alaric kissed her nose. "This is very much yours and my reality. I've been waiting for you, Josephine."

Her mouth dropped open, and he took advantage of that and kissed her. All past kisses were obliterated from her mind. This man's kiss was the only one worth knowing. There was passion and desire in his lips. When his tongue met hers, Josephine sighed. The taste of his mouth was intoxicating. The weirdness of his teeth was forgotten as the kiss deepened.

"Damn." Alaric's mouth left hers as he started pulling at her clothes.

"What?" Was damn good or bad? Undressing her had to be a good sign, though. Josephine tugged at his belt buckle.

"I wanted to take this slow." Alaric moved her towards the stairs.

“Oh.” Normally Josephine could do slow. But not now. She was like a woman possessed as she pulled his zipper down and freed his cock. *Oh boy, all that just for me.* It would have been impolite to ignore it. She touched the tip of his dick.

Alaric closed his eyes. “Bloody hell.” He pulled his jeans down, kicking his legs free.

Mine, mine, mine. Josephine felt a surge of power shoot into her veins. While it was true most men were slaves to their dick and organized their thoughts accordingly around its desires, it was exciting for Josephine to know this man was out of control under her. Her clothes were dropping off her body and hitting the floor at an astonishing speed—almost as if by magic. And then Alaric was holding her close, skin to skin, as he started walking her up the stairs. Josephine stumbled and fell against the treads, her ass landing flat on one of them. Alaric was upon her, his body spreading her legs, his lips on hers while his hands roamed between her thighs, pulling her open and forward for his pleasure.

“Fuck me.” Never in her life had Josephine said that before, but she loved the sound of it. It was raw and earthy.

“Yes, ma’am.” There was no subtlety here. She was wet and ready. He was hard and ready. His cock plunged into her cunt with no further need for foreplay. This was pure hunger. Man. Woman. Need.

Josephine panted under the onslaught of cock. The stairs were not the most comfortable place for sex, but she didn’t care. If this man stopped now, she would scream. His steady, deep thrusts were driving her wild. His mouth on her neck was hot and demanding. Josephine knew she would have a huge love bite tomorrow, but she couldn’t care less. It was not every day a gorgeous man wanted her. But even through her haze of lust, reality kicked in. “Wait, we need a condom.” Riding bare with this stranger was not smart.

“No, we don’t, baby.” Alaric did not lessen the pace of his thrusts.

“Why not?”

“I can’t get you pregnant. I’m a vampire.”

“You’re a what?” And then she felt the reality of his words as his fangs sank into her neck. Josephine gripped at his shoulders, unsure whether she was trying to push him away or pull him closer. The wild rush of heat that tore through her body was all she could think about. His cock was pounding her cunt, and his mouth was fastened on her neck, sucking possessively.

Josephine cried out long and hard as the orgasm hit. It was like nothing she had ever felt before. She shook and shuddered and clung on to Alaric for fear of falling. She felt him come hot inside her, and that rush of cum felt weird but right. No man had ever been allowed to come like that between her legs. But then Alaric was like no other man she had ever met.

His mouth left her neck. She felt no pain. Her skin tingled.

“This is just the beginning, baby.”

Chapter Three

The present

Josephine stood looking at those same steps now. What madness that had been. Lust had overwhelmed her, and she had given in. It had been a crazy six months with Alaric. It was crazy, wonderful, and in so many ways unrealistic. He was a vampire. He didn't play by anyone's rules but his own. Alaric saw no reason for Josephine to work. She saw no reason in his obsession with Maverick House. Why he couldn't share with his cousin was beyond her.

"There's magic in the house, baby. Can't you feel it? Richard doesn't have the strength to handle it."

And Josephine didn't have the patience to deal with Alaric's mania for a Gothic pile of bricks. It was about then when he suddenly disappeared from her life. Josephine figured whatever they had must have run its course. She was sad but stoic. Life went on, and so did she. Her plan was to be more wary of who she allowed into her life and body, hence the reason she was going to marry Jimmy. He was like a declaration of intent. *And he's probably wondering what the hell is going on.*

"Thinking about how we first met?"

"I was horny, you had no shirt on, and I hadn't had sex in ages. You took advantage." *As did I.*

"As did you."

Snap. "For all the reasons I just said." Josephine moved away from Alaric. One soulful look from him and she would once more be on the steps with her legs spread, ready to receive. Instead, she looked

down at her bedraggled gown. This was not how she envisioned her wedding day. It had all been planned out to be sedate and tasteful. Everything Alaric wasn't.

"I want to go home."

"This is home. You just don't realize it yet."

"Don't get all mystical on me, vampire." Even as she said the words, Josephine knew there was something about Maverick House that caught and held her. It was a feeling that was slowly catching hold within her. Maybe it was magic. Maybe it was just the man at her side. Whatever it was, being there now was one more confusing thing on an already perplexing day.

"You're cute when you're angry." He started to tug at her clothes.

"Stop that!" Josephine slapped at his hands. The last thing she needed was to be naked with Alaric. He had a way of changing her mind with a simple caress.

Alaric appeared unfazed. Instead he lifted her skirts in one move and pressed his body to hers. "Why?"

Oh no. "Because..." Why do I want dick when I really want to be over you?"

"Bad answer." He pushed her up against a nearby wall.

She could feel his covered cock up against her stomach. "Alaric, we need to talk."

"After we fuck." His hands cupped her ass, and he lifted her up until she was pinned against the wooden paneling.

Josephine entwined her legs instinctively around his waist. "I won't be able to concentrate then."

"Exactly." His lips were an inch from hers. "Unzip me."

"No." And yet her hands rested just above his waistband.

"Come on, baby, you know you want cock."

As crude as that sounded, it made Josephine feel hot all over. *Yeah, I want cock.* She had lived for months without feeling that heated fullness between her thighs. But Josephine didn't want to make

this easy for him. She was not going to have Alaric think she would immediately do as he said.

He smiled at her, his fangs gleaming white. "You're the least easy person I know."

"Are you reading my mind?" That could be very dangerous. He knew too much about her already.

