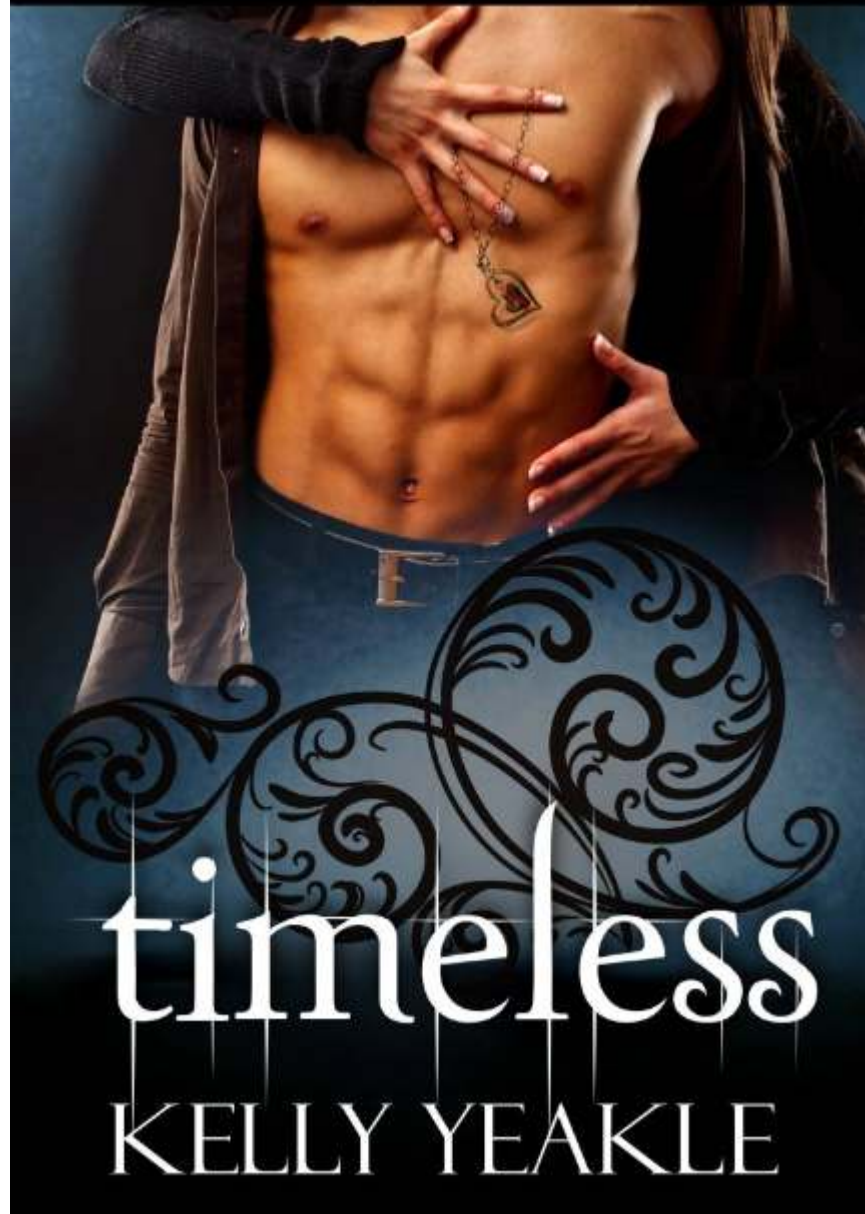


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DEDICATION

To my family and friends who have been an amazing support system as I've continued to grow as an author. Thank you all for dealing with my ranting, my random phone calls to relay a scene or ask your opinion of a character, but most of all for your love and encouragement to keep moving forward when I wanted to give up.

TIMELESS

Kelly Yeakle

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Chapter One

At eighteen, I went off to college with the hope of becoming a writer. At twenty-two I graduated with a degree in journalism and the dream to be a reporter for Graven, the most prestigious Goth magazine in the country. I didn't want to write about the who's who in Hollywood and what they were wearing in a given week. I wanted to write about the paranormal things that plagued our world, the things people brushed under the rug as make believe, and the things that make your skin crawl. I wanted to make a name for myself by finding truth where people said it didn't exist. Now, at twenty-six, with four years under my belt at the local newspaper in Garlow, I'm still chasing those dreams.

It wasn't for lack of trying. I'd applied at Graven more times than I could count, but the pieces I'd submitted had been declared not good enough. I was determined that this would be my year, the time when I would make my dreams come true. Graven would be begging me to join their staff when I wrapped up the story I was chasing. Yes, it would be that fantastic.

I sat at a small table at the back of a tiny diner where I waited for my information source to arrive. It had taken some extensive persuading on my part to get the young girl to agree to meet with me. I'd been given her name discreetly from a member of the Garlow police force, after promising to keep silent on where I'd gotten my information. I wasn't even sure if anything she had to say would be pertinent to the story I was writing, but it was worth a shot.

Nicolette had been witness to one of the most gruesome murders the small town had ever known, and had been in hiding for weeks. I wouldn't have wanted to be in her shoes, watching someone die and living with the fear that if I spoke up about what I knew,

someone would hunt me down and kill me, too. She hadn't spoken to anyone outside of their office since the incident, but thanks to my natural ability to make people feel at ease, I had talked her into coming to meet me for an exclusive interview.

Of course, she refused to show up before dark and only if I agreed to meet her outside of Garlow in Hillside, a neighboring town more than fifty miles away. I should have pushed harder to meet her on more familiar ground, but all I could think about was how her information could make or break my story about the murders.

I had my suspicions that whoever killed those people wasn't human, and I was pretty sure Nicolette knew more than what she had shared with the police. The trick would be getting her to share what she did know with me. I'd probably have to take baby steps, and it might require more than one meeting, but if I could write a good enough article, one that would bring recognition outside of our small town, I might be able to send another resume off to Graven for review.

I glanced at the clock on the wall behind the counter of the diner. It showed just past six in the evening. She was late, but not late enough for me to stress about it, and I wouldn't unless she didn't show at all.

The waitress came over, fake smile glued to her face, to see if I was ready to order. She'd already been to my table three times since I'd arrived, and each time I brushed her off, letting her know I was waiting for someone. This time I heard an edge of annoyance in her voice as she spoke to me.

"I'll take a glass of ice water," I said, glancing past her to the clock on the wall again. "With lemon, please." I added quickly, hoping she heard me as she walked off.

That's when I noticed I was being watched intently from a man sitting at a booth towards the rear of the restaurant. I couldn't read his expression, his face mostly hidden underneath the hood of the jacket he wore. What I could see were his dark eyes full of fire. I met them with my own, a small tremor of fear shifting into my spine as the hair on the back of my neck stood on end. I didn't let it show on my face that he bothered me. Instead, I smiled sweetly in his direction and went back to the file in front of me as the waitress set my glass of water down, without the lemon I'd requested.

“Thank you.” I closed the folder before she could see what I’d been leafing through. I didn’t think she was being nosy, but I didn’t want to take the risk of my notes being read by the wrong person and my story idea stolen or my information leaked. People were just too hard to trust, and it didn’t take a friend or colleague to stab you in the back, a stranger’s blade could be just as sharp.

“Are you ready to order now?” The edge of impatience was back in her voice as she stared down at me, the scowl on her face making her age lines stand out even more. I wondered who shoved the stick up her ass, but simply smiled.

“No, I’m still waiting for someone.” I glanced again at the clock, the stranger’s eyes still burning a hole in me from the corner. This time, I didn’t look in his direction, wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of knowing he unnerved me. “Five more minutes,” I told the waitress, and I swore she rolled her eyes as she walked off to check on another table. *We’ll just see if you get a tip.*

I was about to give up on Nicolette when I saw a young girl who fit her description come through the door, sheepishly looking around. She looked on edge, paranoid, and I wondered as I watched her if she was on drugs. Her hair was the color of blackheart cherries and hung in tussled strands around her face. Her clothes looked worn, perhaps slept in, and the way they hung loose on her body made me wonder when she’d last eaten a meal.

She reminded me of those young girls you see in made-for-TV movies, the ones who leave home thinking that life on the street would be better than the luxury of having parents who care about you.

I still felt like I was being watched and glanced back at the man in the corner, ignoring the tightening in my gut when I saw him cringe at the sight of Nicolette. It wasn’t a look of disgust from her less than perfect appearance—it was a look that happened in slow motion phases. First, he seemed shocked to see her as if he’d been searching for her like a long lost relative and boom, there she was. It was a look that told me he knew her already, and it made me even more curious to whom he was. Then his eyes locked with mine, and I swore I saw a hint of fear in them, but I wasn’t sure if he was afraid for himself or for me, and that left me feeling less confident about what I’d set out to accomplish by meeting with Nicolette. Last, he looked like he wanted to remain unnoticed, and I watched him sink

further down in his seat, attempting to hide his face more beneath the hood.

I focused back on Nicolette, who stood just inside the door glancing around looking for someone or something. I hoped she was searching for me and not the man at the corner table, so I waved my hand to signal her to come to my table. She started in my direction, but stopped suddenly and focused her attention to the back corner of the restaurant where Mr. Anonymous was trying to hide behind his menu. Then all hell broke loose, literally.

Nicolette let out an animalistic cry and lunged toward the man who'd been watching me. I stared in disbelief as he seemed to rise straight up out of his seat and jump over her head almost effortlessly before running out the door to vanish in the night. Nicolette turned to go after him, but I darted over and grabbed her wrist, stopping her before she had a chance to bolt on me, too. I would find out just who the man was later, and track him down, but right now, she was my main concern and the reason I was in the diner in the first place.

She turned on me, and I swore her eyes were red, the color of fresh blood, but I didn't remove my hand from her wrist. I stood firm in my position, showing her I wasn't just going to let her walk away from me or scare me if that was what she was trying to do. I must have blinked because when I looked at her face again, deep blue had replaced the red I'd thought I'd seen in her eyes. I shrugged it off, an illusion caused by the chaos that had just happened around me and began moving her toward my table. *People don't have red eyes. Get yourself together Gab.*

The other patrons in the diner were staring at us, but none of them had gotten up to help, and it almost seemed like what happened hadn't bothered them at all. It made me wonder what else happened in Hillside that was just regarded as normal.

Nicolette looked really uneasy, and though I'd physically let go of her, I didn't dare move my body too far away from her in case she tried to dart again. I didn't want to risk losing my chance to talk to her, so I grabbed my notebook and tossed a few dollars down for the waitress. She didn't deserve it and my water was free, but I knew the kind of salary a waitress held as I'd had my fair share of waiting tables through college, and tips were what kept your bills paid.

I took Nicolette by the wrist again as I led her out of the diner to my parked car and practically shoved her inside. I shut her door,

hitting the lock button on the remote until I'd reached my own side to climb in. I put the key in the ignition and started the car, tossing my notebook and bag onto the backseat as I slid in.

"Would you like to explain to me what just happened in there?" I looked at her before putting the car into drive and eased out of the parking lot. Nicolette said nothing, just stared ahead as if she were watching for something. "Put your seatbelt on."

"I don't need it," she stated, keeping her eyes focused on our surroundings. "Turn right at the next light."

"You're in my car, you wear the seatbelt." I turned at the light as she requested. "I'll pull over and put it on you myself if I have to." And I would, too.

"No, don't pull over. Pick up the pace a little." She pulled the seatbelt down and clicked it into place.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Shhh, do you hear that?" She looked out the window. "Never mind, you probably can't hear it."

"I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be hearing. I hear the engine of the car, the buzz of the tires on the pavement, and the wind against the windows." She turned to look at me, her eyes wide against clammy looking skin. It was the same look I possessed when fear took over my senses. The same gut feeling I'd had back at the restaurant came tiptoeing its way through me again. "Where are we going?" I repeated

"Turn left at the stop sign." Nicolette was watching the side mirror, focused on something behind us. "We were going to my house," she finally answered, "but we're being followed so we're going to circle back around to the diner."

"I thought your apartment was in Garlow?" My first reaction was to look in the rearview mirror to see who was following us, but Nicolette turned her eyes on me, and the fire smoldering in them told me to keep my eyes focused ahead.

A few turns later took us in a huge square, and had me cruising back up to the diner. I pulled along the curb and let the car run, turning to look at Nicolette. She was squinting as she focused hard on the side mirror. I turned around long enough to notice another car had pulled over on the side of the road, hanging back far enough I couldn't see who was inside it.

“Take your bag and go inside the diner.” Nicolette continued to look behind us. “They’re hanging back. They don’t want you, so just get out and go quickly.”

“No.” I wasn’t leaving this young girl alone in my car to be attacked. “Not happening, Nicolette. You need to tell me what’s going on here, or I am staying in this car.”

“I can’t tell you right now, and you have exactly two minutes to get out of the car into the safety of that building before they come after you, too.” She frowned. “Go, I promise I’ll find you another time. I still have your number in my cell.”

I hesitated, but what I read on her face, her sad eyes and frown, was enough to get me moving. If I was dead, I couldn’t help her.

“I promise, they won’t catch me.” She smiled, but I didn’t feel good about the situation. “Gabriela, thanks for caring. For what it’s worth, that means a lot to me.”

I didn’t know what kind of trouble she might be in, and I wasn’t ready to give up on the chance of a great story. She seemed sure of herself, and if Nicolette said she would contact me again, then I just had to believe she’d follow through. Besides, she’d shown up tonight when I thought she wouldn’t. My story wasn’t dead yet, and if anything, the events that had unfolded around me in the last half hour only added to the plot.

I got out of the car and walked slowly towards the diner, focusing my attention straight ahead, not turning around even once to look back at Nicolette or the car down the street, the chill creeping across my skin told me not to. I slipped quietly inside and found the waitress to ask if she’d seen my cell phone. It was the best excuse I could come up with to explain my quick return since I’d been gone barely ten minutes with Nicolette. She shook her head, but told me to feel free to search around the restaurant if I thought I could find it. I went back to the table where I’d been seated and tried to give the impression I was searching for my missing phone.

“We need to talk.” The deep, throaty voice wove its way into my head. It was like the soft caress of a gentle breeze on my skin. I turned around to answer the speaker, but no one stood remotely close to me. Familiar tingles crept up my back, and I shifted so I could see the other side of the restaurant. My suspicions were correct when I met the same dark eyes from earlier in the evening.

His lips didn't move, but he spoke to me again, the same gentle breeze sweeping through my mind. "I'll meet you at your car in five minutes." His eyes bore into mine, and a tingling sensation wove its way inside my head, as he tried to push his way into my thoughts. I threw up my mental defenses, hoping I was keeping him out of my head. I did not like the idea of him talking to me without speaking. It really weirded me out.

I'd seen the way he moved when Nicolette had confronted him, and he was obviously telepathic since he was still trying to break down the barriers of my mind. I wasn't fond of the idea of someone being inside my personal thoughts; some things were better left unknown. There would be no point trying to run or hide. The best thing for me to do was simply meet him at my car to see what he wanted. My cell was still in my bag on the backseat and easily accessible if I needed to call the police.

I wasn't sure if it was working, but I continued to shield my thoughts by thinking of song lyrics and colors as I left the diner for the second time that evening. The waitress smiled at me, an act of kindness for the nice tip I'd left her most likely, and I smiled back simply to be nice. It was just my luck to run into trouble chasing a story, and the night was far from over.

Chapter Two

As he slid into the passenger seat of my car, he told me his name was Kane. From what I could see of his face behind the hood, he looked like a god more than a monster, and my heart seemed to skip a beat. Sweat beaded on my brow as I thought of him and I in compromising positions. There was a strong, instant attraction to him based on his looks alone. If his personality matched his appearance, I was in real trouble.

His eyes were dark with his face partially covered by the hood of his jacket, but I didn't feel the same way I had in the restaurant when I first caught him staring at me. I wasn't afraid of him, but intrigued by what he could possibly want with me. He seemed less intimidating up close, and though I probably should have been fearful, especially since we were locked away alone in my car, there was a peculiar calm within my soul. I also felt a touch of *déjà vu*. Something about him brought memories to the edge of my thoughts, but I couldn't quite get them to come in clearly.

Catching my stare, he pulled back the hood to reveal long hair secured at the nape of his neck with an elastic band. It looked like black silk and made me want to run my fingers through it. I squeezed the steering wheel harder to keep my hands busy, but didn't stop checking him over with my eyes. His face looked like it had been chiseled from granite, his nose perfect, and his jaw line strong. His lips were a deep crimson, full, and so inviting. I couldn't help but gawk at them.

"Would you like a taste?" He smiled, showing off his perfectly straight, white teeth.

I ignored him, focused my attention out the windshield, upset that I'd let my guard down enough for him to get a glimpse into my thoughts. How much of my personal conversation had he heard while I was waiting for Nicolette to arrive earlier in the evening? It didn't matter; I put the wall back up in my mind, forcing him out. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw his smile widen.

"You learn quickly. That will come in handy." He motioned to my keys. "We need to be moving this party elsewhere."

This was twice in one night that a stranger sat in my passenger seat telling me what to do. Thank goodness neither of them had a gun

pointed to my head, but it still bothered me. I knew nothing about Kane except his name and that he looked like a runway model more than a serial killer, but I'd also learned in my line of work that looks could be deceiving.

I started the car, buckled my seatbelt, and pressed my foot on the accelerator, slowly moving us out of the parking lot. Kane seemed to be listening for something, just as Nicolette had done earlier, but focused on the road and ignored his weirdness. I didn't bother to tell him to buckle up or ask where we were going; pretty sure he'd be just as uncooperative as she had been. At this point in my evening, I really didn't care as long as I got to go home when he was done with me. My theory was simple, if he was going to kill me, he could have easily done it already.

My cell phone began to ring in my purse which was still on the backseat. The song was loud against the silence in the car. I cringed when I saw Kane's lips twist up in a smirk as the singer crooned of touching herself. I had been meaning to change the ring tone, but just hadn't gotten around to it. There were more pressing issues in my life than fixing Lydia's idea of a practical joke. She set that particular song for when my crush, Xavier, called. She was my best friend, but we were definitely made from two different molds.

"Do you want to answer that?" Kane was looking at me as I continued to drive, waiting for his next instruction on where to turn. "I can get it for you."

"No." With everything going the way it was, the last thing I needed was to pull Xavier into the craziness with me. It was best that he didn't know what I was doing, and even better that he learned nothing of the events that transpired throughout the evening, especially me being alone in the car with a stranger, not once, but twice.

It wasn't that he was possessive, but he could be overly protective at times. Xavier wasn't known for being shy. He was outspoken, a quality I found appealing in a man, and he'd told me on more than one occasion that my ease in trusting people would eventually get me into trouble. Now, driving to a mysterious location with a strange man, he had been absolutely right. No, I couldn't tell him anything about this little bump in my road to success, he'd only rub it in over and over again.

Kane's brow rose, and I could feel the gentle brush of him reading my thoughts again, but he didn't comment.

He sent me through a series of turns until I lost track of where we were, and there was no way I would be able to get myself back to the main road in Hillside without him. It seemed darker where he took me, not from absence of light, but more like being on the wrong side of the tracks, and my stomach instantly turned. My safety net was starting to slowly crash down around me, and I began going through a list of people in my head I really cared about and hoped knew how I felt. Kane looked at me curiously.

"I'm not going to kill you, Gabriela," he said flatly. "I actually need your help, and you don't know it yet, but you need mine, too." He used my name, something I hadn't told him or anyone else during the last few hours since I'd first seen him in the restaurant. The bile rose in my throat as I wondered what else Kane knew about me, and how he'd come across the information.

I found no relief when he told me I was safe with him. There really wasn't anything he could say that would make the situation seem less frightening. I should have known better than to set up a meeting in an unfamiliar town, and I shouldn't have come alone. I had blown off a shopping trip with Lydia, claiming I was meeting my aunt Brenda for dinner, and now I felt really stupid for not telling her the truth. At least she would have known where I was in case of an emergency.

Helping people tended to get me into more trouble than minding my own business. If I hadn't been so worried about getting on the staff at Graven, I'd never have taken the assignment to interview Nicolette and get her story, and I wouldn't be parked at an abandoned warehouse with a strange man who looked like he could snap me easily in two with his oversized arms and hands. I parked as close to the warehouse as I could get and killed the engine, staring straight ahead at the bricks of the building, not wanting to get out of the car.

"Come." I had been so focused on my own thoughts I'd never heard him open the door. Now as he stood with my door open, his hand held out to me as my stomach twisted and the bile rose in my throat. "We need to get inside the warehouse."

"Why is everyone so worried about being out in the open?" He didn't answer, but stood waiting for me to move. "Ugh, whatever."

Just because he was the one in control didn't mean I had to cooperate easily.

Reluctantly, I reached out to take his hand and the jolt of electricity almost knocked me back inside the car. Kane's eyes went wide, which I'm sure was a reflection of my own reaction to his touch and stepped back. He didn't try to handle me again, but motioned for me to move quickly. I did, with him right on my heels, until we reached the large garage style doors. Kane took a small remote from his pocket and with the click of a button they began to open.

As soon as we were on the other side, he pressed the remote again, the doors retracting back to their original position. Kane went to a control panel on the wall and typed in a security code. I should have panicked about being locked inside the warehouse with him, but going into reporter mode, I thought of every angle. He had been anal about getting inside, and he was now protecting us with the defense of a security system, so maybe he was trying to keep something else out instead of me locked in. In the light of the large warehouse, I could see his face more clearly and the softness in his eyes confirmed what I had just been thinking, this strange man felt like he was protecting me.

"Is this where you live?" I couldn't stop myself from asking the question. There were other things I needed to know, like why I was there and what he wanted, but it just seemed important to me that I know if we were in his home. A person's home, their private place, was sacred.

"No. This is where I run my business. I live elsewhere." He took his jacket off and threw it across the back of a chair. The t-shirt he wore was tight, showing off his well-built frame. I let my gaze drop down his chest to where the shirt disappeared, tucked into faded blue jeans. In another place and time this would have been the ideal ending to my night, but I needed to focus on the present and the fact that I had no clue who he was or why he'd brought me there.

"Do you have any water?" I found my throat dry all of a sudden. Kane nodded and walked across the room to a small refrigerator sitting on the floor. He grabbed a bottle of water and carried it over to me. I reached out for him to hand it to me, but he sat it down on the small table I stood next to. Remembering what happened outside, I thought it best he put it down, too. "Why am I here?"

“I told you, I need your help.” He watched me as I opened the bottle and took a long drink. The water felt good, cool as it flowed down my throat.

“I got that part, but how can I help you? I don’t even know who you are.” I took another drink before putting the cap back on the bottle and set it down on the table. “All I know is you were watching me at the restaurant. The girl who came to meet me freaked when she saw you, and then you ran off. I came back after someone followed us around town and you were there again.” I crossed my arms over my chest.

He eluded giving me any information about himself. “Do you know much about the girl?” In the light, I realized his eyes weren’t black but a dark brown, like melted milk chocolate. Kane crossed the room and grabbed something else from the fridge. He laid a candy bar beside my bottle of water. “In case you’re hungry.” He smiled, his lips curved into a wicked grin, and I realized he’d been in my head again. I really had to be more careful with censoring my thoughts in his presence, especially ones involving my growing attraction to him.

I was a little hungry since I’d missed dinner—thanks to the episode at the diner. I picked up the candy, peeled off the wrapper and nibbled on a corner. It was delicious, the name on the front French, and I wondered just who Kane really was. I didn’t know many men who kept French chocolate in their warehouse offices. Of course, I didn’t really know any men with warehouse offices either.

“I don’t know anything about the girl who came to meet me. That was sort of the point of my meeting with her, to find out about her life.” I bit off another piece of candy, letting it melt on my tongue. “She was witness to a murder recently, and I wanted to get her story. I’ve been told she’s been locked away in her house ever since the incident, and this was my once in a lifetime chance to make it big as a reporter with her exclusive story.” *That, thanks to your uninvited involvement, will probably never happen now.*

Kane frowned. “That’s really all you know, isn’t it?” Before I could answer, he stood in front of me and put his finger to my lips. The contact left a tingling sensation behind, but didn’t send me into electric shock like before. Kane’s body seemed to be on alert; he had taken a protective stance in front of me the way a mother lion would protect her cub, and watched the garage door. As if he’d known what was going to happen, something banged up against the garage door

causing the metal to bend in. The sound created a loud echo throughout the warehouse and had Kane on the move. He pushed me behind his body and moved toward the door.

“Whatever was out there is gone.” He kept a distance between us and the door for a few more moments before turning to face me again.

His cell phone rang, and Kane groaned. He answered it, whispered a few words into the receiver that I couldn’t hear and then excused himself to take the call from another room. I took the opportunity to inventory my surroundings, looking for another exit besides the garage door. There were no windows, and though I did find another door next to the security box, it too was locked.

I would have continued my search for an escape, but the sudden rush of heat told me I was going to be sick, and the acid crawled up my throat at a rapid pace. I looked around desperately for a trash can since I had no idea where the bathroom was, if there even was one, and Kane was still on the phone in another room.

I moved toward the desk which was close to the refrigerator on the other side of the room and prayed I would find a trash can beneath it. I pulled the chair out of the way and lifted the small bin just in time to throw up the lunch I’d eaten much earlier in the day.

I wasn’t sure why I became so ill all of a sudden, but my legs felt like gelatin, and I needed to sit down. I lowered myself to the floor, pressing my back against the side of the desk, and sat the can between my legs. Tucking my short hair behind my ears, I breathed slowly, hoping the nausea would pass. I did feel slightly better, but that was short lived.

Kane returned, and I watched him scan the room for me. “I’m over here.” I waved my hand slowly back and forth, hoping to catch his attention since my voice was too weak to carry.

“What are you doing on the floor?” he asked as he came to stand over me, frowning when he noticed the can nestled between my legs.

“I’m sorry.” I wasn’t really sure what you said when you threw up in someone’s trash can. “I’ll clean it up.” I tried to stand but my legs were wobbly. Kane grabbed me, and all the hairs raised on my arms from the electric current that ran all the way to my toes from his touch. It wasn’t as strong as when he’d helped me from the car, but it was more powerful than when he’d put his finger to my lips.

Instead of pulling away from him, the jolt left me clinging to him tighter. He smelled like the forest, a mixture of pine and fresh mint. I found myself enjoying his scent a little too much.

As my stomach suddenly settled down, new sensations crept into my lower body. I stepped back, keeping a hold on his arms for support, until I was sure I could stand on my own.

“Something’s wrong,” I stated, knowing without a doubt that I’d been drugged. My head was suddenly swimming, my vision blurry, and the last thing I remembered was Kane calling my name before everything went black.

Chapter Three

I woke to the worst migraine I'd ever experienced surging through my head. I was afraid to open my eyes, fearing the light would cause more discomfort, but I needed to know where I was. The last thing I remembered was talking to Kane in the warehouse, and then everything faded out as if someone put a blindfold over my eyes. I'd broken the seal on the bottle of water he'd given me and the candy had been packaged, so I didn't think he was the one who drugged me, but someone surely had. The drug had been slow acting, or maybe it was simply the fact that I hadn't ingested enough of it to have an instant effect. Whatever the case, someone I'd had contact with had it in for me.

The only other place I'd been was the restaurant, and I'd barely sipped my water before Nicolette showed up. Anyone in the kitchen area, or even the waitress could have put something in my glass, but the question was why. It was a scary thought to think that someone was out to get me or stop me from learning something, probably dealing with the case I was researching for my article. I cringed as I wondered what might have happened to me if Kane hadn't been back at the restaurant upon my return. I still wasn't clearing him of being the one who slipped me something, but Kane possessed truthful eyes. When he said he wouldn't hurt me and needed my help, he sounded like he truly meant it. I hoped he proved my feelings about him right.

I opened my eyes slowly, sighing in relief that the room was dark. After glancing around, I realized there were no windows. It took a few minutes for my eyes to adjust, and when they did, I discovered the walls were concrete. The only furniture was the large bed I'd been sleeping on. I sat up slowly, realizing I was lying in a sea of silk which felt amazing against my bare legs.

I shouldn't have been able to feel the texture of the sheets on my skin anywhere but my arms, and as I peered down, angered that my clothes had been exchanged for a skimpy negligee which barely covered my less-than-perfect body. I grabbed my breasts; thankful I still had a bra on beneath the thin material. I could feel my panties snug against my rear as I moved around in the bed, and breathed a sigh of relief.

At least Kane hadn't been a total pervert. Then again, he could have easily had his way with me during my blackout and I'd have no recollection of it, but I hoped, given the small glimpse of his personality I'd received the previous night, that he'd been more respectful of me.

I jumped off the bed, failing to remember my headache until pain shot up my body starting at my toes and ending behind my eyes. I rubbed my temples with my fingers. I needed some aspirin and a tall glass of water.

I licked my lips, everything felt so dry, which was probably a side effect of whatever drug I'd been given. My stomach growled, and it registered with me that I hadn't eaten a meal since lunch the previous day, and that had ended up in Kane's trash can. I really needed to learn to take better care of myself when it came to nutrition, but now was not the time for personal scolding. I needed to find Kane, and I wanted to go home.

My eyes continued to adjust to the dark when I found the door, a chance to get out of the room. I ran towards it, ignoring the thumping in my head, but it was locked. I should have known nothing could be that simple. I banged against the door until my fist was throbbing from the contact, but no one came to check on me or answer my cries. My stomach roiled, and not just because of my hunger. Being trapped, held against my will without justifiable cause was too much. I knew nothing more about Nicolette and the murders than I had when I entered the diner, and I knew even less about Kane, and began to question if I was wrong about him after all.

"You're in so much trouble when I get out of here!" I screamed, not caring if I pissed off my captor with my threats. "I'll have you tortured, you dirty bastard!" I tried to reach him mentally, but got no response that way either. The tears came spilling down my cheeks as I pressed my back to the door and slid down to the floor. I ignored the stabbing pain and tightness in my abdomen, trying to think about anything and everything that would take my mind off food. I curled into a tight ball against the door and wept. It could have been minutes or hours, I had no concept of time, until the door finally opened.

"Gabriela, are you okay?" I recognized Kane's voice, but I made no attempt to uncurl myself to face him. "She has a heartbeat, she's not dead." He hadn't spoken out loud, but I'd still heard him. I

could tell the difference between his mental voice and his speaking voice. Whenever I heard him speak in his mind there was always a rustling effect behind his words like a breeze through autumn tree limbs.

"I'm alive, barely," I croaked, and it hurt to speak. *You certainly did nothing to ensure I was taken care of during your absence.* I made sure I directed that comment toward him loud and clear in my mind.

