

ON THE WINGS OF THE VAMPIRE

SCARLET
BLACKWELL



King Kavan, ruler of the kingdom of Decius, wants to kill all vampires in the land. What he hasn't reckoned on is his second-in-command running off with one of the winged creatures or that he would fall in love with the beautiful Harben. Keeping Harben locked in his tower, with orders to maim the vampire's wings should he escape, isn't conducive to receiving Harben's love in turn, but what happens when Kavan's forbidden feelings are tested? Would he save Harben's life at the expense of his own?

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On the Wings of the Vampire
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On the Wings of the Vampire

By

Scarlet Blackwell

Dedication

To the immortal Bela Lugosi, king of vampires, who started my love affair with bloodsuckers at a tender age.

Chapter One

Keys rattled in the jailer's hand and water dripped slowly onto stone. A tall, thin man carried a lantern, illuminating the way. Behind him followed Lucius Esau, chief truth-seeker of the government.

How silent the cells were as he passed them. Go into any other jail in the land and you would hear the sounds of mortal terror and anguish, the pitiful cries of souls in torment. But this was no ordinary jail, and the creatures it housed were too proud to beg for their lives. They suffered in silence. It would almost have made Lucius admire them if he didn't despise them so.

In the ancient kingdom of Decius, a war raged, a war between good and evil, if its ruler, King Kavan, were to be believed. In his quest to rid the land of its pestilence—the creatures which were blamed for every outbreak of plague and every act of the gods—he left no stone unturned to capture the demons which he longed

to break.

Lucius ably abetted him. He had dedicated his life to killing every one of the beings since he had witnessed, at aged eight, his older sister being taken by one of the vampires in her very bed as she slept. She had been buried with her head separate from her body, mouth stuffed with garlic.

The demon that Lucius was on his way to see had been taken from a castle on the outskirts of the city that morning as he slumbered in his bed. Not without a fight, for Kavan lost two of his best men, their throats torn out before Lucius ripped the heavy velvet curtains down, gripped the creature by his delicate neck and dragged him into the sunlight.

The demon writhed and hissed and convulsed in his grasp, sinking to the ground as his alabaster skin turned red, blistered, then blackened. The stench of burning flesh overwhelmed some of Kavan's soldiers who covered their noses with their scarves.

Lucius only let go when the monster lay in a pathetic heap, curled into a ball like a child trying to return to the womb. As the truth-seeker looked down at him, the creature's eyes opened and its gaze fixed on his. They were a pale green—the colour of the jade amulet Kavan wore about his neck, which was blessed by his magician,

Bela, and supposedly protected him against demons such as this one.

Those eyes, huge and unblinking in the charred face, stared at Lucius for such a long while that Lucius became disconcerted for the first time ever in dealing with these aberrations of nature and was unable to look away. It was a trick in the creature's armoury, because this one's fame was legendary. It was said it could seduce in the blink of an eye, that all strangers who looked into those eyes succumbed within a matter of seconds. More than this, it was said it had the sweetest singing voice, like that of an angel, and that if it sang to you, you would go willingly to your death. These were the reasons Kavan had been so anxious to capture this one. The king stepped forward, pushing Lucius out of the way to look down at his prize.

He nodded in satisfaction. "No more torture. Take him to the dungeon," he told his soldiers, "and raze this place to the ground."

This was uncharacteristically kind treatment from the King because usually the ruler left the demon to be beaten and tortured by his soldiers at will before removal to the dungeon for more of the same. Perhaps Kavan was considering a role for this one beyond starving slowly in a cell in his underground dungeon.

Lucius would have to be careful.

One month earlier

The King dragged Harben from the bed of Ophion, his mortal lover, and thrust him head first into a pail of holy water. The vampire screamed and struggled with all his strength. It took five men to hold him down, before he became unconscious. They pulled him free, the stench of burning quite nauseating in the small bedroom.

Ophion, dark-eyed and red-haired, clutching the bed covers to him and held at sword-point by the king's guards, screamed and begged for Harben's life. Kavan swung his fist in irritation and knocked him down. They bound both the men, Harben more securely than Ophion, and transported them to the castle.

Once in the underground dungeon, Lucius was put to work. He left Ophion alone for the time being, because he wasn't sure what to do with a mortal who had been caught sleeping with a vampire and concentrated on Harben.

The vampire was a fine specimen, muscular and lithe with hypnotic hazel eyes and pale, delicately freckled skin. At least he had been, until Kavan got hold of him. Now he was a mass of weeping sores. He trembled violently on the floor of his cell, half-naked, clothed in

only a pair of bed breeches. His wings, ragged and limp behind him, trailed across the floor. Lucius accidentally stepped on them, making the vampire mewl like a cat whose tail had been trodden on.

Kavan had asked Lucius to seek the whereabouts of the vampire Eachan from the villain—he of the legendary eyes and fair singing voice, the one Kavan longed above all to capture. Lucius tortured him and set him on fire as he did with most vampires, but Harben held strong. Harben lay unconscious on the floor of the cell while he delivered the news to the king that he had failed.

Kavan was predictably angry. Instead of punishing him however, the king ordered him to make the vampire presentable, using the magic salve made by Bela, and deliver him within the hour.

Harben was still burned and bruised but looking slightly better when Lucius and three soldiers dragged him through the door with his hands bound in front of him. They threw him to his hands and knees before Kavan's throne, ordering him to show the ruler of the land some respect.

* * * *

Harben kept his head bowed, but Kavan doubted it was through any respect for him. The vampire was a feisty, noncompliant one and probably showed no man respect unless the mortal earned it in his eyes.

“Harben.” He already knew the vampire’s name as he had been spoken about widely as the oldest and most feared blood-drinker in the city. “I want to know about your powers.”

Harben lifted his head slowly. The monarch was disconcerted to see his eyes were almost identical in colour to his own.

“I want to watch you heal yourself. I have long been researching your species.”

“You have long been *destroying* it,” Harben cried suddenly with a flash of spirit.

Lucius backhanded him across the face and then dragged him up to his feet when he fell to the floor.

Kavan clicked his tongue a little, keeping his famous temper in check. “Bring me a servant from downstairs Lucius,” he said. “Anyone will do. I want to watch this demon feed.”

Lucius strode from the room.

Kavan regarded Harben with malevolence, gaze roaming blatantly over the vampire’s body. Truth be told, his quest for Eachan had moved to second place as

of that morning because he was rather interested in his newest captive. Nobody had warned him Harben was so physically blessed. His body and his beautiful face aroused him hopelessly. Kavan was disgusted with himself for reacting to him as he would any other attractive man.

He got up from his throne and stalked down to the floor, circling the vampire, breathing on his neck and looking him up and down. He smelled sweetly of Bela's salve, a scent Kavan had always found intoxicating. The creature stood tall and proud, despite his hands being bound before him, his body muscular and hard. Behind Harben, his wings trailed from beneath his tunic, almost brushing his ankles. The delicate meshwork of the fibres was something about vampires that had always fascinated him. He longed to break this one. With those eyes and those wings, Harben was alluring, far too alluring for his liking.

Lucius returned with a short, skinny boy in tow and unbound Harben's hands. The boy seemed to know *nosferatu* when he saw it. He screamed and begged for his life. Harben's eyes went dark with bloodlust and his mouth opened, canines lengthening and bared.

Kavan stood fascinated as Harben went in for the kill, stopping abruptly as the first tears ran down the

boy's face. The vampire drew back, looking contrite and hesitant. He cupped the boy's head and licked the tears tenderly from his face. The rest of Harben's wounds healed before Kavan's eyes, revealing that pale, freckled skin of his, and one more secret of his power was divulged.

Harben lifted his head and looked at Kavan. "Take him away, please."

With a curt gesture of his head, Kavan ordered the boy removed. "So," he said, standing a distance away, uneasy at the humanity he had just witnessed and not sure what to make of it. "You are fully recovered by drinking human tears. Would you not kill me now despite my guards?"

Harben merely regarded him, his eyes cold. He did not reply.

Kavan had lost this first round to the vampire, and as such, needed to enter the arena again. He ordered Harben to be taken to the tower and imprisoned in the chamber there. When the vampire had been dragged away and he was left alone, Kavan sank back into his throne and rubbed a little angrily at the erection he sported.

The king ordered his magician Bela to place a charm

over the doors and windows of the tower room so the vampire could not escape. He left Harben there for days while he stewed over the vampire's strength and his own attraction to him. He did not send Harben any source of food, gleefully smiling to himself at the dark, taboo thought of forcing himself on the vampire while the demon was physically weak and unable to fight him off. Once he had done that, Harben would surely be broken and would start to reveal more of his secrets and the whereabouts of others of his kind.

Kavan entered the bedchamber after five days, reassured by his soldiers that the vampire was not dead, but weak. He wore a jade amulet, told by his magician that it afforded him protection against vampires. He carried with him a bottle of oil, because he may have been about to commit rape, but there was no need to make himself sore into the bargain.

Harben was lying on the bed wearing a silk tunic and breeches, his wings trailing across it and off onto the floor. He was curled on his side, eyes closed, and for a moment, Kavan stood watching him.

He stiffened with desire, his gaze on the wings. What would they feel like when he gripped them in the heat of passion? Harben opened his eyes suddenly and turned his head. Even this seemed like a painful effort for him,

his movements slow and weak.

“Where is Ophion?”

Kavan raised an eyebrow. “You mean your little human pet? He’s downstairs in my dungeons.”

He put the oil onto the bedside table and then he unfastened the knotted cord on his breeches. The vampire’s eyes widened and he made a sudden movement, darting from the bed with surprising speed, but not quick enough for Kavan. The king grabbed him by the neck and dragged him back, thrusting him face down, wrenching the vampire’s breeches down, baring his backside.

Harben whimpered. He brought his arm back and slammed his elbow into Kavan’s side. The king grunted and shoved the vampire’s face into the bed, holding his neck in a bruising grip.

“I will take you,” he growled, “and afterwards, you shall thank me.”

“No.” The vampire struggled.

Kavan released himself from his breeches. He pressed himself against the vampire’s plump buttocks, rubbing his erection slowly between the cleft. “The harder you fight me the worse it will go for you. Allow me access and I shall allow you to feed.”

“No,” Harben said again, still writhing in Kavan’s

grip, his struggles weak and ineffective. “I would rather die than allow you to do this to me.” His voice trembled.

The king snickered scornfully and reached for the oil, coating himself in it, before gripping the vampire’s hips and pushing himself forward. Harben wailed and jerked away, trying to bury himself into the bed.

Kavan dug his nails cruelly into his hips and tried once again to penetrate him.

“Please,” Harben cried. “No!”

Kavan’s lip curled in disgust as he realised the vampire was crying. The creature’s head hung down; soft sobs shook his body. This only made him want to hurt the vampire more. He tried to gain access once again and then stopped abruptly. Something had dropped onto the bed, spreading into a pink patch on the white covers.

Frowning, he gripped Harben’s shoulder and tossed him onto his back. The vampire’s face was streaked with crimson, blood tears rolling from his eyes.

Kavan considered himself a connoisseur on vampires but he had learned two new things—that they could also feed on human tears and that they cried blood tears. He reached out to touch one of the tears. Harben jerked away, scrambling up the bed, pulling his pants back up as he did. He crouched there at its head with his face

buried in his knees.

Kavan regarded him. He was too distracted by the blood tears to want to rape the vampire now. “How long can you survive without blood?”

Harben lifted his scarlet-covered face and wiped at it with one hand. “A week.”

Kavan nodded. “Then I have another couple of days to make you suffer.” He smirked. “When you decide to come to me voluntarily, I shall feed you.”

He left the vampire huddled on the bed drowning in his own blood tears which he could ill afford to lose.

As he made his way down the steps, a cunning idea occurred to him on to how to break the vampire. He smiled in glee. Any other man would ask himself how he had got to be so cruel, but Kavan didn't. Whether he was born or made this way, he didn't know, but he cared for no man, and no man cared for him. He did not get to be a great leader by showing compassion, and he could not wage his war against evil by showing mercy to the likes of Harben.

The king left Harben to starve for two more days before he played his *coup de grace*. His soldiers reported that the vampire slumbered on the bed barely alive. At no point had he called for Kavan and

confirmed his surrender.

Kavan was angry but nonetheless confident his next card would be the one to break Harben. He sent food to the tower room, having his soldiers thrust the victim in and lock the door behind them. He stood listening at the foot of the stairs. Harben screamed as he was confronted with Ophion.

Ordering no one disturb him, he ate a solitary dinner and then retired to his chamber. He didn't want progress reports on whether Harben had torn his human lover limb from limb in desperation, he wanted to wait until morning and see the lifeless body on the ground and the broken spirit of the vampire.

He was bitterly disappointed. The vampire's strength of will was something to be admired. Harben was on the ground and he was lying in Ophion's arms, appearing lifeless, their two heads close together, the human weeping over the vampire.

Kavan flew into a rage at being thwarted yet again. He didn't want another example of this compassion of the vampire's. The cruel creature should have drained every drop from this man's neck, regardless of what he was to him, and yet, he had spent a full night with his prey and not touched him. As a result, he was all but dead. Kavan realised if he did not provide food very

soon, the vampire really would die and he didn't want that.

He tossed Harben aside and dragged Ophion from the floor by his neck, throwing him to his soldiers. "Impale him outside the castle gates," he told them, "where the vampire can see him."

"No!" Came a weak cry from the floor and Harben struggled to get up, dragging himself painfully to his knees with the aid of the bed, eyes fixed on Kavan. "I implore you!"

Kavan regarded him, at last sensing the upper hand. "And if I spare him?"

"I will lie with you," said Harben, "willingly."

Kavan was satisfied. He nodded to his soldiers. "Take him back to the dungeon," he told them, gesturing to Ophion. "Allow him to bathe and eat."

He turned to Harben. "I shall feed you now. When I return, I want you ready to accept me." He left the room, following the soldiers who dragged the weeping form of Harben's lover with them.

Chapter Two

Kavan sent a captive from the dungeons for Harben to feed on. Not a vampire because he doubted he would kill one of his own, but a criminal, a multiple murderer and rapist due for execution in the morning. His soldiers reported the bed in the tower room awash with blood afterwards and the covers had to be burned. Kavan smiled in grim satisfaction that maybe there was a barbarian in Harben after all. He ordered another criminal's throat slit and his blood drained into an alabaster jar. He sent it up later to the vampire as a little evening snack.

He gave Harben a day to recover and then he presented himself at the chamber wearing his best clothes, with his black hair carefully slicked back from his satanic face and cologne perfuming his neck, like an ardent lover.

Harben stood by the window surveying the dark land beyond Kavan's drawbridge. He wore the black silk clothes the king had sent up to him. Kavan glanced towards the bedside table, making sure the oil was still in place. He fingered the jade amulet at his neck and told himself this little venture would not end in his own death.

"Disrobe," was his first word.

Harben unfastened his tunic, turning his back as he slid it off. The wings were liberated, falling folded to below his knees. The vampire flexed his broad, muscular shoulders, causing them to shake a little and settle once more against his spine, like a bird smoothing its feathers.

Kavan had been half hard when he walked in the door, but something about the sight caused him to stiffen further. The wings were the most erotic thing he had ever seen without doubt. His hands itched to touch and his mouth burned to caress. As he watched, almost salivating, the vampire slid his breeches free. He stood there a moment, like a statue carved from marble, every inch of his body perfect and renewed. Kavan had never seen a more beautiful naked man in his life.

"On the bed." His voice was low with desire. Harben lay face down and Kavan guessed the vampire didn't

want to see his captor's face while he took him.

He shed his own clothes quickly, stroking himself a little as he climbed onto the bed behind his captive and took hold of his hips, lifting them, spreading Harben's legs until he was satisfied. The wings trailed down over Harben's buttocks, obscuring them and Kavan took hold of both of them, moving them aside, draping them over Harben's hips to trail onto the bed.

An almost imperceptible shudder went through the vampire and for a moment Kavan sat and regarded Harben's arched spine curiously. Then he reached out and took one wing in both hands, smoothing his palms down it.

It was light as gossamer and soft as silk, so fine that he imagined he could have torn it between his hands easily. And this time, there was no mistaking the effect on the vampire. He took in a breath and his whole body swayed.

Kavan was a little astonished that he had found the vampire's sexual Achilles' heel so quickly. The king enjoyed a fight but maybe there would be no need for one when the vampire was already melting beneath him.

He continued to caress the wings with light fingertips. The vampire's body undulated under his touch, his breathing growing heavy.

“You like that?” Kavan questioned in a low voice. His cock throbbed at what he was witnessing.

Harben only nodded, spreading his arms a bit, trying to gain better purchase on the bed.

Kavan smiled to himself. He took the oil from the table and noticed Harben’s body stiffen as he let go of the wings, as though the vampire had come out of some sort of sexual trance and was himself again. No matter, if he wasn’t amenable to this, Kavan would caress the wings while he fucked him and the vampire would purr beneath him.

He touched the vampire’s entrance, rubbing slowly around it with one finger. He was not usually so considerate, but he was rather caught up in the vampire’s sensuality and was in no rush to possess him without proper preparation. It wasn’t always nice to have someone screaming and crying below you and the sight of the blood tears might deflate him quickly.

Harben kept perfectly still and made no noise as Kavan explored with fingers.

When he was satisfied, he slicked himself up with oil and steadied Harben’s hip with one hand. His heart was in his mouth with excitement as he pressed forward. The vampire’s body accepted him, sharp gasps coming from his lover.

Overwhelmed with the sensation and wanting to groan aloud in his pleasure, Kavan lowered his face to the vampire's back and found it right against where his wings rose from the skin.

Gently, he pressed a kiss to the area. An instant shudder shook the body below him and Kavan stifled a moan of pleasure at what this did to him. He had never been one to care whether his partner had a good time or not. Yet, entwined with the golden-eyed demon, he suddenly realised for the first time that the arousal of another at your own hands was one of the most intoxicating and powerful things to witness. He was in charge of Harben's pleasure, and the idea of pleasing the vampire beyond measure was the most exciting thing he had ever contemplated.

Kavan kissed the wings again. One of his hands came up to smooth the wing where it trailed over Harben's hip. The vampire caught his breath in unmistakable arousal.

The king moved into him slowly, keeping his face buried against the wing. He built his rhythm, in no rush for his climax, not with a shuddering body beneath him clearly begging for more. Lavishing his attention on the wings, he moved faster and harder.

The vampire made stifled moans with every thrust

and they were countered by almost blatant gasps of pleasure with every kiss and every touch to his wings. Kavan was about to lose his head at the sounds and the way Harben writhed against his own body. He had expected their congress to be difficult, picturing the vampire lying there like a dead fish while Kavan humped away at him for a few minutes and then drew out unsatisfied.

Though he continued to do it, deep down he knew there was no fun in taking people by force. His gratitude to the vampire for making this so wonderful knew no bounds.

He moved a hand around Harben's hip and into his groin. The vampire was hard. Fluid leaked from his cock. Kavan's fingers closed around him and started to slide him swiftly through his palm.

Harben moaned something under his breath in some arcane language Kavan had never heard before, but then, this vampire was reputed to be hundreds of years old. A master of male anatomy, he drew back a little, adjusting the penetration he was giving the demon and struck him exactly where he wanted him.

The vampire almost gave a howl. Kavan smiled against his back, hand swiftly milking him, letting out a groan. Harben tightened hard around him, clenching

with orgasm. Kavan came, breathing hard, planting a few more almost adoring kisses on the wings as he spilled himself.

Beneath him, his lover trembled. Kavan slowly drew out and fell onto his back, exhausted. It was some minutes before he even came back to his senses. He turned his head to look at the vampire, whose face was buried in the pillow, his breathing heavy. Kavan's body was singing. He frowned as he reviewed what had just happened and how both he and the vampire had seemed to make each other lose control. He was unhappy and uneasy with this. This was not the way it went when he took someone.

Then the vampire opened his eyes and lifted his head. He regarded the king silently. "So," Kavan began, "you were not the hellcat I imagined you would be."

"Does that disappoint you?" Harben countered, his voice low and husky.

Kavan shook his head. "Your performance had merit. What is it with these wings?"

Harben flushed a little. He did not speak.

"Your mortal lover, Ophion, did he caress the wings so?"

The vampire nodded.

"And others? Have your other lovers done this to

you?”

Harben shook his head.

“You like it,” Kavan remarked, a statement not a question.

The vampire nodded an affirmative again, eyes downcast.

Kavan smiled a little maliciously. “I’ve found your weakness so soon, vampire. I bet I could do most anything to you as long as I touched your wings.”

Harben’s eyes grew cold and mistrustful. The king swung his legs off the bed and started to dress. As he did, he remembered his own sexual Achilles’ heel, something rather innocent, but in the hands of a vampire, deadly.

When he was dressed, he turned to look at the man still lying naked on the bed, the wings spread out around him and arousal hummed in his veins once more. “I shall return,” he told the vampire.

That night Kavan dreamed of being folded in the wings. He woke with a start, drenched in sweat and hard. Settling back into the bed with a moan, he passed his hand along himself a few times until he was satisfied. As he came, he thought of the vampire’s bright jewel-like eyes and the creature’s dignity, something he knew he wouldn’t be breaking any time soon.

Chapter Three

Kavan didn't return to the tower room for two days and ordered no food to be taken up there, not wanting the vampire to become too strong, wanting Harben dependent on him for everything. Lucius reported to him on the second day that the vampire had demanded to be allowed to bathe and had become aggressive and violent with the soldiers when he was told no, almost biting one of them and being beaten unconscious. Kavan told Lucius to have water heated and the vampire escorted to the bathroom. When he received word that the vampire was bathing, Kavan left his chamber and made his way there.

