

# *All Hallow's Eve*

CAROLYN FAULKNER



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Carolyn Faulkner

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# Chapter One

Someone was suckling avidly at her nipples, making her body writhe in rhythm with those demanding lips. But she found she couldn't move very well. Something was restricting her that didn't feel bed-like – or restraint like, if she was honest enough with herself to admit that she knew what restraints felt like, and that was only sometimes.

Why couldn't she move like she wanted to? Her eyes were still closed; she was pleasantly drowsy and didn't feel in the mood to open them, but she was lying sideways, so her bottom arm was completely useless, and her upper arm was pressed rather tightly against something hard and unyielding that was nowhere near as interesting as a hard, male body. It felt like some sort of plush material with something firm backing it.

She thought she heard a faint chuckle against her breast, but couldn't quite be sure, and she found it didn't much matter to her right now. All that mattered was that he didn't stop what he was doing.

“So eager, my pet. We have lifetimes together.”

Lifetimes? She was given to exaggeration herself, but lifetimes?

“Yes, Eve, lifetimes.”

Suddenly, she felt the constraints disappear, and it felt like they were in a comfortable bed. She sat up, just to test her theory, and had no problems doing so. But when she opened her eyes, she couldn't see anything; the room was literally pitch-black. For some reason, that, above all else, made her nervous. And that nervousness compounded as she tried to remember who she was with and how she'd gotten there.

Firm, full lips touched hers as he breathed slowly into her mouth, saying, but not with his mouth, “Relax. You have nothing to fear.”

Literally against her will – and her better judgment – she found herself letting go of her fears, knowing that she shouldn't. Every alarm bell she owned was trying to go off, but he wasn't letting them concern her.

Of course, he'd said she didn't have to worry. But then he'd ruined it by adding very deliberately, in a deep, rumbling tone, “Yet.”

Somehow, all that almost threatening tone managed to do was make her nipples harder, and her nether lips wetter.

“Excellent. Your body knows to trust me, even if your stubborn mind doesn't.”

Was he reading her mind? Was that how had he managed to kiss her so deeply, claiming her mouth in a ruthless yet somehow still gentle manner, and yet telling her not to be concerned at the same time? It was weird and kind of creepy.

She heard a sigh. “You modern women think entirely too much.”

Modern women?

Before she could get any further with that thought, though, she found her wrists guided carefully over her head. The bed came up to meet her back as he bathed those sweet, slightly rasped nipples, then left them to the tender care of his strong fingers.

But then how were her wrists being held captive if his hands were on her breasts?

“Because I'm a blood sucker, Eve, as you so quaintly put it at one point last night. I'm a very old vampire, and you and I will be together for eternity.”

She wanted to sit up, but couldn't. She wanted to be terrified, but couldn't.

Eve felt him move up, away from where he'd been trailing tiny bite-kisses down her tummy. "Look at me."

The room was so dark; she wasn't exactly sure where to look, until she saw two red eyes glowing down at her. Eve swallowed hard, but couldn't seem to take her eyes away. "I can't remember anything. Who – who are you?"

"I'm your neighbor, Marcus."

Her neighbor. Her neighbor! That sexy man she rarely saw, except, when she thought about it, at night.

"Thank you," he teased.

"For what?"

"You said I was sexy."

"I did not. I thought it."

She felt those massive shoulders shrug. "Same thing between us now."

Eve swallowed. "You know what I'm thinking?"

"Pretty much, and I'll teach you to do the same with me, eventually." For now, though, she would only read those of his thoughts that he allowed her to.

"Can I sit up?" It grated on her to have to ask, but something, generated somehow by him, she was sure, still held her wrists captive above her head.

His eyes glowed that much redder, just for a moment. "Am I hurting you?"

She wanted to squirm, but it just came out as a sexy, slow wiggle. She wanted to lie, but then he'd know she'd thought that... "No."

She knew without seeing it that his smile wasn't pleasant. "A wise choice, love. Lying to me would be hazardous to the health of some very delicate portions of your anatomy, not that you're going to be able to get away with it very often, since I will know most everything you feel and think. And I'm not going to let you go just yet. I'm nowhere near finished with you."

Eve wanted to cry. She wanted to scream. But more so than anything else, she wanted to leave.

"I'll help you remember, but there'll be a price."

Eve knew, somehow, that she didn't want to know what that price would be.

As he spoke, memories played like a movie in her mind. "Last night was Halloween, and I came home and saw you giving out candy to the neighborhood kids."

"You were dressed like a vampire."

"Can I help it if I enjoy the irony?" He lit a bedside candle without getting up, and she saw that he had the grace to look sheepish. She also saw that his eyes had become an intense, bottomless black. He was the most classically handsome man she'd ever seen, but not very vampirish. He wasn't even particularly pale. Weren't vampires supposed to be strikingly pale, especially if they hadn't fed?

Eve's hand went immediately to her neck, and she felt the two small puncture wounds there. As soon as she remembered them, they began a painful throb in time with her increasingly rapid pulse. Marcus leaned down to kiss them better, knowing that they were burning and itching and hurting, as Eve struggled to get away from him, with literally no success. It seemed her struggle was entirely within her mind, because her body wasn't obeying its commands in the least.

Although he felt her inner turmoil, Marcus didn't explain what he was doing. He simply did as he had intended, placing an excruciatingly tender kiss on those two aching spots, laving

her with his tongue, knowing that it would both help them heal and alleviate any lingering pain she felt.

She was going to feel pain, all right, but not there.

He continued with the story of how she had ended up in his arms. “I decided to come over to talk to you after I’d divested myself of my... costume. I’ve had a hard time avoiding you, and last night I was particularly vulnerable to you.”

“Because it was Halloween?” she asked.

Marcus chuckled. “No, love, Halloween is a human holiday. I’d just been a while without sustenance, which is my own fault. I forget how much power you have over me.”

Eve snorted. “You’re not the one lying here unable to move, unable to feel the fear that would be natural in this situation, with no memory of someone turning you into a vampire!”

He wasn’t going to correct her about being a vampire. There was no turning back from where they were, but he wasn’t going to muddy the waters of her mind with the technicalities right now. “You invited me into your house –“

“Which I will revoke as soon as possible,” she ground out. Apparently, his alleviation of her fear didn’t extend to anger. It felt good to be angry at him.

Another technicality he’d deal with later. Hollywood hadn’t been any help to his kind. At least, in the old days, everyone knew and agreed upon the basic myth for his culture: no reflection in a mirror, couldn’t appear in the daylight without burning, and craved human blood. Nice, neat, easy to remember rules. But now, no one seemed to agree about any of those rules, and anything went. Vampires were everywhere doing everything; they were private investigators and cops and doctors, going out in the daylight if they stayed in the shadows or owned a particular ring or some other such nonsense.

Not that he paid much attention to that kind of thing, but it was sometimes hard to avoid – especially when they seemed to be in every movie or TV program, and usually portrayed as in love with a human. Considering the youth of most of the protagonists, that would have been an impossibility. Younger vampires viewed humans as food. That was it. There was no resisting it, and there were no niceties. Humans were prey.

But the older one became, the more that overwhelming predatory need eased, and he was just about as old as vampires got. He was an extreme rarity, to have lived so long, and it had taken more than a thousand years for the blood lust to even begin to ease. There were many vampires around, but only a handful was as old as he.

“You showed me your house, and you were so genuinely sorry that you hadn’t been a very good neighbor to me.” Strong emotions and desires were extremely attractive to him, since he had very few of them left, and this lovely woman simply reeked of them. She truly was appalled at herself for not having brought him something as a housewarming gift.

But what had intrigued him about her from the first time he’d seen her in passing, even before they’d introduced themselves, was her desire. She lusted in more than her heart, this one. It was as plain as the nose on her face. She was the most blatantly sexual being he’d ever encountered – vampire or human – and he known then that she was the one.

He had to have her.

But, having lived so long, delayed gratification had become almost an art. They’d lived next door to each other, exchanging the usual pleasantries (but no more than that) for three years now. A blink of the eye for him, but a third of one of maybe eight decades for her. He teased himself with her; made sure they crossed paths frequently, allowing himself to be tantalized by her at every possible turn.

It was interesting for him to note that he was not as strong as he'd thought he was. He would have sworn there wasn't an impulsive bone left in his body. He couldn't afford one. He was careful with what he called his life, planning each inevitable move carefully, having learned well from previous disastrous situations where he'd barely managed to survive.

But she was it. He had no doubt. He hadn't felt connected to any one or any thing in more centuries than he'd like to admit. But this tiny blonde woman called to him innocently, making the blood surge almost painfully through his body, settling in the most obvious of areas.

In some ways, in all the important ways, he was still a man, even after all this time. Merely gazing at her had him fully, achingly erect. Being in her presence made him want to ravage her as he would have when he was still human, and he was delighted to find himself struggling not to do exactly that.

She was a challenge, one that he intended to win.

Suddenly aware that he'd drifted into his own thoughts for an abnormal amount of time, judging by the way she was looking up at him, he continued, "You offered me candy, which I declined, but we had a glass of what I believe you referred to as 'rotgut' wine. It came out of a box?" The very idea was repellant to him, as was the wine itself, although he hadn't let her see that.

Despite herself, Eve had to smile. Her sisters teased her unmercifully about the box of wine she usually kept in her fridge. It wasn't as if she didn't like good wines, she did. But she was okay with the cheap stuff, too, especially since it was just her most of the time.

She was feeling a bit better about the situation, which she wasn't at all sure wasn't something he was imposing on her, but it helped that her memories were unfolding as he spoke.

She remembered giving him the wine, and that their fingers touched. Shouldn't she have noticed that his fingers were ice cold? Instead, she remembered, that she'd felt like she'd received an electric shock that settled the most in her nether regions and her bottom. Her entire body convulsed almost orgasmically, and she almost dropped her wine. He'd been very gentlemanly and stood up to surround her and steady her somehow without touching her again. His mere presence seemed to shore her up.

He'd taken the wine away from her and guided her to the pretty floral sofa in the adjoining small living room. "You look faint."

She'd wanted to ask him if he'd felt the same thing, but decided against it, not wanting to appear crazy so soon in their relationship. He'd find out that she was neurotic enough without letting on that she'd felt something extraordinary when they touched.

Men were not Eve's forte, and that was a fact she'd resigned herself to. She'd never married, and, at thirty-five, had pretty much given up on the idea, not that she'd been anywhere near as concerned about whether or not she had a husband as her mother had been. She lived alone, but was almost never lonely. She had a handful of friends, all of them female, and almost all of them unmarried, most without kids. And, as far as she knew, none of them gay, including herself.

She'd long since given up looking for the right man. A couple of messy broken engagements in her twenties had cured her of that. She was alone, and that was fine with her.

"I'm fine," she replied, more embarrassed than anything else.

