

A Candidate For The Kiss

by Angela Knight

To my reader:

I was watching James Bond do something impossible in one of his movies when I thought, "This would be a lot more believable if he was a vampire." And just like that, this story was born.

Thanks to Alexandria Kendall for letting me play in her Secrets sand-box with my handcuffs and handsome hunks. And thanks to the readers who said, "When are you going to do another vampire story?"

Well, here it is.

Angela Knight

Chapter One

If they caught her, they'd kill her.

Dana Ivory looked out the window of the rotting treehouse, peering down at the four men gathered around the bonfire below. She knew that if they discovered her, they'd put a bullet in her brain and dump her body so far out in the woods nobody would ever find anything but bones.

But if Dana could keep the four from catching her, she'd live to blow their plans to hell and make her own reputation. All she needed was guts and luck. Guts she had. Luck... well, she'd see.

Her hand shaking, Dana angled the microphone further out the window to better pick up the conversation going on below.

"Nothin'll put the fear in the mongrel races and traitor whites like killing the President they all elected."

"Shit, they'll piss themselves wonderin' where the next bullet's coming from!"

"And right-thinking whites'll flock to our banner. It'll finally be the start of our holy war."

The voices carried clearly in the warm summer air. Dana just prayed her tape recorder was picking them up half that well.

She swallowed against a queasy blend of terror and excitement. This time tomorrow, her byline wouldn't just be on the front page of The Adamsburg Weekly Tribune. Once the national wire services picked up this story, the words "By Dana Ivory" would be on every paper in the country.

And four white supremacists would be in jail for plotting the assassination of the President of the United States .

All thanks to Dana and their ringleader's nephew.

Jimmy Satterfield had sidled up to her just that morning to whisper that the local chapter of the White Aryan Brotherhood was meeting in the woods outside town. That in itself got Dana's attention, because Jimmy was so terrified of his uncle, he'd normally never breathe a word about anything Joe Satterfield or the WAB was up to.

"I ain't no snitch," Jimmy whispered, his voice hoarse and earnest with terror. "But this thing is so fuckin' big, anybody who even knows about it could go to jail. And not in no candy-ass state prison either. Hard time. Leavenworth time. Time I ain't gonna do for no Hitler-lovin' bastard, even if he is my uncle."

"But what are they planning?"

"Hide in the old treehouse just before sunset. You'll find out"

Dana had gone to the sheriff, of course. Steve Hannah should have jumped at the tip; he already suspected Joe and his crew in a string of convenience store robberies and drug deals he'd never been able to prove in court.

But instead of mobilizing his men for a raid—or even sending a deputy with Dana to investigate—Hannah had given her a verbal pat on the head and told her the elementary school was holding a nice pageant she ought to do a story on.

Well, she'd already written that story, dammit. Six times in the six years she'd been at The Adamsburg Weekly Tribune. What Dana hadn't done was an exposé that would send the WAB straight to jail, leaving the crime rate of Adamsburg, S.C. to plummet for at least a decade.

So she'd headed for the treehouse a couple of hours before the boys were due, picked her way over the rotting pine boards to a relatively solid spot, and started setting up her microphone, tape recorder and camera.

The treehouse wasn't the most comfortable perch in the world. Neighborhood kids had built it in the limbs of the old oak more than ten years ago, cobbling together pine plank walls and a sloping roof now pocked with several fist-sized holes. The whole thing smelled damp and unpleasant from the rot, mildew

and wildlife that had moved in over the years.

But if the ambiance wasn't exactly Martha Stewart, it also wasn't enough to keep Dana away from a good story. She'd pushed a desiccated mouse carcass aside with the toe of her running shoe, swept off a relatively clean patch next to the opening that served as a window, and sat down to wait.

The four WAB boys had showed up just before sunset, jouncing through the woods in a rusted white pickup, one man holding on for dear life in the back. As they got out of the truck, Dana recognized them as a fairly sinister quartet she knew from covering various bond hearings over the years.

There was round, snake-mean Bill Mason, who put his wife in the hospital once a month; Skeeter Jones, a tall man who reminded Dana of a ferret with his long body and narrow head; and buck-toothed Tony Brown, who grew marijuana out in the woods and guarded his crop with a sawed-off shotgun. But the worst of the bunch was Donnie Anders, hulking, bearded and fresh out of prison for beating a buddy to death over a bar tab. Oddly, there was no sign of Joe Satterfield, the leader of the Brotherhood chapter. Dana wondered where he was.

They'd built a fire, rolled a couple of joints, and started working their way through a couple of twelve-packs as they told lies about women and who'd told whose boss to go to hell. Dana began to suspect she was courting the attentions of the area's chigger population for nothing.

Then the conversation wandered to President Daniel Grayson's upcoming speech at the University of South Carolina. Dana was just wondering what possible interest the boys could have in that surprisingly intellectual topic when Skeeter Jones drawled, "This'll be bigger than the time we bombed that church."

She almost dropped her mike. The Mount Zion Baptist Church in nearby Newberry had blown up on Christmas day last year, killing the African-American pastor who'd come in to open up for services.

"No kidding, asshole," Anders said, spitting a spray of tobacco juice into the fire. "Putting a bullet in the President is definitely bigger than blowing up a preacher."

"Too bad the damn bomb went off early," Mason grumbled. "We coulda got us a whole church full."

Being a pastor's daughter, Dana was so horrified they'd bombed the church that the assassination plot took a moment to register. By the time she'd recovered from the shock, the four were already discussing the expert they were bringing in to murder Grayson.

Oh, God, Dana thought, as her heart began to lunge in her chest. These boys are actually planning to murder the President of the United States.

She spent the next half-hour listening in appalled fascination and planning the biggest story of her career.

Now Anders popped the top on his beer with a violent gesture of one grimy hand. "It's a helluva lot of money to give some bastard from out-of-state. I still say we should do it ourselves and keep the cash"

Mason hooted. "Yeah, right. We'd have the Secret Service so far up our ass we'd be pulling badges out of our teeth. This guy is good. Hell, Joe said he's the one that did that judge in Alabama ..."

"Maybe he's good. Maybe he ain't." Anders' little black eyes gleamed in the firelight, feral and mean over his scraggly beard. "And if he ain't, maybe he gets caught and sings to the Feds about what we hired him

to..."

Something growled.

A rush of blackness detached itself from the night and snatched Anders off the ground, then swung him around like a rag and slammed him against the nearest tree.

Dana jumped.

Anders must have tipped the scales at well over two hundred pounds, but now a man held him pinned so far up the trunk his cowboy-booted feet swung six inches from the dirt.

"Let's get something straight, asshole" The man's voice was cold, calm and so deep it seemed to rumble in the bones. "I do not sing for the Feds, I do not tap dance for the Feds, I do not provide the Feds with entertainment of any kind. And I sure as hell don't tell the Feds who hired me to do a job!"

That was the assassin?

Anders' square face twisted with rage. But as he met the stranger's narrow gaze, his expression slowly changed, eyes widening until the whites showed. Wheezing from the pressure of the big hand pinning him to the tree, he gasped out, "I didn't mean nuthin'."

Dana blinked. Anders had just done five years in prison for voluntary manslaughter. What had he seen in the other man's face that was nasty enough to make him back down?

True, the stranger was big, with a good four inches on Anders' six feet. Thick biceps shifted and bulged in his extended arm as he held the ex-con pinned, and the black T-shirt he wore molded to the curves of a powerful chest. But Anders was pretty beefy himself, despite the layer of fat covering his muscle, so it wasn't just the other's brawn that had him sweating.

Gazing at the stranger, Dana silently admitted he could make her sweat a little too. His profile looked as if it should be stamped on a Roman coin: handsome and arrogant, with an aquiline nose, high forehead, starkly masculine cheekbones and a square chin. The only soft thing about him was the wavy dark hair that brushed the tops of his broad shoulders.

But handsome or not, he stared at Anders with such menacing intensity Dana felt the hair rise on the back of her own neck. She was relieved when Joe Satterfield stepped out of the woods, his smile placating. "Uh, Jackson, you can turn him loose now. Donnie's harmless."

Like hell, Dana thought, but the assassin stepped back and let Anders drop. As the ex-con stumbled and tried to regain his balance, Jackson turned his back and walked away. An act of either courage or ignorance, considering Anders had hit the last man he'd killed from behind.

"So let's talk business." Accepting a beer from Skeeter, Jackson popped the top and took a long swallow. "Jonah said you want me to kill somebody big, but he didn't say who."

"How do we know you ain't wearing a wire?" Anders demanded, sullen hostility growling in his voice as he stumped toward the fire. Dana tensed, suspecting he'd feel compelled to do something nasty after the way he'd been humiliated.

Jackson shrugged, handed his beer back to Skeeter, and reached for the hem of his black T-shirt. In one

easy gesture, he pulled it over his head.

Oh, my.

Why the hell was the man making his living with a gun when women everywhere would have paid just to look at his body?

Broad expanses of fluid muscle formed Jackson's pecs, and his abdomen and ribs were sculpted in tight ridges that could have been chiseled by Michelangelo. Dark chest hair grew in a silky ruff across his chest, narrowing to flow downward toward the snap of his jeans. When he turned his back, the firelight gleamed across smooth, rippling contours that formed a beautiful V from broad shoulders to narrow waist, drawing attention to a pair of buns clad in black denim that were as tight and round as cantaloupes.

The man could have played the lead in one of Dana's guilty fantasies.

God, she thought, it's a shame he's a racist pig.

When Jackson faced around again, he lifted a thick brow. "Is that enough, or do I have to drop my pants?"

Satterfield gave an uncomfortable laugh. "Hell, boy, I think you've made your point."

A small voice in the back of Dana's mind whispered, Damn! She winced in guilt. Here she was, ogling a killer. No matter how sexy he was, his job description included sniper scopes and grassy knolls. Her parents were probably spinning in their graves.

Jackson shrugged back into his shirt with a lithe twist of his torso, reclaimed his beer, and sat on the ground next to Skeeter, stretching his long legs out in front of him. "Now that we got that settled—who am I killing?"

Satterfield wandered over and eased his considerable bulk onto a fallen log, his checkered shirt straining over his belly. He splayed his jeans-clad legs far apart to balance his gut and scratched the two-day growth of gray stubble on his chin. "Like I told you on the phone, what we got for you ain't gonna be easy. But Mr. Howard says you're the man to do it, and that's good enough for me"

Dana frowned. Was he talking about Jonah Howard, the Idaho racist who'd founded the White Aryan Brotherhood?

Jackson sipped his beer. "Yeah, I've done a lot of work for Jonah."

Which answers that question, Dana thought.

And what kind of "work" had Jackson been doing? A magazine article she'd read a few months back had called Howard "the suspected mastermind behind the WAB's domestic terrorism." Had Jackson been involved too?

"Well, now you can do something for us." Satterfield leaned forward and looked Jackson in the eye. "We want you to execute Daniel Grayson as a traitor to the white race."

Jackson's beer hesitated in mid-tip. "That is big." The assassin resumed his sip. "And you're right—it's not going to be easy. Not gonna be cheap, either. What do you have in mind?"

Satterfield told him about the President's planned trip to South Carolina. Dana listened, barely breathing, her hand sweating on the barrel of the boom microphone, her mind buzzing with questions and half-formed plans.

Should she call the FBI or the Secret Service? Did the Secret Service even have a South Carolina office? Could she get an agent to meet her so she could turn over the tape? She'd have to make some phone calls and find out.

Then, while the Feds were rounding up the WAB and their handsome assassin, Dana would write the exclusive of a lifetime. No more living on chicken salad sandwiches and driving a ten-year-old Mazda. No more working for a small town weekly for slave wages. This was her ticket to The New York Times.

"...really think you can do this?" Bill Mason asked. Dana snapped back to attention.

Jackson propped his beer can on his flat belly. "It's gonna take some planning." He slanted Satterfield a look. "And money. Figuring out the best time and place to hit him..."

"We thought you could do it in the Carolina Coliseum as he gives the speech"

Jackson snorted. "I'd never get out of there alive. It'll have to be before that, while he's on the way. Or after."

"Could bomb the Coliseum," Tony Brown suggested as he picked his buck teeth with a match.

The assassin shot him a scornful look. "What, you think the Feds are going to let me park a tractor trailer full of fertilizer on the lawn? Get serious. I'm gonna have to work on this awhile, use my contacts in the Service" He turned to meet Satterfield's hopeful stare. "And you're going to have to make it worth my time."

"A real patriot would do it for free." Anders spat into a pile of dead leaves.

Jackson smiled, his teeth flashing white in the firelight. "Even a patriot's gotta eat"

"We got money" Satterfield nodded at Mason, who pulled a suitcase into the light and flipped it open with a flourish.

Jackson leaned forward to peer at the bundles of green inside. "Quite a stash"

"We been raising cash for months," Satterfield told him. "Robbed a couple banks, a few convenience stores, sold a lot of dope. We was planning to buy a truckload of fertilizer and fuel oil, maybe blow something up. But then I heard Grayson was comin', and I thought—here's a chance to make a real difference."

"We'll be famous!" Skeeter said happily.

Satterfield shot him a look. "I hope to hell not. That would mean we got caught, and I ain't getting caught. Some other fool can be Lee Harvey Oswald."

Jackson got to his feet and stretched, putting one hand to the small of his back as he arched his spine. "No, he's right. Y'all are gonna be famous" In one smooth gesture, he pulled out a flat black case and

flipped it open on something that glittered in the firelight. Something that looked a lot like a badge.

His white teeth flashed in a malicious grin. "I'm a federal agent, and you assholes are busted"

Dana's jaw dropped.

Safe, she thought, dizzy with relief. I'm safe. And so is the President.

"I knew it!" Anders howled, exploding off the ground where he'd crouched in a sullen knot.

"Freeze!" a strange voice barked. "Federal agents! Throw down your weapons and raise your hands."

There was a concerted rustle, the crunch of feet stepping on leaves. A ring of men stepped out of the darkness, bulky and menacing in black body armor, their assault rifles leveled.

Donnie froze, staring wild-eyed at the muzzles ringing them. "You heard the man, y'all." Jackson grinned mockingly. "Dump the guns and raise your hands"

As an assortment of hardware began thudding to the ground, it occurred to Dana that she'd better reveal herself to the Feds as quickly as possible. Especially if she wanted an interview with J. Edgar Gorgeous down there. Which she did.

God, what a story this was going to be. And it looked like she'd even live to tell it.

Trying to decide when to draw attention to herself, Dana watched as the agents handcuffed their prisoners. Anders was being his usual charming self—cursing, demanding a lawyer, refusing to lie on the ground so he could be searched. Frustrated, the agent guarding him stepped closer, gesturing with the muzzle of his gun.

Then all hell broke loose.

An agent moving to help Anders' captor tripped on a root and fell against his comrade. The first agent automatically braced him with one hand... and Anders struck like a snake, grabbing the man's gun and ripping it out of his grip. The guard snatched for it, but Anders jumped back, bringing the weapon to bear on both men. Even as everyone else swung to cover him, he opened fire in a thunderous explosion of sound. The two agents went down in a heap.

Before Anders could fire again, Jackson was on him with a roar of rage, smashing the gun out of his hands as he grabbed the ex-con by the hair.

Dana was still wondering how anybody could move that fast when the agent opened his mouth—were those fangs?—and dove, growling, straight for Anders' throat.

What the hell is he doing? Dana thought, incredulous.

Anders grabbed Jackson's head to try to force him back, but his jaws were locked tight. Blood poured down the ex-con's throat, black

and wet in the firelight.

"Let go, you bastard! Somebody get him off me..." He clawed at Jackson, who ignored him, jaws

working. Anders' voice spiraled into a shriek. "Shit!He's drinking my blood!"

Jacksongrowled like a rabid wolf.

Around them, the other agents watched while their prisoners stared in horror. One of the Feds made an abortive movement toward the two, but none of the agents seemed surprised byJackson 's bizarre behavior.

Dana fumbled for her camera. She didn't know whether the photo would even come out in such poor light, since she didn't dare use a flash. But she damn well wanted a shot of a Federal agent trying to rip out a prisoner's throat with his teeth. Bringing up her Canon, she started clicking off shot after shot.

"Archer, they're all right!" an agent yelled atJackson as he knelt beside the two men who'd gone down. "He caught `em in the body armor. Looks like broken ribs. Somebody calleMS !"