"I'm so sorry. I've never had someone crash on me the way you did last night. I was worried, but you were sleeping so peacefully. I honestly hoped I would get back to you before you woke up." Kane stood over me, looking down and I saw a flicker of hope in his eyes and knew he was once again being truthful with me. I took the hand he offered and allowed him to help me up off the floor.

It hurt to stand and I wrapped my arms around my stomach. "You didn't drug me?" I bent slightly forward as another hunger pain crashed through me.

"No. I had no reason to drug you. I need you. I told you that." Kane reached for something on a tray in the hallway, and when he turned around he held a plate of food. I took it without hesitation, not sensing any ill intent from him. "Don't worry, it's all fresh. I have no reason to harm you, Gabriela. I promise."

I ate quickly, barely tasting the food, but feeling much better when the plate was empty. My headache had long subsided during my crying fit, and I was ready to get some answers from Kane. He owed me that much for locking me in the room all day.

"If you didn't drug me, then who did?" I looked at him, noticing his eyes were a much lighter shade of brown, almost amber in color, and I wondered how they had changed from the previous evening. He'd also let his hair loose, and it hung around his face in straight strands. He appeared even more handsome, and I found my gaze drifting to his lips, the same way it had in the car.

I leaned towards him without realizing it until his words were hot against my face. "It could have been anyone at the restaurant," Kane said, confirming my suspicions as he took the plate, and offered to refill it, but I refused. I didn't want to overdo it and wind up throwing up again. "The waitress, the cook, anyone in the kitchen really would have had access to your glass of water."

“You were watching. Did you see anything?” I pressed my back against the wall, using it for support as I stood trying to keep a small distance between Kane and me.

He reached out and cupped my face with his hands. “I was watching you, not everyone else.” He removed his hands, but I still felt the warmth on my cheeks where they had been, and it worried me that contact with him caused my skin to react so strongly to his touch.

“Why did you lock me in this room today if you weren’t the one who drugged me? If you aren’t the one attempting to harm me, why hold me hostage?” I met his stare, hoping his eyes would give something away, but they didn’t.

“I needed to keep you safe, and the only way I could do that was by keeping you here.” He glanced down at the floor. I wrapped my arms tighter around myself in an attempt to keep calm. “I couldn’t take you home and put you at risk of being taken in the night.”

“And what were you doing all this time that was so important you had to lock me in a room?” I hoped he could hear the edge of anger in my voice.

“Sleeping.” He continued to study the floor.

I thought I’d heard him wrong. Surely he had not just told me he had been sleeping all day while I was restricted to a room with only a bed, no water or food for hours. Anger was building inside me causing a tightness in my chest and I squeezed my fists against my sides. “Well, now you’re awake, and I’m fine so if it’s okay with you, I’d like to go home.”

He glanced behind him, and then back at me. “You can’t.”

“What do you mean I can’t?” I was trying not to freak out, but he was really starting to piss me off. “I need to go home. I would like my clothes back, and my car keys so I can leave.”

“I can’t let you go home, Gabriela. You have to stay with me for a few days, until I know that you’ll be safe. I’m saving your life, not holding you hostage. There is a difference.” Kane stood in the doorway blocking any chance I had of getting past him.

“Saving my life from what? I’m sorry, but I don’t understand what’s going on here.” I moved closer to him. “You have a lot of explaining to do, Kane. You’ve told me nothing about you beyond your first name. I never even told you my name, but you knew it, and you seem to know a lot more about me than I’d like. I want some answers. The truth. What is going on?” I attempted to move past him

without success. Kane was like a brick wall standing between me and freedom.

“Gabriela, do you know what the necklace you wear around your neck symbolizes?” Kane reached out, his fingers picking up the pendant that hung from the chain around my neck.

“What does that have to do with you protecting me?” I used my fingers to make quotation marks in the air when I said “protecting”.

“A lot.” He stood firm in the doorway, not missing a beat when I tried to move past him again.

The man never answered me directly, and always changed the subject. Holding down my anger, I put my hands on the sides of my head and pressed my fingers into my temples. The pendant was a glass heart, wrapped with vines of golden clover. It was filled with a thick, dark crimson liquid I’d always just assumed was colored water. I took the heart from his fingers and held it between my own, startled that it felt hot against my flesh. I looked at Kane, who was watching my reaction intently.

“I suppose you know what it means?” I asked him, rubbing my thumb across the glass, still amazed that it felt warm in my hands, something it had never done before, not even at the beach in the summer sun.

“It’s called a bloodstone, not like the quartz you can buy in specialty shops, and it holds very powerful magic.” He reached behind my neck and unclasped the chain, the pendant still safely held in my hand.

“What are you doing? This was a gift from my grandmother on my sixteenth birthday. I never take it off, not even to shower.” I was pissed at his lack of intelligence to ask my permission before touching something I held close to my heart.

Kane said nothing in return, but held the chain up so the pendant lifted off my palm and hung in the air between us. “Do what I do.”

Kane took his pointer finger and touched the side of the heart that was closest to him, and then motioned for me to do the same. As soon as my finger touched my side of the glass, my temperature rose making me slightly flushed and light burst from the heart, filling the space between Kane and me. Old memories, scenes from many different places throughout time with a girl who looked just like me,

played through my mind like a slideshow. In each memory I was dressed to fit the era and always smiling. *How could I be so happy all the time?*

“Impossible,” I whispered. I couldn’t move, frozen in place until the last memory brought me to the present. “You...” I didn’t finish my sentence, stepping back as I jerked my finger off the pendant.

Without my touch, the pendant went back to normal, the strange blue light gone. I wasn’t sure what to say, couldn’t find the right words to describe what I was feeling inside. Kane hooked the chain back around my neck, and then stepped back to smile at me. It was a wicked grin, the kind that made me wonder what he was thinking, and it made goose bumps cover my flesh. My skin became suddenly hot while my stomach did nervous flip flops. I had felt things in those brief seconds of the light explosion that I wished I hadn’t. I’d felt what true, heart-wrenching love was all about, and it had all been for the man who stood before me.

Meeting him in the restaurant had not been by chance alone; it was fate’s idea of a cruel joke. We knew each other, had always known each other. I knew without a doubt that Kane was the other half to my heart. The light, as it filled me and warmed my body, had shown me that he and I were meant to be together. The word *soul mate* filled my mind, and as I looked up at him and allowed myself to stare into his eyes, the almost sad smile upon his face told me he felt it, too.

“What was that?” I asked, hoping he would give me some kind of rational explanation for what I had seen, and what I was feeling.

“That is why you should know that I would never hurt you. I love you, always have. The blood you wear around your neck is ours, mixed together a long time ago.” He touched the heart again. “We’ve come together in every lifetime, and in every one that I find you, you’re taken from me. Then I have to wait an extensive amount of time until you are returned to me again.”

“I’ve already told you, my grandmother gave me this necklace as a gift. How would she have gotten a charm filled with our blood?” He was smiling again, and I really didn’t like the feeling it gave me deep inside.

“Fate—with a gentle push from a suave sales associate at the antique shop she was shopping in.” He moved closer to me, my skin reacting to his closeness, aching for his touch.

“Are you telling me you stalked my grandmother and persuaded her into buying this?” I paused and waited for him to respond, but he didn’t. “I know my grandmother; she would not have taken advice from a teenage boy on what to buy me for such an important milestone birthday in my life. A girl’s sweet sixteen is sacred.” I saw Kane’s lip twitch, could have sworn he was trying to stifle a laugh.

“Look at me, Gabriela, I’m not a boy. I’m a man, and she easily took my advice.” His arms were crossed and lay against his broad chest.

I was confused. “You’re a man now, back then you would have been a boy.”

He laughed, something that irked me immensely in that moment causing my temper to creep to the surface.

“Have you been listening at all to what I’ve been telling you?” He continued only after I nodded. I twisted my arms across my chest, angry that he implied I couldn’t keep up. “I have been here through all your lifetimes. I know every time you’re born, and I wait until you’re of age before I approach. In one lifetime, we managed to beat out fate’s cruelty, and I was with you until you grew old and died of natural causes.”

I frowned. What he was saying did coincide with the new memories the bloodstone had given me, but it was all so much to take in. “In most of our lives together though, you’ve been ripped from my life not long after we’ve come together. It’s happened more times than I care to remember.” He paused and took my face in his hands. “I wait for you time after time because I don’t age, Gabriela, I don’t die, and I never stop loving you.”

“That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. There is no such thing as everlasting life. Now, quit playing games, and tell me the truth.” I was frustrated, my temper threatening to surface. I clenched my hands into fists and held them down at my sides. I wanted Kane to crack a smile, tell me that I was on a hidden camera show and watch as people who’d been hidden away stepped out of the shadows to share in the joke. I didn’t want to believe the crazy things I’d seen in my mind, to know that I had so many horrible things

happen to me over and over again all because of Kane and the love we shared.

“I’m telling you the truth. Gabriela, I love you. I have for as long as I can remember. I keep hoping that in one of these lifetimes together, you’ll decide to stay with me, to let me bring you fully into my world, but so far you’ve always declined my offer.” He placed his hands on my shoulders and bent down so his eyes were level with mine. “Fate has brought us together again for a reason, we just need to figure out how to handle it. We need to be successful this time at sharing a life together, a long lasting life. Living without you is an awful existence. I grow weary of being alone.” Kane ran a hand through his hair.

The pendant’s power took me through a series of visions. I was shown love that couldn’t possibly be described by any other word than dramatic, and it had spanned over so many centuries and lifetimes. When Kane and I touched the pendant together it confirmed everything he was trying to tell me, but it wasn’t enough to make me believe him. As a reporter, I needed cold hard facts, not some supernatural imagery. There were things I needed to know, but I was tired of talking. Some of the scenes that played through my mind had shown Kane as a monster, a murderer. I’d seen him kill to protect me, and I’d seen him drink blood. Both were visions I hoped I could get out of my head. No matter how strong adoration could be, I knew I would never have cared for nor could I love a monster.

“You’re a psycho. I don’t know what kind of sick game you’re trying to play, and I don’t want to talk about this anymore. I want to go home, back to my quaint little apartment, to my own bed, and I need a shower.” Tears stung the back of my eyes. I was so mixed up inside, and I hated feeling out of control. My emotions were getting the best of me, and I just wanted to go back to my normal, semi-boring life.

“You can’t go home, not yet, but I brought you clothes, and there’s a shower down the hall. I’ll show you, and then leave you to get cleaned up.” He held a bag out to me, which I assumed had the clothing he spoke of in it. “Then we’ll talk some more.”

Great, more talking. I took the bag, and followed him out of the room. I was determined to find a way out of the warehouse.

I cleared my mind as Kane led me towards the bathroom. I was going to escape, but I couldn’t risk thinking about it and ruin my

chances of getting away. I had to time it perfectly. Kane stopped, pushing open a door, and I ran as fast as I could in the opposite direction. I looked back once to see if Kane was following me, but I didn't see him and ran into a wall. I stumbled back, falling on my ass, and when I glanced up Kane was looking down at me. He was the wall I'd hit.

Impossible. How did he get in front of me? He held out a hand, and I took it. A light tingle crept up my arm from the contact. It was nothing compared to the first time and didn't happen every time we touched, but I found it quite strange that he could affect me in such a way. Kane's brow was furrowed together, his lips in a tight line across his face. He looked upset with me for trying to escape, but he had to understand my need to try.

"You win." I told him. "It's obvious I can't outrun you, and I'm stuck here until you decide to release me." *Or I find a way to get around you.*

Kane said nothing, but held my arm as he once again led me to the bathroom. He opened the door, pushed me inside, and then closed the door, clicking the lock into place. I fought the urge to scream from being locked in another room, and focused my attention on everything around me instead.

I was expecting the bathroom to have the same concrete walls and bad paint job as the room I'd woken up in. At best, I planned for a standup shower like I'd once used at the public pool as a teenager. I imagined the bathroom to be built for convenience in the warehouse and not comfort.

I was shocked to find it was the type of bathroom I'd find in a five-star hotel, not a warehouse. The walls were made of drywall and not concrete and were painted a shade of blue that reminded me of the ocean at sunrise. The floor was covered in a beige tile that gave the effect of sand beneath my feet. Even a beachy smell was in the air, and I discovered it came from the potpourri filled baskets that were placed around the room.

A large mirror made the backdrop for the double sink on the wall to my right. The sinks were stainless steel surrounded by marble. There was a brand new toothbrush and roll of paste on the counter. I ran my tongue across my teeth, thankful Kane had thought of the little things I might need. I removed the brush from the wrapper, covered it

with paste and stuck it in my mouth. The minty flavor was like a burst of sunshine in my mouth I brushed as I scanned the rest of the room.

There was a standup shower in one corner, but it wasn't my only option. In the center of the room was an antique clawed-foot tub. It was large enough to fit two adults and deep enough that my entire body would be covered with water. As tempting as it was, I decided the shower was the best option under the circumstances. I wanted to be quick, and hoped that after Kane told me what he needed, I'd be on my way home and back to my normal life.

I found everything I needed in the shower and cleaned myself up in record speed. With a towel wrapped around my body, I pulled a pair of red lace panties and a matching bra out of the bag of clothes Kane had given me. Everything in the bag was new with tags and definitely nothing I would have chosen for myself, but I decided not to complain or question who picked them out.

I slipped into the underwear, glancing at myself in the mirror. I needed to hit the gym more often, but I didn't look that bad, and red was a good color for me. I pulled on a pair of black leggings and slid a red sweater dress over my head. The only thing that was missing was shoes. Kane cursed in the hallway and I figured he'd read my mind again. I heard him talking to someone, probably on his cell phone, and then he knocked on the door.

"What size shoes do you wear?" I opened the door to stare at him. "What size?" he asked again.

"Six." I left my wet towel hanging over the edge of the tub, my toothbrush lay beside the sink, and the empty bag and negligee sat on the counter. "Why?"

"You'll have shoes in half an hour." He picked me up and toted me to the first room we'd been in the previous night.

"What time is it?" I still had no idea if the sun was shining since there were no windows to be found anywhere within the warehouse.

"It's just past seven in the evening." Kane motioned for me to sit on the sofa. "Would you like something else to eat?"

Something struck me at that moment; I had yet to see Kane eat anything. He hadn't eaten at the restaurant the previous night. At least I couldn't recall anything being taken to him while I was there. He had given me water and chocolate the previous night, while he had

nothing, and though he'd brought food to me earlier I hadn't seen him have anything. Maybe he was weird about eating in front of strangers.

"No, I'm fine." *I can't believe I spent the entire day sleeping.*
"Now, I think you have a lot of explaining to do."

Kane opened his mouth to speak when a loud knock came on the main door. "Your shoes," he explained.

Kane opened the door to a delivery boy who looked barely old enough to be driving a car. The interaction was quick, as Kane exchanged a few bills from his wallet for a box. When the boy left, he reapplied the security code to the panel on the wall, and then came to where I was perched on the sofa and handed me the box.

"Manolo Blahniks? Do you know how long I've pined over owning a pair of these?" Kane smiled, and I continued to rant. "You can't just win me over with a fabulous pair of shoes. I don't work that way. I still think you're psycho. You obviously have more money than you know what to do with, and we aren't finished with our previous discussion."

"I didn't think we would be. I still have a lot I need to share with you, especially about our present situation." Kane moved aside as I admired the shoes, slipping into them easily. They were like heaven for my feet, and I sighed as I stood and walked towards the small refrigerator.

"Wait!" Kane blew past me, making me once again curious at how he could be behind me one minute, and so far ahead of me the next. "Here." He handed me a bottle of water, and although it was what I had been headed for, I was irritated that he was obviously hiding something from me, which didn't help his case of making me trust him.

"Hiding something?" I gave Kane my best angry stare.

He was about to answer when I heard my cell phone go off. Kane reached under the desk and lifted up my bag. I picked up the phone and looked at the number on the screen. I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't recognize the number." I would have answered it anyway, but Kane took the phone and sat it on his desk.

"Let voicemail pick it up."

"But it might be Nicolette." I was whining, but I didn't care.

"Let voicemail get it," he said again.

I opened the bottle of water and took a long swallow. Kane was a frustrating man, demanding, and so mysterious. I was still

caught up on the fact that he had spent more on one pair of shoes for me than I had on all my shoes in my adult life. I still didn't believe the story he'd told me about my grandmother or our past together. People don't come back, it just wasn't possible. I believed in a lot of things, but reincarnation was not one of them. Only in Hollywood where imagination runs wild can there be such an existence.

Chapter Four

When the voicemail tone rang, I picked up the phone off the desk and listened. The call turned out to be Xavier, wondering where I was and why I hadn't shown up for our dinner date. I'd forgotten all about our plans, and though I had no real control over my circumstances, I felt guilty for being a no show. I'd spent a good six months getting him to notice me and actually ask me out, and now thanks to Kane and his crazy beliefs about past lives and eternal love, I was going to lose everything I'd worked so hard to achieve where Xavier was concerned.

"You know," I began, "people are going to start wondering where I am. My best friend, Lydia, won't hesitate to file a missing person's report."

Kane motioned toward the phone in my hand. "Call her. Make something up. You met me in a bar, we've fallen madly in love and you're going to Europe for a few weeks with me." He smiled, and it made me want to punch him in the face.

"Kane, I don't know what kind of people you surround yourself with, but the ones in my life would never believe something like that. They know me too well, know that I don't give my heart away easily, especially to strangers I meet in bars." I stood, arms across my chest, glaring at him. "I'm very selective of my friends and even pickier about my lovers."

"Have you had many?" He looked at me, his brown eyes seemed darker, and I smiled, liking the fact that I could get under his skin.

I played dumb. "Many what?"

"Lovers." He didn't even blink, kept his eyes focused on my face.

I wanted to laugh, but kept my composure. "A few," I lied, meeting him stare for stare. I censored my thoughts so he couldn't get into my head to see if I was telling the truth. The truth that no man had ever made me feel good enough to take him to bed. At the rate I was going in my life, I'd die a virgin, and that was more depressing than being trapped with Kane at the warehouse. "Why do you care?" I asked, not sure of why I didn't just let the conversation die. "I'm sure you've had more than your fair share."

“Only one.” He was serious; I read it all over his face. “Only you. It’s always been only you.” He stepped toward me, and I moved back bumping into the desk. “There is no one else for me.”

My chest was tight, and I struggled to breathe. Every girl dreams of finding an immaculate looking man, and Kane fit that description to a tee. More than that, she’d wished for someone willing to totally devote to her. Kane had just said the most beautiful thing to me, and under normal circumstances, I would have fallen at his feet in a puddle of mush, but standing in the warehouse, knowing I was his prisoner in more ways than one, I simply felt like I was suffocating. I needed to be cruel, the only way I knew to possibly push him away.

“Kane, I hate to break it to you, but I am not the person you’re in love with. I’ve never met you before last night, and I think we have bigger problems than your delusions about who I am.” I continued to move away from him. “You still haven’t explained your connection with Nicolette, why she freaked when she saw you at the restaurant. It may not seem important to you right now but I need an explanation. I’m not going to call my best friend and tell her anything until I know what I’m dealing with here.”

“You think Nicolette is the victim, a witness to the murders that occurred in the park that night, but she’s not. Gabriela, she’s the murderer. Those people died at her hand.” Kane reached out, his fingertips brushing my cheek.

“Then why haven’t the police taken her in? Do they know?” I stepped back again, wishing he’d stop touching me. Every time his fingers made contact with my skin, I became distracted. “If you know this for a fact, you need to go to the police.”

“It’s complicated.” Kane looked past me, not meeting my eyes. “You have to trust me when I tell you she’s dangerous.”

I needed to sit down. Nicolette didn’t look like a murderer; she looked like a teenage girl who was scared and alone in the world. I wanted to help her, to get her story, and if what Kane said was true, was she ever really going to tell me her side? Where had she been taking me the previous night? A chill ran down my spine as I thought of her eyes flashing red when I first approached her in the restaurant. Had I really imagined that? I wasn’t so sure now.

“She was taking you to Rolando.” Kane responded aloud to my thoughts. “As far as secret societies go, Rolando is the president. He would have interrogated you, found out what you knew, and even

if you proved to know nothing of interest to him, you would have been killed.”

“Are we talking the mafia here?” *What the hell have I gotten myself involved in?* I wrapped my arms around my chest for warmth.

“No, what we’re talking about is far worse than the human mafia. By taking you to Rolando, she was offering you as a sacrifice for her own freedom.” Kane reached out and cupped my face with his hands. “I can protect you, but you have to trust me.”

“Why would taking me to this Rolando guy save her? I’m just a reporter, not anyone important.” I didn’t understand how I played a role in the scheme Kane was slowly unraveling for me.

“What Nicolette did to those people, the way she tore them to pieces, it threatened to expose our existence.” Kane stepped closer, reaching out to caress my cheek with his fingers. “You are important to me. Everyone in my world who knows me, knows about us. Rolando would have gladly accepted you as a sacrifice.”

“What do you mean the murders threatened to expose your existence? Kane, who are you?” I didn’t move from his grasp even though my body began to shake with fear. “What are you?”

“You know what I am, don’t make me say it.” His eyes were pleading with mine as my heart began beating faster in my chest. “Think.”

I opened my mind and replayed what the bloodstone had shown me. I watched the scenes in slow motion exposing the monstrous things Kane took part in. He didn’t eat, didn’t drink, and he never aged. In all the visions, he looked exactly the same, though the time periods changed over and over again around us. My breath caught in my throat, the pain in my heart almost unbearable.

Vampire. “It’s not possible.” Tears stung my eyes, and I blinked releasing the drops down my cheeks. Kane wiped them away with his thumbs.

“I’m sorry, Gabriela. I can’t change what I am.” His face was close enough to mine that I could feel his breath against my face, sweet like honey as I inhaled slowly. He leaned in closer, his lips brushing mine softly.

I didn’t want to feel connected with him. I didn’t want to enjoy the way he touched me, the way his lips were soft against mine, but I couldn’t stop the memories of our relationship from changing something inside me. I allowed Kane to hold me as he spoke.

“Rolando asked me to capture Nicolette. That’s why she attempted to attack me, she knows I’ve been assigned to bring her in.” He stepped back far enough that he could look into my eyes again. “Gabriela, I wasn’t looking for you, but there you were in the restaurant. I knew she was meeting someone because I’ve been following her and listening in on her conversations, but I didn’t know it was you until I saw you there. I read her mind. I knew what her intent was with you, and though I promised myself I’d stay away to spare us both the pain of love and loss in this lifetime, I couldn’t let her take you to be slaughtered.”

“I still don’t understand. If Rolando is your boss, and he knows I’m important to you and your existence, why would he harm me?” I reached up to touch Kane’s cheek. “Wouldn’t he have simply let me go and taken Nicolette when she came to him?”

“Rolando and I have a long history. You have much to remember, and when you do it will all make sense.” Kane lifted my chin and took my lips again with an urgency that triggered lustful desires to rise to the surface like hot lava from a volcano on the verge of eruption. I was on fire from my head down to my toes.

“I can’t do this.” I pulled away from him and turned so my back was all he could see. “I’m so confused. I feel all these things, love, hate, an overabundance of joy mixed with pain, and I don’t know how to handle it.” I turned around to face Kane again, but he wasn’t standing behind me anymore. The man was like a cat, slipping away so quickly and quietly. “Kane?” My heart rate started to increase with each minute that passed and he didn’t respond. I couldn’t find him physically and I was reaching a brick wall mentally. *Where the hell had he gone?*

There were still a million things I didn’t understand, like what Kane’s role in the secret society was. If Rolando was the leader, and Nicolette was just a pawn on the chess board, then who was Kane? Was he some type of renegade? And where did I fit into it all?

Before I’d seen what the bloodstone had stored away, he’d told me he needed my help. How could I help him with things I had no knowledge of? Compared to the powers that people from his world possessed, I was just a lowly human. Was his love for me so deep that he would drag me into something without thinking what the consequences would be for both of us?

Nicolette had let me go; she'd taken me back to the restaurant. Had we really been followed or had she simply changed her mind about sacrificing me? What if she still held onto her compassion in her altered state? There were so many things going through my mind, and if I could just remember more about the history I had with Kane, maybe there would be a chance for me to help him.

I couldn't grasp why Kane had waited until I was twenty-six years old to come into my life. I wished he'd just stayed away and spared me the hurt I'd felt from those visions of the past. Did he approach me because of the pull he felt towards me making him unable to stay away even though he tried? Maybe the stone cried out to him that it was time to claim me for his own once more.

Kane told me he knew Nicolette's intentions with me, but he had been in the restaurant before she appeared and sat watching me from his corner table. It was evident that he knew who I was before he ever made a connection between Nicolette and I. He said he'd been waiting for her to arrive at the restaurant, but had he been keeping an eye on me before that night, before there was ever a sign of danger involving her?

There were so many reasons he could have chosen the present to become a part of my life, and the only one who knew the truth about why was him. Part of me was glad he chose to rescue me, if that was what he'd really done, but a larger part wished he'd just stayed away and left me to live my life without him. I wouldn't be so confused and troubled by what was going to happen, not only to us, but between us as well.

I still wasn't sure how I was going to help him, but I assumed he had a plan. Kane didn't seem like the spur of the moment type, he seemed more like the guy who premeditated every action, and that was another reason I didn't think it was a complete chance happening that we met when we did.

I looked toward the door. It would be so easy to slip out into the night. "Kane?" I called out again. "Please don't hide from me. I'm sorry I don't understand, but don't leave me to face this alone." I dropped to the floor, tears spilling onto the tile as I called out for him. I wanted to try to escape, but my feet wouldn't move. I didn't want to get caught up in his world, in the madness, but thanks to the memories—I was.

I wrapped my fingers around the pendant, something I always did when I was upset and rubbed it with my thumb. How many times had I sat and done that same thing, and never once did it feel warm to the touch as it did now? Did I need Kane's touch to activate the magic within it? What exactly was it?

Kane told me it was our blood secured in the glass heart and since he didn't elaborate, I wondered how our blood had gotten inside it. Another question that plagued me was if I had always had the pendant in my possession? Was it for my protection or was it simply how Kane was able to always find me?

My sanity was slipping further and further away while my mind went into overdrive thinking about everything. I wiped my eyes and tried to control my breathing which had become more rapid, and I could tell I was on the verge of an anxiety attack. I needed to call Lydia to explain what was going on in my life, and I couldn't sound like I was in hysterics while talking to her. She'd freak and then I'd have a whole other world of problems on my hands.

I moved over to the sofa and sat for a few moments, closed my eyes and tried to relax enough to where I could speak in a controlled manner. With my breathing regulated, I flipped open my cell phone and hit speed dial one. Maybe Kane had simply left the room to give me some space. I knew he could hear me no matter where he was within the warehouse, and he'd know if I tried to escape so there was no point of continuing to let it cross my mind.

The phone rang numerous times and Lydia didn't pick up. In a way, I was glad, because I could leave her a voicemail message full of lies without feeling as guilty, and she wouldn't be able to question me. If she put me on the spot, there would be more chance of screwing up a detail and blowing my cover.

On the other hand, I wanted to hear her voice and have her scold me for being a fool and running off with a man I barely knew. At least the voicemail would tell her that I was okay, and she wouldn't call the police thinking something bad had happened to me. I wasn't kidding when I told Kane she would involve the police. Lydia could be a little paranoid at times, and she wouldn't hesitate to go to the authorities if she thought something was seriously wrong.

After leaving the message, I hung up, feeling slightly better knowing she wouldn't be worried about me. I still needed to call Xavier and wasn't sure how to handle his call. I hadn't recognized the

number he called from, but after listening to his message I figured it was the restaurant. I hoped I could reach him on his cell, and once again hoped to get voicemail to make lying to him as easy as it had been with my best friend. It wasn't like I could tell him the truth, and the lie I'd told Kylie about meeting a man would be cruel to throw in his face. As the phone rang I tried to think of what I was going to say, and I cursed to myself when he picked up on the third ring.

"Hello?" I heard a hint of anger in Xavier's voice on the other end of the phone. "Gabriela, where are you? You were supposed to meet me for dinner over an hour ago." He didn't ask if I was okay, if something happened, or show any type of concern for my well being. Instead, he let his tone tell me he was pissed about being stood up.

I turned on my bitch switch; it was the only way I knew how to deal with him as my own anger rose to the surface from his lack of concern. "Something came up." I paused, hoping he would prove me wrong by switching his tune and asking the right questions, but he didn't, so I decided to lay it all out for him. "Xavier, I've been thinking, and I don't think pursuing a relationship with you is in my best interest right now." I heard him make a noise that sounded like a high pitched snort. "It took me half a year and losing over twenty pounds to get your attention. The simple truth is, I don't want to be involved with someone so superficial."

I waited for him to tell me it hadn't been like that, for him to say that I was overreacting about his behavior, but Xavier said nothing. I knew he was still on the other line because I could hear him breathing. Being cruel to him made hurting him easier, and the sad part of it all was that everything I'd said had been true. Xavier didn't notice me until I dropped two dress sizes and found a bra line that made my barely-there breasts seem fuller and perkier in my work clothes.

"If that's how you feel, Gabriela, then maybe it is best we don't associate outside of the office. I won't call you again." Xavier was definitely angry, and I found that I didn't care the way I thought I would. I heard the click of him hanging up and then silence filled the line.

I shut the phone and threw it across the floor, frustrated that I couldn't just tell the truth. I hoped the phone would shatter so I wouldn't have to worry about Lydia calling me back, but only the battery popped off which was an easy fix. Strong hands grabbed me

from behind and spun me around. Kane took my lips with a passion I'd never experienced with any other kiss. I recognized the heat that started to develop between my legs, and I quickly pulled away from him.

I knew he'd heard my conversation with Xavier, and I assumed his passion stemmed from the fact that I had just gotten rid of the competition. "Why couldn't I reach you?" I pushed as his chest. "How dare you just disappear like that?" *And put up a mental block so I couldn't tell if something had happened to you or not.*

"I needed to feed, something I neglected to do before hurrying here tonight. It was a good opportunity to give you some space." His eyes seemed brighter; his skin less clammy than it had been when he'd first come to my room. "I didn't exactly think you'd like to come along and watch or hear my thoughts as I fed. Drinking blood from a human is an erotic experience. I can't always stop myself from listening to the thoughts of my donor which can be explicit at times."

"You feed off humans?" I'd seen vampire movies, knew where they got their blood from, but to hear him actually speak about it made me queasy. I guess I'd just assumed that modern day vampires could get sustenance from other avenues than live donors.

"Yes." He looked down at the ground. "I've tried other things over the years—animals, bagged blood, but nothing keeps my strength up or satisfies my hunger like the real thing. I need to keep my strength up until I know for sure what is going on with Rolando and Nicolette."

A new curiosity stemmed inside me. "Have I ever let you bite me?" Though I tried, I couldn't remember anything past what the bloodstone had shown me, and for some reason the answer to my question was very important.

