

PLEASURE CRUISE

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Warning:

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Pleasure Cruise

Michelle M. Pillow & Mandy M. Roth

Dedication

To Briana, our editor, for all you do. To Jaci Burton for your wonderful support (and, yes, you too Charlie).

Prologue

Interoffice Memo

From: The Powers That Be

Re: Pleasure Cruise, Cruise Line Corporation, Pilot Program

TOP SECRET

Due to the dwindling population of certain supernatural factions and the reluctance of the supernatural kind to take mates for all eternity, we will be establishing a comprehensive program to repopulate the various supernatural species. Many of the supernaturals we've observed are unwilling to take mates from within their own population. This reluctance has been exacerbated in large part by the old grudges still held from the Middle Ages.

In an unprecedented move, we will now be allowing humans on the Pleasure Cruise, to participate in the preordained mating process. Because of existing prejudices against supernaturals in human culture, some

human participants will not be aware of the paranormal elements on the cruise. However, these humans will be blessed with a sixth sense so as to subconsciously recognize their mate upon first sight. We do not wish to have a boat full of frightened humans defying our will. Some resistance is expected, but in the end, we gods know what's best for them.

It is our hope that, by introducing humans into their bloodlines, the supernatural will be less reluctant to take a mate. All humans who mate themselves to a supernatural will be blessed with eternal life. They will also be given the gift of procreation. If this goes well, we will be slowly introducing humans into our other business ventures as well, including Pleasure Air and Pleasure Island .

Chapter One

Clare grimaced as she looked at the gangway of the cruise ship and took a deep breath, trying to steel herself to get on board. A long strand of wavy, blonde hair worked itself out of her loose ponytail. Kira had talked her into the highlights and every time she saw them it caused her to pause. Frowning, she pushed the lock out of her face and reached down to grab her duffel bag. Slinging the bag over her shoulder, she looked around. This wasn't something she'd ever imagined herself doing. No, she was a career-driven woman who never thought of anything beyond deadlines and new deals. Clare was still shocked she'd agreed to this trip.

"Welcome to the boat of love. I wonder what will happen on this week's exciting journey? Will the captain steer the boat off course and into a giant iceberg? Or will the tired executive toss herself overboard due to lack of intellectual stimulation?" she muttered, a little too sarcastically.

"That was the *Titanic* that hit the iceberg. And for the record, I graduated with honors... summa cum laude, baby. And I'd gloat but you graduated with the same honorable distinction," her best friend, Kira, answered, smiling.

"I know. If you recall, I was there. Besides, I wasn't implying that you weren't intelligent. Though I am happy to see that you've decided to admit you're smart. Why you always feel the need to hide it is beyond me," Clare said. "You're the top of your field. You should be proud of it, not ashamed."

"I'm not ashamed. I just don't want to be labeled as some boring pinstripe workaholic prude because I happen to be good at my job. I hate stereotypes."

"We've already agreed to disagree on this topic. Because I love you like a sister I'll let it drop." Clare did her best to smile.

"Thank you," Kira answered, grinning. "I don't complain about your boring life and you don't complain about my wild one."

"Kira..."

"Okay, dropped." Kira winked.

"This is just very different for me. I spent my life avoiding these types of getaways only to find myself here now. Besides, can't a girl be left in her nice little pessimistic place?" Clare grumbled. "Even you have to agree that drowning might be preferable to learning how to play shuffleboard."

Kira laughed and winked. "Yes, I totally agree about the shuffleboard thing. Besides, with my lack of grace I'd only end up slipping in front of the world's sexiest man. Hopefully, he'd be a lawyer. Then he'd want to talk to me about a possible lawsuit. We could discuss it over a lovely night of screwing."

"Kira!" Clare scolded.

Tossing her hands in the air, Kira snickered. "Just kidding. But thanks for taking on the stern mother role you do so well."

"Someone has to try to keep you in line."

"Ah, yes. Considering I'm a grown woman and have a mind of my own, the key word there is *istry*."

"Believe me, I know." Clare took a deep breath. This was an old argument. She could no more control Kira than she could the shining of the sun. She loved her friend despite her quirks. The only thing she could do, as a friend, was to be supportive of her. "If one more person tells me to control you I'm going to scream. Short of locking you in the house, I'm screwed."

"Tell them to kiss your ass. You aren't my keeper and if they want to try the job on, let them. I could use a good laugh." Kira's words were clipped. Clearly she was annoyed with the entire topic.

Deciding to cheer Kira up, Clare changed the subject. "Just think, if you do manage to fall while playing shuffleboard, you may end up with a hot doctor on board to care for you!"

"Oh my... I can't believe you just said that. There may be hope for you yet, Clare. I'm proud of you."

Thoughts of the endless times she and Kira had made fools of themselves around hot guys popped into Clare's mind. Laughing, she took in the sights and sounds of the ship. It was breathtaking, but Clare would wait to admit that to Kira, as she waited to see what her friend would do next to try and cheer her. The woman had an endless supply of one-liners and the dirtiest mind in the world, but that was part of what made Kira unique. If Kira's personality had been the same as Clare's they never would have become friends. Thankfully, it wasn't and neither one of them could deny how beautifully they jibed. Kira was the yin to Clare's yang.

"Okay, getting a little touchy-feely," Kira said, making a face. "Before we grab each other and hug for the entire week can we at least find our room? I love ya to death, babes, but these bags are heavy."

Clare snickered, knowing that as open as Kira was, she didn't like to get weepy. "It's a deal. Besides, some of that body glitter you always wear might get on me. My luck, I'd spend the entire week with hives."

"I'm willing to risk it. Heck, I'd even sit with you and hand you anti-itch cream as needed."

Picturing the scene in her head, Clare rolled her eyes. "Thanks for not saying you'd rub it on for me."

"Ha, I almost said that. Damn, you know me well." Kira sighed and rolled her shoulders. "Are we there yet, Mom? Seriously though, the boat of love joke sort of fits. It's a floating paradise. That's what the brochure claims anyways."

It was early evening and a purple haze spread beautifully over the rolling waters of the ocean. A cool breeze whipped Clare's gray T-shirt against her slender frame and a strange feeling unfurled in her gut.

Her knees weakened in apprehension, and her feet refused to move from their spot. Slowly, she began to back away from the large ship.

Great, I've reached whole new levels of neuroses.

Clare laughed softly and did her best to stay on top of their conversation.

“At least we look good in swimsuits. Unlike,” Kira pointed toward a short man with a gut that hung a good six inches over the top of his tight swimsuit. He glanced in their direction and cast them a smarmy grin.

“Kira, tell me again why I let you talk me into this?” Clare gave her a pointed look.

Grinning, Kira tipped her head, giving Clare an innocent look. Clare wasn't buying it. “Because you never have any fun, you're too serious and you're too polite to say no to a birthday present from your very best friend. Who was very willing to kidnap you if need be to get you on board.”

Clare's lip twitched as she fought back a laugh. That answer was so very like Kira. Everything she did in her life screamed carefree and confident. She oozed sex appeal from her long, straight black hair to her dark red lips. Her green eyes flashed with constant mischief. Regardless of what she was doing, she always looked like she was up to something sinful. From Clare's experience, she usually was. Life without her, while quieter, would also be boring.

“Sometimes I really want to bop you over the head with a wet noodle,” Clare mumbled.

“Who says that? Bop me with a wet noodle? What are you? Pushing sixty? Man, Clare, we really need to get you out more. Oh, but if you're willing to make the wet noodle a dildo, I'll think about letting you.”

That did it. A steady stream of giggles escaped them both. They'd been friends for a long time and neither one of them took the comment seriously. Sighing again, Clare looked over the ship and shook her head. She'd really hoped that being friends with someone as carefree as Kira would've rubbed off on her. So far, unfortunately, none of Kira's confidence and exuberant behavior had come her way. Next to her friend, Clare knew she looked like the ultimate prude. Just thinking of it caused a wave of sadness to overtake her. Perhaps she was.

Perhaps? I've spent the last three weekends alphabetizing my collection of dictionaries from around the world just because it annoyed me that they weren't in order.

“You're going to have to select another weapon for me to use. I'd freak out about hitting you with a dildo,” Clare said.

“A flogger?”

“No.”

“A horse whip?”

“NO!”

“A...”

Fearing Kira's next choice, Clare quickly interjected, "No."

"You love me and you know it!" Kira returned, ever cheerful. Adjusting her ample breasts beneath her corset top, leaving her cleavage positioned to its full advantage, Kira just smiled and continued walking.

"I love you like I love a hole in the—" Clare began.

"—your—?" Kira tried to interject.

"Don't even say it, Kira, or so help me I'll leave." Clare turned a warning look to her side, but couldn't help smirking in amusement.

Kira just laughed, unconcerned. She shuffled her feet in excitement as they waited to go up the gangway. "Don't even bother threatening to leave. You know you aren't going anywhere. And besides, if you tried to leave, I'd have to hog-tie you. And trust me when I say I'm an expert. You would die of embarrassment when I pushed you buck naked and tied up around the ship in a lounge chair."

"Hmm, death from embarrassment or death by ballroom dance lessons and shuffleboard?" Clare chuckled. "Shuffleboard sounds more humane. I'll take that, please."

"This is going to be so much fun! Aren't you excited at all? I can hardly wait. I just know there's a cabana boy with my name tattooed right on his delicious, tanned, firm-yet-supple ass. Yummy! And, if not, he'll have it by the end of the trip. I can already feel my engines revving up, ready to go. Can you smell it, Clare? The fresh, salty sea air, the fun waiting to be had, the sex, the—"

"—ass-tattooed cabana boys?" Clare rolled her eyes in response. She didn't doubt for a moment that Kira could smell sex. She seemed to have a sixth sense for it. It was just like Kira to view every moment as an erotic one and to screen every male, or female for that matter, as a potential partner. Though, to be fair, there was more to Kira than just her sexuality. The woman was intelligent, had a passion for art museums and had read nearly every classical author published before the nineteenth century. Thankfully, Kira didn't spout quotes and act all pretentious. She even managed to squeeze in being a ball-breaking female executive. That in itself was impressive.

"Kira, do we belong here?"

"What do you mean?"

"We're career women. We aren't eighteen and on spring break."

Kira arched a dark eyebrow. "Thank God! I'm damn happy we aren't eighteen anymore. And so what if we're career women? Do you see a boardroom around here? No. What you see is the opportunity to loosen up and have fun!"

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

"You guess I'm right? Honey, who in the hell told you that just because you have a brain, a good job and extra cash that you aren't permitted to let your hair down, take your suit off and be free? I'm not about to spend my week playing executive. Well, not unless it's some sort of kinky foreplay—though he better be cute, 'cause been there, done that. We work our backsides off, Clare. We earned this. Anyone who tells you otherwise is jealous that they're too trapped in the cycle to break free even if for just a bit. I pity them. Really, I do. Life is too short to worry about keeping up your professional appearance. Even

you, Ms. Stuffy Pants, have to agree.”

“Tell me again why you’re my best friend?” Clare asked, managing to keep a straight face. She was taller by an inch and moved to drape a hand on Kira’s shoulder. She turned back to look at the cruise ship.

Kira laughed and tapped Clare playfully on the arm. “Because without me you would just be another boring prude with a very boring, ordinary life. Not to mention you’d be one of those women I was just bitching about. The kind who live only to work. I live to live and with me around you do too. So, as I see it you’re a boring prude with a very interesting best friend. Wait, I prefer eccentric. It has a nice ring to it.”

* * * * *

Kira grinned. What she hadn’t told Clare was that this was a singles sex cruise and they were on their way to meet men—lots of hot, sexy, single, preferably very horny men. It’d been a long time since Clare hooked up with anyone and it was Kira’s self-made mission to make sure her friend had a good time. She really hoped that nature would run its course and do the matchmaking for her.

“Believe me,” continued Kira. “I’m good for your image. I’m good for everyone’s image. You need me. You’re destined for a convent without me.”

Clare chuckled. Kira sighed and grabbed her friend’s hand before she could change her mind about the trip and proceeded to pull her up the gangway of the cruise ship.

“Great, I can feel the hula lessons already,” Clare drawled sarcastically. “Some guy in a gold sequin(ed?) outfit is going to come out here and demand we get jiggy with him, isn’t he?”

“Oh, I hope so,” Kira put forth. “Maybe they’ll be nice enough to provide a sequin(ed?) thong for me.”

“Did I tell you that I had a nightmare about cruise ship entertainers last night? It was horrible. They made me wear a headdress piled high with fruit.” Clare gave a pointed look. “Just direct me to the nearest bar.”

“Trust me, Clare.” Kira turned to walk backward up to the deck. She bumped into the rail and giggled. “This vacation is just what you need. It’s what we both need. You’re going to have the time of your life. I just know it!”

* * * * *

“This way,” a lanky porter said as he picked up their bags. He didn’t even have to stoop down. His arms were long enough to just reach their luggage from his standing position.

Kira shot her friend a wide-eyed look and tried not to laugh as Clare gave in to the giggles. Kira smiled, though she kept a careful eye on the porter. He looked as if he could be supernatural and she did not trust the supernaturals. But, she wasn’t about to let something like a ghoulish porter stop her from having a great time. It felt good to be free and to be sharing the experience with her best friend.

Kira knocked her hip into Clare’s and laughed. They swayed slightly as she hummed Cindy Lauper’s anthem to young women everywhere. In no time flat Clare was humming along with her. It was impossible not to be excited. Kira made a mental note to buy Clare the CD upon their return as a token to remember their trip by.

It went against every fiber of Clare's being to have a blast and Kira knew that she had her work cut out for her. The fact that she'd managed to get Clare to dance, even if it was hip-to-hip and a bit forced, was a huge step forward. Too bad that she'd packed the camera away. People at the office would never believe Clare did this much.

Baby steps, Clare, baby steps. You can do it, girlfriend.

She hid her laugh, as she thought of what she had to do to get Clare to come on the trip. Kira had been sure she'd end up having to eat the cost of Clare's ticket right up until the last minute. She'd been shocked when she opened her door a week ago to find Clare standing there holding two bathing suits.

"Which one?" Clare had asked with a slight roll of her eyes.

Kira had pulled her into her apartment and laughed at her. "Neither, they both suck. My grandma has better taste than you do. Come to think of it, my grandma probably picks up more men than you do. But don't you worry, honey. Kira is here to help. Everything is going to be just fine. I know a great little shop down the street where we can find you the perfect 'please handsome man give me sex because I haven't been laid since the last millennium' sexy bikini."

Kira laughed out loud, remembering how she'd thought she'd changed Clare's mind about the trip when she'd convinced her to join her for a day of maintenance care before they had to leave. There was no way in hell that Kira would be caught dead without the proper "spring cleaning" and, as reserved as Clare was, she figured the girl might need an army of spa girls to get through the overgrown thicket. As it was, Clare had done a good job prepping her bikini zone for the trip. However, the waxers did better.

Kira had spent the entire time on the waxing table watching her waxer's every move, so as to keep from getting a full Brazilian wax. She liked to keep a very narrow strip of hair guarding her privates. Ingrown hairs were the last thing she needed in that particular place.

Clare had screamed bloody murder when they'd gone for her upper lip. Kira had expected to see a red, beat-up, blonde girl emerge from the other room. Much to her surprise, she'd found a woman who could have easily been a supermodel. It was a wonder what a little waxing and makeup could do. Clare had never been one to view herself as gorgeous and Kira doubted the woman even thought about how she looked. Anyone who wore as many T-shirts as Clare owned couldn't be into self-image. Kira sighed. But, despite this, her friend was gorgeous. Kira hoped that this trip would help Clare to see that.

Kira glanced at Clare and pulled her closer. Her friend was way too uptight and desperately needed this vacation to let loose and have some fun. She hoped that Clare would relax, find a man and get herself laid—in many, many strange ways. That's why she'd gone out of her way to book this trip to begin with. It had been too long since Mr. Jackass had broken Clare's heart and her friend had spent enough time avoiding the opposite sex. Clare needed to move forward or risk being forever alone, forever longing for that something else, forever celibate. Kira shivered. To go without sex was like going without chocolate on your period. It was just plain cruel and punishable by death in some countries.

Kira hummed louder. So what if she got a little hot sex out of it too? Sure, she liked sex, but none of the men ever held her attention and some of them had been real disappointments in the bedroom department. She still didn't understand how a six-foot giant could have a two-inch little friend. That was just a cruel joke of nature. That poor man probably insulted the gods in his past life or something.

Kira could honestly say that she'd never had her heart broken because she'd never actually gotten close

enough to anyone to let them in. Her parents had been killed when she was young and from that early age she'd erected a wall to keep people from getting too close. She never wanted to feel that pain again. Somehow, Clare had managed to squeak through her defenses.

Clare often joked about Kira's uncanny ability to separate love from sex. She claimed that it crept her out, but Kira often thought she picked up a hint of jealousy in Clare's voice. That was absurd, especially since it had been Kira who was jealous of Clare's gift to love with all her heart ever since she'd met her. It was a gift to be able to love unconditionally, without restraint and despite faults. Clare viewed it as a curse and used sarcasm to keep men at bay to protect herself. Kira wished for an ounce of that ability, but knew that it would never come to be.

"Have a good day," the lanky porter said as he stopped just outside cabin 2b. He had the pastiest complexion Kira had ever seen in her life and his voice was a dead monotone. She resisted the urge to mimic his flat voice. Clare made a serious face, her pale skin turning red with the effort it took not to laugh.

Kira glanced at her ticket. "That's your room, babes."

The man moved one door down, never stopping to look at the girls. He set Kira's bag down. "Have a good day."

When they were alone, Kira's eyes widened and she turned to her friend. "Kind of creepy, don't you think?"

"Where did they find him?" Clare asked, laughing now that they were alone.

Kira put her hands directly out in front of her and walked back and forth mimicking a zombie. In a monotone voice, she droned, "Have a good day. Have a good day. Have a..."

"Let's just hope he doesn't set the tone for the entire trip," Clare mumbled. She pushed her cabin door open and headed in. "I'll meet you in an hour for orientation. *Oh my gawd, Kira!* Did you book us into the honeymoon suites? Look at this place! Are you sure this ship isn't the *USS Hell*?"

"Why? What's wrong with the room?" Kira peered over her friend's shoulder and had to blow a strand of Clare's blonde hair out of the way to see. Her eyes widened as she saw the black walls and large red circular bed. It was the honeymoon suite or a throwback to a seventies porno film, that much was for sure. She laughed hard and laid her head on Clare's shoulder.

"Don't tell me? You picked the decoration out of a brochure." Clare glanced at her.

Kira nodded enthusiastically. "Don't you like it? It makes me think boom, chicka, chickaaaa! Do you think the complementary cocks come with sideburns and gold chains?"

"You're a barrel of laughs."

"Well, I do try. Besides, how can you not love this room? I'm so tired of those boring executive hotel suites."

Kira frowned and touched her shoulder lightly. "Well, think of it this way, if the bed does take quarters and vibrates, it will be the most action you've seen lately. Ride 'em, girlfriend. Ride 'em hard! Wait, do I have to explain how to ride something to you or did they skim over that in 'How to be a Prude 101'?"

With that, Kira ran into her cabin and shut the door tight behind her, giggling all the way.

There was a soft clicking noise behind Kira and she turned to see Clare standing in her room grinning from ear to ear. “Hey, Einstein, next time you decide to take pot shots at my lack of sex, make sure that our rooms aren’t adjoining.”

“Ha, ha. Aren’t these doors supposed to be locked? Huh, strange.” Kira’s voice was soft as she pushed Clare back through the door and locked it. She yelled mischievously, “Be sure to let me know how you enjoyed the ride! Va-rrrrroom, Va-room! Do you need me to oil any of your creaky parts or do you think you can manage?”

Clare banged on the wall and Kira smiled.

* * * * *

Dominik Zakharov smiled as he drew in the scent of the woman who was going to be his mate. How the powers that be had made such a choice for him was still unknown. He’d never thought of himself as the marrying type but, when he’d received notification that his mate had been found, he could not resist stealing a glimpse of her.

He’d taken matters into his own hands, not wanting to wait to see her until it was too late and he was already on the cruise. He had gone to where she lived and watched her from afar. She was far more beautiful than he could have hoped for, but seemed a bit too reserved for his tastes. Maybe she was like the librarian fantasy—prim and proper until you got into the bedroom. As he made his way quietly into the bathroom, he could smell her arousal and it made his cock jerk with excitement.

No part of him wanted to scare her, so he stayed as quiet as possible. The need to be near her was too great to keep his distance until the pre-set time. Her very scent drove him mad and he had to stop a moment to relax. Concentrating hard, Dominik centered his supernatural energy, using it to ooze serenity and calmness. At one point in his long existence, he’d believed his gifts to be a curse. His ability to affect others emotions, as well as his own, was a sign he was a born alpha male. Now, if his pack got out of line, he simply lifted his hands and allowed his power to flow freely. It didn’t matter what mood needed to be generated, Dominik could do it. It was a rare talent among his kind. One that was normally found only in vampires and one that he desperately needed while around his destined mate.

When his erection eased only a tiny bit, Dominik realized that as powerful as he was, nothing would work to calm him. His mate was so perfect, so glorious and so close. Seeing his mate’s slim silhouette through the shower door left him fighting down the beast within him. He would not share this intimate moment with the wolf that resided inside him. No, this would be between his mate and himself.

She deserves her privacy. I shouldn’t be in here uninvited. I’ll wait until she’s out.

As Dominik turned to leave her, she yelped. He frowned.

“This is what I get for buying cheap razors,” she huffed, her voice soft, beautiful.

Sniffing, he knew his mate was bleeding. The beast within should have attempted to break free at the smell. It didn’t. He wanted to make sure she wasn’t hurt. Making a move to go to her, Dominik stopped. Having a man open the shower door to check on a shaving slip would most likely raise some suspicions, or in the very least a blood-curdling scream. Neither of which he wanted to occur.

She's fine. Leave now. You're overreacting.

He still didn't move. Waiting a few moments to assure himself that she would not lose consciousness and drown from a scratch, he finally turned, deciding it really was time to go. He would introduce himself soon enough.

As Dominik took a step, his mate moaned. The noise didn't sound like something one would do if still troubled by an injury. She did it again. No. He knew that sound. It was the sound a female made when sexually excited. Taking a deep breath, he took in her scent. His legs almost gave out from underneath him.

Oh, gods, she's aroused. Leave! Go now!

He tried to take another step. It didn't work.

Foot, move. I command you.

His foot didn't listen. Not that he expected it to. For one thing, he wasn't able to override his natural instincts. For another, he didn't really want to leave her presence. Okay, maybe it wasn't wrong to just take one, small peek—just to be sure she was not really hurt. Technically, by lycan law, she was promised to him and it was his responsibility to look after her.

Who was he kidding? Her smell entranced him and he didn't want to go. A slow smile crept over his face as he watched his mate turn around in the water and moan gently. He couldn't help but reach down and stroke the rock-hard length of himself, imagining her moaning like that beneath him.

He should have waited until ship orientation to introduce himself, but he'd been too anxious to see her up close. He sensed her arousal, smelling her sweet cream building slowly between her thighs. The very idea of his seemingly mild mannered mate pleasuring herself shook him to the core. He wanted to see it. Needed to see it. Needed to be part of it. He knew that he'd sink his cock into her soon enough and right now he just wanted to kick back on the fainting sofa and enjoy the show. And she certainly did know how to put on a show.

* * * * *

The hot water caressed Clare's skin, easing the tension she carried in her shoulders. The sensations made her moan in delight. The bathroom suite was almost as large as the bedroom in her apartment. She never understood why someone would want a couch in the bathroom, but this one had two of them. That gave it one more than her apartment had. It was a bit depressing and she tried not to dwell on it.

She and Kira had done well making lives for themselves. They'd come from basically nothing, and now had fabulous educations and great paying jobs. It didn't matter that work consumed most of their waking hours, or that the only men they met were colleagues who either used them for their position or just plain old used them. Sure, it was lonely sometimes and it hurt each time a relationship didn't work out. But what could she do? She and Kira had worked too long and too hard to let the men who ventured into their lives interfere with their plans.

Clare peeked out at the luxurious bathroom one more time from behind the glass door and shook her head, still not believing she was in a place like this. It took her a good five minutes to decide between the large whirlpool tub with interestingly placed massage jets and the gigantic shower. The gaudy little cherubs hugging onto the bathtub faucet had been the deciding factor. As much as she wanted to love the

idea of fat little child-like carvings staring at her while she bathed, she couldn't bring herself to soak in the tub. She chose the shower.

