

Evernight Publishing

THE
DARK LUST
SERIES

THE
CRAVING
JENIKA SNOW



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THE CRAVING

Jenika Snow

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Chapter One

When I was younger I always thought vampires were a myth. I thought them creatures from a nightmare that would drink my blood and take my soul if they had the chance. Of course, this was before I learned the creatures I considered monsters were actually a living, breathing reality. My mother always told me everyone was different, that I shouldn't judge a person by who they were, their lifestyle, or what color their skin was. I lived by that philosophy, but how could I not judge a being that lived off the blood of another person? The creatures she expected me to respect were the same ones that killed her.

I found her, on a warm and sunny day—dead. I remember her pale, motionless body with such clarity it still gives me nightmares to this day. She had been staring at the ceiling, twin puncture marks marring her slender throat, two rivulets of ruby red blood making a path across her skin. It is her dull, lifeless blue eyes that I will always see when I close my eyes, when I dream of a different life. Since that day, I have never been the same.

All vampires aren't the evil monsters that prey on the weak. No, there are goodhearted and evil ones in my world, just like humans, but for me, I find it hard to distinguish a difference between the two. They both must consume the blood of another to survive. Sure, some can control their hunger and not kill, but more times than not, the demon within them, or whatever they have that gives them their supernatural power, breaks loose. I have seen too many news reports about fatalities brought on by vampires. Humans have now become the minority. It is because of my reality and the world I live

in that I have moved away from everything I know and love. It is because of those creatures that I have isolated myself.

I ended up buying this cabin up in the Rocky Mountains. When my mother died, she had left me a small fortune. I had been surprised she had so much money saved away that I didn't even know about, but thanks to her I was free from the responsibility of working. The cabin I purchased wasn't anything grand, not with just one room that holds my kitchen, bathroom and bedroom. It suits me just fine, though. I try to make as little contact with the outside world as possible. Some would call me antisocial, well, they're right.

Every month I traveled into town to pick up supplies. It was nearing that time and I hated it. I was content in my little bubble of solitude, and whenever I ventured out of it, I tended to get looks and murmurs. I knew what the townies called me, knew that they whispered behind my back. I didn't care, didn't give a fuck if they threw stones at me as long as they left me the hell alone when I was at my cabin.

I gathered my coat and slipped it on. I was high in the mountains and winter had really hit me hard. I made my way outside, pulled the lapels of my jacket closer to me and hopped into my ten year old pickup truck. It wasn't the prettiest thing around but it had four-wheel drive and got me where I needed to go.

As I navigated down the snow covered road, I still couldn't get over the beauty of my surroundings. The mountain peaks were capped with snow, along with the thick evergreen branches. Several Cardinals were perched within those towering trees, their vibrant red feathers puffed out, the color reminding me of drops of blood hidden within the pure whiteness. The truck bumped along the rough terrain, the narrow road covered in snow and uneven. It was jarring, and if I didn't have to travel to town I certainly wouldn't.

Aside from the rough ride, my surroundings were tranquil and peaceful. Times like this I actually thought about happier moments. Although this might have been a nice way to reflect on better days, I didn't like to. Happy memories would only lead me down the path of sadness. I was sick of the rollercoaster of my emotions and found it easier to just keep my feelings bottled up.

The picturesque town of Sweetwater, Colorado was any tourists dream spot. I admit it was one of the reasons I decided to move out here. The population was next to nothing and I figured if I

was going to get solitude I wouldn't find a better spot. I had found my cabin purely by mistake when I was scoping out the place. It had been rundown and ratty, but I had seen potential in it. The shutters had been hanging by a nail and the door hadn't been in any better shape. The wraparound porch had been in fairly good condition, and aside from a touch up of stain on the weathered wood, it was the one of the main things that made me fall in love with the cabin. The inside was far worse. It appeared the local wildlife had made it their mission to live within the four walls. I still remember the smell to this day, a stench that had almost turned me off from buying the property.

In the end, though, the price and isolation had won me over. I worked tirelessly on that cabin the entire summer, and when it was finally done I had felt a sense of pride. I was proud to say I had fixed the place up completely by myself. No small feat given the fact I had absolutely no background in construction or any other kind of home improvement, but I had pushed through my ignorance and made it livable.

I saw the lights of town up ahead. They twinkled in the dusk covered sky and promised a memorable time for anyone willing to stop. There weren't many shops in Sweetwater, very different from what I had grown up with in the city. I was used to the mega-stores that had all your needs piled into one enormous building. The grocery store here was more like a convenient mart at a gas station. It served the needs of the townies and me, though.

After pulling into the tiny parking lot, I turned off my truck. I stared at the little building in front of me and watched the people mill about inside. Everyone was all smiles and laughs and it irritated me. I knew I had become a grinch, but if they had seen what I had seen, felt what I felt, they would be just as shut down by the world as I was.

I opened the truck door, the squeak loud enough to draw some stares my way. I stepped out of the truck and grabbed my purse before shutting the door. A couple walked out of the store just as I was about to enter it. I stopped, letting them pass and keeping my gaze averted. Their conversation abruptly ended and I knew it was because of me. I murmured my apologies, still keeping my head down, and made my way inside. A blast of heated air slammed into me when I passed the threshold. I looked around. The store was unusually packed and I wondered what was going on. It was dusk and very frigid outside, the combination normally enough to keep people indoors. I spied the

newspaper stand and read the front headline. "The Storm of the Century" was printed in bold letters on the front page. I didn't listen to the radio, didn't even have a TV to watch the news.

I grabbed a paper and threw it into my cart. It now made sense why everyone was out. They wanted to stock up on nonperishable goods before Armageddon swept through. I went down every aisle and threw items in my cart. On my monthly shopping trip I usually had two carts full of items, but I knew it would be wise of me to buy a little extra with a storm coming. I grabbed several gallons of water, canned and dry goods, and anything else that wasn't perishable. I dropped the first load of groceries at the checkout. I didn't need to tell the cashier what I was doing since they were used to my little monthly trips. Once the second cart was filled, I started unloading it onto the conveyer belt.

"Paper or plastic?"

I glanced up at the teenage girl after hearing her soft words. "It doesn't matter," I murmured and she didn't respond, but then again, no one did when I spoke, at least not if they had a choice. I paid quickly, eager to get out of there. Another blast of hot air shifted my hair around and the automatic doors slid open on their own accord. Making my way toward my truck I could hear laughter and voices ringing out all around me. I loaded the bags into the back of my truck and glanced over my shoulder to see where the laughter was coming from. A group of teenage boys leaned against the brick wall. They watched me, smoke billowing around them from their cigarettes.

"Need some help with that?" The tallest one spoke before pushing off the wall and walking toward me. He flicked his cigarette to the side and smiled widely. "Lot of bags to carry for such a tiny woman."

I quickly made my way over to the driver's side and opened the door. I climbed in quickly and was just about to close the door when his big body blocked it.

"I asked if you needed help." His gaze raked over my body and I felt my heart race. "On second thought, I can keep you company on the ride to your place." He winked at me and I felt my anger growing. "I know you stay up there all alone. How 'bout you let me warm your bed tonight?"

I would have laughed at his ignorance. He had to be no more than seventeen, maybe eighteen, and here he was hitting on a woman

ten years older than him. I smiled sweetly and saw surprise flicker across his face. "No fucking way, kid. Go finish your homework." Anger soon replaced his surprise and I saw a nice shade of red start to creep up his neck.

"You think you're better than us? Living in *our* town, acting like you own the damn place? You're just like any other bitch that passes through." He reeked of stale tobacco and whiskey.

His words held little threat to me and I grinned broadly and tightened my grip on the door. "Move out of the fucking way," I said between gritted teeth. He stared at me for a suspended second and after a moment he complied. I looked at him through the dirty driver's side window as I started the engine, his dark gaze still on me, his face still a brilliant shade of red. A grin soon replaced that anger and I couldn't help the shiver that raced up my spine. He was so young but that look was so evil, so knowing it sent a sharp stab of fear through me.

"I'll see you later." He mouthed the words so clearly I couldn't help but swallow to push down the lump that had formed in my throat.

I sped away from the store, my tires squealing for a second before they picked up traction and I was lurched forward. Without looking back, I raced back to my cabin, back to my isolation. I was a little shocked that he actually had the balls to speak to me. Normally they kept their distance unless absolutely necessary. It had to be the alcohol I smelled on his breath that had given him his liquid courage.

I cranked up the radio to drown out his voice ringing in my ears. I saw his face in my mind's eye, the mask of anger, the hatred, the rage filled lust. The disgust and hatred were expressions I was accustomed to seeing whenever I made a trip into town, but the angry lust he had showed me was something new. I was after all an outsider, and they didn't take keenly to strangers moving into their territory it seemed. I went over a pothole and bit my tongue. The taste of my blood almost made me gag and I drove faster, needing to get back to my cabin before I completely lost it.

Chapter Two

I sat in front of the fire, my back against the couch, the wind howling right outside the window. The flames before me were fierce as they licked at the wood. I drew my gaze to the mantle and stared at the only two pictures I had in the whole place. Framed in silver was a photo of my mom and dad. I could never stop the way tears filled my eyes every time I looked at those photos.

Clearing my throat, I refused to let my sadness and anger consume me. The newspaper was spread out before me and I scanned the black and white pages. According to locals, the storm was supposed to hit Sweetwater so hard they expected it to be debilitating. As I read, I became lost in the words—images of stranded vehicles, frantic townies, and no electricity filled my mind.

Something hard slammed against the door and I jumped slightly. I turned and looked at the thick wood of the front door. Even though my heart raced, the more rational part of my brain told me it was just debris thrown against the door by the wind. It was not the young boy, the one who showed such hatred toward me earlier, demanding entrance. It was silly to think that he had followed me up here, but I couldn't help that small sliver of fear that he had done just that.

I stood and walked toward the window. Pulling the drapes aside, I looked out and saw the storm had certainly started. I craned my neck and tried to see if I could make out what had slammed against the door, but snow pelted the window and made it nearly impossible. Turning, I scanned my small home. The only other window was the one above the sink, which was secured as well.

I moved into the kitchen and opened the cupboard to pull out a box of tea. I lit the small propane stove and set the kettle on the burner to heat. While waiting for the water to boil I leaned against the counter and looked around the cabin. When I had bought the cabin it had been one spacious room, but I had erected a couple walls to enclose the bathroom and part of my bedroom. The bedroom only had three walls, leaving it open on one side so that I didn't feel as if I was in a coffin. At first I thought it would look ridiculous, but I had been pleasantly surprised when it actually appeared very modern in

appearance. The living room was sparse aside from the couch, end table, and a potted plant for décor and of course the photos of my mother and father.