Inside the room were five soldiers, all surrounding a large, walk-in bath in which resided a vision of such loveliness that Kavan almost caught his breath. Standing in the steaming, perfumed water, his hair wet and his

wings floating around him was Harben, one arm raised while another soaped it slowly and sensually. Kavan stood at the door watching for a moment until the vampire turned his head and glanced over his shoulder, his gaze cold.

“Leave us,” the king told his soldiers, who made swift exit. He crossed to the bath and knelt by the side. “I am told you have been misbehaving,” he remarked and he noted the bruises and cuts on the vampire’s face as he turned his head fully towards him.

“I like to keep clean. I don’t think it’s an unreasonable request.” Harben’s voice was stiff. His hands moved over his shoulders, soaping them, just touching the top of his wings. Kavan’s breeches tightened, his cock thickening at the act of watching Harben touch himself.

“Would you that I wash your wings?” he asked in a low voice.

He saw the hesitance in Harben’s eyes. Surely the vampire knew he would use this as some sort of sexual foreplay, but Harben nodded warily anyway. Kavan, with the blood heated in his veins, started to disrobe.

Harben kept his back turned as he did. Kavan slid into the water behind him, reached around and took the soap from the vampire’s hand. He rubbed the block

between his hands, lathering it. Then he took hold of one wing at the top and drew it towards him, spreading it out, separating the folds and slowly rubbed soap into it with gentle fingers he never even knew he possessed.

The vampire's shoulders tensed perceptibly and a long shudder ran the length of his spine. Kavan smiled, growing so hard he could barely contain himself. He massaged soap into the entire length and width of the wing and then rinsed it in the water, moving onto the next one. Treating the delicate fibres tenderly, it amazed him once again at how fine and translucent they were.

He spent some time on this, finding the act therapeutic, growing calm and tranquil with every motion of his hands on the wings. Harben's body trembled sensually with each pass of Kavan's fingers.

Kavan's desire only increased until at length, he slid an arm around the vampire's waist and moved to press his erection against him. Harben let out a stifled gasp of surprise. With firm hands, Kavan pressed him against the side of the bath. The vampire gripped it with whitened knuckles.

The king probed him with needy fingers. As he did so, he lowered his head, seeking the soft flesh of the vampire's neck with his mouth. Harben moaned as he was kissed, his head falling back onto Kavan's shoulder.

The king placed kisses to his throat. He twisted and turned his fingers inside the vampire until he pressed against his prostate.

The undead one writhed in pleasure against him. Kavan smiled a little against his throat. "Do you want me?" he asked teasingly, withdrawing his fingers and pressing his cock between the vampire's cheeks.

"Yes," Harben moaned.

The king penetrated him, gasping in pleasure as Harben surrounded him with heat.

This congress was again strange for the monarch. He was not used to a willing participant, much less someone moaning that they wanted him as sensually as Harben. He was almost...grateful to the vampire for this need he had and he was angry with himself for thinking this way.

He bit the vampire on the neck and sucked a little at the bruise which only made Harben hotter, clinging to the wall and now deliberately moving himself back onto Kavan's cock. The king growled and thrust harder into him in delight.

Harben moaned and panted for breath, more vocal than he had been two nights ago, his hand around himself, stroking quickly. Kavan put an arm around his lover's torso, stroking the man's muscular pectorals, rubbing the tiny, erect nipples. The vampire arched into

his touch with a gasp. Kavan's other hand grasped hold of one of Harben's wings, caressing lightly and deliberately, waiting for a reaction.

Harben exclaimed in that strange language of his which he seemed to reserve for sexual intercourse and then moaned Kavan's name loudly.

Kavan drew in his breath. No one in his entire thirty-five years had ever said his name in the heat of the moment unless he had *made* them. He kissed the vampire's throat again, eyes closed and murmured something adoring about how beautiful Harben was, something he had no control over when it came out of his mouth.

He drove relentlessly into the vampire until Harben was coming in long, hard waves, shuddering against the king, almost sobbing in pleasure, milking Kavan to orgasm with him, suddenly weightless in his arms so Kavan had to hold him up.

In the aftermath, Kavan stood with his face buried against the vampire's neck, holding him tight, reluctant to move away. Harben was slumped against the wall, his body trembling lightly, his tongue running several times over his lips. Kavan was distracted by this and watched a moment.

The bloodlust. Vampires loved to drink during

lovemaking and the desire must have been desperately on Harben both times they had done it. He was relieved his lover had been in a position where he could not bite him, but clearly Harben was still aroused and needed it.

Kavan drew out and climbed the steps from the bath as quickly as he could, keeping a wary gaze on the vampire as he dried himself, lest Harben fly at him and tear his throat out, despite the amulet he believed protected him. But Harben only remained leaning weakly on the wall.

“You have been good,” he told the vampire. “I shall send food to you.”

Harben did not reply. His strength had seemed to ebb considerably during the sex. He was pale and unmoving against the wall. As Kavan watched, his legs gave way and he slid beneath the water.

The king tossed his towel aside and jumped instantly into the water, dragging the vampire up to the surface and lifting him into his arms, carrying him up the steps. He knelt there with Harben in his lap, watching the thick lashes fluttering and the bloodless face.

It had only been two days since he had fed. He did not know why the vampire was so weak, but he seemed gravely ill, unrousable. Kavan called for his soldiers and the door was almost broken down in their haste to attend

him.

“Bring someone from the dungeons for the vampire,” the king commanded, “one of the worst offenders.”

The soldiers nodded and left the room. Kavan wrapped Harben in a towel and then himself and carried him up to the tower room personally. He laid him on the bed before retiring to pace his chamber anxiously.

It wasn't long before Lucius came and told him the vampire was too deeply unconscious to drink from his victim. Kavan flew into one of his famous tempers. He gripped Lucius by the throat. “Open the man's veins and let the blood pour into Harben's mouth. Do what you have to do to get him to drink and know this. If the vampire dies, you all die with him.”

Sullen, his chief truth-seeker went back to the chamber. He reported back to Kavan an hour later, informing him the vampire was alive and conscious and had drained every drop from the man's body.

Kavan learned his lesson from this incident. Harben might have told him vampires could survive a week without food but clearly, sexual congress drained their strength shockingly fast. He made sure to send food every two days now to the vampire. He also allowed him to bathe every day, while he himself stayed away from

the tower room. He was in the grip of sexual obsession and if word got out to the common folk of the town that their ruler was sleeping with one of the very demons he had devoted his life to exterminating, there would be rebellion in the streets. The castle would be stormed, and he would be overthrown.

He should deal with Harben summarily, beheading him and burying him in an unconsecrated grave, but he could not, not now. The idea was anathema to him.

Chapter Four

In the past, Kavan had spent a large amount of time riding out with his men and tracking vampires, but in the days following the near-death of the vampire Harben, he stayed at the castle and brooded. For a man whose passion occasionally bordered on near-sadism, he had committed two surprisingly tender acts with the vampire, and it disturbed him.

Lucius sensed his master was not himself and asked him if he wished women or men to be brought from the village for his amusement, but Kavan refused. He took care of his needs firmly every night with his own hand and when his desire finally became too much, he ventured back to the tower room.

Harben was sitting on the broad window ledge and looking at the ground below when Kavan entered the room. The king carried some oil and a stoppered jar of

fresh blood. He put the former on the bedside table and handed the latter to the vampire.

“Here.”

Harben took it and murmured a thank you, resting it on the window sill next to him instead of immediately guzzling it as Kavan thought he might. The king regarded him. The vampire looked well, hair and skin gleaming, gold-green eyes bright, that muscular body encased in white silk clothes, making Kavan effortlessly hard.

He dispensed with any formalities. “I wish to lie with you.”

Harben turned his head. “And if I refuse?”

“Then your mortal lover dies,” Kavan replied. Why would Harben refuse now when he had clearly enjoyed it so much the previous times?

For a moment, the vampire regarded him. Kavan merely turned away and started to undress, dimming the lantern on the bedside table. When he was done, he sat on the edge of the bed and waited. He did not doubt that Harben would acquiesce and surely enough, it was only a matter of moments before he heard a rustle of silk and the vampire shedding his clothes.

He came walking around to stand before the king, glowing in the low light, so ethereally beautiful Kavan

almost caught his breath. He reached up to clasp the back of Harben's head at the same time as the vampire, his thoughts seemingly in tune with his own, bent forward and their lips collided.

Kavan expected to pass out, such a rush of electricity went through him. He pulled Harben down so he was kneeling between his knees and Kavan could clasp his face and kiss him even harder. Their tongues entwined, breath hot and heavy in the other's mouth.

Harben moaned and the vampire groped between his legs, taking the king in his hand and tugging swiftly so Kavan's hips bucked. Harben broke the kiss abruptly and slid down the king's body, taking him in his mouth.

Kavan groaned in satisfaction, this being one of his favourite things. He tangled his hand in the vampire's silky hair and pushed his head further down, eyes closing in delirious pleasure as Harben sucked.

The vampire was down there a while, driving Kavan closer to the edge, one hand playing with his balls, his tongue playing over the head of the king's erection wickedly, wet and soft, making him ache to come.

Harben lifted his head suddenly and looked up at Kavan, a hand around his shaft, jerking slowly. "I want you," he said in a voice deep with desire, his eyes almost black with lust. "*Let me.*"

Kavan stared at him and then started to laugh at the fact that anyone in this world, much less a filthy vampire, thought they could possess him. “I don’t think so,” he said scornfully.

“Then let me touch you,” Harben said, “let me use fingers and tongue until you come.”

A streak of white-hot heat blazed through Kavan’s body and lodged itself in his groin. He tried to speak, but his throat was too dry. He stood up and climbed onto the bed, presenting himself to the demon that appeared to be controlling him.

Harben knelt behind him, one hand stroking his backside gently so Kavan shuddered. Then he deliberately brought one of his own wings around and draped it over Kavan’s arm so he could touch it. The king smiled and did so. The vampire drew his breath in. Harben reached for the oil and coated his fingers. He spread Kavan open with one hand and rubbed slowly around his most private area.

The king flinched and shivered a little in excitement. He didn’t let people do this to him as a rule. The finger slid in, spearing him, and he caught his breath on a moan. The vampire stroked his hip and then a warm tongue flicked over him.

Kavan put his hand over his mouth to stifle his cry of

pleasure. He asked himself why he would allow himself to be so vulnerable in front of the vampire, but really, he had no choice. He was completely and utterly seduced by Harben as he had been from the very start.

Harben lapped over and around his entrance, his tongue wet and soothing, his breath making Kavan's sensitive skin tingle. He swayed there under the vampire's ministrations, helpless to stop himself from moaning when the finger slipped back inside and curled forwards, pressing on something startling inside him.

He jerked on the bed in shock and Harben laughed a little behind him. "Do you like that?"

"Yes," Kavan moaned, "do it again."

Harben did so, stroking the spot efficiently. Kavan writhed so much that the vampire had to hold him in place. He withdrew the finger. The king whimpered a little with loss and then something else pressed against him, slicked with oil, seeking admittance.

"Let me," the vampire whispered sensually, pressing a kiss to the king's back. "Please."

Kavan, panting hard and desperate to come, pressed his face against the wing spread around him and kissed it, moaning his acquiescence in a voice not his own. *What am I doing? He's going to kill me, and I'm going to let him.*

A moment later Harben pushed inside, filling Kavan so full he almost convulsed in pleasure.

“Oh God,” he cried out, “please...”

He could almost see Harben smirk behind him but he didn't care. He was lost there on that bed, lost to the feelings of the cock inside him, squeezing every drop of passion from this cold man who never showed his feelings. Now he showed them all right. He gasped and groaned and cursed and begged the vampire not to stop as Harben drove into him over and over.

As Kavan trembled on the edge, Harben sat backwards and drew the king up off the bed to sit on his lap. Turning his face, their lips met and they shared a fierce kiss before Harben's lips slid down into Kavan's neck and that was the king's Achilles' heel discovered.

His head dropped back and he sighed in delight as his lover covered it with kisses, writhing on his knee as the vampire thrust up into him, one arm wrapped tightly around his torso. It didn't matter anymore who the creature was who held him this way, only that when a lover kissed him on the neck, it sent Kavan into raptures not of this earth and made him lose all his senses.

“Take it off,” the vampire whispered sinisterly, mouth against Kavan's ear and the king knew what he meant and was compelled to do it, knowing without

doubt he was under a spell and helpless to obey. He reached up to his neck and wrenched the jade amulet free, letting it fall from his hand, his head dropping back in surrender.

And so it was that even when he felt lips part and sharp teeth prick his flesh, Kavan merely moaned and arched his throat back for more, wanting all the contact he could get. The vampire's hand wrapped around him and drew him to a climax. As Kavan started to come, teeth slid into his flesh. The first hot swallow of his blood was taken and the king only trembled and convulsed around the vampire. His head hung limply back as his life-force was stolen.

When he came to his senses, he was face down on the bed, his head aching, his limbs throbbing more. The vampire Harben was lying beside him, one hand stroking his shoulder with a gentle touch, his eyes golden in the lamplight.

For a moment Kavan searched his memory and came up with pleasure the like of which he had never known and then he put his hand to his throat and found it sore and still oozing blood. In an instant, he had the vampire pinned to the bed.

To his surprise, Harben gave as good as he got, his strength on display for the first time. The two rolled

together naked on the bed, grappling. Both tried to get the upper hand, each throwing fists, the vampire wild with fury and spitting like a cat, teeth out on display.

Kavan succeeded in pinning him down once more, head well away from the teeth which tried to tear into his throat. He had had a lucky escape. Once more the sex had drained Harben's strength, despite the blood he had taken, or Kavan would have been lying on the bottom breathing his last. "You will go to my dungeon," he hissed at his lover, "and you will *die* there."

Harben shook his head. "If I wanted to kill you, I would have done it then," he said with eyes fixed on Kavan's. "I only wanted to taste your essence, that's all I wanted to do."

Kavan stared at him a moment and then he sneered in scorn and climbed from the bed, pulling on his breeches and calling for the guards. Harben was dragged naked from the tower room and thrown into a dark cell, while Kavan told himself he could forget all about the vampire.

He summoned Bela for an audience with him and confided in a low, ashamed voice that he had been bitten by a vampire, showing the wounds on his neck. The magician was an eccentric man. He wore a long, flowing cloak patterned with silver stars and the most ridiculous

pointed hat Kavan had ever seen, but he trusted the man with his life.

Bela, regarding him solemnly after his confession, shook his head. "It matters not, Your Highness," he told the king. "For you to become *nosferatu*, the vampire has to suck out every last drop. You are safe."

Kavan sighed in relief.

"This is the vampire Harben?" questioned the dark-eyed man who was wise beyond his years, thoughtful and kind and could always keep a secret.

Kavan nodded. "He and I..." He trailed off and shrugged helplessly.

"I understand," Bela murmured, "it is not always possible to choose the right people. We can only follow the dictates of our hearts."

Kavan stared at him with cheeks burning. "You misunderstand," he said indignantly. "I follow the dictates of my manhood. This has nothing to do with my heart, for I despise the creature."

"As you will," Bela said deferentially, "but there is no shame in wanting the forbidden."

Kavan dismissed the man after that and took to his chamber, where he spent a sleepless night with the wounds throbbing on his throat and his skin aching for the touch of the vampire.

Chapter Five

Lucius visited the next morning and asked what he was required to do to the vampire. “Leave him there to starve,” Kavan said in disinterest.

“Are you sure?” Lucius asked, for the way he understood it, his ruler was sleeping with the blood-sucking fiend.

“Yes, I’m sure!” The king snapped. “Do you have something to say about that?”

Lucius only shook his head and went away.

* * * *

Harben lay naked and shivering on the stone floor of the cell in the dark. Cold bothered him just as much as any mortal man, often more so. His mouth burned with the taste of Kavan’s blood. He hadn’t lied to the king. He

had wanted to taste him, nothing more. Of course he'd wanted to kill the king since the moment they first met, but not since that first time they'd spent together. Kavan had unwittingly found out Harben's peccadillo and virtually turned the vampire into his sex slave. Harben shuddered, the cold doing nothing to stop him stiffening in memory. His protests since that first time had been laughable. God, the second time he had almost begged for it and the third time he had sucked the king eagerly into his mouth and put his tongue in that most secret, intimate place as though they were established lovers whose bodies belonged to the other. He had had no control over himself at all. He only wanted every part of the king in his mouth.

And then...The king's blood. Harben groaned, passing a hand along himself. Saliva rushed into his mouth, tasting of Kavan. Kavan on his lap, heavy and hot, Harben's hand around his long, thick, manhood as he drew the king to a moaning climax while swallowing his blood.

Times like those were the only times Harben appreciated being a vampire. To feel that double-edged lust and to sate both simultaneously with a perfect lover, who wanted to give himself. Kavan had wanted it. That was not in doubt. He had given all of himself

voluntarily, his body to Harben's cock, his blood to his mouth. Harben might have bewitched him to remove the amulet, but he hadn't done anything else. Kavan had submitted to ecstasy, and they had made the most perfect love.

Harben hesitated to think of the act as making love, but the fact was there had been more to their couplings on both sides, he was sure of it. Kavan was cruel and hard-hearted with a sadistic streak, but tenderness lurked under the surface seeking the light. Harben could hardly forget how the king had washed his wings, those murderous hands almost reverent.

Perhaps Kavan just used it to subdue him, since he'd discovered Harben's weakness, but he liked to think Kavan enjoyed touching the wings just as much.

If the king would just accept there was something of a...fascination between them on both sides, then just maybe Harben would be happy to stay here and be his personal toy.

At the moment, despite everything Kavan had done, Harben didn't want to kill the king or escape. He told himself this was all for Ophion's cause, but he didn't quite believe it. He almost despised himself.

A few days later, Kavan ventured down to the dungeons.

The sleeping soldiers woke, stood flustered to attention when they saw him, as the king never stepped foot in the bowels of the castle. He asked entrance to the prisoner Ophion's cell and was shown there forthwith.

The red-haired man was lying on a tatty couch and jumped up when the king entered. Kavan had made sure he was fed and watered and provided with baths and clothes because he had no quarrel with the man who had evidently once loved Harben. Ophion, however, was fiercely defensive on seeing the ruler there in his cell.

"What do you want?" he cried. "What have you done with Harben?"

"Harben is down here, a few cells away from you," Kavan said, drawing up a chair and sitting down, crossing his legs. "Be seated."

Ophion sank back onto the couch, regarding him warily.

"I wanted to ask you about the vampire."

"What about him?" Ophion glared.

"You and he, you were lovers for how long?"

"A few months," Ophion said, sorrow crossing his face.

"Did he...drink from you?"

Ophion regarded him a moment suspiciously before replying. "Yes."

“Why didn’t he kill you?”

“Harben tries his hardest not to take human life. He survives on small sips from many victims. I asked him to take my life. He refused. He said he would not wish his existence on anyone.”

Kavan was taken aback. Before he could speak, Ophion said, “Why is he down here? He gave himself willingly to you.”

Kavan glared at him. “And he bit me.”

Ophion shook his head. “And if you say it wasn’t the most erotic experience of your life, you’re a liar.”

Kavan reddened. Ophion nodded in satisfaction. “Harben put you in no danger. He tasted you, that’s what the vampire needs to do during lovemaking, and he has perfect self-control. Don’t be angry at him, it’s how he shows his feelings.”

Kavan was silent. If Harben’s self-control was so perfect, why had he seemed to lose it every time they had been intimate together?

“What are you going to do with him?”

“Starve him to death.”

Ophion’s eyes welled instantly with tears. “No,” he said in a whisper, “I beg you.”

“Save your pleas,” Kavan said scornfully. “I have no further use for him.”

“I’ll do whatever you want to save his life,” Ophion implored him with large, liquid eyes. “*Anything.*”

Kavan smirked. “Are you sure it’s not *yourself* you plead for?”

Ophion shook his head. “No, because I know I will die here. I only ask you to spare Harben and I am yours in return.”

Kavan regarded him in silence.

“I know you like men,” Ophion said quietly. “I have heard talk. Take me and prove to me that it’s not true what they call you—*Kavan the Merciless.*”

Kavan scowled. People had been hung for being heard uttering this name. Ophion stood up and came to him, very hesitantly placing himself on the king’s knee and wrapping his arms around his neck. Kavan closed his eyes as Harben’s lover kissed him. Suddenly, he was back in that room, on the lap of Harben, the vampire’s teeth in his neck, the two of them joined in the most intimate communion.

He stood up, lifting Ophion, and laid him down on the couch, fumbling away necessary clothes before he took him, with something of the tenderness he had recently been showing Harben.

Beneath him, Ophion was almost appreciative with his moans. Kavan guessed who he thought of while the

king was inside him.

When he was done, he stood and fastened himself up. He nodded shortly. “Your vampire is spared,” he said, “for now.” He turned and rapped on the door for Cesare, leaving the cell without a backward glance.

“Show me the cell of the vampire Harben,” he told the jailer.

Cesare unlocked a door two down from Ophion’s and thrust it open. A wan sunlight penetrated the musty gloom inside. The slow dripping of water disturbed the absolute silence. Kavan stepped inside and bade the jailer leave.

He moved forward to assess the figure huddled naked on the floor in the darkest shadows without benefit of blanket or pillow. His skin was a waxy shade of blue and he was curled into a foetal position, lying absolutely still.

Was he dead? Quickly, Kavan knelt down and placed a hand under the vampire’s chin, lifting it. His skin was ice cold and the king’s heart hammered with nameless dread.

“Harben,” he said, “wake up.”

The vampire’s thick lashes flickered up. Dull eyes, heavy with suffering and resignation, focused on his.

And Kavan, the fearless ruler, *Kavan the Merciless*,

knew pity and regret for the first time in his cruel life. It shook him to his core.

He unfastened the cloak from around his neck and took it off, laying it down over the figure on the ground. Then he stood up and left the cell.

