

Siren Publishing

PolyAmour

dark, from the edge of your mind.
but because you're not who you think you are.

Poisonous PLEASURE

The
Soul
Collector

pick around the apple's border.

evil sink into the ground.

Jennifer Salaiz



POISONOUS PLEASURE

JENNIFER SALAIZ

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Prologue

“I’ll tell you the entire story. Not because I want to, but because I have no other choice. If you think I chose this life, you’re wrong. One doesn’t choose to die by mere thoughts, nor does one like to know they are responsible for their family’s deaths. But since I’m telling you all of this, I guess that part can wait until further in the story.”

Marcella stopped talking as she took in the beauty of the master vampire she could hardly see. Her angelic face, so innocent, so young, was capable of things no one could imagine, things only the cruelest of the supernatural could fathom.

The Corpus Christi Police Department, for one, never knew what hit them when they walked into the abandoned warehouse to find two dozen bodies mutilated and hung on the walls for all to see. Bodies, which all just happened to be female, with long dark hair and light skin, all resembling Marcella.

The whole city was in an uproar, hunting down what it assumed could be nothing more than a deranged serial killer. They weren’t far off, but it wasn’t just one. From what Marcy had uncovered, several of the servants had been forced to commit the crimes for their master, for Gwendolyn. Who, from the looks of the sour expression on her face, couldn’t be more than nineteen years of age.

“Story or no story, the facts still remain. You came into *my city* without *my permission*. You take my lover. My lover!” Delicate fingers angrily pulled the long blonde hair out of Gwen’s face. “For over a month you elude

my servants causing nothing but grief, and yet you come here as if you're actually going to make it out alive."

Marcella took a deep breath, feeling heat scorch the inside of her skin. Since her change into a soul collector, getting control of her emotions proved nearly impossible.

"Gwen, I don't think I'll live. I know."

Bubbly laughter echoed off of the bare walls of the abandoned mansion. The sound fit more in a school cafeteria during lunch time, than in a place where ghost stories derived. But the placement made the noise altogether more eerie.

"Is that right? You're a confident little bitch, aren't you? Well, I could say to hell with your story and kill you now to prove you wrong. How would you like that, child? I think you forget who you're talking to."

Aggravation pulsed through Marcella's body. Her collector stirred around inside, calming her enough to control the rage. "I'm not a damn child. To tell you the truth, my true age makes you an infant in my book. But you wouldn't want to know about that, now would you, *child*? You're ready to take me out, so have at it. A warning though before you try. I won't die easily, and if you manage to kill me, how will you know what happened to Ambrose?"

Gwendolyn's pale green eyes deepened in color until Marcella could literally see a blaze ignite behind them. Their luminosity gave enough light for the vampire's pale face to become transparent in the surrounding darkness. Veins of blood surfaced though the mask of skin, blood that no doubt didn't belong to her at all. Fear poured from Marcella's pores, but she couldn't show the vampire how afraid she truly felt. Gwen might be able to sense it, but she wouldn't see it.

"Nothing troubles him. I would know. You put on a good bluff, but I'm more experienced than you, older or not." The glow in her eyes began to die out, leaving her face barely noticeable in the pitch black room. "If you weren't so damn intriguing you wouldn't have lived this long." Relief took over the instant the illumination disappeared completely. "Now, come to my chambers and tell me this story. One lie and I finish you off."

Candlelight appeared as one of the servants opened the door. A mass of billowing red silk flared through the air while Gwendolyn spun around and headed for their exit. The small amount of light gave view to a mound of old

clothes and cardboard boxes littering the bedroom floor. Focusing to block out the smell of mold and dust, she slowly followed the tall, blonde out of the room.

The sound of Marcella's stiletto boots echoed loudly against the creaking wooden floorboards making chills race up her spine. She could do this, she had to. If for some reason things didn't go as planned, she could lose more than just her life.

"After you tell me this story, you'll tell me where Ambrose is. If you do, I might make your death a fast one. If you don't tell me, not to worry, I'll find him myself while my servants torture you, human."

The long hallway gave time for her to think. There had to be a way to get Gwendolyn to accept that her master wasn't coming back, and that she needed to move on. At this point, Marcella wasn't sure that was achievable at all. The woman clearly would kill for Ambrose, and Marcella wasn't about to let him return.

"So, you don't believe me to be a collector? If that's so, then why are you willing to listen to what I have to say?"

The door at the end of the hallway opened, filling the entrance with an abundance of light. Hundreds of candles filled every available space in Gwen's room. "You're human now, are you not?"

"Yes." Marcella couldn't deny it. She'd come here human for a reason. What vampire wouldn't gladly let a meal walk willingly into its domain? But one mention of Ambrose's name caused just the panic she needed. Gwendolyn appeared, dragging her up the stairs before she could get one word out of her mouth about him being safe.

"The only reason I'm interested in your story is to see how you managed to detain my lover. He could kill you in a breath's time and yet, you're not dead. This alone interests me."

"Well, I'll get to that part, of course. If I'm going to tell my story, then I'll start from the beginning. Otherwise, I'm afraid you're not going to believe it."

Red and gold filled the room, completely transforming the condemned outside appearance. A bed, bigger than her own king size sat in the middle of the large space, looking more suited for a palace than an abandoned mansion.

“Sit.” Gwendolyn gestured to a red velvet chair next to the bed. “Is there anything you would like? A last meal?” She laughed, once again making Marcella uneasy.

“No, I don’t have to eat, at least not in my original form. It’s up to me, really. It seems I do it more from habit than actually needing the amount of nutrients it brings. *You* might want to feed though. This is somewhat of a long story. I just ask that you don’t feed from me.”

The pale blonde sat rigidly on the bed. “Original form? What are you talking about?”

It was Marcella’s turn to laugh. She couldn’t help but feel a spike of pleasure at the coldhearted vampire’s nervous stirring. “Well, if you promise not to freak out on me, I’ll change and show you.”

A nod was the only response. Looking down at her pale arms, visible from the black leather halter top she wore, black tribal tattoos began to form while the cobwebs moved under her skin. The feeling took some getting used to, but she had become accustomed to the foreign sensation over these last few weeks, even embraced it. Designs left bare, inside the tribal, were filled with words only Marcella could understand. Gold lettering rippled in the unmarked flesh, disappearing almost instantly. The thick designs surrounding her symbols darkened as her collector made itself known. This was her true form, but not her only one.

“Impossible! Soul collectors are legend, myth,” Gwendolyn squealed.

“So are vampires.” Marcy raised her eyebrow at the irony of her words. “Do you want to hear the story, or not?”

The sound of the master’s throat clearing nearly made Marcella smile.

“Start at the beginning,” she whispered.

Chapter 1

Marcella stared across the large expanse of water from the deck of her second story bedroom. Salty sea air brushed against her face warmly while she waited for the sun to set. It had been a little over three years since she'd graduated high school. The feeling of freedom quickly turned to boredom as everyone left for college, a place she still didn't intend to go for another year at least. What she had been prolonging the experience for, she had no idea.

Seagulls echoed off in the distance, but the sound died out while random thoughts began to surface. The amount of time she spent off in what her mother considered la-la land was beginning to pose a problem. No matter how much she tried to focus, the trances continued to come, blinding her to the outside world.

The water disappeared from Marcella's immediate view as color intensified, filling her vision. She could see herself standing out, facing the water. But her appearance wasn't even close to resembling the one she held now. Flawless skin covered her face and shoulders. The rosiness of her cheeks and lips looked almost airbrushed on. Studying herself, she wondered why this continued to happen. The white gown she wore billowed out behind her while the wind picked up. The urge to know more forced Marcella to look closer, but as her other self turned, light reflected off something on her forehead and suddenly everything vanished.

The last few days these images plagued her. They were all remotely similar and becoming more frequent. She stood staring out over the water. Sometimes, she rested further down the white stone balcony, but always facing in the same direction. Aggravated that she couldn't make any sense of these daydreams, Marcy rubbed her blurry eyes. What was happening to her?

With the problems she faced with Jason, her college boyfriend, and the troubles of life in general, it became more and more stressful to cope with

the changes of her body and mind. Marcella remembered in her earlier years hearing of late bloomers, but did they usually develop overnight? People at the law office were already joking about her getting breast implants. As if she could really afford those making two dollars over minimum wage.

The sound of a horn in the distance made her cringe. Unexplainable anger rushed through her, filling her insides with an intense heat. *He really needs to learn some manners. Four years and he still forgets to get out of the truck and knock on the damn door.*

“Marcy, Jason’s outside!”

“Yeah, I heard him, Mom. I think the whole neighborhood heard him!”

The bedroom door opened just as Marcella walked through the opened sliding glass door from the deck. “Go easy on the boy, honey. He’s had it hard the last year with his father dying, you know that. Now with the baseball draft coming up, he deserves to be cut a little slack, don’t you think?”

“Of course, but he’s been honking like that since he received his driver’s license. That was years ago.”

Her mom laughed and kissed her forehead. “He’s a good kid. You both be careful tonight. I know today is your twenty-first birthday, but I really don’t see why you would want to go to a bar of all places.”

“I’m not sure I want to go now. I think we’re just going to go to dinner and maybe a movie instead. Jason should be okay with that.”

“I like that idea better. You two have fun, and if you need anything, call me.”

Marcella kissed her mother’s cheek as another round of honking pierced her ears. “Dammit, Jason, I’m coming!”

“Watch the language,” her mother yelled, but Marcella was already running down the stairs and was out the front door before she could respond with an apology.

The black Ford F150 sat parked in the driveway caked in mud. There was no need to ask what he’d been doing all day. The remaining guys in town, who hadn’t left area for a bigger college, always went off-roading on the weekends. Both girls and guys used to go, but over the last few months Jason insisted on guys only. The thought made her pause midway while opening the door. The email she received from Kasey, claiming to have had sex with her boyfriend refreshed in her head. With everything happening,

somehow she'd forgotten. New pain stabbed through her heart, nearly taking her breath away.

"Well, hop in, babe. I'm starving. I'm thinking steak. What about you?"

Dark brown hair stuck out in odd angles and still looked wet, but not from a shower. Jason was covered in mud and sweat. Marcella blinked twice trying to process his words and intentions.

"You can't be serious? You want to go out to eat, looking like that?" Slowly, she climbed into the seat, never taking her eyes off of him. The white shirt he wore stuck tightly to his broad chest, showing off the defined lines of muscle.

"No, I thought we'd stop by my place first. There's something I want to talk to you about. I think it would be best before we head to Corpus."

Marcella's stomach flipped. Suddenly, the email didn't sit so well with her. Somehow, she'd dismissed it before. The thought that Jason would cheat had never crossed her mind. Since childhood, she felt connected to him. The link was something she couldn't explain, nor one she never questioned. Now, as his words hit home, she was starting to wonder if she put too much trust in the guy she'd loved for as long as she could remember. "Okay, I think that would be best. I need to speak with you, too."

"You do? About what?" She couldn't ignore the way he slouched and ran his fingers through his hair nervously.

The truck rolled out of the driveway and started down the street. An answer wouldn't come no matter how hard she pushed herself to reply. Orange and pinks painted the sky as the sun hovered along the water for the last few minutes. Silence followed them all the way to Jason's house, he didn't push, and for that she was thankful. With the way her temper kept sparking, she didn't want to fight with him.

"If you want, you can stay in my room while I jump in the shower. My mom's over at her boyfriend's for the night, although I'm sure she wouldn't care. Hell, she probably wouldn't say anything if we walked out of the shower together."

"I'll stay in the room," Marcella whispered, climbing out of the truck. She followed Jason in and sat on his bed while he picked out clothes to wear. She hardly noticed while thoughts of the woman on the balcony began to push into her head again.

"I won't be long. Are you sure you're okay? You seem...distracted."

Marcella nodded her head. Lips gently pushed against hers right before he vanished through the doorway.

Sharp pains raced through her stomach causing her to gasp and clutch to the blue cotton comforter. The tremors only last for a few seconds, but they were becoming more frequent in the last few days. While she tried to breathe her way through the spell, she listened closely for any sign Jason would return.

A twinge caused her to double over. It took every ounce of control for Marcella not to scream out. Tears streamed down her face while blood coated her mouth. When she realized she was biting the insides of her cheeks, she quickly stopped.

The sound of water turning on instantly set her at ease. *You can get through this, Marcella. It'll pass. It always does. Just breathe.*

Minutes went by and another pain brought a groan from her mouth, this one even worse than the last. She knew this wasn't normal, she just didn't know whether to call Jason. At the thought of his name, the twisting ache instantly disappeared. Soreness settled throughout her muscles while she tried to stretch out of the fetal position.

"Hey, what's wrong? Are you all right?"

She looked up to see her boyfriend standing in the doorway, dressed and ready to go. "Fine." Marcella wiped the fresh tears from her cheeks.

"No, you're crying. I've only seen you cry once in the last four years. What is it?"

"Nothing, listen, I need you to take me home."

Jason kneeled before her on the bed, resting his arms on either side of her thighs. She watched his blue and white striped polo shirt stretch tightly over his arms and chest. "Does this have anything to do with what you wanted to talk to me about?"

Marcella stared into his hazel eyes searching for something, possibly the truth behind this rumor. "If you're referring to the email I received about you fucking Kasey at the party last weekend, then no, that's not the reason. I don't feel good. I want to go home."

"Marcy, it's not what you think. That's what I wanted to speak to you about. It's been bothering me. She says we...fucked, but I swear I don't remember. I was drinking with the guys and I do recall her being there, but I passed out."

Fresh tears came to her eyes. Somehow she expected this. Wasn't that the typical excuse? *I was too drunk to remember.*

"Take me home, Jason."

"I swear, I don't remember. For all I know, she's lying. Marcy, I'd never..." He gripped her thighs tighter. The way his eyes pleaded to her just made the anger worse.

"I said take me home!"

Marcella jumped at her own voice. They usually never disagreed on anything. Rage she couldn't even process began to take over her body making her tremble while she fought to contain herself.

"Jason, please take me home." Feeling physically and mentally exhausted, the words barely left her lips as a whisper.

"Okay." He sighed, and stood.

Not even waiting to see if he followed, she walked out of the house and got into the truck. Moving at all proved to be a chore. Her body throbbed with every step she took. Vertigo threatened the moment she became still. Blindly she reached for the dashboard.

"Tell me what's wrong. If you're sick, I can call my mom. She is a nurse."

"I said I'm fine. Just get me home. That is if you can fucking *remember* the way there."

Hurt raced through Jason's features causing her own heart to break. Somehow she knew this was the end of their relationship. Without trust, they were nothing, and she wasn't sure she could trust him. If he could have sex with filth like Kasey, who else had he slept with during one of his outings with the guys? Suddenly, she began to question everything about their relationship.

The ride home became a blur while she focused on controlling the pain of new tremors. Each bump made her want to scream out. The insides of her stomach contorted, twisting her into a million knots.

"We're almost there, babe. Tell me what to do. I've never seen you so pale. Are you sure I shouldn't be taking you to the hospital?"

Marcella wasn't certain anymore. Death beckoned, she could feel it. The intensity of the pain reached a level she wasn't even aware a human could withstand, but she feared if she opened her mouth she'd either go into a fit of screams or become violently ill.

Jason pulled into the driveway, easing to a stop. He had her in his arms, carrying her inside before she could attempt to refuse his touch.

“Oh my goodness, what happened?” Her mom came rushing forward as the door slammed open against the wall.

Bile pushed against the back of her throat while she fought to control her body.

“I don’t know. I got out of the shower and she was crying. She said she didn’t feel good. We got into an argument and she wanted to come home. On the way, she seemed to get worse.”

“Bring her to the guest room and let’s lay her down. We might need to call an ambulance. There’s no point in carrying her upstairs.”

The family pictures on the wall blurred as Jason moved forward. The whole room seemed to tilt for a brief moment before it came back into focus. The coolness of the comforter pressing against her bare arms turned Marcella’s skin to pure ice. She instantly started shaking.

“Here, honey, I got you a blanket. You need to tell me exactly what’s wrong.”

“My s-s-stomach hurts. Cold...”

“Did you eat anything earlier?” Her mom’s palm pressed against her head and cheeks checking for fever.

“The new r-r-restaurant in t-t-town, been going there f-f-for a few days now.”

“Food poisoning, probably. Thanks for looking after my baby for me, Jason. I’m sure she’ll feel better tomorrow and want to see you.”

“No!” Marcella fought to sit up. “Don’t come b-b-back.” Anger eased the pain, making the twinges somewhat manageable, but the cold chills wouldn’t stop. “Go to Kasey’s, I’m sure s-s-she’ll want to see you.”

Jason took a step back.

“Get out,” Marcella growled. “Get out! Get out!” The louder she screamed, the less pain she felt. No one in the room moved at her outburst, which only fueled the fury.

“I know you’re pigheaded, but definitely not deaf, Jason. I said get the hell out of my house!” She jumped off of the bed advancing toward him faster than she thought possible with the pain she just experienced. Still, he didn’t listen.

“Jason, I think you should go. Marcella’s upset, but I’ll talk to her.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he whispered against the shock. “Marcy, honey, I...”

“I’m not your anything anymore! Now leave!”

Heaviness settled in her chest as she watched tears come to his eyes. In that moment she hated herself for resorting so low. The pain wasn’t worth seeing her best friend hurt. They might have been young, but Jason still held her heart. She knew without a doubt, he always would. From the beginning they had an unexplainable connection.

“I’m going. You don’t know how truly sorry I am. I never meant to hurt you.”

Marcella watched her mother walk Jason out of the guest bedroom. Ringing in her ears with a combination of pressure nearly brought her to her knees. The front door shut, but it sounded as if her mother had slammed it. Voices penetrating through the wood left the conversation sounding hollow.

“I’ve never seen Marcella so upset. What happened, Jason? I thought things were going so well.”

“I messed up,” he said, sounding shaky. “I just wish I could remember. A girl is claiming I cheated on Marcella with her. I’m not sure, but a part of me can’t believe that. I love your daughter. I’d never do anything to hurt her. It sounds lame, I know, but I don’t think you understand. I couldn’t hurt her, ever, no matter how drunk I was.”

The sound of her boyfriend’s voice cracking made a sob escape Marcella’s mouth. She didn’t want to hear anymore. Why couldn’t she disappear for awhile, take a trip that lasted for months and come back when all of this drama blew over? She didn’t want to believe the man she thought she’d spend her life with could do this.

“You better hope nothing happened. My daughter loves you. I won’t sit by and let you hurt her. Now go home. I’ll try to talk to her, but I’m not promising anything.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Jacobs. I really do appreciate it.”

Marcella climbed in the bed and tried her best to block out the voices. It wasn’t long before her mother came in and kissed her forehead. Pretending to be asleep, she felt fingers push the hair back from her face.

“Things will turn out the way they’re supposed to, honey. You’ll see. This thing with Jason will blow over. Just give it some time.” The softness of her mother’s words made Marcella’s throat tighten. It was almost impossible to continue acting as if she slept.

The light turned off and when she heard footsteps enter her parent's upstairs bedroom Marcella finally let the tears come.

Images projected in her mind of everything she and Jason had shared over the years. Even though they had known each other their whole lives, and he'd always followed her around, it took until their freshman year in high school before he admitted his lifelong feelings. The word fated is what she'd always used to describe them. It just felt right. They were inseparable.

Years of friendship, and newly found passion clouded her. For the first time, Marcella welcomed the pain, feeding off of it, letting it cleanse the hurt she felt deep inside her heart. While questions plagued her mind, only one stood out above the others. Why would God, if there was such a thing, give her something so beautiful if he only meant to tarnish the perfect illusion? She wasn't sure, but she knew only one thing, she stupidly wished she'd never been born.

* * * *

A voice clearing brought Marcella out of her thoughts. Tears clouded Marcy's eyes, leaving the candlelit room blurry. She wasn't sure when she'd stopped speaking or how much she had actually told, but Gwendolyn obviously was becoming impatient.

"I'm sorry, where was I?"

"You were going over your heartbreak." The blonde vampire sat on the bed, leaning forward. The fullness of her lips was slightly parted.

Marcella noticed the woman seemed intrigued. She never thought by telling her the story it would also open so many of her own wounds. But of course, she still hadn't even really broken the surface of the hardest part. It loomed ahead, the thought alone, enough to close her throat completely.

"Yes, well, I was very heartbroken, but also a bit selfish. You see, if I could live that night over again, I would have never left the situation as I did. Many regrets still haunt me, some I can never fix."

"Tell me what happened next. It's been such a long time since someone has captured my attention like you."

Marcella raised an eyebrow. "But Gwen, we know how this ends, or at least where the story rests. Here we are...everything leads to why I'm here, and I'm afraid you're not going to like me so much after I tell you."

"I have no doubt I'll hate you more than I already do, but please go on. It'll make your death that much more enjoyable." The smile that came to Gwendolyn's lips was one of pure evil.

"Then you're going to love this part," Marcella said dryly.

Closing her eyes, Marcy took herself back to the guest bedroom. The cream colored walls lifted around her and she could physically see herself there fighting to stay awake, the tears drying on her face. A face, resembling little of what masked her now. No freckles covered her new cheeks, and her dark brown eyes were now faded to an orange glow. Her former self looked so petite and frail. Now, she was full of curves and a good three inches taller than her originally five feet three inch height which brought her to five feet six inches.

"Do go on." Gwendolyn's voice broke through her concentration, pulling her out of the room.

"Give me a moment. This is a really hard part for me to tell. I've never had to say it out loud before. The memories torment me enough as it is."

Silence settled throughout the room and Marcella focused back on her connection to the past. The walls were suddenly up and she cringed at what she saw. Taking a deep breath, she slowly looked around and fought for words to express what she experienced.

Chapter 2

The odd sensation of being numb caused Marcella's eyes to drift open. Heaviness made it impossible for her to roll over like she intended. Startled by the miscommunication of what her mind was telling her body, she came to an immediate awareness of her surroundings of the guest room.

Bright shades of orange and blue, tinted with yellows, completely loomed above her. Mesmerized by the beautiful colors, the realization of what she stared at didn't register right away. It wasn't until someone's scream echoed through the walls that Marcella knew exactly what captivated her. Fire.

Fighting to gain control of her unresponsive body, she jerked viciously until she finally managed to sit up. "Mom!" Panicked, she fought to stand. As if she walked through water, she finally was able to get halfway to the door when she suddenly felt herself jolted to a stop. A popping feeling reverberated off her insides making Marcella turn around to see what she'd been stuck to.

A scream exploded from her mouth. Her body was still on the bed, covered in flames. The fire danced along her skin, melting her flesh like wax from a candle. Why hadn't she felt the heat or smelt the smoke?

Bringing her arms up, she noticed the carpet underneath the palms of her hands. Instantly, she screamed again. She was dead. Even though she didn't want to face the facts, Marcella knew this was no dream.

"Mother!"

She quickly forced herself to the door. No matter how hard Marcella tried, her body wouldn't allow herself to step over the threshold, leading to the living room. Moving to the window, she frantically searched for a way to make it outside so she could try to find help, but her hands went right through and stopped against an unknown force.

Maybe her mother, step father, or brothers weren't dead yet, or maybe they'd already made it to safety. She'd never know unless she could find a way out of this room.

"Help! Somebody. Anybody!"

Ripples of energy vibrated from her ghostly silhouette while she focused mentally on reaching out to a source of rescue. If she truly was nothing more than a ghost, there must be something she could do, but there wasn't. She couldn't fly or float, her body felt more grounded than anything.

A laugh made Marcella jump.

"What a cute little thing you are. What a waste."

Turning, the most gorgeous man she'd ever seen stood before her. Blond hair curled around his angelic face making his deep blue eyes stand out. The most sensuous, kissable lips smiled tenderly at her, filling her with relief. Immediately, she felt an unexplainable connection to him.

"You have to help me, please. My family..."

"Has already passed over." His words cut her off so abruptly, she was speechless. "They're gone Marcella, dead. So, tell me, do you know why you're still here?"

"Dead..." She couldn't speak past the word.

"Yes, I already said that, but you didn't answer my question. Do you know why you're still here?" Confused, she shook her head, no. "Well, it can mean many things, but since I heard your call, I'm assuming it's because you belong to me."

"You're an angel?"

Another laugh echoed off the burning inferno around them. "Well, yes and no, but not the kind you're referring to. Sorry, love. If I heard you then that means your soul belongs to me. I'm meant to take you to your eternal resting place. What could an innocent beauty like you have done to be condemned to an eternity of hell? Drugs, prostitution, were you extremely bad as a human? Oh I know, hold on. Was your life like this...?"

Marcella screamed as music blasted around her. The words to the song wouldn't even register in her confusion. When the chorus began to play her jaw dropped. She'd heard the song before, but it wasn't something she typically listened to. "That's My Chemical Romance."

"Great, isn't it? Yes, it's Teenagers, I believe. The music these days is amazing, so much emotion are placed into the lyrics."

"I beg your pardon, but I wasn't a bad person. My days were spent working at some stupid law firm, and before that I was in school. I graduated with honors! I've never even tried drugs." A sob broke through Marcella's voice. "You're a...demon, aren't you?"

The music died out while his face sobered. The tall blond took a step toward her. "Yes, I am. So, if you didn't do anything bad, why am I here?"

"I don't know, but I have to get out of this room and check on my family. Please, help me."

"You don't want to see them as they appear now, trust me. Listen, I know you're upset, but I don't have time to stay here all night while you tackle your emotions. There are places I need to be. I left a very good party because of your call. Imagine this, music filling the room... Damn what was playing as I left? You'll never picture it if I can't set the right mood."

Marcella rolled her eyes and reached for something to throw at him, but she couldn't grasp on to the lightest object. "Don't even bother with the music effects. I'm so sorry our deaths interrupted your party. Go back. It's not like I'm going anywhere. I can't even leave this fucking room, asshole!"

"You do have a point. Well, while you sort through your grief, there are two blondes waiting for me. It's been awhile, if you know what I mean." He threw her a wink and another one of his gorgeous smiles. "I'll be back in a few hours or so to collect you."

The demon vanished, leaving her in the roar of the surrounding blaze. Sirens broke through the sizzling and popping of wood, bringing her rushing back to the window.

"Yes! Hurry, please!"

Despite what the demon told her, she wouldn't lose hope. If her family was indeed deceased, she was glad to know they wouldn't suffer the same fate as her. But if they made it out or possibly needed help, at least it was on the way.

Blue and red lights from the police cars and fire trucks pulled up in front of the lawn. Marcella watched with impatience as the firemen set everything up and began putting out the fire. Men began to pour in the house and she stared stunned while the burning bedroom door opened and everyone retreated back out, just as fast.

Marcella screamed as loud as she could, but rumbling and shaking had her growing quiet while she looked up. Pieces of the ceiling began to fall

through her and she let them, not moving. A good two hours ticked by while she stood in the middle of the smoldering pathetic remains of what used to be her home. Large pieces of the frame and chunks of the walls stood intact, but that was about it. A hole, clear over the guest bed, gave view to the beginnings of the sunrise. To think that her brother's room wasn't above her anymore was too hard for her to take in.

"Marcella!"

Startled, she walked through the smoking debris until she came to an opening in the wall that gave a perfect view to the front lawn of their house. Cautiously, she tried stepping passed, but some unknown force was keeping her inside.

"Marcella!"

Throwing herself into the invisible barrier, she tried to get herself closer to her boyfriend. "Jason! Jason, I'm here! Can you hear me?"

People were thrown out of the way as she watched him try making his way to the front door. Two police officers brought him down while he tried fighting them off. "Marcella! Where is she?" he yelled at the cops. "Marcy!"

If she could have cried, she would have. The heartbreak resting on all of his features made her regret every mean thing she'd ever said to him. He just lost his father, now to lose her, too. What would this do to him? The beginnings of a fear so large made her become aware of feeling in her body for the first time since she'd awoke. A tiny tingling rushed to the tips of her fingers.

"Jason! Jason, I'm here!"

The officers restrained him and pulled him to their cruiser while he continued to twist and kick at them. No matter how hard they tried to get him through the door, he kept pulling them back toward the house, inch by inch. A fireman finally came to their rescue and got Jason locked inside. But it didn't stop him from lying down to kick at the window with his bare feet.

Tortured, she watched, until they finally drove him off. His mother eventually came and picked up his truck, but hours went by and nothing else happened. It wasn't until sunset that she heard the familiar voice.

"Sorry about that. I got a little wasted last night and forgot about you. So, how do you want to do this? You can come to me, or I can come to you. Either way, we both know you won't be able to escape, so please don't try.

I've got a killer headache and the last thing I need is to chase you around the room."

Tingling rushed through Marcella's fingers again as rage took over. This demon was the rudest, most insensitive bastard she'd ever met. She stalked right up to him not once breaking their eye contact.

"I'm not afraid of you. What, no more music? I hope your head hurts so bad that every word out of my mouth makes you want to puke!" She yelled as loud as she could, happy when he winced.

Lips crushed into hers, pulling her into a passion she'd never undergone before. His taste hypnotized her, drugged her into forgetting everything she'd ever experienced. Marcella clung around his neck, amazed by her body's response to him. He wasn't going through her at all and if felt as if she knew him, knew him forever. Nothing mattered anymore but the pull that forced her to get closer against him.

Out of nowhere, she couldn't breathe even though she hadn't taken a single breath since she awoke. The need to take in air made her panic. Desperately, she tried to pull back and noticed she wasn't the only one. He seemed to be pushing against her shoulders, but her lips were locked open with his.

Cold slowly began to seep into Marcella's mouth as a bright light nearly blinded her. A piercing scream almost shattered her eardrums. It took a moment to realize the scream came from her. Dark spots blocked out the majority of her vision and everything turned to slow motion. She could feel herself falling and once again, she couldn't control her body.

Peaceful darkness settled over her, but quickly vanished into a muffled voice. Fog drifted through her head while she tried to process what just happened. The voice got louder and she fought to listen to what it was saying.

"You owe me five souls. Do you know that? What in the hell do you think you're doing?"

Marcella blinked to see the demon hovering over her. The glare on his face made her smile while she shut her eyes. To see him upset felt like perfect payback for the asshole he'd been earlier. "I have no idea what you're talking about. What happened?"

"I'll tell you what happened. You stole my souls! What the hell am I supposed to do now? I'm due to meet with my master within the next month

and if I don't have those souls, there's going to be hell to pay. Now give them back!"

"I already told you. I have no idea what the fuck you're talking about!" Aching raced through her body as she fought to sit up. "Are you going to help me or are you just going to stand there, maybe play me another song?"

The demon pulled her up so fast she fought not to be sick. Twisting resettled in her stomach and she clung to his white button up shirt so she wouldn't collapse back to the ground in pain.

"Oh God, not again. Oh please, no."

"What is it?" He growled.

Fingers laced through her hair at the base of her neck. She leaned into his strength and stared up at him. "I've been having these bad pains, even before the fire. My stomach, it hurts really bad."

"Pains? You can feel?" At once, his voice softened and sounded confused.

"No, I'm just clutching to my stomach because it feels good. Yes, I can feel. It hurts. Make it stop."

A scream escaped her lips while she buried her face into his wide chest. The hardness of muscle nearly made her draw back, but the throbbing immobilized her. "Make it stop!"

"I can't. I don't know what's happening. You shouldn't be able to feel. Shit, what in the fuck is going on? You take my souls, you can feel, you're an amazing kisser. Nothing makes sense."

Caught off guard by the amazing kisser part, she tried to look up. Tingling, followed by what Marcella could only describe as cobwebs, raced from her toes to her shins. "What's happening? What is that? Something's inside of me. I can feel it moving. Oh shit."

"Tell me what you feel. Is it like bugs, or..."

"Cobwebs, it's creepy. I don't like it." She tried pulling out of his arms, but he wouldn't let her go. The need to curl into a ball pushed her to fight against him, harder. "They're to my knees! It fucking hurts."

Her fingers gripped into the demons shirt even tighter. Terror caused her breathing to become faster as the feeling began to accelerate and climb to the bottom of her stomach. Electrical charges shot in all directions making her vision blur.

"I'm dying," she whispered. "Again, but this time they want me to feel it. Why is this happening? I've never done anything. I'm fucking boring!"

Light exploded in front of her while the cobwebs raced up her throat, blocking off every ounce of air she held. The demon's eyes got big as he held eye contact with her. The expressions passing his face made her panic further. Fire raced down her skin feeling like a million needles penetrating at once.

"Your eyes." The words were the last thing she heard before another pain exploded in her head. Then silence.

"Collector, wake up. Collector...Marcella! Damn woman, you faint more than anyone I've ever met before. Your change couldn't have been that bad. Hello....wake up!"

"I can hear you, dammit. You don't have to yell. And for your information, I've never fainted before today."

Marcella sat up groggily. Long dark hair fell over her shoulder as she leaned forward. She stared at it confused. This *was not* her hair. Hers was only a few inches past her shoulders and wasn't ever this dark. Now the loose curls hung past her elbows.

Looking at her skin, she nearly screamed. She was pale before, but now she was downright ghostly, and covered with tribal tattoos that stopped at her waist. Not to mention, she was completely nude.

"Oh my God..."

The demon laughed. "I didn't want to believe it. This is beyond anything I ever thought I'd experience. Marcella, do you know what's happened? Do you know what you are? You've defied everything us demons were ever taught."

"Less talk, and more clothes. Hello, I'm naked." Marcella crossed her legs, and wrapped her arms across her chest trying to cover herself as much as she could.

The blue of his eyes left hers and gazed down at her body. Heat infested her skin, skin that looked real, human. Marcella pressed her fingertip against her thigh. Solid.

"I *am* real. I'm...alive?"

"You're a collector." The huskiness of his voice made her shiver. "You're not supposed to be real. Soul collectors only existed back in the first few hundred years of hell. Lucifer supposedly made them to assist in

his deeds, but he wiped them out. They were too powerful and began to deliver to who they thought best, or so the legend goes. That's when us demons were sent to earth for the task."

"Whoa, what makes you think I'm one of those?"

"Well, it could be the chants that are embedded in your skin. Or maybe it's the fact that you stole my souls! Don't tell me you're forgetting that."

"Demon..."

"Ipos, or did you think I didn't have a name? Although, maybe it's better if you call me Dominic, that's my human name. I do have a life to pretend to live."

"Fine, Dominic. Listen. Maybe you're right, but what if you're not. Am I human or not?"

"Human, no. You're a collector. Didn't we already go over this? You're not too bright, are you? Graduated honors, my ass. What did they teach you at that school you went to?"

"Listen asshole, since you seem to be missing what I'm getting at here. I want to leave. Can I make it past the walls of this room?"

"Oh, why didn't you just say that to begin with? Yes, you're free to do whatever you want. That is, after you hand over my souls."

Marcella's breasts hit the hardness of Dominic chest as he pulled her up. Fingers tangled into her hair making her look into his eyes. "I'm sorry, but this is the only way." His lips pressed gently into hers at first, then harder, sending pleasure heavily to her lower stomach. The softness of his tongue caressed hers bringing her body to life with heightened sensations more powerful than before.

Wetness collected on her inner thighs while she pulled his body closer to hers. She could hear herself moaning as she sank deeper into him. The familiarity of his taste only lasted for the briefest moment. Flashes of her family and Jason made her jerk back, stopping the pull of harbored memories that were trying to break through. Thinking of what happened caused her heart to ache. Jason...

"Stop, I can't. I need to leave. There's someone I have to see."

"Dammit, give them back! It's impossible for me to take them from you. All you have to do is hand them over and I *might* let you leave."

"But I don't know how. I'm not even sure I can."

The feeling of leather materialized around parts of her body. Marcella looked down and still tried to cover herself. A black halter top barely covered her generous breasts. Pants were so low cut and tight, she knew she'd be stupid to bend over or sit down.

"Did you do that?"

"Yes, let's go. You're not leaving until I get those souls back. There's got to be a way to unlock where they're staying. But if I can't, you can face the masters and explain the situation. In the meantime, I'm going to have fun trying my damndest to open everything up inside of you. *Everything.*" He laughed. With the mischievous look on his face, she had no doubt he was referring to something sexual.

"But I can't leave with you. I need to find Jason. I need to make sure he's all right. He lost his father last year and today he saw me and my family rolled out of the house in body bags. Do you have any idea what he must be going through?" *Or what I'm going through? I need him.* Even though Marcella knew Jason was hurting, he was all she had left. She wanted to cry to him, to have him tell her everything was going to be all right.

"I don't care, truthfully. Do you have any idea what I'll go through if you don't give me back those souls?"

Marcella screamed in frustration and ran for the opened side of the wall. The spiked stilettos made it impossible for her to make good timing around all the debris blocking her path. She wasn't halfway across her front lawn when Dominic tackled her.

"Oh no, you don't. Let's go."

A hand clamped across her mouth while he lifted her back against his body. In shock, she watched a red car materialize before them. What looked to be the symbol of a pitchfork rested at the very front of the two-door, sports car.

"Now get in here and be quiet. If you give me any more trouble I'll tie you up and gag you. Is that clear?"

"Is that what you're into?" She raised her eyebrow as his lips parted, quickly turning to a smile.

"Not particularly, but for you, I think the gag would be necessary. Now, stop giving me trouble. Hear me?"

"Perfectly," Marcella bit out. She had to think of a way to get to Jason. Without him there to emotionally support her, Marcy wasn't sure what to

do. When anything had ever happened, he'd been her rock, the one telling her he wouldn't ever leave.

Throwing herself down into the passenger side seat, she cringed when the door slammed. The keys resting in the ignition moved her into a motion. She jumped in the driver's side and started the car, leaving Dominic standing in the middle of the road in a cloud of smoke.

The car quickly jumped to sixty as Marcella left what was considered, Ingleside on the Bay. She hit the highway headed toward town pushing the car over a hundred. Houses blurred by and she didn't slow until she reached Jason's road.

"Come on. Be home. Please!"

The big black truck sat sideways on the front lawn as if it had been parked recklessly. Sickness rushed through Marcella's stomach. Her hand pushed against the horn as she slid to a stop. Jumping out, she raced toward his front door. "Jason!"

A red-eyed, Mable met her at the door before she could even knock. She almost didn't recognize his mother, her face was so swollen. "Where's Jason? I need to see him."

"Honey, he's asked for no visitors." She paused, her eyes raking over the tribal tattoos. "I think you should go...and put some clothes on. You look ready to hit Leopard Street dressed like that."

His mother saying she looked like a prostitute, dressed to hit the most well known street in Corpus Christi, broke her heart. "I know Jason is dealing with a lot right now, but it's imperative I see him. Don't you recognize me?"

The door began to close in her face and panic set in. Marcella's whole body started shaking with anger and fear. She quickly placed her boot in the way. "Listen, get Jason or I'm coming in. I don't have much time."

"Who do you think you are? I'm calling the police."

"Jason!" Marcella pushed passed the door and rushed to his room. The moment she entered, she stopped. His face was blotchy and just as swollen as his mother's. A look of confusion crossed his features before his eyes grew wide. She quickly shut the door behind her and locked it.

"Jason." Rushing to the bed, she threw herself at him. Marcella buried her face in his neck, breathing deeply, inhaling his scent. "I thought I'd never see you again," she whispered.

He pulled back, taking in her appearance. For what seemed an eternity, he shook his head back and forth. His eyes narrowed, only to grow big again. "No. It can't be." He peered into her face harder. "You're dead. I saw them take you from the house." He bit his lip. "Who...are you?" Pressure gripped her arms, trying to separate them.

The alarm he was feeling physically pushed against her skin, startling her. Did she make a mistake in coming here? "It's a long story, but I'm not dead. Well, not exactly dead. I'm not human, either." She held around his neck tighter, afraid to let go.

"Jason! Is everything all right?"

Marcella turned at the pounding on the door. "I don't have much time. There's a... man after me. I'm sure he'll be here soon."

"There's no way you're Marcy. You can't be. You look a little like her, but you're different." The pressure increased on her arm as he tried prying it off, again, in earnest. "I think maybe you should leave."

"I promise it's me, Jason!"

"Don't talk to me. I don't know who you are."

"Yes, you do! When we fought last night, I told you to go to Kasey and to leave me alone. I told you never to come back. I lied. I love you. I only said that because of the pain I was in. Please, you have to believe it's me. Something happened that I can't explain, and now I'm scared. "

"Go on." Hazel eyes narrowed in her direction.

"You said last night while I was sitting on your bed that you hadn't seen me cry in four years. You were there for me then. My family, Jason, they're gone. You're all I have left. I can't bear to think that even though you're alive, I lost you, too.

His jaw parted as his eyes filled up with tears. "Marcella?" Rough hands cupped her cheeks while he leaned in closer to look into her face. Multiple expressions passed over his features as he remained quiet.

"I'm going to have to go with the man for a while, but I couldn't leave without you knowing the truth. I'm so sorry for the way I acted. Please forgive me and know that I do love you. You've always been the one."

"Don't leave me." He crushed her against his chest before she could take a breath. She felt fear rush through him. The sensation prickled her skin. "I can't lose you, again. Please don't leave. Wait, let me come, too."

"Jason!" Another round of banging rattled the door.

“Mom, I’m fine. Give us a few minutes.”

“If you need anything let me know.”

He turned back to Marcella. “Let me come, please.” His whisper could barely be heard over the beating of her heart. “God, you’re so different. I almost didn’t recognize you. If it wouldn’t have been more of a feeling, I might have never known it was you.” He shook his head as he held her stare. “You’re *eyes*, they don’t look real. They’re orange or gold, and definitely not normal. I swear I’ve seen them before...seen you before.”

Jason looked down and ran his fingers over the tattoos. Marcella shook as pleasure tightened her pussy. He pulled her down on the bed, covering his body on top of hers. “I thought I lost you.” He kissed her deeply, running his hand along her hip. She clung around his neck, moaning at the hardness that pushed against the leather between her legs.

“Well lookie here. So this is what you needed to do? We could have done this back at my place. Do you have any idea what you’ve just done by exposing yourself to a human?”

Gasping, Marcella gripped to Jason’s arm, tighter. Her boyfriend sprung from the bed breaking their contact. The moment the men looked at each other, Marcella could see something pass between them, but it was too fast for her to determine what it could have been.

“How in the hell did you get in here?” Jason snapped.

“I have my ways.” Dominic gave him an unsettling smile.

“You’re not taking her. I won’t let you. She belongs with me.”

Marcella eased to Jason’s side, grabbing his arm. More than anger resided on the demon’s face. He was downright scary looking. “Jason, don’t. You don’t know what he is. I told you I had to leave. I want you to wait for me. Can you do that?”

“You can’t be serious.” Dominic’s laugh filled the room. “He can’t stay now. You’ve just condemned your own boyfriend. Humans are not allowed to know about us.” Dominic crossed his arms across his wide chest, narrowing his eyes. “Unless you want me to kill him right now, I suggest he starts packing his stuff. If for one second he tries to outrun me, you know what will happen.” The demon stared at Marcella letting his point set in.

“No, I don’t want him to come. Not where we’re going.”

“You should have thought about that before you stole my car and came here. Look, we obviously can’t all leave together. Marcella, meet me

outside. Jason.” He paused. “Such a good boy. What a shame.” Dominic shook his head. “Anyway, pack up and tell your mother goodbye. You won’t ever see her again. Then, you can meet us in town. I trust you not to do anything stupid. Just know if you do, you can’t hide from me.”

Jason took a step forward. “How do I know you’re telling me the truth? You could be setting us both up, for all I know.”

“You don’t know and you won’t. But I need Marcella, and she needs me. I can’t have her hunted down because she ran her mouth to *you*. Meet us in town at the supermarket parking lot and hurry.”

Dominic vanished into thin air. It took a few moments for Jason to regain his composure. “Did that just happen? What is that guy? Why do I feel like I’m having some kind of weird dream? I swear I’ve seen him somewhere before.”

“Calm down, Jason. He’s a demon. It seems I summoned him whenever I died. And I assure you, you’re not dreaming.”

“Fuck, this is a lot to process. I can’t think passed what just happened.” Jason picked up a book off his dresser and launched it across the room. “Son of a bitch. Who does he think he is, talking to you that way? Looking at you like...” Jason seemed to catch himself. “You better go. I won’t be long. Just be careful until I get there.” He ran his hands through his dark hair as he looked around the room like a predator. She couldn’t ever remember seeing him so angry. A stab of anxiety filled her.

Deciding to give him the benefit of the doubt, Marcella kissed him goodbye and eased out of his door. Jason’s mother was nowhere to be seen while she cautiously escaped. Dominic sat in the driver’s side of the car, gesturing for her to hurry. Getting in would mean she needed to trust him, something she didn’t think should do. But with Jason now involved because of her, did she really have a choice?

Chapter 3

Jason threw everything his hands touched into his old school backpack. Who in the hell was that guy? And what gave him the right to decide anything having to do with Marcy? Demon or no demon, Jason wasn't scared of him. The feeling as if they knew each other only left him feeling confused. He wanted to hurry and make sure the guy didn't leave town before he could follow, but being distracted continuously made his hands fumble.

The truth of their current situation hit him in the chest like a bag of bricks. His mother. How would she cope knowing she not only lost her husband, but now her only child?

She did have Bill, but would he take care of her? The demon said Jason would never be able to see her again. Could he? Was it possible for him to come back after awhile and tell her he was okay? He'd find a way. He had to.

As for Marcella, he couldn't leave her alone with that monster. Everything inside of him forced his arms to move faster. The need to protect his girlfriend overpowered everything. And when it came to her, he never questioned his intuition. A part of him just knew things, even he couldn't understand.

Jason grabbed his bag and headed down the hallway to his mother's room. "Mom, I need to leave town for a bit!"

The wooden barrier between them flew open, her eyes wide. "Why? What's wrong? Who was that girl? Did you see what she was wearing? I didn't raise you to hang out with people who dressed like that."

"It was just a girl I knew a few years ago from high school. She heard about Marcella and wanted to know the truth from me. I can't take all these phone calls and people. They're smothering me. I'm leaving town for a while. My phone will be on at all times. Call me if you need anything."

"I'm so sorry, sweetie. I know it's hard. Marcella...she was such a pleasure to have around. I loved her like a daughter. We all were so sure you'd both end up getting married someday." Tears poured down his mother's cheeks while he shifted uncomfortably. "I can't believe this happened."

Seeing his mother cry made tears blur his vision. His voice was hoarse when he started to speak. "Call me if you need anything. I love you, Mom."