Jackson—Archer?—stiffened, then jerked up his head and shoved the ex-con away. An agent began yelling into a radio, calling for medical assistance.

Anders stumbled back, clamping a hand to his bleeding throat as he stared at Jackson. "You were drinkin' my blood! What kind of sick motherf..."

"Go to sleep!"Jackson roared.

Anders dropped as if somebody had put a bullet in his brain. Dana blinked at the ex-con, sprawled flat on his back in a bramble bush. She hadn't even seenJackson hit him.

There was a long, long silence, broken finally by Anders' gentle snore.

"Jesus" Satterfield lifted his head off the ground to stare atJackson with an expression of wild-eyed horror. "You're some kinda fuckin' vampire!" He rolled his eyes at the agent crouching next to him, naked terror on his face. "We knew there was Jews running the government, but nobody said nuthin' about no vampires..."

Vampires in the FBI,Dana thought.Yeah, right. That hood you like to wear must cut off the circulation to your brain.

As for the fangs she'd thought she'd seen whenJackson had grabbed Anders—well, that had obviously been a trick of the light.

"You ain't gonna get away with this," Satterfield babbled. "I'm gonna tell my lawyer. There's laws against drinkin' people's blood..."

Jacksonlooked at the white supremacist coldly. A smear of red glistened on his mouth, and he wiped it away with the back of his hand. "You too, mastermind. Sleep."

Satterfield's eyes rolled back, and his head hit the ground.

Dana gaped. This time she knewJackson hadn't touched the white supremacist; he'd been all the way on the other side of the clearing. The agent had just... commanded Satterfield to sleep, and he'd slept. Like magic. As ifJackson really did have a vampire's psychic powers.

But that was impossible.

The man who crouched beside the fallen agents got to his feet and walked over to Archer. "You always go out of your fuckin' mind when one of the men gets hurt." He shook his helmeted head. "It's a good thing you're magic, or we'd never be able to explain this kind of shit."

"Yeah, well, the smell of blood makes me cranky." Archer shouldered past him to kneel beside the two injured agents, who'd just begun to stir. "How you doing, guys?"

"Ribs feel... like I got stomped... by the Dallas Cowboys," one of them gasped. "What the hell happened?"

"You got lucky. It could have been your head" Archer rocked back on his heels. "You want me to do something about those ribs, Roberts?"

The man winced and took a deep breath. "Yeah. I'm not... feeling particularly macho at the moment"

"Okay, look me in the eye" He bent close to the injured man and gentled his tone. "Feel the pain drain away, George." His voice was a low, hypnotic croon. "Going. Going. And gone."

Roberts let out a sigh of relief and relaxed, the white lines around his mouth smoothing. "Thanks, Archer. You're better than Demerol any day."

Hypnotism, Dana thought desperately. He's not a vampire, he's some kind of hypnotist.

Yeah. That made sense. The vampire thing... well, that was just plain ridiculous.

"You're welcome." Archer straightened. "But I still don't want you jumping up and running around until you get the ribs taken care of. You could hurt yourself without knowing it." He glanced over at the other man. "How about you, Stevenson?"

The second agent licked his lips and looked uncomfortable. "I'll pass, boss. I'm not that bad."

"Don't be a dumbass" Roberts sounded annoyed. "Archer's not gonna hurt you. I know you haven't been with us long, but..."

"It's his choice, George." Archer shoved to his feet. "Stevenson, if you decide you want help after all, don't be too proud to let me know."

"It's not that I don't trust you," the agent said hastily. "It's just the idea of somebody else being in my head..."

Jesus, Dana thought, stunned. Maybe this guy actually does have some kind of psychic powers.

Uneasily, she flashed on the image of Archer's teeth buried in Anders' throat. Could it be true? Could he be a vampire—the kind of soulless demon her fundamentalist father had always said was abroad on the earth?

No. No way. This was getting too much like an episode of The X-Files. She didn't know what was going on here, but it couldn't possibly be what it looked like. There had to be some kind of perfectly logical explanation for all this that didn't involve capes and coffins.

There'd better be. Otherwise the only paper that would touch this story would be The National Enquirer.

Licking her lips, Dana aimed the camera at Archer and prepared to take another photo just as he lifted his head, looked straight up at her and called, "Get any good shots, Ms. Ivory?"

Dana froze.

"Who the hell are you talking to, Archer?" The agent who'd checked on Roberts and Stevenson moved to join him, looking up at the treehouse over their heads.

"Remember the newspaper reporter the sheriff warned us about? She's up there taking pictures." Propping his fists on his lean hips, Archer stared upward. Dana knew the treehouse window was shrouded in utter blackness, yet he looked as if he could see her clearly. But that was impossible. Unless...

Jesus, she thought, unable to deny the weight of the evidence any longer. He really is a vampire.

"She's been up there with a microphone since before we arrived. I can hear her breathing and the tape recorder running." Archer shook his head. "Then she started snapping photos, though God knows why—she's not using a flash, and there's no way in hell they'll come out."

"Oh. Well, you can handle it." The agent looked around at his comrades. "Come on, let's load these morons up. Where the hell is EMS?"

"Dispatcher said they're on the way," somebody called back.

As Dana watched, frozen, the men hauled their prisoners to their feet. It took some sharp calls and shakes to rouse Anders and Satterfield, both of whom staggered and blinked once they were finally upright, disoriented as drunks.

"Look, Ms. Ivory, nobody's going to hurt you," Archer called, his tone patient. "You can come on down now. I just want to talk to you."

And then he'll look me in the eyes and make me forget the whole thing ever happened, Dana thought.

Like hell. She wasn't losing the story of a lifetime to some vampire's mental magic, badge or no badge.

Dana looped the camera strap over her head, then grabbed her tape recorder and mike and jumped to her feet. Wheeling for the door, she took a single lunging step forward.

Her left foot smashed through a rotten floorboard.

Dana fell, equipment tumbling. She caught herself on her hands and one knee, only to feel her ankle twist with an agonizing wrench of pain.

Biting back a frantic curse, she tried to jerk free. All she got for

her trouble was a jagged board digging more deeply into her trapped leg. Dana gritted her teeth, grabbed her thigh in both hands and pulled. The board dug deeper, bringing tears to her eyes. Something hot rolled down her ankle.

Great. Here she was, trapped and bleeding with Tall, Dark and Toothy waiting to pounce.

"Calm down. You're just making it worse"

Dana looked up to see the vampire standing silhouetted in the door of the treehouse.

Chapter Two

He could see the reporter plainly with his vampire night vision, though Gabriel Archer knew the room must be pitch black to her.

"So," she demanded as she glared up at him through her platinum blonde bangs, gray eyes narrowed with a mixture of fright and defiance. "Are you going to bite me next?"

Archer killed the impulse to purr, "Oh, could I?" Instead he gave her an easy smile. "I wasn't planning on it."

"Well, that's a relief." But she didn't look relieved as she crouched there on the floor, one long, slim leg caught in a jagged hole in the rotten wood, her full breasts quivering with every agitated breath.

She was young, Archer judged. In her mid-twenties at most. And lovely, with a narrow, delicately angular face and a thin nose that tilted just slightly at the end. Under that shaggy mop of moonlight-pale hair, her eyes were the misty gray of clouds after a storm, wary and wide. It was the kind of face you'd expect to see peering out from beneath a mushroom—except there was nothing fairy-like about those centerfold breasts.

Or that courtesan's mouth, Archer thought with a stir of hunger. Her lips were full, pouting and exotic, parted slightly to reveal straight, white teeth. There was a wealth of erotic potential in that mouth.

Her feminine scent only added to the temptation: gently musky, blending with the sharp copper of blood to set Archer's appetite burning. She must have cut herself in that fall.

God, he'd love to kiss it and make it well.

Looking at her, scenting her, Archer felt a ravenous heat. He might consider himself a professional, but his body was a creature

of sex, blood and seduction. A woman like her could feed all his favorite hungers.

Unfortunately, the middle of a mission was not the time to indulge.

While Archer worked for self-control, Dana's features smoothed as though she were reaching for calm

herself. She sat back, bracing her hands behind her. The position arched her spine, and Archer took shameless advantage of the darkness to eye her breasts. She was wearing a bra under that cotton shirt, but he was willing to bet it was little more than a veil of lace over her tempting flesh.

"Just how many vampires does the FBI have on the payroll?" Dana asked, sounding as cool as Sam Donaldson grilling the President. A real feat considering the rapid heartbeat he could hear slamming out her terror.

The question startled an admiring laugh out of him. "Damn, you've got guts. No brains to speak of, but guts to spare."

"Just doing my job, Agent. And you didn't answer the question."

"I'm not with the FBI. It's another federal agency altogether."

"Called?"

"I could tell you" Archer smiled slowly as he put his own spin on the old spook joke. "But then I'd have to bite you."

"I could guess, and you could nod," Dana suggested boldly. "The Bureau of Vampire Intelligence? The Central Vampire Agency?" Her full mouth twitched in an impish smile. "Fangs 'R' Us?"

"The Federal Office of Inquiry and Analysis." She wouldn't remember it in ten minutes anyway.

"Never heard of it."

"I'd be worried if you had."

"Sounds more like accountants than vampires."

"That's the idea."

"How long have you been a vampire, anyway?"

Archer shook his head. "I can't believe you're trying to interview me. Not thirty minutes ago, you watched me come close to tearing out a man's throat. Most people would be babbling right about now."

"I'm babbling on the inside. How long have you been a vampire?"

"Two hundred and twenty-six years." He just wanted to see her reaction.

She didn't give him one. "How long have you been working for the government?"

"Two hundred and twenty-three."

That stopped her, but she rallied. "So what were the Founding Fathers like?"

"That thing about the cherry tree is a myth, Washington's teeth were ivory rather than wood, and Congress was just as big a pain in the ass as it is now."

"That doesn't surprise me."

"Nothing much does, does it?"

She smiled slowly, ambition and confidence in her eyes. "I mean to play in the big leagues, Mr. Archer. I can't afford to be taken by surprise."

I'd like to take you. Slowly. "Why don't you come down to the fire where we can see each other better, and we'll continue this conversation," he said, his voice far more husky than he'd intended.

"Where we can see each other better. Right," she said, sounding surprisingly tough for somebody with that face. "Translated: where I can look deep into your eyes and you can put the vampire whammy on me. And suddenly all my questions will disappear."

Archer grinned. "Smart girl."

Her tempting lips peeled back from her pretty white teeth. "You're not messing with my head."

"Don't you think it's best all around? It's not like anybody will believe you."

"They won't have to." Dana snorted and gingerly pulled at her trapped leg. "What kind of moron do you think I am? I'm not blowing my chance at a national story because of your overbite"

He walked lightly across the rotting flooring to kneel beside her. She shrank back, but Archer ignored the movement and reached down to twist the broken length of board away from her calf. "It won't hurt you to forget a detail or two. You'll still get your exclusive."

"Forget it. I'm not thrilled about having somebody else edit my copy. I sure as hell don't want you editing my head." Dana pulled her leg free with a tiny gasp of pain, then cautiously felt for the wound

in the darkness. He could see it wasn't serious, though she could probably use a tetanus shot.

Archer sighed and stood, reaching down to pull her to her feet. "Ms. Ivory, I'm afraid you've missed the point. I'm not giving you a choice."

Dana narrowed her cloud-gray eyes in anger. He could almost see her busy little brain working out her chances of escape. The results evidently didn't please her; her shoulders slumped. Then she mustered a glower. "You've got no right to rape people's minds just so you won't be inconvenienced."

"Inconvenienced?" He snorted. "Ms. Ivory, if people knew what I am, they'd hunt me down like a rabid dog."

"So what about government officials? They've got to know about you," Dana bent and started to feel around in the dark for her camera.

"Only the few who need to. To others, I'm just another operative. The rest have never heard of me at all. And I keep it that way." Archer scooped up the camera, microphone and tape recorder, then handed the whole armload to her.

"Thanks," Dana grumbled. He took her elbow to guide her toward the door, where she ended up giving the pile back to him so she could climb down the treehouse ladder.

She moved stiffly as she crouched to feel for the first rung with her foot. Archer suspected her injured leg was hurting, but when he offered to help, Dana aimed such a cold look up at him that he shrugged. Delicate jaw set, she began to descend, her long, slim hands white-knuckled as they gripped the rungs. He climbed after her, holding her gear in one arm.

When Dana reached the ground, she immediately turned her back on him. Archer smiled in reluctant admiration, recognizing her stubborn determination to make his job as difficult as possible.

The clearing was empty except for the dying fire. His men had gone, headed for the sheriff's office and the nearest jail to book their prisoners. His unruly body immediately began to see the possibilities, but Archer reined in its eager leap with his habitual self-control. Business first. He wanted to change her memories and be done with it; he'd had enough of her pricks to his conscience.

But he'd make it up to her, Archer told himself. As soon as he checked on his men, he'd give Dana an exclusive about the arrest and finish up the paperwork.

Then, once duty was served, he'd turn his attention to seducing her.

Archer loved a good seduction. The sweet, hot quest to discover what aroused a woman most, the erotic dance of temptation once he found the key to her heat. Especially when the woman had this one's fire and will—not to mention edible little body. She'd be both a challenge and a pleasure.

He dumped her equipment on the ground and moved up behind her. "Look at me, Dana." Softly, he added, "I promise I won't hurt you."

Dana whirled on him, gray eyes snapping in the firelight. "The hell you won't."

"Then I'll be quick." Archer locked his gaze on hers, the way the Countess had taught him two centuries ago, and reached for her mind with his own. He expected the usual easy tumble into alien memories, feelings, hopes and fears.

Instead he felt... Nothing.

Her gray eyes didn't widen, didn't glaze, didn't falter from his in their cool, defiant stare. It was as though she looked at him through a glass shield.

Archer felt a quick spurt of delight at the unexpected resistance. He forced it down. He'd gotten his hopes up before when he'd encountered this kind of mental barrier, only to be disappointed again and again. If he pushed a little harder, her mind would yield to his control the way all the others had.

He gathered his considerable psychic power and stabbed it like a rapier straight between those wide gray eyes.

There. He waited for her to open to him...

"Are you going to do whatever it is, or not?"

God. Archer stared at her, staggered. His mental thrust should have punched right through her resistance, opening her mind to his. But it hadn't.

She was a candidate for the Kiss.

Finally, after two hundred and twenty-six years, he'd found a woman who could survive rebirth as a vampire.

Maybe, Archer cautioned himself. She had the psychic strength, but there was more to it than that. Much more. He needed time, time to examine and probe. Time to decide what to do.

Suspended between hope and wariness, Archer stared at her. She met his gaze stubbornly, her features set in rebellion.

Candidate or not, he realized Dana Ivory was going to be a problem.

For one thing, what was Archer going to do about her knowledge of his vampirism until he decided whether to change her? He had no idea if she could be trusted. He'd survived in his country's service all these years through ruthless secrecy, but Dana could force him into the glare of a national spotlight even if she never used the word "vampire." Once her story hit the Associated Press wire service, he was screwed. There was no way he could influence all the thousands of editors who used the AP into killing the story.

He had to get her under control.

Fortunately, Gabriel Archer had two centuries' practice in controlling women.

At first it was all Dana could do not to shake when she met his gaze. Archer's eyes looked so blue and cold and merciless as he stared into hers. And so knowing, as if he were immensely old. Looking into that immortal stare, she finally believed he was a vampire.

Her father's religious teachings stirred uneasily in her mind. If he was a vampire, didn't that make him some kind of demon?

Yet a demon would have helped the kind of men who bombed churches. Archer had jailed them. So he couldn't be a demon.

But what was he?

As she stared up at Archer, Dana suddenly realized his expression had softened, becoming less ruthless, almost seductive. His lids lowered, pupils expanding into dark pools set in his crystalline blue irises. The tight line of his mouth relaxed, taking on a sensual curve, and his nostrils flared as if scenting her. He took one step closer, then another, until he was so close his big body seemed to

surround hers.

Her mouth went dry as she remembered the way he'd looked with his shirt off, the intensely male contours gleaming in the firelight. She took a step back.

"Are you afraid of me, Dana?" Archer murmured, closing the distance between them again.

