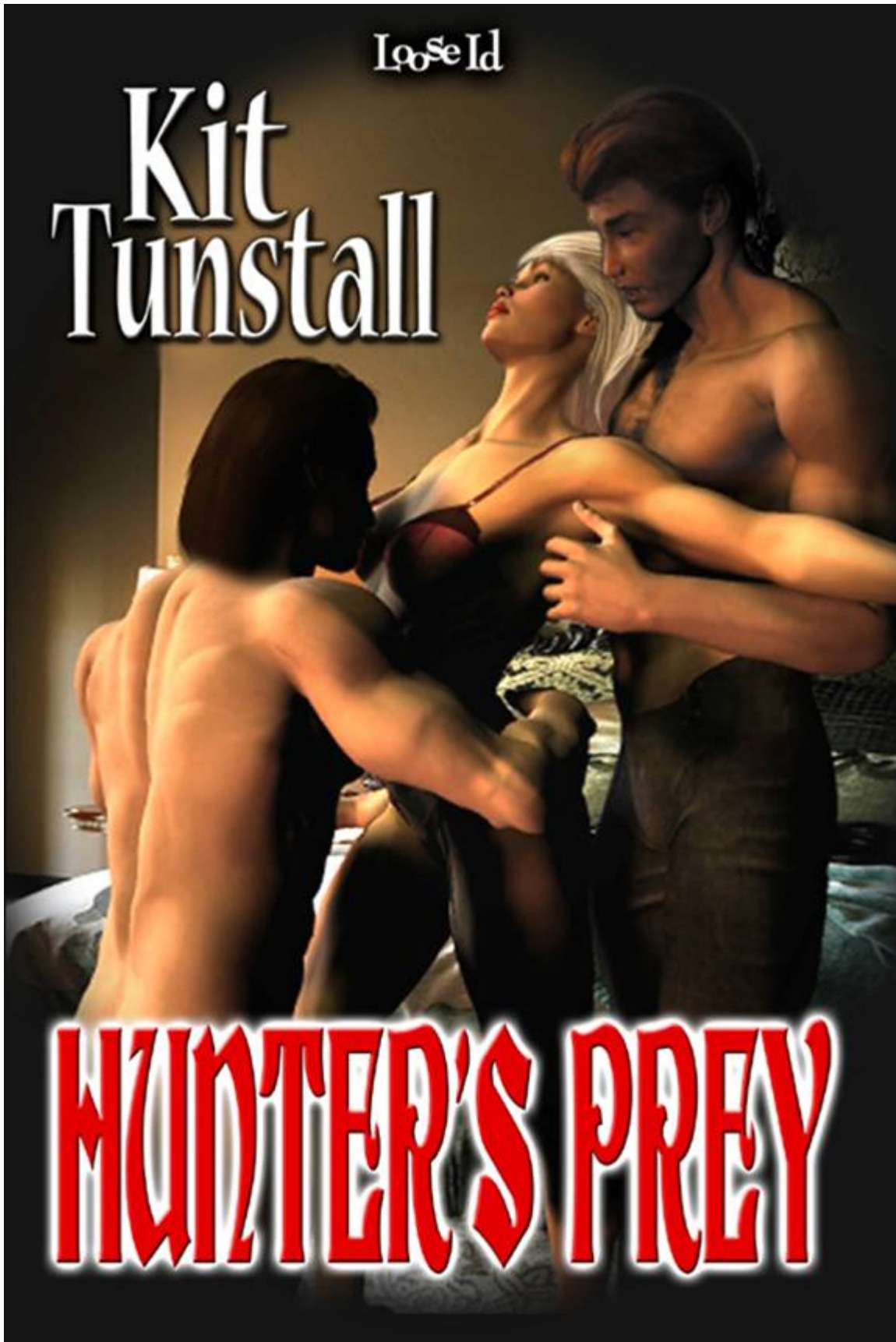


Loose Id

Kit
Tunstall



HUNTER'S PREY

Praise for the writing of Kit Tunstall

Hunter's Prey

Agent Shaun O'Grady thought vampires were just beasts in need of extermination. Boy, do Armand and Foster prove her wrong! Those sexy master vamps proceed to show her a thing or three about their kind, starting with the fallacy that they're definitely not cold-blooded. Steamy ménage scenes and a touching story make this one worth the read!

-- Jet Mykles, author of *Dark Elves 1: Taken* (Loose Id)

Hunter's Prey is one of those books you pick up to read with plenty of cold drinks, an ice pack, and your toys at the ready. I was riveted from the first exciting page and closed the file with a satisfied smile. Shaun, Armand, and Foster were lovingly detailed and believable. I'll never look at my favorite dessert, Bananas Foster, without smiling. Kit Tunstall has done it again.

-- Lena Austin, author of *Sex World: Assassin* (Loose Id)

A riveting tale from beginning to end. Ms. Tunstall definitely proves that three's company in this steamy romance.

-- Eve Vaughn, author of *Blood Brothers: GianMarco's Muse* (Loose Id)

HUNTER'S PREY

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This book is rated:

 SCORCHING

For substantial explicit sexual content, graphic language, violence, and situations that some readers may find objectionable (multiple partners).

Hunter's Prey

Kit Tunstall

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Chapter One

“Nervous, O’Grady?” asked Torres, Shaun’s mentor and her partner for this mission.

Shaun looked up from the sights of her rifle. “No, Torres.” She aimed for cool professionalism, but her tone betrayed a hint of a squeak. To distract herself, she checked the alignment of the sights once again.

Was she really going in there with the sole purpose of eliminating the necros?

Torres shook his head, whipping strands of dark hair over his olive-toned face. When he spoke, the toothpick clamped between his lips barely moved. "Listen, it's normal, okay? This is your first time going on a real mission against the necros. Just remember to not let your fear interfere with your job."

"Yes, sir." Shaun was more concerned with her doubts interfering than fear overwhelming her. For months, ever since one of her sisters joined a group fighting for the rights of necros and began haranguing Shaun about the Agency, the question of whether or not this was a noble way to spend her life had festered in her mind. Finally, she had decided the only way to put the quandary to rest was to go on a mission, surrender to training, and silence the voice in the back of her brain once and for all.

He clapped her on the shoulder. "You'll do fine. Aim for the heart, brain, or spinal column, and you'll put 'em down."

Shaun forced a confident smile, wishing the nausea churning in her stomach would disappear before they entered the mansion. Three vans that had conveyed agents from the *Necro sapien* Containment Agency lined the high-walled perimeter and gate barring the walkway to the mansion. The lead van blocked the gate, keeping it from opening more than a few inches, allowing just enough room for the men and women to slip through the wrought-iron gate, but not allowing an easy escape for any of the necros who might be too young to fly.

Once again, she checked the chamber of her rifle, reassured by the sight of the gleaming .50-caliber silver rounds. Silver wouldn't kill a necro, but it slowed them down enough to allow an agent to make a second shot or lop off their head, if the first strike hadn't hit a vital area. She repeated that crisply in her mind, reviewing her training.

Six years of training, she realized with a start. Six years of her life had gone into becoming an agent, of working to be one of the elite who tracked down the necros and made the world a safer place for humans. Everything came down to tonight. It was her first live mission, and though she had been through countless simulations, Shaun knew it would be different once they were in the mansion. She hoped this assignment would be simple and straightforward, validating her career choice and dedication to the Agency's cause.

She cast assessing eyes upon the towering structure, reminiscent of some kind of spooky castle straight out of a gothic novel. After being hunted for so long, she was surprised the necros still clung to their old habitats and ways. The mansion, perched high on a bluff on the central California coastline, might as well have had a neon sign advertising it as a vampire haven. The crumbling façade, single remaining spire, and air of gloom gave it away as such, just as surely as the cold readouts on their thermal imaging pinpointed more than twenty necros holed up inside, waiting for sunset.

"Move out." Chief Gordie didn't bother to keep his command quiet. Any necro older than a couple of decades already knew the squad had assembled outside. They could smell human blood from three blocks away, even if the team's beating hearts hadn't given away their presence. This mission wasn't about stealth. It was about efficient extermination.

She tried to shrug off her squeamishness now that the time was at hand to actually kill necros. They were dangerous and unpredictable, and they needed to be eliminated. Only then would society return to the way it had been once upon a time, before Dr. Stoker proved the existence of necros. Knowing that wasn't much help to calm her nerves, because Shaun had never killed anything. That was a detriment to this job.

“They’re already dead. You’re giving them eternal rest,” she whispered under her breath as she fell in line beside Torres. She double-checked the cinch at her waist. The lightweight nylon vest held all the weapons necessary for close-quarters combat with a necro: garlic spray, holy water, a crucifix, and a Beretta filled to capacity with silver rounds. The sheath on the side secured a lightweight *katana* sword she had opted to use for the unpleasant task of cutting off the heads once the necros were down. She had trained so long with the sword that it was an extension of her left hand when she held it.

She followed the line of agents moving toward the mansion in a slow jog, the rifle a solid, reassuring weight across her arm. Shaun glanced at the sun, burning high in the sky, and took confidence from it. Only a master vampire would have no fear of the burning rays, and intelligence didn’t indicate there was an MP with this covey, so even if their team didn’t successfully eliminate all the necros, they would be forced to stay in the mansion until another squad arrived.

At the front door of the mansion, one pane of the French window was completely broken out. A spider had taken up residence and built an intricate web in the abandoned space. The ugly creature clung serenely to its web as one of the agents kicked the door, which revealed its age by splintering on contact with the heavy combat boot.

As everyone else around her did the same, Shaun turned on the miner’s light on her helmet and activated the lights on each shoulder of her vest. The necros preferred pitch-black, and any illumination she could get might mean the difference between finding one before it found her first.

Torres tapped her shoulder with his rifle, giving her a wide grin around the toothpick, now showing fraying from his teeth. “Kill ’em all, Rookie.”

She grinned in return, ignoring the way her stomach turned over when she took her first step into the darkness sheltering the necros. The silence surprised her. Not the furtive silence of someone hiding, but rather the silence of a tomb. Truly, it felt like nothing living moved in the space, except for the agents.

With cautious steps, she pressed onward, conscious of the others fanning out, each team following their assigned pattern of movement. Having Torres off to her left reassured her but didn’t hold back all her fear. Sweaty palms forced Shaun to hold the rifle in one hand while blotting the other hand against her vest. After repeating the process, she grasped the rifle in a secure hold once more.

The darkness seemed to swallow her whole as she moved deeper into the house. The lights on her helmet and jacket did nothing to cut through the thick gloom. It seemed almost supernatural. Surely, the black shutters on the windows couldn’t account for this degree of obscurity?

A scream from the opposite direction of their location broke Shaun’s concentration. It sounded fully human, and she had to resist the urge to turn around to flee. No way she was going to let fear ruin her career, not after spending six years training for this.

A door appeared out of the shadows on Shaun’s right. Her stomach clenched, and sweat trickled down her back. With a jerk of his head, Torres indicated they would investigate. He held up his hand while communicating with operations. “Torres here. Do you get any readings from the room O’Grady and I are about to enter?”

“Negative,” said the cool female voice on the other end. “The insulation in the rooms is preventing our portable scanner from operating optimally. We have a call in to the Agency to reposition the satellite, but it’s going to take thirty minutes.”

With a shake of his head, Torres moved toward the door, gesturing for Shaun to keep close. In light of what they were soon to face, the rifle felt too flimsy as she gripped it firmly, falling back to allow Torres to take point. He tested the knob, and when it yielded, he shoved open the door quickly, falling back to the side of the doorway, rifle extended.

Shaun surveyed the carnage of what had once been an elegant sitting room, decorated in Victorian style, hissing with disgust from what she saw in the illumination provided by a single Tiffany-style lamp on an ornate stand. Blood on the walls glistened like the grotesque medium of a madman painting in a psych ward. The dark crimson shade created a nauseatingly appropriate backdrop for the splintered furniture, broken in what appeared to be a feeding frenzy. A pile of remains on a colorful Persian rug weren't easily identified, but strictly on instinct, Shaun knew they were human. Any elegance in the room had disappeared when it became a dumping ground for the remains of the necros' prey. Finding some of her doubts squelched by proof of the bestial nature of necros, she forced down the bile churning in her stomach and followed her partner inside, knowing they had to clear each room before moving on.

Her boots squelched when she stepped onto the carpet, and she looked down reflexively, gagging at the pool of blood she had stepped into. Pool, hell -- more like a lake. Since the necros wouldn't have wasted that much, it could only have come from multiple feeding happening at once.

Echoing her thoughts, Torres said in a low voice, "Must have been a feast."

"Their last meal." Anger overwhelmed her fear as she recognized the remains of a pre-teen amid the pile of bodies stacked haphazardly near the fireplace when she moved closer.

By focusing on her mental training, Shaun managed to ignore the rest of the bloodbath around her and concentrate on searching the room. She walked nearer the fireplace, aiming her rifle up, and firing off three shots. The narrow, dark space would have been a perfect hiding place for a necro, but none hid there. If one had, it would have crashed into the hearth the moment a silver bullet penetrated its flesh. The excruciating pain wouldn't have allowed it to maintain its mastery over gravity.

They finished looking in the rest of the nooks and crannies, and then Torres directed her toward the door. He followed behind her, pausing to sprinkle garlic water on the knob and spray paint a large red X on the door, indicating the room was clear. Should any necros try to take refuge there, the garlic water would be a nasty surprise. Thanks to Agency chemists, an added chemical would interact with the coldness of a necro should they touch it, turning the doorknob phosphorescent blue to let the agents know the room might have been compromised.

They went ten feet before discovering another door. Torres again gestured he would take point, and Shaun didn't argue. As a rookie, it was her duty to defer to his judgment. And she wasn't eager to go blindly into the room. Having the scanners fail was a blow to their efficiency and placed all the agents in greater danger.

He moved low and quick, checking the knob. Upon finding it locked, Torres used his rifle to blast the door. As it swung open from the kick he applied, he moved inside, hunkered into a crouch. Shaun was right behind him.

An inhuman shriek pierced the air. Two necros rushed out of the darkness, fangs bared, and hands grasping with obvious need. They lunged, and Shaun grunted, falling to the floor under the beast's impact. It slashed at her face, barely missing her eyes, and she screamed. The creature drew back, its strangely elongated fangs protruding obscenely.

Upon closer examination, as she brought up her rifle to block the necro's fangs weren't extra long. The flesh on its face had shrunk, just as it had everywhere else. It looked more monster than human in its current state of starvation. Although she had seen victims of their feedings with her own eyes, this vampire's emaciated state indicated it had not received blood for quite a while, or had subsisted on only a small quantity.

The necro snarled at her, trying to wrench away the rifle, so it could tear into her throat. She forced aside her clinical examination, reminding herself a starving necro was even more dangerous than one who fed regularly and was in good shape. The scent of her blood must be driving it mad.

Her fingers slipped on the rifle, and the talons of the necro dug into her hand. Shaun yelped and released her hold on her gun. The necro fell forward, unprepared for the slackening of her resistance. Even as it geared up to feast on her neck, she was reaching for the sprayer of garlic water. Her fingers were nimble, grasping the sprayer to bring it close to the necro's eyes. The thing was oblivious, its fangs brushing against her carotid just as she let loose a steady stream. The creature's terrible screams filled the room as it writhed in reaction to the pain. Distracted and in agony as the necro was, she found it easy to roll away from her attacker to gain her feet.

Automatically, she scooped up her rifle and turned to look for her partner, freezing when she saw him battling a necro in better shape than her opponent had been. While scrawny, this one didn't appear to have been starved to the extent of the other one.

Taking a step closer, she leveled the rifle at the necro's head, able to identify this one as female because she was in better shape than her companion, with enough meat left on her bones to reveal withered breasts and slight curves. "Let him go."

A cold laugh escaped through her gaping maw, but that was the only response she gave. Her eyes never wavered from Torres's pulse pounding steadily in his throat, and her hands remained firm around his wrists, holding him to the floor with what seemed like a minimal expenditure of effort.

"Shoot it."

At his words, her finger tightened on the trigger. She made sure the red dot was centered on the necro's head. Everything was in place, without the necro paying any attention to her. Now was the perfect time to shoot, before the woman pinning her partner to the floor conquered her bloodlust and came after Shaun.

Shaun tried to depress the trigger, but her hand trembled. Her finger slipped off, moistened with her sweat. She blinked and repositioned on the guard, ready to fire. Except she couldn't take the shot. Mouth dry, Shaun tried again, but found her finger wouldn't cooperate.

"What the fuck're you waiting for? Kill this fucking cunt."

His harsh words shocked Shaun back into action, and she managed to fire the rifle, but didn't compensate for the kick. The shot angled away from the necro, causing the bullet to lodge in her back instead of taking out the back of her head as she had planned.

With a howl that was part rage and part pain, she reeled away from Torres, frantically scrabbling at the wound, as if trying to tear out the lump of silver that was no doubt burning through her skin.

As if trapped in molasses, Shaun reacted slowly. Before she could reach Torres, he gained his feet and decapitated the necro with his sword in one smooth motion. For a moment, she stared at the head as it rolled toward her, stopping inches from her feet. The expression on the severed head was one of terror, and she turned to throw up on the carpet. Confusion filled her upon seeing its fear. If the necro feared death, was it really dead? Did the transformation mimicking death necros underwent classify them as dead if they still walked around? Would they be afraid of their existence ending if they weren't alive, by some measure?

As she lost the contents of her stomach, Torres dealt with the necro she had left blinded from the garlic water, removing its head with a clean slice. "Buck up." Although insensitive, the words weren't delivered harshly. He even patted her shoulder as he walked by. "There are more where those came from."

With a nod, pretending a certainty in the mission of exterminating necros she hadn't felt for some time, Shaun helped him examine the rest of the room, determine it was clear, mark the door, and move on down the hall. As she followed him, she tried to push aside the doubts crowding her mind, doubts that had crept in more with each passing day that brought her closer to exterminating them. Telling herself her second thoughts came from experiencing the necros' deaths firsthand didn't explain the doubts she'd had before entering the mansion. The necros' fear had shaken her, but she should have expected that. Like any beast, they were driven by the survival instinct. It didn't mean anything. Not really. She wasn't still questioning having devoted six years of her life training to wipe out the necros, who posed a threat to humans' way of life. Was she? Not because of that incident. It must just be aftermath or reaction fueling her doubts, she decided, trying to push the thoughts from her mind. She had to continue with the mission, to prove to herself she had made the right decision in becoming an agent.

At the next door, a chill touched her spine, and she hesitated, wanting to tell Torres not to open the door. Something was on the other side, and she didn't want to face it, but knew not to express her fears to her partner. He would rightfully dismiss them as nerves.

He checked the knob and opened the door upon finding it unlocked. Her sense of danger increasing with each step, she couldn't help feeling they were making a mistake as she followed him into the room.

The darkness was absolute. Their lights didn't cut through any of it. It was so thick it settled on her skin like a cloying caress. The coldness in the air made the hairs on her neck stand up. The quality of gloom indicated it wasn't natural. "Torres?"

"Relax, O'Grady." He sounded as unflappable as always.

"I don't like this. I think we should ..." *Get the hell out of here right now.* "Call for backup."

"Just calm down and switch to your night scope."

Maintaining a tight grip on the rifle, Shaun used one hand to flip down the eyepiece on her helmet. The scope was supposed to magnify any ambient light by 80,000, but the room remained as purely black as it had been before. She flipped the useless scope back up, removing it from her line of sight. "Now what?"

"We just need to --" He broke off suddenly, with only a tiny gasp of air.

She reached out in front of her. Her hand brushed flesh. Cold, cold flesh. Arms came around her, locking her into an embrace as solid as steel. Shaun screamed. "Torres?!"

"He will not answer."

The whispery voice of the necro caused shivers to course down her spine -- shivers not solely inspired by fear. The husky male pitch made heat pool in her stomach, and her limbs went numb.

He was mesmerizing her. There wasn't another explanation. She tried to school her body to resist, but melted against her captor when he lifted her into his arms. Shaun realized there was another necro in the room as he stepped up beside her captor. Although she wouldn't have thought her fear could reach any greater heights, it swelled into a ball filling her throat. Short gasps were all she could manage.

They strode into the hallway, and the thick gloom dissipated for just an instant, allowing her to see her captors' handsome countenances. Black hair framed the face of one, and caramel-brown curls distinguished the other. The darkness of their hair served to emphasize the paleness of their skin, although it was flushed with a hint of pink. Torres's blood had given them that glow, no doubt.

Caught up in a mind-haze, she struggled for a rational thought. They moved up flights of stairs, one after another. Finally, they exited through the attic and stepped onto the roof. Sunlight seared her eyes, and the jolt brought a return of reasoning. Shaun held her breath, waiting for the necros to burst into flames. After a moment, she moaned her fear. The intelligence had been wrong. There were two masters in attendance. How could they have missed it?

"Come, Armand, let us depart. We have what we came for, and there is nothing we can do for the younglings." Was it the brown-haired one who spoke? She couldn't be sure.

"I know, Foster." The necro holding her tightened his grip. "Damn your Agency for your persecution."

Her mind grew hazy again, and it took several minutes to realize they were flying. A scream rose in her throat, but emerged as little more than a mewl of terror when she looked down. Terrified he would drop her, she gripped the arms of the necro holding her in his arms.

Ignoring her reaction, he flew on, his companion nearby. As they traveled via levitation, not true flight, Shaun wondered if it wouldn't be better to have the necro drop her. It might be a more appealing end than whatever they would do to her once they reached a safe lair.

Chapter Two

At some point in their journey, rain fell in torrents, drenching them, and bringing a tiny measure of awareness to Shaun, enough so she could see where they were going. Not that it helped much to see the gray sky of the late afternoon or the ground whizzing by far below. All it did was make her dizzy to look down, and she closed her eyes, her heart hammering with fear.

"I won't drop you."

She gasped at the reassuring words issued from her subjugator. Surprised he would bother to try to soothe her fear, surprised even more that his words did calm her somewhat, Shaun closed her eyes tighter.

It wasn't until her feet touched ground that Shaun's eyes opened again, her head still fuzzy, but her eyes

were able to focus. The feel of solid earth underneath her boots restored lucidity enough to allow her to clearly examine the modest Mediterranean-style two-story house where they had touched down. The terra cotta tiles on the roof were barely visible against the hazy skyline, and the beige façade had a gray tinge. Despite being perched on a cliff overlooking the Pacific, the house seemed depressing and gloomy.

While the one she tentatively identified as Foster walked up the porch, digging a key from his pocket, she writhed against the man holding her, finding mental clarity brought a return of defiance. Shaun grunted with the effort, but his iron hold remained unbreakable. She sensed his amusement with her struggles and stopped resisting, determined not to provide the necro with entertainment. Also, she wanted to conserve her strength so she could be ready to escape when the opportunity presented itself. She clung to the thought of escape, the possibility like a lifeline that kept her from falling into a sobbing heap.

Armand herded her up the steps and through the door Foster had opened. Inside, black shutters covered the windows, making what would have already been a dim interior because of the rainy weather too dark for her eyes to make out details. She could see large shapes she guessed were furniture, but didn't have time to dwell on them when Armand moved her up the stairs, nudging her when she dug in her heels.