Clare groaned as the tension continued to melt off her, spilling down the drain with the hot water. If not for her telling Kira she'd meet her in an hour for orientation, she would've considered taking a little more "personal" time to really relieve the travel tension from her body. Good thing she brought a little late night backup in her bag. Battery operated pleasures had been the only form of sex she'd gotten lately. It always did the trick, never complained and, most importantly, never cheated on her.

She frowned at the thought of her last relationship and concentrated on the toy she'd brought on the trip with her. Good thing Kira hadn't seen it in her bag! Clare would never have heard the end of it. Let her friend think she was completely dead between the legs. Everyone else did. Mr. Jackass—as Kira had so affectionately dubbed him—did. The name fit him perfectly. He was a complete and utter jackass. But damned if he didn't have a few talents she missed.

Even alone in the shower, Clare blushed, and then giggled. She worked her hair back, pulling the long wet strands from her face as she rubbed in conditioner. Well, at least the vibrator worked on command and didn't tell placating lies to lure her to it. Not to mention it always stayed hard.

A shiver went up her spine. The mood in the room changed and it was as if someone was in there with her. She blinked, turning to quickly rinse the conditioner out of her hair. In her haste, she ended up peering out of one conditioner-filled eye. Clare yelped, shoving her face under the water. The conditioner threatened to burn a hole clean through her head if she didn't tend to it immediately.

"Kira? Is that you?" No answer. "Kira, if I end up blind because of you, you're dead! And you better stay out of my bags!" As soon as she said it, she regretted it. She'd all but told her friend that her bags contained something she didn't want her to see. It would be too much for Kira to pass up.

"Kira?" she called, finally able to see out of her right eye again.

Clare waited for an answer, knowing if Kira had been in her room she wouldn't have been able to resist the setup to make fun of her choice of wardrobe—blue jeans and T-shirts and, lest she forget, the almighty pajama pants. Should Kira manage to stifle her laughter long enough to get past her drab choice of clothing, she'd never let her live down the cotton "granny undies" she packed too. They weren't old lady undies so much as they weren't Kira's panties. Normally people called thongs and crotchless panties by their given names but Clare just referred to them as Kira-wear.

If Kira had her way, she'd force Clare to wear dresses—not just any dresses, but ones that just barely covered a thong up her ass. She swore Kira bought her wardrobe at Whores-R-Us and she couldn't understand her friend's compelling need to wear nothing but leather and lace. Sure, Kira pulled it off without looking like a hooker, but that was not something Clare could do. The one time Kira was allowed to play dress up with her, she'd been propositioned like a whore by about twelve sweaty guys. She'd ended up hiding the whole night in the dance club's restrooms. Naturally, Kira had jokingly told her she should've taken the money.

"Kira?" Clare paused. "Are you in here? Can you help me with something?"

Clare relaxed when Kira didn't answer, again becoming distracted by the warm water. She moaned, low and throaty, unable to help it as the hip-level showerhead sent a warm sensation between her soaked legs. It was an unexpected, but most welcome, feeling.

The water's caress was wonderful. All of a sudden, it felt like strong fingers ran over her flesh in long, tender strokes. She gasped lightly, closing her eyes. One hand gripped onto the shower door, her fingers working absently against the glass, as the other found the far wall. Was it just her imagination or was the shower beating harder against her skin?

Her breasts strained beneath the hot downpour of water. Pleasurable sensations shot throughout her, raging from her nipples over her body. She gasped for breath. She didn't know how it happened but she felt her body peaking against the flow of water. The muscles in her lower abdomen tightened, warning of the impending orgasm. She became mindless to everything but the hot, throbbing need for release.

Clare kept her eyes closed tight, fighting her body as it sought its greedy fulfillment. *Not...yet...no*. She clutched a rail, pulling at it to keep standing as her knees buckled. Each swipe of the water pushed her closer to that unseen edge. She imagined the feel of lips on her nipples, sucking gently, making a hot shock of desire flood her limbs. She pressed her lips tightly together to keep from crying out—the need to scream so massive that she feared she couldn't contain it. The last thing she wanted was Kira running in to find her masturbating with water.

It had been so long since her body was excited to such an extent. She was afraid to look, afraid to move, afraid to open her eyes, afraid it would stop if she did. She panted in ragged breaths, gasping mindlessly for air. Senseless, she gyrated against the water, letting the pounding droplets skim over her clit. She could almost feel the hovering heat of a cock head near her wet pussy, even though nothing was there. It rubbed lightly along her wet slit, up and down, up and down, teasing her ready opening with its presence. Her hips strained, searching for it, searching for the sweet feeling of release. Never had her imagination felt so real.

Had it been so long that she now was forced to recreate the pleasure of a cock in her mind? The answer to that question scared her. She buried the thought deep within her head and locked it away.

The shower hit harder upon her clit, sending liquid waves of desire coursing through her blood as it vibrated hard and hot against her tender flesh. She rocked herself against it, enjoying the erotic feel as tremors racked at her body. She clutched at the wall, the door, herself. She slid her hands over her breasts, toying with her now tender nipples, dipping to part the folds of her clenching pussy. Each stroke sent her muscles into tightening fits. Clare rode the waves of her orgasm one right after another. She'd never been a very orgasmic woman and was surprised to find herself brought to such a fierce climax by a shower.

Clare whimpered softly as pleasure ran rampant through her, knowing she had to stay quiet lest Kira hear her and come running. Her head fell back on her shoulder as she once more fought for control over her shaking limbs. It was almost too much to bear.

A low moan sounded. Clare stopped. Did she just make that sound? She stood, shower beating in a steady rhythm as she listened. All beyond the shower was silent.

She chuckled nervously, as images of possible voyeurs played in her head. Wouldn't that have been lovely? It would just be her luck that she'd find her first real orgasm in nearly a year and the creepy, oversized porter would be the one to share it with her.

"Have a nice day." She heard the monotone voice in her head.

Taking a deep breath, she turned off the shower. Pushing the hair back from her face, she wrung what water she could from it. Then, pushing open the stall door, she stepped out on wobbly legs. It bounced

shut behind her, making a loud crash. The temperature in the bathroom was perfect and she was glad she remembered to turn the thermostat on.

Rubbing the water from her eyes, she blinked, reaching to the side of the shower for her towel. Her fingers met with the wall. She glanced up, frowning, arms still outreached and searching.

“*Mmm*,” came a deep voice as smooth as silk. “The brochure didn’t mention this in its list of entertainments. I’d have been inclined to book a cruise sooner if it had.”

Clare jolted in surprise. She blinked as she turned to the sound. Her mouth fell open in shock. That was no creepy porter sitting on the small couch along the bathroom wall. For a moment she couldn’t move, couldn’t comprehend that the most gorgeous guy she’d ever laid eyes on had watched her take a shower—had been watching her as she pleased herself, as she played with her nipples, as she came over and. . . Clare was speechless. She stared, fearfully waiting for the man to disappear. Her mind raced as she tried to remember what they’d taught her in self defense class.

His short dark hair was tipped with blond highlights, not so much in a “streaky boy band” way, but more of a “sexy adult you want to eat him for breakfast” sort of way. His hair was longer on top and a stray lock fell over his temple, directing her gaze to his dark, penetrating eyes. Orbs of deep brown gazed lazily at her, sated from the sex show she’d just starred in. His expression seemed almost playful, kind, as if he was only teasing her. He seemed familiar. It was almost as if she knew him. But that was impossible.

“I didn’t mean to scare you,” he said. Confusion passed over his face. “Could you not detect me here?”

Clare blinked, wondering at the strange sense of calmness that washed over her at his words. Her body relaxed and she no longer felt scared. It was almost as if the emotions were coming from outside herself. She shook her head, not understanding.

Shouldn’t she try to run? The man’s eyes turned away briefly to the floor, his posture non-threatening. Clare was overwhelmed with a sense of safety.

“This is crazy,” she whispered, mesmerized. “Who are you?”

The man wore a fitted black shirt. It molded to his muscles, leaving nothing to the imagination. Clare’s body responded instantly. A wave of pleasure swept throughout her again. No doubt leftovers from the stimulating shower experience.

Mere seconds passed like minutes. She was sure it was just the aftermath of pleasure from the showerhead that made her knees weak and her heart race but he was so perfect, so close, so cute. Her gaze drifted over his flat stomach to where his tight leather pants molded to his hips and legs. A foot rested leisurely over a knee, framing the biggest bulge she’d ever seen between a man’s thighs.

Clare gasped and couldn’t look away. The man’s smile was deliberate and sultry. His gaze traveled over her naked flesh in ill-concealed appreciation. A low sound emerged from the back of his throat, animalistic and raw.

He smiled, not moving from his seat. A chill went over her at the sound of his voice. It was as if he caressed her without touching her. His tone gentle, he added, “I’m not going to hurt you.”

Clare shook herself back to reality. What was she doing just standing there? She screamed, though the sound of it was odd after having stood for so long staring. Glancing at the door, she tried to hide her

body from him with her hands and arms. All she wanted was to be covered. Now!

“Would you like a towel?” he asked. Her eyes flew to his and he offered up a small hand towel to her, swinging it back and forth between them. “It’s the only one I can find over here. I’d stand up to look, but I’m afraid you’ll try to hurt me.”

Was he serious?

Clare screamed again, not knowing how else to react. Bending down, she grabbed the small trash bin and threw it at him. It cracked him in the forehead. He looked shocked by her actions but she really didn’t care. The only other thing even close to her was a fake plant on the floor. Grabbing it, she hurled at him and ran past him, through the bathroom door to the bedroom. She looked for her duffel bag full of clothes. It was missing. Seeing the red silk coverlet on the bed, she dove onto the mattress. Within seconds, she had the silk wrapped to her wet, naked body. Snatching a rather odd-shaped lamp off the nightstand, she jerked the cord from the wall and held it above her head as she searched the room for a phone. She’d call security and get this man’s sexy ass tossed overboard. Who did he think he was?

When she again looked at him, the man was leaning against the doorframe. His smile widened, though there was confusion in his eyes. Clare attempted her best look of outrage as she glared at him.

“You don’t recognize me?” he asked.

She frowned. What an odd question. Again, the feeling of calm and safety tried to take over her senses. Clare tried to resist, but the feelings were too strong. Anger and fear gave over to embarrassment. After all, he’d watched her most private moments. How dare he break into her room and spy on her! Truth be told, she was mortified that he’d actually watched her pleasure herself like that. *Gawd!* She couldn’t even *think* about what she’d done with him standing there looking at her.

“If I had known you were so eager to get into my bed I would’ve already been in it, naked and waiting for you.” The man smiled sheepishly. Clare frowned. He was trying to make jokes at a time like this? “Why don’t you drop the blanket and come here? I promise I can make you feel better than that shower ever could.”

“Drop the what?” Glancing down, she looked at the red cover and then back at him. Her body shivered, very much liking his idea. “You sick...get out before I...before I...”

“You are holding a lamp, which I presume you believe is an adequate defense.” He flashed a smile and tipped his head. “Maybe you should threaten me with that?”

“Ah!”

“I am only trying to help you. You seemed to be at a loss for words.” He waved his hand carelessly to the side, not coming any closer. His body’s relaxed position was anything but threatening.

“I am not at a loss for anything other than a phone to get your—”

“You have quite a temper. You did not seem as though you would. I rather like that, though it does not intimidate me. I have dealt with much scarier than you and I am always prepared for anything.”

Furious and irrational, Clare snarled at him. “How’s your forehead, Mr. Prepared for Anything?”

He cringed. “Yes, that. I will admit you managed a rare thing. You caught me off-guard.”

“Come any closer and I’ll catch you upside your head!”

The man put his hands out and Clare took a deep breath. “You will calm down. There is no need for such hostility. I pose no threat and would rather die than see you harmed.”

The temperature in the room rose dramatically. Clare struggled to take a deep breath as an unseen force wrapped around her, this time stronger than before. It calmed her, soothed her. Her mind told her to throw the lamp at him but her body refused to move. After a few seconds of internal conflict, her mind agreed with her body. Easing her arm down, she kept a tight grip on the lamp as she stared at the man.

“See, isn’t that better?”

“What are you doing in here? What’s going on? Why do you think I would know who you are?”

She did feel better. Clare frowned, just now noticing his words were edged with a very noticeable accent. Russian, maybe? It only made him all the more appealing. Like he needed any help in the “sexiest man alive” category. Her frown deepened into a scowl.

“Oh, I get it. You think I’m a prostitute, is that it? How dare you assume that I would entertain you!” she fumed, pulling the covers tighter. Her voice was calmer than before, though she was still upset. “This is my bed and my room and you don’t belong in either of them! Don’t you dare take another step closer! Stay back! *You* are in the wrong suite! Get out before I call security and have you thrown overboard!”

The man lifted his hands, motioning her to be calm. “Easy, now. There’s no need to get all worked up. And I would never think you were a prostitute.”

“Stop talking! Just shut up! I’m not going to sleep with you!” Clare demanded, fighting the sheets as she looked all around. Her nerves were shattered and it was hard to be imposing wrapped in nothing but red silk. The strangest sensation came over her, as if she knew the man before her, felt him on a primal level. By his look, he felt it too. “Where is my bag? What did you do with it?”

The man leisurely crossed over to a wooden nightstand. He looked hurt by her outburst. His tone harder than before, he said, “There was nothing worth keeping in them so I threw your bag overboard.” He nodded at a round port window, and then pulled something out of the drawer. “Well, nothing was worth keeping except for this little thing here.”

Clare’s face drained of color. He hit the power button on her purple vibrator and a light buzz sounded over the room. The look in his eyes as they moved over her silk-covered body made her think he was about to pounce. A response sparked in her lower stomach at his boldness and she was instantly aroused. Cream drenched her already moist pussy and it throbbed incessantly with its aching need. He took a step toward her and she shrieked.

“Shouldn’t I be the one calling out for help? It is my cabin that you have made yourself *at home* in. If you’re not supposed to be in here, why are you here?”

Clare’s cheeks flared red and her eyes widened. “How dare you accuse me of... This is my room... You had no right to watch! I mean you threw my things out...you...”

He laughed, a sound that made her inner thighs tighten. “I assure you, this is my room. Listen, I’m sorry.

"I know we got off on the wrong foot. Can we start over?"

Clare's jaw dropped. She couldn't say a word. He was apologizing while holding her vibrator. The nerve of this man! The sheer boldness of his wicked words left her head spinning. She tingled all over and her treacherous body ached to know if he could deliver all that his look promised.

Chapter Two

Braden Montgomery looked around the gaudy cabin and shook his head. Who in their right mind would decorate a honeymoon suite this way?

Honeymoon suite, he played the words back in his mind, hardly able to contain the joy he felt inside.

He'd been told at an early age that the likelihood of ever finding that one true mate, the one who would make him feel alive again, bear his children and spend eternity with him, was almost impossible. His best friend, Dominik, had been told pretty much the same thing, just like all immortals were. Braden had been unwilling to accept that as true. He'd spent too many centuries alone on this Earth resisting the call of evil to believe that his lonely existence was all there was. No, he knew there had to be more. In all his eternity, there had to be someone for him. Then, rumors surfaced in the supernatural world about the Pleasure Cruises being used as a matchmaking device. He was tired of being alone. He wanted someone by his side, sharing the world with him. Knowing he wouldn't find his other half on his own, he took a huge leap and contacted the powers that be, putting his life in their hands. When he saw his mate for the first time, he realized just how right the powers had been.

They'd even been thoughtful enough to offer him a sneak peek at his mate. Taking them up on their offer, he watched, from the shadows, the area the powers had told him she'd be in. He didn't know what to expect. What he found was a creature of such beauty that at first he thought he'd made a mistake—that she could not possibly be his mate.

Once he realized that the raven-haired goddess was indeed to be his wife, he then thought that she must be ugly on the inside. Shallow. Full of greed, lust, anything that would make her less in his eyes. When he scanned her mind, he found only concern for her friend, the one she'd brought with her on the trip, the one that was to be Dominik's wife.

His mate was a human. He hadn't been prepared for that. Humanity was a flaw to his kind, but Braden could easily overlook it. After she accepted him, she'd change, becoming a vampire like him.

After scanning her thoughts, Braden knew that his mate considered Clare to be family, the only family she had left. Kira had little concern for money, although she'd been left a good deal from the death of her parents. Money meant little to him as well. His kind amassed fortunes over centuries of living and he had more than he and his new wife could ever want or need. She did work a lot, perhaps too much. After they were married, he hoped she'd slow down, perhaps even quit. Unfortunately, she might not have a choice. Vampires in the human workforce were a hard balance to maintain as they couldn't go out during the day. But if she wished for a career, he would not get in her way. In fact, he'd do everything in his power to make she got what she wanted. Already, his life was hers. That in itself was amusing. He'd been so reluctant for so long, only to fall head over heels the moment he was finally presented with his future.

Kira's greatest flaw, from what he had sensed in her, was that she had hardened herself to love

somewhere along the way. A thick wall surrounded her heart. He knew that she would make it difficult for him to break through. But he was determined to do just that. He'd waited too long for her to let something as small as her fear of love stop him.

There was something else when he read her. Pain. Fear. She was scared of his kind, had been hurt by them. He tried to read what happened, but the memory had been locked up tight. Whatever it was, it was bad. For that reason, he'd taken the first step and linked himself with her mentally, just enough to ease her fears and allow them to talk.

Braden had been drawn to talk to Kira that first night. Before he could stop himself, he opened his mouth and said the first lame thing he could think of, "Excuse me, can you tell me how to get to East Second Street?" It wasn't his best line, not that he really had any, but it worked. When their eyes met everything around him stopped. Even Kira had felt it. In fact, she'd been so distracted that she'd dropped her briefcase in a puddle.

Once their minds were joined, he entered her dreams, letting her get to know him on a subconscious level so she'd be comfortable with him. Entering the human mind was a simple trick once the connection was made. His friend Dominik had used it with Clare, though to a lesser extent. Dominik, being lycan, would use emotion more than thoughts to ease Clare's fears. Undoubtedly the women would consider it an unfair advantage. And they would be right. As immortals they trusted their innate senses to guide them. But with humans, it could sometimes take years for them to see what was right in front of them. Neither Dominik nor Braden wanted to wait years, not after centuries of being alone.

Braden moved toward the dresser and smiled when he slid the top drawer open, revealing a mound of silky thongs. A man could get used to a woman who loved lingerie—especially if she looked as good as Kira did. Great sex was definitely going to be a perk of being married to Kira. The woman oozed sexual confidence. She liked people to think she was more promiscuous than she really was. She even had her friend Clare convinced of it, though to a lesser extent. It was a way for her to protect herself, to keep men from getting too close. It was the same reason she worked eighty hour weeks. If she wasn't accessible then she didn't run the risk of having to get to know new people. That was one thought she left open in her mind. And it was one he hoped to ease her of soon.

He lifted a sleek navy teddy out of the dresser and let the silk of it glide through his fingertips. He could easily visualize her luscious ass showcased by the tiny scrap of material. The need to rub his stiff cock between her soft cheeks was great and he vowed that he would before the trip was over. When he'd walked her home that night, after she'd purchased her tickets from the travel agency, he could think of little else besides how it would feel to take her from behind, to hear her cries of passion as he rode her body and to know that his seed pumped into her womb. The connection between them had been strong, so intense that it had taken all his willpower to not act on it.

Braden ran his tongue over his bottom lip, imagining his face planted firmly between her thighs. He wanted to taste her, touch her, love her the way that it was meant to be. He knew he should leave her room and wait until ship orientation to introduce himself to her. Orientation felt as though it was months away instead of only an hour or so. He couldn't wait that long to hold her, feel her hot pussy wrapped around his hard cock while she called out his name. The thought of releasing his seed deep within her as her body clutched his damn near drove him to the brink of an orgasm, and losing control of himself was something he was not prone to do.

He shook the thoughts from his head, drawn back by the sound of his mate exhaling deeply from behind the closed bathroom door. His supernatural hearing gave him the advantage, and his other senses told him that she was tired, yet slightly aroused. He'd see to it that she was fully aroused before the night was

over.

Braden turned to leave. He heard the unmistakable sound of material falling to the floor and stopped. He wanted her, had wanted her from that very first moment. The bloodlust inside of him was strong, telling him to bite, to mark what was rightfully his. The gods had ordained this marriage. He and Kira were meant to be. Why should he wait to lay claim to his wife? Entering her dreams had been tortuously wonderful. Having her so close was just short of excruciating.

He'd waited too long to possess her, pleasure her and hold her to him. Kira was his, though she didn't know it yet. Already they were joined.

Bringing forth his power, he sought to enter her mind just enough to let her subconscious remember who he was so she didn't panic on him. He could never hurt her, would never take her free will away from her. But he could ease her uncertainties and take away that small part of her fear that would keep her from acting on pure instinct.

Braden lifted his hand to the bathroom door. He smelled the perfume she wore, heard the beating of her heart. His own heart picked up time with hers, mimicking the beat. Slowly, he reached for the doorknob. The time to claim his mate had finally arrived.

* * * * *

Kira pulled the tiny black dress over her head, revealing her breasts and skimpy panties as she looked in the bathroom mirror. The sound of the whirlpool tub filling with water drifted around her. She chuckled, loving the little gold cherubs on the faucet. They were so perfect, all fat, cute and mischievous. The whole suite was so Vegas. It suited her mood perfectly.

Putting her hands up, she stretched, happy she'd chosen this cruise line over the others she'd seen. Not that she'd had much of a choice. The strange compulsion to book the cruise was almost overwhelming and, from the word go, she'd been drawn to this particular cruise company. Kira shrugged, sure it had something to do with the hot guy on their commercial.

Twisting her hair into a knot, she reached blindly for her hair clip. It was nowhere to be found.

"Crap," she whispered as she began to turn in search of her bag. If she let her hair get wet now, it'd take all night to dry and then it would be a frizzy mess. It was times like these that she wondered if having thick, heavy, long hair was worth it. Mumbling to herself in irritation, she said, "Maybe I should shave my head—*ahh!*"

Something firm grabbed her about the waist, stopping her from making it all the way around. "Shh, love, you will be calm now."

Kira moaned softly, nodding her head in slow agreement. The voice that spoke was deep, with a distinctly British inflection. It made her want to turn around and see if he was as sexy as he sounded. She didn't, her heart pounding in excitement as she let his little game unravel for itself.

"Very good," the man said, but she barely heard him. He moved closer.

She gasped in pleasant surprise and her body tensed, part in fear, part in excitement. Whoever the very male presence behind her was, she hadn't heard him come in the bathroom. A masculine finger worked beneath the thin side strap of her panties, touching her intimately. He held her tight to his body. A soft

voice whispered hotly in her ear, "One can only assume that you are not here to tidy up the place."

"What?" Kira didn't even attempt to get away from him. For some reason, she didn't want to. His body molded hard to hers as he pressed close to her back. From what she could feel pressing large and throbbing into her back, this guy was more than large enough to satisfy a woman. For some reason, she liked his boldness, his confidence. Not many men dared to approach her and that had always bothered her. This one not only approached her, he didn't seem to care what she thought about him touching her and she loved that. She was up to date on all her sexual immunizations, so it didn't matter if he was or not. Only one partner had to be immunized to protect them both. Sex had never been safer.

The memory of the creepy skeletal guy hit her and she drew in a sharp breath. Surely that wasn't who was touching her. But this man's voice wasn't monotone. She turned her head to get a better view of her captor. He loosened his grasp on her, allowing her to pivot in his arms and face him head-on. He was nothing like the skeletal guy.

Kira's eyes widened and she had to blink to be sure he was real. She couldn't have dreamed up a better specimen of a man if she'd tried. Silky strands of long brown hair partially hid what looked to be a perfect face. One blue eye looked out from behind the silken veil, making her shiver with delight. Slowly, a memory tried to unfold. "Do I know you?"

He smiled.

"You look really familiar to me," she said.

His smile widened. Kira closed her eyes for a brief second.

"I met the travel agent late at her office that evening to pick up tickets. I'd just gotten off of work. You bumped into me. I dropped my briefcase into a puddle." Kira shivered. They'd talked for a few minutes. There had been an almost instant connection, though for some reason she hadn't acted on it and neither had he. In fact, she'd never even gotten his name. The whole memory was somewhat blurred in her mind, but she remembered having dreams about him. She waited, eagerly listening to see if his accent was what she remembered.

"Yes, I seem to recall that. I was hoping I'd bump into you again," he answered. Kira wondered at the strange look on his face. He didn't seem to be as surprised as she was at the encounter.