God, his chest was broad. It seemed to fill her vision. And the T-shirt fabric clung, so she could see all that fascinating masculine topography. Like the way the black material tented over the tiny nub of his left nipple. She wet her lips and resisted the impulse to look down, see if something else might be protruding

beneath his jeans.

"You shouldn't be afraid," he said, his velvet and whiskey voice curling around her senses. Archer lowered his head toward hers, his hair falling forward. Dana watched, hypnotized, as strand slipped over dark, gleaming strand, tumbling in slow motion against the stern rise of his cheek. She wanted to touch his hair, feel its silken length slip through her fingers.

"I have no desire to hurt you," he said softly. "There are so many better things to do." His breath gusted over her lips, warm and smelling faintly yeasty.

"Beer," Dana blurted, groping for a way to resist the lush spell he was spinning around her. "I didn't think vampires drank anything but blood."

"Don't believe everything you hear." Gently, Archer reached up and smoothed her own tumbled hair back from her forehead. His fingers felt warm, almost feverish. Wasn't a vampire's skin supposed to be cold? Another myth shot to hell, she thought, fighting dizziness.

"Don't be afraid of me, Dana," he said, his voice a deep, seductive rumble. "I'm one of the good guys" His eyelashes cast long shadows against his elegant cheekbones as he lowered his head. "Very, very good."

And then his lips touched hers, hot silk, brushing once, then clinging, slowly drawing her lower lip into his mouth to gently suckle. His tongue slipped across it, wet and clever, tempting her to open her own mouth, let him inside.

Her head went into a long, slow spin. What was happening to her?

He was touching her now, gentle little strokes, here on her shoulder, there on her cheek, a fingertip dance on her waist, slipping into a caress of her hip. How could a man who could throw Donnie Anders around with brutal strength touch her with such delicacy?

Dana dragged her mouth away from his and gasped. "I thought you were supposed to hypnotize me, make me forget.

"Oh, I want to make you forget" His mouth moved to her ear, nibbled, breathed. "I want you to forget how to say no."

Dana tried to brace her hands against his chest to hold him back, but she couldn't seem to summon the strength. And that alarming weakness spread quickly, rolling from her arms to her knees. She tried to stiffen her legs and stand erect, only to find herself leaning into his chest, surrendering to those hot, seductive hands.

One of them had discovered her bottom. He traced the curve of a jeans-clad cheek with long fingers, then slipped into the cleft to exert a suggestive, wicked pressure. Dana tightened reflexively, unintentionally thrusting forward against his groin. Where she felt the thick, hard length of his erection jutting against the zipper of his jeans. He rolled his hips, letting her feel the massive ridge. She gasped, and he purred a laugh in her ear.

He's got me acting like a skittish virgin, she thought, appalled. "Stop that. Aren't you on duty?"

"I'm taking a dinner break," he whispered, and bit her earlobe. One of those quick hands found its way

under her shirt and slid upward toward her breasts. "How about it, Dana. Wouldn't you like to be dinner?" The hand captured her, slipping over her breast to encircle it with long, possessive fingers. She caught her breath as the sensation unfurled along her nerves. He squeezed gently, his heat searing her skin through the lace of her bra. "No," Dana protested. It came out as a tiny, helpless whimper, sounding arousing even to her ears.

"But you'd make such a lovely feast. And I'm so hungry." He delicately pinched her nipple, which drew into a tight, tingling peak at his touch. "I could spend hours devouring these beautiful breasts. Let me see them, Dana"

"You've done something to me," she moaned.

"Not yet." He grabbed her shirt and ruthlessly pulled it off over her head. then dragged the bra down. "But I'm going to."

Dazed, Dana looked down to see her own bare breasts glowing pale in the firelight, the nipples hard, rosy points. Then Archer's head covered one breast while his hand claimed the other. His mouth sucked and bit as his fingers tormented until need jerked tight in her belly.

Dana's feet went out from under her. She yelped, grabbing at Archer for support, only to realize he'd swept her up in his arms. Still suckling greedily at her helpless nipple, he lowered her to the ground. Dry leaves crunched under her bared back.

For a moment Archer loomed above her, his massive shoulders edged in moonlight before he descended on her to continue his leisurely feast.

Dana twisted helplessly at the sensation created by his swirling, lapping tongue, then groaned as a hand slid between her legs, pressing into her cleft through her jeans until she thought she'd burst into flames. She panted, past protest now, her body yowling for him, for his mouth and his fingers and his erection.

Distantly, she heard the erotic whisper of her zipper sliding down. Then his hand touched her silk clad belly, slipping past the waistband to search out wet curls and tight, soft lips. One long finger dipped inside, gliding through the thick cream of her arousal to slowly pump. Then another joined it, and another, filling her full. She moaned.

It had been so long.

This was just like her fantasies, Dana thought, in helpless, shamed excitement—the ones she never told anyone about because they were so sinful. Being taken by a stranger in the woods, letting him touch and taste and bite.

Bite.

The word stabbed her with a sudden realization that sliced through the heat in her mind like a dagger of ice.

He wasn't just any stranger. He was a vampire.

And this wasn't about love or even sex. He intended to feed on her.

"Stop it." Her voice was low and determined. "Now."

Archer froze, his mouth filled with hard nipple, his fingers buried in tight, lush sex. He was triply erect, fangs and cock, lust searing his veins until he ached.

But he didn't ignore that tone. Ever.

"I said get off me!" Her hands pushed at his shoulders.

"All right, dammit!" He jerked away and shot to his feet, retreating several paces as Dana jumped up and began to jerk and zip at her clothes. Aching, frustrated, Archer watched her pale breasts bounce as she scooped her shirt off the ground and shrugged into it.

"I thought you were supposed to be one of the good guys," she said bitterly.

"You weren't complaining a minute ago." Archer barely managed not to snarl. Showing fang at a time like this would be too much like a threat.

Dana jerked her head up. Her gray eyes swam with betrayed tears. "You said you would make me forget you're a vampire. You didn't say anything about making me sleep with you."

He gaped at her. "You think I did this with psi?"

"Didn't you?"

"I'm a seducer, not a rapist," Archer snapped. "I'd never use psychic influence to get a woman into bed."

Dana fisted her hands on her hips. "Oh, right. One minute you're going to hypnotize me, the next, I'm on the ground letting you suck my nipples. But you didn't use `psychic influence."

"I'm good," he snarled.

"You're a vampire," she hurled at him. "You couldn't be good if you tried. You're damned by God."

For a moment Archer couldn't believe she'd said the words. This was the twenty-first century, and she was giving him the same line he'd heard in the eighteenth. "God and Satan have nothing to do with vampirism. It's a virus. You catch it."

That stopped her. Her pale brows drew down over those cloud-gray eyes. "How?"

"I'm not in the mood for another fucking interview," he ground out.

"I've just been rolling on the ground with you. I think I'm entitled to know."

She had a damn good point. "You have nothing to worry about" At the moment, anyway. "You can't catch the vampire virus from a kiss. Or a toilet seat, or a sneeze. You'd only have to worry if you drank my blood."

She wrinkled her pert nose at him. "Ugh. Well, I'm certainly not going to be doing that any time soon" There was a long, tense pause. Finally Dana drew herself upright, evidently deciding to defuse the moment. "When are you going to do your psychic amnesia thing?"

"Already tried." He shrugged. "It doesn't work on you"

She blinked. "Why not?"

"I don't know." A lie, but she wasn't ready for the truth.

A relieved smile spread across Dana's face, winsome and sweet. "Well, in that case, I'll just be getting back to the paper. I've got a story to write." She turned on her heel and started out of the clearing.

"No" He couldn't let her leave. Not now.

She whirled back to him, eyes widening. "But I told you, I'm not going to use any of the vampire stuff. Nobody would believe me anyway."

"I'm not even talking about the `vampire stuff.' I just don't want this story out right now."

"Too bad. It's out."

"Dana, I flushed Satterfield's plot by using psi on the WAB's founder and ordering him to recommend me to anybody planning something big. If you report this, Jonah Howard will get suspicious, and he won't let me get close enough to influence him again. And I have reason to believe the WAB is planning other terrorist actions."

Well, it sounded plausible, anyway. In reality, Howard would have a hell of a time keeping Archer away no matter how suspicious he was. All Archer had to do was walk up to him in the grocery store, look him in the eye and give him an order, and Howard would do whatever the hell he wanted. But Dana didn't know that.

She shook her shaggy blonde head. "Archer, those men were going to assassinate the President. You can't keep something that big a secret."

He laughed. "Oh, I've kept much bigger secrets than this."

"But..."

"I am not letting you go, Dana."

She bared her teeth at him. "You can't keep me"

Archer reached into his back pocket and pulled out a pair of handcuffs. "Can't I?" He started toward her. "You have the right to remain silent..."

Dana backed up. "But I haven't done anything!"

"How about interfering with a federal investigation?"

"Interfering, hell, I'm just reporting it. Or did they repeal the First Amendment when nobody was looking?"

"Sorry." Archer grabbed her shoulder and spun her around. Catching her slim wrists, he pulled them behind her, trapped them in one hand, and snapped on the `cuffs.

"I want a lawyer, you toothy jerk!" She turned her head to glare over her shoulder at him, her gray eyes snapping. Those moonlight pale curls framed her face, and her full mouth looked mutinous, kissable.

"Now."

"You'll get a lawyer when I say you get a lawyer. In the meantime, you'll stay in my custody" Temper simmering, Archer leaned close to her delicate little ear and whispered mockingly, "How do you feel about bondage, Dana?"

Her heartbeat leaped.

"Ahh" A smile of delight spread across his face. "Does innocent Dana have a guilty secret?"

As he watched, a tide of red flooded from her cleavage right up to her hairline.

And he knew he had her.

Chapter Three

Dana picked nervously at a hole in the vinyl seat of her chair, then realized what she was doing and forced herself to stop. She was in enough trouble without destroying the property of the Adams County Sheriff's Department. Guiltily, she looked around the office, but none of the detectives were watching her.

And Archer and his handcuffs were nowhere to be seen.

Thank God. An hour had passed since he'd hit her with his wicked suggestion, but her skin still felt hot from that blush. Damn her misspent adolescence anyway. And damn big brother Mark and his stash of Victorian erotica.

She slumped. At least Archer'd had the courtesy to take the handcuffs off before he'd escorted her into the building. It would have been mortifying to be cuffed in front of the deputies she'd been working with for the past six years.

Unfortunately, he'd killed the spurt of gratitude she'd felt by leaning over and whispering in her ear, "They go back on... later."

That last "later" was spoken in such a tone of velvet suggestion that she'd felt the blush roll right back up to her hairline again.

Dana glowered, remembering the curious looks her red face had gotten from the deputies as they'd walked in. She'd promptly blushed even hotter. She just wasn't equipped to keep her cool in the face of Archer's sophisticated games, not with her upbringing.

From the day Dana had turned thirteen, her evangelist mother had exercised her considerable talent for fire and brimstone preaching on the subject of sex. "Intercourse," as Helen Ivory called it, was powerful and innately corrupting, and should only be risked under the protection of marriage for the purpose of begetting children.

Anything else was sinful.

Helen also laced her lectures with well-meant misinformation: the AIDS virus would go right through latex condoms, and abortions would leave you sterile and suicidal.

Dana's outrage when she'd discovered she'd been lied to was one of the reasons she'd gone into journalism, the business of spreading truth whether anybody liked it or not.

But that strict upbringing also left her hungry for any knowledge whatsoever about sex. So the day she discovered her brother's hidden porn cache in the attic when she was sixteen, she'd pounced on it.

At first Dana had been horrified at the stories, with their blatant misogyny and streak of cruelty. But she'd been equally excited by their eroticism. Even though guilt had quickly driven her out of the attic, fascination had repeatedly lured her back. She'd spent hours up there on a discarded couch, reading in the light from a tiny attic window as she caressed herself in guilty excitement.

From then on, her fantasies revolved around wickedly handsome rakes and bound virgin prisoners. Hell, she still had those fantasies, and she still felt guilty, not so much out of a fear of brimstone as the knowledge she shouldn't be aroused by the idea of submitting to anybody's domination.

Unfortunately, her libido didn't seem to have a social conscience. And it loved Archer, archetype of wickedly seductive dominance that he was. The man was the sum total of every fantasy she'd ever had: handsome, built like a Roman gladiator, and gifted with enough erotic skill to make a woman get down and beg. Dana would bet her last notebook Archer had actually been a Victorian rake. He certainly seemed to sense her darkest fantasies, knowing just how to drive her right into a frenzy.

Yet he'd stopped when she'd said no and meant it. Unfortunately, he was also planning to book her on some pretty serious federal charges.

Dana slumped, discouraged, and braced an elbow on the battered desk beside her. Brooding, she turned her attention to the federal agent who was typing with two fingers on a small black laptop. He must have brought the computer with him; God knew the Adams County Sheriff's Department couldn't afford any tech that high. "Did Archer really fight in the Revolutionary War?"

The agent looked up and gaped at her, then glanced around hastily for eavesdroppers. Seeing none, he whispered, "He told you that? And let you remember it?"

"His psychic thing doesn't work on me. Did he?"

He frowned. "His psychic thing always works." Hazel eyes focused on her, sharp in the agent's middle-aged face. He was in his fifties, Dana estimated, with tired, lived-in features and thinning sandy hair, but his body was as hard and lean as a teenager's in its black fatigues. "No comment"

"But..."

"I'm not telling you a damn thing, lady," he interrupted, his voice cold. "Especially not if Archer's psi doesn't work on you."

"Fitzroy," Archer said from the doorway.

"Yes sir?"

"I need to talk to you a minute. And you." He shot Dana a hard look. "Quit trying to interview everything that moves."

She slumped down in her chair with a sigh of disgust.

Michael Fitzroy followed Archer into the interview room and shut the door. "How'd it go?"

He closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. Repeated psychic sessions always gave him a murderous headache. "They'll cooperate fully for the next forty-eight hours or so. You'll need to gather all the evidence they'll give you before my influence wears off."

Fitzroy lifted a graying eyebrow. "You sound like you don't plan to be there."

Archer shrugged. "You can handle them. Besides, I've got another project." Which should be a lot more fun. "By the way, I want you to do a full security check on Dana Ivory—the works. I want to know her bank balance, her work history, her parents, her shoe size, what her third grade teacher thought of her and who gave her that first kiss. Everything, right down to the ground. The same

check we give prospective agents. Then e-mail the data to me. I'll be at the house in Charleston ."

Fitzroy stared at him, gaze sharpening. "Why? What the hell's going on, Archer?"

"She's a candidate, Fitz."

"For the team?" He looked horrified.

"More than that—for the Kiss."

"You want to make her a vampire?"

Archer gave him an annoyed look. "Would you hold it down?"

Fitzroy moved closer and dropped his voice to a hiss. "Shit, Arch, are you getting Alzheimer's? She's a kid. She can't be more'n twenty-five. You can't seriously mean to give her your kind of power. Besides, she's a reporter."

He said the word in a tone of such deep loathing Archer had to grin. "It's not a dirty word, Fitz."

"The hell it's not. Look, Archer, this little bimbo makes a living telling morons things they've got no business knowing. And you want to hand her the biggest secret in U.S. history? Why not make a fuckin' sixty-second commercial and run it during the Super-bowl!"

"Once she joins the team, she won't tell anybody anything." Archer scrubbed both hands through his hair, trying to make his second-in-command understand. "Look, I believe Dana has the strength to become a vampire without going insane. And I have never met anyone else I could say that about in my entire life, including you. That makes her a potential intelligence asset we can't ignore." He looked up and caught his friend in a determined stare. "I have to check her out?"

Agitated, Fitzroy turned and began to pace. "What if you change her, and she misuses the power?"

"Then I'll kill her."

The agent snorted. "Oh, you are so full of shit. You hate hurting women, up to and including psychopathic terrorists. This kid would just look at you with those big gray eyes and you wouldn't be able to lay a finger on her. And we'd all be fucked."

"I said I'd handle her," Archer snapped. "Look, I'm not going to change her unless I'm sure she'll work, all right? Besides, she may not even agree"

Fitzroy threw up both hands. "Fine. You do whatever the hell you think best. You always do. But you'd better damn well be right."

Archer set his jaw. "Don't worry. I know exactly what to do."

Dana looked up as Archer stalked back into the detective's office and gave her a smoldering look. "Come with me."