He sat down next to her, but not touching her, and reached out to touch a strand of her hair. Even that seemed to conduct some sort of current that settled with a rising warmth between her legs that was just short of uncomfortable. "Are you a natural blonde?" he asked, wondering if she'd tell him the truth.



It was a crude question, coming from a man who had seemed to have such a courtly manner. Frowning, Eve leaned away from him immediately, tugging her hair out of his fingers.

Before she could reprimand him for being so forward, he apologized sincerely. "I'm sorry. I grew up in Europe, did I say something wrong?" Being the poor, ignorant foreigner usually worked well, probably because there was such a grain of truth to it. He didn't follow current culture much, but had realized as soon as the words were out of his mouth that they would make her think he was asking if the carpet matched the drapes.

When he put it that way, it would have been petty of her to have taken offense. "That question is a bit of a double entendre. But the simple answer is that yes, this is my natural hair color."

She earned points right there for her honesty, but also by not making the situation worse and backing off from her anger. He really hadn't been trying to ask anything inappropriate; he just preferred women in as natural a state as possible. Dyed hair was an abomination as far as he was concerned.

She looked up at him, and the moment their eyes met, the throbbing in her already swollen clit doubled. Eve was trying, with varying degrees of success, not to squirm, but she desperately wanted to clutch her nether regions with her hand, like a little girl that needed a restroom.

But that was definitely not what she needed.

His eyes crinkled with amusement for the most fleeting of seconds, then settled onto – and it seemed, into – hers. "What do you want, Eve?" He placed the emphasis very carefully on the want.

Had his lips moved with that question, or was she just so flustered, lusting after a man she barely knew, that she hadn't paid attention. Who paid attention to that kind of thing, anyway? Of course his lips had moved. She heard the question, so he must've spoken it.

The question seemed to melt into her brain and, more insidiously, her body, and she felt compelled to answer it more honestly than she might, under the circumstances. "I want to be taken."

## Chapter Two

Marcus was aware that he walked a very thin line here. This woman was new to him, and he could see a lot of what was in her mind, but not all of it. Granted, he was urging her to answer him, but, for now, the only push he was giving her was to be completely honest in her answer, without allowing her any prudish self-censorship.

Taken had a lot of possibilities.

“Tell me more.”

She was uneasy about the subject matter, but the truth shone through her words. “I want to be owned. I want to be free. I want to be tested and rewarded and punished and treasured.”

He couldn’t have put it better himself.

Marcus cupped her chin in his hand, feeling the shudder that radiated through her body at his touch. “And you shall be, love. You shall be.”

Even his mere breath on her skin set it to tingling. She was just about as close to orgasm as she’d ever been, and he’d barely touched her.

His smile did more to jangle her nerves than soothe them. “Not yet, Eve. You’ll have to earn those pleasures.”

Earn pleasure? She was just about ready to burst with it!

“And if you disobey,” he interjected into her mind, low and slow, with sinister intent, “you’ll be... punished.”

It was that last word and how he said it while inside her head that pushed her over the edge, as, she came to suspect, he’d known it would. Pleasure exploded in her most sensitive area first in great waves that made her glad she was sitting down, although the natural pressure sitting applied to her violently contracting parts only added to the edges of her complete bliss.

Marcus had to admit to himself at that point that he was dangerously close to completion himself as he experienced the orgasm from within her mind. She came with her whole self, holding nothing back – no guilt at it, no self-deprecation, none of the prudish tendencies that he’d been amazed to find that females in this so called liberated society still seemed to cling to. He could feel the way the gooseflesh rose on her arms almost painfully, how even her scalp and the bottoms of her feet tingled. Her toes were curled, legs shuddering with it.

He had to swallow hard and consciously pull himself a bit back from her, with a reluctance that bordered on desperation. He’d never met a woman who was so whole heartedly aroused. She was a natural sensualist, and everything she liked, from what he could tell from his first travels within her mind, was exactly what he desired in a companion.

He had waited so long to have finally found her, and in the most unlikely of places. Neither of them would have to be alone ever again.

Later, he’d enforce his rules better, and not let her revel in her stolen pleasure. He had told her not to come, and she had. That had earned her a correction, and he didn’t much believe in putting that type of thing off.

So, before she got anywhere near recovering from the most violent orgasm she’d ever experienced, he had her plain-Jane jeans and white cotton panties down around her ankles, bending her over the arm of the couch they’d been sitting on together seconds ago, with one of the throw pillows beneath her hips, causing her feet to dangle uselessly, unable to touch the

floor. The belt that snicked its way out of his pants wasn't the one he would have preferred to use – it was too light by far and narrower than he liked - but any implement in a storm.

The explosion of that strip of leather across the backs of her thighs had her screaming as if he'd set her on fire – and he had. Her hands reached back immediately, but he'd moved forward quickly, so that the only thing she felt was him.

A part of him he hadn't intended to introduce to her quite yet.

Mortified and still feeling scorched from that first stripe, she retracted her hands, but not far enough for him.

"Fold your arms behind you." It was a deceptively soft command.

He could hear her breathing heavily, but her arms didn't move.

"I can help you, but that'll make the punishment worse." Marcus leaned forward over her, easily dwarfing her and deliberately poking himself up against her bottom in a calculatedly threatening manner, placing his lips next to her ear, which was also wonderfully close to the pulse in her throat. "You must submit to me, Eve. Be a good girl and do as you're told."

She knew he was actually speaking to her; she could feel his warm breath moving her hair, but she could still feel his presence in her brain, too. It was absurd to think that this man read spanking stories, but what he was saying to her was exactly what she liked to read about online.

"It's exactly what should be said to you. You need a firm hand. Like you said, you want to be owned. I want to own you." He didn't add that he already did own her to a certain extent, even without having bitten her yet. But he didn't want to raise what he was sure would be those particular alarms quite yet.

"I said I wanted to be free," she countered breathlessly, her body still pulsating and contracting, despite the line of fire from his belt.

"You said much more than that. And being owned is being free. I want to be the man that takes you - gives you everything you want, and some things you don't even know you want yet."

She must be dreaming. Somehow, she must've just had too much bad wine, and this was the resulting dream. She'd wakeup if she tried hard enough.

A long, low yowl broke from deep in her throat when he leathered her again, this time across the crest of her cheeks. Another followed after that, and then they began coming so quickly she couldn't begin to deal with them. This was no dream. She'd had lustful, bdsm-ish dreams before, but none of them had hurt like this!

While he was still strapping her, she heard him say into her mind, "Don't make me repeat myself, Eve."

She barely had the presence of mind to do it; her whole body was as involved in the pain she was enduring just as it had been caught in the thralls of her ecstasy mere moments ago. Eve had allowed only one man in her life to spank her. He was the only person she'd ever confessed that need to, and, unfortunately, she'd chosen the wrong person.

Despite what she'd tried to explain to the man whose ring she wore, Nathan just couldn't seem to grasp the psychology of what she needed. He'd spank her, but it was obvious that, for him, it was just play – a means of softening her up for sex.

She didn't really need much softening; her sex drive had often surpassed her lovers'. She needed someone who understood that rules were rules and that, even at her age, someone should be holding her to account.

And it seemed like this man knew it without all of those inevitably awkward, messy explanations that just made her wish that she could be happy with vanilla sex.

So she forced her arms to fold behind her back, and was instantly rewarded for it.

Marcus knew then that he'd made the right decision in not forcing her to do as he'd asked. In some cases, she needed to make the choice herself. "Very good."

His praise echoed through the entirety of her being just as readily and completely as everything else had, making her feel inordinately proud for her effort. But it was short lived. She heard him unzip his black jeans, and she knew from the size of the package he'd already pressed against her vulnerable rump that what he was revealing wasn't of a size she was used to.

She heard him chuckle softly, but became distracted from his amusement when his big hand splayed on the small of her back, gently rubbing and advancing her shirt up her back until he encountered her bra. "There'll be no more of these," he growled, dispensing with it without having dislodged her shirt in the least.

Half-clad women had always been arousing to him. He loved having her in exactly the position she was in – bent over, legs spread unnaturally wide to accommodate both of his between them, bottom well in the air, and multiple crisscrossing lines of his own correction branding her bottom and the backs of her legs with livid, red wheals. She was bare from the backs of her ankles to just above her scapulas, those arms still neatly folded over her rumpled shirt.

He'd been hard since he'd first seen her years ago, and he'd not allowed himself ease of any sort since then. He was more than ready to take her, in more ways than one.

But this was still a punishment, and he intended to remind her of that. Marcus spread his legs, which in turn forced her to, also. Every delight she owned was forced open to him, and he wasn't about to deny himself the pleasures displayed so wonderfully before him. When he first cupped her in his hand, he nearly echoed her own groan. The human warmth and wetness, the blatant evidence of just how much this was turning her on had him fighting for control as he never had in his life. Her little clit, which was still untouched, despite her previous climax, was swollen to amazing proportions, standing upright and begging for his undivided attention.

But he only dabbled there for a very short time; he could tell that she was already just about ready to explode again. "Don't compound one punishment on top of another, Eve," he warned with a growl. "And don't make the mistake of thinking that I wouldn't give you two punishments in a row, because I would never hesitate to do so. You're not to come unless you've been given permission."

Eve, who had been resting her cheek on the couch cushion, arched up at that pronouncement, but found there was little else she could do. She couldn't move, and she knew that it was due to her exposed position rather than anything he was planting in her mind.

"That's right. You're already mine, Eve, whether or not you're willing to admit it. I'm going to be punishing you and testing you and taking you and pleasuring you for an eternity." He dipped his quill in to the fountain of her pleasure, coating it in a manner he might not when they'd been together for a while. Then he found her bottom flower, and placed himself against it, leaning forward enough to threaten her with it as he simultaneously said, "Just like this," and drove himself into her unyieldingly, unmercifully.

She clenched around him, trying to get him out, screaming for him to stop or pull out or somehow ease the pain of stretching around the abnormal girth of him, but there would be no room for disobedience in their life together, and he wanted her to learn that in a way she'd always remember.

This time was purely for him, although he knew that, given her erotic tendencies, she would glean a certain amount of enjoyment from it, too. But he hadn't counted on just how much. She was very uncomfortable at first, there was no denying it. She tried to writhe and twist away, but got nowhere. She had to bend over and present her red, scored bottom to him, and take what he was giving her, even as the rough material of his jeans scraped against those angry welts. Eve had to try to ignore that and relax around him, because he was pumping into her with deep, broad strokes, each backward motion pulling him entirely out of her, then driving himself like a spike back into her, each plunge a new rape of her relatively virginal backside.

"You are mine. There's no going back from this. I own you." Each word was emphasized physically by a devastating thrust as he whispered furtively into her ear. "You have my permission to come, but don't get used to it."