"Would it be too much to inquire after your name this time?" His accented words gave her chills. She always was a sucker for a good British accent. There was a sound of longing in his voice but she chose to ignore it. "I believe we forgot proper introductions."

Kira moved her hand up, not knowing what came over her as she reached for his sculpted face. He was too tall and she only succeeded in pressing her barely clothed body against his toned frame even more. The lid dipped leisurely over that seductive blue eye. She wasn't scared of him. In fact, she couldn't think of a single reason why she shouldn't touch him. It was as if someone reached inside her and pulled away all her fear and doubt, leaving confidence and instinct. Instinct told her to kiss him. Instinct told her it would be all right, that he was safe.

Kira moaned softly. Liking the feel of his cock pressed against her back, she shifted in his arms again, leaving her facing away from him. He never broke contact with her and the press of his body sent shivers down her spine. Kira smiled and pulled his arms tighter around her waist. She thrust her hips back into him and wiggled, trying to entice him further. A sultry laugh escaped her lips as she answered, "Yes, it

would be too much to ask for a name. Not that I think I'm better than you, but really, is there any reason that we need to know anything about each other, Cabin Boy?"

The "cabin boy" grunted and she thought that maybe he was laughing at her. Kira didn't care at the moment. From what she felt rubbing along her back at full attention, they'd both be grunting in few seconds. What a perfect way to start out a vacation.

"Cabin Boy?" he asked.

"Yes." Kira laughed, feeling very carefree. "Mm, won't you be my little cabin boy for me?"

"So you wish to play games?" He moved his hands over her waist and hips, caressing her.

"Mm, yes," she continued, feeling giddy. "I like games."

The man inhaled deeply. "Then I will be your cabin boy."

"And I'll be the rich woman with no moral conscience." Actually, Kira didn't feel as though she had much of a conscience at the moment anyway, so it wasn't much of a stretch.

She turned quickly in his arms again and gave notice to the fact that he wore designer clothing. The silk felt good against her naked breasts. Her nipples stung with desire and puckered against him. She always liked it when a man dressed well. It usually meant they took care of themselves in other ways, too. She grabbed at his buttons and had three undone before his long fingers laced over hers, momentarily stopping her advances.

"Are you sure this is what you want?" he asked "What you truly want? Because, if you say the words, I will remove myself from you and wait."

Kira believed him. She studied his face, as she forced herself to think about what she was doing. "This is crazy. I...I'm not thinking clearly."

"Yes, you are. Trust me, you're thinking more clearly now than you have ever been."

Kira frowned at that. But as soon as a protest started to form in her brain it was like the thought was snatched away.

"It's an easy question," he said. "What do you want?"

She didn't answer. Her body trembled. Every fiber of her being told her that he was safe, that he was what she wanted.

"Then I shall leave you," he said.

"Wait, no." Where had that come from? She swallowed, knowing it was what she wanted more than she'd ever wanted anything. "Stay. I want you to stay."

"Then I shall stay."

All doubt left her at his words. She smiled, confident and sure of her choice. More and more of their previous conversation came back to her. Why hadn't they hooked up that night? The chemistry had been

right and Kira usually went for things when she wanted them. It was perfectly clear by his hard, erect cock that he wanted her as well.

“Come on, Cabin Boy,” Kira purred, forcing a pout to her lips as she started the game anew. Her body pulsed with excitement, instantly soaking her panties with need. There was no reason for her to be coy. “We both know that this is a singles’ cruise. Didn’t we all come aboard with the idea that we’d get laid?”

“I don’t need a cruise to get sex.” His voice gave her another round of pleasurable chills. “I have no problem finding women who are *more* than willing to please me.”

“Neither do I,” Kira said, as she bit at his smooth chest. She flicked her tongue out at him in a mischievous fashion, moving to play against his erect nipple. She sucked the hard bud between her lips before nibbling gently. His whole body jolted violently beneath her touch.

Letting out a small laugh, he tipped his face down to her. She loved his voice. It sent chills over her skin, down to her moistening slit. She couldn’t wait to hear what it would sound like calling out to her in passion. His tone a little hard, he asked, “Don’t you mean you have no problem finding men who are willing to please you?”

“Isn’t that what I said?” She licked the edges of his collarbone and fluttered her eyelids a bit, not liking his accusatory look. “You can’t possibly be upset. So what if I’m not a virgin. I won’t apologize for it. I’ve been with men and—”

“Enough.” His face went hard as he narrowed his eyes on her. “I would appreciate not hearing about the men in your past. It would not bode well for any of them should I ever find that they have tried to contact you again. For future reference, I will be the only man you ever think of again.”

Kira frowned. So much for the game.

“Ohh, aren’t we the jealous no-name lover? Getting a bit ahead of yourself there, buddy. Let me give you a small, helpful hint. Not all women like to believe that they have a future with a guy on the first or even second date, if that’s what you can even call this. I’ll overlook it this one time but, so help me, if you pull out the ‘I love you’s’, you will find yourself knocked on your ass and sitting in the hall. I know we connected that night by the travel agency, but believe me, there’s plenty of others to take your place. I surely don’t need some obsessive cabin boy pining after me while I’m on vacation. I plan on enjoying myself and that usually means fucking a whole lot of men—and I’d like to take this moment to stress the words ‘whole lot of’.”

Kira grinned, feeling incredibly empowered. His head tilted to the side. He said nothing. In fact, he didn’t look too pleased with her outburst.

“Now,” Kira said, wanting to get back into character. It was easier to pretend she was someone else. “I know nothing about you and you know nothing about me, not really. I’m not only willing to overlook this fact, Cabin Boy, I’m embracing it. I really suggest you do the same. We could have a good time here, where I not only fuck you but I drain your cock dry, or you can go all macho on me and get nothing. I must warn you that I want nothing more than to suck you off at the moment and I’m dying to know what it would feel like to have that tongue of yours licking every inch of my pussy as I cream on your face, but it’s ultimately your decision.”

“You have a dirty mouth, you know it? But I have a feeling you only talk tough. Inside you’re just a closet romantic.” He smiled again, stroking her cheek. “Go ahead, talk tough. Play your little game. I

don't mind."

Kira shrugged off his words. There was no way he could know that much about her from just a few meetings. "I'm assuming that answer means yes. Lovely. I'd like you to begin with me now. For starters, I'd like to take a look at what kind of cock you're sporting. Not that I'm doubting it, but a girl's got her standards you know."

"Of course." He gave her a wry look. "You should know that I'm a—"

"Shh, don't talk. Enough talking. Too much conversation. We talked last time." Kira grabbed his waistband and worked his pants open. "All of my sex shots are up to date. I can't get pregnant. I can't catch anything. And now I want to play. So, my sexy Cabin Boy, why don't you just go ahead and do what we both know you do best—fuck me until I can't stand straight anymore."

His lips twitched in approval and she knew he wouldn't be protesting again. Tugging his pants off, she made sure to take his silk boxers with her as she moved them down his legs. She gasped, her eyes rounded as she looked down at his long, thick shaft.

Kira kissed him. For all her tough words, she actually shivered. There was something slow and seductive about the way his mouth moved against hers. She might have only met him one time, but she felt as if she'd known him forever. He stroked her body, heating her to his touch. Her mouth left his as she explored his neck, his chest, his flat stomach. He smelled good, like expensive cologne. A moan sounded her throat and all thoughts fled. Somehow, this just seemed right. The primal urge to please him took over. Kira wasn't normally an overly generous lover when it came to oral sex, but she found herself wanting—no, needing—to please him first.

Kira fell to her knees, eager to taste him. This was bold, even for her. But, she'd told herself that she was going to do new, adventurous things on this vacation and once her mind was set, there was no changing it. Besides, once the vacation was over, everything that happened on the boat would stay on the boat. It's not like she'd see anyone but Clare again and Clare was already her best friend for life.

His cock, now free from its confines, bobbed next to her cheek. Kira moaned in approval, pleasantly surprised by her cabin boy's long, thick endowment. She moved her lips over the pink, mushroom-shaped head of his cock and let her tongue run out and over it, tasting the smooth, hard flesh. Salty pre-cum surfaced as she continued to toy with the tip of him and moan lightly. He groaned in instant approval. Moving his hands into her hair, he pulled her forward so that her lips were forced to part over his girth. She worked her mouth around the tip of him and sucked gently. He tasted so good, intoxicating, unlike any man she'd ever sucked off before. She couldn't help herself as she became more aggressive.

"Oh, fuck," he growled, as she teased him with her teeth and tongue, not giving him all that she was sure he wanted. He tightened his hands in her hair, helping to work her mouth back and forth. "Oh, fuck, you are good at that. That's it, love."

Kira moaned against him as he continued to talk dirty to her, keeping up her own rhythm though he tried to make her stroke him faster. He was more than she could take comfortably in her mouth, so she brought her hands up to aid her in bringing him close to orgasm. She scraped her teeth lightly over the sides of his shaft, causing him to jerk.

"Oh, yeah, your mouth looks so hot, so sexy on me..." Cabin Boy gasped and panted for breath.

Kira loved a man confident enough to say what he liked. She cupped his sac in her palm and kneaded

gently, rolling her tongue down his smooth shaft as she went. His body tensed and jolted ever so slightly. His balls tightened in her hand and she pulled her mouth quickly off him. As much as she wanted to let his sweet semen glide down her throat, she wanted to be fucked by him more.

“Sorry, but not yet, Cabin Boy,” Kira said, her voice hoarse with excitement. She felt possessed by something bigger than herself. Her body knew this man on a primal level, even if her mind had yet to catch up. “I’ve got other, better things planned for you.”

Forcefully, she pushed him out the bathroom door and toward the red satin bed in her room. She loved being in control and Cabin Boy didn’t seem to mind letting her have whatever she wanted. When they neared the bed, she gave him a good strong shove. He staggered, but managed to land gracefully on the mattress. A scorchingly erotic smile found his lips as he watched her, seemingly content to let her have her way with him. His silk shirt still clung to his arms, baring the hard folds of his muscled chest. Damn, he was gorgeous! Too gorgeous to waste on just one romp between the sheets. She hoped she could use him for more than just a one-time fuck on her vacation.

Kira moved up and over him, slowly slinking her way above his body. His ruddy cock was swollen with need and her pussy was soaked equally with desire. She slid her hands down and unfastened the tiny clasps in the crotch of her panties. Damp and free, Kira straddled the handsome man.

“Bloody hell, you are stunning,” he growled. “I could look at you for all eternity. *I will* look at you for all eternity.”

“Thank you,” Kira shot him a confident smile and said, “You’re not too bad yourself there, tiger.”

She made a roaring cat-like noise and moved over him, working her hips along him until he was begging for her to fuck him hard. Grinning, she slowly embedded his cock inside her. She let out a small cry when his hard flesh pried her body open. His girth alone was more than she was used to accommodating. It spread her to the brink and beyond. Her passage stretched wide, stinging with the mind-numbing friction his length caused. Unable to resist, she pushed her body onto him, taking him deep.

The silk of his shirt was smooth beneath her fingertips and she glided her hands over his muscled chest. She cursed herself for not taking the time to undress him fully. He was quite the find, and seeing all of his naked glory would have made it even more exciting. She promised herself that next time he’d be completely naked.

Kira began to rock on top of him, riding his shaft gently, pushing him deeper and deeper as she adjusted to fit all of him in. A weak moan of pleasure escaped her. Never had she felt so full, been touched so profoundly. He moved his hands to her hips and guided her, pulling her down hard so he was completely embedded. The slight discomfort of the deeper penetration quickly dissolved. He moved his fingers to her swollen clit and caressed her in slow, agonizingly perfect circles. Kira gasped in pleasure, feeling wave after wave of sensations.

Under the guidance of his hands, she lifted up and ground her body back onto his. Each sway, each pull, brought his cock deeper into her, seating her flush to his hips. His distended flesh pressed firmly into her, causing the bittersweet agony of desperate need to surge within her hot core.

“Too slow.” She growled, a low sound in the back of her throat, protesting his hold on her hips. “I need more. I need faster, harder, oh, fuck, yes...that’s it, baby. That’s it.” Kira lost all semblance of control. She rode his body hard and fast, clutching her breasts, tweaking her erect nipples as he watched. He pounded his cock deep within her, gliding in and out with the cream of her body. Intense sensations of

pleasure exploded all along her body. She clawed violently at her breasts, before dropping her hands forward to do the same to his chest. His grip on her hips tightened as he forced her to ride at an unyielding pace. She lifted her legs, propelling herself, slamming his glorious cock inside her heated pussy.

Kira scraped his small nipples with her nails, causing a deep moan to well from within his chest. His legs tightened and his mouth fell open in a silent scream as he fought for control. He grabbed her waist and cried, "I can't hold it any longer."

"I've had my...sex shots for the year...I can't get pregnant. It's all right." The words were absent, as she couldn't think beyond the feelings inside her. Thinking he meant to buck her off him, Kira tossed her head back and fought the pull of his hands. She was so close to coming. Her body began to tremble and quake. She couldn't pull off now—*not now. Oh, please, not yet, just a little harder.*

The violent orgasm caught her off guard. Kira moaned at the explosion between her legs. She let the waves of pleasure continue to move through her as she rocked his thick shaft inside her.

"No, your shots will not stop my...ah...*ohhh!*" Whatever he was going to say was drowned out by their loud cries.

Kira didn't hear him over the heartbeat echoing in her ears. Her body let loose a torrent of cream as he brought her to an immediate second climax. Her channel convulsed around him, sucking him in and milking the hot jet of seed from his body. The cum filled her, causing them both to groan in satisfaction. She collapsed weakly on top of him. A soft whimper of complete gratification left her throat.

Kira gasped wildly, his cock still deep inside her. Her heart hammered. Her thighs tightened and stung in a way only a hard, deeply gratifying fuck could make them. She opened her mouth to speak but the words never made it past her lips. She was almost stunned by the sheer wantonness of her actions. Even for her, this was bold. What had come over her? Never had lust driven her to the point of utter madness where she acted without thought or care.

Suddenly, someone screamed. Kira jolted, drawn out of her stupor, and looked around, almost confused, as she was drawn back to reality.

"Clare!" Kira shouted, instantly concerned for her friend, as she jumped off the bed. The man began to protest but Kira didn't care. Seeing a robe on the end of the bed, she grabbed it and pushed her arms through the sleeves. As she ran across the room, she pulled a leather whip hanging out of one of her bags. She left the man staring behind her, not caring at the moment about his feelings on the situation. Racing toward the door to Clare's room, she didn't look back.

* * * * *

Clare's eyes rounded in horror when Kira came crashing through the adjoining door, wearing nothing but a silk robe. Kira's gaze darted wildly all over room. She wielded a black leather whip over her head, appearing ready to strike out at any threat.

Clare gasped, clutching the coverlet tighter, as if by doing so she could cover Kira too. Kira lowered her arms and frowned, almost appearing to be disappointed. Her cheeks were flushed and she seemed out of breath—more than she should have been just running across a bedroom. If Clare didn't know better, she'd say Kira had just had sex. Seeing a pale, sexy man staggering up behind her friend with the telltale signs of being recently sated, she balked and let out a small groan. *Kirahad* just had sex. Less than an hour on a boat to shag a hot guy? That was fast, even for Kira. Clare couldn't help the irritation that

came over her. Being sexually active was one thing, sleeping with a complete stranger was another. She would definitely be having a talk about this one, whether Kira wanted to or not.

“Dominik?” the pale man with Kira inquired, as he glanced toward her handsome sparring partner. He chuckled lightly. “What’s going on in here? Is everything well?”

Of course, he would be named something as sexy as Dominik, Clare thought, her gaze turning back to the tall man with the insolent smile. She tried to ignore the insistent pull of her body. Her nerves strained to be with him. Her mind held firm, refusing. She’d just have to tend to those needs later—much later when she had all the doors to the cabin locked tight and knew for certain she was completely alone.

The thought brought Clare’s eye back to the object of her sudden horror and desire. The light sound of her vibrator drummed its way back into her brain. She paled, never wanting the floor to open and swallow her up so badly in her life.

Kira, apparently realizing her friend wasn’t being murdered, let down her guard. A quizzical grin came to her features as she glanced at Dominik and the long purple vibrator he held.

“Nice,” Kira said with a mischievous nod, pushing her lips together. “Is that how you say hello to all the girls, Cowboy? I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt what you were doing. Had I known you were only playing, I wouldn’t have barged in like that. Please, by all means, carry on. I’ll just go. Looks like you’ll be having fun. I really should dig out my camera before I go though. The people back at the office would pay big money to see the look on your face, Clare.”

Dominik grinned, Kira smirked and the pale man against the door chuckled. Clare thought she would surely faint. Glancing at Dominik, she saw him lift his hand. Instantly, she felt better, calmer, more relaxed. Her thinking cleared.

“Stop being crude, Kira! You know darned well you weren’t interrupting anything!” Clare said when she could finally speak. She was mortified beyond belief. “What has gotten into you?”

Clare frowned at the handsome intruder. Her eyes pleaded with Dominik for mercy. To her amazement, he seemed to understand her silent cry for help. He looked guilty as he switched the vibrator off and quickly placed it back into the drawer. The action came too late. Everyone had seen it. She wanted to die.

“Kira, tell this...this...idiot,” Clare’s words tapered off in frustration. She pointed at her tormentor. Dominik’s eyebrow rose in challenge at the insult. “Tell him that he’s in my room. Make him leave!”

Dryly, in a monotone voice that was very unconvincing, Kira said, “Idiot, you are in her room. Leave now.”

Clare glared at Kira in frustration, her body shaking with anger and something else she didn’t feel like analyzing at the moment. “Kira! You’re not helping! Please, I... Do you know what he did...he...”

Dominik’s oh-so-kissable lips curled with meaning, cutting off her words, no doubt daring her to say what happened—*all of it*. She swallowed nervously, panicking. There was no way she was going to tell anyone what he’d witnessed her doing. This was too much! She wanted to find a corner to curl up in until this all just went away.

The man from Kira’s room lounged against the doorframe, looking tousled and very relaxed. His gaze

roamed freely over Kira's backside. Kira was completely unconcerned with him but Clare was unnerved. Who was he anyway? And why was he still standing there? It wasn't like she needed more of an audience than she already had. Great, this little scene would probably be all over the cruise ship and for the entire vacation they'd be referring to her as repressed vibrator girl. She could practically hear the snickering in her head. Tears tried to well in her eyes, but she blinked them back. Seeing them all looking at her expectantly, she frowned, nervous and shaking.

Kira stepped closer. "Clare, I think you're overreacting. We're all adults here."

"No I'm not. If anything you're under reacting! That's always been your problem. Everything to you is a joke. You never take anything outside of work seriously."

Kira looked at the floor, but said nothing. Clare instantly felt bad for yelling at her.

"He...he threw my bags out the window," Clare said weakly, unable to look at Dominik's dark eyes. She could feel him watching her, could sense his gaze roaming over her body with something akin to hot desire. "All my clothes are gone. Everything is gone. What am I supposed to do?"

Kira laughed, only stopping when Clare gave her a pitiful look. "Sorry," Kira said, covering her smile with her hand. "Let us all take a moment to mourn the loss of your drab wardrobe. The very elegant T-shirt collection from the secondhand store will sorely be missed by all. It is a sad day, one that will no doubt go down in the history books. Quick, somebody start the funeral and we can all shed a few tears."

"Kira," Clare warned, near the end of her patience. Was she the only sane person in the room?

"I'm just saying," Kira shook her head. "How you can wear a business suit all day at the office and then be seen in public in nothing but an old T-shirt is beyond me."

"They are my after-work clothes. I like being comfortable when I'm not at the office and not all of my T-shirts are old. Oh, this whole thing is a mistake. I knew in my gut that I shouldn't have come. I don't know why I let you talk me into this! I should know better than to listen to your harebrained schemes," Clare shot, frustrated. "This is just like last year when you tried to hire a stripper for my birthday present."

Kira's eyes widened before she burst out laughing. Clare paled and turned to look at Dominik.

"Oh, God! You're a stripper, aren't you? Great, my best friend in the whole world thinks she has to buy me sex. I really am pathetic, aren't I? That's why you stood there as though I should know who you are."

"Clare, I didn't hire anyone. I promised to never do that again and I haven't." Kira still grinned. In an obvious attempt to lighten the mood, she added, "Besides, it wasn't my fault that country boy Bobby came complete with a mullet. How many times do I have to say I'm sorry for that?"

"That's it. I'm going home!" Clare delicately sniffed, as she tried to regain the tattered shreds of her dignity. She lifted her jaw into the air and her body became rigid and full of purpose. "I'm not staying on this cruise a moment longer. You are all crazy!"

Kira's face fell and she rushed forward. "Oh, Clare, I'm sorry. I don't know what's gotten into me today. Please, reconsider. You're already here and, unless you're planning on swimming back to shore, you're stuck. You don't have to go. I'm sure the ship has a clothing store of some sort. We'll go to the

director and get this all straightened out, I promise. This is just a little inconvenience.”

“I don’t call having my room raided by a…” Again a manly brow rose and Clare paused in frustration. Every time she looked at him her body quaked with hot desire. It made it hard to concentrate. Her stomach leapt with longing.

Dominik shifted his weight and his gaze darkened. It was almost as if he knew what he did to her. He left her feeling vulnerable and exposed. She didn’t like it. She was used to holding her own, especially with men. The fact that Dominik melted her with just one heated look and a single syllable from his gorgeous mouth, made her very nervous. She didn’t have sexual impulses that made her want to jump just any cute man. That kind of thing she left to Kira. She shook her head in confusion, feeling helpless and very alone.

Weakly, Clare finished her thought, “I don’t consider having my personal belongings thrown overboard a fun time. My favorite shirt was in there and now I have nothing to wear but this stupid bedspread. I’m going home.”

“You can borrow something of mine,” Kira offered, “just until we can find that gift shop.”

“Your stuff won’t fit me. It barely fits you.”

Kira grinned. Only she would be proud of that fact.

“There is no need for that,” Dominik stated. His Russian accent slipped leisurely from his lips. He crossed over to a dresser, pulled open a drawer and lifted out a red silk dress. He carefully laid it on the bed, caressing it as if his fingers felt something far beyond just silk. His dark gaze looked directly into hers. “You can wear this.”

“I don’t like dresses!” Clare snarled, growling at him just to be difficult. She had a few dresses she wore to work but he didn’t need to know that. She tapped her foot like a spoiled child and pouted her lips. “Whose dress is it anyway? Is it yours? Oh, gawd, Kira, you didn’t hire a transvestite to show me a good time did you?”

Kira shook her head no and Clare was slightly sorry about kicking her sarcasm into full force.

“You must wear it.” Dominik actually managed to look apologetic. “And you cannot go home. The ship is already far out to sea. Unless, like your friend has said and you’d prefer to swim back to shore.”

Clare’s mouth opened, ready to lay into the handsome irritation. She lifted her finger on the beginning of a tirade. Dominik smiled, lifted his hand, and again she felt the warm and fuzzy calmness. The man seemed to exude it like a heavy perfume.

“Come on,” Kira said with a small laugh, before Clare could get a word out. She grabbed the man’s arm and pulled. “Dominik, why don’t you wait in my room with Cabin Boy where you’ll be a little more welcome?”

“That is *my* room.” The sexy man, otherwise known as Kira’s latest male conquest, motioned behind him to Kira’s room. He frowned as Kira shot him an indignant look.

Kira rolled her eyes. Clare still stared at the red dress and didn’t move. Kira pushed both men through the door. It always amazed Clare how Kira could appear to take control of any situation. “Just go wait in

there for now! We'll just have to get this whole room mix-up taken care of at the ship orientation. It was *awelcome* mistake, but a mistake all the same. Oh, and you two, don't do anything unless you take pictures."

They looked shocked as Kira shut the door on them. Turning around, she dusted her hands for effect. "Oh my, he's so incredibly hot. I would have *so* jumped his bones! Why in the world were you screaming like that, Clare?"

"You're starting to babble." Clare kept her words soft. She shivered. Her body ached, screamed at her in neglect and demanded an answer to the same question. She hated to admit it but jumping the voyeuristic man hadn't been far from her mind since first laying eyes on him. There was something about him—a feeling she couldn't place. "You only babble when you're nervous. My goodness, Kira, you actually like this guy, don't you? Do you know him? Please tell me you know him, because that would make me feel a whole lot better."

"Oh, Clare, don't even think about starting with me," Kira sighed.

"What?"

"I so know that look. You're going to lecture me about Cabin Boy."

"Kira, you really should be more careful with yourself," Clare said. "I worry about you sometimes. You take too many risks."