She rose to her feet, eyeing him warily as he strode over to grab her by the elbow. "Where are we going?"

"You'll find out" Archer pulled her around and propelled her out of the office and down the hall toward the front door.

"Am I under arrest or what?" Dana tried to set her feet, but his relentless strength kept her moving. "Look, you haven't booked me, which means I haven't been charged, which means you have no right to hold me. I could report you for this. Who's your supervisor?"

He angled her an amused look. "Don't try to bluff me, Dana. Even if you did file a report, do you really think I'd let anybody take action against me?"

Damn. She hadn't thought of that. She could scream bloody murder clear to the President, and all

Archer would have to do is whisper in the right ear to make it all go away. True, she could go to the press—he couldn't use his psi on everybody – but he could have the right people declare her a nut, and she'd be written off. Maybe even hospitalized.

A sudden chill skated Dana's spine. He could do anything he wanted to her, and nobody would ever say a word.

Feeling helpless, she stumbled after Archer as he pushed open the department door and pulled her out into the dark.

"What are you going to do to me?" Dana licked her dry lips.

He laughed, a low, seductive rumble. "I don't know yet. I'm still trying to make a list." With a flex of his arm, Archer swung her around the corner of the building. Her foot slipped as a piece of gravel rolled under it, but before she could smash into the brick, his

big hands caught and steadied her. Then he planted a palm between her shoulder blades and gently pressed her face-first against the rough surface of the wall.

"Let's start with a frisk, shall we?" Before Dana could jerk back, Archer kicked her feet wide, then moved up behind her. She gasped as he slid his muscular thigh up between her legs until it pressed against her sex, forcing her to ride him. She was just gathering the breath to protest when his big hands began to explore her body as if he owned it.

"Archer, what the hell are you doing?" she gasped. "One of the deputies could drive up!"

"It's so dark back here the only one who can see a damn thing is me." His breath gusted warmly against her ear as he dragged her back against his powerful body, then cupped his hands around her breasts. His thumbs strummed her nipples through her shirt. She felt them harden. "Hell, you can't even see what I'm doing, can you? But I can. You've got beautiful breasts, Dana" His tongue flicked out, tested one of the straining cords of her neck.

"Archer..."

"Ever been strip-searched?" Archer's voice was so darkly suggestive, she shivered. "How about a body cavity probe? We could play pretty little hooker and bad, bad cop. I'll bet you'd like that."

Dammit, how did he do this to her? How did he know just the right notes to hit? Thirty seconds, and he had her creaming. It was humiliating. "I'm not interested in playing anything with you," Dana gritted.

"It's against the law to lie to an agent of the Federal government, Dana." He brought his leg up higher, lifting her off the ground and forcing her sex hard against his thigh. Heat scalded her. "Do it again and I'll have to pull down your pants and spank you."

It was all she could do not to writhe as she rode his leg. "This isn't right," Dana gasped. "It's just a game to you, isn't it? It's a role. Dominant male."

"It's what I am," Archer purred in her ear, fingers plucking her nipples through the thin fabric of her shirt. "There are too damn many of you and only one of me. I've got to dominate you or I'm dead."

He pressed closer until Dana could feel the entire length of his body against her back. She licked her lips

as his rigid erection ground against her bottom. "I've got to find out what you need and give it to you, so you won't notice when I steal what I need. And what I need is you spread wide and wet under me, ready for my fangs and cock." He pressed her against the wall until she could feel every thick, powerful inch of him. "And Dana, you're going to give me just what I need."

"No," she moaned.

"Oh, yes. Over and over, every way I can think of." Slowly, Archer rolled his hips against her bottom, forcing her to imagine what it would be like to be at the mercy of his power. "On your belly with your ass in the air and your hands cuffed behind you. Tied spread-eagle to my big tester bed while I lick and taste all that creamy white skin. On your knees, sucking my cock until I shoot into your mouth."

"I won't!" Dana gasped, hot cream flooding her sex.

"You will," he retorted, his voice rich with velvet menace, his strong hands kneading her breasts. "Again and again. And you'll love every minute of it while I show you just what a vampire can do to a bound and naked woman."

"You'll have to use force," she said, trying for toughness.

"Oh, I will." He twisted her nipples. "Just the way you've always dreamed."

Shame and excitement stung her. "You don't know a damn thing about my dreams."

"I know how your heartbeat speeds when I talk about what I want to do to you. And I can smell how wet you are right now. I'd like to take your jeans down and lap you all up while you writhe and beg." He took her earlobe between his teeth and gently bit. "But you'd love it even better if I handcuffed you first. Admit it."

"No" She swallowed.

"At night in your lonely bed, you dream of being at the mercy of a man like me. Bound and spread and helpless. Ready to be fucked." Humiliation shafted through the languid desire he'd roused. It was as if he'd eavesdropped on her darkest fantasies, the ones she hated

to admit even to herself. "I'm not a toy, damn you!" Dana cried, her voice ragged with shame. "Don't treat me like one!"

Archer froze. She felt the hot wind of his breath gusting hard against her ear, heard him swallow. "No," he said, his voice hoarse. "You're not a toy."

Then he was gone, releasing her so quickly she would have fallen if he hadn't caught her again. He spun her around, gathering her wrists in one hand. She felt the touch of something cool around one of them, heard a snap, a musical rattle.

He was handcuffing her again. He was going to take her right here in the parking lot.

"No!" Dana fought to pull away, but he was too strong. "Not like this. Please, Archer!"

"Calm down," he said roughly. "I'm not going to do it here."

Panting, she subsided. He led her to the passenger side of one of the big, government cars parked in the lot and bundled her inside. Dana sat there, dazed, while he leaned in to buckle the seatbelt around her. His hair brushed her face as he snapped the belt together. She remembered what he'd said about smelling her wetness. She shivered in arousal and shame.

Archer pulled away from her and closed the door with a solid thunk. A moment later the driver's door opened, and he got in. The car started with a well-mannered growl.

"Where are we going?"

"Charleston. I have a house there." He threw the car into reverse and began to back up.

"Charleston. That's a two hour drive." Two hours in the car with him. Alone. And then they'd be at his house.

Alone.

She just wished the idea didn't make her feel so hot.

There was something about Dana that made him lose control. Archer had planned to take it slow, play the dark master of seduction until he had her begging. It was a part he'd acted for countless partners until he knew every leisurely step, every stylized gesture.

So when he'd pushed Dana against the wall, he'd intended nothing more than the opening act. Then he'd touched her, tasted her skin, scented her growing arousal, seen her blend of trembling desire and shame. He'd taken those full breasts in his hands, and hunger had roared over him in a wave so strong he'd come within a hair's-breadth of ripping her jeans down and taking her. Right there against the wall.

But the game was not supposed to affect Archer this way. He was supposed to be in control—of her and himself. An actor, playing a role. That was, after all, what he did best: act, whether the part was white supremacist assassin, Nazi S.S. officer, or demon lover. Whatever it was, Archer wrapped himself in the role, but he never lost sight of his goal and never forgot he was acting.

Yet somehow, Dana Ivory made him forget. This game was about gaining control of a potential vampire agent, yet he was the one who was being seduced. She kicked his hunger so high and so hot that all he wanted was to sweep her up and take her. Take her body, take her blood, take her heart. Take her and own her, until she was his without question, without possibility of escape.

And Dana responded deliciously, but she also fought that response, refusing to simply go along with the game. Archer wasn't sure he understood why. Usually women were more than happy to let him play the demon lover, never questioning what his real feelings were. He suspected they thought of him as nothing more than a fantasy given delicious life. And nobody cared about the feelings of a fantasy.

Yet Dana seemed to want something more. He had no idea what, or how to give it to her. Or even if he should.

Still, she responded to his demon lover. And that would have to be enough—for both of them.

She should be afraid of him, Dana thought. For God's sake, the man was a vampire. He'd handcuffed and ab-

ducted her for sex and bondage. He could even kill her and make sure no one ever caught him. Yet she felt no physical fear of him at all.

Paranoia stirred. Maybe she was under some kind of spell after all.

But... She stole a look at Archer's Roman coin profile as he drove. There was, despite every wicked thing he'd threatened her with, a basic core of decency under that dominant male mask of his. There wasn't even any real cruelty. He wouldn't hurt her. Not physically.

Emotionally, she wasn't so sure about. Dana didn't like the way he was getting to her, the way he'd figured out her darkest fantasies and turned them against her.

"How do you do it?" She asked the question before she realized she was going to. "How do you always know how to make me respond?"

Archer looked at her. His eyes reflected a glow of red in the light of a passing car, making her heart leap at the eerie shimmer they gave off. Dana expected him to give her another one of those suggestive lines of his, but his tone was serious when he answered. "I've been at this two centuries and more, Dana. I serve my country out of duty, but I seduce to survive."

"Why?" she demanded, not sounding nearly as cool as she wished. "Why does it matter to you what my fantasies are?"

Archer turned his head again to watch the road. "A vampire feeds on strong emotion as much as blood. The higher, the hotter, I can get my partner, the stronger the psychic charge she gives me in her climax. I learned a long time ago how to read the needs a woman can't speak, that she can't even allow a lover to guess. When I feed that hidden need, the response is explosive."

She stirred uneasily against the leather seat. "Then what? You just walk away? You've been fed, and that's it? What about how she feels?"

"You imagine a trail of broken hearts in my wake?" Archer snorted. "Women don't fall in love with a guilty fantasy. Generally they can't forget me fast enough"

Dana frowned, studying his profile in the dim, soft light of the dashboard. Was that a flash of vulnerability? "Are you the one with the broken heart, Archer?"

He laughed, a short, bitter bark. "Demon lovers have no hearts, Dana. We fuck, we feed and we walk, and everybody's happy."

"Are you?"

"Ecstatic." A flash of red. "You can't imagine what it's like, seeing a beautiful woman stretched out in

chains, helpless and writhing and hot. Knowing that in a moment I'm going to possess her, sink my cock and my fangs into her delicate flesh.. "

Archer tormented Dana like that for the next half-hour, until she finally blurted out, "So how do you become a vampire?"

It was such a transparent attempt to change the subject that he had to smile. Still, talking dirty to Dana was just a little too stimulating, so Archer decided to play along. "Are you asking about me in particular, or vampires in general?"

She licked her lips. "In general, I guess."

Archer eyed her. She looked flushed and flustered, he noted with satisfaction. Not exactly the cool reporter who'd started grilling him the moment they'd met.

"You'd need a weakened immune system, then you'd have to ingest a large amount of infected blood." Nothing like talking about infected blood to wilt an erection. "All of which would probably kill you anyway, but if it didn't, the virus would move in and change the DNA in your cells. That in turn would change your muscles, your bones, your nerves. You'd become enormously strong, and your immune system would be able to heal almost any injury."

Dana frowned. "I thought viruses weakened their hosts, not made them stronger."

"This is more of a symbiotic relationship," Archer said, repeating the explanation a CIA researcher had once given him. "It has to be. The vampire virus is so weak it only survives by making the few who do catch it practically immortal."

"Huh. I'm surprised the government's not infecting people in droves."

Archer winced, remembering one of the CIA's more boneheaded stunts. "They tried. Once. They had this program going in the Sixties, during the Vietnam War. It was so secret even I didn't know about it. They took samples of my blood when I went in for surgery

to remove a few bullets. Then..."

"Infected somebody"

He nodded. "I found out about the project when I had to kill the vampire they made, and I made sure they never tried it again."

"You killed him? Why?" Archer could almost see her taking notes in her head. "How'd you stop them?"

"You never quit hunting a story, do you?"

"Nope. Why'd you kill him?"

"He ripped out the throats of the research team" Archer grimaced, remembering the battlefield gore he'd seen in that lab. "One by one. Then he killed the strike force the CIA sent in after him. Twenty-three people died before they finally called me to take care of the problem." He shook his head. "The crazy son of a bitch almost got me, too. God, I was pissed. You can't just pick somebody at random and infect them."

"Why not?"

He glanced at her and told her a crucial truth, knowing she wouldn't recognize it until later. "Because very few people can handle the change. You become aware of the thoughts of others, the beat of their hearts, the blood in their veins—blood you're desperately hungry for. If you're not one of the very few who can generate a psychic shield, you go mad. And it takes another vampire to recognize a potential survivor."

"So they dropped the experiment?" Dana looked uneasy, as if she didn't quite buy it.

"I told them that if I ever found a candidate, I'd let them know. Don't worry, nobody's got a lab somewhere turning out vampires. Not in this country, anyway."

"I can't tell you how relieved that makes me feel," Dana said, rolling her eyes. She was silent a moment, mulling over everything he'd told her. "There must not be very many of you"

"I've met only two, other than the one the CIA spawned. About thirty years ago, there was a Soviet agent named Pavel Andronovich..."

"The Russians have vampires too?"

"Not anymore."

"Oh" Whatever Dana read on his face kept her from asking for the details, thank God.

"Then," he continued, remembering a fall of silken dark hair and hungry eyes, "there was the Countess Isabeau de Vitry, who gave me the Dark Kiss in 1774." Catching her puzzled expression, he explained, "That's what she always called making a vampire, the Dark Kiss. I don't know if that's a universal phrase with vampires, or just another example of Isabeau's French hyperbole."

She eyed him, frowning. "Why not just ask her?"

"The Countess has been dead two centuries." Archer paused, remembering the day of guilt and grief when he'd gotten that last letter from Isabeau's steward. "A French mob took her head during the Terror."

A long, dark pause went by as he fought off black memories, until Dana said, her voice gentle, "It must be lonely."

"I have my work. I have my co-workers" He smiled slightly. "I have women, though usually not for long." Glimpsing Dana's appalled expression, Archer grimaced. "Quit believing everything you see in bad movies. There's something like two gallons of blood in the human body; I couldn't drink it all in one sitting if I tried. On the other hand, I can give someone a good case of anemia over time, so I tend to go for one night stands."

"No girlfriends? Couldn't you..." She gestured. "...Not bite? At least not every time?"

"Yeah, I could. And I do. Or rather, don't." Archer shook his head. "But it's best not to form close relationships with my partners. It's not fair, it's not practical, and after awhile, it becomes painful." His eyes caught on the delicate curve of her face. "I outlive people, Dana. I'm tired of grieving."

She glanced away. "Yes, I can see how you would be"

"Besides," Archer added wickedly. "There are so many more interesting things to do..."

Dana groaned as he started describing them.

By the time they pulled into the long, winding driveway. Dana

had her legs tightly crossed against the wet ache between them.

Archer had spent the rest of the trip into Charleston describing the things he'd done to eager female victims, recounting acts of sensual decadence in that deep, drawling velvet voice of his until she was squirming and dry-mouthed.

Still feeling dazed, she looked across the darkened expanse of lawn to see a sprawling brick mansion with thick square columns and wide wings stretching out to either side.

"My father built it," Archer told her as he parked the car in a spacious garage. "Of course, I've made some additions." As he opened the driver's door, he flashed her a wicked smile that showed his fangs. "Manacles in the bedroom."

"Daddy would have been shocked," Dana said as he came around to open her door and unbuckle her seatbelt.

"Not really," Archer said, pulling her out of the seat and into his arms with easy strength. Another flash of those teeth. "We owned slaves."

Dana stared at him, so caught between fascination and revulsion that she forgot to protest as he picked her up. "You're kidding."

"Nope" He straightened, cradling her. "Don't look so self-righteous. I freed them all after the war ended." He shrugged. "It didn't feel right, keeping slaves after we'd just fought the British over natural rights. But God, it pissed the neighbors off."

Archer turned and started across the garage, still carrying her like a child. For a moment the novel sensation stunned her, and she froze in his arms, feeling the warm power of his body, breathing his exotic scent. He smelled faintly of sandalwood and spice, male and tempting. Too tempting.

Sudden panic rose, and she kicked out, trying to squirm her way from his powerful grip. "I can walk!"

"Only if I put you down." He ducked his shoulders so he could open the door without turning her loose, then swept her inside. She subsided reluctantly. "You are such a high-handed bastard" He shrugged. "Comes with the territory."

Curiosity overcoming her desire to struggle, Dana peered around the darkened house as he carried her through it. The kitchen was spacious and modern, likely a recent addition, with gleaming white appliances and a surprising array of copper pots hanging over a central island.