As Cesare escorted him back down the corridor, Kavan told him, "Feed one of the prisoners to the vampire Harben immediately. Allow him to bathe and bring him warm clothes."

Cesare grunted, always insubordinate in nature.

Kavan ascended to the sweeter air of the ground floor of the castle with a sigh of relief.

Lucius requested an audience with him next day, looking bright-eyed and excited. "Your Highness," he began with a sweeping bow, "we have taken another vampire. A man named Akiva."

Kavan regarded him a moment blankly.

Lucius frowned at his lack of enthusiasm. "It is rumoured he has knowledge of the whereabouts of the vampire Eachan," he said eagerly, watching Kavan's face.

Kavan huffed and then said, "I don't care."

Lucius almost gaped at him.

"Do you not think," Kavan expanded, "that I have

enough trouble controlling the vampires I *have*, without capturing the one who is supposed to be seductive beyond all others?"

Lucius' normally severe face broke into a rueful grin. "True enough," he said.

Kavan regarded him a moment. He had always considered Lucius dull and far too dedicated to his job. He was only interested in his chief truth-seeker when he bent over for him on lonely nights.

"So..." Lucius said, "do you want me to torture him or not?"

Kavan sighed because old habits died hard. "Whatever you want," he said dismissively, turning his head away and watching one of the castle cats licking itself.

"And the vampire Harben?" Lucius asked in a lower voice. "I am told you ordered him fed."

"Correct," Kavan said, his posture stiffening.

"What do you wish me to do with him?"

"Take him back to the tower room. He shall be my pet," Kavan told him quietly. "No one is to lay a finger on him again."

Chapter Six

He stayed away two days before he went up to the tower room, two days of sleepless nights and restless days. He busied himself by going down to visit the vampire Akiva. This one was blond and blue-eyed, fine of figure and proud of nature, as was to be expected.

Kavan stood at the door looking at the burned and battered figure sitting against the wall and told him, “I have Harben here.”

The vampire regarded him haughtily. “Lucky Harben.”

Kavan scowled. “My truth-seeker tells me you won’t speak about Eachan.”

“I don’t know who you mean.”

“You have spirit vampire,” Kavan said. “Let me tell you now, I *have* broken Harben’s spirit. That demon has endured the most terrible things since he came here and I

can do the same to you if you wish.”

Akiva shrugged his shoulders. “Do you fuck all your vampires?” he questioned crudely.

“I never said...” Kavan flushed angrily.

Akiva cackled. “You didn’t have to. I heard your soldiers talking about your pet.”

Kavan clenched his fist.

“Know this,” Akiva continued. “Harben is soft of heart and always has been. If you try the same with me, I will tear your heart out and eat it.”

Kavan charged into the cell, grabbed the vampire by the collar of his ragged shirt and dragged him off the ground, snarling. “And know this, *vampire*,” he spat, “speak to my truth-seeker or your head will decorate my battlements by sunrise tomorrow.”

He tossed Akiva to the ground and stalked from the cell.

He went up to the tower room with his heart hardened against any tricks his new pet might wish to play on him this time. His blood was hot at the thought of being intimate with Harben once more but so was his temper. He did not wish to show the vampire the same courtesies he had previously extended. This time, as was his usual wont, he would be perfectly happy with violence and anger.

Harben was lying drowsy beneath the covers of the large bed, eyes turning sleepily to him when Kavan entered.

“This is your last chance vampire,” he said. “You do what I wish or...”

“I *was* doing as you wished,” Harben interrupted in a quiet voice. “I lay with you willingly three times.”

“You *bit* me.”

Harben lowered his gaze. “I couldn’t control myself,” he murmured. “I wanted you. I’m sorry.”

Harben’s desire for him was no act. The blood surged in Kavan’s veins. He struggled for control. The urge to kiss the vampire was almost overwhelming.

“Another begged for your life,” he growled. “Consider yourself lucky.”

Harben’s gaze flickered to his. “Ophion?”

“Yes.”

Harben sat up, the covers falling to his waist, exposing his muscular torso. Kavan hardened immediately.

“And you took what payment from him?”

Kavan regarded him with amusement. The vampire’s eyes changed colour according to his mood. They were breathtakingly emerald now. “What do you think?”

Harben’s eyes narrowed and for the first time, the

king got a true taste of the vampire lurking beyond the man. “You are taking that payment from *me*. You don’t need to force yourself on Ophion, too, you sadistic monster!”

Kavan’s fist clenched and he stalked towards the bed.

Harben leapt from it, clad in a pair of silk bed trousers. “Know this,” said the vampire, “you have only ever seen me at my weakest before today and you have taken what you wanted. I have fed today and now I’m more than a match for you. If you want me, then you will have to take me by *force*.”

Kavan smiled slowly because while the vampire inspired tenderness at times, he also let out the beast from Kavan with frequency. He found this easier to deal with than the man who wanted to kiss and caress Harben’s wings like a whimsical lover. Taking Harben by force would be like all his birthdays come at once.

“I had hoped as much, vampire,” he purred in a low, dangerous tone. “Let us begin.”

Harben moved so fast that the king couldn’t even begin to defend himself. He was gripped by the throat, lifted fully two feet from the ground and hurled against the wall where he collided with a force to shake the entire room, smashing a dent in it before falling to the

floor almost senseless.

Why had his soldiers not coming running at the noise? Kavan cursed them all as he tried to clear his head. But Harben had hold of him again, lifting him, throwing him clear across the room, where he struck the bedside table with his head, splitting open the skin above his eyebrow.

As Harben dragged him to his feet, Kavan realised the jade amulet was gone, the silver chain lying broken on the ground. He managed to throw a fist, taking the advantage and leaping to his feet, shoving Harben backwards. The vampire grabbed his throat again and pushed him into the wall.

Kavan was pinned there, the vampire breathing heavily in his face, his breath hot, his eyes glowing red. Before he could turn his head away, Harben licked slowly down one side of his face, lapping away the blood from the wound above his eye.

Kavan moaned, half in disgust, half in arousal, his heart hammering, trying to push Harben away and finding the vampire had a grip like steel on his throat. Abruptly, Harben dragged him away from the wall, spun him around and shoved him face first back against it.

Kavan grunted his protests, his face mashed into the wall, hands clawing at it. Harben's hand against his neck

held him there effortlessly. All the king's usual formidable strength was in vain. He had once heard tell that a fully sated vampire had the strength of ten men, but it was something he had never witnessed, not when he usually starved and burned them in his dungeon.

The vampire pressed against him, crushing him into the wall, an unmistakable erection against his backside.

Kavan tried to protest, but nothing came from his mouth except gasps for breath. Harben wrenched away his lower clothes and kicked his ankles apart. Heated flesh as hard as iron pressed between his buttocks and the vampire's lips touched his neck. Much to his shame, Kavan groaned in undeniable pleasure at how arousing he found the domination.

Devouring his neck with kisses, Harben penetrated him, his hands held Kavan's tightly against the wall.

The king cursed foully, his head falling back, the better to give the vampire easy access to his neck. And somewhere in his subconscious, he told himself Harben had put a spell on him. He was now defenceless, and the vampire was about to suck him dry. And somehow, he couldn't bring himself to care. He *wanted* it.

His fingers curled around the vampire's, squeezing. Harben crushed them with bruising strength, his mouth buried in Kavan's neck, a hint of teeth in the kisses he

was bestowing, his breath hot and rasping, heating the delicate skin and making it burn.

Kavan merely dropped his head back further onto his lover's shoulder, pressing back into Harben's thrusts, encouraging the vampire to take him harder, all but encouraging him to *bite*.

The twin points of the fangs grazed his throat, the hand of the vampire around his aching manhood. Harben pressed into his prostate and Kavan almost saw stars.

"Please..." It was a cry of desire. Kavan stretched an arm behind him, gripping Harben by the back of his neck and pulling him further into his throat, until he felt his lover's mouth part, the teeth sink in, the skin stretching agonisingly.

And instead of being horrified, instead of crying out in terror, he moaned out again, "Oh please, *please*..." and his skin broke. Kavan gasped in ecstasy as Harben swallowed the first mouthful, the vampire making something akin to a purring noise deep in his throat, one hand rubbing Kavan swiftly to his conclusion, while the other still held the king's own against the wall.

Kavan, with eyes closed, sagged there against the wall and allowed Harben to drive him to such a fierce orgasm that his lover had to hold him up as his legs buckled. Still the vampire continued to drink as Kavan

came, his arm firmly around his torso supporting him. Kavan shuddered and whimpered with joy, weightless and ready to pass out. Harben released inside him. Kavan's own blood trickled down his neck as some spilled from Harben's mouth. He slithered slowly to the ground unconscious.

Kavan opened his eyes slowly to find himself lying in the bed, covers pulled up to his chest, warm skin pressed against him. By his side lay the vampire, eyes open and fixed on his, flushed and glowing with stolen blood.

As he opened his mouth to growl his outrage once more, Harben put a finger on his lips and made a shushing noise.

"Kavan," he purred, "you've finally found the man who is your match. I know you've searched long and hard for me all your life."

Kavan was silent with shock.

Harben smiled, teeth sharp and gleaming. "I could have taken your life twice, but I spared you. The way you did with me. What does that say about us?"

Speechless, Kavan tried to stammer a reply and failed.

The vampire put out a hand and caressed his cheek.

“Between you and me, Kavan,” he said, moving close, their noses brushing. His lips sought the king’s ear, his voice dropping to a whisper. “I find I enjoy being your pet. Which makes me as much of a masochist as you are a sadist, does it not?” He drew back, regarding the king with amusement. “That makes us well suited in my eyes.”

Still Kavan could not find words to reply to the revelations.

“Indeed,” Harben continued, “we even share some wickedness. Although, I like to think I will be able to coax some kindness from you at some point.”

When Kavan spoke, his voice was a soft, almost fearful moan. Tender feelings had overtaken all else. “Harben, you’re so—” He was cut off by the vampire’s lips on his own and he was lost.

They rolled across the bed, the covers falling free, clutching and scratching, mouths joined in fierce passion, both fighting to subdue the other. To the king’s surprise, Harben gave in first, lying beneath Kavan, wrapping his legs fiercely around him, drawing him down into a deep kiss. And Kavan thrust into the vampire.

Harben cried out, his back arching, his legs tightening, his mouth glued to the king’s, frantic with

desire. Kavan crushed those succulent lips with his own and gave the vampire everything he had to offer. He took the wings in his hands and moved them aside, spreading them out around the vampire, smoothing them down. Harben shuddered and writhed in his grip.

Once that was done, he took full possession of the vampire, sinking into his heat. They were joined there on the bed once more, moving desperately together to climax. The new shift in the balance of power in their twisted relationship was sealed when Kavan gripped Harben's head and pressed the vampire's face into his neck, moaning out, "Bite me, *please*...bite me."

Bared fangs flashed before his skin broke. Kavan came, gasping in bliss as his lover sucked at him. Harben's muscles tightened around him with orgasm. Kavan's blood slid down his throat.

The king dropped forward onto his lover, not quite unconscious this time. The teeth slid from his neck so he was able to ease himself free and roll onto his back. He lay there a moment panting for breath, his heart racing, weak and sated. Skin once more pressed against him. He looked down at the vampire curled against him, wings spread out around him, face buried, a slight smile curving his bloodstained mouth.

And instead of rage and horror, there was only

tenderness for his lover. Kavan threaded his fingers through dark, dishevelled hair and closed his eyes, allowing himself to sleep without fear of being murdered in it.

Loud banging on the door woke Kavan with a start. Harben blinked lazily and lifted his head, looking at the king warily. Kavan found himself putting out a hand to reassure him, smoothing it over his broad shoulder and down one wing.

“My liege,” called Lucius through the door. “We have a confirmed sighting of the vampire Eachan. We know the location of his castle.”

Kavan’s eyes moved slowly to those of his bed-partner. The vampire became paler than his normal porcelain skin tone.

“Very well,” he called. “We shall ride at dawn.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” the chief truth-seeker replied and footsteps were heard retreating down the turret steps.

“Kavan,” Harben spoke immediately, his voice low and fearful. “Please...”

Kavan untangled his limbs from those of the vampire and swung his legs over the side of the bed, reaching to the floor to pick up his hastily discarded clothes.

“Kavan,” Harben spoke again. His fingers wrapped

around one strong biceps. “I beg you. *Please*...Eachan is my one and only friend. He is like a brother to me.”

Kavan shrugged out of his grip and stood, pulling his tunic on swiftly, fastening it up.

Harben slid from the bed rapidly, not about to give up, naked as the day he was born. Kavan averted his eyes for fear his resolve would crumble.

“Please,” the vampire spoke again. His hand once more closed around the king’s arm.

Kavan shivered, turned around, intent on pushing Harben from him.

As his gaze fell on the vampire, he stopped in his tracks. The whites of Harben’s eyes were pink. Under the king’s gaze, they darkened to a crimson hue as the first tears welled up.

Kavan reached out quickly, shaking his head, put a hand on Harben’s face. “No,” he said in a soft tone he didn’t recognise as his own. “Don’t.”

Harben’s hand tightened on his arm. He looked up at Kavan with beseeching, blood-filled eyes. “Please,” he said yet again. “Promise me you won’t hurt him.”

And Kavan at that moment, with a lump in his throat threatening to choke him, would have promised Harben the earth rather than witness the blood tears. He stroked that silken cheek for a few more seconds as he

murmured, “I promise.”

He swiftly left the scene of his submission to the vampire for fear he would crawl once more into his bed and never make it out alive.

Chapter Seven

Cesare, the jailer, unlocked the massive door and stood back with the irritating, knowing smirk he always gave Lucius when he arrived. He grinned like he thought the truth-seeker was here for some nefarious purpose other than to beat the truth from these monsters. Like he was here for his own self-satisfaction.

Lucius stepped past him, glaring. “If I shout, you come at once, with five of your best men, do you understand?” He didn’t usually warn Cesare thus, but this demon was no ordinary one.

“Of course, sir,” Cesare simpered, before he winked and stepped out of the cell, closing the door behind him.

Lucius turned to face the pitch-black, ice-cold room, holding up his lantern, sweeping it back and forth so it lit up every corner of the bare cell.

The vampire Eachan lay on the stone floor, each

limb shackled to the wall in such a way that he could only take a few steps before his chains brought him up short. He was dressed in a tunic and breeches of black silk, his feet bare. He was curled up into himself, the way he had been when lying in the sunlight.

From beneath the tunic peeped a pair of furled, thin-as-gauze wings, bedraggled and torn from their confrontation with Kavan's soldiers.

Lucius stepped closer, the demon seeming subdued enough for this to be safe and set down his lantern and the alabaster jar of liquid he carried. He knelt before the vampire. Taking hold of a handful of soft, ebony hair, he lifted the creature's head so he could look down into his face.

The massive burns inflicted by the sunlight were all but gone, but the marble-white skin told the legacy of his treatment at the hands of the jailers. His mouth was swollen, bruises littered his temples, dribbles of blood ran from his hairline. The vampire Eachan's eyes opened and looked into his.

They had the same effect on Lucius as they had there in the creature's castle. The eyes of jade, so proud, so defiant, so alive, seemed to look down into his soul and see the darkness there. For a moment, humbled in front of this creature, *Lucius* was the humble one. The abuser

and tormentor. The wrong one.

He let go of the vampire's hair and sat back on his heels, striving for composure. "I've come to ask you some questions, Eachan. About the others you know. You will answer them and then things will go easy for you. If you don't, I shall burn you alive."

Eachan slowly shuffled into a seated position, the chains rattling, his knees drawn up and his arms around them. Lucius stood to regain the illusion of power. He paced the cell, speaking loudly so other inmates would hear the inquisition and fear him as they should.

"Firstly, I want names of others and where we can seek them."

Eachan looked up at him, following Lucius with his eyes, but he did not speak.

Lucius stopped, frowning down at him. "I await a reply, foul demon!"

In the light of the lantern, the creature was all shades of black and white, save for that bright, almost ethereal green which watched him silently. The situation slipped away from Lucius as though the vampire gained control through his silent dignity.

Abruptly, Lucius reached for the alabaster jar he had brought in with him. Standing above the vampire, he tipped its contents down over him, soaking the raven

hair and the silk clothes, watching as the man closed his mouth and his eyes to avoid the liquid running into them.

Lucius stood back, arms folded, looking down at the vampire, who had eyes lowered now, arms clutching his knees tightly to his chest.

“You are a vile, filthy creature. You are the spawn of the devil. No snake ever crawled lower than you on this earth. You are hated and demonised by every good soul of this kingdom. If I kill you right now, people will cheer at your head on a stake outside the castle gates. How does it feel to know that not one single person will mourn your passing?”

Eachan did not move or even indicate he had heard the speech, which infuriated Lucius. He stalked away, trying to calm himself, lest he fly into an orgy of violence.

“Let’s try again. Your last chance. Give me some names and some places and I will let you be.”

Eachan lifted his head slowly. “I don’t know any others of my kind,” he spoke for the first time, in a low, melodic, undeniably beautiful voice. “I am alone. I have always been alone.”

Lucius stepped forward and struck him hard across the face with the back of his hand. “Liar.”

The vampire shook his head, the scarlet print of fingers stark across his pale cheek. "I tell the truth."

Lucius glared into those frosted green eyes for one more time. Then he moved towards the door decisively. "Jailer," he called, rapping on the iron.

It was a moment before Cesare opened the door, carrying a lantern in one hand and a lighted torch in the other, because he knew how this scenario went.

Lucius turned back to glance again at the vampire, before he told Cesare with deep disinterest, "*Burn him.*"

He stepped out of the cell as Cesare lifted his torch. It fell at the feet of the vampire, igniting the liquid, which dripped there, sending the creature up in flames. A single scream echoed around the dungeons as Lucius made his way back down the corridor. He paused where he was, the blood beating hard in his ears, the green eyes invading his mind once more.

Then he was running back into the cell, shoving the laughing jailer aside and stripping off his heavy coat, pushing the blazing creature to the ground and smothering him with the garment.

He knelt, panting with exertion for a moment after the flames were out and listened to the soft whimpering coming from beneath the coat. Suddenly he could not bear to uncover the face and have those eyes accuse him

one more time. He stood and stalked from the cell.

Lucius was shown through for an audience with the king, greeting Kavan with a subservient bow. He considered the war he waged in Kavan's name on the vampires and the dozen damned souls kept in the castle dungeon until they slowly starved to death. What would the subjects of the land say if they knew their king actually kept one as a pet? The vampire Harben lived in a bedroom in the tower, in the lap of luxury, a charm across the threshold that prevented him ever leaving.

Lucius didn't know what was different about Harben that didn't warrant him being tortured in the dungeon, but to mention his name was on pain of death.

He shuddered a little at the idea that the king might want to put his hands on the plague-riddled immortal.

The king was an imposing figure of six feet three with a body like a god and golden eyes that could turn you to stone. His black hair was startling against his pale skin and his smile was like a shark's, showing dimples around his mouth and boding ill for anyone he bestowed it on. His sexual appetite was legendary. Neither women nor men were safe from his attentions and several partners were usually better than a single one.

Kavan seemed preoccupied, pacing the dining room, the remains of a dinner spread out on the long oak table.

“Does something bother you, sir?” Lucius asked, with an inward sigh. After the unsettling encounter with the vampire, he was hardly in the mood to cater to his king’s unpredictable moods. He worried about what sort of punishment was in store when the king found out he had taken pity on the creature and smothered the flames.

“I am frustrated,” Kavan said with a glare towards him.

He braced himself for what was coming next. He longed to ask the king why his pet wasn’t able to satisfy his desires enough to warrant Kavan seeking pleasure elsewhere.

“Bend over the table for me, Lucius,” the king said.

Lucius moved forward obediently, opening his breeches and pulling them down. He chose the end of the table with no dishes on, bending over, bracing himself on his elbows, his cock already thickening against his will.

Kavan took himself free of his garments and pressed himself against Lucius’ bare buttocks, one hand moving around to fondle his stiffening member. “How went it with the vampire Eachan?” he asked conversationally.

“He was a stubborn one,” Lucius said, eyes following Kavan’s hand as it moved to a jug of oil on the table, fingers dipping into it, coating them

suggestively. He almost groaned in anticipation. "I had to burn him."

"I see," Kavan said. One slicked finger slid inside Lucius. The truth-seeker moaned. "I hope you didn't damage him too much."

"Why?" Lucius panted as a second long finger joined the first. Kavan stretched and probed him ruthlessly, pressing on that little spot deliberately which turned him to jelly.

Lucius bucked on the table, groaning. Kavan restrained him with a hand around his neck, squeezing lightly. The king clearly enjoyed these games although rarely hurt him too much.

"Because he intrigues me," Kavan said. "I may keep him. As a pet."

Lucius was relieved that he had extinguished the flames when he did. If he had actually burned Eachan to death, it may have been *his* head sitting on a stake at the foot of Kavan's drawbridge to ward off evil spirits. *Two* pets? A wicked, seditious thought went through him. He imagined the king writhing naked on a bed being pleasured simultaneously by the vampires Eachan and Harben. Then he saw himself neatly slotted into the middle of the ménage and he became so aroused, it was all he could do not to beg the king for satisfaction.

Kavan slid an oiled hand along his own length, masturbating leisurely while Lucius watched over his shoulder, aching to be taken by him. Kavan took a firm hold of him by the hips and thrust in without further preamble. He bit his lip and held in his cry as he always did because the king had once told him he made too much noise and one of his sexual partners had once been thrown into the castle moat from the top window after Kavan complained of a headache. Kavan set off at a firm, perfectly measured pace, conversing easily as he did.

“Did you make him cry?”