"Where are you going?"

There was only one place he could go that was far enough away where no one could check up on him, his father's cabin. "I'll be in Camp Wood."

"Be careful, honey. I know things are hard right now, but no worries. They'll get better."

Jason took his time hugging his mother. He kissed her forehead and headed for the door. He'd be back. He'd make sure of it.

* * * *

Marcella tapped impatiently against the dashboard while they sat waiting in the parking lot. "What kind of car has a pitchfork for an emblem?"

"A Maserati, that's what kind." Dominic looked toward the intersection with irritation. "Your boyfriend better hurry up. I've given all the patience I plan to hand out today. What you pulled...complete and utter bullshit. Taking off like that could have been the stupidest thing I've ever seen. My god, Marcella, you're dead. You can't be running around flaunting yourself to everyone you knew."

"I'm not, dammit. Jason needed to know he didn't lose someone else he cared about. We had a fight. My attitude toward him was unforgivable. I did *not* want him to remember me like that."

Cars passed by and still his truck didn't pull in to the crowded parking lot. Did he change his mind? Surely, he wouldn't try to run?

"You've completely altered everything. So, let's cut to the chase. Loverboy needs to be dehumanized, as I like to call it. What do you want him to be? You're going to have to change him."

"From what I hear, only a collector has the ability to shift into any form of the supernatural world. I know when you had to of existed in the past, the

paranormal wasn't as evolved as it is now. The creatures have definitely multiplied in the last few hundred years since I've been around, but all the same, you should be able to change. So what's it going to be for loverboy: werewolf, vampire, succubus or incubus depending on the gender, fey? Geez, the list is endless."

"I can really be any of those? They truly exist?"

Dominic stared at her. "All right, let me slow it down for the people who seem to have a hard time understanding what they're told... I...said...they...do...didn't...I?"

Marcella didn't think, she swung. Dominic's head snapped back, the loud crack echoing off of the interior. Slowly, he lifted his finger to the blood coming from his lip. Staring at it in shock, he turned his gaze to her. "What the fuck was that for? Damn, woman!"

"Stop treating me like an idiot and talk to me with respect. Before now, you couldn't have thought I'd believe in things like that. You're being a prick, and I don't like it."

"Okay, okay. Shit, I'm sorry. Maybe I'm not used to this either, but you've caused more trouble for me in the last hour than I've dealt with in the last hundred years. Let's start over, shall we?"

"Gladly." Marcella rolled her eyes and looked out of the window. *Starting over...yeah right.* She couldn't see things changing. He had an attitude problem. The moment he lost it, she'd bow before his feet.

"Look, there's Jason! Good, he made it."

Dominic sighed and signaled for the black truck to follow. The Maserati pulled out of the parking lot and headed in the general direction of the neighboring town of Aransas Pass. Not two miles later they pulled onto a dead end dirt road. Marcy's heart began to pound. Thick brush lined the street for close to a mile before they reached a large, white mansion at the end of the road.

"You live here?" She gasped.

"As of now, I do. I'm going to miss my house on Shoreline Drive. Great view if you ask me, the best actually, I made sure of it," he smiled. "Anyway, my instincts tell me to stay in the town so that's what I'm doing. Besides, it's an exact replica of my home anyway, the scenery is just different."

"Must be nice to make things just appear whenever you want them to," Marcella said, opening her door.

"You'll be able to do it. It's one of the easiest things you'll learn, I'm sure. So, have you decided on loverboy? What's it going to be, wolf, bloodsucker, or," he laughed, "maybe you have a penchant for wings."

She flipped him off and headed for Jason's truck. "I think I'll let him decide, if you must know. I don't see why he has to change at all. He won't tell anyone."

"I'm not taking the chance. By the way...don't flip me off again. If you want to fuck, just say the words. No need to broadcast it to everyone."

Jason's door opened and he jumped out, hugging her tightly. "You okay?" He eyed Dominic wearily.

"Fine, let's all go inside. I need to discuss something with you."

They followed the demon through the double oak doors of the large, white mansion. Black marble floors lined the entry way as they made their way into a living room that resembled a cathedral. Caught up in the grandeur, Marcella took in all the expensive paintings and decorations. The place looked more like a museum than an actual home. Dominic groaned and she noticed the men were sitting on white leather sofas waiting for her.

"Don't start your shit already." She made her way next to Jason. A picture stood above the fireplace and she quickly snapped her gaze to the demon. "Change it, now."

"But I like it. It goes perfectly here, just like you. You make my house shine."

"Me, laying naked on a cheesy bear skinned rug does not fit here. Now change it before I find my way up there. When I do, there won't be much left of your phony artwork."

"Fine." He waved his hand putting a black silk gown over her figure. To Marcella, there wasn't much of a difference. She could still see the curves through the material.

Irritated, she turned to Jason. "I'm sorry. I screwed up by going to your house. Dominic says I have to change you into a..." She looked toward the demon and then back to her boyfriend.

"Oh, come on. It's not a big deal." Dominic leaned forward, resting his forearms on his thighs. "Jason, how much do you know about paranormal creatures?"

“What do you mean creatures?” Jason paused. “We’re not talking ghosts, *are* we?”

“No. I’m talking vampires, werewolves, mermaids, fey. Everything you’ve heard of probably exists. Today’s your lucky day. Pick what you want to become.”

“You can’t be serious?” Jason stood up walking toward the fire. Marcella’s heart ached for him. She did this. Would he eventually hate her for it?

“I’m dead serious,” Dominic said, standing. “You pick one or I can make it easy on all of us and kill you now. Maybe then, I’ll only need four souls.” The demon took a step closer to her boyfriend. “How good in life were you, really? Have you done things considered, sinful? Tell me, Jason, do you repent?”

“If you touch him, I’ll kill you, myself.” Marcella jumped to her feet. “Now let’s quit arguing and figure out a solution to this mess we’re in. I have your souls, you need them back. Jason needs to be changed and I...” She turned toward Dominic. “What am I supposed to do?”

His laugh made her shake with an indescribable need. She turned away from him before he could realize how he’d just affected her. No doubt either a song would play or he would come back with some smartass comment.

“You, my dear, are immortal, unless of course Lucifer decides to put an end to your life. You’ll never die no matter what happens. They could burn you at the stake and you’d somehow come back. Don’t get me wrong, you’ll feel the pain, even beg for death, but it’ll never come. At least, I think. I’m purely going off stories, of course.”

“Great, but what do I have to do?”

Dominic groaned, loudly. “How do I put this in a way where it won’t make you sound completely fucking stupid? Oh, that’s right. Marcella, what are you?”

She grabbed a vase and hurled it toward the demon. He quickly ducked to avoid getting hit. “No shit, I know I collect, I get it, but what am I collecting them for?”

“That’s for you to decide. You can hold them eternally or release them to heaven or hell. That’s as much as I know. Now, you owe me fifty grand for that vase.”

“Whatever. You didn’t even pay for it.” Marcella walked toward the fireplace and her boyfriend. “Jason, tell me what you want?”

“I don’t know.” He turned toward Dominic. “Are you sure we have to do this? I’m not going to say anything. You have my word.”

“I’m not taking the chance. You better pick or I’m not letting you leave this house.”

Jason groaned and ruffled his hair. “What are the pros and cons?”

She followed his gaze, watching Dominic. An evil smile formed across his face. “Depends how you look at it, I guess. A vampire, well come on. You drink blood, the sex is beyond amazing, you’re strong, and fast. Fey, you’re basically the same, but you’ll have wings.” Dominic paused. “Becoming an immortal will be impossible for you. They’re nothing more than fallen angels who are hell bent on earning back their wings. No, nothing else really fits.

“A were is your best bet, wolf, tiger, lion, you pick your animal Only problem is, you’ll need an alpha and we really don’t need the trouble nor are you in the position to become one. Not with Marcella. If you become a vampire, Hotness over here can be your master. You never have to answer to anyone, but her. And that’s eternal, so pick your fights wisely. She can make your life a living hell if she wants to. And from what I’ve seen, God help you.” The demon pretended to make a cross over his head and chest. Marcella wasn’t catholic, but she had seen enough to know it was performed in that religion. Damn, he was horrible.

“Vampire, it is,” Jason said, pulling off his shirt. “If that’s the best way to keep her with me, then I’ll gladly spend eternity by her side.”

“How sweet,” Dominic said dryly. “Marcella before you go all vamp on me, do me a favor and come here. I need you to attempt to give my souls back. I really don’t want to taste blood at the moment.”

She looked nervously at Jason. “Now?” she whispered.

He smiled. “Yes now, and yes, right here where I stand. Jason, come over here, I want you to witness something. You’ll never see this anywhere else. It’s very amazing, actually.”

Marcella felt her heart drop. Her boyfriend wasn’t going to react well to her kissing another guy, especially a demon he didn’t seem to like.

“What is it?”

“You’re going to see me try to take the souls Marcella stole from me, back. If I can get them, it’ll be amazing indeed, if not, well it’s still amazing.” His strong arm came around her waist, crushing her breasts against his chest. “I think she’s got the most amazing taste of anyone I’ve ever kissed.”

Dominic’s lips were suddenly pressed against hers, and his fingers wrapped in her hair. Angrily, she pushed against his shoulders. It was one thing if he seriously wanted the souls, completely different if the act benefited him in hurting Jason.

The grip tightened, pulling hard. She opened her mouth to scream and she felt a connection to the souls she carried. A warming in her stomach, stirred, making her laugh out loud. Histories, names, ages of the people she carried inside, filtered into her mind.

“What’s so funny?”

Marcella leaned back to see Dominic holding Jason still with his gaze. “Let go of him and I’ll tell you.”

“Damn.” Dominic raised his hands in the air and she turned to see her boyfriend advancing quickly.

“Both of you stop. I’ve located your souls, Dom.” Her smile instantly fell. Something in her knew she couldn’t give them back. Even if she wanted to, which she didn’t, it was impossible. They were hers now until her body knew what to do with them.

“First off, don’t call me Dom. He pulled her toward him again and she quickly covered his mouth making her kiss her own hand. “I can’t give them back,” she whispered.

“What do you mean, you can’t give them back? Can’t or won’t?” He squeezed her tighter against his body.

“Both. I can’t, and really wouldn’t want to if I could. They’re a part of me now. ”

“Fuck!”

Every window shattered with his shout. The pressure of energy pushed against her skin with a force that terrified her. Marcella instantly fell to the floor, not expecting her weight, as he let go. His tall form stalked toward the back of the house. Jason quickly helped her up. “Marcy, we need to get out of here.”

“No, he’ll find us. It’s pointless. Let him calm down. He’s just upset now. We’ll think of something.”

“You don’t owe this guy anything. How did you get the souls to begin with?”

Marcella looked up at Jason, remembering Dominic’s lips pressed against hers in a kiss to silence her yelling. She didn’t know what to say.

“Did you kiss him?” A hurt look darkened his face.

“Jason, it’s not what you think. I was yelling at him and he kissed me to silence my screams.”

“And she loved every minute of it, couldn’t get enough. You should have seen how her body responded to mine. We have chemistry like you wouldn’t believe.”

Before Marcella could grab Jason, he was already running toward Dominic. They both hit the floor hard in a flash of fists. Alarmed, she rushed forward, pulling at Dominic’s shirt. The material disintegrated beneath her fingers.

“Both of you stop it!”

Blood poured out of Dominic’s nose and flowed freely from Jason mouth. The smell hit Marcella like a title wave making her own blood pulse through her body at a speed guaranteed to make her heart explode. While they continued to wrestle on the ground, she consistently continued to try to pry them apart.

Cobwebs manifested themselves at her feet, wrapping around her ankles while they inched upward. The fear she felt left her body shaking. Too many thoughts passed through her mind at what might be happening.

“Dom.”

Jason’s fist connected with the demon’s cheek only resulting in furthering the altercation. “Dom,” Marcella said, louder. “Dominic, something’s happening to me! The cobwebs are back. Am I dying? Am I going to disappear into a ghost again?”

Both men froze and tripped over each other as they tried to make their way to her. Blood covered both of their bare chests. Seeing all the muscle smeared with dark crimson made it hard to concentrate. Instinctively, she wanted to lick it off. The thick feeling paused mid-thigh, as if to reconsider, but slowly inch its way back toward her stomach.

“No, I don’t think you’re going to turn into a ghost, but you are going to turn into something. Shit. Tell me everything you feel.”

Closing her eyes, she tried to pay attention to what her senses were telling her. “Blood, I smell both of your blood. The scent is so strong. My heart races when I think about it.”

She opened her eyes in time to see Dominic smile. “Perfect, you’re changing into exactly what we need. Get ready to say goodbye to your life, Jason. You’re about to die. This is going to be so much fun to watch. Vampire, it is.”

Marcella observed the tribal tattoos disappear from her arms while the cobwebs advanced toward her throat. Just the thought of not breathing again made her want to run away screaming. Would she ever get used to this new life?

“Jason, I’m sorry.” The last of her words were muffled against the change. While the thick feeling filled the insides of her cheeks and eyes, fangs appear, only to retract. Air expanded her lungs once again as her eyes blurred over with a dark green color. They quickly corrected themselves while the sensation disappeared at the top of her head.

“Amazing,” Jason whispered. “Did you see her eyes change from gold to dark green? How cool was that? And look at her, the tattoos are gone, but she still looks as flawless as before with rosy cheeks and red lips. I thought vampires were scary looking.”

Marcella took a step, the smell of blood driving her forward. Dominic’s hand pressed between her breasts stopping her advance. She looked from his fingers, up his arm, and to the red smeared across his massive chest. Coherent thoughts wouldn’t focus. All she knew was blood, and finding a way to get what she wanted. The need to run her tongue across his defined muscle almost made it impossible not to launch herself at him.

“Slow down, love.” His voice was softened as he cocked his head to the side and gave her a tender expression. “I know it’s hard for you to control right now. I didn’t expect this to be easy, but you need to think about loverboy. If you’re not careful, you’ll kill him. You need to feed from me first until you’re satisfied. Then you can bite him.”

Marcella stared directly into Jason’s eyes while her thoughts cleared. Dom was right. She needed to learn to control the cravings. The last thing she wanted to live with was her boyfriend’s true death.

“Jason, you need to understand what happens is nothing against you. This isn’t exactly Marcella right now. Well, it is, but when the bloodlust gets a hold of her, things will happen between her and I that you might not like. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“Is this about sex?”

For the first time Dominic didn’t come back with a smartass comment. “Yes, that’s exactly what I’m getting at. I don’t know what will happen because once her fangs pierce me, I won’t be able to stop.”

Jason snorted. “You’re basically asking my permission to fuck my girlfriend, is that it? I see why your attitude changed.” Jason whispered the end, looking down.

“Finally, someone with brains. Yes, I want to fuck your girlfriend, if it goes that far. Hell, be happy I asked. I could have killed you with my pinky finger back there in that pathetic thing you call a fight. If it wasn’t for Marcella, you wouldn’t be here.”

“I’ll take my chances with her first. If she kills me, at least I know she didn’t fuck you.”

Dominic laughed. “Oh, but she will, eventually. You see, with every species there’s a mate. It’s the reason I heard her call and I’ve been trying to deny it, but unfortunately, I can’t. As much as I don’t like the situation, well, you’re part of it, and this is where we’re all at. We’re going to have to learn to face our realities or we all have an eternity to be miserable with each other.

“No, I refuse to believe you both are *mated*. The two of you weren’t meant to be together, she and I are. She doesn’t deserve to be paired up with a bastard like you.”

“I may not be my original self, but I can still hear you two. I think I’ll decide who I want to be with. Shit, it might not be either one of you. I’m glad we got our chance to repair where we left off last night, Jason, but relationship wise, I can’t trust you. You cheated, whether you remember it or not.”

Marcella turned toward Dominic. “There’s some connection, but if you think I’m ready to call you my mate, you’re wrong. I want to hit you more than I want to kiss you. You’re attitude and cockiness are way too much. You’re a dick, and you piss me off.”

Both men were quiet while Marcella began taking off her clothes. Strangely, in her vampire form, she wasn't the least bit self conscious. She untied the halter top at her neck and back, letting the leather fall to the floor.

"Marcy, what are you doing?" Jason asked, cautiously. The husky undertone didn't slip her notice. The acceleration of his heart only drove her faster. She paused long enough to look at him and returned to taking off her pants.

"I don't know," she confessed.

Dominic turned to Jason. "She's doing what's in her nature as a vampire. They're seducers. But this is nothing compared to what we have to face when her succubus comes. Good thing you're changing over now. She'd kill you, for sure."

"Jason, come to me."

Instincts took over while Marcella studied her boyfriend's chest. The muscle flexed as he walked forward. The definition made her mouth water. Her eyes stopped at the V resting just above the lining of his jeans. With her finger, she traced the indentation, feeling herself become wet.

"Take them off. I want to feel your body against mine."

Nervously, he looked over at Dominic. "Can't we do this in a room somewhere where *he* won't be watching?"

"No, he needs to make sure I don't kill you. Trust me," she said, studying his rapidly beating pulse point in his neck. "He needs to stay. The intensity at which I want to taste your blood is making it hard for me not to attack you right now."

Tingly sensations shot through Marcella's nipples. They painfully hardened while she stepped closer. Moving her fingers down to his jeans, she pulled the button free, sliding her hand against the hardness of his cock through the thick material.

"Lay with me, Jason. Let me feel you touch me."

"Son of a bitch," Dominic groaned, collapsing on the couch. "This isn't fair, at all. I just get to watch while he has all the fun."

Ignoring him, Marcella continued to stare at the rapid beating that continued to call for her. "Kiss me, Jason. Let me taste you." She moved her eyes to meet his. He stared at her, captivated. The sound of the jeans falling to the floor was quickly replaced by her moan as he pulled her against his body.

“I love you, Marcy. I’ve always loved you.”

Soft lips captured hers. The taste of blood, still fresh from his cut lip caused her eyes to widen at the intoxicating flavor. She wrapped her arms around his neck pushing her breasts harder into him. They drifted to the rug and she quickly placed herself on top of Jason, straddling his hips.

The base of his cock pressed along the outside of her wet pussy making her once again moan into his mouth. While she ran her tongue along the cut she felt herself lifted slightly. A finger eased into her opening, reaching deep inside of her.

“Fuck. Hey, do you think you both can move more toward me, maybe spin a bit. It’s a good view from here, but it could be better.”

“Shut up, Dom,” Marcella snapped. “If you don’t like the view then move your ass over or don’t watch. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Can’t he leave? I trust you, babe.”

“I don’t trust myself. Just kiss me.”

He did, making her completely forget anyone else existed. Music began to play in the background making her inwardly groan, but she tried to ignore it and pay attention to what she felt instead. When the tune became familiar and she recognized the song, her body became hypnotized by the beat. The band Massive Attack drove her to rotate her hips erotically. The words to Angel pulled out every seductive vampire instinct she held.

Jason thrust his finger into her repeatedly until the tightening in her stomach threatened to burst. Their lips broke and Marcella nearly screamed when he sucked her sensitive nipple into his mouth. She lifted, sliding the tip of his cock inside of her.

Thickness pushed against her folds while she made her way down, inch by inch. The more she descended, the harder he sucked. A cry escaped her mouth at the pure pleasure that shot to her core.

“Jason. Do that thing I like, now.”

Strong hands gripped around her hips lifting her a small amount. His cock plunged inside of her hard, bringing her to instant release. Spasms rocked her body as he continued to thrust. She pushed his arms away, pulling him to a sitting position.

Marcella rotated her hips, sliding him deeper each time she moved her pussy down his length. Their rhythm matched perfectly against the music,

and the beating of Jason's heart. She stared mesmerized as his pulse called for her.

After countless minutes, Jason's thickness began to swell making her feel everything so much more. The vampire in her knew it was time. She leaned forward, kissing her way from his shoulder to his neck. Fangs descended and nature took over. The feel of silk touched her lips as she pierced his soft skin. Euphoria exploded as blood began filling her mouth.

A groan slipped from him as Jason pushed deeper inside of her, only to withdraw to thrust twice as hard. Images of his life flashed before Marcella's eyes. His childhood, every day of his adolescent years, up into the night of the party, played out like a projector in her mind. Mentally narrowing in, she quickly stopped the progression.

Kasey hovered over Jason's unconscious body, running her hands along his lower stomach. She watched the girl pull off his clothes, smiling. Did she really want to know what had happened? At any time she knew she could stop and move to the next memory, but she let it play out.

Jason lay there naked while the girl worked effortlessly to wake and arouse him. To no avail, the moment he opened his eyes, he pushed her away hard and passed back out. Marcella observed Kasey grab her clothes angrily and leave the room.

Just as she let the vision go, the images of the ocean she'd come to see in so many of her past daydreams, appeared. The new familiar face spun and looked directly at her, holding her gaze. She couldn't help but feel like this image of herself was returning her stare. But who could she be looking at? These were Jason's memories, not hers.

"Marcella, that's enough."

Opening her eyes, Dom's face hovered in front of her. She quickly broke the suction of her mouth, jerking back. "I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking."

Licking the wounds closed, the pain that raced through her forearm caused her to scream out. Dominic held up a bloody butcher knife and smiled. "I know you weren't. That's why I thought I would help. Press the wound to his lips. He's still alive, but barely conscious. He needs to drink as much of your blood as he can. But hurry, you'll heal quickly."

"Right." She noticed how her boyfriend rocked in his sitting position. "Jason, honey." His eyes lifted to her at the acknowledgement of his name. "Yes, that's right, lay back and relax. I need you to drink as much of this as

you can, okay?" Pressing her arm against his lips, his hand held onto it with surprising strength.

"That was the most amazing thing I think I've ever witnessed. I'm not much of a voyeur, but the way you move...it's magical."

Marcy shot a glance to the demon. "Do you ever say the right thing at the right time? Geez, Dom. Cut the music, what happens next?"

Jason's eyes closed and his head rolled to the side. Panic started to set in. She hated seeing him like this.

"Now we wait for him to change. It takes a while, and it'll be pretty hard on him, but that part isn't for some time. Go take a shower, I'll watch over him while he sleeps. He's not going to be very happy when he wakes."

Marcy quickly jumped up, not wanting to waste any time. "Clothes and shower?" The smile he flashed nearly took her breath away. She wasn't sure she liked the way he affected her so strongly. It didn't feel right with Jason being in the position he currently was in.

"Use mine. It's through that door, right there," he said pointing to an entrance off of the living room. "Clothes will be in there waiting for you."

"Thanks."

Running, she nearly tripped over her own feet when she passed the threshold. The size mirrored the main room. She had no problem finding the shower in the huge master bathroom. Frantic thoughts poured through her mind as she started the water. What would happen to Jason if he didn't turn into a vampire? What if he died? She tried to block out the questions while she rinsed off, but no matter how hard she tried, they wouldn't ease. They just intensified as new ones replaced the old.

* * * *

"What happened? Did he change?"

Marcella looked up at Gwendolyn. The blondes' green eyes blazed anxiously in the firelight. She looked younger than before, like a child anxiously awaiting something she'd longed for and finally found out she was getting it.

"If I told you, it would ruin the story. Besides, what do you care for Jason? I thought your feelings were for Ambrose."

“Ambrose is my master, and my lover. Although I don’t want him to die, I can’t say that I love him. He holds my loyalty, not my heart. Once, I thought we’d be together, but things change. We’ve grown apart over the centuries. But Jason, now he intrigues me. He’s noble and true, and nothing like the men who walk today’s streets. I think I want him.”

“Think again. Are you going to let me continue or not? How do you even know he took to the change? I’m a collector, not a vampire, or are you forgetting that major detail? My blood’s not like yours. It has the power to kill if I don’t use it right.”

“No.” Gwendolyn’s eyes grew in size. Tiny fingers covered her parted mouth. “Fate wouldn’t be so cruel. Please...”

Marcella took a breath and shifted in the chair. So much of the story was left to be told, parts she wasn’t looking forward to mentioning. Just thinking about the details of Jason’s change made her stomach turn, sickeningly. She could do this, she had to.

Chapter 4

Marcella slipped the white, silk nightgown over her head and rushed to the living area. Dominic already had Jason dressed in a pair of pajama bottoms and resting on a large bed. The couches were completely gone and the open space looked more like a bedroom than anything.

“How’s he doing? He’s still alive, isn’t he?”

“Yes, for now. Marcella, I might have been wrong about you changing him. I’ve never heard of it before, but I assumed since you could shift into different creatures, you could do what they do. What if I’m wrong?” The concern that etched the demon’s features stirred something deep inside of her. Could he truly care about what happened to her boyfriend?

The words he spoke turned her blood into ice. Weren’t those exact thoughts just going through her own mind? “Let’s just hope it works. I can’t lose him, Dom. Whether we were meant to be mated or not, Jason is the one I’ve always pictured myself being with. Nothing is going to change my mind. You need to know that.”

“You love him, I get it. But you can’t fight the pull of a mate. I have no problem with you being with him, but you will eventually end up being with me, too. That I know.”

“But you’re a demon. How can I trust you?”

“We all make mistakes. Believe it or not, I’ve actually calmed down a lot. I’m even trying to be good. Anyway, you know what I do, and that’s eternal. But have you ever thought about why you’re a collector? You once were a type of demon, so to speak, but put on a higher pedestal. Somehow you managed to get reborn. Should I hold your past against you?”

Caught off guard, Marcella quietly thought about his words. “But I don’t remember what I did.” The dreams she’d been having pushed into her head, but she quickly dismissed them. There was no way that was her. The feeling of authority that accompanied the dreams was absolutely absurd. But

she couldn't get over the fact of how identical they now looked. They were a mirror image if she wanted to be truthful with herself.

Dominic grabbed her hand. "I'm not proud of what I've done, but I'm doing everything I can to make things right. You need to know we can't escape what we're given, but we can make the best of it. I want to make the best of it with you...and Jason, if that's what you want. You're right, I've been a dick. I never thought I'd have a mate, *ever*. I'm not sure what's going to happen and it scares me. Fear is something I don't take to well."

A low groan broke the beginning of her response. "We'll talk about it later. Right now let's just get through this."

Dominic nodded and began to pace while Marcella climbed up next to Jason and focused on changing back into a collector. The cobwebs came naturally, moving faster than before, until she held her breath and felt the thick sensation leave her.

Opening her eyes, she noticed the tattoos and smiled at Dom. "I'm getting better. When Jason's better, I'm going to change into whatever he wants. It'll give us something to do while we're waiting for your master."

"About that." Dominic looked at the ground and then lifted his gaze back to her. "I'm not sure what he's going to do. If for some reason they take me away, I need you to promise me something."

Marcella sat up straighter in the bed. "What do you mean, take you? Where?"

The demon laughed. "You have to earn your position on earth, Marcy. I didn't get here because I was randomly picked from a hat. It took a long time. Don't you see? I've failed to make quota. They have every right to replace me with someone else." She watched him walk to the bed and sit next to her. "Promise me something."

"But...I don't want them to take you. Dom, I need you here with me. I'm lost without you. What would I do?"

A tender smile transformed his face into the angelic beauty she remember standing in the fire. The one she thought was an angel. "You and loverboy would live happily ever after, working endless jobs and paying mortgage. You'd never learn to materialize and I'd be miserable for eternity without you." The smile disappeared. "Damn, I sound sappy."

"I'm not talking material anything, Dom. I'm serious. My collector is lost. Who would I collect? How many souls do I need to take in? What if

something goes horribly wrong, and I have no one with experience to turn to? They can't take you away from me. I'll talk to them and convince them to let you stay."

"That's really sweet of you, but when they make up their minds, there's no stopping the decision they reach."

"You say they? Who are you talking about?"

"The masters of us demons. They only get together when there's a problem. I've decided not to tell them about you. If they feel threatened at all, I'm afraid of what might happen. That's why I want you to *promise* me something."

"What?" Marcella asked cautiously.

"Don't forget about our connection. I know you don't know me, but I feel like I've known you forever. It's a very confusing feeling, but a part of me feels protective over you, and it has nothing to do with being mates. No matter what happens, I think our connection is a link I haven't been able to decipher."

"I won't forget. I promise. But this is my fault. I can't just sit back while they take you wherever they want."

Jason's fist pounded hard against the mattress of the bed making Marcella scream. He began to thrash and convulse while she helplessly held him down so he wouldn't hurt himself.

"Dominic, is this normal? Should he be going through this much pain?"

"The pain is normal. The moving isn't. He should be immobile, locked inside his body. Watch out."

Marcella moved back while Dominic materialized restraints on Jason's wrists and ankles. "That should hold him for now. If he changes, they'll rip like tissue paper. That's when the real fun begins. I've never actually seen a vampire hunt for prey before. Let's hope poor Jason doesn't kill anyone tonight."

"He'll feed from me," Marcella said lowly. "I'm sure I can shift to human if I have to. It'll work to calm him down until we can find someone else."

"I'm not sure that'll work, but if all else fails, we'll try. Hell, I'll let him feed off of me too if that's what it takes."

Groans quickly turned into growls as the thrashing turned to violent jerks on the restraints. Marcella pushed the hair out of Jason's face while

she tried to sooth him. "Jason, it's okay. I'm here. Tell me what you want me to do."

"Make it stop. The pain. Make it stop."

"I'm so sorry, Jason." Tears streamed down her face. She felt so helpless. There was nothing she knew to ease his pain. As the hours passed, Jason's breathing decreased. The endless waiting was torture. At times he would gasp or let out a pain filled groan. For the last hour he remained quiet. It looked like he fought to stay breathing. A large intake of breath broke passed his lips. Marcella frantically grabbed at his shoulders.

"Wait. Jason, look at me. Jason!" She quickly slapped his face trying to bring him to, to make him wake up, even if the pain returned. "Jason." The top part of his shoulders came off of the bed as she gave him a hard jerk. "Don't do this to me."

"He's going to have to die, Marcella." Dominic's hand settled on her shoulder. "Just pray he comes back."

The tears came down steadily making it hard for her to see. She'd been so focused on if he would die, she didn't actually think about what it would look like when it happened. And it scared the crap out of her. Every fear she'd ever felt didn't even resemble watching someone she loved slip away while there was nothing she could do.

A last gasp escaped his mouth and she felt in her fingertips the moment his heart stopped. Air was almost impossible for Marcella to take in while she waited what seemed an eternity for him to change or his heart to start up again, but nothing happened.

"Oh god, I killed him. Dom, do something!"

"Marcy, I can't. He didn't call to me. I can't believe he didn't change. He should have turned into something. He shouldn't have died."

Marcella desperately shook him, screaming for him to wake up, but he didn't. His beautiful body lay motionless on the bed. Lifeless. Hiccups wracked her body. Defeated and clueless, she rested her head against his still chest. The smell of his body twisted her stomach until she was sure she was going to be sick with what she'd done.

The images, memories, everything she'd ever been through with Jason filtered into her mind. He'd trusted her, and look at what she'd done. There was no way she could let him go, ever. He was the biggest part of her life

that existed on this earth today and if she couldn't have her family, she'd have him. Anger and greed took over and she knew what she had to do.

"I'm taking his soul. He's mine."

"Marcella, do you think that's a good idea?" Dominic quickly scooted closer to her. The pressure of his hand grabbed her arm making her temporarily stop.

"I don't care! I want him with me," she sobbed. "Don't you for one minute tell me I can't have him. I will!" With a hard jerk, she removed her arm from his grasp.

Gently, she opened his mouth placing her lips against his. An instant connection made her heart accelerate. She waited for his soul, but it didn't come. Searching inside herself, she willed it to come to her. The air left her lungs so suddenly she gripped to Jason's shoulders to support herself from collapsing forward.

Screams filled the room. Marcella felt like her stomach was getting pulled inside out. She tried jerking back from Jason, but her lips were locked to his, just like before with Dominic. Bright light filled the room, dying out the moment her lips broke and she flew back into her mate.

"What in the hell just happened?" Dominic embraced her tightly.

The restraints flew from the bed as Jason sat up, his eyes a vibrant gold. Marcella's mouth parted as she watched the same tribal tattoos she held begin to inch its way up his stomach. The thick dark lines angled off forming what looked like a dragon's face on his chest. It stopped at the base of his neck and moved down the length of his arms. She stared in shock, bringing her eyes up to the pale, flawless complexion of his face. With the tattoos, he looked older...dangerous, and sexy as hell.

"Jason, I thought I killed you." Her breath came out more as a whisper. She threw herself into his arms holding onto him tightly. "Don't you ever scare me like that again." Wrapping her legs around his waist, she tried to get as close to him as she could. "If you wouldn't have come back..."

"You'll never lose me now. We've got each other for an eternity. God, I wasn't sure what was happening. I thought I was a goner." Jason hungrily kissed her, tightening his arms around her waist.

"I hate to break up the happy reunion, but you both need to take a step back and look at our new situation."

They both turned to look at Dominic. "What do you mean? Jason's not dead. He's a collector like me. What's there to look at?"

"Exactly! Marcella, where are my souls? When you had them, there was a possibility I could at least try to get them back. My mouth isn't going anywhere near his, sorry."

Fingers quickly lifted to her lips. She closed her eyes searching for the souls that rested inside of her. Turning, she looked at Jason. "You took one of them from me."

"Yes, I'm not sure how. I just knew I needed a soul as much as I needed to breathe. Without it, I knew my change could never completely ensue. It was as if I was alive in my body, but I couldn't move. I felt weighted down. I could see you, hear you, but there was nothing I could do to get to you to hear my shouts."

"The same happened to me when I died. Once I managed to get out of my body, I couldn't leave the room. Maybe since we had you tied, that's why you couldn't move. I'm not really sure, Jason."

"It doesn't matter, all that's important is the fact that we'll be together now, no matter what. Marcy, I never want to have to see you go through that much pain again. Now, I'll make sure you don't."

She rested her head against his chest. "But what about Dominic? If you could hear everything then you know the situation we're in. He and I share a connection, one that I'm sure hasn't changed. It's possible Dom and I are mated."

"Yes," Jason sighed. "I can feel your bond to him. I felt it the moment my change was complete. Losing him would be equivalent to losing me. As much as I don't like it, we're going to have to find a way to make sure he isn't taken away. Dom, come sit down. I need you to tell me everything you know about your masters."

"Hell, not you, too. My name is Dominic, not Dom. Let's try to skip the nicknames. Only pansies cut their names in half. I don't like it."

The tall blond sat on the edge of the bed, not a foot away. "I'm not sure what you want me to say. It's not like it's going to help." A heavy breath came from his mouth as he rubbed his eyes. "There are a total of ten masters. They all take their orders from the one man who runs the show. I'm pretty sure I don't have to say his name."

"I'd prefer you not." Marcella shuttered just thinking about it.

“Good. Now this is how the process works. After you put in your time, do what is told of you, you’re promoted to demon. Demons have different tasks; some manipulate humans to make them do evil deeds, while others simply collect the souls of those who commit multiple sins throughout their lives.

“Every other month we meet with the master we’re assigned to turn over the souls, or report on our progress. The ones who fail to complete their tasks are taken and punished. They basically have to start over in the chain and work their way to the top all over again. Just getting promoted to the next stage can take hundreds of years.”

“How does one become a master?” Jason asked.

“I’m not really sure. In all the centuries I’ve been here, they’ve never changed. No one speaks of the masters, it’s strictly forbidden. The punishment for offending a leader is brutal. You couldn’t image the consequences when we disobey or mess up. I guarantee the worst thing you’ve ever heard doesn’t even compare.”

Marcella turned around on Jason’s lap and rested her back against his chest. “Dom...inic, tell me what to do. There has to be a way I can help you. Maybe you don’t understand, but I can’t just leave you to take all the blame. I won’t.”

He rested his head in his hands. “Marcella, if they know about you, I’m betting they tell the one person who can kill you. Jason and I can’t live with that. You have to know, if you die, so does he. You’re his master. The connection you two have runs blood deep, literally. Do you understand now? You have to let me take care of this.”

“Then what are you going to tell him?”

“I’m simply going to say those pesky angels came and took them away from me. It’s been known to happen. There are two who are in the area that have been nothing but a pain in the ass for the demons around here. I’ve been lucky to avoid them. I’m sure he’ll buy the story and assign me more, but there’s no telling.”

“How long do we have before you need to meet with him?” Jason asked.

Dominic looked toward him and sighed. “I have a month, but I think I’m going to go to him early. The story will look more believable that way.”

“That’s a good idea.” Marcella yawned, cuddling deeper into her boyfriend.

Looking at her wearily, Dominic narrowed his eyes. “We should all go to bed. Tomorrow’s going to be a long day and an even longer night. We’ll need to test your powers, teach you to shift on command, and the best thing of all, materialization.”

He got off the bed and stretched. I’ll be in my room. If you need anything let me know.”

Marcella wasn’t sure why, but her hand unconsciously reached for him. “Wait.” Looking at Jason, Marcy watched as he just rolled his eyes and smiled. Relief filled her knowing he understood the need to be close to her demon mate.

“I’ll scoot over. Dom, get on the other side of Marcella. She doesn’t want you to leave and oddly enough, it doesn’t seem to bother me so much anymore if you stay.”

“Really? It must be the connection you two have. When you took in her blood, you probably took in everything that makes her who she is. She’s connected to me. Therefore, so are you. It might be impossible for us to hate each other. Pity. Now that you’re not human, I could have shown you what a real fight looks like.”

Jason laughed. “You still can. I’m dying to test my new strength.”

“Excellent. Tomorrow we’ll test each other. The job of protecting Marcella is up to us. No one is to know there are collectors in the midst. Your lives depend upon it. If word gets out, you can bet people will come. When someone feels threatened, they attack and ask questions later. No one likes to feel unsafe.

“Just a caution, in case one of you leaves before you’re told. In public, never bare your tattoos. Not many of us supernaturals know what you are, but they’ll know you’re not human, and not one of the ordinary. That will leave them asking questions, and we don’t want to risk the suspicion.”

Jason looked at Dom, but nodded toward Marcella. “We’ll be safe. Speaking of tattoos, I noticed Marcella has wings covering her back. Do you know what they mean?”

“Not a clue. I’m pretty sure they’re just part of her collector. Kind of like the dragon on your chest, just decorations.”

Marcella yawned again and laid down against the pillows. “Enough for tonight. Let’s go to bed. Tomorrow we go over everything, tonight we sleep. Dom, come.”

He took a step forward and stopped. “Marcella, I don’t sleep with clothes. I think I’ll just go to my room.”

“You will do no such thing. Right, Jason?”

“Shit, I don’t care. He’s not sleeping by me. Plus, I don’t sleep in clothes, either.”

“There, it’s taken care of. Now, undress and get in bed.”

Dominic crawled under the covers and both men took off their bottoms, getting comfortable next to her. The warmth of her boyfriend’s body pressed against her back while she threw her leg over Dom and buried her face in his neck. In all of her years, Marcy never thought she’d be lying between two naked men, but regardless of their clothing, she’d never felt safer. She blocked out the loss of her family as best as she could and focused on sleep.

* * * *

Gwendolyn’s swollen eyes stared at her, blank. Marcella wasn’t sure what to think about the new side of the master vampire. She could tell the woman had a fondness for Jason and she wasn’t sure she liked that at all.

“You tricked me. You made me believe Jason indeed died, when all he did was turn into a collector like yourself. If you would have told me you didn’t save him, I would’ve killed you on the spot. Call him. I want to see him for myself.”

“I can’t do that.”

The vampire’s eyes began to glow from her growing temper. “And why not? I want to meet him. How do I know he even exists? You say, if you die, so does he. So tell me, what are you afraid of? I can’t kill him. Not unless I kill you. At least, I think that’s what you said.”

Marcella wasn’t going to correct her or tell her the truth. “I’ll allow him to stay long enough to introduce himself, but then we finish the story. Agreed?”

A beautiful smile transformed the vampire’s pale face. “Agreed. I just want to see him. Then you can continue.”

Grabbing her cell phone, Marcy hit Jason’s number. She didn’t want to give away too many of their secrets. One ring and he answered. “Jason, it appears there’s a possibility you don’t exist. I need you to reach inside and

feel for me. No front doors for this one.” She clicked the phone closed and smiled at the confused Gwen. “He’s on his way.”

Marcella knew the instant Jason materialized behind her. The warmth of his hand eased on her shoulder and she turned to see his six feet, two inch frame standing behind the chair. A tight black muscle shirt stretched across his wide chest reaching down to his loose fitting jeans. The tribal tattoos wrapped down to his wrists and she still couldn’t get over how amazing he looked.

“You needed me?”

“Yes. Gwendolyn is intrigued by you. She wanted to meet you, personally. I don’t think she believed you existed.”

His laugh, alone brought Marcella’s body to life making her pussy wet. Their connection had only grown stronger over the weeks.

“May I kiss your hand?” Jason asked the opened mouthed vampire as he approached the bed. She nodded and he took her fingers flipping them over to brush his lips across her wrist. Marcella saw Gwendolyn shiver under his touch.

“It’s a pleasure meeting you, Jason.” Her voice was so low. Marcella almost didn’t hear it.

“Now if you don’t mind. I’d like to get back to the story. There’s still so much to tell.”

A pout crossed Gwendolyn’s lips, but she nodded. Jason walked over to Marcella and kissed her lips. “*Be careful. I love you.*”

The words echoed into her mind and she held in her smile. “*I love you, too. I think we’re winning her over. Tell Dom it might be a few more hours.*”

“*Will do.*” Jason winked and suddenly vanished.

“I envy you. My heart aches to see such a handsome man go. He’s almost as handsome as my Ambrose.”

“Speaking of which, how about I get back to the story?”

Gwendolyn smiled. “As long as Jason’s in it and you get to the part pertaining to Ambrose, I’m listening.”

Chapter 5

The feel of lips trailing the length of her arm brought a moan from Marcella's mouth. Wet warmth swirled around the sensitive bend of her elbow, slowly making its way to her shoulder. Whispering barely broke through her semi-conscious state.

"I don't think Marcella's much of a morning person. You're wasting your time, Dom."

"Then you've never woken her up like this, have you? She's absolutely beautiful in the morning, isn't she? I think I could look at her forever."

"Yes, she's very beautiful. And no, I haven't awoken her like that. We've never spent the night together before."

Heat vanished as the kissing stopped. Aggravated, Marcella turned over toward Jason's voice, pushing her ass against the hardness of Dominic's cock. A groan vibrated her body as he followed it with a curse.

"You've got to be kidding me. Never? You wouldn't have been able to tear me from her side. That ass, my god," Dominic growled, gently squeezing it.

His arm wrapped around her waist while the other lifted her head, fitting itself underneath. Marcella's upper body was pulled until her back pressed against Dominic's chest. Fingertips eased over her silk covered nipples. Moaning, she moved her bottom down against his length. Hot air brushed against her neck quickly followed by the pressure of another round of kisses.

"Dominic, I think you forget I just barely turned twenty-one and still live with my mother. Marcella can't just come to my house and spend the night. My mom is cool, but I wouldn't disrespect her by asking."

"That's right; you're a young one. Well, excuse me if I'm not interested in finishing this conversation. Why don't you do me a favor and lay your ass back down, join, or get out. Our dear Marcella has been somewhat awake since my first touch and she doesn't want me to stop, do you, love?"

“No,” Marcella whispered.

Dominic placed his arm around her waist and eased his hand between the middle of her thighs, separating them until her leg rested over his. Pulling the silk gown to her hips, he slid his fingertips along the wetness of her folds while he used his other hand to tug at her tight nipple.

“Don’t leave.” Marcella’s eye fluttered open to see Jason staring down at her. The tattoos covering his body caused her to reach out for him. The dark ink almost called to her. Jason had always technically been hers, but not like this. She felt like he was unexplainably a part of her. “Come to me.”

He looked down at Dominic’s finger’s covering her chest. Lowering himself, he picked up the demon’s hand while he and Dom locked eyes. Marcella’s heart rate increased while she tried to figure out Jason’s intentions for taking away her mate’s hand.

Jason lifted, placing it up toward the top of the bed. Lips eased against hers and air hit her breasts before she ever heard the gown rip loudly from her body. She moaned into Jason’s mouth as he molded himself to her and pushed his cock into her stomach.

“Now this is a party,” Dominic whispered, sliding his finger deep into her pussy.

“Shut up,” she and Jason said together. Dom laughed and lightly bit her shoulder.

“If it wasn’t for me, this relationship would be boring and humorless. Since we’re all awake, might as well turn this into a classroom session. Jason... lesson number one. I want you to turn into a vampire and bite Marcella. If you ruin this by draining her completely, I’ll personally make your life miserable for the rest of eternity. I don’t have days to wait for her to recuperate. I want her to feel pleasure like she’s never experience before, and you’re going to give her that.”

“I’m not sure I’m ready, Dom.”

“If someone held a knife to her throat and you needed to shift, could you?”

Jason’s eyes widened. “Without thought.”

“Do I need to get a knife?” Marcella watched Dominic tilt his head to the side and raise one of his eyebrows at the same time.

“I’ll kill you. That’s not even something to joke about.”

“Then shift. Her life might depend on it and I won’t risk losing her because you think you’re not ready. Here, I’ll help you out.” Dominic lifted and made a small cut across his own shoulder. Blood began to trail down the muscle. It took everything Marcella had not to turn into a vampire, herself. “Now, change” he whispered.

* * * *

The smell of blood made Jason’s whole body vibrate. He felt a beast roar through him pushing on the core of his muscles. Marcella described her shifts as cobwebs, for him it felt more like fingers trailing against his insides, pushing outward. Within moments they pressed against his throat, rising until his eyes blurred over with dark green fire. Once his vision cleared, he fought the impulse to attack the man who was bleeding. Dom’s cut healed before Jason could focus his thoughts.

“Wow. That was extraordinary. Your eyes are so green.” Marcella breathed out heavily.

Jason could see Dominic pushing his fingers into Marcy’s pussy. Her scent hit Jason hard, instantly causing his cock to pulse. He wanted to taste, *needed* to take in her flavor. “Move your fingers.” He licked his lips while moving down on the bed.

A smile passed over the demon’s lips. “Be my guest.”

Dominic rolled Marcella on her back and scooted higher on the bed. Jason positioned himself between her legs and lowered, sliding his tongue upward against her inner thigh. Tastes he’d never even dreamed existed swept over his tongue. The moment he trailed over the artery just beneath her skin, he paused, fighting the urge to sink his fangs into her. They teased to come out. It took sheer force of will to move higher.