As they walked into a hallway, Dana glimpsed a painting of a sailing ship rolling against the sunset in the aftermath of a storm. Archer's booted feet clicked against slate-tile flooring, then they headed up a

broad, curving stairway. Toward a bedroom, no doubt. She clasped her hands in the handcuffs, feeling intensely vulnerable.

Just as Dana expected, Archer ducked into a huge bedroom at the top of the stairs, where he put her down at the foot of a gleaming mahogany bed, canopied in what looked like navy brocade and spread with a matching comforter.

Nervously she looked around as he stepped away from her and began to rummage in a drawer. The room was flooded with a golden glow from countless white candles that sat on the mahogany dresser and bureau. The floor was polished hardwood, set here and there with thick woven rugs.

"Who lit the candles?"

"Called the caretaker before we left." Returning, Archer reached for her wrists. There was a coil of gleaming rope in his hand that looked like silk. He smiled into her eyes. "I commit my best sins in candlelight."

"Archer!" Dana pulled away, but he was already backing her against the side of the bed and pulling her arms over her head. "What the hell are you doing?"

"What do you think?" Quickly, efficiently, he tied the rope around the handcuff chain and the overhead canopy support, reaching underneath the canopy to lash them together with a few smooth turns.

She watched him, dizzy with a combination of outrage and desire. "I can't believe I'm letting you get away with this."

"Could you stop me?" Feral eyes locking on hers, he grabbed the front of her shirt between his big hands and gave it an easy tug. Buttons popped, bouncing on the polished wooden floor with a salvo of tiny clicks. Dana looked down to see the white flesh of her breasts swelling in the pretty lace cups of her bra.

Archer made a pleased purring sound in his throat and took hold

of the fabric that held the cups together between her breast. He tore it like paper, then snapped the shoulder straps one by one and threw the ripped bra aside.

Dana tried to swallow the moan. Her knees shook.

Archer stepped close, looking into her eyes. She felt his big hands at her waist, heard a snap, the hiss of her zipper. "Actually," he said, pushing the jeans off her hips, "you could stop me. All you have to do.." The fabric slid down her thighs. She could feel his warm hands brushing her legs. "...is say no"

He went to one knee to slip off her running shoes and socks, then tossed them and the jeans aside. His hair brushed her belly in a stroke of cool silk that made her shiver. Then his mouth was there, pressing a soft kiss to her stomach just before his hands came up to grip the thin silk of her panties. He looked up at her, his eyes pale and hypnotic in the candlelight. "Do you want to say no, Dana?"

She licked her lips, swallowed. "Would you really stop?"

"Yes"

She should say it. She knew she should say it. Her parents would have been appalled that she even

hesitated.

She didn't say it.

He smiled. Silk ripped

Chapter Four

Wrists bound over her head, her heart pounding, Dana looked down at Archer as he tossed aside the remnants of her panties. Then, slowly, he leaned forward until his face was barely an inch from her wet, aching sex. His broad chest lifted and fell as he inhaled, scenting her. She quivered.

He brought a hand up, stroked one long finger over the delicate flesh of her outer lips and the blonde fluff that covered them. "Such pale, pretty curls."

Archer leaned forward, extending his tongue. She could see it, pointed and pink in the instant before it slipped between her lips in a single hot, searing stroke.

"Oh, God!" Unable to help herself, she rose on her toes and rolled her hips forward to give him better access.

"You're so wet," he said, his voice a dreamy drawl. "So ready to be fucked."

Slowly, skillfully, Archer licked at her wet folds, stopping occasionally to suckle her clit and set off a detonation of pleasure. Dana writhed in her bonds, tormented by delight, on the verge of climax. But each time she almost went over, he stopped, waiting for her to subside.

Only to begin again, licking and feasting, driving her higher. "Archer!" she screamed at last, unable to take any more. "God, now! Please!"

He surged to his feet, one hand at the snap of his jeans, the other catching her under the thigh to pull her legs apart as he stepped between them. The expression on his handsome face was feral, blue eyes narrow and hot, his lips pulled back from white fangs. Dana

gasped in a combination of fear and arousal.

"Shit!" Archer let her go and spun away, jerking his black T-shirt over his head as he strode across the room.

"Don't stop!" She stared at his magnificent back and pressed her thighs together, burning to feel him between them. "Why are you stopping?"

"I don't want it over this quick," he growled, without turning around. "I want more."

Bewildered, aching in frustration, Dana watched as he stopped at the bureau, where a crystal decanter

sat beside a pair of wine glasses on a silver tray. His hands shook with a fine tremor as he picked up the decanter and poured a stream of something dark into one of the glasses.

Archer took a sip as he turned to face her again, then shook his head. "Almost lost control. I never do that" He took another, deeper sip, then grabbed a wingback chair sitting in a corner and carried it across the room, where he put it down directly in front of her. Dropping into it, Archer eyed her broodingly. "How do you make me break all my rules?"

"The same way you make me break mine." She licked her lips. His chest was a tight, curving sculpture of brawn that shifted in the candlelight as he lifted his hand to drink from the cut crystal glass. The snap of his black jeans was undone, and his cock formed a long, thick ridge under the denim. As she watched, the zipper began inching downward on its own, yielding to the strain of that powerful erection. Dana squirmed, imagining how it would feel driving into her.

Any minute now, she was going to start begging.

Archer had played this scene so many times it should have lost its ability to move him. Hell, just yesterday he'd thought he was getting bored with it all—with the women and the dominance games they so often wanted, with the act he'd always thought was light years from his true personality.

But that was before he'd tied Dana Ivory to his bed in nothing but an open shirt that framed her pert centerfold breasts and the tempting moonlit curls of her sex. Below the shirt, her legs looked

as long as his life. The way she kept pressing those sweetly muscled thighs together was slowly driving him insane.

Her gray eyes looked huge in her small face, staring at him with a kind of erotic panic as her tongue slipped out to wet her carnal mouth.

Archer drew in a deep breath, trying for control, but the scent of blood and wet woman mingling in the air almost snapped his grip. He burned to jam himself inside her, sink his aching fangs into the delicate column of her throat and ride her without mercy.

But he couldn't give into that lust, no matter how it tormented him. He had to make her so hungry for what he could do to her that she'd agree to anything if he'd only give her more.

Even if it meant becoming a vampire.

A quick, driving fuck wouldn't force her to that level of desperation. He had to keep building her hunger until she was enslaved by it. And him.

If only he could avoid losing control of his own demanding appetite for her...

Dana pulled at the rope that held her handcuffs, less to get free than to express some of the tension she felt under Archer's devouring stare.

Those crystalline eyes kept flicking from her hard nipples to her sex, then up to her face, then back to her nipples again, around and around while he sprawled there in that chair, his cock thick as a truncheon.

"Are you going to do something?" she blurted. "Or just look?" He took a sip of his wine, lids shuttering over his glowing eyes. "I like to look."

Dana's gaze slid helplessly to his erection. "I can tell."

"Are you feeling... neglected?" Archer bent over and put the wine glass down with a click on the hardwood floor. He stood up in an entrancing display of bare chest and long legs. One corner of his pirate's mouth curled. "Can't have that. A good host keeps his guests satisfied."

She bit her lip, watching in helpless need as he stalked toward her until his broad shoulders were blocking the candlelight. He

loomed there, wolf-pale eyes locked on her face, his features sharp with hunger.

Slowly, Archer knelt, first on one knee, then the other. And slowly, so slowly, he lifted his hands to her breasts and put his face to her sex again.

Dana felt the long stroke of his tongue just as his fingers took her tight nipples and began to gently pinch.

She almost screamed. Not again.

Oh, yes. Again.

Her head fell back, too heavy for her neck, and her eyes slid closed as his skilled tongue savored her, explored her lips, slipped inside, circled delicately over her clit. The sensation was heart-stopping, hot, maddening, like the feeling of his hands squeezing her flesh, rolling and thumbing her nipples until they sent waves of pleasure to her helpless brain.

"God, Archer!" She instinctively ground her hips, pushing against his face as he licked and bit.

One hand abandoned her throbbing breasts, lowered to slip between her legs. A long finger slid into her. "You're tight as a virgin," he whispered, his voice rough velvet. His eyes glinted red as he tilted back his head to look up at her. "It's been a long time for you, hasn't it?"

"College" She shuddered, eyes closing, refusing to think about the callow, greedy young men who hadn't had a tenth of Archer's sorcery. "Once, twice. Too much guilt, not enough pleasure. It was never, never like this... Archer, please..."

A second finger, and she writhed. He was focused on her clit now, circling his tongue until she strained against his mouth.

A third finger, stretching her. Dana imagined what it would feel like when he drove that big, satin-slick cock into her. Her hands fisted in the handcuffs. "Archer!"

He twisted his wrist, pressing his fingers hard up inside her, stuffing her, almost lifting her off the floor as his tongue fluttered over her clit. Pleasure roared over her in a great, burning wave, about to surge into climax...

Archer drew back. The wave began to die.

"No! Please, Archer, how do you want me?" Her voice spiraled into a scream. She had no idea what she was saying, and didn't care. "Whatever you want! Anything!"

He stood in a hard rush, his hands jerking down his zipper, then dragging at his jeans just enough to free his cock. She whimpered with need when she saw it jut out at her, an inch longer and twice as thick as anything she'd ever had.

Then Archer's strong hands were under her ass, lifting her, spreading her as he speared forward in one long, relentless thrust.

"God, you're so wet, so tight," he growled in her ear, forcing deeper. "It's like fucking my way into a peach."

Dana clenched her teeth, shuddering, her back arching, as he tightened his grip on her hips and dragged her down on his cock until she was utterly impaled. She felt stuffed with him, surrounded by his hard body, wrapped in his massive arms. Overwhelmed and helpless.

And God, she loved it.

She'd never felt like this—the strength and the heat and the power, the thick, greedy cock driven into her like a spike. She thought she could come just like this, just from having him inside her.

Then Archer began to move. His slow, slick glide out of her body sent curling spirals of heat up her spine. Then in, and in, and in, his muscled belly flexing against her softer one, his organ forcing her walls to spread around him. Dana twisted helplessly in his arms, wishing he'd grind, needing him to show her no mercy. Instinctively, she wrapped her legs around his waist and locked her feet together, squeezing him between her thighs.

"Oh, yeah," he purred. "Like that."

Archer picked up the pace, shortening his strokes, digging into her. Pleasure coiled tighter and tighter in Dana's belly. His powerful torso rolled against hers as he hunched, fucking her faster. His breath gusted hot in her ear. Spasms of delight rippled through her body.

"Look at me," he demanded in a harsh whisper.

Dazed, she opened her eyes. Archer's face was inches from hers, eyes glowing red in the candlelight. His teeth were bared, fangs fully extended.

"Offer me your throat," he growled. "I want to drink from you as you come."

The image seared her—the thought of his teeth piercing her as his cock tunneled deep. "Oh, God. Yes" Dana let her head fall back.

"Yeah, that's right." Archer gathered her closer, pumping even harder between her thighs, his glowing vampire eyes narrow as they focused on the arch of her throat. "Let me have it all!"

His head lowered. The silk of his hair brushed the underside of her jaw. His teeth pierced her skin, then slowly pressed deep, the sensation building to a deep, hot burn. His lips moved against her throat, warm and smooth, suckling in time to the long, driving thrusts of his cock. His torso stretched and rolled as she held him tight between her legs.

Her climax built, hot and cold at once, the contractions in her sex growing into a brutal pounding. Screaming, Dana convulsed as pleasure exploded through her in a long, fiery cascade down her nerves.

Archer's growl rumbled in her ears as he stiffened in climax, his cock jerking deep inside her, his mouth greedy on her throat.

Until finally she lay limp in his arms, exhausted from the power of her orgasm, unable to move, the vampire still buried deep.

Still feasting.

Finally Archer carefully released her throat and lowered her feet to the ground. Dana staggered and almost fell, but he caught her close. She could feel the muscles in his arms quivering and jumping. He was still breathing hard.

"Are you all right?" Archer asked, his voice a little hoarse. "I didn't hurt you, did I? I was... rough"

Dana shook her head. It spun, and she stopped. "No. You were .." She couldn't think of a word incredible enough. "I've never felt like that. Though I realize you've probably. . ."Driven thousands of women out of their minds.She let the sentence trail off, realizing it sounded like a plea for empty reassurance.

Archer lifted her chin with a gentle forefinger. "I've never felt like that either, Dana. You aren't just the latest in a long line."

She gave him a quavering smile, knowing he had to be lying. A kind lie, but still, a lie. She'd never been the sort of woman that drove a man to that kind of passion. She had no intention of spoiling this lovely moment by saying so, though.

Archer reached up into his back pocket and pulled out the handcuff key, then freed her wrists. Leaving the metal bracelets still lashed to the canopy, Dana lowered her stiffened arms with a groan.

"You okay?" He lifted her hands in both of his to examine her wrists anxiously. "They're bruised. I'm sorry, I didn't think I had them that tight."

"You didn't." She felt herself blush. "I seem to remember pulling on them pretty hard, there at the end."

Archer ducked down to bring one arm up under her thighs, sweeping her into his arms.

Dana giggled as he stepped around the bed with her. "What is this thing you've got with carrying me?"

"It's all part of the service." He bent down, caught the navy coverlet with the hand under her knees, and flipped it back out of the way before laying her down on the cool cream sheets. "Masterful Vampires 'R' Us."

Sitting down beside her, he went to work massaging her aching arms. Dana sighed under his strong fingers. "God, I'm tired. You wore me out."

"You've had a busy night—spying on white supremacists, getting busted by a vampire federal agent, then

driving him right up the wall with lust. Anybody'd be tired."

She grinned and let her eyes slip closed. Just for a minute. It was the last thing she knew for hours.

Archer woke curled possessively around Dana's lush little body. He lay there for a moment, allowing himself to savor the sensation of her warm curves nestled against him. From the sound of her breathing and heartbeat, she was still asleep. He lifted his head to

look into her profile, at the long fan of her lashes against her cheek, that silly nose, the full, rosy lips slightly parted.

He had a sudden mental image of sliding his cock into that carnal mouth, maybe while she was on her knees with her hands bound between her legs, her fingers stroking her hard little clit...

Jesus, Archer thought as his erection stiffened into a spike, where had that come from? He didn't even have bondage fantasies anymore, not after all the times he'd played those scenes in reality.

But only one of them had been with Dana. And he wanted more of her. Much more. Every way he could think of.

Right now.

Archer started to reach for Dana, then hesitated. He'd taken her pretty hard last night. She'd probably be sore. Despite his rapacious hunger, he didn't want to hurt her.

He wondered how long they'd been asleep, and threw a calculating look at the window. The curtains were heavy navy velvet, but there was enough light creeping around the edges to tell him the sun was up. Well up, judging from the clock on the bureau and the "3:45 p.m." glowing on its face.

Archer glanced back at Dana. His gaze caught on her long, slim back as she lay on her side, and followed the curve of her spine down to the tempting mounds of her ass. He thought of another way to take her—draped belly down over a mound of pillows, her wrists tied together at the small of her back...

Breakfast. It was time to fix her breakfast, or she'd be breakfast.

Archer flipped the covers aside and rolled to his feet before stalking, naked, in search of a clean pair of jeans. No shirt, she liked him without a shirt. Almost as much as he liked her wearing nothing at all.

Archer had started work on a batch of crepes when the phone rang. He let go of the whisk to scoop the

handset to his ear. "Hello"

"What's this about some new vampire?" Richard Fleming had never been one for pleasantries.

Sandwiching the phone between his head and shoulder, Archer went back to whipping the batter. "Her name is Dana Ivory, Fleming, and she's not a vampire. She's a candidate for the Kiss, that's all. I've put Fitz to doing a background check on her."

Fleming snorted. "Who gives a damn about a fucking background check? I want to know what you think. A background check can be fooled, but nobody lies successfully to Gabriel Archer—and God knows, I've tried."

He had, too. Fleming was a dyed-in-the-wool ex-Cold War spook who firmly believed in not telling anybody a damn thing they didn't have good reason to know. It had taken Archer years to break his superior of the habit of automatically lying to him about anything and everything. But the effort had been worth it. Fleming was damn good at covert ops, and after his years in the intelligence community, he was an invaluable resource. Which was why Archer had recruited him away from the CIA to begin with.

"So what do you think of this girl?" Fleming demanded.