“Shall I carry you, *ma belle*?”

The underlying threat in his smooth voice, spiced with a French accent, propelled her forward, up the staircase. He pressed against her from behind, and each flex and bunch of his muscles heightened her awareness of his physical power. Warmth pooled in her stomach as the constant contact made her nipples harden. Shocked at her reaction, she stumbled to a halt near the top of the stairs, and Armand caught her, bringing her close to his body.

For a long second, she was tempted to melt into his embrace, but the reality of how different he was kept her from doing so. His skin was much cooler than hers, much cooler than it should have been, even accounting for the time they had spent in the cold rain. She shivered from being pressed so close to a necro. That shiver ignited more, reminding her how cold she was.

“The room is ready?” Foster asked, having preceded them up the stairs.

“Yes. It has been for a long while.”

On the landing, Shaun put an inch or two of space between herself and Armand, just enough to allow her mind to clear. He must be mesmerizing her to cause these reactions. *Necro sapiens* had powerful mental abilities and could project sexual magnetism their prey would find irresistible. But why would he bother? He didn't need to lure her; he'd already caught her. All three of them knew she would not be a match for two master vampires when they were ready to feed on her.

Foster unlocked a door with a key he took from his pocket. He pushed it open, and Armand propelled her forward. Shaun's mouth turned as dry as the desert as they passed through the doorway. Heavy shutters on the interior of the windows filtered out most of the daylight, but she realized it was a bedroom. Panic filled her as photos of feedings she had seen during her training days paraded through her mind. Visions of herself sprawled across the sheets, soaking them red with her blood, renewed her determination to escape.

Armand approached the bed, and her heart raced in her ears. He seemed oblivious to her kicking and writhing, continuing to move forward purposefully. In a last-ditch effort to avoid having him pin her to the bed, she latched onto his wrist with her teeth.

With a casual motion, he broke free of her mouth and dropped her onto the bed, where she landed with a harsh exhalation. The softness of the mattress broke her fall, and she bounced slightly, looking up at him. Her vision blurred, as if she were dazed. He loomed over her, and a different vision filled her mind -- of him coming down onto the bed beside her, to explore every inch of her body. Not with the intention of feeding, but of bringing them both pleasure.

She swallowed audibly, trying to erase the image from her mind, not wanting the necro to sense her emotions.

Armand turned away from her to stride back to the door, and Foster stepped into the hallway seconds before he did. Somehow, she broke her paralysis upon realizing they were going to lock her in. The thought panicked her anew. She couldn't stand to be confined in this dark space, with only thoughts of what they planned to do to her for company. She raced to the door, reaching it just as the lock clicked. In her mind, she could picture Armand removing the key and placing it in his pocket.

Loneliness and fear coupled to make her legs weak, and she sank into a crouch on the floor, squinting at the knob in the gloom, hoping it would turn.

After some time, the coldness penetrated, and she blinked, wondering why she was sitting on the floor like a faithful dog awaiting its master. She should be trying to escape this room and get away before the sun went down, when the necros attained full strength.

With that thought in mind, she got to her feet, still feeling shaky, and took stock of her weapons. They hadn't taken her belt or vest, so she still had possession of her sword, garlic water sprayer, and crucifix, which might or might not be effective, depending on whether or not they believed in -- and feared -- a religious origin for vampirism instead of a purely biological explanation. She'd lost the Beretta, and the rifle was no doubt in the room where the necros had ambushed her and Torres.

Her determination renewed by thoughts of what might have happened to her partner, Shaun examined the door first, checking the strength of the hinges, thickness of the wood, and durability of the lock. All were quality products, making the door an impenetrable barrier without either the key to the lock or an ax to break through the thick oak. She could try hacking at it with the sharp blade of the *katana*, but it would be futile, and the necros would come running before she could make any progress.

Shaun moved on to the windows filling one wall. The metal shutters groaned with resistance when she tried to open them, but she persisted, straining to roll them up. One side moved a couple of inches, but refused to go higher, and the other shutter wouldn't budge at all. Either they were rusted solid from disuse, or the necros had done something to prevent her from opening the blinds.

The only other door in the room led to a modest bathroom with no windows. She closed the door and returned to the main bedroom, frustrated by her lack of progress. The room might as well have been a fortress.

Needing time to think, Shaun went to the bed, stripping back the heavy comforter and sitting down cross-legged. Scooping off the helmet, she tossed it aside. The sound of tinkling glass indicated the miners' light had broken. What did it matter? The helmet was useless to protect her. Feeling a hint of self-pity, she brought the quilt up to her chin and huddled under it while her mind raced, trying to find a plausible means of escape from two master vampires.

* * * * *

Shaun jerked awake suddenly, roused by a noise that shattered the silence. She straightened to look around the room, wincing at the crick that had developed in her neck when she dozed off with her chin on her chest under the warmth of the comforter.

The sound came again, and she sat up. *The scrape of the key in the lock*. With speed motivated from fear, she sprang from the bed, hand on the hilt of her sword, waiting to draw until the sound of the door opening would muffle the weapon coming from its sheath. When the lock clicked, she drew the sword, moving silently to the doorway. A brown head appeared, prompting her to swing with all her strength. Rage washed through her, giving strength to the arc of her sword. She wanted to see the necro fall under her sword.

The blade lodged into his neck, sending blood spewing from the gaping wound. Instead of delight, horror filled her, killing her rush of bloodlust in an instant.

Dishes clattered to the floor as Foster intercepted the sword, keeping her from going deeper. Shaun could have told him he didn't need to bother. The sight of his blood and pain-contorted face made her freeze, unable to complete the kill. The blade was sharp enough, but she was too weak. Maybe not physically, but definitely emotionally.

Sweat made her hands slick, and she released the sword, taking a wary step back. She blotted her palms on her tight black pants, her gaze pinned on Foster. He appeared calm, despite the blood pouring from his wound. His movements were economical when he withdrew the sword, casting it over his shoulder into the hallway.

Training urged her to move, and she struck before he had fully recovered, launching herself at him. Shaun punched him in the solar plexus, pleased by the whoosh of air leaving him. Then she frowned, wondering why a necro would have air in his diaphragm.

He slumped forward, his face chalk-white. Shaun seized the advantage by striking him with the full force of her body, planning to knock him to the floor so she could slip by and hopefully from the house before Armand could stop her.

As she had planned, Foster sprawled across the floor, but she had underestimated his strength. He latched onto her, and she struggled futilely in his grasp. Losing her balance, she stumbled and fell on top of him, straddling him in an indecent fashion, frozen with shock.

“Am I interrupting?”

Her head jerked up, her eyes taking in the dark presence of Armand gliding into the room. Even in a red cashmere sweater and khakis, he looked old-world. He carried himself with the air of an ancient one. Shaun renewed her struggles to escape, but Foster held her easily. One could hardly tell his strength was recently depleted. Already, the wound had mostly healed, save for a trickle of blood, barely visible in the crimson smears adorning his neck.

“Apparently, our guest isn't hungry.”

At his words, she jerked her gaze from Foster's hazel eyes to the contents of the tray he had dropped when she attacked him. Her eyes widened when she saw a plate and normal food scattered over the hardwood floor.

With graceful movements, Armand joined them, standing just behind Shaun. His fingertips hovered on her shoulders, and they might as well have been lead weights holding her down, because she couldn't move.

He crouched lower, bringing his mouth close to her ear. His gaze was focused on Foster, but his words seemed aimed toward her. "You must be now, Foster, since she nicked you."

A wicked grin slowly curved across Foster's mouth, and his hazel eyes sparkled with enough sexual heat to make Shaun swear the temperature had just risen a few degrees. "Yeah, I'm starving."

"You were to have a reprieve before we made use of your resources, but you have changed our intent." Armand didn't sound at all regretful as he pressed against her upper back, pushing her forward.

Foster's mouth neared her neck, making Shaun whimper. Until that moment, it had been abstract that her chosen profession could mean her life. What had she been thinking? If she could do it all again, she would go back to culinary school and work weekends in her parents' chain of successful restaurants.

Her eyes widened when Armand stopped nudging her forward. She was at an awkward angle, and a gasp escaped her when Foster's erection swelled against her pussy, her tight-fitting black pants providing little barrier from his denim-clad cock.

Armand repositioned her, tilting her hips back so her pussy cradled Foster's shaft. His fingers nimbly disposed of her vest, and he tossed it aside with an air of disdain.

A moan escaped her when he crouched behind her, cupping her breasts. Confusion swirled through her, along with guilt prompted by the physical reaction of her body. Her nipples hardened under his caresses, becoming sensitive to the lightest touch.

While Armand fondled her breasts, Foster reached for her hips, and he pulled her tightly against him so he could rub his cock against her clit. How he found it so unerringly through the fabric was a mystery she contemplated for all of a second, before pleasure washed away her ability to reason.

When Armand tugged at the hem of her shirt, Shaun made a feeble attempt to stop him. Foster captured her hands, and he refused to relinquish his hold when she tried to pull away. The material inched up, followed by Armand's palm against her flesh, his skin surprisingly warm where it pressed into her belly, before sliding higher.

Shaun cried out when he pulled the shirt above her breasts and jerked off her bra. The straps had dug into her shoulders, leaving stinging areas behind, but his thumbs moving roughly across her nipples blotted out the pain. Losing all caution, she tossed back her head, revealing her neck. At that moment, she wanted Armand to take her lifeblood. The thought should have frightened her, but instead, fed her desire.

Foster continued pumping against her. Each thrust of his hips excited her swollen flesh, and her pussy was drenched with need. She wouldn't have expected the act to be so pleasurable.

She wasn't the only one receiving pleasure. When Armand shifted slightly to better cup her breasts, his cock pressed into the base of her spine. Her mind filled with images of the three of them lying naked on the bed, with Foster's length buried deep inside her pussy, while Armand stretched her anus with his penis. Phantom sensations associated with the mental images became almost real. Their grunts and moans added to her enjoyment, forcing her to the brink. Trembling, she cried out as an orgasm claimed her. Foster jerked against her, and Armand continued caressing her nipples, though he moved at a more

leisurely pace.

He leaned forward, his chin resting on Shaun's shoulder. She was too sated to protest, although common sense was returning, urging her to get away from them.

"Satisfied, Foster?"

He shook his head, tousling his brown hair. "After waiting so long, I'm not even close to replete, but I've healed. I can make do."

Silence filled the area, and Shaun swore she could hear a clock ticking, although there wasn't one in the room. The tension grew by the second, and she sensed something important was being decided.

Finally, Armand spoke. "Why deny ourselves? Our guest will do amply to satisfy our appetites." He squeezed her breasts with enough pressure to bring a mix of pleasure and pain, leaving her gasping. "All of them."

After a moment, Foster nodded. "Yes, she'll do nicely." His gaze raked over her bare breasts. "The Agency has certainly made some aesthetic changes from the early days. Twenty years ago, you would have been a burly man. His blood would have been sustaining, but the package it came in wouldn't have had the same appeal."

Anger stirred at his appraisal and nonchalant words. "That's all we are to you, isn't it? A meal? A quick fix?" She spat at him, and her anger gave her the strength to shrug away from Armand. "I'm just a blood bag, so drain me. Just get it over with and don't prolong the torture by raping me."

Armand laughed. "We haven't harmed a hair on your head ... yet. Rape is certainly an exaggeration."

"No, it isn't. You've been manipulating my mind since the moment I encountered you." She tilted her head to glare at Armand. "If you don't kill me now, I swear to you I'm going to find a way to escape, but not before I take your head for my collection." The outrageous lie should have been difficult to tell, since she had trouble with even minor falsehoods, but rage made it sound convincing.

His face darkened, and he grasped the base of her neck, tilting back her head. He lunged forward, his teeth grazing her carotid. Shaun closed her eyes, preparing for his teeth to tear into her flesh. Anticipation lengthened the time, until her nerves were screaming. Finally, she opened her eyes again, finding him in exactly the same place.

"I could take your blood." His lips tickled the sensitive skin of her neck. "It would be easy, *ma belle*, but you will last longer if we see to your pleasure along with ours. The sex will mean we have to feed more infrequently."

"I'd rather die than let you violate me again." Panic swept through her when she realized they planned to turn her into their personal sex toy for however long she lasted. Was it true? Could they feed on her pleasure as well as her blood? Unfortunately, her training hadn't covered that particular topic.

Was it simply another way for them to torture her? Perhaps it was all a bluff, to get her adrenaline racing, so her blood provided more of a kick when they drank from her.

Foster reached up to cup one of her breasts, tweaking the nipple. "You will die many times in our arms, *chérie*, but each death will be *petite* and pleasurable." He shared an unreadable look with Armand. "For

all of us.”

He slid out from under her abruptly, gaining his feet. Shaun couldn't find the strength to resist when Armand pulled her up. She faced Foster, her head bowed, as Armand stood behind her.

“First, you must clean up. You smell musty from the rain.”

“Let us see what we have acquired,” Armand said.

“You don't own me.” Shaun said the words as forcefully as she could, recognizing them as hollow. She was no match for them and couldn't escape whatever they chose to do to her. That didn't mean she wouldn't fight like hell to delay her fate.

“Yes, we do. You have belonged to us forever,*ma belle*.” Armand's voice had taken on a chill to match the room's temperature, but his fingers were gentle when they unwound the bun restraining her silver-blond hair. It fell in tangles past her breasts, and she let the strands shield her face, hoping to hide her humiliation.

Foster made a sound of appreciation, reaching out to stroke her hair. “When properly attired, you must be a beautiful woman,*chérie*.”

She turned her head away when he tried to cup her cheek. “I guess you'll never know. I didn't exactly have a chance to pack when you kidnapped me.”

His laugh was entirely too sexy and full of joy for Shaun's peace of mind. “Fortunately, this room's former occupant left many garments.” His expression clouded for just a moment, but when he blinked, he looked carefree again. “Jacqueline had a generous nature. I'm certain she wouldn't have minded loaning you her wardrobe.”

Shaun tried to dart away, but Armand's arms came around her, anchoring her to his chest. “I'm not playing dress-up for you.”

“Of course not,” said Armand in a soothing tone. “We much prefer to dress you ourselves,*petite poupée*.”

High school French lessons allowed her to translate, and she burned with resentment.*Little doll*. Despite her annoyance, she couldn't summon the will to break away from him as he herded her into the small bathroom, with Foster just a step ahead of them. As she met her gaze in the mirror, she first saw fear of the unknown. But what disconcerted her was the smoldering excitement banked in her eyes. Surely, she wasn't really looking forward to whatever perversities they planned to subject her to before the sunrise drove them back to their beds. She wasn't ready to jump on two necros intent on using her pleasure for their sustenance. It hadn't been that long since she had a lover.

Again, she reassured herself they had done something to her making her act this way. She didn't want the two vampires standing in the tiny room with her, regardless of how her body ached for more fulfillment. Her arousal was an illusion.

Foster picked up a silver-backed brush and ran it through her hair. Shaun tried to pull away, but Armand's firm hands on her upper arms kept her in place.

"Kick off your boots, *ma belle*."

Shaun shot Armand's reflection a defiant glare. "I have a name."

"Really?"

His arched eyebrow suggested amusement, and she gave her name grudgingly, not wanting to entertain him, but also not liking the constant stream of endearments whispered in French -- an entirely too sensual language under the circumstances. "It's Shaun."

A frown flashed across Foster's face, and he stopped brushing in mid-stroke. "That's a man name."

"My father's." She squared her shoulders, daring him to take issue with her being her father's namesake in lieu of him having no sons. By the time Shaun arrived, the fifth girl of six, he had given up on having a boy and let his daughter carry the name instead.

Foster returned to his self-appointed task, smoothing the tangles from her hair with the sinfully soft brush. "I meant no offense. You should have a beautiful, feminine name, such as Fleur."

Obviously, Armand had grown impatient waiting for her to comply with his command, for he knelt to pull the boots from her feet, doing so less than gently. "This one is about as delicate as a weed, Foster. The masculine moniker suits her."

That stung her pride. She could be feminine and delicate, given the appropriate occasion. It was on the tip of her tongue to retort a dress wasn't suitable for Agency fieldwork, but she bit back the words, having drawn his antagonism each time he received a reminder of her profession. Whatever they planned for her would only be that much worse if one or both were angry with her.

When her bare feet touched the cool ceramic tile, Shaun shivered. The chill pervaded her bones through the rain. She wondered why neither Armand nor Foster seemed to notice the lower temperature, but assumed it had something to do with their chemistry. A necro's core body temperature ran at sixty degrees, so why would they notice the temperature of the room, since it was only a few degrees cooler than them?

Armand's hands went to the drawstring of her pants, causing her to jump. Reflexively, she slapped his hand. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Undressing you." He examined her with a bland expression.

Her throat constricted, making it difficult to speak. "Why?"

"You stink. A bath is in order." The corner of his mouth twitched. "We would prefer not to wash your clothes at the same time."

"You're not undressing me." When he reached again for her waistband, Shaun brought up her knee, driving it into Armand's chin. With a grunt, he fell away from her, springing to his feet in a graceful leap.

The blow would have toppled a human male.

“Enough.” He practically hissed the word, and his blue eyes darkened with anger as he advanced on her.

Shooting a desperate look at Foster revealed she would find no help from him. He was a step behind his companion, an intent expression on his face. She backed away as they advanced on her, cursing her inability to meet them with equal strength. When the backs of her knees hit the side of the old-fashioned bathtub, she had to stop. There was nowhere else to go. “What are you going to do?”

Armand stepped close to her, cupping her chin in his hand. When he exerted pressure, she had no choice but to open her mouth. “Make you more biddable, you infernal ...” His voice trailed off, and he shook his head. When Foster touched his shoulder, he turned to his friend, while still holding Shaun. “You are sure she is worth the trouble?” asked Armand.

Foster nodded, conviction clear in his stance. “You are too. You’ve seen what I have.”

A frown of confusion furrowed her brow. “What are you talking about?” The words came out distorted, because of her opened mouth and constricted jaw.

“Silence.” Armand issued the command in a glacial tone.

Shaun’s eyes widened with horror as Foster took Armand’s free hand, placing a finger in his mouth. The action was sinister, but also somehow sexual, sending a convulsion of need through her pussy. Foster bit down and blood flowed freely, making her gasp with shock. Armand brought the bleeding digit to her mouth, inciting muted grunts of horror from her. As a drop of blood trickled onto her tongue, she tried to close her mouth, but found it impossible. The last thing she wanted was to be one of them.

To her surprise, he withdrew his finger, sucking on the wound for a second, until it closed. Then, he bit the finger Foster placed in his mouth, and Foster repeated the experience, with Shaun doing her best to fight. Again, after a single drop of blood touched her tongue, he pulled away, tending to his wound.

Armand’s gaze locked with hers, and she found it impossible to look away. A swirling vortex of blue sucked her in. She was aware of her muscles slackening, but couldn’t resist the compulsion to relax.

“Obey.”

With the simple word, Shaun slumped forward, all fight leaving her. A muted voice in the back of her mind urged her to continue struggling. With a determined effort, she managed to ask, “What have you done?”

“You are in our thrall,” Foster said. He shrugged. “It is only temporary.”

In a stupor, Shaun stood passively while Armand stripped off her pants and underwear. Standing naked before them stirred embarrassment, allowing her to summon the ability to cross her arms over her breasts.

“See how she resists?” Foster sounded proud.

“It is remarkable.” Armand’s closed expression revealed nothing, until he pulled her arms to her side. Heat radiated from his eyes as his gaze caressed her from head to toe. Feeling stripped bare, she once again tried to cross her arms over her breasts. “Leave them at your sides.” The harsh command had her

freezing, although her mind tried to battle his control.

A half-smile curved his lips, displaying a dimple. "Without the annoying defiance and sharp tongue, you are a magnificent woman, *ma belle* ." He nodded once, sharply. "Yes, worth the trouble indeed, Foster."

"Told you." He grinned at Shaun before beginning to shed his clothes. Armand did the same, and Shaun's gaze darted constantly between them. She wanted to feel alarm or fear, but instead, desire spread through her as each inch of their flesh became visible.

Naked, they were still a study in contrasts. Armand's olive skin glowed a warm honey shade in the amber light of the bathroom fixture, while Foster's appeared a light cream color. It didn't make him look sickly, as she might have expected. Instead, he was peaches and cream sorbet, with her tongue begging for a taste.

Her gaze slipped lower, until she was examining their cocks. Both men were aroused, but the similarities ended there. Armand wasn't circumcised, and his penis was long, with several dark veins visible under the olive skin. It jutted a little to the right, making her have to resist the urge to grasp the shaft in her hand and align it straight ahead. A dusting of hair smattered across his balls did nothing to shield them.

The hair covering Foster's testicles was more profuse than Armand's. Still, it did little to obscure his balls, due to the lightness of the brown shade of his pubic hair. He had been circumcised, leaving his slightly shorter, thicker cock with a bulbous purple head that reminded her of a mushroom. Her pussy contracted, aching to have the massive appendage surge inside her.

She blinked at the thought, her mind clearing. What was she doing? These necros were intent on using her for their pleasure, and she was contemplating participating. If only the training classes had covered this scenario! All she knew was the necros could manipulate the minds of any victim they chose, and sex was the most efficient way of doing so. There had been a few techniques taught to break mind control, but none were working. They weren't strong enough to fend off the power of the two men before her.

As Foster moved to the bathtub, turning on the faucets fully, Armand approached her once more. Shaun raised her foot to take a step back before freezing. She wasn't going to back away from him again. Whatever he wanted to do to her, she would endure it without revealing any weakness.

His gaze locked with hers for a second time, and his mouth formed a word. "Release."

The fog in her head cleared instantly, and she had control of her limbs. It took a second longer to shake off the lingering remnants of arousal so she could move. With an angry growl, she hurled herself at him, hands extended to scratch his face. She got in one rake with her nails before he dragged her writhing body against his, clamping her close to his chest with his cock poking into her stomach.

"I have yet to force a woman into my bed, Shaun. I will not use the thrall to do so." He arched his hips, pushing his cock deeper into the softness of her stomach. "You are now free to do whatever you choose, aside from taking a bath. You will have one before we taste you." He licked her cheek with a teasing flick. "I insist on a clean consort."

She jerked back her head, glaring at him. "If I'm really free to act, you won't be tasting me ... or anything else." With an exaggerated motion, she swiped at the spot he had licked with the back of her hand. "You disgust me."

A low chuckle escaped him. "And that's why the scent of your arousal hangs heavy in the air, why your

nipples are hard, and why you came just from dry humping Foster a few minutes ago? Because we disgust you.” His voice lowered to a purr. “I’d love to see what you do when you really hate someone.”

“That.” She pointed to the scratch on his cheek that was already closed over and starting to disappear. “Come near me again, and I’ll do worse --” She broke off with a cry of outrage when Foster came up behind her, scooping her into his arms without effort to carry her to the tub. She was screeching and fighting him, and the hot water surprised her. Shaun froze for a second, letting the warmth seep into her. It was heavenly, and a sigh of contentment escaped her.