“Good boy. You pass the first test. Now, let’s see how good your skills truly are.”

Jason glared at him, but Marcella’s scent quickly grabbed his attention again. Tracing her folds, he felt her move underneath him. Sliding his finger along her slit, he trailed the length only to instantly move back down to her opening.

Easing the tip of his finger in, he lightly began sucking her clit. The movement of her hips made him enter her a fraction more. A moan filled the

room while he pushed deeper, rubbing the sensitive spot deep inside her. Repeatedly, he circled his fingers around, paying close attention to what made Marcella moan the loudest and how she reacted to his touch. Pleasuring her caused his cock to ache, along with his throat.

“Jason,” she whispered.

Marcella quickly met the thrusts of his finger. He sucked her clit harder, making her pump her hips faster. The stronger her scent filled the air, the harder it became to control the need to taste her blood.

“Dom, lick her clit for me, please.” Jason noticed the demon hadn’t moved since he started.

No questions were asked while Dominic made his way down the bed. He stopped when he reached her waist. Leaning down, Dominic began flicking his tongue across her clit while Jason slid another finger into her pussy. Using his other hand, Jason spread her thighs wide. Kissing his way down her thigh, he stopped directly over the throbbing pulse point he could see deep under her skin.

Fangs lowered and he easily sunk them into her. Marcella’s jumped, and the moment her heart accelerated he could feel it in his entire body. Pushing against her G-spot, tightening collected around his fingers. Blood poured into his mouth causing his eyes to open wide. The sweetest, most addicting thing he ever tasted fed him, drugged him. Her blood could be deadly and he still would drink every drop to taste more.

Jason never recalled being obsessed with anything, but in that moment, he knew he’d forever be lost. He might be a collector, but a vampire is what he’d be when they made love. To experience what Marcella consisted of became his new infatuation. Feeling her flow down his throat and become one with his soul was what he never knew he yearned for.

Visions kept flashing before him of her standing on a balcony in a white gown, but he pushed them away only wanting to focus on what he tasted. Moans poured from Marcy and he felt her body spasm while her pussy clutched his fingers. This was test two and he knew it. He could literally feel his heart ache as he broke his mouth away from her skin.

“Bravo, loverboy. I’m so proud of you. Now tell me, how do you feel?”

Jason tried catching his breath. “I didn’t want to stop. It’s...”

“Amazing?”

“More than that, it’s heaven and hell combined. It’s everything you’ve ever wanted and the one thing you know you can never truly have. To stop feels like heartbreak.”

“Well, change back and get at the head of the bed. It’s Marcella’s turn, unless you haven’t had enough? Do you still want more? I trust you if you want to bite me. But it ends at that. I really don’t see you trying to cop a feel.”

“You got that right.” Jason considered Dominic’s offer. He remembered the flashes and thought it the perfect opportunity to find out more about the demon they now had in their lives. His first priority was to protect the one he loved. Could Dom be trusted? Was he truly trying to do good these days or was it all a talk to win Marcella over?

“I think I will drink more. How are we going to do this? I’m sure as hell not getting between your thighs.”

Dominic let out a loud laugh. “Get beside Marcella’s head while I get on top of her. My neck will be in perfect range for you to bite, but one nibble on my ear and I put you through the wall. You got that, collector?”

“You don’t have to worry about me trying to seduce you. Trust me.”

Jason climbed to the head of the bed next to Marcella’s face. She smiled up at him with heavy lids, her face instantly transforming into pleasure as Dominic eased his cock into her. Studying her body, Jason found his hand moving to caress her breast. The strength of her blood still caused his heart to race. A part of him screamed to taste her again, and he would do so the first chance he got.

* * * *

Dominic’s cock inched into Marcella’s tightness. Painfully, she gripped him while he slid deeper. The juices from her pussy made it easier, but he still felt he’d hurt her if he rushed. Patience, a virtue he wouldn’t say was one of his best, caused him to fight for control.

Years had gone by now since he’d been with a woman. Sure, he’d been no saint before that, but after awhile the urges just weren’t there anymore. Women didn’t affect him the way they once did. He felt positive something had happened and he was beginning to wonder why, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t get back in his groove of sex. Not even with the sexy

blondes from the party. But with his mate, she captivated him and made his body come alive.

Fighting the need to focus on himself, he instead focused on her. Lowering, Dominic felt his cock slide until he reached as far as he could go. Marcella moaned, pulling his mouth to hers. Pressure gripped around his hip as he begun to slowly withdraw. Tightening her legs, she plunged him back inside of her.

"I can take a hint." He chuckled. "Are you sure I'm not hurting you?"

"No. Faster."

He watched her turn her head and reach for Jason. "Come to me, let me taste you." The seductive tone she used sent Dom's blood racing. Instantly, internally alarms went off. He moved his head over to stare deeply into her face. Marcella turned and looked at him, her eyes a bright sapphire blue. The tattoos were gone. They weren't dealing with Marcella the collector anymore.

* * * *

The moment cobwebs began to cover Marcy's body, she didn't care what she was turning into. The thickness of Dom's cock made her lose all sense of sanity. Instead of focusing on the change, she paid attention to the sensations coursing through every inch of her. When the thick vibrations left, she didn't feel any different. Still, she listened to her needs, and what she wanted more than anything was Jason, too. She needed the length of him in her mouth, to taste him, have him fill her with his cum.

Greedily, she reached for him, pulling his hips closer to her. Dom's voice broke her fixation.

"Look at her eyes. It seems we're in for a treat."

Confused, she looked back and forth between them.

"Holy shit, what is she?" Jason's wide eyes grew bigger as he traced them over her body.

"Succubus. I hope you're ready. I'll get further up so you'll have better access to my neck. When I say *when*, bite me. That is, if you can focus enough to remember what you're doing. Succubuses are experts at sex. She's going to know exactly what you want and how you want it without so much as a word from you."

Jason nodded and looked at her. Succubus? She didn't feel anything special about this creature, but she didn't dwell on the news, she still wanted to taste him. "Come closer," Marcy said, staring deeply into the dark green depths.

Words pushed into her head. Hypnotized by what he wanted, she moved nearer, never breaking eye contact. Marcella lifted her head and ran her tongue across the tip of his hard cock. Salty maleness erupted through her senses leaving her desperate to sample more. A deep moan vibrated through her throat as Dominic plunged into her. The difference in his speed left wetness flowing freely around his thickness.

"Fuck, you feel so good," he groaned above her.

Marcella tightened her pussy wanting to keep him inside of her forever. She also knew it was what he wanted. Taking more of Jason's length into her mouth, she let his essence flow freely over her tongue, savoring everything about what made him taste the way he did.

Applying more suction, she swirled along the head, stroking him with her hand. Jason gripped onto the headboard letting out a hiss as he fought to keep his eyes connected with hers.

Dominic's thrusts became faster and harder. He picked up her far leg, pulling it to his shoulders and turning her slightly while he pushed even deeper. An orgasm caught her off guard making her moan around Jason's cock. The vibrations had him gripping her hair in his fist.

"Now," Dom groaned.

Marcella watched Jason grab Dominic almost violently and pull him forward. A flash of fangs were visible only for a moment before they sank into Dom's neck. Both of the men let out sounds of pleasure causing a new wave of wetness to flow more from her pussy.

Stroking Jason's cock faster, she felt the pre-cum slide across her tongue. A wall of energy burst from her boyfriend, somehow feeding her. The feeling slammed into her chest taking her breath away. Adrenaline rushed through Marcy's body encouraging her to go faster so she could taste more. Dominic swelled inside of her while he continued to thrust at a slower pace. She gripped around him greedily with her pussy wanting him to release. The closer both men came to coming, the more energy poured from them and into her. She knew it was too much, but for the life of her, she couldn't stop.

Focused on the intake of power, Marcella screamed her way through another surprise orgasm. She used her legs and forced Dominic in her faster. Jason's hot cum shot into her mouth, just as Dom groaned and buried himself.

Panting sounded above, but she was blinded to everything but the screaming inside her head. She could feel both men collapse to the sides of her. Their heavy breathing bounced against her skin.

"Fuck, I don't think I can move. Damn, Marcy, what in the hell did you do to me?" Jason asked raggedly.

"No more than what she did to me. I can't breathe. Not that I really need to, but it's pretty fucking uncomfortable when you're not used to the feeling. I told you to prepare yourself, loverboy."

"Yeah, well next time I'll know what to expect."

"Next time, huh. So I guess you're all right with this?"

"You're cool, I guess. You've been a good boy and that's what I wanted to see. You didn't lie. You're really trying to get your shit together."

Marcella shook her head against overwhelming sensations coursing through her. "Enough! Quit talking, something's wrong. You're words are literally touching me."

Getting off the bed, she began to pace. She couldn't think when her thoughts were going a million miles a second, not to mention her heart.

"Tell me what's wrong. How do you feel?"

"I don't know. I can't think. There's too much of you both floating around inside of me."

"Can you shift to something else?" Jason slowly got off the bed and slid on his pajama bottoms.

Stopping, Marcy closed her eyes and concentrated on changing. The energy made it impossible. Pressure of her collector was there, but it wouldn't respond to her call. Marcella continued to keep her eyes closed and searched through thoughts on how to make her use power.

"Dominic, give me something to materialize. I need to release some of this...stuff."

"Well I am hungry. I'll take a large pepperoni pizza with mushrooms, black olives, some hot wings, and a liter of Dr. Pepper."

"What?" Confused, she shook her head, okay, and tried to focus. Using everything in her mind, she imagined his order. By simply seeing it, the

materialization didn't work. Instead, she tried seeing it, smelling it, and one by one, tasting each piece.

Dominic laughed, breaking her concentration. She opened her eyes to see him holding up half of a box of pizza, one slice with a bite taken out of it. The hot wings were scattered across the floor at her feet, and Jason pointed to an empty Dr. Pepper bottle sitting on the mantle of the fireplace. Damn, she forgot to add the soda.

"Harder than it looks, isn't it." Dominic took a bite of the pizza and held the box out for Jason. He waved his hand, and turned back toward her.

"I can do this. Just give me some time." Marcella's whole body was shaking. Feeling as if she didn't have control on her new self made it harder for her to concentrate.

"Try cleaning up your mess first. I'm not ready to see it raining hot wings again. Plus, it'll probably be easier for you. Jason, you get me my hot wings and Dr. Pepper."

Marcella watched Jason change into his collector form. He closed his eyes while she focused back on the mess in front of her. Determined, the splattered sauce and pieces of chicken at her feet captivated her vision. Forcefully using her mind, she willed them to disappear, felt the energy rush through her limbs and anger follow when they remained.

"Bravo, Jason. Excellent job. Now bring me my food."

Marcella jerked her gaze up. A smile lit up her boyfriend's face as he walked over and handed Dominic the white to-go box of hot wings. With a snap of Jason's fingers, he made the bottle of drink appear, only fueling Marcy's rage, even more. Snapping her eyes back to the wings on the floor, she focused on the mess.

"Don't try so hard," Jason whispered in her direction.

Ignoring him, she stared harder, and imagined them being gone. A scream echoed through the room when after countless minutes they remained. Marcy kicked the mess with her foot, watching it spread across the marble.

Dominic laughed. "You're still going to clean that up. Here, want a piece of pizza? You're going to starve by the time you finally figure it out."

Narrowing her eyes and slowly bring them up, she stared at the pizza box Dominic held in his hand. With all the adrenaline still racing through her, it only intensified her anger. She hated that she couldn't materialize,

and wanted the food to explode into a million pieces. Instead she watched, startled while the cardboard shot up in flames.

“Holy shit! What the fuck, Marcella?”

Jason fell to the floor laughing while Dominic jumped off the bed and threw the engulfed box to the ground. He quickly made it disappear. Blue eyes glared at her while he stalked forward. The heaviness of his breathing made Marcy’s heart beat faster, and it had nothing to do with the energy she’d consumed. No, he looked every bit the demon when he was angry.

“I suggest you watch that temper. If there’s one thing I don’t like it’s fire. Never use heat against me if you’re pissed. You’ll find my temper a lot worse than you think. Now clean your mess.”

Dominic walked from the room and headed through his door. Jason still lay on the floor, tears coming from his eyes. With a wave of his hand, he made her mess disappear.

“Brilliant, Marcy, really. I think you scared the shit out of him. How did you do that?”

“How did *you* do that?” She asked, gesturing to the clean floor.

“You have to be calm and just imagine it. What about the fire?”

She smiled. “You need to ask? I was angry as hell.”

“You practice on materializing some clothes to cover you. I’ll get mad and work on fire or whatever else I can accomplish. Maybe I can start the fireplace.” He looked toward the door. “Dom probably won’t be back for awhile. You really upset him.”

“I didn’t mean to.” Marcella considered Jason’s words. Instead, she had another idea. “Hey, Jason, do you think the connection I have to Dom could be used for something? He thinks so.”

Jason’s brow creased while he shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe, what do you have in mind?”

“I’m going to try something I just thought of. It might make him more pissed, but I have to attempt it.”

“Go for it. I don’t think you can make things worse.”

Well, that’s debatable. Closing her eyes, she envisioned herself needing her mate, wanting to apologize for hurting him. In her mind, she could see him standing before her in his beautiful, tall, muscular form. Dressing him in a pair of loose fitting jeans with a long sleeve, black shirt, Marcella ran her hands up his arms. The way the fabric clung to Dominic’s build had her

heart pounding with wanting him, again. Blond curls hung next to his bright blue eyes, eyes that called to her.

"If you needed me you could have just yelled. Summoning is for masters only. It's a skill you shouldn't be able to possess unless you indeed have power over me. Which I guess, means you do."

Marcella opened her eyes. Dominic stood before her in exactly what she imagined. Shock mixed with something altogether indescribable made the words catch in her throat. All she could do was stare at his gorgeous face.

"Marcy, did you need something?" His tone caressed her skin. The anger was gone. He sounded more wounded, than anything.

"I'm sorry about the fire. If I would have known you didn't like heat, I promise I would have never lost my temper. As for the summoning, I think I found the link you were looking for, the one that connects us. Once it hit me, I knew I could bring you to me no matter where you are. Don't you see, Dom? They could take you away, but they'd never be able to keep us apart. I'd bring you back to me every time."

Before Marcella could finish her last word, her body was colliding with his chest. Large arms engulfed her, squeezing her tightly into him.

"I knew something would come out of it, but never that. Do you know what this means? I'm free of them. Free!"

Confused, she looked up at him. "But Dom, where does that leave you? What happens?"

He shifted her in his arms, cradling her like a child. "Nothing can change what I am. I'm still a demon. I'll still have to collect souls, just not for them. For you." He paused looking at her. "I can get the bad ones, deliver them to you. Then you can decide where they go. But..." His face looked perplexed as he walked to sit them down on the bed.

Jason shook his head. "You can't tell them. They'll come after her. You said yourself. When someone feels threatened, they attack. She'll be killed if they think she can take demons under her control."

"You're right. I'm going to have to go along with what they say. It's the only way to keep her safe."

Marcella wiggled from his arms and stood before Dominic's crushed face. "If they take you, I'm bringing you back. I won't let them possibly torture you. I can't."

“Let’s not think about that right now. We still have some time. At least we know what the link is. We can use it to our advantage if we ever need to. Let’s just hope they give me a new list and be done with it. Now manifest some clothes and go take a shower. We need to be outside for the next part of training for both of you.”

Completely focused on what would happen to Dominic, the clothes didn’t even register as a concern. Flashes of her old wardrobe filtered through her mind, mostly brand name apparel, but a pair of jeans and a white t-shirt caught her attention long enough for her to grab them. Weight settled into her hand, pulling her from the plan to help save her mate.

“I did it?”

“See, it’s easy. You try too hard. Now go get ready. This next step will be a lot easier for you than poor Jason. He won’t stand a chance.”

Concerned, Marcella looked toward her boyfriend. She was almost afraid to know what Dom had planned for them next. Would it be extremely hard or dangerous? She almost was afraid to find out.

Chapter 6

Clouds covered the sky, momentarily blocking the sun. Although it was barely noon, the humidity was enough to make sweat break across Marcella's skin. The breeze that usually came with being along the coast was absent, leaving behind nothing but the heat.

Brush, not an acre from the back of the mansion encircled them. Marcella looked at her surroundings and thought about how dead everything looked. It was downright depressing. The brown colors made the thick clustered trees look dull and lifeless. Footsteps walking up in the distance had her turning in the direction of her men.

"So, are you ready to learn to control the elements? I can't even do this, but I'm assuming you can, so we'll test it out. The only supernatural who can perform this hard task are witches. And trust me. You don't want to mess with them. I once had a spell put on me that left me bedridden for a week. And *that* is hard to accomplish."

Music began to fill the air. Looking into the sky, Marcella brought her gaze down to narrow her eyes at Dominic. "Is this really necessary? I mean, how am I supposed to concentrate when you're jamming out in the background?"

"This song *will* help you concentrate. Your first element is fire. Since we're on the topic of witches, you will become one, feel what they feel, imagine everyday being ridiculed for your religion. Pagans, Wiccans, whatever path they've decided, they still believe very highly in their Goddess. I want you to let the music flow through you. Let it drift into your fingertips."

Dominic manifested a sand pit filled with a large bonfire. The flames reached just over her height. "Now, here's your fire. Make it rise and fall at your command..."

Marcella no longer thought music was a bad idea. She'd always loved listening to it, but Dom usually did it as a joke. This was nothing to laugh about. The words to the song affected her the moment she closed her eyes. Every word meant something, every sentence told a story.

The lyrics kept mentioning the air we breathe, repeating endlessly in her mind. She felt something for the sentence and the way it was sung. Cobwebs began taking over and she let them. They shot through her so quickly she barely noticed when the wind picked up around her.

For a long time she stood motionless. The song began to repeat and she continued to see darkness behind her closed lids. With every beat of the drums in the background, she felt her heart jump. Air caressed her skin making it feel alive as wind whipped past her again. The words that grabbed her began to reiterate, and she opened her eyes slowly taking in her surroundings.

Everything felt the same, yet not. Dominic stared at Jason, paying attention to what he was doing. Marcy looked at the trees and saw something she'd never seen before. They were alive, pulsing with radiating colors. Greens of multiple shades, shades she never even knew existed, vibrated out against the bark. Captivated, she felt the need to walk over and caress the wall of energy.

Instead of causing too much attention, she leaned down, stoking her fingers through the carpet grass. Life filled her, causing the strongest bond of love to the earth she'd ever felt. Everything her eyes came in contact with had rhythm and almost looked as if it breathed. The feeling left her overwhelmed to praise someone at their magnificence.

Suddenly, she felt the need to speak, but wasn't sure exactly what planned to spill from her lips. The collector inside stirred, and fought with the Wiccan for control. It was enough to snap her back to reality and focus on what she was supposed to be doing. Deciding she'd take her chances, she parted her lips and let her mind take over.

"Goddess, you have made your presence known, for I feel you. Now, I ask that you hear me. I call to the element of air. Please allow it to hear me and follow my commands." Marcella placed her palms toward the sky, letting the sun warm her skin. Energy flowed evenly around her. In harmony. "I ask that you let it caress my skin upon my request. With every gust of wind, I'll know I've been blessed."

The wind picked up gently, slowly spinning around her feet and making its way up her body. “Wind, hear my call. Come to me. Please do as I ask.”

Unexplainably calm, she stood staring at Dominic and Jason, who looked back at her in amazement. “Faster, please.” The air picked up, rotating around her until her hair flew freely around her body. “Now go to my friends and greet them, but return back to me.”

Smiling, she watched their hair blow roughly as the wind did as she commanded. Jason started laughing while his shirt molded to his chest. As quickly as it reached them it retreated and came back to her.

“Thank you, air. You may go.”

Marcella knew immediately that she wouldn’t have to be in witch form to control the elements. Somehow, once she made the connection, something inside of her clicked, releasing the secrets on what she needed to do. Now, it was nothing more than materialization. She’d be able to do it on command. Impressed by how quickly her collector was learning, she shifted to her true self.

Dom placed his index finger out, pointing at her. “Amazing, but you cheated.”

“No, I didn’t. I just tapped into what I knew I’d find. You said yourself go into witch form.”

“You’re twisting my words. I wanted you to stay in collector form and try to tap into being a witch.”

Marcella placed her hands on her hips. “I’m not twisting anything. Maybe you just need to be clearer. Anyway, I don’t want to fight with you. Changing form helped. I won’t have to do it again to tap into the elements.”

The song repeated once again and she bowed her head respectfully. “Watch and see.” Lifting, she turned to stare at the fire, debating on what she wanted it to do. Studying the flame, she tried to listen to what the orange fiery glow was telling her, but all she could see was her old body inside the flames, burning off her flesh. Marcella blinked hard, clearing her thoughts. The accident was the last thing she needed to think about.

Words to the song filled her and she let them calm her growing anxiety. The lyrics began to speak of the fire being alive. She lifted her hands as they played. The flames grew, rising a good five feet. “More.” They shot up, higher until she lowered her hand, watching them decrease.

A smile crossed her face when she suddenly had an idea. "Fire, come to me." A little shocked, she watched a baseball sized orb float across the expanse until it hovered inches above her opened palm.

"That is fucking awesome," Jason said, walking over to her. "How did you do it? I've been trying my damndest, and it doesn't move for me."

"Feel it, become one with your element. Trust me. You'll know when it happens. There's a feeling that pulses through your body. It's unbelievable. Turn...Wiccan, and look at the trees. I promise you'll have a new respect for everything of the earth after you see what I'm talking about."

"Witch," Dominic said from beside her.

"No, I don't like it. It just doesn't sound right. I prefer Wiccan."

"Whatever. So, what are you planning to do with that fire? You're making me nervous. Can you put it back?"

"Of course. I'm sorry." Marcella willed the small ball of flames back into the sandpit and watched Jason. The tattoos were gone, but other than that his appearance was the same. When he opened his eyes, Marcella watched him stare around in fascination.

"This is the coolest thing I think I've ever seen. Everything is so...colorful." Jason closed his lids, his face taking on a look of deep concentration. Marcella screamed and jumped back as his body became engulfed in flames.

Jason laughed hysterically while he held up his arms and looked at them covered in the glowing color. "This is fucking amazing. It's not even burning me. Become one with the element, right? Fire is my element. I love fire."

Leveling his hand, Marcy watched a ball begin to grow in his palm. When it got to the size of a basketball he repeatedly tossed it in the air, and caught it.

"All right, enough lessons on the elements today. Send the fire back to the pit. This was a bad idea. Loverboy and fire are not mixing well with me. Talk about a stupid plan. I should have filled the bathtub for him and made him work on water."

Dominic stood a good ten feet away from them, his brow creased, full of cautiousness. Marcella wished she knew what his fear originated from. He didn't seem too scared the night he showed up in her room. Whatever it was, she hoped somehow she'd be able to help him get through it.

The fire disappeared from Jason into the sandpit and Dominic quickly made the whole thing disappear. "All right, now let's try something else. I'm going to disappear into the house. Let's see which one of you can dematerialize to the living room first. No walking through the front or back doors, it's cheating. I'll see both of you inside, maybe."

Dom vanished, leaving her alone with Jason. She smiled at him and they both began laughing. "Can you believe what's happened to us? It's crazy, isn't it?"

Her boyfriend suddenly became serious. "Crazy yes, but how are you doing? I'm not sure you're dealing with what's happened. I know you, Marcella. You tend to push things away until you inevitably snap.

"Do you remember when your father left your mother and then unexpectedly passed away? For weeks you pretended nothing was wrong, but I knew how hurt you were. It's the only time I've seen you cry besides the night you were in pain. Maybe we should talk about what happened."

"No. I'm fine."

"No, you're not. Look at how defensive you are."

"Drop it, Jason!"

"Fine. But this conversation isn't over. You need to talk about things or you'll never heal inside. I know more than anyone." He got quiet and put his head down. "See you inside."

Marcella stood alone, amazed at how fast Jason disappeared. She didn't even want to try to go inside. Being by herself is exactly what she needed. Looking around the backyard, there wasn't a chair in sight. She manifested a replica of the one that sat on her old deck and collapsed into it, looking off into the brush.

"Mom," she whispered. Tears filled her eyes while the image of her mother's face appeared in her mind. The single word held everything she wanted to say. *I miss you. I want you back.* Her needs were spoken all in her call for the one person she longed for the most.

"Why couldn't I go with you all? It's not fair. I don't want to have to be separated for eternity. I didn't choose this. Why me?"

The wind brushed her face, making sobs wrack her chest. She imagined her mother's touch, but knew it was nothing more than a breeze. Marcella wasn't sure how long she sat, staring mindlessly at the thick foliage of the

brush, letting the tears fall down her cheeks until her face felt stiff. The sound of footsteps brought her back to reality.

Dominic scooped her in his arms and carried her into the house without so much as a word. When she felt the coolness of the sheets under her, she buried her face in the pillow and willed herself to sleep. Her body felt emotionally and physically drained. The thought of being awake didn't appeal anymore than food. She wished she could sleep the next one hundred years away. Maybe then, the loss she felt would have eased.

* * * *

Dominic walked into his room where Jason stood waiting for him. They'd been discussing Marcella for the last two hours and still hadn't come to an agreement on how to make things easier for her.

"I still think you should have left her alone. How is she?"

"What do think? Her face is swollen from crying. She looks horrible. I should kick your ass for upsetting her like that. If you would have seen her that night, you would've been smart to keep your mouth shut. Why do you think I've neglected to mention anything about what happened? I saw the outcome first hand. Do you know what it looks like to see a human burn alive? It's not very pretty. Marcella got to see her own flesh melt off of her face. Imagine knowing your family died in the exact same manner."

"I didn't think about it like that."

Dominic watched Jason walk to the chair next to the dresser and sit down. "Yeah, well next time think before you speak, especially, when it concerns her. You may be her boyfriend, but I'm her mate. Whether you want to believe it or not, we'll always be closely connected. I can feel the pain she's going through, you can't, not like me."

"So what do you propose we do?"

"Leave her alone. She will deal with it the best way she knows how. If it takes her bursting into tears out of nowhere, we deal with it then. Until the time comes, keep your mouth shut."

"Do you know how hard that's going to be for me? What if leaving her alone only makes it worse? She obviously took it bad this time, but maybe if I can get her to release all of her pain, it'll get better."

“Dammit, Jason. I fucking said enough. I’m telling you, she doesn’t want to constantly relive her last hours trapped in that house. I meant to get her away from there before they pulled the bodies out, but I was too drunk to care at the time. That shit is eating me up inside. I thought she was another soul. My head didn’t consider anything else even with the pull I felt for her.”

“I’ll keep quiet for now, but I’m not promising anything. I think I know her better than you.”

Dominic could feel his blood boiling. “Listen to me and listen good. I won’t repeat this. If I see her hurt to the degree she is now, I don’t care how pissed she’ll be, your ass is mine.”

“Why wait. Let’s take it outside. I’m tired of you thinking you can push me around. I’m not the kid you think I am.”

“Oh really? I think in college you were big shit, but here, you’re nothing. You’re way too inexperienced and cocky. Something you should know. If it didn’t hurt Marcella, I *could* kill you. You may be a collector, but you weren’t born one. It would be hard to accomplish, but you *can* die, Jason.”

“You think you scare me? Not even close. If you killed me, Marcella would hate you forever and you know it. When I drank your blood, one thing was for certain and that’s your unexplained feelings for her. You don’t even understand them, but you love her more than you’ve loved anyone, even yourself. There’s no way you’d ever hurt her. The only reason you’re a dick is because you’re still somewhat fighting your feelings. Just give in already. It makes me sick to see you treat her the way you do. She deserves better than that, better than you!”

“Are you two done yet? How is anyone supposed to sleep when you keep yelling at each other? Hello, door isn’t soundproof.”

“I’m sorry. We’ll keep it down,” Jason said, looking down at the floor.

“I got a better idea. How about you both quit arguing over who’s more powerful than the other and come put me to sleep? Having you both around comforts me. Jason,” Marcella asked, holding her hand out.

“Marcy, I’m really sorry.”

Dominic watched as she held her hand up silencing her boyfriend. The pain he felt slice through his chest caused his fists to clench. He’d never let her feel hurt again. Never. What he would do to keep her safe bordered

insanity, death if it ever came that far. She was his, forever, and he'd be damned if anyone got in the way of her happiness. He wouldn't let them.

"Dom?"

"Right behind you, love. Is there anything you want before we lay down? Food? A drink? I know it's not completely necessary, but it might make you feel better."

"No." A half smile came to her face. He could feel her fake it for his benefit which only made him angrier. "Thank you for asking, though."

"Sure," he whispered, following behind them as they went into the living room, that now somehow became her space. He really needed to talk to her about moving into his bed. Jason could sleep on the floor for all he cared. The boy definitely needed a lesson in growing up, and he was just the man to show him.

* * * *

Marcella crawled into the bed and nestled herself in the middle of the soft mattress. Dominic lay on one side while Jason walked around to the other, slowly climbing in. She knew immediately something was wrong. They both remained clothed, and for two people who supposedly slept in the nude, it didn't seem natural for them to automatically snap out of it in a day.

Going over their angry whispering in her head, she tried to decipher what it is they were talking about before she reached the door and picked up actual words to what they said. The only parts she could remember revolved around who could kick whose ass. She hadn't even heard what was said after she opened the door. Their expressions made her mind race, cutting off their words.

Both men faced toward her and she looked from one to the other. Their gazes were locked, but they both remained silent. Dominic even had his eyes narrowed at Jason. The tension settled through her, immediately signifying that she missed some vital part of their discussion.

"Spit it out. Too much testosterone is making my skin crawl. I think if you both stared any harder at each other, you'd start inflicting bodily wounds, and we really don't want to see if that's possible."

"I do," Jason said.

“You just don’t know when to shut your mouth and drop things, do you? Do you really want Marcella to witness me kicking your ass? Or maybe you do, maybe that’s why you’re pushing for this fight. Are you feeling neglected, Jason? Do you want her to take care of you?”

“There’s not going to be a fight,” Marcella said precisely. “You’re both going to stop right now and let whatever it is you both are hiding from me drop.”

“Marcy, I can’t do that.” Jason sat up facing her. Dominic immediately jerked up on her other side.

“Don’t do it. I’ve warned you, loverboy. Leave her alone.”

“All right. What in the hell is going on? I don’t like this one bit. Whatever your both hiding obviously revolves around me, so tell me. What could possibly have you two ready to kill each other?”

Jason took a deep breath. “I think it would do you better to talk about your feelings revolving your family. Dominic thinks I should leave it alone.”

Her best friend instantly flew from the bed and slammed into the wall, clear across the room. Dominic vanished from beside her and Marcella looked around, panicked. When her eyes focused back on her boyfriend, Dominic was floating in the air a good fifteen feet from the ground slamming his fist into Jason’s face.

The sound of the wall crunched beneath their weight and power. Desperately, Marcy tried to think of way to reach them. She couldn’t levitate. Hell, she wasn’t even sure she could make herself disappear like Dom and Jason could.

“I told you to leave her alone. You can’t feel what she feels,” Dominic yelled, slamming Jason back into the wall. Small pieces fell to the floor scattering over the marble. “Every time you mention the words her heart breaks. I won’t let you hurt her anymore!”

Jason managed to wedge his feet between them and send Dominic flying though the air. Marcella jumped from the bed. Now that her mate wasn’t holding them off the ground, her boyfriend fell to the floor. Dom, landed not feet from her.

“Enough! I will not sit by while you two beat the hell out of each other.”

“She needs to feel that heartbreak if she’s ever going to heal. You might not like it, but she needs to mourn, not close herself off completely from

feeling anything. What is the matter with you? People can't just numb themselves from the pain forever."

Dom jumped from the ground charging in Jason's direction. Her boyfriend didn't wait. He ran toward the demon at full force. The images of the two of them turned into slow motion as adrenaline took over from the panic. She couldn't let them do this. If one of them seriously became hurt or even killed, she'd lose her mind for sure.

Marcella didn't think. She lifted her hands and mentally jerked them to a stop, letting them feel the intensity of the pull backward. Their heads snapped back and a groan came from their lips while they hovered a foot off the ground.

"Jason," Marcella lowered him and slowly walked over. "I understand you want to help me, but you need to let me deal with the loss of my family the only way I know how. Listen to me. You and Dom are the only people I have left. Think about what it's doing to me inside right now seeing you both act the way you are. He's my mate, you're my soul. I love you both. So, please just... stop."

"See, I told you."

Marcy flashed her gaze to Dom. "No, he may be right. Regardless, you never should have thrown him against the wall. I know you're just protecting me." Marcella looked at him, hurt. "And you don't know how much that means to me. But don't do this again. Don't hurt me by hurting him." She lowered her mate and walked to the bed, feeling the weight of the world press against her shoulders.

"I'm sorry." He looked at the floor and then to her boyfriend. "Jason..."

"Don't worry about it." He waved off Dom's words with a flick of his wrist. "I know you're just doing it for Marcy. So, if you two don't mind. I'm going to take a shower and then join you. I've got a lot to process. A part of me just feels like I should be doing something to protect her. Everything feels off about the three of us."

"I know what you mean. We're missing something about the link joining us all together." Dom ran his fingers through his hair. "Anyways, I haven't got a clue. But speaking of showers and rooms, we really need to all just move into my room. I don't think the living room is really the place to be."

Dom waved his hand and reorganized the space the exact way it sat before he changed the layout for Jason's change. White leather couches appeared along with the glass coffee table. His arm wrapped around Marcella's shoulder as they followed Jason into the large master suite.

Confused and worn out, she prayed for something to distract her mind. It felt like someone left her thoughts on overdrive. Everything raced and spun searching for an outlet. They were right about a part of them being off. She felt it too.

"I'm truly sorry about what I did. Feeling your pain just set me off. No one will ever hurt you. I won't let them." Dom stopped next to the bed and placed his hands alongside her face. "Marcella, I would take the harshest punishment if I knew you would be able to live a happy life. I'm so sorry for the way I've been acting."

Tears came to her eyes. The look on his face told her he meant every word he spoke. Could he possibly not be a demon at all? He didn't deserve to be. She knew how conflicted he felt. Marcella could sense it. Even when he'd make her angry, she was aware at how confused his mind was.

Soft lips pressed against hers as a gesture of love, but she greedily took over his mouth. Sweetness filled her senses at his taste, pulling her into the passion that connected them together as mates. He was hers, forever, and no one would ever take him away from her, not the masters, or even the big man, himself.

Hands wrapped around her ass, pulling her legs up to straddle around his waist. Her arms clung to him tightly while he lowered her to the bed, pushing his hard cock against her pussy. This was the distraction she needed to make the hurt and confusion go away.

Marcella let out a moan and made their clothes disappear. She was desperate to feel his skin against hers, to feel the power that rested behind the man she knew would always be her protector.

Dominic's face lowered to her hard nipple, and he gently sucked it into his mouth. Wetness seeped from her while he nibbled and bit the nub between his teeth. Wrapping her fingers into his silken curls, she pulled his face up so he could look at her. Heaviness settled through Marcella's heart. A solution exploded into her thoughts out of nowhere. It hit her mind like concrete, nearly paralyzing her. Where it came from, she wasn't sure.

"Will you just hold me? I feel..."

“You’re terrified. Tell me what’s wrong. You’re shaking.”

Dom moved up next to her, pulling her body against his while he held her. She knew she couldn’t tell him that she knew how to save him. There was no way he’d let her out of his sight for a moment if he knew. Words left her lips before she could even process what she was saying.

“Just flashes of things I don’t want to remember.”

“Shh, it’s okay. You’ll never have to go through anything to make you scared again. I’ll protect you.”

His words were exactly the reason she couldn’t tell him about her plan. Now only if she could figure out how to proceed without asking too many obvious questions. If he caught on, she’d never save him from getting taken away.

Chapter 7

Two weeks quickly flew by and Marcella still didn't have anything that would help her along with the plan she'd come up with. Dominic assured them he'd taught her everything she needed to know, just in case something happened and she needed to defend herself. They even discovered she and Jason shared a bond allowing them to communicate mentally when she addressed him, but only when they were within a certain distance.

Everything in the mansion remained blissful and no one mentioned Dom's meeting with the master. And the information was exactly what she needed.

They all sat quietly at the table eating dinner when Marcella grew brave enough to bring up the dreaded subject. If she didn't act fast, her plan would be ruined.

"Dom, when are you planning to give your story to the master?"

The fork paused midway to his mouth while Dominic looked up at her. Something passed behind his eyes that she couldn't make out. It wasn't fear, that wasn't the emotion that ran through her, but the unexplainable tug left her puzzled.

"Tonight, how did you know?"

Panic began to flare through her body. "Tonight? Why tonight? Couldn't you do it tomorrow?"

"I've prolonged, long enough. I think tonight would be perfect. Don't be upset, Marcella. Everything should be fine. If it's not, I'm confident enough that Jason can take care of you, not that he really needs to. You've learned everything to perfection."

"But, I'm not ready for you to go. Can't you stay just one more night? I had plans to run out and get you something. A special gift."

A smile crossed his lips showing bright, white teeth. The tenderness nearly crushed her heart. What if she never saw that smile again? He

laughed, sending delicious shivers down her spine that instantly awakened her body.

“That’s a lie and you know it. You could easily materialize anything you want. There’s no need for you to go out. But, I’ll indulge you. Samael and I will meet in the morning. But you do know you owe me a gift now, right? And it better be good.”

The name sent a jolt through Marcella as if she’d been struck by lightning. Something about it caused her heart to flutter. Confused, she smiled at Dom, and tried to pretend everything was okay. “It’ll be the best gift ever. I promise.” Fuck. Where did she know that name from? It continuously repeated like it belonged bouncing around her mind. And it was all she needed for what she had planned.

“If you gentlemen will excuse me. I have some shopping to do.”

The red silk gown Dominic insisted she wear spun around her body while she flew out of the room. The tattoos appeared, and with them, her human appearance vanished. More than ever, she could feel her collector. It called to her, comforted her at the joy to be back.

She focused on the name. Samael. Her body reacted defensively, yet there was something there that felt overpowering. Love? Surely not, but she might be able to use it to her advantage. If she truly knew this demon master somewhere from her past, she hoped she’d remember more when seeing him.

What would he look like anyway? Would he be a vision directly from books, a red-eyed, vicious looking creature, or would he be dressed in a dark robe like she imagined most masters would wear to hide their appearance?

Marcella jumped in Dominic’s car and headed down the dark deserted road. Turning onto the highway, she tried to think of a place where no one would be, and they could have a private conversation without someone seeing them. Only one place came to mind. The Harbor. Sure, some boaters might be loading or unloading at the ramps, but she’d summon him on the pier away from everyone.

The town of Aransas Pass wasn’t very big, but nevertheless it took a good ten minutes to get from one side to the other without getting a ticket. Thirty miles an hour wasn’t nearly fast enough for the adrenaline pumping through Marcella’s body. But she wasn’t sure she could give the cops an illusion as pumped up as she was. *God, goddess, whoever resides up there,*

please don't let me be cast to hell tonight. All I want is to keep Dominic safe.

Water appeared through the headlights while the Maserati winded around the hill. Shrimp boats aligned the walls and she couldn't help but think of the times she'd been out here with her own family.

Pulling into the parking lot, Marcella screamed as a phone began ringing. Looking down to the passenger seat she saw her cell. Where it had come from? She had no doubt Dom was behind it. "Fuck, please don't let them know something is wrong." She picked up the phone and tried to calm her nerves. "Hello."

"Hey, love, Jason's throwing a fit. He says it's not fair for you to buy a gift for one without buying for the other. I told him it's because I'm sexier than he is, but I don't think he believes me."

Marcella laughed. "Tell him his gift is already at the house, but he doesn't get it until I come home."

An old memory pushed into her mind and she thought of the watch he mentioned before her change. She materialized it in a box with a bow, imagining it under their bed. If she would have planned better, everything would have been prepared.

"I'll tell him. Are you okay? You sound...different."

"Fine, really. I'll see you soon."

"I love you," he whispered.

"I love you, too. More than you'll ever know." Marcella quickly hung up the phone and pulled the car to the far side of the harbor. Not a vehicle or a person was in sight. She quickly got out and walked to the end of the small, square pier. The heavy smell of salt water reminded her so much of when she used to stand on her deck back home. Now, she fought to save the only home remaining in her life.

Blocking out the fear and hurt, she focused on what Dominic had taught her in their countless lessons. Minutes of silence went by while she pulled at the connection. "Samael, come to me. Feel my call and show yourself."

The wind began to pick up, whipping long strands of hair across her face. The sound of thunder shook the wooden boards beneath her feet as lightning began to strike the water not ten feet from where she stood. The red silk gown clung to the front of her body while air pushed her back against the railing.

“Samael, I know you can hear me. I command you to show yourself!”

A mist began to form at the far end of the pier. She could feel her heart rate accelerate. The foggy presence slowly began to take shape, easing toward her. “You better have a good reason for awakening me from my sleep.” The voice growled as it made its way closer to her.

Glowing red eyes broke through while the features of a man began to form. The clearer the face became the more calmness settled over her. At least he wasn’t a creature. A man she could deal with.

“I have a very important reason for awakening you. Take a good look at *who* wakes you from your slumber.”

The figure suddenly appeared inches from her body, taking her breath away. She *did* know him! She just couldn’t place from where. God, he was beautiful. Heartbreakingly so.

Bits of information leaked through as he came closer to her. Long dark hair reached his broad shoulders and he looked no older than Dominic, twenty-five at the most. The red of his eyes turned to a startling blue while they narrowed in her direction.

“So it is you. Never, did I think I would see the day when our paths would cross again, collector.” The look on his face almost seemed amused. It made her jumpy as hell.

“I see you didn’t remain on the good side. You’re angel has been corrupted by darkness, Samael. I’m disappointed. So tell me, how’s life treating you?”

The words she spoke came from nowhere. Marcella only wished she could truly remember him. Somewhere buried in her subconscious, she obviously did.

Full lips parted as the amusement quickly melted from his face. “I couldn’t be better now that I have you back. We were a great team, you and I. Weren’t we?” Something in his words felt off making Marcy know she needed to proceed with caution.

Searching her mind, she wasn’t sure what to say. When no words came, she decided to change the subject. “I didn’t come to talk about our past. I’ve come to help out a demon you’re in charge of. Dominic.”

“Dominic? I have no idea who you’re talking about.”

“Ipso, that’s his demon name. He’s one of your servants.”

Samael's laugh caressed her body, making her want to walk closer to him. It wasn't until she almost took a step that she physically felt her skin prickle with his emotions. Something about what she had said evidently hit a nerve with him. By the way he bit his lip and turned toward the water, he momentarily looked hurt, and that was the exact emotion that squeezed her heart.

"Ipos is not a servant. He is a prince of the underworld." Samael turned back to her. "Has he neglected to tell you? It's a shame you were killed before you had the chance to watch him fight his way to the top. Great demon, really. Hell of a motivator."

Marcella's face shook back and forth from confusion. "Prince? You mean he doesn't deliver souls to you?"

"Souls, yes. That's his job here on earth. I, like you, am a sort of collector. What about my souls? Is he ready to hand them over?"

"What happens if he's not?"

A smile lit Samael's face. "Then I bring him back to face the consequences. What happens to him after that is up to more people than just me."

"What if you and I make a pact, like old times? I'll deliver you souls, truly bad ones and you can decide what to do with them. Dominic...Ipos, I want him left alone. He stays with me."

"Like old times...Oh, yes, just *like* old times."

Marcella instantly was pulled into Samael's chest. Just the touch of his hands on her bare arms made her body almost go into immediate orgasm. Flashes projected across her mind nearly causing her legs to collapse. The lights surrounding the pier began to flicker at the panic she felt.

"You and I are connected somehow," Marcella whispered. "We share a past, but..." Pictures flipped through her too fast to comprehend. But she could see him, no them, together, a lot. The way they looked at each other. What was that look? Her mind wanted to scream from not being able to understand what their connection could be.

"You wanted me?"

"So, you're starting to remember. Things could have been so different between us. All you had to do was submit to me, let me pleasure you the way you were meant to be. No one will ever be able to make you feel the way I can. You know that, don't you? "

"No, there's more. A part of you is lying. You want me, but something else more important is trying to come. You're not what you seem. There's so much more."

"Let her go, Samael!"

Dominic and Jason rushed up the pier. A laugh came from the dark angel holding her in his arms. "Ipso, would you like to explain why you're harboring a collector? The trouble you could get into for this is equivalent to treason."

"Just let her go and I'll do whatever you want."

"I want my souls. Where are they?"

"They're gone. I couldn't get them. But if you give me another list, I'll have them in half the time. You have my word."

"They're gone, yet you didn't get them? That doesn't add up, prince."

Marcella jerked against his arm feeling the pleasure ignite all over again. "I have them, and couldn't give them back. Please, *I'll* get you more. Just leave Dominic alone."

"My beautiful collector. What I wouldn't do to have you sacrifice your eternal days for me. But I will have those souls, and you're going to give them to me."

Full lips crushed into hers while his hand pulled her body closer. Air left her lungs while burning replaced the warm cozy feeling of her souls. Only one stayed as the others were sucked from her body in agonizing pain. It felt as if they physically grabbed and pulled at her insides, not wanting to leave.

Tears poured from her eyes and a weak scream came from her mouth. Hollowness settled in the pit of her core when he dropped her to the ground.

"Since I'm missing two souls, your job just got harder, Ipso. You have a month's time to get me five more souls plus a supernatural soul. It's not like they need them anyway. They live just as long as we do." His gaze narrowed at Jason causing her a moment of panic. Dominic's voice distracted him.

"That's impossible! I can't take souls from supernaturals. You know that."

A laugh came from above her and she looked up at Samael. "She's part of you now. If she can get it, I'll collect it from her. If not, find a way." The smile grew bigger as he looked off into the distance. "I know just the one I want, too. He goes by the name Ambrose, a vampire of the vilest sorts. Have

his soul ready for me to collect in a month's time. Pleasure doing business with you, Marcella, Ipos."

The dark angel kneeled before her, placing his hands on her cheeks. The deep blue of his eyes penetrated into hers. "It really is good to see you again." The softness of his lips pressed against hers gently. Samael disappeared just as something tugged at her memory.