He gave her permission because he knew she wouldn't be able to handle what was going to happen to her in a few seconds. His mouth moved from her ear to trail down to the middle of her neck, to that point where her carotid was the closest to the surface of her soft skin. It called to him, that ancient, rhythmic song he knew so well, and that played into his sexual desire like a hand into a glove. His fangs, which he hadn't had cause to use in centuries, descended with an especially piquant ache which only added to his out of control desire.

By that point, Marcus was beyond himself. He was almost beyond even his own iron control. He heard her squeal when his fangs pierced her, but it was distant, like the buzz of an insect. All he could experience was the warm flow of her blood into his mouth and down his throat, and the ache of his cock as he claimed her ruthlessly, making no accommodations for her delicate humanity.

His violent pinnacle triggered her own as he'd known it would. She was powerless to resist him, and with their blood connection, what he felt was translated to her with no shields, nothing to diminish the full blown ecstasy of a vampire's orgasm. He could feel her spasm around him, which only served to drive him even crazier. Only by an act of supreme will was he able to keep himself from completely savaging her, but having finally found the love of his long life, he wouldn't allow himself to be the cause of her death.

He actually took very little of her blood, really, preferring not to tempt himself too much in that vein. He was still rock solid within her, still spilling himself into her, caught in the throes of unimaginable ecstasy, as she was.

Eve was floating. She had felt every little bit of their culmination, but her mind had set her aside from it, somehow, in a self-preservation move that probably helped her retain what little sanity she'd ever had a claim to. A pure human mind wasn't meant to know such joy.

"But you're no longer pure."

His voice called her back from her self-imposed exile, and she found she no longer cared whether he was actually speaking or just projecting his thoughts into her mind.

"Good. There really isn't any difference, anyway."

He forced her to come back to her body, the agony of the condition of her backside, and the ecstasy of the rest of her, moving her arms off her back and sliding slowly out of her, thoroughly enjoying her groan as he did so. It was like the cherry on top of an orgasm sundae, and set his nerves humming again with renewed pleasure.

Eve didn't have the stamina even to move out of her indelicate, humiliating position. She just lay there, entirely unable to form a coherent thought, awash with feelings she had absolutely no control over, and useless limbs that refused to obey her commands.

Marcus had rearranged his clothing while keeping a watchful eye on her. She seemed somehow paralyzed, and although that was something he intended to subject her to eventually, he wasn't doing it now. Taking pity on her in a way that he wouldn't if it involved a punishment, Marcus dressed her as if she was a child, holding her against him as he pulled her pants – minus the panties - up over her now striated bum, feeling and hearing her inhale sharply as the material abraded the welts. But that was just about the closest thing to a protest she made.

He was amazed at just how limp she was in his arms, and then he began to worry that he might have taken a bit too much blood from her, more than half out of his mind as he had been. She was slightly clammy to the touch, but definitely paler than usual. He helped her to stretch out on her side on the couch. Having had such a phenomenally strong orgasm, his abilities, both physical and mental, would need a little while to recover, so he couldn't reach into her mind to assess her condition.

“Eve, do you feel dizzy?”

At this point, she couldn't remember a time when she hadn't felt dizzy, and whispered exactly that to him.

Marcus stalked into her kitchen and opened her fridge, spotting what he wanted immediately. Then he scoured her cupboards, and found a package of double stuffed Oreos way at the back, tucked behind a package of dusty brown rice, on the top shelf.

He returned to her and had her drink a small amount of orange juice, then two cookies. She'd been weakened by him feeding on her, and needed to replenish her blood supply. She was a small woman, and, in his hunger for her, he must've overdone it.

There was no way he was ever going to allow her to stay in this house by herself in this weakened state. He was recovering his powers quickly, but not fast enough to teleport them into his bedroom. Instead, he wrapped her up in a blanket and took her into his arms. It was too late at night for Halloween revelers to still be out, but just in case, he extended what he could of his abilities to pull a cloak of invisibility around them, just long enough to get into his place.

She must not have felt well at all; Marcus had the impression that there was no way she would have been quite this complacent about staying overnight with him if she was at the top of her game. He laid her on his big, custom made bed and arranged her blanket over her. He'd been smart enough to scarf the juice and cookies from her place, but didn't fancy feeding her a bunch of junk food, so he called a friend who owned a steakhouse and asked him to send a meal over. She needed protein, and he knew she liked that restaurant; he'd seen her bringing their brightly branded doggie bags home.

Since he got preferred treatment, her dinner arrived miraculously only about fifteen minutes later. Marcus wondered which of the patrons who had bothered to drive to the restaurant was having their dinner delayed on account of him. Although the meal smelled and looked as unappetizing to him as road kill, he fed her every bite, including the slice of hot fudge drenched cheesecake he'd ordered for dessert.

“Vampire or not, how can you not like cheesecake?” she asked, her voice still a little thready, though she'd definitely regained a lot of her strength. “It's un-American.”

“I'm un-American.”

She opened her mouth eagerly for another bite. “So what are you? I mean, if I'm going to play along with this vampire thing, what's the back story?”

His mouth, which was at least as luscious as the dessert she was devouring, quirked just a little at the idea that she was just humoring him.

“Oh, come on. I’m not supposed to be skeptical? Has it been too long since you were human?”

He leaned back against the ornately carved oak headboard. “When I was human, they were much less skeptical than they’ve become.”

“And when was that?” she asked, not giving up. She loved vampire myths and lore.

“That’s probably a good thing, considering...”

“Stop doing that.”

One eyebrow rose, and that was all he needed to do to make her bottom begin throbbing even worse than it already was. “I was born in Rome in forty-four BC.”

She tried to sit up, but couldn’t quite. “Before or after Caesar’s assassination?”

He was impressed, and admitted it. “I didn’t think they taught history much any more.”

“They don’t nowadays, but they did when I was in school, and I loved it. I minored in history in college. So? Before or after?”

“Just before. My birthday translates to March first.”

“What was your family like? Were you loyal to Caesar? What was your life like? When did you become a vampire?”

She shot questions at him rapid fire, making him reveal his first real smile in decades. He actually chuckled when he said, “Slow down. If I tell you everything at once, you’ll be bored of me in a month.”

Since she was finished with dinner, having eaten every disgusting morsel, he took the tray back to the kitchen and threw the dishes into the dishwasher and started it, even though there was nowhere near a full load.

“That’s very domesticated of you,” she commented when he returned, having heard what he’d done from the bedroom, since this house, unlike hers, was based on a very open concept.

“Not really. I just can’t stand the smell of it.”

“Oh.” He leaned down and picked her up in his arms again, stopping mid-stride to ask, “Do you need to use the facilities?”

She gaped at him, answering hesitantly, “No...”

“Good.” He then walked towards a blank wall of the bedroom, and Eve would have sworn they were just going to crash into the wall, but instead they ended up in a dark, confined space that she knew she should be alarmed to find herself in.

She interrupted his narration of how she’d come to be in his house last night by yelling loudly, “I SLEPT LAST NIGHT IN A COFFIN?”

“Yes. I don’t have to sleep there anymore, and I considered just using my bed, but then I thought that you might decide to do something naughty in the middle of the night, like try to leave me, and I didn’t want to have to spend time hunting you down when I woke, so I tucked us in here.”

He was still suppressing her fear, but not her annoyance. A lot of things had happened in the past twenty-four hours that she didn’t want to scrutinize any too closely, and this was probably one of the biggest.

“And,” Marcus whispered softly into her head, “if you’ll remember, I said that you were going to have to pay a penalty to me for my assistance in recovering your memories. Do you remember that, Eve?”

She didn’t want to, but she did.

He chuckled. “Well, you have a reprieve until tomorrow night. It’s almost dawn, and, even at my age and strength, I’m not worth much during the day.” She knew he was staring directly into her eyes, although she couldn’t see a thing.

She heard but one more word, despite the fact that she desperately wanted to make sure that she didn’t end up sharing his coffin again.

“Sleep.”



## Chapter Three

for you. I'm sorry I didn't think of it before you woke up last night." He took her hand in his and kissed the back of it, as if they were in an elegant ballroom.

"Thank you."

"You won't be thanking me for long, love," he warned darkly. He rose to stand next to the bed, extending his hand imperiously towards her.

Eve paused and looked into his eyes. This man had changed her life completely, overnight. She could still feel the sting of that belt as it bit into her tender flesh, but she could just as easily relive the mind boggling bliss that had stripped away every notion she'd ever had about her own orgasms and shown her how piddling they'd been before him.

Taking his hand this time would be more of a conscious commitment to who and what he was – what they would become – and she wouldn't do it lightly.

Marcus knew the struggle that was taking place in her mind, and stood there quietly, never retracting his hand. He'd made a lot of decisions for her in the past twenty-four hours, but she needed to consent to making such a drastic change in her life.

Her fingers, when they met his, were more tentative than he would have preferred, but then she'd had a small taste of what she was facing last night, and he couldn't say he blamed her.

Before she could retract them, he clasped her fingers with his and used them to pull her against him. She was only wearing a thin white cotton t-shirt and demure white panties. He would ban clothing while they slept shortly, but for now, he didn't want her to be cold. Room temperature wasn't something he paid much attention to any more. He caught her face in his palms, brushing kisses over her forehead, her nose, and finally settling gently, undemandingly onto those generous pink lips, slanting them open just slightly, breathing only himself into her, no strings attached, with no attempt to control or influence her in the least.

She had to decide she needed this; that she needed what he could give her, and that she was willing to make the major adjustments that living with him would require. He had done his best not to intrude on her thoughts during this process, although, as time passed, he had found it harder and harder to keep himself in check.

He hadn't wanted her to come to the wrong decision, and he wasn't exactly sure what he would do if she had refused him.

...Yes, he was sure.

And he was even surer that she wouldn't have liked it.

He leaned back enough to catch her eye. "I am yours just as much as you are mine." The words reverberated in her head and where they rumbled against her chest. "I've trusted you with parts of me that I haven't exposed in centuries. With what you know about me now, you could easily kill me yourself, or have me killed." Marcus was glad to see the alarm in her eyes at that suggestion. She had no idea how careful he'd been prior to this, and exactly how exposed he'd made himself to her. She had no idea of his history.

Of her.

Marcus pushed the unbearable memories away, back into that disused corner of his mind.

"Can I ask you questions?"

He was already reaching for the hem of that thin t-shirt, although he'd enjoyed every moment of how it tantalized him with glimpses of her body, draping lovingly over those wonderfully swollen peaks and riding conveniently up when she moved so that he could see how those pristine white panties clung to her bottom cleavage.

"Yes." He'd said she could ask, and she could, but he had not committed to answering any of them.

Eve considered him for a moment, then asked shrewdly, "Are you going to answer them?"

He'd laughed more with her in a little more than a day than he had in longer than he'd like to contemplate. "I will answer what I can," he replied, consciously endeavoring to be as truthful with her as possible.

She seemed to think about this for a moment, until he knelt and wrapped his hands around her bottom, squeezing enough to elicit a squeak from her, where he was compressing those raw, red marks that remained hers from last night. But she wasn't deterred. "How come you breathe? You don't have a need to, right? You're dead?"