"You let me bite you once." Kane caught my stare, and I tried to keep my face blank. I didn't want to offend him by cringing at the thought of his teeth piercing my skin, and I also didn't want to let on that the idea both excited and fascinated me at the same time. "I had been attacked, taken a pretty hard blow with a silver bullet. I lost a lot of blood, and you offered yourself to me." He frowned.

"I thought silver bullets were what killed werewolves." That's what I'd always known from books and movies.

"Silver can't kill us, but it hurts like the sting of a thousand bees. It also drains our energy level immediately. If you hadn't gotten

the bullet out, and given your blood to me, my life would have ended that night in the middle of the cemetery where we were hiding from demons who had been outcast from the underworld.” He smiled, his eyes twinkling. “It wasn’t the circumstance I’d hoped to taste you, I’d always wished you would give yourself to me willingly.”

“You mean ask you to bite me?” I raised an eyebrow.

“It’s very common between lovers, vampire and human alike.”

If it was possible, his smile grew wider. “Regardless of the circumstance, I’ve never forgotten your flavor, so sweet.”

I didn’t let him know that our conversation was arousing me even though I could feel the heat and wetness between my legs increasing at the thought of him biting me. Picture after picture flowed through my head of him holding me and drinking my blood, and keeping myself controlled was becoming harder. I hoped he couldn’t tell my heart was beating faster as I envisioned him sinking his teeth into my flesh, a thought I was trying hard to censor from his mind reading capabilities.

“So, Rolando, is he a vampire too?” I wanted to change the subject, get my mind off Kane’s fangs. I needed to know what I was dealing with, still unsure I believed any of it, but maybe I could catch Kane in a lie. If he slipped up, forgot a detail we’d already discussed, I would have a better chance of escaping.

“Vampire, and very old.” Kane’s voice was a whisper. I could feel the sensation of him attempting to get inside my head.

“And Nicolette?”

“She’s a vampire, too, but only recently turned which is why she has gotten herself into so much trouble. She hasn’t honed all her skills yet, and she’s careless.” He moved closer to me, his body heat radiating, and ran his hand down my cheek. “I promise, as long as you’re with me, no one will hurt you.”

It was in that moment, when I looked into his brown eyes, that I really knew I was in trouble. Curiosity was a natural element of being a reporter, but I often found out things I didn’t really want to know, and I’d just discovered what others had been claiming for years—vampires were real.

My grandmother had once told me that curiosity killed the cat, and I wondered if Kane’s involvement in the underworld and with me would be the thing to take the last of my nine lives.

Chapter Five

The warehouse bored me. Kane didn't even own a television, and I was tired of being cooped up already. It didn't matter that I'd only really been coherent for a few hours. The lack of windows was making me feel boxed in, and it was Saturday night. I should have been out tearing up the town with Lydia, recapping my dinner date with Xavier, not stuck in a warehouse with a man who claimed to be my vampire lover.

Kane was putting together some paperwork at his desk, and I sat on the couch trying to entertain myself by playing games on my cell phone which he'd put back together for me. I wasn't tired, thanks to sleeping for almost twenty hours, and I was still a little pissed about having to lie to the people in my life. I didn't understand how Kane could sit there so nonchalantly, like we were old friends hanging out, when he was holding me against my will.

I put my phone down and got up to walk around. I took some time to really take in my surroundings, and though Kane told me he didn't live here, I couldn't help but question if he spent most of his time at the warehouse. The place was well stocked with all the normal amenities, and was in the perfect part of town for him to grab a quick bite. I cringed as I thought of him taking human donors and wondered how he fed on people without guilt. I knew I would have serious trouble using people that way.

As I looked at some pictures hanging on the walls, done by local artists, I wondered if he could read others' minds the way he did mine. I ran Hollywood's depiction of vampires, and a few articles I'd read in *Graven* through my thoughts when a light bulb went off. If he could read my mind, could he also control it?

I didn't like the idea of knowing there was a possibility that he could use mind control on me. I thought of the last twenty four hours and wondered how much I had done of my own free will or what he might have planted into my mind. Had I lied so easily to my best friend because I really wanted to or because he had told me that was what needed to be done? I told myself I lied because I didn't want her to worry, and I was a little afraid of what would have happened to her if I'd shared the truth about my whereabouts with her.

I grabbed a bag of potato chips I'd found in a cabinet near the fridge and sat back down on the sofa munching them with my back to the hallway. Kane had gone into another room while I'd been wandering around, and I once again thought of freedom and how it was so close but so far away at the same time. The combination of salt and vinegar flavors of the chips hit my tongue causing my lips to pucker. I licked them, wishing I'd grabbed a bottle of water, too. A few more chips later and I was unable to continue eating without water to wash them down.

I stood to go back and retrieve one from the fridge, never hearing Kane come up behind me until he tapped my shoulder as I reached to open the door. I jumped. *I swear I'm buying him a bell.* He laughed, and I turned to scowl at him. He reached behind me and grabbed the water I had set out to retrieve. The way he was looking at me, like an after-dinner mint, made me self conscious.

"What?" I asked. "Do I have something on my face?" I brushed at my lips and cheeks with the back of my hand.

He shook his head. "There's nothing on your face." He sat on the edge of his desk and reached out to take my hand pulling me closer to him. "We're going on a little trip. I just made all the arrangements for us. There's only one thing I need you to do." I could have sworn there was something vicious about the way he said it, something entirely unpleasant was about to be laid upon me.

"And that is?" I asked, looking up to meet his eyes. Of all the things he could have asked of me, what he said was not what I expected.

"If we're stopped by anyone, you have to pretend to be my wife." He handed my driver's license to me. Everything looked the same except for one minor detail; my last name had been changed from Swanson to Barringer.

I stared in disbelief; the man was still treating our situation as one of lovers about to go on holiday. "Absolutely not. I will not go parading around as if we're going on some nice little vacation together. You're holding me hostage, Kane, against my will in case you forgot that little detail. You've already made me lie to my best friend and to my potential boyfriend. I won't do it." I crossed my arms across my chest. "Not happening."

Twenty minutes later, I was playing with the knob on the radio as we drove out of town on our way to the airport.

"I'm sorry for making you lie to your friend." Kane turned off the highway, taking the exit that led into the parking garage at the airport. "Technically, if you think about it, you didn't lie about everything. You did meet me, and we are going away together."

I said nothing but stared out the window watching the city disappear behind us as we entered the tunnel that would take us to the parking deck.

"I really am sorry. I wish you had your memories back. Then you would understand all this better." He turned to look at me. "They'll come now that we activated the bloodstone, but I'm not sure how long it will take."

"What do you mean we activated the bloodstone?" I frowned as he pulled into a spot near the elevator.

"I told you the pendant holds magical powers, through our blood, and by touching it together we basically turned it on." He was smiling, but I still didn't get it. I didn't understand how a little vial of our blood could hold magic.

"How exactly did our blood get inside the pendant?" He had left that detail out before, and I wanted to know. "And don't you dare say magic!"

Kane laughed. "Your grandmother, the first one you ever had, she was a witch. Before I was turned, we did a blood bonding ritual with her as a promise to each other that we would always be together."

"Like a blood brothers kind of thing?" I was still confused, and thought perhaps those missing memories might come in handy.

"I'm not sure what that is." It was Kane's turn to look bewildered. "She pricked the tips of our fingers and squeezed our blood into the heart while she chanted to her Goddess to grant us everlasting love." His eyes glazed over and for a few moments Kane was in his own little world reminiscing on a memory I couldn't grasp.

"Kane?" I touched his cheek bringing him back to the present. "I haven't forgotten anything. Those are your memories, not mine."

"Yes, you have. You've forgotten us, but it will all come back to you, Gabriela." Kane got out of the car, and opened my door before I even had a chance to blink. I slid out of my side following him to the trunk, watching as he pulled two large suitcases out.

"What's all that?" I still had no idea where we were going.

“I assumed you would like to have clothes.” He laughed. “I can leave it all here if you’d rather walk around nude. I wouldn’t complain.”

“Grab the luggage, Kane.” The man was a complete smartass; of course, he had many lifetimes to perfect that part of his personality, if he was telling the truth about who he was. I still wasn’t sure. “Where are we going?”

“Some place you’ve always loved. I’m hoping it will trigger a memory or two, and besides we need to get out of town for a few days. We’re being hunted, even as we speak.” Kane shut and locked the trunk.

I didn’t like the feeling of helplessness that crept up my spine from his words, my stomach twisting in knots. I glanced around to see if anyone was watching us, but the parking garage was empty. Even so, I stepped closer to Kane who easily held both bags as we walked toward the elevator.

He didn’t lead me into the main terminal as I anticipated. I was looking forward to being surrounded by people, and instead, I found myself standing next to a large, private plane. While Kane spoke with the pilot, I watched as another man filled the plane with fuel and loaded our luggage on board. I had plenty of time to quietly slip away, escape around the corner and hide until the coast was clear, but I found my feet stuck in place once again.

Movement to my left caught my attention, and I focused on the figure standing just out of my line of vision. I squinted my eyes, moved a few paces forward to get a better view. The man was maybe three feet tall at most with a head full of coppery tendrils. He looked like something straight out of a bad horror film with his dark green suit and gold chains. I suppressed a laugh, but didn’t take my eyes off him. He never moved from his position in the shadows, just observed us like a cat stalking its prey.

The familiar brush of Kane pushing his way inside my head calmed me slightly, and I let down my barriers a little as I continued to focus on the man in green. I refused to meet his eyes, afraid of what I might see in them, but didn’t take mine off him. The way he watched us worried me, and a chill worked itself into my bones.

“That’s Rolando.” Kane said his name and it sent a chill down my spine. “Do not show fear. He is just here to see us off.”

“Why?” I didn’t dare speak out loud. “Does he know where we’re going?”

“Rolando knows everything, and what he doesn’t know, he finds out. It would be useless to try to hide my plans from him.” He put his arm around me. I figured it was a gesture to show the leprechaun that I was with him, a sort of male power trip. Whatever it was, Rolando nodded in our direction, and vanished before my eyes. I didn’t think I blinked, but he was there one second and gone the next.

“The pilot’s ready for us.” Kane took me by the arm and led me toward the plane. I looked back to the shadowy area once more before climbing the stairs into the plane. “Have a seat and buckle up. I’ll let him know we’re situated.”

Kane moved up the aisle and disappeared into the cockpit. I glanced around the plane, which looked more like a hotel suite than the inside of an aircraft. This was nothing like when I flew to Florida with my family for vacation; this was extravagant and a little over the top.

Sofa style seating was against the windows to my left. Straight ahead was a huge flat screen with a built in DVD player, and below it sat a small cupboard full of DVDs. I looked through the titles, mostly comedies, and found it so normal.

To my right was a bar, complete with every type of liquor imaginable. I pulled a glass from the holder and poured myself a small amount of bourbon, hoping it would calm my nerves about flying. I turned around then, pressing my back against the bar, to view the rest of the area.

A small table with built in cup holders was in the center of the cabin, surrounded by four comfortable looking chairs. I finished off the Bourbon and put the glass in one of the cup holders on the table when I noticed the bed. It was made up with silken blankets and pillows in soft blue. It looked enticing, and I was beginning to feel a little sleepy. I knew Kane had told me to get myself latched in, but I couldn’t resist crawling on top the covers and stretching out. It was so comfortable as I snuggled into the pillows and closed my eyes. I told myself I’d only lie down for a minute, but sleep came easily against the silken threads, and I was suddenly too tired to fight it.

Fields of clover were as far as the eye could see. Little purple flowers spread throughout the sea of green leaves. I ran barefoot through them, the tiny petals brushing against my toes as the sun cast

its warming rays down upon me. My hair was a fiery mass of curls rolling down my back, which bounced as I ran. Up ahead, I saw rows of fir trees growing, like a Christmas wonderland, and I glanced behind me once as I ran faster to reach their shelter. I dashed between the rows, my arms outstretched to touch the branches, which were soft against my fingertips.

I could no longer hear Kane behind me, though he'd been right on my heels just moments before. There was shade in the trees, despite their small size, but when the sun dipped behind a cloud, it cast an eerie shadow over everything around me. I stopped in my tracks, hearing Kane cry out to me. I turned slowly to find Kane being forced down on his knees.

At first, I couldn't tell what was happening, and I moved quickly towards him, but stopped when I saw the wicked little man peer from around his body. He looked at me, exposing his already elongated fangs, and I was frozen in place, unable to push forward even another inch. There was nothing I could do as he held Kane's hair aside, exposing the smooth skin of his neck before biting down hard. Kane yelled out my name through the pain, and I screamed for the loss of my love.

"Gabriela! Wake up. Gabriela!" Kane was shaking my shoulders.

I woke, reaching out until I found myself wrapped tightly in Kane's arms. I pressed my face into the crook of his neck and clung to him with every ounce of strength I had. He pulled back, lifting my chin up and tucked a loose lock of hair behind my ear.

"Are you okay? You were screaming." His hand cupped my cheek, his other arm still wrapped around me.

"I was dreaming. It was horrible. There were fir trees. The sun went behind a cloud and he bit you." I was rambling, still breathing heavily from the state the dream left me in. "I don't understand how he was out in the daytime, unless it had something to do with the sun being hidden. He took you from me."

"Who took me from you?" Kane pulled me tighter against his chest so my lips were close to his ear.

"Rolando," I whispered, and saw Kane shudder at the mention of the ruler of the underworld's name.

I didn't shy away from Kane's touch as he continued to hold me and caress my back with his fingers. For some reason I couldn't

quite grasp, there was comfort being in his arms. The previous day, he'd simply been a stranger in a restaurant, but now as we flew to somewhere unknown, he was so much more.

The dream left me shaking. There had been something familiar about the clover field, like I'd been there before. In fact, the dream left me suffering from a major case of déjà vu, something that was happening more often in Kane's presence.

I still wanted to believe that everything he'd told me was bogus. I wanted to go back to my boring life of following leads and writing good stories for the local paper, but that was impossible. Every time I closed my eyes another vision of us filled my mind, and I was sure it was because of the pendant that hung around my neck, but I refused to take it off. Every sign pointed to the fact that Kane was meant for me, no matter the place and time, he was mine.

"Why is it so dark in here?" I took notice that the windows had been covered over with some type of thick, black material. An old movie played on the flat screen, creating a soft glow that gently lit the cabin area of the plane.

"The sun has risen outside, and unfortunately my condition doesn't permit me to enjoy it." He shrugged. "So, I've learned how to live comfortably without it."

"Don't most vampires sleep during the daylight hours?" I ran a piece of his hair through my fingers, surprised at how soft it was. I thought of my own shortened locks, and for the briefest of seconds, was actually jealous of him.

"We sleep during the day more out of boredom than necessity, especially at my age." He mimicked my behavior and ran his hand through my hair. "I need minimal sleep to function, so I nap here and there to get it. I don't have a set schedule."

I didn't press the issue because it wasn't exactly a thrilling topic, and instead, I opened my mind to him, there was no point in hiding the things I discovered while I was sleeping.

"You remember." Kane moved, bracing himself above me as he looked into my eyes with joy.

"Some things. So, now we need to discuss why you sought me out again, and how you think I can help you." In my opinion, it was safer to discuss the details while we were miles above land, away from the possibility of being overheard verbally or mentally by anyone other than the pilot.

"I already told you once, I didn't seek you out. I'd planned on staying away from you this time, to spare us both the heartache." He moved back and helped me sit so we could talk easier. "Rolando fears that Nicolette is going to bring harm to our quiet existence. I'm a bounty hunter of sorts, for vampires. He hired me to capture her, and if need be, kill her. Unfortunately, she's been dragging me in circles, until I caught wind she'd be at the diner, and you already know the rest."

"I ruined your chances of capturing her that night."

"No, you've given me hope." He ran his thumb across my bottom lip. "Rolando's goons followed the two of you when you left the restaurant. That's why she brought you back, but she'll contact you again."

"If Rolando is so powerful, why does he need you to capture this renegade?" I didn't understand how the underworld worked. "Why doesn't he just call for her and take care of it himself."

"I don't know." Kane frowned, looking as if he wished he thought of that on his own. "I guess he wanted it to seem like he wasn't behind it."

"She obviously knows he's behind it, or she wouldn't have fled from those guys who were chasing us." Maybe it was a little smug on my part, but I was enjoying that I could think of angles Kane probably hadn't thought of.

"It doesn't matter." He seemed a little agitated, his hands clenched into two tight fists at his sides as he spoke to me. "With me suddenly out of town, and her having no knowledge that you and I know each other, she'll be ready to meet with you again."

"If we're out of town, how will I meet with her?" I wasn't following Kane's train of thought.

"We're not going to be gone forever, and she won't call right away. She's up to something, and we have to make sure we have a plan in action to capture her." There was a look in Kane's eye I hadn't seen before; perhaps he had a mischievous side after all.

"We?" I asked, wondering why he made us sound like a team.

"I told you I need your help, therefore we are a team." He smiled, and I resisted the urge to roll my eyes.

"Why do you think Rolando was at the airport?" His presence before our departure had really gotten under my skin. "How do you know he isn't working with Nicolette to get rid of you?"

“That doesn’t make any sense.” Kane looked at me as though I’d lost my mind.

“It makes perfect sense to me. Think about it, Kane. He hires you to capture someone he could catch himself easily, and she just happens to be someone I’m also in contact with. We’re thrown together again in a lifetime where you vowed to leave me alone.” I paused, watching his facial expression change. “What if she was just a decoy to get us together?”

“Rolando is my maker.” I’d seen that in the vision and as I thought of everything else I’d seen, my chest became tight as my palms moistened. “He would never deceive me that way.”

“Kane, he created you in anger. He wanted to separate us.” I covered my mouth with my hand. I hadn’t meant to speak about what I’d seen in the dream out loud.

“Jealousy is a very malicious emotion, Gabriela. Rolando couldn’t handle the fact that we had something he could never possess—love. That’s why he took my life, but he didn’t understand that death would not be the end for us.” Kane stood, and pulled me off the bed. “He didn’t anticipate you’d still love me as a monster. You kept your love for me even after he changed me because we have the power of the bloodstone, and that was something he had no knowledge of when he killed me.” He touched the pendant and its warmth grew against my skin. “Rolando has had a long time to rid himself of me, if that was what he wished. I don’t think I’m what he’s after. He has bigger fish to fry right now, starting with Nicolette and ending with the demons of hell who want to rise against us and all of humanity.”

I couldn’t shake the feeling that Rolando was after more than just a newly turned vampire. I could feel deep within me what Kane was trying to ignore, Rolando was out to get him. What I didn’t understand was why, and even more than that—why now?

The plane began to vibrate uncontrollably, and I didn’t have a chance to say anything before Kane put me in one of the seats at the table and strapped me in. He moved quickly toward the door that would take him to the pilot. He had to feel the fear radiating off me.

I tried not to focus on what was happening around me, my apprehension of flying was worse than any other phobia I possessed, and the trembling plane was only increasing my level of anxiety. I thought of the things Kane had told me, and something deep in my

gut told me Rolando was the one we needed to watch out for, not Nicolette or some rebel demons. I had nothing more than the feelings I experienced when his name came up in conversation, or the way I'd felt when I'd seen him in the shadows at the airport, but I knew deep down inside myself that Kane was in more danger than he was aware of.

The vibration began to subside as Kane made his way back to me. He sat in the seat across the table and buckled the belt on his lap. "We'll be landing in a few minutes. David apologizes for frightening you; he hit a patch of turbulence."

The position of the plane changed causing butterflies in my stomach as we began to make our descent from the sky. I was looking forward to being on solid ground again, and I wanted to know where Kane was taking me. "I'm fine." I lied, trying to hide my inner turmoil from him. "How are you going to get off the plane if it's daylight outside?"

"I have my ways. Try to relax, Gabriela. Where we're going, we don't have to worry about anything." He reached across the table to take my hand. "No one will bother us, no one will spy on us, and we can formulate a plan on how to take care of business back home."

"Great." I tried to sound enthusiastic, but deep down I was more worried than ever.

Chapter Six

Traveling with Kane during the daylight hours was complicated to say the least. The plane pulled into a private garage area at the airport, one that looked like the dead of night inside once the large door was pulled shut. A limo was waiting there for us with the same dark window coverings that had been inside the plane.

David, the pilot I'd been briefly introduced to while exiting the plane, wasted no time in unloading our luggage and tossing it in the trunk of the limo. Kane ushered me off the aircraft in a swift movement and shut the door of the car after he climbed in beside me. If nothing else, the man had money and knew how to travel in style. I could get used to living in the lap of luxury, except I didn't think I could handle having a vampire for a husband. The man owned planes, limousines, and the house we pulled up to after a short ride from the airport couldn't be described as anything other than a mansion.

Daylight was fading by the time we reached his estate, but it still wasn't dark enough for Kane to be able to exit the car safely. He edged away from the door, where no light would touch him when it was opened and waited. David came around and quickly helped me out; shutting the door as soon as I was far enough away.

"What about Kane?" I asked as he grabbed the bags from the trunk and began pushing me towards the house.

"He'll be along shortly. In the meantime, I'll get you settled in and show you around." David seemed to be struggling a little with the luggage.

I took the time to really look at him. David seemed middle-aged with hair that was beginning to gray and a moustache in dire need of trimming. His eyebrows looked like one straight line across his forehead, a true unibrow. His eyes were set close together and appeared small behind the glasses he wore. His nose was a little too large, his cheeks round and rosy, with thin lips set on top of a pointed chin. The man should have looked a mess, but his features worked on his chubby face, and though he wasn't handsome, he wasn't terrible to look at either.

He wore a t-shirt tucked into a pair of khakis which were a little too tight, showing he had a little extra weight around his middle,

and where I originally thought I'd see loafers, sneakers adorned his feet.

"How long have you known Kane?" I asked as David sat a suitcase down to open the large wooden door with a key from his pocket.

"I've known Kane a long time. I met him in college, and he's the one who paid for my flight school. I was supposed to be a lawyer." He laughed. "Kane said he needed someone he could trust fully to be his travel coordinator. No matter what the hour, if he calls, I come." David stepped aside to let me enter the house first.

"What about your family? Are you married? Children?" I didn't pay attention to the beauty around me, but focused on the man who was now lifting the luggage over the threshold and placing it just inside the door.

"My wife understands that my job brings in a steady paycheck regardless of how many hours I actually put in every week. She's learned to deal with the sudden trips out of town, and the rare but sometimes necessary late night phone calls." He put his hands on the small of his back and pushed his stomach out to stretch. "Our children are all grown now, away at college, but even when they were home, this job didn't take away from my life with them. If anything, Kane's generosity gave me more time than I probably would have been given to spend with them from working the court system."

"What did you do when you found out about Kane's condition?" I wasn't sure how much David knew, and didn't want to come out and ask him straight out how he liked working for a vampire.

He laughed. "That's a great way to put it. I'm fully aware of what Kane is, Gabriela. I know he's not allergic to the sun." He continued to chuckle as he started for the stairs. "Come on, I'll show you up to your room."

I glanced again towards the door, wondering how much time Kane was going to spend sitting in the car before he'd be able to get out and walk the short distance into the house. My stomach let out a small growl, but against the silence around us, it was loud enough that David heard.

"Maggie should have dinner ready for us by the time you get unpacked. I guess Kane failed to feed you on the plane." David laughed again. "He has a tendency to forget things like that. He's a

creature of habit, and he doesn't usually spend much time in the company of humans." He turned left at the top of the stairs and led me to a set of double doors at the end of the long hallway.

"What do you mean he doesn't spend much time with humans?" I was curious.

"He's kind of a loner." David didn't elaborate, and I didn't press the issue. "Here you are. My room is on the other side of the staircase. I'll meet you by the stairs in fifteen minutes." He sat the luggage down and turned to go in the opposite direction.

I nodded. "David, where are we? Geographically, I mean."

"That's for Kane to tell you. I've been sworn to secrecy," he said with humor in his voice.

"Okay then, one last question. Where's Kane's room?" David simply smiled and continued walking away from me. I looked again at the double doors. *Oh hell.*

I knew he was in my head before his words filled my mind. "Don't worry, I'll be sleeping in one of the guest rooms. The master suite is for you while you stay here." There was sincerity in his voice, sweetness, but above all that sat a gentle pull of sadness.

"Kane, I am not taking over your room. I'm sure it's been specifically put together for your needs. I'll use a guest room."

"No." Kane pulled out of my head, and though I tried to reach him again, he didn't respond. The man could be such a stubborn, distanced ass when he wanted to be.

I pushed open the double doors and thought for sure I'd just died and gone to heaven. The walls were the palest blue I'd ever seen, and the fluffy white carpet made me eager to sink my toes into it. I slipped off my heels before stepping across the threshold into the room, leaving them and the luggage in the hallway.

The bed, with a king-size, white wooden frame, was the focal point of the large room, sitting off to the left by a large bay window. The gold fabric hanging down from the canopy portion of the bed was sheer and sparkly, matching the border in the room perfectly. It made the bed look fit for a king, not a vampire. The bedding and pillows were made of shades of blues, gold, and white that matched the rest of the room. I couldn't resist touching it, noticing the silky textures, and wondered if Kane had ever heard of simpler fabrics, like cotton.

I pushed the golden strands aside and climbed on top the pool of silk and stretched out. The window was covered with light-

blocking gold curtains, a special feature I knew the room would contain for when Kane slept, the sun was shone. I personally would have thought no windows would have been simpler, but would have made for a less attractive room, and Kane seemed to like beautiful things.

I wondered what his fascination with me was because I was far from beautiful. I had a pretty face thanks to my mother and her genes, but I was on the short side and even after dropping two sizes in my attempt to capture Xavier's attention, I was still a little curvier than most of my friends. The way Kane looked at me, you'd think I was the most exquisite thing he'd ever laid his eyes on.

I pulled the luggage in from the hallway and placed it on the ground in front of the armoire so I could easily unpack. The bag with my name on the tag contained a mixture of clothing. There were jeans, t-shirts, dress slacks with button-down blouses, and at least six pairs of shoes. There were also bra and panty sets in every color of the rainbow, and a few slinky pieces of lingerie, which I credited to Kane's wishful thinking that I would remember how much I loved him and invite him to bed me. Kane's bag was much smaller, hardly containing any clothes and when I opened the left side of the armoire I realized he already possessed a fairly large wardrobe, and that he must visit this house often.

I unpacked quickly; putting everything where it was needed and stacked the emptied luggage bags under the bed. I walked toward the bathroom, and felt another wave of excitement when I saw the room was an exact replica of the one at the warehouse. The only difference was this one had a large whirlpool style bath. I understood quickly why there had been no personal items inside the luggage, the bathroom was fully stocked with the things I would need, including my favorite perfume. I opened the bottle and breathed in deep. *How had Kane known?* I could get used to being treated so luxuriously.

I heard a light tap on the bedroom door, and found David standing on the other side. "Ready for dinner?"

I nodded.

"I need to warn you about Maggie, before we go downstairs." His voice was a barely audible whisper.

"Okay." I looked at him with questioning eyes. "Should I be concerned?"

He took me by the arm and we began walking toward the stairs. “She’s very protective of Kane, no, extremely would be a better word. She will come on strong, you will feel like she’s trying to tear you apart, but don’t let her get under your skin. Under her over protectiveness, she really is a sweet old lady.”

“How old is she?” I was thinking little white-haired lady as we stepped off the last stair as David led me toward the kitchen.

“Over two thousand years old.” He didn’t crack a smile, and gently pulled me along when I stopped to gawk at him. “She looks barely older than you, but don’t be fooled. She’s been around the block a few times.”

“She’s, um, like Kane?” I couldn’t believe what I’d just heard. I was about to be served dinner by a vampire that even surpassed Kane in age, but I wasn’t supposed to let her get under my skin? That would be so much easier said than done.

David pulled me into the kitchen. Maggie had her back to us, focusing on what she was cooking on the stove. Her hair was fire engine red and in tight ringlets down her back, the tips touching her rear. She was thin, dressed in a pair of black yoga style pants, and a white t-shirt which read *Bite Me* when she turned to face us, and I had to suppress a giggle.

Her skin looked like smooth porcelain, and her eyes were a shade of green that looked like a cross between emerald and sapphire. Her cheekbones were high; her lips full and naturally crimson. Her hair was tucked behind her ears which adorned a pair of black cross earrings. *There goes that theory out the window.* She looked like a goddess, beautiful beyond words, and I couldn’t believe she was as old as David said.

“I hope you like seafood.” Her voice carried a deep accent and I tried to place what it was. “I’ve made a delectable alfredo.” She reached into the oven and removed a pan of bread. My stomach rumbled as the smell of butter and garlic hit my nose. “I’ll take that as a yes.” She smiled. “David, will you set the table while I finish this up?”

“Sure, Mags.” David walked over and pulled plates from the cupboard. There was no point in questioning why he’d only gotten two down, Maggie and Kane didn’t need to eat.

I wondered when Kane would take time to feed again. He had to be hungry; we'd been on the plane a long time. I was starving, but I didn't know exactly how often a vampire needed to find sustenance.

As Kane and Maggie bustled around the kitchen, I stood in the doorway, literally twiddling my thumbs, unsure of what to do. I was out of place, a stranger among friends, and wondered what was taking Kane so long. I could see out the windows and it was dark enough that he should have already entered the house. Anxiety began swelling inside me from his absence.

I focused on Maggie again, watching her move with ease and grace around the kitchen. *What would it be like to stay so young and beautiful forever, to never age?* I was intently staring at her when I heard her speak.

"She looks the same." Her voice was soft, but she wasn't talking to David, her lips weren't moving at all. "I don't know how you do it, Kane, keep finding her time after time." She glanced at me, and I smiled knowing she couldn't tell I was overhearing the conversation.

I wasn't sure how the mind-reading thing worked, and I wondered if Kane was allowing me to be privy to the conversation through him or if I had somehow managed to get into Maggie's head on my own. Regardless, I was enjoying their banter back and forth. It seemed so normal.

"I'll be in shortly." I heard Kane tell her. "I'm finishing up my meeting with Roman." He seemed to be fading in and out as he spoke. "And, Maggie, be nice. I wouldn't want to be angry with you on my first night back." I heard her laugh, and the conversation ended, leaving a buzzing effect in my head, like a television whose programming ended in the middle of the night.

I wondered who Roman might be, and why Kane hadn't told me about having a meeting with him. *Are they conducting a meeting in the limo?* I tried not to let my irritation show on my face.

"Come sit." Maggie motioned to a chair at the small table. "Don't worry, I don't bite."