Kira refused to meet Clare's eyes.

"So tell me about the new stud," Clare said.

"Don't know," Kira said. "I didn't get his name. I know, don't say it. Apparently, we were assigned the same room by mistake. I just call him Cabin Boy. It's a shame he's really not the cabin boy. I really think these rooms should come with a complimentary man."

"Kira, you didn't really have sex with him did you?"

"Oh, honey, I most certainly did!" Kira groaned for effect, sitting and pulling her legs up to her stomach. "Gawd! Man, I wasn't lying when I said I wish he was the cabin boy. I'd like to order him around for a long while. I'd insist that he be assigned to me for the week. I'd tie him to my bed and make him stay there the entire trip. I mean, you know me. I'm not one to exaggerate. I swear he was like," Kira spread her hands wide, "like this thick and longer than any I've ever seen before and I've seen a hell of a lot of—"

Clare held up her hands, stopping her. "That's great, Kira, but you're starting to babble again. This one's really gotten to you, huh? And you never answered me. Do you know him?"

"Okay, fine, if you're not going to drop it, I'll tell you. I know him. Well, I kind of know him. I... Uh, I can't explain it. We met one evening outside the travel agency. He must have been buying tickets for the same cruise. Anyway, I dropped my briefcase, the Helderman file fell into a puddle, I panicked and must have looked all freaked out because he insisted on walking me home."

"You let a man walk you home?" Clare asked. "A stranger? At night? Are you crazy? What if he'd been—?"

“Yeah, I know,” Kira rolled her eyes, but Clare could see her apprehension over the whole situation. “Anyway, he was very charming from what I can remember. The night is a little fuzzy. I’d been working eighty hour weeks and was really tired, not to mention, Mr. Carter asked me to his office and we toasted the completion of the Brembridge deal. You know the man likes whiskey and I might have been a tad on the tipsy side. But even though I can’t remember everything we talked about word for word, I remember instantly connecting with him. I know what you’re thinking, and we didn’t have sex that night. We didn’t even catch each other’s names. It was like names didn’t matter. The conversation just flowed like we’d known each other forever.”

Clare opened her mouth. Kira clamped her hand over it. The explanation did make her feel a little better about the situation, but still, it seemed a little fast.

“That’s all I’m saying, got it?” Kira gave her a pointed look.

Clare nodded. Her voice muffled by Kira’s hand, she said, “Fine.”

“So?” Kira asked, changing the subject as she let go of Clare’s mouth only to playfully nudge her arm into Clare’s side. “That toy really yours?”

“No,” Clare answered weakly.

“Liar!” Kira laughed, falling back on the bed. “You know, I didn’t get the creep vibe off of Dominik. He actually seemed... calm.”

Clare was used to her friend’s ways and didn’t pay any attention. Kira was like a piranha when she sensed vulnerability and Clare didn’t want to give her any bait. The dildo was most certainly hers but saying that aloud was so against her nature that she couldn’t bring herself to do it.

“I am so proud of you, Clare. Though I wish you would’ve told me you were in the market for a vibrator. I know where all the best ones are sold. I’ve got a few sources who call me when new toys come in and I’m always getting them at bargain prices. I got a great deal on a Super-Stimulator 9000 just the other day. In fact... hold on!”

Clare frowned as Kira ran to her room. She contemplated locking the door before her friend came back. If Kira brought that voyeur back into the room with her, she’d kill her!

When Kira came back, she handed Clare a birthday present and tossed a pair of dress shoes on the bed. Luckily, they wore the same size. The wrapping paper had naked men dancing on it. Clare chuckled. *Only Kira!*

“Dare I ask?” Clare mused. The present was too small to be a male, unless he came deflated. The thought was funny, to a point. Kira had tried to convince her to get a blow up doll to help her gain access to the car pool lane once before, so it wouldn’t surprise her if she actually carried through on her threat.

“It doesn’t need a pump to work, does it?”

Kira laughed. “Well, pumping could very well be involved. Just open it!”

“I’m almost too afraid.” Clare sighed and tore back the paper to reveal the bold packaging of a Super-Stimulator 9000. She didn’t need to look in a mirror to know her cheeks were bright pink. How

could they not be? She was sure she'd never seen a real man quite the size of the new toy she held. If they did come that big then she was in serious trouble, because there was no way that would fit in her.

"Hey, it was going to be a birthday gag gift of sorts but now that I know you'll use it I'm glad I picked the extra one up." Kira winked, looking very pleased. "Don't worry. It's great."

"Uh, thanks?" Clare hastily interrupted to stop Kira's graphic details. She was sure she didn't want to know what Kira had done the night before. From past experience, she knew Kira would tell her *everything*.

Clare desperately needed to change the subject from her lack of a sex life. It was getting to be beyond pathetic. The best action she had in a year was from a showerhead, and now her best friend was giving her self-pleasuring toys. If the ship didn't sink soon, she didn't know how she'd possibly live with the humiliation. It'd just be her luck that the ship really would sink and, when they recovered her dead body, they'd find that damn dildo with her, forever immortalizing her pathetic sexless existence.

"What happened with Dominik?" Kira asked.

"I don't know. Room mix-up. I think he thought I was his cabin girl. I..." Clare hesitated. "You're going to laugh, but I really think I do know Dominik from somewhere. I know, I know, it sounds insane. I haven't met him before today, but I know him. Haven't you just looked at someone and felt as if you knew everything about them? Maybe we're just overworked. We both seem to have the same problem."

"You know." Kira sat up and pulled her robe closed, cinching the belt tighter at her waist. "Maybe hooking up isn't such a bad idea. That cutie you found looked to be packing—"

"Ah!" Clare waved her hands. There Kira went again, changing the subject when things got to uncomfortable emotionally. Clare swore half the things Kira said was to shock people into thinking she didn't feel at all. "No."

"What?" Kira demanded.

"Now you're just trying to shock me!" Clare stood, stretching her hands over her head. She looked at the red dress and frowned. "You didn't have time to see how well endowed he was. Besides, he was dressed."

"Are you telling me that you didn't notice those skin-tight leather pants he had on? *Mmm* ... Or that deliciously tight black shirt? I know you're into guys who wear black and look good in it."

Kira picked up the red dress that held Clare's attention and absently thrust it at her. Clare swallowed nervously, feeling dangerously out of her league. She had no idea who the dress belonged to. There had to be a rational explanation for him having a woman's dress with him. For all she knew, it belonged to Dominik's lover. Could they even take lovers on a singles cruise? The jealous woman would probably attack her the moment she stepped out of the cabin. Clare knew that's how she would react if she were Dominik's wife and she found him watching another woman masturbate.

The instant jealousy she felt over a man she barely knew and had no claim to, surprised her. She didn't want to think any harder about it. The last thing she needed was to get attached to a man she knew nothing about.

"He had a really nice butt. Ugh, look, did you notice your room has a mirror on the ceiling?" Kira

pointed up.

“Ah no,” Clare broke in softly, holding up her hands for mercy. “How the hell do you do it? You go from normal businesswoman to party girl in like two-point-two seconds.”

“Two-point-two? Are you trying to insult me or does the bitchiness just come natural to you? Please, try point-two flat.” Kira chuckled. “Hum, well, I take it wonder boy didn’t leave you with any underwear. I’ll get you some of mine to borrow. I just bought all new lingerie for the trip, so don’t worry, they’re not used or anything. Oh,*darn it ...*”

Clare looked at Kira’s worried face. “What?”

“I don’t own granny panties.” Kira affected a pout. “So you’re going to have to make do with either crotchless, string or edible.”

Clare’s eyes widened and she choked on air.

“Kidding. Just kidding.” Kira winked, grinning audaciously. “Okay, I’m just kidding to a point. I don’t have edible with me. They tend to melt and can adhere to all the wrong places if you’re not careful.”

Clare feigned annoyance and looked for something to throw. There wasn’t anything handy. “You’re impossible. I don’t know why I bother keeping you around.”

“It’s because you love me.” Kira wiggled her eyebrows. “Hey, what do you think those two are doing in there anyways? You don’t think they’re getting to know each other in the biblical sense do you? Should we take a quick peek and see?”

“They didn’t seem the type to be into*that* sort of thing. They were too manly.”

“And you didn’t seem the type to bring a purple vibrator on vacation! Could be they’d surprise you. I tell you what, that’s one party I’d want to be a part of. I’d sign up in a heartbeat to watch two hot men go at it like jackrabbits. Hopefully, I could be sandwiched in the center of it but I’m willing to give a little here for the sake of the fantasy. Besides, you’re the type that would never be able to look me in the eye the next morning. Don’t try to deny it. I’m worldly about these types of things.”

“Stop talking, Kira,” Clare said. “You sound like an uneducated twit when you say things like that.”

Clare turned her back and lifted the red dress over her head. With much practiced grace, she dressed without exposing herself. As the silk slid over her skin, the coverlet slid to the floor. The gown was truly beautiful. She couldn’t have worn a bra with it if she wanted to. The low-cut back swooped all the way to the curve of her hips. Her arms were left bare and the neckline scooped low enough to expose her collarbone. The slinky material clung close to her body, swishing tantalizingly against each and every curve as she moved, molding like a second skin.

“I don’t think this qualifies as a dress,” she muttered. “I’ve seen bathing suits with more material—not *your* bathing suits, but bathing suits in general.”

Kira winked.

“It’s perfect! It’s exactly what I would’ve picked out for you, well, almost what I would’ve picked out for you. The skirt would’ve been shorter with me in charge but it’ll do nicely. So, you want me to send

Dominik back in here to see what he thinks of it? Bet ya ten bucks he gives it *astanding ovation*,” Kira said, laughing.

“No thanks,” Clare mumbled. “And you’re still babbling. Stop it. If you keep it up, I’ll assume you’re in love with that man in your room.”

Kira made a choking sound, but was quiet.

Clare had seen quite enough of Dominik to last her a lifetime—or, more correctly, he’d seen quite enough of her. Even if he was the first man she found herself potentially attracted to in eons, it wasn’t like she could ever look him in the dark, penetrating eyes again. She shivered. “Now go get dressed and try not to come on to anyone until after orientation.”

Kira saluted naughtily and giggled. “Okay, fine! I can’t make you any promises but I will try my best. You’re always sucking the joy out of all my well-laid plans. I swear, Clare, you missed your calling as a nun.”

Chapter Three

Clare cringed in horror. The luxury ship’s ballroom was an overdone, gaudily romantic affair of gold statues and cherubs, crimson red and gold velvet curtains. Where the deep red carpet filled with dinner tables left off, a long dance floor and stage began. Instruments for an orchestra were set up in the corner but there were no musicians that they could see.

Thankfully, Dominik had not thrown her cosmetic bag overboard and she was able to find a couple of Oriental-style sticks to pull her hair back off her neck. The red silk wisped as she walked, making her a little self-conscious. She was aware that gazes turned to her and watched. At first, she thought they were staring at someone walking behind her, until she looked back to see that no one else was there. It took her a minute to realize that she’d been the one they were focused on. It made her feel sexy and a bit empowered. She wondered if Kira was always on a natural high because of the amount of heads she turned.

As usual, Kira had been running late and Clare had gone ahead without her. Clare suddenly wished she’d waited for her friend. They could have brought the house down with a grand entrance. But, in truth, she’d gone ahead because she didn’t want to chance running into Dominik in the hallway.

“I absolutely love this ship!” Kira exclaimed, running up and placing her hand on Clare’s arm. She nearly jumped in excitement. “It reminds me of Vegas! I so want to quit the boardroom and move here. What do you say? Should we quit our jobs and become deck hands?” Kira paused and made a very serious face.

“You would grow tired of this life fast. You know you like those high pressure meetings too much.” Clare shook her head and gave a small laugh.

Turning to her friend, Clare looked her over. Kira wore a tight leather dress that fit snug to her body, leaving little to the imagination. Clare had to chuckle at the outfit. It was *so* Kira and if anyone could pull it off, it was her. Suddenly, she scowled. It wasn’t Kira’s short dress that caused a problem, it was the fact that Kira hadn’t managed to lose the two intruders.

Dominik's dark eyes were on her, his gaze roaming leisurely over the red silk he'd given her to wear. Her body lurched at the potent heat of his gaze. Shivering, she grabbed Kira's arm and pulled her along as she walked away.

"Why did you bring them with you?" Clare asked under her breath, her eyes wide.

"What?" Kira giggled. "You're still upset aren't you? I thought you might be."

"Of course I'm upset! Why wouldn't I be upset?"

"Just calm down. We need them to go with us to the director. Look, it appears as if this boring orientation thing is about to start. Afterwards, we'll have the room assignment matter cleared up. Though, I for one, vote we share the rooms with them."

"Kira!" Clare clenched her teeth, grinding them together in an effort not to yell. Just the memory of Dominik's eyes was doing strange things to her limbs. It was as if her body boiled and melted all at the same time. She could practically feel him behind her, watching, looking, drooling.

"What?" Kira asked. "It's not like you have a boyfriend or husband to answer to. Besides, I think Dominik is cute, completely do-able. And he's funny, seems well educated. We talked for a long time in my room. Did you know that Dominik can speak seven languages and he's independently wealthy? He even gives to children's charities. How cute is that? I knew I got the good guy vibe off of him. And I love how he laces most of his comments with sarcasm. They both do. It's hilarious and kind of reminds me of you, so you'll have lots to make fun of together. You should've heard him and Cabin Boy going back and forth. I was practically rolling on the floor with laughter."

"Kira, I... I don't want your leftovers, all right? We've been through this scenario before. Remember Kevin? He flirted with me to get to you. I fell for it—let him wine, dine and use me. In the end, all he wanted was *your* number."

Kira shook her head. "Kevin was just a confused little boy."

"Kira, I swear that you're my friend and I love you, but you're seriously pushing your limits with me today." Clare trembled slightly at Kira's words.

Kira had the type of personality that drew people in, made them want to be around her. And even though her friend talked big and was open about her sexuality, she was no whore. She was more discriminating than people thought about whom she gave her body to, or had been until they set foot on the love boat from hell. Clare was jealous about that, but would never let her feelings interfere with the friendship. Kira couldn't help her magnetic charm.

"Kira, I—" Clare began, only to have her words cut off as a deep voice drifted from behind. She blinked in confusion, not able to finish the thought.

"Kira?" an English-accented voice drawled. Clare turned to see her friend's cabin boy. His long brown hair hung just past his shoulders and he was dressed to impress. He looked completely enamored by Kira and Clare wondered if her friend even realized that the man had fallen for her. No doubt that Kira was immune to such things. It seemed to happen on a weekly basis. She had yet to see her friend reciprocate the feelings and wondered if Kira would ever fall in love. It was her hope for Kira to find happiness, but it didn't seem likely. "Such a lovely name for a very captivating woman."

Kira looked at Clare and winked audaciously. She lifted her finger and wound it into Cabin Boy's dark silk shirt. Giving him a vixen's laugh, Kira purred, "Talk like that might just get you a repeat performance."

"I would give anything for a performance from you, Clare."

Clare gasped. The low, sultry voice was next to her ear, whispering and soft. Intense heat radiated onto her back. Dominik stood close to her, but didn't touch. When she felt him pull away from her neck, she said, making her voice dip breathlessly, "And I'd be more than happy to give you a repeat performance."

Dominik's breath caught in a sharp gasp. Clare felt warm fingers stroking along the back of her arm—gentle and slow. It was the first touch and it shook her to the core. She felt connected to him in some strange way she couldn't even begin to comprehend. Turning to glance over her shoulder, she shivered. It was a mistake. He leaned into her and she saw his parted mouth, begging to be tasted. Her lids lowered and she almost allowed him to draw closer. Jerking back at the last second, she sarcastically added, "You want me to call you names, throw stuff at you, and start screaming for you to leave me alone? I'd be more than happy to."

A finger glided down her exposed spine before he pulled back, not touching her again. Almost wistful, he said, "That was not the performance I spoke of. But, I do not mind your stubbornness. In fact, I find everything about you refreshing. I've grown weary of women just falling into my arms."

"Nice come-on. Has it actually worked for you in the past?" Clare's body still stung where he'd touched her bare skin. Her nerves tingled and jumped, demanding more. Her breasts suddenly felt heavy and, to her horror, her nipples tightened beneath the silk for all to see. She swallowed, trying to adjust her arms so it wasn't as noticeable.

Dominik moved to stand beside her and her actions only drew his gaze down to her chest. A lazy smile glanced over his lips as he gave her peaked breasts a pointed look.

"What?" Clare shot. "I'm cold. *Someone* threw out my clothes!"

"I'm sorry about that. I shouldn't have done it. I don't know what impulse came over me. But, if you like, I could warm you," Dominik offered, his tone dipping to a seductive murmur. His dark eyes were inviting. "I'm very hot-blooded."

Damn, but he is just too gorgeous for his own good! Clare thought with a light moan. The look on his face said he was teasing. If the circumstances were different—like he hadn't seen her masturbate in the shower—she might actually think he was charming. He seemed nice, if a little on the dominant side. Clare didn't mind a strong man who knew when to take control, but too much was too much. Seeing the look on his face, she couldn't help but chuckle. Was the man ever serious?

A waiter came up to them with a tray and notepad, keeping her from having to answer. Clare looked at him. He appeared a little green in the face, just like the porter had been. She frowned, looking around at the staff. It would appear that most of the crew was supernatural. It wasn't a big deal, as the supernatural kind had been living quite peacefully amongst humans for nearly half of a century. A lot of the time humans and such creatures didn't intermingle, each living out their own lives in their own ways.

"I'll have a Sex on the Beach to drink, please," Kira grinned.

"That can be arranged," Kira's cabin boy interjected. Looking at the waiter, he shook his head, refusing

a drink. Clare saw him eyeing Kira's neck with rapt attention. She wouldn't be surprised if they began making out right there in the banquet hall. Kira would probably enjoy putting on such a show.

The waiter turned to Clare and Dominik. Clare could've really used a stiff glass of Scotch, but she shook her head in denial. If she started drinking before she ate, she'd be drunk in no time flat. Dominik's hand lifted to her back in a protective gesture as the waiter shot her a smile. She glanced at him and frowned, stepping away from his possessive hold.

"I've borne witness to the seductive power of your water," Dominik put forth, a little dryly. His gaze peered into her and she could see he was hurt by her open dismissal of him. The fact that she could hurt him surprised her. Up until that moment, she didn't think he'd ever take anything seriously. "I'll do with that please."

Clare took a deep breath, hoping she didn't look like she was blushing. The waiter turned to the bar to give Kira's drink order and picked up a glass of water. Clare stared at Dominik and tried to back away as he flashed a devilishly sexy smile at her. She jolted, feeling that smile all the way to her heating pussy. Wrinkling her nose at him, she tried to pretend she wasn't affected by him. Bumping into a warm body, she spun around in surprise. The tall porter ghoul grinned lecherously at her. He bowed his head, his pale green eyes raking her over. Clare shivered, left cold by the ghoul's attention to her body.

Nervous, Clare backed up again. Dominik's arm shot out and he caught her as she collided with him, spinning her around so she faced him. He pulled her instantly to his strong chest. Clare gasped. His body was firmer than she imagined—and so very hot. If she wasn't mistaken, it was his leather-clad erection that rested along her waist. Kira's comments came back to haunt her and she couldn't help but try to gauge if it was a roll of dollars stuffed into his pants. Somehow, she doubted it. She felt the tremors his touch caused all the way to her toes. In his free hand, he held a glass of water.

"See, they should market this as an aphrodisiac. One drink and you fall into my arms." Dominik smiled. His eyes dipped to her mouth.

Clare gasped and tried to pull away. The cruise director began speaking to the crowd from the stage, welcoming the guests. She could barely concentrate on what the man said. She couldn't see anything but the man who held her.

She tried to struggle against Dominik's arm but, as he pulled her closer, her movements only seemed to make their contact all the more intimate. Clare felt his breath blew over her neck. A low, animalistic sound came from him, making her shiver with anticipation. The wickedly tight leather of his pants slid along her silk-covered hip, scalding her with the fire radiating off his erect cock. Clare stopped struggling, stiffening instead.

"Let me go," she said. It was hard to look dignified when she was gasping for breath.

"As you wish, Clare." With a demonstration of power, Dominik slowly released his arm from her. It made Clare realize how easily he could control her with his strength. She looked up at him. He stared deeply into her wide eyes, his gaze full of promise and meaning. His strength frightened her but, beyond that, it excited her, making her feel weak in the knees. "I only wish to please you. In fact, I still need to apologize for that little incident when you got out of the shower. I was bewitched by your beauty and wasn't myself. Would you let me take you to dinner to make it up to you?"

Clare's mouth opened and she gasped for air. There was just something about him that drew her to him. She couldn't explain it. It was a feeling deep inside her that called out to him. If they had been alone, she

was sure she'd have boldly kissed him. She was thankful for the sound of the director's booming voice because it brought her back to reality and kept her from having to answer his question.

Oh, this wasn't good. It wasn't good at all. She didn't want a relationship. She wasn't ready to be hurt again. Trembling, she silently cursed. She always fell too hard, too fast. Her heart was her greatest weakness. She'd just have to make sure she avoided him for the rest of the trip.

"...welcome to both our supernatural and human guests," the ghoulish director was saying.

Clare shivered. It was as she thought. This was a mixed-race cruise. She glanced over at Kira, who fit easily into the circle of her cabin boy's strong arms. The man looked human enough, as did Dominik. Clare frowned. She'd never seen Kira get so cozy so fast. Moving to get away from Dominik, she stepped around to Kira's other side.

"Please enjoy the human meals we have provided for you," the director continued. He motioned to his side.

Kira's face paled dramatically, as if she'd just now heard what was going on. Clare swallowed, growing really nervous. An excited energy glanced over the crowd. A line of willing, half-naked men and women were led forward from a side door wearing nothing but white loincloths and barely-there togas. They posed for the onlookers. Some of the women bared their breasts, wiggling around indecently.

Clare flinched. Many humans had a meal fetish and liked to be "preyed" upon by immortals. It was a common enough thing, though she had never actually seen it practiced. The last thing she wanted to do on her vacation was watch some junkie offer up his body as a main course.

Kira let loose a slight sound of disgust. Clare turned, trying to give her friend a light smile of encouragement. Cabin Boy glanced down at Kira from his taller height. His look was possessive, hot. It was no secret Kira hated most supernatural beings. Well, hate was the strongest word Kira had for it. Clare thought it was more like she feared them immensely. Considering vampires had killed her parents, Clare couldn't blame her.

The cruise director waited for the murmur of supernatural appreciation to die down before speaking again. "Please keep in mind that all *unclaimed* humans on the vessel have volunteered to be here. We only ask that you pleasure them thoroughly."

A murmur again rose over the crowd and eyes looked around amongst the group. Clare shivered, feeling very much on display as several gazes turned to her. She hugged her arms to her waist, nervously. Her fear only seemed to arouse more interest and she saw several of the men sniffing in her direction.

Kira was still under her cabin boy's arm and was left alone. Clare watched as the man pulled her friend further away, walking her toward the bar. Kira had an odd look on her face, as if she was entranced. It was silly, because Cabin Boy wasn't supernatural. They'd have been able to tell if he was. Maybe Kira really did like the man. He did seem like her friend's type.

Clare made a move to follow, not wanting to be left alone for too long. Before she could take a step a big hand clasped around her smaller wrist and she nearly screamed in fright. She glanced up, terrified as a large man with liquid yellow eyes leered at her. His mouth was elongated slightly in his state of arousal, showcasing a mouthful of sharp, pointed teeth. Clare opened her mouth but only a squeak came out. She looked for Kira but her friend had disappeared into the crowd. She was all alone.

“Mmmm.” The terrifying lycan growled. His chest rose and fell in deep breaths. His nostrils flared, as his face looked ready to shift into his lycan form. “You will come with me, human. You will be mine.”

Clare’s mouth opened but only a squeak of protest came out. She shook violently, as tears welled in her eyes. She moved to push weakly at the lycan’s brawny chest, whimpering in fear. He didn’t budge.

A gentle hand touched her back. Bold fingers glanced over her skin, dipping beneath the silk at her hip only to settle on the naked flesh between her gown and her waist. It was a possessive act, one the snarling lycan seemed to recognize immediately. The lycan backed down, but still looked angry. She shivered, knowing instinctively whom the hand belonged to.

Dominik jerked her back into his chest. A shock went up her spine to feel his length against her. Her body responded to his protection, heating beneath his intimate hand and becoming damp. A finger circled lightly over her navel in the most possessive caress she’d ever felt. His body was tense, as if ready to do battle. His chest heaved.