The taste of blood coating the insides of her mouth, pulled her back to reality. Damn, having the souls removed forcefully had really hurt, but she wouldn't trade it for anything. Dominic was still here and at the moment that's all she cared about.

* * * *

"You have Ambrose's soul!" Gwendolyn flew off the bed. Marcella held her hand up, placing an invisible barrier between the two of them.

"Do you want to listen to the rest of the story or not?"

"Do you have his soul? Answer the question."

"No."

"No, you don't have his soul?"

Marcella rolled her eyes and looked up into the light green depths of Gwen's. "No, I'm not answering your question. Now sit back down. You do realize your lover's soul isn't the only one you should be worried about, don't you?"

Gwendolyn immediately stepped back. "I knew you were trouble the moment I saw you. Now finish the damn story before I *really* lose my temper. If you think this wall will keep me away from you, think again." The vampire sat back on the bed.

"That's better." Marcella tried to calm her growing anger, and focused back on the pier, leaving the wall between them just in case her guard fell for the slightest moment.

Chapter 8

“What in the hell were you thinking? He could have taken you back and had you killed! I told you I would handle it.” Dominic lowered his voice and continued, “Marcella, do you know what you’ve done? You’ll forever be at his mercy. He owns you now. If he finds one thing he doesn’t like, he can turn you over to the one man who can kill you.”

She jumped to her feet and faced both Jason and him. “If that’s the price I pay, so be it. Can’t you see I refuse to lose either of you? I think I’ve lost enough. Plus, I don’t know... something is off about him. I don’t know what it is.”

Dominic shook his head. “Yeah, you’re telling me. I’ve never seen him act so...caring.” He shook his head, the anger coming back to his face. “Regardless, this mess could have been prevented if you would have let me try to convince him to give me another chance to begin with.”

“No, you just assume that he wouldn’t have taken you because you trust him. You forget I can feel your emotions.” Marcella took a step closer to her men. “Listen, I somehow know Samael. I have a feeling he plays both sides, good and evil. I’m just not sure which dominates him. The fact that he and I share some kind of link scares me. I don’t know what it means and it confused the fuck out of me.”

The sound of her stiletto clicked against the wooden board as she took another step forward. “I want you safe. Don’t underestimate him, Dominic, AKA Ipos, *prince* of the Hell. This time I play things by the book and keep what belongs to me, and that’s you and Jason. You’re both are all I have. Until I know more about Samael, I’m not taking any chances.”

Marcella vanished, appearing in their house. Let Jason and Dominic manifest the car back to the house. She waved her hand toward the coffee table placing a small, white box wrapped with red ribbon there for Dom to find. Inside held a gold ring with odd looking symbol covered in diamonds.

Marcella wasn't sure what made her think of it, but something about the significance pulled at her heart. The thought of what his gift would be came natural. As the meaning taunted her memory, she pushed it away, still thinking about Samael. The fact that she couldn't remember only made the aggravation worse.

The dress disappeared leaving behind red lace panties, bra, stockings, and heels covering her. Walking to the mirror, she stared at herself. The reflection that looked back caused her stomach to twist. Everything about what she was doing made her feel ill. Changing the way she looked wouldn't make a difference to what was going on in her life, but it'd make her feel better at the moment.

Scrunching her hair between her fingers, she watched it bounce into tight curls that reached the middle of her back. Dark eyeliner and a smoky effect covered her lids giving her exactly the look she wanted seductive, mysterious, dark. Just the way she felt.

Moving her eyes toward the tattoos and symbols covering her body, she studied each one carefully, bringing the chants out in a gold script. She'd never used any of the words on her body and suddenly she felt curious why.

The first bare symbol was a cross over her heart. She laughed thinking it quite ironic to be located there of all places. Marcella believed in a higher power of good, but she wasn't sure that her coming from darkness or being mated to a demon prince allowed her in the graces of him or her. Gold letters inscribed in the cross came forward permitting her to read the words.

"Vampire? I see. These must be for the supernaturals. Great, just what the doctor ordered."

Scanning over to the opposite breast a symbol revealed itself through the twist and turns of the tribal. Focusing on the letters, she read the word, Immortal.

"Now look at you. You could have placed a bow right here and I would have been happy."

Marcella watched Dominic's hand began to caress her pussy in the mirror. The diamonds from the ring on his middle finger glistened in the light. She moaned, leaning back into his chest. "Do you like your gift? Don't ask me what the symbol means, I really don't know, but it's something important. I can feel it."

"I promise to never take it off. I know what you mean about the importance. A memory keeps trying to come, but I can't place it.

Jason's reflection came forward in the mirror. "Yeah, something about the symbol hit home with me, too, but I'm not sure what it is. Damn, you look good." Jason immediately leaned around her to kiss along the curve of her breast.

"Your gift is under the bed, Jason."

The top half of his body lifted and opened his hand, the present appearing in his palm. "If this is empty, I'm going to punish you tonight."

Marcella laughed and shook her head. "I assure you it's not. The gift is something you told me you wanted before the fire. I meant to get it for you, but I didn't get the chance. I hope you like it."

He tore off the paper and opened the box, looking up at her with a smile on his face. "Thank you, babe. I can't believe you remembered about the watch. I only mentioned it that one time in the mall."

"Yes, but you stared at it for close to thirty minutes. Let's just say it left an impression."

He kissed her cheek and began putting it on. Marcella stared into Dominic's eyes in the mirror. The way his eyes were narrowed told her he wanted so badly to say something, but no words came out and none needed to. She did what she felt necessary to keep him on earth. There was no taking back the past.

"Why don't we go out tonight and have some fun? We'll hit up Corpus and Dom can play theme music to everyone we pass on the street. Does that sound like fun?"

Jason laughed and looked toward the demon. "Like that one song, 'Dude looks like a lady?' Hell yeah. That's a great idea, Marcy. Hey Dom, what's my theme song?"

He looked Jason up and down and turned to Marcella. "I don't know about his, but I know mine. It'll be one very fitting for tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"I need to get back to work. Tonight you and Jason can play the couple. I'm the friend tagging along just for fun. I've received my list," he said, pointing to his head. There's a soul for me to collect and she happens to be getting ready to go out even as we speak."

“Dom...” Marcella turned around, afraid to look at him and ask the questions plaguing her.

“I don’t kill them if that’s what you’re wondering. They don’t have to be dead for me to take their soul. And if it makes you feel any better,” he lowered his voice leaning in inches from her face, “I always tell them to straighten up their life. They never know what I do, but sometimes it works. They can feel the difference. Other times, well I tried to warn them, didn’t I?”

“That’s all you can do,” she whispered.

“Yes, now let me have a look at you.” The blue of his eyes raked over her body for a long time. “God, you look good enough to eat. Now change. Vamp will do for tonight. I don’t want you human. Clubs can be rowdy at times. Your senses need to be sharp. Jason, call your mother. She’s about two minutes away from calling the cops.”

“How do you know that?”

Marcella waited for him to answer Jason’s question. A loud sigh left Dom as he looked toward the floor and then back up toward her boyfriend. “I have the ability to be able to tell the near future. I haven’t really given it much attention, but even after I knew our girl was up to no good, I figured I better listen a little more carefully. And you promised your mother you would call, correct?”

Jason looked down. “Yes. I did last week, but I could tell she was beginning to worry. She’ll want to know when I’m coming home.”

“Well, that’s up to you. You’re free to go any time you want.”

Multiple expressions passed Jason’s face. Tears collected in his eyes while he looked at Dominic. “I can see my mother? She doesn’t have to think I’m dead?”

“You’re pulling a Marcella. Need I repeat what I just said? You can turn human. No one will ever know you’re a collector besides the people in this room. Why don’t you tell her you’ll be home in the morning? It’s not like we don’t live a mere five minutes away. You can come over every day, even spend the night. Marcella will like that.”

“Marcy?” Jason gave her a look as if he wasn’t sure he should leave.

“Call your mother. You need to spend as much time with her as you can. We never know what tomorrow brings...well, minus Dom. Still, nothing would make me happier than you being back with your mom.”

Large arms encircled her and he quickly rushed from the room. Marcella turned to Dominic. “You didn’t have to do that, did you?”

“No, it probably wasn’t a good idea, either. I feel better when someone besides me is here to protect you. But I know that’s what you would have wanted for him if the option became available, so, what the hell. You being happy is all I care about.”

Marcella hugged him and kissed his cheek.

“Also, tonight...I’m not even sure this is worth mentioning. This is why I hate these feelings and usually keep them to myself. It may sound stupid, but just promise me that no matter what happens you won’t do something to jeopardize who or what we are. You’re not Marcella, tonight. So you’ll need to pick a name, any name.”

“I promise I won’t put us at risk.” She thought long and hard for a name, smiling when it came to her. “Veronica.”

Dominic’s face twisted with confusion. “Now, what in the world made you think of that name? I was thinking more along the lines of something sweet like, Amy, or Jessica, but Veronica. That’s a bad girl’s name. Are you trying to tell me something?” he asked smiling, pulling her body against his. “Is a bad girl really underneath that beautiful body?”

“You have no idea. I can feel her.” Marcella said the words seriously, feeling they may be truer than she wanted to admit to herself. “And you want to know why Veronica?” Snapping her fingers, music filled the room by *The Veronicas*. “God, help me I think you’re rubbing off on me,” she groaned.

Dominic tilted his head, listening to the music. “Not bad for chick stuff, I guess. I like the guitar that comes in after the beginning. What’s this song called?”

“Popular.”

“Well Miss Popular, let’s go find loverboy. I found a theme song for him after all. It seems he has a *very* bad girlfriend and that’s exactly what we’ll listen to on the way to the club. After the girly stuff I just heard some heavier music will be perfect.”

“Funny, I’ll know what to do when you piss me off.”

Marcella winked and changed her red stilettos and stockings to black, matching the short, tight, black dress she materialized to cover her. The back

was completely exposed while the deep V on her chest settled just above her belly button. She headed for the door leaving Dominic in her midst.

“Whoa, you’re not going out looking like that, are you? When I said bad, you know I didn’t mean for you to play the part. It was joke, you know, something to keep in the bedroom. Ha ha, laugh, leave it at the door.”

“I think I *will* play the part tonight. The dress is very cute, don’t you think? I saw it in a movie awhile back.”

“Cute isn’t the word that comes to mind. Sexy, yes, hot, definitely, cute, not so much.”

Jason walked through the front door and stopped in his tracks. “Dom, you’re not letting her go out in that, are you?”

“She’s your girlfriend.”

“Yeah, but she’s your mate. Tell her to change.”

“She’s Miss Popular, or haven’t you heard? I don’t think she’ll listen to me, anyway.”

Marcella laughed and kissed Jason while she made her way through the door. “Nope, I’m not listening, so let’s go. I think it’s a very cute dress, and I want to wear it.”

Dom leaned in and she heard him whispering to Jason. “You let another guy touch her while I’m not around and I’ll kick your ass for good this time. You better have your guard up ten times more, now.”

“She’s not getting an inch away from me. You can bet your ass on that. Son of bitch,” Jason growled, following Marcy.

“You guys chill out and get in. I’m driving.”

Opening the door to the two-door Mercedes, Marcella smiled. “Veronica says stop gaping and get in my new car.”

“That car is over a hundred grand, Marcy. When did you care about what you drove?” Jason took a step toward the passenger door, running his eyes down the length of it.

“Since everything became free. Now get it and please don’t call me by my name anymore, tonight. Dom, you said Jason had a theme song? I want to hear it.” She let them get in and took off out of the driveway, hitting the highway. Uneasiness was beginning to set in, but she remained quiet. The fact that she wasn’t acting like her old self wasn’t sitting very well with her.

"I'm not sure I like Jason's song anymore. Not with you dressed like that." Dominic started the music, groaning, and looked out of the window. Marcella instantly died laughing at the words.

"Nice." She bobbed head to the music, hearing them begin to fade out as a quick flash of her standing on the balcony, in the white gown, assaulted her vision. The lights from the town wavered, but quickly came back into focus.

"Not nice," Jason snapped at Dominic. "That sounds nothing like Marcella and you know it. Very funny. Now put on something else. If I have to hear one more word about the girlfriend shaking her ass or dancing on guys from out of town, I'll blow theses speakers."

"No, no more music. Listen, I have a really bad feeling about tonight. It seems to be growing worse." Dominic shifted in the seat.

"Do you want me to take her home while you collect the soul you need? We don't have to go out. Really, I don't mind." Jason leaned forward making it obvious his reasons involved Marcella.

"No way, I want to go out. I promise to behave myself."

"Jason, I mean it. It's your responsibility to watch over her. Now shift and get rid of the tattoos. You'll have to go human so they don't see a difference. You'll have no abilities, which I like even less. But it's the only way."

Marcy sped down the causeway reaching over one hundred miles an hour. "Can you tell me more about what you feel? Maybe if we're prepared things will go okay."

"No, I wish I could. All I see is you." Dom got quiet while his face grew focused. "Rage, you're going crazy. You don't even look like yourself. Listen, my predictions sometimes aren't worth a shit. That's why I never pay attention to them. At times, they don't happen at all, but I thought I'd warn you just in case."

Jason took a deep breath from the back seat. "Not to worry. I won't let anything happen. After you leave, are you just going to meet us at the house or do we need to come get you from somewhere?"

"It could take awhile. I'll just meet you both at the house."

Marcella made her way downtown, parking at a private lot. Dom quickly paid the guy as they walked around the corner and headed to

Stingers. A variety of music echoed down the street from the various clubs lining Chaparral Street.

"It's wonderful, isn't it? The smell of people everywhere is invigorating. I just want to bite and sample each one." Marcella laughed at her own joke, but Jason and Dominic looked more nervous than ever. "Chill out, guys, laugh, have fun."

"Not funny," Jason whispered, sliding his arm around her shoulders. "I want you to have fun tonight, but please let me know if you feel a change coming on. The last thing we need is surprises or a blood fest."

"You'll be the first to know, I promise." Marcella leaned closer, kissing his cheek. One look at the line stretching from the doorway and she sighed. Putting a little more sway to her hips, she walked directly to the man at the entrance. "Well hello, there." She sized up his body making sure he noticed. "We really don't need to wait in this line, right?"

"Let's just go to the end, *Veronica*."

Her eyes shot to Jason at the way he said her name, but she returned her flirty gaze back to the muscled man holding the clipboard. "You can't get in front of the others unless you're on the list." The bouncer took a long look up and down her body. "You wouldn't happen to be on here, would you?"

"As a matter of fact we are. *Veronica*, Jason, and Dominic. No last names."

"Everyone has a last name."

"Just check the list," Dom snapped.

"And so you are. VIP is upstairs. The Smith party awaits you."

Marcella smiled brightly. "Why, thank you, kind sir." She walked in and threw a fifty on the counter with three ID's all ranging over the twenty-one age mark. "So Dom, how long do you get to stay?" The music was so loud she had to lean forward and yell for him to hear her.

"My girl should be here soon, but she's not planning to stay long. When she leaves, so do I."

Jason led the way upstairs, stopping at the top. From the shouts that erupted, Marcella tried her best to see around him. People were chanting his name excitedly, but she wasn't sure who they all were.

"Jason, dude, I've been calling your house for days now. We heard what happened. Are you okay?" Another male voice boomed its way toward them. "Dude, have you been working out? You're fucking huge."

Marcella pushed Jason in enough for her to squeeze through. Everyone who remained in her hometown was sitting up in VIP. She instantly froze in fear, thinking of what the bouncer said. Smith party, shit! The name was so common, she didn't even think they meant Harold Smith.

"Dom," she yelled, moving out of the way so he could get through.

"Yeah, well I went out of town for awhile. Had to get over the initial shock of losing...her." Jason walked forward, pulling Marcella with him. "But, this is my new girlfriend, Veronica."

Everyone got really quiet as they took her in. The music seemed to increase in volume as everyone stared. Some of the guy's mouths hung open. Trembling took over her body. Her old self would have never dressed this way. Growing up with the majority of these people, she felt like a complete outsider. How could she have changed so much in the short amount of time she'd been dead? She didn't even recognize herself anymore.

"Nice to meet you," Kyle said, slowly reaching out to shake her hand. The emotions he felt slammed into her. The need to step back away from his anger made her nervous, but she kept still. He turned back to her boyfriend. "Uh, Jason can I have a word with you?"

"No, I don't want to talk about it. Leave it alone."

Dom caught her attention. The way his eyes watched the guys talking to Jason wasn't helping with her nerves. "Are you ready to leave? I don't like this. It isn't what I saw. That happened outside, but if you want to go, we can."

"No, not yet. Let's see if Jason can take care of it first."

"Dude, Marcella hasn't been dead but for a few weeks and you're already seeing someone else? Where's your respect? Marcella was...she was great, and now you come in with a fucking Barbie. Did the up and coming Draft go to your head or something? I don't care how pretty or how much they look alike, she'll never replace the real thing. Never!"

Kyle pushed his way past Jason and left the VIP. The hurt on her boyfriend's face made her stomach flip. She never thought his friends would treat him this way. Sure, she had known Kyle since grade school, but they weren't close. Come to think of it, he always bitched every time she went anywhere with them.

Other friends walked up to Jason, talking to him like nothing was wrong, but she could feel the tension in the room. The need to flee pulled at her.

“My girl’s here. I can feel her. Are you going to be all right without me?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Go ahead and go. See you when you get home.”

Dom smiled, bringing her hand up and flipping it over to nibble on her wrist. Feeling his teeth against her flesh made her shiver. The need to kiss him caused her to bite her lip. Pulling him forward while she sat down at a small table, she watched as he perfectly blocked their view from everyone. Marcella ran her tongue along the curve of his ear. “You tease me like that again and I might have to sink my fangs in you when you get to the house.”

Dominic’s face moved in inches from hers. “I’m going to hold you to that.”

“Please do. I’ll enjoy every minute of it. Now, go find your girl.”

The tip of his finger ran down her nose and then he turned to the group of guys. As he left, Jason immediately joined her side.

“This wasn’t a good idea.” He leaned over the small round table, closer to her so no one would hear him. “I look like the biggest asshole in the world. I’ve just basically spit on your grave. I doubt Kyle ever talks to me again. He loved you, you know. Once when he was drunk, he told me so.”

Marcella’s jaw dropped. “But he hated me. He always said mean things.”

“No, he hated seeing us together. That’s why he was always rude.”

“I had no idea. I always figured he thought you could do bet...” Marcy’s words died off the moment Kasey walked up the stairs. The amount of anger she felt left her shaking uncontrollably. The girl took one look at Jason smiled, and walked over to him.

“Sure didn’t expect to see you here. You look like you’re doing very well considering the news. I’m sorry, by the way. I tried calling, but your mother said you’d gone out of town.”

“Yeah, well I had to leave.” Jason fidgeted nervously under her lustful gaze.

The lights in the whole club began to flicker while Marcy fought to stay grounded to her seat. The need to snatch Kasey up by her fake hair

extensions left her nails digging into the metal chair. Dominic rushed into the VIP room looking around nervously.

“Kasey, I would like you to meet my new girlfriend. This is Veronica.”

The brunette flashed her gaze toward Marcella, her eyes narrowing. “Girlfriend? You mean to tell me after all the fuss you made over your last one, you’ve already moved on?”

Kasey was about to say something else when the anger melted from her face and she slowly turned toward Dominic. It looked like she was in a trance. “I’ve been looking for you. Don’t you remember? We were supposed to meet here.”

Dom wrapped his arm around Kasey, stunning Marcy and feeding her rage. The girl looked up at his angelic face and smiled, completely mesmerized.

“Oh, I must have forgotten. I’m sorry, what’s your name again?”

“Dominic. We met at the mall the other day. You told me you would be here, remember?” He looked deeply into her eyes. Marcella knew he was planting the memories into her brain.

“Oh okay, that’s right. Well, let me introduce you to...them,” Kasey said with a snarl. “This is Jason, and that’s...oh excuse the rude manners, I forget her name.”

“Veronica,” Marcella said, giving her hand to Dom, but never taking her eyes off the nasty brunette.

“Nice to meet you, Veronica. I think we were just leaving, weren’t we, Kasey?”

“Oh don’t mind us, Jason and I were leaving, too. I suddenly feel sick to my stomach. Too many fake bitches in here if you ask me.” She stood taking Jason’s hand. They walked downstairs and headed through the front doors of the club at a fast walk. Marcella knew if she didn’t get away from Kasey fast, the girl wouldn’t stand a chance against her rising temper.

“Hey! Wait up!”

Marcella groaned at Kasey’s voice yelling toward them. She turned around seeing Dom standing with the girl. Marcy wasn’t about to make Dom’s prediction come true so she kept walking to the car. “Let’s go, Jason.”

Kasey yelled louder. “Veronica, wait! I need to warn you about something.”

Caught off guard by her words, Marcella stopped.

“No, no, let’s go,” Jason said. “If I would have known she would be here, we never would have come. I’m sorry about what might have happened with her. I know you’re still angry about that.”

“You didn’t do anything with her, Jason. I saw it in your memories. She undressed you, and when you pushed her away she got mad and left. You never cheated.”

“You could have told me that before,” he growled. “Well, see, she doesn’t have anything to tell you that could possibly make you angry. You know the truth.”

The sounds of clicking on the sidewalk caused Marcella to turn around. Dom stood next to her as they came to a stop in front of them. He looked at her nervously, obviously not sure what was going to happen.

“Could we have some girl talk real quick? There’s just something I think you need to be warned about.”

A laugh came from Marcy’s throat. “Sure, there’s nothing you can tell me that I don’t already know. Jason, give me a minute, will you?”

Kasey pulled her to the side of the building. Her face turned from smiles to a look of sadness. Anger once again began to pump through Marcella. “Cut the bullshit and just tell me. I think I mentioned in the club how much I hate fake people. And you’re about as fake as they come.”

“Fine.” Her true viciousness seeped from her skin nearly causing Marcella to gag at the evil that lurked inside. The smell almost held a metallic fragrance, stunning her. Her collector was definitely growing stronger.

“Just so you know, my dad’s the fire chief of the town we live in. Jason’s girlfriend died a few weeks ago. Supposedly, the fire report shows every outlet in the bedroom she was sleeping in mysteriously blew up. I’ve seen them personally, so I know something happened. I’m betting she found out about Jason and me, and killed herself and her entire family.

“Just watch out with Jason. Don’t fall too hard or you might end up getting your heart broken and do something just as stupid. He’s not one to be faithful and I would hate to see another girl, or her family, die because a guy couldn’t keep his dick in his pants.”

Every ounce of blood froze in Marcella’s body. “You said the outlets in her room exploded?” The words barely came out as she fought to breathe.

“That’s right. They’re marking it down as some electrical issue only because they can’t figure out how she got them to blow up.”

“Thanks for the warning.” Completely disoriented, Marcella walked toward Jason in a daze. Dom immediately came to her.

“What did she tell you? I can’t read your emotions. They’re too,” he waved his hand around the air wildly.

“Nothing, I’ll tell you when you get home. Take care of her soul. It’s one that belongs just where it’s intended.”

“Gladly,” Dominic said under his breath.

“Tell me what she warned you about.” Jason wrapped his arm around her as they approached the car. Getting in, her hands were shaking so bad, Marcella could hardly turn over the key. The parking attendant waved her out of the parking lot and she was thankful the traffic wasn’t nearly as bad as she assumed. Before Marcella knew it, she was crossing the Harbor Bridge going eighty. The thought of manifesting herself directly to the guest bedroom entered her mind, but fear of Kasey’s words being the truth kept her from seeing what she could have possibly done right away. Instead, she felt content to drive at a fast speed until she reached the scene.

“So, are you going to tell me what she said or continue to scare me with your driving? You’re way too quiet.”

“I don’t think I can say it. You’ll see soon enough.”

“Marcy, please. I don’t like this.”

The Mercedes increased to one hundred and twenty once she hit the causeway. Silence filled the interior until she arrived in Ingleside and turned right, instead of left. Jason immediately leaned toward her.

“Where are we going? We live the other way.”

“There’s something I have to witness for myself. Once I do, depending on what I see, we’ll go home.”

“Can you at least give me a hint?”

“No, you’ll stop me.”

The car immediately slammed to a stop in the middle of the road. She flew forward and glared at him. “I can stop you now. Just tell me what this is about.”

There was no more time. Marcella vanished from the driver’s seat and appeared in the remnants of the guest bedroom. “Light.” The room instantly filled with a white glow. Walking to the far wall, Marcy pulled debris out of

her way. There wasn't much wall left, but a gaping hole filled the area where the outlet used to be. Running around the room, she noticed only one outlet remained, untouched by the fire. It was the same, a large hole.

"I killed them," she whispered past the sob that threatened to escape. "Oh god, forgive me." A ragged breath broke through her lips while she spun around the rubble surrounding her. Marcella felt lost, not at all in control of her body. She wanted to scream, to tear everything around her apart with her bare hands. Coherent thoughts wouldn't come, just the whirling of growing anxiety and rage.

So many memories had been made around her. Looking at what was left of the house she'd grown up in, and knew she was the cause of its ruination made stars dance in front of her vision. Why had it come to this? What kind of monster was she?

"What are you doing here, Marcy? Tell me what this is all about?"

Her fingers buried in her hair, pulling as Marcy fought not to scream out loud. Uncontrollable tears began streaming down her face while she tried to think of something to say. There were no words....nothing.

"Marcella, talk to me, baby." Jason rushed to her side, pulling her in his arms. "You have to tell me what's wrong or I can't fix it."

Dominic materialized next to them in a fury. The red glowing of his eyes made the skin on his face almost see-through. "What the fuck did you do? Did you bring her here after I told you not to mention this again?"

"No, dammit! She came here by herself. I tried to stop her but when I did, she vanished. I went to three different places before I came here. She won't tell me what's going on. Whatever it is, Kasey's to blame. This all began the moment she spoke with her."

"Love, look at me," Dom said smoothly. "You need to tell us. We can't help you if we don't know what's wrong."

"You can't help me. No one can help me." Marcella pulled out of Jason's arms and walked to the wall. After a moment of hesitation, she pointed. "Tell me what you see." The words were almost impossible to get out.

"A hole," Jason said confused.

"And how did the hole get there?" Marcella looked at both of their puzzled faces. "I'll tell you how it got there. Kasey's father is fire chief, so what she told me makes complete sense. I know she's not lying." Taking a

deep breath, she felt her air cut off from the sobs that broke through. "They're ruling the fire an electrical problem or something like that, but only because they can't figure out how the outlets exploded."

The guys stiffened, but remained quiet. "They exploded because I caused them to. Before I fell asleep I questioned why I was alive. To me, in that moment, everything was messed up. I wanted to leave, run away, die! I'm a murderer. I killed my family! They didn't deserve to die. They were good people. I'm not!"

Dominic and Jason both got to her at the exact same moment. "Marcy, baby, we don't know that for sure. It could have been anything. Let's go home and get out of here."

Looking at Jason, she shook her head. "It wasn't just anything. It was me. My mother...God, I can still feel her hands touching my face." Marcella could hardly talk she was crying so hard. "Why didn't I let her know I wasn't sleeping? Why didn't I tell her that I loved her before she left the room that night?"

"Don't cry, baby, please." Jason pulled her into his arms as he tried to comfort her. "Your mother would have never questioned your love for her. She's in a better place. She's with your real dad now."

"Take her home, Jason. I have somewhere I need to go."

Marcella looked into Dom's face. Absolutely no emotion whatsoever gave her any indication of what his plans consisted of. "Where are you going?"

"Nowhere you need to be concerned with. Go get some rest, love. I'll be there shortly."

Dom suddenly vanished causing more panic to tear through her. "I'm summoning him back. The look on his face scared me." Marcy shivered at the thought of what Dominic might do. No matter how upset she was, she couldn't let him do something he might end up regretting. Or worse, do something that might send him back to hell.

"No, you have to learn to trust him. Don't think the worst until he gives you reason to. Trust me, if I know one thing about Dom it's that he's not stupid. He wouldn't jeopardize losing your respect."

"Take me home, Jason. I can't stomach looking at what I caused. Right now, I don't even trust myself not to do anything stupid."

Marcella held on to him tightly as he made them disappear and reappear inside the bedroom of the mansion. He led her to the shower and slowly took off her clothes while she let the tears fall. The images of her family wouldn't stop pushing into her mind. As much as she wanted to blame Kasey for sending the email, she knew the girl didn't start the fire. She did.

Warm water hit her skin, soaking her with its calming sensation, but Marcy's thoughts weren't on her surroundings. The large restroom didn't even exist in her reality. She knew things would never be the same. No one had ever asked her if she wanted to become a soul collector. It wasn't fair that she had grown up loving a family, only to be the result of their deaths. At what she'd become, a bitterness swept over her

* * * *

Dominic read over the report for the fourth time. The breaking of his heart grew with each sentence he reread. Kasey wasn't lying. Something or someone had indeed manipulated the energy to cause an explosion from the outlets. It didn't say that, but he knew that's what the words implied.

He was hoping to go back with good news. Now he dreaded not having anything good to tell her. Kasey's soul lingered around inside of him and for the first time in his existence, he wanted to destroy it, destroy her. The girl had no clue what she'd done when she told Marcy about the fire. That was the only reason she got to keep her life, but the urge still grew harder to fight.

The amount of devastation his mate held inside was enough to destroy the mind of anyone. He just prayed there was a way he and Jason could bring her back from this. For so long, Dominic tried to do good instead of evil. He knew more than anyone how once you moved into a dark place in your life the evil sucked you down. Once the darkness weaved its way into you, coming back sometimes proved impossible. Marcella came from darkness, yet in her past goodness took over. Lucifer destroyed her for it. Now, she might be joining evil for good. There was no way he could let that happen. To keep her alive, she needed to be neutral, hidden.

Manifesting himself back to his bedroom in the mansion, the sound of water from the shower led him to the door. Jason sat on the sink, his head in his hands. The need to stay concealed from Marcella, until he learned details

of her condition hurt him even worse. He wanted nothing more than to wrap his arms around her and comfort her in the grief she felt, but her thoughts were so dark, he didn't even want to try to tap into them.

Jason looked up and glanced toward the shower. A pained expression crossed his features causing him to turn away quickly. Jason walked out of the restroom and followed him to the far side of the bedroom.

"What happened? What did you do?"

"I needed to check the files for myself." Dominic ran his fingers through his hair. "I'm afraid Kasey wasn't lying. Something or someone manipulated those outlets. My best guess is the actual energy was triggered."

"Oh, God." Jason sunk to the bed. "She's not good, Dom. The way she's standing there in the shower, she looks like a zombie. Her face holds nothing, no emotion, not even anymore tears. It's like no one's home inside her head."

"I don't know what to do. Jason, she can't slip into the darkness. Yeah, she might be there for a long time, doing their deeds, but someday she'll snap out of it and want out. What happens then? They won't let her walk away. I needed her in-between, unknown."

"Dom, I don't know. I wish there was something we could do. I think we just need to take our time with her. Let her grieve. If we see a difference, hopefully we'll know what to do by then."

Dominic nodded and walked into the restroom. Marcella stood exactly the way Jason had described her. Everything about her face was blank. Grabbing a towel, he opened the shower door and turned off the water. Still, she didn't move.

"Marcella, look at me, love."

She turned to him slowly, robotically. After a few moments of gazing into his face, dazed, her head shook and she took a ragged breath. "Dom, where were you? Where did you go?"

The lies his mind came up with made guilt eat at him, but he knew there wasn't any other way. If she knew the truth it would destroy her, and he'd be damned if she'd ever learn the truth. Not in the near future, anyway.

"I had to go back and collect the soul, remember? The chance didn't present itself earlier."

"Oh."

He wrapped the towel around her small body and led her to the bed. "So, tell me what your plans are for tomorrow." The question sounded stupid coming out of his mouth, but he couldn't let her dwell on what she'd learned. She needed something to keep her busy.

"Well, I don't know. Maybe I'll just lay here for awhile. I really don't feel like doing anything."

"Marcella..." Dominic sickened at what he was about to do, but he couldn't see her go through this. Taking a quick glance at Jason, he turned back to her. "There's something I need to tell you. I read the reports of the fire."

The life flickered behind her eyes, briefly. She sat up, grabbing his hands. "What did it say? Did I..."

Dominic took a deep breath and turned to Jason, whose eyes were just as big as Marcella's, but for a different reason. "No, it was an electrical disturbance. The holes around the outlets were made by the investigators so they could get a better look at what caused the initial blaze. You had nothing to do with the fire."

A shuttering breath came from her lips and she instantly burst into tears, clutching at Dom's shoulders. He looked at Jason who just shook his head in shock and disgust. A glare quickly shot his way, but he turned back to the one person he couldn't see hurt.

"I was so sure," she sobbed. "That...bitch..."

"Yes, well I have her soul now so we'll see if she can turn her life around."

"I don't see that happening. She's truly evil."

Jason shot another look at him and stepped forward. "Listen, I think I'm going to go home for a while. My mom will be asleep, but I want to be there when she wakes up to surprise her. Marcella." He walked over and hugged her tightly. "If you need anything, whatsoever, don't hesitate to call. I'll be back tomorrow afternoon." His glare shot to Dominic. "I'll call you in the morning."

Dominic watched the boy vanish and his stomach turned at letting down his new friend. Trying not to think about it, he focused back on Marcy. Weaving his fingers through her damp hair, he met her large green eyes. "You're still in vampire form?"

“Oh, yes, I didn’t think about changing over. We could do what we talked about earlier if you want.” The softness of her fingers caressed the pulse point on his throat making him shake under her touch.

“No, let’s just get some rest. You’ve had a stressful night.” The thought of making love to her when he’d just lied was unthinkable. He couldn’t take advantage of her like that.

“But I’m okay. I know the truth now, thanks to you. Kasey’s just a mean bitch out to hurt anyone she can. She just wanted to scare me away from Jason.”

“Yes, but taking souls are tiresome work and I think tonight we should just rest.”

A small pout formed across Marcella’s face. Dom laughed and materialized the white silk nightgown on her while he vanished his clothing. Nothing felt more perfect than having her curled against his body, back to her old self. But several hours passed before he finally fell asleep. Would this lie end up backfiring, or could he keep it a secret long enough for her to heal? Was that even possible? He wasn’t so sure anymore.

Chapter 9

Marcella reached across the bed for Dominic. Emptiness greeted her hand. Confused, she opened her eyes and looked around the large room. The silence filling the mansion eerily pressed against her skin. Climbing out from underneath the covers, she walked into the living area.

“Dom?”

The word traveled through the large space, echoing off the walls. Light beamed in through the windows, reflecting off the black marble floor. Stepping into the light warmed Marcy’s feet making her smile. Something about the light soothed her, calmed her nerves. She peered into the driveway, noticing Dom’s car wasn’t there.

Uneasiness made her narrow her eyes while she turned and walked back to the bedroom. Warmth still covered her feet as she stepped through the threshold. Screaming, she ran forward to the bed. Flames circled the mattress inching their way toward her and Dominic’s body.

Trying her best to control the element, she pushed her arm away from their sleeping forms. Fire spread across the carpeted room alarming her more. “Not again! Dom, wake up!” She watched horrified as he turned cradling her but didn’t stir from her calls.

Flames slithered up the walls taking the appearance of hundreds of snakes. Shouting, Marcella called out to water as she tried shaking and pulling at Dominic arms, but he wouldn’t budge and the element wouldn’t come.

“Marcella! Wake up. You’re having a nightmare.”

Gasping, she flew up in bed, launching herself in his arms. “Oh God! I had the worst dream. I couldn’t stop the fire. You wouldn’t wake up.” Breathing heavily, she tried to get control of herself.

“Don’t cry, it was just a dream. Come here.” Dominic pulled her on top of him and stared up into her face. “Marcella, do you have any idea how much I love and trust you?”

Not sure how to answer, she shrugged her shoulders. “Some, I guess. You still sleep with me so you must have faith, a little.”

He laughed. “A little? I trust you more than I’ve ever trusted anyone. You know how I feel about fire and if I thought I was in the least amount of danger, I’d run for the hills. But, I’m here because I know you’re not going to burn this place down. Now, let’s forget this dream of yours and think more positive thoughts.”

The love he felt for her instantly put Marcella at ease. After all, last night she’d overreacted. She wasn’t responsible for her family’s death. Moving her hips down, she pressed herself against the pressure from Dominic’s hard cock.

“Now that’s *very* positive.” He laughed.

Rolling her onto her back, he made her gown disappear from between them. The smoothness of his arms wrapped around her while he cradled her neck and lower back. Lips descended upon hers filling her mouth with mint. She shivered under the clean iciness and slid her tongue against his hungrily.

The firmness of his hand trailed from her lower back to one of the mounds of her ass, kneading the flesh with just the right amount of pressure. Wetness seeped from her folds with how much she wanted to feel him inside of her.

“I love you,” Dom whispered as he made his way down her neck. Each kiss trailing down her skin branded her forever his. So tenderly, he took his time making his way to her breasts. Placing the hardness of her nipple between his teeth he pulled, sucking her into his mouth. The swirling of his tongue had her grasping onto his blond curls.

Slowly, his hands moved from her waist, gripping her hips as he rotated his thumbs in a circular motion on the sensitive sides of her lower stomach. Muscles flexed in his back while he trailed lower. Reaching just below her bellybutton, he became still. Confused, Marcella watched him stare at the flat surface.

“What is it? Why did you stop?”

“I don’t know.” Dominic shook his head sending his blond curls bouncing. He continued to kiss down her stomach until he reached her folds.

Separating her thighs wide, he laid down on the bed to look up at her as his tongue trailed her slit.

"I love the way you taste. I could drink you in all day and never get tired of the way you take over my senses."

Pressure from his tongue sliding inside of her brought a moan passed her lips. Hands gripped tighter to her hips bringing her farther down against him. She clutched to his shoulders, arching her back against the pleasure he triggered.

"Dominic."

"Yes, love?"

Fingers caressed over her skin until he reached her clit. Soft pressure from his thumb rubbed the area in circles. Fire raced through her body reaching her core. The need to be filled grew until she was ready to scream.

"Dominic, please touch me."

He lifted his head giving her a smile. "Touch you, here?" The tips of two of his fingers eased inside of pussy. He turned them slightly, never taking his eyes from hers.

"Yes, more."

"This much more?" The depth only increased a small amount making her sigh in frustration. Heat infested the lower half of her body.

"Dominic, please."

"How about this?"

Marcella screamed as he plunged his fingers deep, bringing her to instant release. His lips quickly covered her folds sucking them into his mouth. Spasms covered her body. The pleasure caused her to dig her nails into his shoulders while he pushed against the spot deep inside of her, prolonging her orgasm.

Dazed, she pulled at him until his mouth reached her lips. Her taste against his tongue drove her over the edge, causing her hands to move wildly across the muscles of his back. Thickness pushed against her opening and she welcomed it, wrapping her legs around his waist to drive him in further.

"Slow down," he whispered, easing his tip into her. Out of the last few weeks, they'd made love plenty of times, but she'd never been in her true collector form. Having him penetrate her now made her eyes open wide. He was so thick, so heavy against her pussy.

The slickness made it easier for him to enter, but the speed tortured her. Inch by slow inch he entered, molding her to fit around him. The pleasure was so drawn out Marcella was sure she'd come before he completely filled her.

Dominic pulled back and eased another inch forward. Separating her thighs wider, she felt him bury himself entirely. They both moaned loudly at the completion of their joining. Realization hit Marcy hard. This was the way things were meant to be with mates. More than ever, she knew her connection to the partner fate handed her was meant to be. What she feared was how long?

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The grip of Marcella's pussy around Dominic's cock made him fight not to shoot his cum so soon. He wanted to pleasure her, make her always remember why they were meant to be together. But the tension only seemed to intensify, and he knew it wouldn't be long before an orgasm made her even tighter. The control he held could only last so long, and with her, he felt lost. The way she affected him crumbled ever amount of power he harbored.

"Dom, I want you to go faster. *I need* you to..."

Internally he groaned. She needed speed, and he needed to go as slow as possible. If she wasn't so tight he'd be able to last for hours. Searching his mind he tried to think of something to focus on while his rhythm increased. But all he could see was golden eyes and full, kissable, soft lips.

"Look at me, Dominic." Opening his eyes, he watched her study his face. "Tell me what's wrong."

"Nothing's wrong. You're just really..."

"Tight?"

He sighed. "Yes, exactly."

"Does it hurt you? I can change form if you think that would be better."

"No, I don't want you to be anything else. It doesn't hurt too much, you actually feel really good. Too good, if you must know."

"Oh. Well what can we do to make things easier on you? Would this help?"

Marcella held up a small bottle of lubrication that she made appear. Dominic looked at it and then back to her. A smile came to his lips. "Yes, I think that will work perfectly."

He took the bottle, examining it. Pouring a small amount in his hand he withdrew his cock, groaning at the sensitivity. Marcy sat up, applying some lubrication to the outside of her pussy. He watched mesmerized while she rubbed it along her folds and slid two fingers into her entrance. Pressure from her hand wrapping around his thickness pulled him closer.

"Now, make love to me like you wanted to."

The seductiveness of her voice caused his cock to ache. He entered her smoothly causing them both to cry out. Dominic wrapped his arm beneath her head as he leaned down and tasted her sweet mouth. It didn't take long for him to find a pace they could both enjoy, one where he held some form of control.

"I'm never going to let you go, Marcella. I don't care what happens. You need to know that I'll always be yours."

Hungrily, she replaced her mouth against his. Fingers weaved through his hair while he held her. Tightening gripped around him, but not to the extent prior to using the lubrication. He pushed deep, grinding his hips into her thighs so he could apply pressure to her clit. Tremors rocked her body, but he pushed himself faster needing the memory to burn inside her brain so she'd never forget. He knew it was imperative she remember, he wasn't sure why, but his mind pleaded for him to make it a point.

A brush of fingertips against the sensitivity of his sack wiped every thought away that raced through his head. His body betrayed him as he was blindsided with his own release. Dominic groaned, thrusting into her for the last time before he collapsed to the bed. "You cheated. I wasn't ready to stop."

"Me either, but Jason's coming down the road and something's really bothering him. Tell him to give me a few minutes."

Marcella kissed his lips, jumped off the bed, and ran to the shower. He smiled, watching her curves disappear around the door. Blissfully, he lay back, and stared at the ceiling. Jason entered not seconds later.

"Where is she?" He said, panting.

"In the shower. She told me to tell you to give her a few minutes. What's bothering you?" Dominic sat up to stare into Jason's collector eyes.

“You know damn well what is wrong with me. I’ve tried to hold back, tried to forget what you told her. I even almost convinced myself she was better off not knowing, but I can’t let you continue to lie to her. If she finds out...”

Dominic materialized pajama bottoms to cover him than he slowly got out of the bed. “Tell me how she’ll find out. If you keep your mouth shut, she’ll never know. You saw her last night. Do you seriously think she needs to go through that?”

“It’s the last thing I want her to go through and you know it. But I can’t lie to her. And I sure as hell won’t lose her over your dishonesty.”

Stalking toward what Dom was starting to see as his enemy, he looked down into Jason’s eyes. “But you’ll let me lose her by exposing mine, is that it? I’m trying to protect her and you’re ready to play the knight in shining armor, here to whisk her away from a monster, right?”

“You know that’s not it at all. I love her as much as you, more actually, and I’m not risking that love for a second. What made you even think to do something so wrong? We could have helped her through it. Now we’re going to be in the shithole once she learns the truth.”

The water cut off so Dom lowered his voice. “Everything will be okay if we just stay quiet. Do you like seeing her in pain? Don’t do this, Jason.”

“She deserves to know the truth, Dom!”

“What truth?” Marcella walked out wrapped in a black silk robe. Her smile slowly disappeared upon seeing their faces.

Dominic thought he was going to be sick. The thoughts he had while they were making love, to make her remember, resurfaced nearly causing him to choke. With the damn gift he held, he should have known. He would have taken Marcella away until Jason came to his senses. Well, Dominic would have at least tried. There was no way of knowing whether Jason couldn’t find her if she vanished. Marcy was his master. Their connection still was a mystery.

“Truth? Oh, nothing you need to worry about.” Dominic said quickly, glaring in Jason’s direction.

“No, I want to know.”

Jason opened his mouth and Dominic didn’t think, couldn’t think passed not letting Marcella feel pain. The scream that echoed into the room tore

into his heart, but he knew he'd lose her if she learned the truth. He'd betrayed her, lied to her.

Before he knew it, the boy was beneath him. Dominic repeatedly slammed his fist into Jason's face. No matter what went through his mind, he couldn't stop. He couldn't lose Marcella.

The air pushed from Dom's body as he hit the wall hard, sticking into place. Jason stood from the ground, murder in his eyes as he held Dominic into position. "Tell her or God help me, I will. I came here to give you the option, but you didn't let me get that far. Now, tell her!"

Marcy ran over, pushing a rag under Jason's bleeding nose. "Dominic?" She whispered. The pain etched into her face was his fault. He'd been so worried about keeping her protected, he'd been the one to end up hurting her in the end.

"I don't want to tell you. You don't need to know. Marcella please, just listen to me and believe when I say nothing good will come from you knowing."

"Me knowing?" She got quiet and looked down at the floor. Dominic fell to the ground, finally released from Jason's hold, but he took a step forward and walked into what felt like a brick wall. Confused, he pushed against the invisible force. Gold looked up at him while Jason shrugged at not knowing what was happening.

"Marcella, don't think about it. Just come to me and we'll leave. We'll take a vacation somewhere so you can clear your head and not worry about anything. It'll be fun, just me and you."

Slowly, she shook her head back and forth making his heart accelerate. The light coming from her eyes gave the effect of fire behind her golden color. "You lied to me last night, didn't you?"

"Don't do this. Just think about something else."

"No! I killed them, didn't I?"

"Marcella..."

"Jason?" She asked, heartbreakingly.

Dominic went crazy beating on the invisible wall. "Jason! Don't do it! Jason!"

Jason held out his arms, and Marcella nearly collapsed before she made her way into them. The sounds of screaming raked against his skin, tearing all the way into his insides. Something shattered deep in the core of his

being. He'd lost her. Their connection weakened considerably leaving him gasping for air while he held his chest.