The kettle started to whistle. The small island had been something that wasn't original in the cabin, but it added extra counter space and even classed the place up. I grabbed a coffee mug, put a teabag into the cup, and then poured it full of steaming water. I let it steep for a minute while I stared out the kitchen window. Ice and snow covered the screen, adding a touch of "winter wonderland" even though it was a blizzard outside.

Moving out of the kitchen I sat once again in front of the fire and spread the paper out before me. The storm, which was already running wild, was supposed to last for the next three days. I was used to this weather, what with living this high in the mountains, but the damage a storm like this could cause didn't sit well with me.

I leaned back against the couch and brought the mug to my lips. I drank my tea as I watched the flames dance around the wood. My windows rattled and I looked over out of habit. Another loud bang against the door startled me and I cursed as scolding liquid splashed across my chest and seeped into my shirt. I hurried into the kitchen to grab a towel. After slipping off my shirt, I looked down at my now red flesh. When I ran the tips of my fingers over it, I winced at the tenderness. I grabbed another shirt and eyed the front door. I debated whether I really wanted to open it and let the frigid air blast inside. Deciding if I didn't I would just hear whatever debris was banging against it all night, I moved forward.

I walked over to the door, gripped the cool brass handle and pulled it open. Icy air and snow slammed into my face and I lifted my hand to stem off the onslaught of snow. I lowered my arm just enough to see outside but didn't notice any sort of debris near the door. I stared ahead of me for another minute and then went to shut the door. Just before I closed it completely a flash of red off to the side caught my attention. My heart started to pound fiercely as I leaned my head out farther to see what it was.

My eyes widened when I saw that a body lay a few feet from me. The jacket he wore was tattered and dirty. I opened the door wider, fearing a hiker or tourist had gotten lost or disoriented in the storm. The light from inside illuminated the porch slightly, but I still

wasn't able to fully see who the person was. I quickly slipped on my boots and stepped outside.

It was then, as the light cast shadows all around me that I was able to see exactly who lay on my porch. A towering man, no more than his early thirties looked up at me with frightened eyes. His face was as pale as the snow around him and dried blood covered his face and mouth. I took in his attire once more and realized this was no hiker, not with what he was wearing. I didn't know who he was but if we stayed out here any longer we would both freeze to death.

"Can you walk?" He closed his eyes briefly and shook his head. I didn't waste another minute. I moved behind him and slipped my arms under his shoulders. I used all the strength I had and started to move backwards. It was no easy feat, but I was able to drag him inside and shut the door behind us. Leaning against the wall, I breathed heavily. Looking down at the stranger, I immediately took note that he was a stunning man. He stared at me just as intently as I stared at him, dark circles surrounding pale blue eyes. I scanned his body and noticed his pants torn, as if a wild animal had clawed at him. Several large gashes could be seen where the fabric was torn—pink, meaty flesh and dried blood coating the entire area.

"Are you okay? What happened?" He slowly pulled himself into a sitting position and continued to stare at me. "Can you understand me?" He nodded. "Are you able to talk?" He looked down and the light from the fire flickered across his face.

"I can walk. Thank you." His voice was deep and smooth with a hint of an accent. I couldn't quite place it, possibly European.

"What happened?" I crouched down, knowing he needed to answer my questions if I was going to be able to help him. He lifted his head, his eyes boring into mine for a suspended moment before he opened his mouth to say something. I felt my eyes grow wide and I stumbled back a few steps.

When he saw my reaction he snapped his mouth closed and a strange look crossed his face. "Please, please don't be frightened." He held his hands up in surrender and I backed into the far corner. I stared at his fangs, those twin daggers that brought back so many memories of my haunted past. The dried blood around his mouth didn't help him appear any less frightening, not when I knew what he really was.

"You have to leave. Now." My voice was a mere whisper, my whole body shaking with fear. I closed my eyes, praying this was all a horrible dream and I would wake up soon. Images of the night my mother died flashed behind my closed lids. *The death. The violence.* Blood was all I could see, bright red blood that splattered the walls and painted the floor. It had been clear that my mother's killer, a vampire, had merely murdered her as a game. If he had killed my mother out of hunger there wouldn't have been a drop of the ruby red liquid.

"Please. I swear on my honor I will not harm you. I would leave if I could, but I have no strength. Until my leg heals I won't be able to walk." His voice sounded desperate, pleading even. "I beg of you. All I ask is for shelter until I can heal. I need to heal so that I may look for my brothers."

He started to scoot away from me and I wondered if he was doing it to give me some kind of reassurance. It didn't help. I felt my panic rise and fear take a tighter hold of me. He propped himself against the far wall and we stared at each other.

"Please." He whispered the lone word before his eyes closed and his head fell forward.

"Shit." I was still pressed against the wall, feeling the bite of the cold seep into my bones. "Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!" I glanced around the room, trying to decide what to do. "This is bad, so bad." I covered my mouth and watched the slow, irregular rise and fall of his chest. I didn't know what the hell had happened to him but it was clear some kind of wild animal had attacked him. The only question I thought of was how the hell did a fully grown male vampire let an animal wound him? I dropped my gaze to his leg once again, confused as to why it hadn't healed. He was a vampire, after all, and his body should have mended any wounds in a matter of seconds. He also should have been impervious to the cold, so the fact that his fingers were starting to turn blue told me that it had been a while since he had fed.

"Fuck!" The lone, lewd word was starting to be the only vocabulary. I paced, not knowing how the hell I was going to get him out of my house. There was no way I was going to let a vampire stay with me. When he woke he would be hungry and the blood pumping in my body would be too much of a temptation for him to resist.

I wrapped my arms tightly around my waist and debated whether I should go over to his unconscious body and drag him the

fuck out. For all I knew he could be faking it, but I knew there was no way he could fake the non-healing wounds covering his leg. I didn't have an explanation for the blood around his mouth. Maybe he had killed the animal that attacked him, but it didn't matter because I couldn't stay cooped up in this tiny cabin with him. I would surely die before the sun rose.

Chapter Three

An hour had passed and I hadn't moved from my little corner. I had contemplated a lot of things during that time. Whether or not to help him, whether I should drag his ass out, or kill him right then. After what seemed like hours I took off my boots and gingerly walked over to his still unconscious body. "Well shit!" I crept closer, trying to stay as quiet as possible. Blood from the wounds on his legs was starting to seep onto the hardwood and the smell was getting to me. I wasn't a cold hearted bitch, and no matter how much I wanted to hate him right now, he was wounded, and I couldn't watch a hurt person suffer.

I touched his boot with my toe and jumped back, expecting the monster he truly was to attack. If he had been healthy I could have had a machine gun and it wouldn't have saved me if he wanted to sink those deadly fangs into me. I knew there was nothing I could do even if he wanted to drain me dry, but I was still cautious.

When nothing happened I moved slowly toward him again and crouched. His respirations were barely noticeable now and I knew what he needed to fully heal. I hated that and even cursed out loud. I thought for a moment about how I was going to handle this before I moved into action.

"I should get some kind of medal of honor for this shit," I mumbled to myself as I stood and went into the kitchen. I opened the fridge and grabbed the rare steak I had bought earlier. I went through the process of draining the excess blood into a cup. There wasn't much, but I knew any amount would help him immensely. I set the cup on the counter and opened the freezer. I grabbed several more steaks out and threw them into the sink to defrost.

Glancing over my shoulder at him, I breathed out deeply and willed myself to be strong. Just looking at him brought back memories of my mother. Gritting my teeth, I was helpless to stop the pictures that flashed through my mind, the blood, the gore, the agony she must have felt. If I could have traded my life for hers I would have, but now it was too late and I would have to forever regret every little thing I had done to hurt her.

Shaking the nightmarish thoughts from my mind, I went over to him and set about the task of removing his shoes and coat. There was no way I could lift him onto my bed so I made a pallet of blankets in front of the fire. He was very tall and a dead weight as he slept, so it took everything in me to drag him over to the pallet. His clothes needed to be removed so I could really assess his injuries, and I found myself feeling extremely uncomfortable with the notion. With his body not rejuvenating like it should, his wounds needed to be cleaned or there was a good possibility an infection could take root and spread quickly through his body. That of course was highly unlikely given the fact that he was a vampire, but now that I had made it my mission to nurse him back to health, there was no way I was going to deal with the corpse of a vampire.

I grabbed first aid supplies, a basin of warm water, and several rags. Kneeling in front of him, I reached across his wide chest and started to unbutton his shirt with shaky hands. The material was torn down the front in several places, and when I finally removed it I realized he had several more deep gauges across his chest. His pants were a little trickier to remove and when I finally got them off my eyes widened. He wore no underwear, of course, I thought sarcastically. Averting my eyes, I quickly laid a towel over his genitals.

I kept my gaze turned as the material molded over his shaft. I was embarrassed to say that I found myself impressed. Sickened by where my thoughts were going, I couldn't get the image of his cock out of my mind. Even flaccid he had been thick and long. I swallowed roughly and told myself over and over again that he was a vampire, not a perspective lover. I also felt shame that I was thinking such thoughts about an unconscious person, like I was a predator or something.

Bracing myself once again, I lifted my gaze and started assessing his body and inventorying his injuries. His wounds were substantial, the cuts so deep I knew he probably hadn't fed in weeks. *What happened to you?* I tried not to gag as I cleaned them, but several were so deep that the water pooled in the gash. Gritting my teeth to get the job done, I finished cleaning them and dressed the wounds. With a thick blanket pulled over him, I leaned against the couch and sighed wearily. I took a minute to just sit there and let everything absorb.

I followed the rise and fall of the blanket every time he took a breath. It was mesmerizing, almost enough to put me in a trance. Shaking my head I stood and went back into the kitchen. The steaks were defrosting slowly and it would still be awhile before they would do any good. I grabbed the cup of blood on the counter and stared into it. The liquid's viscosity was thicker than water, the smell tangy with a hint of iron. The color was almost black, like spilled ink.

Animal blood wasn't a vampire's first choice, and it wouldn't heal him like the blood from a human or another vampire, but it was as good as it was going to get because there was no way he was sinking his fangs into my neck.

When I finally made my way back toward him, which seemed like it had taken me ages to do, I couldn't do anything but hold that cup and stare at the flames. Blinking several times, I held the cup tighter and stared down at him. I had wiped the dried blood from his mouth and idly thought how full his lips were. The shadows from the fire danced across his face in sharp angles and defined his exquisite bone structure. I shook my head, feeling disgust at where my thoughts were going.