The king was obsessed with this. He had supposedly made the vampire Harben cry in private and had discovered to his shock that the creature cried blood tears. He was now on a mission to see whether the entire species had this quirk or merely his pet. One other thing he had discovered through his *research* was that vampires had an alternative method of feeding on humans. As well as drinking their blood, they could also sustain their energy by taking their tears.

Lucius had witnessed this when Kavan had attempted to feed a servant boy to his pet. While the terrified boy begged for his life, Harben had stopped, with fangs extended and instead, licked the tears

tenderly from his face. This had caused the burns and bruises from his interrogation at the hands of Lucius to heal almost immediately in front of their disbelieving eyes. The vampire had then taken his hands from the servant boy and put him aside, looking to the king and telling him, "Take him away please."

The unease was all too apparent on Kavan's face at this show of humanity by the vampire. If this was true, it showed up his own reasons for hatred and violence as worthless. And Lucius' blind allegiance, too.

The king had ordered his soldiers to take Harben to the tower and he had locked him up there for days alone.

Then Kavan had gathered those witnesses to this act of compassion by the vampire together and told them if they ever repeated to a living soul what they had seen there that day, their heads would decorate his battlements. The whole scene had shaken Lucius so greatly that he was more than glad to forget it, to tell himself that Harben was merely an anomaly, a soft-hearted freak in a den of vipers.

"No, I didn't make him cry," he told Kavan as his nails scrabbled at the table. He groaned with every thrust inside him.

"Did he beg for his life?"

"No."

“Did he give you any information?”

“No. He said he knew no others of his kind.”

“Hmm,” Kavan said. “He has courage that one. I’d like to beat it out of him until I see the blood tears.”

Lucius didn’t reply because he was fast approaching his end. Kavan’s strong hand around his cock jerked him off. He found the image of the king hurting the green-eyed demon distasteful. He could not have said why. Just what had Kavan done to the vampire Harben to make him cry? What wickedness had he perpetrated?

“Come for me, Lucius,” Kavan said, a little breathless, his thrusts jerky, right into the spot that made Lucius see stars.

When the king told you to come, you did as you were told. The last man who hadn’t come on demand had been mounted on a stone phallus with his hands bound, outside the castle gates until dawn, by which time he was begging for release, his cock swollen and purple.

Lucius let out a loud groan and released into the king’s milking hand, just as he had an image of being entwined with a pale body on the stone floor of the dungeon, green eyes glowing through the darkness.

Kavan hissed in satisfaction and gave two more thrusts. Done, he rested on Lucius’ back for a moment

before pulling free, wiping himself off with a cloth and dressing himself again.

Lucius stood up stiffly and adjusted his clothes, glancing towards the king to see the shark-like grin. The other man threw his muscular frame into his jewelled throne and yawned loudly, showing every one of his perfect teeth.

“Very nice,” he said. “Pour us both some wine.”

Lucius did as he was told, moving to hand one goblet of the pale liquid to the monarch, while hovering respectfully a few feet away with his own glass. His legs were unsteady after his orgasm, but he knew better than to sit down unsolicited.

“Come here, Lucius,” Kavan said and patted his lap.

This was a rare event, for the king to show affection after the physical act. The truth-seeker climbed nervously onto the monarch’s knee, clutching his wine. Kavan put a powerful arm around him and pushed the long, dark hair back from Lucius’ neck, pressing his lips softly to his throat.

“I want you to clean Eachan up and have him taken to the tower,” he murmured against Lucius’ skin. “No more torture.”

Lucius nodded quickly. A burning, bitter emotion filled his chest, clawing its way up his throat until he

feared bile would spill from his mouth. He let his head rest exhaustedly against Kavan's strong shoulder while he fought to identify this unknown emotion.

And there it was.

Jealousy.

Chapter Eight

Kavan broke his promise to Harben just as he always had with everyone who had ever been foolish enough to accept one from him.

He would be a liar if he said he wasn't attracted to the vampire Eachan, at least before his chief truth-seeker dragged him into the sunlight and burned him almost beyond repair that was. As he looked into the jade green eyes of the demon curled up on the floor, he decided to make this one his pet, too, in the hope that transferring some of his sexual desire, might release him from the hold Harben had over him.

That morning when Lucius was shown in for an audience with him, Kavan was pacing the dining room with something approaching guilt clawing at his heart for hurting the vampire when he had promised not to. His eyes turned to the truth-seeker, with those coal-dark

eyes and long hair so good for gripping like reins to steady a man in place. He decided then that he needed to start looking elsewhere for his pleasures. The vampire Harben had had far too much of his time, energy and blood. Even as he thought of the blood-taking, the wounds on his neck burned behind the scarf which concealed them.

Kavan's heart sank on hearing of the further damage to the vampire, this further shattering of his promise to Harben. His chief truth-seeker was without doubt, over-zealous, but then that was what came from carrying the same firm beliefs as your king. Except the king's beliefs were now wavering. How would Lucius judge him if he knew that his frozen heart had been pierced by an arrow of something beyond mere physical desire? That it had been set melting by the most wonderful creature he had ever known.

He had sensed Lucius' disapproval at his taking of a second creature of the night as his sexual slave, but if his truth-seeker had issues to raise with him, Kavan would be happy to discuss them, shortly before escorting Lucius down to the dungeon as its newest inmate.

As he had his truth-seeker over the table, Kavan's body burned for Harben's touch. His lips cried for a kiss from the vampire.

It was some time before he could bring himself to go up to the tower room. He had not made a decision on what he would tell Harben, even as he opened the door and found the vampire lying semi-naked on the bed, the heavy blackout blinds drawn, although twilight rapidly fell outside.

The vampire was asleep, his wings spread out around him. Kavan shed his clothes with desire heating the blood in his veins and crawled onto the bed. There he leaned down over Harben, pressing his lips gently to his.

Beneath him the vampire stirred, his lips parting, responding to Kavan. The king was able to put his tongue within the wet warmth of his mouth and deepen the kiss. The vampire's arms came up around his back and their passion was lit.

Their bodies joined, naked torso against naked torso. Kavan's hand moved down the muscular curves to the vampire's groin, stroking the erection through the flimsy silk he wore. His lover drew in his breath in excitement and kissed him harder in response.

Harben arched up against his hand as Kavan drew him free and slid him firmly through his palm. The king pressed his lips into the vampire's neck and started to kiss, moving down his torso, covering the skin with hot caresses, until he was between Harben's legs and taking

him in his mouth.

The vampire let out a loud moan as Kavan swallowed as much as he could, his hand working the base, jerking Harben off as he sucked him, his tongue playing over the head and licking down the sides.

The vampire was noisily appreciative, gasping as Kavan's mouth sucked at his balls and a moistened finger probed between his spread legs. The king went back to the vampire's erection, sucking until it was wet and glistening, then as Harben threatened to get carried away, his body tightening and arching, Kavan lifted his head. "I want you."

Harben opened his eyes, the irises almost black with lust. He sat up, so their faces were close. Kavan traced his cheek with light fingertips. "Tell me you didn't capture Eachan," the vampire said softly, earnestly.

The king regarded him in silence for the longest moment as a battle raged within him. "I didn't capture him," he said finally.

The immediate relief on Harben's face speared him with anguished guilt. The vampire's arm curved around his neck and he brought Kavan back down onto his body, legs wrapping around him. Their mouths met, Harben's hands sliding down his back, his touch making the king's skin burn and sing with need. He gasped out

the vampire's name as his mouth slid onto Harben's neck and he bit lightly, sucking at the bruise, the act making Harben moan, arching his head back further, gripping Kavan's hair.

Kavan lifted his head to look at him. Would Harben find it as erotic as *he* did to be drunk from? Judging by his reaction when Kavan kissed him there, the answer was yes.

"Have you ever created another vampire?" he asked in a low, breathy voice, as he moved one hand onto a wing, caressing lightly.

Harben's heavy-lidded eyes slid open, focusing on him. "Yes."

"Who?"

"Eachan." Harben's hand smoothed over the curve of Kavan's buttocks, fingers sliding down into the crease.

"Why?"

"I was lonely. It's hard to be alone for as long as I've been."

Kavan frowned. "And you and he..."

"At one time," Harben murmured. "Not anymore."

"Who else?"

"Nobody else." Harben's eyes closed and he turned his face away. "Why do you ask me these questions?"

"Because..." Kavan stumbled over his words, as

they spilled unbidden from his mouth. “I want to know if you’re going to kill me.”

Harben’s eyes snapped open, wide and fixed on his. “You desire this?”

“I don’t know,” Kavan admitted, with eyes downcast in shame, “perhaps.”

“You don’t know what you say.” Harben shook his head angrily. “This is a long and painful existence. The next time I create a vampire, he is to be my soulmate and stay with me until the end of time. That is what I search for and I know you are not he.”

These words hurt Kavan. “How do you know?”

“How do I know?” Harben echoed, something approaching sardonic amusement in his voice, his eyes glowing green in the low light. “You have had me burned and tortured. You keep me prisoner here and you threaten to kill my mortal lover if I don’t do your bidding. You have devoted your life to eliminating my species and you ask me how I know you are not my soulmate?”

Kavan climbed abruptly off him and stood up, seeking his clothes, pulling them on roughly.

“Where are you going?”

“Away, you have ruined this evening,” Kavan replied petulantly.

“I have ruined it?” Harben cried from the bed. “I don’t understand what it is you want from me Kavan! I’ve given you what you desire and now you talk of dark things you don’t understand, of things I couldn’t possibly give you.”

Kavan turned around. “You could give me them if you wanted to. You have had ample opportunity to kill me and yet you haven’t. Why?”

Harben, lying on the bed, regarded him warily, his body drawn into tense lines, before finally lowering his gaze. “I have no answer,” he murmured, “just like you will not give me an answer if I ask you why *you* haven’t killed *me*.”

Kavan came back to the bed quickly, throwing a knee over Harben’s body, straddling him, grasping his face in his hands. “I cannot,” he said earnestly. “I cannot. To kill you would kill *me*.”

He saw the reaction in every sinew of Harben’s stiffening body, the sudden turning of the whites of his eyes to pink, his breathy moan of, “I can’t kill you either. I would only kill you in order to turn you and my heart would be broken forever if I did and you wanted me no longer.”

“Harben, Harben...” Kavan breathed in anguish.

The blood tears welled up and spilled at an alarming

rate down the vampire's cheeks. He crushed their lips together as his lover let out a sob. They fell on the bed, flesh against flesh, limbs entwining, hands grasping. And Kavan slid into the vampire's welcoming body and made love to him like it would be the very last time. Even if it wasn't, time was fast running out for them. Storm clouds were gathering overhead and soon they would be torn asunder.

Not that their relationship could ever have lasted. Kavan's barren heart didn't hold enough love to keep anyone for too long.

Chapter Nine

Lucius sent a message with a boy for Cesare to ready hot water and take the vampire Eachan to the bathing chamber. When he entered the room, the creature was huddled on the steps leading down to the giant bath, the jailer trying to haul him by the scruff of the neck into the water, fully dressed.

“*Cesare!*” Lucius snarled, taking the leather whip he carried from his belt, uncoiling it in one smooth movement and bringing it down on the other man’s skinny back so the jailer shrieked. “Unhand the demon immediately.”

The jailer let go of the vampire and scurried up the steps, slipping a little and almost going on his backside before he left the room, slamming the door. Lucius turned his attention to the creature on the steps.

The vampire Eachan’s silk clothes hung in charred

remains from his lean form, red skin visible through the material, the tattered wings like the skirts of a ballerina trailing from beneath the tunic. He had not healed after the fire the way he had after being exposed to the sunlight. Instead, the visible skin—his face, hands and feet—was red and raw and covered in weeping blisters.

Evidently the vampire was getting weary and needed to feed which accounted for his skin remaining in such a poor condition. Kavan wouldn't be happy to see him this way. Punishment might even be due. Like Lucius could control the demon's healing patterns. What was he, a witch doctor?

"Take your clothes off and get into the bath," he said coldly.

The vampire Eachan looked over his shoulder and up at the truth-seeker, their eyes meeting. Lucius stared down into the crystalline green and his stomach lurched and tightened with indescribable anxiety.

Eachan looked up at him for a moment more, before he dipped his head and fumbled at the buttons on his tunic. As Lucius watched the material slip from the creature's shoulders, a layer of charred black skin came with it, falling to the steps of the bath so the truth-seeker almost vomited.

Then the demon lifted his backside up and drew his

breeches off, before he slithered down the steps and into the bath, sitting on the ledge, which ran around the bath's perimeter. His naked body was crimson and black with burns. He hissed in pain as the water enveloped him. The wings trailed like ragged confetti over the sides of the bath.

Lucius put his whip down and moved to a jar kept at the side. The magic, renewing salve, which Kavan's magician made from secret ingredients.

Eachan leaned back against the side of the bath, trembling violently beneath the water. Lucius had seen this sort of behaviour before, just before the vampire went into shock and sank into a coma they never came out of, too delirious to drink the lifeblood they needed to recover. Usually he didn't care. Today if he let this happen, his head would be on a stake.

He knelt down behind the vampire and put his hand into the salve, taking out a handful, smearing it between his palms and looking at Eachan. He was afraid to touch the vampire.

Steeling himself, he put his hands out and placed them on the shoulders of the vampire. He started to massage slowly. His touch was light and gentle. He wouldn't have Kavan's new pet telling the king that he had inflicted unnecessary pain on his traumatised skin.

The demon flinched and tried to shrink away from Lucius' touch, but the truth-seeker moved his fingers up the back of his neck, under his singed hair to the burned scalp, rubbing in smooth motions. His hands trailed down the vampire's arms, stopping at surprisingly muscular biceps, kneading them, feeling them flex into hardness beneath his fingers. Something about the subtle power below him excited him. Perhaps it was the danger. Eachan could throw him into the bath at any moment and drown him effortlessly. He laughed derisively to himself because the vampire was half-dead and could barely hold himself up.

He massaged the elbows. He gathered more salve and applied it to the top of the vampire's back, where the wings joined the skin. Then he moved back from the bath, taking one delicate wing in his hand and smoothing the charred creases from it, detangling it, massaging. He had never taken the time to hold a vampire's wing like this and explore its structure. The material was as fine and gossamer as a spider's thread, a delicate meshing of fibres creating a wing like a bat's, only thinner and semi-translucent, burned to transparent in some places.

Lucius applied more salve to the wing and worked it patiently into every fold and crease of the burned area,

spreading the wing out as far as it would go. It swept the ground in a dainty, torn arc. The rhythmic massaging and kneading was soothing and therapeutic. The tense muscles of anxiety in his stomach relaxed. A sense of achievement filled him with every uncoiling of the silken meshwork, like he created something wondrous.

It was thirty minutes before he moved onto the second wing. The vampire Eachan was absolutely still in the bath before him, not a sound coming forth. Lucius finished the second wing. The two trailed over the side of the bath, moist and gleaming silvery with water and the magic salve.

Lucius hesitated in his task, because he could not reach any other part of the vampire from his position behind him.

He stood up and slid the boots from his feet, discarding his belt, which contained his dagger, his only means of defence against the demon. The vampire's shoulders stiffened as he heard the rustle of Lucius discarding his clothes, but he needn't have worried. Lucius stepped into the bath still wearing his underwear, saving both their blushes.

The vampire still trembled with shock, his teeth chattering, pale green eyes fixed on Lucius as he knelt before him. Eachan's knees were up. Lucius put his

hands to them and parted them, so he could kneel between them. Then he dipped his hands into the jar once more and brought them to the vampire's face.

Eachan flinched as the fingers smoothed over his burned cheeks, over his forehead, his nose and his chin. His features were delicate, almost angelic. His beauty belied what he was. He closed his eyes as Lucius' index finger massaged both eyelids in turn, before he moved it over the vampire's cherubic lips, top then bottom. Eachan drew in his breath at that touch and his lips parted, so Lucius' finger slipped inside his mouth and over one razor sharp canine tooth, drawing instant blood.

Lucius gasped and drew his hand back. There was blood on the vampire's mouth. The pink tongue came out instantly to lap it up, the demon's pupils dilating massively in the green eyes. Lucius knelt back on his heels and reached a hand out of the bath, towards the dagger in his belt.

"You make one move towards me and I can promise you a death from your worst nightmares."

Eachan's eyes slid shut and his head abruptly fell back against the edge of the bath, showing the long, graceful curve of his neck. His mouth parted and his breath came in slow, shallow pants.

He needs it, Lucius realised. If he doesn't get blood soon, he will die of his injuries. He debated what to do. Kavan had not told him to *feed* the vampire, only to make him presentable. It was probable the king wanted to be present when the vampire was fed. No doubt he wanted to see if Eachan showed the same compassion to servant boys that Harben did.

He would continue with the salve, to at least begin the skin healing and then arrange to have the vampire taken up to the tower to recover.

He dipped his hands back into the jar, and then he lifted one of the creature's arms from the water and massaged its entire length, down to the fingertips. The magical salve was impervious to water. He lowered the arm back into the bath and repeated the action with the other, before moving onto the vampire's muscular torso.

He rubbed the salve over the hard pectorals and dusky pink nipples. His fingers played deliberately with these until they stiffened, helpless to stop himself. Then he massaged the ridged, flat abdomen, stopping at the neat thatch of dark hair between the vampire's legs.

Aided by the fact that Eachan's knees were still up, he was able to massage the entire legs and feet with ease, right up into the inner thighs. Now the only place he hadn't done was the lower back, the buttocks and the

groin. He could hardly leave these out because it was clear to him that the vampire had burns over every inch of his body.

And if he was to be Kavan's pet, Lucius had no doubt Eachan would need these areas in full working order. That image came unbidden into his mind again. Kavan reclining languidly, being pleased by his two pets. So help him, Lucius' wicked thoughts were going to drive him out of his mind. He ached between his legs.

"Turn over," he said to the demon, who seemed to be asleep, breathing heavily. Predictably, Lucius received no response. He leaned forwards and gripped Eachan by his hips, dragging him towards him and flipping him over onto hands and knees. The vampire moaned in pain and banged his forehead on the side of the bath, his face going into the water, one hand catching hold of the edge to right himself.

"Hush, don't struggle," Lucius said. "Let me reach your back."

The vampire became calmer when he realised what Lucius was doing and knelt still as the truth-seeker parted the wings and massaged the skin beneath them, moving down the curve of the creature's spine, to his pert, plump buttocks. He kneaded them like dough and as he held the firm, muscular flesh in his hands, he

pulled the cheeks deliberately apart to look at the little rosebud between them.

He felt a tug between his legs as he stared at the pink and puckered entrance and couldn't help but imagine sheathing himself deep in it. His fingers moved between Eachan's cheeks, stroking around the hole, desperate to touch and penetrate, desperate to feel Eachan taking him inside. Had anyone ever gone there before? Had the vampire known fingers and tongue and cock and cried out for more as he was filled?

Lucius let go of the vampire and stepped back, eyes closed, hand to his head. Oh God, what was happening to him? Was this the seductiveness everyone spoke about? The vampire tempting him to sin just by the very sensuality of his beautiful body?

He gritted his teeth. One more place and he never had to touch the vampire again. But the place which would undo him.

"Here," he said, "give me your hand." The demon swayed tiredly in place, trembling, head resting on the side of the bath. Lucius bent one of Eachan's hands backwards to him and smoothed salve over the palm. "Rub this on yourself. Down there."

The hand flopped into the water and the vampire's cheek fell onto the side of the bath. He seemed barely

conscious. Irritated, Lucius gripped the hand again and moved it around Eachan, guiding it into his own groin. “Rub the salve on,” he said again. “The king needs that part of you recovered.”

But the vampire’s hand, cupping himself, didn’t move and when Lucius let go, it fell away again. Growling in frustration, Lucius scooped up another handful of salve and reached around again, groping the demon’s groin.

He found his balls first, heavy and soft, massaging lightly, making sure to cover every inch with the salve, before moving up to the base of Eachan’s penis and taking it in his hand, sliding the flaccid length through his fingers, reaching around to hold it still with his other hand while he covered the head in salve.

Even as he did this, it grew and stiffened in his hand, the vampire quivering a little beneath him.

Lucius tensed, but he didn’t take his hand away. He continued to massage the magic ointment into the burned flesh.

Eachan sucked his breath in. He became more than half hard in the truth-seeker’s hand and quite suddenly an answering rush of blood between Lucius’ own legs made him dizzy.

“Do you trick me foul demon? You are unresponsive

until I touch you there!”

“No, sir,” the vampire replied in a low voice, one arm weakly supporting his head on the edge of the bath. “I would hardly seduce the man who has brought such misery on me. I am dying. I welcome any pain relief I can take.”

Another unidentified emotion flooded Lucius’ breast, as sharp and bitter as the jealousy he had felt earlier. He was choked, as though there was an apple in his throat, compressing both his oesophagus and his windpipe. His breath came in short pants. His chest ached with the effort. It was *compassion*. Compassion for this being he had tortured and driven to the edge of death. It burned him alive the way he had burned Eachan.

Lucius trembled, swallowing hard. “My hand on you thus eases the pain?”

“Yes.”

“Then you would I continue?”

“As you will,” the vampire said. He was fully hard in Lucius’ hand, his thick shaft making the truth-seeker throb with need. Lucius moved closer so he pressed against the creature’s buttocks through his wet underwear and Eachan took a sharp breath in.

“The King will take you as his pet,” Lucius said quietly as his hand moved slowly up and down the

slicked shaft of the vampire. "He has a cock like a horse. It would be wise for me to break you in."

"If you wish to take me, then do so," Eachan replied. "I only ask that for the duration of the act, you don't do it in hate."

Lucius was silenced by the vampire's words. He sought some of his own and failed. The emotion in his breast continued to sting and burn. He wanted nothing more than this. He could not remember a desire this powerful in his whole life. A desire which was beyond the physical and he knew it.