Suddenly, he fell through the force that held him. Looking up, they were gone. The floor tilted beneath his feet leaving him stumbling to the bed. Desperately, he searched for her link. He needed to bring her back, explain why he did it, but nothing was there for him to latch onto. Emptiness, that's all that remained for him. Just like before his angel ever appeared, he was hollow. She was meant to save him, and he'd done the only thing he knew, sin. He failed her, and himself.

* * * *

Marcella looked toward the Gulf of Mexico, hugging Jason tightly. The tears were drying, and the numbness settling throughout her body felt better than the pain she'd experienced when she realized Dominic could lie to her about something so crucial.

They'd been here for hours and still her best friend held her. She'd immediately brought them to the one place only Jason knew of, a small beach hidden behind a hill, not a mile from her old house. Even though Jason tried to explain Dom's reasons, she wouldn't listen. The fact remained, he had lied.

"Marcy, why don't you come to my house for awhile? My mother won't mind. I'll talk to her."

"No, I don't think so. We've already made a mess for you by showing me to your friends. I'm sure they're going crazy with all the gossip. I don't doubt Mrs. Jefferies already called your mom."

"She did, this morning. But I don't care. You leave my mom up to me. I'll tell her something."

Looking up into Jason's eyes, she saw his worry. "What, more lies? No, I'll get a place. Somewhere no one knows exists."

"You can't hide forever. He's your mate. As much as I hate it, I think you both need to work out your problems."

"Nice try, but I don't need a mate. I have you. You're the only one left who's stayed honest with me. As long as we have each other, that's all that matters."

“Now who’s lying? We both know you need Dominic. He really was just trying to protect you. He loves you more than you think.”

“Enough, Jason.”

“If you say so, but I think you’re making a mistake. You weren’t supposed to leave. You were supposed to be angry, maybe break some stuff, and then together Dom and I would show you how much we’re there to support you. Then things would go back to normal.”

“Oh, is that the way your plan worked? Sorry if I messed up your little vision of the perfect family, Jason. I’m still pissed that you didn’t tell me this last night.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I almost didn’t tell you at all.”

“But you did.”

Marcella walked to the water, gazing out over the miles that held the tall buildings of Corpus Christi in the distance. “When I was a little girl, I used to imagine myself living at the top of one of those towers. Too bad they’re banks and offices, or else I would.”

“You could stay at the penthouse in one of the Omnis. Have maids wait on you, and there’s that fancy restaurant you can eat at every night. Huh, huh...sounds good, right?”

She watched Jason move his eyebrows up and down at her. A smile came even though she really wasn’t in the mood to laugh, but he always knew how to make her happy.

“I supposed they have a reservation waiting for a Miss Amanda St. Claire.” Marcella dressed herself in an outfit she’d seen on television not that long ago. The black pencil skirt hugged tightly to her curves and she wore a red silk blouse tucked in. She removed the large sunglasses, placing them on top of her tightly twisted conservative hairstyle.

“Wow, you look stunning. I always knew you’d make a fine lawyer someday, but...wow!”

“Well Jason, darling,” Marcella purred, “Let’s not forget I have an eternity to acquire it.”

He laughed, pulling her into his body. “You forget you’re spending it with me. I plan to keep you in bed half of that time. Now, tell me how I come to see you.”

“Well you can just feel for our connection and appear right outside my door. But if you want details, I’ll be at the Omni Bayfront, not Marina, and

I'll be in the presidential suite, eighteenth floor. You're on my guest list, no one else. I'm trusting you not to tell Dom."

"Your secret is safe with me. If he asks, I haven't seen you. You left me at my house and took off."

Good. You better be getting back to your mom. How is she, by the way? I've been rude not to ask."

"She's great now that I'm home. A bit hovering, but that's okay. I think she's afraid I'm going to do something. She doesn't quite trust me yet."

"I'm sure she'll come around. Just give it time. You get back. I'll see you when I see you."

"In the morning. I'll wake you for a pretend breakfast. We can at least act the part of human, even if the food compares poorly with the taste of blood."

Marcella body vibrated. "Thanks for reminding me. Now, go," she said smiling and pushing him toward the hill. He laughed, winked, and quickly disappeared. She turned toward the water and looked back toward Corpus Christi.

Well, this is it, Miss St. Claire. Shall we go to our new home for the present? Why certainly. Marcella rolled her eyes for resorting to answering herself back, but she didn't dwell on it for long. She imagined the restroom off from the lobby and manifested herself. Saying a prayer, she opened the stall door.

Chapter 10

Jason opened his front door and froze. The sound of laughter flowed from within. Knowing Bill was out of town, he recognized instantly who sat inside entertaining his mother. Walking forward, he came face to face with Dom.

“Oh honey, there you are. Your friend stopped by to see how you were.”

“Thanks, Mom. It was nice of you to keep him company for me. Dom, you want to take a walk outside?”

The tall blond stood, reaching inches from the ceiling. “Sure, sounds great.” He turned toward Jason’s mother and dazzled her with a smile. “It was a pleasure meeting you, Mable.”

“Pleasure’s mine. Come by anytime.”

“I definitely will, Thank you.”

Jason stormed from the house furious. When he walked around to the backyard he turned around glaring at Dom. “What are you doing here?”

“You have some nerve to ask me that.” He growled. “I want her back. Tell me where she is?”

“She doesn’t want to see you.”

“But I want to see her. I have to explain.”

“I’ve already told her why you lied. She wouldn’t listen. She’s gone, Dom.”

“Gone where?” he asked, his face growing pale.

Jason shifted his feet. “You mean to tell me you can’t find her? I thought you could, no matter what?”

“Something happened. Our connection is weak. I’ve lost her for good. I...”

Dom began to pace the length of the backyard, running his fingers through his hair. It wasn’t until he stopped and looked toward him that Jason saw the tears. “I can’t lose her. I can’t. You don’t understand. She makes me

good, better than good. Yes, it was stupid to lie to her. I'll never do it again, but it felt better than letting her hurt." He paused and walked back toward him. "Is she okay?"

"She wasn't at first, but when she left I got the impression she was better."

"Listen, you have to tell her I'm sorry. Tell her I'll never lie again. Whatever she wants, all she has to do is say the words."

"Dominic, if I see her I'll tell her, but I can't promise you she'll listen to what I have to say."

"Tell me where she is. I know you know."

Jason took a step back. "And you also know I'd never go against what she asked me. Don't make things worse, Dom."

"You're right. Fuck! Okay, just tell her..."

"Dom, I know, okay I'll tell her you want to see her, you're sorry, and you promise never to lie again."

"Yes, and..."

"Dom, go home and wait for me to come to you. Or better yet, go collect the souls you need."

"What do you think I did all day? I'm done. I was going crazy in that big house by myself. Marcella's presence is everywhere. I couldn't go in the room, or the living room. The dining room and kitchen were even filled with her. I tried going upstairs, but it was too damn quiet."

"You're done collecting the souls? Are you serious? How?"

"Easy, I didn't bullshit. I took their souls and told them if they didn't straighten out their lives everything would go to shit. Sweet and simple."

"Oh, but isn't that against the rules or something?"

"No, I didn't do anything that would jeopardize me staying here."

"Good, well, it's getting dark and I'm sure my mom is done making dinner so you better go. I'll tell Marcy when I see her."

"Thanks, Jason."

Dominic disappeared, leaving Jason in the backyard by himself. He shook his head and walked into the house. Being the middle man wasn't a very good place to be. Hopefully, it wouldn't last an eternity, or he'd surely lose his mind.

Looking across the dinner table at Jason, Marcella watched him uneasily shift in the chair. Nine days. That's how long they'd pretended nothing was wrong. The busy restaurant sitting atop the large hotel wasn't nearly as noisy as the previous nights, but she couldn't deny how her body jumped at every sound. She felt home sick, and like a piece of her was missing.

Pushing away the anger that began to surface at the memories, she rose, staring down at Jason. "I'm done pretending to eat. Let's go to the room."

Leaving money on the table, she waited for him to link his arm in hers. The silver gown she wore glistened in the light as they made their way to the elevator. Silence followed them all the way to her door.

Jason cleared his throat. "I wish you'd stop this. You're acting different. Please come home with me."

Marcella kissed his mouth gently. "I can't, Jason, you know that. Give your mother a hug for me."

Heaviness settled in her chest. She walked in and shut the door on him. Kicking her heels across the room, Marcella tore the dress off of her instead of making it disappear. Hate, that's all she felt. She hated being away from her mate, hated that all Jason talked about, when he did talk, revolved around things like the weather or of course, Dom. Things were so fucked up.

The sound of a sigh told her Jason had materialized inside of her room. "Now why did you do that? The dress looked beautiful on you."

"Go home, Jason."

"I'm thinking of telling Dominic where you are. You both really need to talk and put this behind you."

Spinning around, she faced him, her eyes burning from their anger. "You better not, Jason. There's nothing to talk about. He lied to me about something that's beyond forgivable."

"That's a lie and you know it. He loves you, Marcy."

Clearing her head, she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She didn't have time for this. Jason needed to leave. She had plans to go out and she wanted to get there early.

"Give me a few more days, okay?"

"You promise?"

Deciding it was time, she nodded her head. "Yes, I promise."

"All right. Get some rest. I'll see you in the morning."

He vanished, leaving her in the suite by herself. Looking around, she sighed. How could she grow to dislike a room so much? All she wanted to do was go home, to her real home, if not that, then the mansion. Her heart ached for something familiar. At the pain, she numbed it by letting the cobwebs take over.

Materializing a black dress, she let herself appear in the dark parking lot of the club. An attendant turned and jumped when he saw her. She smiled and watched him sheepishly smile back. Not wanting to get into a conversation, she headed for where she'd been almost every day for a week.

Walking through the crowded club, Marcella made her way to the VIP room. Ambrose had to be somewhere around here. She wasn't sure what made her come to the clubs of all places, but that's where she felt her pull. A week ago, when sleep neglected to come, she knew what she'd needed to do. Ambrose would keep Dom here, and she couldn't risk him being sent away. It didn't matter how mad she remained, he wouldn't suffer for his mistake.

The VIP held the same people as it did every night. What did everyone get out of coming here? She couldn't understand it. Nothing special ever happened, and after the second night she became bored with the atmosphere.

Turning around, she headed back toward the bar. For hours she sat there watching the door for someone new to walk in. Vampires littered the place, and she couldn't help but inwardly groan. Every single one of them who crossed her path acted as if Ambrose didn't exist, but she knew he did, he had to. They no doubt were covering for him, but she'd find him if it was the last thing she did.

"May I buy you a drink?"

Marcella looked toward the same vampire who always seemed to make his presence known to her. His dark brown hair rested passed his shoulders, dark green eyes like her own stared back at her. "No, thank you. I'm about to leave."

"But don't you want to hear about Ambrose?"

"You already said you didn't know him."

"I lied. Why don't we go back to my place and I'll tell you all about him."

“Get lost, asshole. You don’t know shit. If you’re looking for a quick fuck, you’re looking at the wrong girl. I don’t care how good looking you are. I’m taken.”

“So you said a few nights ago.”

“Oh, I’m sorry I thought maybe my rejection didn’t get through the last time.” Marcella rolled her eyes and headed for the restroom. She was exhausted from lack of sleep. Two hours a night just wasn’t cutting it.

Walking to the last stall, she made sure no one saw her go in. She quickly vanished back to her hotel room.

“Fucking prick, I swear.” She snapped her fingers placing on a white gown almost identical to the one she wore with Dominic. Tonight, she’d finally get some rest. That is, if the nightmares didn’t wake her again.

“My my, what a vision you are. And powerful, very, very powerful if I do say so. Who’s your master?”

Marcella spun around, seeing a vampire she’d never seen before walking out of the darkness of her restroom. “How in the hell did you get in my room?”

“You’ve been asking for me. I thought I would meet the only vampire in town who wasn’t my servant.”

“You’re Ambrose?”

“You’re correct. Now tell me. Who’s your master?”

She took in his black hair and pale skin. The bangs rested just even with his defined cheek bones, the rest of the length came just above his shoulders. She noticed all the vampires shared the same dark green eyes, and he wasn’t an exception. His features were beautiful, perfect. A dark business suit covered his body, showing off his small waist and wide shoulders. Remembering his question, she took a step forward. “Me. I don’t take orders from anyone but myself.”

“*Tisk, tisk.* You’re wrong, my sweets. Everyone has a master. Yours is in big trouble if he lost you. I need to know his or her name.”

“Well, I don’t have one to give you, I’m sorry.”

“Tell me why it is that you don’t think you have a master?”

Marcella watched as he sat down on her bed. The pounding of her heart caused her whole body to vibrate. What was she supposed to do now? She could turn collector, but how would she detain him, try to read what was on her chest, and keep him quiet? *Jason.*

"If you give me a moment, I'll tell you." She closed her eyes, feeling for her connection to her boyfriend. Once she had it she focused on pulling him through, but nothing happened. Stunned, she tried again. In all the training, she'd summoned everything, but him. Dominic, objects, even Samael came to her. Why not her own servant?

"Would you mind if I made a quick phone call?"

Ambrose gestured toward the phone. "Be my guest. Just make it quick. I don't have all night."

"Thanks." Marcella grabbed it and dialed out, punching in Jason's cell. After four rings the voicemail came on. "Uh, Jason...call me." She hung up and looked at him nervously.

"Sorry, okay, well you see. Fuck!" She knew she couldn't let him go or get the upper hand. Desperate, she closed her eyes and felt for Dominic. Their connection remained, but was very weak. Focusing all of her energy, she grabbed a hold of it and jerked hard. A ripple echoed through her body and she knew she had strengthened their tie.

"What the fuck?" Dominic hit the ground hard landing on his back. Groaning, he rolled to the side, his eyes heavy with sleep. The dark circles made Marcella gasp. He looked nothing like the flawless angel she'd left. He resembled hell. Knots covered his silky hair, and his face looked weary. Was he drunk?

"Have you been drinking?"

Dominic stood, his body falling forward before catching itself. "No, I wish. The temptation was certainly there, but I knew you wouldn't like it. I've only just gone to sleep."

"Since when? You look horrible."

"Since you left," he said, looking around the room tiredly. "Where are we?"

"Never mind that right now. I want you to meet someone." Marcella took a deep breath and walked closer to Ambrose.

"Look, woman, I don't know what you're up to, but this isn't your master. He's a demon, not a vampire."

"I already told you, I'm my own master."

"Ambrose, meet my... mate, Dominic."

"Mate? Impossible. Vampires don't mate with demons."

“This is Ambrose?” Dominic asked, confused. “I expected him to be older. Not so...pretty.”

A laugh filled the room sending sharp pains down Marcella’s skin. “I’m over four hundred years old. Don’t let this face fool you. I’m capable of things you could only dream about.”

“And I’m thousands of years, older. Now, let’s cut the bullshit. Marcella, do you know that thing you did when you left with Jason? Do you think you could do that again?”

Thinking back on how she made Jason disappear with her, she shook her head. “I think so, but Jason usually does it. I haven’t tried it since, but I’m sure it couldn’t be too hard.”

“To the house, then?”

“Are you serious? I knew you’d try to trick me into going back there! You have some nerve, Dominic. To stoop so low is beyond what I thought capable of you. You hurt me by lying, now you’re trying to manipulate me, too?”

Marcella buried her face in her hands and pretended to cry. The vampire instantly reached out to comfort her. “Don’t cry. Shh, it’s going to be all right. I won’t let anyone hurt you”

Wrapping her arms around Ambrose’s waist she shut her eyes, visualizing Dom’s bedroom. Guilt settled in the pit of Marcella’s stomach, but she knew what she had to do. Opening her eyes, the familiar bed sat a few feet away. Jumping back, Marcella wrapped the invisible wall around Ambrose.

“What in the hell was that about? You really don’t think I’d do that, do you?” Tears clouded Dominic’s eyes as he walked toward her.

“Of course not. Did you really think he’d let me bring him here on his own? I’m not sure what he’s capable of and truthfully, I’m not ready to find out. He’s got a hell of a laugh, that’s for sure. Now, I need help taking his soul. Someone’s going to have to keep him contained long enough for me to get my mouth near his. I knew if I changed and began reading the chant he’d know what I was doing. And Jason of course isn’t answering his damn phone.”

“Why didn’t you summon him?”

"I tried, but I can't," Marcella whispered, turning away. Looking at him hurt her heart. She wanted to touch him, taste him. Another part wanted to scream at him for lying to her, for breaking their trust.

"He's your servant. You have to be able to bring him to you."

"I'm telling you, I tried!"

"Fine, okay. I'm sorry. Marcella..."

The strength of Dominic's presence directly behind her caused her eyes to close. The need to feel him make contact caused every inch of her skin tingle and tighten. She quickly took a step away from him.

"It's two in the morning. He's probably asleep. Why was Ambrose in your hotel room while you were dressed like...that?" Dominic walked over to the bed picking up her nightgown from next to his pillow.

"I just got home. I changed and was headed to bed when he walked out of my restroom. He heard that I was asking around for him."

"Oh, where were you?"

"Dominic, really, come on. You know exactly where I was."

"At two in the morning? Were you out partying?"

"No, not partying, asking questions."

Marcella walked to the wall looking in at a very angry Ambrose. She made a chair appear next to him but he still stood. Rubbing her eyes sleepily, she turned to Dom. "Will the wall hold if I go back to my room and go to sleep? I don't think I have the energy to take his soul tonight. I'm about to drop here."

"I'm not sure. I've never seen you do this besides that one day. You can sleep in the bed if you want. I'll stay awake and watch over him. Just...please don't leave."

Perplexed, she looked at his hurt features. "Dominic, I'm not sure that's such a good idea. I can't..." Marcella took a deep breath. "I think it'll make things worse."

"It won't. I would never do anything to upset you, but do you know how much I miss you? I'm empty without you here. I'll never lie to you again, I promise."

"So Jason keeps telling me. Dom, I trusted you. I *need* to be able to trust you and I'm not sure that I can. What happens if something else tragic occurs? Are you going to keep that from me too just to spare my feelings?"

“No, never again. As long as I can be there to help you through it, I’ll take whatever comes. Please just give me a chance to prove myself to you. After we’re done with Ambrose, stay here with me. You can have this room, I’ll find another. Just let me see your face. Let me hear you laugh.”

“I don’t know.” Marcella changed into a collector and climbed in the bed, fighting to keep her eyes open. “I’ll have to think about it. Tonight, I sleep here just to see if the wall holds. Tomorrow’s a different story.”

“All right.” He placed a chair next to the bed and sat down. “As long as I have you for tonight, I’m okay with that.”

The last of his words echoed into her subconscious while days of deprived sleep took a hold of her fast, pulling her in an abyss of darkness. She welcomed it, giving herself over to it fully. Never had she been happier to be back in the bed she’d become accustomed to.

* * * *

Dominic sat staring at Marcella’s sleeping form. She was beautiful, so much more so than he remembered. Nine days felt longer than all of his days of existing. Leaning in, he took in her unique fragrance, letting it drift through his body. Now that he had her here, sleep was the last thing from his mind. He’d stay awake forever watching her if he could. The half hour he’d spent so far didn’t feel nearly long enough.

“What is it you plan to do with me?” Ambrose asked from the chair he finally rested in.

“That’s none of your concern. Just...be quiet.” Dominic raised his hand trying to stress the point.

Turning back to stare at Marcella, he ignored the master vampire’s sigh. All he wanted was to be left alone in his own little world with just the two of them, but Ambrose kept interrupting his thoughts.

“I don’t see how I can help you trapped behind this thing you have me in. Let me out and I’ll do whatever you wish.”

“I said be quiet. If you wake her you’re going to piss me off and trust me, you *don’t* want to do that.”

“You love her very much. I can tell.”

“Yes, of course I do. She’s my angel. My everything.”

“So why did you lie to her? You did lie, didn’t you? She wouldn’t be staying in a hotel room if you did not. And why is it she is there, and not you? Did you not give her the option to stay in this grand house of yours?”

Dominic watched him extend his arms to show the room. Annoyance stirred inside of him. “Do you ever stop talking?”

“They’re simple questions, no?”

“They’re annoying questions, but if you must know, yes I lied. And no, I didn’t give her the option because she vanished. But if she wouldn’t have, I would have gladly left. Not knowing where she was made me sick to my stomach.”

“What lie could be so bad that she would leave?”

“None of your business. Now go to sleep, or something. Just let me spend these hours with her. It may be the last time I get to see her sleep.”

Silence filled the room and Dominic went back to focusing on Marcella. He wanted to memorize every curve that made up her body, the way her breasts rose slightly and fell deeply while she exhaled. The smallest details about her, he wanted to lock away in his memory, forever.

“Do you think she would like you watching her?”

Dominic growled lowly shooting his gaze in Ambrose’s direction. “I said be quiet. One more word and I put a gag on you and tie you to the chair. Don’t think I won’t do it. I won’t even have to leave where I’m sitting to make it happen.”

“I believe you, demon. My worry lies for the girl. You’re very unstable. Do you know that?”

“Tell me about it. Now enough.”

Picking up a lock of Marcy’s hair, he slid the silk between his fingers. So many times he weaved his hands through the tresses while making love to her. Never once, did he think he’d miss the feel. The thought, never crossed his mind.

He lifted the loose curl to his nose and took another breath, holding in the fragrance for as long as he could. The change in her breathing made him freeze. The silk fell from his fingers and he quickly pulled back.

“Not so brave now, are you demon?”

The words muted as he watched her turn over toward him in her sleep. Like a child, she curled into a ball. Fascinated, he watched her expressions

change. He wasn't sure what she was dreaming of, but it didn't look alarming enough to wake her.

"Dom," she whispered.

A smile appeared on his face as he leaned toward her. "Yes, Marcella," he whispered back. Her face turned toward the mattress only to move back in front of him.

"Dom," she said louder.

The smile melted away at the tear that rolled from her closed eyes. Again, she repeated his name, flinging herself to her back. He looked down at the mattress angry at himself for lying to her. Being without her had been pure torture, no doubt she'd felt something similar. All mates went through pain if separation occurred, whether they wanted to be split up or not.

"Dominic!" She flew into a sitting position, repeatedly screaming his name. On impulse, his arms wrapped around her, and pulled her small body to his lap. Seeing her distressed brought tears to his own eyes. Cradling her, he began rocking her gently in his arms.

"I'm so sorry, love." He wasn't sure what else to say. Slowly, he looked down and realized she never truly woke up. Not wanting to let her go, and afraid he would truly wake her, he leaned forward and grabbed the blanket, covering her in his arms. The warmth and familiarity soon settled in his body and Dominic's eyes heavily fell shut.

* * * *

"So, that's how you managed to capture, my Ambrose. With the same thing you used against me. Very clever, collector. He would have eaten you alive."

"I have no doubt."

Gwendolyn shifted on the bed, lying on her stomach to stare toward the chair Marcella sat in. Her eyes began to grow heavy as dawn quickly made its approach.

"So you know I am not truly master, why are you here?"

"I plan to get to that part soon. There isn't much left to tell."

"You've had Ambrose for a month. I'm sure there's plenty to tell."

Marcella smiled. "You'll see. Ambrose is very...amusing."

Gwen yawned, smiling. “Yes, amusing, he is. Now, collector, try to make this fast. I fear I’m not sure how much more I can listen to before I fall asleep.”

“I’ll try.” Looking at her watch Marcella realized she’d been telling the story now for four hours. She, herself, felt ready to pass out. The thought of asking the vampire to scoot over teased her mind, but she pushed herself forward ready to get this over with and face her fate.

Chapter 11

“Well, I can see you two made up. About damn time. If I would have had to go back and forth one more time, I think I would have lost my mind. Wait, who in the hell is this?”

Marcella blinked her eyes, trying to focus her vision on Jason. The familiar background that rested behind him quickly grabbed her attention. Confused, Marcella turned and looked up. Dom’s face not inches from hers caused her to jerk and fall backward from the chair. A scream didn’t even make its way out before she hit the ground.

“You had a bad dream. It’s not what you think. Ask, Ambrose.” Dominic raised his hands in an innocent gesture.

She turned toward the vampire and looked back at her mate. “He’s sleeping. I can’t ask him. Jason, where were you? I tried calling, but you didn’t answer. I needed your help last night.”

“I’m sorry, Marcy. I never heard it ring. How did you find him, anyway?”

“She’s been going out. He heard she was looking for him and he showed up in her room.”

Jason’s eyes quickly shot back to her. “You were going out after I left? Why didn’t you say something? I could have gone with you! What if something bad would have happened? Did you think Dom or I wouldn’t worry?”

“He needed to be found. And I knew you were tired after sitting bored with me in a room all day, so I let you go home and sleep. Plus, I can take care of myself.”

Marcella quickly changed her gown for a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. Walking to the invisible wall, she placed her hand along the energy force. Concentrating, she made sure she blocked the sound from entering. Ambrose didn’t need to hear what she was going to say. “I’m going to go in

there with him. If anything happens, whatever you do, don't remove that wall. *No matter what.*" She stressed the words making sure they understood.

"Absolutely not!" Jason walked forward. "You don't know what he's capable of. He might hurt you."

"But he can't kill me, can he? I need to talk to him, explain what it is I'm meant to do. Maybe he'll comply, if not, we'll have to do it forcefully."

"No one will willingly hand over their soul, Marcy. I'm telling you it's crazy. Don't do it. We'll just figure out a way to hold him down while you take it."

Dom came forward. "Jason, you have to let her try. I don't like her plan either, but I'm willing to let her give it a shot."

Marcella looked toward her mate and quickly turned away. The pain was still too fresh, and for him to display his trust, hurt. "Thank you." Closing her eyes, she let herself break through the wall. The ripple of the energy shut behind her and caused her ears to pop. She looked down at the sleeping vampire, admiring his beauty. Something about him tugged at her memory.

"Ambrose, wake up. We need to talk."

The paleness of his form didn't move. Leaning down she gripped his shoulder, shaking it gently. "Ambrose."

The feel of her hair wrapped around her face as she was suddenly spun around and slammed into the floor. Panicked, she raised her hand toward the guys. "Don't break the wall!" Fangs sunk into her neck making her eyes close. Pleasure exploded throughout her as Ambrose's body covered hers.

Dominic stalked toward them but paused just outside. "Don't," Marcella whispered. Fire infested her body while a hand wrapped around her hip and the other around the back of her neck. The master vampire moaned against her throat, gripping tighter with his fingers.

Unrecognizable flashes covered Marcy's vision, flickering so fast she couldn't decipher what they meant. Paralyzed, she stared blindly at the ceiling watching the light hallowing from behind the projection, eventually dying out with the pictures. Her world turned black while her mind fought to break the vampire's hold. Hollow voices registered in the background, but the words were muffled making it impossible to decipher what they were saying. Trying her hardest to listen, she was surprised when a clear laugh broke through.

“Marcella, you really didn’t think Ambrose would be so easy now did you?”

“Samael? Where are you? I can’t see anything? What in the hell happened? Wasn’t he just feeding?”

“Of course you would think that. You’re in-between right now, sort of dead in a way, but not quite. I’ve taken the job of being your angel since I figured you needed one. Are you ready to give up your so called life with your men? I can end this now, and you can be happy here with me.”

Marcella internally groaned, surprised she could hear it against the open expanse. “No that’s okay. I’d rather stay with Dom and Jason, thank you.”

“Are you sure? You feel so miserable inside.”

“Send me back!”

“Okay, but I’ll be seeing you, again. Have fun.”

Air pushed into Marcella’s lungs causing her chest to ache. Jason and Dominic looked enraged as their hands rested along the wall. Ambrose stood staring at them, blood dripping from his mouth. No one noticed her laying there with her eyes open. Every inch of her body began burning with heat. Angry, she tapped on the energy, catching everyone’s attention.

“Thank God! I thought he killed you for sure,” Jason said, angry tears coming to his eyes. Ambrose stared down at her amazed.

“What in the hell did you do to me? This shit burns. You better hope it stops soon or else it’s not looking so good for you.”

“You’re not dead?” The vampire took a step back, clearly not sure how to take the news.

“Not even close. You see, I can’t die. Do you know what I am?”

“You’re a collector. I heard you say it, but it can’t be true.” He collapsed to the chair and rested his head in his hands.

“Then you know what I need from you.”

“I will not give you my soul. It’s the only thing I have remotely left of my humanity. You can’t have it.”

Marcella sighed. “Look. I understand why you wouldn’t want to part with it. Hell, no one knows better than me. But I do have to have it. Tell me, you drank my blood, what did you see?”

“You lost your family not long ago. You’re a good person. This...thing, that’s happened to you. It’s another personality, another form of you, but we both know your collector doesn’t define who you are.”

Confused, Marcella knelt down before him. You also saw Samael, then? You know it is he who wants your soul, not me?”

“Yes, but I don’t know why. What is he planning to do with it?”

“Truthfully, I don’t know. He’s an angel, albeit a dark one. There’s a possibility that he can deliver to both sides, but I’m not sure what his intention are for you.”

“Will I die?”

“Absolutely not. You’ll live your life until you pass. You just go where they have you.” Marcella lowered her voice and leaned in closer to him until she could feel her breath along his cheek. “You know if you’re good, things can change, right? It’s all up to you.”

Silence greeted her for a long time and she slowly stood, feeling her body revolt against her. “What in the hell did you do to me? Shit,” she groaned.

“I poisoned you blood. You really should be dead. It was meant to be a pleasurable death.”

“Poisonous pleasuring? Interesting.”

“Yes, it is a nice weapon. Anyway, I thank you for the warning, but I still can’t hand over my soul. I hope you understand.”

Marcella looked down to Ambrose and smiled. “I wasn’t counting on you to make this easy.” Lifting her hands she extended the walls out another five feet. The vampire immediately stood.

“And so it begins.” He laughed and charged for her. Vanishing, Marcella placed herself behind him and slammed his body to the ground.

“Yes, it begins.”

“I’m not going to take it easy on your because you’re a woman.”

Before Marcy could answer him, her arms were waving through the air wildly as her legs were knocked from the ground. Hitting the floor hard, she turned her gaze to see Ambrose, but he was already climbing on top of her. Marcella disappeared again and spun him over, pinning him to the ground.

“Your strength is amazing, collector.”

“Thank you. Does this at all feel familiar to you?”

Feeling his hips buck forcefully, she flew forward, pushing off the wall to remain sitting on his chest. "Now that you mention it, I do feel like we've done this before."

His hands wedged under her thighs throwing her into the energy force. Marcella groaned as she caught herself before she slid to the ground.

"All right, you're starting to piss me off."

"I'm just getting started. Let me show you some of the cool things I can do." He laughed wildly and like the previous night, fire raced across her skin. Marcy cried out, slapping at her arms. The moment he stopped the pain ceased.

"Nice, my turn."

Heat established itself behind her eyes and she felt them begin to glow. The vampire levitated off the ground and his limbs seemed to fight against the lack of gravity. He opened his mouth, but she didn't give him a chance to speak. Marcella slammed him into the wall at a force that sent his head bouncing off the energy.

"Now, I need your soul."

"Marcella, may I?"

Dominic motioned for her and she nodded. The wall opened enough to let him in, and Jason quickly ran in behind. "There's no way I'm letting you all have the fun without me. No one hurts my girlfriend and gets away with it."

"It was hard to watch, wasn't it? I didn't like it at all." Dom advanced quickly.

Large hands grasped the vampire by his shoulders and slammed him into the wall, repeatedly. Marcella and Jason both had to pull the demon off of Ambrose. "That's enough. I'm making you get out if you do something like that again."

"Fine, I'm done," Dom said, raising his hands in submission. "Now, grab him and lay him down. I want this over with."

A small bed appeared, and Jason, along with Dom held the vampire down. Marcy pulled off her shirt and straddled Ambrose's waist. He bucked wildly but she dug into him with her knees so he couldn't throw her.

Light shone through her skin and she looked down at the symbol on her chest. Gold letters shone brightly through her skin. She opened her mouth to speak, but the words wouldn't come.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

Meeting Dom’s eyes, she felt the beginning of fear. “I’m not sure. Something won’t let me repeat the chant.”

“What do you mean,” Jason asked, fighting against the vampire’s arm.

“Just what I said! I’m not being allowed to speak the words.”

A loud sigh escaped her boyfriend’s mouth. “Please try again, baby. He’s stronger than you think.”

Nodding, Marcella stared at the words and let them repeated in her head. The moment she opened her mouth, her throat felt like it was literally closing up. “I can’t.” A sob broke came out as she looked down at Ambrose’s scared face. What she was doing left her horrified. “I can’t. Oh God, this isn’t right. Let’s regroup and see what we can do. There’s no point in restraining him if we don’t have to. We’ll come back when we think of something.”

They all reappeared on the other side of the invisible force and Marcella stomped the floor, blocking off the room from hearing any sound. “I can’t take this. Did you see his face? This can’t be how collecting is done. It doesn’t feel right. We were so close and yet nothing happened. There has to be a reason. What did I do wrong?”

“Nothing, we’re just missing something.” Dominic went to sit on the bed while he glared at Ambrose.

Marcella pulled her hair out of her face, and tried to think. “The only thing we’re missing in this situation is consent. It’s no better than rape. That’s exactly what it feels like I’m doing.”

“You may be on to something.” Dominic stood walking toward the wall. “You can’t take it from him, he’s going to have to submit and let you.” He turned around, facing them and closed his eyes. “Collectors used to be known to have thousands of followers and servants. They,” Dominic looked at her and got quiet for a moment. “They were icons, so to speak. But more than that, their people loved them, worshipped everything about what they were. Does that make sense? They never had to take anything from anyone. They found ways to win them over.”

“You’re saying I need to make him love me? Are you fucking serious? Like I don’t have enough problems as it is.”

Dominic shrugged. “I can’t believe I didn’t think of that earlier. I’m afraid it’s the only way.”

Marcy rolled her eyes. "Well I gave him one hell of a first impression. Great. I'll be back." Slowly, she made her way back to the wall, looking at the angry vampire. "Oh, and if he knocks me out and kills me again, don't worry Samael is having fun sending me back. It seems he's taken the position of being my angel. Funny, isn't it? There's something about that guy. I can't place my finger on it, but if you ask me, he's enjoying this too much."

"Fucking great," Dominic spit out.

Walking through the wall, electricity hit Marcella's chest hard, sending her to her knees. Lifting her hand she blocked another round, sending it back his way. Ambrose yelped and rubbed his own chest. "Hurts, doesn't it? Now enough games. Lay on the bed."

The look he gave her made her laugh. "I'm not going to try to take your soul. I want to talk."

"You want to talk now? After everything you've done, you want to carry a civil conversation?"

"Yes, I acted horribly before. I'm sorry. It's not like the person I truly am at all. You've tasted my blood. You know I speak the truth. You've also seen the options Samael has given me. If I don't have your soul, I lose Dom. We both know I can't do that. You felt what I do, right?"

A heavy sigh left the vampire while he lay down on the bed. Marcella joined him, throwing her leg comfortably over his waist. She had no clue who this person was, but she planned to get very much at ease with him, so she wasn't about to hold back. Nuzzling her face in his neck, she held him.

"Now, tell me what you felt when you tasted my blood."

"You love your men very much. As you did your family. To you, they are everything."

Marcella nodded. "They're all I have in this world, Ambrose." She let a few moments pass while thoughts of Dom tried pushing their way in. Refusing to listen, she got to the point. "I want you to tell me everything about you, from your childhood up until today. Tell me your likes and dislikes. What your favorite thing to do is and what do you find most pleasurable."

He turned to her, pulling her leg high up on his waist. "Why do you want to know all of this? You're going to take my soul regardless, aren't you?"

"I'm afraid that's up to you. You see, I could lie to you, but I don't like lies. To get your soul you have to love me and give it freely. But I won't take your love without returning it. That is why I want to know everything that makes you the person you are. If you can love me, just a little, I promise I will spend the rest of my days taking care of anything you need. You can go back to your old life or stay here with me. It'll be up to you."

Green eyes stared into hers for a long time. "What if I can't love? What if I don't want to?"

Marcella thought about his words. "Then I learn to deal with my failure. I'll lose Dom and since I love him, I'll reject giving him over to the underworld. They'll eventually find out about me and kill me. But you see they've already done that once before. I can't remember why, but here I am. I refuse to surrender and even if it is thousands of years later, I'll come back."

"You're like no one I've ever met before. I'm not sure what to think about you."

Cool fingers traced down her jaw line until they reached her neck. She shivered under the soft caress. "There's something about you and I can't figure out what it is. Are you sure we haven't met before?"

Marcella shook her head. "No, not that I'm aware of."

"Pity. Things could have been different." The tips of his fingers paused over her pulse point. "I really wish I could have enjoyed your blood, instead of ruining it. You tasted so good. It's been a while since I've fed and I haven't had nearly enough."

"It should be fine now. If you want, I'll let you drink on one condition."

"What's that?"

Placing her palm on his cheek, she pulled his lips down to brush hers. "Don't take advantage of the situation. You're a vampire. I know you need blood. I also know you're a seducer. There's nothing more that I want than for you to feel comfortable around me. Just don't push things too fast, okay?"

A look of surprise passed over his features. "I promise. But it may be you I have to contain. I respect your wish while you're under my influence. See, like you, my true power doesn't come out until my donor submits. The pleasure you felt before was only a fraction of what I can give you."

Just hearing his declaration caused an unknown fear. “Will you give me a moment?”

He laughed. “Of course.”

Marcella stood and entered the bedroom. Uneasiness settled over her while she looked at the two men she loved. Their faces masked something she couldn’t read. “You heard what is going on. I need to know where you both stand with this. It’s become clear to me now what direction my life is taking.”

“Please tell me what direction that is?” Jason asked angrily. “Are you going to have to love and fuck every man Samael assigns you? Or how about followers? Are you going to have to fuck every follower you acquire?”

“Jason, don’t talk to her that way. Just, everyone stop for a minute.” Dominic sat down on the bed. “What she has to do is going to be hard for both of us, but it’s what she is. What she’s made to do. I just wish I would have remembered and put the pieces together sooner so we could have been prepared. She’s a collector, Jason. Collectors had lovers, but they had to have a certain amount of freedom. I think.” Dom shook his head aggravated. “I wish I would have listened to the stories more, but they’re pretty forbidden to talk about.”

“Well, I don’t like it, and I don’t like him.”

Marcella walked up to her best friend and held both of his hands in hers. “Jason, it’s the way it has to be. He’s not bad, I can feel it. I think he just needs love and gentleness.”

“And you can give that to him, is that it?”

“You know she can,” Dominic said, walking over to them. “I’m behind you no matter what happens, now or in the future. As long as I have you here with me, you can bring a hundred people to live in this house and I’d sleep beside you every night without a single fear of losing you.”

Jason’s jaw fell opened. “Well, I’m glad someone can handle it because I’m not sure I can. I feel your need, Marcella, right here,” he said, pushing his palm against her chest. “But I’m telling you, in the long run it might be too much for me to take.”

“You’re not the only one who’s going to have to deal with sharing, Jason. You forget what you are. At some point you’ll have to collect, and when you do, you’ll be bringing in followers and servants of your own. I’ve

lived my life by saying I won't share you, but it looks like I don't have much of a choice, either. Do you know how sick that makes me?"

Jason's skin grew extremely pale. "I didn't think about it that way. I'm sorry. It looks like we're both stuck in the same situation."

"Yes, but we'll still have each other. And that's all that matters."

"You're right. I think I need to go...think. Tell him I said welcome to the family."

"Thank you," Ambrose yelled through the wall.

Marcella rolled her eyes, forgetting she didn't think to make it to where he couldn't hear. "Well, if you don't mind Dom, I'd like some time alone with Ambrose. He needs to feed and we have a lot to discuss."

"Right. I think I'll just go with Jason. Be careful. If you need me, just do the summons."

Nodding, Marcella turned back to the vampire. "You weren't supposed to hear that." Walking through the wall she sat easily on the bed, swinging her feet up to lie down. The sound of the bedroom door closing put her at ease. She really didn't want them to witness what might happen.

"I'm glad I got to hear. Now, come lay closer and relax. I promise not to let you try to rip my clothes off." He laughed.

"Is it really that good?"

"I hear it is better. If you would like to put your shirt back on, I can wait."

Looking down at the white lace bra, Marcella's cheeks heated. She'd become so comfortable in the nude she hadn't even noticed she still remained almost topless. "Actually if you don't mind, I think I'll get back in my gown. It's more comfortable and easier for you to feed. But maybe this one will be red. White is for Dominic."

"Works for me," he said shrugging.

Changing her appearance, Marcella curled into his arms, giving him the best angle for her neck. She could feel her heart rapidly beating from not knowing what to expect.

"Calm," he said quietly, while moving his hand in the air inches above her body. Instant serenity filled her. Wrapping her arm around his side, she placed her leg over his hip, enjoying the peace she felt.

Looking directly into her eyes, Ambrose formed some kind of link with the mind. The pull sucked her in like a magnet. The dangers he was capable

of went beyond her knowledge or even her understanding. While fighting him, she'd been so focused on what his next move would be that she never really looked into his deep green depths. Now that he had her in some type of trance, she knew she was trapped against ever getting out of what he might want her to do.

"You promised me love, even the smallest amount. Here, you can't lie to me. From your mouth comes only the truth, for I will it so. Blood can hide many things, I've come to find. Now that we're alone, I'm going to ask you a series of questions and I'll decide whether or not to attempt to kill you again. Is this clear?"

Robotically, Marcella opened her mouth. "Yes."

"Perfect. The first question I ask you is this: Do you truly want my soul for yourself or for Samael?"

"Samael wants your soul."

"Interesting." The vampire bit his bottom lip as he seemed to go over something in his head. "Now, is it true that you feel you can love me or do you lie?"

"I want to love you. But not as a mate."

Ambrose grew quiet as he stared at her, keeping his eyes locked. "Is this because you already have two men or is it because you don't find me attractive?"

"You're very attractive, beautiful. But I have a mate, and a boyfriend."

"If I won your heart and you truly began to love me, would you become my lover?"

Marcella's mind went crazy with wanting to scream, but she couldn't stop her voice from responding. What kind of questions were these anyway?

"My body does react to yours sexually, yes. I assume if things happened positively between us we could become lovers. That is if my men didn't have a problem with it. If they said no, I would have to decline."

"What if I bit you now and wanted to make love to you before you had a chance to talk with them? Would you be extremely angry at me, even if you wanted it?"

"I told you from the start that you weren't to take advantage of me. I would be angry."

"I respect your wishes. Now look away from me and you'll become yourself again."

It took everything Marcy had to break the connection. She turned, blinking her eyes repeatedly.

“You didn’t lie before. Thank you for being honest.”

“What in the hell was that? You didn’t ask my permission first.”

“You didn’t warn me of your kidnapping, either. We’re not even yet, but close, my sweets. Now I feed. Come sit on my lap and face me. If we’re lying down it might make things harder for you.”

Hesitantly, she crawled onto his lap straddling his waist. He removed the jacket to the business suit he wore and laid it next to them on the bed. Unbuttoning the first two buttons of his shirt, she watched as his pale skin captivated her. More than anything, she wanted to run her fingers across the exposed flesh. Confused with her reaction she turned her head away from him.

“Now calm,” he repeated like before, moving his hands just above her back. Marcella felt herself become so relaxed she leaned back against his waiting arms. Supporting her head, he brought her lips to his. The softness pushed into hers and quickly moved along her jaw line. Arousal took over her body at the feel of him touching her.

Air brushed against the beginning of her neck while he kissed his way down. The bite happened so fast she wasn’t expecting the near orgasm that almost exploded from her body. Clutching to his back she moaned deeply trying to control her reaction. Everything inside of her begged for more contact, yearned for it.

A cross between a moan and a groan came from his throat as he slammed her to the bed on her back. With his fangs still inside of her and his body pressed against hers, she couldn’t help but grab at him tighter. She knew she was in trouble from succumbing to her needs. The orgasm that tightened her stomach begged for release and she wasn’t sure she could handle the ecstasy that would follow.

The arms he held her with distanced themselves. She felt him try to pull up, hesitate, then break himself away from her neck, panting. With how heavy her eyes felt, controlling her focus proved impossible.

“You’re blood,” he gasped. “It’s beyond powerful. It’s like nothing I’ve ever tasted. Before, with the poison, you were immediately tainted. Now...I can’t breathe.”

“Are you hurt?” She slurred, sitting up. “I’m sorry if it’s not good.”

“Don’t say...not good. Your blood is the greatest thing I’ve ever tasted. Better than any food or drink I can remember. I think it best if you leave before I break my word. If you knew how hard it was to control myself, you’d thank me and be gone.”

Marcella stood on shaky legs. “Thank you.” She quickly stepped out of his little box and rushed to the restroom. Pains shot through her stomach with the need she felt. Cobwebs circled around her ankles while she cursed the succubus that haunted her when the need became too much. There was only one person she could call and the thought scared her beyond anything she could think of.

Chapter 12

Marcella tried changing into every supernatural creature she could think of to hold the succubus at bay, but the damn thing just wouldn't stop taking over. Looking in the mirror at her body, temporarily a collector, she knew she had to do. Dammit. It was time to open back up to the one person she was afraid would hurt her again.

Summoning Dominic, the cobwebs shot through her at the speed of light. A moan came from her mouth at the overwhelming lust that accompanied the change.

Gripping onto the marble countertop and closing her eyes tightly, Marcella heard him hit the floor with a thud. The sound almost made her laugh, but the urges overpowered her continued clumsy summoning of her mate.

"Damn woman, you really need to learn to do that without dropping me on my ass. What's wrong? Are you okay?"

She turned and looked at him. The need to seduce took over her instinctively. His small gasp was followed with a step backward.

"Marcella, we both know that you need Jason. You're not mad at him. If something happens now, you'll be pissed at yourself later."

A painful groan came from her mouth while she clutched to her stomach. "Dom, I don't think there's time. Where is he?"

"We just arrived in front of his house. He wanted to talk to his mother. I could call him. Can you wait five, maybe ten minutes?"

"No. It's either you or Ambrose and I'd prefer it be with you. You're my mate. He's a great guy, but a stranger. Please, Dominic."

"You're not going to be angry with me?"

"I'd be angrier if you let me walk out this door and fuck our guest."

A sigh left his lips, but he nodded. "Not here, take us to the next bedroom." The thickness in his voice tightened her stomach even more.