A low growl sounded in Dominik’s throat. He turned, pulling Clare away from the sweaty lycan. Snarling possessively, he roared, “*She’s taken!*”

Clare shivered, too weak to move. The hand on her stomach kneaded her flesh, hard and controlling. She breathed heavily, feeling the touch shoot wave after hot wave of desire throughout her body. A firm thigh molded itself nicely into her ass, pushing into her, spreading her cheeks ever so slightly. She cursed the crotchless red panties Kira had given her for they left her opened and exposed. Moisture dripped from her body and made her thighs sticky.

“She does not look taken,” the lycan growled. His eyes narrowed and he sniffed in her direction. His eyes lit with pleasure. “She’s unmarked and I saw her first.”

“What’s the commotion here?” a voice boomed. All three pairs of eyes turned down to the potbellied amphibian-like creature in the captain’s uniform. A long tongue flipped out of his wide mouth. His short frame waddled with authority. His head turned and Clare was sure he’d be more suited as an old sheriff in a bad cowboy movie rather than commander of a seagoing vessel. By the look on his face, he seemed about ready to spit tobacco on the floor and scratch himself indecently.

Clare stiffened. Her head was light from Dominik’s nearness and she couldn’t think straight. The large lycan stared at her, heaving in anger, ready to fight Dominik for possession over her. Dazed, she tried to figure out what was going on.

“Nothing, I—” Clare began heatedly, ready to deny both suitors at once. She wasn’t going to be “claimed” by anybody. Surely, once she explained to the captain, she’d be left alone.

Dominik stopped caressing her and pulled her so hard against him that she lost her breath. He spread his fingers along her ribs, nearly touching the bottom curve of her breast. Her nipples puckered anew, straining indecently for all to see. The men’s gazes turned down to her chest. The amphibian captain licked his lips. The beefy lycan growled. Easily, Dominik said, “I was just going to get my lady a glass of water.”

Clare flinched as he handed her his glass. She didn’t take it. Her heart hammered in her chest. Her breasts felt heavy and she had the insane urge to grab his hand and force it higher. What was wrong with her? They were in public! This wasn’t like her! She didn’t act like this!

Dominik tensed, digging his nails slightly into her skin in warning. He leaned over and whispered into her ear, "Take it or you'll be going home with him or another tonight. I can guarantee the others won't be so understanding of your resistance to them. In fact, the smell of your fear will only make them more aggressive."

Clare trembled as his hot breath tickled her flesh. Her hand quivered in terror from his words. She reached for the glass of water and took a hesitant sip, barely able to swallow. The captain studied them both. The lycan behind him growled, making an aggressive move forward in protest.

Without missing a beat, Dominik leaned over and nudged Clare's temple, planting a quick kiss against her forehead. The gesture was amazingly tender. Louder, so the onlookers could hear, he said to her, "I'm sorry, sweetheart, I should have known better than to leave you alone when you had on my favorite dress. You can't blame them for wanting you when you look as delectable as you do. I promise to spend all night making it up to you."

Clare, who had been about to swallow, choked on her water. Dominik's chest jerked against her back. He was laughing at her! Did this man never take anything seriously?

"I don't smell your mark on her!" her other suitor growled.

The captain seemed to study her reaction. Slowly, he asked, "Miss, do you agree to this lycan or would you rather be unclaimed?"

Clare blinked and looked over at the sweaty lycan. He leered at her, making her skin crawl with repulsion. She was about to shake her head until she realized the captain was looking at Dominik. Dominik had gone completely still at the comment. Clare turned, her eyes questioning as she looked up at him. His jaw tensed, his eyes almost appearing vulnerable, as he waited for her reaction.

Oh, gawd! Clare made a weak noise, searching his face for changes. *Dominik is a lycan!*

Clare swallowed. She hadn't suspected it, but it suddenly made sense—the feelings he seemed to project at her, the way he almost just knew she wanted him from the first moment, even if she'd never admit to it, and the quiet strength of his hold. No wonder he seemed to exude power and confidence. Lycans weren't like humans. No wonder he'd not thought twice about being in her room. She'd heard his kind often lived in large packs. He probably was used to sharing his space.

Looking from one lycan to the other, she knew she had to choose quickly. There was no choice really. She slowly turned and wrapped her arms around Dominik's waist, pressing her cheek into the muscular ripples of his chest. His smell wafted over her, drifting dreamily onto her skin, tempting her. He smelled of vanilla and mint and he felt so good against her softer body, so warm. She felt safe.

Dominik relaxed against her, as she openly attached herself to him. His hand had been forced from her stomach as she turned but he kept it possessively on her bare waist. His finger absently ventured down to toy with the thin strap of her panties along her hip.

Clare closed her eyes. She was sure she would faint from his touch, his smell, his possessive nearness. It was almost as if she could feel his emotions inside of her. He wanted her, that much she could tell by his erection, but she also felt that he needed her. Moisture continued to pool between her thighs until she felt only her need for him burning in her blood. Never had she reacted so strongly to a man—a *lycan*.

"You have her answer," Dominik said, his voice cocky and sure.

Clare didn't care. Her body raged. She couldn't think beyond the feel of Dominik's length to hers. Another weak moan left her in a daze.

"Come on, sweetheart," Dominik said hoarsely into her hair. "Let's get you back to *our* room."

Clare followed him blindly, shaken. He kept her hugged possessively to his side as he walked. She fitted her hand weakly on his chest and she could feel his heart beating in steady thumps against her palm. As they passed through the ballroom to the safety of the hallway, she shivered.

"I'm sorry to treat you like that, Clare. It's the only thing I could've done to get him to back off, short of ripping out his throat." Dominik said softly. He tried to pull away, but she didn't let him. Being in his arms was insanity, but for the moment she couldn't bring herself to care.

* * * * *

Kira turned to watch Clare being led out by Dominik. A small smile lit her face. He was a nice man, if a little on the strange side. Kira supposed it was because he was a foreigner. She'd gotten plenty of time to talk to him when waiting for orientation and found him to be decent enough.

The arm around her shoulders shifted and she looked up at her handsome cabin boy. She wondered if he would mind ducking out of orientation early for a little evening rendezvous.

"Ah, Sir Braden, good to see you again."

Kira jolted as the little toad man stepped up to them. A long, pink tongue curled from his lips and she made a face. Seeing his captain's hat, she quickly hid her revulsion. Well, what better creature to command a ship than an amphibian? That was unless the ship started to sink. Then he might not care as much, as he could just swim away. Kira turned her face away, hiding her amused expression.

Suddenly what he said struck her. She glanced up to the handsome man. *Sir Braden?* She would never have guessed her cabin boy for a Sir, or that he was named Braden. But somehow, it fit him perfectly. She should have known that he was nobility. He flashed her a handsome, devil-may-care grin and she couldn't resist moving around in his arms to face him.

Kira pouted her lips out slightly and let her lids dip lazily over her eyes. She knew he wouldn't be able to resist her look. She was right, too. Braden's body stiffened and he instantly leaned into her. But instead of the bold, exploring kiss she tried to initiate, he brushed her lips gently and pulled back. Kira blinked in surprise.

"Captain," Braden acknowledged, his voice low. He kept a possessive arm draped around her.

"Ah, young lady." The pudgy, green captain turned his eyes to her. "Looks like you found yourself a keeper."

"All right," Kira said slowly, confused. She wished the little toad man would just hop away. Her body was stirring and she was pretty sure she could convince Sir Braden to join her in a linen closet somewhere.

"Ah, don't look so worried, my dear girl. Braden won't drink you dry! He's generally good about keeping the blood off the carpets as well." The toad captain laughed. He waved his hand and wandered

off into the crowd.

Kira looked at the captain's retreating back and then to Braden. "Excuse me? I'm not following him. Was that a joke or something? Because I think he just said you were going to drink from me."

Braden stiffened and he cleared his throat uncomfortably as he glanced around to room. Finally, his blue gaze bore into her. He leaned into her, saying softly, "I tried to tell you, love, but you didn't want me to speak."

"Tell me now, *love*," Kira demanded, pulling back from his arm. The word love hardly sounded affectionate the way she spat it at him, but she didn't care. She looked at him coldly, taking in his pale face with a growing sense of alarm.

"I'm supernatural." His words were light, relaxed.

"What?" Kira shot, trying to fully grasp the situation and failing. "You do silly little magic tricks or something?"

"No, I'm a vamp—"

Braden didn't get the whole word out before Kira's body convulsed. She gagged violently, as if she would throw up on him. That's why the night they met was so fuzzy. That's why she'd fallen so readily into his arms. He'd mesmerized her, *was still* trying to mesmerize her. She shook her head, forcing him out of her mind so she could think clearly.

Kira gasped in horror, spitting on the floor in disgust. She'd let that monster touch her, she'd let him inside her. Without stopping to think, she ran to look for Clare. Suddenly, it was she who wanted to jump off the ship and swim for shore—or gladly die trying.

Chapter Four

Kira scrambled up the stairs, only tripping twice in her attempt to distance herself from the vampire she'd allowed inside her. Her body still ached for his touch and her mind raced with the memory of him buried deep within her. She clasped her hand over her mouth and ran to the side of the boat, sure that she was going to be sick. Heat flashed through her body and she suddenly felt very dizzy.

She clutched desperately at the railing, not wanting to fall off the port bow. It would be her luck to foolishly pass out and plummet to her death on a cruise she hadn't intended to be on. It wasn't supposed to be a mixed cruise! No supernaturals on board. She'd double-checked with the travel agency before signing for the package deal, afraid of this very thing happening. The woman had assured her that only humans would be onboard this vessel. Kira made a mental note to kick her travel agent's ass if she ever made it off the ship alive.

"What would make such a beautiful, passionate woman so terrified of the supernatural?" Braden's deep voice asked from behind her.

Kira sucked in her breath, holding it, hoping beyond hope that she wouldn't scream or jump overboard in fear. She knew she should have kept running, should have known that he would track her easily. That's what his kind did. They tracked and hunted humans. They didn't discriminate. They didn't care if

the human was an innocent or even just a child. No, they killed without pity or remorse.

Shaking her head slightly, she refused to answer him. A delicate whimper sounded in the back of her throat. He didn't need to know that her parents had been slaughtered by a pack of rogue vampires, or that she'd been the one to find their mutilated bodies. No, that little bit she'd keep to herself.

"So that is what happened. I had wondered. Do not blame me for the actions of others. It is wrong to lump all vampires in with the ones who caused you such pain. It is against our very code to harm the innocent. We prey on criminals and evildoers and have a steady supply of willing donors. Do not think for a moment, Kira, that I would ever harm you as they did your parents. If it is within my power, I will not rest until every last one of the monsters responsible for your family's death is destroyed. It is my sworn duty to protect you and that is not a responsibly I take lightly."

How dare he read her? How dare he presume that he could invade her thoughts the way she had allowed him to invade her body? She spun around to yell at him. The dizziness that threatened her senses washed over her, making her knees weaken.

There was no time to even eke out a small cry of protest as Braden's strong, cool arms wrapped around her. He pulled her up into his chest, enfolding her within a protective embrace. His lips met hers, stopping any protest she might have uttered. His mouth was cool at first, but seemed to warm slowly as he worked against her.

Kira pressed her lips tightly together and pulled back, refusing to open her mouth to him. He fitted his full length against her body, as hard as steel. The firm line of his erection seemed almost to pulse along her stomach. All too well, her body remembered its length, its texture, its intoxicating power. She looked into his captivating blue eyes, watching as they filled with what looked like pain a second before they began to swirl. She beat hard against his chest, trying to hurt him. "No! No, let go of me. This can't be happening. You're dead! A walking corpse! I don't want to be with you. I don't want to be touched by you ever again. Just let me go!"

Braden tightened his hold on her and held her with his gaze. He trapped her to him, forcing her back to the rail so she couldn't escape. Something tugged on her insides, pulling her body into a state of arousal. She knew enough about vampires to know that Braden tried to seduce her mind, to mesmerize her to his will. She couldn't allow him to do that. She'd fight him and then she'd get off this godforsaken bloodsuckers' cruise if it was the last thing she did.

"You're not going anywhere, not until we talk about this in a reasonable way," Braden said, his lips brushing hers as he spoke, causing her lids to grow heavy. Almost instantly, her panic melted and she had an odd sense of safety. "You had no problems with me prior to finding out what I was. As I recall, you rather enjoyed fucking the 'cabin boy'."

"Stop it! You... undead... walking mummy! Get away from me!" Kira just knew he was using his mind tricks on her and tried to shake him off. "You're probably some poor vampire con artist who tries to pick up women and then kills them when you get their cash!"

Braden chuckled. "Are you always this dramatic?"

"I'm not dramatic!" Kira pressed her lips tightly together, daring him to disagree.

"Hum," he drawled, disbelievingly. "I would think that you would be pleased to find out that I am no cabin boy. I am certainly no con artist searching for a meal ticket. In fact, I do not doubt that I could

purchase several of these cruise ships for you this very evening and it would not make a dent in my bank account.”

“I don’t care, I—”

Braden rocked his hard cock against her, sending a shockwave of desire over her treacherous flesh and shutting her up.

Kira huffed and struggled to free herself from his strong grip. “I’d never have been with you if I’d known what you are. You did something to me, something that made me want you like that. I wouldn’t have let you touch me if I’d have known you were truly a monster!”

“You knew, Kira. Some part of you knew that I wasn’t human and liked it. I only took away your apprehension so you could act on instinct. I didn’t take away your choice. You chose me, Kira.” His gaze darkened in torment. “Besides, it is I who should be disgusted. I do not come from a line that condones mating with mortals.”

She couldn’t believe the nerve of him—making her out to be the repulsive one when he had a liquid diet and was in some bizarre state of perma-preservation. Braden snickered and she knew he listened in on her thoughts again. She focused on blocking him out. In her mind, she pictured a wall and hoped that the visual aid would help her block his mental intrusions.

Braden ran his tongue along the edge of her bottom lip, causing her lids to flutter lazily over her eyes. Kira responded with a weak moan. Her tongue found his. It was the first real kiss they’d shared. She’d needed sex so bad in the cabin that she hadn’t bothered with a kiss. She hadn’t even bothered with a name. No, she’d gone straight for the grand prize.

Braden moved his hands to the top of her leather dress. He slid one of the straps down, pulled his lips back from hers and planted a tiny kiss on her shoulder. Her feet no longer touched the deck. Braden held her as if she weighed nothing, keeping her body tight against him. Her total lack of control over the situation was terrifying. She looked around for help, for anyone, but found nothing.

“Ah, my sweet,” he murmured between soft kisses to her skin, “the others will feast upon the willing donors until dawn. We are very much alone. You have nothing to fear. I will always protect you.”

Braden’s accented words ran through to her core. Kira fought hard to regain her thoughts. She was so confused and she didn’t like it. He made her want him. He had to be using his vampire tricks to induce seduction and she was falling for it. He chuckled as he licked her collarbone.

“You are a stubborn one, aren’t you? On my word,” he murmured. “I am not using any of my powers on you, not any more. I only did that to help you, Kira. I wanted you to see how perfect we could be together, how we were meant to be. I swear I didn’t take away your free will. I don’t wish to control you. What you are feeling for me now is normal for a mate to feel, or at least that is what I have been told. You see, you are the first, the only mate for me.”

It was Kira’s turn to laugh. She wasn’t buying his story. There was no way that someone as hot as he had been a virgin prior to meeting her.

Placing his hand in her hair, he pulled gently on it, forcing her head back more. She looked into his blue eyes and saw the faintest hint of amusement still lingered. “I did not say I was a virgin, Kira. In fact, I am far from it. You do not live as long as I have and remain celibate. Sex is one thing. Passion is another

completely. I said that I had never *mated* before.”

“You’re not mated now,” she said, though a part of her knew his words were true.

“You belong to me now, Kira, or at least you will very soon. And I belong to you, for all eternity. We are mated.”

“I’m no man’s property and I certainly am no vampire’s.” Kira’s voice was stern. “I didn’t ask for you. I don’t want you. And I hate to poke holes in your logic, but humans don’t live for an eternity. You best go find someone else to fulfill your cozy little fantasy with. I don’t feel like playing house—well, crypt—with a dead guy. My life is too short, vamp boy. I’m going to go live it up—without your help. There has to be a male human aboard this vessel that wants nothing more than to have a good time.”

Braden yanked her dress down more, freeing her breasts from their confines. Kira gasped. The cool night air struck them and her nipples instantly puckered. Lifting her hands, she tried to cover herself. The challenge in his eyes stopped her. She dropped her hand to her sides and met his gaze.

Braden licked his lips, grabbing onto the rail with one hand to keep her trapped. He moved his fingers to her breast, but did not touch it. He hovered around it, teasing it with his power. Every nerve in her chest pulled to him as if he caressed her deeply. Blood rushed to his call, engorging her, making the soft globes swollen and tender. Kira moaned as cream built between her thighs.

“N-no,” she murmured, very unconvincingly. Her mouth fell open as she gasped raggedly for breath.

“Say you didn’t mean those words,” he demanded. “Tell me I’m the only one for you.”

“No!” She groaned, and wiggled her body restlessly toward him.

Braden slid his finger over her nipple and tweaked it slightly. Still, she held back from him, fighting the passion that threatened to consume her body. He bit playfully at her jaw line, then her neck. His sharp teeth scraped lightly over her tender skin.

Visions of her horrible past came flooding back to her. She cried out in fear and tried to push him off her. “Stop! Just stop it!”

“Why? I can tell it excites you. Inside, you’re screaming for me to bite into you.” He held tight, never hurting her, only kissing her, pleasing her, making her body crave the feeling of him in it again. “I can smell your longing for me. Its sweet fragrance is in your blood, in the wet juices of your body. Why are you resisting?”

“Ah!” Kira cried out as Braden worked his fingers up her skirt, pulling it until she was fully exposed. “Please, Braden.”

“No panties, what a naughty girl. I like that.” Braden reached forward, forcefully pressing his long fingers into the trim thatch of hair between her thighs. He delved boldly into her wet folds, parting her. A groan escaped his lips. “Just like silk. Spread your legs for me so I can feel deeper. I think that I’ll need to have my cock in you very soon. Now, do as I tell you to.”

Kira didn’t take kindly to being ordered, but her legs obeyed. He thrust two fingers up into her, causing her to quake with pleasure. Her body released a torrent of cream, flooding his hand. He circled her clit with his thumb, rubbing deeply at the sensitive bud of pleasure as he worked his fingers deep and fast.

The power in his hand made her tingle as he claimed her. He devoured her neck with his kisses, licking and sucking at her as he leaned to capture a nipple between his teeth. A bead of blood drew from the round globe and the suction of his mouth intensified, as he drank from her, taking all he could of her breast into his mouth. When he groaned, the pleasure of the sound reverberated throughout her whole being.

“Please,” Kira whimpered softly, unsure what she was begging for exactly. Part of her wanted Braden to slam her legs apart and drive his cock deep within her; another part wanted to run from him. She felt him everywhere—in her mind and body. He connected to her, controlled her, seduced her and she didn’t want any of it to stop.

“Please what?” Braden’s words were feverish as he left her pulsing groin and tightly grabbed hold of her ass. Lifting her up, he set her on the top rail. The ocean churned dangerously behind her but she didn’t care. She was thrilled with the danger of it, of him.

“Make love to me.” Kira roughly wrapped her legs around him, her decision made. “Ah, just fuck me now!”

Braden slid one hand behind her back and the other between her legs. Positioning his tall body between her thighs, he spread them even further, causing her dress to move up and over her hips. Once more, there was nothing between them. Braden dipped a cool finger into her soaked channel, able to push deeper now that she allowed him access. A wide grin settled on his pale, handsome features.

Kira gasped as he plunged two fingers deep within her, hitting that spot in her body that felt so painfully right. He forced himself in and out of her, causing her to moan as he finger-fucked her. It was as if he could read her body, knowing just where to stroke, how hard to push. He undulated his hand faster and harder against her, the thumb pushing at her clit. She clung to the rails for fear of falling overboard. Her hips couldn’t move, only take what he gave her.

Braden increased the pressure on her back and brought his lips within a hairsbreadth of hers. “Trust me, Kira. I will let no harm come to you. I will always protect you—*always*. You are mine now. Forever.”

Kira did trust him. She wasn’t sure why, but she did. Braden’s penetrating blue gaze begged her to believe him. She wanted him like she’d wanted no other before him. She nodded her head slightly and he pulled his fingers from her wet pussy. He brought them to her lips and his gaze glittered with raw need.

Kira took his fingers into her mouth, boldly meeting his gaze as she sucked the taste of her own cream from him, lapping it up with her darting tongue. Tiny animal noises released from her throat. He wore an approving look as he watched her.

“I want to taste,” he growled, ripping his fingers from her soft lips and crushing his mouth to hers. He licked her lips, sampling the cream from them. He sucked against her mouth, groaning like a wild beast. She bucked against him, eager for him to join with her.

Braden jerked his head back and, for a moment, Kira thought she would fall over the edge. He smiled and glanced down at his black dress pants. Her gaze drew to the bulge of his cock.

“I must let you go, only long enough to free myself. My body burns to be in you, every part of you. I have the taste of you upon my lips and I need to merge with you now. Tell me that you want this,” he said, sliding his pants down, freeing his long, hard shaft. He gripped it with one hand and pumped. Each pass of his strong fingers over the mushroom head sent chills throughout Kira’s body. She didn’t think it

possible, but he grew larger with each firm stroke.

She shook her head no but every part of her wanted to scream yes. She wanted to yell at him to fuck her until she couldn't walk, to take her anyway he could get inside her, but she didn't. She sat, half-naked on the railing, clutching to Braden's strong arms for fear of falling. "I don't understand this, Braden. I need time to think."

"Do not lie to me, Kira. I can sense lies and they disgust me. We both know that you want me," he said, stroking his cock harder and faster, "buried deep in you. Don't you, love?"

"Not out here, someone will see us." She was convinced that they would be the sideshow on the cruise from hell if they continued on their current path, and she didn't feel like being the porn star in a vampire production. Already she felt too exposed.

"Where did my adventurous little vixen go?" He chuckled lightly. "I have already told you that the other guests will be snacking until dawn. Besides, the ship is mystical and if it wants us to have alone time, then we shall have alone time."

Kira wrinkled her nose a bit. Her gaze kept drifting over him to where his hand rested on his hard shaft. "What do you mean mystical?"

Braden sighed. "Do we have to discuss this now? I would much rather make love to you," he said, moving the head of his cock near her opening. She knew that her pussy glistened with moisture, wanting him to enter it, to fuck it—fuck her.

Even though her body ached to have him in her, she needed to hear why they'd been brought together. She needed to understand why her attraction for a man she'd only met a few times was unlike any she'd ever known before. It wasn't like she lacked in experience. And it definitely wasn't like she'd never fallen head over heels in lust with a man before, but Braden was different.

"Close your eyes, Kira, remember your dreams. You spoke with me there. You talked to me. You know me." Braden kissed her softly and she felt a flood of memories pouring into her. They were soft, hazy, dreamlike. He was right, she did know him. In her dreams he'd taken her places. He talked to her, but never once took advantage of her, not even to steal a kiss. With the memory came the full force of his passion for her. He wanted her, needed her, had ached for so long to possess her. No wonder he now seemed so eager and so frustrated. He'd waited a long time for her.

"I want you to," Kira said. "I want you."

Braden growled. Grabbing her shoulders to steady her, he thrust his cock into her hard, harder than was called for. Her muscles clenched around him in surprise, leaving her body tipped dangerously back. True to his word, Braden did not let her fall, but he didn't lighten his assault on her either.

This time, Kira wasn't on top, controlling the depth. She cried out, the pressure of his thrusts greater than she'd expected, deeper than she'd allowed him before. He slowed his pace, grinding his hips in a rhythm that left his body rubbing against her clit. Her breast bobbed with each forceful thrust. It was more than she was used to. More forceful than any man had been with her before. Part of her was scared, another part was excited. No man had ever touched her like this.

"Never think of being with another man again, Kira." Braden's eyes swirled, dominant and possessive. "You are mine now and I will not share you with anyone. I own you. I own all of you. You will never

escape me.”

She ran her hands up his strong arms to his neck. Normally, she would have argued, letting him know that she belonged to no man. But as he worked his body in and out of hers, she knew that it was a lie. She belonged to Braden now, like it or not. The most bizarre part of it all was how comforting that knowledge was to her.

