

DRAVEN'S CROSSING

Draven could be a distraction she can't afford...

TEMPESTUOUS CROSSINGS

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Draven's Crossing:
Tempestuous Crossings
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To Diana, Cyn, H and Michelle.

Chapter One

His blood burned. Arousal slid up and down his spine, hardening his balls and causing his stomach to clench. Draven's cock pressed against the zipper of his slacks, making him uncomfortable. He wanted to adjust his position, but had no desire to draw attention to himself. Eyeing the woman doing the presentation, he remained with his ass pressed against the ledge of the

desk and prayed for relief soon. Her nervousness tinged the air with wisps of a sour perfume.

“As you can see, this charity ball will not only be good for our image, but also allow you some leverage with the parties involved in the negotiation for equal rights.” She licked her lips, making her already glossy mouth shine. He nearly groaned aloud; slick, puffy, red lips. *That mouth would look so fucking sweet around my cock.*

Unable to resist, he shifted his position, hoping to alleviate some of the pressure he felt. Just as he thought, her gaze darted toward him and then back at the group sitting around his board table.

In an act of nervousness, she smoothed down the plain tan jacket of her suit, which only drew attention to the outline of her breasts. Full, ripe mounds that he was sure would fit perfectly in his hands. He shifted again from one foot to the other. The pressure inside of him ratcheted up another notch.

Licking her lips again, she bent over, ducking her head as she rifled through some papers on the table. Corkscrew curls bounced and shook at the small movement. Draven wanted to thread his fingers through those silken strands, grab a handful, and pound into her from behind. His cock jumped. Desire sizzled along his nerve endings

and created a wildfire through his veins.

“Miss Andrews, your idea is a good one, but charity balls don’t exactly raise the revenue we’re hoping for,” one of his advisors pointed out. “The fetes always seem more for the haves rather than the have-nots. How are we supposed to make this accessible to everyone?”

Switching to business mode, Draven nodded in agreement and watched her reaction through narrowed eyes. Her nervousness increased, drawing out the predator in him. He wanted that reaction; he wanted her to fear and want him. An image of chasing her down a long, dark corridor danced

before him. Her fear mingled with desire as he chased her. He loved it.

The woman, whose name he hadn't caught when the meeting had started, smoothed her hands over a tight skirt that hugged her hips. A groan began in his chest. He squashed it, refusing to lose control, even though every cell in his body wanted to go to her, pull her out of the room and trace her figure with his hands before ripping off every stitch of clothing she wore. She licked her lips again. The groan returned, and he ignored it. *Not yet*, he admonished himself.

“That’s why the ticket price will

only be five dollars, affordable to everyone,” she answered.

“And the ad campaign?” another of his advisors asked.

“We’ll have ads in every area of the city and on television,” she replied. She held her head high meeting his gaze. Confidence pushed away the earlier fear.

“As you can see, Rose has thought this plan through. If you read the information we passed out at the start of the meeting, you’ll have all the ways we intend to reach our target audiences and what we hope to accomplish with the charity ball. We look forward to your

call.” Rose’s partner pushed back his chair and stood. It was clear that the meeting was over for him.

Rose, such a delicate name. I bet she has thorns to go with that beauty. Draven watched the scene play out. As usual, his advisors looked to him for guidance. He straightened, running his hands over his jacket, thankful that it was long enough to cover his erection. Focused on Rose, he stalked to the front of room.

“I’ll say when this is over. After all, I’m the mayor of this town.” Allowing a bit of power to roll over the room, he watched her nostrils flare. The fear was back in the air, and he drank it

in. Standing close to her, but not quite touching, he watched her body stiffen. Something sweet and musky joined in the sour aroma wafting off of her. He almost smiled. *My little flower finds me attractive.*

“It was a good presentation, and you certainly answered the questions. Rose was it?” He allowed her name to come out in a gruff purr. Pausing, he watched her reaction. Her pupils dilated. She moved nearer, but only a millimeter or so. Disappointment twined with satisfaction. He wanted her closer, but knew that wouldn’t be possible. They were in a business setting, and there were people in the room with

them. “Rose, you still haven’t guaranteed me that any of the money put into this venture would be returned to us and then some. I need to show that I can make money for this town. Elections are coming up. I may be in the lead, but my opponent makes a good point: out-of-towners don’t consider this a vacation spot. I need the hotels and motels booked up and the inns full. I need to cast a wider net with this, and all you’ve given me is local color.”

Draven invaded her personal space. If she allowed her fear to control her actions, she’d step back, and he would be disappointed. Rose didn’t disappoint him. Tilting her head on a

slim neck, she looked right into his eyes. *No fear. Fuck, she's perfect.* Very few people looked a vampire in the eyes. Especially not one as old as he was.

“That’s why there will be commercials and internet ads placed on high traffic sites. Ones directed at the type of clientele we want coming to our fair city,” she responded with challenge in her eyes and tone. Holding her head higher, she looked like a queen instead of a simple mortal.

Waving away her words with his hand, he countered her argument. “People will fast forward through it with their DVRs and use ad blocker, so they won’t see it. Give me something else.”

He leaned down and pressed his size upon her short height. Draven guessed her to be about five feet, three inches to his six feet, five inches. Bringing his face closer, he inhaled her scent. Musky desire joined with the heat of challenge along with the soft mix of the jasmine, roses, lavender, vanilla that made up her perfume, and something else.

“So, we’ll do flyers.”

“Fodder for the recycle bin.” He held back a smile as thoughts flitted across her face like lightning.

Her lips thinned, and she refused to break eye contact. “We’ll form a street team like musicians do.”

“They’ll want perks. What can we give them? I need more ideas,” he pressed.

“Celebrity endorsements,” she shot back.

“Who could we possibly get? They’d demand pay.” He leaned his head closer, taking in more of her heady perfume. Her fragrance, her presence, everything she was seeped into him and went straight to his head. It had been centuries since someone had intrigued him like this.

“We’ll say it’s for charity, because you’re supposed to be the grandson of Dracula.” The gasps from

around the room told him that his advisors felt she'd gone too far.