He pushed the vampire further over the edge of the bath and gripped his hips, bringing his plump buttocks up out of the water. He pulled down his underwear to allow himself to spring free and put his hand into the jar of salve, spreading it on himself as a lubricant. Moving to position himself, he spread the vampire's wings, so they were on either side of Eachan's thighs, trailing against his own beneath the water, like skeins of silk, a caress on his needy skin.

For a moment, he imagined being wrapped in the wings and borne aloft, taken many miles from here. He shuddered, afraid of the direction of his thoughts.

He pushed slicked fingers into the vampire. Eachan writhed a little and his breath quickened even further.

Lucius was about to make love to, not just any enemy vampire, but the future pet of his king. He was in an unlocked room where a guard could walk in at any moment and catch him. And yet, this didn't stop him. He wanted the burned, pitiful little figure beneath him more than he had ever wanted anyone in his life.

He took his fingers free, put a hand around himself and steadied the creature by the hip as he slid into him in one swift motion. Eachan caught his breath, letting it out in a long moan which aroused Lucius, together with the tight vice around him, like nothing ever had before. The truth-seeker leaned forward, pressing his torso to the burning hot flesh of the vampire's back, holding him close with both arms around him as he thrust slowly into him.

He found his face against that place where the wings joined the vampire's back. With the lightest touch on the delicate mesh of blood vessels and silk-like strands, he pressed a kiss to the wing.

Eachan shuddered beneath him, seemingly half in pain and half in pleasure. He turned his face over his shoulder, craning his neck to look at his lover. "What's your name?" he asked in a whisper. "Please."

"Lucius." He kept his lips right there against that wing, eyes closed, one hand travelling down to hold

Eachan in his palm, to stroke him in time with his movements into him.

The vampire panted for breath, light moans reverberating against the stone of the bath, one hand weakly gripping the side. *He has barely enough energy to participate. What if he dies during this? How would I explain it to Kavan?*

Lucius knelt up, took hold of the narrow hips with a gentle grip and withdrew, changing the angle of his thrusts, aiming to please his lover beyond his wildest dreams. Suddenly, he did not wish to send the vampire to his grave in the sort of pain he had already inflicted.

His lover mewled like a cat, nails scrabbling at the side of the bath and gasped Lucius' name. At his name on the lips of the beautiful, scarred demon, heat consumed Lucius alive, as though it rose from the vampire's skin and diffused into his own. He wrapped his hand quickly back around the vampire's straining shaft, intent on bringing him to completion with himself.

He jerked quickly, trying despite his haste, not to be too rough and he thrust into that spot which sent the vampire to the only heaven he would ever see. Eachan moaned with every thrust, hips moving weakly, attempting to push himself into Lucius' hand with the last remaining ounces of his strength and back onto the

cock that penetrated him.

The two hit orgasm at the same time. Hot fluid coated Lucius' hand and the vampire clenched hard around him, groaning ecstatically. As Lucius panted in his bliss, moaning helplessly, Eachan went suddenly weightless beneath him, hands slipping bonelessly from the bath so his head bumped the side. He went under.

Still coming down off his high, Lucius gripped him and pulled him to the surface. The vampire was virtually comatose, all control gone from his body, a gash on his forehead staining the water crimson. He was a dead weight. Lucius struggled with him, managing to drag him to the edge of the bath and hoist him over unceremoniously. The vampire flopped there like a stranded fish, all black and red, some fresh pink showing where the magic salve was slowly healing his skin.

Lucius climbed out of the bath with his heart in his mouth. Oh God, he had killed the vampire. Of secondary importance to the fact that he would be decapitated by Kavan was the fact that the vampire's plight and the vampire's beautiful body held him on a string. This had nothing to do with Kavan now and *all* to do with himself. He rushed for a large towel and came back, sitting down and dragging Eachan into his lap, wrapping him in the towel, cradling his head. The vampire still

breathed, but his lips were blue. He was fading slowly away in Lucius' arms.

Lucius stared down at the long, sooty lashes which veiled the jewelled eyes. If the vampire died, he would take his own life because he could not live with what he had done to this man. Not creature, not foul demon, but *man*.

Barely making a conscious decision, he scooped up the vampire into his arms. Leaning down over him, he held him behind the head with one hand. The vampire's face was pressed into his neck.

"Take what you need," he told Eachan and waited.

His lover's lips moved slowly and he shivered as they travelled over his throat in the lightest and yet most intimate of caresses. Eachan seemed to be searching, rubbing both nose and mouth over the skin as though seeking the scent of the blood and the vessel, which would yield it satisfactorily.

The lips parted. Canine teeth pricked hesitantly. Lucius cradled the vampire's head more firmly and pressed his skin against the teeth, doing Eachan's work for him.

His skin broke as the teeth pierced him and the hot rush of blood was caught instantly in the mouth clamped to the wound. Lucius both heard and felt Eachan

swallow the first mouthful. He gasped and closed his eyes at the surprising rush of pleasure through his veins, overtly sexual in nature. He stiffened again.

For long moments, the vampire lay passively in his arms, swallowing weakly as the blood flowed into his mouth, held there by Lucius like a baby suckling its mother and then slowly, surely, the roles became reversed.

A languid heat and dizziness overtook Lucius. His head lolled onto Eachan's face, almost smothering him. Suddenly, a strong hand gripped the back of his neck, raising it, holding it away, the mouth sucking harder, like a leech, drawing mouthful after mouthful down.

Lucius' eyes stayed closed. He swayed over the body below him until the vampire pushed him upright, keeping his mouth fixed to Lucius' neck. He moved with surprising agility to straddle his hips, holding him there with arms around his back.

And suddenly Lucius realised Eachan was positioned above his arousal. He clutched the vampire and groaned as Eachan sank down on him and started to rock himself back and forth as he drank.

It might have seemed like he was drunk, but the intensity of this experience was a hundred times more pleasurable than any wine-induced fuck had been in the

past. Lucius held fast to his lover, content to let Eachan ride him, with no energy of his own to thrust into him, his head inclined, that jugular vein of his giving everything to his lover. His hands moved over the wings, gripping them lightly in his fingers, savouring the feel, wishing once more to be wrapped within them.

As he hurtled towards orgasm, Lucius also realised that he hurtled towards death. He felt his heart slowing, instead of speeding up, the loss of blood reaching a critical point. One hand tangled in the soft, wet hair of the vampire. "Eachan," he whispered. And then he stopped, because he would not make a plea for his life. His life had been one of wrongdoing and unspeakable evil perpetrated on those who could no longer defend themselves. He had always known he would meet his death at the hands of those he punished for being different to himself and he saw it as just.

He closed his eyes. Turning his head a little, he pressed a kiss to the warm, smooth cheek of the vampire and there he noticed the difference. The skin wasn't blazing hot and it wasn't covered with blisters any more. Lucius' blood healed his lover before his very eyes. He smiled in satisfaction.

A moan came from his neck and Eachan released onto his chest and stomach in a flood of semen. The

convulsions of the muscles around him milked Lucius to orgasm and his head fell back. The vampire's teeth slid from the wound, blood dripping down his neck from the puncture marks.

Lucius let out a few gasps and then his breathing started to quicken further and become erratic. The vampire's hand gripped his hair, lifting his head, and he murmured, "Lucius," against his lips.

Lucius tasted his own blood, but it didn't concern him. What concerned him was receiving the kiss of an angel as he died. Their lips melded, their tongues softly wrapped around the other and Lucius took his last breath against that mouth as he sank slowly away.

Chapter Ten

The vampire Eachan was now strong and renewed again and there was no prison that could hold him. He lowered the dead body of his lover to the ground and climbed off his lap, pulling a towel around his nakedness, before looking around in search of clothes.

He found Lucius' discarded garments, the black uniform of the government inquisitor and looked at them a moment. There was always the logistics of wearing clothes when you needed to use your wings. In the grand bazaar, deep in the heart of the city, was a wise old man who tailor made clothes for those special customers who had things to accommodate.

Eachan would have to improvise now. He took Lucius' dagger from its sheath and slit two holes down the back of the tunic, manoeuvring his wings through tortuously.

As he did, his eyes strayed with regret to the truth-seeker. He shouldn't have felt bad, but he did. Lucius had set him on fire and almost killed him, he deserved no pity. But then he had smothered the flames quickly. And his hands had spread salve over every inch of his poor, burned body. How could Eachan forget the way his nimble fingers had coaxed every crease from his tattered and torn wings, wings Eachan thought were damaged beyond all repair? He had spent an hour just stroking and soothing these wings, healing them. No person in Eachan's entire immortal life had ever touched his wings, least of all in this way.

With a sigh, Eachan knelt over Lucius and pulled him into a sitting position, cradling his lover's head against his shoulder. He had to make a decision before his jailers discovered the murder of the truth-seeker. Draining every drop from a human's body guaranteed a new vampire, which was why Eachan never did it, surviving on small sips, allowing himself to grow perilously weak, because he couldn't bear to take human life, nor could he bear to condemn a human to this existence.

And yet, he had taken the life of this man who had almost killed him, only to save him.

Did he allow this man to rise again or did he snap his

neck now? He looked into the beautiful, angular face of the truth-seeker. He would be a liar if he said he did not desire the dark-eyed beauty, a liar to himself to claim he was not lonely in his one hundred years of solitude since his death.

He would take Lucius because if he left him here, he would be killed by Kavan for becoming a vampire, after first being tortured in the underground dungeon. Maybe Lucius would not want him when he awoke, maybe he would be horrified by what Eachan had done to him, but at least he would have the choice to live his immortal life away from the palace and the king.

A tunic and breeches hung on a rail in the corner of the room, similar to the ones Lucius had first dressed Eachan in when he was taken prisoner at his castle. He manoeuvred the dead man's limbs with difficulty into the silk, before standing him up, holding him upright with both arms around his back.

Concentrating hard, his healing wings unfurled about him and flapped slowly, gaining momentum.

He turned his head at sudden voices outside the chamber. A knock on the door sounded before it burst open and there stood the principal jailer, Cesare, another three men behind him. Their mouths hung agape in horror at the vampire, who was alive and well and

clutching a member of the king's government in his arms.

As they rushed into the room, armed with daggers and crossbows, Eachan beat his wings hard, gaining leverage from the ground. It would have been a simpler task if he dropped Lucius, but he had no intention of leaving him now. His wings beat faster like those of a giant bird and he rose slowly off the ground as his enemies rushed upon him.

Cesare, by virtue of being the tallest, leapt up as Eachan approached the ceiling and caught him by one foot, dragging him back down.

Eachan responded by viciously aiming his other boot into his face, knocking him free, breaking the jailer's nose in a spurt of crimson. The vampire licked his lips.

His wings beat powerfully and rhythmically, carrying him up into the vast glass dome above and straight through it, into the floor above. The bathroom was made with a glass roof because the king liked to spy from the castle above.

Now, as Eachan cleared it, there was the thunder of glass smashing below him as a crossbow bolt flew through the roof and pierced his shoulder. Eachan gave a grunt of pain, clinging tighter to Lucius. He almost reflexively dropped him and held on as he continued to

rise through the roof of the next room, too, arriving in a dark, narrow corridor.

He was not happy to find himself in the main body of the king's castle, but having the ability to walk through walls, this did not present an obstacle to him, even if he was bleeding profusely from his wound, the healing taking its time.

And there in the tower room, Eachan came to an abrupt halt. Lying wrapped in each other's arms beneath silk covers the colour of blood, were two dark-haired men. One was King Kavan, the other was the vampire Harben.

Eachan hovered there, wings beating, holding Lucius fast to his chest, unable to believe his eyes.

Harben lay on his back, his glossy, dark hair stark against his ivory skin, while the king, taller and more muscular, lay with his face against the vampire's chest. His arms encircled his pet, dark lashes resting against his cheeks, soft breaths escaping his mouth. How innocent he looked, not like the monarch that burned, tortured and killed vampires at will.

Harben's eyes flicked up abruptly and his mouth opened in silent astonishment, greenish-gold eyes wide. These two had a history, for Harben had been the one to kill Eachan one hundred years ago. Bitter with rage over

the taking of his mortal life, Eachan had eventually come to accept what Harben had done and embrace him as his closest—and only—friend. Harben had been taken more than a month ago and Eachan had believed him dead all this time.

To see him here now, looking healthy, but lying in the arms of the man who had captured them both, made Eachan's eyes brim with tears. He spoke telepathically to Harben, as only the oldest vampires could do.

“You lie here with this man like this? Has he not hurt you?”

Harben shook his head. His eyes were sad. “He hasn't hurt me. He has put a magic spell across the threshold and the window. I cannot escape.”

“What about the roof?” Eachan said. “You can levitate through it, Harben. Don't tell me he is able to control every aspect of the room.”

Harben lowered his gaze for a moment, looking at the king. “I wouldn't expect you to understand.” Inside Eachan's head, the other vampire's voice was barely a murmur. “You say these things to me, and yet, I see you with the king's truth-seeker there in your arms. That man almost burned me alive. What's going on?”

Eachan hung his head in shame. “I killed him. He shall be one of us.”

“What?” Harben exclaimed. “Why?”

Eachan tightened his arms around the man who hung limply within them. “He showed me compassion. He gave me his blood.”

Harben sighed. His hand came up to stroke the dark hair of the king. Kavan made a noise of sleepy satisfaction against the vampire’s chest, like a cat and smiled in his sleep. “So what is your plan now? They will hunt you down.”

“I have no plan,” Eachan replied. “Only to avoid persecution and to keep this man safe. What is your own plan, Harben? How much longer do you intend to stay here being kept a prisoner by this man when you could tear his throat out right now and escape?”

Harben gave no answer. He only looked down at the king once more.

“He must trust you implicitly,” Eachan said, “to sleep so soundly in your arms when he fears and reviles our kind so much.”

“I’m sorry, Eachan. Forgive me for being a traitor.”

Eachan shook his head. “You owe me no apology, Harben, for I understand only too well.” He lowered Lucius gently into a nearby chair. He reached to his shoulder and yanked the bolt free with a hiss, tossing it aside before he approached the bed and leaned over

Harben.

“Farewell and I hope to see you soon, my friend,” he whispered as his lips brushed the other vampire’s forehead.

Beneath him, Harben regarded him with eyes swimming in blood tears. “Farewell.”

Eachan moved back to the chair and scooped Lucius into his arms once more, his wings unfurling and beating, carrying him up towards the roof and freedom.

A shifting on the bed below him reached his finely-tuned ears, a yawning and a murmuring voice. “Harben, I had the strangest dream.”

The sky paled to violet as Eachan’s strong wings carried him and Lucius over the spires and rooftops of the kingdom, the blood flowing from his wound beginning to slow finally. He made for his castle and even from such a height he made out, not a magnificent structure perched precariously on an abyss, but smouldering ruins. He almost wept for the destruction of his home.

He held Lucius tighter, a sensation of warmth finally returning to the dead body, a slight twitching in the arms hooked around his neck. Eachan made for the nearest deserted place to set his lover down. The priority was

taking rooms at a lodging house before the sun rose and killed them both, but he could hardly cart a dead body in with him as his guest. He needed Lucius functioning.

Soft waves lapped at the sand as Eachan lay the chief truth-seeker down on the beach and cradled him in his arms, stroking the dark hair back from the mesmerising face and willing him into undeath.

After a little while, he began to sing, in a strange, archaic language, his voice soft and incredibly sweet, the voice he had been famous for, the reason why Kavan had wanted him captured. He sang to the man in his arms at length, song after song, until birds flocked around him on the sand, heads cocked, watching with bright eyes. Slowly, the flickering lashes lifted and eyes as black as night fixed on his. For a moment they stared at Eachan blankly, before recognition flooded them.

“Don’t be afraid,” Eachan said and then chided himself because surely the man responsible for torturing and murdering vampires had never been afraid of anything in his life.

Lucius’ thin lips parted and he spoke hoarsely. “Where are you taking me?”

“To a hotel,” Eachan replied, “we must sleep while the sun is up.”

If Lucius didn’t know what had happened to him

before, he did now. His lips moved soundlessly, unable to formulate any words, his skin ghastly white, like milk.

“This is a shock to you,” Eachan murmured. “A rest will ease your troubled soul. I will carry us to the hotel and then you must walk in with me as though everything is normal and we are two friends taking a holiday.” His eyes fixed Lucius, working the magic spell he was often able to fixate humans with.

Lucius’ gaze moved down Eachan’s body. “You mustn’t wear my uniform,” he told the vampire urgently, “any sighting of it will lead the king to us.”

Eachan nodded and inside, his dead heart sang with the tiniest spark of hope. He helped Lucius to his feet, the truth-seeker as weak as a new-born calf on his legs. Lucius put his arms willingly around Eachan’s neck as Eachan’s wings bore them into the air.

They remained joined as they travelled over rooftops, Lucius’ face hidden in Eachan’s neck, clinging hard, no longer the dead weight of before, but warm and mobile in his grip, his body sensual and muscular, arousing Eachan effortlessly. He even laughed as Eachan swooped down and snatched a tunic off some unsuspecting person’s washing line, before they landed in the forest behind a secluded hotel. Eachan guided

Lucius gently to a tree stump to rest while he stripped off his tunic, easing his wings through it.

Lucius was up off the tree in a moment. His hands on the wings helped Eachan take them through the slit in the material, his touch making the other vampire shiver. For a moment, the truth-seeker's finger travelled over the wound in his shoulder from the crossbow bolt. He leaned forward, his breath brushing the back of Eachan's neck as he asked in a whisper, "Do you like it when I touch your wings?"

Eachan nodded, his breath in his throat, arousal beginning to thrum thickly through his veins. "It makes me feel safe."

"You are a beautiful creature, Eachan," Lucius said as his hands smoothed and folded the wings beneath the stolen tunic and inside, Eachan glowed. "I heard you singing to me."

The older vampire turned around to look at the new vampire for a long, silent moment, before he gestured towards the hotel. "Come."

* * * *

The concierge seemed oblivious to the fact that Lucius wore no shoes and the two carried no luggage. Lucius

refused to let the short-sighted old man show them to the room, instead taking the key himself and walking close behind the vampire to hide the wings trailing from beneath his tunic.

He gave the key to Eachan as they reached the upstairs landing and the older vampire unlocked it and stood by, gesturing to Lucius to enter first. Inside, there was a large four-poster bed, hung with golden brocade, a chaise longue against the wall on the other side.

“Take yourself to bed and rest,” Eachan said softly to Lucius.

Lucius did as he bade, unfastening his tunic. Eachan turned away, moving to the dresser and pouring some water into the bowl there, stripping off his own top and turning his face to examine the back of his shoulder. He sighed a little and took a cloth, cleaning the wound, which was starting to heal, before moving bare-chested to the chaise longue, where he sat down and took off his boots.

“What are you doing?” Lucius asked softly from the bed.

“Going to sleep,” Eachan replied in surprise.

Lucius shook his head. “Not there. I want you here. I want to feel your wings against my skin.” Eachan stood up on legs, which were not quite steady.

How lucky he was that Lucius hadn't rejected him outright. He crossed to the window and closed the heavy curtains against the impending dawn. Then he stood at the bed and stripped off his breeches, already stiffening. Lucius' hot gaze moved down blatantly into his groin as he threw back the covers, exposing his own erection.

Eachan slid into the bed, pulling up the covers around their necks as Lucius' arms went around him, his fingers softly caressed his wings, and their mouths met.

Lucius drew his breath in, one leg slipping between Eachan's, rubbing himself against him. The two worked themselves into a fever pitch, hands grasping and stroking, burning kisses rained on sensitive skin.

It was only a few minutes before Eachan took the lead and manoeuvred Lucius readily onto his back, spreading his legs and penetrating him. Lucius gasped and groaned, nails scratching, mouth begging for more.

Eachan kissed him insistently, swallowing his cries, his mouth tender, despite the intensity of the passion being shared between them. He noticed the moment at which the bloodlust ignited in the new vampire beneath him. A moment before his mouth opened and the fangs lengthened, Lucius' eyes glowed red in the dark. With a growl, Lucius buried his face into Eachan's neck, piercing the skin and drawing the first mouthful of

blood.

Eachan groaned in supreme pleasure, having forgotten the ultimate erotic high of having a vampire drink from him. He had nearly always lost his mind when Harben did the same to him, and it had always ended with the two of them on the floor making the fiercest of love. Having just received his strength back from Lucius, he shouldn't be giving it away so freely again, but he was powerless to resist the soft mouth sucking so insistently at his neck.

He thrust harder into Lucius, moaning, arching his head back further and positively encouraging his lover to drain him, the way he waited for him to drain him of his ejaculation. The orgasm rose like a whole body sensation, the ecstasy coming from his neck, spreading downwards into his groin.

Lucius had his legs around his back, one hand clawing, and the other curled into a fist on one wing, not pulling at the delicate strands, but holding. Eachan got an extra added tug of sensuality on top of his already overloaded senses.

He was going to explode. He and Lucius cried out together, moving hard and fast, Eachan's hand milking Lucius, Lucius still with mouth attached to his neck, groaning orgasmically with every swallow of the

crimson liquid.

As Eachan came into the body beneath him, Lucius' mouth fell away from his neck and blood trickled down it.

Lucius spurted into his hand and Eachan caught his mouth with his own, groaning as he tasted his own blood, their tongues tangling.

Exhausted beyond all reason, his newly acquired strength drained once more, Eachan fell unmoving onto his lover.

* * * *

Lucius opened his eyes and gently pushed Eachan from him, onto his side, gathering the vampire into his arms against him. The wound in his lover's neck was clotting slowly. Blood still oozed from it. Lucius was beginning to come back to his senses and realise what he had done. He had drained the only means of both their escapes when Eachan had only just got his strength back from Lucius himself.