Foster and Armand knelt on the floor in front of the tub, both armed with natural sponges and a bar of French milled soap waiting to be unwrapped resting on the lip of the tub. The smell of mulberry reached her, and her quickened breath involuntarily revealed a spark of pleasure at the scent. Her favorite. Had they known? She dismissed the thought with a shake of her head. They couldn’t have. It was just a coincidence.

Foster unwrapped the soap quickly, tossing the expensive tissue paper into the trashcan. With a slow smile that turned the pit of her stomach into a molten volcano, he dipped the sponge into the water, brushing his hand against her thigh. She swallowed at the brief contact, telling herself there hadn’t been time to push him away before his hand left. She hadn’t wanted him to keep touching her. Definitely not -- had she?

Her mind was clear, and she believed Armand had released her from the thrall. If he honored his words, she only had to endure the bath before having the opportunity to reject them. When they realized she didn’t desire them, they would be forced to leave her alone ... at least sexually. He hadn’t promised not to drain her blood, after all.

In slow circles, Foster rubbed the bar of soap over the sponge, until a thick lather covered it. As he passed the soap to Armand, he brought the cleanser closer to her. Shaun tensed as it neared her chest, and then gasped with surprise when Foster’s other hand dipped into the tub to splash water across her bared breasts. Her stomach clenched when the rough texture swabbed across a sensitive nipple, and she balled her hands into fists, pressing them against her thighs in an attempt to hide her reaction.

Armand joined in, choosing to focus his implement first on her neck and shoulders, where he massaged with firm strokes. The abrasive surface was just enough to heighten her senses, making each brush of their hands against her flesh that much more arousing. How in the world was she supposed to resist this when it felt so good?

Foster trailed it across the valley of her small breasts to seek out the neglected one. At the same time, Armand brought the other sponge down her arm, deliberately rubbing it against the side of her breast, before going lower to rub soapy circles on her stomach. The water gently lapped with each movement of the sponge, sending swirls of lather into the water. They resembled milky semen, and her mind instantly supplied an image of the three of them in the bathtub, her mouth and pussy filled with their cocks, bringing all of them to satisfaction.

She wanted to believe one of them had planted the thought in her psyche, but knew that wasn’t possible. Necros could sense and suggest emotions in humans’ minds, but they couldn’t read thoughts or implant ideas. No, her own fevered brain had produced the image and accompanying surge of arousal that had her core convulsing with need.

Foster lifted one of her breasts to wash under it as Armand’s hand plunged lower, guiding the abrasive thing to her folds. Without thought, Shaun parted her legs in invitation, groaning with frustration when he

detoured to wash her thigh instead. With gritted teeth, she endured the scrape of the sponge down her leg, across her foot, and over to the other, where he worked his way slowly up again.

Again, she tensed with anticipation when the implement neared her pussy, and he perturbed her once more by lifting the sponge from the water. Grasping the soap in his hand, he said, "Time for more lather." She didn't think she imagined the hint of teasing in his voice, nor the sparkle in his eyes.

With diligent care, Foster had washed her breasts thoroughly, rubbing them into a state of raw awareness. He lightly squeezed a nipple between his thumb and forefinger, inciting a dart of electricity that shot through her.

Finally, Armand ceased teasing her by bringing the rough cleanser to her slit, slowly circling her mound. Abruptly, Foster's hand was there between her thighs, parting her lips so the sponge could invade her opening. It was almost too coarse to endure, but the sensation was so enjoyable she didn't have the will or strength to resist. Gradually, her head tipped backward to rest on the hard lip of the tub as the men worked her clitoris with fingers and sponge. Her hips moved of their own accord in a piston motion, and she was panting in no time. Her harsh breathing melded with their groans, filling the bathroom with an erotic symphony.

"Natural."

The word was so out-of-place that Shaun opened her eyes to look at Foster. "What?" Was that scratchy, urgent tone hers? Had she really been reduced to little more than a pile of need?

He grinned at her while his fingers tugged lightly at her clipped pubic hair. "With your dark eyes and warm skin tones, I thought your hair had to be dyed, but I see it isn't."

She shook her head, unable to verbally respond as Armand tossed aside the sponge with an impatient growl. His fingers surged into her slit, finding no resistance, thanks to the passionate frenzy they had worked her into. Now was the time to protest, to tell him to stop. It was the perfect opportunity to see if he would honor his promise not to force her.

The only problem was she didn't want him to stop. Right then, she wanted nothing more than to have them -- both of them -- buried inside her, giving her more pleasure than she had ever imagined. It didn't matter if they were necros and she was an agent. She didn't even care if they were only fucking her to gain sustenance from her orgasms. All that mattered was finding release. An opportunity like this would never arise again. Why cast it aside, just because they were what they were? They weren't human, but they were certainly alive. Their actions had proven that already. Maybe it was wrong to feel this urgency to have them fuck her. If she hadn't had doubts about her purpose for a while, they probably wouldn't have such a strong influence on her, but Shaun was in a place to be receptive to viewing them as men, not monsters. After all, there was little physical difference between the two vampires and the human men she had taken into her bed, except their physiques were more impressive, and they seemed to have more stamina. Why tear herself up with remorse? They were just like vibrators, only with fangs. She wouldn't feel guilty for using a sex toy, so why should she worry about taking pleasure from them?

A brief image of Torres flashed into her mind, but she didn't linger on his fate, wanting to avoid bringing herself back to her senses with the reminder of what Foster and Armand had done to her partner. He hadn't been an innocent victim. Like Shaun, Torres had been there to kill the necros before they could kill anyone else. He had known the stakes. Her rationalizations allowed her to blot his face from her mind with only a small twinge of guilt. Her mental picture of the three of them in the bathtub replaced it once again.

She moaned when Armand withdrew his hand, shooting him a baleful glare.

“What will it be, *ma belle*? Shall we leave you to dress, or would you prefer company?”

The decision was already made. Shaun had a feeling it had been made the moment they kidnapped her. If not, certainly her body had decided by the time Foster had mimicked fucking her. It had just taken her mind a while to catch on. She extended her hand, beckoning. “You two need a bath as much as I did.”

Chapter Four

Neither hesitated to accept her invitation. Armand slipped into the tub with her first, easing her forward so he could settle behind her. When Shaun leaned back against him, the heat of the water masked any trace of coolness in his skin. His hot, thick cock pressed into the cleft between her buttocks, and she wriggled her bottom until he issued a low moan.

Foster eased into the water in front of her, kneeling instead of sitting. He cupped her thighs to spread them wider, his gaze appearing centered on her pussy. A look of hunger crossed his face, and her stomach quivered with anticipation.

Armand cupped one of her cheeks in his hand, squeezing lightly. “Juicy.” He traced her cleft with his thumb before venturing in to rub against her anus. Trembling under the force of her emotions, Shaun rested her head on Armand’s chest, closing her eyes. When doubts tried to intrude, she banished them, determined not to talk herself out of the most pleasurable experience of her life.

With slow movements, Foster’s inched his hands up her thighs to her pussy. He parted her lips with one hand, while seeking out her clit with the other. The bud swelled with need and pressed insistently against the rough pad of his thumb. “You like that, *chérie*,” he said with a chuckle, clearly pleased. He raked it more vigorously across her clitoris, circling her clit with enough pressure to send tremors throughout her body. Shaun couldn’t hold back a cry of delight.

Armand withdrew his hand from her buttocks, and Shaun opened her eyelids to slits, wondering what he planned. From the corner of her eye, she saw him take the bar of French soap, but lost sight of it when he whisked it beneath the water.

Foster distracted her by withdrawing his hands from her pussy and lifting her by the thighs to prop her ankles on each side of the bathtub, exposing her pussy to him, just an inch above the water level. The position would have been uncomfortable if Armand hadn’t provided support with his thighs. “Relax, *ma belle*. You will not fall.”

As Foster dipped his head, Shaun let go of the ledge of the tub to reach for him, not sure if she was going to guide him to her pussy or if she was having second thoughts and wanted to stop him. Fear mingled with desire at the thought of him drinking her blood. She could be in the throes of an orgasm, and he might bite her without her having a chance to stop him. As the blood rushed through her body, he might drain it.

The thought didn’t frighten her like it should. In fact, her fear faded away as her desire grew. The idea of

him drinking from her pussy excited her. Was it their natural sexual magnetism, or was she that depraved?

Rational thought fled under the dual onslaught of both men. As Foster's mouth touched her pussy, his tongue tentatively seeking out her clit with slow strokes, Armand's hands were once again at her buttocks, this time parting the cheeks. Her eyes flew open with stunned pleasure when he ran the bar of soap up and down her crack, working a rounded corner against her anus, testing the puckered rosebud. "What are you doing?" Her voice was little more than a moan.

"Preparing you."

Her pussy was proving to be just as slippery as her anus, without benefit of the soap. Her natural juices, flowing fast and free from Foster's ministrations, provided a slick surface for his tongue, easing his passage when the appendage ventured into her opening.

The bar of soap disappeared suddenly, and Shaun mourned its loss, never having experienced anything so strange, yet delicious. She didn't have time to notice the void in her anus, because Armand gently eased a finger inside with the assistance of the lather he had built up. At the same time, Foster replaced his tongue in her pussy with his finger, thrusting in lightning-quick. As he turned them in a corkscrew motion, Armand entered her anus all the way. They began finger-fucking her in completely opposite rhythms, making her feel as though she was being torn apart, while simultaneously being put back together.

"Oh, what are you two doing to me?" Shaun tossed her head, caught in the pleasurable throes of surrendering to their control.

"Do you like it?" Foster's flushed face and harsh breathing betrayed his arousal. He lifted his head from between her thighs, even as his fingers continued drilling ever deeper into her convulsing pussy.

"God, yes."

"So do we, *ma belle*," said Armand as he pushed a second finger into her, penetrating with little resistance.

She tossed her head from side to side, overwhelmed by the sensation. Once her snug back passage hugged his fingers, he began twisting them in the same corkscrew motion as Foster. She didn't know if they used their powers to time their efforts or if it happened by chance, but they were thrusting into her in unison, applying the same speed and motions. If she thought the pleasure of them fucking her in different rhythms would drive her mad, she was wrong. It was the dual pleasure of them fingering her in concert that would do her in. The gratification would surely cause an aneurysm.

She pumped her hips frantically, trying to match their pace. The water lapped in waves against her stomach, splashing over her breasts, and she groaned with anticipation. Foster lowered his head to her stomach, tracing a heated trail up to her breasts with his tongue, where her nipples begged for his mouth. He obliged by taking a firm peak between his lips, sucking almost all of her small breast inside. He moaned his delight, vibrating his mouth against her nipple. His tongue matched the rhythm of his and Armand's thrusting hands, and the added, harmonious stimuli was enough to trigger convulsions in her womb.

Shaun cried out a hybrid of their names, incapable of clear enunciation as the orgasm built in intensity, sweeping from deep inside to the sensitive nerves lining the walls of her pussy, moving downward, until

release seemed centered on her clit. As she trembled on the edge, Armand inserted a third finger in her anus, pushing in with a force that should have been painful, but only served to send her over the precipice.

Her vision dimmed, and she couldn't be sure she didn't lose consciousness for a brief moment when she climaxed. Once she came back to herself, she found their fingers, though motionless, still buried inside her, while her sensitive flesh contracted around them.

A sense of buoyancy overwhelmed her, and she found it impossible to support any of her weight. Every muscle in her body relaxed, and she lay on Armand's chest and thighs when he sank lower in the water. She managed to summon a small measure of strength to embrace Foster when he lay across her. She locked her thighs around his waist and let her mind wander, content to lie sandwiched between the two men who had so expertly pleased her. She might be happy to stay that way forever, if the promise of further delights didn't beckon.

Shaun pressed her mouth against Foster's neck, her teeth nibbling his skin. With a start, she realized she hadn't even kissed either of them. That would have to change.

"That feels good." Foster pushed his hand between their bodies to find her breast, and he massaged the globe with smooth strokes.

Armand's cock lay nestled between her legs, and Shaun couldn't resist arching her hips to slide her pussy down the hard length. Just a little shift in position, a slight easing forward, and she could offer him her pussy, take his cock inside her, but with Foster lying on her, she couldn't move. Part of her was reluctant to anyway. She didn't want to rush the experience since chances were good it would never be repeated.

The thought drew her up short, and she stopped sucking Foster's neck, although he didn't seem to notice, occupied as he was with his fingers still busy teasing her ripe nipple. Was this her last hurrah? Was she really okay with the two of them fucking her to exhaustion before draining her blood? How could she have gone from upholding the policies of the NCA to the willing lover of two necros in just a few short hours? She couldn't blame it on mental manipulation from them, which left only a serious flaw in her own makeup to accept the culpability. It was sobering to realize she was a coward. Months ago, she had acknowledged she didn't believe in the cause to which she had dedicated her life, but had refused to face up to it. Instead of seeing her doubts as tools to help her find her way out of the life she was in, she had pressed on blindly, hoping something would change her mind, sway her back to the conviction she had felt upon signing up fresh out of college.

"Shaun?" Armand's gentle tone carried a trace of concern. "Is something wrong? Have we displeased you?"

She shook her head, torn between the need to know her fate and fear of knowing. Finally, she mustered her courage. "What happens now?"

Foster eased away from her. "We could move to a bedroom. Both Armand and I have large beds."

Again, she shook her head. "No, I mean what happens after the sex? Will you drain my blood? Am I to die, with sexual gratification as my parting gift?"

Armand stroked her hip, his lips brushing against her neck when he spoke near her ear. "You will not die by our hands, *ma belle*. We have waited too long for this." He spanned her waist with his hand, lightly

stroking her navel with his fingertips. "Relax and enjoy what we have discovered together. Put aside worries of the future. Can you do that?"

He shifted his hand higher to cup her other breast, and she issued a jerky nod. "Yes." The whisper revealed her weakness, but she lacked the will to continue fighting. Stupid as it might be, she believed Armand's assurance they wouldn't kill her. A tentative bond was forming between them catalyzed by passion.

Foster rose from the tub to take a towel from the rack. He held it out for her when she stepped from the tub with Armand's assistance. Shaun only hoped she would live long enough to discover what was unique about the two vampires who had taken her captive and turned her into a wanton sexual being in just a few short hours.

* * * * *

Foster held her hand, leading her from her room and down the hall, with Armand following closely behind. They entered the first door on the left, which concealed a masculine bedroom done in dark gray and navy blue. The dark stain on the furniture had worn to a smooth patina from age, and while all the antique pieces were beautiful, it was the bed that captivated her. The four-poster dominated half the room, with blue bed curtains pulled back invitingly.

The thick carpet cushioned her bare feet with each step as she and Foster followed Armand to the bed. She hesitated at the side until Armand's hand at her back guided her forward. Shaun twisted so she could sit, feeling at a disadvantage with the two of them still standing, towering over her. She looked up at them, straining to see their expressions. The dim illumination of the single lamp on the nightstand didn't aid her quest to gauge their thoughts.

Did they feel the same way she did, experience the same conflicting emotions? Probably not. No doubt, they had done this countless times before. There would be no hesitation or uncertainty on their parts. She couldn't imagine Armand or Foster fearing what was happening like she did. The fear of joining with them was nearly as intense as the desire for the act, but need won out, keeping her glued to the bed as they finally sat down, one on each side of her.

Foster placed a hand on her shoulder, guiding her backward. "Relax and let us take care of you."

Shaun let her body follow his gentle demand, her stomach quivering with nerves. He eased her down until her back rested against the silky coverlet. She eyed each of them alternately, anticipating their next move.

Armand twisted sideways to lean down, bringing his mouth to her breast. "You have beautiful breasts, Shaun." When his tongue swept over the turgid peak, she moaned, finding her nipples super-sensitive after their previous ministrations and the sensuous toweling-off Foster had provided minutes ago. When his teeth scraped against her nipple, Shaun reached out blindly, grasping his thigh.

Foster dipped his head to taste her other breast, making her cry out with shocked pleasure. His style was slow and delicate, his tongue swirling leisurely around her nipple, while he applied light suction. In contrast, Armand devoured her breast, his teeth nipping at her peak, while he seemed determined to suck all of her breast into his mouth. His passionate onslaught was almost painful, but she didn't try to push him away.

Once again, their pronounced contrasts were driving her mad, sending all logical thoughts scattering to

the wind. Time and space shrank to the bedroom, then just to the bed, and finally, to the two men at her breasts. Wet heat dripped from her pussy in rivulets as they continued sucking on her nipples.

“Oh.” Armand drew in a deep breath and forced it out again against her nipple, catching her by surprise with the intensity of her reaction. Every muscle in her body tightened, and her hips pumped frantically. She sought a connection with Foster, grasping his cock.

“Squeeze me, *chérie*. Touch me.”

She couldn't deny his throaty request, tightening her hand around his thick shaft. His cock pulsed in time with his rapid heartbeat, and she cupped her hand around him, moving up and down with steady pressure. At the back of her mind, something stirred, diminishing her pleasure like a bothersome gnat. Finally, she forced herself to focus on the thought buzzing around her brain, a frown sweeping across her face.

Armand's brushed his thumb over her lips as he raised his head to look down at her. “What troubles you, Shaun?”

From the corner of her eye, she saw Foster rise to a sitting position. “I can feel Foster's heart pounding through his cock.”

He laughed. “You excite me.”

She shook her head. “You aren't supposed to have a heartbeat. Everything I've learned in my training says it's impossible.”

Armand's expression darkened, and he seemed to distance himself, completely breaking contact with her save for her fingers clenching his thigh. “There are a great many lies your precious Agency feeds its agents and the public. That we are dead is just one of them. Vampirism involves a transformation, a process of physical mutation, but it doesn't involve death.” His eyes narrowed when he glared down at her. “At least, it didn't until your kind began hunting us to the verge of extinction.”

A tense silence fell, and Shaun shivered under the anger in Armand's eyes. Aching at the withdrawal of their mouths from her breast, at the chill settling in her flesh where it touched Armand, she released both of them.

Foster reached across her body to place a hand on Armand's shoulder. “Do not let it trouble you tonight, Armand. We should be celebrating the moment.” He glanced down at Shaun, his expression full of tenderness. “We have found her. Let us not lose her because of our differences.”

Shaun held her breath as the atmosphere changed. Armand still seemed to be brooding, but his expression gradually lightened, until his blue eyes looked clear again. He traced a circle on her stomach with the pad of his index finger, and she was able to relax at the proof of his returning ardor. Even that small contact was enough to send her desire into overdrive again, almost instantly returning her to the passionate haze into which she had been slipping before almost ruining the moment with her confusion.

When Armand dipped his head again, she expected him to resume his post at her breast. Instead, he brushed his lips against hers in a coaxing kiss. It was undemanding, and she opened her mouth freely when he traced his tongue over her plump contours, before darting inside to explore the moist recess with finesse. Once again, Shaun reached for Armand, placing her hand on his thigh, just inches from his tantalizing cock.

The bed dipped as Foster shifted positions to kiss her cheek. The feather-light touch of his lips across her face made her stomach quiver, and the tenderness in the touch somehow made it all the more erotic. Armand's kiss changed, becoming hungrier and more possessive. Foster moved his lips over her cheek, eyelids, and finally to her ear, a delicious counter. It was almost impossible to not melt into the bed in a boneless heap as Foster nibbled on her ear, while Armand's tongue dueled with hers, enticing her to chase it around her mouth.

Foster moved away from her ear, making her moan at the withdrawal, although anticipation of what he would do next heightened her pleasure. His mouth was suddenly on hers, his tongue plunging inside. A thrill of shock shot through her to have both of their tongues between her lips, but it felt so good, so right, that she surrendered to them, doing her best to meet each thrust of their tongues with her own.

Together, they cupped her breasts in their hands, each circling the plump nipples with their thumbs in concert. Their mouths continued to devour hers, and she found it increasingly difficult to respond, swept away by a tide of overwhelming desire. Never had she felt like this -- not just physically, but emotionally. Wild abandon had taken over, and she was at its mercy as much as she was at theirs. The loss of control should have been frightening, but was heady instead. It was delicious to surrender all thought to desire, to let Foster and Armand introduce her body to unimagined pleasures without her mind trying to offer reasons why she shouldn't be doing this.

Foster broke from her mouth first, and she reached for him, burying her fingers in his hair to try to bring him back. With a low chuckle, he resisted her attempts, seemingly with little effort. "Be patient." He trailed his tongue down her neck and across to her shoulder. He nipped her, causing Shaun to cry out at the pleasure, but Armand swallowed the sound. In defeat, she let go of Foster's hair, returning her hand to his arm, needing to touch him as much as she required him to touch her.

Armand doubled her frustration drifting lower, sweeping down to her neck, where he drew in some of her skin to suck gently. Shaun stiffened at the image popping into her mind of him biting through her skin to take her blood intruded. It wasn't the thought that frightened her. Rather, it was her own excitement. She wanted to toss back her head in unspoken invitation, wanted to feel his teeth penetrate her skin, wanted to offer the gift of her blood as a small measure of repayment for the pleasure he and Foster were giving her.

The moment passed, and Armand moved lower, his tongue leaving a wet trail across her breast. As he approached her nipple, Foster left her shoulder, seeming to have the same aim as Armand. Simultaneously, they reached her breasts, each drawing a nipple into their mouths. Shaun arched her back, wanting more than the gentle laving of their tongues across her sensitive buds. Even when they responded to her unspoken demands by increasing the intensity of their suckling, both rasping their teeth in gentle harmony across her nipples, it wasn't enough.

At her restless shifting, Armand broke away, lifting his head as he shifted his position to sit between her thighs. Shaun groaned when Foster's mouth also departed, leaving her bereft. Her body screamed for another release, and she barely contained a cry of frustration when Foster slipped behind her. A drawer opened behind her, but she couldn't see what he was doing from her angle.

Armand took her hands, and she grasped his, rising into a sitting position. Her stomach quivered with nervous excitement upon realizing their union was imminent. Never had two men been inside her at the same time, and while she feared some pain, she anticipated the pleasure more.

Armand lifted her to sit astride his thighs, with her legs wrapped around his waist. "Look at me, *ma belle*

”

Shaun met his eyes, losing herself in the vortex as he thrallled her. Her mind resisted for a moment, until he explained himself.

“You will feel no pain as Foster prepares you.”

The tension left her body, along with her lingering fear. Shaun sagged against Armand, pressing her cheek to his chest, while bringing her pussy that much closer to his cock. So near, she felt his shaft spasming with need. They matched the convulsions shaking her molten core, and she shifted impatiently, only stilling when Foster cupped her buttocks.

He started out by squeezing them gently, massaging in circles. A groan left Shaun, and she melted completely against Armand, cuddling the tip of his cock with her pussy. He echoed her groan and thrust his hips to nestle inside more snugly.

That changed when Armand cupped her buttocks below Foster’s hands to lift her ass higher, while positioning their pelvises better. Shaun was about to sink onto his cock, but he held her steady, shaking his head. “Not yet, Shaun. Let Foster make you ready first.”