Dominic picked her up holding her to straddle his waist. His lips eased to hers as she made them appear in the next bedroom over. They hit the bed bouncing. Vanishing Dom's clothes, the feel of his skin ignited an inferno in her body. Hungrily, she kissed him, drinking in his missed taste.

"I never thought this would be happening again. A part of me wishes it wasn't. I didn't want you to come to me because of this."

Marcella glanced down at his stressed features. "I'm sorry. If it makes you feel any better, I've missed you. Don't think I don't want this to happen. What comes of it scares me more than the act itself. The act, I love."

Fingers slid deep within her wet pussy. Moaning, she sank down on them further. "Dominic, I don't have time. The pain...I need you inside of me."

He lifted her by the hips while she eased the tip of his cock inside of her. Even as a succubus, she could feel herself having to stretch to fit his size, but within seconds she eased to the base.

"Fuck. Marcy, maybe I should get on top."

"No," she said, leaning forward to grip his chest. Ecstasy took over as she began to ride his cock. Sinking her nails in his muscle, she rocked her hips faster, taking him in as deep as he would go.

"Dominic," she reached, pulling him into a sitting position.

Fingers found her clit, rubbing the area in circles while she continued to bury him within her. Trembling took over her body as her orgasm released forcefully. Screams quickly were cut off by his mouth. The flavor of him overwhelmed her, sucking her into memories of the last time they were together.

Fingers gripped into her hip while Dominic tried to get her to ride his cock faster. "I want you to get on your knees. Can you do that for me? I want to fuck you real good, love."

Marcella moaned and nodded at the same time, easing from his lap. Getting on her knees, fingers buried themselves in her pussy, pounding extremely hard and fast. Gripping the comforter in her hands, Marcella turned around to watch him.

"You like that, Marcy?"

"Fuck, yes."

"Are you ready for my cock to pound your pussy like that?"

Biting her lip against the beckoning orgasm, she pushed back into his fingers. “Yes. Give it to me the exact way your fingers just fucked me.”

Wetness allowed him to slide easily into her. Reaching a whole new depth, Marcella cried out from the building heat. Dominic leaned forward wrapping his arm around her waist. The palm that pressed against her stomach moved down until he made contact with her clit.

“Arch your back more, love. I want my cock buried so deep inside of you that you never forget what it feels like.”

Complying, Marcella gripped the comforter tighter while he pushed through depths never before, discovered. She could feel him in her core, in her very soul. “Dominic, fuck me faster. I’m so close.”

Looking back, she watched him stare at their joining. With every increased thrust he held her hips tighter. The sound of their bodies slapping together brought Marcella’s climax to a whole another level. She tightened around him, but lost concentration once the liquid heat pumped inside of her. Energy exploded from him, feeding her body.

It wasn’t until Marcella heard the sound of Dominic’s body hitting the bed that she realized she’d drained him completely. Dazed by the drugged feeling, she turned toward him sluggishly. Dom lay there fast asleep. She smiled as she pulled the blanket over and covered him. It probably wasn’t a good idea to go so long without bringing out her succubus.

Moving in inches to his face, she stared at his features. “You’re no demon at all. You’re too beautiful to be labeled with such an ugly name. I really did miss you.”

The sound of the door opening tore her eyes from his face. Jason came in looking alarmed. “Thank god you’re here. I was afraid of what might have happened.” He walked slowly up to her. “When Dominic disappeared I knew something was wrong. You really wore him out, didn’t you?”

“Jason, quit making jokes. My succubus is not done so that means I need you to help me.”

“What’s wrong with fangs in the bedroom? With the whole feeding thing, I thought that’s why we were meant to leave. You didn’t...fuck him?”

“No, of course not. He’s still a stranger and a guest in this house.”

“Dominic was a stranger.”

“Dominic’s my mate, Jason. To me, we’ve known each other forever. That’s the way it feels here.” Marcella pulled his hand up to push against her heart. He stared at her breasts, licking his lips.

“I guess that makes sense. I wouldn’t know. All I know is the way I feel for you, but the way you describe a mate makes me wish I had one.”

Pain raced through Marcella’s chest. “I’m sorry, Jason. I didn’t choose who I’d be mated to.”

“I know, babe. That came out wrong. If I hurt your feelings, I’m sorry. It’s just that sometimes I think everything we’ve shared over a period of years took you seconds to reach with Dom. Now, what the two of you have surpasses what we share.”

“No, Jason. I may be mated to Dominic, but I love you both the same. I can’t be without him anymore than I can be without you. Without one, I’d be incomplete.”

The effects of the succubus subsided as she fought her emotions. She quickly changed to her collector form before the temptations of the other creature could convince her to play the role of a seducer.

“Well at least my depressing talk scared away your demon.” He laughed.

“Jason, please. I know how much this new life we both have hurts you. I can see it in your eyes. You hate what you’ve become and the blame lies on me. I did this to you. Please forgive me.”

“Come here, you.”

Warmth surrounded her while he held her in his arms tightly. The weight of their overall plans to deal with the soul collecting began to push against Marcella. Materializing her robe she placed it on and pulled Jason to the bed. Once he sat down, she placed her hand on Dom’s chest and brought them back into the other room.

“At least we know you can transport more than one person. That might come handy in the future. Wait till Dominic hears. I’m sure he’ll be proud of you. So how long do you think he’ll be out?”

She looked at his sleeping form, still noticing the dark circles under his eyes. “He hasn’t slept at all since I’ve been gone, but for maybe a few hours this morning. My guess is awhile. What do you have in mind?”

Jason looked toward Ambrose’s lounging form and back to her. “I assume he’s not going anywhere?”

“No. Why?”

“Because. If he’s going to be around you, I want to know more about him. How do you so easily trust someone who’s already basically killed you as much as they can?”

“Hello, I kidnapped him and tried to take his soul. If that’s not a good enough reason, what is? The poor guy has every right to be angry.”

“Still, the way you react to him. It just doesn’t seem normal.”

“I’m going to have to take his soul. Just the thought goes against my morals. To me, no one should be able to take a soul unless they were god or the devil himself. But I didn’t make the rules, and I’m only doing what I’m supposed to. I collect, but I can also store them for whenever I choose. A part of me strongly feels like if I wanted to, no one could take them away. Not Samael, no one. Why in my head do I believe this?”

“Marcella, I don’t know. The urges to take someone’s soul hasn’t even hit me yet. It could be because of the one I hold, but it scares me to think I’ll have to go through with the act. What do I do with them? You couldn’t pay me enough to go to Samael.”

Opening her mouth, she became immobile while the thought hit her. “You store them. Hold on to them and guard them with your life. You have to protect them, Jason, from going into the wrong hands. Someday maybe you can deliver them personally to where they need to go, but until that time comes just...wait.”

“Is there something you should be telling me? Is it a memory?”

“No, just a nagging feeling.” Marcella stared at the ground, dazed while she tried processing her emotions and thoughts.

“Well, I think your idea is a very good one. Handing over someone’s soul is big. I’m not sure I’d trust anyone to do it but myself. So, enough of this. What are we going to do about pretty boy, vampire?”

“Great, what is it with you guys? Dominic calls you loverboy. Now you’re going to call Ambrose, pretty boy. I don’t understand the two of you at all. What is Dominic considered as?”

“Definitely, the bad boy. But Ambrose, look at him, Marcy. He’s pretty. Not very manly at all.”

“Are you serious? You’re just jealous, Jason. I happen to think he’s very manly, and beautiful, if you must know. Now leave him alone.”

“That’s my point. Beautiful, like maybe he should be on the front of a magazine. It’s freaky to look at, up close.”

“No it’s not, and magazine, yes. I wonder if he’d pose in *Playgirl*?” Marcella walked away leaving Jason sucking in air. At the sound she smiled and headed for the wall. Ambrose smiled back at her, obviously listening to their conversation.

“If I let you out, will you promise not to run away or attack me? I want your word, Ambrose. I trust you. Now I need you to trust me.”

“There are things I need to do. People will be looking for me. You don’t understand. I’m a master vampire. Upon my disappearance, my lover will try to find me. Gwendolyn’s got quite a temper, you know?”

“Leave your lover to me. Do you promise or not?”

“I’ve got responsibilities, and my own servants to look after.”

“Ambrose, if you didn’t turn up, who would take over?”

“Gwen, of course. She’s the next powerful vampire, then Sebastian, after her.”

“Do you trust your lover to take care of things?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Then so do I. Your servants and responsibilities will be fine. If they’re not, you can blame me. The only thing I ask is that you give me more time with you. Can you do that? Everyone needs a vacation every once in awhile. When was the last time you got to get away from your everyday life?”

“Longer than you know. I have to admit it does feel good not have the stress of everything being thrown at me.”

Jason groaned. “Just stay. It would make Marcy happy.”

Marcella looked over at her boyfriend, smiling, and turned back to Ambrose. “So you’ll stay? Just for awhile? That’s all I ask.”

“A few days, that’s all I can spare.”

Dropping the wall completely, Marcy ran and threw herself into his arms. “This is going to be great. You’ll see. Jason, Dom, and I will take you out. It’ll be like old times before I left, right Jason?”

“Yeah, sure. If you think he can hang.”

“Oh, I can *hang*. That won’t be a problem.”

Jason smiled. “Yeah, we’ll see.” He turned from her and Ambrose, walking toward the bed. “Hey Marcy, how much sleep do you think demon’s need, anyway?”

“Don’t even think about waking him. I took a lot of energy. You weren’t here to buffer the blow.”

Ambrose nodded toward Dominic. “How did you take his energy? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“How much do you know about collectors?” Marcy pulled Ambrose to the small bed that used to be behind the walls.

“I know you can change your form, make things appear, even teleport to different places. Truly, I’m not sure on the details. I’ve never given the myth much thought. Gwyn though, she knows more about that stuff, but even I’m not sure how much she’d know when it came to this. We don’t really consider collectors a threat.”

Marcella turned to Jason and thought of where to begin. “Well, you’re right on all of those. Jason and I can do everything you said. We can also control the elements—water, air, fire, and, earth. We change into every supernatural that exists. My biggest problem as of now is the succubus. The majority of the time when my body reacts...sexually, she comes. Well, she’s me, but the need to take energy and drain a man of his sperm takes over everything. I could kill a regular human. Dominic is extremely powerful and well, you see him right now.”

“But couldn’t you just change into something else?”

Marcella laughed. “Oh trust me, I’ve tried that. It’ll prolong everything for so long, but the succubus wins or the pain becomes unbearable, and I give in. Either way, usually both Jason and Dominic have to be there so neither one ends up like that.” She gestured to the bed.

“And did this happen because of me?”

“Typical, you would think that,” Jason spat out.

“No, he’s right. It was because of him. Ambrose, your bite was...well, no words can really describe it. From the moment you sank your fangs in me I fought to take control of my body. I’m not sure it’s a good idea to continue. We might have to bring someone in to feed you.”

“So you didn’t like the way it made you feel?”

“No, I did. Too much. But we both saw how hard it was to control ourselves. I just think it would be rushing if we tempted temptation.”

Ambrose looked down toward the bed. “I’ve never reacted to someone’s blood that way before. I’m sorry, but maybe you’re right. Next time, I make no promise. I was stupid to even consider without really tasting you first.”

“How was it different than when I bite you?”

Marcella turned to Jason. “You want to find out? I’m sure Ambrose wouldn’t mind.”

“No way,” Jason said, turning his back toward them. “Well, maybe for a little bit.” He said turning back around. “If I can see how you do it then I’m sure I can duplicate the reaction.”

“You really think so?” Ambrose asked curiously.

“I know so. Make it quick and on the forearm. I don’t want you close to my neck.”

Marcella walked to both of them and led Jason to the bed while she laid on top of him. “Ambrose, give it everything you’ve got. I can’t wait to see what he thinks about this.”

“But why are you laying on me?”

“Oh, you’re going to want me here, trust me.” Marcella smiled.

Ambrose grabbed his arm, and knelt on the floor. She quickly rested her hand down the back of the vampire’s shirt. Any touch was better than no touch in her opinion. And she wanted to feel them both. Easing her lips to Jason’s, she felt his body jump at Ambrose’s bite and come to life. Hungrily, he kissed her, moving his hand under the robe to grip her ass.

“Fuck!” he groaned loudly. The rumbling that went through his body vibrated her chest.

The hardness of his cock pushed into her pussy through his jeans as he frantically tried to get them undone. Marcella let him battle with them, noticing his mind had to be so cluttered that he didn’t even think about making them disappear with his powers.

“Enough, Ambrose. I think he gets the picture.”

The vampire came up panting. “Damn you both taste so good. I think you could promise me your blood and I’d stay with you forever.”

“You’re right,” Jason said, holding Marcella down to his chest tightly. “There are no words for the way that feels. I’m sorry about attacking you, but I don’t know how you managed not to tear each other apart. There would be no way I could blame you for losing control with him. Shit, if you weren’t here I’d hate to imagine what I’d do.”

Marcy laughed and kissed his lips. “But I was here, so don’t stress.”

“I’m going to learn to do that if it’s the last thing I manage to accomplish. Damn, talk about explosive.” Jason groaned, laughing. “How

long does the effect last because everything in me is begging to take Marcella out of this room.”

Ambrose laughed. “How do you think I feel? This is the second time today.”

“How long?” Jason groaned.

“Until you get your needs met or you finish it off yourself.”

Marcella’s eyes widened at Ambrose’s statement. “You mean to tell me that you’ve been in pain this long and now you’ve made it worse? Why didn’t you say anything? Your curse is as bad as my succubus. Tell me what to do. Would you like me to summon your lover?”

“No, someone needs to be there with the others. She can’t leave. I’ll be fine.”

“No, you won’t be fine. Jason?”

“Don’t look at me! There’s nothing I can do for him.”

“That’s not what I meant. I was asking for your help. What can we do to help both of you out?”

They both stared at her until she caught their meaning and stood from the bed. “I thought we already discussed this. Ambrose and I don’t need to rush. And maybe I’m not in the mood anymore. Dominic did a wonderful job of satisfying me.”

“Yes, I have no doubt he did.” Jason circled around her slowly. A mischievous smile crossed his mouth the moment just before he attacked. Marcella burst out laughing and dodged his wide form, just in time.

“You give it away every time, Jason. What were you hoping to accomplish by tackling me down? Were you going to kiss me into submission?”

He laughed, beginning to circle around her again. “It used to work all the time.”

“Yes, but now isn’t that time, Jason. You couldn’t catch me anyway.”

“Oh no?” Jason caught her in his arms, and they fell to the floor. Lips eased against hers while he pulled her close against his body. Marcella could feel herself getting sucked into the need she began to feel.

“Jason. The time for Ambrose and me isn’t right now. I’m sorry, but either you both can find someone else or you’re going to have to wait. I’m not ready.”

A groan came from Jason's throat. "You know I won't be with anyone but you. Guess I'm waiting. What's your plan, Ambrose?"

"I wait."

Marcella looked back and forth between them. "All right. So who's up for a game of Monopoly?"

Both of the men looked at her like she'd lost her mind. Raising her eyebrow she returned their look. "Monopoly or Candyland, you pick, but it will be one, and you both *will* play. Dominic needs his rest and I'm not leaving him alone."

Jason ran his fingers through his hair. "Couldn't we play Poker or Gin? How about Go Fish? Anything but a board game. I'll fall asleep for sure."

"How about quarters?"

Marcella and Jason turned to Ambrose. "You drink?" They both spoke at the same time.

"Of course. I may be a vampire, but I can go out in the daylight. That should tell you right there that all the stereotypes aren't true. It may take me a lot to get drunk, but I can throw back a few. It may not taste very good, but even when I was human, alcohol never truly did."

"Jason, have you tried drinking in collector form?"

"No, let's try it. It'll be more of a study that actually having fun. But... Marcella, you don't drink. Are you saying you're going to try tonight?"

"I've drunk liquor before, Jason."

"That one time at Maria's party doesn't count. You threw up after three shots."

Marcella glared at him and manifested a table filled with every alcohol she could ever remember hearing about. She looked around and smiled at him.

"I bet I won't have to drink half as much as you do tonight. You're getting your ass kicked for that comment about my three drinks. That was really low, Jason. If you remember correctly, the next morning I magically caught the flu. So, I'm assuming my sickness had more to do with that than the Crown."

"I'm sorry, but tonight, you're getting so wasted. I rock at quarters." Jason raised his hands toward a small oak table he made appear and smiled. "Let's begin. I'll go first."

“Ladies first.” Marcella grabbed the quarter out of his hand and tossed it down, watching it bounce in the shot glass. Raising her eyebrow at Jason, she gestured with her hand. He missed and she died laughing. “Drink up, *babe*.”

A look of uncertainty passed his face. “That’s not fair. No manipulating the energy to make it go in.”

With a quick jerk of his hand, Jason took the shot, removed the quarter from the glass, and sucked in air. “Now that’s what I’m talking about.” He shook his head back and forth quickly making grunting sounds. “Holy shit, supernatural or not, that shit still burns like hell.”

Silver flashed in the air and liquid splashed on the table with a flick of Ambrose’s wrist. Marcella watched the quarter go in the glass. Holding her own coin she looked at her target, but didn’t stare too long knowing she could indeed easily make it go in if she wanted to. A clinking sound echoed through the room as it hit the rim.

“Drink up, my beautiful collector,” Ambrose purred.

Marcella sighed. “Well, shit.”

Closing her eyes, she threw back the tequila. Fire raced down her throat leaving a blazing path searing its way to her stomach. Tears collected in her eyes the moment she opened them.

“Feels good, doesn’t it?”

Her gaze shot to Jason who just laughed. Only one word registered through her head, water. She needed something to kill the fire resting at the back of her throat. Upon thought of what she needed the glass rose to her lips. By the time she stopped, Ambrose was making her drink again.

After the twelfth shot, Marcy could hardly concentrate on the target anymore. Gravity kept pulling her to the side. It wasn’t long before they began teasing her, asking her why she continued to sway.

“All right, Marce, just toss it in.”

“Jason, do...not call me that.” The words grew harder and harder for her to get passed her tongue with every minute.

“Just throw the quarter. You’ve been staring at the glass for five minutes already.”

She opened her mouth to argue but quickly shut it. Had she really taken that long? As soon as the thought popped into her head it disappeared just as

fast. Who cared? She blinked heavily and tossed the coin in. Liquid splashed out the side while silver floated to the bottom.

"In your face, *Jace*. Try not to miss. You're only two drinks behind me."

"And not nearly as drunk." He flicked his wrist and cursed, grabbing the shot. The tip of his finger pointed in her direction and she looked away laughing. She wouldn't say anything...yet.

"Let's just drink. I'm tired of this game. Ambrose is never going to even get to take his fourth shot at this rate."

"Okay." Marcella picked up the bottle and walked over to the bed to sit at Dominic's feet. "Hey, what do you get when you mix a vampire with alcohol?"

"What?" They both asked.

"How am I supposed to know, I was asking you guys. It wasn't a joke. Ambrose, you're not going to go all stark raving mad are you?"

"No, I'm a lover when I'm drunk."

"Great. So I'm the one who gets to go crazy when he makes his advances on you. *Jealousy*, what a buzz kill," Jason whispered. "Give me that bottle, Marcella. You don't need any more, anyway. You're leaning again."

"Don't you dare tell me what to do, Jason Andrew Wilder. I'll kick your ass right now for treating me like a lightweight. If I'm leaning it's because of the mattress on this bed. It's filled with feathers, you know."

"No feathers. You're leaning. Look how close your face is from the bed. I'm not even sure how you're managing to stay up at all, tilting over that far."

Marcy got quiet and stared at him while anger rushed through her. She had almost forgotten the way Jason became once he drank liquor. You could give him beer all day long and he was the sweetest guy on earth. Once liquor hit his blood, he acted like a complete ass.

"Enough. If I'm tilting then fine, let me tilt."

"Give me the bottle, Marcella."

What part of *she felt fine* did he not understand? It wasn't as if she'd get alcohol poisoning. Why wouldn't he just leave her alone? Placing the opening against her lips, she lifted the tequila and began to chug. Two swallows hadn't broken past her throat before she became soaked.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing busting out the end of the bottle?” Marcella stood, furious. The rage she felt pushed against her insides until she wasn’t sure if the slight brush rushing through her were cobwebs, or if it could be the effects of her condition.

“I told you to stop drinking. You’ve consumed twice the amount any human girl could withstand.”

“You act as though I’m going to die, Jason. I don’t see why we all can’t have a good time. You’re ruining it by acting this way.”

“I’m sorry for caring. Whatever. I’m out of here. You two have fun.”

Jason grabbed one of the bottles and vanished without so much as a backward glance. The spot where he stood sucked in her attention. What in the hell had just happened? Fuck, she hated when he pulled this shit. Confused and angry, tears came to Marcella’s eyes. She knew it was probably the alcohol bringing out her emotions, but she still couldn’t stop what the way she felt. These last few weeks had been beyond horrible.

“Are you all right?”

Slowly, Marcella raised her eyes to Ambrose. “Yes, I’m fine. Why don’t we try to get some sleep. I...”

Standing, Marcella quickly walked from the room and didn’t stop until she reached the front door. As her hand wrapped around the cold brass handle she stopped and closed her eyes fighting the tears. Minutes went by and she couldn’t move.

“Collector, why don’t you come over here with me and talk. I think it will do you good. You seem really upset. Maybe I can comfort you.”

Turning around, she walked to the couch where the gorgeous vampire sat, waiting. She couldn’t help but notice how her legs weren’t quite functioning well. Maybe Jason was right. Balance definitely seemed to be an issue.

“Ambrose, I really don’t feel like talking.”

“Then no talking. Come. Rest your head on my shoulder.”

Marcella didn’t hesitate. How would he ever learn to trust her if she refused something so simple? She fitted her head against the junction of his chest and arm, convincing herself that this was what she needed to do so their bond could grow. Even if they never became lovers, they could always be friends.

Unrecognizable pain exploded in her chest. Time slowed while her mind tried to process the origin of the sudden stinging. Tears ran down her

cheeks, instantly blurring the vision of a pale face with dark hair leaning over her body. She could feel herself falling sideways, even taste the blood coating her mouth, but still she couldn't understand.

"I'm so sorry. But I can't let you have my soul. You do seem like a really good person, but I won't risk the only thing I have for anyone or anything, not even love."

Chapter 13

Tears ran from Ambrose's eyes just before she saw him lift and jump over the couch. The end of a large kitchen knife stuck from her chest. Just at the sight of the black handle Marcella almost fainted, but she knew she couldn't let him get away. She used all the energy she could collect to place the invisible force field around the outside walls of the mansion.

The sting of pain began to die out while darkness dotted her vision. Sounds of glass breaking and things being thrown around barely registered. For the life of her, she couldn't get her body to work. Something about dying this time was different. When the poisoning from Ambrose's bite took over and she'd died, it didn't take this long. A part of her knew the knife pierced her heart. She should be dead, yet she wasn't dying. At least her mind wasn't. Her body seemed to be dead although her eyes were still opened and she could see.

I'm not breathing and yet, I'm still not dead. Marcella tried to move her arm and realized how heavy she felt. *This is just like before. My body's dead. Something he did killed my form.* She pulled harder on her arm until she felt it lift. Minutes flew by when she finally managed to sit. When she turned, she wasn't surprised to see her body laying there.

"Ambrose, you are so gonna get it when I get a new body. Samael! Where the hell are you? Some angel you are. You're falling behind on your job. I need to know how to make my body hurry up and grow back."

The vampire came running down the stairs looking around frantically. Slowly, he walked toward her dead body, lying on the white leather couch. Blood dripped down the cushion in a steady rhythm splashing against the black marble floor.

"Oh, God." A heavy breath escaped his lips as he kneeled down before her. "Why aren't you waking? You were just supposed to die long enough for me to escape. Why aren't you waking?"

He leaned down with his head turned to the side, listening. Hands slammed into the couch next to her body. "You said you couldn't die!"

"I'm not dead." She knew he couldn't hear her, but she still felt compelled to answer, even if it was for her own benefit. Ambrose looked over his shoulder right at her, but quickly began looking around everywhere else. He searched the air with his eyes like a crazy person, madly jerking them in different directions. Marcella stared, fixated with trying to figure out what he was doing.

"What in the hell is going on in here?" A voice asked groggily.

Marcella jerked her attention to Dominic standing at the door. He stood wearing a pair of dark blue silk pajama bottoms, rubbing his eyes while blonde curls bounced around the sides of his face.

"Oh god, Dom. Go back in the room. Please, don't look over here. Let me come back to life first!"

A big yawn came from his mouth and he opened his eyes. Ambrose slid to a stop at the front door and froze, staring at him. Nervously, her eyes darted back and forth watching them look at each other. Dominic took a step forward and stopped.

"What is the matter with you, Ambrose? Where's Marcella?"

Jason appearing not feet from Dom only caused her heart to drop even more. Blood trickled out of his mouth and she could hear her scream echo off the walls of the large mansion, but no one heard it but her. Without Dominic being in his demon form, he'd never even know she was in the room.

"Jason? What in the hell happened to you?"

Marcella reached Jason before anyone did. His body swayed forward clamping onto Dominic's shoulder just as Dom caught him.

"Jason, talk to me. What happened?"

"Where's Marcella?" he groaned, clutching to his chest. "Fuck, I hurt."

Dominic went rigid. "You mean this didn't happen to you? No one physically did this? It...Marcella!" His head turned around hysterically searching the area. As if Dominic had put everything together, his body froze and he slowly turned to Ambrose. The vampire didn't move.

"Where is she? And don't you dare lie to me!"

"She said she couldn't die. I just wanted to leave. I can't..."

“Where is she?” Dominic’s voice boomed through the room making the energy around Marcella body waver. A red glow began to light his face as he walked forward, pulling Jason with him. “You have three seconds to tell me. Three fucking seconds, and then I start putting you through the worse pain you’ve ever experienced.”

Ambrose’s gaze looked toward the couch and turned back to her mate. “I only wanted to leave. I thought she’d be fine.”

Dominic turned to follow his guilty stare and stopped, nearly dropping Jason. “Oh...God. How long has she been like this?” Jason pulled away from him while they both rushed to the side of her body. Their hands began tracing her pulse points and listening for breathing “How long, dammit?”

“A few minutes. She sealed the house before...she died.”

The red glow began to flicker behind Dom’s stare. She could tell how close to transforming he was. Just a little more and she’d be able to speak to him. Why didn’t he think to turn to find her? Did he expect her to come back from the dead like before?

“Beautiful scene. If I do say so myself.”

“Samael! Where in the hell have you been? Turn me back before Dominic kills Ambrose.”

“Let him kill him. You can retrieve the soul and give it to me now.”

“Why don’t *you* just take it if you’re here?”

Samael turned to look at her. “Maybe, because I want to feel your lips pressed against mine, again. I really wish you’d give up this mate nonsense and just come back with me. Ipos is not right for you at all. Look at him. He’s way too attached and that’s never a good thing. You’ll feel smothered before the decade is out.”

“No. Now make the process go faster. I need to stop them.”

“Sorry, no can do. My powers only go so far and when you’re this bad off, you have to be reborn by yourself.”

Dominic slowly stood, pulling her attention. “But, what about this time is so different than getting poisoned? Why didn’t I die like this then?”

“Because before, his feelings hadn’t evolved to the extent they are now. They’ve grown and he’s just committed a sin against you. A collector is designed to basically win her followers. If he thinks he just killed someone he cares about, the feelings will grow. Do you see what I mean?”

“It’s a lie, a trap to make him fall in love with me?”

“You can say it’s the way of the collector. You may be good, Marcella, but your good ways won’t last. You’re designed to seduce the souls from people. Eventually, you’ll be nothing more than the succubus that you can’t stand. Just, instead of taking energy, you’ll thrive to take souls. Give it time.”

Samael disappeared, leaving her open mouthed. She’d never be like that, ever. Dominic walked through the couch and she knew she had him. “Dominic!”

He froze, jerking his gaze to her. The red that filled his entire vision, left, but he stayed in demon mindset. “Don’t say you can’t see me or even hear me. You are not allowed to hurt him. We need him, remember? Now, walk back to my body and just listen to me, please.”

Fire flickered in his gaze, but he obeyed. “Good, now please take Jason in the other room and see if he’s all right. I’m worried what this might have done to him.”

“Jason, come with me to the other room before I do something I might regret.”

“I’m not leaving her. Where is she? What is taking her so long?”

“Jason, I’m not telling you again. Come with me to the room. I’m about two seconds away from killing this vampire and if Marcella comes back I sure as hell don’t want to piss her off. She’s going to be angry as it is. At least, she better be.” His gaze shot to her just as he pulled Jason up.

They left Ambrose standing in the middle of the living room alone with her dead body. She watched curiously while he waited a few seconds and then rushed to her side. Pale fingers brushed the strands of hair back from her face.

“Please, come back. I swear I would have never harmed you if I thought for one second you would die. What have I done?”

His fingers grabbed the handle of the knife and pulled. More blood poured from her chest and a ragged breath escaped his mouth. Marcella walked closer while he closed his eyes and placed his hand over the wound.

“Heal,” he whispered. “Make her heart beat again. Don’t let me have killed the one chance I’ve been given. I taste it in her blood, see it in my thoughts. What she offers is true and without conditions or greed. She can’t be gone. There was something, some connection. I felt it.”

Nothing happened to her body while she watched him repeatedly try different things. She knew it would take time. Her collector proved to be a person of its own, but in the meantime she needed to check on Jason. That was, if she could leave the living area. She couldn't when she died the first time in the guest bedroom.

Walking to the door to Dominic's bedroom she placed her hand against the wood and tried to step through. She couldn't.

"Dominic, open the door!" The door cracked and he stood staring at her. "Only shake your head yes or no. Is Jason okay?"

His head shook yes and she sighed in relief. Dom stuck his head out and looked toward Ambrose, his vision instantly going red again. The look on his face sent chills down the body she didn't have.

"He didn't think he'd hurt me. I know how that sounds, but really. He just wanted to buy some time to try to escape." Dominic's mouth opened, but he shut it when she raised her hand for him not to speak. "Look at him. Does he really look like someone who meant to actually kill me? He's been trying to heal my wound for the last few minutes. The regret is evident, all right?"

The angry stare told her that her mate didn't so much agree. "I know this is going to be hard for you. But for me, please, don't hurt him. Leave his punishment up for me to decide."

Pain raced across his features. A large hand lifted to his chest and she watched as his palm covered his heart. Emotion swelled through her just as cobwebs began to brush against her toes. Closing her eyes, she took a breath.

"I love you, too, Dom." Her lids open and she reached and placed her hand against his. "I do love you. Go back to the room and I'll call when I'm ready."

Reluctantly, she left him standing there and walked back toward her body. Light covered her skin. She watched, amazed while her dead self disappeared. Ambrose let out an agonizing scream making the air around her sizzle. Glass shattered from the windows as the wood from the door splintered beneath the invisible force. Shocked by how powerful he truly was, she had to make herself close her mouth.

Ambrose rested his head along the part of the cushion that wasn't covered in blood. Touched by his sob, she came to a stop directly behind

him. Thickness pushed against her throat momentarily blocking off her air. The cool atmosphere rushed across her naked skin and she shivered, kneeling behind him. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she felt him stiffen.

"I forgive you, Ambrose. But if you ever so much as pierce my skin again with the intent to harm, I'll let Dominic gut you alive. Is that clear?"

Slowly, the vampire's gaze turned to rest on her face. A ragged breath passed his lips while she wiped the tears from his eyes.

"Absolutely. But...you're not dead? I thought..."

The whisper came out hoarse and almost unrecognizable. She slowly shook her head back and forth. Ambrose crushed her nude body into his. "Please forgive me. I'm so sorry."

The emotion pouring from deep inside of him made her anger recede. A feeling, not love, but something, definitely sparked.

"I'll never hurt you again. Please don't fear me, Marcella. I've never killed anyone in cold blood before. When I thought you were gone forever, at my hand, there are no words to express what that did to me. Forgive me, ask me for anything and it's yours."

"Ambrose, you know what I need. Have you forgotten why you killed me to begin with? I know how unfair this is to you, but I can't lose my mate. You must understand that. If you give me your soul, I'll spend eternity making sure you keep it in good hands. Like I've said before, you choose where you'll ultimately end up. No one else can decide for you."

"Will I have to stay here?"

The fear that passed through his eyes twisted something in her stomach. "If you're not happy, then no. But I do still want you to be a part of my life. I want see you, often, everyday if it were up to me. I'm not going to abandon you once I have your soul."

"And if I want to stay? Would you let me?"

"In a heartbeat."

Marcella was lifted in Ambrose's arms. He carried her to Dominic's room. The door swung open on his silent command. Dom and Jason's startled gazes shot up from across the room. Jason smiled while the fire behind her mate's eyes flared.

Her boyfriend eased from the bed, still clutching his chest. The smile faded as he stepped to them and took Marcella from the vampire's arms.

Jason's eyes connected with hers and the emotions that passed between the two of them were deeper than she ever felt with him before.

"I've failed you. Dom and I are your protection and I left you alone. It will never happen again. I'm so sorry, Marcy. When I thought you..."

She placed her fingertips against his lips. "Not another word, Jason. I'm here and that's what matters."

"No, it's not what matters," Dominic boomed from across the room. "He shouldn't have left. If he wanted to throw a bitchfit, he should have woken me to watch over you. Do you know how close we came to truly losing you? You're not as immortal as you think. I felt it! I really thought you were dead."

Dominic walked over so fast, he blurred across the carpeted floor. "I'll deal with you later," he said glaring at Jason. "She may be your girlfriend, but she's my mate, dammit, and I won't lose her over some stupid quarrel you two had. If she dies, it'll be because I failed in protecting her in the midst of battle. And you can bet your sweet ass there's going to be plenty of fighting in the future."

"As for you!" Dominic picked Ambrose up by the throat. Marcella struggled against Jason's arms, but he kept them locked around her, preventing her from moving.

"If you ever, ever, so much as harm her, even emotionally, I will relish in killing you. If you think I'll make it quick, you're wrong. I'll take my time in making you regret the day the thought even popped into your fucking pretty boy head. I don't care how bad you feel about what you've done. Your actions were beyond inexcusable. The devil himself will not be able to stop the wrath I'll bring if you so much as cause her to break a nail in your presence."

Ambrose fell to the floor holding his throat and gasping for air. Marcella stared at Dominic in shock. Jason eased her to the ground. Realizing she still was completely nude, Marcella materialized her white gown and cautiously walked over to her mate. Dom's body shook as he looked at her.

Collapsing to his knees, he wrapped his arms around her thighs, burying his face in her stomach. Marcy weaved her fingers through his golden curls while she held him. The pressure increased around her legs as his body shook harder.

The room was silent except for Dom's soft cries. Ambrose walked to Jason while they stared at her perplexed. Lowering to her mate, Marcella wrapped her arms around him. She was instantly swept into his arms while he cradled her to his chest.

"I'm sorry. You told me to leave him alone and I disobeyed. But you have to understand how much I love you. They *need* to know. In their own ways they may love you, even die for you, but never more than me. Never. There are no bounds when it comes to what I wouldn't do for you."

"Then will you do something for me?"

Marcella looked into his bloodshot eyes, still clouded with tears. He nodded his head sending blond curls bouncing. He'd never look more like an angel than at that moment, so innocent, so unbelievably beautiful that it made her heart ache.

"Kiss me."

The softness of his lips pushed against hers without hesitation. Sweetness took over her senses as his tongue brushed the tip of hers. Caught up in the sensations, they didn't stop until Jason started laughing.

"All right, all right. I think Ambrose and I have had to endure enough today."

Dominic pressed his forehead against hers while he stared into her eyes. Not once did he look away as he started talking. "Listen up, boys. There's something you need to know. And you better start seeing it this way because it's imperative that you do."

Slowly, Dom stood, pulling her up. He turned her to face Jason and Ambrose. "Marcella is a collector. Since, none of us can remember being around when they actually existed you need to know their history, and know it well. When I was asleep something happened. That's what I woke up to tell you all. You know I have the gift to tell the past, present, and future. Well, I saw the past, or at least a flash of it. I think it's going to explain why we all feel a pull to her."

"Go on." Jason said after a few moments of silence.

"There was something on her head...She was a..." Dominic ran his fingers through his hair... "Queen or something. And I think she's back to start what ended long ago. I'm not really sure, but I know one thing for certain and that's that we were her foundation. The three of us were there with her. I think it's time we start acting like the protectors we were meant

to be. We need more collectors, more souls, and we need the strongest warriors we can find. There's a reason why she picked us. It's no coincidence why we're all together again. Or why we all feel like we know her."

"Oh shit." Jason's eyes grew big as he looked into her face.

"Wait," Marcella said, turning around to face Dom. "Picked you? For what? I'm no queen. I can't be." Flashes of her overlooking the water in the white gown closed her throat. The thing on her forehead exploded in her mind. She quickly decided not to deny it completely. "But, if you're right what are we going to do?"

Dominic's gaze grew harder the more he gazed into her depths. "You're going to have to fight to stay, love. But I promise you won't be alone. We'll all fight beside you when the time comes."

"Why does it have to come to that? I don't understand why he killed me in the first place. Truthfully, I hardly remember anything having to do with that other life. For all I know it could be imaginary."

Dom narrowed his eyes at her. "We both know that's not true. Let's go over what we know. The devil made you bring him souls. I'm assuming he didn't count on the good he holds deep inside to manifest into you. You must have become a mediator, one who does what's right. But you have the power to not only take human souls, you take every soul. Supernatural souls can't be touched by us demons. They linger." He paced while his words tumbled out. "You have the chance to make it right. You can send them to finally rest, wherever that might be. He's going to want it to be with him, but I don't see you handing over Ambrose, do you?"

"Absolutely not!"

Dominic smiled. "I didn't think so. So, we stay hidden, we gather people, and we fight."

"We fight," Ambrose agreed, walking forward.

"Fuck yeah, let's fuck some shit up. I'm always ready for a fight." Jason stopped before her, next to Ambrose. The guys all looked back and forth, something passed between them that Marcella didn't understand. Dominic walked around and stood in the middle of them. All three simultaneously kneeled before her. Time slowed at seeing the three of them in that position.

"Our queen, from this moment forth we give you our lives, our loyalty," Dominic lifted his head and looked at her, "and our love."

Flashes, as if clouded in sepia, washed over Marcella's vision. Three, there were three men. Her three men just as they were now, kneeling before her. She was dressed in a Grecian gown of white silk so thin it was but a veil against her skin. White pillars surrounded the terrace overlooking water beyond the cliffs below, but the sky wasn't blue nor black. It was a cross between lavender and light blue.

The vision vanished leaving her dazed, but somehow more aware. "Rise," she said in a voice not sounding like her own. Mystified, they stood staring at her. She looked down to see the same gown from her vision covering her body. A thin gold chain hung from her neck, a symbol covered in diamonds nestled between her breasts.

"You were our queen," Jason whispered. "I saw something when we kneeled. Me, Dom and Ambrose. We were all together just like this, but not here," he trailed off. "How?"

Dominic started shaking his head back and forth. "I don't know. I saw it, too, but I don't remember living that life. I'm not even sure what made us all get down and kneel like we did. It just felt right, almost as if it were natural. We need answers, we need..."

"Me, I'm assuming."

They all turned to look at Samael. He kneeled before Marcella and stood. "My queen. It's good to have you back. It sure as hell took you forever to grace us with your true presence." He smiled at her charmingly and collapsed on the bed. "I'm sorry, but I can't tell you the answer you seek yet. It's something that you'll have to remember and figure out on your own. You're making progress, but how far you get will remain to be seen." A yawn came from his mouth as he closed his eyes.

Dom shook his head, slowly. "Why didn't you tell me? I've known you for...ever. You don't think maybe you should have mentioned I fought against evil and lost? How did I become a prince of the underworld, anyway?"

"Shortly after her fall, Marcianna or Marcella, as you prefer, had me instructed to bring you back as who you all are today. But that's all she wanted me to tell you. If I say more there will be consequences. The past has a way of repeating itself, especially if the individuals know the details. You think you can change the outcome, but really you end up making it

worse. If you don't know, you can be taught to handle things the right way this time."

"And what's the right way?" Marcella stepped forward feeling the gown caress her body. Although she had no reason to doubt Samael's words, something told her he was holding something back.

"Only you know that, my queen. And in time, you will remember." Samael sat up on the bed narrowing his eyes slightly, as if thinking. "You didn't tell me your plans, but I trust you know what you're doing. You just said it was time and so I did as you asked and gave you life. You instructed me to test you, to see if you were worthy of this mission. I was never to expose the truth of your station until you yourself remembered who you were. Is any of this bringing the memories back?"

Marcella sighed and sat down next to him. "No, I'm afraid not. But I do somehow feel different, older. I'm not sure how to describe it." Leaning down, she went to rest her head in her palms. She stopped herself so she wouldn't press the gold plated band into her skin. Frozen, she looked at all of them.

"My band, my crown thingy, where is it? I wore one about a quarter of an inch thick," she said, holding her fingers up. "It wrapped around the top of my forehead like so. There were...diamonds embedded into it."

Samael smile brightly and reached behind his back pulling the fragile piece from around him like a magic trick. "Your Highness, I present your crown."

Marcella grabbed it feeling like she couldn't be without it for another second. Something about the crown sparked an intense emotion of "self" inside of her. Just as she knew she couldn't be without her crown, she couldn't part with the chain around her neck. They were hers, her symbol, and a part of who she was. Taking in the necklace, she noticed the twisted design covered in diamonds. Grabbing Dom's hand, she looked at the ring.

"I knew all along. Dom, my symbol is on your ring."

"That's probably why it looked so familiar us. May I?" Dominic stood in front of the bed, before her. His hands were placed in front of her, palms up. With complete trust, she handed him the gold band. He kneeled, sliding it into place just below her hairline.

“You’re beautiful.” He kissed her gently on the lips and lowered even more, resting his head in her lap while she ran her fingers through his curls. Pressure gripped her calves while he held onto her.

“Thank you, Dom. I don’t know this for fact, but I do know if I sent you to hell then you must be my best warrior. I’m not sure why I sent you there, of all places, but I obviously believed you could take care of yourself. Maybe we needed information or something only you could interpret. We’ll have to find out eventually.”

Marcella turned to Jason. “And you, my... personal protector? No wonder I’ve loved you my entire life. You’re part of me. Every time I’ve needed you, you’ve been there, whether to give advice or emotional support.” She couldn’t keep the elation off her face. Happiness surged through her. “I love you, Jason.”

He smiled and rolled his eyes. “Yeah, yeah, I think you’ve been there for me more than I’ve been there for you. But if you still love me, that’s all that matters.”

“Ambrose, I’m not sure how I managed to make your life the way it is. But I promise for all the pain you’ve suffered, I will try to ease and erase the hurt I’ve caused you. I do think the position you hold is somehow very important to the future.”

Marcella turned to Samael. “I can’t give you his soul. You know that, right? And I’m not letting you take Dominic back, either.” Heat radiated behind her eyes while inside she prepared to start the battle right now if necessary. She could feel the power swirling around inside of her. Dominic’s head came from her lap as he eased to his feet, placing his hand on her shoulder. He was ready and that’s all that mattered.

“My intentions were never to have Ambrose’s soul, Marcianna. That was *your* test. You needed to know and prove to yourself that you were worthy to stand up, even to me. Plus, I can’t take his soul, he’s supernatural. Only you have the power to do that. Supernaturals sever the tie from heaven or hell the moment they choose eternity. You must return them to their rightful place. Good luck getting any to the good side. The big guy thinks they all belong with him regardless of how they became immortal.”

“But, what if it wasn’t their fault? What if they didn’t ask to be changed or it was some sort of accident?”

“Doesn’t matter. I think you better reflect more on this conversation. We’ve had it multiple times before. Let’s pray some of your memories come back. For now, I have work to do. Tonight, be ready. I’ll help you with your first ceremony. Are you ready, guys? This is your test for your queen. She’s to have all of your souls if you truly believe everything she stands for. You’ve done it in the past. It’s the reason you’re alive today. Let’s see if you all remain true.”

With that, Samael vanished, leaving Marcella the only one gaping. She looked over at them nervously. “I completely understand if you don’t want to do this.”

“I’m game,” Jason said, making a bag of Doritos appear in his hand. As she watched him chomp away at the nacho cheese flavored chips, she stared in horror.

“You don’t even have to ask,” Ambrose said, walking to the small twin size bed.

“I’d want nothing more.” Dominic pulled her into his arms hugging her tightly. Suddenly he turned her in his arms while he scanned the room. “Hey, what’s with all the alcohol? Did you guys have a party while I was passed out?”

“Don’t remind me,” Jason said, waving his hand. “No more tequila for me for awhile. I’m a dick on liquor. Beer from now on, if anything.”

“Yeah, drinking probably wasn’t a good idea. Listen, guys, we need to discuss what we’re going to do. I think we need to start making plans about who we need, what we need, and where in the hell we’re going to get it.” Marcella broke away and paced uneasily. “For some reason I’m getting antsy. We need more protectors. Gosh, I feel like we need a freaking strong hold or something. Like no matter what monstrous castle or place we find, it’s not going to be enough in the end.”

“All right, let’s do this.” Dominic pointed to the doorway and they all filed into the living area. With a wipe of his hand everything disappeared but the bare walls holding the mansion in place. “Let’s start from scratch. You want to be protected, so be it. Tell me what you want, a castle, a concrete fortress, you just name it and it’s yours.”

Marcella looked around the empty space and searched her mind for what she felt they needed. “Wouldn’t a castle be obvious and attract

attention?" She asked curiously. "I mean, what I see in my head would bring the national guard in with worry."

Dominic ran his fingers through his curls. "The only thing anyone will see if they ever come down this road will be the projection of a small house. There's no need to worry. I can make anything possible, trust me."

Marcella nodded. "I do. More than you know."

"Good, now, what do you see?"

Looking at Jason and Ambrose, she smiled nervously. "Well, let's start with the surroundings. I need a fifteen-foot wall of something impenetrable, stone, I guess. But it has to be smooth, where no one can climb it."

Dominic closed his eyes and shook his head. "Okay, what else."

"We need a fortress, one that will hold a lot of people, and also protect us. You know, with one of those large open areas...a great hall, that's it! There needs to be enough room to contain hundreds of people for dinner and meetings."