"I wish I could. Then I'd have all the answers to please you."

Josephine was surprised at the sincerity in his eyes. "Is that important?" Was it more than just the house that he loved?

Alaric nodded. "More than you'll ever realize, baby. Please let me in."

It was the "please" that did it. Her fingers tugged down on his zip. His cock jumped out. Alaric wasted no time in positioning her body so he could plunge inside her cunt with one single thrust. Josephine moaned and wrapped her arms around his shoulders. "W-W-We have to stop doing this."

"Why?" Alaric slammed in and out of her body.

"Because, um..." It was hard to think of reasons when the most delightful friction was sending tremors of pleasure up her spine. "We have to talk about stuff—serious stuff." Josephine doubted they had ever had one serious moment together. Normally it was just fun and sex. While that was amazing, she wanted to know where her life would go with someone who would never age and if he could even commit to her, without wandering off as he previously had, in whatever future they had together.

"So talk."

Her head banged up against the wall as he banged into her. "Not now. I can't focus on anything but you."

"Is that so bad?" He leaned in and kissed her.

Josephine sighed against his lips. "After all these months, you just expect everything to be the same."

"Yes, because I love you."

Everything always seemed simple for him. "Oh, Alaric..."

“And you love me.”

Josephine didn't get a chance to answer.

“Oh dear!” Polly Patrick, housekeeper to Maverick House, appeared. Her mouth dropped open on seeing them.

Josephine felt herself blush ten different shades of red. “Hi, Polly.”

The chatelaine of the house was a large, buxom woman who dyed her hair vivid red. If Josephine had to guess, she would have said Polly was anywhere in age between thirty-seven and ninety-seven. She dressed like a teenager in bright, out-of-control colors, yet she had the mind of a sage. Polly alternatively terrified and fascinated Josephine.

The older woman closed her mouth and smiled, her eyes riveted on Josephine's face as if anywhere else would be too hard to deal with. “Always good to see you, dear.”

“Oh hell, Polly. Of all the times to show up,” Alaric growled.

“Keep your pants on—I mean, calm down. How was I to know you were shagging a guest in the front parlor?” She smiled at Josephine. “How have you been?”

“Um, okay.” This was one of the stranger conversations she had taken part in. Josephine was pinned by a cock to the wall and wondering whether the subject of the weather or would she like a pot of tea would be brought up next.

“Please rack off, Polly.” Alaric's voice was calm and polite, yet his eyes were fierce with need.

“Oh, yes, of course. We'll get caught up later once you've, er, once he's...um, well, you know.” Polly scuttled out.

Josephine's pushed her forehead against Alaric's. “That was embarrassing.” While she knew Polly had probably seen and done more in her life than she could imagine, sex was not something Josephine considered a spectator sport.

“Why? Was she looking at my ass?” Once more he began thrusting within Josephine.

She slapped his shoulder. "Alaric, not everything in life is about y-y-you." *Damn, he is good.* Her whole body shook under the deep pounding of his cock. The driving force of his body against hers triggered a delightful itch that was spiraling out of control. "Hurry up." She wanted to come, but with him. There was something special feeling the man she loved jerking and groaning on release as she came. *The man I love?* Josephine shook her head. This morning she had planned to marry Jimmy, a man who barely touched her, and now here she was slammed up against a wall, urging on her errant ex-lover.

"We're going to have to make time for a long, slow fuck." Alaric's words came out strained as his thrusts became harder and deeper.

Josephine could taste the sweat on her upper lip. "I'm going home after this." She tightened her hold on Alaric.

"You're so funny, baby."

"As are y-y-you." She gasped as the most amazing sensation of pleasure, pain, and relief shot through her body.

"Oh, I'm never going to leave you again." Alaric stiffened against her, his body tense as he came.

The feel of hot cum shooting into her body was primal and intense. A wild feeling of ownership gripped Josephine. *This is my man. But can I trust him to stay?*

Chapter Four

Alaric watched as Josephine walked to the side door that led to the garden. Her wedding dress was crumpled and torn, her brown hair hung tangled around her shoulders, and her face was solemn. She was the most beautiful woman he knew. As for the solemnity? Alaric knew Josephine was confused. She had every right to be. One minute he was in her life, the next he disappeared, only to reappear months later when she was trying to get on with her life without him. Josephine had every right to be angry. But to marry someone else? Someone called Jimmy?

“I don’t think so,” he muttered under his breath. Josephine getting fucked by Richard he could deal with. His cousin was like an oversized sex toy for Josephine to play with. That was just sex. There was no threat in her playing with him, but this Jimmy guy? It was scary to think his woman had been that close to walking down the aisle and into suburbia. Josephine wasn’t the stuff of housewives.

And yes, Alaric had been caught up in the battle for ownership of Maverick House. That race had intensified when both vampires had discovered that the first one to marry their true love would own the house. The local witch had told them that. Neither had approached her. She had made herself known only to Polly and delivered the news.

At the time, Alaric had been suspicious. “What’s in it for her?”

“She said she feels cosmic unrest. That the power from Maverick House is causing it,” Polly had explained to him after her visit. “You and I both know the power that is here and that if it gets into the wrong hands—”

While he was unaware of the extent of the power, Alaric could feel it. "There will be chaos." He had lived long enough to know if any talisman, such as Maverick House, was not cared for, it could cause a cosmic shift in the supernatural world.

"Why tell us now?" While Alaric knew everything happened for a reason, he liked to know what the reason was."

"Maybe, you're ready to hear it now."

"Possibly." Alaric was the first to admit that vampires didn't take a lot seriously until reality was forced on them.

"So you two have to get your acts together. You know this house and the land it stands on is sensitive to the moods of your kin. It has stood here for centuries. You two have only been allowed access to it recently, and you've created nothing but havoc with your bickering."

"We're grown men. We don't bicker."

Polly rolled her eyes. "Okay, so you whine a lot. Just get your acts together, or neither of you will have a peaceful future."