Mystified by his words, she hesitated a second before nodding. The new position stretched the muscles in her thighs, so she dropped her legs from around Armand’s waist to bend them on either side of him. She clutched his shoulders to brace herself until finding her center.

Foster moved his hands from her buttocks, but returned them seconds later. Shaun stiffened when something hard but narrow penetrated her anus. A rush of warm fluid provided explanation for what was inside her, and she relaxed as the lube filled her anus.

When he withdrew the tube, his fingers replaced it, two easing inside her carefully. Shaun shivered at the sensation, finding it pleasurable, without a hint of pain. Considering Foster’s careful movements, she suspected it would have been the same even if Armand hadn’t thrallled her.

Her excitement must have transmitted to Armand, because his hands had become like vises on her ass, squeezing with so much pressure it almost hurt. Shaun didn’t say anything, but not because she was afraid of his reaction. She was just enjoying the rough handling in contrast to Foster’s gentle thrusting of his fingers into her back passage. As she groaned with delight, Armand began pumping her hips, moving her to meet each of Foster’s thrusts, making her pussy drip with need. The three of them were moaning almost in concert. When Foster managed to ease a third finger inside her anus, she knew she was ready. “Please, now.”

Armand nodded and the bed dipped as Foster moved closer behind her. She held her breath with anticipation. Armand lowered her pussy onto his cock an inch at a time, enveloping himself in her slick heat. Her sheath took him easily, and Shaun wondered if it was because of the thrall, or because she had never been so aroused in her life.

It seemed like it couldn’t get any better as he gently thrust in and out of her, until Foster joined them, pressing his chest to her back, while his cock probed her back passage. Shaun dug her nails into Armand’s shoulders, unable to fight a stir of apprehension when Foster’s large cock penetrated her, slowly sinking past the barrier of her sphincter. When she experienced no pain, Shaun relaxed fully, leaning back slightly to help Foster plunge inside her.

For a moment, the three of them stilled in unison. She wondered if they were lost in the sensations of them being joined as she was. Shaun was stretched to the limit, so full from them she could barely move, but it was delicious. Driven by desire, she bucked her hips, and they followed her lead, thrusting into her with powerful strokes.

As Foster withdrew, Armand surged deep inside her pussy. There was no fumbling to match rhythms. They had probably done this many times, so of course they knew how to work together. The thought was disquieting, and Shaun had to push down her jealousy.

The thoughts faded from her mind as the men plunged inside her in opposing motions, moving her body for her. As the pace increased, she could only concentrate on holding onto Armand as they guided her between them. Foster's nipples and lightly haired chest pressed against her back, giving her a connection to him too. Sensual lethargy invaded her limbs, and she was content to be their marionette.

While the rest of her body relaxed, her pussy remained tense, her womb convulsing. She hovered on the edge of climax as they continued pounding into her, but couldn't quite achieve orgasm. Was it because she had been satisfied already tonight? No, that wasn't it.

A frown furrowed her brow as she thought about what was missing. What kept her from having a climax? After a moment, it came to her that they were together, but Armand and Foster were holding themselves separate of each other, which indirectly kept them segregated from her, at least emotionally. With a deep breath, she managed to speak. "Together."

"We are together, *chérie* ." Foster sounded amused, but breathless.

She tossed her head. "No, take me at the same time. Match your rhythm. Don't separate."

Armand hesitated for a second, but then nodded.

Tension filled the room as Armand and Foster stopped thrusting. They held her between them for a long moment, with Shaun resting her head on Armand's chest, and letting Foster brace her back while his hands settled over Armand's on her shoulders.

Sandwiched between them, she struggled for breath. She sensed a shift in her body, one preparing her to come. The bit that had been missing was now in place. Their cocks seemed to be seeking out each other, and the trace of separation disappeared. They thrust inside her in concert, their cocks touching each other, save for her skin separating them, making all three shudder simultaneously. Armand and Foster breathed raggedly together, their harsh exhalations filling the room.

"Take me."

"We are, *ma belle* ."

Shaun shook her head, needing just one thing more. "Bite me. I want to feel it." It was supposed to be the most sensual of experiences, and coupled with their possession, the pleasure might kill her. She was willing to take the risk.

Foster's mouth was the first at her neck, his teeth grazing her artery before his fangs slid through her skin like a knife through hot butter. There was an instant of almost-pain, but it faded as he began sucking her blood.

It was amazing, but got even better. Armand dipped his head to find a vein in her shoulder, kissing the spot just before penetrating her with his teeth. They sucked in concert, findings *simpatico* rhythms that matched their thrusting hips. Her head spun, but she didn't know if it was from pleasure or blood loss.

The sensations were overwhelming to Shaun, allowing only for a few thrusts before their cocks spasmed inside her convulsing pussy, while her anus clenched tight around Foster's cock. Shaun cried out as her orgasm claimed her, just as each man spilled his seed inside her, their warmth mingling in her openings and filling her with liquid heat. Her heart pounded in her ears, and she closed her eyes to weather the intensity of her release, spinning away into darkness as their fangs left her body, although their cocks stayed lodged deep inside her.

Eventually, the spasms in their bodies calmed, and Shaun regained a hint of awareness for the world around them. With two cocks still semi-hard inside her, it was almost impossible to remember the reasons why she shouldn't be here, to recall what awaited her in her normal life, if she ever got back to it.

Armand moved first, not withdrawing from her, but taking her with him as he lay on his side. Foster's cock slipped from her anus as he lined himself up behind her, his arm over her waist and resting on Armand's hip. He pressed a gentle kiss to the back of her neck, drawing her attention to the area.

In the aftermath, Shaun felt some twinges where they had bitten her, but the blood had stopped flowing from the wounds the minute they withdrew, their saliva acting as both a coagulant and anticoagulant, depending on at what point they were in feeding.

Armand tilted her chin to press his mouth to hers, causing the clinical explanation to leave her. His kiss was gentle, comforting, but with a hint of restrained passion. He lifted his head, and she wanted to protest.

Before she could form words, his gaze locked with hers. "You will wake before us, I'm sure. You may go anywhere you wish in the house or on the grounds, but you will not wander off." He gave her a half-smile. "Right?"

"Yes." The word sounded like it came from a zombie, and Shaun glared at him as she agreed, finding it beyond her will to resist the command, but still able to resent his power over her.

"Armand, is that necessary?"

He glared at Foster. "Are you convinced she will stay?"

Foster's silence was his answer, and it preceded a deeper stillness as they fell into slumber with the rising sun. Shaun thought about getting up as soon as they slipped into their regenerative state, but decided she was too comfortable to move. As Armand had said, she was sure to wake before them and would find a way to escape then.

Wouldn't she? Her stomach clenched at the thought of leaving them, but what choice did she have? How successful could the relationship between two vampires and an NCA agent be, when they were supposed to be sworn enemies, each destined to kill the other whenever the opportunity arose?

Shaun shook her head at the ramblings of her mind, wondering where the relationship nonsense was coming from. The sex with Armand and Foster hadn't changed anything. To them, she was still just a source of sustenance. Despite Armand's assurances to the contrary, it was a given when they tired of her body, they would drain her blood and discard her unless she managed to escape first. She was left with

no choice but to try to fight the thrall and leave the two men who had brought her such pleasure.

As she surrendered to sleep, Shaun realized she no longer thought of Armand and Foster as necros. They were men, not that much different from lovers of her past, aside from their skills. When she returned to the Agency, she would have many questions that urgently needed answers. Were they deliberately deceiving the public, or were they just misinformed?

Chapter Five

Around noon, Shaun awakened from a deep sleep, one so satisfying it left her fully rested after just seven hours. In a tangle of arms and legs, she lay pinned between Foster and Armand, who slept deeply. She studied them for a long moment, staring at Armand, examining him as he regenerated. In a state deeper than sleep, he appeared dead, save for the occasional respirations moving his chest up and down. His pale skin had a waxy look that didn't seem healthy.

Turning around, she examined Foster, finding him in a similar condition. Her mind whirled with confusion as she eased out of the bed, moving carefully so as not to rouse them, although they both seemed beyond waking at the moment. According to her training, necros were dead once they were infected. They didn't breathe or have heartbeats. Again, she questioned what she had learned as she slipped from the room.

Her feet automatically carried her back to the room where they had imprisoned her yesterday. When she stepped into it, a frown furrowed her brow. What was she doing? She should be looking for a way to escape, testing the bonds of the thrall.

With a rueful look at her bare state, she acknowledged she couldn't traipse around naked, and she certainly couldn't try to escape without garments. A trip to the bathroom revealed her clothes from yesterday still scattered on the floor. The bathwater was still in the tub, and she plunged her hand into the icy liquid to release the plug.

Shaun returned to the bedroom while waiting for the tub to empty so she could wash, going to the closet. Foster's words about their roommate having left garments stayed with her, and she opened the wardrobe doors, finding a nice selection of clothing.

With a yelp of delight, Shaun removed jogging pants and a sweatshirt from the closet, pleased to find her favorite brand and color hanging in the other woman's closet. When she opened the purple pants to check the size, the tag brushed against her hand. Frowning with confusion, she read the paper, discovering the pants were brand new and her size. What were the odds?

With a shake of her head, she checked the gray and purple sweatshirt, finding the same scenario. She tossed the outfit on the bed and began sorting through the rest of the garments. A chill settled in her scalp when she found several items all in her size and style preference. Very few items seemed older, and they had been pushed to the back of the closet. When she pulled out a flowing blue dress that was contrary to the comfortable, casual clothes, the label revealed it was two sizes larger than the new clothes. It was also an older style, reminiscent of the 1940s, although she had little knowledge of the fashion of the time period.

Deep in thought, Shaun padded to the dresser, finding packages of new underwear, again in her size.

Two sports bras were folded neatly beside them, and she found their presence reassuring, simply because they weren't for a specific size; just marked Medium. The socks also encompassed a large size discrepancy, lending credence to the information Foster had given about Jacqueline's clothing being available to her.

Still, the thought circulated in her brain that the clothes in the closet couldn't have been more what she liked if she had selected them herself. In fact, she owned a good number of the same items, all stacked neatly in her drawers at home. Even stranger, the garments were in the bold colors she would have chosen herself, while the older clothes pushed to the back of the closet were pastels in feminine designs. Jacqueline must have vastly divergent tastes, depending on her mood for the day.

Suspicion remained with Shaun as she took underwear, a bra, and the jogging outfit into the bathroom. Leaving them folded on an empty shelf, she climbed into the bathtub, using the showerhead attachment to wash the evidence of passion from her body as quickly as possible. A sense of urgency had gripped her, and she was chomping at the bit to escape this strange house and the two men sleeping across the hall.

In lieu of a clean towel, and with no idea where to find one, Shaun used the towel from last night, scrubbing firmly in the hopes of removing the phantom imprints of Armand and Foster's hands from her skin. She had to break free of whatever hold they had over her, and the first step was clearing her mind of the passionate haze still lingering in her brain.

She dressed quickly, finding the combat boots an interesting contrast to the jogging pants. They were her only option, unless Jacqueline just happened to wear her size in shoes as well. Curiosity compelled her to the wardrobe, but no shoes were in sight. She tested the drawer at the bottom, and pulling it out revealed just three pairs of shoes -- sneakers, ballet-style house shoes, and a pair of high heels that looked old, the leather cracking. As she had suspected, the sneakers and ballet shoes were both new and both in her size.

With efficient motions, Shaun slipped on the athletic shoes, double-knotted the ties to keep them from coming loose if she had to run, and left the room. She didn't bother to take her vest or sword, knowing she didn't have it in her to hurt Foster or Armand.

Silently, she crept down the stairs, although each step seemed to squeak when she stepped on it. If Foster or Armand had been awake, they would have had no trouble hearing her. Her pounding heart would have betrayed her presence.

When she reached the first floor, Shaun went directly to the front door. To her surprise, it swung open easily. Expecting one of them to come running after her, she stepped into the autumn afternoon, finding it a pleasantly sunny day, although cool.

The grass was still damp, and the earth smelled rich from yesterday's rainfall. The flowers lining one side of the house seemed to have thrived on the moisture, their opened buds greeting her as she passed them. Shaun walked around the house, away from the cliff because there was no escape route there, short of flinging herself into the Pacific. No thanks.

The side of the house revealed more flowers and plants, including a small vegetable garden lying dormant. One of the necros clearly had a green thumb. Instinct provided an image of Foster, as he seemed the most likely candidate.

Her survey led her through the garden to the back of the house, where she found a winding drive, and even a black SUV parked facing east, as if waiting for her to climb in and drive away.

A shop at the back of the house diverted her attention from the vehicle, and she detoured toward it to peek into a window. Shaun's breath caught in her throat when she saw the delicate works of art lined on a shelf. Someone had shaped glass into sculptures, figures, glasses, and vases with a delicate, artistic touch. The figures must be worth serious money. Was this how they supported themselves?

Shaun's brow wrinkled as she tried to decide which one was the artist. Armand didn't seem to have the sensitive nature usually required of an artist, but Foster lacked the patience to form these exquisite works, or so it seemed to her. It was a puzzle, and she wouldn't know the answer until she asked them.

Blinking at the thought, she turned from the shed and hurried to the SUV, reminding herself there would be no friendly chats with them in the future. She had to get out of there and contact the Agency. They would be worried about her, and they would be frantic to find two master vampires.

Her stomach rolled with nausea at the idea of betraying Foster and Armand's location to the NCA. She wasn't really going to tell her boss where to find the two men who had made love to her so deliciously last night, was she? With a shake of her head, she decided she couldn't, especially knowing what fate would await them. The Agency would send a large detail to eliminate the threat posed by two such powerful necros. She couldn't have that on her conscience.

The SUV was locked, as she expected. Shaun looked around, finding a rock nearby. When she lifted it, she estimated it weighed three or four pounds and should be heavy enough to break the passenger window. With the rock in hand, she walked around to the other side, bringing back the stone with every intention of crashing it through the window. Once she was in the SUV, she was confident in her ability to hotwire it.

Something held her back. Her hand trembled in mid-air, until she finally dropped the rock, sagging forward. Shaun's stomach clenched as a voice whispered in her head, like skittering spiders crawling across her brain, drawing her toward the house. Shudders racked her body when she tried to resist, but her feet disobeyed her mind's orders and took her back to the residence, one treacherous step at a time.

Reluctantly, she trudged up the porch and reentered the dwelling, finding the icy spiders dissipated with each step she took, until her mind was clear again when she closed the front door behind herself.

Sounds from the kitchen drew her attention, and she walked over to investigate. A laugh escaped her before she could call it back. She paused in the doorway to stare at Foster, clad in a white apron and nothing else. He was whistling a nameless tune as he whisked eggs in a metal bowl. With a jaunty wave of his hand, he beckoned her forward, saying, "How are you with bacon?"

"What?"

"Bacon ... you know, pig carcass? Can you cook it?"

Discombobulated, Shaun shrugged. "It's not that difficult."

A wide smile spread across his face, and he nodded toward a package on the wooden counter, near the stove that had to be thirty years old. "Excellent. Armand always complains about the way I do it. Says it's too crispy." He made a sound of disgust. "Personally, I think it should be crisp. Who wants it soft and mushy?"

"I ..." Shaun trailed off, her mouth hanging open, at a loss for words.

“Careful the flies don’t gather,” he said over his shoulder as he turned to the stove, preparing to drop the egg mixture into an omelet pan. “Your mouth is too tempting to remain empty for long.”

A startled giggle escaped Shaun, and she walked into the kitchen, eyeing the homey charm, which was a contrast to the Mediterranean style of the exterior. The sunny yellow and white décor put her instantly at ease, and the large wooden chairs at the wood block table beckoned her bottom to sink into the thick checked cushions. Idly, she picked up the package of bacon, eyeing Foster from the corner of her eye. “You don’t have to go to all this trouble for me.”

He turned to her with a frown of confusion. “Huh?”

“I don’t usually eat a big breakfast.” A glance at the clock revealed it was nearly one-thirty. “Especially for lunch.”

Foster grinned. “You worked up an appetite last night, *chérie*, as did we.”

“You eat?”

A hearty chuckle escaped him. “Of course. Think how dull life would be if we subsisted solely on blood.”

“And sex,” she said in a thick voice, wondering why in the world she contributed that to the conversation.

With a wink, he poured the eggs into the skillet. “That depends. If it comes from you, I’d live quite happily ... until I starved to death.” He turned to her, looking confused. “Did you think I was speaking in code when mentioning Armand’s bacon preferences?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know. I thought maybe you were talking about before you became a vampire.”

Nodding, he turned his attention back to the eggs. “Could be, except he was a vampire when I met him.”

“He’s your sire?” As she asked, Shaun found herself opening the package and laying the strips of bacon into a skillet Foster had brought out for the task.

“Yes. Armand’s an old man compared to me.” He winked again. “I’m only ninety-five, you know. He’s almost three hundred. Maybe that’s why he hates crispy bacon -- his fangs are too weak to chew it properly.”

She swallowed, thinking how much she was dreading her thirtieth birthday, approaching in less than eighteen months. They were ancient to her. It was difficult to comprehend their ages in any terms she was familiar with. Although they weren’t old in the bedroom, she had to concede. Their stamina definitely matched, and exceeded, the ages they must have been when they were both changed.

Before she could formulate a reply, Armand entered the kitchen. Unlike his immodest companion, he wore jeans sinking sinfully low on his hips, seeming on the verge of dropping to reveal his tempting package. Unlike the rest of the house, the dark shutters here were rolled up, and his bare chest gleamed amber in the light spilling through the curtains, with each crisp, dark hair accentuated.

Inexplicably shy, she dropped her gaze to the bacon as Armand and Foster exchanged morning greetings. Although hypersensitive to his presence, she still jumped with surprise when he touched her shoulder as he leaned over her to look into the skillet, sniffing appreciatively. Without saying a word, he patted her fanny and took a seat at the table.

Shaun shot a look at Foster, finding him engrossed in flipping the omelet. "Do you always cook for his Highness?" she asked in a teasing tone.

"Nope. Armand knows his way around the kitchen better than I do. It was simply my turn."

As they finished cooking, Shaun grew more nervous about sitting down with them for breakfast. It seemed like too normal an activity, especially after last night's events. Too cozy and domestic by far. It was strange to be eating with the men who would eventually eat her ... well, drain her blood.

She picked at her food, watching both Armand and Foster eating large quantities, as if they were starving. The omelet was light and fluffy, but she had no appetite. Awed by the amount they devoured, she said, "I had no idea you could consume food. Considering the amount you're packing away, it's amazing the world doesn't know necros consume regular food in addition to their ... liquid diets."

Foster laughed, but Armand's expression turned wintry. "The world knows only what your Agency wants it to know about *necros* ." He emphasized the last word, infusing it with a depth of rage and disgust that was frightening.

"Armand, after everything we've gone through to find her, it isn't worth --"

"No, Foster, it's time she lost some of her illusions." Armand practically snarled when he turned back to Shaun. "What do you care about the truth though? All you and your kind care about is exterminating us."

The verbal attack shocked her into responding with the rhetoric drilled into her over the years. "We exterminate necros because they're dangerous. You kill humans, and you'd overrun our race if given the chance."

A hard laugh left Armand, and he pushed away his plate. "You're a fool, Shaun. Before the world learned of our existence and created the NCA, it was an offense punishable by death for a vampire to kill a human. The way you track us down and kill us has forced us into coveys for protection, and when we have prey, we're forced to use every last resource. Who knows when we'll have the opportunity to feed again?"

She shook her head, refusing to believe him. What he said couldn't be true. The NCA couldn't have driven vampires to murder. It was impossible. "I can't believe you're trying to blame your merciless nature on the Agency. We do what must be done to protect our people. It's as simple as that." Even as she issued the words to defend the cause to which she had dedicated her life, Shaun's stomach clenched as she remembered the inconsistencies between what she had been told of necros and what she had observed in the company of these two.

"And we do what we must to protect our race, but many hundreds are still annihilated each day. Their only crime is being different from you. You give no thought to those you kill, to the families you destroy. At least we kill for a good reason. You kill because they tell you to." He broke off, his voice softening. "Why bother? You will never understand." With a sudden motion, he shoved away from the table so hard his chair crashed against the parquet flooring. He ignored it, turning his back as he stormed from the room.

In stunned silence, Shaun looked at Foster, finding him unruffled, although a trace of concern shadowed his gaze. "What was that about?" she asked.

He raised a shoulder. "Armand has reasons to feel the way he does."

Reasons to verbally attack her after a teasing remark? She shook her head, unable to fathom any rationale for his overreaction. "Like what?"

"Why not ask him?" He stabbed a piece of omelet with his fork, clearly intent on finishing his breakfast. "If he wants you to know, he'll tell you."

"It's not your place?" she asked with a hint of annoyance.

"Nope." Foster put the fork in his mouth to take the bite before saying, "He's in his workshop."

"The studio out back, with all the glass?"

With a nod, he chewed enthusiastically, seeming to have lost interest in further communication. With a small sigh, she pushed away from the table, abandoning her plate, intent on going after Armand.

"You going to eat that?" Foster asked with a full mouth.

"No. Have it." Shaun left the kitchen, moving through the house in search of a back door, which she found in the laundry room. An ornate paver-brick path led to the workshop, and she could see Armand's silhouette in the hazy afternoon sunlight spilling through the glass window. The set of his shoulders suggested despair, and her heart stuttered with apprehension as she made her way to the small building. She opened the door without knocking, assuming he wasn't going to politely invite her in.

He looked up, his expression impassive. Immediately, he straightened his spine, removing any trace of dejection. "I don't like to be disturbed while I'm working."

Shaun closed the door with a click, bracing her back against it for support. "You aren't working right now."

"I will be." He looked away from her, his eyes settling on a pair of Kevlar gloves.

With a slight stutter, she struggled to say something to ease the tension. "I'm sorry."

Armand swung his head back in her direction, and he took a step toward her. "For what? Participating in the mass murder of my race?"

Her mouth firmed. "How can you expect me to apologize for devoting my life to a cause to save my race?"

He snarled in his anger, his teeth skinning back to reveal his descending fangs. "You aren't saving your race. You've been blinded to the truth, co-opted into destroying us for no good reason, other than fear."

She shook her head. "That's crazy. There is proof, data ... you're a threat."

"Really?" His voice lowered an octave, and he walked toward her. "How much of a threat am I, Shaun?"

You aren't dead, are you?"

Her gaze clashed with his as she tipped back her head to meet his gaze. "Yet. Once I'm out of blood, and you've taken every bit of pleasure you can from me, you'll discard me."

A long sigh escaped him, and he stopped approaching. "When I realized what you were, I told Foster it was impossible." Shaking his head, he turned away from her, going to his workbench.

At the mention of Foster's name, she remembered her purpose for seeking out Armand. It wasn't to continue their argument, but to ... what? What did she need from him? What did she want to give?