Draven had never spoken about his heritage, nor did he like to discuss his relationship with one of the world's most notorious vampires. He hated his great-grandfather, which was very well known. Instead of dismissing her, he rose to her challenge.

“I loathe the spotlight. I may love this town, but I won't whore myself for it.” Draven waited for her response, sensing she wasn't done.

“And yet you're the mayor. Doesn't that mean you whore yourself anyway?” She blinked. Spice infused her

essence as embarrassment appeared on her face. He smelled the blood rushing to the surface of her skin, hot, metallic heaven.

“Miss Andrews that’s uncalled for,” someone admonished.

“Rose, apologize. Sir, I’m so sorry, she didn’t mean that,” her associated started.

“Yes, she did.” Draven murmured. *If we were alone, I’d be balls deep inside of her, fucking both our brains out. Damn, she’s glorious.* His incisors throbbed. Saliva pooled in his mouth, and his dick pressed more persistently against his fly as yearning flared hot

enough to burn inside of him. Rose stepped back. He almost brought his hand to reach out and draw her into his orbit again. Instead, he let her go, tasting her need for distance. The hunter in him hated to put anything between them, even if it was air. He continued to look at her, wanting her more with each second that passed.

“And she’s right.” He gave her a smile. “But that doesn’t excuse her not having any ideas for how to reach those outside of our town. I want this ball to be on par with Carnevale di Venice.”

Turning his back on her was hard, but he had to. He walked across the room, settled down behind his desk and

allowed his gaze to wander over everyone in the room before settling back on Rose.

“I have a challenge for you, Ms. Andrews. Give me what I want, and if I win this election, I’ll put you in charge of my P.R.” *And I’ll make sure that we’ll be using every inch of this office to fuck on. You will be mine, Rose Andrews.*

She nodded her head. Embarrassment still tinged her perfume. “I’ll try my best.”

“No, Ms. Andrews. You’ll *do* your best. There’s a difference. Meeting dismissed. I have a newspaper interview

to prep for.” He gave a dismissive wave of his hand, and they scattered like birds. With great regret, he watched Rose leave with them. It was necessary. His patience had been pushed to the limit. Any more time with her and Draven was sure that he would have created a scandal for both of them.

As soon as Rose left his sight, his mind turned over the meeting. One thing snagged in his mind; David's reaction to Rose's mistake. His stomach lurked. He had a bad feeling the werewolf would try something. He summoned his head of security, Hamilcar. The black dragon appeared in a puff of black smoke and bowed low.

"I'm concerned about the woman that just left my office. Send over some security to Rose Andrews' apartment. I believe her boss will try to harm her. Bastard probably whips his own mother for a simple mistake."

Hamilcar bowed again and disappeared.

"Damn, black dragon," Draven muttered.

* * * *

Rose's legs shook. She felt dizzy, as if her body had crashed in on itself.

Horror at what she had done took precedence as she watched David step onto the elevator. His hard features and tight-lipped expression said it all. If Draven hadn't laid down the challenge to her, she would have been fired as soon as they'd left the meeting. She still couldn't believe she'd said that. It was common knowledge among those who lived in the town how much Draven loathed his great-grandfather, yet her mouth and brain had stopped communicating.

His spicy cologne had gone to her head. The nearness and heat of his body had pushed her libido into overdrive. She wanted him closer, but as far away

as possible. Part of her feared him, yet another half of her wanted to know more. His liquid grey eyes had never left her from the moment she'd entered the room. It had been a heady feeling and at the same time, terrifying. Based on Draven's response to her, he wanted something from her. Something she wasn't sure she could give.

“What the fuck, Rose?” David demanded, drawing her out of her thoughts.

“I'm sorry?” She shook her head to dislodge the thoughts of steel colored eyes watching her as she came, screaming his name for the world to hear.

“You’re damn right you’re sorry. How could you do that? You know how he feels about Dracula, and yet you brought it up. You’re pretty damn lucky he decided to put you on the case and that he wanted to fuck you.” David grunted.

Rose shifted away from him. *It really sucks to have a werewolf as your boss.*

“I’m taking over the case. You’ll present to him, but I’ll be running the show.”

She wanted to be outraged, to demand that he let her take the reins, but

doubted he would allow it. It was clear she'd fucked up big time. The fact that David had noticed Draven's response to her only made things worse. Rose vowed to go along with it, but come face time with Draven, she'd inject some of her own ideas.

“After this is over you're taking a leave of absence. You're going to think about what you did and if this firm is right for you,” he spat out.

“Look, David, I'm not a bad dog who just went on the carpet. I screwed up, but I hardly think—”

“You're damn right you didn't think. And you did go on the carpet. You

pissed all over it by bringing up Dracula. A rookie mistake that won't be repeated. We clear?" David snapped.

She opened and shut her mouth. "Yeah, crystal."

"Good," he growled out.

The ride down to the garage was done in silence. Rose stewed silently in rage at his treatment of her. *I'll show you rookie. If I nail this, I won't need your stupid firm.* Marching over to her car, she unlocked the door and slid behind the wheel. She tossed her briefcase into the passenger seat then slammed the door shut. Turning the key, she allowed the stress to float away at

the sound of the engine purring. For a moment, she melted into the deep, plush leather seats. Rose stroked the wheel.

“My sweet Corvette Sting Ray, you’ll make all my problems go away, won’t you?” Revving the engine, she took off with a squeal of tires. There was no traffic outside of the capital building. Late afternoon sunshine blinded her for a second before her glasses adjusted and darkened. The lack of vehicles gave her a brief reprieve from having to think about avoiding any other cars. With her eyes on the road, she reached over and switched on the radio. Angry metal blared through the speakers. She gritted her teeth.