I looked at David and when he smiled I took the seat she offered. I sipped the glass of water that was sitting in front of me, my throat suddenly dry from the thought that I would have to make polite dinner conversation. Maggie filled my plate with the seafood medley

she created, and took a seat next to me. I took a bite, pleased that the combination of flavors was more than satisfying.

"This is really good." Maggie smiled, and David nodded while shoving another heaping fork full into his mouth. I figured David probably didn't leave too many meals unfinished. "Maggie, how many times have we met?"

"Oh, I lost count years ago. I've known you almost as long as Kane has." She smiled, her eyes going distant as if she were trying to remember something. David said nothing, just continued to eat, politely accepting another spoonful when Maggie scooped it onto his plate.

"Are we friends or enemies?" I asked, unable to really read her. There was a slight edge to her tone that told me she might not be my biggest fan where Kane was concerned.

She laughed, deep and throaty as if I'd just said the funniest thing she'd heard. "We are friends, Gabriela." She reached out to pat my hand. "I gave up on expecting anything more from Kane when I found out about his situation."

"By situation you mean me, right?" I didn't like being referred to as a situation.

"Precisely." She smiled wide enough that I saw just a glimpse of fangs, and felt a chill slide through my body. "Never letting him change you is unfair to him you know."

"No, I don't know." I wanted to change the subject, not liking the tone she took with me, but I was not one to back down from a good argument. "Why don't you enlighten me?"

She stood to look out the French doors. "Every time he loses you to the death's cold grip, he mopes around for years like a small child whose best friend moved away. Then when he is finally getting back to normal, when he can smile without feeling guilty about not being sad, you show up again and the whole cycle restarts." She crossed her arms over her chest as she turned to look down at me.

"I didn't ask for this to happen to us." I was frustrated, but remembered what David had told me about her ability to come on strong, to try to break me, and I refused to let that happen.

"Neither did he." She sat down again. "I just wish, in one of these times together, that you would at least consider the possibility of becoming one of us. Eventually Kane will become too weak to fight off death without you and he will succumb to it."

I had felt the strength of Kane's love in the few memories I'd regained. When I played the scenes through my head I could feel what true happiness was like, but even looking at Maggie with all her beauty didn't take away the ill feeling about becoming undead. It was not a choice I could consciously make.

I decided it was time to talk about what we were facing now, and Maggie and I could continue discussing Kane's ability to live without me at another time. "Maggie, how much trouble is Kane in?" I asked meeting her eyes one more.

"I'm not sure what you mean." She was playing dumb and that was fine, but I would break through her barrier before dinner was over or Kane showed up, whichever happened first.

"I think you know exactly what I mean." I continued to stare, making sure I didn't so much as blink. "I'm not buying that we took a private jet to who knows where because he just wanted to get away for a few days. I think we're hiding from someone or something while he figures out what is really going on back home."

"If you know so much already, why are you asking me?" She didn't look away, and broke off a small piece of garlic bread, popping it into her mouth. "What?" She asked when I fixed my gaze on her mouth as she chewed. "We can eat when we want to."

Interesting. I hadn't seen Kane even sip water. Maybe he had no desire to eat food.

I focused back on our conversation again. "I'm asking because he won't tell me anything. I know there is some trouble with renegade demons, but not how much. I know that Nicolette has caused quite a stir with the activities she's been involved in, and that Rolando wants her captured and possibly killed." I paused and took a long swallow of water. "What doesn't make sense to me is why I've been whisked off to an unknown location where I'm supposed to relax like none of this craziness is going on around me." Maggie said nothing. "I also don't understand how I am supposed to help in all of this. I know nothing about demons except what I've seen in movies, and in those, nothing short of an exorcism would send them packing. I don't have any special powers, and I'm basically clueless in the underworld hierarchy."

David squirmed in his seat, obviously uncomfortable with the conversation going on around him. "Would you like some more, David?" Maggie kept her voice sweet as she scooped another healthy

helping of food onto his plate. She didn't really respond to anything I'd said, but asked me a question instead. "Do you know where you are, Gabriela?"

"No. It seems Kane wants to keep that little detail hidden from me for the time being. Would you like to maybe tell me where I am and why?" I took another bite.

"Not a chance." Maggie laughed. "I don't need to get on Kane's bad side. He'll be here soon enough, and I'm sure before the night is over and you're tucked away in bed, you'll have all your answers."

"He hasn't exactly been free with information so far." I faced her again. "I've seen the things this stone has shared with me." I picked up the pendant and held it where she could see. "But I still don't understand it all, and I think I've been handling everything fairly well so far. I've played nice when I could have kicked and screamed and fought him every step of the way. I've had moments where I've been caught up in the romance of the story, and on the plane, I remembered a crucial moment in my relationship with Kane. I'm frustrated, nervous as hell, and more than anything scared to death."

Maggie surprised me by reaching out and taking my hand. "Everything will come back to you. I'm positive this place is going to bring memories back, more than just the romance. This is Kane's home, Gabriela, where he's from originally." She continued to hold my hand in hers. "I can feel your emotions, something else is bothering you."

I hadn't been expecting her kindness or her insightfulness of my emotions, especially after our banter back and forth about Kane. Perhaps that was her gift, Kane could read minds and maybe Maggie could read a human's emotional state. I was still unclear on a lot of the happenings in their world, and I did hope she was right. I hoped that I would get all my memories back about the past and know enough to help them.

"I don't think the demons are the real threat. I believe they're a decoy for what is really happening." David got up to put his plate in the sink, and I lowered my voice. "I feel Rolando and Nicolette are behind everything or at least Rolando. I imagine they're out to get rid of Kane. For some reason that I haven't figured out yet, he poses a threat to him."

“What makes you feel this way?” Maggie rubbed her thumb across my knuckles.

“It was the way Rolando showed up at the airport. Kane didn’t notice, but Rolando looked at him with hatred in his eyes.” She looked toward the French doors like she’d heard something, but then focused back on my face. “I think the vampires are controlling the demons instead of being afraid of them like Rolando claims, and I sense he wants to expose the existence of your kind. I think Rolando is on a power trip and wants to, not to sound really stupid, but I believe he wants to take over the world.”

Maggie’s lips were pursed in a thin, straight line across her face. I’d hit a nerve, or maybe I’d opened her eyes to an option she hadn’t thought of. I just wanted her to say something, anything, to let me know that I wasn’t crazy.

“Why do you care? You aren’t even sure you believe in any of this?” She motioned around her to make her point.

“I care, because despite my circumstances of basically being held hostage by Kane, I have feelings for him, strong ones. I know they were put inside me from the necklace, and they might not even be real, but I can’t help but care.” I crossed my arms over my chest. “Besides, I have a horrible sick feeling in my stomach every time Rolando crosses my mind, and seeing him before we left only heightened that feeling.”

“All of those assumptions based on a simple, human feeling, how absurd.” Maggie rolled her eyes, but I knew she believed me. I’d seen it in her eyes even when she’d tried to mask it from me.

I didn’t respond to her rude remark. Instead, I continued to nibble on my food, not really hungry anymore, but I needed to keep my energy level up since I had no idea what I might be subjected to next. Despite Maggie’s control issues, and her trying to get the upper hand in our conversation, I had the strangest feeling that we were going to be the best of friends.

Chapter Seven

With dinner over and the kitchen cleaned up thanks to mine and David's teamwork, and Kane still MIA, I excused myself to go upstairs. My original thought was to simply change into some pajamas and climb into bed, but as I stood brushing my teeth in the bathroom, the whirlpool tub looked too inviting to pass up.

Still brushing my teeth, I slipped over and turned the water on full blast, as hot as I could make it. I found some bubble bath under the sink, lavender and chamomile and poured a generous helping into the water, the sweet smell filling the room almost instantly.

Growing up, my mother was a firm believer that lavender and chamomile calmed the spirit. She'd put it in my bath numerous times, and when I became a teenager, she sometimes slipped it into my tea when I couldn't sleep. As an adult, I had carried on the tradition. I wondered if Kane knew that, and had put it in the bathroom just for me or if it was simply coincidence.

I finished with my teeth and rinsed the brush before placing it into the holder. I found towels in the closet beside the shower and pulled out two, sitting them on the floor beside the tub for easy access when I was finished. I slipped out of my clothes and into the water, which instantly warmed my skin. I slid completely under, wetting my hair and then positioned myself so only my head was above the water line.

The bath was exactly what I needed to take my mind off everything that was happening around me. I let my shoulders relax as I floated in the bubble filled tub. I closed my eyes and opened up my mind. I was no longer afraid of Maggie finding her way in; she'd given up halfway through dinner when she realized I wasn't letting my guard down for her. After our talk, I knew she wouldn't try to pry again knowing I'd told her all I knew.

The house was almost too quiet, but it was the perfect atmosphere to let myself drift off. I began thinking about Kane, how I shouldn't be so comfortable with a stranger.

What I had told Maggie was true; my life was ruled by feelings. Even as a small child, if something didn't feel right, it usually wasn't. I had learned early on to follow my gut instincts, no matter how foolish or prudish it made me look. As a reporter,

following your instincts was sometimes the difference between a good story and a bad one, what made me or broke me. In my case, it usually made me and though my ladder climb had been a slow process, I was making progress at the local paper and soon I'd be headlining at Graven.

The things I read about in Graven magazine were mild compared to what was happening around me. Kane's world would be the perfect piece to write to get me in the door, but could I betray him after the memories I'd witnessed in my mind? If he hadn't saved me from Nicolette, I'd probably be dead right now, a dreary thought but true. Reality was that I no longer knew what I wanted. My world had been disrupted by vampires and even if Kane held true to his word and could let me go after everything was taken care of, I wasn't sure I wanted him to.

I was still convinced that I was going to come out of my current situation with the upper hand though. I would help Kane, but in return he would owe me a favor, and I would cash in on it when the time was right. I didn't know yet what I would ask for, but I had plenty of time to think of something good since he was going to be around for a long time, at least for the rest of my lifetime anyway.

I dipped my head back under the water and stayed beneath the surface, holding my breath while the water washed over me, clearing my mind. I didn't hear Kane slip into the bathroom, but I saw a shadow fall over me. I sat up abruptly wiping the bubbles off my face, and opened my eyes to find Kane standing beside the tub staring down at me. I quickly dipped back below the surface so the bubbles covered the parts of my body I didn't think he needed to see.

"Don't you know how to knock?" I scolded. "Turn around or something." I reached down after he turned his back to me, and grabbed one of the towels off the floor, wrapping myself in it since he was no longer looking at me. I picked the second towel up and wrapped it around my hair.

"I did knock, but you obviously didn't hear me." He sounded ashamed of walking in on me, and I cringed, my cheeks on fire from yelling at him. "I just came up to tell you that Maggie and I are going out for a little while, and you should get some rest."

"Kane, we need to talk. I don't appreciate you bringing me here, dumping me off on David all evening, and now you're running off with Maggie and leaving me alone again. For someone who

supposedly cares so much about me, you have a funny way of showing it.” I tried to get past him to go into the bedroom, but Kane grabbed me gently, forcing me to stop and look at him.

“I need to feed, and I’m pretty sure you’re not going to volunteer to be dinner. That’s the only reason I’m leaving you again.” He tilted my chin up so his eyes, which I’d been trying hard to avoid, met mine. “I won’t be gone long, and I really don’t think you’d enjoy coming with us.”

I grimaced at the thought of watching him drink someone’s blood. It made me nauseous just thinking about it. “You’re right about that.”

“Try to get some sleep. Tomorrow will be a busy day.” He smiled.

“Oh?” I looked at him, wondering what he had up his sleeve. “Why’s that?”

“You’ll have to wait and see. I have a surprise for you.” He bent quickly and kissed my lips. I didn’t pull away. The warmth that filled me felt too good to walk away from. It was like walking outside and being kissed by the sun after a rain shower.

“Oh goody.” I muttered when he finally ended the kiss. “We still need to talk, Kane.” I said as he walked me to the bed. “I won’t forget.”

“I don’t expect you to. I’ll answer anything you ask of me.” He kissed me one last time before leaving me alone in the bedroom.

I’d never been the jealous type, but as I slipped out of the towel and climbed under the covers, I found myself questioning Kane’s relationship with Maggie. I reached up and pulled the other towel from my hair, tossing it onto the floor too and threw my head back against the pillows. I lay staring at the ceiling, thinking of how easily it would be to escape while no vampires were in the house, but instead of jumping from the bed and running, I closed my eyes and prayed for peaceful sleep.

* * *

I woke with something hard pressing against the bottom of my rear. At first, I thought I’d backed up against the wall beside my bed at home, but then I remembered I wasn’t home. I was in the master suite of Kane’s house. I reached behind me and ran my hand down the hardness, realizing my fingers were not touching the wall but brushing against the skin of a well-endowed penis which explained

what had been poking me. Arousal found its way to my core from the contact but I didn't give into it. Instead I turned, sitting up quickly to discover that sometime after I'd fallen asleep, Kane had made his way back home and was now sharing the large bed with me.

I didn't scream, not sure if he would wake up in a frenzy and bite me. I really needed to ask if there was some type of manual I could have to read on vampires. I slowly moved away from him and slid off the bed to stand and watch him. Remembering my own nakedness, I grabbed a t-shirt from the armoire and slipped it over my head.

"Kane?" I said his name barely above a whisper as I re-approached the bed, but received no reaction from him. "Kane?" I called a little louder, but still no movement. I reached out and poked him with my finger, same result. "Kane!" I screamed causing him to sit straight up in bed.

He rubbed his eyes and turned to look at me. "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" I repeated. "You're naked in my bed."

He glanced around. "Oh, shit."

"What do you mean, oh shit?" I asked, giving him my best "you better have a good explanation for this" look.

"I thought I was dreaming when I climbed in here last night. I meant to use the room next to this one. I'm sorry, Gabriela, I didn't mean to invade your space." Kane crawled out of bed, and I saw every inch of his well-chiseled body, *every* immaculate, chiseled inch.

"Kane." I said, barely able to breathe let alone talk from the sight of him standing there in the buff.

"Yes?" he asked with a crooked smile on his face.

"Do you think you could put on a robe or wrap a sheet around you or something?" I was trying not to stare, but the man's body was beyond anything I could have imagined, and I couldn't pull my eyes away. Every single muscle was toned to perfection, it was no wonder he was so strong. I eyed his manhood again, amazed at his length and size.

Kane, didn't appear embarrassed at all by my gawking, and simply walked across the room in his birthday suit. "I'm going to get a shower. If seeing me naked bothers you, you might want to stay in here until I'm finished." He laughed, disappearing around the corner, and I heard the water begin to pour from the shower.

I threw myself on the bed. I didn't know anyone else as cocky as him, not even Xavier would be so bold with me. Of course, Xavier probably wouldn't ever speak to me again after the way I'd treated him. Maybe someday, I'd be able to explain everything.

"You know you can't do that." I'd forgotten that I'd let my guard down.

"I can do whatever I want, Kane. You're not my boss." I heard him laugh, and I didn't like the mocking tone. "Why aren't you dead to the world right now anyway? Don't vampires sleep all day long while the sun is shining?" That's what he'd done the day he'd locked me up in the warehouse.

"You woke me up, and it's raining outside, so I don't have to worry about frying today. I slept quite peacefully last night. I'm well rested." I wanted to slap him, his sarcasm and arrogance was annoying as hell.

To sate my own curiosity, I went to the window and pulled the curtains back. Kane was right. The sky was a dark, gray mass of clouds with not a single ray of sunshine in sight. Drops of rain splattered against the pane, and I could see it was still falling heavily from the sky, too. I went back and sat on the bed, not satisfied until Kane walked back in the bedroom, his lower body wrapped in a towel. Before his still-erect penis could lure me into another staring fit, and before he could say anything else to me, I slipped into the bathroom to enjoy a hot shower of my own.

I took my time, hoping he'd be gone from the room when I was finished, but when I came out Kane lay on the bed. His shirt was unbuttoned exposing his chest. He wore jeans and his feet were bare. Something on the television held his focus, and I stood wrapped in a towel to see what was so fascinating. Seeing the news report on the screen, I sat on the edge of the bed to take it all in.

Kane's entire warehouse had been burned to the ground. I recognized the building on the news. Kane held the remote so tightly in his hand that I heard the crunch of plastic as it broke beneath his fingers. I could hear some of the thoughts buzzing through his head, and they weren't making me feel comforted at all. They were scaring the shit out of me.

"Kane, I'm sorry." I moved so I was angled toward him. I was afraid of him losing control. His eyes had darkened, and I could feel the anger emanating off him.

“That just intensifies my point of why we had to leave town. We’re safer here for now, but I’m not sure for how long. Maggie stressed some concerns to me last night about Rolando, and she might be onto something.” His eyes met mine. “Get dressed, something comfortable. I won’t allow this to ruin our day.”

So when I mentioned that Rolando might be the devil himself, Kane wasn’t moved, but if Maggie stressed concerns, it was worth taking into consideration. I didn’t want to, but had to admit to myself that stung. I would have to get some more time alone with Maggie, and soon. If she believed me, and I knew she did, then she could be the ally I needed to protect Kane.

I wanted to protect him, be there for him, and that was scarier than anything I’d been put through in the past few days. I didn’t want to love him, but I was falling hard. Looking at him lying back against the pillows with his shirt open made me want to snuggle against him, but thinking of having sex with him to wash away the pain of losing his warehouse proved it just wasn’t the right time.

I brushed it off and chose a plain white t-shirt, paired it with some blue jeans and a green hoodie. I found the sneakers I put in the armoire the previous day and slipped them on. Kane said I looked comfortable, and I was. He’d slipped from the room as I was getting dressed and I found him in the kitchen, along with David and Maggie who had put together a nice breakfast spread of fruit, yogurt, and scrambled eggs. I filled a plate and sat at the table.

Kane was filling them in on the destruction of his warehouse. He sounded so sad, and I reached over to take his hand with mine since I wasn’t sure how else to comfort him. He looked at me with curious eyes, but said nothing. I ate silently, taking in their conversation while making my own assumptions of what really happened to his warehouse.

Deep down, I knew it had been burned to the ground because of me, or my relationship with Kane, or maybe a combination of both. I also knew Rolando was behind it. I continued to listen to the chatter around me, hoping they wouldn’t ask my opinion.

“Did anyone besides Rolando know you were coming here?” Maggie looked tired, if that were possible for a person who was supposed to be undead, and her voice seemed nervous.

“No.” Kane responded. “Only Rolando knew of my plans to get away for a few days.”

“Then only Rolando knew you’re warehouse would be without protection, human or vampire.” Maggie frowned. “Kane, I know you don’t want to believe it, but the signs are all pointing to him.”

“I think we should switch planes.” David spoke up. “Rolando knew which plane we left with and if he had anything to do with the warehouse fiasco, then at least no one could notify him of your return if we take the other plane back.”

“That’s a good point, David, but I’m not sure why you guys are so determined to pin this on Rolando. I really think Nicolette is to blame, or Chadwick and his demon buddies.” This was the first time I’d heard that name mentioned, and I made a mental note to ask David just who this Chadwick guy was. If I were going to come up with a viable plan to save Kane and protect humanity as well, I needed to know all the players on the game board.

Maggie answered, meeting my eyes as she spoke. “Call it a feeling, Kane, but I think Rolando is up to something. It just doesn’t seem right that he would hire you to catch Nicolette when he has plenty of goons who could easily do the job, and how much did he tell you about this supposed demon uprising?”

Kane looked frustrated. “Not a lot. He stressed that Chadwick was getting restless again, that there had been a few demon attacks on some vampires in New Orleans, Memphis, and Atlanta. He was afraid they were moving north and that eventually they would come to our territory.”

“But have you witnessed any recent demon activity that would support his claims?” Maggie pressed on.

“No, but I’ve been unable to reach Chadwick to question him.” Kane frowned and glanced out the French doors.

I continued to pick at my fruit. It was good, definitely fresh, but my appetite wasn’t there. I could hear Maggie’s thoughts, feel her desperation, and I wanted to try to reach her mentally, but though I could read her thoughts, I still wasn’t sure I could direct mine towards her like I did with Kane. The bigger issue for me was that I didn’t want him to hear what I had to say to her.

“Maggie.” I pushed, but hit silence. Neither of them glanced in my direction, so at least I had been successful of not sending it to Kane. “Maggie.” I tried harder. She angled her head toward me, her eyes wide. “Wink your eye if you can hear me.”

Maggie winked, quickly. “Do you have something in your eye?” Kane asked as she pretended to wipe it with the back of her hand.

Maggie shook her head, and Kane glanced at me. I popped another piece of cantaloupe in my mouth and smiled. I could wear a mask just as easily as he could if I wanted to hide my emotions.

“I think Rolando torched Kane’s warehouse. If by some chance it wasn’t him, then it was Nicolette’s doing.” I spoke to her mind while nibbling at the remaining fruit in my bowl. Kane was talking to David about the plane, so he seemed occupied. “She was probably looking for me.” I continued. “Apparently I was to be her human sacrifice to Rolando for her freedom of the charges against her.”

“A new born like Nicolette wouldn’t have the means to do something to destructive, but Rolando, he could have easily done it.” Maggie pretended to listen to Kane as she filed her nails.

“Is there somewhere we can meet tonight to talk, away from you know who?” I had some questions I just knew she would answer more honestly than he would.

“We’ll go shopping later. Kane would be suspicious if I tried to barge in on his plans for today.” She smiled, and patted David on the back before getting up to start clearing away the breakfast dishes. I got up and helped, feeling like I should do something since she’d cooked food and didn’t even touch it.

David had feared that Maggie would be cruel to me, and yet I had only seen a soft side of her which I credited to her adoration of Kane. I glanced over at him, and he smiled at me, but his smile didn’t hold its usual cocky charm. I wondered what all had been ruined in the warehouse and if it was my fault for being there with him that caused the attack. I feared that having Kane in my life would upset my world, but I hadn’t taken into consideration what having me around again might do to his.

Chapter Eight

“Where are we going?” I asked Kane as he pulled me along up the large hill. If not for his strength, I would have fallen numerous times thanks to the wet grass. “I’m serious, my legs hurt.”

“Stop whining.” His tone was playful. “We’ll be there in less than a minute, and I promise it will be worth all the pain you’re feeling now.”

“Easy for you to say, you’re immune to human exhaustion.” Before I could stop him, Kane scooped me up into his arms and continued moving at a brisk pace up the large hill.

I was glad because unless there was a million dollars or my freedom on the other side of the hill, there wasn’t anything, in my opinion, worth the soreness I’d experience later. Even though Kane carried me the last few feet, I still had to walk back to the house when we were through with whatever he had planned. There was no way he was going to carry me the entire length back.

“Close your eyes,” Kane told me as we approached the top of the hill. I gave him my best you’ve got to be kidding look, but he just smiled. “Come on, humor me.”

At this point, what did I have to lose? I was pretty sure Kane hadn’t brought me out to the middle of nowhere to off me. I’d given up on thoughts of him harming me before we ever left his warehouse. I closed my eyes and waited. We stopped a few seconds later and Kane set me down on the ground.

“Okay,” he said excitedly, his voice more animated than usual while turning my body so I was facing a different direction. “Open your eyes now.” I could hear the smile in his voice as he said the words, and it made me feel like a child waiting to tear into a present.

I opened my eyes slowly and felt the rush as my breath escaped my lungs. Even under a sky of dark gray clouds, the clover field seemed to be illuminated. The ground below us, on the other side of the massive hill we’d climbed, was a luscious covering of clover with its tiny purple blossoms dancing in the light breeze. I wanted to take my shoes off and go running through the field, knowing the clover would feel soft against my toes.

“I’ll race you.” Before I knew what was happening, Kane was darting down the hill. I knew he wasn’t going as fast as he could, but

it was funny to watch him try to be slow like me. I slipped out of my socks and sneakers, holding them in my hands as I chased after Kane. I would probably end up with a nasty cold from running barefoot in the wet grass, but I couldn't resist.

I dropped my shoes at the bottom of the hill so I could focus more on catching Kane, and less on trying to run while holding my shoes. We were frolicking like school children, running in all directions throughout the clover, when I saw a sight that had me stopping dead in my tracks. Just beyond the field was a forest of pine trees, small ones about the size of Christmas trees. I turned in circles, taking in everything around me, knowing with all my heart that I'd been there before, not just in the dream I'd had on the plane, but in real life too. Kane stopped running and turned to look at me. He was waiting for me to say something about our surroundings, but I couldn't put into words what I was feeling inside.

The tears spilled down my cheeks. It was a natural reaction to the overwhelming feelings that were surging through me as the clover swished against my toes. This was not only a beautiful place, but a sad place. It was where Rolando had taken Kane from me for the first time, and in every lifetime, I lost him again as I met death.

Kane moved silently and wrapped his strong arms around my shoulders in an attempt to comfort me. I leaned back into him, allowing his closeness to soothe over the ugly feelings that were trying to surface from my thoughts of death and loss.

"Why would you bring me to such a sad place?" I asked, choking down a sob.

"This is home, Gabriela." He ran his hands down my arms.

I turned my body so I faced him. "Where are we? No jokes, no riddles."

"I told you, we're home." Kane placed a strand of my hair behind my ear. "In all our times together, I like your hair this way the best." It was off topic, but I still found it flattering.

I refused to let him change the subject that easily though. "I said no riddles, Kane. Where is home?" I crossed my arms over my chest and tilted my chin up so I could see his face better.

"Ireland."

It clicked. Maggie's accent and the subtle way Kane sometimes enunciated his words, though his dialect was weak

compared to hers. No wonder we had been on the plane for such a long time, we'd traveled across the entire Atlantic Ocean.

"This is your home, where you're from?" I continued to look at him, trying to see if there was anything in his eyes he was leaving unsaid.

"Our home. This is where we first met all those centuries ago. Our families were good friends, and we grew up together. We played here in the clover fields a lot, even as teenagers. We had our first real kiss over there among the pine trees." He smiled at the memory, and as the scene played out in my head I smiled, too.

"Playing hide and seek," I said after I realized I was sharing his mind. "You snuck up behind me, and when I turned around, you kissed me."

"That was it for us. We were inseparable after that day. Our parents were planning our wedding when Rolando showed up." I cringed at the mention of his name, remembering the vision I'd had and how cruelly he'd made me watch as he bled Kane among the trees and then fed him his blood. "If it weren't for your love and devotion, I would have been a ruthless killer. Our love saved us, Gabriela. Can you understand why I've been unable to let go? It doesn't matter how long I have to wait for you. You're my reason for living, for continuing on in this bleak existence."

I pressed closer to Kane allowing him to shelter me from the breeze that picked up around us. He carried me to where my shoes lay nestled in the grass.

"I understand that you think I'm your saving grace, Kane, but I'm just a girl." I wrapped my arms around myself, suddenly chilled to the bone. "You haven't lived all this time because of me. You've done it because you are strong and wanted to live."

"Yes, Gabriela, you are a girl, but you're not just any girl, you're mine. I know you feel more than you are letting on. I know you share my love, and when you're ready to open up to me, you will." He looked out past the field at the trees, and I noticed a darkness flash in his eyes. It caused me to shiver, and scared the shit out of me.

I got a sick feeling in my stomach and could sense that we were not alone in the field. Something was coming, but I didn't know where it was or how much time we had until it arrived. I looked at Kane, knowing from the way his eyes were darting around that he felt

the power in the air, too. There was no point in me trying to run, whatever it was moved much quicker than I ever could, and even with Kane's vampire speed, the power in the air told me we were outnumbered.

I saw movement within the trees, and what looked like four oversized men stepped out in the open. I knew they weren't human because humans don't glow and these guys were lit up like the fourth of July, but I wasn't sure what they were. I looked towards Kane for guidance as they didn't waste any time and came charging toward us. Kane pushed me behind him as he hit the first one with a force that sent the man flying back into the trees.

I didn't know what to do. Feeling helpless, I grabbed the pendant around my neck for comfort. It was flaming hot despite the chill around us, and when I touched it I saw in my head the power it held and what I needed to do. I stepped around Kane before he could stop me and held the bloodstone out, whispering a few words in a language I didn't know. A stream of red broke loose from the stone and hit the first man square in the chest. His body exploded, the pieces catching fire and vanishing on the ground below. Satisfaction filled me as I changed positions to work on taking out the other three.

I turned back to face Kane as another goon came running up behind me. When I could feel him almost at my back, I spun around and repeated my performance causing the man to disintegrate. Kane's eyes seemed to sparkled, his smile wider than I'd ever seen. I assumed this was because of my new found powers, and I smiled back, finally feeling like I brought something worthwhile to our vampire/human relationship. While he distracted the third man beast, I darted across the field towards the last one. He was hiding amongst the pine trees, but I could feel his negative energy and followed the trail. He jumped in front of me on the path and attempted to lunge at me, but I was quicker and struck him with the pendant's power before he was close enough to actually touch me. Like the other two, he was eliminated leaving only the stench in the air where he'd been.

Knowing there was only one left, I circled back around, heading for where Kane had been keeping him occupied. The man held Kane down, pinning him to the ground as he sucked the energy from his body. I didn't waste any time but ran full force and for the final time, released the power that I had within me. I didn't miss and the man exploded in the air above Kane. I managed to reach Kane

before I collapsed on the ground beside him, my legs weak and my own energy wiped out. Kane didn't move except to turn his head to face me. We lay there, looking at each other for a few moments, silently reminiscing on the events that had just taken place.

"Would you like to explain to me what just happened?" I asked, trying to slow down my breathing.

"You kicked some major demon ass, that's what happened." Kane reached over and took my hand in his. "I don't know about you, but I'm drained. We'll need to call Maggie for help."

"Okay, so call her." I closed my eyes and waited, but when I didn't hear him move to pull out his phone, I opened them again.

"You'll have to reach out to her here." He pointed to his head. "I didn't bring my phone and I don't have the strength to do anything right now. That last demon really drained my power." He closed his eyes. "I can't even talk to you telepathically and you're right beside me. I'd never be able to reach Maggie."

"That's what those things were? Demons?" He nodded, shutting his eyes. It explained their strange auras. "Why did they attack us?"

"I don't know." He frowned. "I thought we'd be safe here."

"In Ireland?" I asked feeling my own energy level continuing to deplete.

"Not just Ireland, but here in this clover field. I thought it would be the one place we'd be untouchable." He frowned again. "So much for my way of thinking."

I reached over and took his hand. "I'll try to contact Maggie, but what if I can't reach her?"

"We die." He said it so nonchalantly, and that scared me. Death was not something I took lightly.

I wondered if Kane knew I could speak to Maggie mentally and if he'd heard our conversation at the table just hours before, but pretended he hadn't. Maybe he was just making an educated guess that if I could reach him, I would be able to reach her, too. For all I knew, he might have knowledge of other things I could do that I was unaware of. Maybe I wasn't just a lowly human after all.