As he sat down on a stool in front of the workbench, picking up a tube used to shape hot glass, his troubled aura twisted her heart. Instinct propelled her forward, and she placed a hand on his shoulder, finding she wanted to give him solace. He didn't look up, so she bent closer, turning his chin so he faced her. "Foster said you have good reasons for feeling the way you do. I know you've seen necros --" At his darkening expression, she hastily amended her words. "Vampires murdered, but I've seen humans killed too." A shudder racked her body when she remembered the gruesome scene from the mansion, with the lake of blood squishing under her feet. "We're in the middle of a war, Armand."

He nodded, his expression hardening. "Yes, but have you seen your parents slaughtered in front of you? Have you watched your sister tortured and raped by a group of agents while you fought to reach her, unable to stop them? Unable to make her whole again, to save her sanity?"

A soft gasp escaped Shaun, and her hand on his shoulder tightened reflexively.

"In the early days of the Agency's inception, just decades after Dr. Stoker proved the existence of our kind, my parents underestimated the danger. When others fled their homes and ways of life to go into hiding, to try to avoid detection as *anecro*, they stayed in their home in Paris where we had always lived, thinking their discreet ways would shield them." A harsh laugh escaped Armand, holding no amusement. "They were wrong."

Shaun's eyes closed. "The Paris Raid, 1934." It was generally lauded as the defining moment in the movement to rid the world of vampires, when the Agency mobilized a coordinated effort and exterminated more than one hundred vampires in a single day. There had been more glorious assaults since then, but most in the NCA considered the Paris Raid their crowning achievement, done before technology smoothed the way for agents to detect and destroy necros more efficiently.

He clapped his hands, shattering the silence. "Congratulations on the brilliant deduction." Armand's brooding expression deepened, and his eyes became dark blue sheets of ice, showing nothing but her reflection. "Those involved in the raid were out to prove themselves."

Shaun nodded. "They wanted to demonstrate to the governments of the world the NCA had a valid purpose, that funding must be approved, along with sweeping changes in the law."

Armand didn't acknowledge her interruption. "They weren't fast and efficient as most agents are these days. The killings were brutal." He drew in a deep breath before continuing. "They decapitated my father quickly, sensing he was the greatest threat. When Mother tried to stop them, three of the men hacked at her with swords, over and over. Long after she had fallen, they continued mutilating her body."

Her stomach churned at his description of the events. She had seen photos from that night in her training, but suspected they were sanitized versions. It would make the idea of saving your race much less

appealing if the agents-in-training had to confront the brutality of the slayings so early on.

“I was barely defending myself, and I couldn’t reach my sister when another group of agents turned on her. I prayed her death would be quick, as my father’s had been, but it wasn’t to be.”

“Armand.” Shaun leaned closer, placing her head on his shoulder, not certain if she was seeking or offering comfort. His only reaction was a slight lessening of the tension in his muscles, but when he continued, his voice remained haunted.

“It was near the end of the massacre, and word was spreading the Agency was victorious. Those in command had issued orders to finish up current assignments and return to base. That allowed them plenty of time to rape my sister, but only after tying her up. When I tried to stop them, they tied me to a tree nearby and hung garlic over my neck. Helpless, I could only listen as she screamed, until her voice faded to nothing. After what seemed like hours, they finished with her.”

“How did you survive?”

“Foster.” Armand’s voice caught on the second syllable, emerging as a whisper. “He was human, but appalled by what he had witnessed. After the agents slit our throats and soaked us with holy water, leaving us to bleed out slowly, he untied us. He took us to his home and tended to us.” He made a scoffing sound. “Of course, the holy water did nothing but irrigate the wounds, so his major task was to stop the bleeding. He did the only thing he could think of, which was to slit his own wrist and give us nourishment.”

Shaun blinked, trying to reconcile the action with the charming, carefree man currently in the kitchen devouring bacon and omelets. “That was brave.”

“It was foolish. If I hadn’t recovered in time, he would have died from his nobility.” Armand sighed. “I did the only thing I could to save him, which was to transform him.”

“Was he upset?”

Armand shook his head. “Foster was thrilled with his new state, even with the inherent dangers and persecution.”

“What happened to your sister?”

His Adam’s apple bobbed visibly when he swallowed, and she eased closer, placing her lips against his neck to press light kisses against the strong flesh. “Physically, she recovered, but was never the same again. Jacqueline never spoke another word. Most times, it was like caring for a child. Somewhere inside, the woman she had been was trapped, but I don’t think she really wanted to escape. Locked in a trance, she didn’t have to confront the horrors of what had happened. The only times she came close, she was depressed for days before finding her way back to the comforting state of oblivion.”

Shaun lifted her head, frowning. “Jacqueline, your roommate, is your sister? Where is she?”

“Dead.” His expression closed again.

“How?”

“I couldn’t save her from herself, Shaun, from her own torment. When it became too much for her, she

killed herself.”

She cupped her mouth, shocked at the revelation. His pain, still visible, reached out to entangle her, drawing her closer to him. Her heart shuddered under the burden of accepting a measure of his agony, even as her body embraced it. Shaun pulled him to her, hugging him as hard as she could from her awkward angle.

For a long second, he remained tense, as if debating whether he could accept the comfort she offered. With a harsh exhalation, his muscles relaxed, and he drew her into his arms, settling her on his lap and returning her embrace.

Shaun leaned against him, remaining silent, while patting his back. He wasn't sobbing, but old grief clung to him like a bitter stench. Instinctively, she knew it wasn't an ache she could truly ease. All she could do was offer comfort while he dealt with his pain.

As the moments passed, her tension faded, and she found comfort for herself, although her pain was less specific, more of a void than grief. Although the future was uncertain, and Armand's reaction to her could change like quicksilver, for the moment they were together, joined in a way she hadn't experienced before.

And then the embrace changed, from one of comfort to passion, a natural progression. He roamed over her back instead of moving in soft circles, his fingers teasing the sides of her breasts. Shaun nestled closer, seeking out his neck to blow softly against the sensitive flesh. In response, Armand's breathing quickened, and his hands moved lower, cupping her buttocks to pull her more snugly onto his lap. His cock pressed into the crux of her legs, igniting the receptive tissue and making it weep with arousal.

She nibbled on the column of his throat, working north to veer toward his ear. She nipped his earlobe while drawing it between her lips, sucking lightly. He shifted restlessly, and the stool creaked as his cock burrowed more firmly into her slit. When he tilted back his head, she honed in on his neck again, biting the area near his carotid artery with gentle pressure. She was doing to Armand what she wanted him to do to her. The realization made her tremble.

Abruptly, she jerked away from his neck, her eyes wide with apprehension. Armand didn't allow her to flounder for long. One of his hands left her buttocks to capture her chin, bringing her face to his. Armand settled his lips onto hers with hungry possessiveness, his tongue darting between her parted lips to explore her moist recesses with confident strokes. Shaun moaned under the onslaught, digging her nails into his shoulders to anchor herself on his lap, and to keep from losing all awareness.

She was incapable of words, and he seemed disinclined to speak, but she didn't need him to. Their bodies were communicating better than empty words. She could almost feel his emotions reflected through her own. This strange melding of bodies and emotions was new to her. Did vampires routinely experience this, was it common for their human partners to do so? Or was she sharing something special with her vampire lover?

Armand inched up her sweatshirt, but stopped at her breast. Shaun expected him to withdraw to remove the shirt, but he didn't. Instead, he moved to the waistband of her jogging pants, pushing them down. With Armand steadying her, Shaun lifted her buttocks from his lap to assist in the removal of the garment. The pants and underwear settled at her ankles, but she gave no thought to discarding her running shoes. Her mind was too busy urging her hands to be more nimble as she fumbled with the snap and zipper of Armand's jeans.

She expressed her excitement with a breathless sound as his cock sprang free from the denim prison, unimpeded by underwear. He was hot and heavy in her hands, and she stroked the length of his cock, delighting in the spasms coursing through it with each stroke of her finger, each squeeze of her palm.

Armand threaded a hand through her hair, tipping back her head to kiss her again. Shaun leaned back further, aligning her pussy to his cock, while bringing her neck closer to his mouth. "Take me." The words seemed to shatter the crystalline sphere enclosing them, but only for a moment. As the last word faded, Armand surged inside her, his cock filling her as pleasingly as it had last night. Her folds adjusted readily, and she arched downward, taking in all of him.

Even as she rode him, Shaun arched her neck, forcing it against his mouth. This time, she didn't have to speak to make her request. The tensing of his shoulders and soft wisp of his lips at her neck gave away his reaction. His hesitation frustrated her, and she nudged him with her neck, while her pelvis thrust against his. He seemed content to let her control the pace of their bodies, so why not this?

With a small flash of pain, he bit into her neck as his cock surged deep inside her. The pleasure rose to a fever pitch, making Shaun oblivious to everything but the cock thrusting into her and the teeth in her throat. Her wordless cries of ecstasy overshadowed Armand's soft sucking sounds as he drank lightly. Her pussy convulsed around his cock, and her climax was near as his cock spasmed, releasing spurts of satisfaction inside her, filling her with liquid heat.

A warm sensation accompanied her orgasm, spreading through her body as it shook under the intensity of her release. Vaguely, Shaun was aware of Armand's teeth leaving her skin, and she laid her head against his bare chest as afterglow washed over her, filling her with sated lethargy. His arms were a welcome weight holding her against him, and his heart thumping against her ear slowed almost perfectly in time with her own.

Chapter Six

Minutes later, he shifted, moving her into an upright position. A tender kiss across her forehead couldn't quite soften his dismissal. "Go back to the house now, Shaun. I have work to do, and I'm sure Foster is lonely."

Feeling rejected, she got slowly to her feet, watching him. As she turned to leave, he caught one of her hands and brought it to his mouth, brushing his lips across her fingertips. "Thank you, *ma belle*. If I didn't have a deadline, I would be able to show you just how thankful I am."

She managed a small smile as the negative emotions left her, replaced once again by contentment. Shaun paused to dress before leaving the shop, turning to find Armand had already started, his shoulders hunched as he bent over his worktable.

With a sigh, she closed the door behind her to return to the house. Their differences weren't resolved, but there was peace between them. The rest would work itself out in time.

That thought drew her up short, and she paused to stare at the SUV in the driveway. There was no time. She had to escape from them. It was what a good agent would do. Of course, she wasn't a good agent, because she couldn't kill them before escaping as she should, according to the guidelines she had

dedicated her life to the past six years.

With a heavy heart, hearing a ticking clock somewhere in her mind Shaun resumed walking the path back to the residence. She shouldn't dread leaving this place. Knowing the ultimate fate awaiting her at Armand and Foster's hands, despite their passion for her body, should have spurred her to keep fighting. Instead, all she wanted to do was lose herself in them, to stay in this small house with Armand and Foster forever, and let the outside world fade away.

When she entered the dwelling, she found Foster loading the dishwasher. Somewhere along the way he had disposed of the apron and now wore immodest briefs so tight they left nothing to the imagination. Not that she needed to imagine the feel or appearance of his cock. A jolt of arousal speared her, renewing the wetness between her legs and reawakening her desire.

He wore a knowing grin when he turned to her. "Did you make up with Armand?"

A fiery blush burned her cheeks, although she didn't know why. Maybe because she had just finished fucking Armand and was now thinking about jumping Foster. Did he know what they had done? No doubt, with his keen sense of smell, but he didn't seem to mind. There wasn't a trace of jealousy in his expression. Her eyes dropped to his briefs, and she saw he was hard and ready. "I think so ... for now, anyway."

Dropping a companionable arm around her shoulders, Foster steered her into the living room, maneuvering her to the overstuffed couch. Shaun didn't resist when he plopped down, pulling her along with him. She ended up curled into the corner with her legs across the cushion between them, and her feet propped on his lap.

"Do you understand him better now?"

She nodded as Foster cupped her foot in his hands and began running his thumbs lightly up and down the sole. "Is it really true? Did his parents die in the Paris Raid? Did you save him as a human?" Questioning Armand's story could have angered Foster, but he seemed to understand she didn't doubt his friend's words. It was just almost impossible to grasp the full scale of the tragedy, and she needed it confirmed from another person who had witnessed it.

His eyes seemed haunted, and his caresses weren't as coordinated as his gaze settled on the unlit fireplace. "Unfortunately, he spoke only the truth. It was a massacre in the true sense of the word, *chérie*. The vampires didn't stand a chance, and his family was particularly vulnerable, because his father never believed it would really happen." Foster's gaze swung back to her face, and his lips twisted. "He believed in the goodness of humanity, the poor fool. He refused to accept the raids were coming, that humans would exterminate the vampires once the world accepted their existence. Until that very afternoon, Armand told me he was still predicting humans and vampires could co-exist in peace."

She didn't miss the bitterness underlying his words, lending an air of rugged dimension to his blithe nature that proved he wasn't as carefree as he seemed. How much of the façade was the real Foster, and how much was the bitter, angry vampire lurking beneath the surface? Her throat clutched at the thought, wondering if she was anything at all to him besides sustenance, even after their lovemaking.

"I couldn't do anything to save them when the men were there with their weapons, but after the agents left, I took Armand and Jacqueline to my home." With a shrug, he said, "You know the rest."

Shaun cocked her head, barely aware of his fingers still flitting over her foot. Her attention was focused

on their conversation instead. "Did you really give them your blood and nearly die from doing so?"

Foster nodded.

"Why? You didn't know them before, did you?"

He shook his head. "I had never seen them before, but when I saw what humanity had done to them, I felt I had to atone for the actions of the humans who participated in the raid, in whatever way I could."

Reading his closed expression, Shaun decided the topic of his brave and stupid act was no longer open for discussion. Instead, she turned to the delicate subject of Armand's sister. "So, you never knew Jacqueline before ... the incident?"

A soft smile curved his lips, one full of affection. "No. I am certain she was quite different before. The person I knew was sweet and docile, akin to a child. Jacqueline was like a doll in many ways, but there were times when darkness consumed her." His smile slipped into a grimace. "I think she was connecting with her old self again during those periods, but couldn't find a way to reconcile the two halves without facing what had happened."

In response to his unspoken grief, she reached out to touch his arms, hoping to provide a measure of comfort. "She ... I guess it became too much for her?"

"Yes." The abrupt answer seemed to be all he was going to say as the silence stretched. Shaun was on the verge of changing the subject when he added, "There were more and more dark periods toward the end. I think she was so desperate to avoid full recall of everything that she had to escape." He closed his eyes, clearly pained by the memory. "She fought the need to regenerate and entered the sunlight. Jacqueline never mastered her skills enough to control her body's natural reaction to sunlight and other dangers. Armand tells me she never put much effort into it in the years before the Paris Raids."

The silence stretched between them again, and Shaun let it stay undisturbed. Her mind was consumed with trying to absorb everything she had learned, to reconcile what she had been taught as an agent with what she had observed as their captive. Armand and Foster seemed nothing like the way she had been trained to think necros would be. They weren't wild animals, driven only by the need for blood, without regard for their victims. They seemed civilized, well educated, and empathetic.

But there had been necros in the mansion that behaved just as she had expected. The two she and Torres faced in the first room had been animalistic and brutal, with the human remains of their feedings stacked with careless disregard.

Her head ached trying to reconcile everything. Surely, the agency was just misinformed. The agents in the early days must have been as brutal as the necros they put down, but the Agency had evolved, hadn't it? Agents were trained to be swift and methodical, to eliminate their targets as quickly as possible. There would be harsh consequences for any agent who toyed with a necro before putting it down.

Her brow furrowed when she tried to remember if anyone had ever been tried for cruelty to a necro. Was there a precedent for the statute, or was it simply on the books to appease the public, to make the Agency seem more compassionate?

Were they deliberately deceiving the public about the true nature of vampires? Had she spent six years of her life perpetuating a lie? Or were Armand and Foster the frauds, presenting the faces they wanted her to see, to lull her into a state of trust? It stood to reason they received more nourishment if she more

actively participated in their sexual activities. Was it all an elaborate setup to make her tastier and more fulfilling?

She jumped when Foster pressed his thumbs into the sole of her foot, concentrating on a sensitive spot. Her thoughts had so engrossed her she had nearly forgotten he was holding her feet.

He wore a serious expression when he met her gaze. "I will never hurt you, Shaun. I don't know your thoughts, but I can sense your fear and confusion." He squeezed her foot gently. "Causing you pain is the last thing I ever want to do."

His words worked magic, easing the tension in her muscles so effectively she half-thought he had thrallled her. Shaun's head dropped back against the cushion, and she closed her eyes as Foster massaged first one foot, and then the other, with slow, deliberate strokes meant to relax her.

They were also turning her on. Shaun's eyes popped open at the realization, and as if her awareness guided him, his hands slid up her leg until he cupped her pussy, rubbing her through the slick material of the jogging pants. A gasp escaped her when he pushed against her clit, once again using his special abilities to find it unerringly through the barriers of her clothing.

"I only want to give you pleasure, *chérie* ." It was as if no time had passed at all from his last statement. The sincerity in his voice resonated through her, and she found her doubts fading. Shaun didn't resist when Foster's hand slipped inside her waistband to lower her pants. She lifted her bottom to assist with the removal of the garment, along with her panties. Eyes slitted with pleasure, she watched Foster as he shifted positions, propping one of her legs over the back of the couch, so he could crouch between her thighs. His nostrils flared when he breathed in the scent of her, inches from her pussy.

Shaun gasped when his fingers entered her opening, slick from her own juices and the remnants of Armand's satisfaction. He seemed unbothered by the mixture, plunging a second finger deep inside her, as his head moved upward to take possession of her mouth in a hungry kiss.

Foster's tongue probed her lips, slipping gently between, to explore her mouth. His tongue collided with hers, shyly engaging in a dueling match, before she pinned it between her teeth with gentle pressure. His coaxing attitude was a marked contrast to Armand's lovemaking style, and she was relieved, knowing she wouldn't confuse them in the shadows of her mind.

He withdrew his mouth, keeping his fingers buried inside her pussy, but not moving them. "*Chérie*, you taste like cinnamon. It's peculiar, because I'm certain you haven't had any since you came to stay with us, but each time I kiss you, that's the taste I take away."

She frowned, equally puzzled. "I don't even like cinnamon."

A chuckle made his chest tremble, brushing against her nipples for just a second. "The mystery deepens." His voice lowered an octave, and his light tone roughened. "I suspect it's a mental association. Cinnamon is sweet and spicy at the same time, with a hint of a bite. Just like you, Shaun. You can be sweeter than honey, but there is always a tangy hint of spice just beneath the surface."

His compliment both confused and delighted her. It also astounded her to know he could project the taste of cinnamon onto her just from his mental abilities and subconscious impressions of her. Without a suitably bizarre compliment to give in return, she said, "You taste like bacon. Probably because you ate mine."

Foster's eyes gleamed, and he laughed again, once more brushing his furry chest against her rigid nipples. If the sweatshirt hadn't covered them, he couldn't have failed to notice how erect they were. "You gave it up freely, *chérie*."

"Did I?" The husky note in her voice bared more of her soul than she wished, making it clear she was asking about much more than the breakfast. "How much was my own free will?"

"Everything after the bath. You know that," he chided, his eyes reflecting disappointment. "We have manipulated you slightly, but you are here with us because you want to be."

Shaun shook her head, her gaze moving to the door. "What if I asked to leave right now?"

His face contorted, and he took a deep breath, seemingly for courage. "Then you may leave. We want you to want to be with us, not to be here because you've been forced into it." His eyes bored into hers, and he spoke quietly. "You are released from the thrall Armand imposed to keep you on the grounds. You may go where you wish."

A tense silence filled the room as Shaun glanced at the door before turning back to Foster. "I'm right where I want to be." His sigh of relief was audible, although his expression reflected confidence. With a grin, she shifted her hips. "Although, you're not where I want you to be."

He wiggled his fingers inside her pussy, sending shockwaves radiating throughout her lower body. "No?"

She shook her head. "Your cock should be higher ... right about where your fingers are." To emphasize her point, Shaun clenched her muscles, trying to expel his fingers.

Foster waggled his eyebrows at her as he withdrew his fingers slowly, bringing them to his nose to take in her scent before sitting upright. His teasing fingers trailing over her calves had her squirming with impatience.

"Please, Foster."

"How can I refuse a beautiful woman?"

Still, he made no move to kneel between her spread legs. His fingers went to the hem of her sweatshirt, inching it up over her breasts. With a growl of impatience, she lunged into an awkward seated position, lifting her arms into the air so he could remove the garment. As soon as he tossed it over his shoulder, she sank against the couch again, propping her head on the arm.

Her body tingled with anticipation, and Shaun held her breath. His head lowered to her breasts, rolling a ripe nipple between his lips. Foster teased the sensitive peak for several seconds before he sucked it deeper into his mouth, grazing with his teeth. She curled her hands into fists, tossing her hips, seeking relief.

Foster moved his mouth to her other breast, prolonging the torture, but in a pleasant way. Shaun regretted having urged him to remove his fingers from her pussy. They were not equal to his cock, but they would have satisfied at least a portion of the aching void in her folds. He bit her nipple forcefully, and she yelped, finding all sensation centered in the bud. It was exquisite to have his mouth drawing on her peak, alternately sucking and releasing, flicking and nibbling. Never before had she experienced such sensations from just her breasts. Her stomach quivered, and her womb tightened as an orgasm built.

Reflexively, she loosened her hands from fists and grasped his back as he shifted to remove his briefs before finally settling between her parted thighs. During the seconds he raised his mouth from her nipple, she still felt him suckling her and marveled at his abilities.

The moment Foster returned to her breast, the lightest touch triggered an orgasm. Convulsions swept through her pussy, along with a flood of arousal, and she arched her hips and back simultaneously, seeking more. He sheathed his cock inside her as the climax rocked her, making her muscles spasm around him as a gasp escaped her.

He began thrusting inside her, and the pleasure increased, feeding the orgasm, prolonging it. A light nibble on her breast renewed the sensitivity of the area, and his fingers probed her anus, stroking lightly over the puckered bud. Her eyes widened at the sensation, because his hands were braced on the couch arm on either side of her head. How could he be ... "Ah, that's amazing." The questions flew out of her mind when he penetrated her anus with his thumb, finding the channel slick and waiting, although he hadn't used lube. It must be some mind trick he used in conjunction with his phantom hands.

All the while, the orgasm built in intensity, spiraling through her until she was lost in the maelstrom. Foster continued pumping into her, his cock stretching her pussy to its limit. His finger in her anus and mouth at her breast were all blending into one all-body sensation. Try as she did to focus and separate each action, Shaun found it impossible.

With a grunt, Foster spasmed inside her, releasing waves of hot fluid. As he peaked, a new level of release swept over her, making it seem as though every molecule in her body separated. Sobs escaped her mouth, and she held tight to Foster, digging her nails into his back in an effort to keep from being lost.

Gray tinged the edges of her vision as her body shook with the force of coming. Her eyes locked with Foster's, his gaze sucking her into a black vortex. As she went, Shaun's last thought was she wouldn't survive the experience, but couldn't care less. What an amazing way to go.

Chapter Seven

Shaun awoke to the enticing aroma of mulberry. She opened bleary eyes to take stock of her surroundings. It was a surprise to find herself still lying on the sofa. After the amazing orgasm with Foster, she half-expected to be floating somewhere in the stratosphere. Instead, she was wrapped in silk, with her head supported by a soft feather pillow.