I knelt before him and shook his shoulder. "Hey. You need to wake up and drink this." Nothing. I shook him a few more times, harder, and then brought the cup below his nose. As if it had been smelling salts, he opened his eyes and turned his head towards me. His mouth opened slightly and my eyes widened as I watched his fangs lengthen. I forced myself to not move, made myself be strong even though I was frightened. I started to shake but held my ground because if I dropped the cup we both would be shit out of luck. The sooner he healed the sooner he got the hell out of my house.

He pulled himself up slowly. The blanket started to slip down his chest and pool at his waist and I couldn't help but follow its path. The muscles in his arms and chest bunched and became defined from the act. I licked my lips and snapped my eyes back to his. He didn't say anything, just watched me for a moment before he took the cup from my hand. His fingers brushed against mine and I felt a jolt of awareness travel through me. I didn't like that zing of electricity that I had felt, hell it made me feel so uncomfortable that all I wanted to do was burrow in a hole. I moved away from him, not comfortable with how my mind warned me to stay away and how my body became warm and wet from the sight, smell, and touch of him.

I wasn't immune to how he looked, wasn't blind or numb that he was a gorgeous man and I hadn't been intimate with one in years. However, my mind kept shouting that he was a vampire and to remember my past and the horror his kind delivered. He brought the cup to his mouth and tilted it back. I watched those full lips open, watched his throat work as he swallowed the small amount of liquid. I didn't want to admit it, but it was erotic and almost sensual. His eyes never left mine, and no matter what I did I couldn't seem to break the hold he had on me.

"Thank you."

I blinked rapidly, my eyes focused on his face. He set the cup aside and looked down at his chest. I did the same and watched as the cuts across his smooth, defined chest started to knit themselves back together. The injuries didn't close completely, but that little bit of blood was already making its way through his body and healing it from the inside out. "I don't have any more blood, but I'm thawing out some steaks so it shouldn't be too long."

He smiled briefly and licked his lips. "Can I have a glass of water?" His voice was slightly gravelly and he cleared his throat.

Despite myths about vampires in books and movies, they have to eat food to survive. Blood is a necessary substance that they must drink regularly, but if they didn't eat and drink regular food they wouldn't survive. Once he had drank two glasses of water, I sat with my back to the couch and stared at him.

"What happened?" I didn't want to wait to ask questions. I wanted to know how he had gotten into this situation, and there was no better time than right now for him to give me the answers I sought. He flicked his eyes up to mine and then down to the blanket that covered him. I saw a kind of sad smile tilt his lips.

"Thank you for tending to me."

He sounded sincere, but I wasn't about to let him change the subject so easily. Still, I couldn't help the pictures of what he looked like naked slamming into my mind. I felt my cheeks heat at the image of his huge, albeit flaccid cock. I straightened my shoulders and stared at him in the eye. "It was necessary to remove your clothing to clean your wounds." I could see surprise flicker across his face.

"I know, thank you."

I was taken back by his gratitude and manners. The vampires I had met had not been nearly so kind. "You're welcome." I swallowed

and looked around the room. I could feel him staring at me but as much as I wanted to ignore how it made me feel, I couldn't disregard the sliver of awareness he brought forth in me. "Are you hungry?" I stood and looked down at him. I wanted to put some distance between us, wanted to give my mind and body some breadth because I couldn't think, couldn't seem to function. "I can make you something." I realized I was extremely nervous, and it had nothing to do with having a vampire in my home. His powerful masculinity made me feel so feminine, so womanly. Never had I felt like this, never had I wanted someone's touch as much as I wanted this strangers. I idly toyed with the idea he was using some type of control over me to make me feel this way, but I knew it was a lie. Despite a vampire's many talents, that wasn't one of them. No, it was just *him*, his body, his voice, his everything that made me feel weak and needy.

"That would be...much appreciated. Thank you."

I went into the kitchen and tried to find protein packed foods to help with his wound healing. I kept glancing over my shoulder, expecting him to be standing right behind me, his fangs bared at my throat. He didn't move, just sat in front of the fire, running his fingers across the healing wounds on his chest, lost in thought. I took that time, when he was unaware, to really look at him. His hair was dark as coal and appeared thick. It was pin straight and fell across his forehead. His shoulders were immensely wide, like a linebackers.. He could crush me with his bare hands. His chest and abdomen were lined with muscle, the sinew and tendons running beneath the flesh flexing as he shifted. Biting my inner cheek, I grabbed another glass of water and walked over to him. I handed him the plate and glass and sat on the floor, my back against the couch once more.

"I'm sorry the selection isn't the best." I saw him stare at the plain chicken breast and leftover carrots and mashed potatoes.

"It's wonderful. I can't thank you enough." I watched in awe as he practically inhaled the food in a matter of minutes. His biceps and forearms tightened and bunched with power every time he brought the fork to his mouth. It was quite an arousing sight.

"Would you like more?" I could see the lie forming on his lips before the words actually came out. "I know you're still hungry." I got up, took the plate before he could protest, and filled it with more food. He engulfed that one as well, but before I could ask if he was still hungry he shook his head and held out his hand.

“Please, sit, relax. You have been more than kind to me.”

He plucked at the blanket and I swear I saw his cheeks redden as if he was embarrassed over his nudity. Maybe it was just the fire warming his skin and making them appear that color? “Your clothes really aren’t suitable for you to wear, not with all the tears and holes in them. I think I have some of my dad’s old clothes in a box.” The mention of my dad brought back a string of memories. The vacations we used to take, the laughs, the cries, even the fights. Everything threatened to rush to the surface but I beat the memories down. I didn’t know what was wrong with me, why he was causing this type of reaction in me, but I refused to let it consume me. I needed to remember to keep my wits, to keep my head straight if I was going to get through this.

“Thank you, I am feeling a little exposed.” He smiled and I did the same despite how uncomfortable I had become. I didn’t know what I had kept of my fathers, but I knew I had something that would fit him. As I went into my room and pulled out the large tote where I kept things from my past, I idly thought found humor in my situation. It was like an episode of the Twilight Zone. Who would have thought I would be conversing with a vampire, tending to him, even giving him some of my father's clothes after everything that had happened? I would have laughed if someone told me this is what I would be doing after my mother's attack.

Chapter Four

My father had been a big man, just like this vampire, so I hoped my estimation wasn't off or he would be shit out of luck. I walked back to him and handed him a pair of wool socks, a set of long johns, a t-shirt, sweater, and a pair of pants. We watched each other for a moment and my cheeks heated when I realized he probably wanted some privacy. I mumbled my apologies and walked back into the kitchen, keeping my back toward him. I heard shuffling and fought the urge to turn around, not so much because I wanted to see his body but because I was still frightened of the power he wielded.

"I'm finished. Thank you for the privacy."

I wasn't used to such politeness, especially from a vampire. My experience with the other species had been fairly limited, but the little I had spoken to them they seemed apathetic and far from nice. I turned around and took in his appearance. The clothes fit him perfectly and I internally patted myself on the back for guessing correctly. The shirt hugged his broad chest, showing the definition of his layered muscles just beneath the fabric. The pants formed against his powerful legs and thighs that appeared to be as solid as tree trunks.

We didn't speak for several moments and I thought about how I would phrase my questions. In the end I just blurted out the first thing that came to my mind. "I would like to know what happened." I kept my tone pleasant enough, but I could hear the bite in my words. I wanted answers. He nodded and limped over to the vacant chair. The little blood he had drunk had somewhat healed the wounds on his legs because at least now he could stand.

"How about we introduce each other first?" He smiled faintly. "I am Kristofer Ashakov." He was silent after he spoke and I felt the tension rise higher. I didn't comment, just nodded and licked my dry lips. I wondered if I should lie about who I was. In the end I decided it was pointless. Most likely he would be able to catch my lie and it wasn't like he didn't know where I lived.

"Payton Marshall." I rambled off my name and averted my gaze, not sure why, but knowing I couldn't stare into his face. The silence that followed seemed deafening, but thankfully he started to speak.

"I guess I should start at the beginning." He chuckled but it sounded flat and humorless. "For the last fifty years, I think—" He was silent for a moment and I glanced up at him. His expression became distant and a look of confusion crossed his face. "Yes, I think it has been fifty years." He smiled, but it wasn't one of joy, more like one of sorrow and sadness. "I have been a prisoner in these very mountains." He looked at me, maybe to gauge my reaction but I kept my expression stoic.

"I find it hard to believe that you," I emphasized my meaning by running my eyes up and down his body, "could be caught by anyone." He was a massive man and it was hard to imagine someone being able to subdue him. His laugh was soft yet deep.

"Well, when your captor is your brother that knows your every strength and weakness it isn't very hard, believe me."

"I thought you said you had to go look for your brothers once you healed? One of them had you prisoner?"

He nodded. "Yes. I have three brothers. The eldest, Ellon, has been holding me, Ayden, and my youngest brother, Zacharia prisoner all these years."

"Why?"

He shrugged and leaned back in the chair. "There is no logic to his reason for doing so. Ellon hasn't been right in the mind since he was turned. He believes that by consuming the blood of his brothers he will in turn absorb our strengths." I raised my eyebrows in surprise. "Yes, I know, his logic isn't rational."

I held in the shiver of disgust. Drinking from your family had to be incest of some kind. "If you've been prisoner for all these years how were you able to escape?"

"Ellon may have been able to capture all of us, but at times his intelligence is lacking."

I brought my knees to my chest and rested my head on them. "I'm not sure I understand what you mean."

"All those years it never occurred to him to change the locks on our restraints. The chains had strength, but after time they became weak, so weak I was able to free myself and my brothers."

"I don't understand how he was able to keep three fully grown vampires prisoner."

"He fed from us daily, keeping our strength so low that we could do nothing but submit to his cruel punishment. Of course he had

to give us nourishment of some kind but it was always the bare minimum, only enough to keep our hearts beating.”

I eyed his body again, wondering exactly how big he truly was. If he had been starved for all these years and still looked this powerful he had to be enormous when fully healed.

“He would also wound us, therefore draining what little blood we did have.” He shifted in his seat slightly, as if remembering his past also pained him. “My brothers and I separated, hoping to mask our scent when Ellon realized we had escaped.”

I licked my suddenly dry lips. “And so you stumbled upon my home?”

“Yes. I was able to run across a rabbit while I fled, and the little blood it offered helped my injuries somewhat.”

My eyes grew wide as I thought about his injuries being worse. I remembered the blood that stained his mouth and it all made sense now. Fear also started to take hold of me. “What if your brother tracks you here? We aren’t safe.” I started to hyperventilate, knowing that letting a vampire into my home had been a horrible mistake.