Kira wrapped her legs around Braden’s waist and leaned her body back, allowing him greater access to her. He snarled slightly and his mouth moved to her neck. He allowed his tongue to dance along her skin as he continued slamming his body roughly into hers. Each push, each grunt shared between them sent her closer to climax. She clawed at his arms and screamed out as he lifted her body up, continuing his hard drives into her core.

Something tugged at her brain. There was something that she should be worried about but she couldn’t quite remember what it was. Braden’s arms held her tight and his mouth found hers. The minute his tongue entered her mouth, her body gave in to the pleasure he was trying to give her. Her legs began to spasm. Her pussy tightened around his cock, milking him. His muscles tightened and he knew that he was going to share in her release.

“Braden...” she cried, as he filled her womb with hot spurts of his cum. “Mmm, yes, Braden, yes.”

It hit her then what she needed to remember. The shots to prevent pregnancy didn’t work on supernatural sperm. Kira tensed.

Braden put his forehead against hers, rocking his hips in shallow plunges as he forced every tremor from their bodies. He held her tightly to him as the rest of his seed squirted into her. Her body tensed and he caressed her back lightly, holding her up. “Do not fear, little one. You are my mate and you have been with my child since our first time together. I was able to sense the moment of conception. That is why no other man tried to lay claim to you during orientation. They, too, can smell that you are with my child, that you are my mate, my wife.”

Kira gasped in shock and tried to push herself off him. She did manage to pull away slightly, just in time to realize that she would fall overboard if he let go of her. Flailing her arms wildly, she gripped his neck tightly to keep from falling. Braden laughed and pulled her to him, leaving himself buried deep within her. Kira looked over the edge at the raging ocean and shuddered.

Braden kissed her forehead softly. Kira breathed heavily in disbelief. It was all happening so fast. She felt something for Braden, had since she first saw him, felt him. But to be a mate? To be a mother? She shivered uncontrollably.

“See, did I not promise to keep you safe? The Elders are all-knowing and intervene when necessary to find mates for supernaturals. Our kind would die out if it were not for their interference. I was skeptical at first but, when I saw you purchasing your tickets, I knew that they were right. You are my mate.”

Kira shook her head, not wanting to believe all that Braden told her.

“Why didn’t you say something then?” she asked, but she knew the answer. She would’ve screamed bloody murder and never seen him again. How could the powers that be decide that she was a vampire’s one true mate? Did they not know her history? Did they not care? Now she was pregnant and in love with a vampire.

Oh, God, I think I'm in love with a vampire!

Braden let out a loud noise and bounced her up and down a bit. "It is not such a bad fate. It is good that you feel this way. To be my wife and not love me would be a disaster. It looks as though the powers knew what they were doing after all. You're with me and your friend Clare will be with Dominik."

"Dominik? He's supernatural?"

"Yes, a lycan."

Kira thought about what Braden said. He'd referred to her twice as his wife. He was right. *If* what he said was true and she was his mate, then by law they were considered man and wife.

He moved a hand around between them and reached down to touch her stomach. "Notif, Kira. We are mates. You see, I would not have been able to impregnate another."

"Clare," Kira said, thinking of how Dominik looked at her friend. Dominik was a lycan? "Oh, my gawd, I need to find Clare!"

"Ah, don't worry about your friend. Dominik is a good man and will make her a fine husband. He'll take care of her this night and many others. He too has been visiting her dreams."

"No, you don't understand," Kira panted for breath, panicking. "Clare won't understand any of this. She doesn't want another relationship. She's fragile right now. If she gets hurt..."

Guilt overwhelmed her. She knew how sensitive her friend was, and a lycan's prowess in bed wasn't exactly rumored to be at Clare's level. Oh, it was her fault they were in this mess. Clare didn't want to come and she'd practically forced her onto the ship. Once she found out... Oh, gawd!

"Clare's not going to like this. I'm telling you she's...she's really delicate when it comes to sexual things. Lycans are rough and wild and not exactly known for their control. Clare won't know what to do. She won't know what's going on. She won't understand. Please, I need to talk to her. I have to tell her." "Kira gulped, her thoughts racing aimlessly, as her hand drifted to her flat stomach. Oh, man, she was pregnant? "Braden, I need to talk to Clare, now!"

Braden gently kissed her swollen lips and shook his head. "No, we can't interfere tonight. Dominik will take good care of her. Besides, she might not want you barging in on her."

"But, Braden, I—"

"*Shhh*. It has been preordained. Clare will be safe. She knows that, has known it from the beginning. That is why she didn't run. In her heart, she knew Dominik was meant to be there. So, no more worrying about Clare. I would have you focus on us."

"Bra—" Kira wiggled against him.

Braden pressed his lips against hers, silencing her protest with a deep kiss. He began sliding his still-hard cock in and out of her again. Kira moaned, her body instantly smoothing his way with her juices. A strange calm came over her, numbing her mind to everything but him. She needed to talk to Clare but she needed to have Braden, her husband, make love to her more.

Chapter Five

Clare sat on the end of the bed. She looked up at Dominik as she curled her bare toes into the plush carpet of her cabin. He handed her a glass of water. She was still shaken from her ordeal in the ballroom and took the glass gratefully. She sipped it, trying to avoid looking directly at the handsome man before her.

“I think the travel agent gave us the wrong tickets. This was supposed to be a singles’ cruise, not a...” She looked helplessly at Dominik’s handsome face. Suddenly, he didn’t feel so much like a stranger. She frowned, wondering if she had met him at another time.

“A supernatural singles’ cruise?” he supplied easily. Her heart fluttered. He was too damned handsome. The feelings of warmth and familiarity tried to invade her.

Clare nodded. “I didn’t even want to come on this trip. Kira made me, well, she didn’t *make* me, but she bought the tickets for my birthday and I could hardly say no to her gift. I should’ve known she’d mess up like this. She never really pays attention to details when it comes to planning trips. Send her into a conference room and she’s fine. Send her to the airport and the woman will fly in the wrong direction.”

Dominik twitched his handsome lips up slightly. In one graceful movement, he came before her, getting down on his knees. She gasped, dropping the glass from her shaking grip. He swept his hand up with lightening-fast reflexes to catch the bottom of it. Not taking his gaze off her, he set the glass on the floor.

“What are you doing?” she asked nervously.

“Listening to you talk,” he returned easily. “I like hearing the sound of your voice. It soothes me. I’m sorry if I’ve scared you. I forget sometimes that humans aren’t like us. We lycans are so used to using all our senses to detect a situation, not just words. We can feel how others feel. That is why I tried to instill calm into you upon our first meeting. I felt you were scared, Clare, but I also felt that you didn’t want me to go.”

He glided up onto the bed, and placed his palms down, to lie next to her thigh. Clare clamped her legs tightly together. Dominik smiled wolfishly at the modest reflex.

“I can feel that you still don’t want me to go,” he said. “You want me to be here with you.”

“No, please, don’t do that. I—”

“I knew this gown would look good on you,” he said quietly, not even trying to hide the fact that his gaze roamed over her body with manly interest. Slowly, he licked his lips.

“You say that as if you bought it for me.” Clare had an array of emotions move through her—confused, frightened, exhilarated. Again her body tried to tell her she knew him, that he was safe, that she wanted him. It recognized him when her head did not. She was so confused.

Dominik didn’t answer. He leaned in. His hard stomach pressed lightly to her knees. The heat from his arms soaked into her but he didn’t move to touch her. Unconsciously, she licked her lips, instantly drawing attention to her mouth. Her breath caught, held.

“Lean forward and kiss me,” he requested, his gaze darting up to look deeply into hers. “Please, Clare. I’m trying to be patient, I promise you, but I am not a man used to holding back from what I feel. I can tell you want to kiss me and it drives me mad that you don’t. Please, Clare, I want you to.”

“I…” Clare’s mouth fell open. Shaking herself to her senses, she frowned. Her arms flew forward to push his shoulders. He was strong—too strong for her to move. His shoulders didn’t even bend beneath her force. A low growl sounded in the back of his throat and his eyes swam with liquid amber. She jerked back and cried nervously, “Get off me. Really, don’t you understand the word no when you hear it?”

“I am hardly on you, Clare.” Dominik gave her a dangerous grin. “And I know the word yes when I smell it.”

Clare couldn’t answer. How could she? He was telling the truth. She did want him, or at the very least her body did. Her mind was too scared of getting hurt by the feelings trying to grow inside her. Her heart fluttered, squeezing painfully at the thought of sending him away.

“This…” He growled and gripped her thighs and pried her legs apart, sliding his chest between her knees to hold her open to him. The dress pulled tight along her legs, keeping her hidden. This didn’t seem to faze him as he drew one finger forward. A claw shot forth from the tip, and grew slightly.

Clare’s body lit with excitement to see him shift. She became hot under his glittering stare. Dominik took the claw and poked into the red silk. With a loud rip, he leaned back and cut the skirt open, ruining the expensive dress. She let her legs fall wide before she could think to catch them and he was again between her knees.

“This,” he repeated fiercely, before adding, “would be me on you.”

Warm hands touched her ankles, gliding up, parting the torn gown as they rode over her smooth, tanned flesh. She couldn’t move, could barely breathe. She didn’t dare look away. Her whole body trembled violently.

“Why do you fight me?” Dominik asked. “I promise not to hurt you. I only want to please you, worship your body with mine. It’s what you want as well. I can tell. Why not admit it? We were meant to be together, Clare.”

Clare was scared. She never had a problem with emotional intimacy. It was sometimes hard for her to get attached but, once she did, it was even harder for her to let go. This lycan wasn’t offering sentiments of love or crooning sweet nothings at her. She’d never been one to jump in the sack with someone who didn’t express an interest in her in other ways first.

Yeah and look where that has always gotten me—dumped and alone.

Dominik was bold, wild, untamed like so many of his kind. She could sense it in him. Lycans weren’t renowned for their gentleness and slow passion—not that she knew from firsthand experience. From what she’d been told, they made for rather rough, sexually demanding bed partners. Clare wasn’t a rough sex kind of girl. She’d always heard that the lycans were. They existed in a whole different culture, a culture that prided itself on instinct and quick reactions. It was said they could sometimes spot their mate with one look and accepted that. No wonder Dominik was trained to go for what he wanted. He’d most likely lived for centuries, his kind usually did. He knew he wanted her, knew she wanted him. It was simple for Dominik. Clare wished it was that easy for her. Humans were not blessed with foresight.

Humans only knew how to fumble around, making mistakes and hoping one of those mistakes would lead to love and happiness.

A low growl sounded in the back of Dominik's throat, almost as if he was moaning. He looked at her as if he could read her thoughts. Could he? For all she knew, he could be listening in right now. Hopefully, he was. It would save her time explaining herself out loud. His lids drooped over his glittering eyes—darkest brown flecked with the gold of pure amber. He dipped his head slowly forward to her thigh and he rubbed his nose lightly over her warm skin, breathing deep. Her muscles tensed but he didn't seem to notice.

She watched him, too afraid to touch him in encouragement, though an insane part of her wanted to wait and see what he would do. He kneaded higher, working his fingers toward her hips. He slid her forward with his strong grip, causing her skirt to ride up, exposing more of her tanned thighs.

A pleasantly surprised gasp sounded in Dominik's throat as he looked at the wet lips of her body, showcased in a pair of red crotchless panties. She was so very ready for him, knew her body would be glistening with her cream. He instantly parted his lips as if waiting to lap up her taste. His fangs strained forward.

Seeing his teeth, Clare yelped in surprise. They excited her more than scared her. She found she wanted his bite, wanted to see what it would feel like to be possessed in such a way. Frightened by her own desire more than the lycan before her, she clamped her knees down hard on him as she tried to wiggle free. Dominik frowned, a look of immense displeasure. He didn't force her as he let go. She managed to work her hips back and away. Her thighs clamped shut, ending his show.

"Stop," she whispered, pleading with her own body more than him. "Please, I can't do this, Dominik. Please, just stop it. Let me go."

"We must do this," Dominik answered. "I must mark you or people will get suspicious. Your lycan suitor will come back for you. He'll be able to tell you are unclaimed and will push his suit for you. I have no wish to see you hurt, Clare."

"Mark me? Like a dog?" Her eyebrows arched on her face. "You're not going to...pee on my leg or anything are you?"

Dominik chuckled but his eyes dulled and she was instantly sorry.

"I didn't mean that like it sounded," Clare whispered. She again tried pull away. Wiggling to be free of his hands, she tried to draw back. "I'm just not used to...well, your kind, and I make horrible jokes when I'm nervous. I wasn't supposed to be on this cruise."

"Are you nervous to be near me?" His tone was soft and his eyes glinted.

"Well...yes...I... Why would you do this? Why would you care if that other lycan comes for me? I'm not your concern."

"I've wanted you..." Dominik visibly hesitated, his gaze turning down. Clare could see his uncertainty and wondered at it. Quietly, he finished, "...since the first time I saw you."

"You make it sound like you wanted me a long time. We haven't known each other a full day."

At that he smiled. "Mm. What would you say if I told you I'd been waiting an eternity to meet you?"

"Uh, I'd say nice pick-up line." Clare shivered. Her voice lacked its usual sarcastic snap. Oh, he was good.

Dominik's hands began to caress and drag her back to him, as he said in his low accent, "I could feel your pleasure washing over me as you showered. I felt your body trembling as if it were my cock buried deep in you, giving you pleasure. You felt me too, didn't you, Clare? You felt me against you, sucking your nipples, pressing my body to you. And you liked it. Our minds were connected in a way that is rare even for my kind. I can still hear you in my head, the low whispering of your thoughts."

"Stop," Clare knew she sounded desperate but she couldn't help it. "Just stop it. Don't say such things. I'm horrified that you saw me do that. I'm not like that, not really. I think you have the wrong idea about me. I—"

"Why do you try to deny us what we both so obviously want?" Dominik's tone was harsh and demanding. He leaned in and sniffed between her thighs. "My body burns for you. You've got into my head and your voice teases me. I don't understand, make me understand. If this is meant to be, why do you fight? You're not mated. I would smell it if you were."

Clare's eyes widened and she was unable to answer. Did he just say he could smell if she was married to someone else? Her jaw dropped.

Dominik took advantage of her stunned silence to add, "But I do smell something... something temptingly sweet, hot, wet."

Before she knew what he was doing, Dominik's hand slid over her thigh, coming around to touch her intimately. His thumb pressed along the top arch of her pussy, circling down to rub her clit. Clare rewarded him with a stiff jerk of her body. Pleasure burst over her in a shockwave and she instantly felt faint.

"*Mmmm.*" His voice rumbled, as if he was about to sample a fine wine. "See how well your body reacts to me? Do you feel how wet you just became at that simple touch? If you won't kiss me, Clare, at least allow me to kiss you."

He flicked his tongue against her inner thigh and he moved his lips along her skin, eager to end her torment with his mouth. The sight of his blond-tipped hair moving erotically up her leg pleased her senses. She had the strangest urge to grab his face and smother his mouth into her willing body.

"No," she moaned instead, like a coward. This was all wrong. She wasn't this kind of girl. She wasn't Kira. "Please... just... let me get the... ah... the lights first."

He lifted his head and smiled up at her. The soft glow of amber in his gaze sparkled with impish desire. "Why? I can see you as plainly in the dark as I do now. You're beautiful. You have no reason to try and hide yourself from me."

"Ah," Clare moaned weakly. He overwhelmed her. He was so bold, blunt. She wasn't used to men like that. "If it's all the same to you, I would be more... ah... comfortable in the dark."

Dominik's dark eyes softened, almost appearing tender. He gave in with a sigh, nodding. Slowly, he pulled back. "Fine. But, first, give me a kiss."

Clare hesitated, licking her lips. His gaze narrowed in on the movements of her tongue. As if mesmerized, he leaned forward. He gently brushed his mouth along hers, taking advantage as her lips parted in a gasp.

He delved his tongue softly into her mouth. Her heart skipped a beat. Dominik's kiss was gentle and devouring at the same time. He probed her mouth, exploring the depths of her, teasing her into responding. He sucked her tongue into his mouth, sipped leisurely at her taste, urged her to explore inside of him as he did her.

Just as her hands began to lift to him, Dominik drew back, breaking the contact of their mouths. A soft smile greeted her as she opened her eyes. Her lips, parted and damp by his touch, pursed like she still felt him. Her lashes fluttered dreamily over her eyes.

"Go see to your lights, *ZAychik mov*," he urged tenderly, his accented voice low and hoarse.

Clare's heart thudded erratically in her chest. He pulled away. She stood, trying to be graceful as she stumbled across the floor. Behind her, she heard his weight shifting on the bed.

"Mmmm, I am so hard for you, Clare." Dominik groaned and she could practically feel his eyes burning into her back. "My body is on fire. I want to fuck you so bad. I want to ride you until your pussy trembles in ecstasy around my cock and I come inside you."

Clare nearly choked on her own spit at the bold words. Who talked like that? She panicked. As she passed the dresser, she saw an ice bucket next to a bottle of champagne on top of it. Nervous, she grabbed the bucket without thinking and turned.

Dominik already lounged back on the bed, the top button of his leather pants undone. He ran his fingers over his clothed erection, stroking it lightly. She could see the firm line of his strong stomach, peeking from beneath his shirt, exposing the thin trail of dark hair leading from his navel to his groin. The tight leather left no doubt that what he said was true. His huge erection strained from between his thighs. Her mouth went dry.

Dominik's brow lifted up, a small frown forming on his firm lips when she made her way back to him. Clare stopped before him. Without hesitation, she said, "This should cool you off."

His eyes rounded as she dumped the entire bucket of ice cubes on his crotch. Clare didn't wait for his reaction. She turned and ran straight for the door. As she reached for the door handle, she glanced over her shoulder to see if he followed. Instead of the knob, her fingers found something wet and cold. She gasped, turning in confusion. Dominik stood in front of the door, panting wildly.

She froze. His eyes swirled golden as he stared at her. There was a great passion in him and she couldn't tell if it was desire or anger. Suddenly, she realized her hand gripped his leather-clad cock. She pulled back, stunned.

"How... You were there...and—?"

"That was a very nasty trick, *ZAychik mov*," Dominik's chest heaved with his irritation. His fists clenched and unclenched at his sides. He took an aggressive step forward, giving her no choice but to retreat. She watched his face shift slightly before he once more gained control. "I might have to punish you for that, Clare."

“Just let me by,” Clare asserted weakly. She’d never had a man want her so badly he was driven to madness—well, never before now. “Please, Dominik, I want to go home.”

“No. You don’t. You want to be here. Why do you lie to yourself? To me?”

“Yes, I really do want to go home. I don’t want to do this.” Her bare feet hit an ice cube and she shivered, doing her best not to slip and fall. “Please, I don’t want to be here. It’s a mistake. I’m not this sort of woman. I’m scared.”

“Let me touch you, pleasure you. If at any time you don’t like it, tell me to stop and I will.” He took another step for her, walking her back toward the bed.

“Can you stop?” Clare didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. She trembled, unable to take her eyes from him.

Her words caused him to laugh, a low, animalistic sound that bordered on mocking. “I tried to be gentle with you, Clare. I tried to temper my excitement for you as not to scare you with my beastly nature but I see that was the wrong approach to take with you. Do you know how much effort it takes a lycan to hold back from his primal instincts? Even now I can smell your body growing drenched with excitement. You want me to make the decision for you, don’t you Clare? You want me to force you to my will. I hear the thoughts in your head, swimming around. They’re muddled, but I hear them. I don’t want to force you, can’t you see that?”

Her mouth opened, ready to deny him.

“There is no use,” he continued before she could speak. “Your desire grows stronger with each of my words, with each shift of my body. I can detect your longing, your needs. I know you want me as much as I want you. I saw it in your eyes as you stood naked and wet before me, staring at me, water clinging ever so softly to your ripe nipples, caught up in the hairs guarding your tight pussy. You wanted me to take you then, there in the shower. Only you were too afraid to ask for it. And you most definitely want me to take you here and now.”

Clare knew what he said was true. She did want him and it terrified her. He was a stranger, a lycan. She didn’t have sex with either. She didn’t do casual.

But if he was a stranger, then why did she feel as if she knew him, had always known him? He touched her and it was familiar. He spoke and it was like she’d heard his voice every day for a thousand years.

“I tried to be gentle, Clare.” His words stayed close to a growl, as if he was just on the edge of his sanity. She could practically feel the passion and anger radiating from his chest, pouring out over her from his very expression. “I can smell that you are frightened by me, even more so since you discovered what I am. That fear excites you, does it not? Even now your heart pounds like never before. Admit it, *Zaychik mov.*”

Clare’s legs bumped into the bed and she stopped moving. Her feet were cold and she felt an ice cube slide down her leg from the mattress to the floor. Dominik came close, towering over her, his broad shoulders blocking everything else from view. He lifted his fingers, drawing a lazy trail over her collarbone. Her chest rose and fell in hard pants.

“Admit that I frighten you.” His gaze was steady, commanding. “At least admit that much. It will be a

start.”

Slowly, Clare nodded. “Yes.”

“Admit that I excite you.”

Again, she agreed. How could she not? All his words were true. “Yes, but, I’m a rational person. With my career, I have to be. I don’t do this. I don’t act rash. This isn’t rational, Dominik. We just met.”

“Use your body’s natural instincts, not your head or your fears. What does your body tell you?” Dominik’s hand snaked around her waist, pulling her tightly against his body. He pressed his erection hard into her stomach until she felt every inflexible inch of his cock imprinted into her tender flesh. “Admit that you want me to fuck you hard, that your pussy is drenched and ready for me.”

“I...ah.” Clare was unable to meet his eyes. How could she even say such a thing to him? She could barely say the words when she was alone. His body stiffened and she hastened, “Dominik, please, I don’t have one-night stands. I’m not that kind of girl. Even if I did want something like that, I don’t just act on impulse.”

“Who said anything about only one night? You will not be rid of me so easily.”

Clare shivered. His body pressed into hers, making her nipples peak in instant response against his chest. She held her hands nervously at her sides, torn between pushing him away and pulling him closer.

Dominik grinned and pushed her lightly so she fell back on the bed. The ripped gown parted, revealing the long length of her athletic legs. “I can see you would like more convincing.”

“Yes,” she breathed, wondering where the word came from. Clare watched as he unhurriedly drew his shirt off over his shoulders. His sculpted chest was tanned and smooth. The muscles worked beneath his flesh, flexing, as he breathed deep, slow breaths. Her gaze was drawn to his waist, to the trail of hair she saw beneath his navel. The trail led down into the low riding leather pants. Her mouth began to water, as she thought of kissing him where the unbuttoned leather parted enticingly.

“Don’t worry.” He chuckled at her rapt attention and hungry look. “Your sweet lips will suck on me soon enough.”

“Ah!” Her features lacked conviction as she tried to sound shocked.

Dominik threw back his head and laughed. It was a dominantly masculine sound. He grinned at her, a truly handsome smile. His brown eyes softened and he winked. “I give up, Clare. I have tried to be what you needed me to be, but I cannot bring myself to force you when you’re not ready. I will wait until you know your feelings as I know them. If you truly wish it, I will sleep on the floor tonight and leave you in peace. I cannot guarantee we won’t have a fight on our hands tomorrow when you are detected as unclaimed. But, I can easily fight for you, if that is what you want. But, make no mistake, you are mine. Can’t you feel it? Our connection? I will have you—all of you.”

Clare shivered. He was serious.

“Is that what you want, *Zaychik mov*? Do you need me to prove my worth to you?” Dominik’s smile remained soft. “I will gladly fight a thousand lycans. You are worth waiting for, if that is your wish. Just command me how you will.”

Her fingers shook as she lifted her hand to touch his face. Losing her nerve, she let it drop. Who was this man? She wished she could have an ounce of his certainty. “No, I don’t want anyone hurt. I don’t want anyone fighting over me. I just want to go home now. I’m so confused. I don’t understand all this.”

“What’s to understand? I want you. You want me.”

“Please... Humans aren’t as certain. We...”

“Do you truly want me to leave you alone? I will if you ask it of me. I’ll leave this room and sleep before your door if that is what you wish. I want you, Clare, badly. But I won’t force myself on you. I promised not to hurt you and I’m a man of my word.”

To her shame, Clare knew she didn’t want him to stop what he was doing. His smile faded into a knowing look. Closing her eyes briefly, she said, “Sleep outside.”

It was a test, to see if he would. Without pause, Dominik stood, nodding his head. “As you wish it.”

She watched him walk to the door and open it. As he stepped out, she said, “Wait.”

Dominik turned, watching her.

“I don’t want you to go.” Her face became hot and she knew she had to be red with a blush. Unable to meet his eyes, she said softly, “I want you to keep doing what you were doing before.”