The lilac robe covering her smelled of mulberry -- no, she did, she realized, her nose twitching as she inhaled. She touched her hair, finding it slightly damp and drawn into a loose knot atop her head. Her skin was silky-smooth, and she smelled like her favorite fragrance. Someone had bathed her during her stint of unconsciousness.

"Wake up, Sleeping Beauty." Armand's lips brushed against her cheek as he whispered the words.

She reached up to touch his cheek, reassuring herself he was real. The moment had a dreamlike quality. How had she managed to stay asleep through a bath?

"Did you enjoy your experience?" Foster asked with a knowing glint as he entered the living room,

bearing a silver tray he placed on the floor near the fireplace. Following his movements, Shaun saw several candles arranged along the mantel and coffee table, filling the room with soft illumination and the hint of cinnamon, a choice she suspected was deliberate.

An inviting black throw made from what appeared to be genuine fur was spread before the lit fire, contrasting elegantly with the burgundy carpet. The circular rug was definitely large enough for three, and she guessed their intentions. Foster settled cross-legged on the rug, naked, beckoning to her with his fingers. She didn't resist Armand taking her hands, pulling her to her feet. When she looked downward, she discovered he was also undressed.

Why had whoever bathed her bothered placing her in the robe? She walked with him to the fur throw, thinking it would have been much more expedient to leave her nude. Apparently, Armand reached the same conclusion, because he stripped the robe from her body. Once free of the garment, she stepped onto the sensuously soft rug, her toes curling into it of their own volition.

Foster extended a hand from his seated position, assisting her to the floor. Shaun grinned at the gallantry of the gesture, her lips twitching with suppressed laughter as he pressed kisses across the back of her hand, over her wrist, and to her elbow.

Armand knelt behind her, placing his hands on her shoulders to massage her neck. A sigh of contentment passed her lips as his fingers worked their magic, kneading deeply into muscles she hadn't realized were tense until he started. Her head fell backward to rest against his arm, impeding his strokes. Seeing Foster watching, his eyes gleaming with an emotion she tentatively identified as hesitation, she gripped his hand to tug him forward.

Paralysis broken, he moved onto his knees as he shifted closer, bringing his hands to her breasts. She moaned when his thumbs worked lightly over her swollen nipples. They retained their earlier sensitivity, and the lightest flick across her buds moistened her pussy.

Armand moved his hands lower, gently moving her head. She stiffened her neck as his fingers traced her spine, pressing lightly at different intervals, somehow always finding a spot to make her squirm with pleasure.

Foster lowered his head, and she raised hers to meet him, opening her mouth to his questing tongue. He tasted like pears, and her stomach growled, reminding her she hadn't eaten since early afternoon. In an imitation of feline grace, she licked his tongue and inside of his cheeks, enjoying the sweet-tart taste almost as much as the tremors racking his body at her light caresses.

Armand feathered his lips over her shoulder, catching her by surprise. He flicked his tongue in teasing strokes across her skin, alternating with the light kisses. It took her a moment to realize he was mimicking the rhythm she had established with her tongue in Foster's mouth. It was her first experience sharing the movements of her lover so synchronously, and she wondered if Foster felt the same sense of completeness when he and Armand shared each other's thoughts and motions. How close was their relationship? Did they share everything? If they did, where did that leave her? The thought was so disconcerting she drew away from Foster, compelled to know the answer.

“Are you lovers?”

Foster and Armand froze, and she could feel Armand staring at her as intently as Foster was when she met his gaze.

“Would that bother you, *chérie*?” Foster asked.

Shaun hesitated, not certain how to answer. A dark emotion assailed her. It wasn't repulsion at the thought of them making love. On a purely physical level, she found the idea more exciting than she would have expected, picturing the two of them touching each other intimately. But it troubled her emotionally. Was she jealous?

Squirming at the idea, she shrugged, bothered by the concept. Already, Foster and Armand were closer on many levels than she had ever been to a man she was involved with. If they met each other's needs -- all their needs -- why would they want her as more than a temporary distraction? “No,” she finally whispered, finding the word difficult to say.

“It's okay, *ma belle*. Many are uncomfortable with two men loving each other.”

“It's not that, Armand ...” She trailed off, unable to express her deepest reservations, still fearing their rejection.

Silence fell between them, with Foster staring over her shoulder, no doubt trading a look with Armand. Finally, he said, “We love each other, but it is complicated. We are not lovers, *chérie*.”

Instead of the relief she expected, her chest constricted at his admission of love for Armand. It seemed impossible they could ever want her for more than pleasure and blood if they had such a strong bond already forged. A third person would surely detract from what they shared.

“I dreamed of Foster for years before we met.” Armand's hands moved to her shoulders, easing her onto her back with gentle guidance. He looked down at her, his eyes shining with wonder. “Just as we dreamed of you.”

Shaun shook her head. “What?” A squeal escaped her before she could expand her question in reaction to something cool touching her breast. Lifting her head, she saw Foster rubbing a ripe strawberry across her nipple. He had shifted to lie on his side beside her.

“I dreamed of this moment many times,” he said, resting his head on her chest while continuing to stroke the fruit across her nipple.

“I don't understand.” It was so difficult to focus on the conversation with him caressing her breast as his breath fanned over her skin.

“They're your favorite,” Armand said, brushing a plump strawberry against her kiss-softened lips. “We know from the dreams we've had. When I dreamed of Foster, it was vague, with little more than his face appearing, along with a sense of completion I hadn't experienced before. But after he turned, we began having the same dreams, intensified. They were how we knew to find you, how we knew your taste in clothes, and your favorite foods.”

Shaun parted her lips to taste the fruit, giving into her hunger. The firm berry yielded reluctantly to her teeth. Juice dribbled down her chin as she chewed. “You dreamed of me?” she asked after swallowing, unable to filter the skepticism from her tone.

Armand licked away the sweet juice from her chin with slow strokes of his tongue before answering. “Not immediately, of course. You weren't born yet.”

“Our first clear vision of you was eleven years ago. We saw you in a pink formal, standing with a gangly young man. His hair was carrot-orange and stood up in a most amusing manner,” Foster interjected before dipping his head to lick her nipple around the fruit.

“Perry.” Shaun uttered his name with confusion. “My prom date ... but how could you know?”

“It is fate, *ma belle*.” Armand stole a kiss, tracing her lips with his tongue, removing the sticky strawberry residue. “We are meant for each other.”

“All three of us.” Foster squeezed it ruthlessly, mangling the fruit to send rivulets of juice across her breast.

He and Armand began licking the juicy trails from her breasts, their tongues laving her nipples in concert. The sensation made Shaun groan and arch her hips. It was almost impossible to continue speaking under the passionate onslaught, but her mind whirled with questions. “How can that be? What do you want from me?”

“To be with us,” Armand said, tickling her stomach with his lips as he followed a rivulet of juice from her breast.

“Complete us.” Foster said before returning his attention to her nipple, flicking the peak.

What did they want from her? The idea of them dreaming of her was fantastical, but what if it were true? Where would she fit in with the relationship? If they shared a deep emotional connection, all they needed from her was her body. “This is crazy. You want me just for sex, for blood? You can’t possibly need me.” Spurned by her anger, Shaun pushed them away, chest heaving with the struggle to suppress the tears burning the backs of her eyes. Their spiel was worse than their plain-stated intentions yesterday to use her for sustenance. Why did they have to lie to her? It had to be a lie, just a fantasy they were spinning, for some reason known only to them -- amusement, perhaps? Hadn’t the NCA taught their agents the necros would drain every ounce from their victims? Apparently, it wasn’t just blood, or even sex they took, but also emotions.

Armand shook his head, and Foster muttered something, his expression a cross between bewilderment and hurt. “We do, Shaun. Having you near me has filled an aching void I’ve lived with all my life.” He brushed a hand across Foster’s arms. “My dear friend filled it partway, but there was still something missing, until you.”

“It’s true. Why else do you think we were with that covey when it was raided?” Foster cupped her hip, squeezing gently. “The dreams directed us there.”

“They could have revealed you were an agent,” Armand said with a mixture of amusement and despair. “Perhaps it’s for the best we didn’t know what you were, or we might not have waited for you.”

Shaun rose to a sitting position, shaking her head. “You’re saying you were deliberately waiting for me to raid the mansion? You weren’t part of that covey?”

“No. Foster and I do not associate with the coveys. There is too much competition for food, too many petty squabbles, and too much pressure to guide the younglings when they want no guidance.” He sighed, his eyes staring off into the distance. “We have been content these years together, but there was always an awareness of something still missing, even before we dreamed of you.”

Foster shrugged. "Who knows? If we were attracted to each other, if we shared a sexual relationship, maybe it would have been enough for us. For whatever reason, we were meant to find you. You were meant to be with us."

"But why would you need me? You share this amazing bond." She ducked her head, embarrassed. "I couldn't stand to be nothing more than your plaything, to be closed off from the intimate relationship you share." Her head snapped up when Armand laughed. Shaun was prepared to vent her outrage, but he spoke before she could give voice to her angry reaction.

"Is that what worries you?" He put an arm around her, drawing her into his arms. "It is not just a physical need you satisfy, *ma belle*. We will share this bond with you as well, once your mental powers develop."

"Armand," Foster said, his voice thick with caution.

"What powers?"

"We will change you to be like us." Armand nodded, clearly believing it was a simple matter.

"What? No." Shaun withdrew from his embrace. "I can't. I'm an agent --"

His mouth tightened. "You *were* an agent. Now, you are our consort."

Ire stirred, Shaun tried to scoot backward, needing space. Foster restrained her, shaking his head. "It is your choice, Shaun. We won't force you to become like us if you don't want to."

"I won't lose her to mortality," Armand hissed fiercely, trading glares with Foster.

"No, you'll lose her to your own stubbornness, Armand. Allow Shaun to make up her own mind."

Foster's words reassured Shaun, as did the slumping of Armand's shoulders and his reluctant nod. Tentatively, she said, "You're both mad, you know."

"No doubt." Foster managed a weak grin. "Do you believe anything we've said?"

"I can't. It's too wild." Left unspoken was the complete truth -- their words resonated with her on a deeper level, one not ruled by logic. It had to be nonsense, but she found herself wanting to believe, was in fact perched on the edge of accepting everything.

"Give it time, *chérie* ." He leaned forward to kiss her neck before adding, "In the meantime, may we pleasure you?"

"Only if I can reciprocate." Somehow, she managed a lighthearted tone, even though her mind dwelled on the thoughts racing through it. Shaun was certain she couldn't lose herself in pleasure, but hadn't accounted for the determination of the men.

Once again, she found herself on her back, this time with grapes at her mouth. She accepted Armand's offering with slow, sensuous movements, rolling it on her tongue before biting into it. Her gaze darted to the tray from where they were taking the items used to toy with her. They'd gathered together all of her favorites -- strawberries, grapes, whipped cream, maraschino cherries, bananas, and chocolate sauce. Her stomach quivered with anticipation as she speculated what they planned to do to her. From the looks

of things, she was going to be the main entrée. Shaun's pussy convulsed at the thought.

Foster reached for the chocolate sauce, decorating her stomach and thighs with enthusiastic swirls as Armand drew intricate patterns on her skin with his finger, dipping it frequently in the cherry juice. Their opposite styles were amusing, but she didn't have the urge to laugh. Instead, she wanted to cry out at the sensations spreading through her as they began swiping away the edible body art using their tongues.

Armand took a huge strawberry, dipped it in a line of chocolate sauce adorning her stomach, and trailed it lower, across her mound, and into her slit, making her tremble at the feeling. She gasped with surprised pleasure at the intrusion of the berry into her pussy, squirming when he rubbed it against her clit firmly. The texture was unlike anything she'd ever experienced, simultaneously soft and rough, making her slicker than she had been just seconds before.

He lodged the strawberry into her opening, and she moaned, arching her hips as his head descended. Armand's uneven breath washed across her mound, causing her to stiffen in reaction, anticipating his tongue sweeping inside her pussy. The keenness didn't last long, and his skilled technique far exceeded her expectations.

Armand started out tracing her clit before he drew it into his mouth to suck lightly. Foster had been engaged licking chocolate from her thigh, but when he trailed his tongue across her skin to her pussy, she went rigid, thinking she might pass out just from the thought of the two of them eating her out together.

He slipped the appendage inside, moving around the berry to stroke the walls of her pussy, as Armand continued sucking on her clit. Shaun cried out, unable to hold back the reaction, just as she couldn't keep her hips from pumping against their faces, wanting more. When Foster dislodged the strawberry to sweep his tongue inside her opening, she cried out again, gathering handfuls of the fur throw in tight fists to keep herself grounded.

Armand increased the pressure of his sucking artfully, in small increments, until she was barely aware of a pause in the pressure. All she could feel was his mouth wrapped around her clit, as Foster tongue-fucked her with rapid thrusts. Shaun tightened her hold on the rug, seeking something to keep her tethered. Convulsions swept from her womb and into her pussy, and sobs of ecstasy burst from her as she found release. Her pussy convulsed as her legs tried to tighten around them, wanting to keep Armand and Foster between her thighs forever.

Inevitably, they withdrew, leaving her an exhausted, sated heap of sensation.

"Delicious," said Armand.

Foster nodded. "Your sweetness outshines the fruit, *chérie*."

Shaun was convinced she was spent but hadn't counted on Armand lifting her onto his lap. She cuddled against him for a long moment, regaining her breath, as Foster stroked her thighs. Her mind was just starting to clear when Armand lay back, taking her with him. With her head in the direction of Armand's feet, she straddled him, facing Foster. He found the opening of her pussy, nestling the head of his cock there until Foster was standing before her, bracing her hands on his thighs as she leaned forward slightly to facilitate the position.

Armand speared her, thrusting deep inside her with one stroke, crying out his pleasure. The action renewed Shaun's passion, and she met his thrusts eagerly as her gaze settled on the tray. She reached for the whipped cream, chuckling. Foster watched with interest as she brought the can to his cock, spraying

a liberal portion on him. His eyes closed as he subtly thrust forward, clearing expecting her to take him into her mouth.

But she wasn't finished. Barely holding back giggles, Shaun took a chunk of banana and placed it atop his shaft, garnishing the whipped cream. "Bananas Foster," she said, the laughter escaping.

Armand's laughter rumbled through his body, causing her pussy to clench around him as his erection spasmed. Shaun waited until Foster was in a full-throated laugh before darting forward, taking in as much of his cock as she could. With delicate strokes, she licked away the sickly-sweet whipped cream until it was only Foster's penis and the banana in her mouth. Looking up at him through veiled lashes, she sucked forcefully, the juice of the banana and Foster's pre-come mingling in her mouth in a delicious cocktail.

His face was contorted with pleasure, the strong column of his throat revealed by him tossing back his head. His cries of pleasure mingled with hers and Armand's as he thrust into her mouth in concert with Armand plunging into her pussy. Shaun lost herself in the rhythm and his cries, allowing instinct to take over. Somehow, she managed to keep sucking Foster's erection, to feather her tongue around his corona and lave the bundle of nerves at his sensitive V, even as her body trembled with reaction to Armand's pace.

Her pussy convulsed as Foster's staff spasmed. Hot fluid filled her mouth, and she swallowed automatically, letting the banana fall to the floor as she withdrew her mouth from his cock. Armand's body was tight with tension, and when her pussy clenched around him as Foster dropped to his knees, straddling Armand's legs while sitting in front of her, he found release, shooting hot streams of fluid inside her quivering pussy.

As the orgasm washed over her, tiny pricks of pain at her neck flared and faded. The sounds of Armand and Foster sucking in concert, both taking her blood, filled her mind, enhancing her pleasure. There was something wonderful about sharing her blood with them, a gift she gave willingly. Not only did it enhance her physical pleasure, but also strengthened the mental bond forming with them.

As they fed, her mind whirled, speculating how much more intense the experience would be if she let them change her to be like them. If she shared their mental abilities, how mind-blowing would it be to orgasm while sharing their blood? A shiver raced down her spine at the thought of drinking from them, but it wasn't prompted from disgust. The idea was entirely too tempting, leaving her with much to contemplate.

Chapter Eight

Two days later, Shaun awoke in what was quickly becoming her accustomed and favorite place -- cradled between Foster and Armand in Armand's massive bed. A look at the clock revealed it was barely past noon, meaning her lovers wouldn't rise for another hour or two. Coffee beckoned, and she clambered from the bed, not worrying about waking them. It would take much more than her shifting and scooting off the bed to rouse them from the regenerative rest that assured their continued immortality.

Walking over to retrieve her robe from the hook on Armand's door, a wave of dizziness passed over Shaun. With a rueful brush of fingers against the wounds in her neck, she found her explanation easily

enough. While Armand and Foster had been careful to take only a little of her blood, they drank of her each time they made love. It seemed to be all they did, so no wonder she was feeling lightheaded.

A little queasy too. Her stomach churned as she slipped on the robe and left the bedroom to pad downstairs in her bare feet. Absently, she rubbed it, thinking she needed food to replace the lost blood that much more quickly.

So they could drain it from her again. With a sigh, she entered the kitchen, going straight to the coffee machine. Foster had reprogrammed it to begin brewing when she awakened, so the coffee was ready and waiting for her. As she took a mug from the cupboard, Shaun contemplated how futile it was to continue the cycle they had established. She could never meet their requirements for blood in a long-term relationship. As a human, she would weaken too quickly, necessitating they look elsewhere for sustenance. The thought had her seething with jealousy, but it was something she would have to come to terms with if she was really going to stay, as she had been thinking of doing in her private moments the past two days.

Could she stay with them as a human? Inevitably, she would age and die. Aside from the vanity aspect of not wanting to become old in their eyes, it was impractical to think the type of relationship Armand and Foster wanted with her could be sustained beyond a few decades. She couldn't imagine being the object of their sexual desire, and the primary source of their sustenance, when she was in her sixties or older. While thirty years with them sounded like a lifetime to her, she knew it would pass in a blink for them. Was it fair to start something she couldn't finish, metaphorically? Could she remain as their consort while retaining her humanity, knowing she would eventually have to leave them, either by death or her own choice when she became a burden?

Shaun sipped the hot coffee, wincing at the way it burned her mouth. Shaking her head, she wandered from the kitchen to the den, seeking escape from her thoughts, but not finding it easily.

How could she even think of becoming a vampire, something she had been taught to exterminate? Never had Shaun hated necros, but she couldn't approve of their feeding methods, whether or not the Agency had driven large numbers of them to murder. It was insane to think of becoming one so she could remain forever with Armand and Foster.

There were no guarantees of forever, of course. With the Agency continually improving their hunting and termination methods, the world was an unsafe place for necros. Whether or not she became one, she could lose both of the men who had come to mean so much to her so quickly.

Yet, it seemed willful and foolish to deliberately turn her back on the opportunity presented, to spend what could conceivably be eternity in their arms just because she might lose them either way. If only ethics guided her indecision, she wouldn't have such a difficult time choosing. Shaun knew if she could excise any hint of emotion from her judgment, she would come to a quick, simple answer: Leave them as soon as possible, retain her humanity, and try to forget about everything she had experienced with them.

It wasn't that simple though. Try as she might, she couldn't analyze the situation critically without paying heed to her feelings. She shied away from labeling the emotions, but knew they couldn't be ignored. What she felt was equally important as what she should feel, and what she should expect herself to do. Not to mention, she had to weigh how Armand and Foster felt too. Their love for her was genuine. She had no doubt they believed she was their soul mate. Not being ruthless enough to turn her back on that, she could find no easy solution to her dilemma.

Shaun settled on the recliner in the den, reaching for the remote. The satellite dish attached to the roof

offered myriad choices, and she began flipping idly through the channels, trying to clear her mind.

An infomercial for a food processing system caught her attention for a couple of minutes, but she changed the channel upon acknowledging she would probably never use it -- especially if her diet changed to one of mainly liquid in the future.

A news program stopped her in mid-flip, and her mouth dropped open with shock. Her own face was splashed across the screen in a montage of agent photos displayed for a long moment, before the screen cut back to the anchor. The TV announcer gave a succinct recount of events at the mansion, listed the dead as three agents, with no mention of Torres's name, and then said Shaun's name. Her photo appeared in the corner of the screen.

"NCA agents are trying to find Agent Shaun O'Grady, missing since the raid at the mansion. Sources inside the Agency say she is most likely dead, but her family refuses to accept that."

The coffee mug tumbled from Shaun's fingers when her parents appeared on screen, along with a note at the bottom indicating the clip was recorded earlier. Her stocky father seemed to have shrunk in upon himself, and her mother's robust Italian complexion was pale, with heavy bags under her eyes. They were pleading for any information about Shaun's whereabouts, both fighting back tears.

To see her father crying was a shock for her. He was a man of hearty laughs and jovial disposition, not prone to gloom. She couldn't remember seeing him cry since Granddad's funeral when she was fourteen.

"Please, we beg you to contact us if you know anything about our daughter," said Giada O'Grady, staring intently into the camera in such a manner Shaun felt like her mother was in the same room. "She can't be dead."

The screen cut back to the anchor, looking suitably somber. Shaun missed his closing comments as Foster and Armand came rushing into the room, both nude, with fear in their expressions. "What's wrong?" Armand's eyes swung wildly around the room.

Shaun shook her head, tears overwhelming her ability to speak. "Nothing."

"Then why do you hurt so, *chérie*? Your pain woke us from our slumber." Foster came closer, stepping gingerly over the broken ceramic shards and wet spot on the carpet. Once clear of those, he knelt beside her chair, touching her hand, as Armand joined her in a similar pose on the other side.

"My parents ... they were on the television begging for some information about me." Horrified, Shaun stuffed her fist against her mouth, biting on her knuckles to hold back sobs. How could she have been so thoughtless to have gotten swept away in a tide of passion and not given a thought to anyone in her life besides herself? "The Agency considers me dead, but my parents won't believe it. They looked so distraught."

"All will be well," Armand said, looking calmer by the moment.

"I have to see them." Shaun gripped Foster's hand, turning to look at him. "Please let me see them."

"You aren't a prisoner." Foster's eyes seemed dull when he nodded to Armand. "We won't force you to stay."

Armand took her hand, and she turned to look at him, knowing he would be the one to try to stop her.

To her surprise, he brought it to his mouth to press a light kiss to the palm.

“Having you with us has been bliss, *ma belle* . My heart will miss you.”

Shaun closed her eyes, not needing their honed mental powers to sense the anguish in the two of them. It was mirrored in her, but what choice did she have? She couldn't turn her back on her family to embrace being a necro, even for Armand and Foster. Too many obstacles stood between them, and they all had to accept that.

Incapable of speaking, she gripped their hands tightly, bringing them to her chest and holding them there, hoping she could keep Armand and Foster in her heart for the rest of her life. That would have to be enough to sustain her.

* * * * *

A chill in the evening had Shaun huddling deeper in her jacket as Foster and Armand came to rest in a parking lot without any visible activity, within walking distance of her parents' home restaurant on Soscol Avenue in Napa. It had taken about an hour to cover the distance from their home near Big Sur, and iciness seemed to have pervaded her bones.