“I said I was sorry. It’s not like he hasn’t fucked up before. How many times have I covered his ass when he screwed up and hadn’t read my notes? Think about my actions? Bullshit. He’s lucky I even joined his stupid firm. I’m twenty-seven years old, graduated top of my class. I had my pick of firms, and I chose yours. Prick. I wanted to work with the para-people. Now I have to deal with an asshole werewolf for a boss who thinks he can slack off. Whatever. After this case, I’ll leave, join the competition. They’ll at least pay me my due.” Rose jerked the wheel and turned on to the street leading to the heart of the city. Slowing down her speed, she reached over and switched

the station to classical music. A gentle twittering told her that she had a phone call.

“Answer phone,” she told the onboard computer. “Hello?”

“Ms. Andrews,” Draven purred over the speakers. Her body tightened as arousal reignited in her body. Tingles ran along her pussy lips and burned at the base of her back. Her vaginal walls contracted. Prickles ran along her skin as her response increased. Her breasts grew full and began to ache. She almost jerked the wheel again, which would have crashed her into one of the trees lining the streets.

“I hope I’m not distracting you, but I wanted to book an appointment with you directly instead of going through your office. I hope you don’t mind.” He didn’t sound sorry in the least for calling her.

Rose pulled over to the side of the road as her desire amplified. She swallowed and pushed down the need that danced along her nerve endings. After licking her lips, she answered him. “Not at all, sir. What time did you have in mind?”

Her clit swelled, throbbing with need. She fought against squirming in her seat, searching for relief.

“Please...” he paused, “...call me, Draven. And anytime you’re available. Tell me when.”

His tone had dropped to a husky whisper that had her straining closer to the hands free phone plugged into her car. She tried to ignore the throb of her nipples and the dampness of her panties.

“In fact, I’m free for dinner tonight. Would you be willing to come up to my home to discuss your ideas over a meal? I’ll have the chef prepare something exquisite.”

Dinner? At the moment she wasn’t exactly sure what that was, but his tone made it sound like something dirty,

filthy. Sweat beaded on her brow as the fire inside was stoked.

“I promise, I won’t bite,” he purred.

Not unless you want me to, she heard in her head. The idea of him nibbling on her, dragging his fangs over her heavy, pussy lips made her whimper.

“Ms. Andrews, are you all right? Do you need help? You’re whimpering. Are you in pain?” He was being nonchalant again.

She tried to sound calm, but couldn’t help the throaty tone her voice had taken. “I’m fine.”

“You don’t sound fine. Perhaps you should come back to the Mayor’s office, so I can check on you personally, make sure you’re as fine as you say,” he murmured.

She couldn’t stop herself. Rose squirmed in her seat. The creak of the leather and the heavy perfume of her desire drifted up into the interior of the car. Her panties were soaked. Biting her lip, she tried to push away the demanding ache between her thighs.

“Don’t you have a newspaper interview to do, sir?” Rose managed to get that part out in an even tone, which pleased her.

“Draven, and it was canceled. As was the rest of my day. I found myself thinking about your ideas and wanting to know if you’d come up with anything else in the short time since you’ve left my office.” His tone was calm and controlled, which infuriated her. Sweat trickled between her breasts. The interior of the car was too hot and small for comfort. Closing her eyes, she marshaled at least some of her lust.

Gone was the seducer. Back to business. Stupid vampire. Rose straightened in her seat, gripping the wheel tight. She focused on the task at hand, refusing to flirt with the client. Definitely not flirting with the client.

“No, sir. I haven’t had a chance to think on a new direction for the ad campaign.” *If he could be calm, so can I.*

“Call me Draven, please. Don’t call me, sir, unless you intend for this conversation to take a sexual tone.” The gruff tone was back, filled with heat.

She swallowed and nearly whimpered aloud again. A fantasy of being on her knees as he ordered her to suck him off floated up in her mind. *Traitor.* She tried to ignore the direction the conversation had taken. “Don’t you think that comment was inappropriate? Your phone could be bugged.” *God, I hope not.* She released the wheel to drag

a hand over her face.

“I don’t really care what the public thinks of my sexual preferences. What I do in the bedroom is of no concern to my politics. Even if I were to fuck you in my office, it wouldn’t matter.” So aloof, so aggravatingly calm.

Her knees turned to jelly, and she almost fainted right there. Drawing strength she didn’t know she had, she tried to figure out a good comeback. “First off, why would I fuck you? You’re not even my type, and second, this is really inappropriate.”

A loud creak came over the phone. She pictured him settling back in that

massive, leather chair behind his desk. In her mind, his shirt was unbuttoned, jacket off, completely comfortable, playing this little verbal game with her, making her squirm while she melted into a puddle. A smile danced on his lips, and every so often, a peek of fang would appear when he opened his mouth.

“Liar, you should be spanked for that. You forget how close I was to you. I could smell that sweet, arousing perfume. I bet your little wolfie boss didn't like that one bit. And I have to say thank you for not threatening me with sexual harassment. You will be fucking me, regardless of what you say. You're building walls, Rose, and I intend to rip

them apart.” A loud, tearing sound filled the speakers.

Her ears burned as the picture in her mind took a sexual turn as he yanked down the zipper of his fly.

“If you—”

“Filthy mind you have there, Rose. No, I’m not jerking off while talking to you. If I ever masturbate, it will be in front of you. I want you to see how hard I am for you and what you do to me.” The tearing sound continued.

Water. Air. Something? The pinpricks of fire became a full on blaze as goose bumps broke out over her skin.

The tingles at the small of her back grew. She reached out and gripped the wheel with both hands to keep from pulling up her skirt and touching herself. Rose squirmed in her seat again and gritted her teeth as the wet silk of her panties rubbed against her throbbing clit. She wanted relief so badly it almost hurt. She bit her bottom lip and tried to stop her movements, tried to halt the inferno rushing through her body, enveloping her into the heart of the blaze. Nothing worked. Her nerve endings were alive with sensation. Arousal danced through her veins as her nipples pulsed, pushing against the lace of her bra. The slightest movement sent threads of electricity straight to her

pussy. Closing her eyes, she sought the calm she used when going into a meeting with new clients or fighting her boss over an idea. Once found, Rose latched onto it and refocused her attention. “I was tearing up my contract with your boss. I intend to work with you exclusively.” He drew out the last word.