He shut the door and came back to the bed. “You’re sure?”

“Yes,” she answered, looking up at him. She was sure. Pulling her dress over her head, she tossed it to the floor. Her body was bare except for the red, crotchless panties. His eyes devoured her body, traveling everywhere. Slowly, she sat back on the bed. “I’m sure. I want you to continue.”

He leaned forward to crawl on his hands and knees, very much the stalking beast after his prey. She watched him come over her and fell back on the bed. He worked his legs naturally between hers.

Dominik stopped, pressing a tender kiss along her calf. His lips continued their delicate torture along her leg to her thigh, dragging his tongue steadily over her smooth skin. He nudged his head against her, parting her so he could explore, and fitted his hands along her thighs, pushing her open when she refused to move. A light groan escaped him as he drew higher.

“*Mmmm*, you smell delicious,” his low voice rumbled, vibrating along her body. He flicked his tongue out, hitting lightly onto her clit, moving back and forth in her moist crease.

Hot desire washed over Clare and she lightly cried out, whimpering for more. She felt her body heating, growing agreeably moist in anticipation. Her limbs became restless, searching. She gripped the silk sheets, holding on.

“*Mmmm*, you taste better than you smell.” Dominik licked her again, more fully this time as he delved his tongue between the soaked lips of her body, lapping upward in a single deft stroke to taste her.

When he sat up, he licked the residual cream from his lips. His eyes swirled with amber promise and his chest heaved as if he fought to control himself.

“Your scent has been driving me crazy all night,” he growled. Clare shivered, blushing at the erotic words. He grasped her hips and pulled her roughly down so she straddled his thighs with her own. He leaned over to kiss her, intent on marking her as his. Letting his hands roam over her shoulders and chest, he tweaked her nipples and rolled them between his forefingers and thumbs. “It’s been in my head, teasing me. It’s made my cock so hard I can barely see straight.”

To prove his point, he maneuvered his body to rub his leather-clad shaft into her body’s fire and groaned loudly. Clare’s thighs gripped him. She lifted her hands quickly, unable to deny herself any longer. Logical or not, this was what she wanted. Dominik was what she wanted. She pulled him down to her. His lips devoured hers briefly before moving to suck along her breasts. He flicked his tongue over her nipples, alternating passionately between the two, hardening them.

She drew her hands over his shoulders, gliding her fingers over his solid muscles, discovering the firm texture of his skin. She could feel the constrained power beneath his flesh. Her lids dipped lazily over her eyes. Knowing she blushed, she admitted, “I thought lycans were supposed to be, well, you know, hairy.”

Dominik chuckled. He leaned to nuzzle her ear, rimming it with his hot tongue. “In due time, my sweet Clare, I will let you have me like that, if that is your wish. I’ll give you whatever you want.”

Clare trembled at the promise in his beautiful voice and found she wasn’t as repulsed by the idea as she should have been. Dominik’s teeth nipped her lobe and he once more began an exploration of her body with his mouth and hands. He slid his fingers over her skin until sweat began to bead on her flesh, and trailed teasing kisses over her collarbone, breasts and neck.

“You make me so hungry,” he growled to her throat. “I want to drink from you. I want to taste your blood, but even more I want to taste your sweet cream. I want all of you.”

He dipped his fingers between her thighs, stroking into her tight cavern. He leaned up, capturing her eyes as he drew his wet finger up to his mouth to suck gently. Clare gasped at the erotic sight of him licking her moisture from his finger.

“So good, so addicting,” he groaned. His brown eyes swirled with amber. “I want more.”

With graceful speed, he was back between her thighs, hooking her knee over his shoulder. Dominik’s mouth latched onto her slit, drinking deeply. He dug his fingers into her hips, keeping her from escaping his hot mouth. Clare screamed, bucking up off the bed. She watched their reflection in the ceiling mirror as he seemed to devour her. She watched his hands on her breasts and hips. His teeth grazed over her clit, lightly biting. He lapped at her several times with his tongue, soothing where he had bitten. Unable to resist, he shoved his tongue inside her heated silk.

“Ah-ah,” Clare cried out, again and again. Mindlessly, she turned her head back and forth. She was no complete innocent and had tried a few things with men, but never had a man brought her so near climax as fast as Dominik did with his tongue. He licked deep inside her until she was sure his tongue was twice as long as any normal man’s. Her hips rocked up against his mouth, encouraging. Her tight pussy clenched his tongue. Small sounds of pleasure escaped his throat, vibrating her clit.

Dominik stopped when the tremors started in her body. Clare whimpered weakly in protest, meeting his eyes over the length of her body. He circled his fingers over her swollen lips, keeping her on the brink of release, but never giving it. She moaned in protest.

“Ah, not yet, but soon,” Dominik promised. “I’m not done playing with you just yet.”

“Oh, please, no more,” she whimpered, still gasping for breath. Her thighs rubbed up to clutch at him, hoping to draw his mouth back down to complete her. “Dominik, no more, I beg you.”

Dominik’s eyes closed briefly and she knew he was fighting for control. He was too strong for her to push around. Clare sat up, her hands moving quickly over him to his waistband. He let her explore, watching closely as she freed his erection. She gasped to find his heavy, pulsing length, straining so hard that veins showed along the sides. Dominik groaned. Cupping his hand over his cock, he stroked it hard a few times as she watched, taking in the mushroom-shaped head beneath his hand. To her amazement, he only grew bigger now that he was free from the tight leather.

“I think you should sleep on the floor,” she said weakly, her mouth hanging wide open. Clare began to back up. There was no way he was fitting that giant piece of flesh inside her. He was bigger than the Super-Stimulator 9000 Kira had given her as a joke!

Dominik slowly crawled up, forcing Clare to lie down as he came up over her. He reached past her head to the nightstand. A wicked grin came to his lips as he opened the drawer and he brought out her purple vibrator. Clare looked at it, suddenly thinking it pitifully small. “Are you sure?”

“No. Stay,” she heard her hoarse voice answering.

He drew it over her neck and down the valley of her breast, switching it on as he reached the flat of her stomach. A light buzzing sounded in the room. He drew the vibrator over her clit only to glide it down between the cheeks of her ass.

Clare jolted with liquid excitement. Her body was more than ready for him. He reached her tight passage with his finger, wetting them inside her.

“Ah, damn, you’re so tight.” He joined his finger with another. “I will enjoy breaking you open. First your hot pussy.” When his fingers were moist with her cream, he ran them down to where the vibrator worked between the cheeks of her ass, teasing the virgin rosette he found there. “And then, when you allow me, I will break open this sweet little ass of yours. I will enjoy fucking you there.”

Clare tensed as he said the words, but the sound that escaped her was not one of protest as he probed the tight muscles with a finger, rimming her gently with the aid of her body’s cream. She watched his every move in the mirror above them, liking the way his strong back rippled with muscles.

“*Argh*, I think you’re going to have to allow it soon—very soon.” He groaned, pulling his finger away as if he couldn’t take the torture.

Dominik gripped the vibrator and drew it up to her hot pussy. He pushed the smooth plastic firmly into her body. Clare screamed, arching. He stroked her several times with it. The vibrations hit deep into her, sparking a fiery reaction in her womb. She’d never experienced toys at the hand of another, always playing with them alone. Her body jerked, begging for release. She pulled her hands quickly to her breasts, gripping the nipples, pinching them hard.

“Ah, so sweet,” he crooned from between her thighs, murmuring to her in his native language as he stroked her. She couldn’t understand what he said, but the words only fueled her desire for him. He quickened the pace of the stroking vibrator. His own hips drew lightly into the silk of the bed, as if eager

to have their chance at her. Working the vibrator expertly inside her body, he demanded, "Come for me, *ZAychik mov*. I want to watch you."

The words were too much. Clare screamed as ecstasy took over her body. She trembled, violent and strong.

A torrent of liquid flowed from her clenching pussy. Dominik grinned. Turning the toy off, he tossed it aside and stood only long enough to strip off the black leather. Within seconds, he was on top of her, completely naked. His large, heavy cock found her wet entrance, still hot and quivering with pleasure. "You know how good your toy feels. Now let me show you what a lycan can do."

"Wait," Clare said softly, not sure she could take any more. She saw his body clearly in the mirror. Her eyes fixed on the reflection of his muscled hips and ass. His hand was on her breast, massaging deep, circling her tight nipples, sending shockwave after shockwave through her core. Her mind raced for an excuse to stop him. "I haven't had my sex immunizations within the last year. We need to stop."

"Don't worry about it," he chuckled. "We're fine."

She was glad to know one of them was up to date. Her hips flexed in offering to him. Why was she protesting again? She couldn't remember. It felt too right, too good, too hot. "Mm, Dominik, talk to me. Keep talking to me. I like hearing your voice as you touch me."

She gasped for breath as he slowly worked himself in, filling her.

"Ah," he moaned. "That's it, take me in. Oh, you feel so good, so damn tight."

Dominik's stiff flesh slid in her natural juices as he worked his hips back and forth in shallow thrusts, pushing deeply into her, stretching her tight pussy to fit him. Clare cried out, feeling impaled before he had even worked himself halfway.

"You're too big." She didn't want him to stop but she was afraid to let him go on.

Dominik slowed. His lips lowered to cover hers in a deep kiss. He moved his hands to the back of her knees, pushing them wider. Whispering into their kiss, he said, "Try to relax, *ZAychik mov*."

His kiss distracted her from the slight pain, as pleasure rippled from every nerve in her body. She was awash with sensations—the gentle massaging of his tongue, the brush of his strong chest against her straining breasts, the hard conquering length of his cock.

Clare wanted him—all of him. She pulled back, gasping for breath. Planting her feet on the bed, she thrust her hips at him hard, sliding him roughly past any point she'd ever been touched, seating him completely inside her. Clare cried out, marveling in the complete possession, feeling so full and achy.

Dominik groaned, holding his hips flush to her as he let her adjust.

"Stop," Clare cried, a dam of emotion breaking in her.

"Ah, give me a minute. I want to pound you so bad... Oh, don't move."

Clare ignored the straining of his voice as she rocked her hips. "I meant stop holding back. I know you want more than this. I can somehow feel that you do. I want you to enjoy it, I need you to. Stop fighting

your nature. I want you to fuck me hard. I need you to. Please, Dominik, *please* fuck me.”

Dominik let loose an animalistic growl, a desperate need in his eyes that reflected her own. Instantly, he began thrusting into her, pummeling her hot channel. His shaft glided in the cream of her body. Grabbing near her hips, he pulled open the cleft of her ass, parting her even more.

Clare’s cries echoed around them, joined by the primitive grunts of Dominik. He lifted up, leveraging himself against her hips. The action drove him deeper still and Clare thought he might spilt her in two from the glorious pressure of his claiming.

“Dominik,” she cried, reaching for him. His name dripped like honey from her lips. “More, Dominik! Faster! Fuck me hard!”

Dominik growled, obeying her command. She felt powerful, as she controlled the handsome man. He’d been willing to stop when she asked him to. It made her want him more.

Her body began to tighten, her muscles convulsing around his rigid shaft. Still he moved, using all his energies and strength to give them what they both wanted, needed. A violent scream left her as she arched off the bed. Her hot passage clenched onto him hard, spasming her release against his embedded cock.

Dominik’s shout of pleasure joined hers. His body shot his hot seed into her womb, filling her with the fiery contentment of his release. Still embedded, he fell against her chest. So as not to smother her, he rolled, pulling her panting body with him. He held her leg, curling it over his hip. He slid his cock partly out of her swollen sheath and she trembled.

Clare’s face turned a bright shade of red and she buried herself into his chest to hide. Dominik chuckled, brushing back her hair. He lifted her jaw up gently, so she met his eyes.

Reaching behind him, he drew covers over their bodies and pulled her closer. His lips brushed along hers gently as he said, “Perfect.”

Chapter Six

Clare gave him a tentative smile, not sure what he meant by that one word. *Perfect*. She shivered, drawing her knee weakly from his hip. She sleepily closed her eyes.

“No regrets, right?” he asked.

“Mm, no. Well there is one thing.” She felt him stiffen at her words. She giggled. For a confident man he really seemed to care about her opinion for him. She liked that. Then, suppressing a yawn, she said, “You ripped my dress. Now I don’t have anything to wear.”

Dominik chuckled and relaxed. “It’s fine by me if you wear nothing but those panties around for the rest of the cruise. I always did have a thing for sexy underwear.”

“So you really did throw my bag out?” she mourned, snuggling deeper.

“I had to. It was the only way I’d get you into that dress. I’ve pictured you in it for months now,”

Dominik said. Right after the words were out, he stiffened.

Clare wondered at it. Her mind was a bit sluggish with the aftermath of her pleasure. “What do you mean, you’ve been planning this? Oh, no, Kira didn’t. . . she didn’t really buy you as a birthday gift, did she?”

Clare’s eyes welled with tears of humiliation. She tried to pull away but his arms tightened, not letting her.

“No one paid me to come here,” he said, kissing her cheeks.

“But. . .?”

“I was told of our joining, and when I first saw you, walking alone through the park with a book and a cup of coffee, I knew that you were going to be mine—forever.”

Clare giggled nervously. “I think you’re delusional.”

“Perhaps,” Dominik allowed. “But, can you not feel it? Our connection?”

Weakly, she asked, “Is it because I am marked?”

Dominik grinned. The back of his hand brushed over her lower stomach. “Yes, *ZAychik mov*, you belong only to me now.”

Clare shivered, wondering if his possessive tone should have scared her. Then it occurred to her that maybe his translation of the English language was just a bit off and he came off more possessive than he intended to. Yawning, she snuggled into his warmth. She was unable to think too hard about what he said through the oncoming haze of her dreams.

* * * * *

Kira laughed and reached out to tickle Clare’s chin. Her friend moaned weakly, smacking her lips in sleep. Glancing over Clare’s long body hidden by the sheets, Kira grinned. She heard the shower running and assumed Dominik was in the bathroom. She’d tried knocking but had got no answer.

“Clare,” Kira whispered, trying not to alert Dominik. Braden had kept her up most of the night. She’d had sex in so many different positions she could barely walk. There was one thing to be said about having an undead lover. They were tireless in their stamina. And, having lived an eternity, he knew some damned good tricks.

Clare’s eyes fluttered open. She blinked, apparently surprised to see Kira’s face so close to her own. Kira pushed a finger over her lips and shook her head for silence. Clare turned, looking at the empty side of the bed. When she turned back, she was blushing.

“Come on,” Kira mouthed, with a “we need to talk” look on her face.

Clare nodded, covering her mouth as she yawned. Kira motioned that she would be waiting outside. Clare’s hand darted out to stop her. She grinned sheepishly.

“I don’t have any clothes.”

Kira nodded in understanding and crept across the dark cabin to the adjoining door. Pausing, she grinned at Clare and pointed to the bed. "Did you...?"

Clare blushed profusely and waved her away. Kira shrugged, suppressing a teasing giggle. Clare was just too easy to embarrass. It was so much fun!

* * * * *

Clare yawned, watching Kira leave. She blinked, looking again at the bed, remembering every inch of Dominik's body as if he was next to her. She didn't know how, after four times the night before, but she was ready to go again. Hearing the shower, she thought of joining him in it. She had the strongest urge to kiss him, Kira's interference be damned. She bit her lip and decided against it, knowing she wouldn't start anything with Kira coming back. Hearing a chuckle at the end of the bed, Clare giggled. She'd been caught staring at the bathroom door.

Clare waved at Kira to go away. Kira shook her head in denial. Her hair tumbled around her shoulders at the motion. She signaled that she wasn't leaving until Clare followed her.

"Why aren't we speaking?" Clare grumbled and slid to the edge of the bed.

"We're sneaking out on the men to go shopping and have some girl time," Kira said softly. Giggling, she tossed Clare a tight black shirt—well, a shirt that would have been tight on Kira's larger breasts, but bagged a little on Clare's smaller endowments—and a miniskirt. "Braden seems to have really good hearing."

Once dressed, Clare followed Kira out of the bedroom. Kira smiled. "For a second there, I thought you were going to ditch me for Dominik in the shower."

Clare felt herself blush. She'd been doing that a lot lately.

"Looks like you had fun last night," Kira added, giving a sly look. There was something to Kira this morning. She had a calmness about her, a peace.

Clare rolled her eyes and tried to act mature. However, at her friend's overly hopeful expression, she grinned. "Oh. My. Gawd. I did have fun, lots of fun. They just don't make men like that—or toys for that matter."

"That good?" Kira walked down the quiet hall. It would seem the ship was less lively during the day hours and that was fine by them.

Kira grabbed Clare's arm and walked toward the ship's shopping center. Clare definitely needed some new clothes for the remainder of the trip, though she doubted Dominik would allow her to spend too much time in them.

"I still can't feel my legs," Clare admitted in an awed whisper. "I swear, Kira, I didn't know it could be like that. He was so sweet, yet forceful, or is it confident? I don't know how to describe it. But he was actually willing to stop in the middle of... well, you know. And he was actually going to sleep outside my door to protect me when I asked him just in case the other l..." Then, feeling as if the blood rushed from her face, Clare stopped. She'd been about to say in case other lycans attacked. "Oh, Kira, about Dominik. I have to tell you something and I don't want you to be upset. He's a lycan."

Kira merely smiled. "I know."

"Are you okay with that? 'Cause, if you're not, I'll get rid of him. I know your history with supernaturals and our friendship comes first." Clare really didn't want to banish the lycan from her bed, never knowing when she might have another lover such as him, but friends came before lovers. To her relief, Kira giggled and shook her head in denial.

"No. I don't mind. In fact, you'll never believe this, but Braden is a vampire."

"Who?" Clare asked, confused. "Braden?"

"Ah, Cabin Boy," Kira clarified.

"He's not!" Clare proclaimed in horror for her friend. "No wonder you... He mesmerized you didn't he? That jerk! Don't worry, Kira, I'll protect—"

"No, he didn't mesmerize me." Kira giggled, cutting her off. Clare frowned. Her friend had been giggling quite a bit since they started their walk, and not in a mischievous "I'm going to tease Clare" sort of way, but in an "I've got a secret that I'm dying to tell" sort of way.

"Spill. I need details and pronto, girlfriend!" Clare demanded. She put her hands on her hips and refused to move.

"I'm married," Kira blurted, grinning happily. "And pregnant."

Clare looked her over in disbelief. "No way. You are so lying!"

"No, really. I swear it. I'm married. I mated with Braden and—"

"You mated with a vampire? Knowingly mated?" Clare shook her head in disbelief. Kira looked so earnest, that she would have believed her if her words weren't so impossible. "And you're pregnant?"

Kira nodded, swallowing nervously. "And in love... which I guess is a good thing, considering."

"Nice try." Clare stepped into a little ghoulish clothing boutique. "You had me going for a second there, I'll admit. But, you're the last person who'd ever settle down with one man."

Clare ignored the troll at the counter who sneered at everyone who entered. The shop wasn't busy. Seeing racks of lingerie, which took up over half the store, she faltered. Kira grinned, winking knowingly at her hesitation.

"Are you looking for something in particular?" Kira motioned around the store.

"I..." Clare colored slightly. "Dominik mentioned that... well, that he'd enjoy seeing me in..."

"In...?" Kira teased.

"He liked the underwear, okay!" Clare rolled her eyes. "And he said he'd like if—"

"—if you wore something sexy for him?" Kira grinned as she finished the thought for her friend. "Perfect

idea! Come on! Let's go try some stuff on. I want to get something to wear for Braden tonight when he gets up."

"You really think he'll sleep *all* day, Kira? What did you do to him?"

Kira smiled. "I told you, he's a vamp. They sleep all day, remember?"

Clare stopped at a clothing rack with leather lace-up bustiers. She fingered the outfits curiously, letting the smooth, cool leather occupy her hands while what Kira said occupied her thoughts. "You're serious, aren't you? You really slept with a vampire?"

"I'm dead serious...or undead serious," Kira joked. "Clare, just be happy for me. I mean, he's great. He's rough at all the right moments and possessive. And he's tender and sweet and...and I'm in love him."

Clare read the truth in her friend's eyes.

"Clare, there is something I really have to tell you, though. And I don't want you to freak out, 'cause I know how you are," Kira began. Clare stared at Kira, watching her speak but, as her words started, so did a loud foghorn overhead. Clare leaned in, hearing the words, "Dominik...lycan...forever...so...when...you...marked... understand?" The foghorns stopped. Kira smiled brightly at Clare. "So that's everything."

Clare opened her mouth to speak, but was interrupted.

"May I help you?" Both women turned down to the little troll. He glared up at them. "You can't just stand here, you must buy."

"Sure." Clare tried to keep a straight face.

Kira grabbed a lace-up leather thong with a matching string bra off the rack and thrust it at Clare. "Trust me. This is just the one to make him wild." She fingered another article of clothing and her eyes lit up. "Oh, pleather! I think pleather should be a prerequisite for women's wardrobes everywhere. I mean, you can wear it, sweat and it doesn't smell or cling to you like leather and, as if that wasn't enough, you can sort of wash it. I'm forgetting the most important selling point of it. It's economical. I should really buy more pleather!"

"Somehow I don't think that will be a difficult goal for you to live up to."

"Hey, no need to be snippy. Maybe if you wore more pleather, your panties wouldn't be in a bunch all the time. Oh, wait...I forgot that you're not wearing any."

Clare paled considerably.

"Hum." The troll leaned forward to smell Clare, causing her to flinch. "Lycan, huh?"

"Ah...?" Clare looked at Kira, feeling helpless.

The troll sniffed Kira, "Ah, vampire." Reaching forward to the rack, the troll picked out several outfits and handed them to the women. "You'll take these."

Kira smirked and made a face at Clare. “I guess we’ll take these! Most are duplicates for me, but a hell of a new look for you! Do you think I should get them a size bigger? How long is it before you show? With a big ol’ pregnant belly, I mean?”

“Not the ‘I’m pregnant’ bit again. I was with you when you got your last shots. Nice try. Come up with a better joke and I’ll promise to laugh. You pregnant by a vampire isn’t funny at all. You don’t know the first thing about babies. I’d have to tell you which end was up.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence and for just volunteering to be my new nanny. I’ll have you know that I can read and will buy every baby book out there.”

“Oh, the kid is screwed already. Don’t worry, baby, Auntie Clare will help out.”

Kira rolled her eyes and headed toward a wall of T-shirts. “These look more your speed, Auntie Clare.”

“Ha, ha.”

“You’re out of luck. They don’t seem to have any T-shirts with the phrase ‘I went on vacation and finally got laid.’ I could see if troll boy could hook us up with one.”

“Um, I think the troll thing is a girl. But while you’re at it, see if they have a coffee mug that reads ‘all I got out of my vacation was a dead husband and knocked up’.”

“Don’t make me strangle you with an extra-large T-shirt. I’d hate to actually have to buy one of those hideous things—but I will.”

Clare frowned. “I kind of like them.”

“You so would.”

After picking up some jeans and ridiculous vacation T-shirts from the store’s limited non-lingerie section, Clare and Kira checked out. As Kira paid, Clare grabbed a brochure about the cruise ship and began flipping through it. She was suddenly happy to have been shanghaied into coming along. The thought of almost missing out on Dominik pulled at her gut. The need to hug Kira for forcing her into compliance was great and she couldn’t help but drape an arm around her best friend quickly, giving a tight squeeze, before concentrating on the brochure again.

Walking down the hall that led back to their room, Clare mumbled, “It says here they teach ballroom dancing from beginning to advanced. Cha-cha, tango, waltz...”

“That could be fun,” Kira said. “Though I don’t know how much time I want to spend... ah, joining the group activities. I think I want to relax with my new husband. This is a great honeymoon, don’t you think? I wonder what he’ll want to do tonight?”

“My guess is that he’ll want to spend time doing husband and wife activities? Isn’t bingo one of those things?” Clare teased.

“Nope. Horizontal hula.”

“Right,” Clare drawled. “I still can’t believe you married a vampire. No one back home will believe it either.”

“Do you think...” Kira began. Her eyes turned sad and Clare knew exactly what Kira was thinking about—the death of her parents. She would not let Kira feel guilty for finding happiness with the most unlikely of men.

“No,” Clare’s voice was firm. “Those vampires who killed your parents were not Braden. They were renegades and they were staked long ago. I’ve seen the look on your face all morning. Your parents would be pleased that you finally found happiness and love. Don’t you ever doubt it.”

Kira nodded but said nothing. She wiped her cheeks and took a deep breath before smiling. She looked around and then toward Clare. “Hey, does this hallway look different to you?”