"Just think of Maggie in your mind, tell her what you need her to do and push hard. Make sure you get your message across the first time, you might not have enough energy to try again." He kept his eyes closed.

I opened my mind and called out to her. Kane was right and it took the last bit of energy I had. I focused hard, begging her to please come, and didn't stop until I heard her response that help was on the way. I looked up at the sky, thankful the cloud coverage was thick and Kane wasn't in any danger of exposure to the sun.

The ground was still damp and cold, and my body temperature dropped with each passing minute that she didn't arrive. I was more concerned about Kane and what the demon had done to him than I was about myself. A few warm blankets and I would be good as new, but who knew what the demon took or put inside Kane. I closed my eyes but fought the urge to sleep, and looked once again in his direction. His eyes were still closed, and though he seemed peaceful I could see the pain he was trying to hide written all over his face. Each wrinkle of his nose made my heart break.

"Do you need blood?" I asked sheepishly.

"No." Another tight squeeze of his eyes including a full nose wrinkle had me trying to sit up.

"I believe you're lying to me." Kane turned his face toward me, and I saw the hurt he was trying so desperately to hide. "You need to feed. Looks like I'm lunch today because there isn't anyone else here to donate to the save Kane's life fund."

"No." He was trying to be noble by being stubborn. That nobility radiated from him, but I knew he needed me, and though the thought of him drinking from me made me nauseous, another part of me wanted him to do it. I was eager to feel him drink from me, part of that came from remembering the last time he'd done it and how it made me feel.

"If you don't take my wrist and do it yourself, I'll use the pendant to cut my skin and I might slip and cut a main artery." I wasn't serious, not about slipping up anyway. I was, however, very willing to slice myself to entice him to feed.

"You wouldn't dare." He tried to sit up, but barely got his back off the ground before his strength gave out slamming his body back down.

"Oh, I would." I said. "It's obvious that demon did a number on you before I stopped him." I decided to play the only card I knew would break him. "Kane, you've just come back into my life. I can't afford to lose you again so soon. We have a mission to complete, together. I can't do it without you."

“I don’t want to hurt you.” His eyes showed a new emotion, sorrow. “I might not be able to stop myself, and if I killed you...”

“You won’t.” I was trying to be confident that he wouldn’t harm me even though I was unsure in his weakened state that he wouldn’t kill me. I picked my arm up and held my wrist out to him. “Let me help you.”

Kane pulled himself closer to me with the last bit of strength he had. He kissed my wrist gently, his lips creating the tingling sensation on my skin that his finger had once done to my own lips. He paused to look at me. “Close your eyes.” I did and the slight sting of his fangs pierced my skin moments before pleasure took over my entire body.

It started with a warming sensation, beginning at my wrist and slowly moving across every inch of my skin. It was like lying at the beach, the sun’s rays pouring down on me. The more Kane sucked, the more relaxed I became, and less aware of what he was doing to me.

I was floating somewhere between the realm of reality and flight of the imagination. I began envisioning Kane’s long hair cut short and spiky, more modern, and much sexier. I remembered the way his body looked when he’d climbed out of bed, and I fantasized about running my hands over his chest while his muscles quivered beneath my fingertips. I wasn’t sure if the thoughts were my own, or if the lustful feelings were coming from the blood exchange I was sharing with him. My already weakened state prevented my ability to block him from my mind, and I could feel his growing excitement as he shared my thoughts while continuing to drink from me.

My wrist began to throb and I wanted to tell Kane that he was hurting me, but I couldn’t find the words. All I could think about was sex, and I knew those thoughts were not all my own. I was growing weaker with each passing moment, and soon the lustful desires began to dissolve leaving behind overwhelming anxiety and fear. I knew I was going to die. I had trusted Kane to have control, and he was going to kill me.

The bright colors that had been swirling around us were growing dimmer, like daylight fading. He needed to stop drinking from me, but I had no control over my body to force him off me. Darkness began creeping into my mind.

I became detached from my body and then I was floating above the ground, looking down at myself as Kane still fed, fully engrossed in what he was doing and totally unaware that he was killing me. I saw Maggie approaching quickly, David holding his chest while huffing behind her slowly. I heard Maggie's voice, it seemed far away though she was just below me and I couldn't make out what she was saying. I wanted to call out to her, beg her to help me, but all I could do was watch.

A stream of light opened from the sky above and I was being pulled toward it. Time was running out and if Maggie couldn't stop him, I was going to be permanently separated from my body. My death would be Kane's fault, something he'd never be able to live with.

Chapter Nine

I focused my attention on the people on the ground below me. David stood back, unsure what to do as Maggie yelled at Kane who continued to ignore her. It was like watching a soap opera, the events unfolding in slow motion, and the outcome so predictable. The light from the sky was becoming almost blinding, and I was finding it harder and harder to fight against it.

I watched as Maggie stopped yelling and lunged at Kane, smashing into his body hard which forced him to drop my wrist. His mouth was covered in blood, my blood, and his eyes appeared glazed over like he was in a trance without having power over himself. I couldn't really be angry with him for what happened, not entirely, because he had warned me. I did think a vampire of his age would have more control, and I had been hoping his devotion to me would be enough to keep him focused, but I also didn't know what drinking from me was like for him.

I saw Maggie grab him by the shoulders and though her back was to me, the position of her hands told me she was holding his face and looking deep in his eyes. I tried to move closer, but the light had a firm hold on me. When she pulled back, nodding to David, Kane's face registered that the monster was gone. In its place was a sad representation of the man I'd spent the last two days with, and it saddened my heart to see him so devastated.

"Did I kill her?" He asked with clear desperation in his voice. "Tell me I didn't kill her, Maggie."

"She's not dead, Kane, but she's holding on by a thread. She's lost too much blood, and you'll have to change her." Maggie's voice was low, and I wasn't entirely sure I'd heard her correctly at first. "David, go back to the house and bring the car around to the other side of the field."

David nodded his face full of grief. I wanted to tell them all I wasn't dying, that there was no need to worry, and Kane didn't have to change me. I wanted to tell them those things, but I was unable to do anything but fight against the light that was growing stronger with each passing moment. Part of me wanted to simply give in and let it take over, but I'd never been a quitter and I wasn't about to play weak now.

“She’ll hate me.” Kane turned to look at my face. “As much as I’d love to share eternity with her, waited centuries to be given the chance, I can’t take her life away if there’s even a slim possibility she’ll pull through this.”

“There isn’t. Kane, her heart is slowing down even as we speak, and she’s barely breathing now. We have no time to do a transfusion to save her; I’d never make it back with the blood in time. Changing her is the only way.” Maggie knelt in front of him. “If you don’t do it, I will.”

“No.” There was anger in his voice, and I saw Maggie back off. “This is my fault, and if she’s going to hate anyone, then it has to be me. I can’t let you take the blame when I did this.”

I hated being trapped in place; the light was climbing further up my body, still trying to pull me away from the ground below. I watched Maggie hand Kane a blade which had been strapped to her thigh, well hidden beneath her flowing skirt. It seemed so like her to have it there, so natural, and if I had been able to laugh I would have.

Kane slit his wrist, only cringing slightly from the pain while Maggie held my head and opened my mouth to allow Kane to pour his blood down my throat. I should have been grossed out by what they were doing to me, but I was actually intrigued by the whole process and what he was attempting to do. Would I remember any of this when I woke up? Would I wake up?

The light start to ebb away from me, slowly, and I was finally able to move. I began to lower myself down closer to my body until I was hovering just above it. At first glance, there seemed to be no change, but then I noticed I my chest no longer rose and fell. I wasn’t breathing, but felt more alive than ever like I’d caught my second wind after a tiresome day. Whatever I was, a spirit or bodiless soul, I began to dissolve into a mist-like substance and was absorbed back into my skin where everything became a foggy haze.

* * *

Saying I was hot would be an understatement. I woke up feeling like my body was on fire, my blood boiling under my skin. My mouth was dry and every inch of my body felt tight, like it was stretched thin across my bones. I was stiff, sore and irritable.

If anyone had been in close proximity to me at that moment, I probably would have bitten their head off, literally. There was something wrong about my body, something different, but I couldn’t

quite put my finger on it. I just knew it felt strange. I needed water, cold and wet to soothe the burn in my throat.

I sat up, recognizing the bedroom as Kane's room. I couldn't remember how I got there; the last thing I could recall was offering my wrist to Kane in the clover field. I remembered feeling really good as he drank from me, and then the fog set in and my mind went hazy.

I lifted my arm and looked my wrist over. There were no marks, my skin was smooth without a single defect on it, and even the small wart that used to sit where my palm met my wrist was gone. I shrugged it off, thinking the memories I had might simply have been from a dream, and slipped out of bed. My vision was an issue as I made my way the few paces to the bathroom in the dark. I tried to wipe the sleep from my eyes as I walked, but no matter how much I rubbed, they didn't seem to clear up all the way. It felt like being drunk and unable to focus.

I made it to the sink with no major catastrophes and splashed water on my face. It felt good against my flaming skin, so I began rubbing it all over my body. I lifted my head when I heard the click of the bedroom door as someone came in. The water still ran in the sink as I waited for them to approach the bathroom where I hadn't bothered to turn on a light. Though I still couldn't see clearly, the form that filled the doorway was female and even the scent that caressed the air was feminine, vanilla with just a hint of citrus.

"You know there is a shower," Maggie said in her usual smartass tone. "It would probably be much easier than the whore bath you're attempting to take from the sink."

Her voice seemed really loud and the sound pierced through my ears causing me to reach up and cover them with my hands to try and stop the ache. She looked at me curiously, and when I was sure she wasn't going to speak again, I splashed water on my face, rubbing at my eyes hoping the fog would lift, and I'd be able to see clearly. I seemed to be fighting a losing battle, and no matter how much I rubbed, they remained blurred.

"Sorry," she whispered, stepping closer to me. "I forgot how bad everything is the first few days when you're trying to get used to your new heightened senses." She took my hands down away from my eyes and looked me over. "Gabriela, what color are my eyes?"

I squinted, tried pushing my face closer to hers only to smash into her nose. "I can't tell. What's wrong with me? Why can't I see?"

Was I drugged again? Because if I was, that is really getting old.” I sat my rump on the edge of the sink and crossed my arms over my chest.

“You weren’t drugged.” She placed a cup in my hands and instructed me to drink, which I did, without even taking a breath until the glass was empty. Whatever she’d given me, it tasted extremely sweet, and helped curb the hunger I hadn’t even realized was nagging at me until I’d had a taste.

“Why don’t you get in the shower?” Maggie touched my cheek. “You’ll feel much better once your temperature cools down, and then once you’ve had a full meal things will get back to normal.” I couldn’t tell if she was smiling at me, but her voice sounded kind, and I did want to feel better.

“Okay, but as embarrassing as this is, you’ll have to help me.” I hated asking Maggie for help, especially not knowing what was wrong with me, but even though whatever she’d given me had helped to clear my vision slightly, I still couldn’t see straight and there was no way I could maneuver around in the shower without causing harm to myself. I was clumsy enough at times with perfect vision, and tended to get bruises with no recollection of how I’d obtained them. That was normal, and with my vision altered as it was, yes I could see disaster happening without her help.

I was still burning up, desiring nothing more but the cool water to lessen the smoldering heat beneath my skin. I slipped out of the negligee someone had put on me and stood naked while Maggie turned on the shower. I wasn’t concerned with wrapping myself in a towel; she was going to see me without clothes in the shower anyway. The glass shower doors wouldn’t hide anything from her.

I could hear every movement she made in the bathroom, which I found odd, but if I didn’t have my sight entirely, at least I had exceptional hearing. Maggie took my arm and led me to the shower, opening the glass door slowly and helped me step into the cool stream of water. I stood facing away from the water flow, and leaned my head back to let the water soak my short brown hair first. I focused on the sound of the water springing from the faucet above my head and managed to tune everything else around me out. It was peaceful, like listening to a gentle rain, and the fire that had been raging throughout my body began to subside with each drop of cool water that touched my skin.

I could feel the heat lifting out of my body and slipping into the air around me. I heard the shower door open, and smelled Maggie as she stepped in with me. I had expected her to hand me shampoo or soap as I needed it, but I wasn't thinking that she was actually going to shower with me when I asked for help. I turned towards the water so my back was facing her.

"You don't have to be embarrassed." There was a new gentleness in the tone she took with me. "I'm just here to help you."

"Where's Kane?" I asked, wiping soap from my eyes.

"He's gone to Italy for a few days on business. He was afraid you'd be angry with him, and he wanted to give you a few days to cool off." She opened the shower door and ushered me out, handing me a towel before wrapping one around her own body. "He left me in charge of taking care of you in the hopes that you won't do anything stupid. If you do, I'll be the one to pay the consequences."

"What do you mean in charge of me?" I was really confused. I bit my lip, something I did often when I was nervous, and felt a stinging sensation where teeth had punctured skin. I ran my tongue across my teeth and discovered two of them were elongated and very sharp. I tasted blood and knew I'd cut my lip open when I'd bit down. I ran my tongue across my bottom lip, licking at the blood that lay there. My blood tasted like the liquid in the cup Maggie had given to me when she came into the bathroom, the consistency was the same and the flavor just as sweet.

Why would Maggie give me blood to drink? More than that, why do I like it?

I looked at Maggie who now stood facing me. She was still slightly out of focus, but not as blurry as before. She moved her hair aside and exposed her neck to me. "You need sustenance. Go ahead and bite me. I'll feed you properly later."

"I can't bite you." But even as I said it, I knew I wanted to. I was teetering on the brink of reality and fantasy. Reality would mean that I was a vampire and that I hadn't dreamt of what happened in the clover field, it had actually happened. If I were fantasizing of being like Kane so we could stay together forever, that made more sense to me, but I had a strange feeling I wasn't living in a fantasy world.

"I should be angry with Kane." I began to dry myself with the towel ignoring the fact she still stood with her neck just inches from my face. "I should want to kill him, but I don't."

Maggie laughed and stepped back, letting her wet hair fall onto her shoulders again. “Gabriela, you say that now, but you might change your tune once you start getting more attuned to your new self, especially when you have to feed.”

I stood, my wet hair dripping onto my shoulders and looked at her. We were talking about me being a vampire like it wasn’t a big deal. I had to still be dreaming. I knew myself, and if this were really happening, if I were really a vampire, I’d be freaking out right now.

I looked in the mirror. My light brown eyes were now a deep scarlet color. Illusion, I told myself, this is all an illusion. No one has red eyes, but then I thought of Nicolette and how her eyes had been red when I’d first seen her at the diner. I blinked and looked again, but mine didn’t change back to a normal color, mine remained a deep crimson.

I turned around quickly to face Maggie again. “What’s your version of what happened in that clover field?”

Chapter Ten

I was fuming by the time Maggie filled me in on everything, and not because Kane had chosen to change me rather than let me face an untimely death at his hands, but because he made assumptions on how I would feel about it. Sure I was pissed off that I was now a walking corpse, the living dead, but I was grateful he'd brought me into his world instead of letting me simply die. He could have let death take me, and waited for the time when my soul would once again come back, but he didn't, and I knew that was a hard decision for him.

I was deeply wounded that he hadn't stuck around to usher me into my new life. It seemed that every time the going got tough, Kane went off somewhere. I was getting tired of being dumped on other people, allowing him to easily shirk his responsibilities. I understood that he feared my hatred, but that only proved how much he truly didn't know me.

I wanted to love him because that's what my heart told me was right. I was still retrieving old memories from some archive in my brain and each one only deepened my emotional connection with him. I couldn't fathom why he couldn't understand that our love was stronger than anything that tried to crush us, and that I could never hate him even if I wanted to. It wasn't possible.

On top of my unhappiness with my current Kane situation, I was frustrated with my new powers, too. All my senses were magnified except my sight which Maggie assured me would be more than perfect once I ate. Maggie told me that learning to tap into my senses would be the hardest challenge in my new life. She also warned me that I'd move more rapidly than humans, and my strength would be beyond what a woman of my height and stature should be able to possess.

I would have to learn to blend into society if I wanted to walk among humans without triggering alarm. Other vampires would be able to smell me, as would demons and any other creatures of the underworld, but blending in would make it harder for them to single me out from a distance. There was so much information I needed to remember, and memories of being in college ready to take a midterm filled my mind.

“Is there a handbook for all this information?” I asked Maggie. “Like Vampire 101.”

She laughed. “Not quite, but don’t stress. Some things will just naturally come to you. Everything else you can learn along the way.” I frowned and she squeezed my shoulders. “No stress.”

David had gone with Kane to Italy, not because Kane needed him, but because they weren’t sure he would have been safe in the house with me. I didn’t like the idea of someone’s life being put into danger because of my new condition. I paced in the bedroom, still trying to take it all in. I was a vampire. I would never again be normal, never feel the warmth of the sun on my skin, and the people who had been important to me would have to be eliminated slowly from my life, including Lydia, who I loved like a sister.

It wasn’t like I could tell her what I’d become. She wouldn’t believe me anyway. I was the one who tried to convince her more times than I could remember that there were things in our world other than just humans. I was the one who tried to explain to her vampires and werewolves existed, that demons were real. She was the level-headed one, the girl who tried to keep my head out of the clouds. We were total opposites and that’s why our friendship worked so well.

I would continue to look twenty six as Lydia aged, and eventually our lives would have to take different paths so that I could keep in touch without actually seeing her. I figured I’d have at least five years before she’d start to notice I wasn’t changing, ten if she aged slowly, too. I didn’t want to think about the future. Not when I couldn’t think straight about the present. I would be able to spend time with her, if I could get used to being around humans like Maggie said I would, but there would come a day when I’d have to bid her farewell for good, and that day was going to hurt like hell.

That made me think of Kane, and how he’d lived through so many things I couldn’t imagine. He’d lived through centuries, so many different time periods where he had to relearn how to dress, to act, to speak. But more than the growth of the human race around him, he’d had to watch people he came to care for age and die. He’d watched me grow from a baby, to a child, into the woman he loved over and over again. He’d also watched me age, whither, and die, too in some of our lifetimes together. In others, we’d barely been together when fate took me away.

I was pondering what it was going to be like to live forever when a wave of power washed through the air around me. It felt dark, like a sickness weaving its way inside me. It was more evil than anything I'd ever been exposed to, and I knew my vampire senses had helped me pick up on it. I rushed from the room immediately in search of Maggie, who'd gone back downstairs to clean.

"Maggie!" I called over the railing until I saw her appear below me by the base of the stairs. "Kane needs to get back now. How long will it take for him to get here?"

"Not long." She came up the stairs until she stood beside me in the hallway. "What's wrong?"

"I have this awful feeling in my gut. Something is coming for us, again. Whatever it is, it feels stronger, and it isn't that far away. I can actually feel the power that's being sent out around it, and Maggie, it's not good." I hoped my eyes were displaying my distress to her. "I can't be separated from Kane if they attack. I'm not strong enough to fight alone."

"Gabriela, I've never met anyone else in my life that has feelings the way you do." She smiled, attempting to lighten the mood. "But I believe you. I'll try to reach Kane." I watched her streak back down the stairs in what would have been a blur to a human's eyes, if they'd be able to see her at all when she moved like that.

A while later, as I lay across the bed in Kane's room, another wave of power surged through the house. Whoever it was, they were making it well known they were nearby, and I started to get nervous. Maggie hadn't been able to reach Kane in over two hours, even when I tried all I got was static. He was doing an excellent job of blocking us, which really wasn't the best idea under the current circumstances.

"Gabriela!" I heard Maggie yell from the kitchen. "We've got company."

I could smell the stench as I walked into the kitchen, it was the same odor that had surrounded Kane and I in the clover field the previous day. Maggie held her nose with one hand and pointed toward the French doors that led out to the deck with the other. I moved toward the door, my hand firmly holding the bloodstone, and scanned behind the house. At the edge of the yard, standing in the tree line were two demons, one male and one female. The only way I could tell they weren't human was from the eerie green glow that surrounded them.

“Demons.” I stated, turning to look at Maggie. “Any suggestions on how to handle this?”

“If they wanted to attack, they’d have charged the house. I’m not sure why they’re hanging back unless they’re feeling us out, too.” She looked out the small window above the sink. “I think you should call them over.”

“Me? Why me?”

“Because you’re the one with the wicked, demon-killing pendant.” She motioned toward the French doors.

I opened them and stepped onto the deck, scared as hell, but not about to let the demons smell my fear. I held the pendant tightly between my fingers, not sure if I had the power to activate it without Kane’s presence, but I would give it my best if the opportunity presented itself. Maggie stepped up behind me, but I didn’t dare take my eyes off the demons

The demons approached us cautiously, and it was a good thing they didn’t come full force because I would have zapped them if I could make the stone work. The female was smaller up close and my fear lessened maybe half a notch, until the male took his place directly in front of me. He was about six foot seven with broad shoulders and ice blue eyes that bore into me. The green glow that surrounded him was eerie, and I wondered if it was like a force field around his body. I remembered the large men from the clover field had shared the same green aura. I was tempted to touch it, my mind getting off track, but I resisted and focused hard on keeping it together in Kane’s absence.

“May we help you?” I said sweetly, smiling at them as I rubbed my thumb across the bloodstone.

“We’re looking for Kane.” The man’s voice boomed like thunder from the sky, and it hurt my ears.

Maggie squeezed my hand. “Try to tone down the volume of his voice, Gabriela.” Maggie’s voice was soft inside my head. “Don’t let him know it causes you discomfort, or he will use it against you.”

“Kane is not here.” I said, dryly. “He’s on his way back from Italy, but hasn’t arrived home yet. Is there something we can do for you?” I asked, pointing at Maggie and myself.

The male frowned, and the female stepped forward. She was barely five feet tall, which made my five-five frame seem more than average. Her hair was short, pixie-like, and bleached blonde. She

might have actually been pretty, but like the man, she had the same demonic glow surrounding her body, and she smelled like a sewer.

"I'm Kelina and this is my husband, Chadwick. We're rulers of the demon portion of the underworld." Her voice was much softer and didn't hurt my ears. I looked at Chadwick closely, remembering his name in a conversation just the previous morning. So, he was the one Kane had been trying to reach, but did that make him friend or foe? "My husband and I are being blamed for the recent demon attacks that have been happening to your people, but we aren't behind it. We've been trying to reach Kane, but he hasn't responded."

I wanted to tell her that we'd been trying to reach him too, with no success, but I didn't want them to know I'd been lying when I said he was on his way home. I still didn't know if I could trust them, and the last thing I wanted to do was let my guard down and get myself killed, again. Maggie kept close enough to me that her hip was touching my rear and I was glad for the comfort her closeness brought me. I wrapped my entire hand around the pendant and sent out one last mental message to Kane, hoping that somehow the stone would break through the barrier he'd put up.

I looked up at the man. "I believe Kane has been trying to reach you for a few weeks now as well. So, have you been avoiding him or is something else going on?" I put my hands on my hips and focused on making his voice less loud, hoping that when he responded I wouldn't feel the piercing pain in my head like the first time.

"We've been traveling, hiding, since we caught wind that our family was to blame for the attacks. It is not our demons that have been doing the attacking. We're not sure where the others are coming from, or why they've taken up conflict with vampires. We've come a long way to get here; we haven't been followed but may still be hunted. May we please come in and wait for Kane?" Chadwick's voice sounded sincere, but I still wasn't sure he could be trusted.

"How do I know you weren't sent here to kill us?" I rolled the pendant through my fingers again.

"If I wanted to kill you, you'd already be dead." The cocky way he said it pissed me off.

"Do you know what this is?" I held up the pendant and watched as it began to glow. "It's your death sentence. Try anything

and I will kill you, easily.” I laid pendant back against my skin. “Do we understand each other?”

I watched Kelina give Chadwick a nervous glance. “We understand completely.” She said before gently pushing him forward with her hand. “We don’t want any trouble, we just want to get to the bottom of all this.”

Maggie and I stepped back to allow them to walk ahead of us into the house. There was no way I was turning my back on a demon, not a chance in hell. I shut the door and motioned for them to sit at the small table.

I was about to open my mouth to speak again when the pendant became unbearably hot against my skin. I lifted the chain so the stone was dangling in the air above my chest. It began glowing green, something I hadn’t seen it do yet. I wasn’t sure what it meant, but Kelina looked frightened.

The phone rang and Maggie picked it up. I watched her press a few buttons on the phone and then Kane’s voice filled the room.

“Chadwick and Kelina, thank you so much for seeking me out at my home. You’ll be safe there as long as you don’t attempt harm to Gabriela or Maggie. I apologize that I’m still detained in Italy, and I won’t be able to travel back until tomorrow evening. Maggie will show you to a guest room, and let me stress again, you are welcome in my home so long as you intend no harm.” There was an edge to Kane’s voice I’d never heard before, a threatening undertone directed at the demons. I liked him taking control rather than being so easy going and passive. It excited me.

“Kane, we’ve not come to harm your family. Our own is in terrible danger. We come seeking your help in this matter. There isn’t anyone else my wife and I can trust.” Chadwick glanced toward Kelina who nodded. “We have much to discuss with you and would be honored to stay in your home as long as you’ll have us.”

“Very well then. Please get some rest; you’ve traveled far. I will see you tomorrow evening.”

Maggie pressed a few buttons again before picking up the earpiece. I was concentrating hard on the demons and couldn’t center my hearing on their phone conversation. I couldn’t even get myself focused enough to tap into Maggie’s mind to read her thoughts. I didn’t know what to say, so I stood and fiddled with the pendant

which had settled back to its normal color and temperature upon my chest.

“Gabriela, there’s no need to worry.” Kane’s gentle brush was there in my head. “Maggie is going to take you out to feed. She’ll show you how to do it without harming your donor. You don’t have to fear Chadwick and Kelina. They will not harm you.”

“Hurry home, Kane.” That was all I said before breaking our mental conversation.

I waited in the kitchen while Maggie ushered Chadwick and Kelina upstairs to a room at the opposite end of the hall from our own. She and I had the same thought, keep a little distance between us and them. I wasn’t afraid of them attacking us, but I wasn’t entirely sure that something else might not come looking for them, and I was curious to know what they would do all day while Maggie and I slept. I wasn’t thrilled with the idea of them having reign over the house while we were dead to the world.

“Are you ready?” Maggie asked me, smiling as she walked towards where I stood looking out at the night through the French doors.

“Just don’t let me kill anyone, okay? That’s all I ask.” I smiled, too, as we slipped out to find some dinner.

Chapter Eleven

Finding someone to feed on was harder than it looked. It wasn't exactly like there was a large buffet of human donors at two in the morning. There were mostly drunkards out on the streets, and though the smell of humans in the air was strong and I suddenly felt starved, I was strong enough to be more selective. The thought of feeding from a grimy drunk just didn't do it for me. Maggie seemed to have the same opinion as we moved further along the street searching for another option.

A young couple stumbled out of Murphy's Pub just as we made our way up the sidewalk. I caught a whiff of the man's cologne before I spotted them up ahead of us. Maggie seemed more interested in his date, and I had a feeling she didn't do men, period. That would explain her closeness to Kane for so many years without attempting to break their friendship barrier. I smiled; at least I finally knew she wasn't a threat to me.

"What are you so happy about all of a sudden?" she asked, casting me a sideways glance.

"Nothing, just glad a worthwhile opportunity has finally presented itself to us." My incisors lengthened as we got closer to the couple, and I tried to relax so they would retract and I could smile. The last thing I needed was an incident in the wide open, even with our only company being a few drunken passersby. "Talk me through this Maggie, 'cause I'm on the verge of starving."

Maggie took my hand and pulled me forward until we managed to get in front of the couple. They stopped suddenly, the guy's eyes wide while his date gave us the stink eye. I stifled a giggle at her reaction to Maggie and me.

"Hi. My name is Maggie and this is Gabby. We're a little lost. Do you guys know how to get back to the square?" Maggie's accent was completely hidden when she spoke, and I wondered how she managed to do that since her Irish dialect was normally strong.

"We don't know." The girl snapped and pulled on the man's arm.

He shrugged her off. "Don't mind Kate, she's had a little too much to drink this evening. My name's Matt." He held out his hand which Maggie placed hers easily into, and I watched as she batted her

eyelashes dramatically while he kissed her knuckles with his lips. “We’re not from around here either, but we’d be happy to walk with you at least to our hotel. It’s right up the road a few blocks. Two beautiful women shouldn’t be out alone at this hour.”

“Thank you, Matt. That would be delightful.” Maggie snuggled up to his free side, wrapping herself around his arm. Kate kept her eyes straight ahead of us, a scowl visible on her face. I had to stop myself from laughing at her jealous behavior. If only she knew what we really wanted, her tune might change slightly.

We began walking, slowly as Maggie talked about the rainy weather. I kept close to her side, furthest away from the bitchy girlfriend, and made sure my mind was open to everything around us. With Chadwick and Kelina at our house, and the knowledge that they might possibly have hunters on their trail, I wanted to make sure we weren’t ambushed.

Maggie made small talk with the couple as we made our way down the few short blocks to their hotel. Matt continued to be friendly, and Kate kept her nose in the air. I tried hard to stay focused on the task at hand, not sure how we were going to pull it off.

“We’re here.” Kate was a little too happy to announce the arrival at their hotel suite. “You ladies have a wonderful evening. I hope you find the square.” She pulled on Matt’s arm, attempting to move him away from us, but Maggie stood firm, and didn’t let go.

“Thank you, Kate, but we aren’t leaving just yet. We’d like to come in for a little while and get to know you guys better.” Maggie unattached herself from Matt’s arm and moved until she was standing in front of the girl, bent down so their eyes were level. “Wouldn’t you like that, Kate? The night is still young.”

Kate’s pupils dilated until her entire eyes looked black. It happened fast, and I knew Matt hadn’t noticed the change. “I guess it would be okay if you came in for a little while.”

Matt glanced at his girlfriend as if he was seeing her for the first time. He smiled at Maggie and me and motioned toward the door. “After you ladies, down the hall to the right. We’re in room 107.”

I looked at Maggie and she mouthed, “it’s all in the eyes”, and then moved to follow Kate inside the hotel. I stood pondering what she meant and when I didn’t move, Matt tapped me on the shoulder.

“You coming?” he asked, and I forced a smile before walking past him into the hotel lobby.

The place was more upscale than I would have imagined from the condition I’d seen on the exterior of the building. The chipping paint and broken shutters gave way to golden tiled floors and decorative vases full of fresh blooms. The lobby area was empty, as well as the hall as Kate led us to their room.

The suite was larger than I expected for two people just passing through, but I had to remind myself that some were blessed with wealthy parents who could afford to send them away on holiday without a care to the expense. Just because I’d had to work for every luxury in my life, didn’t mean that everyone else did, too.