“Why?” That was the only word she could get out as the pulse of need continued to thrum through her body.

“Because, I don’t want to fuck your boss, and I have no desire for him to use you as a puppet. I’m not his new client. I refuse to be some animal mounted on his wall to show off. You’re an intelligent woman with a mind of your

own. I'm sure you can come up with a way to push the promotion and get us the attention we need while fucking me at the same time.” His words were so matter-of-fact. He was so sure of himself.

She gritted her teeth and gripped the wheel tighter, letting the solidity anchor her in the here and now while pushing away her desire. “First off, I accept your offer and second, you’ll have to get blue balls first before I sleep with you. I don’t fuck clients. Period.”

“That’s other clients. Not me,” he countered smoothly.

His arrogant statement infuriated

her. Using her anger, she pushed back more of the wave of need that had robbed her of her brain cells. “You may be the mayor and the great-grandson of Dracula, but I’ll be trussed up like Little Bo Peep in pink before I get on my knees and suck you off or fuck you. I take my job seriously, sir. I’ll meet you for dinner to discuss the ads, but I will be leaving with all my clothes intact and not having had sex with you in any form. You want in my pants, give me some respect. I’m not some empty headed, sex-on-the-brain airhead.” She almost reached over to the end the call, but waited. Her body shook with barely restrained emotion. The lust she’d felt had been fully tamped down, the fire

mere embers now as her body cooled. Sweat slipped down the side of her face and the back of her neck.

“You are so fucking glorious. Fuck, I wish you were with me right now. I didn’t think I could get any harder than before.” He paused and drew in a loud breath. “I also understand what you’re saying. I’ll try to behave myself tonight, but know this; I’ll be thinking of you naked and spread out on my table, ready for me to eat you out like the tender, delicious morsel you are.”

The phone call disconnected, and she let out a shriek of frustration. Desire flared to life, burning through her like an out of control blaze.

“Asshole! I’m so going to make you pay for that.” Rose gunned the engine and drove like a demon to her apartment rather than back to the office. No police were in sight, and David didn’t phone her to demand to know where she was, much to her relief.

Once inside her apartment, she wasn’t sure what to do first; take the edge off the sexual need simmering through her body or find the sexiest dress she owned to wear to dinner. The dress came first. Next, she grabbed her waterproof vibrator and headed for the shower only to be stopped by a knock on her door.

Grumbling about interruptions, she hid the sex toy and answered the door. David stood before her, his face bright red, his eyes glistening.

“What the fuck did you do? The mayor’s office called to say that he would be working with you exclusively and that our services as a firm were no longer needed.” He pushed his way into her living room.

Rose stumbled back. Her shoulder ached from the contact. For the first time since the meeting, she was glad to run into someone. *Finally, a punching bag for my rage.* Smiling, she shut the door.

“First of all, that was the mayor’s

decision, not mine. Second, how dare you invite yourself in—”

“You’re fired. I knew it was a mistake hiring you. You’re hot and all, but too damn young to understand anything. Clean out your desk, but first, call the mayor’s office and resign from the campaign.”

She ignored the first part of his statement and focused on the last bit. “The hell I will. He offered me a job, and I’m taking it. I’m also taking all of my clients with me.”

“You don’t have any clients. Stupid bitch. I’ll ruin you if you try to take even one of my clients from me.”

He growled at her, his lips quivering and his face morphing into something more lupine with a longer chin, mouth and nose.

Another knock at the door sounded. Swearing, Rose darted around him and opened the door. Two tall, imposing men dressed all in black stood in the doorway with sunglasses covering their eyes. “Ms. Andrews? The mayor assigned us as your security during your time as part of his P.R. staff. Is there a problem?”

She glanced over at David, who’d returned to something humanlike.

“No, no problem. Is there,

David?” She smiled sweetly at him.

The werewolf shook his head.

Smart move. “I’ll clean out my office tomorrow. Don’t worry about contacting my clients. I can do that myself.” She waited for him to lash out.

Like a dog with its tail between its legs, he nodded and headed for the door.

“I won’t forget this,” he hissed.

She shrugged. “Neither will I.”

He brushed past the two men and left the apartment.

“Okay, did Draven really send you here to protect me?” She crossed her arms over her chest and took in the two goons from head to toe. They looked like tall blocks of onyx. She sensed there wasn’t something entirely human about them. “I’m just organizing and promoting the charity ball. I’m not some high ranking member of his cabinet.”

“Yes, ma’am, he did. Mr. Draven felt that you weren’t safe,” the man on the left said.

She rolled her eyes and didn’t push the issue about not being part of his cabinet. “I do know how to handle myself. Thank him for me, but your services aren’t needed.”

The goon on the left shook his head. “Sorry, ma’am, but only Mr. Draven can take us off this assignment.”

Rose headed to her phone to call Draven. She stopped when she realized she didn’t know his number. In fact, she didn’t know where the mayor’s private residence was. Throwing her hands up in the air, she groaned. “How am I supposed to go to dinner?”

“We’re to take you,” Mr. Clipped murmured.

She gritted her teeth in frustration. “Great. He’s thought of everything. I don’t suppose you have his private

line?”

“Yes, ma’am, but we’re not to give you the number,” Mr. Obstinate answer.

“Why?” She threw up her hands.

Mr. Obstinate smiled. “Mr. Draven’s orders.”

“Oh, of course. I don’t suppose you have to stay here in my apartment?” Rose wasn’t entirely sure she wanted them in her home. For all she knew, Draven had given them a set of private orders they weren’t to tell her about. Orders that could have them snooping around her things.

Mr. Obstinate nodded. “Yes, ma’am, for your safety.”

“You two enjoy your job far too much.” She stomped over to the bathroom and shut the door, not bothering to retrieve her vibrator. The yearning had burned out.

“He’s going to pay for this, dearly.” Rose turned on the shower and stripped, doubtful that she’d enjoy her time under the water.