Clare glanced up from the brochure and adjusted the bags on her arm. “I’m sure this is the way we came. See, there’s 2b.”

“Yeah, but I could have sworn the carpet was red, not blue,” Kira said.

“Oh, well, here,” Clare answered, reading her brochure. “It says here that the ship is mystical and changes at random. It must mean the decorations. Cool. I’ve got my fingers crossed that those ugly cherubs are gone from my room now.”

“I like the cherubs.”

“You would.”

“Are you sure we’re not lost?”

“No, it says here that the boat is mystical. I’m sure that’s what it means.”

Kira nodded, remembering Braden saying something about the ship changing to give them privacy even when outside.

“I wish I had this for my apartment,” Clare said. “Only instead of changing color, I’d want it to change from dirty to clean.”

“What? And confuse the roaches?” Kira teased.

“Ew! I don’t have roaches.”

“Might as well, your tiny apartment is sad enough. It sits above the world’s most disgusting pancake house. I swear, each time I use your bathroom I smell waffles. You really should move out. You deserve better and can well afford it.”

“It’s rent-controlled,” Clare said, as if that explained everything. She turned back to the brochure. “Hey, we can swim with sharks and giant rays.”

“Lovely idea, Clare. Sign me up for a lobotomy while you’re at it. I still have a few too many brain cells.”

“You’d never know it. You don’t use them,” Clare quipped, reading further. “It says you’re lowered into the water in a large cage.”

“Great, I can hear it now. Here, fishy, fishy, fishy, come get your dinner—a cage full of stupid humans.” Kira snorted with laughter. Pushing the door to her suite open, she stepped in. The room was the same only the main color was blue, not red.

“Ha, ha, ha, you are too funny,” Clare stated dryly before giggling.

“That’s odd,” Kira said, sounding a bit perplexed. “Braden’s gone.”

Clare followed her inside the room, still reading. Absently, she said, “Maybe he went for a swim. It says here they have five pools and, *eww*, one of them is filled with slime. I’m sure that it has some sort of exfoliating quality but I think I’ll pass. Are you listening to me? Stop worrying about him. He’s most likely out for a walk or something.”

“He’s a vampire and it’s broad daylight.” Kira crossed over to the bathroom door and looked in. All her things were missing from the counter. She frowned. Walking to the dresser, she pulled it open. Her clothes were gone.

“Maybe he wants a bit of crispiness to his pallor,” Clare teased.

“Hey,” Kira said, obviously not listening. “What happened to my clothes?”

Clare laughed, crossing over to the door adjoining their rooms. “Serves you right. Not so funny when they do it to you, huh?”

“Clare,” Kira said, worried. She reached into the dresser.

“Maybe Braden’s with Dominik,” she offered.

“No, Clare, look.” Clare turned just as she pushed open the door. Kira stood at the dresser, holding a black lace negligee that had room for four arms and three breasts. “This isn’t mine.”

Clare heard a grunt and a snort. Turning, she looked into her room. A thick mass of grayish-purple lay there, gyrating. Tiny animal noises emanated from the enormous beast. It took Clare a minute to realize that it wasn’t just one creature lying on the bed, it was two! And they were having sex, or something that could pass as sex!

A purple tentacle shot out across the cabin and tried to go up and under Clare’s skirt. She screamed as she watched the repulsive creature pump the full length of itself into the grey blob below it. It was an Octopynanton Demon, she was sure of it. Her stomach lurched when she thought back to high school demonology class where she’d learned about Octopynantons and their mating rituals. They had a habit of stealing human females and turning them into like creatures with their semen secretions. By the looks of the grey blob under it, it wasn’t a pretty way to go.

Another tentacle leapt forth to probe beneath her miniskirt. It hit closer to home than Clare would have liked. She jerked back, kicking out at it. She hastened through the door and slammed it shut. “*Run!*”

She and Kira automatically ran for the door leading to the hall. Opening it, they came face-to-face with the three-breasted, unearthly creature who undoubtedly owned the bizarre negligee they’d found. Kira screamed, prompting Clare to do the same. The creature leered at them and smacked her lips. It reached a clawed hand out and caught Kira by the arm. Clare dove forward and thrust her body into the

creature's center. It toppled backward and Kira was freed.

The side door burst open and the Octopynantons from the other room poured through. A band of eyeballs circled the large purplish male's head. Each one moved independent of the others and all seemed to be ogling them in one form or another. Given no choice, Clare ran to the bathroom, followed closely by Kira.

Kira slammed the door shut and flipped the lock. "Help me," Kira ordered. Together they moved a large towel cabinet before the door. "What in the hell were they?"

"I'm not sure! I think two were Octopynanton Demons, but the rest are anyone's guess! I'm not going back out to ask them, so let's just go with nasty and unfriendly." Clare heaved for breath, frightened.

"Well, look in your damned brochure!" Kira yelled. "What are they doing in my room?"

"I'm looking!" Clare growled. She searched through her bag for the brochure. "It's not like I'm the one who booked this hell cruise in the first place!"

"I didn't hear you complaining when we were shopping for sexy garments to please your new fuck buddy!"

"Dominik *isnot* my new fuck buddy! I can't believe that I let you talk me into this. I can't believe that I'm having this conversation with you when creepy funky things are trying to eat us! Didn't you read the fine print before you signed us up for this?"

"Hey, I told you back in the store what was going on here!" Kira yelled. Clare only heard about half of what she said. "The mess-up isn't my fault! This cruise is a matchmaking... *whatever*... set up by the elders so that supernatural creatures wouldn't have to spend eternity alone. So you were meant to be with Dominik."

"Right!" Clare yelled. "The supernatural elders wanted me to get it on with a lycan because he was horny. You fucked up and you just don't want to admit it!"

"That's not what I said—" Kira began. Something large smacked against the door, followed closely by the distinct sound of oozing. "Hey, could you just yell at me later, Clare? We can't all be perfect with the paperwork like you. Right now, let's just figure out how to get out of here."

"The window!" Clare said, running for it. They pushed it open. "Look, there's a deck down below. I think I can lower myself down."

Clare climbed through with Kira's help, intent on reaching the deck. Just as she had her miniskirted ass dangling over the edge, she heard a masculine moan. "Oh, my gawd! Kira! What is it? Quick, look!"

Kira leaned over her back. "It's that creepy porter. I think he wants to catch you. And his mouth is open!"

"Ah, oh my gawd, pull me up! Pull me up! Pull me up now!" Clare demanded, kicking and screaming in horror.

"Why is he smiling like that?" Kira tried to yank her friend back into the bathroom.

Clare gasped. "Because I don't have on underwear, remember?"

The porter looked disappointed as Clare was dragged back inside. Kira looked as if she wanted to laugh, but Clare was thankful she had the good sense not to. Their situation was too dire.

"That won't work." Clare tried to catch her breath. "Any other suggestions?"

"What does the brochure say?" Kira looked wary as she eyed the bathroom door. "What do you think they'll do to us if they get in?"

"I told you, I don't even know what *they* are." Clare flipped frantically through the brochure and stopped. "Didn't you listen to anything at orientation?"

"No, I was...distracted," Kira had the good grace to blush. She came to sit by Clare, reading over her shoulder. "You?"

"No, I was being fought over by two lycans."

"Good thing the right lycan won."

"Yeah," Clare grinned, looking completely girly. "I really like him. He's...sweet, but not sweet. Do you know what I mean?"

"I understand completely." Kira looked around and laughed. "Hey, look at the tub. At least they're not cherubs."

Clare glance over, laughing slightly to see horrific snakelike creatures wrapping around the faucet. "Mmm, that's much more romantic. Although I do prefer serpents to little flying babies."

"Yeah, Dominik's serpent," Kira teased. Suddenly, the doorknob rattled and a loud knocking sounded. Kira jumped and began digging through her purse, looking for a weapon. Pulling out her Super-Stimulator 9000, she wielded it like a sword.

Clare looked at her friend and fought hard to hold in her laughter. Now wasn't the time for it. No, now they needed to make a break for it. Clare nodded and took a step toward the door. She shoved the towel cabinet out of the way and flipped the lock. Kira moved in close by her side. The knob twisted and the door burst open.

In a flash, Kira struck, coming in direct contact with her target. Clare screamed and kicked, attempting to hit anything.

"Ouch! Stop that!" Dominik yelled.

Clare stopped in mid-kick and lost her balance. Dominik's strong arms wrapped around her and kept her from cracking her head on the marble tub. She looked up into his eyes and relief washed over her. Clutching to his neck, she sprinkled grateful kisses along his cheek.

"*Mmm*, this is much better than being flogged by a vibrator. Although the thought of flogging you with it is piquing my interest." He laughed lightly. Clare pulled back, knowing her cheeks had to be bright red. His grin widened, confirming it.

“Kira?” Braden asked, panicked, as he barged through the door, gathering Kira into his arms. He held her close before inspecting her for injury. “I woke and you weren’t there. I felt your fear. Please don’t ever wander off on the boat again without telling me where you’re going. I would not survive if anything happened to you.”

Clare glanced at her friend and couldn’t help but smile when she saw the look of love on her face. Feeling faint, she let Dominik lift her into his arms. Without a backward glance, he carried her from the bathroom.

Chapter Seven

Kira wrapped her arms tighter around Braden as he carried her into their cabin. Her shopping bags hit along his back in even thumps. He’d barely spoken a word since he’d found her huddled in the bathroom with Clare. He had lectured her about the folly of scaring him, then snatched her up and stormed off with her. The strange creatures were nowhere to be seen. Kira grinned, hugging tighter to her big, strong man.

It felt good to be in his protective arms, knowing that she was desired. He lifted her higher and put her face closer to his. His blue eyes swirled with a dangerous fire that left her shivering. Weakly, she gasped, “Braden?”

“Never wander off like that again.” His tone was stern.

“You already said that.”

“Well, it is good to know that you were listening to me. Do I have your word that you’ll not do that again—*ever*?”

“I didn’t. . . I mean we didn’t. We came straight back to our room only it wasn’t our room anymore.” Kira hugged herself tight against him, trembling against his hold. Braden lowered her to the cabin floor.

“Didn’t you hear the horn?” Braden frowned. His eyes still glittered with his emotions and she realized he was scared.

“What horn?”

“Signifying the boat change,” Braden sighed in exasperation.

“Is that what that was?” Kira ran her hands over his body, letting them glide aimlessly. “I didn’t know. I just thought it was some time to change the deck hands sort of thing.”

“Didn’t you listen at orientation?” A small smile came to his pale features.

“No,” she admitted. “I was thinking of other things.”

A manly brow lifted ever so slightly. “Like what?”

“Like what I wanted to do to you.” She slowly stripped off her clothes. Her dress slid from her shoulders, baring the leather corset she’d kept on when shopping with Clare. Her breasts were bare, jutting above the black leather in wicked invitation. As the dress slid over her hips, Braden’s eyes lit with

a different emotion—pure, primitive lust. “*And* what I want you to do to me.”

Kira slowly backed up before turning to crawl on top of the bed. Staying on all fours, she wiggled her ass in invitation, parting her legs. She whipped her hair over her shoulder to look at him, watch him.

Braden slowly stripped off his clothing, first the black silk, then his tight leather pants. His cock rose proudly from his hips, pulsing and strong. She loved his cock, wanted it in her. He pumped his fingers over it in long, hard strokes. Kira wiggled her ass again and she moaned at the erotic sight of him touching himself.

“Braden, please,” she begged. She moved to stand, ready to go and drag him to the bed.

“Don’t move,” he ordered, pumping his fisted hand harder. He narrowed his gaze on her round ass and he licked his lips. Still stroking his hard flesh, he came to stand behind her. “Part your legs wider. Let me see how wet you are.”

Kira obeyed, liking that he commanded her. Her hips wiggled again, thrusting against the air with her rampant need. Panting, she begged again, “Braden, please. I want you.”

“I like it when you beg for me, Kira.”

Coming forward, he smacked her hard on the side of her ass. Kira’s hips jerked and she moaned loudly in pleasure. She glanced around, seeing the reflection of her ass in a mirror from across the room. The stinging imprint of his palm was on her flesh. Her eyes closed and she turned her face forward. She heard a drawer open and close behind her. Her pussy began to throb, dripping with her cream, her needy desire.

“Ah, you like that, don’t you, love?”

“Yes!” she cried, wiggling in hopes that he would spank her again. She reached her hand up and grabbed her breasts, pinching the nipples hard in turn. He smacked her again but this time his hand didn’t leave her cheek. It slid over her flesh, dragging lubricant over her skin and into the cleft of her ass. He rubbed along the tight rosette he found there, rimming it, readying her for him.

Kira jerked again, moaning in approval. His weight shifted on the bed. A loud buzzing started and she shivered to feel the Super-Stimulator 9000 rubbing hard against her clit. With a forceful hand, he pushed her over. She fell forward on the bed, ass in the air, breasts pressed along the mattress. Braden groaned.

“I’ve wanted to fuck this tight ass of yours since the first moment I saw it,” he admitted. He sounded breathless. He continued to rub her with the giant vibrator as he drew his cock to tease her lubricated cleft. “And I am going to fuck your slick cunt with your little toy as I do it. I’m going fuck you so hard you won’t be able to walk from this room for the rest of the trip.”

Kira moaned. She pressed back into him, ready, offering. “Do it, oh yes, please, Braden, do it! Fuck me! Fuck me now!”

At her plea he thrust the vibrator hard into her. She screamed in pleasure. She rode the toy, thrusting her ass back and forth as she took it deep. The idea of him watching her take it excited her. He groaned and the motion of the toy slowed enough to allow him to press the tip of his cock into her tight hole. Kira’s body tightened with anticipation. He inched his hard cock in and she bit down on her lower lip, attempting to calm the screams within her.

“Ah,” he groaned. “Your ass is so fucking tight. Oh, that’s it love, take my cock. Oh, yeah, take all of it.”

Kira growled, thrusting herself hard against him, burying his cock and the vibrator to the hilt. She was so full. She felt him shake before he began to drive his hips into her repeatedly. His balls smacked against her clit in the process, knocking the vibrator deeper.

She gripped the sheets and bit at the pillow. Sensory overload loomed and she feared that she’d pass out from the joy of it all. Braden lay along her back, still pumping his rigid cock hard into her tight ass. He nuzzled his face down near her neck and moaned softly.

“Let me taste you, Kira, let me drink from you while I enjoy*all* that your glorious body has to offer.” Braden’s voice was strained. “On my honor, you will take pleasure in it as well.”

Sharp teeth grazed over her skin. His connection to her was strong and she felt his emotions inside her body as if they were her own. He wanted,*needed*, to bite her. He wanted her blood, wanted to mark her completely. She was surprised by how deep the hunger was, how much he ached for her. Kira shivered to find she wanted it as well.

The raw need joining them was too much for Kira. She bucked against him, screaming for him to take her, taste her, fuck her. He obliged, moving his lips to kiss her throat, sucking it hard. She could tell the moment he was going to bite and braced herself for the sharp pain of it. White heat hit against her flesh. Braden moaned, nearly stopping his body’s movements as he began to suck along her throat, drinking of her. To her surprise, the pain quickly faded away, being replaced by pleasures she’d never known before.

Tiny noises escaped her throat and she found that Braden’s moans matched hers. He began to move, taking her body as he took her blood, demanding everything from her. Kira let him have it. She knew she belonged to him completely now. Their joined cries sounded in the cabin and he rode her relentlessly, pushing and pulling at her body.

The vibration to her wet pussy, the sweet sucking of his mouth on her neck and the strong, smooth glide of Braden’s flesh in her ass sent her over the edge. Kira screamed, climaxing the hardest she ever had in her life.

Braden’s body burst as her clenching muscles spasmed against his length. His seed gushed into her and she knew he’d be left drained and weak. Letting her go, he kissed her neck gently. Kira’s body slid from his as he turned the vibrator off, tossing it aside. Braden slid down next to her on the bed and wrapped his arm around her tightly, protectively pulling her into his body for a long time. Kira lay on her stomach, unable to move. Opening her mouth, her lips worked as she tried to speak but only a low whimper came out.

“*Mmmm*, we’re not done yet.” He groaned, pushing up from her embrace. Kira shivered as he stumbled to the bathroom. Water started in the shower. Coming back to the bed, he lifted her up.

Her arms wrapped around him as he carried her to the shower. He set her down, letting water pelt their skin. Taking soap, he lathered it up and began to heat her anew. She couldn’t believe how fast she’d fallen in love with him. It was as if she’d loved him, or the idea of him, her entire life and now he had finally found her.

Braden smiled and she knew he didn't need to hear her words. She could feel his emotions as if they were her own. Quietly, he said, "Yes, darling, I know. I love you, too. We are forever. You are my wife and I shall never let you go."

* * * * *

"You don't have to carry me. I'm all right to walk." Clare held onto Dominik's neck as he brought her to the cabin door.

"No. I'm not letting you out of my sight ever again." Dominik's growl was possessive. Her shopping bags were in his hand, bouncing along his leg. One of his hands left her only long enough to turn the knob.

A scream sounded from Kira's room and Clare felt her cheeks heating with a blush. She giggled, but said seriously, "I think you mean this week. After the cruise, we'll be going our separate ways."

Dominik frowned. "Why would I leave you? I told you, *ZAychik mov*, you belong only to me now. You are mine."

Clare shivered, looking deep into his dark eyes. "When you say it like that, it sounds like forever."

Dominik's brows rose in question. "Of course I mean forever. You are my wife, we are mated. And, as soon as you bear my child, you will become like me. The Elders have chosen it. You are my fate and I, yours."

"Are you saying that I will be a lycan?" Clare studied him carefully. His arms didn't let her go.

Again Kira's cries of pleasure sounded from the other room. Clare shivered, growing excited by the sound. A slow grin came to Dominik's lips, as if he could smell her longing.

"Yes, you will be lycan. Does this news upset you?"

Clare thought about it. It didn't upset her at all. It felt right. It felt like her destiny. "No. And you say we're married and that we'll have a family together?"

"Yes," he answered, swooping down to kiss her lightly. He kicked off his shoes as he walked. "Even now my child grows in you."

"But I thought you said you'd had your immunization shots? How can I be pregnant?" Clare felt pleasure trying to curl inside her. The lycan way of just going for what you wanted was going to take some getting used to.

"I said we have no need to worry. When you accepted me into your heart, we connected completely. I felt the moment you let me in. We are one, *ZAychik mov*."

"*ZAychik mov*?"

"My little bunny." Dominik smiled.

"Don't wolves eat bunnies?" she giggled, liking the pet name.

"Ah, that we do," he growled. His eyes lit with meaning. "And I will enjoy feasting on you every night for

the rest of forever. We are forever.”

“Yes,” she said softly, giving him a light kiss. There was no point in denying it. Her head was slowly catching up to what her body had known all along. Their lips joined and her heart felt as if it would explode from the sudden fullness inside her. She was overwhelmed with emotions, emotions she couldn’t even begin to fight. Her body hummed. She didn’t want to fight her feelings. Dominik was everything she’d ever wanted, everything she dreamt about but was too afraid to ask for. She felt him as she felt her own soul. He was a part of her. In a whisper, she said to his lips, “I love you.”

“I know. And I have loved you since the moment I saw you in the park. It was so hard not to go to you then. But I knew I had to wait, as did Braden. For only on this ship could the Elders grant you eternity.”

“Then, Kira...”

“Yes, when her baby is born she will become like Braden. She will be a vampire.”

“Then she’ll never be able to have any more children?” It was funny how the very thought of Kira being a mother had seemed absurd to her but now she was concerned that her friend would only be able to have one child.

“No,” Dominik said softly. “They will be able to have as many children as they choose to have. It is just that the conversion process could harm the child that already grows within her womb. Once the conversion is complete, she will still be able to bear many children, as will you.”

Clare continued to kiss him, loving his taste, his feel. He was the other half of her soul. “Where are we going?”

Dominik grinned. Sheepishly, he said, “The shower. I can’t get your little show out of my head. Only this time, I’m going to join you.”

Clare didn’t even blush at the bold admission. Dominik set her down and moved to turn on the water. When he looked back at her, she was completely naked. She stood proudly before him. She pressed him back into the stall, wetting his clothes against his body.

“I believe you said I could suck on this later,” she growled aggressively. She felt a change inside her, an aggressive need, and wondered if already the lycan she would become was starting to show within her emotions. She felt empowered, bold. She grabbed his long, hard cock and massaged it through the wet leather of his pants. “It’s later.”

Dominik growled as she sank to her knees. The shower pounded her skin, flowing over her budding nipples, hitting her back and hair. She tugged the wet leather from his hips, freeing his large cock. Clare gasped, growing moist by just looking at his wet length. Dominik threw the shirt from his shoulders before kicking out of the pants. Clare picked his pants up and tossed them out of the stall. She reached behind her and pulled the door closed.

She rubbed her hands over his thighs. Her mouth opened. Gripping him, she took his hard length aggressively into her mouth. She hungered for the feel of him inside her. She sucked him, hard and strong, drinking the water from his rigid shaft as she played with his heavy balls. Dominik grabbed her hair, thrusting against her throat as he fucked her mouth. She tried to relax against him but his size was too much to take in.

His body tensed beneath her fingers. She relished his strength and her control over his very being. He gripped her shoulders and, with a growl, he pulled her off him.

Dominik's eyes glittered with golden promise as he forced her against the stall wall. His hair lay flat against his head. Water rolled over his face. Hungrily, he leaned in to kiss her. His dipped his finger to rub along her swollen, aching clit. Clare moaned, parting her legs to urge him inside.

There was no need for words. A deeper understanding passed between them until they knew what the other wanted, needed. Dominik lifted her up. She held onto him as he thrust his cock hard inside her wet pussy. She gasped as he filled her, stretching her body around his.

When she relaxed from the initial penetration of his fullness, he began to move, stroking within her hard and deep. Their heavy breaths mingled. He found her breasts with his lips, biting lightly at the nipples until she screamed his name. He pumped his hips, rocking them hard against her, burying himself to the hilt. As he felt her tight passage gripping him, he thrust faster, making her ride the brink of her hard, jerking orgasm.

Her muscles racked and clenched his shaft. It was too much. He exploded inside her, rocking back and forth in the flowing cream of her body as he met with full release. His seed washed inside her, marking her forever as his. And when the trembling stopped, he still held her to him, keeping himself deep inside her.

"I love you," Clare said softly, weak and so in love.

"And I you, *Zaychik mov*," Dominik answered, kissing her deeply. "And now we truly are forever. We owe the powers that be much for our happiness, for bringing us to this ship. Let us pray that others find their way together as we have."

The End

About Mandy M. Roth:

I grew up fascinated by creatures that go bump in the night. From the very beginning I was odd and creative—a combo every mother hopes for. After studying art all the way through school, I majored in it at college. One rather unexpected child later, I changed my major and finished with a great balance of art and business. I'm working on my MBA with a concentration in marketing but it's taken a back seat while I plug away at the keyboard.

I live in Ohio with my husband and three boys. They definitely keep me busy. Between convincing one he really doesn't need to have his eyebrow pierced, listening to the middle one's philosophy on life and pulling the youngest off the countertop, I do manage to eek in a very small amount of writing time during the day. More often than not, my writing is done from 8pm until 3 am.

If the following years are half as good as my first one in writing, I'll be a happy gal! I'm doing something I love, meeting tons of new people, have the greatest readers in the world and the support of my family. The only thing I still don't have is that hot lycan on a motorcycle. I'm working on it, though.

About Michelle M. Pillow:

Born and still living in the Midwest, Michelle M Pillow has always had an active imagination. Ever since she can remember, she's had a strange fascination with anything supernatural--ghosts, magical powers, and oh...vampires. What could be more alluring than being immortal, all-powerful, and eternally beautiful? After discovering historical romance novels in high school, it was only natural that the supernatural and romance elements should someday meet in her wonderland of a brain. She's glad they did, for their children have been pouring onto the computer screen ever since.

She fell madly in love with and married a tattoo artist/body piercer, who is her personal "knight in colorful armor". They own a successful tattoo and body piercing studio. Her vivacious daughter and loving husband constantly attempt to plague her home with new pets. So far they've managed to get two prairie dogs, countless fish, two cats, a dog and one African Grey parrot past her guard--at least, that is all she has seen so far.

Michelle would love to hear from you and tries to answer her emails in a timely fashion. That is if the current hero will let her go long enough to check the computer.

Mandy and Michelle welcome mail from readers. You can write to them c/o Ellora's Cave Publishing at 1337 Commerce Drive, #13, Stow, OH 44224.

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