Marcus looked up at her, while his fingers drew her panties down and off. His hands returned, like magnets, to that luscious bottom of hers, reveling in her indrawn breath as he explored the marks of his pleasure on her body. His response was slow and hypnotic, like his hands as they roamed her skin. "I breathe when I want to. You're right. I don't have to."

As if by example, he buried his face against her mons, inhaling deeply of her scent. Because of his heightened senses, it was almost enough to bring him to fulfillment right then and there. One sense always triggered the others, building his desire four fold with just one, long breath. He felt his fangs descend, and was amazed at himself. He had long since learned how to control his bloodlust, but apparently not with Eve. His responses to her were very elemental, almost base, and it took a conscious effort to get them to retract. He didn't want to partake of her too much, too soon, for the sake of her health as well as for his own selfish reasons.

Eve's head lolled back and her knees weakened. She had so many more questions, but none of them would stay in her head. She couldn't think of anything but what he was doing to her. When he touched her in one place, she felt it all over her body, as if he had a thousand hands or mouths on her at once. When he pressed his face into the apex of her desire, she'd wanted, naturally, to shrink away. Although she felt that compulsion, he wouldn't allow it. Eve could feel that he had scaled back his control of her mind somewhat, but not to the point where he'd allow her to do something he didn't want her to do.

He breathed onto that neatly trimmed triangle of hair, and her nipples came to attention immediately. She felt his lips nibbling at her neck, suckling strongly at her earlobe and the tender parts beneath, his tongue branding a moist path down her spine. She wanted to faint, she wanted to cry, but he wouldn't allow any of those things – just yet. Eve had to settle for a long, low moan.

"My, my, my, and we've barely begun, my Eve." His tongue washed over her hip bones and beyond, always staying just above where she wanted him to be. "I won't do this from now on; you'll be expected to remember that the rule is that you don't orgasm without my permission."

He was going to have to accept her mindless groan as an answer, and it was almost too much for her to summon.

As he spoke, Marcus tipped her back onto the bed, positioning her so that her bottom was at the edge while he knelt in front of her, her legs spread obscenely wide, so that the innermost sensitive parts of her were laid bare for his delectation. "Is that a proper response, Eve?"

He wasn't going to make her think right now, was he?

His palm, even cupped as it was, when it slapped down onto that horribly exposed area had her screaming uncontrollably. No one had ever done anything like that to her. Except for the loss of her virginity, and having accidentally landing on the cross bar of a boy's bike when she was eleven, she'd come to think of that area of her body as a playground. All pleasure, no pain.

The second swat was harder still, his palm flatter and fingers splayed a bit, so that his broad middle finger actually struck the heart of her pleasure; her already eagerly swollen clit.

This time, he did nothing to suppress her scream.

She knew without asking that he would continue until he heard what he wanted to hear from her lips, but it was so hard to think when she was experiencing so much pain from such an unlikely source. "I- I un- understand, M-Marcus." What if he didn't want her to call him Marcus? But he hadn't told her to call him anything else...

Eve would have said or done pretty much anything to avoid another smack.

"Marcus is fine, unless I tell you otherwise."

She allowed herself a deep sigh of relief that proved premature. The full force of the third slap landed squarely on the delicate heart of her, and she fairly howled, her head rocking back and forth against the mattress, tears streaming down her face.

It was a good thing she wasn't looking at him at that point, or she would have run as far away from him as she could have. Those black eyes had begun to glow red as he threw his own head back and absorbed the sights and sounds of her pain at least as eagerly as those of her pleasure.

Maybe more so.

And then he leaned forward and encompassed all of those swollen, sore parts in one mouthful, washing away the pain with a broad, flat tongue that coaxed ecstasy from agony with one wet sweep. Eve writhed with it, amazed at how quickly her body succumbed to those warm, demanding lips when she would have sworn that a few seconds ago the only thing she'd be able to think about for years to come was how punished that same area felt.

"Exactly," Marcus murmured against her, commenting on her thoughts. He could feel her frown without seeing it, knowing she didn't much like him wandering around in her mind. She'd get used to it.

"Please, Marcus, please," she breathed, closer to orgasm than she wanted to admit, praying she could hold it back.

"You'd better do just that, unless you want double the punishment you're already getting."

Double what he'd already done? She wouldn't live through it! He had to be kidding.

He grabbed her clit with his teeth, just enough to warn, saying into her mind, "Unlike most of the current male population, I say exactly what I mean, Eve."

Even on such short acquaintance, she had no doubt as to the truth of what he'd just said, and that idea was enough to dampen her desire considerably. No one had ever expected her to not orgasm. That idea went against everything that the sexual revolution had brought to women. In her, granted, rather meager experience, in comparison to a lot of women her age, the idea was to get the woman off as fast as possible, especially if one was performing cunnilingus.

It was something she almost never asked of her partners, who never outright refused the request, but made it known in more subtle ways that this was not something they enjoyed doing, and it should be considered an extreme favor.

He was chuckling again. "Fools. All of these technological advances have caused the human race to forget how to make love." He dropped quick, velvety kisses everywhere he could reach. "I will have all of you. I will know all of you. You can't hide anything from me, Eve, especially not here." His mouth claimed her boldly, suckling and licking and teasing and tormenting with rapid then slow strokes that covered every sensitive inch of her.

She wanted to let go. She wanted to give in and ride the wave of the perfect storm he was building carefully within her. But she couldn't. She knew she couldn't tolerate a second round of what he'd just done.

"Ah, but Eve, we've just begun your first penalty. Surely you didn't think I'd let you off that lightly?"

She could hope.

"There is no hope with me, Eve. No mercy. No quarter given. I will swallow all of your screams and then give you even more." She felt, as well as heard, what he was saying. He used his low, gravelly voice rather than his mind, but still it rasped along her nerve endings, sandpapering her nipples with his intent and pooling her body's corporeal response right in front of him.

He'd let go of his suppression of her fears right at that moment. He needed to know that she felt the way he thought she did. That she could deal with who and what he was, and what he would demand from her, and she hadn't disappointed. Her juices were bathing his hands where they cupped and separated her folds. He was baptized anew – him, a most unholy creature – at her innermost font, and felt himself free, and happy, for the first time that he could remember in his long, lonely life.

Part of him wanted to grant her the ultimate in pleasure immediately. She'd pleased him like no other woman, even Cassandra, but he couldn't back away from giving her a punishment he'd promised. That would set an unhealthy precedent. Perhaps later – much, much later – he would be less stringent with her, although he doubted it, somehow. It was always best to go in heavy, and then back off later, once the way of things had been established.

He didn't like to think of war analogies when making love, but sometimes they fit better than anything else.

After planting butterfly kisses all the way down each of her beautiful legs, kissing the soles of her feet and then back up to the crux of her, he stood, saying, "Stay still," very firmly.

Eve did exactly as she was told, despite the fact that, intellectually, she wanted nothing more than to run out of this house, even completely naked as she was, whether the neighborhood watch saw her or not.

Marcus knew that she was conflicted about his order, but let her work it out for herself. He positioned himself at the top of the bed and then floated her up so that she lay, sprawled as she was, right in front of where he was kneeling. He stared into her eyes the entire time as he ripped apart the front of his pants and underwear, enjoying the look in her wide eyes as the fabric melted away from his full blown desire, but very little more than that.

Eve swallowed hard, glad she hadn't seen him prior to last night. It amazed her that she'd been able to accommodate him where she'd accommodated him!

But now he presented himself just above her mouth, and she found it watering at the idea. He was dildo-perfect – almost too robust, hard and lightly veined. She remembered seeing

some sort of penis impression kit online, and she filed that thought away for another day while he chuckled above her, and she knew he'd heard where her mind had wandered.

She was momentarily distracted by a drawer opening and then closing, although he'd not moved a muscle, and suddenly a deceptively wicked looking whip appeared in his hand. It was pink and purple and she knew – felt – that he detested the colors, but liked its functionality.

“Very good.” At her questioning glance, he responded, “You’re already beginning to read the edges of my mind. That’s very good. For some humans, it never happens. You must be predisposed.”

Although she appreciated the compliment, Eve was too preoccupied with the whip in his hand to really appreciate it. Its handle was long and slender, with a loop on the end, but near the end it frayed out into several long strands of what she hoped wasn't pink and purple rawhide.

But it was. She learned that quickly enough when he brought it down on the same area he'd slapped not long ago. Only a few of the strands found their ultimate mark, but the rest of them snaked into crevices that had never been awakened to such pain, and that was almost worse than the ones that landed atop her clit.

Her screams made him want to explode, but he wouldn't allow it. Instead, he gave her a few seconds to come to grips, then presented himself at her lips.

Eve wouldn't have thought that taking him into her mouth would soothe her, somehow, but it did. She didn't feel him in her head, so she didn't think that that was something he was suggesting to her, although she wasn't at all sure she'd be able to tell the difference between her own thoughts and those he caused, which was somewhat alarming.

Unable to stop herself, and hoping it wasn't going to get her into even more trouble, she reached up and began to touch him, wanting to let her hands wander over his taut, rippled stomach, over his hips and the tops of his thighs lazily, trailing just her fingertips over most of him, wanting to tantalize and enhance his experience. But he wouldn't allow it, moving her hand immediately to that thick, throbbing column.

When she reached to cup the rest of him in her palm, he moved her hands away. She looked rather crestfallen, so he explained, “You’ll make me unman myself, love. Put your hands beneath you for now.”

She obeyed him immediately, but dear God, it was going to be so hard to keep them there if he whipped her again.

“If?” he asked. “You mean when, Eve. When.”

Her legs closed reflexively against that possibility, and she found herself on her stomach before her two thighs even touched, a wide leather belt already in his hand that she'd not seen anywhere around them. It bit into a bottom that was still freshly remembering last night, and the mattress did nothing to absorb her wails.

“You do not move without permission, Eve.” Welts were being raised in an intriguing plaid pattern across her backside, from butt to calf. “Ever.”

She wouldn't. She swore without reservation, without thought. Ever.

But he didn't stop until several strokes later, until she was out of her mind with it, crying and sobbing uncontrollably.

He turned her over, ignoring the fresh round of sobs that came from her scored flesh connecting with even the soft silk of his sheets, and positioned them in exactly the same way, pressing his erection fully into her mouth and groaning at the engulf of its hot wetness.

Damn, this woman was almost too hot for him to handle! Everything she did – every surprised look, every ecstatic groan, every scream ripped from the back of her throat made him

want to come, and even a vampire didn't have the endless capability in that area that most women had. He would have to clamp himself down with as much of an iron hand as he was using on her.