But the blood sang in his veins at his vampire awakening. Eachan's blood was like the sweetest, heaviest, richest nectar on his tongue ever. It set him on fire like the touch of the other vampire's mouth and

hands had. It was like nothing he had ever known before, and even though he was adequately full, he burned for more, his mouth full of saliva.

He moaned softly at the memory and held Eachan closer, his hands straying over his wings, comforting himself with the feel of them beneath his fingers. He had to think what to do. The vampire was near comatose in his arms. Giving the blood he had stolen straight back to his lover would result in Lucius ending up in the same comatose state. But Eachan was the one with wings, not Lucius. He was the one who could save them from Kavan's soldiers, not he. He cursed himself for being greedy enough to take Eachan's blood.

He tried not to think about anything else—about how he had come back to life on that beach. Instead of feeling revulsion and hatred for the creature that had taken his life and made him into one of the demons he had spent a large part of his life persecuting, he only thought, *I have been rescued*.

Shouldn't he be in hell, condemned to live as the undead for the rest of time? But how could it be hell when you were lying next to Eachan, when he had just made love to you?

Eachan. A symbol of the race Lucius had tried to destroy. He wept helplessly over his own wickedness as

he held his lover close and prayed to whichever god would listen for forgiveness.

Eachan stirred in his arms. His thick lashes fluttered up and his pale green eyes focused on him. "Lucius," he breathed, fingertips trailing over his face.

"I'm sorry," Lucius said, trying to compose himself, "I didn't mean to..."

"Hush now." Eachan's voice was low and firm. "I only need to sleep. I will regain my strength before nightfall, you shall see." One finger caught a tear from Lucius' eye and he brought the droplet to his face, studying it. "You don't cry the blood tears of the vampire yet," he said in astonishment. "You still cry the tears of a human."

When he looked up from examining the tear, Eachan's pupils were huge, overwhelming the green of the iris. "My strength may return sooner than you think," he told Lucius as he moved his head forward and gently placed his mouth on Lucius' cheek, his tongue licking away the track of tears staining the skin.

Lucius held still, his eyes closing as Eachan kissed the lids gently, his tongue catching the tears which fell. He lifted his face when Eachan drew back, seeking a kiss. Eachan provided one, his lips damp with salt-water and sweet with desire.

They kissed for long moments until finally, Eachan slid down in the bed, so his face was against Lucius' chest, his arms around him. Lucius closed his eyes and allowed his fingers to trace the mesh of his wings, stroking, caressing, and soothing the both of them as they fell asleep.

Chapter Eleven

Kavan had the strangest dream. He dreamed there was someone else in the room, someone pale-skinned and green-eyed, conversing with Harben like the two were long-lost friends. He tried to jump up from the bed because the man was his enemy. He wanted to fight him, but his limbs were heavy and he could not move.

He awoke in Harben's arms, his head on the vampire's chest, a hand stroking his hair with infinite care. He lifted his head to look into the hazel eyes below him. The eyes were full of nameless sorrow.

"Harben," he said, "I had the strangest dream."

"Did you?" Harben asked. His voice was oddly cold and detached.

"What's wrong?" Kavan remembered the words and the tears they had exchanged the night before, the confessions they had made to each other.

Harben shook his head to indicate that he either wouldn't or couldn't tell him and closed his eyes, turning his face away. Kavan watched him a moment, then he climbed from the bed and started to dress. Harben didn't ask him where he was going. He remained lying there silently as the king left the chamber, one destination in mind.

The growing unease in the pit of his stomach increased as he saw the general hullabaloo in the castle below, soldiers milling around, casting guilty looks at him as he passed. As he made his way down the steps to the dungeon, he was confronted by Cesare holding a bloodstained cloth to his face.

"Sire," he addressed the king sullenly, "the vampire Eachan is gone."

"What?" Kavan roared. "How?"

"From the bathroom. He simply flew away. Through the ceiling." Cesare didn't look remotely repentant.

Kavan stormed past him, back up the steps, along the corridor to the bathroom which was reserved for prisoners to bathe in and threw open the door. The water in the bath was bloodstained, there was blood on the tiled floor and the glass ceiling was smashed.

A cold hand snaked down Kavan's spine. He had not

dreamed anything. Eachan had been in his bedroom.

He turned around as Cesare spoke behind him, “There is more, my liege. The vampire took Lucius with him.”

Kavan’s mouth fell open. “Out of my way,” he growled, shoving the thin man aside and ran from the bathroom, across the great hall, towards the spiral staircase which led to the turret.

Kavan flung the door open. He stalked to the bed and dragged Harben up by his throat.

Harben’s eyes flew open. He gasped and then he sighed a moment. The fight went from his body. He hung limply in Kavan’s grasp.

“Your friend escaped this morning,” the king spat in his face.

Harben’s gaze shifted away. He didn’t speak, but his face coloured a little from the grip Kavan had on his neck.

The king glared at him. “You *knew*.”

“Eachan visited me here before he left,” Harben murmured.

“He took my chief truth-seeker with him!”

The vampire only nodded.

“Why?”

“Eachan had fallen in love with Lucius.” Harben

kept his gaze averted.

Kavan huffed in disgust and tossed the vampire back onto the bed like a rag-doll. He stalked the room a moment like a caged lion before stopping to stare at the captive.

“How did he escape?”

“Through the ceiling,” Harben replied.

Kavan fumbled for words in his ensuing confusion. Eachan had escaped a room with a charm supposedly placed over it. Kavan bit his lip. His gaze slid a little lower, over Harben’s exposed flesh, the covers falling down below his waist.

“I’m so angry with your friend that I’ll have to make you pay.”

Harben only looked resigned to this. He did not speak, only lay down and waited for Kavan to strip off his clothes.

Kavan took his time. His mind whirled, and he was filled with a rage that he wanted to take out on Harben, but it wasn’t the vampire’s fault. He ached when he remembered the words of last night, of how Harben was looking for a soulmate, which Kavan would never be. He burned with shame at the words he had spoken in return.

He stood naked, looking down at Harben. The

vampire's green-gold eyes opened slowly, glowing in the near darkness.

"You lied to me," he accused. "You said you hadn't taken Eachan."

Warmth heated Kavan's cheeks. "I am a liar," he said coldly. "It is what I do. It is a mistake to trust me. You will know better in future."

Harben's expression hardened.

Kavan gave a sigh. "You need to answer something for me." He finally gave voice to what had tortured him for the last few minutes. "You said Eachan escaped through the ceiling."

Harben nodded.

"The charm on this room prevents you from crossing the threshold by either windows or doors," Kavan continued. "What about the ceiling?"

"What about it?" Harben echoed almost facetiously.

Kavan got on the bed, gripping him by the back of the neck with a hard hand. "Don't play games with me, vampire. Could you escape through the ceiling?"

Harben regarded him a moment before he nodded silently, turning his head away, eyes closed.

Kavan let him go and sank back onto his heels. "Then...why..."

"I don't know," Harben mumbled, his hands

gripping the covers.

“All this time...”

“You still have Ophion here. I cannot leave him to your mercy.” Harben glared at him defiantly.

“I don’t believe that’s the reason,” Kavan said, watching him carefully.

“I don’t care what you believe.” Harben’s voice was cold, but his eyes were anguished and filled with that softness the king had come to know more and more.

Harben is soft of heart, the vampire Akiva had said and it was true. This demon he had persecuted for being different was not different at all. He was just *better*.

Kavan drew the covers back and slid naked within them, the silk caressing his skin. He lay there against the pillow and waited for Harben to touch him. He had forgotten his threat to make him pay for Eachan taking Lucius with him. It was not Harben’s fault. Harben had stayed and taken Kavan’s punishment for this last month when he could have left any time he wanted.

He turned onto his side, eyes squeezed shut, deep and bitter misery suddenly overwhelming him. The vampire’s hand touched his hip, warm skin pressing against him. A wing folded around him, and his anguish was blown away like clouds from across the moon. Kavan fell into welcoming sleep.

He awoke at midday and saw his partner standing over by the bureau, naked, wings trailing down his back, an alabaster flask tipped to his lips. Kavan sat up, admiring Harben's willpower once again when the vampire could have sucked him dry while he slept. *And I would have enjoyed it.*

Harben noticed him and put the flask down, rubbing the back of his hand over his mouth before licking his lips. He came to him, sitting down beside Kavan, one hand caressing his cheek.

Kavan turned his face into the touch, eyes falling shut. Harben leaned forward, kissing him softly. His mouth moved down onto his throat, never any less than gentle, teeth locked carefully away behind his lips.

Kavan melted under his touch like he always did, his hands on Harben's bare shoulders, sliding down his back, slight moans coming from his mouth. Harben reached his chest, lips toying with one nipple, tongue wetting it, making it stiffen.

Sudden footsteps echoed on the stone of the spiral staircase, a knock at the door, a loud voice, "My liege, our sources have given word of the vampire Eachan and your chief truth-seeker. They are at a hotel near the Ulisian border."

Kavan's eyes opened. Harben froze in place, his hands still on the king.

"Saddle my horse, gather necessary supplies," Kavan ordered. "I shall be down directly."

"Yes, sire."

Kavan's gaze slid to Harben, to the anguish on the pale face. "Please don't," the vampire said.

Kavan shook his head. "I'm going to bring Lucius back," he lied smoothly, "that's all."

"Lucius is *dead* Kavan. He is *nosferatu*. You cannot bring back the man you once knew."

The king was silent for a long moment, then he put Harben firmly from him, even as the vampire tried to cling to his neck, and started to dress.

"Don't hurt Eachan, I beg you," Harben said.

How pointless this was, the same words repeated when he had not taken note of them the first time. But why was he going after Lucius, if he wasn't going to kill Eachan? And if he killed Eachan, it would be the end of him and Harben, forever.

He fastened up his tunic and put on his shoes and then he turned to the vampire who was now sitting on the end of the bed with his head in his hands.

He had pause for thought as he stared at the smooth, pale slope of his spine, the delicate wings trailing behind

him, the dark hair closely-cropped to his neck, the delicate hands resting on his naked knees. Something fluttered within him, something caged and aching to be set free.

“I won’t kill him if I can help it.”

Harben didn’t turn to look at him. His shoulders shook with silent sobs as Kavan left the room.

Before he set off for his destination, the king arranged a hasty meeting with his magician. He told Bela that he believed the vampire would try to escape directly from the tower room and follow him to the hotel where Lucius and Eachan were hiding. He explained that Bela must stop Harben on pain of death. His choices were to drug the vampire into unconsciousness using a potion in his supply of blood, or to put a spell on the ceiling of the room, preventing Harben from leaving.

Bela regarded Kavan thoughtfully. Then he said, “He can only leave by using his wings, Your Highness. Without them...” He trailed off, dark eyes downcast respectfully.

Kavan stared at him a moment. “If that is what it takes to keep him,” he said finally, “then do it.”

* * * *

Harben remained almost in a stupor on the end of the bed when Kavan had gone. He could not reconcile his tender feelings for the king with the man's wickedness. He would kill Eachan, Harben was sure of it and then Harben would be completely alone in this hostile, cruel world, an enemy of other vampires, like Akiva.

He had long made his decision to escape, to leave Kavan behind forever even though it would break him in two, but he lingered still, finally galvanized into action a few hours later when footsteps sounded on the steps outside.

Harben jumped onto the bed, wings unfurling, flapping. The door burst open. The nearest man grabbed him by the ankle as he floated towards the ceiling. Another soldier gripped him by one wing, all his weight upon it.

It tore and white-hot pain seared Harben. He fell onto the bed, screaming, fangs bared. One soldier pinned him down. Harben tore his throat out. Another tried and Harben did the same.

He scrambled from the bed like a wild animal, crouching, facing the group of soldiers, noticing Kavan's magician standing somewhere safely at the back. One by one the soldiers drew their daggers from their belts and Harben eyed them. Why use daggers?

Why not wooden stakes, crossbows? The dawning truth hit him like a slap to the face. The daggers were not to kill, they were to *maim*.

He screamed again as the soldiers bore him face down to the floor, daggers raised, his wings lying ready around him.

Chapter Twelve

All the way to their destination, Kavan contemplated what he was going to do if he caught up with Lucius and Eachan.

He couldn't kill Eachan, as much as he wanted to. It would mean the end of any feelings Harben might hold for him. He would have to let Eachan go and concentrate on retrieving Lucius. But he had to remind himself, as Harben had, that Lucius was now one of the undead. Kavan would never be able to have him back as his truth-seeker, only keep him as a prisoner in the underground dungeon. And what exactly would be Lucius' crime? Falling in love with a vampire? If he really had gone willingly with Eachan, Lucius would not be captured easily and the vampire would also not give up his new prize without a fight.

Perhaps Lucius had been forcibly taken away? His

blood stolen, changed into a vampire and kidnapped to be the soulmate to Eachan, the way Harben hoped someone would be to *him* one day. Maybe Lucius would want to return. Either way, Kavan decided he would bring him back to the castle, with minimal damage to the vampire Eachan if it could be at all helped. He gave strict instructions to his soldiers on this.

They arrived at the hotel at night-fall, bursting through the doors, startling the old man manning the reception who immediately prostrated himself on the floor when he saw his king. Kavan merely swept past him, armed with a crossbow, leading his men up the stairs, crying, "Search every room!" while throwing open every unlocked door they came to and breaking down every door which was locked.

They found the room they sought on the top floor. As Kavan kicked it open, he was just in time to see two figures jump from the open window. He ran to it quickly, leaning out. The vampire Eachan hovered in mid-air, wings swiftly and strongly beating, holding the king's former truth-seeker in his arms, Lucius' arms around his neck, clinging on and looking frightened for his life as well he might.

Kavan's blood was hot with the thrill of the chase and the fear on Lucius' face. He raised his crossbow,

and Lucius opened his mouth in horror. To think that his truth-seeker thought he would not hurt him, when the man had crossed to the other side and become *nosferatu*!

The vampire Eachan swooped down, but Kavan, who was the finest shot in the land, merely followed them with his aim and shot Lucius coolly in the shoulder. His target gasped. Pain flashed over the face of the vampire carrying him. In a moment Kavan realised, *They are in love. Lucius loves Eachan and the vampire loves him in return. Instead of abandoning him to his fate, Eachan has risked his own life to save Lucius.* Would Harben ever think to save him the same way? The wings beat harder and faster and the two figures were lost to the night.

* * * *

They were deep in the heart of a forest when Lucius awoke, lying on the ground, his shirt removed and hands smoothing over his skin. He opened his eyes to see a pale face leaning over his, jade green eyes intent on him.

He remembered Kavan standing at the window holding his crossbow, pale with rage. He could not believe the king had shot his most loyal subject.

“The wound is healing,” Eachan said in a murmur.

Lucius' gaze moved to his stiff shoulder, to see the wound dressed with a lattice of plant leaves.

He sat up, Eachan leaning back to give him space, unable to stop his gaze flickering over the vampire's beautiful bare torso before he looked around him. "Where are we?"

"Across the border in Ulises," Eachan replied and one hand brushed a few errant strands of dark hair from Lucius' eyes. "We are safe here. Kavan's power does not stretch this far."

Silence fell between them as Lucius' eyes roved the beauty of the face before him, with its pink, sensual mouth and jewelled cat-like eyes.

It was Eachan who spoke first. "What do you want now, Lucius? Would you that we part here or...." he hesitated, "shall we carry on together?"

Lucius regarded him. It was an illusion that his dead heart seemed to beat hard in his chest for a moment as he put an arm around the other vampire's neck and drew him down to him. "I would that we carry on together," he said in a whisper, "that you teach me your world—and your love. If you can forgive me my crimes."

Eachan's eyes visibly moistened, the whites turning a delicate rose colour before tears of pure blood started to fall down Eachan's ivory cheeks.

Startled and moved, Lucius held his lover's face gently in his hands and pressed his mouth to the cool, satin skin, seeking the essence of the man, the one he had tortured and almost killed.

His tongue came out to lick over his lips, tasting the blood tears Kavan had been so obsessed by, before the two vampires kissed, sealing their bargain beneath the trees.

Chapter Thirteen

When Kavan arrived back at his keep, Bela was hovering nervously in the great hall. Today he wore a crimson cloak and a towering golden hat, which Kavan could barely take his eyes from with astonishment. When he focused on the magician's face however, he feared the worst. He feared that Bela had taken his instructions as literally as Kavan had meant them.

"My liege," Bela began, twisting his hands apprehensively together. "The vampire tried to escape shortly after you left."

Kavan, with his heart lying like lead in his chest, gestured for Bela to go on. He was cold with dread, sweat prickling his spine, his clothes suddenly too heavy and hot.

"We had to subdue him. He fought like a tiger. He killed two of your men and..." Bela hesitated again.

Kavan stood with his head bowed, waiting for his magician to tell him that Harben had been mutilated beyond repair.

“I know you gave me licence to damage the wings,” Bela continued presently, “but I hesitated to do so, while you were not present. In case you changed your mind.”

Kavan looked up at him. A weight like a death sentence lifted from his shoulders. He realised he had been holding his breath.

“We bound him with chains. He is hurt, but his wings are intact. When he was subdued, I poured a powerful sleeping draught down his throat. He slumbers still. I hope to have created a charm to place over the ceiling of the tower room by the time he awakes.”

Kavan looked into his magician’s dark eyes. His gratitude to Bela for not following his orders implicitly was more than he could ever convey in words. The other man knew this, because a small, comforting smile crossed his face and he said softly, “Let us go up to the tower, my liege.”

The walk to the turret seemed to go on forever, with Kavan’s legs uncharacteristically uncoordinated. When he reached the top, for a moment he considered turning around to Bela and instructing the man to let Harben recover, waiting until he was fully healed before Bela

called him to the chamber. After all, nothing was making him go into the room. Apart, that was, from the fact that even during those few short hours he had been gone from the castle, he had missed Harben like a part of him was gone.

He pushed open the door slowly. There were four soldiers in the room, crowded around the bed. They shrank back deferentially when they saw the king enter. The vampire Harben lay on the bed curled on his side, his back to Kavan. His semi-clothed body was bound by chains, his arms behind his back, wings trailing limply out from beneath them. His pale skin was dark with bruises and lacerations, bleeding in places, the bed covers stained beneath him.

Kavan stood looking a moment with such an uprising of emotion in his breast that he was afraid. He tried to speak and could not for the lump in his throat. Burning tears filled his eyes much to his mortification, and he blinked them fiercely away.

“Sire,” Bela said softly behind him. “Shall I send your men away?”

Kavan could do nothing but nod, standing with head bowed as his soldiers left. When there was silence in the room, Bela spoke again, “The key, Your Highness.” He held out a golden key, over Kavan’s shoulder, so the

king took it from him.

“There is some of the magic salve there on the table should you wish to use it,” said his magician.

Kavan nodded. He swallowed before saying in an unsteady voice, “You are wise and judicious, Bela. I thank you.”

“There is no need to thank me, Your Highness,” Bela replied. “I did not want to hurt the vampire, even if some of your soldiers got rather carried away when subduing him. I know that he is precious to you. I only ask you to consider one thing, a caged bird will never sing the way you want it to.”

Kavan did not turn around. A moment later, the door closed behind his magician. The king immediately let go of his emotions. His lip started to tremble and his eyes filled to overflowing. He crawled onto the bed and unlocked the chains, slowly unwrapping them from the vampire’s body, smoothing out the wings as he did so. Instantly, he saw the damage the metal had caused, deep grooves in the fine fibres, the delicate meshwork bruised and torn, bleeding in places.

His heart caught and stuttered in his chest as he tried his best to smooth and untangle the wings. Maybe they were beyond repair. And indeed, as he touched them, pieces broke free, the tiny blood vessels haemorrhaging,

the blood running down Harben's back.

Kavan's mouth opened in a silent sob and with hands which had only ever been used to hurt and maim, he turned the unconscious man over and cradled him on his lap. Harben was marked on face and torso with the bruises of fists and boots, blood seeping from his nose and the corner of his mouth.

Kavan did not realise he was crying until he saw a tear splash onto Harben's wounded face. Then a sound escaped his mouth. He tightened his arms around the vampire, bringing him up to his chest, lowering his face so it was buried in the vampire's thick, sweet-smelling hair. There he allowed himself to weep until no more tears would come.

His tears were dry and his head ached fiercely by the time Harben stirred in his arms. Kavan drew back to look into his face. Harben's thick eyelashes fluttered before his eyes lifted, a pale shade of gold in the candlelight. He blinked several times as though in confusion and an expression of pain chased fleetingly across his face when he flexed his limbs in Kavan's grip.

"Did you capture Eachan?" His voice was low and hoarse.

"No."

“Did you hurt him?”

“No,” the king replied, relieved that for once, he was telling the vampire the truth.

Harben closed his eyes again. Kavan felt the slow, sensual flexing of the wings against him.

“Harben...” he began earnestly. “I beg you, please don’t try to escape again.”

Harben opened his eyes, scanning the king’s carefully. “Let me go,” he said in a whisper.

And once more the tears welled up uncontrollably in the king’s eyes. They fell onto Harben’s face one by one, so the vampire’s tongue came out to lick them as they ran into his mouth.

“I cannot let you go,” Kavan said in a trembling voice. “Don’t ask me to because I can’t do it. Just know that I’m sorry you’re hurt. That I won’t hurt you again.”

Harben closed his eyes again and his mouth trembled, a slow slide of blood tears appearing from beneath his lashes. “Let me go,” he repeated. “I will *never* love you.”

Kavan stared down at him. Suddenly, he brought the vampire’s head fiercely to his chest again, crushing Harben’s face against his breast, holding it there. “Yes, you will. I promise you that you will. I’m sorry. I will heal you. Take my blood and you will recover your

strength. Take as much as you want.” His voice was despairing, hitching with sobs.

And he let the vampire move his head back, waiting for the blissful sting of teeth in his neck, but instead, Harben regarded him with blood-filled eyes. “I would rather starve than touch your poison-filled blood again,” he spat, his face ice-cold.