Alaric didn't doubt for a second that Polly was right. She always was. The housekeeper was one of the few people Alaric stood in awe of. Why? He wasn't sure. He was eighty percent certain Polly was mortal, and yet there was something indefinable about her that made him wary. But she was one of the few people who knew the ins and outs of Maverick House. Before he and Richard had arrived, the house had remained silent and watchful but for Polly. Each successive housekeeper, like Polly, had maintained it without question. It was their job, and they never queried it.

Although he had been aware Maverick House existed, neither he nor Richard had been permitted to visit. They had to be summoned. That had annoyed them, but they knew that when they were summoned, in this case by Polly, there would be good reason. What it was, they still hadn't been sure, and Polly's vague allusion to "your futures" hadn't helped.

Alaric shook his head and tried to focus on the present. The future was unfathomable.

“Josephine hasn’t changed.” Polly’s eyes were on the woman who walked through the garden.

“No. She is still beautiful and stubborn.”

Polly turned her eyes to Alaric. “When are you going to tell her?”

“I’m not.” He didn’t want to. Alaric could imagine the fury from Josephine when he explained he needed to marry her to keep the house. Yes, he could share the premises with Richard, but vampires weren’t good at that. Their home was their castle and no one else’s. He knew Richard felt the same way. Although they were immortals and had spent years spinning around the world doing what they pleased, every vampire, at heart, had the deep-seated need for a home, and Maverick House was it. Problem was, they both wanted it, and only one could have it. That pleasure-loving Richard was off pursuing a woman in itself was alarming. *I will not let him beat me. This house is mine.*

“Josephine’s not stupid.”

“No, and I don’t want her thinking I need her just because of Maverick House.” Alaric loved Josephine. He had since the moment they met.

“Well, that’s why you went and got her.”

Unlike other mortals, Polly was unafraid to stare him down. “No, she was going to marry some suburban dimwit.”

Polly looked surprised. “Really?”

“Yes. Someone called Jimmy. How could she want a Jimmy when she could have me?” *What did a Jimmy even look like? I may have to pay him a visit.* Alaric linked his hands together and cracked his knuckles.

“Clearly she’s out of her mind,” murmured Polly with deep sarcasm.

“You know, the house was the least of my concerns. Josephine’s supposed to love me. Not someone called Jimmy.” Alaric knew he was guilty of neglecting her, but he always believed in his heart neither could marry another. They were meant for each other. Once

married, his immortality diminished. Alaric wanted that and Josephine. *I want to be normal with the woman I love.*

"She loves you too much. You're her weakness."

"As she is mine."

Polly nodded. "You need to tell her."

"I will."

"Before Richard does."

"Damn Richard." Alaric loved his cousin, and he hated his cousin. They had grown up together and travelled together. The only thing that divided them was Maverick House. "He's a pain in the ass."

"He says that about you." Polly looked amused. "Richard will find out Josephine is here."

"What is it with women who like force?" Alaric knew it was a fetish that Josephine could not help but to give in to. He himself could not treat her as Richard did. There was no love in it. There was a dominance and control. Alaric accepted her need for it as she accepted his need for blood. That thirst would never decrease with the end of immortality. Alaric had to respect Josephine's desire.

"It's hard to explain," Polly responded. "It's the feeling that you're being forced to be bad and you would never normally do that."

Alaric looked at the housekeeper. There was so much he didn't know about this woman. What were her needs? Polly spoke very little about herself and never directly answered questions involving her own life. She was an enigma and perfect for Maverick House, where nothing was as it seemed.

"This is my home, Polly." He wanted Josephine with him in it.

"As it is Richard's."

"The first one to marry owns it." As far as Alaric knew, Richard, while pursuing some blonde woman, was not close to matrimony. *But then he tells me only what he thinks I should hear, as I do him.*

"I'm sure your bride will be flattered to hear why you need her."

"It's more than that, Polly—much more."

Polly sighed. "I know. I'm just dying to see how Josephine handles the news when she finds out—and she will."

"Yeah, me too," Alaric responded. The woman he loved was anything but tame.

* * * *

Josephine walked around the grounds thinking what to do. There were so many reasons she should just walk down the front drive, never to return. But that would solve nothing. Alaric would still be Alaric, and he would come and find her once more. *And I will fall into his arms as I always do because I love the big dope.* No matter how many times she convinced herself otherwise, that was the truth. She loved the vampire. He was irritating and annoying, and yet Josephine had the best times of her life when she was with him.

She still found it hard to believe he had been with no other woman. Alaric was a highly sexual man. Even if he had not been inside another's woman's body, Josephine still wondered how he had contained his need for blood. He was a vampire. They needed blood to sustain them.

Josephine turned and looked at the house. "What do you want from me, house? What do you want from him? Clearly this all comes back to you." If only it could speak. She sighed. "I bet you'd only speak in riddles." While it was true this was just a bunch of old stones, there was something more to this place, something that obsessed Alaric. But what? Why was he so caught up in it? She dismissed that childish idea it was just because his cousin wanted it. Alaric wasn't that shallow. He accepted her brief liaisons with his cousin as something she needed to do. So it had to be more. "Why do you bewitch these men?"

"Maybe you're not meant to know, Josephine."

The hair stood up on the back of her neck. *Oh, fuck—the other one.* Josephine turned and looked at Richard. Darkly handsome with

an intense energy vibrating off him. It was an energy that called to her, that demanded everything she had and would leave her weak afterwards. One cousin was so different to the other. Alaric was more playful and open. His needs were clear in his dark, sparkling eyes. Richard was the exact opposite. She wasn't sure what he wanted, and yet it made her all the more interested. It was like touching something you knew would be bad for you. There were so many reasons you shouldn't, but yet, none of them were compelling enough to stop.

"How are you, Richard?" Josephine told herself she needed to act calm and not be sucked into the charisma of the man. That he knew her weaknesses scared her. It would take so little for her to succumb to him again. She loved Alaric, but Richard had a hold on her as well. He understood her dark side. That scared yet exhilarated her. "Are you well?" It was a crazy to ask, as vampires were never sick.

"Ah, polite conversation, kind of funny considering the last time we were together my cock was buried in your ass and you were begging me to fuck you hard."