He alternated punishing her with tantalizing himself, although they were really much the same thing. She was very good and had put her hands behind her as soon as he'd turned her over, although at one point, he'd pulled them up to his stomach again and let her tease him some more with those gentle, seductive fingers. He'd even allowed her to cup him completely, her small fingers barely managing it, and when she squeezed him just slightly he let loose with a dangerous, warning growl.

Marcus almost literally fell on her, although he caught himself with his hands at the last moment and merely lowered his head slowly until his mouth was full of her again. He could taste her fear and discomfort, but was glad to find that arousal was her body's first and foremost reaction. He wanted devour every inch of her, letting his fingers delicately rasp those inner lips, playing with the entrance to her body that he had yet to explore.

This was too much for Eve to bear. This unrelenting combination of pain and pleasure had her reeling. This man had the ability, like no other, to set her off center, to make her feel vulnerable and raw and almost animalistic, and yet he then constrained her with rules that had her chafing in her mind – don't lose control until she'd been given permission, don't close her legs against the searing bite of the whip on her most delicate parts - but had set every inch of her body on fire.

He knew what she wanted – what she needed – better than anyone on this Earth. She didn't care if he was a vampire. She didn't care if he was the Devil himself. She just cared that he didn't stop.

"Not even the punishments?" Marcus murmured into her mind.

Eve made her mind a blank and thought of multiplication tables instead. It was her version of taking the fifth. She liked his soft chuckle. She liked making him laugh, knowing, instinctively somehow, that he hadn't done much of it in what passed for his life, regardless of how long it had been.

Marcus didn't deign to acknowledge the truth of what she was thinking. Instead, he threw the whip across the room and commanded, "Come now, Eve. You have two minutes. If you haven't come by then, I'll fetch the whip back and it'll be a while before you receive my permission again."

This man had definitely been reading her mind. Or reading over her shoulder while she surfed the Web, or something. He knew exactly what turned her on, and in some cases, that could be dangerous! The tension that his command created within her, combined with the fact that he'd reached beneath her at just the right time and squeezed her sore bottom ruthlessly, allowed her to just make it under the wire, and it was even more explosive for her this time than it had been last time. She bucked and writhed and even scratched him, which she had never done to a partner before, but she was largely out of her mind with ecstasy, and he wasn't allowing her to settle down after just one orgasm, either.

"I think there are more within you that I need to coax out, Eve. I mean to wring every bit of rapture from you that I can, because I'm going to punish you at least that thoroughly, every time."

He kept her in that mindless, raw Heaven through another five orgasms, until her protestations against them sounded true to his ears. Marcus rolled off her and moved himself up

so his head was next to hers, his hand lying possessively on her stomach, as if he thought she'd fly away at any given moment.

He took her hand and lifted it to his mouth, kissing the back of it. "You'll always be able to do something I can't, you know."

"Like what?" she rolled towards him, trying to memorize his face.

"Multiple orgasms."

"Really? Even with all of your abilities you can't do that?"

He shook his head, grinning slightly at her look of triumph.

Suddenly, she frowned down at him. "But you –"

"I don't need to. . . indulge myself very often, and I rather like delayed gratification."

"Those should be four letter words. I don't do delayed gratification."

He reached down and cupped her still tender kitty firmly. "I've noticed that about people nowadays. There's really no such thing any longer. Mores the pity. The more sweat and hard work you put into something, the more you truly enjoy and cherish it when you finally have it." He knew that she had no idea how closely his end of their relationship paralleled exactly what he was saying.

"Am I a vampire now?" she asked impulsively.

"No. You're mine, tied to me for all eternity, but you're not a vampire." He watched her closely. "Do you want to be?"

Eve shrugged. She truly didn't know. This whole situation was more than an unexpected development, and that wasn't a question she expected to need to answer at this point in her life. Did she want immortality? Did she want to watch the people she loved die around her?

She was cynical enough to admit that, over all, there were few people in this world that she really liked. Would she be able to stand living around all these stupid humans forever?

He actually laughed, and it lit up his face in a way that made him seem almost angelic, although she had a flash of insight that told her that that was the farthest thing from the truth.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Your opinion of the human race."

Eve raised an eyebrow. "Have you driven on a freeway lately? Been in a Wal-Mart on a Saturday afternoon before Christmas? Humans are crazy, every everlasting one of them, including myself."

"You're crazy, too?"

"I'm lying here with a man I let –" her face colored brightly, and she could see that that amused him even more. " – take liberties when I'd barely known him for an hour or so. I slept last night in a coffin. I'm lying here right now with a vampire. That's damned crazy, in my book. I should be twelve counties away from you, if I had any sense of self preservation at all."

"And why aren't you?"

"I'm still contracting, that's why." She regretted that as soon as she said it, because it was so much more than that. She felt connected to him – whether at his behest or not. He piqued her curiosity, and she had a thousand – no, a million – questions she wanted answered. He understood her. It had taken a man born millennia ago, apparently, but she was most of the way to believing that he was the one.

"If I'm going to stay with you, what do I do?"

"If?" he returned, immediately. "You're assuming I'm going to give you the choice." His voice was hard edged, his jaw set.

Not willing to fight over something she'd pretty much already settled on – although there was no need to appear too eager, as far as she was concerned – she acquiesced. “Okay, that still begs the question: what do I do?”

“About what?”

She drew her legs up and folded her arms on top of them. He was glad to see that she was unselfconscious about her nudity around him already. “My life, such as it is. My house. My job. My friends.” At least she didn't have any family to make awkward explanations to. She was an only child, and her parents had long since passed away. Her only remaining blood relatives were distant cousins and aunts that she saw very rarely. Her friends would be happy that she was happy. “Are we leaving? Are we staying here? What's going to happen?”

He leaned down and kissed her on the top of the head. She looked worried, but he resisted the urge to soothe her mentally. There'd be lots of time to go tiptoeing through her mind, and he'd already done more of that than he probably should have. She'd have to see for herself that there was nothing to be concerned about.

“Do you want to leave here?” he asked, standing next to the bed in front of her. She looked up at him, all of her concerns written plainly on her face. He hoped she didn't play poker... or maybe he did.

Eve shrugged. “I don't know. What would be best? You must have a lot more experience at this kind of thing than I do. What would you recommend?”

He chuckled, sinking down onto the bed and gathering her into his arms and onto his lap. “Would you be surprised to hear that I don't have much experience with this particular situation?”

Her derisive snort was extremely indelicate, and something he decided right then and there he needed to train her out of. Perhaps it was too much time spent in eighteenth and nineteenth century drawing rooms, but pretty much all women of the twenty-first century could stand to spend some time in finishing school. They were altogether too mannish, in some ways, for his tastes.

Perhaps he'd have to open one of his own, for one particular pupil.

She leaned back and caught his eyes. “You expect me to believe that you've been twenty-one hundred years – give or take – without a lover?” Eve watched with alarm as those eyes turned unexpectedly hard.

His voice, both physically and in her mind, was the barest of rough whispers. “I expect you to believe whatever it is that I tell you. I will never lie to you, Eve. I have no need to. If I say we must hide for safety's sake, then we must hide. If I need to leave you at any time in the future, to conduct some business of my own, then that's exactly what I'm doing.”

Safety – except for how safe she was or wasn't around him – hadn't really come to her mind. “Are there Van Helsings out there I should know about?”

“Not that I know of any more, at least not in the States, but there have been in Europe in the past, and I lost many friends to them.” Eve laid her hand on his cheek, seeing – and feeling through their connection – the depth of his sadness. “And now that I've found you, I intend to be overly cautious. I will not lose you.” Like he'd lost someone else, she intuited.

“Yes, there was someone else, but it's been a very long time. Six hundred years or so.”

She looked at him, aghast. “You haven't had sex in six hundred years?”

It was the first time she'd heard him really laugh, and the sound melted into her heart like butter into a hot biscuit. As much as it could, his face lit up with it, and she knew she had to commit herself to making him do that more often in the future. Much more often.



“Well, you said you liked delayed gratification. . .” she defended her assumption.

“Yes, but that would be monkish, even for me. Yes, I’ve had... liaisons since then, but that’s all they were. None of them lasted more than an instant, really.” He didn’t mention that an instant for him and an instant for her were two very different things. But he was telling her the absolute truth. He hadn’t found a woman he’d even come close to considering a mate in more than six centuries. “Some of them never really knew what I was.”

“Not the most observant of sorts, huh?”

“No, but your experience of me is very different from most women.”

There was no drama in her tone; it was almost matter-of-fact. “You’ve killed people, haven’t you?”

“Yes, I have.” Again, no brag, just fact.

For the first time, Eve found herself consciously trying to read him, and was amazed at how easily the skill came to her. He was like an open book, at least right now. All of what must’ve been considerable defenses, built after such a long time of fearing for his life, were down. She knew he had killed a lot of people, and that he regretted it now – had begun doing so around the same time he’d been with the other woman. But he wasn’t wracked with guilt about it, like some latter day Barnabas Collins.

“No, I’m not,” he stated badly. “I had to survive, and the hunger when you’re first born to vampirism is a lust unlike anything a mortal can experience. The more traumatic the transformation, or the younger the vampire, the more uncontrollable the need is. We’re barely more than animals when we’re first converted. Civilization is a cloak a young vampire dons to get him what he needs – human blood.”

She could tell he was laying himself bare before her in a manner he hadn’t very often, and she felt proud that he knew he could do that and still be safe with her. She wasn’t some ninny teenager to go running off to her parents or Youtube or Jerry Springer to gab about her experience with a vampire and bask in the fifteen minutes of fame Andy Warhol presciently consigned to everyone, and that had come to fruition forty years later. There was no one she needed to impress, no one she had to think about beyond the two of them. She would take his secrets – any of them he cared to share with her – to the grave with her.

Eve moved off his lap, where she seemed to end up naturally, and turned their positions around, so that she was holding him, rocking just slightly.

This was something very new for Marcus. No woman had comforted him besides his own mother, and those times were few and far between. Hers was an unbelievably hard scrabble life, and she didn’t have much time for the niceties. Even his dear Cassandra had expected him to comfort her, never the other way around.

“It must’ve been so hard for you. All those years. You must’ve been so lonely.”

Uncharacteristically, he allowed himself several moments of succor, then pinned her to the bed and changed the subject. “I want you to know that you don’t need to be afraid. I can protect you from most anything, and, unless we’re in the backwoods of Europe, no one’s going to be looking to kill of vampires any more. It’s much more likely that they’d want to follow in Anne Rice’s footsteps so that they could make money off of my story,” he finished wryly, wanting to see her smile instead of that worried look on her face.

“I am going to pester you with questions, you know,” she warned playfully.

Marcus sighed dramatically. “We all have our crosses to bear.”

“And there’s another one – “

He cut her off with a deep languid kiss.

## Chapter Four

Marcus might not have had a lot of experience wrapping up the more human aspects of his lovers' lives, but he certainly managed to do it for her in a very practical, composed manner. She liked her job as a buyer for a large retail chain, and he was fine with her working out short notice, although he made sure she knew she had the option of calling them up and telling them to take the job and shove it, although he'd be certain that she used better language than that.