The room began to warp in and out as stone began to cover the walls and floor. In fascination, she watched Dom work his amazing abilities. The expanse of the room alone was easily close to forty thousand square feet and the ceiling in parts seemed to go up higher than she'd thought possible. A large table appeared that could sit more people than she even knew. At the far end of the room were five chairs, the largest in the middle, towering over them all.

Marcella began to pace as images exploded in her mind. "I want it to have electricity, but also candles and torches everywhere just in case we need the light. We need a dungeon, I'm not sure why, but it has to be filled with chains and shackles. And one of those, those....fuck what are they called? Jason, I'm sending you a picture via mind message. What is the thing I'm seeing?"

"A bailey? An outside courtyard inside the walls, right?"

"Yes! I want a bailey right in the middle of the castle, boxed in so I never have to watch my back when I want to be outside. And, and, we need towers on all four sides of the castle. I also want a place to walk, off one of those towers, surrounded with white pillars. It's to lead from one side of the fortress to the other."

Marcella was talking so fast she wasn't sure if air even made it to her lungs. Flashes were blinding her. It took all of her concentration to see exactly what kept repeatedly rushing past her vision.

"An armory or a room where we keep weapons, every weapon you can think of, old weapons, new ones, whatever you've ever seen, we need. No nuclear bombs or anything like that, but grenades, definitely. And I want...no I *need*...fuck it, I got this."

Marcella smiled crazily as her mind raced. Lifting her hands open, she watched a diamond encrusted dagger appear. With it not being more than six inches long, she knew exactly where it was meant to go, where she'd worn it for centuries.

The dress magically split up to her thigh without her so much as thinking it. Yes, this was her, the dagger, the crown, the necklace. She could feel the power swelling inside of her. Spinning around, she threw the small weapon toward the table stabbing the blade into the wood at the very end where she knew she'd always sat.

"Enough for tonight. Shall we eat? I think I've claimed my seat."

Marcella lifted her hands and shot them down fast, filling the table full of every food she'd ever heard of or seen. The men's eyes grew round as they looked at her.

"What's wrong with her?" Jason whispered toward Dominic.

She turned and walked toward him. "I'll tell you what wrong, Jason. I'm remembering bits and pieces of our past and I'm loving every minute of it. Would you like to see something really cool?"

He returned her smile. The mischief was evident in his expression. "Show me. Show me everything you know."

Marcella held out her hand, praying she was right. Wind whistled and just as Jason opened his mouth at what he saw coming behind her, she turned, grabbed the dagger that she'd summoned, crouched and swiftly kicked his feet out from under him. He hit the ground hard, all the air escaping his lungs. Laughter echoed off the walls from Dom and Ambrose.

"Do you remember when we used to train that way? Jason, we had so much fun."

A groan poured from his mouth as he pushed himself up. "I think it's coming back, slowly. Damn stone floors, what the hell? Can't we at least have carpet in here? Do you have any idea what century this is?"

"I remember that move," Dominic whispered. "Oh shit! I remember you doing that before, Marcella! Fuck, I can't believe this. We've been here before, like déjà vu. It's totally freaking me the fuck out."

"Breathe, Dom. Here, maybe this will bring more back for you. I still can't remember much, but my brain sure is flashing me clips of things that are blowing my mind." Manifesting a sword, she placed it across her hands for him to see. The shape of her symbol, covered in diamonds, rested right where he was meant to hold the sword.

A deep intake of breath passed Dominic's full lips. "That's mine. Oh, God..." He quickly retrieved it from her hands and moved back to where he could do a few swings. Captivated by how graceful he looked, she almost didn't hear Jason move in from behind her.

Air rushed past her head as her feet were kicked out from under her. Just when she thought she'd hit the floor, Jason caught her in his arms. "Bet you didn't remember that, did you, my queen?"

"Feeling her heart in her throat she had to laugh. "Touché, my knight. Now kiss me and apologize for nearly hurting me, or I might have to punish you down in the dungeon."

"Mmm, is that a promise? As much as I want to check out the area and see what kind of torture you can dish up, I'd rather taste you right now."

The snap of Jason's finger was quickly followed by him standing and lifting her. Looking around, she noticed Dom's bed right next to them. They both fell into the soft mattress. His weight pushed against her deliciously, causing her to moan out.

"Let me please you, Marcella, just like I used to, like we all used to. Can you remember it? Everything back before the fight was wonderful."

"You remember," she whispered.

"A little, and there are not words to describe the way things were. I'd say heavenly, but I know we weren't in heaven. We were in our own place, not heaven, nor hell. Our own little world, where things were perfect."

"Afterward, you'll tell me more? I want to know everything you do."

"Anything you want."

Jason's mouth eased to her and she became consumed by his taste. The time had come. She could possibly remember everything she needed to, to make the pieces fit together. If she received the answer, she might be able to figure out what her plans were. If not, she feared they'd never come.

Somehow she knew they still had time, but she wasn't sure how much. And that part scared her the most.

Chapter 14

Everything about Marcella drove Jason wild with desire. She possessed him, filled his body until there was nothing left but her taste and her smell. From the first moment he could ever remember seeing her, he knew they would someday have a special bond. But this, this was so much more than he ever dreamed, could ever have hoped for.

Jason leaned in closer. "Let me have you, please."

Marcella quickly jerked back and pushed him off of her. She looked around the room at Dom and Ambrose. Turning her gaze back to him, he couldn't help but feel confused by her sudden lack of passion.

"Not like that. I'm not ready for all of you, Jason." She crawled back to him straddling his hips on the bed. "Let's go somewhere, just me and you."

"Absolutely."

They vanished and quickly reappeared in a room that looked vaguely familiar, but he couldn't place where he'd seen it before. Slowly, he crawled off the bed and walked to the window, pulling the lock out and swinging the glass open. He nearly jumped back when he realized how high off the ground they were.

"This is my room, I think. We're in the highest part of my tower."

Jason nodded. "Yeah, I can see that. How many stories up do you think we are?"

"I'm not sure. It really doesn't matter. Come to me," Marcella whispered.

Just at the sound of her voice Jason forgot about everything else. He turned and started walking toward her, taking off all of his clothes just before he reached the large bed. The red silk sheets settled around her waist, exposing her bare breasts.

"God, you're beautiful."

He climbed onto the soft mattress, pulling the silk around him as he covered her body. Marcella moaned while he settled his weight against her soft skin. Kissing her deeply, he wrapped his arm around the back of her waist, pulling her deeper into his body. A part of him wished he would never stop touching her. It didn't matter what she was doing or who she was with, he'd always be there, always be waiting for her to pick him, just as she had done not moments before.

Jason broke away from her mouth to look at her. He swore physical pain stabbed into his heart. Her taste was addictive, a requirement if he wanted to live a happy life. What hurt the most was he knew he'd never be able to live without her, never. Just the thought of them being separated sparked a fear he'd be willing to fight for. Kill for.

Trailing his lips down her neck, he ran his tongue over her skin, taking in even the faintest flavor of her skin. She tasted so sweet, almost like vanilla, but with a hint of butterscotch. Brushing his lips against her pulse point, he felt himself changing into the one thing he knew he wanted to be, a vampire. If he could take in as much of her as he could, then she'd be inside of him until the next moment they got to be together. It would keep him sane and sedate the cravings. Since turning into a collector, they'd only gotten worse.

Nibbling down her chest, fingers gripped into his hair, but didn't force him in a direction. She was still letting him lead, but obviously fighting not to take control. Sucking her hard nipple into his mouth, he rolled it around in a circular motion with the tip of his tongue until she began to cry out and clutch with her other hand onto his shoulder. He fought not to smile. He loved pleasing her. Knowing he caused these reactions in her drove him on.

Easing her thighs farther apart, Jason trailed his fingertips up slowly, feeling her shiver beneath him. Deep pants left her mouth, the higher up his fingers traveled.

"Tell me you want me, Marcella. Tell me to taste you."

He'd never really been that blunt before. But after remembering bits of his other life, this talk was nothing compared to what it used to be. And if he remembered correctly, she loved it.

"I want you," she whispered. "Yes, taste me. Please, taste me."

Jason kissed down her stomach, nibbling the closer he came to his prize. She wiggled beneath him just as he reached the silkiness of her mostly bare

pussy. He looked down amazed, feeling a hunger he'd never felt before. Flashes of their other life passed through his mind.

Seeing the thin rectangular strip trailing to her bare folds made his cock throb until he thought he'd come right there. It looked like it had before. The neatly trimmed curls were gone. His queen was back in every bit of the form he'd last seen her in.

A growl broke through his throat as he raced his tongue down the smoothness. Wetness greeted him and it took everything in his power to keep his fangs from coming down. Her distinct essence exploded through his senses. Greedily, he sucked her into his mouth wanting to take in more than she could ever provide.

"Jason!"

Marcella went into spasms underneath him and he continued to suck, taking in every drop she released. Probing his tongue inside of her tightness, he circled around the opening until her fingers wrapped in his hair and pulled him up.

Looking into her heavy lidded eyes, he felt her impatience. Marcella pulled his mouth against hers, wrapping her legs around his waist and pushing the tip of his cock inside of her. Jason groaned feeling her grasp around him.

This was heaven, perfection. Their chemistry and emotion were so in tune there wasn't any turning back. He'd died for her once and without a shadow of a doubt, he'd do it again. She was his, forever. Mate or no mate, it didn't matter. Dominic and she might share the title, but she'd made him what he was back then, and today. They held something so much more than mates. He, in other words, was her other half.

* * * *

As Jason's tongue swept across hers, she took in her flavor mixed with his. There wasn't a word for what the two of them together made. Intoxicating came close, but still, that wasn't the right description. She could taste this forever, *would* taste him throughout eternity. He was hers just as much as Dom ever would be.

She knew somewhere deep down something happened between them a long time ago, but she wasn't sure exactly what it could have been.

Ownership felt like a horrible thing to think about, but in a way, she did feel like she possessed him, body, mind, and soul. He was hers and hers alone.

The length and thickness of his cock drove deeper into her and she gripped his back with her fingertips, urging him on. A cross between a growl and a groan echoed off the walls while he buried himself.

Slowly, he thrust, pushing and grinding his hips into her. The friction against her clit caused her to become so hot her skin tingled. Hard muscles tensed under her nails as he withdrew, only to enter her slowly, but powerfully, again.

“You’re mine, you know that, right?”

“Always,” she breathed heavily against his lips.

Passionately, he slid his tongue back in her mouth, thrusting harder and faster. She could feel herself tightening around him. Their lips broke apart and he began to kiss down the side of her face and neck. The fangs pierced, causing her orgasm to burst. Her whole body convulsed while she screamed his name.

Something of Ambrose’s bite rubbed off, the pleasure she felt the moment the sharpness entered her completely, blew his last bite out of the water with no contest. He still hadn’t reached Ambrose’s intensity, but damn near close.

Vibrations trailed down her skin as he moaned. He continued to drink pushing his cock deeply, setting off orgasms back to back. The room tilted as she gasped for breath against the ecstasy racing through her. The second his lips broke connection with her, his hot cum shot across her stomach.

Blood trailed down his chin, his brown hair almost reaching his heavy lidded eyes. At that moment, he’d never looked more beautiful to her.

“I made you,” she whispered in realization. “You were a servant.” Flashes of Jason blinded her from the room. She could see him so clearly. The first moment they met, their eyes connected and she knew, knew more than anything, that she wanted him. “I took your soul and made you mine. You’re truly mine.”

“Forever,” he whispered.

Dominic paced the great hall, staring at Ambrose. The urge to rip out the vampire's throat made his finger's twitch. They may have gotten along in their other life, but this was different. Marcella could have tried to do anything to him, and never once would Dom try to harm her physically. She had an aura that made you want to love her, not stab her. He couldn't understand what possessed Ambrose to do something so heinous.

"Just get it out. I'm fucking tired of you staring at me like that. I don't care who you are, demon. I'm not afraid of you. You've yet to see my worst."

"Why did you do it? Didn't you know she was special? Couldn't you feel it, somewhere?"

"All I could think about was returning to my people before the whole city turned into a midnight snack. Can you imagine the crisis and the news? It's my job to keep what we are a secret. If something happens, I'm as good as dead. *That* is what I was thinking about, if you must know."

Ambrose took a step toward the demon and sat on one of the many chairs. "I did feel something though. She kept talking about love. I thought...well, let's just say I haven't been so lucky in that department in quite some time. I dismissed it and tried to focus on what everyone expected me to do."

"I still can't believe you could do it. When I first met her, I knew instantly there was something different about her soul than anyone's I'd ever taken. But I was drunk I dismissed it, too. When I came back after sleeping off my alcohol, it was like my body gravitated toward her. I've never felt anything like it before. The protectiveness I've felt for her since then is something I can't even describe.

"I'm not going to lie. At first I wanted to just walk away. She stole my car to go to Jason. I even went home and paced for all of five minutes, but I knew I couldn't let her just disappear. My mate." He laughed. "I'll never forget the moment it hit me. My heart must have nearly exploded from swelling with love. I've never loved anyone besides her, you know."

Ambrose looked at him. "No, of course I didn't know. I think it's taking me longer than the rest of you to remember my past. I seriously barely even remember kneeling before her as queen. But I know what I see is true and she is what you all claim her to be."

“Yes, she is our queen. And if you ask me, probably the best damn thing to ever happen in this thing we call a life.”

“Well, I look forward to tonight. I’m not sure why, but suddenly I feel compelled to hand over my soul. There’s something significant about it that I can’t place my finger on.”

“I feel the same way.” Dominic searched his memory for having done it in the past, but he couldn’t grasp anything more than what he already knew, which only irritated him. He hated not knowing exactly what transpired from the battle, or how it even began.

All the air left Dominic’s lungs the moment he caught sight of Marcella and Jason walking down the stairs. They looked like a couple out of the medieval times. Dark hair rested in waves down to her waist while she wore a red and gold dress of silk. The material hung out loosely around the arm encircling Jason’s. Her crown sparkled brightly in the light. An aching raced through his heart.

Jason looked like a knight, and a completely different person. His dark hair surrounded his handsome face. The colors of his clothing matched hers. They, together, looked like the perfect pair and so much in love he wasn’t sure what to think. He’d never truly been jealous of the kid, but now he wasn’t sure what his reactions were.

“My queen,” Dominic said, kneeling as they approached.

“Rise, lover. You don’t have to kneel to me.”

Golden eyes sparkled as she brought her hands to his face, and his lips to hers. All the fears of Jason vanished in that moment. He had no reason to feel threatened by him. Marcella was his mate and he needed to remember that. She loved them both and that was just the way things were.

“So, I thought I’d bring the old tradition back. It feels right. We have no particular colors. The matching is just custom. It’s something I prefer. I’m truly not sure why, but I’d like it if we could always mirror one another. Somehow I think it makes it easier for me to spot you if I always know you’ll be identical to me.”

“I like that idea. It does feel right.”

Dominic took in Jason’s clothing, down to every little detail and dressed him and Ambrose in the same thing. The clothing immediately felt like it belonged.

“I like it. It’s...right,” Ambrose said, looking down.

"I couldn't agree more," Dominic muttered.

"Well, now look at all this food we just left here. Shall we eat?" Marcella asked.

Jason led Marcella to the head of the table when she stopped and looked toward the chairs that were placed at the other end of the room. The tension in her body made everyone stiffen.

"What is it?" Dominic walked over and brought her face to look into his.

"Dom, count the chairs. We're missing someone. Oh god! We're missing someone. There's another person and I can't remember who he is. This is horrible. You are my men. I should know who you are. What if he's all alone or is in some sort of danger and we're not there to help him?"

"Calm down," Ambrose said, walking over and resting his hand on her small one. "We'll find him."

"How?" she asked in a strangled voice.

"I don't know," he whispered.

Dominic hated seeing her distressed. But she was right. They were missing someone, and someone important. He could feel it, too. But a part of him had always felt like something was missing in his life.

"Could it be Samael's chair?" Jason asked curiously.

"It's not Samael. Oh shit, I don't even know his name or what he looks like. I just know it's someone I've never seen before."

"All right, let's take this one thing at a time." Dominic rubbed his eyes. "Let's eat and we'll go over what we can remember. Maybe someone will have some type of recollection of this guy."

"He wasn't kneeling with you three. I don't know how he fits into our circle. I just know he's one of us and he needs to be here."

Marcella sat down and watched as Jason and Dominic sat at the ends with Ambrose next to Jason. She looked back and forth from one side to the other. Picking up her fork, she began to slowly eat, studying the emotions and thoughts going through her head.

No one said a word, just as deeply in reflection as she. Before she realized it, her plate was clear and she still looked back and forth. Then the realization hit her so suddenly, she burst out laughing. A clue, her first clue.

"Lover... Dom, sorry I think that's an old habit."

"I like the name lover. It is old habit and one I prefer to keep. Go on, my queen."

"You led an army in the underworld, true?"

"Yes, of course. Thirty-seven troops to be exact."

Her stomach flipped. If Dom had thirty-seven armies alone, how many others were there? They'd never win with the amount of people that "the bad guy" had. She refused to think his name. Shit.

"All right, do you realize you automatically, sat on this side and Jason sat on the other? I think this is your army's side and that of course is his. Ambrose, being his number one man. Who's yours?"

Dominic's face turned pale white. "Oh fuck. Marcy, I don't know. The chair flew back as he sprung to his feet. "I should know this! You're right, I can feel it. I'm missing someone important to me. I hate not being able to remember."

"Lover, sit. We'll figure it out." Marcella sipped her wine while scouring through what she could remember. "The place we lived. Well, this place," she said gesturing with her hands, "do you all remember where you slept?"

"There are two rooms next to yours. Jason and I shared a room and Dom and this mystery person shared the other. But two of us always slept with you at all times. As protection of course, but we were lovers, too. It was always you, me, and Jason. Or, you, Dominic and...Don...Donavon! Oh shit, Dom, Donavon!" Ambrose jumped over the table and embraced her big, blond mate. "I can't believe I remember something."

"Donavon, that's it! I know that name, but nothing else except, well..." He got quiet and looked over at Marcy, then she watched his face turn red.

Marcella stood, feeling the heat rush through her limbs. How in the hell could *she* have forgotten Donavon? The moment his name broke through the air, flashes blinded her. Geez, just thinking about him turned her body to water. An amazing lover, that one was. His tongue...

"How you doing?" Dom pulled her slowly into her arms, running his hand across her fevered cheek. She hesitantly looked up into his eyes.

"I'm okay. I just think it's been a long day."

"I think you're remembering something." His finger trailed next to her earlobe and down her throat.

"Yes, I can remember a little about Donavon."

“Me too, and a certain obsession he had when it came to you.”

Dom’s other hands pushed against her gown, brushing the heat enflamed between her thighs. She moaned gripping tightly to the red and gold material covering his arms.

“Oh yes, you remember. I’m going to find him. And when I do, and he recalls the past, I know the first place he’s going to want to bury his face. And I’m going to let him,” he whispered into her ear. “I’m going to hold your arms like I used to and kiss you while you scream your orgasms into my mouth.”

“Dom,” Marcella whispered weakly.

“Yes, my queen.”

“Find him. Not just for that, but because I really feel like I’m missing a piece of myself without him. We need Donavon with us.”

“Anything for you. I’ll take Ambrose. Jason needs to stay with you. We’re all located around this area so I don’t think he can be far. I’ll return by dark. If you need anything, summon me.”

He turned away, looking at the dark haired vampire. “Let’s go find our boy. Jason, I don’t need to tell you what to do. Just protect our queen.”

Dominic changed their clothing, kissed her, and they rushed out of the large, wooden double doors. She turned to Jason, who was now standing next to the table. She sighed as she approached. “I’m changing, aren’t I? I don’t even feel like the same person anymore. The little girl is gone. I’m not who I used to be.”

Large arms quickly encircled her. “You’re turning into who you were meant to be. There’s nothing wrong with that. Everyone changes. I just think with you it’s going to be different. You’re still humanly young, but your mind now has to mature more years than you can comprehend. Everything will be fine, you’ll see.”

“I hope so because I don’t feel so good.” She rested her head against his chest, but instantly pulled back to meet his eyes. “Look at me, Jason. If I were to walk into a grocery store like this, can you imagine what people would think? But for the life of me, I can’t ever comprehend taking it off. I feel like this is who I really am, what I’m meant to wear. It’s like the mannerisms and this,” she said waving her hand in front of her gown, “is programmed into me.”

"I prefer this over the jeans and t-shirt, trust me. But if you have to go out, just wear the gowns and make people *see* you wearing normal clothes. You know how Dom taught us to do that. Human's see what they want to. You could walk naked in front of them and they would never know."

"You have a point." Marcella hesitated. "Tell me what you remember about Donavon."

"Come, let's lay on the bed. We've had a long day."

Resting her body against Jason's, he led the way. The mattress sunk to mold against her as she lay down and wrapped herself around her boyfriend. He took a deep breath and stayed silent for a few moments before he began to talk.

"Truthfully, I can't remember too much. I don't like him if that's what you mean. I get the impression he's a conceited bastard, and I'm not looking forward to seeing him prove it."

The more Jason spoke the angrier he became. "Come to think of it, I don't like him at all. Why in the hell do we have to bring him here? A part of me feels like we don't need him. We should summon Dom back."

"No, Jason. I feel we do need Donavon. You might not like him, but I don't feel threatened by him. We're going to need everyone we can get. You know?"

"I guess you're right. But I won't put up with his shit. I won't. I'm sorry, Marcella, but I can't shake this feeling that he's bad news."

"I'm sorry you feel that way, Jason. Maybe in this life he'll be different. It's possible time has changed him."

"Don't count on it. Inside, I don't feel like that's possible. I can't even remember what he looks like, but he's left a big enough impression that I know he's going to be just as big an asshole as he was back then. I'm glad he's on Dom's side. I'd beat the cockiness out of him if he were on mine. Shit, I still might."

"No more, Jason. Please don't talk about fighting right now. We're going to have plenty of that in the future. Just thinking about you all not getting along makes my stomach nauseous."

Marcella yawned and fought not to close her eyes. She was so tired and lying in this bed wasn't helping her out at all. Dom and Ambrose wouldn't be back for some time. She could probably afford to take a small nap before

they arrived. The longer she fought sleep, the worse she was beginning to feel. Something definitely felt off.

“Jason, I think I’m going to crash for a little while. Is that okay with you? I’d hate to leave you awake by yourself, but I’m extremely tired.”

“Get some rest. You have a big night. I’ll keep watch over you while you sleep.”

Snuggling closer to him, the scent from his skin calmed her, providing just the frame of mind she needed to fall head first into unconsciousness. When she awoke, hopefully Dom and Ambrose would be back with Donavon and their circle could be complete.

* * * *

The breeze from the coast filled the Maserati with the scent of the ocean as Dominic and Ambrose pulled out from the driveway of the house. Looking over, Dominic noticed the vampire resting his fingers on the bridge of his nose. Confused, he brushed it off and thought about where they’d find their lost man.

“Ambrose, if you needed to pick a direction, where would it be? I’m lost when it comes to guessing. I was in Corpus, as were you, and Marcella and Jason lived here in Ingleside. Now it’s a good fifteen to twenty minute drive between the two towns. Where would you say this Donavon guy is?”

“Well, if we want to pick the halfway mark there’s Portland. But who’s to say he’s not further north of Ingleside and living in Aransas Pass or Rockport?”

“Fuck, I don’t know. We should have just seen if Marcella could summon him. Do you think she could? She can summon me, but not Jason, and he’s her own servant.”

Ambrose ran his fingers through his long bangs and leaned forward making his hair cover his face. “I don’t know. We should have tried. It sure as hell would beat riding around different towns all day looking for a needle in a haystack. We all look a tad bit different than our old selves. So will he. Marcella’s the only one who looks the same.”

“You’re right. We’ll just ride through Ingleside and Aransas Pass, make a loop, and go home. Leave your senses open and let me know if you feel a pull in a particular direction. If you do we’ll head that way.”

“Sounds good to me. Hey, give me some glasses. This light is a killer. I can hardly open my eyes.”

Dom handed him a pair and looked at the soon to be setting sun. It wasn't far from the horizon. “It really hurts you that bad when it's this low?”

“The older you get the more the light affects you. I hate the sun. If it were up to me, I'd only be awake at night. But I had obligations I needed to take care of during the day, so I'm used to it.”

“Listen, I've been doing some thinking.” Dominic turned onto Highway 35 and headed toward Aransas Pass. “If I weren't mated to Marcella and it was just a feeling I had for her, I might have reacted the same way as you and tried to harm her. Especially, if I was taken against my will. You gave in a lot sooner than I might have. I'm sorry for attacking you like that, but you have to understand how much she means to me.”

“Thanks. But I know how much you love her. From the beginning I felt it. When you watched her sleep, I envied you. More than anything, I wanted to take your place. Maybe that's what scared me most of all. Never have I felt so strongly for a female. And trust me when I tell you, there have been plenty over the centuries. But you know I've always loved her, too, right? There's nothing I wouldn't do for her.”

“Who couldn't love her? Just being in the same room with her makes my blood race. I'm almost afraid to bring in all these people. It'll be us four protecting her against how many others? How many lovers will she take?”

Ambrose turned toward Dominic. “I'm not sure. But I don't think many, if any at all. Back in the past, she seemed pretty content with what she had. Between the four of us, we'll just have to keep her so busy she forgets to look elsewhere.”

Dom laughed. “Yes, I'm sure we can do that.”

The town of Aransas Pass wasn't much larger than Ingleside, just laid out differently. Turning down Wheeler Street, they made the long stretch to the other side of town until they reached ten-sixty-nine. Stopped at the light, they looked around.

“A Wal-Mart and a Walgreens. This place isn't like Corpus, is it?”

Ambrose let out a laugh. “No, not at all. Right now, we'd be stuck in traffic and fighting to make our way through every yellow light in town. It feels so laid back here. No one's pulling out in front of you or honking.”

Just then a honk sounded from next to them. “Hey sexy, you looking for a good time?”

Caught off guard, Dominic leaned forward to see a Jeep full of girls.

“Follow us! We’ll take care of both of you.” A blonde licked her lips while she pulled the top of her bathing suit open, exposing her large breasts.

They both laughed and Dominic turned left at the green arrow.

“I’m thinking maybe we shouldn’t mention that part,” Ambrose said, still laughing. “You know our queen. She can get pretty jealous.”

“Can she?” Dominic looked over interestingly.

“You don’t remember?”

“You do?”

Ambrose shrugged. “Not really, but I just know, okay? I can feel it. If some woman came on to you in front of her, her temper would flare. Take my word for it and don’t let it happen.”

Dominic nodded, staring at the road. They’d be coming to their turn within the next two to three minutes. As they drove the distance, he couldn’t recall Marcella ever showing any sign of jealousy. Had he been so focused on her, he missed it?

Turning onto the road, Dominic pulled in front of the house. The red brick starter home looked no more than a three bedroom residence that would belong in a subdivision. They glided up the sidewalk laced with gardenias, walking into the fortress. He could hear Ambrose lock the large wooden doors behind them.

“Now what do we have here?” Dominic smiled at Jason, who was sitting on the bed watching Marcella sleep. He eased onto the end of the mattress and nodded his head up to his friend. “Did she tell you anything more after we left?”

“Nothing vital. She fell asleep pretty fast. The way she’s changing is scaring her a bit, I think. The clothes, her manners, she’s not used to them and she can tell her behavior is different. Other than that, all she wanted to know about was Donavon. So, did you have any luck?”

Dom shook his head. “No, we didn’t know what the hell we were doing. We just cruised through town, seeing if we felt anything. I’m wondering if Marcella can summon him.”

“I don’t know, maybe.”

Knocking on the door made them all stop and look at each other. Marcy stirred in her sleep, fluttering her eyes open.

“Who’s here? Did you find Donavon?”

“No, we didn’t, and I have no idea who that is.”

Dominic strode forward making a peep hole appear in the wood so he could see. A groan passed his lips while he turned around. He could feel his heart beating through his chest for some unexplained reason.

“Ambrose, you answer it.”

“Who is it?” Marcella stood, walking toward him.

“No one,” he said quickly. “Why don’t you go back to the bed and rest?”

She narrowed her eyes at him and placed her hand on her hip. “No one. There are sounds of knocking and no one’s there? Odd. Let me see for myself.”

Marcella strode passed him and he quickly grabbed her around the waist and ran, placing her a few feet away. “Yep, I think it’s a ghost. They seriously follow me around all the time. I’m surprised you haven’t noticed. Let’s go up to the second floor and you can show me around. You know, I really don’t remember much about this place.”

When something passed through her eyes, he could have slapped himself for saying something so stupid. He did see spirits at times, but they sure as hell weren’t following him around, more like trying their best to hide from him.

“Wow, a ghost. That is absolutely amazing. I’d like to meet this ghost since I’ve never truly seen one before. Please, remove yourself from my path.”

Another round of knocking came louder and Dominic cursed. “Look, we don’t even know who these girls are, okay. They must have followed us or something.”

Marcella walked passed him, stopping at the wooden door. She quickly changed her appearance to a pair of jeans and a tank top, revealing her tattoos. Swinging the door open, she stared at the three girls. Two were blondes, the other a redhead. They were strikingly beautiful and dressed for the beach in short shorts and bikini tops.

“Hi, we’re looking for the guys that were driving that car. Are you the dark haired one’s sister?”

Dominic watched Marcella stare at the blonde asking the question. The look in her eyes were not her own. The golden color grew paler as she studied them.

“Sister? No, I’m not his sister. What do you want to see them about?”

A round of giggles didn’t so much as make her smile. The cold look on her face made the girls stop after a few seconds. The redhead shifted uncomfortably from the side.

“Well...we thought they were cute so we wanted to see if they would like to go to the beach with us tonight.”

“Oh. You wanted them to go to the beach.” A small laugh left her lips. Marcella turned and looked right at him, burning him with her gaze. Slowly, she made her way to look at Ambrose. “These girls want to know if you both would like to go to the beach. Would you? Do you want to go play in the sand with the beautiful girls?”

Another round of giggles echoed on the outside and Dominic looked from Ambrose to Jason, panicked. He hated not knowing exactly what happened in their past.

“Not I,” said Ambrose quickly.

She turned her gaze to him and took a step forward. “What about you, Dom? Would you like to go to the beach with them? They desperately want you to go.” The narrowing of her eyes made his mouth open and then shut.

“The other dark haired one can go too if he wants. He’s damn hot!”

Marcella’s eyes closed for all of two seconds when she opened them and looked at Jason. The blaze making them glow could not be mistaken. Dominic was glad she had her back to the girls.

“Jason, love. How about you?”

“No way, baby. You know you’re all I need.”

“So what about it, cutie? You gonna come with us?” Dominic looked at the taller of the blondes, the one who exposed her breasts.

The glow left Marcella’s eyes and she quickly turned around with a smile that looked so fake that Dom had no doubt that she wasn’t fooling anyone. “Listen, girly. As much as I know you would like all three of my lovers to go with you, I’m thinking they don’t want to. You see, I keep them pretty busy.”

“All three?” One of the blondes jaw parted as she looked from Marcella to the guys.

“Oh yes, honey. Well, that’s a lie. Actually there are four, but he’s not home at the moment. I’m sorry you all had to go out of your way. Have a fun time.”

Marcella slammed the door in their faces and stalked back to the bed. The guys looked at each other, not sure whether to follow her or stay as still as they could until she fell asleep. Dominic was choosing the latter. The last thing he wanted to do was feel the wrath he almost knew her capable of. Especially, if she was as angry as he guessed. By the look on her face, he’d live happily right here, in the same exact spot, for the next week if that’s how long it took for her to change moods.

Chapter 15

Marcella pushed her temper down and crawled in bed. Damn girls, wanting to take her men to the beach. Ridiculous. She could never see herself going to some stranger's house. What if Jason's mother would have answered the door? His mom would have freaked out. Disrespectful kids.

A knock made her sit up and glare toward the wooden divider. Ambrose quickly raised his hand stopping her from getting up. Very wise of him, she thought.

"I'll take care of it."

He opened the door and she listened carefully. She stared at Dominic the whole time noticing he refused to take his eyes from the floor.

"Are you sure you don't want to come?"

"Listen, we all love our girlfriend very much, okay. There's no way in hell I'm leaving this house, so go before she knows you're back. Trust me, my girl's got one hell of a temper and I'd really hate to see any trouble."

Ambrose shut the door and stared out of the peep hole until she assumed they were gone. The guys didn't move. Suddenly, she wasn't sure if she should feel guilty or not. One part of her felt extremely bad for the way she acted. What if they did want to go? What if they wanted to have fun?

The other part of her said if they wanted to have fun then they should be asking if *she* wanted to go to the beach. They could all have fun together. These were her men and no one else's. Hers, forever.

"All right, everyone come to the bed, dammit. Are you all planning to turn into statues or potted plants?"

"I personally was going for the statue look," Jason said, walking over and plopping down next to her. He rested his head in her lap while she played with his hair. She felt calmed at having something to keep her occupied from the new feelings taking over her. Damn she couldn't think straight. Her body was humming with weird sensations.

"I'm sorry I acted that way. Did you two really want to go? I mean, if you want to go with those girls then just tell me. I'll be okay with it. I don't know what's happening to me."

"Marcella, the girls didn't attract me. I love you. I felt more afraid of what you were going to do than anything. Just promise you won't blow our cover. I know with your change you're going to be going through an emotional rollercoaster, but please just try."

"I concur," Ambrose said, following Dominic's suit and sitting down on the bed.

"I promise, no more freaking out for me, okay?"

A knock at the door had a scream echoing off the walls. Marcella looked over angrily at the door and then back at them. They were as rigid as boards. The rage pouring through her proved impossible to control. "I promise, I promise....fuck! You have to be kidding me. Jason, help me. Make them go away. I'm trying my best here."

"No, prob, babe. I'll take care of this."

"No let me." Dominic rose and swiftly walked to the door pulling it open. "What?" The sound of his voice made *her* jump.

"You never gave us an answer."

"How about fuck no. Does that work for you? What in the hell is the matter with you girls? Don't you get the hint? We're not interested. Did you not see who answered the door the first time? She's gorgeous, not even on the same level with any girl on the planet. Now go away."

He slammed the door shut and walked back to the bed. Marcella laughed at the combination of anger and nervousness coming from him. She waved him over while he rolled his eyes, looking aggravated.

"Come here, lover. You've been tense since you came home. Tell me what happened on your search. You weren't gone very long. I don't see Donavon, so I'm assuming you haven't found him."

"No, we rode around trying to see if we felt a pull to anywhere in particular, and nothing. We were wondering if maybe you could summon him."

Marcella looked at the comforter while she searched for a connection to a man she couldn't really remember. Something was there, but like with Jason, she couldn't quite grasp it.

"I'm afraid not. Not yet, anyway. I can feel something, but it's not enough."

"Damn, we'll just have to make a plan and take one town at a time."

Dominic sighed and curled up on the other side of Marcella. The peace she felt having her boyfriend on one side and her mate on the other wasn't anywhere near complete until Ambrose lay between her legs and rested his head on her stomach. One more and she'd be whole. How was she going to find Donavon?

While the intensity of her worries increased, she could feel the change eating at her mind. As long as she stayed calm, she'd be able to deal with the multiple personalities trying to take over. The most powerful was none other than herself, her old self. Although she knew she and this former self were similar, Marcianna was ruthless on things she'd have easily let go. Jealously was one of the first things that stood out.

"Rest, love. Samael will be here soon."

Mindlessly, she curled her finger in Dom's ringlets while she ran her other hand through Ambrose's long hair. "I'm resting. Just let me get my emotions in order."

She wasn't sure how long she stared straight ahead in a trance before she caught what she'd been doing. Light snores filled the large room and she hadn't even noticed. If she lost touch with reality, what would happen? Her succubus, her vampire, even things she wasn't sure truly existed kept pushing to take over, but she managed to hold them off all thanks to her older self, the one she feared the most.

"What a happy little family. How are you feeling, my queen?"

Marcella jumped to her feet on the bed, leaving the sleeping guys falling off of her. Anger pounded against her insides as she looked at Samael. Enough games.

"Where's Donavon? I need my men complete. I can't think without all of us being together. You bring him to me now!"

"Whoa! Calm down," Samael said, walking over to the bed. "There's no reason to get upset. You know where he is, just try to remember."

"What the hell do you think I've been doing for the last few hours? I can't. Fuck, I can't even think passed stopping these...other creatures," Marcella pointed to her head, "from trying to overpower me. They want to

come out and I don't want them to. How in the hell do I control this? I will not be pushed out of my own body. Not even by Marcianna."

"Marcella, don't fight it. Let them come. Once you sate their cravings they'll leave. They are you, and you are them. Your old self isn't a separate person from the woman I'm talking to right now."

"I am not that mean. She's evil and I'm not! Did you know she killed people? I can still see their faces as my dagger pierces their skin."

"Do you remember why you killed them?"

"I didn't kill anyone, she did! I'm not her."

Samael got quiet and stared up at her, standing on the mattress. She towered over his tall frame and she hated that a part of her enjoyed it.

"I'm going to do something for you even though I'm not supposed to. Lean down to me and put your face even with mine."

Marcella turned and looked at her men. They stood without her saying a word and walked around to stand on the side of Samael. Dominic got inches from his face looking straight into his eyes.

"If you hurt her, we'll kill you."

"Oh, it's going to hurt, but it won't be permanent. She'll recover quickly."

"Do it." Marcella stepped off the bed and looked up at him. "If it'll help me find Donavon, I'll take it. I need to find him. You don't understand. We need him."

"Oh no, this isn't to help you find your other warrior. This is so you quit being a baby about what you are."

Large hands cupped her cheeks, wrapping around her head. Her face was jerked forward until all she could see was the deep blue of his eyes. Images exploded into her mind.

Looking around the edge of a door, she could see a woman facing an occupied chair. Her beauty was unmistakable. Flawless skin covered her face, her lips perfectly bow shaped. Leaning down toward Ambrose, she pushed her golden hair over her dark green, silk covered shoulder.

The woman kissed along his bare chest as she wrapped her arms around him. Anger consumed Marcianna, but she stared curious to see what Ambrose would do. The grip of his hand looked to be tight on the woman's shoulder as he held her attention and shook his head no.

Silver flashed from underneath the girl's sleeve and Marcianna realized she already had her dagger in her hand. She watched carefully while the girl slowly withdrew it from the underside of her wrist. Without thought, without a grain of guilt, Marcianna pushed the door open wider and sent her dagger flying into the girl's neck.

Screams broke through the vision as pain rushed into her head. She yelled for Samael to stop, but another vision soon followed this one faster, drowning out her voice. The men all were laughing at their long table. The great hall was completely full of people. She could feel how happy everyone felt. As hard as she could, she tried to bring Donavon's face into focus, but she couldn't.

A young man, no older than nineteen began filling her glass, distracting her. Red sloshed around her golden cup. The smell of food seemed so real, a part of her could swear she was truly there. Time slowed, until everything stopped completely. Immediately, she saw herself looking around at an immobile room. Grabbing her dagger from her thigh, movement and sounds swallowed the space as if nothing happened. A second hadn't gone by when pain erupted on the side of her throat.

Warmth spilling over her hand was the only clue that she'd even raised her weapon. Her eyes turned to Dominic, whose own dagger was buried in the serving boy's ribs. They stared at each other shocked. Pandemonium broke out as people rushed to her side, screaming about the attack. She knew she would heal within seconds, but the stampede of warriors set her into a panic. Suddenly, the color drained away until all she could see the darkness of Samael's blurry eyes in front of her.

Fire raced down her throat from screaming. Her energy felt completely gone. The last thing she refused to do though was drop like her body wanted to. Clearing her throat, she fought to focus her eyes, but with the pain in her head it was almost impossible.

"I see."

"You see! That's it?" Dominic stared at her unbelievably.

"Yes, I see. They deserved to die. I'd do it again."

"Well, what the hell happened?"

She opened her mouth, but closed it. Something told her not to tell. Her eyes went back to Samael. The anxiety coursing through him hit her in waves. The more she remembered the more sensitive she became. If she

didn't get him to calm soon her skin would begin to crawl with his concern. "I forgive you for showing me. Stop worrying."

The dark angel gave her a look as if he didn't believe her. "When you're back completely, you better not punish me for that. You asked for it. I've never seen you doubt yourself so much and it irritates me. Now, you mentioned not being able to think? Tell me."

Trying to find the words to describe exactly the problem, she twisted her hands in the material of her dress. "I can't think. My mind tries to focus and everything ends cut off except the tingling that's brought on by the voices."

"I was wondering when it would begin. You need to submit so we can see what happens. Something wants out and you have to let it."

"Absolutely, not!"

"There's no other way. You have to, and your men are going to need me here. You may not be anywhere near as powerful as you used to be, but I'm betting even now we're going to have a hell of a time controlling you."

"The succubus stays inside. She, I will not release. Not yet."

Samael rolled his eyes. "Whatever. If it is her trying to come, I'll help you put her back until you're ready. There are no guarantees but I'll try. Marcella, you have to understand what your life will be like. You will always have to release every creature at some point. That's what the dungeon is for. I don't think we need it yet, but we will eventually."

Marcella took a deep breath and closed her eyes. Great. What a thing to look forward to. She'd do this and get it over with. What could possibly go wrong? She might have had a hard time at first with her vampire, but she quickly got control of that one. The others should be a piece of cake.

"Fine, but no succubus." Cobwebs took over her body. Completely relaxing, she let the energy flow through her. The moment the change reached her chest, she could feel her heart accelerate and fill with rage and hate. Scared, her eyes flew open wide. She tried stopping the progression, but the pushing continued to rise.

"What is this? It's evil. I don't like it. Make it stop."

"I don't think I can," Samael said cautiously.

She turned to look at her men. "Please." Her throat immediately closed. The webs burst through her head and with it, the fire and heat from all the fury residing inside of her. An evil low pitched feminine voice whispered

incoherent words. Marcella started shaking her head frantically trying to make them stop.

Noticing her skin, she gasped for air. Gray tinted her flesh giving off the impression of a dead body. She wasn't sure if it was from the darkness overlapping her vision or if she truly was the awful color. Pains began to push against her shoulder blades setting her into further panic. The scary voice quickly distracted her from her body.

Marcella let out a scream from the hate she felt rush through her. Looking around, desperate to escape away from everyone, she raised her hands and used the energy to push them away. They all flew back a good ten feet landing hard on their backs.

The need to protect them left Marcella sprinting for the front door. They couldn't see her like this. What if she ended up hurting one of them? It wasn't worth the risk. How could she do this for the rest of her life? She wasn't safe.

Weight pulled her back within a second. A hiss broke through her mouth while she struggled against whoever was standing behind her, holding her immobile. The voice in her head screamed in anger making her own emotions flare. The door, which she still stared at, burst into eerie blue flames.

"Don't get in her path!"

Samael, he was the one behind her. She twisted, but didn't budge as another pair of large hands wrapped around her shoulders. Pieces of the flaming wood exploded from the door the moment she thought it.

"Let me go! I'll kill you. I'll fucking kill you!" The person who spoke the words sounded nothing like her. The tone sounded hoarse, scratchy, yet very powerful.

"What in the hell is she?" Jason yelled.

"Ask Dominic. He knows better than anyone."

Marcella heard her mate take a ragged breath. "She's a demon, a newborn one at that."

"Fuck...me, that shit is scary," Ambrose whispered.

An agonizing screaming echoed in her head while all she wanted to do was emulate the sound to make the noise stop. A string of words had her hands flying to her ears. *Run. Run away. Blood. Blood!* Marcella bared

down against the irresistible urge to cause chaos. She would not jeopardize anyone's life.

"How long do I have to do this? I can't take much more. She's driving me crazy." The words were almost impossible for Marcella to get out.

"Whenever you can turn, you're done." Samael and Dom eased their grip letting her go completely. Big mistake. She spun around taking in the four men who stood before her. The demon inside of her laughed evilly, fueling her to step toward them.

"I'm thinking you guys just fucked up royally." Jason's voice had her looking in his direction.

"You might be right, there, loverboy. I keep forgetting Marcella isn't exactly herself." She turned to Dom and hissed in his direction. Fire circled around everyone as she took a step forward, laughing. The flames shot up on her silent commands, reaching over all of their heads.

"You neglected to let me leave when I wished. Now you will all pay the consequences."

Dominic stepped forward giving her a bored look. Marcella fought to make the demon inside of her stop, but she couldn't call to her collector. Unable to control her body, she walked to meet him.

"It's time to go. You have to give me back my mate. You'll have ample opportunities to grace us with your presence in the future."

"I'm not going anywhere."

A pained expression passed over Dominic's face. "Don't make me use my authority. It won't be pretty." His eyes began to glow a bright red tinged with orange. The actual flames she could see in the color made fear shoot through her demon. Grasping, Marcella jerked her connection to the collector inside.

Cobwebs progressed with every step she took away from her mate. "Marcy, is that you?" Nodding, she made the fire disappear.

"I need some time. My collector is having trouble coming. Something else is getting in the way." Like lightning, a force rushed through her and she fell to the ground crippled in pain.

As the demon was pushed from her body, she could feel the instinct of a predator take over. Taking deep breaths, she tried to work her way through the aching.

Samael laughed as he looked around. "You feel that, boys? That tingling at the back of your neck is not something to ignore. You all be prepared. We're about to be visited by a shifter, and I'm not sure which one is her animal to call.

"She's going to go through the transitions of turning into a couple of different things, but ultimately she'll turn into the one who's chosen her. When she does, we make her change fast, or else someone might get their throat ripped out."

Marcella watched the dark angel smile at her guys. Yes, she wouldn't stay in the form for long at all. Not if it meant she'd end up really hurting someone. The demon turned out to be bad enough. That was too close of a call.

Marcella slammed her fist against the concrete at the amount of pain shooting along her contorting insides. Dominic instantly lowered himself and grabbed her hand.

"You're either very supportive or very stupid. Get the hell away from her."

"Shut the fuck up, Samael. I'm not going anywhere. When she begins to shift I'll back away, until then, kiss my ass."

"Suit yourself. It's your body."

The feeling of bugs crawling along her skin made her want to tear herself to pieces. She slapped at her arms frantic to make the pain overpower the uncomfortable sensation. Dom caught her arm. A roar poured out of her mouth before she could stop it. He looked at her, frozen.

"Don't," Marcella whispered. "Just don't touch me, please, lover."