She knew he was trying to make her react in anger. "It's impolite to remind a lady of her past." The smile he returned showed a glint of powerful fangs. Regardless of what Richard did to her, he was never allowed to bite her. They both knew that was solely for Alaric. Theirs was not a love match. It was based solely on lust and greed.

"Are you a lady? Do ladies whimper and moan and agree to anything to be fucked?"

Yes, she had done all that. *I will not feel ashamed.* "Probably not. But then I see you are still no gentleman."

"But you like that about me." Richard moved towards her. "Did you miss me?"

"No." That was the only answer she could give. Richard was like fine wine to Josephine—heady and bad for her, but she couldn't help but give in and take more, or in this case, be taken.

"Liar." Richards's voice sounded confident. "No other man understands you like I do." He waved his hand to dismiss her words.

“Yes, yes, you love Alaric, and he is infatuated with you, but he doesn’t answer the dark needs you have. Only I can do that.”

And that fact scared her more than she was willing to admit. That Josephine craved rough treatment appalled her. While Alaric was a spirited lover, he was also tender and caring. Only Alaric could taste her blood. That was a right she would only ever bestow on him. With Alaric, it was more personal and possessive than sexual. It was a deep-seated need to connect with the one you loved.

“I no longer have those *dark needs* as you call them.” It was a bad lie, but she would use whatever she needed to stop herself succumbing to Richard. Her life was already complicated without adding him back into the mix.

Richard threw back his head and laughed. “You’re always so much fun. Now come here.” He crooked his finger towards her.

“No.” *I have to be strong.* If Richard overwhelmed her with lust as he did last time, she would never leave Maverick House. Two intense vampires having an unbreakable hold on her would be impossible to leave.

“I command it.”

If it was anyone else, Josephine would have laughed in his face. But this was different. Her mouth went dry, and her hands twisted together as she willed herself to be strong. “I am not yours to command.”

“Aren’t you?”

“No.” She wasn’t frightened. Josephine was excited as once more she thought about Richard’s body, hard and relentless, on hers.

“Defiance won’t work, you know. I’ll still have you, but maybe I won’t make you come. I may just fill you and fuck you and then walk away.”

The thought of him taking her solely for his own pleasure made her tremble. Richard always did so without asking. And she fought it. But he always won. *And I crave that.* “You’re an arrogant sod.”

He laughed. “But you need me.”

Yes. "No."

"Come here, or do you want me to take you?"

Yes, please. Take me. Make me. Break me. After the simple sweetness of Jimmy, to the robust loving of Alaric, this was all too much for her. "No, Richard..." Josephine knew what would happen next.

Richard strode over and grabbed her hand and started to drag her to the nearby gazebo. It was a large, old-fashioned wooden structure belonging to a time when outdoor tea parties had been popular.

Josephine yelled, slapping at his hand as she tried to dig her feet in. It was impossible, of course. Richard was bigger and stronger and completely in control of this game. And that's what it was. He knew what she liked. "Leave me alone."

"You don't want that." Richard kicked open the elaborate wooden gate and pushed her inside.

"I do." Her heels skittered over the rustic marble floor as she tried to break free from him.

"Liar." He let go of her. "Lift your skirt, Josephine." His eyes were hot and predatory on hers.

She felt the wetness rush between her thighs. "Richard—"

"Do it."

"No."

He grabbed her and spun her around so her back was to his front. Richard frog-marched Josephine to the large wrought-iron table. He stopped before it and pushed her forward so her breasts were squashed against it. He lifted her skirts so her bare ass was exposed. "My cousin fucked you yet?" The vampire slapped her ass.

"None of your business."

Once more his hand came down on her ass. *Slap, slap, slap.*

"Stop that!"

"I'll do whatever I want when I want, and you'll love it." *Slap, slap, slap.*

The sting of his palm made her whole body heat up. She moaned in excitement. He was right. Josephine loved every second of this. It was so wrong and bad that it made her hot with need to be filled.

“Bet he never fucks you like I do.” His hands pulled her legs apart.

Richard’s rough touch made her gasp and wiggle around for more. “He’s sweet, tender, and passionate.” Josephine heard his zipper slide down. *Oh yes.*

“That doesn’t sound like Alaric. Did you wonder who he was shagging while he was gone from you?”

“No.” Josephine felt his cock head against her butt cheek. Richard loved anal sex.

“Yeah, you did.” He pulled her cheeks apart and slid two fingers inside her anus.

Richard never asked if she was ready. He just took. “You’re hurting me.” He wasn’t. She wanted more and harder. She was a completely different woman to the one who made love with Alaric. But then this wasn’t love. This was lust.

He leaned in over her and whispered hot against her ear. “You have to stop lying so much, Josephine.” He inserted a third finger.

She stiffened as those digits began to move inside. “I hate you.” Josephine instinctively pushed her ass back against him.

“I know.” He removed his fingers.

Josephine knew what that meant. “I’m not ready yet.” She was, but Josephine didn’t want to give him any satisfaction for it.

“This is my game and my rules. Besides, you’re always ready for me. I only have to slap your ass for you to spread your legs.”

His words were disgusting and crude, yet they excited more than they repelled. She felt the sudden icy chill of lube at the tight, puckered hole of her butt. Like Alaric, Richard could produce anything with a snap of his fingers.

"I don't want this," she spat out as she pushed up against him. This was greeted by another volley of slaps to her ass. She moaned. *That felt so good.*

"Be a good girl, and shut up and submit." He centered his cock on her anus and started to push inside.

"Never." Josephine shrieked as he jammed his cock in hard all the way without any mercy. It was exactly what she wanted—hard and painful and with no choice in the matter.

"See? Bad girls get what they really want." Richard began thrusting hard and deep.

"I didn't want this," Josephine whimpered as her fingers gripped at the table underneath, nails breaking under the onslaught of his body slamming into hers.

"Oh yeah you did."

"Bastard." Her ass was on fire. Her clit was rubbing against the metal of the table. It would take so very little to come.