“Please, stay calm. The storm will confuse his senses. We have a while before he picks up on my trail, that is, *if* he picks up on it. The snow will cover my tracks and mask my scent. Ellon will not attack you, and if he tried, I promise you he will not succeed.” His voice dropped lower and I shivered from the intensity of it. “He hides from the general population. He has grown very paranoid with age.”

I couldn’t leave, not with how the weather currently was. I just had to wait out the storm and pray the weatherman was correct in saying it would only last three days.

Chapter Five

Four days had passed and the storm still ran rampant. I paced in front of the window and stared out through the frosted pane at the darkened sky. Snow and ice pelted the glass and I could feel the cold radiate toward me. I glanced over my shoulder at Kristofer who sat on the couch, a book in his lap. The blood I was able to get off the steaks helped him and he was slowly healing, but I made sure to store some away, knowing I only had so much. I turned and walked into the living room and sat in front of the fire.

Although I didn't want to think about what was happening and the situation I was in, it was too hard to avoid it. I couldn't *not* think about Krisofer. I looked over at him through the veil of my hair. He was immersed in his readings and I took that time to study him. He seemed so concentrated, as if whatever he was reading had him so engrossed the outside world wasn't even reality. His coal colored hair hung freely across his forehead but not long enough to obscure his vision. More and more frequently I was finding myself wondering how that obsidian colored hair would feel running across my fingers, or more lewdly, how it would feel against my inner thighs.

I shifted uncomfortably due to where my thoughts were headed and turned to look at the fire once again. Over the past several days Kristofer and I had become more comfortable around each other. I no longer watched him in fear that he would rip out my throat. I was actually pleased with his company. He made me feel safe, as strange as that was to admit, I liked having him around. I still worried about his brother, but with each passing day Kristofer's body continued to heal and grow stronger and I no longer worried that he wouldn't be able to protect us if need be.

"This storm is never ending." I murmured absently, trying to get my mind off having sex with Kristofer.

"This is good, though." He set the book down and looked toward me. "The more snow we get, the better the chance of Ellon never finding the cabin." He smiled and his fangs flashed momentarily. My heart started to pound at the sight and I looked away.

"Why do you turn from me? Do I frighten you that badly?"

“The sight of your...fangs reminds me of my mother’s death.” That was the nice thing about Kristofer—he didn’t pry. I told him what I wanted to and he got the hint, never pushing for more than I was willing to give. “If you wanted to kill me you would have done so already. Heaven knows you’ve had plenty of opportunities to do so.” He didn’t respond and so I listened to the crackle and pop of the fire in front of us.

“Payton, look at me.” I was hesitant to do so, scared of what I might find in his pale blue eyes. My feelings for him were becoming fiercer with each passing moment, and I feared that I wouldn’t be able to ignore them for much longer. I knew what it was like to be with a man, but never had I felt the raw, primal feelings that Kristofer ignited inside of me. They were foreign, and coupled with the fact that he was a creature that I feared deeply, I didn’t know whether to run or embrace my emotions.

I lifted my gaze and was immediately captured by his. He moved closer and I could smell his intoxicating scent. It was like nothing I had ever smelled before—a mixture between evergreen and pine, a purely masculine yet wild aroma that held me tightly. I breathed in deeply, knowing I needed to rein in my feelings. I tried to tell myself I felt this way because it had been so long since I had been with a man. Maybe I wanted the empty feeling inside of me filled. Or maybe it was the fact that we were stuck in this small, enclosed space for a length of time, but in the end I knew better. I wanted him, in the most elemental of ways.

“Why do you turn away all the time? I would never hurt you. You saved my life and because of that I owe you my life.” He ushered me forward and I complied without hesitation. When I was leaning against the couch, so close to him I could hear him breathe, he lifted his hand and grazed my cheek with the backs of his fingers. I didn’t shy away, not any longer, because I craved his touch.

“Honestly?” I don’t know why the truth suddenly wanted to make an appearance, but it did. “I’m afraid of how I feel. Of how you make me feel.”

“And how is that?” His voice was a mere whisper, his warm breath teasing tendrils of my hair as he leaned in closer.

The urge to run my fingers across his hair was too strong to resist. I lifted my hand, tentatively to brush the wayward strands away. He closed his eyes when I touched him and I swallowed.

“Your touch, it feels...wondrous.” He opened his eyes and our heads moved closer, as if on their own accords. Our lips were inches apart, our breath mingling together as we panted.

I could hear my heart thundering in my chest, knew that I might live to regret what was about to happen, but helpless to stop it. I moved in the last couple of inches and closed my eyes as our lips pressed together. Despite Kristofer’s brute size, his lips were soft and full. I slanted my head to deepen the kiss and felt him spear his hand through my hair, bringing me closer. I opened my mouth and accepted his warm tongue inside, moaning at the addicting taste of him.

We both were breathing heavily as the kiss deepened, as our tongues slid along each other, and as our hands started caressing one another. He leaned forward and I felt his hands grip my waist, and he lifted me onto the couch. His bigger body covered mine and I spread my legs to accommodate him. Warm fluid seeped out of my pussy and my clit started to tingle. My body knew what it wanted, and what it wanted was Kristofer.

Our mouths broke apart and he started to kiss the side of my face. I closed my eyes and wrapped my arms around him, pulling him closer. He started moving lower, his lips and tongue more demanding the closer he came to my neck. I snapped my eyes open, a moment of panic swelling within me.

His mouth was suddenly by my ear, his voice low and gentle. “You know I wouldn’t hurt you. Tell me, Payton. Tell me you know this.”

Slowly my fear started to dissipate and I thought rationally, telling myself over and over this wasn’t the past. Kristofer hadn’t hurt me, in fact, at every opportunity he had been gentle, caring and sweet. I felt this hands run along my hair, cupping my head so softly. My pussy ached and my clit throbbed. I wanted Kristofer so badly. “I know this.”

He broke the kiss and whispered in my ear, “Good, that’s real good.” He kissed the shell of my ear before running the tip of his tongue over it. “I want to be inside of you, Payton.”

I shivered at the eroticism I felt when he spoke. “I want you inside of me.” He pulled back and looked down at me. His breathing was just as accelerated as mine, and at that moment, when I saw his fangs, arousal the likes of which I had never felt washed through me. He dipped his head and went back to kissing me. His hips started to

slowly push against mine and I could feel the rough material of his pants pressing against my clit, sending my desire higher. I braced my hands on his shoulders when I felt one of his hands move between our bodies and start to unbutton my jeans.

I could hear my pulse thundering in my ears, knew that what I was about to do went against everything I had believed in since that fateful night. I pushed the memories to the back of my mind, knowing that I couldn't let the past haunt me, not anymore. Our lips parted and I turned my head as he started sucking at my neck. I didn't feel his fangs, only felt the soft, rhythmic pull of his lips and tongue on my flesh. His hand slipped beneath my panties and I arched up as his finger made contact with my sopping slit.

He sucked harder at my throat as he removed his hand and tore my jeans down my legs. I lifted up and he took the panties with him. I could smell my wetness and felt my face heat with embarrassment. I had no doubts Kristofer could smell exactly how aroused I was.

"Your pussy smells so sweet, Payton. It drives me wild." He growled against my skin and the vibrations went straight to my nipples and clit. I felt them swell and harden further.

His finger went between our bodies again and he started to rub my clit in slow, measured circles. I gasped at the intensity that small act caused and closed my eyes as pleasure coursed through me. I let myself absorb what I was feeling, let my body and mind become one and just feel. His finger continued moving down and teased circles around my opening. He pressed in slowly and I felt the burn from his thick finger as it stretched my pussy. If this was how his finger felt I was in for one hell of a ride when his cock replaced it. He started to finger fuck me, pushing the thick digit into my hole and then bringing it out quickly. The sound of sucking wetness filled my ears and made me hotter.

"You feel so tight, Payton, so warm and hot." He dragged his tongue up my neck and gently bit my earlobe. "I want you, so fucking bad."

His crass language was my breaking point. I tore my shirt over my head and he got off of the couch to remove his clothing. There were no words needed, I could see the scorching desire in his gaze and I'm sure mine was a reflection of his. I felt the loss of his body heat immediately. My nipples puckered into tight buds, so hard they

ached. My legs were still splayed open and I could feel the warm liquid of my desire slip out of my pussy and down the crack of my ass.

“You are so beautiful, so pink, so wet.” His gaze was riveted to my pussy and I felt a twinge of embarrassment at the thought of what he was staring at. No doubt it was glistening, swollen and red from my arousal.

When he started to remove his clothes my mouth went dry and my eyes widened. His shirt was the first thing to go, and when it did my pulse picked up. Rippling muscle covered his chest, ropes of sinew and tendons running just beneath the alabaster skin. His wounds were healed on his chest, but even if they had still been there I knew it wouldn't have taken away from the beauty of his body.

His hands went to the button of his pants and he slowly removed them. He wore no underwear beneath them, and when they fell to the ground and I got a look at his fully erect shaft, my pussy clamped down tight. He had been impressive flaccid, but now, all hard and leaking pre-cum at the tip, he was monstrous. I was honestly frightened for a moment that he wouldn't fit.

My gaze skimmed to the gnashes in his leg and I was pleasantly surprised that all that remained were raised pink scars. With more time, those too would be gone. He moved closer and I could see a small limp in his step. It was clear there was still damage beneath the surface.

I flicked my gaze to his, saw his eyes skim over my body. He stepped closer and ran the tips of his fingers over my arm and along the underside of my breasts. I would have never expected to see this kind of gentleness from a vampire, but then again, everything about Kristofer was like nothing I had ever known or thought possible. He teased my areola and I looked down to see the traitorous tissue tighten under his ministrations.

“You are so responsive to me.” He glanced up at me and I couldn't help but shiver.

I grew bold, grew needy for him. I sat up, ran my hands up and down his thighs and then urged him closer. I stared at the thick, hard flesh in front of my face, saw the slit weep with clear fluid and leaned in. I ran my tongue across the head, tasting his strong, salty essence and wanting more. He groaned above me and I knew he liked what I was doing. I sucked the head in and ran my tongue along the

underside of his cock. The thick vein that lay just under the skin pulsed beneath my tongue.

“Oh fuck, Payton. Your mouth feels so good.” His hands went to my head at the same time his hips jerked forward ever so slightly.

I hollowed out my mouth and tried to take as much of him in as I could. It was no easy feat and I could only get half of his cock into my mouth. I hummed in satisfaction when I tasted a spurt of his cum fill my mouth. Gripping the root of his shaft, I started to stroke what I couldn't suck. I ran my other hand up to his abdomen, felt the muscles of his six-pack flex and tighten under my palm, and sucked harder.

“Wait,” he grunted, his thighs shaking, his orgasm close. Just when I thought he would explode in my mouth, he pulled away. I panted and looked up at him. I licked my lips, still able to taste him.