Awkwardly, she stood in front of them once they had released her, wondering how she should handle the parting. “I ...” Should she thank them for the incredible orgasms and unbelievable experiences? Would it be better to leave it light, saying a casual farewell?

Before she could decide, Armand gathered her into his arms, pressing a passionate kiss to her mouth. He seemed to be trying to absorb her through the embrace, and she strained against him just as eagerly, returning his kisses with equal fervor.

When he wrenched away from her, sending her gently to Foster, she met his mouth with the same passionate intensity, trying to pretend she didn't feel moisture on his cheeks, and tears weren't streaming from her eyes either. His kiss gentled toward the end, and he held his lips to hers for a long second, unmoving, before breaking away.

With a cry of distress, Shaun wiped at her cheeks and turned away from them as they began walking in the opposite direction. Her feet led her unerringly around the corner, onto First Street. As she walked, heading for the intersection of First and Soscol, she focused on regaining control of her emotions, not wanting to upset her parents any more than they were already, and not able to cope with the pain of parting from Armand and Foster right then.

When she reached Soscol, Shaun covered the two blocks to O'Grady's, bypassing the elegant brass door with the restaurant's name engraved in Script font in favor of going down the alley to use the back entrance. Nothing stirred in the alleyway, although her heart cried out for the sound of two sets of footsteps to emerge from the darkness -- Armand and Foster coming back for her, even though it was impossible.

The back door leading to the kitchen was unlocked, and she slipped inside. Immediately, Shaun felt a little better as familiar scents washed over her. Roasting pork, fish, and chocolate mingled into a unique fragrance synonymous with her childhood and teen years. As she moved deeper into the kitchen, she saw the customary bustle as the chefs danced around each other, intent on their various tasks.

At the site of her sister chopping vegetables, Shaun's eyes watered anew, having nothing to do with the

onions yielding to Amelia's sharp blade. Before she could approach her, the swinging door opened, and her mother came rushing through, a look of panic on her face, as was also normal. Giada never believed things were running smoothly in the kitchen unless she was there to personally supervise.

Giada froze as Shaun stepped into the light, pushing back her hood to reveal her face. A stream of Italian left her mother, and she shouted, "Sean, come to the kitchen," as she ran forward, gathering Shaun into a tight embrace.

Shaun snuggled closer to her as her father rushed into the kitchen, letting Giada's bulk engulf her while the scent of her perfume washed over her. The tears she had been trying to fight came in a rush, soaking her mother's white apron.

"My darling, you're alive." With another tight squeeze, Giada allowed Sean the opportunity to hug her. Shaun did her best to rein in the tears as she accepted her father's hug, but failed miserably.

Amelia was there next, hugging her as enthusiastically as Giada had, her eyes also filled with tears. Shaun let their questions and love wash over her simultaneously, enjoying being with them, letting their presence ease some of the ache in her heart.

Giada maneuvered Amelia aside, once again bringing Shaun close to her bosom, this time to steer her into the break room, followed by Sean and Amelia. Her father closed the door, and Shaun's eyes widened when she saw the way he trembled. His normally ruddy complexion was white, and new silver strands had sprouted in his bright red hair. She didn't protest when he came to the chair her mother pushed her into to kiss her cheeks and hug her again.

"We thought you were dead," said Amelia.

"Never." Giada shook her head so abruptly strands of her dark hair, ruthlessly scraped back into a tight bun, fell free to frame her face. "We never believed that."

"I did," Amelia said softly, clearly upset. "What happened to you, Shaun? The Agency didn't tell us anything other than you were MIA."

"I was taken by two vampires." Self-consciously, Shaun fingered the fold of her turtleneck, hoping it hid the bites adorning her throat. "They didn't hurt me," she hurried to add upon seeing Giada's face fold as she started sobbing.

"Necros not hurt you?" Sean frowned. "How can that be?"

She clenched her hands in her lap. "It's complicated, and not something I want to explain right now. Suffice to say, the Agency hasn't been completely honest with the public, either from lack of information or deliberate deception."

Looking up, she saw her parents trade a troubled look. "What?"

"You are finished with that awful place aren't you, darling?" Giada patted her shoulders. "Promise me you will resign. I couldn't stand to lose you again."

With a firm nod, she said, "I'm resigning tomorrow. I've learned some things ... troubling things ... about the Agency, vampires, and myself. I can't continue --"

The door crashing against the wall interrupted Shaun, and her head jerked up in reaction. Relief swelled in her. Torres stood before her, looking completely healthy. Another realization followed -- he was in uniform, toting a machine gun, which he kept aimed at her. Three others followed him into the room, all in the standard uniform, bearing full gear.

Training had her looking around for the threat until she realized they perceived her to be it. "What's going on, Torres?"

"You have to come with us, O'Grady."

She shook her head, eyeing the guns not wavering from her. "Why? I just got back. I want to spend time with my family. Can't we do this tomorrow?"

"Negative. My orders are to bring you in tonight for debriefing."

Giada put herself between Shaun and Torres's gun. "Leave my daughter alone. She has done nothing to have you breaking in here like the Gestapo."

He remained unfazed. "Ma'am, it's standard policy to assess an agent if they've been tainted by a necro. Your daughter could be one herself."

Shaun's gasp was lost under her mother's retort. "I don't care if she is. I've nearly lost her once. I won't let you take her from me again."

Sean moved to stand beside his wife, putting his arm around her shoulders. "You will leave now."

A lump lodged in Shaun's throat. With an air of precision, Torres removed the pistol from his holster, pointing the laser sight at her father's chest. Disaster was seconds away.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I have to follow orders."

"Get out --"

Decisively, she stood up, pretending her knees weren't shaking. "It's fine, Dad. Don't worry." She walked over to him to kiss his cheek. "This won't take long at all." Turning to her mother, she pressed a kiss to her cheek as well. "As soon as I'm debriefed, and they realize I'm not a vampire, I'll be right back here, or I'll find you at your house."

With confidence she didn't feel, Shaun walked over to Torres, straightened her shoulders, and smiled. "Shall we?"

He had replaced his pistol and now took silver handcuffs from his vest. Shaun didn't know whether to be angry or terrified at their extreme measures as the man who had trained her, a man she considered a friend, secured her wrists in front of her before guiding her to the door. She supposed she should be grateful he hadn't bound them behind her back, which was much more uncomfortable, but could summon very little in the way of gratitude for any facet of the outrageous treatment.

They herded her across the street, disdaining the crossing sign forbidding them to do so, stopping traffic with little regard. A sleek helicopter waited in the parking lot of a store closed for the night, with two agents keeping their laser sights trained on her the entire time. Was she that much of a security risk? What a way to treat a hostage who had been released. More and more, she found it easier to believe

Armand's ominous interpretations of the mistruths the NCA encouraged.

Upon reaching the helicopter, they wasted no time loading her in. Two of the agents lifted her inside, not allowing Shaun to assist in any way. Once in the cabin, the female agent secured her to the lone chair bolted to the floor. It was in the center of the cabin, making it easy for them to watch her every move. Not that she could do much of that with her hands bound and silver clamps locked around her waist, allowing barely enough room to breathe, let alone squirm.

The agents filed into the helicopter, taking seats on the benches secured to each side of the chopper. Only Torres approached her, his expression revealing a hint of his distress beneath the icy façade. "Are you injured, O'Grady?"

"No, Mateo." The use of his first name was deliberate as she attempted to remind him she was more than a prisoner. He had been her mentor for two years, her partner on her first mission, and a good friend. Shaun sensed she was going to need allies, and he was the only one who might be receptive to viewing her as something other than a danger.

He nodded, his face not giving away anything. "I'm surprised you're still alive. Two masters taking you, a new agent." His dark eyes narrowed. "It seems impossible for you to have survived."

Her stomach dropped at the suspicion in his gaze, and she gave up trying to remind him she was his friend. "They let you live. Why not me?"

With a low sound in his throat, he rose to his feet as the helicopter engines turned over, preparing to grab a seat on the bench. "I hope for your sake the NCA chooses to do the same."

His words confirmed her fear. This wasn't going to be a routine debriefing, or even a gauntlet of tests to prove she was still human. There was something else going on, and she was facing it alone. Her heart cried out for Foster and Armand as the chopper ascended to ferry them to the nearest NCA facility in San Francisco.

Chapter Nine

Shaun had expected immediate interrogation, not to be locked in a holding cell reinforced with silver and left there, ignored, for the next six hours. She paced the confines of the small room, staring out the Plexiglas walls constantly, craning her neck for signs of activity in the hallway. When footsteps finally sounded from down the hall hours later, her heart raced. The waiting had been worse than anything they might do, since it gave her ample time to imagine their plans for her.

To her mingled dismay and relief, the person nearing her cell wore the uniform of a cadet and carried a tray of food. Her stomach rumbled at the sight, even as her annoyance raised another notch. How long did they plan to keep her here, in the dark, metaphorically?

The agent didn't speak as he flipped open a small door on one wall of the cell and slid her dinner through the opening, leaving it on the shelf built for that purpose. The portal closed with a click when he turned and walked away, looking over his shoulder just once. Seeing the fear in his eyes, Shaun had to resist the urge to scream, "Boo." As she walked over to retrieve the tray, she wondered what the agents

had heard about her. Why was the Agency treating her like this? They couldn't really believe she was a necro, could they?

Curled on the thin bunk, Shaun examined the meager contents of the tray. The offerings of a grilled cheese sandwich, carrots, and applesauce tasted as bad as they looked, but she was too hungry to protest. Making short work of the meal, she placed the tray on the floor and stretched out on the bunk, curling into the fetal position. Hunger still consumed her, although her stomach felt full enough. It just didn't seem to be what she needed.

Self-pity threatened to overwhelm her, and Shaun closed her eyes in an attempt to regain control. As she had told herself repeatedly over the past hours, once they realized she wasn't a threat, the Agency would release her. By this time tomorrow, the whole thing would seem like a bad dream. She would be home with her family and could pretend this had never happened.

The soft squeak of rubber shoe soles on the tile hallway gained her attention, and she sat up, composing her expression into one she hoped was the picture of calm as her visitor came into sight. Torres stopped in front of her cell, tapping in the code to release the lock. The door slid open with a hydraulic hiss, and he gestured with his hand. "Up. The director is ready to debrief you."

"About time," she said under her breath as she got up. She walked out of the cell quickly. Although still in a hallway under heavy security, surrounded by empty Plexiglas cells, immediately Shaun felt freer once she passed the threshold. Each step taking them out of the containment area lightened the weight in her heart, and she dared to find hope the nightmare was ending.

They left the containment area and headed to a conference room. Shaun hadn't been to the San Francisco facility before, but the floor plan was similar to the building in L.A. where she was stationed. Her surge of hope faded somewhat when Torres took her into a Level II interrogation room, equipped to restrain a necro. She had hoped for the casual Level I, which doubled as a staff meeting room at most Agency buildings.

To her relief, Torres indicated she should take a seat in one of the leather chairs around the table on one side of the room instead of strapping her into the metal chair on the other side. Once seated, Shaun looked around at those already assembled, not recognizing the pudgy man in a white coat, but identifying him as an NCA scientist. Chief Gordie sat there, his lips tight. He nodded briefly, but his expression gave no hint to what he was feeling.

Shaun's eyes widened when she saw the regional director seated at the head of the table. Raven Bradshaw was in charge of every field office in Oregon and California. They hadn't met, but her picture hung in the foyer of the Los Angeles office. For her to be involved with a routine debriefing proved it was anything but.

Gathering her courage, Shaun spoke first. "What is all this? Why am I being treated like this?"

Bradshaw remained silent, looking toward Gordie. He cleared his throat, appearing uncomfortable. "Agent O'Grady, you're here to tell us everything that happened."

"I was taken hostage by two vamp -- necros." Her eyes swung to Torres, seeking support. "Didn't Lt. Torres tell you that?"

"I don't remember anything beyond entering the darkness," Torres said. "I don't know what happened to you."

Shaun swallowed down her fear, striving to maintain a level tone. "The two necros knocked out Torres somehow and took me. It's as simple as that."

"Where did they take you?" asked the man in the white jacket, his pen poised to record her answer.

Shaun squinted at him, seeing the name Holmes engraved on the breast of the coat. Hesitating, she searched her mind for an answer, refusing to reveal the whereabouts of Armand and Foster. "I don't know. It was a house of some kind, but I was out for the journey."

"What time did you regain consciousness?" Holmes asked.

With a shrug, she said, "I was already in the structure. I don't really know."

"What did the necros do to you?" Gordie's eyes focused on her turtleneck. "Did they feed from you?"

Since she could hardly deny it in light of the abundant bite marks on her neck and body, she nodded once.

"Yet, you survived." Bradshaw's voice was like an ice pick stabbing into Shaun's ears. She made no effort to hide her suspicion. "How can that be?"

Squirming, Shaun struggled to maintain eye contact with the intimidating brunette, sensing any hint of weakness would be exploited. "They don't kill their prey."

Torres scoffed. "Right. They're fucking animals, O'Grady."

It took every ounce of control not to lash out at Torres for his condemnation of Armand and Foster. Shaun knew she couldn't reveal any strong feelings for either of them, or she might never get out of here. "I'm sitting here, living proof they didn't kill me." Her eyes narrowed. "As are you, Torres. Two master vampires against an agent going in blind? They could have killed you easily."

His mouth tightened, but he nodded in acknowledgement.

Shaun turned back to Bradshaw, knowing the woman held the decision about her fate. "When can I get out of here? I want to go home."

Bradshaw studied her coolly for a moment before her mouth curled. "As soon as you prove you haven't been tainted. As a source of sustenance for them, you might have accidentally been exposed."

"I'm as human as you are." Although Shaun doubted that. Director Bradshaw seemed more machine than human, with her brain practically spitting out equations and tabulating outcomes every second of the day. The idea of the woman having a heart or emotions was laughable.

"Fine. Once Dr. Holmes performs tests, we'll meet back here to see when ... or if ... you're leaving."

Shaun nodded, struggling to hide any trace of fear. She knew the test results would be negative for infection, so she had nothing to fear. So why was her heart still racing as she got to her feet to follow Holmes and Torres from the room? Why couldn't she really believe it was nearly over?

* * * * *

Two hours later, Shaun once again sat at the table, surrounded by the same faces as before. Holmes had several sheets spread around him, his brow furrowing as he examined them. Every once in a while, he would look up at her, his eyes full of eagerness. Her skin crawled each time his gaze settled on her. Hunger blazed in his eyes, but not the sexual kind. That would be a relief to the nameless need reflected in his gaze, because at least she could understand sexual desire.

Gordie was the first to speak. "There are more questions, Agent O'Grady."

With a nod, she leaned back in the chair, trying to appear relaxed. Inside, she was anything but, with her nerves strung so tightly they might snap at any moment. "What do you need to know, sir?"

"Prisoners taken at the raid on the mansion revealed under interrogation the two masters who took you weren't part of their covey. They had shown up the night before, seeking shelter in passing." His eyes narrowed. "Several necros said they seemed to be waiting for something."

Shaun swallowed the lump in her throat. "Like what?"

"Our raid, maybe."

"Why would any vampire voluntarily wait for an Agency raid?" She winced upon seeing the way Torres's eyes narrowed when she used the word vampire instead of necro. He clearly wasn't used to hearing the term vampires used to refer to them, especially from an agent. Agents were indoctrinated to use the scientifically established term from the first day of training -- the term designed to strip vampires of any semblance of humanity, to classify them as a thing, thus making it easier for everyone to accept the extermination of their species.

"That's what we want to know," said Bradshaw. Her dark eyes bored into Shaun. "And we're certain you have the answer."

"I don't." She blinked before meeting the director's eyes and cursed the reaction. Might as well paint "Liar" on her forehead.

"Hmm." Bradshaw's chair squeaked when she leaned forward. "You know the necros have a private, violent resistance movement, in addition to the public protests they wage with the humans enthralled by them, claiming we're abusing their civil rights."

"Every first-year cadet knows that."

"You might not know they're using some of our agents against us to ferret out classified information."

Shaun's eyes widened. "That makes no sense. Agents are dedicated to their mission."

"You're familiar with the thrall?" Holmes asked.

Shifting, Shaun nodded. She was intimately familiar with it. "You're saying some agents are being controlled by necros?"

"Yes." Bradshaw folded her fingers together on a stack of papers. "More disturbing are the ones voluntarily infiltrating the Agency, knowingly betraying the human race for those parasites." The way she examined Shaun left no doubt she had ascribed her to that category. "We can deprogram an agent

corrupted through no fault of their own, but death is the only option for a lapdog of the necros.”

“Where are you going with this?” Shaun wanted her voice to be level, but it trembled, betraying her fear.

Gordie tugged at the collar of his white dress shirt. “Were you working with them, O’Grady? We know someone from the L.A. facility was passing on information to the necros, and we’re close to identifying them. Our working theory is the two necros who took you were an extraction team. Maybe you sent for them because you realized we were closing in on you.”

Shaun couldn’t call back the harsh laugh that escaped her. “That’s insane. I spent six years studying to be an agent. I dedicated my life to your ideals. Armand and Foster took me for reasons of their own, and it had nothing to do with the Agency or any resistance movement.”

“Did it have something to do with impregnating you?” Holmes asked quietly.

She whipped her to face him, her mouth hanging open. “*What?*”

Instead of answering her directly, his gaze swept around the table. “If you’ll turn to page six of the subject’s test results, you’ll see the ultrasound image. You’ll also notice on page seven when I scanned the subject’s heat signature, the vampire embryo emitted a core body temperature of seventy-five degrees. This is higher than an adult necro, but I presume it has something to do with the rapid cellular growth of the beings.”

The room spun around Shaun, and she reached out for the table to brace herself, feeling as though she might fall over at any time. “I don’t understand. That’s impossible. Necros can’t reproduce.”

Holmes cleared his throat, returning his gaze to her. “That’s not entirely true. Their reproductive process is different from ours, but necros can have offspring if they can find a compatible genetic match. Without compatibility, the virus that causes the infection attacks any embryo, treating it as an intruder. It’s one of the necros’ immune responses, how they live virtually forever. The immune system is revved up --”

“Enough, Doctor.” Bradshaw tapped her page. “How old is this creature? I’m certainly no expert, but it looks quite developed.” Her gaze swung to Shaun. “How long has she been in collusion with them?”

“The age of an embryo is difficult to gauge, ma’am.” Holmes swiped the sweat forming on his brow, his excitement evident in his every gesture. “We know they develop much more rapidly than a human embryo, in a matter of weeks, but there isn’t enough data to know the precise rate of development. At this point, the embryo measures about eight weeks in human terms.”

“I can’t be pregnant.” Shaun’s voice carried around the room, drawing all eyes to her. “It’s impossible. It’s common public knowledge necros can only reproduce by transmitting the virus through the ingestion of their blood.”

“Think about it, O’Grady. We can’t have the public knowing these necros have children like we do. It’s important we represent them as closely as possible to the image created over the years. Many of Dr. Stoker’s initial suppositions have proven false, but we can’t let the world know that.” Bradshaw shook her head. “If they question the animalistic nature of these beasts for even a second, if public opinion influences politicians to intercede in the Agency’s workings, we will lose the war for supremacy.”

Nausea churned in her stomach, although she didn’t know if it was from the news she was struggling to absorb, from Bradshaw’s cold speech, or even from morning sickness. The last thought threatened to

trigger hysterical laughter brought on by panic, and she clamped down hard on her tongue to avoid letting it out.

“Director Bradshaw, I’d like permission to study the subject as the pregnancy develops.” Holmes’ muddy-brown eyes shone with fanatical anticipation. “Just imagine what we can learn from the process.”

“Yes.” She assessed Shaun with no hint of emotion. “Agent O’Grady, I’m prepared to offer you generous terms.”

“Terms for what?” She slapped the table, wincing at the sting in her palm resulting from the impetuous action. “I haven’t done anything wrong.”

“At the very least, you’ve let one of those animals touch you.” The veins in Torres’s forehead throbbed visibly, and he clenched his fists on the table. “Maybe both.” His eyes darkened with rage, and she looked away, unable to bear the accusations coming from her friend.

“Lt. Torres, that’s enough.” Bradshaw’s tone bordered on pleasant. “I want to believe you didn’t betray the Agency. We all know the necros have powerful mind control abilities. If you were thrall’d, it wasn’t your fault. You have the opportunity here to assist the Agency, the scientific community, and retain what you had -- your position as an agent, and your life. All it will cost you is a few weeks.”

Shivers raced up Shaun’s spine at the ominous words. “What do you want from me?”

“To observe the creature growing inside you, to study its weaknesses. If the doctor is correct, it will be over very soon.” A dark brow arched, making Bradshaw appear sinister. “After all, if you were impregnated in the past three days and are already eight weeks along, it won’t take long at all for the embryo to develop.”

She folded her hands on her lap, struggling to appear composed. “What happens then?”

“After the birth ... hatching ... whatever, you’ll be free to go.”

Apprehension warred with anger, making her voice shake when she asked, “And the baby?”

Bradshaw grimaced. “The abomination will be studied until Dr. Holmes has learned all he can. Once it serves no further useful purpose, you can be assured it will be humanely euthanized.”

Responding solely on instinct, Shaun lunged forward, hands extended. If Torres hadn’t pulled her back, she would have clawed out Bradshaw’s eyes. “You heartless monster. How can you sit in judgment of vampires, condemning them for having no regard for human life, when you have no regard for their lives? No way in hell will I cooperate with you.”

Bradshaw had maintained her calm expression. “I assumed that was your answer when you tried to attack me.” She turned to Holmes. “You’ll have everything you need, Doctor. Make sure the subject is maintained in good health, but do what you must, without regard for her status as an agent. Shaun O’Grady is suspended from field duty. Her only assignment is to nurture that animal in her womb for study.” Her chair squeaked slightly when she turned back to Shaun. “After that, exterminate her.”

Shaun wanted to meet the woman’s eyes bravely, to show no fear, but couldn’t manage the feat. Her mind whirled with confusing thoughts, and fear coursed steadily through her. She was afraid for herself and her child, just as she was afraid of having the child, having no idea what to expect. Had Armand or

Foster known it was a possibility she might conceive? She shook her head, knowing they wouldn't have let her go so easily if they thought she might be carrying a child fathered by one of them.

A flutter of happiness speared the dark emotions welling in her, and she placed a hand against her stomach, tuning out Torres as he prodded her to her feet to lead her from the room. Although she wouldn't have asked for the pregnancy, had never expected such a thing, she was thrilled. Already, her maternal instinct had kicked in, evidenced by her foolhardy rush at Bradshaw. Her stomach quivered upon recalling what they planned to do to her and the baby. She wanted to promise she wouldn't let anything happen to the embryo inside her womb, but couldn't, not even in her own head. Shaun wasn't able to defend herself against their overwhelming force, so how could she protect her helpless baby?

Chapter Ten

Shaun looked up briefly when the door to the lab opened. She was so accustomed people watching her twenty-four hours a day she paid little heed to Torres as he walked over to confer with Dr. Holmes. Instead, she returned her attention to her meal, much to his disgust, which he shared audibly.