Richard laughed and pulled out from her body. "Beg me to come back inside."

"Fuck off," Josephine yelled in defiance.

"Okay then." He stepped away.

The sudden loss of his body heat alarmed her. "No!" *I want more.*

"No what?"

"You can't leave me like this." Josephine turned her head to Richard. He looked very pleased with himself.

"What? With your skirt up and your ass out, ready for anyone to fuck you?"

"Please!" He knew what Josephine needed.

"What?"

"You know." She ground her clit against the table, seeking release.

"No, I don't."

"Fuck me!" Josephine shoved her ass back at him.

"Where?" He moved forward and slapped her backside.

“In the ass.”

“Why?” *Slap.*

“Because I like it hard and deep.” She sighed as he slid back inside her and began thrusting so hard and fast she could barely catch her breath. “I still hate you.” *But I love this.*

Richard laughed. “Just for that, I’m not going to make you come.” He pulled out for the last time.

Josephine felt the spurts of cum land wet and hot on the small of her back. He never came in her. It was always on her. She turned over and watched him zip up. “What about me?”

“Play with yourself.”

“No!”

“Then you won’t come.” Richard snapped his fingers and disappeared.

Chapter Five

"Enjoy your walk, dear?" Polly smiled at Josephine.

Her legs were stiff, her fingernails broken, and her ass was aching and red raw from the pounding she had just enjoyed. She was tingling all over from Richard and the orgasm she had driven herself on to with her own fingers. Did it show? Could they see she'd been taken and used and liked it?

"Yes, but I need to go home now." Maverick House was not for her. These vampires were not for her. They played for keeps, and being kept scared her.

"Not back to the wedding?" Alaric raised a speculative eyebrow.

"Like I could now." Jimmy would think she was an ill-mannered coward for leaving as she did. *How do I apologize for that? How do I explain that? You see, Jimmy, the thing is I like to be fucked hard and often by vampires. I forgot how much I did. I'm sure you'll agree this probably doesn't indicate you and I are compatible.* "And don't look so pleased." Alaric's smile was telling enough. He knew she was conflicted.

"I'm just happy."

"Uh-huh. Messing with my life does that for you, does it?" Though, if she was honest, she had messed her own life up pretty well without any help from him.

Alaric shook his head. "No, you make me happy, baby."

Josephine blinked. Was he serious? She wanted to believe so, but how serious could a man be if he left her for months to sit and wonder what she'd done wrong? The soft, possessive look in Alaric's eyes was confusing. What did he want from her? Was it just sex? While

fucking the vampire was amazing and she never had so much fun naked with anyone, when they were not naked, they were impossible together. Both of them were stubborn and opinionated. Both wanted what the other couldn't give. It was better that she laugh this off and move on. The day had been confusing in so many ways. "Oh, ha ha. Very funny."

"You never take me seriously. Why is that?"

"Maybe because you never are, Alaric." Josephine wanted to change the topic. His sudden hurt look got to her. "Looking around the place, I can see nothing has changed."

Polly nodded. "Yep, nothing much changes here."

"I guess not." Josephine focused on the vampire. "Let's cut to the chase. Why am I here?"

Alaric grinned. "You never change, baby. I like that about you. You're so sweet and even-tempered."

More than ever, Josephine knew something more than his declaration of love was behind his need to see her. "What do you want?"

"You."

"Why? I know you turning up as you did is not about undying love for me, is it?"

"I do love you, and there doesn't have to be a reason behind everything."

Josephine laughed. "Yeah, with you there does." She turned to Polly. "What's going on?" The other woman knew too much to be in dark.

"Tell her, Fang."

That made Josephine smile. She had forgotten Polly's nickname for Alaric when he was being impossible. "Yeah, Fang, what is it?"

Alaric spread his hands in a plea. "Just remember what I'm about to say is only a really small part of why I want you here."

"Oh yeah?" Josephine knew whatever he was going to say was going to piss her off. As much as she wanted to believe Alaric loved

her and that there was a connection between them, she knew vampires, on the whole, were slaves to their desires. Alaric loved two things above all others—sex and Maverick house. Sex they had done, so this was about the house. “So, whatever this is about revolves around this pile of stone.”

“It’s more about you.”

“Uh-huh, how so?”

“I need you.”

Josephine’s needed to know more. “Why?”

Alaric looked uneasy. “Why all the questions, baby? That’s an annoying habit you have.”

“And your evading them is annoying to me. So be a big, brave vampire and just tell me.”

“You’ll get all emotional.”

After a statement like that, it was guaranteed she would. “I suppose you hate that too.”

“No, it’s kind of cute how worked up you get about things.” Alaric reached out for her.

Josephine sidestepped him “Oh, piss off. Just tell me the truth.”

“Well, you see, it’s like this...”

Polly snorted in derision. “Oh, for God’s sake. Tell the woman.” She faced Josephine. “He needs you here to solidify his claim to the house. If Alaric marries you, then he wins Maverick House.”

Josephine staggered slightly under those words. She was a means to an end. Any rekindling or acknowledging of feelings had been doused with cold water. “This is about Richard.” This had nothing to do with loving and needing her.

“Well, no, more so the house and—”

“When are you going to grow up?” Josephine had endured enough. She spun around and headed for the door.

Alaric followed. “I’m two hundred and seventy-five years old, so it’s a moot point.”

"I'm leaving." She grabbed hold of the front door handle and turned. It wouldn't budge.

"Baby—"

"Don't *baby* me!" Josephine pulled at the door. "I will not be used for the sake of this house. And why won't the fucking door open?" She kicked at it, then howled in pain. Pointy-toed white satin pumps were not practical door-kicking-in equipment.

Polly caught up with them. "You're an idiot, Alaric."

"Go away, Polly," Alaric growled in annoyance.

"I live here."

"I can change that," he responded.

"No, you can't, Fang. This house controls who lives here. Why do you think Josephine can't get the door open?" Polly looked at him smugly. "Besides, Richard likes me."

"The fucking house won't let me go? Why can't my life be normal?" Josephine wailed and beat her fists against the door.