Maggie took Kate by the hand and disappeared into the bedroom, leaving Matt and I to stare at each other. I focused on his eyes, mimicking the way I’d seen Maggie do with Kate outside the hotel, and didn’t stop until I saw the same reaction pass across his face. The distant look told me he’d do whatever I wanted, all I had to do was ask, and that was when I wished Maggie had gotten me started before wondering off with Kate.

“Would you like something to drink?” Matt asked, opening the small fridge and pulling out a beer.

“No, thanks. Why don’t we sit down for a bit?” I sat on the black leather sofa, sinking down into cushions and patted the seat beside me, motioning for him to come over.

He sat his beer on the coffee table and settled down beside me. Kate, who’d been so standoffish since we’d met, was now loudly displaying her excitement in the bedroom with Maggie. Matt seemed embarrassed about what was happening, his cheeks turning bright crimson which had my incisors coming out again knowing his blood was so close to the surface. I scooted closer to him, turning my body so my knee was pressed into his thigh.

“I’ve never seen Kate like this. I’ll have to go back to that pub and ask the bartender what liquor he was giving her.” He smiled a wicked little smile that showed off his dimples. “I like her so much more when she loosens up.”

“Yeah, anything is better than dealing with a party pooper.” I turned my body more towards him, arching my back so my barely there chest seemed perkier and close to his face.

I didn't want to have sex with him, but a little kissing wouldn't be so bad. My thoughts went back to Kane, something they did more often than I would like, and I wondered if he had to get his donors in the mood with actual physical contact or if there were an easier way to get what he needed. I knew he didn't sleep with them, but we hadn't had a chance to discuss how far he might have to go during a blood exchange.

The way I saw it, he couldn't get angry with me during the learning stage. It wasn't like he offered any real support, and Maggie was caught up in doing her own thing. I could hear Matt's heart beating, the blood flowing through his veins and I knew I had to take a step in the right direction soon or I was going to seriously hurt him. I was running out of time with the sun on the verge of rising, and we still needed to get back to the house.

Matt began to reach for his beer, but I grabbed his arm and pushed him back against the sofa. I straddled his lap and took his lips eagerly. He didn't hesitate to respond to my neediness and when he fisted his hand in my hair, pulling me closer, my temperature rose to dangerous levels.

"What about Kate?" he asked glancing toward the closed bedroom door.

"She's occupied." That was all I could say on the subject, and it was enough to have him focusing back on me.

I kissed his neck, my incisors at their maximum length in my mouth. They were throbbing as the sound of his blood flowing filled my ears, and it was taking every ounce of my strength to have control. Matt attempted to move our positions but I pushed him back against the pillows with such a force it almost knocked the wind out of him.

His eyes were wide, filled with lust as I moved my hips in slow motion, the art of dry humping not exactly my strong point, but he didn't seem to mind what I was doing. His erection strained against his jeans as I rubbed myself firmly against him. He moved his hands to my lower back as I leaned towards his neck again.

Matt's hands began creeping lower as I licked and nipped at his flesh with my teeth. As he grabbed my ass and pressed his erection hard against my core I bit down hard. His hands rubbed up and down my thighs as I sucked at his neck.

I drank deep, drinking him the way a parched human would water in the desert. His blood was nectar and I the honeybee. I didn't

want to stop, and I was on the brink of losing it when Maggie tapped me on the shoulder.

“Finish up; we’re almost out of time.” I heard her voice, but the pull of his blood on my tongue was stronger.

When I didn’t stop, Maggie yanked me back by the hair and tossed me onto the floor. She bent down and closed the puncture wounds on Matt’s neck with her tongue, then gave him a long lasting kiss that caused him to close his eyes and drift off to sleep. When she turned to look down on me, her face full of disappointment, I actually felt bad.

I was more disappointed in myself than she ever could be. I hated the fact that I could so easily lose it. I understood how easy it was for Kane to get swept up in the clover field, how he could forget reality and focus on the sweet taste of my blood. I would have killed Matt if Maggie hadn’t stopped me.

I licked my lips, and wiped the corner of my mouth with the back of my hand. I stood and followed Maggie out of the room, sure to lock the door behind us. When Matt and Kate woke up the next day, Maggie shared with me the fact that they’d never remember anything about us, and for that I was grateful.

The walk home was done in silence. I didn’t know what to say to Maggie, and she just wasn’t talking to me. It was almost as if I’d let her down, and that was something I was going to have to live with.

“You know, I really don’t appreciate the attitude you’re giving me right now.” I inclined my head so I could see Maggie better as we continued onto the house. “For my first day as a vamp, I think I’ve done exceptionally well. I haven’t been in a bloodlust craze, haven’t harmed anyone on purpose. I think you should be proud of me.”

“I am proud of you.” Maggie stopped, grabbing my arm so I would stop beside her. “Believe it or not, I remember what it was like to be in your shoes. The problem I have is not with you.”

“Then what’s going on?” I wanted to get to the bottom of things.

“I’m pissed at Kane for leaving you like this.” She moved in, rubbed her lips against mine. I didn’t back off. I was wound up, and she was there.

The heat of the sun, which was barely a sliver on the horizon, was already weakening me. “Thank you, Maggie.”

“No need to thank me. I wish someone had been there for me like this.” She frowned. “We need to get indoors now. We have about five minutes until the sun will peak above the horizon line, and when it does, things are going to become uncomfortable for us, especially you. It will be much worse for you.” Maggie grabbed me by the arm and we ran with every ounce of strength we had left.

“That was close.” I said as she pulled the curtain down on the kitchen door. “Too close for comfort.”

I yawned, stretching so that my t-shirt rose up exposing my stomach. Maggie licked her lips, and I quickly readjusted myself before either of us acted on the thoughts we were sharing. I excused myself for bed, knowing Kane would be home the next evening, and I would need my rest to deal with him and the problems surrounding us. I still didn't like the idea of sharing the house with demons, but I could hear them sleeping as I reached the top of the stairs and turned toward my room. I had to trust Kane's judgment on the matter, and deep down I knew he never would have allowed them to stay in his house if he feared for my safety.

There seemed to be a change in the air as I opened the large door leading into the master suite. I reached down and slipped off my shoes before stepping onto the carpet. I didn't notice anything out of place, and so I brushed off the weird vibe as I continued into the room, dropping my shoes just inside the door as I shut it making sure the lock was securely in place. I removed clothing with each step I took, beginning with my shirt and ending with my panties as I reached the bed and crawled in slowly.

I pulled the covers up over my naked flesh and snuggled into them. Kane's scent was all around me and the weird feeling still lingered in the air. I couldn't quite put my finger on what was making me on edge, but the rising sun was causing my energy level to drain fast. Just as I rolled towards the middle of the bed, my eyelids became so heavy I could no longer keep my eyes open even a sliver and in that same moment I discovered I wasn't alone as flesh touched flesh. I couldn't scream, or move as the sleep took over my body.

Chapter Twelve

I don't know how many hours I lay, my body nonfunctional, and thought of the possible danger I was in. I couldn't tap into my senses and zone in on any one thing, like the person beside me in the bed. After a few hours of trying with no success, I gave up figuring if I were in any real trouble; the person would have already struck out at me. Certainly if they were in the bed of a vampire, then they knew about the power of the sun. I was frustrated that I couldn't even turn my head to look at who it was, and even my sense of smell was all over the place. Nothing worked after sunrise, and I wondered if that was due to my newborn status.

My body was stiff, like a statue, made of granite or concrete. I didn't have to worry about tossing and turning, but it was more annoying not being able to move at all. Finally, after a few hours of staring at the back of my eyelids, I let sleep take me, mainly dozing off from boredom.

As long as the sun was shining, I was as good as dead. My body would not respond, no matter how hard my mind pushed, until the last streak of light dipped below the horizon line. It was a strange feeling to be aware of things in your mind and not be able to respond to them physically. It was definitely something I found as a weakness, not being in control of my own body, and hated that most about my new life.

Kane on the other hand seemed to be able to wake whenever he wanted, and the only thing I could credit that to was his age. I assumed Maggie could do the same, but just enjoyed sleeping in. It would get boring, I thought, to be awake all day and not be able to go outside or near an uncovered window. I was sort of thankful that I was comatose during the daylight hours.

My body seemed to have an automatic timer, and I knew exactly when the sun set. Once the last bit of daylight dipped out of sight, my eyes opened. Energized and well rested with the ill feeling from the previous night gone, I was ready to begin another day. I lay in silence for a moment, trying to remember what had caused my distress, but my mind was a blank slate.

Strong arms were wrapped firmly around me, and I knew they belonged to Kane. A wave of relief washed over me instantly. A

flashback from the night before danced into my head. The stranger in my bed the previous night had to be him, but it didn't make sense when he told all of us he wouldn't be home until now which was the following evening. I was confused.

"Hello beautiful," he whispered and I snuggled closer to his body, enjoying the moment of peace that came with being so close to him. He was fully dressed, and I wondered when he had put clothes on. Why hadn't I been able to tell he moved to do that?

"Kane, how long have you been here?" The person I'd been sharing my bed with had been as naked as I still was. The ill feeling started to work its way back under my skin as more and more of my mind opened up to remembering. *Please say all night. Please say all night. Please say all night.*

"I got in just before the sun set. I couldn't resist climbing in here and watching you sleep for a few minutes." He smiled and my stomach twisted in knots. If Kane hadn't been sharing my bed, then who had?

"Was there anyone else here? In the room, I mean?" I sat up, holding the blanket against my chest, and looked around for any tell-tale signs that someone else had been in the bedroom, but nothing was out of place. There were no open drawers, nothing looked searched through, and I couldn't figure out the significance of someone crawling into bed with me just to sleep and then leave before I could discover who they were.

I'd read things in Graven about people who became obsessed with things from the underworld, people who would do anything to get close to it, but how had someone gotten into Kane's house? If that were the case, what would have been their purpose of getting so close to me? I wasn't anyone important, didn't hold any type of special title. I hoped that my overwhelming tiredness had caused me to hallucinate someone being there.

"I disposed of your dinner, if that's what you mean. Next time, try to feed somewhere else and not so close to your death sleep." Kane motioned to the bed where a slight trace of blood was present on the sheets. "I'd prefer not to come home again to a naked human in bed with you."

I grabbed my stomach as the first wave of nausea came over me. I didn't know vampires could throw up, but I rushed to the bathroom in time to turn the toilet water from clear to red. Kane was

by my side, a questioning look upon his face as I continued to lose last night's dinner into the porcelain bowl. I didn't care that I wasn't dressed, it wasn't like Kane hadn't seen me naked numerous times already since we'd met.

"Gabriela, are you okay?" He was leaning down and I lifted my head slightly to meet his eyes.

"No, I am obviously not okay. Kane, I didn't feed on anyone in your bed last night. I would not bring a stranger into your home, and especially not to your bed. Maggie and I went out to eat after you called. When we got back the sun was already beginning to rise. I crawled beneath the covers and discovered someone else was there in the bed with me, but I couldn't get past your smell on the sheets and I couldn't move thanks to the death sleep curse you fucking vampires suffer from." I paused to grab a towel and wipe my mouth. I stood, shakily and made my way to the sink where I rinsed my mouth out with water, not because I needed to but because it was a habit. "What did you do with the body?"

"I told you, I disposed of it."

"Where? I want to see who it was, see if I knew them." I made my way back into the bedroom and began stripping the sheets off the bed, tossing them angrily into a pile on the floor. Someone had gotten into Kane's house, undetected by the demons sleeping just down the hall from the bedroom. They'd managed to murder someone and leave their lifeless body in my bed. We were no longer safe in Ireland, and it was time to pack it up and move on or come up with a good plan of attack for finding the culprit who'd administered such a vicious act against us.

I was sure Kane would tell me we could handle it, that things weren't as bad as I was making them, but I wouldn't be so easy to persuade into staying. I wanted out, wishing he had just let me die. Now someone had lost their life because of him, or me, or both. I couldn't handle the thought of someone's death being my fault.

"I threw him into the fire pit out back. I didn't light it yet. Get dressed and I'll take you there." Kane scooped up the sheets, and I made sure none of the blood had seeped through onto the mattress before throwing on some clothes and following him downstairs. "I'll get rid of these, too."

“They can be washed.” I was suddenly angry with him, too. “Just because you have money, doesn’t mean you have constantly waste it.”

Kane said nothing but continued toward the kitchen. Maggie smiled cheerfully as we entered the room, and I watched her face change to concern as she locked eyes with Kane. He shook his head at her and motioned toward me. No one spoke out loud of my emotional state and I knew why when I spotted Chadwick and Kelina sitting at the table having dinner. I noticed David wasn’t present, and I would ask Kane about his whereabouts later. Right now, I had one focus in mind, seeing the body of the dead person who’d been in my bed.

“Kane, I see you’ve made it back.” Chadwick stood and put his hand out. Kane shifted the ball of blankets to one arm and shook the demon’s hand.

“I have to take Gabriela out back for a moment. Take your time and finish up dinner. We’ll be in shortly and then we’ll all sit down and talk about what’s been going on.” Chadwick nodded and retook his place at the table beside his wife.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Kane asked when we were outside, away from prying ears.

“I need to, Kane. What if it’s someone I care about?” *What if it’s the poor boy I used as a donor last night?* I shook my head to try to remove the horrible pictures floating through my mind.

I smelled death as we closed in on the fire pit. My stomach lurched, but I held it together for the moment.

“Whoever did this did it with intent to kill. His neck was torn open, and his body was completely drained, the little bit of blood on the bed sheets was what rubbed off his skin when he was dumped in the bed.” Kane stated.

“Then why did you think it was me who brought him into your room?” I was genuinely hurt that he thought I could do such a thing to someone.

“Most newborns don’t have as much restraint as Maggie claims you do. I just assumed dinner went terribly wrong.” Kane stopped me as we came upon the edge of the hole. “Before you look, you have to promise me something.”

“Okay.” I said nervously. “What?”

“You won’t scream.” I shook my head, promised I wouldn’t, but if the person in the hole turned out to be someone I loved, I didn’t know if I would be able to keep that promise.

I began to move forward with extreme caution, my stomach still in knots and so nervous my knees grew weaker with each passing step. Kane stuck by my side like glue, matching me step for small step. When I got to the furthest point I could at the edge, he held my arm as I leaned over to view the body he placed face down in the pit.

I could only see the person’s backside, the body was male, and I recognized the jersey he was wearing right away. The poor unfortunate soul was none other than Matt, the young man I’d spent such a short time with the night before. Why someone would have taken his life was beyond me, he knew nothing other than the memory we’d given him when we’d left his room.

“He has clothes on.” I stated.

“Yes the killer was kind enough to strip him beside the bed and leave his clothes on the floor. I thought it was best to dress him before carrying him outside, call it respect. He already suffered enough humiliation I’m sure in his death.” Kane looked up at the sky.

I turned and was sick again in the grass. The loss of so much blood was causing my energy level to decrease rapidly. I needed to feed, and soon.

“How did they beat us home?” I spoke more to myself than Kane, but he responded anyway.

“If you and Maggie weren’t rushing to return, Rolando or one of his minions could have easily gotten to him as soon as you left wherever you’d been with him, and made it here before you even crossed into the yard.” He frowned. “Older vampires, like myself, can move at unbelievable speed when we want to. Whoever it was wanted to send you or me a message.”

I grabbed my stomach, but didn’t throw up. The pain of hunger was beginning to weigh on me, and I stood cringing.

“You offered yourself to me once,” Kane began. “Allow me to return the favor.” He knelt in front of me. “Wrist or neck?”

“What?” I asked, suddenly more worried about how I would respond to feeding from him than my need for sustenance.

“Would you like to feed from my wrist or my neck?” He was waiting for an answer, and I wasn’t sure which option would be easier for me to handle.

Feeding from his wrist seemed less intimate, but it was my wrist he fed from when he'd brought me to the brink of death in the clover field. I turned my attention to his neck, and noticed for the first time since his return that he looked different. His hair no longer hung in the long silky strands I was used to seeing, and it wasn't fastened at the nape of his neck. He'd cut his hair, short and spiky, just like I'd fantasized about.

Our eyes met and something sparked inside me. "You cut your hair."

"Yes, do you approve?" He smiled and I reached my hand out, rubbing my fingers through his shortened tendrils.

The contact was exhilarating, and I lowered myself to my knees so I was directly in front of him and ran both hands through his hair. He wrapped his arms around my back and pulled me close, his face gently settled in the crook of my neck. "You did this for me?" I lifted his face so I could look into his eyes.

"I believe you saw this style as more modern and what was the other word you used?" He paused, but I didn't respond. "Oh yes, sexy."

I laughed. "Of all the things you could have chosen to pick out of my fantasies, that's the one you act on."

"You don't like it." He turned his face down, and a stab of guilt for making him feel bad washed over me.

"I love it." As I spoke a wave of hunger hit me like a bat out of hell. It hurt and I grabbed my stomach again.

"You need to feed, Gabriela." Kane bit into his wrist and held it out to me. "No more procrastinating. Go on."

"What about you?" I was afraid to drink from him. I knew what blood sharing was like, and I knew that I wouldn't only feel better, but I'd be extremely horny afterwards. I wasn't ready to sleep with Kane, and I hoped I could control my thoughts as I fed.

"I'll be fine until I take you to feed later. You don't need much right now, just enough to restore some of the blood you've lost in the last hour." He pushed his wrist out toward me again.

I took it shyly and drank, pushing the sexual thoughts that were on the brink of surfacing back down into the darkest part of my mind. I focused my thoughts on the man in the hole who'd been an unlikely candidate for someone who was taking revenge on Kane and me. I was sorry for his family and the fact that they would never know

what happened to him. His body had to be burned and I understood that, but it didn't make it any less depressing. I wondered about Kate and if they'd let her live, or if she had suffered some cruel and unusual punishment as well.

I would wait until Kane had his talk with the demons to bring up my concerns about staying in Ireland. I still felt it was time to move on. There had to be somewhere else a rich vampire like Kane could take me to hide, if we couldn't come up with a way to fight back.

Thinking of everything else kept my hormones from raging out of control and I took only what I needed from Kane. When my strength increased and the hunger pains subsided, I closed the cut on his wrist and stood.

"Feel better?" Kane asked.

"Much." I placed my hand on Kane's cheek. "Thank you."

I glanced toward the fire pit again. "Did you bring matches?"

To answer my question Kane pulled a handkerchief from one pocket. He pulled a lighter from the other one and lit it on fire, then threw the blazing material into the hole. I said a silent prayer for the man who lost his life, and fought back the urge to cry for a stranger as Kane and I walked back towards the house in the silence of the night.

Chapter Thirteen

There was a strange vibration in the air, like a ripple across a perfectly still lake as we approached the back deck and I stopped walking to look around. It didn't feel evil like what demons put out, but it was still off. I couldn't see anything that didn't belong around the house, but I was learning more and more to rely on my instincts. The vibration felt wrong, so something no matter how small was out of place.

"Gabriela, why did you stop?" Kane was following my lead and doing a visual search around the perimeter. "What's wrong?"

"You'll just think I'm being paranoid." I looked through the glass of the French doors to see Maggie entertaining the demons with what looked like a board game. It struck me as odd to see them doing something so normal, so human, and at the same time it really touched my heart.

Kane turned me so my back was to the house. "I would never think ill of you, Gabriela. If I've learned one thing in my life as a vampire, it's that if something feels off, it probably is." He reached up to cup my face. "Now tell me what bothered you so much that you stopped walking to stare around the yard like something was going to jump out and get us."

"Before the demons arrived, Chadwick and Kelina I mean, there were waves of power all day. Kane, I knew something was coming before it got here, and I knew it was something dark. I just didn't know what." I paused, something in the tree line catching my attention. "I'm still learning how to make my senses work to my advantage but there is something here that shouldn't be, whether it turns out to be friendly or evil, I can't read it clearly."

The vibration grew stronger, and I knew when Kane picked up on it because his eyes began darting off in every direction looking for its source. I grabbed his hands, feeding off his strength, and continued my visual search of the yard, including the trees where I swore something moved. Kane began pushing me towards the stairs and I took them slowly. It was harder trying to walk backwards even with him directing me.

“I think I know the cause of your distress.” Kane turned so he stood beside me, my back pressed against the door. “Dimitri, you can approach the house now.”

I saw something move out into the open parting the brush at the tree line. It was what appeared to be an oversized gray wolf and it came trotting towards us through the yard. “Do you have any normal friends?” I asked, never taking my eyes off the beast that was almost to the stairs. I knew it wasn’t an enemy or Kane would have immediately gone on the defense.

“They’re normal to me.” Kane laughed. “Dimitri is a werewolf. Normally he could change at will, but tonight it’s a full moon so until dawn he’s stuck in his wolf suit.”

I tried to smile, but I couldn’t seem to make myself relax enough. In just a few days time, I’d met vampires, demons, and now a real in-the-flesh werewolf. All the things I’d been searching for to make myself a name and get in with Graven was right in front of my face, but with my feelings growing daily for Kane because of old memories and the power of love, I couldn’t write about any of it, ever. *How ironic.*

“Kane, thank you for letting me approach. We’ve got a big problem.” I could hear Dimitri’s voice plain as day as if he was talking out loud, but in his animal form he was speaking to us mentally. “The northern perimeter of the forest has been breached. I think it would be best if you and your friends skipped town for a few days. It’s vampires, powerful ones, and they are moving quickly. The guys and I have held them off as much as we can, but they’re headed in this direction even as we speak.”

“Did you recognize any of them?” Kane’s brow was creased making him look older, more distinguished.

“I believe one is your maker. He seemed agitated, and though they never mentioned specifics during our interrogation, I believe they may be looking for her.” Dimitri pointed at me.

“How many of them are there, and how much time do we have?” Kane began to pace, his hands fisting and un-fisting at his sides.

“There were six in their group, all males. I’d say you have about an hour, so get moving. I don’t fear they’ll harm any of us, but the young girl they have with them looks scared to death. I need to get back to my clan to ensure safety.” Dimitri turned to go.

"You said there were only six of them." Kane's brow was raised. "The girl, is she vamp as well?"

"We're not sure. If she is, she's new and weak." Dimitri moved further away. "Kane, you owe me deeply for this."

Kane bowed his head. "Gabriela, I believe your fears stand true about Rolando. He hasn't been back to Ireland, not to my home for a long time. He's not welcome here, so his presence tells me something is definitely wrong in my world," he said looking at his feet. "We must gather everyone and get out of here at top speed."

"The girl he has with him, do you think it's Nicolette?" Even though she was willing to sacrifice me to Rolando to save her own ass, she was still so young, and she should be spared. I couldn't help but think that maybe Kane and his family could help her.

"More than likely." Kane looked back to the tree line where Dimitri had disappeared. "We need to move now."

We managed to do that by getting everyone in the limo and away from the house in a matter of minutes. David, I was told, would meet us with another means of transportation to aid in our escape. I had to wonder if Kane knew something was coming ahead of time or if David had simply been left where he was to keep a distance from me until Kane was sure I wouldn't harm him.

Part of me was thankful we were heading somewhere else; I'd wanted to leave since I'd woken up. A bigger part of me was sad that Kane was once again being run off, and this time from his home. I hoped that his house wouldn't be torched like the warehouse back in Maryland.

"Why would Rolando drag Nicolette along if she is weak?" I asked Kane as he drove way above the speed limit across the winding terrain.

"I'm not sure. It might not be her after all. They could have a human with them to feed upon. I may have been mistaken about her involvement in all this. She could have just been a cover to put me on the wrong track, keeping me out of Rolando's affairs." Kane frowned.

"You told me the first night that you read her mind. She was taking me to Rolando to sacrifice me, but what didn't make sense was that she brought me back unharmed when Rolando's men were on our tail." I glanced out the window, looking up at the large moon casting its silver glow across the sky. "If she was taking me to him anyway, why not just hand me over?"

“I’ve been thinking about that, and you’re right. It doesn’t make any sense.” Kane’s brows creased together, a sign that he was thinking hard. “We need to find out what Chadwick knows about all this before we jump to any conclusions one way or another where Nicolette is involved.”

I didn’t want to stop talking; it calmed my nerves. Kane’s driving was stressing me out, the higher the speedometer rose, the more my temperature increased from fear. I was pretty sure a car wreck couldn’t kill us, unless we were decapitated, but I still didn’t want to experience one.

“Do you think Rolando killed the man you found in the bedroom?” I sat in the front seat of the limo while Kane drove.

“I would have smelled his scent in the house and on the body. I don’t think he killed him, but I’m pretty sure now that he’s back in town that he had something to do with it.” Kane frowned. “Rolando has a lot of avid followers, people who would do anything to appease him, even humans who want a chance at everlasting life. You would be surprised what people will do if something like that is waved in front of their face as payment for a wrong doing.”

“Little surprises me anymore, Kane. Very little.” I looked out the window, thankful I saw no headlights in the side mirror. “Where are we going anyway?”

“Mexico.” Kane pushed a button and the back window came down so we could see Maggie and the demons. “Maggie, are we in the clear to get to David?”

“I don’t sense anyone near us, but if Rolando discovers the house empty, you know he will come after us, tracking full force to the airport.” Maggie glanced at me.

I read her mind and she’d been filled in about what had transpired early in the evening. I gave her a half-hearted smile to let her know I would be okay.

“We’re not going to the airport. David has the plane stationed in Paris. We’re headed to a boat waiting for us near the Dublin coast.” Kane focused on the winding road. “Rolando would never expect that angle. I need everyone to shield your minds; we can’t risk them tapping into our plans at all.”

Everyone nodded, including me and I hoped I could keep my barriers up. I was starting to get hungry again and wondered when we would have a chance to feed. I watched the Irish countryside fly by as

we sped toward a few more days of freedom. There was so much of the country I'd wanted to explore, but that would have to wait for another time, a safer time. I knew Rolando would eventually track us down, as he had already proven he could do, but this time I hoped we had a little more time to formulate an actual plan before he managed to find us.

Kane drove full throttle, and we reached the coast in record time. I was happy to get out of the oversized car and feel the ground beneath my feet. I couldn't afford to throw up anymore blood, and hoped I could keep it all in my system. I couldn't drink from the demons, and I'd drank from Kane once already.

I'd never been on a boat larger than a blowup one on the river as a child, so I wasn't sure how my body would respond to being on a large body of water for an extended period of time. I was hoping I wouldn't be seasick. Blood loss was my worst fear, even more scary than being caught up in a huge vampire and demon war.

I glanced toward the dock area to find a boat, not much larger than a fishing vessel, tied to the pier. If this was a disguise to hide us on the water, it was a good one. Rolando would never expect Kane to parade around in something so discreet. I looked to Kane for answers, but he was distracted with the demons. I cued my ears in to their conversation, while keeping my own mental barriers up.

"Maybe we should split up." Chadwick looked out towards the large body of water. "If they do track us to this point, they will be given a choice on which path to follow. We still don't know if they are seeking you out, or us."

"That's true, but we need to stick together. We've yet to discuss what you know about this uprising and the attacks, and we'll be stronger in numbers against them." Kane turned his focus to the boat as David came up from below the deck.

"We're all set." David eyed me as I made my way off the small platform onto the boat. "Good to see you, Gabriela." He seemed nervous, and it made me feel bad.

"You don't have to fear me, David. I'm not going to eat you." I walked past him, frowning as anger churned deep inside my stomach. I made my way below the deck into the cabin area before I exploded on him.

Maggie made her way down behind me. "Gab, are you okay?" She touched my shoulder gently. "You look a little pale."

“We always look pale, Maggie.” Though I tried to fight it, my lips turned up in a smile. “We’re vampires, remember?”

She laughed. “I meant more pale than normal. When’s the last time you fed?”

“Kane let me drink from him a little while we were outside, before we left the house.” I looked at my feet. “I didn’t take much, and I’ll admit I’m a little hungry.”

“Here.” Maggie crossed the small area and opened a cooler that was placed on the floor. She pulled out a plastic bag filled with blood. I recognized it as the type of plastic container hospitals use for blood transfusions. She cut off the top and poured the liquid into a cup. The smell was all around me and I drank the cup dry without hesitation.

“Thank you.” I handed the empty cup back to her. “Not as good as from the source, but it serves its purpose.” It still creeped me out that I didn’t think twice about drinking blood. I should have found it gross, disgusting, not appealing and delicious.

The engine turned as David fired up the boat. The hum of the motor filled the cabin area loudly. The vibration of us cutting through the water tickled my body as we headed out into the ocean towards our first location.

“What time is it?” I asked Maggie, trying to calculate in my head how much time we’d have before sunrise.

“Just past ten.” She poured herself a glass of blood and sipped it the way a normal person would coffee. “It will take us about three hours to reach our destination in this beat up boat. We could move much quicker without the boat, but we can’t leave David behind, and the demons don’t move as fast as we do. So, we’ll have to deal with these regular transportation methods. Once we reach the French coast, it will take another half hour to get to the plane, get everyone loaded on, and hit the skies.”

“What about the sun?” I was nervous about being trapped somewhere due to the rising sun.

“We’ll be in flight before the sun rises here. It’s a bigger plane than the one you flew over on, so it will be totally safeguarded. Don’t stress, Gab. Kane thinks of everything.” She smiled, and I was able to allow myself to relax a little.

“Maggie.” Kane’s voice bellowed down the stairs. “How about bringing David something to eat?”

I watched her throw together a sandwich in no time, literally, it felt like no time passed before she was barreling up the stairs. I walked around the cabin looking at the pictures on the wall, not recognizing anyone in them, and knew the exact moment Kane was in the cabin with me. I smelled him before his hand touched my shoulder, and he spun me around.

“Kane, what are you doing?” My back was pressed against the wall of the cabin, my arms limply hanging by my sides.

“What I’ve been dying to do since I got home.” He tilted my head up and took my lips before I could take in what was happening.

When my mind caught up to my body, it was racing with lustful images of things I wanted to do with and to Kane. The world around us no longer mattered. The danger we were facing was just a distant thought. I was hot, and the more Kane kissed me, the more I lost focus on everything else but him.

Chapter Fourteen

“Wait.” I breathed out between kisses. “I can’t do this. Not here, not like this.”

Kane took a step back. “You’re right. You deserve candlelight and romance, not a beat up fishing boat in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.”

“It’s not that. I just think that while we have the opportunity to talk, we should. Call the demons down here. We all need to put our heads together.” I walked over to the small sofa and sat down, waiting for Kane to gather our little group minus David who needed to man the controls.

Maggie took the seat beside me on the sofa, allowing some space between Kane and me which was a good thing at the moment. The demons perched themselves on the bench seat of the nook that took up the corner beside the sofa, and Kane stood, like a speaker ready to give a speech to a large crowd, in front of us all.