He groaned. “When you do that I find it hard to control myself.”

Kristofer pushed me back onto the couch and I spread my legs wide. He covered my body with his and I felt exactly how big and powerful he truly was compared to me. He latched his mouth onto my breast and started sucking my nipple. His hands were everywhere—my hips, my thighs, my face. Everywhere he touched seemed to tighten in response, in awareness. He moved to my other breast and I snapped my eyes open when I felt the sharp point of his fangs graze my skin. His teeth gently ran over my nipple before he sucked it in his mouth and began to roll it back and forth between his teeth. The reaction I was having made me feel slightly uncomfortable. His fangs on my flesh aroused me, immensely.

He pulled back and looked at me, his fangs longer than they had been. “I’m sorry, Payton, as hard as I try I can’t control myself around you. I promise I won’t hurt you.”

I knew he wouldn’t, but those deadly teeth were still surreal to me. A shiver ran through me at the thought that slammed into my brain. Without thinking, I blurted it out. “Maybe I don’t want you to control yourself, Kristofer.” He stared at me with surprise flickering across his features. He moved up my body again and kissed me softly.

“I don’t think you mean that.”

I spread my legs wider and rubbed my pussy along his hardness. “No, I think I do.” Where had this part of me come from, I idly wondered.

He panted against my mouth and murmured, “Touch me. I want to feel your hands on my cock again, Payton.”

Oh lord, this was going to be one hell of a night.

Chapter Six

The feel of his massive pectorals beneath my palms excited me. I ran my fingers down his smooth flesh, across his rippling abdomen and finally reached the junction between his legs. I could feel the coarse hair surrounding that monster cock and then finally the smooth, thick flesh between his legs. He visibly shook as I gripped him and started to slowly stroke his erection. I couldn't fit my fingers all the way around the girth, not even close. I panted with arousal and we stared into each other's eyes.

"Put me inside of you." He licked his lips and closed his eyes when I placed the tip of his shaft at my opening. He groaned roughly. "I can feel how warm and wet you are. I'll go slow, I promise."

I felt him start to push inside of me and I braced my hands on his broad shoulders. At first the pain was indescribable. He slowly shoved all those thick inches into my body, his pelvis curling forward as his hand landed on my hip, holding me, steadying me. As his cock continued to tunnel its way into my pussy, I moved my hands down to his biceps and gripped the hard muscles tightly. My nails dug into his flesh. He hissed and I immediately let go, fearing I hurt him.

"No, don't stop." Our eyes locked and I placed my hands on his biceps again, feeling his muscles tighten as he braced himself. He pushed farther into me and I arched my back, feeling the pleasure and pain become one. With one last thrust, he was buried deep inside of me. We groaned in unison. He didn't move for the longest time and I knew he was letting my body get accustomed to his. Despite my knowledge that he wanted to be easy with me, a dark and delicious burn was traveling through me, demanding it be ravished by Kristofer.

I felt stretched, filled. My pussy clamped down on his erection and he jerked in response. Kristofer closed his eyes and gritted his teeth. He slowly pulled out and when just the head was lodged inside of my cunt he shoved back inside.

"So fucking good, Payton." His voice was a rough whisper.

He pumped in and out of me, my pussy juice making the ride slick, noisy. He leaned back and lifted my leg over the back of the couch. I was spread wide, obscenely open to his inspection. His palms landed on my inner thighs, the sound of his skin slapping against mine

erotic and arousing as hell. Kristofer rubbed my outer labia with slow, measured strokes. He stared down with hooded eyes where his cock was buried.

“You have no idea how you look to me right now, so open, willing. In all my existence I have never seen a sight so arousing.” His gaze lifted and we stared at each other. “I want be gentle, to go slow, but I am holding onto my control by a thread, Payton.” His jaw clamped down tight and I heard his teeth grinding.

“I want you to lose control, Kristofer. I don’t want slow and gentle,” I whispered, not knowing where that statement came from. His nostrils flared and a hunger so fierce and powerful flashed behind his eyes. I knew what was about to happen would be irreversible.

After that he was a mad man, slamming into me, pumping his hips with such speed I could do nothing but close my eyes and hold on. The sound of my pussy sucking at his cock seemed lewd in nature, but I would be lying if I said it didn’t turn me on even more.

“Fuck, Payton. You feel so good.” I watched as a light sheen of sweat started to cover his glorious chest. I panted, feeling my own body becoming slick with perspiration. I started to lift my hips to meet his thrusts. My clit bumped against the root of his shaft, sending me closer to an orgasm I knew would suck the very air from my lungs.

He smoothed a hand over my hip and across my mound until he was resting his thumb right above the engorged bud. “Play with your nipples, baby. Make them hard and red.”

I opened my mouth in a silent cry as his thumb pressed down on my clit. I let go of his arms and cupped my breasts, taking each nipple between thumb and forefinger and started twisting, pulling. I felt the skin tighten further, felt the blood rush to the surface.

“Your skin, it gets the most beautiful blush.” His mouth was slightly open as he breathed out heavily. I could see the points to his massive fangs, actually contemplated what it would feel like to have them pierce my flesh while he fucked me. I pushed the thought far from my mind, not even about to go there.

“I’m so close, Kristofer.” I bowed my back which caused my breasts to lift into my palms. I tweaked by nipples harder, matching what his fingers were doing to my clit. If at all possible, he started thrusting into me harder, faster. I pulled on my nipples, making them stand stiff, hard.

“Oh fuck!” He grunted and I lost control. The combination of his crass language, his huge shaft spearing my pussy, his finger on my clit, and my own tugging motions on my nipples set off an explosive orgasm within me. I tensed, hearing an ear shattering scream and realized it was coming from me.

I heard a string of curse words, knew they were coming from Kristofer, and peeled my eyelids back to watch him come. His whole body was tense, his muscles and veins standing in stark relief as he came in my body. I could actually feel the hot, powerful jets of his cum pulse within me and the feeling set off another orgasm inside of me.

I watched in rapt awe as Kristofer’s fangs seemed to lengthen further, watched them puncture his lower lip, and saw the drops of ruby red blood well from the wound. His head was thrown back as his orgasm seemed to escalate. I opened my mouth in a silent gasp when a drop of his blood landed on my belly. The warmth of it startled me and I flicked my gaze from Kristofer to the crimson droplet.

When he finally relaxed he opened his eyes and breathed out deeply. “I’m sorry.” His voice was a hoarse whisper and he hung his head, refusing to meet my gaze. “I tried to control myself. It’s just it has been a long time since...It has just been a long time.”

The blood on my skin was momentarily forgotten as I cupped his cheeks in my hands and lifted his head. He slowly opened his eyes and stared deeply at me. “I wanted you to lose control. You made me feel so good, Kristofer.”

He licked his lips and then glanced down at my stomach, where the bright droplet of blood lay splattered against the paleness of my flesh. A startled expression crossed his face. He was about to pull away from me but I stopped him. I knew he could have overpowered me easily, but he let me bring him closer to my body.

He rested his head on my chest and I wrapped my arms around him, as much as I could. I ran my fingers through his hair which was surprising soft. “You did control yourself, Kristofer. If you had lost control I would have been your dinner right now.” I felt the rumble of his laughter seep into my body. I never thought I would have been able to joke about something like that, but as I felt his laughter travel through me, I felt my own lips curl in amusement.

“Never.” He lifted slightly and brought his lips to mine. “How do you do it?” He murmured against my mouth and I brought the tip of my tongue out and swiped it across his lips.

“How do I do what?”

“Stay in control? “

Unease washed through me and I gently pushed him away. His words brought my past threateningly close to the surface and unease settled within me. Fear and anxiousness swirled around me in a tornado of emotion that had me gasping for air. He took the hint and got off me, but not before taking the blanket off the couch and covering my body. He was ever the gentleman.

“I apologize. I did not mean to upset you.”

Pulling myself into a sitting position, I stared at my feet and brought the blanket tighter around myself. Guilt washed through me and I cocked my head to the side to look at him through the fall of my hair. “You didn’t upset me. It’s just...It’s just that I try hard to suppress that side of me.” I had never really spoken to anyone about what had happened and, although Kristofer and I had only known each other for a short period of time, there was this undeniable connection I felt with him. I took a deep breath, knowing I needed to tell him because it was eating me up inside.

“When I was younger I thought monsters were only in movies. I never knew that my neighbor, or anyone else in the world were vampires. When my mother finally told me, I accepted it. I was young enough that I was able to see them as just another person. Just like there are so many different races in the world, I just figured they were the same. I didn’t see them for the monsters they truly were until years later.” I stole a glance at him and saw that he watched me intently, his sole focus on me. There was no judgment in his expression, no condemnation over how I described his species.

“I came home from work and immediately knew something wasn’t right. The house was too still, too quiet.” I rubbed my eyes, refusing to cry. “I found her sitting at the table. At first I thought she had just fallen asleep again, she did that all the time when she was grading papers. I smirked, recalling how I would find my mother hunched over the table, her breathing heavy and even, a sheet of paper stuck to the side of her face. This wasn’t like any of those other time, though. I saw the pool of blood on the ground.” I dropped my hands and stared out the window. The snow was so pure and white, so fresh

and clean. “Her face was as white as the snow falling outside. He had been waiting until I came home. I didn’t know it at the time, but he had been watching us, waiting for the right time to strike.” I felt Kristofer’s hand on my back, strong, supportive. It felt good to tell someone, but I was reliving the nightmare.

“He didn’t even give me time to scream. One minute I was alone, staring at my mother’s body and the next he was behind me, his fangs buried in my throat. I can still smell him to this day, that acidic stench of death and decay.”

“Did you know who he was?” There was a bite in Kristofer’s voice and I turned my attention back to him. His teeth were gritted and his eyes flashed anger. I breathed out roughly and let him pull me toward him. He wrapped his arms around me, giving me strength and compassion. I did cry then, finally letting myself feel something other than hatred.

“No. He didn’t give me a chance. He drained me to the point that I couldn’t even stand, that all I could see was darkness. I remember shivering so hard from the cold.” I wrapped my arms around my stomach and curled slightly forward, remembering it all too well.

“Did he say anything?”

I nodded, my eyes unfocused as I heard his taunting words over and over in my head. “Yes. He said I was special, that he had been searching for a companion for ages. He told me he would be able to find me no matter what. He said he would be back for me.” I started to shake and burrowed closer to Kristofer. “I passed out after that and woke up the next night. After that I ran away from everything. I couldn’t even stand to look at myself in the mirror, knowing what he had done to me, what he had done to my mother.”