"You'd be bored with normal." Alaric pulled her from the door and into his arms

Josephine fought him. "You don't need me. I'm sure you can charm any woman into marrying you."

"But I love you."

"And I hate you." Josephine took a swing at him.

Alaric ducked. "Nah, you love me."

"Oh, fuck off."

Polly smiled. "I'll let you two fight this out. Don't take any crap from him."

"I don't intend to. I'm leaving."

"No, you're not." With one swift move, Alaric hoisted Josephine up in his arms and over his shoulder in a fireman's lift.

"Put me down!" She clutched at his hips to steady herself.

"No, we have to talk." Alaric turned around and headed up the staircase.

“What about? How you interrupted my wedding to use me to get back at your cousin?”

Alaric slapped her butt. “Oh come on, you weren’t serious about marrying Dimwit. Besides, once I have sole possession of Maverick House, then we can live together in peace.”

The slap to her ass made her sigh in pleasure. After what Richard had done, it reignited all her needs once more. “Peace?” Josephine snorted. “You are the least peaceful person I know.”

“You’re not exactly the queen of serenity yourself, baby.”

“I’m plenty serene when I’m not with you.” She pummeled his ass. “Put me down. I’m getting a headache from hanging upside down.” He did, but only when they reached his bedroom. He dumped Josephine on the bed. Before she had a chance to move, he was on her.

“We need to talk.” Alaric pinned her body down and grabbed at her skirt. The sound of tearing rent the air.

“We never talk. We fuck.” Josephine struggled under him. Alaric continued ripping her dress. “What are you doing?”

“I’m going to tie you up.”

Oh yes, please. “Why?”

“Because I have a feeling you’ll enjoy it, and I need you still and quiet.” Alaric finished ripping the fabric and grabbed one of her hands.

Josephine made a halfhearted attempt to fight him, but the idea of being tied up appealed to her. Not even Richard had done that to her. She willingly allowed him to bind her other hand to the bedhead. “Alaric?”

“What, baby?”

“Who did you sleep with while we were apart?” Richard’s words still reverberated in her head.

“No one.” He reached for one of her legs.

“What about blood?” No vampire could live without that.

Alaric lashed one hand to the bottom bedpost. "I don't have to have sex to get blood. I prefer your blood, but there are ways to get what I need. I just have to—"

"Don't tell me. I don't want to know." Josephine knew some things were better unknown. "Why are my legs spread so far apart?"

"For comfort."

"Mine or yours?"

"Both." Alaric lay between her thighs, his face level with hers, and he smiled. "Hello."

Josephine sighed. He had a beautiful smile. *I could spend forever with that smile.* "Hello."

"We need to stop arguing and just be together."

Josephine went to speak. Alaric put a finger to her lips.

"I know I'm irresponsible and annoying and arrogant and I just expect you to fall into line with my plans, but I'm in love with you, and that makes me do crazy things."

"Like pull me from my wedding?"

"And make love to you."

"And tie me up?"

"And make love to you again."

He was impossible and beautiful and just perfect for her. "Why?"

"Because I love having sex with you."

"Why?"

"Because I adore you and I need to be with you and I'll never leave you again."

Josephine wanted to believe that. "Really?"

"You can trust me." Alaric pushed back the hair from her face. "Yeah, the idea of marrying you to get Maverick House did appeal to me, but not for the reasons you think. I missed you. I needed you." He started kissing her neck.

"You were an idiot to let me go."

"Yes." His lips moved up to her jaw.

Oh, that was so nice. Josephine felt like she was melting under his soft, sweet kisses. "I'm the best thing that ever happened to you."

"Oh yes." Alaric kissed all around her mouth, but not her lips.

Josephine closed her eyes and gave in to the tender pleasure. "But this doesn't mean I forgive you."

Alaric's hands caressed her breasts. "No, I understand."

Did he really? "I need more from you."

"I'll do whatever I can to make you happy."

"Alaric?" The need to be filled as only he could was upon her. She was wet and ready, and having the man she loved as close as her heartbeat was what she needed.

"Yes, baby?"

"Come inside me."

"With pleasure." He wasted no time. Alaric freed his cock and pushed into her cunt.

Alaric's lips found hers, and they kissed as he fucked her with a slow, deep pace. She whimpered and cried out. She was tied up and at his mercy, and yet she wasn't. This was exactly what Josephine wanted. Alaric made love to her without her having to urge him on with caresses. This was about him pleasing her.

Her eyes met his. "Please." One more thing would make this perfect. She tilted her head to the side to expose her neck.

"Thank you."

The razor-sharp slice into her vein barely registered as his cock pumped in and out of her body. She cried out at each deep thrust, wanting it to never end. The heat from his dick and his mouth had started off a chain reaction that was pushing from her pelvis up her back. Josephine started to tremble as the orgasm gripped her. "Oohhh..."

Alaric, in turn, pushed harder in and out of her, his mouth fastened on her neck and sucking in time with his thrusts. He kissed her hard as he jerked and came against her.

The warm cum flowed from him as her blood flowed from her. It was perfect. Alaric lay between her legs as they both caught their breath.

“Untie me.” Josephine wanted to wrap her arms around his body and snuggle against him.

“No.” Alaric lifted up from her.

“Why not?” The cool air on her skin came as a shock.

“You’re all mellow and calm now. Soon you won’t be, and you’ll be thinking what a bastard I am, and you’ll want to leave.” Alaric crawled off the bed. “I want you to stay a little longer and work past that.”

Josephine began to see red. “Work past that? Have you been reading self-help books?”

“I’ll be back, and we’ll play some more.” He headed to the door.

He has to be kidding surely? “Alaric—”

“Think about us.”

“You bastard!”

He chuckled and left the room.

Chapter Six

“Hello, what do we have here?” Richard appeared out of thin air ten minutes later.

Oh, great. That that was all she needed. Trussed up with Richard in the room. “Go away.”

“And miss this opportunity?” He moved to the top of the bed.

Josephine watched as he climbed onto the bed. “What are you doing?”

Richard unzipped his trousers. “I know how much you like to suck cock.”