“How long have you guys been on the run?” His question was directed towards Chadwick and Kelina.

“Two months, since word of the first attacks came to us in Shreveport.” Kelina squeezed her husband’s hand. “Vampire friends of ours came to the house to warn us that we were the first suspects named, yet no one could give the source of how our names were thrown into the mix.”

“I don’t understand it. Rolando is my maker, I should have a connection with him, and yet I feel like he is out to take me down.” Kane frowned. “We have to figure out what he’s up to.”

Chadwick stood. “He wants to rule the entire underworld, and I’ve heard rumors he wants to try to take over the human race, too. He is seeking ultimate power, and he cannot have that unless all the key players of the underworld stand with him. My wife and I refuse to allow our demon family to be a part of anything so outrageous, and so he needs to eliminate us or have our people turn against us.”

“That explains why he would come after me, too.” Kane started pacing again. “He knows I would never allow him to be successful.”

I spoke up then. “Nicolette is a young vamp that is being held accountable for a murder in the park in Garlow, and Kane was hired

to take her down because Rolando told him she was a threat to exposing the existence of the underworld. If he is set on taking over everything, why would he care?"

"He doesn't." Chadwick looked at Kane. "She was a distraction; he was using her to bait you. I know for a fact she didn't kill those people. I overheard a conversation from some of the goons Rolando sent after us. They were discussing this Nicolette girl and how she really was a victim. It was in the park, the night of the murders that she was turned. The other two humans were left for dead. The girl woke up, with no recollection of what happened, and no one to show her the ropes of being a vampire. It was the perfect excuse for him to use to lure you to help him, and keep you away from what was really going on."

"Damn it!" Kane was angry, I could tell by how dark his eyes became. "Do you think she's the girl they've brought along to Ireland?"

"Probably. Rolando's intent would have been to lure your girlfriend away long enough to take her." Chadwick nodded to me. "You have a connection with the vamp girl, right?"

"I was covering a story about her for the local paper I work for. That's actually how Kane and I met." Something clicked deep inside me. "Kane, did Rolando know your intentions, to stay away from me in this lifetime?"

"Yes. We discussed it over cocktails one night when I ran into him out of the blue." Kane cursed so loudly the walls of the boat threatened to crack. "He set me up. He knew I wouldn't be able to resist you if I saw you."

"Okay, let me lay it all out here." I turned so everyone could hear me easily. "Rolando is out to basically take over the world. He used Nicolette, making her seem like an enemy to lure Kane into finding me. He tried to kill Kane and me in the clover field by sending demons to attack us which would have looked like another lash out from your demon family against vampires and make you guys an easy target for destruction. What he didn't anticipate was that I would get my memories back so quickly this time, or that I would possess this necklace which would help protect us. He also didn't think far enough ahead to know that we would ban together against him." It made perfect sense when I said it out loud, and everyone seemed to agree

with me. There was only one thing left to do, figure out a way to stop him, and that was where we were all coming up blank.

“We have to figure out Rolando’s biggest weakness and use it to our advantage.” Maggie, who’d been silent up to this point, spoke softly. “What is the one thing that can distract him long enough for someone to kill him?”

We all stared at each other, all trying to dig into the depths of our minds to come up with something that would help us.

“I’ve got it!” I stood up and walked to stand in front of Kane. “Think, Kane, why did he turn you?”

“He was jealous of us, of...” Kane swooped me up, hugged me tight before placing my feet back on the ground. “Love is the answer. Rolando would give up everything in his existence for love. It’s the one thing he never had as a human, and hasn’t found in the afterlife either.”

“So what do we do?” Chadwick looked at Kane. “How do we stop him?”

“We don’t. She does.” He pointed to Maggie.

“Oh no, not a chance. I can’t stand that little leprechaun looking creep.” Maggie crossed her arms over her chest. “I’m not that good of an actress, Kane.”

He left my side to kneel in front of his oldest friend. “You can do this, Mags. He will eat it up. It would be the best betrayal in his mind, my best friend siding with him, loving him.” Kane touched her cheek. “It’s the perfect way to get under his skin, buy us some time, and then we can slip in and take him out.”

“What about all his followers?” I asked, thinking that just because you get rid of the leader doesn’t mean the problem would be solved.

“People only do what he says because he is the oldest known vampire alive. They fear his wrath more than anything else. If he was gone, and a more worthy person took his place, they would easily change their tune.” Kane was smiling. “And no, Gabriela, I do not want to be that person, but I know who would.”

I noticed the twinkle in Maggie’s eye as she thought of being Queen. *What have I gotten caught up in?*

Time slipped past and we worked out the details of how Maggie would get herself aligned with Rolando. Kane was better at plotting out a course than I thought he’d be, and with some good input

from the demons, I was confident we'd be able to stop the evil little man from causing harm to anyone else.

David docked the boat in just under three hours. I was happy to get out of the cramped cabin, and away from Maggie's ego which had swollen to new heights since the moment Kane gave her even the slightest inkling that she could be the new Vampire Queen after Rolando's demise. Once we were all off the boat, David set it to auto pilot and I watched as it went wandering back out into the ocean, void of all its passengers.

I expected a limo to be waiting to drive us to the air field, but instead the six of us crammed into a small SUV. Kane drove, since he proved to be the fastest and safest of us all. I simply secured my seatbelt and allowed myself to be taken to yet another secret location, not satisfied until I was tucked safely away on the plane.

I drank two more cups of blood, and had two shots of whiskey before slipping off to one of the many private rooms. I knew that I wouldn't be able to sleep before sunrise, but that would be soon enough. My body was still fully awake, but my mind was tired.

I slipped out of my jeans, removed my bra, and crawled into the silk dream that was a bed. I curled into a ball and tucked the covers around me. I let my mind drift through memory after memory, hoping that I could find something else that would help us defeat Rolando.

Chapter Fifteen

Kane slipped into the room, attempting complete silence, but I could hear his thoughts. His mind was a field of worry and concern, not only for Maggie, but for all of us. If we didn't succeed in taking Rolando down, we would all die by our enemy's hands and never have the opportunity to fulfill our life together.

The covers moved slowly and then Kane's body was pressed against my back, spooning me while his large arm wrapped around my waist. I sighed, and snuggled into him, our bodies as close as I imagined two could be with clothes on.

Kane had a way of calming me, or maybe we calmed each other, even in the midst of chaos around us. The more time I spent with him, mixed with the memories that continued to fill my mind and heart, the more I realized I was hopelessly in love with him. From his stubbornness to his gentle kisses, I was hooked.

I knew the plane ride would be long, and we had at least two hours until the sun would begin to show itself. I wanted to make good use of our time together, before my body fell into the concrete oblivion I detested. I wanted Kane, and I'd made him wait long enough.

I edged my body down his as we lay in the bed, rubbing my lace-covered bottom against his sex. The response was immediate, a low growl escaping his throat as he slipped his hand beneath the fabric of my t-shirt to caress my waiting breasts with his hand. I moved up and down slowly, teasing his excited nub until its hardness was pressed firmly into my lower back.

Kane moved us in one swift movement so that I lay beneath him, my shirt tossed to the floor below. He held himself above me, flexing the muscles on his large arms. His eyes were blazing and staring into mine until the strong need to have him inside me, filling my body with every inch I could take, was all I could think about. My eyes moved lower to inventory his manhood, and for a brief moment I was actually afraid.

Thoughts of how good it would feel to have him inside me outweighed any fear I had of his oversized penis. Heat and wetness continued to grow between my legs as he kept his eyes locked on my body. If he could make me feel so aroused with just a stare, I knew I

was in trouble when his hands found there way to my body once more.

I opened my mind completely and let him in. I wanted to feel what he was feeling during our first time together, and I wanted him to be able to do the same with my thoughts. His lips curled up into a wicked grin as I thought of things I'd seen on late night television.

"We can certainly do that." He bent down to take my lips, his tongue slipping inside my mouth to do a rhythmic dance with mine.

My nipples hardened, becoming two tiny peaks tingling with anticipation. Kane trailed kisses from my lips across my jaw and down my neck. Each one left my skin over stimulated with a strong need for his touch. He continued lower, taking my breast into his mouth, teasing my nipple with flicks of his tongue and when he gently tugged with his teeth, I found myself arching off the bed, eager for more.

"I like you like this," he purred against my stomach. "Wild, full of passion, and on the brink of losing control."

I grabbed onto his shoulders and flipped him onto his back easily. "We'll see who loses control."

I wanted him to feel like he was losing his mind, the way I did every time his lips touched my skin. I wanted the fire to spread across his body until it was a blazing inferno of desire. More than anything else, I wanted to make him beg for release.

Following his lead, I began my seduction with slow, lingering kisses. I traced his bottom lip with my tongue, edging my way slowly down his jaw to capture his ear lobe in my mouth. I enjoyed the way his hands rubbed and squeezed my ass as I sucked and nipped at his lobe. The rougher I became the hotter his skin felt against mine.

I found his happy trail and began to follow it; getting pleasure from the moans I could not only hear but feel vibrating from his chest. I wanted to taste him, make him swallow his pride as he screamed out my name. I felt sexy, and as I touched the spot right above his erection his hands fisted in my hair. I looked up to find him watching me the way a mountain lion watches its prey. I didn't laugh out loud but sent him a mental giggle.

"Behave Kane, I'm far from finished with you." I grabbed his cock with both hands and stroked until dampness pooled at the tip. I took him in my mouth, tasting the saltiness of sex.

I positioned my lips so I could take as much of him into my mouth as I could. I teased his shaft with my tongue as I moved up and down, killing him softly. I rolled his balls in my fingers as I continued to suck on him.

“Gabriela, if you keep doing that.” He stopped talking as a deep moan escaped his lips. “If you keep doing that, I’m not going to be able to stop myself from coming in your mouth.”

I looked up long enough to meet his eyes while my lips curved in a wicked grin. I took the length of him back into my mouth, the head of his cock bumping against the back of my throat. I could tell he was on the verge of climax, his balls a tight mass of flesh against my fingers. I grabbed his ass with my hands, digging my nails into his flesh and thoughts of the pain and pleasure principle worked itself into my head.

I wasn’t afraid to swallow and looked forward to tasting him fully. His cock swelled slightly as I pulled him into my mouth again slowly, the warm explosion of his seed trickled down the back of my throat in response to my touch. I sat back on my knees, licked my lips and made sure not one drop was wasted. Before I could remark on his masterful performance, I was on my back again.

“Your turn to scream.” There was a look in his eye I hadn’t seen before, and couldn’t quite put my finger on. The closest description I could come to in my mind was determination. Kane smiled, and the hair on the back of my neck stood on end as a jolt of electricity seared through me as he parted my knees with his broad shoulders.

I attempted to sit up, but was quickly disappointed when he placed a hand on my stomach and pushed me back against the bed. I stared up at the ceiling, thinking dirty thoughts I knew he could see in his mind, frustrated I couldn’t watch what he was doing. He pushed my legs farther apart, gaining easier access to me, and I gripped the bed sheets hard as he found my swollen clit, the torture slow as he swirled his tongue against it.

“Kane, I need you.” Each stroke of his tongue added fuel to the fire that was now raging out of control. I reached up grabbing my hair tightly in my fingers, biting my lip to prevent myself from screaming out loud. I knew it was what Kane wanted. How had he managed to turn the tables around on me? I was the one who wanted him to beg me, and now I was the one begging. “Kane, please.”

There was no hesitation on his part, his member already rock hard again, as he grabbed my hips and thrust his cock into me. I wrapped my legs around his waist so I could take him deeper. His balls bounced against my perineum causing friction that added to my heightened state of bliss.

“Tell me that you want me.” I tightened my legs around him in response. He thrust harder and faster. “I want to hear you say it, Gabriela.”

I knew it was going to be a quick release for me because all the built up pressure caused by the added stress in our lives needed to be expelled. The more he pushed the higher I climbed.

“I, oh.” My vision blurred as climax took me like a choir hitting the high notes of a beautiful hymn. “That was...”

“Perfect.” Kane finished my sentence for me. His body gently fell on top of mine, a state of relaxation between us. I closed my eyes, completely sated.

I wasn't sure how much time had passed, it didn't feel like that long at all, but the weight of the sun's existence was beginning to take a toll on my body. My eyelids were becoming heavy, and though there were a million things I wanted to say to Kane, I could only get out three little words. “I love you.”

Chapter Sixteen

We left Maggie in Maryland at a small house near the remains of Kane's old warehouse. She was to begin putting everything in order to have it rebuilt and restocked. We hoped that was where Rolando would find her and our plan could kick into action. I wasn't so sure it was going to work, but Kane seemed really confident, and he knew Rolando better than the rest of us, so why argue?

"I'll miss you." I told her as we stood waiting for everything to be loaded into the car for yet another departure.

She moved closer to me. "I'll miss you, too, Gab." She used the short version of my name, something that I only allowed her to call me on a regular basis. She brushed her hand down my cheek and hugged me hard. "I won't let you guys down."

"I know you won't, but that doesn't make me any less fearful." I allowed her to squeeze harder. "I really wish you were going with us."

"Me, too, but this will all work out." She kissed my cheek. "Trust your instincts. I'll be fine."

I stepped back, feeling Kane's eyes on us. "I have complete faith in you." I moved aside when he came closer. He grabbed Maggie, securing her in a brotherly type hug.

Kane looked at me over her shoulder and I smiled though I was more worried than I had ever been in my life. I moved back in to give her one last hug and then turned to focus my attention on the plane so she couldn't see the sadness in my eyes. I was scared for her, not because I didn't think she could handle herself, but because I wasn't sure how far Rolando would go to take Kane down. If something happened to Maggie, Kane would never be able to forgive himself for asking her to take on such a task. I just had to hold firm to the belief that he knew what he was leading us all into.

I got into the waiting car only after Maggie was tucked inside the small house. The drive back to the airport was short, and the plane we were taking was much smaller than any we'd used so far. We flew as close to the Mexican border as we could get using a private landing strip that a friend of Kane's owned. I hoped the friend was trustworthy and wouldn't tip Rolando off on our whereabouts. We

really needed him in Maryland to hook up with Maggie before chasing after us.

David looked exceptionally tired when we landed, and I was relieved when Kane dismissed him to go home to his wife. There was no reason for him to continue the journey and have his life at risk. Being a human, he was much weaker than the rest of us and would be an easy target in times of chaos. I watched as Kane embraced him in a hug, and though I'd already known it before, that moment defined the fact that David wasn't just hired help, he was a true friend.

"Gabriela, it's been a pleasure getting to know you." David hugged me gently, and I fought down the urges that came from being that close to him when I was hungry. It wasn't him personally, just humans in general. I was still having trouble keeping my fangs under control when I could smell or hear the blood moving in their veins. "When all of this is over, Kane will have to bring you to dinner to meet my family."

I was touched by his willingness to let me be around those he cared for most in the world. "I'd like that very much." I smiled as he climbed back into the plane, and only when I heard the engine purr to life did I allow Kane to walk me to the waiting car.

I slid into the back of the limousine, thankful for the darkened windows. I knew once we hit Mexico it would be daylight. Knowing I would be safe sleeping in the car as we traveled was important to me. There wasn't much I could depend on in my new life, but Kane tried to provide a sense of security for me and I appreciated that.

"How long do you think it will take Maggie to convince Rolando she's turned against you?" Kelina, who hadn't said much in days, spoke up.

"Maggie is a better actress than she thinks she is. I give it less than a week and they will be hot on our trail." Kane passed me a cup of blood.

"What do we do in the meantime?" I noticed for the first time the small bump that graced Kelina's middle. It took me off guard and I wasn't sure how to feel about it.

"We keep our eyes open, and try to enjoy Mexico." Kane took my hand as he tried to get inside my head. "Kelina is expecting their first child. Demons are not like vampires, they can reproduce."

I had always wanted children, at least two, but now I would never experience the joy of motherhood. I would never have a real

family, or a normal life. I was a vampire and I just had to accept everything that came with the title, good or bad. I didn't have to like it, but I had to recognize it. My life had changed, there was no turning back, and I could embrace it or be devastated forever.

I handed Kane the empty cup and laid my head on his shoulder. I wished that Chadwick and Kelina had their own transportation. I wanted to be alone with Kane, wanted to feel him inside me again, because when we were a tangle of heat and passion, nothing else in the world mattered. I closed my eyes, feeling the warmth of the rising sun through the window protectors and let dreams of the children I'd never have dance through my head.

I woke in a strange bed, in a dark room that smelled of coconuts and I was completely alone. I sat up and wiped the sleep from my eyes, glancing around as my vision adjusted. I wanted a shower, and I needed to feed on something better than cold blood from a mug. It wasn't that it didn't curb the hunger, but I wanted the real thing, warm and fresh.

On the bathroom counter sat a rather skimpy white bikini and a note from Kane requesting I meet him for a swim. I tossed thoughts of a hot shower away as I imagined Kane's body wet with his muscles accented by the moonlight shining down on him as he waited for me. I was hungry, but there were other needs taking over my senses, and I changed quickly into the two-piece and followed Kane's instructions on how to get to the pool.

I found him, wearing nothing but a smile in the hot tub. I glanced around, half expecting to see other people meandering around, but I remembered the late hour.

"It's just you and I." The words rolled off his tongue as lust filled the air around us. "I've been waiting for you to wake up."

The human me would have been self conscious in the skimpy swimsuit. The vampire me simply felt sexy, and I wanted Kane to know it. I walked slowly, seducing him with the gentle swish of my hips as I approached the bubbling water. I slid in across from him, never taking my eyes off his and took my time edging down into the water.

I ran a hand across my neck allowing the heat to soak into my skin, and brushed against the pendant. I reached behind my neck to unclasp it, not wanting the heat or chemicals in the hot tub to ruin the chain, but Kane was on me instantly.

“Don’t take it off.” He took my lips before I could question him and left my lips tingling and lust in overdrive when he pulled away.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there when you woke up the first day.” He reached down to pull me into his lap. “I should never have left you in anyone else’s hands. I was afraid...”

“That I would hate you. I understand that, but Kane, you had a responsibility as my sire to see me through the first few days.” I pressed my face into his neck. “You left me, with needs and desires I couldn’t control, and Maggie was there for me. She took me out and taught me how to feed, and all the necessities of not harming the donor. I don’t regret that it happened the way it did, and she and I will always share a certain closeness because even though she didn’t change me she did teach me, but you have nothing to fear when I tell you I’m yours. It can only be you and me, Kane. You are the other half of my heart.”

“I love you so much, Gabriela, and though I’ve always dreamed of forever with you, I always hoped it would have been because you asked me to change you, not because you didn’t have a choice.” He frowned, and my heart hurt.

A memory flooded my mind, and I realized I knew more than just what Maggie had told me about the day in the clover field. “I did have a choice. I saw everything that happened and you saved my life.”

“No, I took your life.” He pulled me tight against his chest. “This is all my fault.”

I wasn’t sure what to say to him, but I couldn’t stand the pity party. “Listen to me Kane, and listen good. No matter how many times we’ve been pulled apart, fate has always brought us back together. Our love is timeless, and without the normal boundaries in this world.” I took his face in my hands forcing him to look at me. “Now we have forever. You can sit here and feel bad for yourself because of how we got here or you can just enjoy that we’ve been granted this opportunity. I would seriously prefer option number two.”

In response, he slid his hands down my sides and untied the strings on the bikini bottom. His hands moved up my back then and removed the top in the same fashion. I saw the material float away in the water exposing my naked body to his hungry eyes. He slid off the

bench, still holding me in his arms, so we were both down in the water.

His cock grew hard causing the need inside me to increase with each passing moment. I wrapped my legs around his waist and positioned myself to take him deeply. The water made him slide in with ease and the first wave of bliss crashed into me as his hands grabbed my hips moving my body in a rhythm that was pleasurable for both of us.

I didn't want a romantic coupling, I wanted hot sex. I moved faster, and when he attempted to slow me down I simply shook my head. I wanted it fast, and Kane aimed to please by holding my hips tightly in his grip and matching my speed as I rode him hard.

I was on the verge of climax when Kane pulled me close and drove his fangs into my neck. The heat that seared through me was beyond anything I'd ever felt and I came instantly. He didn't take much and pulled back, fire in his eyes and I wanted to give him the same pleasure. I continued to ride him; my own hunger sated but not completely satisfied knowing he hadn't experienced release yet. My incisors lengthened as he wrapped his arms tighter around my back pressing my breasts against his chest. I could feel the excitement buzzing in his head as I bit into his flesh, and the warmth of his release filled me as I came again, my body tightening around his.

Neither of us spoke for a while. Kane didn't let me go, but seemed content with holding me in the water. I was happy, the blissful after-sex feelings surging through me until the hunger pain hit, and I heard my stomach growl. I could have held out a few more minutes in the peace with Kane, but he'd heard it, too.

"We should feed before the night gets away from us." I didn't want to move, but Kane was right. Neither of us had real sustenance during our journey from overseas until now. We gathered our clothes, and wrapped in towels for other people's benefit made our way back to the room to dress for our first dinner out in Mexico.

Chapter Seventeen

A few days went by and I began to worry about Maggie. I didn't dare try to reach out to her telepathically, afraid that Rolando would know. Instead I patiently waited, along with Kane and our demon friends to hear from her the old fashioned way, the telephone.

When my cell began blazing right after I'd woken, I jumped on it, assuming that Maggie would be on the other line. I was surprised to hear the voice I did, and tried to keep calm. Anything I said could harm us, it could be a trap.

"Nicolette?" I asked as I moved out on the balcony of the hotel room. *Where was Kane?*

"Listen, Gabriela, I don't have a lot of time to talk to you." She sounded frightened. "I remembered your number, and you probably hate me, but I need to talk to you."

"I don't hate you, and I won't unless you give me reason to." I sighed. "Nicolette I know you could have taken me to Rolando that night when we left the diner, but you didn't."

"Shh. Don't say his name." Her voice was low, almost a whisper. "Listen, he left me here with two of his less than worthy peers. They're not smart, not in the catch on right away sense, and they were stupid enough to give me the phone."

"Why did you call me?" If her time was limited, I didn't need her rambling. I needed answers.

"Rolando has hooked up with your boyfriend's friend, the red-head. They're planning to come after you." I heard them earlier this morning before they left.

"Why are you telling me this?" I was still afraid that Rolando could be listening in. If Nicolette was still a hostage, it was possible that he'd put her up to calling us to see if I would let anything slip, like where we were staying.

"I'm telling you because I feel you need to know. You deserve a chance to be prepared." I heard her fighting back a sob. "I wasn't prepared when he came for me, not the first time in the park, and not when he caught me after I left you at the diner." I heard her sob again. "He's going to kill Kane, and he wants you for himself."

"Why?" This was a new angle, one I hadn't thought about.

“I’m not sure. He’s happy with the red-head, which is why I think he left me behind this trip.” I heard her shudder. “But, I overheard him say something about how sweet the revenge would be with your boyfriend gone forever. Something about you getting to suffer for eternity like he has.”

It all boiled down to me and my relationship with Kane. Rolando had never been after Kane all those centuries ago, he’d been after me. His anger had sparked from the simple fact that I was in love with someone else. Kane wouldn’t have lived so long, suffering time after time without me, if Rolando had never laid eyes on me in the first place. Everything that had happened was because of me.

I heard a commotion in the background that sounded like someone trying to beat down a door. “What else can you tell me?” I asked, knowing there had to be more and that my time was limited to talk to her. They had given her the phone, but probably never expected her to call me like she’d done. It was only a matter of time before they would get into the room, and I was pretty sure with their vampire hearing they’d heard everything she told me. I was truly afraid for her.

“Rolando and the woman left just after sunset tonight. Wherever you are, they’re coming. He has all his best men with him.” I heard the noise growing louder. “Take him down, Gabriela. Whatever it takes.”

I heard Nicolette whimper, then the sound of plastic being crushed, and the phone went dead. My heart broke for her. She’d called to help me and I hoped they didn’t kill her.

I needed to find Kane to share the new information I’d been given. If Rolando and Maggie had left just after sunset, they’d arrive in Mexico early the next day. They’d have to take immediate cover, and I would be faced with a huge disadvantage, I’d be sleeping when they arrived. If Rolando were smart, he’d attack while I was sleeping, but I really hoped he wasn’t that intelligent.

The knock on the door was gentle, and I checked the peep hole before pulling it open. A young man stood there, tray in hand, and I invited him in. He sat the silver platter on the edge of the bed and turned to face me. His eyes held a distant glaze, and I realized Kane had sent him to me, knowing I’d be hungry when I woke. I picked up the note on the tray and read it.

Take only what you need.

I drank slowly, savoring the flavor of the fresh blood, but I didn't get swept up even though the boy was thinking of some things I had never imagined possible. I made notes so Kane and I could experiment later. I followed Kane's instructions and took only what I needed to stop the hunger pains. I knew he would take me to feed later.

I ran into Kelina in the lobby on my way to the pool area. I hoped I would find Kane there taking a swim. It would be easier to indulge him on the bad news if he were relaxed. Of course, seeing him naked in the pool, given we'd be alone; we might not even get to the talking portion of our program until much later.

I smiled, and noticed how uncomfortable Kelina looked. "What's wrong?" I asked breaking the space between us in just a few small steps. "Where's Chadwick?" *Why did her husband leave her unprotected?*

"He's with Kane, they're having a pow-wow of sorts, man style." She frowned. "I don't feel so good."

"Is everything okay with...?" I pointed to her stomach.

"Oh yeah, the baby's fine." She frowned again. "I think I ate something that didn't agree with me, and I'm a little tired."

"Where are the guys having their meeting?" I asked, glancing around trying to pinpoint their location with my senses with no luck.

"You know something." Kelina pointed her finger at me. "I can tell."

"I need to talk to Kane." I brushed off her accusation, even though it was true. I still didn't trust our demon comrades completely, and I didn't want to let anything slip until I spoke with Kane first.

"Are we in trouble?" Kelina pressed further. I shook my head and walked away.

I found Kane and Chadwick at a small table out near the pool. Kane met my eyes as I approached the table and I was sure he saw what was hidden in them, fear.

"Chadwick, I think you might want to go check on Kelina. I just saw her in the lobby and she's not feeling the best." I was trying to dismiss him without letting on that something was bothering me.

Once Chadwick vanished inside the hotel, Kane stood and wrapped me in an embrace. The gesture was small, but it was just

what I need it. The call with Nicolette had rattled me, but I hadn't known how much until I saw Kane sitting at the table with the demon. I couldn't lose him, and allowing myself to get upset was just what Rolando wanted. He needed me scared, shaken, and vulnerable. He needed me to screw up, but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

"Did you eat?" Kane stroked his fingers down my cheek. "You look a little out of sorts."

"Yes I got the room service, thank you." I sat down because my knees were threatening to become weak. "Rolando and Maggie are on their way. They left Maryland just after sunset this evening."

Kane moved the other chair so he was sitting facing me and took my hands. "Maggie called?" I knew what he was thinking, how did she manage to slip past Rolando enough to phone me, and I had to set him straight.

"Nicolette called." I watched his expression change, utter curiosity written all over his face. "She's on our side, Kane. I think Rolando has been abusing her."

He frowned. "I was afraid of that. When we defeat him, we will make sure she's taken care of." He lifted my hand, kissed my knuckles. "She cares about you."

Now it was my turn to be curious. "What makes you think that?" I asked, moving into his lap where he could wrap his arms around me and take away some of my stress.

"She called, risked her own ass to reach out to you." He smiled. "She certainly didn't do it for me."

She might not have called to save Kane, but by alerting me of what was coming, she was giving us both a chance to defeat Rolando. He would try to get to Kane first, to weaken me, to make me submit to him, but I wouldn't. He would never kill Kane during my watch; we would stay together, attached at the hip like Siamese twins if that's what it took to keep both of us from meeting the true death.

Nicolette might not like Kane, but only because of what Rolando had implanted in her head about him. That could be altered once everything else was taken care of, when she realized he was actually the good guy. I looked up at his face as he studied mine, our eyes met and I wanted to pretend that everything was perfect.

"They might kill her." Kane stated very matter of fact. "Hopefully Rolando will be too busy with his mission coming here to worry about what she's doing wherever he left her."

I nodded and snuggled closer to him again. "I hope we kill him before anyone else dies at his hand."

Kane squeezed me again, ran his hand back through my hair to comfort. I laid my head on his shoulder and looked up at the sky.

"Kane, if we only have one night left, I want to cherish every moment of it." He smiled and stood, lifting me effortlessly.

Behind the closed door of our room, he took my lips gently. "I want you to feel my love, Gabriela." His mouth was like an inferno and our tongues found a rhythm to dance, slow and teasing.

I lifted my arms as his hands came up my sides, pulling my shirt over my head to expose my breasts which were already aching for his hands to caress them. He cupped them, rubbing his thumbs across my nipples and purred in response. He nuzzled my neck as his hands continued to roam every exposed inch of my body.

He pulled me close, grabbed my hips and moved me against him in a sensual slow dance. His erection was already straining against the cabana pants he wore. I put my hands between us, slowly pulling the string on his pants until they were loose enough to drop to the floor. He wore nothing under the pants, and I became even more aroused when the softness of his skin brushed against my fingers.

I ran my hand the length of him, slowly, torturing him with gentle tugs and caresses. A low growl came from within his throat. He grabbed my hands, pulling my arms above my head and held them there with one hand. With his other hand he removed my shorts, seeing that I had also neglected to put on any type of undergarment when I'd gotten up. Kane smiled as his eyes did a visual inventory of my body.

His mouth was on me then, his lips and tongue teasing my flesh as his hand cupped my heat. My body was on fire, Kane had a way of turning up the burner to high and when he slipped a finger inside me, it was almost as if someone poured gasoline on the flames.

"Kane." I couldn't say anything else as I climbed toward the first peak, rubbing against his hand.

Kane let go of my wrist and wrapped his arms around me. He began moving me toward the bed. He turned me around and bent me over so my stomach lay on the mattress, my bottom in the air. With his hands on my hips he slid into me from behind. I arched my back so my ass was slightly lifted and I could take him deeper. He reached

under me and cupped my breasts, rubbing and squeezing until I thought I'd explode.

He thrust harder, his speed increasing which had me climbing the peak again more rapidly. What undid me was when he reached around my body and ran his thumb across my swollen clit and with one last thrust I came, my body squeezing tightly around him. I heard a slow moan, felt the small spasms in his body, and knew that Kane had gone over the edge with me.

"I love you." I heard myself say as he gently lay my body back down against the mattress. *I can't lose you.*

Chapter Eighteen

We lay for a while in silence wrapped in each other's arms, but I knew that like me, Kane was deep in thought about what the next day would bring. There was no guarantee that Roland would find our location as soon as he got to Mexico, but I wasn't taking any chances and I hoped that Kane felt the same. We had to put our heads together with the demons and plan strategy.