I think she's hot as hell and I want to keep her tied to the bed for at least a decade. Instead Archer said, "She's intelligent, and she's got nerve..."

"Huh. Yeah, setting up in that treehouse to spy on those assholes took either nerve or no sense of self-preservation. Which ain't necessarily a bad thing in an agent."

"It's practically a requirement," Archer, agreed, grinning. "But other than that, I don't know enough about her yet to make a decision. I need to find out more."

Fleming cracked out a nasty laugh. "And judging from the photos on my desk, I'll bet research is a ball. God, what tits."

"And which photos are these?" Archer inquired in his best tone of silky menace.

"Jesus, Arch, you're paranoid. No, we didn't put a guy outside your house with a telephoto lens—not that I'm not tempted. It's just a couple of Polaroids Fitz got from one of her old boyfriends. Ivory at the beach in a bikini." He whistled. "Speaking professionally, that's some package of intelligence assets. If you do make her a vampire, tell her she can bite me anywhere, anytime."

Archer was surprised at the flare of jealousy he felt. Fleming was a good-looking bastard, Marlboro-man handsome. It was far too easy to imagine that Dana might find him a tempting meal. "She has better taste."

"And if anybody'd know how she tastes, I'm sure it'd be you," Fleming said, with another annoying laugh. "Whatever you decide, keep me posted."

"It's not just my decision," Archer told him, still frowning at the strength of his own jealousy. "She gets a say in this, too"

"No, she doesn't." His voice went completely flat, with that cold, deadly tone Archer knew well. "If Ivory's a good prospect, recruit her. She can get used to it later."

"Fleming..."

"I mean it, Archer. I've never liked the fact that we have only one of you. Your abilities are too goddamned invaluable to this country. Hell, if not for you, Manhattan would be glowing in the dark and half the eastern seaboard would still be coughing up blood. We need another vampire agent in case somebody puts a stake in your heart."

He snorted. "Nobody's killed me yet. And believe me, it's not for lack of trying."

"We've been lucky," Fleming snapped. "I'll make it a direct order—if you decide she's trustworthy, bite her."

"Betrayal's a hell of a reward for being worthy of trust."

"You're a fucking secret agent, Archer. It's what we do"

Dana awoke to the feeling of soft lips brushing hers, a tongue slipping sweetly between her teeth. "Rise and shine, sleepyhead. There's a nice, hearty breakfast downstairs with your name on it."

She blinked up at Archer's handsome face as he leaned over her. He'd opened the curtains, and sunlight poured into the room, painting his delectable torso with light.

"I gather the whole bursting-into-flames-at-dawn thing is a myth, huh?" Rubbing her eyes, she sat up.

"Mostly, though you won't catch me sunbathing in the nude anytime soon. Second degree burns in half an hour. I'm okay with overcast days, though."

"Hmmm." Dana yawned and stretched, then stopped in mid-gesture, remembering her would-be exclusive. "Have you seen the news? Has the story broken yet?"

Archer raised an arrogant eyebrow. "That story won't break until I'm good and ready for it to break. And I've made sure everybody who knows anything will keep their mouths shut"

"Somebody could check the jail logs, find out that way." It would kill her if another reporter beat her to the punch.

"Isn't the Trib the only paper in town?" Archer moved to the mahogany armoire, pulled open the door, and contemplated the contents. "Who checks police records for you?"

Dana gave him a sheepish smile. "Me"

"And right now, the only thing you'll be reporting on is how mouth-watering my crepes are." She was about to launch an indignant protest when he pulled out something long, black and gleaming and brought it to her. It turned out to be a silk robe.

"Here, put this on," Archer said. "All that naked Dana makes my blood supply head south. Hard to have

an intelligent conversation when my cock keeps interrupting."

The mention of his cock—and the thought of what he could do with it—deflated her interest in argument. "You do say the nicest things."

He watched with lecherous interest as she rolled out of bed and shrugged into the robe. "The things I do are even nicer. Like letting you eat instead of ravishing you right now."

Dana licked suddenly dry lips. "You could serve me breakfast in bed."

"True, but I thought we could do something really radical—try to hold an actual conversation like people who aren't compelled to couple like crazed mink." Archer caught up her hand and folded it into the crook of his muscular arm. "Come on. I don't know how long this burst of self-control will last."

"But I like coupling like crazed mink," Dana said, trying to make

it sound like a joke as he towed her out of the bedroom and down the sweeping staircase.

"Couple later. Talk now."

"I thought it was the woman who always wants conversation instead of sex. Men are supposed to be the insatiable ones"

Archer raised a brow, a humorously dangerous gleam flaring in his eyes. "Are you suggesting I have a weak sex drive?"

"Who me?" Dana squeaked. "Never. I would never do that"

"Good," he purred. "Because my fragile male ego would be compelled to prove you wrong."

"That's not necessary," she assured him. "I like being able to walk." He laughed. "Beauty and brains. What more could a vampire ask?" Five minutes later Dana was watching from the breakfast nook as Archer poured crepe batter into an electric skillet with the same graceful skill he'd used in combat.

"How can you cook when you don't eat?" She plucked a ripe strawberry from the bowl of sliced fruit at her elbow.

"I can taste" Archer popped a forefinger into his mouth to suck off the batter. "Besides, I've always thought if a woman feeds me, it's only polite to feed her. Would you like some eggs? Bacon?"

"No, crepes and fruit are fine."

For a moment they were silent as he flipped the crepes, then transferred the finished product to a plate. "I actually enjoy cooking. It's relaxing. Nobody dies, nobody gets screwed. If you mess up, you throw it in the trash." He carried the plate to her, then sat down to watch her eat.

Dana cut off a forkful and popped it in her mouth. Her eyes widened at the burst of delicate flavor as the crepe simply dissolved on her tongue. "God, that's good!" She took another bite and closed her eyes to savor the sensation. "You're an incredible cook"

"Thanks. It's a useful skill," Archer said, smiling slightly as he watched her devour her breakfast. "Chef is

one of my favorite covers. You can find out all sorts of interesting things about a household in its kitchen."

"How did you become a spy, anyway?" Dana took a sip of her orange juice. Fresh squeezed, judging from the juicer and pile of orange halves on the cabinet.

"Ah, well. That's a long story."

"I'm not going anywhere." She lifted a brow at him. "Give."

"I'd rather talk about you."

"I'm not nearly as interesting as you are."

"But I know my story, and I don't know yours." Archer's lips curved into the charming smile that had probably been the downfall of many a female spy. "Tell you what, we'll trade. All my evil secrets for yours. How about it?"

It was a tempting proposition. "Okay. But I want to hear about all the spy stuff."

"I'll even show you my secret collection of espionage toys." She grinned. "I'll just bet you will."

So as they cleaned up the kitchen, Dana told him about herself and her work. She related the challenges of putting out a weekly newspaper: the stories she'd done, the people she'd interviewed, the Byzantine machinations of small town politics—who was sleeping with whom, who was cheating whom, and why.

"You're good at this, aren't you?" Archer asked thoughtfully, as he led the way to the library when they were done with the cleanup. "Sounds like you found out where all the bodies were buried pretty fast."

Dana shrugged. "It's just a matter of listening, getting people to open up to you. You can pick up a lot chatting at the neighborhood diner. Then you hit town hall and start researching the records, and you find out whether there's any truth to the gossip."

"Why bother? Why go to all that effort?" He flung himself into a massive leather wing chair as she settled onto the matching couch. "You work for a weekly. You could be doing stories about the county fair and school kids winning essay contests."

"I have done those stories." She shrugged. "But I have a responsibility to the community. If somebody's using public money to advance his own agenda, people should know it."

He eyed her thoughtfully. "I imagine that goes over real well with the powers that be"

Dana smiled in reluctant amusement at his cynical tone. "Oh, I'm considered a huge pain in the butt. And the public isn't always

pleased when I drag things out in the open. At one time or another, the whole town's been furious at me" She tucked her legs beneath her and settled back in a corner of the couch. "But once they calm down, they always wind up doing something about whatever set me off, so I figure I did my job."

"What do your parents think about what you do?"

Dana looked away. "They died just after I got out of college. Car accident."

His eyes darkened in sympathy. "I'm sorry."

"They were strict, but they loved me," she said, staring out the window over the rolling lawn. "They were evangelists. Had a syndicated radio show that was aired around the country in a hundred and twenty markets."

Archer lifted a brow. "Somehow you don't strike me as the daughter of a minister."

Dana laughed. "Oh, I'm the stereotypical P.K." Catching his questioning look, she explained, "Preacher's kid. Rebellious against my upbringing, fighting authority, the whole bit."

"I thought you liked authority." He smiled slowly. "At least the handcuffs."

She glowered at him. "Cheap shot."

"Sorry." He sobered. "Seriously, what was it like for you growing up?"

Dana found herself telling him everything: the frustration, the guilt of never being good enough to meet her parents' high standards, the sense of suffocation under their strictures. And the love she'd felt for the mother and father who always acted out of love and a desire to do what was right.

It was only later that Dana realized how skillfully Archer interrogated her. Before long he had her telling him things she'd never told anyone, seduced by his interest and humor.

She even told him about Mark's collection of erotica.

"I don't know what it is about all that stuff that gets to me," Dana told him, studying her bare toes as a blush heated her face. "I don't believe in women being submissive. God knows I don't submit to anybody or anything in my daily life. I'm a dedicated feminist."

"Oh, I know exactly why you like bondage" Archer gave her such a teasing, masculine grin that she lost her discomfort and grinned back.

"Oh? And why is that?"

"You don't have to do any of the work. You can just lie back while the guy licks and nibbles and thrusts in a desperate attempt to please you."

Glad to have the conversation back on a comfortable footing, Dana sat back in her chair and eyed him. "Are you saying I'm lazy?"

He smirked. "If the handcuffs fit."

"For your information, there's a lot a woman can do with both hands tied behind her back."

Archer reached into his back pocket and pulled out his handcuffs, let them dangle by a thumb. "Prove it."

"You're on" Dana stood up and shrugged off the black robe. It landed in a silken pool around her ankles, leaving her wearing nothing but a smile. "Take off those pants, Double-O-Fang, and we'll see

who's lazy."

Grinning, he skimmed his jeans and briefs down his hips in one, smooth motion, then stepped out of them. It was the first time she'd seen him totally naked, and for a moment Dana just stopped and stared. His legs were long, roped with muscle, and his cock was a thick, aggressive thrust over the tight, furry pouch of his testicles. He lifted a brow at her. "Well?"

Dana marched over to him and held up both wrists.

"Nope" He gestured for her to turn. "Both hands behind your hack, remember?"

She spun around and crossed her wrists at her spine. A moment later she felt the cool caress of metal, heard a double click. Dana turned back around to find him grinning down at her.

"So what are you going to do now, Gloria Steinem?"

Chapter Five

"The possibilities are endless," Dana shot back, grinning. But as she let her eyes play over his face, across his bare, powerful shoulders and down his brawny torso, she felt her amusement fade, replaced by something more urgent. She wanted to touch him, to see how all that male strength felt under her fingers. But her hands were bound behind her.

Inhaling sharply, she caught his scent—dark, spicy. She leaned forward, wanting to draw that tempting Archer smell more deeply into her lungs. The froth of hair covering his chest tickled her nose.

Impulsively, Dana leaned even closer, put out her tongue, licked at a ridge of muscle. He rumbled in approval. She eyed his chest, the swell of a pectoral muscle, the tiny dark bead of his nipple. Testing, she bent her head and flicked her tongue over it. He stiffened, catching his breath.

Encouraged, Dana edged closer until the tips of her breasts brushed his chest, the sensation sending a flare of pleasure through her. She sighed and licked him again, a long pass of her tongue over the hard bulge of his pecs. Intrigued by the sensation, she caught his nipple between her teeth, gave it a slow, gentle bite. His breathing roughened, his chest rising and falling more quickly against her face.

Suddenly there was the breath-stealing sensation of fingers stroking her nipple in a light, velvet flutter. Archer's other hand brushed down her spine to linger on the upper curve of her ass.

Dana shivered at the sensation and lifted her head. Archer looked down at her, his eyes intensely blue, the lids heavy. She stood on her toes and stretched her neck up until she could taste his firm mouth.

A quick brush of the lips, once, then again, then a slow foray with her tongue into the warm cavern of his mouth. He opened for her, letting her explore his lips and trace the edges of his teeth. She touched the

point of a fang and drew back, startled. Archer looked down at her, eyes shuttered, subtly challenging.

Quick as an impulse, she leaned forward again and slipped her head up under his jaw to the strong cords of his throat. Taking the smooth skin there between her teeth, she gently bit down. He tasted salty, tempting, male. He moaned.

"I see why you like to bite," she whispered against his skin, and began to nibble.

"It does have its... pleasures," Archer agreed, his voice rasping.

Slowly, Dana worked her way lower, using her tongue and teeth, lapping and raking in turn, exploring his chest, the ridges of his abdominals, the ripples of his ribs. As she moved, the tips of her breasts brushed against him, the pressure sending curls of rosy pleasure through her.

Until she was on her knees, the rigid length of his cock thrusting out beside her face, the hair of his thighs caressing her nipples. She felt languorous, hungry, as bewitched by her own gentle teasing as he was.

And he was bewitched. When Dana tilted a look up at him, she found his azure eyes locked on her, watching her every move with a kind of tortured anticipation. She could almost see him wondering when she was going to take his cock into her mouth, see him aching for the firestorm of sensation her tongue and teeth and lips would bring.

Watching him wait, Dana felt a burst of feminine power. She was doing this to him, just as he'd made her writhe and ache last night.

She turned her eyes to his cock again, studying it, admiring the thick stalk, the big, heart-shaped head that blushed dark with the force of his passion. It quivered and lengthened, taking on a pronounced upward jut.

Dana put out her tongue and licked away a drop of pre-come. He jolted against her mouth. "God, Dana..."

She licked the head again, watching it bob under the stroke, then leaned closer and caught it in her mouth. And began to suck. Gently at first, then harder. She felt him dip, as if his knees had gone weak for an instant. Smiling around his width, Dana pressed her head forward until the thick shaft moved deeper between her lips. Then pulled back, tightening her lips at the same time to create a demanding suction. She closed her eyes as smooth length slid from her mouth, remembering how it had felt when he'd stroked it into her sex.

A strong hand came to rest on top of her head, fingers lacing through her curls. She felt him shudder and reversed her stroke, taking him deeper and deeper, until the big head brushed the back of her throat.

Archer gasped as her mouth drew at him with such power it made his head swim. It felt so good, so hot.

And the sight of her, slim and naked, kneeling between his feet with her wrists bound behind her back and her lips wrapped around his cock. God, he could come just looking at her.

She slid forward again, pleasuring him until he wanted to explode down her throat. Yet it wasn't enough. He needed her sex clamped where her mouth was, hot and tight and wet. He wanted her body pressed to his, flexing against his strength. Surrendering.

And he wanted her blood. He wanted it flooding his mouth in a wave of liquid copper.

Now.

Half-maddened, Archer pulled out of the unbearably seductive suction of her mouth, almost groaning at the loss of her wet heat even as he bent and scooped Dana off the floor.

He turned to the couch and dropped her lush body belly-down over its padded leather arm. The position thrust out her rounded, heart-shaped ass, inviting his possession.

Dana moaned.

Archer grabbed his cock in one hand, aimed for the glistening red folds of her sex. And thrust.

God, she was wet. Sucking him must have aroused her as much as it had him. And she was just as tight, clutching him like a slick fist, her grip so strong he had to bear down to force his way deeper.

The sensation seared its way up his spine to his skull with brutal intensity.

Shivering, Archer settled against her until the full curve of her bottom nestled into his groin. And slowly, he began to thrust.

God, he felt so big in this position. Thick, forcing her to spread. And strong. She couldn't have kept him out even if she'd wanted to. And she didn't.

Dana hung there over the couch arm, head down, feeling his powerful hands clamping her hips as he tunneled in and out. It felt as if each thrust impaled her to the heart, sending sparks of pleasure spiraling along her nerves. She whimpered in raw delight.

Archer leaned over her, slipping his arms under her torso to gather her close. His fingers found her nipples, plucked and strummed as he fucked her. His thrusts grew even faster, harder, winding the pleasure like a spring. He felt huge inside her, too much, far too much, yet she could only hang there in his hands, bound and helpless. The thought made her close her eyes in wicked delight.