“Oh, Payton. I’m so sorry.”

He held me for hours, the only sound being the crackle of the fire and our combined breathing. I allowed myself fall asleep, let myself feel safe for the first time since my attack.

Chapter Seven

The following day the snow finally stopped. The sun had just set and I stood on the snow and ice covered porch. I held a hot cup of tea between my hands and stared ahead of me. Inches upon inches littered the ground and covered the trees. It was a beautiful sight, but essentially I was trapped. There was no way I would be able to drive anywhere, not unless I had a snowmobile, which I didn't. I made a mental note that when all of this was over with I would invest in one.

I wondered if Kristofer's brothers were out there, if they would find us. His leg was healing nicely, and I surmised he would be as good as new within the next few days. The thought had an uncomfortable pain settling behind my sternum. I walked over to the front window and used my coat-covered forearm to brush away the icicles and snow from the glass.

I peered inside and watched the deep rise and fall of his chest as he slept on the couch. The sun had just set and I knew he would be up soon. I quickly went back inside, not wanting to alarm him when he woke and I wasn't there.

"Hi." He turned toward me and smiled. That pressure in my chest made itself known. I had only known him for a short while, but there was something between us, something that connected us. He had been hurt and so had I. The feeling I felt when I was around him went beyond any and all logic. Who would have thought I would have grown to care for a vampire? I couldn't help the chuckle that bubbled from me.

"What's so funny?" He stood and stretched before coming over to me. Kristofer wrapped me in an embrace and I closed my eyes as I rested my head on his chest. The sound of his heart beating lulled me and I sighed in content. "You know I have to leave soon?"

I slowly opened my eyes and stared at the front door, memorizing the grain of the wood. I had just been thinking about this, but to actually hear him say it aloud wasn't something I was prepared for. Pulling back from him, I walked over to the sink and rested my hands on the cool ledge and breathed out deeply. His hands were on my hips before I even heard him move.

"What's wrong, Payton?" His voice was low by my ear.

I shook my head, not about to say what I was truly feeling. “Nothing’s wrong.” He turned me around, but I kept my eyes averted.

“Don’t lie to me.” He lifted my chin with his finger until we were looking into each other’s eyes. I could see a flash of fire erupt behind his gaze and swallowed. I knew he would never harm me, but I had never seen this fierce side of Kristofer before. “Tell me, Payton.”

“I-I just don’t like the fact that you have to go.” He let me turn away from him and I started fidgeting with the hem of my sweater. I sensed him retreating. Glancing over my shoulder, I watched as he started to pace. He continuously ran his hands through his hair, making the short strands stand on end.

“I didn’t mean for things to go this way. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“What?” I don’t know what I expected from him. Maybe him returning my sentiments, telling me he didn’t want to leave, that he also felt this strange and wondrous connection. What a fool I had been. “That’s your response to what I just said?” My heartache was starting to become a slow burn of anger in the pit of my stomach. I tried to stay calm, but something inside of me was slowly starting to crack. I felt stupid and embarrassed. Here I had opened myself to this man, this vampire, and he was telling me he didn’t want to hurt me? That he didn’t mean for things to go this way?

“You don’t understand, Payton. If I stay it would only end up putting you in more danger. I couldn’t live with myself if I got you hurt.”

“Maybe you should have said all that before you begged me for help and then fucked me!” I saw him wince and felt a flare of triumph. I slowly started to feel the strong hold I had over myself unravel. I breathed heavily, trying to rein in my anger. “I shouldn’t have let myself feel anything. I should have just kept my distance.” *Stay calm! Stay calm!* “Oh God. This is a nightmare.”

“Payton. Look at me!”

I hadn’t realized I closed my eyes, but when I slowly opened them and stared at the concern in his face, I felt the world tilt. I had never let myself get this far. Tears pricked my eyes and I started to pace. Strong hands gripped my shoulders and stopped my erratic movements. Never had I acted like this, like a fool.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know what’s come over me.” I had no right to act this way toward him. He owed me nothing. He needed my help and I had offered it, and here I was acting like a complete bitch. Kristofer pulled me towards him and wrapped his arms around me. His hand cupped my head and slowly I felt the anger, the wild emotions inside of me subside.

“This is my fault. I am so sorry. Believe me, I don’t want to leave.”

I squeezed my eyes shut. “I shouldn’t have reacted like that. I think everything that has happened, and talking about my past, was just a little too much in a short period of time. Although, who am I to blame my anger on that. I’m sorry, Kristofer. You have been nothing but kind and here I am treating you like shit.” My head started to clear and I felt my control slip back into place.

“Shhh.” He stroked my hair. “Don’t apologize. Emotions are what make us all human.” I stiffened and pulled back to look up at him.

“I may not be a human any longer, but I still like to think I hold a little part of my former humanity. I still feel things, feel emotions that stop my heart and take my breath away.” His fingers brushed along my cheek. “Like the way I feel about you.” I closed my eyes, leaned into his touch, and let myself feel what he was saying, what he meant. I opened my eyes and looked into his. We stared at each other for a long moment and his head slowly descended toward mine.

When our lips brushed, I felt my pulse accelerate. I stepped closer to him, felt his hard shaft press against my belly, causing warm liquid to slip from my pussy. I knew this was most likely the last time I would feel this with Kristofer, feel this with another living being. The thought was sobering, but I shoved it to the back of my mind, determined to enjoy this moment. I wanted it to last forever, even though I knew it would be over before I knew it.

He slid his hands down my body, gripped my hips and lifted me easily. I wrapped my legs around his waist, his cock rubbing along my jean clad pussy. I slipped my arms around his neck and deepened the kiss, running my tongue along his. He moved us over to the bed and gingerly laid me upon it. His hand skimmed along my breasts, my nipples standing so hard the material of my shirt abraded them. I arched my back, pressing my breasts into his palm.

He ground his cock against my cunt, dry humping me until I was withering against him. We broke the kiss and quickly undressed. My breath halted as I looked at his muscular body once again. I knew no matter how many times I saw him naked, I would always become breathless from the sight.

He slipped onto the bed and I turned to face him. Kristofer took my mouth in a bruising kiss and skimmed his fingers along my side and across my hip bone. He curled his hand around my thigh and lifted it over his leg, exposing my sopping wet pussy to his rock hard cock. His hand slipped between my legs and he started rubbing my clit in quick, fast motions. I pressed my breasts into his chest, my softness against his hardness.

“Are you ready, Payton?”

Chapter Eight

Just hearing him say my name, in that deep, breathless tone made me want to press my legs together to stem off the flow of cream. He stared at me with such longing, such heat and desire, that it was as if he was seeing me for the first time.

“Do you feel good, Payton? Does my hand playing with your cunt make you want more?”

I breathed heavily against his mouth. “Kristofer,” I whispered, his name falling from my lips on a moan. “You make me feel so good.”

He kissed along my jaw and down to where my pulse beat rapidly beneath my skin. He slipped a finger into my pussy and I clenched around the digit, sucking it in, pulling it deeper. His thumb continued running slippery circles around the hard little bud and I squeezed my eyes shut as my orgasm neared.

When he removed his finger from my clenching pussy, I groaned in disappointment. “Turn around, baby. I want to fuck that pretty ass.”

I stared at him in surprise. I had never experienced anal sex before, but the thought of Kristofer’s huge cock stuffed up my ass was too much of a temptation to resist. I found myself so accepting of all of his desires and demands. I wanted to experience everything with Kristofer, anything he wanted to do to me.

“If it is too much, too fast, tell me now because I won’t be able to stop once we’ve started.” He kissed the underside of my jaw and I felt any reserve toward the act vanishing. My whole body was strung tight, the need to find release thrumming through my veins.

I braced my hand on his chest and stared into his eyes for a moment. After turning, I moaned when his cock slipped between the cheeks of my ass. He moved the hair off my neck and started kissing the exposed skin. Pressing his hips forward, the root of his cock teased my anus, the head tempting my clit. I knew my cream coated his shaft, knew he would soon be putting that slick erection in my virgin hole.

“You feel so good, Payton. So hot and wet,” he murmured against me and his movement picked up speed.

“Oh, Kristofer.” I dropped my head and stared down the length of my body, between my legs. I could see the heavy weight of his balls hanging feeling, slightly moving back and forth every time he pressed against my cunt. As if he knew I was watching, he braced his legs wider apart, curled his hips forward and let his cock move down so that it moved across my mound. The length was so long and thick it reached my navel. Panting fiercely, I licked my lips and lifted my head.

Pumping his hips slowly at first, the length of his cock rubbed along my cleft and clit. A breathy moan left me and I turned my head and accept his kiss. Our tongues slid along each other erotically. He gripped my hips and pulled back from me slightly. He reached between us and aligned his cock with my pussy hole. I was a little confused as to why he wasn't putting his dick in my ass, but I wasn't complaining because the feel of his cock tunneling through my wet folds had me crying out in pleasure.

Kristofer reached his hand over and gripped my breast. His thumb and forefinger started to tweak my nipple, pulling the flesh out and then letting it snap back in place so that my breast bounced from the force. He pounded into me, his fierce pumping shaking the bed and sending me closer to climax.

“Your pussy feels so good squeezing my cock, Payton.” Panting, he ran his teeth gently over the back of my neck. I didn't feel fear when he did this, on the contrary, it made me hotter. He grunted behind me, his cock shoving through pussy folds with more force. He started to become wild, pinching my nipple until it bordered on pain, on pleasure.

“I'm. Going. To. Come!” I cried out and closed my eyes as ecstasy tore through me. He didn't stop thrusting, no, he went harder, faster. He groaned behind me, the sound almost animalistic in nature. Just as my climax subsided he pulled out of me. I could feel my cunt clenching, trying to suck his cock back inside. When his erection slipped free, I could feel my pussy juices coat the thickness as it moved along my inner thigh. His hand on the middle of my back urged me onto my belly. My body was so weak and boneless that I complied without complaint. My eyes were closed, my breathing heavy as I was vaguely aware that he was shoving a pillow beneath my hips so my ass was popped out and in full view.

I could feel his cock, juicy from fucking me moments before, probe my cunt again. He moved slightly back and his fingers took residence where his shaft had just been. He pumped in and out of me several times, his grunts of pleasure causing my body to react. I slowly started to climb toward pleasure again.

“Oh, baby. This is going to feel so good. I’m going to make you feel so good.” He started trailing kisses along my spine while his fingers fucked me. He pulled the digits out and moved them up the crack of my ass. He rubbed my anus, my pussy cream coating his fingers and spreading along my anus. I could feel both orifices clench when he slowly started to push a digit into my ass.

“Relax, Payton. I promise to be gentle with you.”