Chadwick and Kelina would be awake during the day, and though they weren't defenseless, their powers were much more limited than ours. Kelina was in no real position to be taking part in any form of physical conflict, and part of me wished we could tell them to leave, to get far away from our location until everything was over. I knew we couldn't do that of course, they were our only line of defense if Rolando decided to attack us during the day, and they might be the only thing standing between us and the true death.

"Gabriela, I need you to promise me something." Kane rolled and held himself up on his elbow with his palm pressed against his face. "If things don't go as planned, if something happens to me..."

I didn't let him finish. I knew what he was thinking because I was thinking the same thing. "I won't give up, Kane. I'll fight until Rolando is finished off."

He reached out and stroked my hair with his other hand. "No, that's not my concern." He pressed his palm against my cheek. "If something happens to me, you have to promise me that you will go on, and you won't let a broken heart make you do something foolish."

"Like stand out in the sun until I explode?" I was serious, but Kane took that as a joke and a laugh, deep and throaty escaped his lips.

"Something like that," he replied. "Now, I think we should get dressed and find Chadwick and Kelina again before they go to sleep. Then you and I have got to feed." He sat up. "We have to really gorge ourselves tonight, blood is power, and we need lots of it."

After a brief meeting with the demons, Kane took me away from the hotel and down to the beach where we found a group of people having a late night bonfire. Most were highly intoxicated, which seemed to be the trend in Mexico with the tourists, but we managed to find a few couples that were completely sober.

I didn't like the way the women looked at Kane, their eyes feasting on his body. I caught myself before I let the jealousy monster unleash its wrath. We needed to feed, and I couldn't be too picky given our current circumstances. As much as I hated the way the women viewed him, his anger toward the men around us was greater, and when my first donor attempted to cop a feel of my chest he almost lunged at the man, but I was able to take care of myself.

We left them all dazed and confused, surrounded by liquor bottles with only the memories of partying a little too hard around the fire.

"They won't hurt themselves when they snap out of it, will they?" I asked him as we walked toward the hotel hand in hand.

"No, soon they will drift into peaceful sleep, and in the morning the only thing they will remember is what a great time they had tonight." He flashed me his perfect smile. "We won't exist to them."

"Will it get easier?" I asked him as gentle waves lapped against my bare feet. "Feeding without the emotional attachment?"

"In time." He smiled. "You will always be able to feel what your donor feels, you just have to learn when to tap into it for the energy and when to step back from it, like tonight when the guy became sexual with you." He glanced down at me, the light of the moon casting a silvery glow upon his skin.

"You're beautiful in the moonlight." I touched his face.

"And you're changing the subject." He laughed before scooping me up into his arms. "I need to get you back to the hotel."

"I know. I feel the heat already." The sun was barely a sliver on the horizon, but the sky was already becoming lighter. "We can do this, Kane. We're going to take him down."

Kane ran full speed to the hotel, tucking me into the bed as the sun rose. My eyelids became heavy, and then darkness took over. I hoped he didn't try anything foolish, like going searching for Rolando in the daylight hours while I slept.

* * *

I woke to someone screaming, and it took a few minutes, but I realized that person was me. I hadn't dreamt one dream since the change, until now, and it didn't even qualify as a dream but a full-

blown nightmare. There had been blood, lots of blood, and the stench of death. I hoped it wasn't a preview of what was to come for us.

Kane sat holding me, stroking my cheeks with his thumbs, and I melted into his arms. At least he was still there in the room with me. My worst fear had been waking up alone.

"You're shaking like crazy." He pulled me in closer.

"It was just a dream. I just need to work it out of my system."

He stroked my back, his fingers gentle and it helped ease my mind.

"Let's get dressed." I said pulling back before jumping from the bed.

"We might as well get this party started."

Kane seemed a little taken back from my eagerness to face what was bound to happen, a full blown war with Rolando. I had never been a coward, and I wasn't about to turn into one. I was more the face my problems head on kind of girl, and I had the bloodstone. I still didn't know how much it might help us, but it hadn't let me down so far.

As I put on my shoes, a loud knock on the door had my body going stiff. I glanced up at Kane as I tied the last lace. He moved to the door slowly, checked the peephole and opened it to allow our demon friends to enter the room.

"I'm not going to beat around the bush." Chadwick ran a hand through his hair. "Rolando is here, not just Mexico here, but here in town."

"Someone had to tip him off." Kane looked at me, and I knew he was thinking Nicolette, but I didn't agree. We hadn't spoken directly of my location, and even if she had known, she wouldn't have given up the information easily. I still trusted her.

"If he's connected with you." I looked at Kane. "What if the stone is pulling him towards us?"

Kane glanced at the pendant, and then met my eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Think about Kane, our blood is mixed together in the pendant. It's one reason you're always able to find me." I paused, studied his face. "Rolando is your maker; his blood runs through you, too. So if your blood is in the pendant, then so is his."

"He's using the pendant like a tracking device." Kane smacked his palm against his head. "That pendant is like a personal GPS. We have to get rid of it." He reached out to pull the chain from my neck.

“Wait.” Chadwick spoke up. “If he comes with demons, you’ll have no way to fight them off, not if they come in large numbers.”

Kane was pacing, clearly disturbed by this new found knowledge. I was upset with myself for not figuring it out sooner. As long as I had the pendant, I would draw Rolando to us, but without it, we might not survive an attack.

“What if we use it to our advantage, without getting rid of it all together?” I asked, looking at each person in the room.

“How?” Kane stopped pacing long enough to look at me.

“Without it, you are practically defenseless. With it, we cannot hide.”

“We use a decoy.” I smiled. “We use it to our advantage, lure Rolando out of his comfort zone.”

Kane kissed my lips. “I love your way of thinking.” He turned toward Chadwick. “We need to find Juan and fast.”

I wondered who Juan was, but I didn’t ask as the limo moved over the rough terrain. It seemed we were traveling somewhere off the beaten path, and with Rolando so close, I wasn’t exactly fond of the idea that we would be in the middle of nowhere. Kane drove like a bat out of hell and out of habit my seatbelt was securely fastened. He gave me a curious look when I clipped it in place, and I simply smiled.

“Chadwick and Kelina can’t wear the pendant.” Kane explained. “It would kill them. So, we need to find Juan, he can wear it and lure Rolando to our rendezvous spot.”

“Makes sense.” I glanced out the window as we slowly stopped outside what looked like a make shift cabin. “Seriously?” I asked Kane and what I got in response was the most devilish smile I’d ever seen his face possess. If our situation had been less serious I would have laughed.

“Gabriela, give me the pendant.” Kane held out his hand, and I could tell he was sure that we were doing the right thing.

I hesitated, not because I held such an emotional attachment to the necklace anymore that I couldn’t let it go, but because I was unprotected without it. Kane’s plan was that this Juan guy would wear the necklace, Rolando would track him, and we would meet up at a particular spot to ambush Rolando. It sounded easy, but I knew it wouldn’t be. Nothing was ever that simple.

“You two stay here.” Kane pointed at Kelina and me.

“Chadwick and I will approach Juan, as he sometimes is a bit nasty

when he first wakes up. If anyone approaches the car besides the two of us, keep the doors locked.” He looked at me then. “If they try to break the windows, the keys are in the ignition. Take off and we’ll meet up later.”

“Kane, I couldn’t leave you behind.” I frowned, immediately upset that he would suggest my leaving the two of them stranded in unknown territory.

“Hopefully it won’t come to that, but these vampires are not like my friends and me. They are killers, ruthless, and you will be a stranger.” I shuddered. “Gabriela, you have to be strong right now. I don’t think it will be an issue, but you need to know what to do just in case.” He shook me out of my dark thoughts.

Kelina climbed up front with me and we watched out men walk off into the night. *Our men*. It had a nice ring to it.

Chapter Nineteen

My mind was racing, thoughts of Kane's demise threatening to take over any rational thought I might have had left. He'd been gone too long, that was what my mind kept registering, way too long to be okay. I looked at Kelina who sat with her eyes closed while her hands lay softly on her stomach, but her face was a blank slate. How could she sit there so calm while her husband, the father of her child, was out there with possibly rabid vampires?

"Do you mind if I turn the radio on?" I glanced in her direction, tired of the silence.

"Not at all." She leaned back further in the seat which only made her baby bump stick out more, and I had to fight off the jealous feelings bubbling up from somewhere deep inside me.

I turned the key in the ignition one click so I had power for the radio. I kept the volume low, and found a slow rock station that Kelina and I could agree on. I didn't want to cover the noise of the outside, but I needed something to focus on other than Kelina's bulging belly. I hoped the music would soothe me, take away the feeling that something was wrong.

I followed Kelina's lead and closed my eyes. It wasn't as easy for me to settle down, but with the sounds of guitars and drums filling the air, I finally allowed myself to relax against the seat. I wasn't tired, the night was still young, but the boredom of being left behind in the car and rendered pretty much helpless if trouble came along had me daydreaming of warm beaches and margaritas.

"What was that?" I opened my eyes to find Kelina sitting straight up in her seat, her eyes focused on everything around us outside the car.

"What was what?" I'd been so caught up in my thoughts; I hadn't heard anything and that told me I needed more practice honing my skills. She looked pale, her face full of fear, and I tried to get a visual on what could be causing her to freak. I was unable to get a visual on something around us, and I couldn't even sense anything out of place.

"Do you see him?" She never took her eyes off whatever she was looking at. I tried to follow her line of vision with my own, but still saw nothing.

“Who?” She was beginning to freak me out, especially now that she was folding and unfolding her hands together in her lap at a fast pace. “Kelina, who do you see?”

“We’re being watched. Follow my eyes, I can’t point him out.” She sat patiently as I turned in the seat to get a better view. “In that big tree over there, the one by the upper window of the cabin. Do you see him?”

I focused hard, harder than I’d ever done on anything before. Frustrated that I couldn’t pick the man out in the tree, I sat back against the seat and let out a small growl. Kelina didn’t move, but slid one hand over to pat my thigh.

“Try again.” I knew she wouldn’t take her eyes off him; for fear that he would attempt to attack. He had to know his location had been breached; she was staring straight at him. “His eyes are dark, but he has chain around his neck. The moonlight hits it ever so often and that’s how I noticed he was out of place.”

I sat back up and looked past her out the window again. I zoned in on the branch just outside the cabin window, and when the moon came out from behind a cloud in the sky, its light hit something shiny, and I saw the man.

“Kelina, do you think that’s Juan?” She didn’t move. “Kelina, nod yes or no.” She stayed perfectly still, and I realized why almost immediately. The man in the tree was wearing my pendant, and as a demon with a vampire holding the deck of cards, she was at risk of losing everything.

My mind began racing, thoughts and ideas branching out in a million different directions all at one time. If the vampire in question was Juan, then where were Kane and Chadwick? *Please don’t let them be dead.* I reached over and squeezed Kelina’s hand.

Kane would be really pissed at me, but I needed to get out of the car. If the vampire holding the pendant was Juan, he needed to understand we weren’t going to hurt him. I probably could have spoke to him mentally but I didn’t want to lose any energy in case Rolando showed up. As long as Juan was with us, we were still in danger.

“Juan?” I asked, getting out of the car slowly. “I’m Gabriela, would you like to tell me why you’re stalking us from the tree?”

He jumped down and approached me, glancing one last time at Kelina. “I’m not stalking you. I was told to keep an eye out for any trouble.”

“Why? Where’s Kane?” I stayed close to the car. If he tried to attack, I could get back inside before he had a chance to strike me, and I could do my best to keep Kelina safe.

“On his way.” He motioned to the wooded area behind him. “The demon smelled something and they wanted to check it out. He asked me to keep watch on you two.”

“The demon has a name.” I wasn’t exactly sure why his comment irritated me, but it did. “Chadwick is his name.”

Juan said something in Spanish, and though I couldn’t understand him, his tone told me whatever he’d said wasn’t good. I brushed it off, too hyped up to let his bad mood rub off on me. I couldn’t relax though, not with the way he kept ogling me, in a creepy stalker type of way.

“They’re coming.” He looked behind me, but I didn’t turn around. I could feel Kane approaching, and I was thankful his timing was so perfect. “That’s my cue to start running in the opposite direction. I’ll see you soon.”

I nodded as he took off, running full speed away from the car. Kane wrapped his arms around me from behind, and even though I could feel him coming, my body jerked in response before I settled against him.

“I see you met Juan.” He turned me to face him, took my lips passionately then pulled away. “I hope he didn’t scare you too much.”

“No, but you could have told me you might wander off.” I frowned. “I didn’t sense him, but he scared Kelina. She wouldn’t move.”

Chadwick climbed into the car after helping his wife into the backseat. I took my place up front with Kane. He turned around and gave a quick apology to Kelina who still looked pale. Then he turned the ignition and we were off, traveling down another bumpy road headed to hell.

A surge of power cracked through the air as we pulled onto the interstate. I looked at Kane, but he stayed focused on the road. I reached over and took his hand in mine, a subtle gesture to let him know I wasn’t afraid. Chadwick and Kelina said nothing, but I could feel the tension in the car.

“How do you know Juan will lure Rolando where we need him to be?” I whispered my voice low enough that only Kane could hear. “Are you sure you can trust him?”

“He owes me a favor.” Kane smiled.

“And he’ll follow through? I hope whatever you did for him is worth him risking his life for you.” I looked out the window at the passing road signs. “Where are we going?”

“Further south. A little town called Viejas.” He took an exit ramp putting us back on bumpier ground. “It’s the perfect area for battle, though I think Rolando’s death will come quick and easy.”

“Kane, I hate to break it to you, but nothing with you is ever quick and easy.”

He smiled and hit the accelerator.

Chapter Twenty

Veijas proved to be an even smaller hole in the wall than the spot we'd left behind. There were hardly any people out, and finding a room had been a challenge, but Kane was able to get us a small place to wait until the next nightfall. He gave Chadwick and Kelina firm instructions not to leave the room while we slept, but I didn't think that would be a problem since they'd both been up all night long as well. No one could sleep in the car with Kane driving; it was impossible with his erratic driving methods of speeding up and slowly down constantly.

I was just thankful we made it to a town before sunrise. I'd come too far in such a small amount of time. I didn't want to die by the sun's rays. At least if I died in battle against Rolando, I would know that I'd given my all. I would give everything I had inside to beat him, I reminded myself. The war wasn't over, but we were on the winning side. That was something I was sure of.

I continued to feel power swirl in the air all around us. It was strong, and evil seeped from every pore of it. I could tell without a doubt that it was Rolando and that he was in Veijas, too. Hopefully he was tracking Juan, and we'd be safe until my death sleep wore off. The sun rose, and I fell into oblivion, hoping with all my heart that we'd live to see another night.

When I awoke just after sunset, Kane rushed us out of the hotel. I could sense that something didn't feel right, and it seemed that was the general consensus of our group. Something wicked was lurking nearby, and if we weren't careful we'd end up being caught in a trap. We needed to get to where Juan was waiting, hopefully well hidden from Rolando.

I needed to get the pendant back so we could finish what we started by luring Rolando to Viejas. In my head, I played out what had to be done, and I couldn't tell Kane because he would try to stop me. I hoped that I had the right idea of what I was doing, because if I miscalculated even a small portion of my plan, we'd all end up facing death.

"Shit!" I heard Kane mutter under his breath. "I was afraid this would happen."

I glanced around wondering what had caused his sudden outburst when I spotted the road block up ahead. Two cars sat nose to nose in the middle of the street, and two oversized men stood with guns aimed in our direction. Kane slowed up as we continued to approach them, and rolled down his window.

“What’s going on?” He asked the dark haired man who came to his side of the vehicle. The other man stayed in his position, the gun still locked on us.

“There’s been an incident just over the hill there. We can’t let anyone in or out of town.” He looked all of us over. “You’ll have to turn around and go back the way you came.”

I smiled, and focused hard when his eyes caught mine. “Surely you and your friend over there can let us pass through. We need to get to a friend who might be in trouble.”

His pupils dilated, and when they were back to normal he returned my smile. “Of course. Let me tell my partner you guys are cleared to pass through.” I watched him walk over to the other man. They had what appeared to be a small altercation, but the man with the gun finally lowered it and motioned for us to go around their cars. I didn’t relax until I could no longer see them in the mirror when I looked back.

“Well?” I asked Kane. “What do you think happened?”

“Rolando.” He frowned. “Be prepared for blood, guts, and gore.”

What we found looked like a deserted mining town. Buildings barely stood on their foundations with windows boarded up or severely broken. It reminded me of a scene from an old western I’d seen, and I was patiently waiting for a man with a gun to appear and challenge us to a duel.

Kane parked in between two buildings and we exited the vehicle, entering a building that had probably once been a bar. The place had the feel of old time Texas, and I couldn’t believe it was tucked away in Mexico. I stayed close to Kane’s side as he led us further inside. We weren’t far in when the pull of someone trying to get inside my head was evident. Kane seemed to be having the same problem and he confirmed what I already knew, he wasn’t the one trying to invade my private thoughts.

We stood together, the four of us looking in every direction to see if we were alone. I knew we weren’t, I could feel the power being

sent at us, and sensed it was coming from a source close to where we stood. The problem was figuring out how close, and in which direction to move.

I heard a feminine scream come from the upstairs of the building. *Maggie!* I turned to run but Kane grabbed my wrist.

“Don’t.” I met his eyes and saw the fury swirling in them. “It could be a trap.”

“But...” I couldn’t stand the severity of the screams.

“It could be a trap.” Kane repeated.

I hadn’t thought about that. In fact, I couldn’t think much past the noise. Every scream was like a needle being pushed through my skin, piercing and painful.

“Kane.” Chadwick motioned to something behind the bar, and I watched as Kane went to investigate it. “Do you think...?” Chadwick began.

“Yes, it’s Juan.” I moved to get a closer look. I hadn’t seen the other vampire since we arrived and wasn’t sure why he’d be hiding behind the counter listening to our banter.

Nausea threatened my stomach when I noticed the only thing left of Juan was the clothes he’d been wearing. The pendant was missing, and Juan was nothing but a pile of ashes on the floor. Without the pendant, my entire plan to beat Rolando was destroyed.

I ran a hand through my hair. “Kane, if Rolando has the pendant we’re in big trouble.” I moved toward him, and placed my hand on his back. “I’m sorry about your friend.”

Kane straightened. “It’s okay, he died fighting to help us. He was a good man.” He looked at our demon friends. “You two should get as far away from here as possible. Hide out until I send word that things are taken care of.”

“You need our help, Kane. We won’t turn our backs on this battle.” Chadwick’s voice was soft compared to the screaming that was still coming from somewhere upstairs.

“You are expecting a child. You must keep your family safe first.” Kane put his hand on Chadwick’s shoulder. “Please, leave now and lay low.”

Chadwick began to protest, but I saw the fear in his wife’s eyes and apparently he did too, because he nodded. Taking Kelina by the hand, they left quietly. Our army had just lost two members and we were without the pendant. I wanted to believe that Kane knew

what he was doing, but it felt like the odds had just turned in Rolando's favor.

The screaming stopped abruptly and a cold chill filled the air around us. I moved closer to Kane, pressing my hip against his thigh. He wrapped an arm around my waist and we began creeping slowly up the stairs.

"I feel Maggie." Kane said. "She's close." We turned at the top of the stairs and moved left swiftly.

The top floor of the building was full of rooms, and I wondered if it had once served as a brothel. It didn't seem like too farfetched an idea, but there were more pressing things on my mind than the answer to that question. I tuned my mind back onto what was taking place around us, zoned my senses in so I could focus.

Kane motioned to the door at the end of the hall. I could feel the power, and I just hoped Rolando hadn't done anything to Maggie. The screaming had sounded so real, but I remembered what Kane told me about Maggie's ability to adapt to any situation and how she was a great actress. I just hoped she would know when to stop pretending and start helping us. If she wanted to be crowned queen enough I figured she'd be ready for us.

Kane stopped and flung himself forcefully against the door. It broke right off the hinges and slammed into the ground. Maggie was sitting on the bed nonchalantly painting her toenails, and Rolando was missing. She looked up, met my eyes for the briefest of moments, but that was all it took for me to see what was hidden in her mind. Rolando was perched just outside the window, waiting for us to let our guard down.

"Hello, Kane." Maggie spoke to him the way a master would a servant. "How nice of you to join us."

"Maggie." I could hear his teeth grind as he spoke. "Where's Rolando?"

"He's around." She drew out the word around, and I was hoping Kane had caught on. I knew that he hadn't seen what I had in her eyes or he would have charged the window. "My, Gabriela, you're prettier than I remembered. Perhaps when this is all said and done, I can keep you."

"What's wrong with you?" I played stupid, knowing damn well that Rolando was listening to everything. "What are you doing here anyway, we left you in Maryland to guard Kane's warehouse."

“There’s been a change of plans.” Maggie crossed the room and took my hands, slipping something into one of them. “I’ve fallen in love. Finally, after centuries alone or pining over someone I could never have.” She looked at Kane.

Her acting was better than I could have ever imagined, if she was still acting. I couldn’t tell the difference and that scared me. I closed my fingers around the item in my hand, but didn’t look at it. I didn’t have to see it to know that she’d given the pendant to me.

She turned to stand in front of Kane, and moved close enough to kiss him. “It’s really a shame that you and Rolando can’t get along. We could have built a grand empire, the four of us, an underworld like no other.” I watched her touch his cheek for the briefest of moments with her lips and knew she wasn’t deceiving us. The small gesture was her way of letting Kane know we were still running the show. “It could have been fun, Kane,” she said as she stepped back towards the bed.

“Maggie.” His voice was firm. “Tell me where Rolando is so I can finish what I came here to do.” Kane’s tone was nothing short of demanding. He was ready to fight, and I was ready to crush Rolando like a bug.

“I told you,” she paused and motioned with her hands. “He’s around.”

Kane didn’t have time to react as Rolando jumped through the glass of the window and shoved him to the ground. They tumbled across the floor, taking turns pinning the other down. I stood still, waiting for the opportunity to get everyone’s attention.

I still wasn’t entirely sure of all the consequences that would come from the destruction of the pendant. I didn’t know if along with Rolando’s death, it would bring my own and Kane’s as well. All our blood was mixed together within the vial, but something deep inside me was screaming to take the risk.

“Rolando!” I screamed as he sat on Kane’s chest, ready to shove a stake through his heart. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

“Maggie.” He looked at her with fear in his eyes. “Do what we talked about.” He motioned toward me with his head, but she didn’t move. “Maggie, do as you’re told.”

“No.” She looked right at him. “I may have suffered a week of being your slave, or pretending to love you, but time is up, Rolando.” She came to stand beside me. “Do you really think I would go against

my oldest friend and the love of his life?" She laughed. "I envy them, and someday hope that I can find the one who will turn my world upside down as she has done his over and over again."

Rolando was so caught up in her words he forgot about Kane, until he was flat on his back with a stake pressed against his skin. I didn't want Kane to stake him, I wanted to destroy him. Sure a stake through the heart would take him to his death, but it would also give him the chance to come back again in another life. I needed to be sure every piece of him was gone.

I held up the pendant and Rolando's eyes went wide.

"Maggie, you bitch!" The fear that he was showing only made me want to kill him faster. "You will pay for this. All of you!" he screamed.

Before Kane could stop me, I smashed the pendant into the ground. The glass shattered, allowing the blood to spill against the hardwood. Kane's eyes bore into mine, but I didn't stop. I took matches from my pocket and lit one, tossing it onto the blood and watched as flames engulfed the red material.

"Now!" I screamed at Kane. "End it now!"

Without hesitation, he shoved the stake through Rolando's heart. The vampire became a pile of dust beneath him. I didn't move, afraid of what would happen if I did.

Kane wouldn't look at me, and I wondered if the magic the pendant had possessed, the blood oath of true love was destroyed between us. It was what I had feared when I destroyed the blood, but it was the only way to ensure all traces of Rolando was gone from our life.

"Kane?" I stepped closer to him. "Are you okay?"

He rose, wrapped his arms around me and squeezed. If I had still been human, he would have crushed my bones. "Thank you." He pulled back, looked me in the eye, and I smiled knowing nothing had changed. I could still feel the love flowing out of him into me. "You saved my life."

"And mine." Maggie approached us and I held my arms out so she could join in our hug. "You can't even imagine what I've been through this past week."

"Thank you." Kane wrapped her in a tight embrace as I stepped aside to give them some room. "I mean it, Maggie, thank you for everything."

She smiled. "Can I go home now?"

"Yes." Kane said and then turned his focus on me. "We all can."

The pain from his words slammed into me, and I knew what he was implying, that I was free to go too, but what did I have to go back to? I couldn't go back to the local paper, not unless my boss would allow me to work at night, and how was I supposed to explain that sudden change? Graven was still an option, but how could I write about what I'd seen, what I knew existed without exposing my new life?

There was only one place I wanted to go, but it all depended on one thing. Kane.

"Maggie?" I asked quietly. "Can you give us a few minutes alone?"

She nodded. "I will try to find Chadwick and Kelina. They couldn't have gone far." She patted my shoulder as she left the room.

Kane stood, staring out the broken window. "The sun will be rising soon. We'll need to take shelter somewhere close by."

"Kane." I whispered softly while approaching him from behind.

"Tomorrow I will get you back to Maryland, back to your real life." He looked sad. "You'll have to make some adjustments, have a plan for the future. Maggie can stay with you for a few weeks until she's sure you have a routine that works."

He was rambling, and I found it sweet that he was so clueless about my true feelings for him. "Kane." I said a little louder. He stopped talking and looked at me. "Home is where you are."

The look on his face was priceless, happiness mixed with surprise, and just a hint of fear. "I know this isn't how you imagined your life." He took my hand. "I've waited so long to have you forever, and I just don't want to screw it up."

"You won't." I stood on my tip toes and kissed his lips. "I've told you before, and I will tell you again. Our love is timeless, only now we have forever. You don't have to wait for me anymore, Kane. I'll always be here."

That's how our friends found us, standing by the broken window in the run down tavern with our arms wrapped around each other and a smile on our faces. No matter how my life had started out,

or what my dreams may have once been, there in Kane's arms was where I wanted to stay.

Epilogue

“Here’s the files you asked for, Mrs. Barringer.” Taking on Kane’s last name in a normal wedding ceremony had been exciting, and I was still getting used to my married life. “I think you’ll find the last one quite humorous.”

“Thank you, Nicolette.” The young girl had been a mess when we found her locked away in Kane’s warehouse in Maryland. Maggie had feared she’d be dead before we reached her, but the guards who’d been assigned to watch her had left long before we’d gotten back and she’d managed to keep herself alive. “Will you go tell Maggie I could use her expertise on something?”

“Of course.” She looked better, and she seemed so much happier. A new wardrobe and a day at the spa had proven what I already knew; underneath the ratty hair and old clothes was a beautiful young woman. I offered her a job as my personal assistant to keep her close, and promised her we would learn the ropes of being good vampires together.

I read the files Nicolette brought me, and laughed when I got to the last one. She had been right; some of the stories that came across my desk were just out of this world. My position at Graven continued to open my eyes to how silly humans really were when it came to things of the underworld.

My cell phone rang, a song of friendship filling the air. I let it play a little longer than I should have to enjoy the song before I picked up. “Hey Lydia. No, I’m just about done for the day.” I sighed, it was so nice knowing I could still have my best friend around for a few more years. Kane assured me that life didn’t have to turn totally upside down, I just had to adapt to my different sleep patterns which he also told me would get better with time. Eventually there would come a day when I would have to bid her farewell for good, but I knew I’d be okay when that day finally came because it was years down the road.

“Hey.” Maggie walked up the small amount of stairs into my loft office and flopped down into my cushioned chair as I hung up the phone. “Nicolette said you had something you needed my expertise on.”

“Yeah, can a were-panther and a were-tiger mate?” I looked up from the file I was reading. “I mean they both have kittens, right?”

Maggie laughed. “Oh Gabs, you have so much to learn.” She looked so royal seated in her golden dress, and I was glad she hadn’t let her new title of queen go to her head. More than that, I was glad I’d found a friend I’d never have to let go of, at least as long as trouble kept its distance from us.

I laughed, too. “Yeah, I guess I do. Kylie wants to meet up for drinks, but how about you and I go grab dinner first?”

“Where’s Kane this evening?” She glanced around.

“Business meeting with some guy named Demarco. He said it was important and could possibly effect our future in a positive way.” I smiled, glad that he thought about me before making decisions. I knew that was hard for him after spending a long time worrying only about himself.

“Oh, yes. If it turns out the way Kane wanted, you’ll be overwhelmed.” Maggie’s lips twisted into a huge grin. She hugged me. “Let’s get that dinner so you don’t keep your friend waiting.”

Four hours later, completely refreshed from dinner and drinks with my girlfriends, I found Kane waiting patiently for me in the library of our newly built home. The suspense of his private meeting was killing me, but I kept my composure.

“Did you have a nice evening?” he asked, glancing up from the book on his desk.

“Yes, I did. It’s nice to have friends, but do you know what’s even better?” He raised an eyebrow as I sauntered over to sit on his lap. “Coming home to you.”

He kissed me. “I have news, big news!” His grin widened as he touched my cheek with his hand.

“So, tell me already! You know it’s killing me.” He laughed and rubbed his thumb gently across my cheek as his fingers lay on my neck.

“We’re going to adopt a baby.”

I sat back stunned, unsure that I’d heard him correctly.

“A baby?” I ran a hand through my hair. “How is that possible?”

Being a mom was the one thing I’d never thought possible since becoming a vampire.

“Demarco knows a young demon girl that was taken advantage of by some of Rolando’s goons before his demise. She’s due anytime now, and way too young to be a mother.” He paused to look at me. “Plus, she fears that looking at the child will give her nightmares of her experience.”

“We can have a baby?” I was still in shock. “A real baby?”

“Yes.” He hugged me, pulling my body tight against. “A real baby. We’ll just have to find a way to get past the smell.”

Another chapter of my life was about to begin. I was being given a grand opportunity and though Kane explained the baby wouldn’t be human, it didn’t matter. A human child could never adapt to our way of life, and eventually there would be confusion and too much secrecy. Once the child grew into an adult, we’d have to abandon it.

“We’re going to be parents!” I was so excited.

“Go ahead.” Kane motioned toward the door.

“What?” I asked with a grin on my face.

“Go tell Maggie the good news.”

I jumped from my perch on his lap. “I’ll only be a few minutes.”

“In woman time, that means I’ll see you right before sunrise.” He laughed and my heart melted. Another dream was coming true all because the love of a good man had found its way into my life.

The End



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