Something within Kavan shattered.

As if that wasn’t enough, Harben continued, “If I drank from you now, I would kill you. And by that I mean drain every drop, then snap your neck. I’ve never hated you more than I do now.”

Kavan stared down at the man in his arms. Slowly, he released his grip. The vampire laboriously dragged himself free, breathing heavily, lying down on the bed, curling up into a foetal position with his back turned. His ragged wings trailed pathetically behind him.

The king, hurting like he had never hurt before in his life, reached out and touched one of the delicate skeins, his fingers tracing its fibres. And he longed like he had subconsciously longed for a month, to be wrapped safely into the wings and borne aloft, cherished, protected and loved. He had dashed all his own hopes and dreams to pieces. He had driven away the only thing he had ever cared about in his life.

The muscles in Harben's powerful back twitched at his touch, but he was too weak to pull the wing from Kavan's grip. The king nonetheless let go. He stood up and regarded the vampire for a moment.

Now that he had been denied everything he wanted, he only knew one way to act. With cruelty and rage. "Your choice is to drink from me or die," he told the vampire. "You shall receive no other source of blood from now on. Soon you will *beg* to taste me."

He waited for a response, but the vampire was silent. Kavan wiped a hand roughly over his eyes and strode to the door. As he wrenched it open, Harben spoke, "I am happy to die. When I do so, I shall be free of you."

"My liege," Bela said softly as Kavan stalked through the grand hall.

The king slowed, his steps faltering. "Bela, I would be very grateful if you would apply the magic salve for me. I was not able to do it."

"Yes, sire," Bela murmured, bowing.

Kavan continued on, where he locked himself in his chamber until morning.

Chapter Fourteen

He was awake and breakfasting before dawn, sitting alone at the long dining table, the food ignored. He summoned Bela at length and bade the magician help himself to refreshments, before he got up and started to pace the room.

“Have you yet placed a charm over the roof of the turret?”

“I have, my lord,” Bela responded. “The only way Harben can now leave the room is with your express permission.”

Kavan nodded curtly. “Did you apply the salve?”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

“And?”

“The vampire was barely conscious while I did it. By the time I was finished, he was sleeping peacefully and had some of his colour back.”

“And...” Kavan hesitated, “the wings. When you touched them...” His gaze slid to Bela’s.

“Yes?” Bela’s brow furrowed.

“Did he, when you...” Kavan almost stammered over his words, flushing. “When you touched his wings, did he become...aroused?”

Bela frowned, turning just as red as the king. “No, my liege, as I told you, he was hardly responsive.”

Kavan nodded. He paced still, biting his lip.

“He is weak,” Bela said quietly, “he needs sustenance.”

“He will get sustenance when he requests it of me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean he drinks from me or no one.”

Bela looked aghast. “Come now...”

Kavan lost his temper. “Are you second guessing me, magician?” he roared, hurling a cup against the fireplace, where it shattered into a hundred pieces.

Bela flinched but remained calm and serene, as was his usual outlook. “Sire, I merely think of *you* when I wonder whether this move might be dangerous. The vampire may become so hungry that he would be uncontrollable. He may kill you.”

Kavan regarded him a moment. His anger had disappeared as soon as it had arrived. Now he paced,

clutching at his hair, muttering to himself.

“Your Highness,” Bela said softly, “if you wish to discuss anything with me, you know, as always, that I will listen.”

Kavan shot a glance at him. Then he sat down at the end of the table and let his head fall heavily upon it, groaning. “I don’t know what to do. He has bewitched me. I am afraid of the power he holds over me. I want him to be mine.” He jumped up again wildly. “I *want* him to be mine! Do you understand?” He stalked towards Bela, who stood up quickly, nodding.

“This is wrong!” Kavan cried. “It is so base and sinful that I would want this creature. It is so wicked what he does to me. I *adore* him. I can’t sleep. It hurts me to *breathe* for thinking of him.” His eyes were full of tears. “I want to *kill* him.”

“You don’t mean that, sire.”

Kavan swept dishes and plates onto the floor with one violent jerk of his arm. “Do not tell me what I mean!” he screamed, eyes bulging, fists clenched. “I want to kill him! I would be free of him if I killed him. He shall starve. No one shall feed him on pain of death! If he wants me, he shall *beg* for my blood!”

Bela lowered his head and stood waiting to be dismissed, saying nothing. Perhaps his magician could

not bear to look at him for the disgust he felt for his ruler.

“Go.” Kavan gestured abruptly and turned away, horrified at his emotional outburst.

“My liege,” Bela said softly. “I can bring you a sweet drink, something to calm your troubled spirit, something to help you sleep.”

Kavan turned his head and regarded him. “You would not attempt to poison me,” he said, a statement not a question.

Bela looked deeply offended and hurt. “My liege,” he began, stopping when Kavan started to walk over to him.

The king advanced on him until he was standing staring down at the slightly smaller man, so close that their toes almost touched. The magician stared up at him with wide, dark eyes. Kavan lifted a hand and stroked his cheek. There was no problem which couldn’t be solved by taking an attractive man to his bed.

“Bela, I am in need of more than potions. Come to my bed.”

Bela turned a fiery shade of vermilion. “No, sire.”

“You would disobey an order from your king?”

Bela sighed. “No, my liege, I would not, but I ask you to reconsider before you force me to do something I

do not want to do.”

Kavan snorted in derision. “You must think me blind, Bela. I have eyes.” It was only his ultimate respect for the magician which had stopped him making advances in the past. After all, Bela was a better man than *he* would ever be.

The magician remained scarlet from the neck upwards and Kavan nodded sagely with a smirk. He stepped forward so he crushed the magician to the table, before taking him firmly by the back of the neck and kissing him.

Bela gasped and struggled, his ridiculous hat falling off, revealing closely cropped dark hair. Kavan kissed him harder until the magician’s arm curved around his neck and he moaned, submitting to the kiss.

Kavan pressed him even closer into the table, a hand travelling beneath Bela’s cloak, up his tunic, smoothing over spine, moving around onto his torso, palming pectorals and abdomen, finding them taut and hard.

The magician groaned and arched into his touch, his head falling back. Kavan buried his mouth into his throat. The king moved his hand down into his groin and rubbed the bulge in Bela’s breeches. The magician made a noise deep in his throat. Kavan kissed Bela’s neck, inhaling his scent, closing his eyes, drifting away,

imagining the hand coming up to clutch at his hair was another's.

He stopped suddenly, lifting his head. Bela's eyes opened. The tide of lust retreated from them, to be replaced by shame and embarrassment. Kavan let go of him slowly and stepped back. Retrieving his fallen hat, Bela scuttled out of the room.

Kavan spent the day attempting to pursue his kingly duties, discussing tithes on his land with his advisors, making sure those prisoners due to be hanged were taken from the dungeon at the correct time and transferred to the gallows. By sundown though, he was ever more anxious and distressed. He sent word to Bela to request the draught he had offered him and sipped at the sweet, soothing liquid eagerly when a servant brought it. Alone in his chamber, he tried to sleep until the early hours of the morning, tossing and turning, alternately sleeping and waking, covered in a burning sweat, his body aching all over.

Finally, he resisted his inner urges no longer and got up. He pulled on a tunic over his bed breeches and slipped quietly from his chamber, carrying a lantern across the great hall, lighting his way up to the turret. A candle was lit on the bedside table within, shadows playing across the walls. The vampire laid on his side

beneath the covers, eyes closed, breathing slow and even.

Kavan stood there holding the lantern up and studying the vampire for the longest while. His body was still bruised, the wings still torn and damaged, the healing power of the magic salve clearly limited now he was so weak. Harben's sleeping face was serene, pale and bruised and delicate, a smattering of freckles over the bridge of his nose. Kavan put out a hand and traced his finger across them, moving down Harben's cheek and over the curve of his jaw, onto his lips, tracing their perfect outline, their plumpness. His hand trailed down Harben's neck and over his broad shoulder, fingers luxuriating in the satin soft skin.

He took his hand away, put the lantern down and started to undress silently, taking his time. He drew the covers back and lay down behind Harben, curving his body to the contours of the vampire's, putting an arm over his hip. Holding Harben to him this way, warm, soft skin and hard muscle pressing against him, he suddenly became calm and infinitely sleepy. He pressed his lips against the back of Harben's neck and felt him shift in his sleep, a slight moan coming from his throat, but the vampire

did not awake and slowly but surely, Kavan fell asleep.

Even in his sleep, Kavan's body tried to take what it wanted without his conscious effort. He awoke to find his mouth on the vampire's neck, his hand travelling over Harben's hip and onto his abdomen, moving down to take the stiffening length in his hand, stroking slowly but firmly. He pressed his own erection against the vampire's buttocks, rubbing insistently, catching his breath at the friction of warm skin against his own.

Harben stirred, a shudder running through him, his body flexing sensually. Kavan's blood heated to boiling point. He pressed himself harder against Harben, pushing him so he was almost on his face, grasping one calf and lifting his leg, bending it at the knee, exposing the vampire to him. He hastily spat on his hand before burying himself inside.

Harben gave a stifled moan, his hands clutching at the pillow, his head snapping back in ecstasy. He almost slammed it into the king's chin.

Kavan lowered his head and kissed the very top of the wings, one after the other where they joined the vampire's back. Harben started to writhe in bliss, almost whimpering with need, pushing back against Kavan, so tight and so hot around Kavan that he was almost coming within moments.

Somehow he managed to hang on until the vampire almost howled his way to orgasm. Kavan slipped his hand under Harben's body and around his cock, pumping it swiftly until Harben spilled over his fingers, shuddering hard.

The king came a moment later, falling exhausted against the vampire, lips still caressing the wings with reverent kisses. Slowly, he fell back onto his side, moving Harben back with him, still inside him as he softened, already falling back beneath the waves, unsure if it had all been a dream or not.

A cold voice startled him instantly from sleep. "Now you've taken what you wanted, remove yourself from my bed."

Kavan drew back in confusion, slipping silently from the bed, watching how Harben folded his damaged wings around himself as though to protect himself from the monster in his bedchamber. How ironic. After persecuting these creatures for so long, the only demon all along, was himself.

He laid a hand on the top of one of Harben's wings, just where it joined his back. As he stroked, he felt the reaction in the vampire's body as he always did. No matter how much Harben hated him, he would also always desire him, no matter what. He dressed quietly

and left the room.

He had only been back in his bedchamber a few minutes and he was standing staring at himself in the looking-glass when there was a knock. One of his head soldiers asked for admittance. Gabrian was diminutive of stature and thin but clever and musically gifted. He was from a neighbouring province, his large doe eyes dominating his pixie features. He intrigued Kavan who had often thought of him in a less than pure way.

“Sire,” the soldier began. “The vampires Lucius and Eachan are in Ulises. They hide at a remote location in the mountains.”

Kavan lifted an eyebrow. He had honestly never thought to hear of the two vampires again. “I see,” he said and once more he turned to look at himself in the glass.

Harben had rejected him. What did he have left in his life but murder and vengeance? Even if his heart wasn't in it any more, what else could he be expected to do? He knew no other way to behave than as the brute and animal everyone expected him to be.

Chapter Fifteen

Kavan tried and failed to sleep during the journey to Ulises. Bela had refused to accompany him, citing terrible travelling sickness as the reason, but the king rather suspected it was something more even than embarrassment at the kiss they had shared the night before. More than likely, it was to do with the tender-hearted magician not wanting to witness Kavan's savagery when he got his hands on the vampires.

Kavan fared no better with his own motion sickness, having to have the coach halted numerous times to vomit, the potions Bela had provided him with merely coming up again. He lay trembling and sweating against the plush cushions for most of the journey and asked himself time and time again why he hadn't stayed at home. With Harben.

They entered Ulises just before nightfall. When his

soldiers told him the lair the vampires had taken was in view over the crest of the next hill, Kavan ordered that everyone dismount and that they proceed on foot, lighting no torches lest they alert the vampires to their arrival. The dwelling they stalked was modest and pretty, smoke curling from the chimney. A cat washed itself in the front garden.

A strange sensation gripped Kavan as he witnessed the home the lovers had made together. *Jealousy*. For one rash moment, he wished he could change places with Lucius and Echan and live there alone with Harben, cut off from civilisation, with the vampire belonging to him twenty-four hours a day. They would spend most of every day in bed, only parting briefly to go their separate ways to eat and when they met up again, they would be desperate with need at having been out of each other's sight. Kavan would allow Harben to drink from him and would swoon into orgasm as he did.

The king and his soldiers approached from the back of the house. When they reached the long garden, Kavan halted and told them, "I go alone. If I call or gesture for you, then you come."

"Your Highness..." Gabriel immediately protested.

Kavan waved him away. "If I want you, you shall know." He started to creep through the garden, armed

with his crossbow.

The place was choked with weeds, overgrown with tall grass. A few twilight bees buzzed around the foxgloves and buttercups.

A paved area was beyond, a collection of tools laid out, a clearing already made, rows of seedlings neatly planted. He regarded this evidence of domesticity and knew it was the work of Lucius. The man had shown some evidence of interest in horticulture when he had resided at the castle, often to be found poking around the rare orchids Kavan's gardeners cultivated in the greenhouses. He was making this place his, having never had a home to call his own. The two vampires hid away together, with nothing to do but tend the garden and lavish love on each other. How Kavan burned.

He moved up towards the French windows, standing pressed against the wall, slowly tilting his head to peer through them. The darkness of the living room within was broken by multiple, strategically placed candles.

On a chaise longue in the centre of the room were two naked figures entwined. The man on top had sun-kissed skin and dark, unruly hair. He kissed the throat of the man with the snow-white skin beneath him as he moved into him slowly and his lover clung to him, his moans audible through the glass.

Kavan stared, already stiffening against his will as he watched Lucius and Eachan making love.

To his astonishment, a pair of wings trailed down Lucius' back, the tips of them lying against the wings which trailed from beneath Eachan. This physical evidence of two winged creatures making love was more than Kavan could bear. He drew back against the wall, breathing heavily, his hand moving to touch himself at this erotic scene.

Muted gasps reached his ears and he glanced around again. Eachan clung to Lucius' wings with both hands, stroking, caressing, their mouths fixed together, Eachan's body arching with every thrust. Then Lucius lowered his head. There was a flash of bared fangs and Kavan held his breath in shock as his former chief truth-seeker bit his partner on the neck. Eachan's response was to clutch him harder and groan in delight, legs wrapped around him.

Kavan cursed softly to himself and hid once more against the wall. His erection pulsed. He remembered the feel of Harben's bite and how he had begged for it. He took a few deep breaths and tried to control himself before he masturbated right there against the wall. He slithered around the side of the house and found a door

unlocked.

He approached the living room, following cries, diminishing to soft moans, then murmurs of endearment. He witnessed the two men moving from each other, pulling on breeches before embracing again on the chaise longue, exchanging kisses.

He stepped into the room, raising his crossbow. "Hello, Lucius."

The two vampires turned their heads, their hands dropping from each other. Lucius stood up. "Kavan," he said, voice wary and unfriendly. On his shoulder was a lattice of plant leaves, where the king had shot him three days previously.

"I've come to take you back," Kavan said.

"I don't think so," was the chief truth-seeker's reply. Next to him, the vampire Eachan stood up, and the king's attention focused on him. In the candlelight, his eyes were a stunning jade green, lustrous with reflections, his skin like marble, completely without flaw. The two half-naked men standing together with wings falling almost to the ground were a wonder to behold. They were like fallen angels, the most beautiful creatures Kavan had ever seen.

The vampire Eachan took Lucius' hand in his and told the king, "He's staying with me."

Lucius squeezed his partner's fingers and nodded at Kavan. "Go home. I am not returning with you."

Kavan looked at him and then at Eachan. He aimed his crossbow so when he peered down its sights, the bolt was aiming right at Eachan's dead heart. "You might like to reconsider, Lucius."

Lucius stepped neatly in front of Eachan. "I served you faithfully for years, Kavan. Your quarrel is with me, not him. Leave him be."

But Eachan stepped back to Lucius' side and addressed the king, "Are you still keeping Harben prisoner?"

Kavan nodded curtly.

"Harben has made some very poor choices in his past," Eachan remarked, his voice scathing, "but choosing to voluntarily stay and be tortured by you has to rank as his very worst."

Kavan started forward furiously only to be shoved backwards hard by Lucius. An instant later, the crossbow was wrenched from his hands and suddenly, both vampires were upon him.

He was pushed against the wall, his left hand pinned there by Eachan, his right by Lucius, his head roughly shoved to one side. Struggling in horror, hot breath bathed him an instant before fangs pierced him.

He let out a gasp and suddenly his body went languid and unresponsive. He sagged there against the wall and groaned as Lucius took the first swallow of his blood.

Eachan chuckled, leaning towards him, green eyes intent. "This arouses you, doesn't it?" he whispered and his hand slid down Kavan's stomach and into his groin, rubbing the bulge in his breeches.

Kavan cursed under his breath and tried to squirm away.

Eachan laughed again. He pressed a light kiss to Kavan's lips and then increased the pressure of his hand. Kavan groaned. Lucius lifted his head, his mouth crimson and Eachan moved in from the other side, fangs sinking into his neck. Kavan's eyes closed and he thrust helplessly against Eachan's rubbing hand.

He was lost. Pinned there by the vampires, he was their slave. He would do anything they wanted him to do. It was Lucius' turn to laugh now, his dark eyes fixed on Kavan, his hand working its way into his groin. Both vampires' hands stroked him.

He moaned and bucked against their touch. Eachan drew his teeth out of his neck and immediately kissed him. Kavan tasted his own blood. Lucius moved in, kissing him too, sharing him with Eachan. All three

were joined in a kiss, the two vampires still stroking him through his breeches. Kavan writhed, half-heartedly attempting to escape the grip they held him in, trying not to respond as both tongues were thrust into his open mouth.

The two vampires smiled a little sinisterly, pressing against his torso, one on either side. Kavan closed his eyes and tilted his head back as they both went in for the kill together, a set of teeth in both sides of his neck. He hissed in ecstasy, bucking up at the two hands rubbing him, two erections nudging his hips as the vampires drank.

Low moaning came from his attackers' throats. Kavan came against their hands.

He fell back against the wall groaning, almost boneless with exhaustion. The two vampires moved away from him. When he opened his eyes they were licking their lips, Lucius' hand lightly trailing over the small of Echan's back. Their eyes met, a tender look exchanged between the two of them.

Kavan should slink away like the dog he was, for ever thinking of breaking this love apart. He moved away from the wall and retrieved his crossbow.

"Goodbye, Kavan," Lucius said quietly.

Kavan was both too embarrassed and too ashamed

over what had just occurred to speak. He was also weak with blood loss. He turned to leave.

“Let Harben go,” Eachan said behind him.

Kavan stopped in his tracks. He stood with head bowed for the longest moment and then carried on, out of the house.

At the bottom of the garden, where his soldiers waited, he almost collapsed, dizzy and disorientated, blood trickling from the wounds on either side of his neck. “Sire,” Gabrian said in dismay as he was borne aloft by his men. “Let us storm the house.”

“No,” Kavan said with as much authority as he could muster. “The vampires are free to go. Take me back to the castle.”

In the coach on the way home, Kavan slept, plagued by dreams in which his castle burned, and he was thrown into his own dungeon and tortured by Harben. He woke, sweating and groaning, shouting for the carriage to be paused so he could vomit. Gabrian wished their procession to be halted so a doctor could be sought, but Kavan refused, insisting on reaching the castle with haste.

He was looking listlessly from the window and trying to organise his thoughts when the coach came

across a group of raucous people outside the castle walls and was halted. Voices were exchanged. Gabrian came to his window. "My liege," he said, "a lady wishes to present you with a flower."

Kavan nodded, because he very rarely saw his subjects and needed all the public relations help he could get. A gaggle of people came to the window, mostly women and children, chattering excitedly, pointing and cooing as they saw him.

He smiled benevolently, the movement hurting his face and his aching neck and put out a hand to accept the red rose that the fair, blushing maiden at the front of the group presented to him.

"Your Highness," she said softly, inclining her head as the king took it.

"Thank you," Kavan replied, bringing the flower to his nose and inhaling its scent. He took the lady's hand and pressed a kiss to the back of it, making her colour further, her smile radiant.

Suddenly a man pushed his way to the front, almost knocking the woman down. "Is it true what they are saying, sire?" he questioned cockily, a thin, untidy man with bird's nest hair.

Kavan regarded him, an eyebrow raised.

"That you hold a vampire chained to your bed for

your pleasure?”

Kavan drew back from the window with a growl, but not before the man spat in his face. There was a scuffle, Kavan leaning out to try and grab the individual, his soldiers lunging for the man at the same time. People in the crowd shrieked. Food missiles were hurled into the coach. Kavan was pelted with eggs and fruit before he managed to raise the window. The horses set off at a gallop towards his castle.

When they arrived, he was conveyed to his chamber barely conscious and Bela was sent for. He was cleaned up by a servant girl and helped into bed, where his magician administered a poultice to the wounds on his neck and bade him drink a potion. When he was relaxed and drowsy, Bela asked him, “What happened with the vampires?”

“I let them go,” Kavan replied.

“I am glad my liege.”

Kavan regarded him for a moment. “It is all done,” he said. “All of this is done.”

He closed his eyes. Bela started to speak, his voice a mere murmur, “There is something I need to tell you, sire.” But Kavan was already asleep.

He was startled from sleep by a distant sound. He lay in the dark with his heart beating hard in his ears and listened. A noise he could not distinguish came from far beyond the castle walls, a roar like the sound of waves crashing on a beach.

A sudden hammering on his door startled him. "My liege!" Gabrian cried from the other side. "The village revolts! A crowd a thousand strong marches on the castle!"