They sold both of their houses quickly – they were relatively small and they let them go cheap in this economy, because they didn't need to worry about money. Her furniture was put in storage until they could find a place for themselves. But he didn't want to settle down with her at first. There were so many places he wanted to show her. They would travel the world until they got sick of it, then decide in what places they might like to have homes. He had a feeling one might be London, considering her interest in British history, then perhaps one or two in the States, and the Caribbean, maybe... they'd have to see what they liked

She adapted well to his style of living – sleeping during the day and staying up all night. He would, eventually, allow her to stay up during the day some, if she wanted to, but for now, it was impossible not to want her with him every second of every day and night. He did allow that they didn't have to sleep in his coffin all of the time, for the sake of her comfort and their convenience; it wasn't all that easy to travel with a coffin, and since he didn't really have to have it any more, he put them in storage, too, the morning they were leaving on their first trip together.

“But,” he tapped his finger onto the tip of her nose, the first night he decided that, later, when they went to sleep just before dawn, they'd stay in the luxurious king bed awaiting them at the hotel, rather than retiring to his coffin, where he could keep more of an eye – or rather, a hand – on her. “I am putting you on your honor to behave while I'm asleep. And I'm going to give you a taste this evening of what will happen if you misbehave.”

They were having a sumptuous dinner together in their Imperial Club suite at the Atlantis Resort in the Bahamas, having just arrived on a private plane and settled in. He hadn't bothered with places like this in a long time – hence the fact that he'd ended up living next to her in Middle America. But he enjoyed how much she loved it, and he knew he was going to enjoy spoiling her terribly.

In some ways, but definitely not in others.

She had blossomed under his strict tutelage. It seemed the stricter he was, the safer she felt. He wasn't much of a mind to let her get away with even the smallest of things, and that seemed to suit her fine, despite the fact that this first trip had taken them to a place that pretty much required bathing suits, and she wasn't always going to be in the right condition to wear one very often. He made a mental note to make sure that any of the suits he bought for her had coordinating skirt wraps, so that she could go out on the beach in the sun, if she wanted to, eventually.

Just allowing them to sleep in that big bed would be a huge test of whether or not he could trust her, not that he had any doubts. He'd never seen anyone take to this life as readily as she had. Marcus didn't know if it was just because she was easy going, or infinitely curious

about his life, or if she might be beginning to harbor some feeling for him, but whatever it was, he wasn't going to question it too closely.

But just to be sure she remembered to whom she belonged; he was going to reinforce that ownership tonight. He was going to test her tonight – a test that, when she looked back on it would probably seem trivial, but it was more than he'd asked of her so far. Much more.

He was having a bit of a trial himself, in forcing himself to join her for every meal. It was an interesting test of his will, and he rather enjoyed that. But the smell was just abominable.

"The garlic thing must just be a myth, huh?" she asked, spooning a forkful of roasted garlic whipped potatoes, drenched in butter and liberally laced with salt and pepper, to her mouth and groaning in ecstasy almost as loudly as she did for him.

"It smells as revolting as everything else you're eating, but no, it has no particular power over me."

He had bought her an entirely new wardrobe before they'd even decided where they were going on their first adventure together, and he'd already said he'd supplement it here with whatever bathing attire she wanted. He'd bought her anything and everything her heart desired, so much so that she was learning to be careful not to stare at something too long in a shop window, for fear she would find it under her pillow the next night. He sent her a dozen roses, delivered just after dusk every evening, always pink after he discovered that that was her favorite color. But the best thing he'd said or done for her so far, as far as she was concerned, was to drop the innocuous little comment that, as long as he fed from her, she would never gain weight, no matter what she ate.

Marcus had been truly amazed at her reaction to a side effect of he'd never considered was that much of a big deal. She'd thrown her arms around him and offered him her neck immediately, gigglingly telling him to imbibe of her any time he liked if it meant she never had to count calories or carbs again.

She had found herself feeling generally better overall. She had always been a few pounds overweight, just enough to give her doctor cause to nag when she had her physical. But no more, even though she'd taken his word to heart and was eating anything and everything. Eve felt stronger and happier than she'd been in her life, and it was all due to him, and him alone.

He made her happy. He made her cry and scream and beg for mercy that would never be issued, but he made her happy.

Zoloft was a thing of the past, as was cholesterol medication. He'd seen her taking them one morning and had thrown the whole lot out. "You're healthy now, my Ava. No need for those."

He was so scrupulous about her health that she had to believe him.

One of the few things that tickled the back of her mind when she stopped to think too long was the fact that she'd yet to see him naked. She could definitely get into the dominance aspects of being nude while he was clothed, but he was taking it to extremes. She rarely got a glimpse of any part of him other than his genitals, and it made her itch to run her hands over his broad chest and impressive arms. She had a feeling that he'd've been a force to be reckoned with even without his vampire powers.

Eve had challenged him over his size. For someone born before Christ, he was enormous. He said it ran in his family, that his father and his father before him had been considered giants, and as a result he'd had families offering their nubile virgins to him, hoping he'd carry on the tradition within their family line.

“Was dinner up to snuff?” he asked when she wiped her mouth delicately and laid the napkin on the table. She’d left some behind, and that was unusual.

Eve reached over and took his hand in both of hers. “Yes. The chateaubriand was filling, and I don’t need to make a pig of myself just because I can.”

“A wise decision, my love.”

She would never get used to how quickly he moved. One moment she was sitting at the dinner table with him, the next she was strung, nude, upside down by her ankles, which were separated almost to the point of pain by a wide spreader bar.

He lay down directly in front of her, playing absently with her hair and watching her carefully for signs of fear – of the wrong kind of fear. But he saw none. Her eyes were clear and her face as relaxed as it could be in that awkward position. “I’m going to do something to you tonight that you might not like.”

She was already grinning, and he knew even without reaching into her mind that she was enjoying the irony of that statement.

He was serious, but decided not to repeat himself. She’d been warned. “Tonight I want you to remember that you belong to me. Every bit of you, to do with as I please.” He emphasized the “I”, and could see that that set her to thinking. “We’ll be sleeping in the bed tomorrow, and I’m not going to bind you to me like I have been at night. If you wake up and want to go down to the beach alone, you may, but I expect you to be back here before I get up.”

Marcus stood and walked around her, running his hand over her possessively.

Eve was thinking that he looked like he was judging a fine piece of horseflesh.

“I have a good eye for horses, but a better one for women,” he purred, kissing her most vulnerable spot audaciously, until she started to squirm and wiggle. “That’s enough of that.” The statement was deceptively quiet, but with it, she found she’d lost the ability to move. Her arms were clamped to her sides instead of hanging down by her head, which she had to admit was a more comfortable position, but she couldn’t so much as twitch her finger even if it hadn’t been more pleasant.

“If you need to tell me something, you must use your mind. After all, I was only able to ask the hotel to make certain changes that wouldn’t be permanent. I couldn’t very well ask them to completely soundproof the suite in such a short time.” He was a whale, and the staff had bent over backwards to accommodate the small changes he’d requested, which included installing the eyebolts in the high ceiling from which she was currently suspended, along with a few other surprises.

She couldn’t talk. She’d tried. She couldn’t scream. She was still trying to, but she couldn’t open her mouth or make even the slightest of sounds.

He’d paralyzed her, completely. The only things she could do were swallow and blink. Panic was rapidly settling in, especially when he laid a velvet swatch near her head that contained a disturbing array of items.

Some of which were metal tipped.

Marcus could feel her rising terror, and it made him harder than he always was around her, which he would have thought was pretty impossible. But this woman kept proving him wrong about himself, and he hoped she never stopped.

Her panic increased a thousand fold when he robbed her of her sight. She screamed at him with her mind, and he lay down in front of her immediately, reaching out to her with his mind and hands, helping her to find calm.

What helped the most was simply saying the truth in a soft, confident manner. “You are precious to me. I would never do anything to you that was physically detrimental, but I will test and push you. Since you’re my favorite midnight snack, you’re able to bear much more than you think, and, as you already know, you’ll heal much faster from anything I choose to do to you.” He leaned forward and licked away the tears that were flowing into her hair. He didn’t mention that her senses were gradually increasing, and that, by removing her sight, her body would automatically compensate by heightening her other senses – in her more so than any human.

She would feel what he did to her in a more excruciating manner – both the paradise he would often gift her with, as well as the torment. And she would be truly helpless to do anything about either of them.

He was gracious just then, now more than he would be in the future, and extended a thin blanket of calm over her that just barely took the edge off of her distress. He didn’t want her to come to rely on that, though, so he hadn’t alleviated all of her concern as he could have.

Eve was wondering how the hell she’d gotten herself into this situation, with a man she barely knew. Marcus felt that thought and it pained him. They’d fit together so well that he’d hoped she’d been beyond such doubts, but he had to remind himself to look at things from her point of view. She’d taken a tremendous leap of faith for a mortal, and if their positions had been reversed, he was sure he’d be thinking the exact same thing.

He rose, decided that he needed to distract her from her fears. He produced a long, fluffy ostrich feather, pink for her, leaving a sensitized trail along her skin, over the raised ridges from last night, when he’d caned her rather severely, but not ignoring the rest of her lush body. He parted her nether lips with his mind, exposing her to that barely there, tickling touch, knowing she would normally be arching away – or maybe towards – the feather. He didn’t dally there long, though, and heard her groan in her mind when he moved on, as if she was calling him back to finish what he’d started.

Marcus touched the tip and body of the feather all over her body, knowing it tickled her terribly in some places, and raised gooseflesh in others. He avoided her breasts until the last moment, when he raised her up with a silent command, until those gorgeous globes were directly in front of his face. He squeezed them together in the middle of her chest, then grabbed each one rather roughly by the nipple, tugging and twisting them and compressing them cruelly between his thumbs and the sides of his forefingers while she begged him to stop and he nearly lost control completely and burst within his pants.

But it was too soon for that. Much too soon.

Instead, he lifted her head for a deep, if one-sided kiss, then sank his fangs into the side of her neck and sipped of her most precious fluid.

He’d taken less than a teaspoon of her, and yet she ignited a fire in his veins he hadn’t felt for longer than he wanted to consider. He would never let her go. He wanted to scream that – and much, much more – from the nearest mountain top, but tamped down the impulse.

There was work to be done. Pleasure to be given sparingly yet generously and a wealth of her pain on which to build it.

Before he let her go tonight, before he let her crawl into that bed with him with no spell around her to keep her close to him, she would know that, on the most elemental of levels, she was bound to him. She was truly his.

He returned his loving attentions to those eager, swollen nipples, selecting a deceptively small, flat spatula type of implement from the velvet pillow case he’d laid on the floor near her.