"Why the hell is she sucking blood from that bag? Is O'Grady a fucking leech now?"

"Not at all, but she has to provide the proper nourishment for the embryo." Dr. Holmes didn't seem to think twice about sharing information with a lowly agent. He was clearly still too excited about his study to be discreet. "The subject ate large quantities of food, but wasn't sated. Over the period of three days, she lost fifteen pounds, while developing a craving for rare meat. That served to satisfy her marginally, but wasn't sufficient. She continued to drop weight until we provided her with blood starting early this week."

Shaun saw Torres grimace but didn't care about his opinion. In her mind, she found the ingestion of blood somewhat repulsive, but her body craved it, and her child needed it. Perhaps it would have been better for both of them if she had starved to death, but the survival instinct wouldn't let her take that way out.

"Okay, I get that, but does she have to drink it? Can't you give her a transfusion?"

"Negative. The blood must be ingested for some reason. She showed little response when given it intravenously. Even drinking it as she does now, consuming three liters per day, the subject is still losing weight, while experiencing lethargy and constant nausea."

"I'm sure he didn't come to hear about my condition," she said as she finished the latest bag of blood. The straps keeping her confined to the bed prevented her from moving the bag herself. Shaun cursed the control they had imposed upon her as the attendant removed the empty bag.

Torres watched the process with evident disgust, cautiously approaching the bed. She didn't bother to look at him when he stopped near her side. It required too much effort, and she couldn't imagine he had anything to say that she wanted to hear.

"They've found the leak at the L.A. office. It was Agent Simms." He shifted, looking away from her as the attendant washed her mouth with a damp cloth to remove dribbles of blood.

Shaun was surprised, having pegged the agent in question as a true disciple of the cause, but didn't have sufficient energy to express the emotion. "I see."

"It's obvious you weren't in collusion with the necros, and Gordie acknowledges that." He revealed his discomfort by mussing his hair with a large hand. "He's spoken to Bradshaw, convinced her to give you another chance."

She found the strength to turn her head in his direction. "What are the terms?"

"You know the terms." His eyes moved to her stomach, where a small bump had formed in just the past few days. It looked ridiculous with her otherwise gaunt frame, but was proof of life. "You've been here two weeks, and you look half-dead. They're sparing no thought for you because of your status as a suspended agent. Give them what they want, they'll take care of you, and you can get on with your life."

"At the cost of my child's." Her lips tightened. "No, thanks."

"Dammit, Shaun, you can't really want that thing. They raped you --"

"No," she said quietly. "It wasn't like that."

Torres snorted. "You don't know what you're talking about. You're an agent, trained to kill them. You wouldn't have voluntarily let them ... touch you." Red spots mottled his cheeks, and a tic above his eye betrayed his anger. "The fuckers did something to your mind."

She shook her head. "No. I love them, Mateo, and I want this baby. I can't just turn her over to the Agency for study and dissection while I go on my way, picking up the threads of a life I no longer want." Seeing the disbelief in his expression, she added, "The Agency lied to us, the agents and the entire world, about so many things. We're expected to exterminate the necros, but we're only the tools of their hatred, no better than the Nazis who facilitated the genocide of the Jews."

"That's insane. We do what we must." His hands balled into fists at his side. "Sometimes, it's also for pleasure. I'd kill both of them for messing up your mind like they have, and it has nothing to do with duty."

Shaun's voice was a whisper as she closed her eyes. "I'm tired. You should go now."

"You can't really love them, Shaun. They're animals."

"Sure, some are, just as some humans are. Being a necro doesn't make them evil, or even a threat, necessarily." A long sigh escaped her, and she opened her eyes again. "I know you can't believe it, but you've dedicated your life to a lie. I'd rather die than do the same. I'm grateful Armand and Foster took me. If they hadn't, I might never have learned the truth." Voice softened, she added, "I might never have known love."

"You have to know I --" The sound of gunshots in the hallway cut off whatever Torres might have said. He swung toward the main door of the lab, his hand at his hip, taking out his gun.

Shaun's heart raced with excitement, and she swore she could sense Armand and Foster even before the metal door flew from its frame to reveal them. A small smile lifted her lips. They were clad in Kevlar vests and wearing black garb. They looked ready for battle, but so incongruous to what she knew of them it was difficult not to giggle.

Her mirth fled when Torres shot at them, aiming for areas of their body not covered by the vests. Fortunately, their accelerated reflexes seemed to give them the ability to dodge his shots, and they kept coming, wearing identical expressions of determination.

Torres didn't falter, his stance speaking of equal determination, his attention not wavering from them even when Holmes and his assistant fled the lab, both shouting for help. As Foster neared him, he tightened his grip on the pistol.

Armand waved a hand. "Move aside. We have no wish to hurt you."

"You aren't taking her."

"Torres, I want to go with them. Stay out of it."

He didn't look over his shoulder, but his voice seemed to carry directly to her. "You're confused, drained of strength from that damned parasite inside you. I'm trying to protect you."

"Thank you, but I don't want to be protected from them." Shaun met Armand's gaze, then Foster's. "I love them."

"You do not." His pistol wavered slightly, and a visible tremor ran through Torres when Foster closed the distance between them, his chest pressed against the gun. "Back off, leech, or I'll take your head."

An amiable grin crossed his face. "Your devotion to Shaun is touching, and I might be able to like you under other circumstances." The smile faded. "Right now, I'm finding it difficult, since you're trying to keep us from her. She belongs with us."

Torres fired the gun, causing Foster to jerk back as the vest absorbed the slug. Taking advantage of the distraction, Torres angled the gun higher, into Foster's face. Shaun gasped as her boss depressed the trigger, but needn't have worried. Armand interceded, tearing the gun from Torres before he could finish firing. With a contemptuous snort, he tossed it over his shoulder as the agent went for his sword.

Foster took that from Torres with ease, clearly unharmed from the force of the bullet. Shaun idly wondered if he would have a bruise like a human would have, but the mundane thought fled when Torres launched himself at Armand. She wanted to issue a warning to her former partner, to keep him from injury, but it was too late. Armand lifted him easily, tossing Torres across the room, through the glass of a supply cabinet of medication and implements.

Before she could fully absorb what had happened, Foster was at her bedside to free her from the restraints. With his assistance, she slid from the bed, leaning against him for support. Her legs were too weak to support her, but she didn't care to stand alone right then anyway. All she wanted was for them to embrace her.

Instead, she had to settle for Foster lifting her into his arms and following Armand at a run from the lab. The alarm sounded in the hallway, and amber lights flashed from strategically placed bulbs positioned at regular intervals in the passage. Running footsteps sounded behind them, but Shaun didn't see anyone appear from around the bend, because Foster was running too fast.

Her energy was lagging, making it difficult for Shaun to follow the sequence of events. Ahead, she saw Armand engage two agents, disarming them and sending them sprawling on the tile floor to clear their

exit. The main doors beckoned, and she held her breath as they approached, expecting something to stop them since they were so close.

A harsh exhalation left her when they passed through the threshold and into the night. Wasting no time, Foster immediately levitated, as did Armand. She gripped his neck in a tight hold instinctively. Knowing he wouldn't drop her couldn't prevent the fear of falling.

As they flew across the night sky, the bright lights of the city spread out below them. Shaun marveled at how easy their escape had been. If she had been in top physical form, would she have had as easy a time escaping?

Foster began descending, and Shaun looked down to see their destination -- a tree-heavy lot in a community park. The play area was silent, and a lone streetlight provided only meager illumination. As soon as her feet touched ground, she slumped against Foster again while taking a deep breath. The outside smelled wonderful, especially after being imprisoned in that lab for the past two weeks at the mercy of Holmes and whatever procedure he chose to subject her to.

Armand took her from Foster, pulling her into his arms, as he whispered her name several times, his voice thick with suppressed tears. Finally, he drew back enough to look down at her, his face a mask of worry. "You are weak, *ma belle*."

She nodded. "It's the baby. She's using every available resource."

Foster pressed close to them, his hand cupping her distended stomach. "It's impossible."

Managing a small smile, she said, "I thought so too, but clearly it isn't. I've seen her many times on ultrasound, so there's no doubt she's in there. Trust me, I didn't go on a donut splurge."

Her joke fell flat, the men too engrossed touching her stomach, where the baby obligingly kicked against their hands.

"Do you have any idea how rare it is for a vampire to find a genetic match, *chérie*? We're fertile, of course, but unless our DNA is compatible, the mother's immune system will attack the foreign genetic material, preventing the pregnancy from forming." He rubbed her belly in a small circle. "I've only known one other vampire couple who were compatible."

"My parents," Armand said, his mouth finally closing. It had seemed to be locked in a semi-open position permanently.

Shaun's eyes widened. "You were born to them?"

He nodded. "Jacqueline and I both."

"I assumed one of your parents had been transformed and then did the same for the rest of you, to keep you alive always."

"A logical assumption." He shrugged. "There wasn't anything known about genetics when they were alive, but Papa always assumed it was because he was Mother's sire that they could have children. That isn't the case, as we now know. It's still a mystery why some strains of the virus are compatible when others aren't. In fact, it's rare for a sire to be compatible with their progeny, so it has nothing to do with the particular strain."

“I don’t care how it happened.” Shaun put her hands over both of theirs on her stomach. “I’m just happy it did.” Taking a deep breath, she broached a topic she feared might be sensitive. “But which of you is the father?”

Armand and Foster shared a look before turning their attention back to her. “We don’t know. We might never know,” said Foster.

“We both are. Obviously, one of us is the biological father, but without our link, our shared dreams, we wouldn’t have found Shaun. There wouldn’t be a baby without both of us ... without Shaun.” Armand shrugged. “I don’t care who fathered her. She is my child.”

“My daughter.” A twinkle in Foster’s eyes showed his pleasure, but it faded suddenly. “You can’t do this, Shaun.”

Her brow furrowed with confusion. “What?” He had seemed happy about the baby, but his expression told a different story, as had his words that cut through her heart.

“No human has ever given birth to a vampire baby. You can’t possibly survive the process.” His eyes raked her from head to toe. “You’re drained, on the point of collapse just from nourishing her. You couldn’t survive the birth in your current state.”

She took a step back from Armand, somehow managing to stand on her own, crossing her arms over her chest. “It’s a little too late to change things now. I’m not aborting.”

“Don’t be angry, *ma belle*. Foster is only worried for you, as am I.” Armand had to clear his throat before continuing. “We do not want to lose you again, but we aren’t suggesting termination.”

“Then what?”

“You must transform immediately. The process will infuse you with strength, and you’ll be able to sustain our child and yourself.”

Shaun saw the worry in both of their gazes, could sense they were forming arguments to counter her inevitable resistance to the notion. It was almost fun to say in a light tone, “Okay.”

“If you don’t do it, you’ll die --” Foster broke off, blinking. “Did you say okay?”

She nodded, a smile twitching her lips. “I did.”

“I thought you didn’t want this.” Armand’s eyes relayed his confusion, along with a trace of hope.

Her head spun, and Shaun took a step forward, leaning against them to keep upright. “I didn’t know what I wanted, but I do now. I’ve had a lot of time to think while trapped in the lab.”

“We would have come sooner, but the dreams weren’t specific enough to reveal a location until last night.”

Shaun touched Foster’s lips, cutting him off. “I figured it was something like that, love. I never doubted you would come for me. I was only afraid it wouldn’t be in time.”

“Nothing can keep us from you.” Armand gathered her close. “Now, not even death.”

It was easier than she thought to surrender to the process. Although she had already decided to become a vampire so she could be with them forever, part of her had wondered if she would be able to so easily relinquish her humanity. As Armand and Foster held her between them, their mouths poised on each side of her neck, she found the fear fading. She wasn't losing her humanity; she was only augmenting it.

Their teeth pierced her skin simultaneously, bringing a brief flash of pain that quickly turned to sweet warmth, like a heavy drug flowing through her veins, spreading from the bites. They sucked her blood in concert, their hands roaming over her body, awakening a different kind of heat, one she would be happy to quench with them once she was strong enough.

Their mouths left her neck, and Armand was the first to bring his wrist to his mouth, slashing the vein with his fang. Shaun pressed her mouth to the wound, sucking the blood and swallowing as it flowed into her mouth. It started out a veritable river, but quickly slowed to a stream, before drying up completely. As Armand withdrew his arm, Foster's wrist was there to take his place, and she repeated the process until his wound closed, and he dropped his hand to his side.

A floating sensation filled her head, and the warmth flooding her body began to burn slightly, like the sting of an over-exercised muscle after an intense workout. It wasn't exactly painful, but didn't incite any excitement in her. Instead, the sensation quelled her burgeoning desire completely when it turned to fire eating through her, as convulsions racked her body. She cried out, and they lowered her to the ground. The soft grass provided a cushion for her as she spasmed under the onslaught. Foster and Armand stayed beside her, their hands gripping hers, their eyes mirroring her pain.

Abruptly, the burning stopped, replaced by a feeling like ice coursing through her veins. She had barely registered the sensation when it faded to more of a refreshing sensation, like a cold drink on a hot day. Her senses had increased in sensitivity dramatically, and she could smell blood nearby, but experienced no hunger. “It's not like I thought it would be.”

“How so?” Armand pushed hair off her forehead, his eyes still reflecting a measure of concern.

“In our training, we were taught newly converted necros attack the closest source of sustenance, but I'm not in the grip of bloodlust. I feel much as I always did, actually, except stronger.”

“Yet another thing they got wrong,” Foster said.

Moving slowly, Shaun sat up, gauging her strength as she did so. Although still on the weak side, already renewed vigor filled her. For the first time in days, she didn't seem to be hovering at death's door. “What now?”

“We run,” said Foster, his lip curling.

She sighed. “I guess we have to leave behind the house on the cliff.”

“Yes, *ma belle*. Such is our existence.” Armand got to his feet at the same time as Foster, and then they both assisted her to a standing position, making sure she was steady before relaxing their grips. “It is frustrating, but you will still find life can be happy and worthwhile, even while there are those in the world who would kill us on sight.”

“I never doubted I would be happy with you.”

Foster chuckled. “Never, *chérie*?”

Shaun squirmed. “Okay, maybe in the beginning, when I thought you were just going to drain me dry.”

“Or fuck you to death,” Armand interjected.

“That too.” She lowered her voice to a husky rasp. “It turns out, that wouldn’t be a bad way to go.”

“You will never have to fear death now,” Armand said.

A sad smile crossed her face. “My darling, we still have to worry about dying, with the NCA out there.”

“That’s always a possibility, but we don’t dwell on that.” Foster put his arm around her, drawing her closer. “Instead, let us think about the future, and the ways we will love each other.”

“And our child.” Armand touched her stomach.

“Thank you for finding me.” She spoke with heartfelt sincerity, finding it impossible to express the jumble of emotions flooding through her. Gratitude, relief, fear, and joy all blended together to form a disorienting cocktail. The only way to cope with it was to filter out everything but the joy.

“It was our pleasure, *ma belle* .” Armand kissed her.

“And now, the pleasure will be mine ... forever,” she said with a mischievous grin before offering her lips to Foster.

As they held her between them, making her feel safe and secure, Shaun decided to try to adopt Foster’s policy of not dwelling on the threat from the NCA. Instead, she would embrace her new life and the two men who had completed her. She no longer doubted they were her soul mates. The concept wasn’t ludicrous. How could it be, when they fit together so perfectly, when they were the missing parts of her, and she was the same for them?

 THE END 

Kit Tunstall lives in Idaho with her husband and dog-children. She started reading at the age of three and hasn't stopped since. Love of the written word, and a smart marriage to a supportive man, led her to a full-time career in writing. Romances have always intrigued her, and erotic romance is a natural extension because it more completely explores the emotions between the hero and heroine. That, and it sure is fun to write.

* * * * *

Read on for a tantalizing glimpse of

Maslow's Needs

by Sheri Gilmore

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Maslow's Needs

Shit! Nolan hadn't attacked her. Drayden looked at her bandaged hands, then back at the cuts and scratches on her face. He frowned. If his brother hadn't done this to her, who had?

She watched him with a narrowed gaze, and he knew he'd given too much away. When she eased away from him to stand, he registered the loss of her warmth. His lips tightened. He couldn't afford to get involved in a sexual relationship with a woman right now, especially this one. He shifted his hips to release some of the tension in the crotch of his jeans, but the second she turned away from him he caught a glimpse of her ass.

She still wore the black jeans she'd been wearing at the club. In the dim light he hadn't been able to make a good appraisal, but had known she looked good. He'd seen the way the other men had watched her, like a pack of wolves. He snorted. Some of them were! His club serviced not only the vampire community, but otherkin also. All goth peoples were welcome, as long as everyone followed the rules -- the main one being, *Don't munch on the cowans without an invitation.*

Her hips swayed, and his mouth went dry. The denim fit her skin like a glove. She had one of those pear-shaped asses a guy just wanted to --

She turned; he glanced up. Her hands went to her hips.

Drayden smiled, knowing he couldn't deny he'd been staring at her ... assets. He shrugged. "What can I say? I'm human."

"Are you?"

Tension filled the space between them. Their eyes clashed.

He could see desire and wariness in hers. "I'm as human as you."

"You're not ... vampire?" Her head cocked in an angle of challenge.

"Yes." He nodded and stood, slowly. He could see her muscles tense in preparation for defense. He wanted to ease her suspicions. He would give her as much information as he could. "But I'm human, and I'm also witch."

Her eyebrow shot up. "Like Konstantinos?"

His jaw clenched at the mention of the man who had been her escort that night. He'd seen the other witch in action before with other women -- goth women, who knew the score. Drayden felt a rush of resentment that she would compare him with the writer-musician. "I *amnot* like Konstantinos."

Her eyebrows drew down. "Then you're a different kind of witch?" She looked at him, and he saw the confusion in her eyes. "I-I didn't realize there were different kinds --"

Her confusion had allowed him to move closer. One more step and he stood directly in front of her. His fingers found her chin, but he made sure he didn't touch the cut he had cleaned. He lifted her face to his.

Her pupils dilated with surprise.

"There are different kinds of *everything* in this world, just like there are in yours. What I meant was that I don't sleep around with a different woman every night."

She pulled away from his touch. Her lips compressed into a thin line. "You said that earlier, and I told you it wasn't your concern."

"He's gone and left you here alone."

"So?"

He smiled and stepped in closer. "So, you must not be the *flavor* he wants at the moment."

She tried to shove past him, but he exerted his strength and didn't move. He caught her upper arms and pushed her back against the wall. Her strength amazed him. Even with her wounds, he had to tighten his muscles and dig his boots into the carpet to prevent her from breaking his hold.

After a few seconds, she relaxed and his weight fell into her. The gush of her scent as their bodies met assailed his nostrils. Once again his cock hardened. This time he didn't stop her from knowing he was aroused. The way they stood, he knew she could feel the outline of him against her abdomen. He pressed closer.

She jerked back, but couldn't go anywhere. Her head hit the wall.

"How long have you two been together?"

"A week."

"Has he fucked you?" The flame of jealousy he'd experienced earlier at the thought of them together returned.

Her entire body stiffened. He watched her skin flame from the neck of her shirt to the top of her forehead. He heard her words, angry and tense, scrape through clenched teeth.

“That's ... none ... of your ... damned ... business.”

He smiled at the sound of her southern drawl, especially on the word *damned*. The accent might be slow, but the effect on his libido had him craving to hear her say a few more naughty words for him ... in bed. “Oh, but it is.”

“Yeah?” She shoved him. “How do you figure?”

He caught her wrists below the bandages and forced her arms above her head. The sweater she wore rode up to reveal the smooth texture of her skin.

With a groan, he caught both wrists in one hand. His free hand moved to caress her beneath her rib cage. Her breath hissed in his ear. Her hips bucked, but he pressed closer, holding her in place. “I don't steal other men's women.”

She stilled at that and raised her head. Their gazes met, once again, and locked. He circled his fingers, letting his fingernails brush the sensitive nerves lying just below the surface, one by one across the flat line of her belly. A surge of power engulfed him at the sight of her throat convulsing on a swallow.

“Are you one of his women?” His hand had lined up directly over her navel. He curled the tips of his fingers and his nails scraped her skin, harder, tugging lightly on a navel ring. He paused in surprise and delight. The detective had a wild streak. His fingers twitched. A tremor passed through her body.

“He has so many, what difference would it make if I am?”

He dipped his head to nibble the sensitive area behind her ear. He nipped her earlobe. With the tip of his tongue, he circled the rim of her ear, then let his breath fan the dampened area with a whisper. “I don't like to share.”

She bucked her hips again, and he had to tighten his grip on her wrists. The flat of his palm pressed into her abdomen with the ends of his fingers submerged below the waistband of her low-cut jeans. He could feel the coarse hair of her pussy against his fingertips.

“Are you, Jessi?” He flicked his tongue along her jaw.

She groaned. “N-No!”

“Good.” He dipped his head and took her mouth with his at the same time he slid his hand deeper into the crotch of her jeans to cup her mound. Warm, wet heat spread beneath his fingers, but he didn't try to enter her. Without the proper precautions, his nails could hurt her. For now, he'd let her move against the pressure of his hand to bring her release.

His tongue slid against and around hers. He sucked her bottom lip, bit her top one. And the entire time, she gave as good as she got. Her little moans and whimpers shimmered down his spine, making him want to sink his cock into her, deep and hard. The hum in his ears intensified, but he ignored the sound he knew indicated a psychic link. He'd felt the connection with her before. She had a highly developed system that she seemed unaware of.

Just a little more, then I'll stop before it gets too far out of hand.

Jessi curled her bandaged fingers around his hand, wanting to yank the loose layers of his poet's shirt and pull him closer. She opened her mouth to take more of his teasing mouth, feeling the cold swirl of his tongue-ring. She shuddered.

God, to feel that on my clit! She squirmed her hips against his hand, needing him to put his fingers deep inside her pussy. The pressure of his finger on her clit hardened, but he refused to go further.

She broke the suction of their kiss, and had to evade his lips that searched and demanded her return. She shook her head. "P-Put your finger in."

* * * * *

What people are saying about the writing of Sheri Gilmore

One Thing Leads To Another

This is an erotic, fast-paced thriller that starts off with a bang from page one. Rose is about ten years older than Nathan, which was one of the reasons why he's been off limits to her, but imagine her surprise when she learns he's desired her all along. Nathan is one sexy, dominant man, and his expert tutelage of Rose in the art of sex and bondage is thrilling to read... Run out and grab this one up!

-- Barb Chan, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

Wow! This one is so hot you may need to keep a fire extinguisher handy to put out the flames. A stimulating and suspenseful read, this story is well developed and expertly delivered. The characters are so real you expect to look up and see them standing next to you.

-- Keely Skillman, *Coffee Time Romance*

Combustible chemistry between the hero and heroine right from the start, deadly secrets in the background and lots of hot sex throughout. *One Thing Leads to Another* is explosive and makes you want more.

-- Treva Harte, author of *Why Me?* (Loose Id)