"I'm sorry. I just hate seeing you go through this."

Biting her lips against the twist in her upper stomach, warmth poured into her mouth. As if the blood were the missing ingredient in some type of supernatural alchemy, her ribs began to snap with loud cracks. The pain caused Marcella to jolt, leaving her unable to scream. All she could do was try her best to suck in air as she tried not to move.

"Son of a bitch," Jason whispered. "How often does she have to go through this?"

"Depends, really," Samael said. "But I'm thinking about once a year. Her other forms are going to be triggered a lot easier and sometimes need

attention at least once every few days. What's the one that comes to her the most?"

"Succubus," Jason answered. "She hates it. Sometimes all she has to do is kiss us and she's taken over and can't stop the thing from coming."

"That's what I thought. Well, other than that, is there anything else?"

Jason's head tilted as he looked at her. "She's turned into a vampire quite a bit. And a Wiccan, once, when she tapped into her powers of the elements, but nothing else that I'm aware of."

"Well it seems like she's not going wolf like I thought she would. With that roar, I'm thinking lioness. How much do you want bet?"

"No way, I heard her. I'm going to have to be with you on this one. Dom, dude, get your ass back. How do you think she's going to feel when she accidentally bites your head off?"

"Jason, shut up. She's not going to do that. She may be a newborn in everything she does, but Marcella is still there, somewhere."

"Enough," she panted. "I can still fucking hear all of you."

The distortion of her insides grew worse and she suddenly felt like her body shattered. The agony of the process ended just as quickly as it began. The world blurred only to come in crystal clear and so different than what she was used to. The moment she thought she'd bypassed the multiple shifts and remain in lioness form, she began to morph all over again. Colors distorted and cravings for meat overpowered every thought.

Over and over she could feel her body flex, and push, and strain until she was sure there would be nothing left of her by the end of the process. She hated it. Never again would she go this long without taking care of her inner creatures. At least, if she shifted on occasion, she wouldn't have to go through multiple transitions.

Nausea threatened while everything continued moving. Her equilibrium was in desperate need for absolute stillness. A last ripple rolled through her body and finally the cold floor became evident under her nude body. She pushed her fingertips into the hard ground praying to never move again.

Arms picked her up and carried her to the bed. She looked up into Dom's pained eyes and prayed she'd stop feeling motion. Exhaustion beckoned her to the peacefulness of sleep, but she fought the feeling, knowing the night wasn't over. With her eyes closed, a tickling began to

etch against the sounds of whispering. Listening carefully, her eyes flew open. Heartbeats, she could hear every single beating heart in the room.

“Holy shit. I want her eyes. How awesome is that?” Jason tilted his head moving a little closer to her.

“What color?” The thickness in her throat made it difficult to talk. She tried clearing it, but the feeling didn’t go away.

“They’re green, but with yellow shooting through them. I’ve never seen anything like it before. I can’t wait until I can turn shifter. I wonder what my animal will be.”

Jason’s voice began to fade in and out until all she heard was his heart. Somehow, she managed to focus on his individual beat instead of hearing the others’. *Thud-thud, thud-thud*. The noise, so sweet, so...alive, drew her to stand and move closer to him. The scent of his skin hit her in a wave of mouth watering sensations.

Did he know his complexion couldn’t be more flawless or perfect? The temperature of his skin caressed hers the faster she neared, and she wanted to bask in his warmth. Did he know he ranged in the high ninety-nine degree mark? She wasn’t even sure how she knew. But she did discern that she felt warmer than he would, and she couldn’t stop thinking about how much she wanted to test the theory. Her teeth would be perfect. She could bite against his skin and run her tongue over the flesh. What would he taste like while she compared their heat?

“Marcella!”

She looked up at Samael, annoyed. “What?”

“What do you think you’re doing?”

Confused, she raised her hands. “Nothing. What do you think I’m doing?”

“Continue then, by all means. Jason, don’t say I didn’t warn you. You’re about to become lunch.”

Alarmed, he looked at the foot of distance separating them. “Um, Marcella, do you think maybe you could just, well, take a step back? As much as I love you being close to me, I’m not sure I want to get mauled by a lioness at the moment.”

“I beg your pardon, but to think I would do something like that is...” Realizing exactly what she’d been doing and how she felt, she took a

stepped away. “Yeah...I think it’s time to see if I can find my collector. Hopefully this is over with.”

Walking back toward the bed, she made a space for herself away from everyone. She wasn’t sure what would happen, but fear made her cautious of whom she stood by. She braced herself and grasped the link to her true self. Opening her eyes, she saw the tattoos and sighed in relief.

“So, I guess that was it.”

Samael came closer to her. “The demon is probably the reason for the rapid thoughts and aggravation. We’ll let it out again in about a week so it doesn’t become too much. Afterward, every other month or so should be fine. But next time we chain you in the dungeon. If you escape, there’s no telling what you’d do.”

“I think that’s best. Fuck, my muscles ache. Shifting is intense.”

“The more you do it the easier it will become,” Samael said, crossing his arms. “Now, it’s time for the collecting. After what you just went through it might take you more than one try to accomplish, but you’ll be able to pull it off. I have complete faith in your abilities.”

At least someone did. She wasn’t so sure, herself. The first attempts failed. True, Ambrose hadn’t submitted, but still, what if taking his soul didn’t work this time either?

“I’m ready.” Marcella materialized a pair of white lace panties and a bra to cover herself, and still bare the tattoos. Clearing her head, she concentrated and imagined the bed in the room gone, and candles lighting almost every surface. The smell of lavender hung heavily in the air by the time she reopened her eyes.

“Very good. Your instincts are superb.”

“Ambrose, please kneel before me.”

Marcy didn’t even wait for Samael to tell her what to do. The lavender helped calm and clear her head. She let her own soul lead her in the progression. If she wanted to be truthful to herself, this last transformation was her turning back to her old self. Marcianna lingered in the background just out of touch, but close enough to control Marcy’s actions. The only thing that wasn’t taken over was a piece of her mind. How big that piece was, she wasn’t sure.

The clear symbol on her chest began to glow as he kneeled on one knee and stared up at her. Golden letters lit up across the flesh-toned cross and

she immediately projected them out as if she were looking at a see-through movie screen.

Glancing over the chant she looked away. She already knew what to say, and it wouldn't even matter if she read it word for word. The power belonged to her. As long as she followed the general outline, she would be fine.

"You pledge to love me, protect me, and become my follower. Is this true?"

"Yes."

"Vampire, creature of darkness, from this moment forth you shall become my follower and I, your queen. Through me, you will no longer be damned." Marcella manifested her dagger and sliced her forearm. "I bleed for you. I'll honor you. You and I will become one, from now until your time comes for us to say goodbye. I pray that time won't be anywhere in the near future. I've missed you more than you'll ever know, my knight. I plan to keep you safe for as long as you'll love me."

Ambrose took her knife and cut his arm. "And I bleed for you, my queen. Everything from this moment forth will be for you. I'll serve you for the rest of my days. Nothing, and no one, will ever separate us. You are now my life."

Marcella smiled and sunk to her knees. Their lips connected and the pull she felt to his soul came easily. No pain, no shortness of breath, just as easy and sweet as their vow for each other. Light lit up the room and his soul entered her body. A love and bond so overpowering consumed her soul, making her want to wrap her arms around him forever and never let go.

"Thank you for trusting and loving me, Ambrose. I promise not to fail you."

"You could never fail me. I'll love you always, my queen."

Marcella stood while Ambrose walked to stand by Jason. A thought made her turn to Samael. "Dominic's soul. Do you have it?"

"Yes, my dear. But I'm afraid I can't give it to you."

Raising her eyebrow, Marcianna took a step forward. "And why is that?"

"Because then if someone ever came looking for it, they'd know it was gone. He's a demon. To the big man himself, he owns Dominic."

"Not anymore. Give it to me."

“Marcella, you know I can’t do that.”

“Well, you will. Right now. If they find it missing, he can come to me. He eventually will anyway and I want Dom’s soul in my possession.”

“I...”

Pulling him forward by his energy, she gripped his shirt in her fist and glared at him. “You’re going to give me his soul right this minute. And if you think I need a chant to get it, you’re sadly mistaken. You see, he’s pledged to me already. He’s mine.” Blood dripped down her elbow while she smiled at him.

“You wouldn’t dare.” The resistance in his eyes left her no choice. There was no way she could let Dominic stay behind. If something happened and she ever needed to bring them all back again, he’d be lost.

Pulling Samael’s head back, she wrapped herself around him while he tried to pull her off. She jerked his hair and locked her mouth to his. With the pressure she felt, she knew it was Dom’s soul. Unlike Ambrose’s quick easy transaction, her mate’s made tears come to her eyes. She could literally feel her soul ripping his away from Samael. What she didn’t expect was to take the other demon’s soul, too. Fire engorged her insides until she felt sure the heat had reached a boiling point. The light nearly blinded her.

Their mouths broke apart and they gasped heavily. Slowly, Marcianna eased herself off of him. “If you ever deny me again, there *will* be a punishment. Is that understood?”

Samael’s eyes clouded with tears. “You really did it now. Fuck, Marcianna. You weren’t supposed to be able to do that. His, okay, but mine?”

His words hit her hard making reality dawn on her. Marcella broke through her other self feeling somewhat dazed. “I knew you had intense feeling for me, but love?” The words flowed out before she could stop them.

“I’ve always loved you. I think I already told you that. We used to be good friends.”

“Wait, you took both of their souls?” Jason walked up staring back and forth amazed. “How fucking awesome is that? Welcome to the family, Samael. Hell yeah! Can you imagine what kind of warrior a master demon will make?”

Samael raised his hand. “Jason, pipe down the enthusiasm until I can figure out how I’m going to pull this off. I’m over there, more than here. Do

you know what will happen if I'm discovered? Collectors are extinct for a reason. If it was known that my soul was being harbored by one it would be considered betrayal, punished immediately in the worst ways imaginable. It's eternal, not something I can work my way up from."

"You know I'd never let that happen, Samael. Especially now. You may be my protector, but ultimately, I'm yours."

Marcella was confused from expression. She was his ultimate protector, wasn't she? From the look on his face, she wasn't so sure. She hated not knowing the secrets he held. It was something she'd have to think about later. Turning to her other half, she motioned him forward.

"Jason, come to me."

The smile radiating off his face was contagious. He'd always been able to do that. Just when she thought she'd lose her mind from something, he'd swoop in and make her forget.

"Let's do this, babe." He kneeled before her, growing serious.

"Collector, you are part of me, all of me. I had you once, and I ask to claim you again. Do you give your word to protect, honor, cherish, and love me, for the rest of your days?"

"You forgot the part where I pleasure you, but yes, yes I will."

Marcella laughed and rolled her eyes. Noticing her wound already healed, she recut her arm. "With this blood, I will honor, cherish, and protect you forever, no matter what. You're my other half. My everything. We shall never be separated again. I'll always bring you back with me, as I will with all of you."

He followed suit, not even looking down at the blood flowing from his arm. "And I bleed for you, my queen. Everything from this moment forth, I do for you. I'll serve you for eternity. Nothing will ever force its way between us. I give you my soul freely, and everything else your heart shall ever desire."

Lowering herself, Marcella met his waiting lips. Jason's soul freely came into her body. Light exploded into the room and her collector jerked awkwardly inside of her as the power grew.

"And now, we are all one." Marcella whispered the words against his lips while he shivered. Heat poured from his skin and she could almost feel his love for her radiating from his pores. Turning slowly, she smiled. "This

is the way it should be, I can feel it. Now, as for Donavon, we start the search first thing in the morning.

“Samael, you said that you’re over there, more than here. Is there any way I can convince you to live in the fortress with us?”

Blue eyes grew big as he looked at her. “You want me to stay here with you?”

“Why, of course. I know we have a connection. We were close. I would like that again. Please, don’t hold the fact that I took your soul against me. I feel better knowing that you’re even closer to me now.”

“I don’t hold it against you, but you do understand that if this time you don’t succeed, there’s no one to bring you all back, right? If you die and they lock me away, no one will ever be reborn. The only thing I can come up with is that you must somehow be confident in your future plans or else you wouldn’t have condemned us all.”

Marcella took in his words feeling butterflies swamp her stomach. “Samael, I don’t know what Marcianna has planned. She comes and goes, as you can see. I can’t control her if she decides to take over.”

“She doesn’t exist, Marcella. She is you. You’re the one doing this. Don’t separate the two of you. It’s only going to make things harder to accept. Now, I should go. I’ll think about your offer on living here.”

“Take care.” She pushed his words away and kissed his cheek. The depth of his emotions brushed against her skin, but she ignored his worry. He vanished before Marcella’s eyes, before she could thank him.

Turning around, she faced her men. In the reflection of candlelight their beauty almost took her breath away. Could this really be happening? It felt like just yesterday she’d been talking to Jason about the baseball draft. Now, he looked like he’d aged from twenty-one to twenty-four. Before, he’d been well built, but she could swear his arms were now almost twice as thick. No wonder he told his mother he was going out of town again, but this time with Dom. The moment she saw him, she was going to freak out.

Thoughts raced through her mind and she knew it was Marcianna going over everything. No matter what Samael said, she couldn’t think of them as the same person. How could she when she could feel the different presence inside of her? They weren’t one, not really. Ignoring the uncomfortable feeling, she walked forward until she approached them.

“You’re exhausted.” Dominic’s hand cupped her cheek, making her meet his eyes.

“It’s irrelevant. We’re going to celebrate. Tonight is a night I don’t ever want to forget. I think we should go out. What you do all think? Do you want to go somewhere and have some fun?”

Marcella dressed herself in a white and red silk dress. It looked much like the one she’d worn before, just a different color. It felt like home, which put her at ease.

Looking up, she noticed they tensed around her. The silence set off internal alarms. “Answer me. Do you all want to go out or not? If you don’t, that’s fine. I just thought maybe you all needed a change of environment, an abundance of people. Don’t you want to have fun instead of being held up here?”

“Just the thought of having you around that many people nearly makes me sick,” Jason said, holding his stomach.

Ambrose nodded. “I agree. We’d constantly be on guard. I vote we stay here.”

She looked at Ambrose, then to Jason, and back to Dominic, who remained quiet. “Things changed, didn’t they?”

Dominic nodded his head, yes.

“So, you’re saying... if I thought you all were protective before, basically, it’s nothing compared to now, right?”

“Exactly,” Dominic whispered.

“But I wanted you all to have fun. I wanted to see everyone laugh and have a good time. How am I going to do that now?”

“Just being with you makes us happy,” Jason said.

“It’s not the same and you know it. Somehow I’m going to figure out a way for us to go places and have a good time without you all having to worry.”

“Until you do, let’s get some rest. I’m eager to find Donavon. And tomorrow will be a long day. I’ll take my regular room and Jason can take his, we’ll keep an ear out for anyone. Ambrose will stay with you in yours, tonight. If that’s all right with you?”

“I think it’s a wonderful idea.” Marcella looked toward the vampire. Her body instantly began to respond to the new closeness she felt to him. They’d

yet to be completely intimate and she decided tonight would be perfect to correct that.

“Good.”

Dominic and Jason came to her side while Ambrose followed behind them. She walked up stair after stair until they finally reached the two rooms that rested at the entrance of her tower.

“We’ll see you in the morning.” Dominic opened his door, as did Jason. “If you need anything let us know.”

“We will.” Marcella kissed them goodnight, and took Ambrose’s arm. They walked up the stairs and she turned on the light. At the familiar environment calmness enveloped her. She could do this. Her body sure wanted to. But just the thought of making love to someone new frightened her a bit. Dominic, from the beginning, felt so familiar due to their mate status. Jason, she had known forever. But Ambrose, he was new. Even though she knew they had done this dozens of times in their past life, it just wasn’t the same.

As he stared at her, she walked to the side of the bed and slowly begun taking off her clothes. A part of her knew he didn’t expect this, but she wanted to complete their joining. It was time to reestablish their bond.

Chapter 16

“Marcella, if you’re not ready...” Ambrose’s thick voice caused her nipples to tighten painfully against the white lace bra. Silk whooshed to the floor when her dress came to rest at her bare feet.

“I’m ready.”

Instead of calling for him to come to her, she walked until they were inches apart. His body was shaking at her nearness. Waves of lust poured from his skin. Closing her eyes, she inhaled the erotic aroma deeply.

“You want me, don’t you?” Marcella whispered.

His tongue ran over his lips while he continued to take in her body. “Yes, more than anything.”

“I’m yours, forever, now. Kiss me, Ambrose.”

Instead, he swept her in his arms, and carried her to the bed. She watched as his weight settled over her body. Dark hair fell forward while he captured her mouth in a passionate kiss. A flavor all his own swept over her, igniting his soul that rested deep within.

Ambrose rubbed his cheek against hers. “You have no idea how much I’ve wanted to touch you and to taste you. Your blood calls to me, begs me to sample its sweetness.”

“I want you to taste me.”

Marcella slid her hands under his shirt, feeling the muscle tighten as she made her way up to his chest. He ripped the shirt off, tearing it in his dismissal. Everything else quickly followed until his nude skin pressed against hers.

Lips trailed down her chest until he reached the clasp between her breasts. Sliding his finger underneath, he pushed up, freeing her generous mounds from the confines of the lace. Seeing him so close made her nipples ache even more.

“No words could describe your beauty. I feel the need to express myself, but I truly can’t even think of the right thing to say. You’re so much more than a description.”

Hair tickled her skin as he lowered himself and sucked her tight tip into his mouth. A gasp escaped her at how cool his tongue felt. Against the heat of her skin, he wasn’t far from the temperature of ice. She moaned underneath him, arching her back against the pleasurable contrast.

Pressure from his hands gripped the sides of her ribs while he began to work his way to her other breast. The tips of his fangs dug across her skin making her hands tighten on the comforter beneath her body.

“My God, you smell so good. The flavor of your skin...I can’t wait to taste you.”

Ambrose shifted slightly and his fingers traced her folds, massaging the wetness into her smooth skin. A cry escaped her lips as his fang punctured her skin. Ecstasy exploded immediately throughout her body. She looked down to see a tiny crimson drop surface on the curve of her breast. Ambrose groaned deeply as he collected it with the tip of his tongue.

“Fuck, your blood is downright sinful. A vampire would do anything for the zest and power of your taste.” He growled and rolled her on her stomach. Softness kissed down her back. When he reached the lowest part Marcella tensed and nearly screamed when he continued farther.

“Marcella, calm.” Peace instantly filled her, and she didn’t have to see his hand hovering above her to know he was the cause.

Wetness from his tongue swirled around the fullness of her ass. The sensitive skin picked up the softest touch. Pressure pushed against the opening of her pussy. Two fingers slid inside of her.

“How much do you like that?”

Swallowing past her dry throat, she searched for her voice. “A lot. I don’t want you to stop.”

“Oh, I won’t stop.”

Ambrose’s other arm wrapped beneath her hips, pulling her closer to him. When his tongue circled her back entrance and continuously probed, she buried her face in the mattress and screamed her orgasm through. Her hips jerked, but he held them firmly in place.

“Just feel.”

The words brought another orgasm bursting from her body the moment the first one stopped. She tried breathing past the scream, but couldn't do anything but feel the tingling that swept over every inch of her.

"So you like it? I wasn't sure if you would. You see, the gift wouldn't have worked if you didn't find pleasure from what I was doing."

Panting, she lifted her head and looked back at him. "That was amazing." Letting her head fall back to the covers she tried to focus her eyes. There wasn't an area on her body that wasn't vibrating from the high she felt. This, she could get used to.

* * * *

Looking down at Marcella's body, Ambrose could feel his cock throb painfully. The way she affected him went beyond lust. "Oh no, we're not done. There's plenty to make up for. We've been separated for too long."

Wrapping his arms around her, he brought her back against his chest. Her heat seared him deliciously and he couldn't help but want more. Ambrose reached around her waist, brushing his fingers across her clit. She jumped, moaning low in her throat.

The fact that she was enjoying his touch to the extent that she was excited him more than he thought possible. He'd always been able to sense when a woman pretended pleasure or only wanted to have sex with him due to what he could give them. Gwendolyn just enjoyed his bite. Marcella basked in the fact that he, himself, touched her.

Ambrose slid his cock against her slit. The warmth emanating from her caused him to bite his lower lip. She felt so good, so hot and ready for him. He pushed the tip against the opening of her pussy, breathing heavily at the juices that greeted him.

"Fuck, you feel so good."

Tightness gripped around him as he slowly inched his way into her. He wrapped his arm across her chest holding her firmly against him while he rotated his other fingers repeatedly.

"God, I missed this," she whispered.

Her words filled his heart with love. Flashes of their past teased his mind, but he didn't want to see them now. All Ambrose wanted to focus on was the moment happening before him.

Taking in the scent of her skin, he buried his face in the side of her neck. She smelled so familiar. This is where he was meant to be, with her, no matter where that led him. For all he cared, Gwendolyn could take over or do whatever she wanted. The only responsibility he had now was moaning beautifully in front of him.

“Let me taste you, Marcella. Allow me to give you the greatest pleasure you’ve ever felt.”

Waves of dark, loose, curls fell forward as she nodded her head yes. Ambrose’s heart pounded when she gave her response. Just knowing that he was going to be able to taste her nearly blinded his control. She wasn’t someone he could just sink his fangs into. His queen needed gentleness.

Kissing along the softness of her neck, he trailed a path from her ear to her shoulder, running his tongue against the silkiness. His thrust slowed almost torturously, but when he felt sure her body was as relaxed as it would get, he let his fangs break through her smooth skin.

Nails bit into both of his hands. Marcella moaned loudly and tightened around his cock while her orgasm hit full force. Ambrose thrust into her deeply, feeling the power of her blood explode through him. Pleasure like he never experienced washed over in a tidal wave of desire.

The more blood he drank, the more his eyes burned. She was too powerful, too pure, but stopping almost seemed impossible. Together they were one, body and mind. Marcella’s thoughts, her emotions, surfaced. He knew everything she ever experienced in this life and every thought she ever had, all within seconds.

Pressure gripped around him again and reluctantly he broke his lips from her throat. Ambrose leaned her forward and began to thrust into her steadily. Hoarse screams came from her throat, and he didn’t stop until she panted before him. Feeling his cock swell, he pulled out spilling his cum across her ass.

Noticing what a hard time she was having getting air, he lifted her and carried her to the restroom adjoining her room. Turning the water on, he cradled her until it became warm enough for them to get in.

“You’re so much warmer now,” she whispered against his chest.

“I’ve fed. It happens. Our temperatures fluctuate a bit around the time we need to feed.”

Marcella wiggled and he let her down, but she wrapped her arms around his waist and held on to him. The top of her head rested a good two inches below his chin. He kissed her dark curls and closed his eyes against the flashes that suddenly blinded him.

“You know I would never hurt you, right? With the whole stabbing thing, you have no idea how much I regret that. I was scared at the feelings I felt for you. You have to understand, it’s been hundreds of years and my ability to trust is not so good.”

“Shh, no more talking. I know why you did it.”

“But you have to know...”

“I do, Ambrose. I felt it when you were drinking. I saw and experienced everything you have. I’m so sorry my old self was responsible for some of the things you’ve been through.”

“I’m not sure how you knew I’d become a vampire, Marcella.”

“I know I did. I’m not sure how, but I knew, or else I never would have brought you back so soon. Don’t you see, Ambrose? I needed you to be what you are in order for the result to be different this time. I’m a horrible person. Dominic, I sentenced to hell. Hell! Donavon is lord knows where, and doing lord knows what. Shit, we don’t even know what he is. I made you a vampire. Jason is the only one I didn’t curse with something. I’m not sure why I’ve done the things I have, but I intend to find out.”

* * * *

Dominic stood in his doorway staring at the entrance to Marcella’s room. He hadn’t moved since she and Ambrose proceeded up the stairs. Repeated screams echoed from down the few steps leading to her tower. A part of him wanted to rush up there even though he knew they weren’t screams of pain.

“How long do you think this is going to go on? I don’t like to hear her getting off if I’m not one of the ones involved.”

“I’m not sure, but I know what you mean.”

Jason stood facing him from the opening of his room. It seemed he wasn’t the only one having a hard time adjusting to the way things were.

“How mad do you think she’d be if we went up there and disturbed them?”

Dominic raised his eyebrow. "I'd be pissed. But that's just me."

"Yeah, you're probably right." Jason leaned his head farther out of the door. "Man, you should feel that bite Ambrose has. I don't blame her for screaming one bit. The pleasure is beyond what I think I'll ever be able to master."

"Jason, shut up. I don't want to hear that shit."

"What? I'm just saying. We'll be lucky to ever sleep with her again after tonight."

"Dude, shut the fuck up. What is the matter with you? Don't you ever know when to stop?" Dominic tried to control his temper as he continued to stare at the stairs. The screaming and moaning momentarily stopped, but for how long was yet to be seen.

"Play some music or something. I'm bored as fuck standing out here. What happened to you? You used to play us tunes all the time. Ever since Marcella left, you stopped."

"Maybe I just haven't been in the mood lately, okay?"

"Are you in the mood right now?"

Dominic glared at Jason. "No, not really. Plus, we won't be able to hear if anything happens below. We're on guard, remember?"

"Of course I remember. But I guarantee you that no one is breaking past the barriers I put up around yours."

"What, you don't think I did a good enough job?"

"You can never be too safe."

Rolling his eyes, Dominic looked away from the boy, who now looked more like a man, and turned back toward Marcella's direction. His mind raced while he tried to imagine what they were doing in the room. Ambrose wouldn't hurt her again, would he? Certainly not now that he'd given her his soul. But what if he did?

"Jason, you don't think Ambrose would harm Marcella, do you?"

"No way, dude. She's not hurting, trust me. Plus, I don't get that feeling from him. Not anymore."

"Fuck, I hate not being with her. It drives me crazy. Ever since she left, I feel the need to have her glued to my side."

Dom ran his fingers through his blond curls, cursing under his breath. He needed to figure out a way to back off. More men would surely come

into her life and it was something he'd have to deal with. Donavon was one of them. When he arrived, at least Dominic knew they could finally pair up.

"You know what? Fuck this. I'm going up there."

Raising his hand up to stop Jason, Dominic stepped forward. "What are you going to tell them? You're seriously not going to say you were jealous, are you?"

"I'm going to tell them the truth. I'm tired and I can't sleep unless Marcella is by my side. If they want to continue what they're doing, I'll turn my back."

"You're not fucking serious." Dom laughed, shocked. "Ambrose is going to bust you in the face. It's his first night with Marcella. They have stuff they need to work though."

"Not my problem. I'm tired and I want to go to sleep."

"Well, I'm coming with you. You know, to stop Ambrose from ripping out your throat and all."

"Shut the fuck up, Dom. You so want to be in there, too. Quit trying to play Mr. Hardass."

"Oh, be quiet and lead the way. You're knocking, not me."

Laughter echoed off the walls of the bedroom as they walked up the stairs and approached the door. Dominic's heart was racing. Seeing the paleness of Jason's hand rise, he held his breath, but the door suddenly swung open.

"I couldn't sleep without you both, either. Come, climb into bed. You know, I could hear you both talking."

Jason turned around, smiling brightly. Shaking his head in annoyance, Dominic followed them inside. "I told him we shouldn't bother you."

"Yes, but you wanted to, and had every right to come to me. Even when I was taking a shower I could feel both of your anxiousness."

Marcella kissed his cheek and bounced down on the bed next to Ambrose's pale body. The smell of her soap hung heavily in the air. He sighed and thanked God it covered up her scent. If he would have been able to smell their sex, he'd have gone crazy with wanting to taste her.

"Jason put extra security around mine, so we should all be fine."

"And I put extra security around his." Marcella winked at him and he had to laugh. Her cuteness went beyond adoring a crush or a first time lover. He absolutely loved her.

"I call dibs on this side."

Jason jumped up next to Marcella while Ambrose made himself comfortable on the other side of her. Dominic glared down and growled. There was no way he would settle for sleeping by either one of these men when his mate was sandwiched between them.

"If one of you doesn't move I'm grabbing the first foot I can find and pulling your ass off the bed."

"No need, lover. You come and lay in the middle and I'll sleep on your chest."

White teeth flashed at him and he smiled at Marcy. "That sounds better than perfect." He raised his eyebrow at Jason, who just rolled his eyes.

"Well, hell. I'm not cuddling up next to him if that's what you want. Son of a bitch." Jason rolled over as Ambrose laughed at him and faced the other way. Dominic climbed up, embracing his mate.

"Now this is more like it."

"Go to sleep, Dom. If you start bragging, I'm sleeping on the floor and you three men can hold each other all night for all I care."

Grinning, he made the light from the room vanish. He'd be quiet for now, but the thought that he'd be able to hold her all night was worth getting chided. Yawning, he nuzzled his face to her damp hair. "Good night, love."

A mumbled reply answered him and Jason's snores soon followed. Dominic listened to the sounds of the room, content in his life more so than ever. Hours went by while he held the woman he loved and had vowed to protect. Going over everything he could think of to make a peaceful solution, he hated that he hadn't gotten any closer to finding one before unconsciousness took him from his thoughts.

* * * *

Light broke through the room making Marcella stir from sleep. A cocoon of warmth surrounded her so tightly she couldn't move. Sometime during the night Dom must have turned. Jason completely wrapped himself around both of them leaving her trapped between their two large bodies. She wanted to laugh at what either one would do if they picked that moment to wake up.

Tilting her head, she saw their faces not inches from each other. Movement made her freeze. Easily, so as not to wake them, she lifted her head and looked at Ambrose who was sitting up. A laugh burst from his mouth making her groan out loud.

“God dammit, Jason! Get off me.” Dominic picked up Jason’s leg from his thigh and threw it off. Her boyfriend groaned and rolled over, facing away from them. Finally, free from her trap, Marcella grabbed the pillow and knocked Ambrose across the shoulder.

“What? They looked so cute.”

“Enough,” Dom growled. He pulled Marcella back down from her half sitting position and cuddled with her.

“You know what, asshole? You got her all night. I get her this morning.” Jason turned over and stared at them, his eyes heavy with sleep.

“No, you can have her tonight. I want her now,” Dom said, angrier.

“If you are going to start this early, I’m going to order you all out so I can go back to sleep.”

“Hey, what did I do?” Ambrose said, from the other side of Dom.

“You woke them.” Marcella closed her eyes but knew there was no going back to sleep. She felt wide awake and ready to eat a big breakfast and start their search for Donavon. Today would mark their new life and she wanted to start as soon as possible.

“Dominic, I’m serious, let me have her for a little while.”

Marcella opened her eyes. “Jason, there’s no point. We need to get going to look for our other man. But I’ll tell you what. Dominic can drive and I’ll ride in the back with you. If you want to hold me there, you can. I’ll even sit on your lap if it makes you feel better.”

“It would. Thanks, babe.”

Dominic groaned and eased his arms from her while he sat up. Everyone got off the bed and materialized new clothes. Marcella matched Ambrose with them and they left the house within minutes of waking. She’d eat in the new SUV she had waiting for them. The sooner they started searching, the sooner they’d find Donavon. The need to feel complete drove her forward, and would continue to drive her until she found her last man.

Chapter 17

Three weeks of searching flew by and they found absolutely nothing. Marcella couldn't believe there was no trace of him. She still wasn't completely sure what he looked like. She knew his hair was light like Dominic's, but as for facial features or build, she still couldn't remember, and neither could anyone else.

As the men all paced before her in the great hall, she drank her wine and tried to figure out what their next move would be. They'd already searched every town in a one hundred mile radius. She was thinking maybe they should expand the search another hundred miles.

"Fuck this. I can't take much more of this searching bullshit. I still say we don't need him. I'm doing what normal people do. I'm going to watch some TV and drink some beer."

Jason made a flat screen television and a couch appear in front of him. He sat down with a beer in his hand. While he flipped through the channels, Marcella wondered if they might have missed a town somewhere in between.

"Wait, go back," Dom said, walking toward the television.

"No way, dude, I am not watching the news. I'm looking for something a little more away from reality."

"Go back, dammit! Did you see that girl?"

Marcella leaned forward just as the news broadcaster came back on. Multiple girls all fitting the same profile as Marcella were aligned across the screen. They all had dark hair with pale to lightly tanned skin. She shivered as she noticed they all looked eerily like her.

"Serial killer?" Jason looked around the room curiously. "Around here? That doesn't really sound like anything I've ever heard happen in this area, even Corpus. It might be a city, but it's really not that big. Twenty-four dead girls, seems unreal."

"If you ask me, I happen to think they look a lot like our queen. I'm afraid I know who's doing this and maybe I'm responsible." Ambrose sighed.

"You think it might be Gwen?"

"Without a doubt in my mind. Gwen and I used to be very close. The relationship hasn't been well for a while, but regardless, she's still very protective over me. In my opinion, she's trying to send a message to whoever took me, and she obviously knows what you look like."

"Then I need to go and see her. I need to explain how you belong with me now."

"You're not going anywhere, not alone anyway." The look in Dominic's eyes said he meant every word.

"I'm going Dom, and I'm going alone. As your queen, that's an order." A curse was his only response. Marcella bit her lip and turned back to Ambrose. "I've been thinking about this for awhile now, and I think we need your servants, Ambrose, all of them. They're warriors. They'll fight with us. Especially, if it means regaining the chance to claim their souls, if they should ever die."

"She might let you have me, but she'll never give up power over them."

Looking at Dominic and Jason, she turned back to her vampire. "She won't have a choice. We need their help, and I'm taking them."

* * * *

"That's the story you wish to tell me, collector? You want my servants, my lover, and my soul?" Gwendolyn eased off the bed, but stayed in place as she glared down to Marcy. Emotions completely left her while she focused all of her energy on protecting herself if this vampire decided to attack.

"Yes, don't you see how important this is? It's imperative we all come together."

A blonde eyebrow rose at her. "Why? So you can save your mate, or yourself?"

Groaning, Marcella stood. "Have you not been listening to the story? Supernatural souls are not making it to where they need to be. A collector is the only person who can deliver them to their resting place. As of today,

that's me or Jason, and no one else. The devil himself, would rather you all sit here and rot instead of a single one getting the peace you may deserve. Don't you think that's unfair?"

"I could care less. The majority of us are immortal anyway. We have no worries of ever dying."

"Oh, but you can die. We both know that, don't we? Where would you go? What would you do? Have you any idea what happens when a person dies?"

"From your story, I'm assuming I would be trapped in the same area in which I passed. But I'm not going to die, so I'm not worried."

"That's yet to be seen. When I leave, I'm taking everyone with me. Either you can come or you can stay, but you'll be alone." Marcella braced herself. She could feel the energy from Gwen increasing. She knew she should have her shield up, but as her aggravation spiked, it was taking too much energy to contain both herself and her protection.

"You're not taking my clan! Ambrose doesn't want to come back, fine. But you'll not take the people I'm master to. I've waited too long for this opportunity and you will not take it away from me."

"So you'll condemn everyone you're responsible for? That doesn't sound like much of a leader to me. It sounds like greed. I promise if you come, you can still lead them. But I need their souls. You don't even have to live there if you don't want. Although they will have to, so I assume you'd want to, too."

"Listen to me good, collector. You have five seconds to remove yourself from my house or else I'll try my best to see you dead."

Marcella could feel her heart jump. She was so sure she'd be able to talk Gwen into coming. It was the only reason the men let her come alone. Sure, they could be here in a second, but she convinced them it wouldn't come to this. Now, she was about to eat her words.

"Don't do this. It doesn't have to be this way. You won't even know I'm in the fortress. I promise. Shit, you can have your own wing if you'd like. We can make this work."

"No, if they follow you, they'll worship you, and I won't be their master anymore. It defeats the purpose. One of us dies right now."

"Can I at least have your soul first, that way it's not without a place to go? If I die, you get it back. But if you die, at least you might be in peace."

“Hell is not peace, and I’d rather be trapped here eternally than end up there.”

“Please reconsider. It doesn’t have to be like this.”

“Five... You better leave, collector.”

Marcella took a deep breath and held the vampire’s gaze. It was dangerous to do, but she couldn’t look away for fear of getting blindsided by an attack. “You know I can’t do that.”

Ice cold air crashed into Marcy’s chest throwing her over the chair and into the wall. Her head slammed into what felt like concrete. Stars danced in front of her vision, but she fought to stand. The air burned her skin like dry ice as it dropped in temperature. Holding up her hand, she blocked it from hitting her. It wasn’t seconds when the vampire’s eyes began to glow brightly.

Every candle in the room extinguished against the swirling wind circling her. An ear piercing scream grated her ears making Marcella’s hands drop to provide protection. The pain from the shrill seemed to slice her eardrums. Once again, she slammed into the wall at a force that surprisingly didn’t land her in the next room. Fire danced along her skin, the atmosphere extremely more frigid than before. Breathing became a chore as the air took her breath away.

Gwendolyn’s eerie glowing eyes were the only source of light she could see. Blonde hair whipped in front of the vampire’s face while Marcy stared in horror. This wasn’t good, at all. Pulling her hands from her ears, Marcella used the element of air and pushed the vampire into the opposite side of the room, feeling stillness settle around her.

The chatter of her teeth echoed throughout the silent space. Without the light the vampire produced, the room was pitch black. She knew she could call the element of light, but if she focused on producing it, would the vampire get the best of her? Cautiously, she stood, searching the darkness as best as she could with her vision. Sure, she could see better than a human, but even she couldn’t make out any recognizable shapes.

“You should have left, collector.”

Marcella’s body was ripped upward, toward the ceiling. Gwen plastered her against the surface locking her body into place by straddling her. Gravity pulled Marcy down, but with the vampire straddling her waist, she remained immobile.

The smell of evil burned her nose with a metallic stench. She couldn't help but remember it was the same odor Kasey had given off the night she was told about the fire. Nothing she would be able to do would win over the murderer before her. She knew that more than she knew anything.

"I really didn't want to do this, Gwendolyn, but it seems you leave me no choice."

Letting the cobwebs take over, the screams began to fill Marcella's head. She yelled out with them, feeding off of the hate and anger rushing through her. What she was capable of in her new form, she didn't have a clue. But she'd seen the outcome once before and knew she didn't have the rage inside of her to protect herself if she stayed in collector form. She didn't need guilt giving her a conscience. She needed to fight for what would become of their future.

Fangs bit into her throat and at the assault the demon in her began to fight with incredible strength and hate. Grabbing the vampire's hair and jaw, Marcella pried the sharp teeth from her throat. Yells came from below and light filled the room, but she didn't take her eyes off of Gwen for a moment.

"You can't have them. You can't, collector. I won't let you."

"You don't have a choice. I'm taking them." Marcella's thick voice was completely unlike her own. She knew she had a bit more control since the last time, but she still didn't trust this part of herself completely.

Blood flowed freely from the wound on her neck, onto Gwen. She really needed to get them off the ceiling. In her current position, the blood kept flowing faster and faster, and she wasn't healing nearly near as quick, in demon form.

Another scream echoed in her head, and she let the fury out by repeating the sound and letting it fill the room. Marcella stared into Gwen eyes feeling more hatred than she thought one person could hold. Her hand slid to the vampire's neck holding back her slashing teeth from getting near her face. Words exploded into her mind.

Kill her. Kill her! Tighten your grip. Stop her from breathing.

"Ambrose, tell her to stop!" Dom yelled.

The sound of her mate's voice distracted her long enough to bring the vampire's face an inch closer. Between the words repeating in her head and the screams from below, it was impossible for her think clearly. She could feel her fingers growing tighter as a laugh echoed in her mind.

“Tell him to get the vampires out of the house and back to the fortress, now!” Marcy screamed.

Gwendolyn growled and the room began to grow ice cold all over again. If Marcella let go of Gwen’s throat she was done for. At least temporarily, and she couldn’t let the vampire escape or take the clan somewhere else.

Burning traveled over her skin and quickly turned her arms numb. *Do it, collector. Finish her, you know you want to. Marrrciiannna...Kill her!*

A yell exploded from Marcella’s throat as she fought the demon inside of her. Gwendolyn grew closer to her neck every second that ticked by. She wasn’t going to last much longer in the freezing temperatures. The numbness covered every inch of her, yet somehow the cold managed to settle deep inside of her bones. How she still was able to hold off the vampire was a pure miracle.

“Are you ready to die, collector? I’m done playing games with you.”

Marcy barely heard her words. All she could think of was fire and warmth. Her body ached all over and her teeth were chattering so hard, she’d be surprised if any remained by the time this ended. On thought, she felt the element stir deep inside of her. A sob broke past her lips at what she needed to do. The demon laughed hysterically. *Yes, collector. YES!!!!*

Closing her eyes against the tears, she projected the feeling out in an explosion of flames from her skin. Evil cheers echoed in her head causing her heart to break. These personalities couldn’t be her, they couldn’t! She wasn’t evil. Never once had she imagined herself having to hurt Gwendolyn.

The vampire screamed while her body went up in a blaze. Horrified by what she’d done, Marcella pushed the demon out and called to her collector. Cobwebs covered her as the vampire leaped away, leaving her falling to the ground. Jason caught her inches before she hit the floor.

“Is Ambrose getting everyone out? We have to leave!” Jason yelled.

Dominic shook his head yes, watching the burning Gwen roll around, still covered in flames. The last of her screams pierced the room and Marcella knew the moment she died. Everything turned quiet and completely still. Fire raced up the walls and she grabbed Dominic’s arm as Jason pulled her toward the door.

“Let’s hurry before we have more than one dead vampire on our hands. We need to make sure Ambrose is out of here.”

They all raced down the dark hallway and down the stairs. With relief, Marcella saw Ambrose ordering the servants all out to the SUVs aligning the drive. No doubt, Dominic's quick thinking.

"She's dead. I'm so sorry, Ambrose. I never meant to kill your lover. I just..." The tears filled her eyes again as she tried to vanish the sound of her demon and the visions of Gwen's last moments.

"Marcella, she killed all of those girls. She was trying to kill you! Don't apologize for defending yourself." Ambrose kissed her forehead and quickly started breaking the cluster of people into groups.

Dominic pulled her deeper into his side. "Everyone pick a car and let's get out of here before the police arrive."

Every vampire turned to Ambrose, who nodded at Dom's order. "It's okay. They are good people. I tell you the truth. Listen to them and do as the demon says. Dominic isn't who you may think he is. He's not evil."

Marcella took in the faces around her. One in particular caught her attention. She studied the vampire. He didn't look a day over eighteen. His boyish features stared, captivated at Dominic as he whispered something to the guy beside him.

Narrowing her vision, she watched a small pale finger point, and they both nodded their heads. Did they know him? They almost looked like they did. What could they be talking about? Mindlessly, she walked closer. Her mate's hand grasped her shoulder.

"Come, love. It's time to load up. We need to talk." He opened the passenger side door and cradled her face. "You know you didn't have a choice back there, right? I don't want you to worry about anything. She was trying to kill you. You just protected yourself. In our world, that's all you can do."

Marcella nodded. "I know she was. But I really wished things could have been different." Dominic gave her a sad smile and kissed her forehead. She climbed in and buckled her seat belt. Turning around, she came to face eight pair of eyes, all staring at her. They look scared, unsure of their fate. The looks were enough to break her heart.

"I'm sorry it has to be this way. Ambrose will explain everything when we get home. I know you all must think of me as a really bad person, but I'm truly not. I'd never hurt any of you. That's a promise."

“Gwendolyn was the bad person. The things she made us do.” A guy in his early twenties looked out the window at his words. “Vampires these days aren’t like they used to be. We’re not murderers. Most of us hate that we even have to live off of blood. We don’t lust after seeing it smeared on walls, or dripping from innocent young girls. If you wouldn’t have killed her, we were all planning to try.”

Marcella grew quiet while she looked at them. Their expressions were so full of pain. She didn’t doubt for one moment that they were reliving the hell they’d been under for the last month. A part of her hated how much time had gone by before she realized what needed to be done.

“You’ll never be ordered to do anything like that again. The only time I’ll ever ask you to kill will be to defend yourselves and your people.”

They returned her stare and silence settled throughout the interior. When no one said another word she turned around and watched the traffic thicken as the sun broke over the horizon. The sound of a phone ringing brought Marcela’s eyes to Dominic. He said a few no’s and yes’s and then hung up and smiled eagerly at her. “Jason says one of the vampires he has in his SUV thinks I look strangely familiar, like a wolf he knows named Donavon.”

Marcella squealed, clapping her hands excitedly. “Do you really think... Did he say anything else?”

“No, he’s refused to go into detail until he has a chance to speak with Ambrose. With him being the master again, the boy feels the need to go over everything with pretty boy first.” Dominic looked over eagerly. “I really think he knows something. Are you prepared for a little adventure?”

“Bring it. I want my other man, no matter where it leads.”

Dominic nodded his head and focused back on the road as they crossed the Harbor Bridge, and left Corpus Christi. A rush of adrenaline pumped through Marcella’s body at the new information.

This was the beginning, the start of their journey. Where it would lead them or how they would end up, she didn’t have a clue. All Marcella knew was today they’d somehow won some small battle, and that alone was worth celebrating.

They were so close to finding the one person who would complete them all. But would Donavon truly do that? Would he help them piece the puzzle of their past together, or would his presence only complicate things even

more? Marcella wasn't sure, but she was ready to face the challenge of entering a wolf pack. Even if it meant she had to face it alone.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I live in a small Texas town along the Gulf of Mexico. Family is everything to me. My mother always encouraged my reading growing up. Looking back, my earliest memories revolve around my grandmother, who was always glued to a book. Her passion for mystery is probably the reason I'm so comfortable around a police scanner. Hers was on twenty-four hours a day.

When I'm not writing, cooking, or brainstorming new ideas, you'll see me with a book in my hand. Briefly before I started writing, I was devouring a romance novel every day. For some reason, I couldn't get enough. My husband asked me the question that ultimately changed my life forever. "Why don't you try writing a book?"

At first, I laughed. Write a book? Who, me? Never written a story in my life, I was intimidated. To satisfy my husband and to sate the curiosity that began to fester inside of me, I did. My first story was my husband's favorite. There was something that ultimately bothered me about it, though. I couldn't write a love scene to save my life. Not one that would fit inside of a "romance" book, anyway. It was way too graphic.

After doing research I came across the erotica genre and knew this is where I belonged. Details are important and with my books, the more details during their "coupling", the better.

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