She did, but not now. “Are you out of your mind?”

“No, I just want to please you.” He moved up so his knees were on either side of her head.

“You are a pig.” And Josephine was almost ashamed that this was turning her on. *Almost*. Helpless and sucking cock? She trembled.

“Suck me.”

“No.” His cock pushed against her lips. Josephine was fighting herself. She enjoyed sucking cock and seeing a man lose control. It gave her a strange sense of power. *But it's so naughty and wrong to be tied up and told to do it...or is it?*

“You know you want to see me come and get weak for a while.” Richard rubbed his dick across her lips.

Yes, she did. Josephine allowed her tongue flicked out and licked at the tip. “You’re not normal.”

“I’m a vampire. None of us are. Now suck me.” He pushed his cock inside her mouth.

The shaft was in before she could speak. Natural instinct kicked in. Some women would bite at such an intrusion. Josephine gave in to need and sucked. The groans from Richard were her reward. Even tied up, he was under her control now. Josephine sucked and lapped, teasing the cock until it was ready to blow.

Richard pushed away from her. As she did, cum splattered her breasts as he growled his release. "Oh, you're good at that."

"I know." She licked her lips in satisfaction.

"I'll be back."

"I also know that." The dark animal lust was their weakness.

* * * *

Polly freed her and supplied her with some of Alaric's clothes to wear. "You know you're screwed, don't you?" Josephine raised her eyebrow at her. "I mean in the sense that you and I both know you love Alaric, no matter how much he irritates you."

Josephine sighed as she rubbed her wrists. "Yes, but that doesn't mean I'm going to put up with being manipulated." *Even though I just have been in the most delicious ways.* Her knees were still wobbly from being shagged so intently by the two vampires.

"Here's the thing. You're here now. Alaric knows he's done the wrong thing. The next move is yours. What are you going to do? Go home and forget about him?"

As if I could. "No, but I just can't accept this as normal."

"Hell, girl, it's not normal. It's strange and odd. They're vampires and naturally weird."

That made Josephine laugh. "Yes." Vampires were truly in a world of their own.

"They're never going to be normal."

"Alaric told me he will lose his immortality if we marry." Josephine wasn't sure how she felt about that. Could she ask him to give up an important part of his life for her?

"Yes, that's true, but he will always be a vampire, and they're selfish men who need to have sense beaten into them by a strong woman."

Josephine rubbed her hands over her face. "It's all too hard," she muttered.

"Yes, it is, and you'll wonder why you bother at all, but one day you'll look at him and you'll realize it was worth it."

"Are you talking from personal experience?" Once more the question of who this woman really was came up. No one, not even Alaric, seemed to know.

Polly's smile was subtle. "You know I have no personal life. I'm here because of the house."

The bloody house. Everything came back to it. In many ways, it was a maverick. It made up its own rules, and everyone else had to fit in with them. "What is it with this place?"

"I'm not sure. It commands just by its presence, and both those boys are drawn to it because it's their destiny." Polly winked at Josephine. "Yes, they may be selfish and stupid, but they are destined for great things."

Josephine raised her eyebrows. She couldn't quite see a vampire on the political world stage or winning a Nobel Prize.

"You don't believe me." Polly didn't look surprised.

It was hard to know what to believe after being fucked within an inch of her life by the two selfish men Polly was referring to. "I don't know. Vampires being the saviors of the world doesn't seem to fit." They weren't cruel, but they were bad boys. *Probably why I like them so much.*

"Yet you love one and lust after the other."

That was true. "In some ways I am no better than they are." Who was Josephine to cast the first stone?

"No, you give in to what you need," Polly responded. "You need to give in a little more."

“You mean marry Alaric?” It was a bizarre concept, but strangely doable. *If I dare.*

“Yeah, this is no longer about who has what claims on Maverick House. Alaric needs to settle down. He needs to stop roaming and being idle.”

“What about Richard’s claim on the house?” If she married Alaric, that voided the other vampire’s claim.

“Richard will have something else that will draw him to greatness and the house won’t mean as much to him.”

Interesting. Josephine knew there had to be more to it, but she doubted Polly would tell her. “Alaric mentioned a woman Richard was involved with.”

Polly smiled. “More like he is chasing her. And yes, she is part of it, and no, he will not forget or stop needing you.”

“Richard doesn’t need me. I’m a toy to him.”

“As he is to you.”

This woman was so spooky in her observations. Was there anything Polly did not know? “So, if I just accept Alaric—”

“Which you already have. Oh, come on. If you said to him, ‘Stop. Don’t touch me,’ you know he would have.”

Yes, Alaric was honorable in that way. He did not force himself on women. Annoy them? Yes. Break down their resistance? Ditto. Josephine blew out a breath. “I just don’t know what to do.” The last twenty-four hours had gone from frustrating to confusing. *What choice do I make?*

“As corny as it sounds, my dear, follow your heart. Do you love Alaric?”

“Yes.” There was no question of that.

“Can you, as a strong, determined woman, beat him into shape and make him the man he should be?”

Josephine grinned. “Oh yeah, I can whip his ass into line.”

“So marry Fang and get on with it.”

“Just like that?” It seemed too simple.

"You're not giving in," Polly told her. "He hasn't won. You haven't lost. You're just being who you're meant to be."

* * * *

Alaric stood the minute Josephine walked into the room. He reached out for her "Baby—"

"Shut up, and sit down." She walked past him. "If I marry you—"

"You will."

"Shut up."

"Yes, ma'am." Alaric sat down and watched her.

"If we get married, you have to clean up your act and start being responsible."

Alaric arched his eyebrow. "Find a job, get a dog, learn to mow the lawn, and play golf on Sunday?"

Josephine rolled her eyes. "Focus, will you?"

"On you? Anytime."

"Alaric."

"Okay, okay. Sit here"—he tapped his thighs—"and I'll shut up and be good."

"Hmmm..."

He held out his hands to her. "No funny business."