Chapter Two

Draven looked over some of the requests the various business owners of Draven's Crossing had put onto his office. After awhile everything started to blur together. A glance at the clock told him it was almost time for dinner with Rose. His arousal flared to life from the dormant state it had taken after he'd ordered a security detail for her. His early anger manifested as well. After calling David to inform him of his decision, Draven had gotten the uneasy

idea that the werewolf would pay Rose back for the humiliation by doing her bodily harm. He hadn't missed the way David had watched her during the presentation. Ownership was clear in his eyes, and Draven hadn't liked it one bit.

To werewolves, ownership was non-negotiable. Things had progressed to where women and men had a say, but some of the old-fashioned caste still believed once claimed, it can't be undone.

“Sir?”

Draven didn't jump at the deep voice that came from a shadowed corner of his office. Hamilcar, stepped

forward, swathed from head to toe in black. Only his dark brown eyes showed behind the mask he wore.

Draven eyed the most trusted member of his staff. “Yes?”

“David Vanderbilt has been taken care of. His business partner, Eli, has been informed of our decisions. Due to your concerns over Mr. Vanderbilt, an investigation has been launched. The pack alpha has informed me that if you prove to be wrong he’ll demand a public apology for the insult done to his pack.”

Draven shrugged. “The man is arrogant. I don’t doubt for a second the wolf has been skimming off the top and

using others to maintain his very expensive lifestyle. The suit he wore to this meeting cost a small fortune. A look into the firm's finances told me they didn't make that much last year or the beginning of this year. If I'm wrong, I'll not only apologize, but personally approve of their request to expand their running grounds."

Hamilcar nodded. "Shall we keep monitoring him in the meantime?"

"Yes, and make sure he stays the hell away from Rose. Put pressure on the alpha and the firm to speed up the investigation. I have a feeling David is going to try to clean things up."

Hamilcar went still. He placed a finger to his ear, or at least where Draven assumed his ear would be. The man nodded. “The investigation has brought forth fruit. The alpha is not pleased. It seems the convertible David was driving is not a rental as he told his pack. It’s actually brand new and bought two weeks ago. Also, recent renovations on the werewolf’s house were not paid for by insurance, as he claimed. He actually paid everything in full yesterday, almost fifty thousand dollars worth of renovations. Several members of the staff have come forward to claim he took credit for work he didn’t do on some of the firm’s biggest clients.”

Satisfaction purred through Draven. “That was fast. Where is David now?”

“Being hauled before the alpha. A tribunal has been called forth. This should take a few days to clear up, sir.”

“Wonderful. That gives me time to concentrate on Rose. Call my car around. I’m taking my work home with me. Inform her security detail it’s time for dinner.” Draven stood up and started to gather some of his paperwork.

“Yes, sir.” Hamilcar melted back into the shadows.

“Damn, black dragon. Can’t even

say goodbye.” Draven straightened. Anticipation buzzed through his legs and arms. His hands itched to touch Rose. Fire burned through him, demanding that he finish what was started on the phone earlier. He’d lied when he told her he hadn’t been jerking off. Draven had unzipped his pants to relieve the pressure and caressed his cock to ease some of the aching. That made things worse. He’d had to stop or he would have come right then and there. Tonight’s dinner would test his control. Seeing her had been one thing. Sparring with her verbally had been something completely different. He’d enjoyed challenging her, enjoyed the verbal chess match they’d been engaged in.

Every move he'd made, she'd countered. Part of him had hated that he'd resorted to going into the gutter a few times to knock her off her guard.

There was little doubt that he'd been pushy and downright arrogant in his dealings with her. During their meal this evening, he knew Rose would be turning the tables on him. Draven looked forward to it. He wanted to be pushed and challenged by her, needed it. It had been decades since he'd been tested by a woman. Having to work for something made the reward so much better in the end. After putting his papers into his briefcase, he headed to his private elevator. On the ride down, he thought

about the meal request he'd put in with his chef. The food would be the best his private kitchen had to offer. Nothing less would do. He wanted to impress her. It didn't make sense to him as to why he needed to affect her in some way, but he did.

This invitation was important to him. Never during his tenure as mayor had he brought a date to his private residence. Rose was special. He wanted to get to know her in a setting that he was comfortable with and would hopefully put her at ease. His staff was unobtrusive, unless it was an emergency. Nothing would come between him and his time with Rose. Nothing.

His emerald green Jaguar XKR coupe stood idling at the curb in front of his private entrance. The driver exited the car and Draven slid into the driver's seat. The door closed and the world became smaller. No more demands and answering to the people. Just him. He reached over and pushed in the CD waiting for him. The first strains of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata floated through the speakers. His muscles relaxed as the stress and strains of the day melted away. He sank into the plush leather comfort of the seat and let out a sigh.

His thoughts drifted to various subjects on the drive home, but all came

back to Rose. He could see the form fitting tan suit with the ruffles at the hem of the jacket and sleeves, and the pencil skirt with the ruffles in the back that she wore this morning. The color complimented her smooth, mocha skin. She wore shiny, black patent shoes. The thin metallic heel had made his cock jump. The delicate straps drew attention to her ankles. He'd wanted to kiss his way up her leg, starting at her feet. The shoes had made him think prim and proper in public, but a wild woman in the bedroom.

Her hair had been pulled back into a messy bun. Spirals trailed down the back of her neck to frame her oval face.

Almond shaped dark brown eyes surrounded by long, thick sooty lashes, blinked back at him. Her small, pert nose had been cute, but it was her full, glossy lips that drew most of his attention. Her make-up had been simple; a bit of eye shadow, mascara and eyeliner, some blush and lip gloss. Nothing caked on. It all looked natural. One glance at her lips and his mind ran through a variety of filthy scenarios.

He wanted her to reveal her most inner desires; tell him every tawdry, salacious thought and wet dream she'd ever had. For now, it was the getting to know her stage. Which tested his self control.