A month ago, Kavan may have leaped from the bed, called for his armour and crossbow and prepared to defend himself and his home. Now he remained where he was, beneath the covers which were damp with cold sweat.

"Sire!" Gabrian cried in panic at his king's lack of action.

"Defend the castle," Kavan said. "If you need me, I shall be in the tower room with Harben."

Chapter Sixteen

Weak and dizzy, Kavan dragged himself up the spiral staircase to the tower room. A lone soldier guarded the door and the king paused to speak to him. "Wait until the oncoming crowd are at the castle," he directed, "and then at that time, go down to the dungeons and unlock all the cells."

"Sire?" The soldier almost gaped.

"You heard me," Kavan said. "Set all the prisoners free. Now go, I no longer need you up here."

The soldier bowed hastily and retreated down the steps, muttering to himself. Kavan pushed open the door to the bedchamber and stepped within. He caught his breath in astonishment at what he saw.

Harben stood naked at the window, his wings falling down his back, obscuring the muscular globes of his buttocks. Every inch of him was regenerated and perfect,

not a mark on the porcelain skin, his wings whole and undamaged.

“What...” Kavan began to stammer, gaping.

Harben turned around. “Bela,” he said quietly and then when he saw the look on the king’s face, he went on in a rush. “I enchanted him. He had no choice but to give me his blood. Don’t punish him, I beg you. He could not help it.”

Kavan regarded him. He was not angry at either Bela or Harben. “Can you enchant anyone you want in order to steal their blood?”

Harben knew exactly what Kavan was asking. “Yes,” he said. “But I never bewitched you, not once. Whatever you did with me, you did it of your own free will.”

Kavan lowered his head. “I tried to tell myself that you had put a spell on me,” he murmured.

“Of course,” Harben said, his voice carrying a trace of scorn.

Kavan reddened in shame.

“The wounds on your neck, Kavan. What’s happened to you?”

“Lucius and Eachan,” the king replied.

Harben frowned. “They did this?”

Kavan nodded.

“And did you capture them?”

“No. I let them go.”

Harben’s eyes softened for the first time. “Why?”

Kavan shrugged his shoulders. “They showed me mercy. They could have killed me and they didn’t. In the same way you have.”

Harben lowered his gaze. “They took too much. You are gravely unwell.”

“No matter,” Kavan said glibly, “in a very short while, the crowd you hear approaching the castle will cut off my head and put it on a stake at the foot of my drawbridge.”

Harben visibly flinched and then his eyes began to fill with blood. A lump like an apple grew in Kavan’s throat and his eyes stung with tears.

“I have come to set you free,” he told the vampire in an unsteady voice. “And I know I deserve no consideration from you at all, but before you go, I ask you, please...” he halted to swallow and compose himself, “to spare me from my fate and kill me.”

Kavan hurried on quickly at the expression on Harben’s face. “Oh no, I don’t mean for you to *change* me. I know that you would never love me, that I could never be the soulmate you desire, even though my own heart aches for that chance. No, I mean actually *kill* me.

Drain my blood dry and then snap my neck. To die in your arms would be the most wonderful death I could dream of.”

Tears spilled down Harben’s cheeks and the vampire came forward suddenly and took Kavan fiercely in his arms, holding him hard. The king buried his face in his shoulder, hands clutching at Harben’s naked body, and despite the ever-growing rumble of stampeding feet and shouting voices outside, he felt serene and calm inside.

Harben still held feeling for him. He had faith that the vampire would cradle him tenderly in his arms and drink from him until Kavan fell into a sleep he never woke from. He did not deserve this chance, not for one moment, but it was now within sight.

Harben lifted his head, took the king’s face in his hands and kissed him. The vampire’s tears ran into his mouth and Kavan caught his breath with shock as he tasted Harben’s blood. It was not the cloying, metallic taste he might have imagined, but sweet like honey, making Kavan suddenly breathless with desire. He moaned softly, hands on Harben’s hips, guiding him firmly backwards to the bed, while the kiss deepened and their tongues entwined.

They fell there together, Harben wrenching at Kavan’s clothes, neither attempting to say they had no

time for this, not when it was something they both needed, one last time. Kavan was naked in a hurry, shifting Harben beneath him, covering his neck with ardent kisses, a hand moving between his legs gently.

When he entered him, the vampire clutched at him, drawing Kavan forward, legs wrapped around him, mouth spilling soft moans for more. The pace was frantic as the crowd surged ever closer crying for the king's head. And as the noise grew louder, so did Kavan and Harben, rolling across the bed with abandon. Harben was on top and riding Kavan, only to be then pinned beneath him again. The king grasped his head and thrust Harben's face into his neck. "Kill me, I beg you."

Harben responded by baring his teeth and with a groan, sank them into the tender, bruised flesh. Kavan cried out in ecstasy and his orgasm was upon him immediately, his hand milking Harben to his own end also.

The vampire shuddered and writhed beneath him as he drank. And Kavan, weak and growing weaker still, began to sink away as the vampire swallowed his blood. He cradled Harben's head against him, a slow smile of satisfaction and happiness spreading over his face as he closed his eyes. Nothing else mattered but this. Harben

was the focus of his world.

Harben withdrew his teeth from the wound abruptly. Kavan lifted his head. “No, don’t stop, *please*, take it all.”

Still the blood tears streaked Harben’s face and he wiped them roughly away with the back of his hand. “I cannot,” he told Kavan fiercely. “I cannot.” He pushed the king off him, sliding from beneath him, hurrying to drag on some clothes.

Kavan remained reclining on the bed, his eyes burning with tears, almost oblivious to the sound of a battering ram being applied to the castle gates. “Please,” he said once more as Harben finished dressing. He caught the vampire by the wrist. With a sob, Harben came to him once more, holding Kavan’s face to his chest, pressing kisses into his hair.

“I’m sorry. I can’t kill you.”

And he turned around, striding towards the door, wings trailing from beneath his tunic.

Why, when he had given Harben permission to leave, would he choose the conventional method of the door when surely it was easier to leap from the window and fly away or levitate through the ceiling? Then Kavan realised.

For a moment, he lay back on the bed as Harben

disappeared, bitter tears coursing silently down his cheeks, before the crash of the gates flying open roused him into action. Before he gave himself up to his fate, he had to make sure Harben got away safely.

He dressed quickly, swaying with dizziness as he did so and made his way out of the room, clutching at the wall for support as he descended the spiral staircase which swam before his eyes, almost missing his footing several times.

He entered the great hall. Voices sounded below, the stampede of feet as the villagers spilled up the stairs towards him. He grabbed a crossbow from the armoury and loaded it with a bolt before he fled across the hall and down the stairs leading to his dungeons. The first people entered the hall behind him just as he vanished.

All the cells were open as he had requested, and he descended into the dank bowels of the castle, torches on the wall lighting his way. Harben was up ahead, running from cell to cell, slow because he did not know which room he sought, unlike Kavan, who knew that Ophion was in cell number eight.

Harben was saving Ophion instead, although he had had the chance to save Kavan. Kavan's heart split completely asunder.

Harben darted into cell number eight and a cry of

horror echoed down the corridor.

Kavan ran to the door and was confronted with a scene which made him shudder down to his very soul. Pinned writhing to the ground was Ophion, his tunic torn away, strangled cries for help escaping him.

Above him crouched the vampire Akiva, lifting his head to smirk at Harben with a blood-stained mouth and pale blue eyes of indescribable evil. He stopped the other vampire in his tracks by putting two hands around the neck of the half-dead Ophion and lifting an eyebrow in a mocking manner, making it clear what he was going to do if Harben came any closer.

Then Akiva's eyes flickered to Kavan and his crimson lips pulled back into a snarl. With one vicious twist of both hands, a crack split the air. Ophion dropped lifelessly to the ground.

Harben screamed.

The fact that Akiva was a vampire did not factor into Kavan's decision. Nor did Ophion's death unduly concern him. Akiva had hurt Harben badly and for that, he must be punished.

He raised his crossbow and shot the vampire right through the heart. Akiva fell back hissing. A fountain of blood erupted from his mouth. A gurgling noise emitted as he slowly choked on it. His eyes went glassy and he

stopped moving.

Harben ran to Ophion and fell to his knees, pulling the mortal into his arms, cradling his head against his chest, eyes closed, blood tears dripping into his hair.

Kavan watched helplessly. "You must go," he said urgently, as footsteps descended into the dungeon. "Please."

Harben looked up at him with eyes dull with pain and suffering. He lowered a kiss to Ophion's dead lips. Then he let his mortal lover slowly slide from his arms and stood up.

He walked over to Kavan so purposefully that the king shook with apprehension. He took Kavan's face in his hands and pressed the lightest of kisses to his mouth. Harben let him go and stepped toward the door. As he did so, he unfastened his tunic and let it fall behind him to the floor, exposing his wings, which quivered slowly and started to flex.

"Harben," Kavan said desperately behind him. He wanted to prolong the moment forever, even though the footsteps in the corridor were almost upon them.

The vampire turned around to face him as the first villagers arrived at the cell door. Kavan, eyes fixed on the leader, the scruffy man who had accosted him at his carriage, stepped towards Harben.

The leader of the group raised his crossbow, aiming at the vampire's back. Kavan pulled Harben into a hard embrace, turning him swiftly around as he did so, his own back offered to the villagers.

The bolt knocked all the breath from him as it slammed into him, but there was not as much pain as he had imagined there might be. It was an initial sting, followed by a steady ache. He fell forwards onto Harben, his legs giving way, so the vampire gripped him hard to keep him upright, moaning softly.

The same serenity overtook Kavan as when he had made love to Harben earlier. He was in the vampire's arms and his life was slowly leaking from him, his vision fading fast, his limbs heavy and unresponsive.

"Harben," he breathed with a smile on his face. "I love you."

Chapter Seventeen

Holding Kavan hard, Harben stood motionless as the villager with the crossbow once more raised his weapon and smirked, the bolt aiming right at him. “Two for the price of one. The king and his pet.”

Harben closed his eyes, held Kavan close and concentrated on performing a very old trick he had not used in a long time. He disappeared from the cell. He reappeared in the cell next door. The villagers yelled in frustration. Thundering footsteps poured down the stairs. He smelled burning. The castle was alight.

Lying against the wall a few feet away was the body of Cesare, the jailer, his head separated from his neck, blue eyes wide open. A trick of the flickering shadows cast an almost sinister grin across his mouth. Harben could not have imagined a more fitting end for the surly, sadistic keeper of the dungeons.

He looked down at the face of the king and traced his cheek with his lips, savouring the velvety feel of the cooling skin. He had no idea why he had ever thought he could leave Kavan, not now. He could not survive without the king, nor did he want to. He would save Kavan from the fate he had brought on himself, even if it meant dying for him.

Once more he concentrated and this time moved himself to the entrance hall of the castle. This was empty, most of the crowd swarming within the castle itself, but right there above the doorway, a man in a silver pointed hat speckled with stars and a purple cloak hung by a length of rope. He gently swayed in the evening breeze, head at an odd angle to his neck and shoulders, tongue protruding from swollen blue lips.

Harben closed his eyes at the fate of the man who had always treated him with the ultimate kindness. Who were the barbarians here, Kavan or his villagers?

He stepped out into the night air. He shook his wings, allowing them to unfold, and with the dying king in his arms, he rose into the dark sky.

Kavan came back to brief consciousness when Harben alighted on the shore of a lake. He sat on the ground, cradling the profusely bleeding man in his arms.

Kavan's lashes flickered up, and he smiled. Harben's blood tears fell on the king's face, but Kavan only smiled ever more serenely.

"Don't cry," he told his lover in a whisper, "let me go."

"I can't," Harben said, just like he had said not so long ago that he couldn't kill the king. He lowered his head with a whimper of torment and plunged his teeth into Kavan's neck.

Kavan sighed, his head falling back, hands clutching weakly at Harben. "My love," he said as he died. "My one true love."

* * * *

Lucius uncurled himself from Eachan and made his way downstairs to answer the hammering at the door. Considering Kavan was the only one who knew where they lived, he was not as afraid as he should have been. Not anymore. He was undead and he had the strength of ten men. What was there to fear?

Answering the door, he was confronted with the vampire Harben. He scowled immediately, unwelcome memories warring within him of torturing and burning the creature he was now the same as.

Harben carried a man slung over his shoulder, a man so tall and muscular, that there was no mistaking who he was, even before Lucius saw the golden eyes and satanic face.

“What in God’s name are you doing?” Lucius demanded.

“Let me in,” Harben said. “I need sanctuary. The sun is almost risen.”

Lucius’ lip curled in disgust. “How dare you bring that man into my house.”

Before Harben could reply, a soft voice said behind Lucius, “Let him in Lucius. He is my oldest friend.”

Lucius turned around, glowering at Eachan. “Have you forgotten what Kavan did to you?”

“He hasn’t,” Harben growled, “just like he hasn’t forgotten what *you* did to him either Lucius and yet he forgives you.”

Lucius reddened. “And you forgive Kavan, do you?” he snarled at Harben. “He held you prisoner for a month and yet you still want him?”

Harben made no reply, but Eachan moved Lucius impatiently aside and gestured for Harben to come in. The other vampire did so, following Eachan to the parlour where he lay Kavan down on the chaise longue.

Lucius stood silently at the door. The king did not

breathe, and his skin carried the waxy, blue tinge of death. With any luck, he really was dead.

Harben turned to look at Eachan. "I knew you would be here," he said softly.

Eachan had told Lucius that he and Harben had used the house as a hideaway for many years. Eachan smiled gently and embraced his friend. The sting of jealousy was strong in Lucius' breast. The two vampires had history he could never be a part of. Harben was Eachan's creator, and they had been lovers.

Eachan drew back, looking at Harben, smoothing some dark hair from his pale face. "Come," he said, "you must rest. Bring Kavan to the bedroom."

Once more, Harben scooped up the newest vampire of their group. Lucius remained where he was as the two ascended the stairs. Their conversation reached him loud and clear from the bedroom at the back of the house.

"Are you sure about this?"

"I know he wants me. He wants *this*."

"Then I'm happy for you."

Lucius heard the soft kiss Eachan planted somewhere on Harben's face. Cursing his vampire hearing, he drowned in impotent fury.

He was already buried back beneath the quilt when

Eachan stripped off his robe and joined him. His back was turned and his partner moved up close behind him but did not try to touch him.

“Lucius,” he said quietly, with a tone of rebuke in his voice. “Harben is in love with Kavan the way I am with you. Do you understand that?”

Lucius did not reply. He was too angry and disgusted and busy fighting the inner demons that he hated more than any king in the world.

“He is king no longer,” Eachan continued. “He is one of us and must be accepted as such.”

Still Lucius did not speak.

“Would you rather I sleep in another room?”

Again Lucius childishly remained silent, so Eachan slid from between the sheets, pulled on his robe again and left the room.

* * * *

Harben and Kavan were beneath the covers of the bed, naked, the wound on Kavan’s back dressed. Harben told himself he wasn’t a necrophiliac as he held the stiff, ice-cold body in his arms and waited for it to come back to life. Kavan was taking more time than Eachan ever had. Had something gone wrong? Had Kavan’s heart actually

stopped beating before Harben had bitten him? The king's skin chilled him to the marrow as he lay shivering and praying to whichever god would listen to a damned soul.

As he held Kavan close and pressed his lips to his temple, he allowed himself finally to cry over the loss of Ophion. He had loved the mortal in his own way, even if it wasn't quite the way Ophion had wanted. The fact that he had met his death at the hands of Akiva, with whom Harben had always shared bad blood, was too much to bear. He wept for Ophion and for the kind magician, Bela. His blood tears fell onto the king's face and rolled down into his half-open mouth.

He was so consumed with grief that he didn't notice Kavan's lips twitch, the slow appearance of the very tip of his tongue at his lip, licking slowly, the fluttering of his eyelids. He only held the fallen king tighter and begged him, "Come back, oh God, don't leave me, *please...*"

Harben was startled when Kavan opened his eyes, the pupils shrinking in the candlelight, the irises glowing with breath-taking gold and green. He stared with breath caught in his throat as Kavan's face became slowly pink and his skin warmed. The king smiled gently and a hand came up to cradle Harben's head.

“Am I dead?”

Harben nodded.

Kavan only smiled wider, the dimples sunk deep around his sensual mouth. He sighed and pressed his lips to Harben's. Harben clung to him as they kissed sweetly and softly, bodies pressing together, limbs entwining.

Harben manoeuvred Kavan beneath him. They made love, sealing the arrangement which would last for the rest of time. And as Harben moved into the king and they both approached climax, he took Kavan by the neck and brought his face up, pressing it against his throat. “Drink from me,” he told his lover.

* * * *

All this was too much for Kavan. He was alive but he was dead and he was with Harben. Harben had saved him and Kavan had to be the man Harben expected him to be from now on. He had to be that man Harben had somehow seen deep down inside.

He inhaled the scent of Harben's skin. A light sweat dewed it. He nuzzled it a moment with lips and nose, licking gently, until suddenly, a flash of something akin to sexual pleasure came upon him, a doubling of the ecstasy of his lover being inside him. His mouth flooded

with saliva. Control was lost as his lips parted, his fangs lengthened. He bit Harben on the neck, teeth smoothly penetrating soft flesh.

His lover groaned and suddenly, Kavan's mouth was full with the substance which would now keep him alive.

He was so shocked he almost choked, swallowing quickly, and as he did, he tasted. Harben's blood was like the thickest, sweetest honey he could ever imagine. It slid down his throat like liquid fire, setting each cell in his body ablaze. With that first mouthful he came, whimpering in ecstasy as he spurted helplessly into the hand around him. Harben followed, filling Kavan with his essence. His lover thrust jerkily into him for some seconds before his muscles relaxed and he dropped limply onto the king.

Kavan only took three mouthfuls before his stomach was full and he was so drowsy with satiation and pleasure, he almost passed out. Slowly and delicately, he eased his teeth from his lover's neck and let his head drop back, groaning.

Harben laughed softly, moving to his side, placing his head on Kavan's chest, his arms around him as they fell into the deepest of sleeps.

* * * *

It was only ten minutes, with Eachan drifting slowly into troubled, unhappy sleep when the bed shifted beside him, warm skin pressing against him and hands encircling him.

“Forgive me,” his immortal lover breathed, no longer the wicked truth-seeker of old but a man reformed and repentant. “I love you.”

Eachan lifted his head with a sigh and Lucius kissed him. He had never expected to have Lucius as his soulmate when he had changed him. He imagined Lucius would denounce him, perhaps even run back to the king and take his punishment voluntarily but no, Lucius had loved and worshipped him from that very first moment. He had been strong, sure and dependant. His one moment of faltering had come at the arrival of Harben and Kavan. And Eachan could forgive him that.

* * * *

The night was silent and warm. The ink black sky glittered with stars. The four vampires sat on the paved area, overlooking the rows of seedlings Lucius had been working so hard on.

It was the second night of their arrival and Kavan was, for the most part, silent and contemplative, serene and happy in a way he had never been, happy to be cradled in Harben's arms, his lover sitting behind him.

Part of his silence was, of course, embarrassment at being here with Lucius and Eachan, after all that had happened between them. He was humbled at now being one of them, the youngest of the group and an outsider as far as they were concerned. But nonetheless, he was here with Harben. Nothing else mattered.

Despite sleeping all day, he was drowsy as he sat there, having made love with Harben only half an hour previously, the wounds on his neck from his lover taking his blood slowly closing up with every passing minute.

Harben had told him about Bela and the formerly hard-hearted king, whose heart had been set melting by the vampire from that very first day, had cried over his magician until no more tears would come. He had even asked if Harben had tried to make him undead and was told it had been too late.

Eachan and Lucius were sitting in a chair close by, Eachan on Lucius' lap. Lucius had not spoken one word to Kavan since he had arrived, but he was saying plenty to Eachan. Every word reached Kavan to his astonishment, even though they were delivered in the

barest of whispers. Each one of his senses was heightened to extraordinary levels and all these combined to make his physical unions with Harben even more intense than previously.

Lucius planted kisses on Eachan's neck and whispered all sorts of poetic things Kavan would never have imagined him capable of.

The things he had made Lucius do to Eachan in his name. The innocent bystanders who had lost their lives as he had waged his own private war.

He shuddered, closing his eyes, his hands tightening on the ones resting on his stomach. Harben pressed a kiss behind his ear and held him tighter. Kavan didn't speak. He had no need to.

His heart was filled with calm and peace. He did not care how long he would have to stay with Lucius and Eachan or what ill Lucius might wish him, because he wished the two vampires nothing but happiness. After all, he was the same as them now. They were blood of his blood.

He sank back against Harben, resting his head on his shoulder, letting his lover's warmth drive out the cold inside him forever. The vampire encircled Kavan's chest with both arms, holding him tight and Kavan turned his head so their lips could meet.

He did not dwell on dark thoughts of what this existence would be like now and how he would be running from men like himself for all of eternity. He only dwelled on the fact that his new life had begun and it would be happier and purer, despite the creature he had become. He had a second chance, and with the love of his life by his side, he fully intended to take it.

He turned around to face Harben so he could look into the hazel eyes. His heightened vampire vision showed him sparks of shimmering gold and emerald in the irises, his lover even more stunning to Kavan than he had previously been.

Harben smiled gently, tracing the curve of the king's cheek with his fingertips. "All we have is this and all we have is each other," he told Kavan softly. "Is it enough?"

Kavan nodded. "It is more than enough."

From the corner of his eye, he saw Eachan leaning down to kiss Lucius, the ex-truth-seeker's hands on his waist.

Kavan drew Harben to him with hands not worthy to touch the vampire. He kissed his lover with tender care, for despite his nature, he was now filled only with love.

Love which would last forever.

About the Author

Scarlet likes cats and hats and firmly believes that the only thing better than one attractive man is two attractive men.