I believed him, but there was a slight twinge of unease at the thought of his monster cock filling me back there. Adding another finger, he pumped them in and out of my asshole. He spread them wide, scissoring them inside of me and preparing me for his dick. “Please, Kristofer. I need you.”

“What do you need? Tell me.” As his fingers moved in and out of me, his groin was pressing into my side, his cock throbbing against my flesh.

“I need you inside of me.” Taking position behind me, he removed his fingers, his cock head taking their place. Slowly pushing into me, I felt an uncomfortable burn settle at the area of entrance.

“Relax, Payton. Bear down as I push in.” Hands splayed on my ass cheeks, he continued to shove those thick inches into me.

I gripped the sheets in my fists, bearing down like he said and then feeling the thick crown pop free of the tight ring of muscle. We both breathed out in pleasure.

“Oh fuck. You’re so tight, so hot.” He bent low until he was whispering in my ear. “I’m going to fuck your ass nice and slow, baby, and then when you’re begging me for more, I’m going to go hard and fast.” He started moving then, in and out, slow and easy. He did this for several moments until I felt perspiration cover me, heard my begging, heard my pleas. As if that was what he had been waiting for, he moved faster and harder until I felt my body coiling tight, getting ready to explode.

“Oh God, I’m so close.” I didn’t think it was possible to reach another mind blowing orgasm after the one I had just experienced, but

as his sweat slick skin slid over mine and his warm, humid breath teased my flesh, I knew this was how it would always be with him.

The sound of his balls slapping my wet pussy folds was an aphrodisiac all in its own. Beads of sweat covered my forehead as he continued to pump into me. He wedged his hand between the pillow and my body and lightly squeezed my clit between his thumb and forefinger. That was my breaking point. I buried my face in the sheets and cried out in pleasure. My pussy quivered and my asshole clenched around his cock. He slammed into me once more before stilling and letting out a deep, guttural groan. I could feel his hot cum shoot out of his cockhead and into me. The feeling was like nothing I had ever felt before.

Kristofer collapsed onto me once his body stopped jerking. When it started to become harder for me to breathe and I wheezed, he rolled off of me, his slippery cock sliding from my ass in one swift move. I could do nothing more than lay there, trying to catch my breath, trying to sink back to Earth.

“Oh Payton.” He panted beside me, his breath hot and humid. That was the last thing I was conscious of before I let sleep and exhaustion overtake me.

Chapter Nine

The sound of scraping outside my front door woke me. I peeled my eyes open and turned my head toward the noise. My body was pleasantly sore and I smiled as I remembered exactly why my pussy ached. I rolled slightly and looked at Kristofer's sleeping form behind me. The scraping noise ended and I disregarded it as probably just ice falling.

Closing my eyes once again, I was right on the verge of falling back asleep when the noise started once again. The weather was probably warming up enough that the ice was starting to break off the roof. I had been living out here long enough to push away irritable sounds that the wild and nature threw my way.

I looked at Kristofer and then climbed from the bed. Wincing as unused muscles protested, I grabbed my robe and put it on. The chill in the air was stroking over me like a frigid caress. I went to the kitchen and started making some tea when the scraping sound resumed. Gritting my teeth, I stalked toward the door. I slipped on my boots, grabbed the broom to break off any icicles hanging from the gutter, and gripped the door handle. There was only so many times I could listen to the sound, and if the weather continued to warm up it would only get worse. Gripping the chilled brass handle of the door, I braced myself for the arctic chill that was sure to blast me once I opened it. Just as I went to pull the heavy wood open I felt my heart stop in my chest.

I pressed my ear to the wood, positive I had heard someone whispering. The cold wood was startling to my flesh. I strained to hear, but when I heard nothing I told myself I must have imagined it. Still, I couldn't ignore the inkling of fear that stayed with me. No doubt talking about my past had reminded me of the horror I had seen. I dropped my hands from the door and took several steps backward.

"Get a grip, Payton. You have been living out here long enough by yourself that you know better than to start letting your imagination get the better of you." I breathed out, laughing softly at where my thoughts had strayed. Just as I turned to walk back into the

kitchen I stopped, my pulse beating rapidly at the voice that spoke just beyond my front door.

“Open up, open up, little Red Riding Hood.” The voice coming through was clearly a male, the sound so sinister it had me instantly shake. He started to laugh, a deep, evil chuckle that had a shiver skating down my spine. That voice, so deep, demented, I remembered all too well. I slowly turned around, knowing he couldn’t see me through the wood, but feeling his gaze on me nonetheless.

Despite the fact wood and metal stood between us, I could hear his voice clear as day. “Oh God,” I whispered and started walking backward until I felt the edge of the bed hit the back of my knees. “Kristofer,” I whispered, not knowing why since it was clear the monster right outside knew I was in here. I reached behind me and blindly searched for his body. “Kristofer.” I gripped his leg and shook it.

“Let me in, let me in.” Evil laughter filtered through once again and I felt the world tilt.

“Payton?” Kristofer’s groggy voice became clearer. “What’s wrong?” I heard the ruffling of sheets. Before I could utter another word he was off the bed and in front of me.

“I can hear your little heart beating. It is music to my ears.”

Kristofer glanced behind me and I saw an emotion cover his face. I couldn’t distinguish what it was, maybe fear, horror, or maybe something entirely different. “Kristofer. Oh God, Kristofer, it’s him.” I didn’t need to elaborate on who *him* was. I shouldn’t have been surprised that the vampire that had killed my mother had found me, but to actually hear his voice again, so close, brought me back to that horrid night. I stupidly thought I had been safe. After living so long out here by myself and being so isolated, I was a fool to think he wouldn’t deliver on his promise.

“Let me in or I’ll huff and puff and blow this mother fucking door down!” His voice rose and I gripped the back of Kristofer’s shirt.

“What are we going to do?” I noticed that Kristofer’s breathing had increased and knew he was changing, turning into the same creature demanding entrance. He turned and looked at me, his fangs fully extended, his eyes as dark as the night. The sight didn’t frighten me, no, it reassured me on some level, made me actually feel safe and protected.

“I’m going to fucking kill him and end this once and for all.” He threw his pants on and stopped in front of me again, gripping my shoulders and dipping his head to kiss me swiftly. “I swear to you, Payton, he will not hurt you ever again. He will not hurt anyone ever again.”

I wanted to believe him, but this was the same creature that had brutally murdered my mother. Before anything else was said, the door splintered inward, sending shards of wood in our direction. I screamed and covered my face with my arms, but Kristofer was there, blocking the worst of it. I felt myself get shoved onto the bed and then rolled over it. I knew what Kristofer was doing, knew he was trying to protect me.

“Where is she? Where the fuck is she!”

I closed my eyes and willed myself to be strong when I heard that evil voice so close to me once again.

“So you’ve found us, Ellon, but you won’t take her. I can guarantee that.” Kristofer’s voice was like a beacon of light and I slowly rose from my position and looked over the bed. They stood toe-to-toe, both looking fearsome, both fully changed. It was then, as I stared at them and realized they resembled each other far too much to be coincidental, that Kristofer’s words speared my brain. He had called my mother’s murderer, Ellon, his brother’s name.

“Oh my god.” I covered my mouth and stood, watching as their confrontation was temporarily put on hold as they turned to stare at me in unison. Ellon smiled, his teeth stained yellow, jagged and sharp as a shark’s grin.

“God won’t save you from what I have plan...” Before he even finished his sentence Kristofer attacked him. They flew across the room, their massive bodies slamming into the wall with enough force to crack the wood and mortar. They were so quick that all I could see were flashes of fangs and claws. I willed myself to stay calm, knew I had to do something, anything. I felt the logical side of my brain think of how to help the vampire, the man I had grown to care about.

“You’ve tainted her, brother!” Grunts and animalistic snarls reverberated through the cabin. “For that you will die slowly, but not before you watch me fuck her.” Ellon snarled as he slammed his fist into Kristofer repeatedly.

The fact that they were brothers was still a shock, but not shocking enough that I couldn't react. I had to think fast, had to stay calm and help Kristofer. I charged forward, sidestepping thick pieces of wood and jumped on Ellon's back. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I squeezed as tight as I could. He grunted for a second, most likely from surprise that I had actually attacked him, but even that wasn't enough to overtake him. His strength was immense and he flicked me off of him as if shooing a fly.

I realized I was flying through the air only a millisecond before my back connected with the mantle of the fireplace. I cried out in pain and crumpled to the ground like a rag doll. Stars danced before my eyes and I struggled to stand. Shaking my head to clear the fog, I slowly, and unsteadily, stood and watched in horror as Kristofer's and Ellon clawed and slammed each others fists into one another. Blood coated Ellon's tattered clothing and Kristofer's bare chest. Bruises and gashes formed and healed just as quickly on Ellon, but because Kristofer was still recovering, his wounds took longer to knit back together. The fight seemed to drop into slow motion and I watched in anguished horror as Ellon's strength overpowered Kristofer and sent him to his knees. Kristofer knelt there, staring up at his brother and then looking my way, his face bloodied and bruised, his eyes pleading with me leave, to run away. He hadn't spoken the words but I could read his intention as clear as day. With that last lingering look, Ellon slammed his fist into the side of Kristofer's head, sending him falling to the floor as blood pooled around him.

"No!" Sheer fear of losing Kristofer overshadowed my terror of Ellon. I brought forth the part of me I had always kept hidden, always kept dormant. Never had I felt a need to let myself go, but as I watched Ellon smile down at my broken hero, I knew I had to do something. I was not going to stand around and watch Kristofer die.

I felt it start in my fingertips and toes, that tingling sensation that spoke of the power I would soon have. My fangs lengthened, and my nails grew into sharp little claws. The power and strength that radiated through me was as tangible as anything I had ever touched. I had always hidden my vampire self, too afraid of what I might do, who I might hurt if I let it forth. I realized maybe it wasn't something to fear, but something to bring forth, accept. Kristofer held me back

when I had felt it surface just yesterday. He gave me inner strength and now I would give him my strength so we could defeat Ellon.

I stared at Ellon, the vampire, the monster and murderer with such hatred I felt my whole body heat with rage. Ellon had drained me to the point of death and then had turned me all those years ago, making me live as a vampire and fearing I would end up like him, a ruthless, emotionless killer. Only when I had fully realized what had transpired had I fled, as far away from civilization, from living, breathing beings that I could possibly hurt. It was bad enough making the trek into town, seeing the fear in their eyes as they stared at me, hearing the harassment from them that my kind was nothing more than savage animals. The thing was, they were right on all accounts. I knew I was an animal, knew I had the possibility to kill without thought, feeling, or remorse for anything or anyone but myself.