"There better not be." Josephine sat down, and his arms wound her body, pulling her in close to him. That was nice. It was sweet. She could feel his cock pushing at her ass. *Some things never change.* "If we marry, I want the following—"

"Sex every day. Okay, shutting up..." Alaric grinned at her.

"Do you know why I wanted to marry Jimmy?"

Alaric shook his head.

"Because he had this need to look after me and to be with me through the good, the bad, and the boring bits. He wanted to be the one person I relied on above all others. I need someone like that I can believe in and focus on." It wasn't like Josephine couldn't get through

life and look after herself. It was more that if she had Alaric to herself, she wanted to depend on him as he could her. “What I want is for you to just be there for me as I will be for you. I don’t want to worry about unexplained absences and wonder if I did something wrong or if you just don’t like me anymore. When you walked out of my life all those months ago, it really hurt me.”

Alaric picked up her hand and kissed the palm. “I’m sorry. I was selfish and stupid.”

“Yeah, you were.” Josephine curled her arm around his shoulder.

“Baby, you know I’m never going to be the perfect man. We both know that. I’m going to do dumb things, and when I do, I want you to call me out on them. Help me be a better person. I have lived such a long, selfish life that I know I’m going to drive you mad, but I cannot be without you. So slap me upside of the head if I upset you.”

“Okay, I will.” Josephine’s heart beat a little faster. Was this her Alaric? Never had she heard him sound so sincere and desperate. Maybe her two-hundred-and-seventy-five-year-old vampire was finally growing up.

“I can’t lose you. You mean more to me than the house. I’ll admit a lot of that was to do with male pride and one-upmanship that made me compete with Richard. I also accept what he does for you.”

They had never really discussed her and Richard. “Oh, Alaric, I want—”

“It’s okay, baby. I do understand. I’ve lived long enough to know that some needs have to be fulfilled outside of what we have. You’ll always be mine.”

“Yes, I will.” That was fact.

“Polly said he’s like a big sex toy.”

“Um, yeah...he is.” Josephine blushed. “About Maverick House—”

“I know it’s just a house, but there’s something here that calls me to stay and live here. It’s like I’m meant to be here, and after years of aimless wandering, I want to be here with you.”

"I actually do understand that. There's magic here, and for some reason, we both have to be a part of it."

"Oh, baby, thank you." Alaric's hands went down to the buttons of her borrowed shirt.

"Wait a second." Josephine stopped his downward progress. "No sex before the wedding." The look on Alaric's face was worth the joke.

"We're getting married?"

"In theory. You haven't proposed yet."

"Marry me, Josephine McDonough."

She smiled. This was exactly what she wanted to hear. Marriage wasn't the be-all and end-all of any woman's life, but it was what Josephine wanted. "Yeah, okay, someone needs to kick you into shape."

"Always the romantic." Alaric ripped open her shirt. "Now back to sex."

"No sex until we're married. It's tradition."

Alaric looked at her in mock horror. "But I'll die."

"That's a lousy excuse. You're immortal."

"Only for the moment and I need to be inside you. I need your skin on mine. I need your kiss on my lips. I need you, baby."

Oh, that sounds so good. "Well..." Tradition wasn't everything, was it?

"You know you want me."

Yeah, why deny it? Josephine got up and pulled at her oversized, borrowed trousers. She smiled as Alaric worked his cock free of his.

"Climb on board, baby."

Josephine did just that. She slid down until her cunt was filled with his cock. Josephine wrapped her arms around his neck. "I love you."

"That's the best thing I've ever heard." Alaric's hands fastened onto her hips as she rode him.

Josephine was on fire. So much need was within her. She moved on him, rubbing her body against his almost as if she wanted to leave a mark on him that would make his hers forever. To come now would be like she was sealing their future. It was crazy and mad to think in such flowery terms. *Yet, that's what I want. I want this man.*

Alaric chuckled. "I'm not going anywhere. You can slow down."

"I'm sealing our fate."

"I like it."

When the orgasm hit, they cried out at the same time, holding each other and promising that whatever they had to do in order to stay together, they would.

* * * *

"I have to see Jimmy." After making love, it was probably not the most appropriate thing to mention another man to your lover, but Josephine knew she had to apologize to him. She felt Alaric stiffen at her side.

"Why?"

"I need to explain."

Alaric smiled. "That I won?"

Josephine slapped his chest. "Something like that."

Chapter Seven

Alaric was looking at her oddly.

“What?”

“No white wedding dress?” Alaric asked in a mocking tone.

That was never meant to be her. Josephine knew she had been kidding herself before. Besides, it didn't matter what she wore to get married in. She were committing yourself to another. A wardrobe full of clothes meant nothing compared to the simplicity of true love. Jimmy had been very sweet and kind with her, more so than she suspected she would have been with him if the situation was reversed.

“Let's do this.”

“How romantic.” Alaric's voice was filled with amusement.

“Oh, come on. This is us. We've both finally worked out what the hell we're doing in life, so let's not wait. Let's do this before we mess it up.”

He caught her hand in his. “I love you.”

“Of course you do. I make you look good.” Josephine twined her fingers with his. “Speaking of which, you're going to be a boring mortal like the rest of us now.” How would he fare with that? There was something so unmortal-like about Alaric. “You'll get colds, aches and pains, tired, worn out, and mentally taxed. You'll not be able to flit off to some exotic destination whenever you like.”

“Looking forward to it.” Alaric pulled her body against his. “And more importantly, I'll grow old with you.”

“I'm not easy to live with.” Josephine had lived alone too long to believe she would be able to peacefully coexist with another on a daily basis. She liked certain things done her way.

“That I know. You’re a pain in the ass.”

Her eyes were soft on hers. *How I love this man.* “Bite me.”

“With pleasure.”

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amarinda Jones believes anything is possible and sometimes just asking for the impossible will surprise someone enough that they will give it to you. Writing is like that. Put it out there and wait for a response. There is always the possibility you may fall on your ass, but after all, that's what cellulite is for. Amarinda believes in taking chances, speaking her mind and aging disgracefully. Twenty years from now she plans on being the neighborhood witch that all the kids are scared of. But then, everyone has to have a hobby.



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