Suddenly Archer crowded hard against her, his thighs trapping hers against the side of the couch as he reamed her in short, hard strokes. One hand gripped her breast as the other dragged her head back by the hair. She stiffened, realizing what he intended.

Just as he sank his fangs into her throat.

Dana convulsed helplessly, the combination of pleasure and pain kicking her over into a long, rolling orgasm that continued to shake her while he drank, still pistoning into her, ruthless, hungry and possessive.

Until he lifted his head from her and roared out his own climax.

It took Archer thirty minutes to recover enough to carry her back to bed. Dana protested sleepily that

she was perfectly capable of walking under her own steam, but he suspected she was lying. He shouldn't have drunk from her so soon after the last time; he never did that. He had a firm rule against taking from the same partner twice in a six-week period.

But then, he'd never made anyone a vampire before.

Holding her as she sank into a doze, Archer realized that was exactly what he was going to do.

She was everything he'd spent two centuries searching for. A vampire had fantastic power, and he'd always feared giving the Dark Kiss to someone undeserving. But Dana would never misuse those superhuman abilities; she had too keen a sense of idealism and morality. She would be the perfect agent.

More than that. she'd be the perfect wife.

Archer loved her humor and intelligence—not to mention all that shy sensuality. He could easily imagine spending the next three hundred years being fascinated by her, working with her, making love to her.

He almost woke her up right then to blurt out his proposal. But there was no rush.

They had forever.

So he let her sleep, savoring her warm, smooth curves as she nestled into him. Until finally she stirred against him and woke.

Then, heart in his throat, he began telling her everything.

"I met the Countess when I went to her estate in France to negotiate the purchase of a wine shipment," Archer said, his chest vibrating under her chin.

Dana had been staring dreamily into his handsome face. Now she sat up, attention instantly caught. The Countess had been the one who'd made him a vampire. "Shipment?"

"We were merchants," he explained. "My family owned a number of ships, and I'd heard she bottled the best wine in France. We traded letters for a year before she finally invited me to her chateau to finish the negotiations." Archer smiled faintly. "God, that house. I'd never seen anything like it. The furnishings, the art. We were wealthy, but not like her" The amusement drained away. "She realized I could survive the change the moment she met me."

"And seduced you" Dana felt a sting of jealousy, then was instantly ashamed when she remembered he'd said the Countess had been killed by a French mob.

Archer nodded, the look in his eyes distant with memory. "She

was lovely—all dark beauty and wicked fascination. It didn't take me long to fall in love. I was willing to do anything for her. Even become a vampire."

She propped her chin on her fist and studied him. "Was she in love with you?"

Archer shrugged. "She said she was. And I know she was lonely. It gets very lonely, after a hundred years or so. You become willing to do damn near anything for company" He hesitated. "But we were very happy in the three years we had together.

"Then my brother wrote to tell me my parents had been murdered."

As Dana listened in horror, he described how his father, James, had thrown his support behind the American fight for independence. During a trip to Boston to meet with leaders of the rebellion, a rival British merchant and a gang of Tories attacked James and Archer's mother at the docks. The men dragged them into a warehouse, where they used clubs to beat James Archer until he was broken and dying. Then they turned their attention to his wife.

The couple was dead by the time they were found two days later.

"Their deaths haunted me," Archer said, his voice distant and terrible. "The thought of my parents dying in that filthy warehouse, each knowing the other was suffering, neither able to help. All because some greedy bastard wanted to get rid of a rival, and some Tories wanted to make a point."

He'd booked passage back on the same ship that had brought his brother's letter. The Countess had cried and begged him to stay, but Archer had turned a deaf ear. She finally told him she'd get her affairs in order and join him.

Archer arrived in Boston like an avenging demon. He used his powers to hunt down the men who'd murdered his mother and father, then systematically killed them all.

"I had no mercy," he said. "They deserved none. My parents weren't the only innocents they'd killed trying to terrorize supporters of the rebellion." Archer paused, his eyes chilling. "And they weren't acting alone. Before he died, one of the Tories told me they'd been carrying out British orders. A particularly brutal Redcoat major out to build a name for himself." His voice flattened. "He told them to make my parents an example."

"What did you do?" Dana swallowed, caught between fascination and horror.

Archer looked away, refusing to meet her gaze. "I slipped into British headquarters when he was working late one night. And I made him an example."

But that wasn't the end of Archer's war. He left the major's bloody body and headed straight for the nearest Continental commander to offer his services. Archer couldn't join the army because he couldn't fight daylight battles, but he could become a spy. It was no job for a gentleman, but in his hate and grief, he didn't care.

Archer spent the rest of the war among the British, assuming various guises to observe their fortifications and troop strength, sometimes even gaining access to commanders and using his psychic influence to discover their plans.

"You could have influenced them into deliberately losing," Dana observed.

He frowned, stroking her slim fingers absently. "There were times I was tempted, but I always drew the line. It didn't seem honorable. Like beating a bound prisoner, there are some things you just don't do"

As Archer went on telling her about his experiences, Dana realized he'd become addicted to the idealism and the danger of his cause. Even after the war was over, he continued using his talents to gather information and undermine the country's enemies.

Yet even in his zeal, he hadn't forgotten his Countess. Archer continued to exchange letters with her, even traveling to France for frequent visits, but he never stayed long. Conditions in the fledgling United States were too uncertain, and he couldn't stand to be away. The Countess swore she'd join him, but busy with her estate and the worsening conditions in France as the country spiraled into revolution, she never did.

Until the day came when Archer got word she had been murdered.

"A mob is the greatest danger to a vampire," he said, his voice

soft, bitter. "Once it gets going, you can't stop it. Influence doesn't work on that many people in the grip of bloodlust." He stared broodingly at nothing. "They hacked off her head with a scythe"

Guilt-stricken, Archer returned to France to try to find her killers. This time he had no luck, and he finally returned home to the cause that was now all he had left.

"As the years went on, America became everything to me," Archer said. "Friends and enemies age and die, but she remains. I've watched her grow from a sickly newborn to the queen of the world. I've watched her act from greed and gallantry. I've seen her whore to rich men, then turn and sacrifice her own children for the freedom of others. There is no other nation like her. She's worth every lie I've told, every life I've taken, every morning I've faced with dread."

As Dana listened in spellbound fascination, Archer described the wars he'd fought and the missions he'd carried out. He was brutally frank, describing not only the triumphs but the failures that still made guilt flare in his eyes decades later. His stories were an enthralling glimpse of the past, of the people and events that had molded the country.

And as he spoke, he unwittingly revealed himself—a powerful man moving invisibly among powerful men, using his abilities to play a prominent role in history that he allowed few people to even know about. A ruthless man, yet quietly, intensely honorable.

"Why are you telling me this?" she asked at last, uneasy. It didn't seem in character for a man who'd made secrecy a way of life for two centuries. "You can't make me forget it."

Archer rolled over on his side and braced himself on one elbow. He met her eyes, his expression so serious her unease increased.

"Dana, the Countess knew I could become a vampire because she tried to influence me into giving her a better price on the wine. And it didn't work."

Understanding hit Dana like a punch so brutal she lost her breath. When her heart began beating again, she whispered, "Like me."

"Like you."

Dana licked her lips. "All this... These things you've told me..." She stopped and almost lost her courage, then forced herself to continue. The words came out in a rush. "Archer, are you saying you want to make me a vampire?"

His blue eyes were steady, staring into hers with a quiet intensity. "If you agree."

A crazy joy bloomed in Dana's chest. He wanted her to stay with him. Forever.

"We could do so much," Archer said, and reached out to cover one of her hands with his own. "Dana, you have no idea how I need you—how the country needs you."

She froze.

"Even with all my abilities, I'm only one man. But working together, we..."

A wave of shock washed over her skin, so cold that for a blessed moment she went completely numb. Humiliated understanding roared in behind it.

Archer had been planning this from the first. He had guessed her secret fantasies, and he'd used them to bring her to heel. He'd played the demon lover, tied her and taken her and made her hotter than she'd ever been in her life. But to him it had been just another mission. It had never touched him at all.

She had never touched him at all. While he had made himself everything to her.

"...Have to undergo training, of course. Weapons and tactics. Languages. You'll need to..."

"No."

Archer blinked. "What?"

Biting off the words, Dana said, "I'm not going to spend the next two hundred years whoring for this country. I'm not going to spend the next two hundred years in love with you, watching you seduce an endless succession of willing women.

It was only after she'd thought the word "love" that she realized she meant it.

Jesus, it had only been twenty-four hours. You didn't fall in love in a day. Not with a normal man.

But Archer was not a normal man. He was so damn good, so

damn seductive—not just his body, but his intelligence and idealism and that damn honor. He'd slipped into her heart like the spy he was, and he'd taken it.

"You're not just a spy," she said brutally, wanting to hurt him. "You're a whore."

"No" The word came out as a whisper, sounding somehow wounded. Another of his actor's tricks. "I've... done some things I'm not proud of, but I've also saved a lot of lives." For once his eloquence failed him. Dana could almost see him groping for a way to defend himself. "Just last year there was this terrorist with a nuclear..."

"I need to get dressed" She couldn't take any more of this, or she was going to humiliate herself and start sobbing.

Dana lurched off the bed, then realized she was nude. She couldn't stand to be naked in front of him—he'd stripped her enough as it was. She grabbed the hem of the sheet and tried to drag it off the bed, but it wouldn't come, caught under one of Archer's trim male hips. Dana gave it another ruthless jerk.

Immersing her in a glare that was beginning to sizzle with grow-ling rage, Archer freed it.

"Thank you." Back rigid, Dana wrapped the length of cloth around her body, then turned and made for the bureau where she'd stashed her folded jeans. "Look, do you have a T-shirt? You ripped mine."

"I don't understand you." His voice rumbled with anger, threatening as the thunder before a storm. "I could make you immortal."

In one fluid movement, Archer rolled off the bed and strode naked toward her. She refused to look at that magnificent, deceptive body as he stopped inches away. "You would never grow old. You could take a shotgun blast to the chest and survive. Hell, you could bench press aToyota , see in the dark..."

"Leap tall buildings in a single bound and turn into a bat. I know." Dana jerked on the jeans with trembling hands.

The corners of his mouth twitched in a bitter fragment of a smile. "The bat thing is a myth."

"Well, if I can't turn into a bat, why bother?" She zipped the jeans.

"Hell, I don't know. Maybe for the men who died at Bunker Hill andGettysburg andNormandy ." Fury emanated from him like his potent body heat. "That old cliché is dead-on, Dana—freedom ain't free. Sometimes people have to step up and pay the bill."

"Oh, that's right—"The tree ofLiberty is watered by the blood of Patriots.' Or however the hell that goes." She dragged open a drawer and searched for a shirt. "Well, that tree has all of my blood it's getting." Dana lifted her head to glare back at him. "You drank it already."

For a moment, such rage blazed in his eyes that she instinctively hunched her shoulders.

Seeing her flinch, Archer snarled and spun away. He strode to the door and flung it open, then slammed it shut again behind him. Dana still couldn't find that damn shirt.

Staggering back to the bed, she collapsed as the tears began.

Damn her! He took the stairs in a rush, pounding down them, still naked and not giving a damn. She was everything he'd always wanted, always needed, and she'd blown him off, left him to the mission that never ended and the women he could never have for more than a single night.

Archer stormed into the kitchen for lack of any other destination. The phone rang just as he passed the counter, and he snatched it up.

"How's the girl working out?" Fleming's rough voice asked.

"Oh, she's just fucking perfect," Archer snarled. "She'd be a great agent. Unfortunately, she just told me

she has no interest whatsoever in having anything at all to do with us."

"And that stopped you?" The acid sarcasm in his tone made Archer's lips pull back from his teeth.

"If I did turn her, how the hell would we get her to cooperate? You can't force a vampire to do a damn thing. Believe me, it's been tried on me, and it never worked."

"I know of at least one cell even you couldn't get out of."

"I will not let you lock her up and starve her, Fleming."

"Fine. So convince her. Even after she's a vampire, you'll still be proportionally bigger, stronger and more experienced. Right?"

He frowned. "Yeah. So?"

"So we need this girl, Archer. Quit fucking around and bite her."

Fleming's right.

The words whispered through his skull, chill and tempting. He fought them, knowing it wasn't right to force her.

Until a demonic voice asked, But what about the lives that could be saved?

And he couldn't think of an answer.

A wave of burning cold washed over Archer—the same deadly psychic frost he felt when he knew he had to kill.

When he spoke, his voice sounded flat and emotionless in his own ears. "I'll call you when it's done."

Dana wiped her eyes. He'd be back any moment, and by then she had to have a shirt on and some fragment of self-control. God, she felt wrecked.

Get hold of yourself Dana. Concentrate on the practicalities. How was she going to even get home? He'd driven. She'd have to call a car rental company and arrange to have them send over a...

The door opened. Dana whipped around, her arms automatically covering her bare breasts.

Archer filled the doorway like a Roman god brought to life, all beautiful naked strength. But the expression on his handsome face was cold, closed. Flat. She felt a shiver of unease.

Summoning her courage, Dana stood up. "I won't reconsider, Archer, so don't waste your breath."

He didn't even acknowledge her attempt at a preemptive strike, just started toward her in a long, silent stride. Something about the way he moved made her feel stalked, and she took an instinctive step back.

Archer's pale eyes watched her retreat like a cat focused on a canary. "I just got a call from my boss with my next mission." His tone was soft with velvet menace. "You."

One instant he was halfway across the room. The next, she was on her back on the bed, his powerful, naked body pinning her down, a superhuman hand gripping both her wrists. His wolf-pale eyes were merciless. "Dana," he told her, his voice emotionless, "you've been drafted."

Archer fisted his free hand in her hair and pulled her head back to arch her throat. He opened his mouth, revealing the sharp white length of his fangs as he bent to bite.

And she screamed.

Archer hesitated an inch from her flesh and looked up as she bucked under him, terror and rage contorting her face, her hands jerking helplessly in his. Pity stirred beneath his mental chill. "I'm sorry," he said softly. "This won't be pleasant. I can't even make it quick."

He would have to drink from her several times over the coming days, partially draining her before forcing her to drink his blood. What followed would be worse. Archer could still remember the raw agony he'd suffered two centuries ago as his body was reshaped by the vampire virus. And he, at least, had been willing.

"You have no right to force this on me!" Dana spat, struggling to drag her hands out of his grip.

"No." He contained her desperate jerks carefully. "But I do have a duty. There've been so many times when I have accomplished things no ordinary man could have. Foiled plots, saved lives. If I die, I want to know there's someone to carry on the work. And there's no one else but you."

Realizing she was helpless, Dana subsided to glare up at him bitterly. "I thought you were supposed to be invulnerable."

Archer shrugged. "Not to being crushed, burned, staked or decapitated. Given my lifestyle, the odds that I'll encounter something I can't walk away from are pretty good."

"I don't give a damn. I will not work for you!" She gritted out the words, her gaze as defiant as a martyr's.

"Yes, you will." Archer smiled sadly. "You're an idealist. No matter how pissed you are at me, when a crisis comes along, you'll have to help."

Recognition and despair flickered in Dana's eyes until she squeezed them closed. She took an angry, hitching breath, half sob, half curse. "Do it then, damn you," she spat, "And get it over with."

Archer started to lower his head just as something glittered on the side of her face. A lone tear, sliding slowly down the fragile curve of her cheek as she sank her small white teeth into her lower lip.

Something twisted in his chest.

He had done worse things than this, dammit. Betrayed men who believed him a friend, killed gallant

enemies and innocents who knew too much. He'd done whatever his country had demanded. Besides, he was giving her a precious gift—immortality. Freedom from the twin mortal curses of old age and disease.

In the end, she would forgive him. He'd see to it, spinning a spell of sex and pleasure around her until she forgot her anger. He already knew he was her weakness.

Another tear beaded on her lashes.

"Goddamnit!"

Suddenly Archer was sitting on the side of the bed, and she was free. Dana blinked at him in bewilderment. His broad shoulders were hunched and knotted as he scrubbed a big hand over his face.

"Goddamn it," he growled again. "I can't do it. I should, and I can't."

Cautiously, Dana sat up, confused. "What's happening? What are you talking about?"

He rose from the bed and strode away from her to brace both arms on the bureau. "I mean you're safe. Now get out before I change my mind."