It was a highly polished, lovely piece of ash, with a handle wrapped in rawhide at one end and an area at the end, perhaps an inch and a half in diameter, that was a bit thinner than the rest.

It was perfect for nipples such as hers.

Marcus didn't think that Eve would agree, though. She yelped sharply in his mind every time he brought the piddly thing down on her, alternating generously between each breast, smacking sharply down on those stiffened tips. He would have thought that would have discouraged them some, but they rose to each strike, as if begging for another. And he obliged them until well past the point that she was screaming in his head.

He dropped the implement carelessly where he stood, and reached his left hand between her legs, eager to prove to himself – and to her – that she was enjoying this. He held his breath until the pool of her nectar overflowed down her tummy when his fingers swam eagerly into it, then exhaled directly onto her swollen nub. “Ahhhhhh. Such a rich, lovely tribute, Eve. Thank you.”

He allowed her see, in her mind, that he had taken the fingers that were sopping wet from her, and her alone, and licked them clean, like a cat with a saucer of cream.

Marcus was nowhere near done with her nipples, but he didn't want to neglect other needful areas, such as her bottom. He strolled behind her, reaching down to grab an old razor strop that he'd had for more years than he wanted to count. It wasn't often used to this purpose, at least, once he stopped looking at humans as prey, and few women who saw it – even the occasional courtesan who supposedly specialized in things of that nature – would agree to have it used on her person.

But poor Eve had no choice in the matter. She couldn't even make the slightest motion to try to dodge the strokes, as would have been perfectly natural, nor could she reach around with her hands, like a schoolgirl trying to ward off the headmaster's retribution. No, she'd have to endure every bit of the thundering slaps against her unprotected posterior.

There would be no mercy, no protection, no respite for her, unless he allowed it.

And he wasn't feeling in a particularly generous mood this evening.

Eve heard that thought and wanted to whimper.

The strapping of her bottom was much worse than the caning she'd had to endure the night before, only partially because of the fact that her bottom and thighs were already liberally strewn with raised red reminders of the crack of his wicked cane across her tender flesh. The kiss of the strap brought the pain of those livid wheals to life again, and with an overlay of unrelenting sting from his vigorous attentions this evening.

But the worst element of the strapping was contained in the very tip of the strap, which was a metal tab that bit into her flesh horribly, adding insult to injury at the very end of each and every stroke. He lathered her backside but good until she nearly glowed in the dark with it; her skin was an angry crimson from butt to calf, with distinctly brighter, v shaped spots from where the tip had had its way with her, and he was breathing nearly as heavily as she was with it. She made him feel alive at a time when he was feeling the most dead. He reveled in the echoes of her wails in his brain, letting them spur him onward, letting them assure him that this was something she needed.

And when he checked to see if, perhaps her desire had waned in the face of the agonies he'd imposed on her, he always found her gushing and swollen, a mere hairsbreadth from orgasm. He didn't deign to remind her of her rule. If she forgot it, she'd learn not to in a hurry.

Eve wasn't really aware of how close she was to orgasm; she was too involved in the pain at that moment. It occupied too much of her being. Marcus felt that, and knew he needed to even things out before moving on to the next, most trying phase of the evening.

He began distracting her with his tongue, allowing it to wander where it wanted, with no real thought from him, evening laving and soothing her well strapped bottom, lovingly caressing each raised red ridge as it led into the next. Her bottom was the most perfectly formed he'd ever seen, and he had to get his hands into the act, cupping and squeezing gently, while his lips continued its wanderings in steamier areas, using his hold to bring her further into his mouth until he encompassed every inch of that lovely grotto, overflowing as it was with her tribute to him.

Marcus almost came himself at the thought of her responsiveness, but he was able to hold himself off, barely, enough to concentrate on her pleasure. When he could feel that her mind was no longer occupied with the less pleasant experiences he was providing, and he knew she was having as hard a time as he was staving off her culmination, he knew it was time.

She could hear him bending down to pick something up near her head, and when he rose, she rose, so that her breasts were right in front of his face. Eve could feel his breath on her breasts, and knew that that was what he wanted her to feel.

"Your breasts are beautiful, Ava. And your nipples are unbelievable – rosy pink and plump and so hard..." He made them even harder by twisting and tugging them until they were swollen to twice their usual size.

Then she could feel him wrapping something around the base of each of them, something that felt like a rubber band that clung to her nipple and squeezed it never endingly tight, which stimulated them beyond anything she'd ever felt. Eve would swear she could feel the very air around them, and even just that was almost beyond her tolerance.

Those most susceptible, sensitive areas were just made a million times more so.

Marcus whispered into her head, "It gets much worse from here, Eve."

She swallowed hard, and would have been shaking like a leaf if he'd allowed it.

Those nipples were standing up so proudly for him that he couldn't resist a bout of long, languid suckling, razing them with the edges of his teeth. His fangs descended again, unbidden, and he almost laughed at how easily she made him forget himself. Without a second's consideration, he did as his instinct bade him, which he almost never did any more, and sank them into her breast, just to the left of her areola.

His mind drank in her scream just as his mouth flooded with her honey sweet blood. That combination made him wish she was beneath him and he could sink himself into her more fully in several different ways, but he didn't allow himself to be distracted for long. He did, however, because he knew she liked symmetry in all things, repeat the favor on her other breast, this time marking her to the right of her areola, bracketing her nipples with the unmistakable evidence of his true nature.

He let her see, with her mind's eye, what he had in his right hand as he brought it up to her hugely swollen nipple.

It was a needle. Deceptively thin and innocuous looking, but a needle just the same. Eve screamed in his mind, knowing exactly what he was going to do with it even without reading his mind. And, before she got to the crescendo of her distress, he tapped it just into the middle of that outstretched nub, so that it really just broke the surface, and within seconds, he'd applied the same loving attentions to her other nipple.

Although her distress echoed loudly through his head, he took his time getting to the next step, which was soothing her. She heard him moving the velvet swath away, and knew that he had come to stand directly in front of her, probably not far from the pool of tears that must've gathered beneath her head.

He had not removed those damned needles, and she could feel her breasts throbbing from their unusual position and now the multiple puncture marks they each sported. Her mind wandered to an alarming picture of how she was probably drenched in blood, but he reassured her immediately that there was no such sight, and imposed his view of her into her brain, showing the relatively small circles where he'd tasted of her, as well as two shiny needles standing straight out from each nipple.

Seeing it was almost worse than enduring it, despite the lack of gore.

He was standing near her, but not touching her in any way, so when she felt his mouth at both sets of her lips, as well as hands gently kneading both those abused globes carefully but firmly, it was a bit of a surprise, enough to do what he'd intended, which was to distract her, at least at first.

And then he was a part of her more completely than he'd been before, although he hadn't made a move towards her and wasn't touching her physically. Marcus was both controlling and occupying her body. She was full of him, every interesting orifice forced open by his mind, her bottom hole stretched to just a twinge past discomfort, along with her overflowing font.

His mouth claimed her clit. It belonged to him, because she belonged to him. Eve felt as if he was going to devour it, and her along with it. "Give me your pleasure, Eve. I will have that above all else. Whenever I want, for an eternity."

Marcus hadn't given her a timeframe, for which she was very grateful. Every sensual thing he'd done to her – which she had to admit to herself included the punishments – as well as her own need to control her explosion until he allowed her to experience it, combined to make her wonder if she even could let go. He was maintaining a very delicate balance between true discomfort and true ecstasy, and at time she wasn't sure in which direction she was going to go.

It was, surprisingly, when he laid yet another set of invisible hands on her rump, squeezing those sizzled cheeks and kneading them mercilessly, that she could hold off no longer. The orgasm literally ripped through her, through every atom of her being. She thought she was going to die of it, or at the very least, faint, but he wouldn't allow her either of those escapes. He kept her awake and alive through every single ecstatic contraction, never having moved or touched her throughout, which was somehow wrong to her.

Something happened then that she had no more control of than she did of him. She began to cry. Not polite, crocodile tears, but great gulping wails that had him worried he'd done something he hadn't intended, and his connection with her, however intimate and complete, wasn't much help.

Instantly, she was on their bed with him, no mental or physical restraints, no elastics or needles anywhere near her, just his big arms around her, cradling her like the precious thing she had so quickly and so irreversibly become to him, and rocking slightly. He was wracking his brain as to what he might have done – beyond the obvious – to make her cry as if her heart was breaking. "What is it, Eve? What did I do? I can't help you if I don't know what's wrong." He detested the pleading note in his own voice, but he was at a loss, and she showed no signs of stopping, but was clinging to him like a limpet, for which he was as grateful as he was surprised.

Marcus knew he could compel her to tell him why she was crying, and he'd already poked about in her mind a bit, finding nothing of any help, but he didn't want to do that. He



wanted her to trust him implicitly, without having to prod her. She would tell him when she was ready.

Delayed gratification was definitely two four letter words, he grumbled to himself.

This, of all things, set her chuckling in a tearful way, and he felt his body relax a bit his own rising alarm. He kissed each new tear away as it spilled down her cheeks, until there were none. "Please tell me what happened."

She fiddled with the collar of his navy blue shirt, wondering, not for the first time, why he seemed to be always dressed while she was always naked. Come to think of it, she couldn't remember ever having seen him nude. Eve latched onto that thought, and it helped steady her jumbled mind.

"Thank you for not just barging into my brain. You must've really wanted to," she whispered hoarsely. One of the very few things she'd asked of him was that he endeavor not to do that. He had agreed, very reluctantly, but had been pretty scrupulous about it since then.

"I was there when it began, but couldn't make heads nor tails of it, and then I just tried around the edges of your consciousness again," he confessed, and she'd already known, "but it wasn't much help."

Eve sniffled a little, and adjusted her head on his shirt covered chest. "I don't know if I could tell you myself. Maybe it was just... sensory overload. I don't think anyone could be expected to handle quite that much – " she was going to say pleasure, but it was so much more than that – "stimulation at one time."

Marcus kissed the top of her head. "Are you all right?"

Her breathing was still coming in irregular hitches, but she said, "Yes. I'm okay." Needing to change the subject, she leaned her head on her hand and looked him straight in the eye.

"How come I've never seen you naked?"

Because he was trying to accommodate her – she'd asked for little else from him – and not maintain a mental connection with her at all times, no matter how contrary that was to his being, the question came at him from out of the blue, and he wasn't at all sure how he wanted to answer it.

Or if he wanted to at all.

## Chapter Five

It was her open face as she looked at him that convinced him to do something he'd never done with any human before. He knew even without telepathy that she was already at least half in love with him, and, although he intended to guide their relationship with an iron hand, he wanted to share as much of himself with her as he could.

So Marcus forced himself to stand up, leaving her lying there, watching him with such loving eyes he wanted to cry himself. He unbuttoned the shirt slowly, but left it on, then decided to divest himself of his underwear and pants first, and save the worst for last.

Finally, he turned around to face her and let the shirt drop onto the floor.