Weaving his car through the town, a smile curled on his lips. Everything looked calm. Draven's Crossing had one of the lowest crime rates in the state, with a constant rate of job growth. He was proud of his little niche and what he'd added to it. His mind turned to what he would be discussing with Rose. Other than sex, he wanted to turn Draven's Crossing into a vacation spot. There were mortals willing to come work here and even live in town, but no one outside the current citizenry was willing to think of it as vacation material.

Draven was hopeful that Rose's ideas could be implemented. Even though he'd contested some of them,

he'd liked that she could think on her feet and challenge him. "Hopefully over dinner, we can come up with a few workable ideas and advance this attraction we have for each other."

Pulling into the driveway, he smiled. Everyone knew where the mayor's residence was. What no one knew was where Draven actually called home. There were perks at being the grandson of the founder of the town, like having a personal residence not open to the public.

His home was right on the edge of town close to the border of an area of protected forest. Being so far away from his people and the office gave him a

sense of privacy and normalcy he badly needed. And right now, he was grateful for it. He hit a button on his dashboard, and the garage door opened to reveal his Aston Martin DBS UB-2010. The shiny black paint glittered in the overhead light. He took his time pulling into the large space and driving past his Bentley Continental, Ducati SportClassic GT 1000 and his black 2010 Harley Sportster Forty-Eight. He grinned. *His* toys. Vehicles were one of the few pleasures he allowed himself.

After pulling into the space for his Jaguar, he shut off the engine, took out his cell phone and hit speed dial.

“Yes, it’s me. Inform her dinner should be ready shortly, which means I’ll expect her within the hour. I’m sure she’ll hate me even more.” Chuckling, he hung up and got out of the car. The door to his private entrance opened. Pale, golden light spilled out around Ross, his butler.

“Draven, the alpha of the Torstan werewolf pack, is here. He said it couldn’t wait for morning.”

Draven grumbled. “He’s in the parlor?”

“Yes, I made sure he was comfortable and served him a beer.”

Draven nodded. “Good, inform him that I’ll be with him soon. I just have to shower and change. Is the chef almost ready?”

“Yes. She’s been working hard to ensure your dinner will be a good one.”

“I’m sure she has.” He brushed past his butler and headed for a set of stairs near the entryway. On his way up, his mind rolled over the alpha’s visit. *They had to have decided what to do about David and couldn’t wait to tell me. It never ends.*

Draven sighed in weariness. Once he entered his room, he tossed his briefcase on the bed and headed to the

bathroom. After a quick shower, he dressed in jeans and a button up shirt and went down to the parlor. He wanted the alpha gone before Rose arrived. It irritated him that the werewolf would come to his personal home and not book an appointment through his office. Not only had this alpha been brought in by the Torstan pack from outside of town, but the man had never introduced himself, as was proper.

He didn't even know the werewolf's name. No one had told him, not even David. *Now this?* He shook his head and took a moment to compose himself before entering the parlor. Draven didn't want to meet the alpha

with tension or irritation. The wolf would smell it and react. Trying to seem relaxed and open, he took in a deep, cleansing breath and walked into one of his least favorite rooms. A fire burned in the hearth, and the man's back was to him. Draven stopped short as he heard a familiar, soft, feminine voice floating toward him. *Rose. Shit.*

Heat unfurled in his body as the desire manifested itself once again. His balls hardened, and his cock thickened in his pants leg. A bark of laughter drew Draven's attention back to the mysterious new alpha. Trying not to scowl, Draven moved forward, unsure how to act in this environment. Part of

him wanted to rip his security team a new one for bringing her earlier than expected; the other half wanted to study this situation and take his cues from Rose to see how he should act. One thing was for sure, he didn't like this new part of the equation.

“Rose, so good to see you here. Uh, hello? I was told you were here. I'm Draven, mayor of the town. I haven't had the pleasure of welcoming you.” He strode forward with his hand held out, while sidling up to Rose and making sure a foot or so separated them.

The voice was a deep, grumbled rasp. “Branson Torstan.” The werewolf took Draven's hand. Branson had a firm

grip, not too tight, but not too loose. Up close, the man had an ink black Mohawk with red streaks, the sides cleanly shaven to reveal a wolf tattoo on one side and a full moon over the tops of the evergreens on the other. When he smiled, he showed off white, straight teeth. His bottom lip was pierced in the center with a silver hoop.

Draven winced, wondering how much that hurt. The myths weren't lying when they said that werewolves had a silver allergy. Most couldn't even look at silver without getting hives or becoming physically sick. The rest of Branson's attire was a black leather jacket, button up shirt and jeans with

dusty motorcycle boots. The most notable thing was a large, black medallion with a picture of a massive gray wolf, its mouth hanging open as if it was howling.

“Sorry to come to your private residence. I know I should have introduced myself earlier, but the last alpha left such a shit pile that I’m just now sorting things out. ‘Scuse my language.” He nodded toward Rose, who shook her head.

“It’s okay. I’ve heard worse.” For a moment, Draven was entranced by the sight of her. Rose wore another figure hugging outfit, this time a one-shoulder, dark green dress with an asymmetrical

cut skirt. Golden braid work formed the strap holding the dress up. On her feet were gold strappy sandals. She looked stunning with simple, understated make-up. Her lips showed with color, a nude pink shimmery gloss that made her mouth look even more enticing than the red gloss from earlier. Draven stood there unable to move, much less breathe.

“You looking stunning,” he murmured to her.

She gave a small smile. “Thank you.”

Branson cleared his throat, drawing Draven’s attention back to him. “Again, sorry to interrupt a date. I was

just telling Rose here that David has been taken care of. The old alpha was his cousin, which is why the little rat bastard had managed to steal money from the pack. The advertising firm is owned partly by the pack. Eli is royally pissed, as expected. I'll have a report for you by tomorrow morning. May I request a meeting about pack business and this charity ball you're trying to organize? I'd like to formally back you on it, even do a donation on behalf of the pack.”

Draven nodded with a grin. “Trying to curry favor are you? How's nine tomorrow? That work for you? I'd like to discuss the state of the

werewolves' packs. I'm concerned."