She stared at the strong muscled V of his back, blinking at a sudden wave of disappointment. Oh, God, Dana thought, stunned. I actually wanted him to do it. Force me to stay with him, even if it meant watching him make love to other women. Never loving me. "What about all that stuff about duty and country and..."

He whirled on her, fangs bared as he growled, "I said get out!"

She should. She should run like hell, and she knew it. But some perverse demon drove Dana to find out why he'd stopped. "Is this another game? The stories you told me... You never walk away from a job, even when it turns your stomach."

"Which is why you should get the fuck out while you can" "Not until you tell me why."

He stared at her, bewildered and furious. "You little idiot. Don't you understand what kind of danger you're in? I want to throw you down on that bed, feed from that white throat of yours and keep you. And to hell with what you want. So if you don't want to stay with me for the next three hundred years, you'd better get your tight little ass right out that door. Now!"

Hope began to expand through Dana's chest like a slow motion explosion. "Why?"

"Why what?" he roared.

"Why do you want to keep me?" She rolled to her feet and moved toward him, feeling the cool air against her beaded nipples. Deliberately, Dana arched her back and watched his gaze slide hungrily to her breasts. "For duty? For truth, justice and the American way? For sex? What?"

"If that was all it was, I'd already have my fangs in your throat. Get out."

"No" She put a deliberate roll in her hips. "Not until you give me the truth."

He peeled his lips back from his fangs and growled, "Keep it up, Dana, and I'll definitely give you something. But since you've already said you don't want it, I strongly advise.."

"Why do you care what I want?" Daringly, she stroked a forefinger over one of her own hard nipples and watched his eyes blaze. "Why aren't we on that bed right now, Archer? I couldn't stop you." His cock was lengthening between his muscled thighs, thickening, tilting slowly upward. "You could tie me down and feast on me, indulge every hunger your keen sense of morality has never allowed you to feed. And you're so good, it wouldn't take you long to make me want it."

He lifted burning eyes to hers and asked in a seductive purr, "Do you want me to rape you, Dana?"

"No" She licked her lips.

Archer watched the movement of her tongue hungrily. "I'm not convinced." He took a long, gliding stride toward her, his cock swaying, fully erect.

Dana stepped back quickly. "I want to know why you didn't take me."

The sensuous mask dropped, and he drew himself up. "Luscious games notwithstanding, I'm not actually a rapist."

"You're whatever your country needs you to be, Archer." She dared to step close enough to look up into his eyes. "Including a rapist. Yet you let me go. For once in your immortal life, you ignored your duty. And I want to know why."

His expression closed, chilled. But his cock was still hard. "Because I've fallen in love with you. And I couldn't stand to doom you to a life you don't want."

Her heart leaped. "We've only known each other twenty-four hours."

"It doesn't seem to matter."

Dana met his gaze with a long, steady stare. "No. It doesn't."

Archer's eyes widened and blazed with incredulous joy, only to cool into caution an instant later. "What we're feeling could be just a product of truly amazing sex."

She grinned. "Got a pretty high opinion of your skills, don't you?"

"I've had a lot of practice."

"I love you."

He moved with that astonishing vampire speed again, and she was in his arms, every inch of his muscled body pressed to hers. She cried out in utter joy, both arms going around his broad back as his mouth met hers greedily.

Dana matched Archer kiss for searing kiss, tongue dancing with his as their demanding hands explored one another, dizzy with love and lust. Until finally she pulled back enough to pant, "Make me a vampire."

Archer stilled. "But you said..."

"I thought you didn't really want me, I thought you were just doing a job," she said in a breathless rush. "And why the hell didn't you know that? You're the bloody telepath."

He gave her a look. "But I can't read you. Where you're concerned, I'm just like every other poor bastard, wondering what the hell's going on in his woman's head."

Dana grinned. "If it's any consolation, it sounds like you'll have plenty of time to figure it out."

He smiled slowly, sensually. "Why don't we get started?" Her grin widened. "Oh, yeah. Let's."

Archer bent down, swept her into his arms, and started toward the bed. "Now where," he purred, "did I put the rope?"

Dana froze in the act of caressing his shoulders. "Rope?" "What was it you said a minute ago? Oh, yeah. 'You could tie me down and feast on me.' I liked that idea, Dana. I really did." "I was speaking rhetorically!"

"But I'd love to try it."

She tossed her head, enjoying the game immensely. "Not a chance." He sighed in mock sympathy. "That's the trouble with being a feast. You don't get much choice."

Archer tossed her on the bed. Dana immediately rolled off it. And the chase was on.

Just to be polite, he allowed her to elude him for two quick circuits of the bed, slowing down his lunges just enough to let her dart free. Round breasts bouncing as she danced on the balls of her feet on the opposite side of the lake-sized mattress, Dana giggled. "Slowing down in your old age, Archer?"

He grinned and vaulted the width of the bed, enjoying the way her gray eyes widened when he hit the floor beside her and caught her into his arms. "What do you think?"

"Archer!" she squealed, as he swooped in for a hungry kiss of her laughing mouth. He kept her distracted with his tongue while he waltzed her backward to the bedside table, pulled open a drawer with one hand and reached inside. When his fingers found the silken coil of rope, Archer grinned against her lips.

Dana shrieked out a laugh as she felt herself flying through the air to land on the soft surface of the mattress. Before she could even think about rolling off again, Archer was on top of her, jerking her left hand over her head. He tied it to one of the bedposts with a few twists of rope while she playfully pounded at his chest with

her free hand.

He ignored her until she sank her teeth into the muscled ribs that were so temptingly close to her face. "Cut that out, you little devil," Archer ordered, stretching out to snap the remaining length of the thick rope so he could tie her other wrist with it.

"Brute!" Dana accused, trying to sound outraged. "Rapist! Pervert!"

"You bet your sweet ass."

As he went about binding her to the bedposts, Dana squirmed, trying to look as tempting as possible as she slowly twisted her half-naked body. The ploy worked; she saw his blue eyes heat as he eyed her struggles. But his hands never hesitated in the task of tying her down. At last she was completely immobilized, arms and legs stretched wide.

Archer straightened to stand over her, scanning her bound body with an expression of lecherous triumph, his cock at full, magnificent erection.

"I hate to mention this, but there's a fatal flaw with your plans," Dana observed, swallowing as she stared at his cock. It looked as thick as her wrist.

"I don't think so" Archer grinned, showing the long points of his fangs. "You're tied up and helpless, ready to serve my every evil appetite."

"Not in these jeans."

"Oh, that " He scanned the tough blue fabric, then focused his attention right between her legs. "That's not going to be a problem."

And it wasn't. Archer reached down, grabbed her waistband in both hands and yanked. The thick fabric tore with a loud rip, splitting right down to her left thigh.

Stunned by the display of raw vampire strength, Dana blinked, then mustered a grumble. "Great. Now I don't have anything to wear at all."

"You don't need anything to wear," he told her, and licked his fangs as he reached for the fabric again. "At all."

Archer shredded the jeans off her body like a greedy boy tearing into a birthday present. In seconds, she was completely nude.

Wide-eyed, Dana watched him toss aside the shreds of her clothing and rock back on his bare heels to give her a long, hungry stare. The air felt cool on her pebbled nipples and spread, wet sex. She tugged at her bound wrists with a blend of excitement and unease.

Archer watched the nervous movement like a starving wolf. "Feeling helpless?" His stare flicked back to her full breasts, then down between her thighs. "You look helpless. And you are. I can do anything I like to you" He looked up into her eyes. "Does that worry you?"

She licked her dry lips. "Should it?"

"Oh, yeah" Slowly he began to stroll around the bed. "I'm remembering all the wickedly creative things I've done to pretty victims over the past two centuries." His eyes glinted. "Sometimes they were a little reluctant to try this or that at first, but I soon had them begging for more." His voice deepened, drawled. "I'd like to make you beg, Dana."

She remembered his tongue, spinning spells of pleasure and frustration around her clit. "Youhavemade me beg."

"True." Archer's grin was white and wicked. "But somehow I never get tired of hearing `Please, Archer!' and 'I'll do anything, Archer!' Gives me a feeling of power." He stopped by the bedside table and pulled

open a drawer.

"A feeling of power," Dana repeated, watching him dig around. "Yeah, I can see how that's something alien to you. What are you looking for?"

He pulled out a length of bright red silk. "Ever been blind-folded?"

"Hey, now, wait..." She tried to jerk her head aside as he sat down next to her and covered her eyes with the scarf. "But I like looking at you!" she wailed as he tied it off.

"But I want to keep you in suspense," Archer said, laughter in his voice.

"And since I'm not the one who's tied up, guess who gets his wish?"

"Rat," she grumbled, staring into the blackness over her eyes. Despite the moment's frustration, she felt her anticipation began to rise as she waited for his hands, his mouth, his first, heady touch. Nothing.

"What are you doing?"

The bedroom door closed with a soft click.

"Archer! Did you just leave? What the hell are you up to?"

Damn. Frowning, Dana blinked against the blindfold. He'd damn well better not be planning to just leave her here like this. She'd kick his vampire butt clear to Washington .

Great, she thought. Here I am, naked, bound and blindfolded. And my demon lover leaves.

Hadn't he?

What if he was still in the room? He moved so quietly, he could be standing right beside her and she wouldn't know it. He could be standing over her right now, looking at her hard nipples, thinking about where to touch her first.

Then again, he might be downstairs watching 60 Minutes. She was definitely going to kick his ass.

Dana stewed behind her blindfold for what seemed an hour but was probably only fifteen minutes before she heard the door open and close again.

"Sorry to leave you hanging, but I had to get a few supplies," Archer said with disgusting cheer.

"When I get loose, I'm going to hurt you," she told him. "How'd you like to have a clove of garlic shoved up your..."

"Oooh, you are pissed." Something rattled. "I hate to disappoint you, but the garlic thing's a myth" A wicked purr entered his voice. "But if you'd like to experiment, I could get some and see how you like it."

"That's not what I had in mind at all."

"May I remind you, you're the one who's tied up. It doesn't much matter what you've got in mind."

Dana felt her irritation drain at the note of velvet threat in his tone. The bed shifted under her, the mattress dipping as though he'd sat down beside her.

Now, she thought. Now he'd touch her.

Something brushed her skin, then retreated. His fingertips?

There it was again, dancing over the tip of her right nipple, faint and delicious. Not a finger.

Something thin. Several somethings. Filaments gliding over the sensitive skin of her breasts, swirling circles, tracing the full lower curves. Dana couldn't help squirming as she stared into the darkness of the blindfold and wondered what he was using to inflict those delicately erotic sensations.

"I love to watch a woman writhe," Archer said, his voice silken and deep. "Especially when she's bound."

Now the thing was dancing between her legs, tickling the sensitive skin of her thighs, drawing ghostly patterns of delight. "What is that?" she gasped. "What are you..."

Warm, strong fingers touched her most sensitive flesh, parting the delicate lips of her sex and spreading them, then holding them that way for the filaments' tender dance. Dana gasped at the fairy-like sensations playing over her wet lips, only to zero in on her erect clit, circling and brushing it. Unable to stop herself, she began to roll her hips, not even knowing whether she was trying to elude the sensation or get more.

"No, darlin'," Archer murmured. She felt his warm weight settle across her hips, pinning her down. He must be draped over her on his side, Dana thought, a little dazed.

The filaments continued their play, but now she felt a hot puff of air as well, gusting over her clit. He was blowing on her sex, she realized. The idea of his head so close to her hungry core made her grow even wetter.

His tongue slipped down, flicked over her button. Dana moaned, waiting for more of his delicious mouth.

Instead he rolled off her.

"No!" she whimpered. "Archer, don't stop!"

"Patience, darlin'." There was a rumble of laughter in his voice. "One of these days I'm going to tie you down and torture you," Dana growled. "We'll see how patient you are."

"Promises, promises." Something rattled. She thought she heard his bare feet padding on the floor. Then the mattress shifted, moved. Something rattled again.

He was crawling up between her legs, she thought in growing excitement. Something warm pressed against the inside of both thighs that she recognized as his shoulders.

Rattle.

For a long moment he didn't move as she waited breathlessly for him to begin feasting on her sex. Dana

could feel the cream flooding her core in heady anticipation.

Then his mouth was there at last, sucking her clit, hot and wet and setting off a firestorm of burning pleasure. Dana cried out as he drew strongly on the tiny bud, the feelings so intense she could hardly bear them.

Maddened, she rolled her hips. One of his arms clamped across them to pin her down. Another rattle, just before he took his skillful mouth away from her sex. As she was about to groan a protest, she felt the brush of his fingers at her opening.

Cold!

Dana yelled and convulsed as she felt him slide the ice cube up her heated, creamy core, but he held her pinned. Then her clit was in his mouth again, and his free hand was rolling and pinching one nipple. She squirmed and writhed, cursing breathlessly as the ice melted inside her hot sex, the chill warring with the sensation of his wet, clever mouth on her bud, the skilled fingers tormenting her breast.

The orgasm hit her out of nowhere, rolling over her like a train as he suckled her ruthlessly. Dana screamed, unable to bear the raw, brutal pleasure.

Suddenly he was on top of her, his gloriously naked body pressing into hers, touching her everywhere. A hand snatched the blindfold away.

She blinked as Archer reared over her, his fangs bared, taking his big cock in one hand and aiming it for her core. Archer shoved it deep, sucking in a breath as he felt the chill.

"That's what you get for putting ice up my..." she gasped.

"I'll melt it," he growled, and began to drive, fucking her hard and ruthlessly, his thick organ shuttling in and out with such strength she could only twist and moan in her bonds.

The sterling silver ice bucket tilted against her hip, but before it could fall and dump ice on them both, he stopped long enough to grab it up and put it down on the floor. Dana spotted a long ostrich feather curling among the sheets and realized what he'd first used to pleasure her with.

Then he was shafting her again, and she didn't care about anything else except that massive satin cock and the ecstasy it drove into her with each merciless stroke.

Another orgasm swamped her, and she threw her head back in pleasure. She saw his eyes lock on the column of her throat. Deliberately, Dana held the arch, offering herself as he lowered his handsome head. The sting of his fangs pressing deep kicked her climax even higher. He drove to the hilt and stiffened, his cry muffled against her throat.

As the last aftershocks of her climax shuddered through her, she collapsed into the mattress. His big hands stroked her, gentling and soothing as he fed.

Finally Archer drew away.

Dana blinked up at him, a little dizzy, a lot satisfied. "That was... amazing," she sighed.

He stroked tender knuckles over her cheek. "You're pretty amazing yourself. Which must be why I love

you."

She felt a goofy smile spread over her face. "I love you too. You want to untie me now?"

Archer's smile took on a wicked cant as his long fingers found her nipple. "I don't think so. I'm nowhere near done yet." And he started again.

Epilogue

Dana stumbled into the hotel room, staggered to the bed, and fell across it. Archer sauntered in after her, looking, she thought resentfully, disgustingly fresh for a man who'd just spent the last month posing as a terrorist.

"You did good today, darlin'," he told her, pulling his gun out of his shoulder holster. "I was proud of you. Even Fitz thought you handled yourself well."

"It's about time. That man has made my life hell for a solid year." Dana gave him a narrow look. "Come to think of it, so did you."

Archer shrugged as he unloaded the nine millimeter Smith and Wesson. "We had to make sure you were well-trained. And you are. You took down those three mob guys like a pro."

"The look on Galleni's face when I bent that gun barrel..." She laughed, savoring the memory. "I wish I had a picture."

"We probably do. I'll ask." He unbuckled his shoulder holster and shrugged out of it.

Watching the flex of his powerful chest, Dana felt a familiar wash of heat. She rolled to her feet and began to stalk him.

He looked up as she slid nearer and smiled. "Why, Mrs. Archer—whatever do you have in mind?"

Dana grinned, exposing the fangs she'd finally gotten used to. "Just thought we could celebrate the successful closing of my first case." Reaching to the belt of her black combat fatigues, she whipped out a pair of silver bracelets and dangled them from a thumb. "In fact, let's break in my new handcuffs."

With a wicked laugh, Archer reached for them. "I do like the way your mind works, wife."

"Then try this." She grabbed his shoulder and spun him back around. "Up against the wall and spread 'em! I need to practice my strip search."

His rich laughter rolled as he obeyed.

The End.