Eve couldn't see him, but she could feel how tense he was, and she knew how hard he'd had to push himself to do this in front of her. And now she knew why.

His back was a mass of scars, some thin red lines, some long, thick welts and some veritable crevices. They covered all of him, from the back of his neck down to his ankles, red rivulets of a long ago agony. When he turned, she saw that whoever it was that had hurt him hadn't spared the front of him, either. The thick plates of his chest muscles were also tattooed in that horrid manner, as were his abs and hips, and the fronts of his thighs.

She was crying again, this time silently, and he could feel her anger and outrage at whoever had treated him this way. He could bear neither her tears nor her pity, but, when he reached for his clothes again, she put a small hand on his, and he let her stop him when he wouldn't have allowed anyone – or anything - else in the world to do so.

Eve tugged him back onto the bed with her, reversing their usual roles and holding him tightly in her arms, murmuring, "I'm so sorry," the entire time and absently kissing the top of his head.

"There's nothing for you to be sorry about. You didn't do it."

Her heart was aching so badly in her chest that she could barely reply. "I know. But I would bet that this was done by a mortal, or at the behest of a mortal."

Marcus only nodded, reveling in the comfort and acceptance she'd so openly offered. Her hands glided carefully over those old wounds, as if they were still fresh and painful to him, touching him more delicately than he had ever deserved.

"Let me guess," she breathed at his temple. "The Spanish Inquisition?"

His head snapped back so that he could look into her eyes. "How'd you know?"

Eve shrugged her shoulders. "It just came to mind as soon as I saw the scars, that this was the work of the Inquisition." She was full of questions, but didn't want to push him. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

"Do you want to hear?" he countered.

She snorted, which she knew she'd pay for later. One of the first rules he'd established for her had been not to do that. "I want to know everything about you that you're willing to share."

In seconds, he had them under the covers, him in his favorite silk pajamas, and Eve in her favorite night shirt, with candles breathed to life around the room and all artificial lighting dimmed, so that they were in their own cozy cave. He reached to gather her to his chest, but she refused, which confused him. And then she took off her pajamas, and began to do the same with

his. He stilled her hand more out of habit than embarrassment, and she ignored it until they were nude in each other's arms, and he began to speak about it for the first time, ever.

"I suppose I should start at the beginning. Her name was Cassandra Lourdes Maria Alonsa Castillo. She was of noble birth and I met her at one of her betrothal parties in the mid-fourteen hundreds. Her family had arranged for her to marry a very powerful man, but we fell in love." Eve could feel his every emotion as he recounted this terrible part of his history. "She was my angel. My savior. I would have died for her, but I wasn't allowed that grace.

"Her family came from old money, and was extremely powerful in its own right. I was so blinded by my love of her that I wasn't as cautious as I should have been – as I have become," he said, always seeking to reassure her. "Her family found out about us, but worse than that, they found out about what I am.

"We were together, in bed, when the soldiers came and dragged me away from her. She paid for loving me with her life. They considered that she was unclean, since she had clearly lain with me. She was burned at the stake, and I could hear her screams from my window in the prison at Cordoba."

Eve couldn't think of a thing to say, so she merely held him as tightly as she could, hoping he could take some small comfort from her nearness.

"They weren't nearly as generous or as quick with me. I was there for a very long time while they tried to find ways to kill me, or torture me enough to make me tell them who else was as I was. I wasn't as old then as I am now, and I hadn't bothered to cultivate many powers beyond those that would help me find sustenance."

Not wanting to interrupt, but unable to suppress the question, she asked, "How did you escape?"

He seemed far away, locked in those awful memories. "There were more of us than they would have wanted to know about, some with considerable connections of their own. An acquaintance of mine – and that's all he was at that point – had heard about my situation, and he arranged to get me out of there.

"By the time they were able to get to me, I was covered in scars from the whips they'd soaked in holy water. I'll have these scars until I die. I was lucky they came when they did. The guards had told me that they were going to start on my face and genitals the next day."

They both were silent for a moment. Eve was in tears again, he could feel them on what small spots of untouched flesh were left on his chest, and he held her closer, frankly amazed that she was willing to be so close to him. In today's society, with its eagerness to eradicate any possible imperfection, he'd never expected to find someone who could tolerate his physical flaws. Even immortality might not count for much in the face of what he looked like.

But she'd never flinched, not once, and her cheek was lying directly on top of some of the worst of the scarring.

When she asked the inevitable questions, her first one surprised him pleasantly. "Who helped you escape?"

"Francisco Victor Geraldo Castillo."

"Is he still alive?"

"I hope so – I send him a note every once in a while on the anniversary of that day. I was more religious about it for a long time afterwards, but he convinced me that I didn't owe him anything. He was my mentor, really. Helped me really become a vampire, rather than just the ravening beast Livilla had left me as."

He'd known she was going to latch onto that, and she rose to the bait admirably. "Livilla?"

It surprised him that he could smile during a discussion of such an awful topic, but she did that kind of thing for him. "Yes, Livilla was the woman who made me what I am." He didn't say but she knew that it was something he'd cursed her for a very long time. "And before you ask, she's dead, and by my own hand."

He sat up, signaling an end to twenty questions and his uncomfortable stroll down memory lane. Eve was flattered – and glad – that he'd opened up to her as he had, even though every time he told her something about himself, it just made her want to ask a thousand more questions. He was reaching down for his pajamas when she again stopped him. "You don't have to do that unless you want to. I'm more comfortable in pajamas, myself, but I'd like to learn to sleep nude with you." She was quietly inviting him to do the same with her, and he dropped the shirt and leaned back to her.

"You don't mind them – the scars?"

"Of course not." Her hands were again tracing them, until she stopped suddenly and looked up at him. "I'm not hurting you, am I?" she asked in abject horror.

Marcus squeezed her fingers, nearly crushing them with the depth of his emotion. "No, no," he said hoarsely. "They're mostly numb, although the deeper ones sometimes still ache." He tipped her face up to his. "You could never hurt me."

"I would never hurt you," she confirmed back to him. "I would die before I'd allow anyone or anything to harm you."

No mortal – or vampire, for that matter – had ever said such things to him, but he could feel the truth of her words within her heart and mind.

He wore a small, infinitely endearing smile when he said, "Aren't I supposed to be saying that to you?"

"You already have," she smiled back. "Make love to me, Marcus." He was more than willing to do so, but unexpectedly her small hand on his chest stopped him just when he would have placed himself carefully over her. "Will you tell me your real name?"

Without a second's thought he answered, "Marcus Seneca. Marcus Julius Drusus Seneca, originally, although I don't use either of my middle names anymore."

"How long has it been since you've been able to use that name?" she asked as she butterflyed kisses all over his shoulders and chest. It was terribly tantalizing, because he could only feel some of them, and she was making it hard for him to think.

"This is the first time I've used it since I became a vampire." She was making him remember what he'd given up in not allowing his lovers much access to his body, flicking that determined little tongue over his nipples. "I lost myself there, for a while, especially after Cassandra, and it didn't really occur to me until just recently, when I decided I wanted to try to live as normally as possible for a while."

His nipples hadn't completely escaped the wrath of Torquemada, or whoever it was that stood in for him at the time; there were small red strips over them, but there was more than enough sensitive flesh there for Eve to coax each nub into full arousal, all the while thoroughly enjoying his unabashed moans of pleasure.

When she started to make her way downward, though, as if she was going to take him into that luscious mouth of hers, he decided he'd had enough of allowing her to have her own way, and flipped her easily onto her back. His hand fell naturally to the crux of her desire, where

it always seemed to land, and he watched her eyes as his fingers plundered that hot, swollen grove.

Afraid that he was going to pleasure her without taking her completely, Eva mewled, mid-writhe, "Make love to me, Marcus, please."

He wanted to comply with her request more than he'd ever wanted to do anything in his entire existence. He would go through the Inquisition again happily, if they told him that she would be his at the end. "My love," he breathed, melting his lips onto hers and his body into her own.

Each time was new, and he would revel in her indrawn breath when he first entered her, feeling her pulsing around him, squirming to one side and the other trying to accommodate his unyielding presence within her. It was their first time, every time, because of the regenerative powers he passed on to her with every bite. She would be ever almost virginal, as she'd come to him weeks ago, having not had a lover in years, and he found he liked that idea very much.

She seemed to enjoy it also as she sighed and purred beneath him. Marcus leaned down and kissed her deeply, remaining entirely still, claiming her mouth with his tongue as thoroughly as his rampant cock claimed the rest of her. Eve responded by arching against him, and he abandoned her lips in favor of the generous swells he'd just punished, although he could see that the reminders of what he'd done to her were already beginning to fade. The more blood shared between them, the more quickly she'd heal.

This time there would be no pain. Marcus dedicated himself to her pleasure, and what she wanted was exactly what he wanted – for him to sink himself into her so completely that they were as joined physically as they were mentally. He threw open the doors of his mind, silently encouraging her to do the same thing. Their melding was complete, and their mutual orgasm spilled through them until Eve thought for sure their rapture would seep out onto the sheets beneath them.

When it was done, they lay together quietly, still connected as much as they could be, speaking without words, until Eve bade him move just a bit away from her, so that she could reach herself. She knew he could still feel everything she felt, and she wanted to see if he could partake of her womanly ability.

At first, when he realized what she was going to do, he was somewhat turned off. Perhaps what she was doing wasn't culturally acceptable to him; he was still a pretty old fashioned man, for having lived as long as he had. But her pleasure quickly overwhelmed his objections, and he let himself experience what she was experiencing. Besides being unbelievably erotic, it was a wonderful way to learn about what she liked.

He had to admit that her orgasms were much more full bodied than his, which tended to center in that one particular area of his body. But hers – he could feel her toes curl. He could feel her nipples tighten, and her scalp tingle. And she was still coming.

Eve didn't stop until she'd had as many orgasms as she wanted, which he was surprised to see was only about seven.

"Why'd you stop?" he asked, eager for more.

She giggled. "Because more is not always better."

That went entirely against his grain as a male, but he would pursue that at another time. "It's nearly dawn."

Eve could tell he was getting tired. "I'll sleep with you today. I don't need to go anywhere."

Marcus was rapidly losing the ability to stay awake. "You do what you want. Just remember your rules, and be here when I wake up."

"I won't leave you," she repeated, giving the small phrase multiple meanings.

He raised his eyelids slowly, and she could see the cloudiness already forming in them. "You have a punishment coming for that snort of yours." She'd known he wouldn't let her get away with it. "But you can go swimming, if you want."

"Not today." She curled against him, drawing the sheet and blanket up over the both of them, and saying, just before he was completely asleep, "But I do want to meet some of your vampire friends."

The thought of Eve with his friends was almost enough to keep him awake, but not quite. He'd have to deal with that tonight.

The last thing he felt before oblivion claimed him was her lips on his as she sighed, "I love you," into his mind.

## The End

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