"As am I. I'd be happy to, and nine is fine. I get up earlier than most wolfies." Branson smiled. "I'll be leaving now. Thank you, and nice meeting you." He nodded toward Rose and left the room.

Rose's tone was short and clipped. "You're invading my personal space."

His muscles tensed in warning as an alarm went off in his head. He tried to act as if he didn't understand what she was talking about. "Hmm? What?" Draven made a show of looking down. Sometime during the talk, he'd moved

even closer to her.

She took a large step away to her left. It felt as if a wall had slammed down between them, and he wasn't sure what'd he done to deserve it.

“This is a business dinner only.” She raised a glass to her lips and took a sip of white wine. He watched her mouth on the glass as she pursed her lips on its rim. Draven bit back a groan. The tip of her pink tongue came out to lick strays drops up. He closed his eyes and shoved his desire down.

“Of course, dinner, business, yes.”

She rolled her eyes. “Yes.

Business.”

Draven tried to ignore the emphasis on that particular word. *She has no clue how this night will end. Rose will be mine.* He decided to change his tactics. Instead of trying for a direct seduction, he would aim for destabilizing her by allowing her to see another side of him, show her that this wasn't all sexual for him.

“Dinner is ready, sir,” Ross announced.

Draven held out his hand toward Rose. “Shall we go in?”

She looked down at his palm and

then back at him before gesturing toward the door. “Please lead the way.”

“My hand is clean, I promise.” He waited, refusing to budge until she took it. Silence descended between them as she continued to gaze at his hand. “We can wait here all night if you want.”

Emotions flitted across her face. Her lips thinned. She lifted her chin and gazed up at him. “This means nothing.”

“It’s me being a gentleman.” He tried to sound innocent.

She snorted in response. “Have you ever been a gentleman? Do you even know what that means?”

“Of course I do.” He decided to keep his sentences short. Force her to do most of the talking and see what happened.

“Yeah, probably in your youth. What’s for dinner?” Her hand flexed, and she still looked unsure. Her jaw tightened, and she lifted her palm then dropped it.

“Scared?”

She glared at him. “No, I’m just wondering what else I’ll be giving in to if I let you hold my hand.”

He allowed his fangs to distend fully and grinned at her. Rose gasped

and stepped back. Her fear tinged the air, but another softer, muskier perfume joined it a second later. *Ahhh, she's aroused as well.* This pleased him. Draven resisted the urge to tease her about it. Instead, he remained silent, waiting for her reaction.

She licked her lips and held his gaze. Fear flickered in her dark brown depths. “Having fun at my expense?”

He gave her a nonchalant shrug. “One would think you weren’t use to being around vampires. Raising an eyebrow in question, he waited for her response. She shifted from one foot to the other.

Rose ducked her head and looked away. “I’ve only been living here for a year and half, and I don’t go out much.”

That one move constricted his heart. She looked vulnerable and sweet, yet sexy at the same time.

“If you’d like—”

She held up a hand. “No dates.”

“I was going to suggest escorting me to some events, get to really know the locals. I think that’s what you’re missing. You’re suggestions for the campaign is how an outsider would see it, not a local.”

Rose's features scrunched up. She bit her bottom lip and tilted her head to the side as if considering his words. Warmth spread through his chest as his heart yet again constricted.

“So, they won't be dates? Just meeting the public?” Her words were slow and careful. She was trying to establish that the appearances would be harmless.

He nodded, not bothering to correct her. To him they would be dates.

“You need to say they won't be dates,” she pressed.

Draven considered lying. He

searched for words that would make it sound as if he was saying it wasn't a date when it was. She placed both hands on her hips. "Say they won't be dates, and I'll go on them."

Exasperated, he shook his head. "Why is it so important to you that these not be dates?"

"I told you on the phone, I don't fuck clients. Technically, with me leaving the firm, you're my boss now. I don't need people getting the wrong idea about how I got this job."

He sighed. "You care that much about appearances? You're attracted to me."

“And?” She gave him a look that clearly said that part wasn’t important.

Draven was pleased she didn’t deny it. “To be honest, to me they’ll be dates. You can think of them however you please.”

“Then I can’t go with you. They can’t be dates in any way.” She shook her head and moved away, much to his annoyance.

“You are being so difficult.”

“Says you. You’re not the employee here. You have the power.”

“And yet you can slap me with a

sexual harassment suit or go to the press and tell them all the tawdry details of our phone conversation.”

“As you said, you don’t care, so how would that hurt you? You’ve also stated that your sex life isn’t any of their business and the public wouldn’t care,” she pushed back.

He shrugged. “They won’t. Only you seem to be making a big deal out of this. You haven’t answered my sexual harassment claim.”

“You’ve smelled my attraction to you and I just...I don’t know.”

“Just because you’re attracted and

allowed me to talk to you in a particular way doesn't mean it doesn't become unwanted," he pointed out.

She nodded. "True. It's just—"

"You wouldn't feel you had a right after you've allowed me to talk to you in such a way," he finished. "If I go too far, tell me. I don't want to make you uncomfortable, nor will I tolerate people speaking about you and acting as if you didn't earn this job."

"You want to fuck me." Her hands dropped to her sides. She seemed to have calmed down.

"I don't deny that. I can't deny

that. But you did earn this job even if some of my motives weren't entirely pure. You offered up better options than your former employer.”

She shook her head. “I'm sure a local agency would have done better.”

“Don't put yourself down. How about a deal?” As opposed as he was to the idea that had risen, he knew to be fair he'd have to say it.

Her head cocked to the side. “I'm listening.” Her liquid, brown eyes filled with curiosity.

“If you'd like me to, and this is totally up to you, I can meet with another

agency and see what they're ideas are.” He waited for her answer. Indecision showed on her face.

“How about this,” she started. He held back a grin and allowed her to talk. “I go to these events, experience the town, and you hire another agency to make their own campaign. In a blind draw, you pick the one you like the best for the ball?”

Draven admired her competitive spirit. “If that’s what you want, I’ll go for it. Does this mean you won’t be part of my P.R. department?”

She shook her head. “No. I can’t be.”