I sucked in air and watched as Ellon turned around. His smile broadened as his gaze roamed over my body. I fought the need to gag in disgust, reminding myself I had immense power coursing through me. I knew I wasn't as powerful as him, but I still had an advantage over him. I was smaller and quicker.

"I knew you would be perfect. Look at you, fearsome yet beautiful." He took a step toward me. "You will make the perfect companion, the perfect lover."

I reached for the poker that lay just inches from my fingertips and held it in front of me. "I would rather die than be with you." His laugh was cruel. I swallowed roughly the lump in my throat caused by my fear. I doubted the poker would really help me, but I felt stronger holding it nonetheless.

"How will you stop me? If you run I will just find you again. There is nowhere on this planet that you can hide, Payton. My blood runs through your veins."

I glanced down at Kristofer, fearing he was dead. I fought back the tears that threatened to fall. I could not show weakness. "You killed my mother."

He shrugged and chuckled. "I did." He smiled, his tainted fangs sickening me. "I didn't want any interference. I could not risk anything coming between us."

"I don't understand. Why me?" Maybe it was a dumb question, because really, it didn't matter what he said, the outcome was still the same. Even knowing this, I still wanted to know.

“Why not? I saw you and wanted you like I have never wanted anything in my long existence.” He held his hands out to me, as if he truly expected me to rush into his arms.

“You’re crazy and a murderer.” I gripped the iron poker tighter, the bite of the metal digging into my flesh and reminding me I was really standing in front of him.

He chuckled. “Maybe, but the end result is the same. You know you can’t win. I have killed beings far stronger than you.” He held his hand out toward Kristofer. “Look at my dear brother, a lifeless heap on the floor. He was the most powerful one out of the four of us, but see how I have defeated him?” He took a step forward. “Just come to me and I promise everything will be okay.”

Nothing would be okay, but honestly, how was I supposed to fight one such as him? An idea surfaced in my mind. It wasn’t the most elaborate plan, but it would get right down to the point. I dropped my arms, my grip on the poker loosening. I let out a breath I hadn’t known I had been holding and slowly walked toward him. My heart was pounding so hard and fast I prayed he didn’t notice, prayed he didn’t realize what I was doing.

His smile was almost blinding in its intensity and it made me sick. When I was close enough for him to touch me, he gripped my shoulders and pulled me close to him. I could feel his claws dig into my skin. I flinched in pain, despite trying to appear unaffected.

His gaze roamed over my face and I felt the rising need to pull away from him. The stench of death clung to him like a darkened cape and the need to show my disgust was paramount but I knew I needed to keep my composure. “I am glad you have come to your senses, my love, although I must admit I did enjoy the chase.” His breath was rancid and warm, coasting over my senses and causing me to shutter in disgust. “Now, your first kill will be to drain my brother.”

My eyes snapped up to his and I cringed away. I flicked my eyes to Kristofer, saw the pool of blood, and wanted to cry in relief that he wasn’t dead. I kept hope alive that he was just severely injured, but he was still weak and I knew he couldn’t afford the blood loss.

“He will die by my hand or yours.” His eyes took on a dark cast and I imagined he was what evil personified looked like. “I promise you, Payton, my kill will be slow and painful.” He gripped

the back of my neck and turned me around so that I was staring at Kristofer's broken body. Ellon pushed me forward and I stumbled. I was relieved to know Kristofer was alive, but even knowing that, the sight of all that blood sent nausea through me. Knowing what I had to do, I turned around and smiled, trying my hardest to make it look believable.

I steadied my voice before I spoke. "I have never fed from a living person before. I've always just thawed out animal blood." I tried to appear innocent, completely the opposite from the emotions waging war inside of me. "Will you show me?" I saw surprise and pleasure flash across his face. He was either stupid, or I was that good of an actress. Either way, things were falling into place.

"I knew you would see things my way." He stepped forward and ran his hand down my arm. I kept my expression neutral. I prayed he knelt by Kristofer, if not, this wasn't going to work. I waited, his movements excruciatingly slow, but finally he dropped to the floor. I tightened my grip on the poker I still held, but didn't move. He looked behind me and smiled, his fangs lengthening further before he turned back around and went for Kristofer's jugular. Without wasting another moment, I raised my arm and brought down the tip of the poker.

I used all my strength to bring the weapon down and through his back. I prayed I hit my mark, prayed the iron had went through his heart. He might have been immortal, but no creature could survive a wound like that.

Just when the poker would have went through muscle, tissue and bone, Ellon turned around and grabbed the poker. He tore it from my hand as if it weighed nothing and tossed it toward the fireplace. He stood so fast that I teetered backward on my heels. I could see the rage burning in his eyes, knew he was pissed and feared what he might do to me. His big hand was wrapped around my throat in a matter of seconds, squeezing, tightening, and suffocating me until I clawed at his fingers, pleading with my eyes for air. I wouldn't die without oxygen, but it was painful as hell.

"You see what you have made me resort to?" Spittle dripped down his chin. "If you would just be an obedient little bitch I would give you nothing but pleasure, but because you want to be traitorous, you have pissed me the fuck off and you'll get punished." He threw me across the room and I bounced off the mantle. I cried out in pain,

pictures falling all around me, the sound of my ribs cracking from the impact loud in my ears.

Glancing down, I looked at my broken wrist, the bone protruding from my flesh at a sickening angle. Right before my eyes, my skin pulled together at the same time the bone popped back into place and mended itself. It always disgusted me to watch myself heal so inhumanly, but at this moment I couldn't be more thankful for the ability.

I braced my hands on the ground and went to push myself up. That was when I felt the cold metal of the poker graze my fingers. I didn't look down to verify the fact, didn't want Ellon to realize I had my weapon back. He stood a few feet from me, his face reflecting murderous rage. I stood, kept the poker behind my leg the whole time, and took a step toward him. He launched toward me again, hands outstretched, claws bared. I lunged at him at the same time and brought the poker up at the very last minute.

The sickening sensation of the poker going through raw meat, that resistance, was almost enough to cause me to falter. I heard bone crunching and held the bile down. We stared at each other for a long moment. I still gripped the poker, not knowing if it had pierced his heart, but praying it did. The myths about vampires being able to be killed by holy water and crucifixes were just that, myths. The sunlight and stakes through the heart were true, though. Who wouldn't die if someone stabbed a stake through their heart?

Stumbling back, I let go of the poker and saw that it had indeed went through his chest. The question was, did it puncture his heart? This would either kill him or the poker had completely missed its mark and he would kill me instead. He stumbled back. Shock reverberated in his expression when he glanced down at the poker that stuck through his chest. I still didn't know if I had gone through his heart, but he was still standing which was not a good sign. He gripped the poker, and as I watched in horror, pulled it through his chest. He grunted and gasped, but tossed it to the ground, the iron clattering so loud, my ears rang.

"You stupid little bitch." He took a step forward, but I had nowhere to run. I was cornered.

Ellon stopped after moving another step, a strange expression crossing his face. He cleared his throat and looked down at the hole in his chest. Blood started to pool around the material of his shirt and he

flicked his glance up at me. He opened his mouth to speak but no words came out. He staggered forward and I moved back. Wet gasping sounds came out of him a second before he fell to his knees.

Reaching a hand out to me, I moved farther back until the wall greeted me. Blood started to come out of every orifice. His ears, mouth, nose, even his eyes poured out the ruby red liquid. I sobered and covered my mouth with my hand. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. Blood pooled on the ground, making a wide circle around his body and coming closer and closer to me. The stench of the liquid was like flesh decaying.

He fell forward, his arm still outstretched, as if he thought I would help him. As the minutes passed, I watched his body deteriorate, his skin seeming to shrivel and turn an ashen grey. His bones became prominent, his body decomposing right before my eyes. I had done it, I had actually killed the creature that had been haunting me for years, the vampire that had locked up his own brothers and tortured them. I hesitantly moved around him and rushed toward Kristofer.

“Oh God, Kristofer.” I ran my hands gingerly over him, mindful of his numerous cuts and gashes. “Please wake up. Please be okay” I finally let my tears flow. I willed my vampire half to leave, for my body to go back to “normal.” I felt my fangs recede and my claws turn into blunt nails. The power my vampire half gave me left so quickly I felt dizzy. I felt empty, something that astounded me and was also unsettling. Feeling for Kristofer’s pulse, I wept harder when I heard and felt the faint beat. He was unconscious, but it didn’t matter, he was still alive.

Curling myself around his body, I didn’t care that blood seeped into my clothes, didn’t care that I wept like an infant. I was happy Kristofer was okay, glad I hadn’t lost yet another important person in my life. I cried for everything, everyone I had lost by the hands of a monster. My outlook on vampires had changed considerably. Not because I finally accepted that I was one too, but because I realized it doesn’t matter what you are. Humans were no different from vampires, not in the morality of it all. Kristofer had been my hero, the person who had opened up my eyes and showed me that there is still good in this world, despite what you are on the outside. He had fought for me, risked his life to defend me.

I cried harder, knowing I had gained something monumental. It was then, as I cried, that I felt a light touch on my shoulder. I jerked my head up, fearful for a heartbeat that I hadn't killed Ellon and he was about to rip my throat out. I looked at the hand resting on my shoulder and then looked into Kristofer's eyes. I buried my face against his neck, letting myself feel the rise and fall of his chest, the soft, yet audible beat of his heart.

"I thought I was going to lose you." My words were muffled against his shirt but I knew he heard me. The feeling of his hand caressing the back of my head sent warmth through me.

"I would never leave you." I lifted my face and cupped his cheek. His voice was so soft and he was so pale, so battered that I wanted to weep harder. I lifted up and he moved down until our lips were an inch apart. "You're my hero."

I chuckled at his statement, not caring how the ending had come to be, just glad he was still alive. I knew, from that moment on, that I would never take my life for granted, no matter how much it frightened me.

"We're a team, Payton, you and I."

I liked the way that sounded and smiled. "Yes we are, Kristofer." I hugged him tighter and then stood, holding my hand out to him. "Let's go find your brothers." He stood, wincing and gripping his abdomen. I hated to see my strong warrior hurt, but the important thing was that we were both alive and that we could start our lives over, together. We both looked at Ellon's body, only bones and pieces of black and grey flesh hanging from them. I glanced down when I felt Kristofer twine his fingers through mine. He squeezed gently and I smiled. The wind blew snow inside, snowflakes twirling around us in a soft, yet powerful dance. We stood at the entrance, just staring at the landscape, at how the moon shined down upon the snow and made it appear like there was millions of tiny diamonds embedded in it.

"We're a team." I murmured to myself, my focus still on the snow in front of me.

"Yes, we are, Payton. Always."

The End



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