He let out a long, suffering sigh. “Fine. But the security detail will remain. I don’t entirely trust that David is gone. Now, we’ve kept the chef waiting. Time for dinner, and if you protest I will take you over my knee.” Draven held out his hand. “Ready?”

This time she took it, but didn’t smile.

“I promise I won’t bite, unless you ask me to.”

He watched her shudder. Goosebumps broke out over her skin, and she held back a smile.

Chapter Three

Rose tried not to squeeze her thighs together. The consistent pulse of need grew at the mention of Draven's bite. There were legends that said the smallest scrap of a vampire's fangs could bring unbelievable pleasure. Looking down at his hand again, she went over her options. *I can either take the gesture or continue to be rude.* With a sigh, she accepted his hand. His skin

was warm and dry, with the rough edge of calluses on his fingertips. That slightest brush of roughness against the back of her hand sent a ripple of need up her arm and throughout her body.

She tried to shove it back, but that made it worse. The slow, burning fire inside blazed stronger. Sucking in a breath, she ignored the longing and glanced toward the doorway. “Are we having dinner or not?”

The butler from before appeared in the entryway. “Sir? I’m sorry to disturb you, but there’s an important phone call for you, and they say they won’t wait.”

Draven sighed. “Duty calls. If the call goes too long or I have to leave, I’ll have the chef put together a plate for you to take home. Be right back.”

He bent down and kissed her cheek before leaving the room. The moment he released her, she felt the loss. It was as if he’d taken the heat with him.

Despite the fire, she hugged herself, rubbing her arms and crossing her legs at the ankle, unsure of what to do. She brought the glass of wine to her lips, ready to take a sip, but moved it away. With a shake of her head, she looked around for a place to set it down. The alcohol held no appeal. What had once been used as a distraction or means

to relax her had lost something in Draven's absence. She didn't want to admit that it had been used as a wall and grounding point.

She swallowed hard and scanned the room filled with antique furniture. Unlike Draven's office, this space looked like it had been decorated by someone with a taste in antiques. Heavy armoires, side tables, couches and chairs overflowed in every nook and cranny. The dark wood made the room feel cold and aloof. There was a weight in the air that made it hard to breathe, stifling the space around her. The furniture looked clean enough, not a mote of dust floating in the air anywhere.

Not seeing an empty space for her glass, she put it on a side table near the fireplace. As she wandered around the room, she felt like an intruder. Her heels clicked on the dark hardwood floor. There wasn't even a small rug to dampen the sound.

“Oh, you must be his new play toy,” a high pitched, twittery voice uttered from the far side of the room.

Turning her head, she caught sight of a curvaceous brunette standing in the doorway decked out in furs and silk. Long strands of diamonds hung around her neck catching the light of the overhead chandelier. Inky, black hair was piled high atop her head with

curling tendrils framing a diamond shaped face with delicate features. A cruel smile curled her bright red lips. The woman strolled gracefully across the room and held out a gloved hand. “Ileana.”

Rose accepted the handshake. “Rose.”

The woman’s grip was loose, insulting, and lasted a few seconds. A sense of disgust rose up within her.

“Rose,” the woman purred with a foreign tinge to her tone. “Such a sweet name.”

Instead of focusing on the veiled

insult, she turned her attention to something else in the room. “I’m not his plaything or girlfriend. I’m the head of the advertising campaign for the masquerade ball he’s pushing to be held in town.”

Rose retrieved her wine glass and took a sip, ignoring that it had warmed by the fire.

“Of course you’re not his girlfriend. I am. Well, fiancée, but such trivialities don’t need to be observed. He’s mine.” The claim was obviously a warning to back off and not get any ideas. Rose doubted what the woman said was true. Draven didn’t seem like the type of man—regardless of rumors—

to cheat on a significant other, much less allow himself to be tied down to anyone in anyway. Which suited her just fine. One more reason to ignore whatever attraction she had for him.

“I don’t want him.” She took another sip of her wine and looked around. The room seemed to have gotten smaller since Ileana arrived.

A pained laugh filled the air. “Don’t be ridiculous, girl. All women want Draven.”

“I’m sorry, honey, business called me...Ileana. What are you doing here?” Draven’s sullen tone said it all. “I was told you’d be out of town for the rest of

the month. Have you decided to move up negotiations with the town? I have the building plans for that mall your family wants built on the other side of town in the Paon Vert district ready.”

He slid into the room, giving Ileana a wide berth before settling beside Rose. His arm wrapped around her waist. For a second, she flinched and began to move away. He squeezed. A glance up at his face showed his features were hard with an angry glint in his eyes.

Ileana's displeasure was clear. Disgust flashed on her face before disappearing behind a smooth façade. A smile that didn't show in her eyes curled

on her lips. There was a lack of warmth or triumph in her expression. “No, I just got back tonight. I wanted to come here straight away, see if you were free for dinner.”

She clasped her hands behind her back, pushing out her large chest. The diamonds sparkled in the light with each breath she took.

“No. I’m not free for dinner. If you want an appointment, call my office.” Draven’s body relaxed next to her. “If you’ll excuse us, we haven’t had dinner.”

He squeezed Rose’s side again before removing his arm. Grasping her

hand, he led her out of the room, leaving Ileana alone.

Rose tried not to feel smug, but couldn't help it. He'd chosen her.

“I'm sorry about that. Ileana is the daughter of one of Draven's Crossing's most prominent vampire families. She believes herself to be my perfect match.” Draven's grip on her hand didn't loosen. She didn't insist that he let go, either.

“She also fancies herself your fiancée.”

A choking sound came from above her. If it were even possible, he seemed to become paler. “She said that?”

“Yup. Tried to warn me off of you.” She managed to take a sip of wine as they went, amused by the horror on his face.

His features became stony. “Who I date is none of hers or anyone else’s business. I’m not some fucking stallion needing to be paired off. Ridiculous.”

“This is a business dinner, remember? Not a date,” Rose pointed out.

He grinned. “This is a date to me.”

“You’re delusional. This is business, plain and simple.” After taking another sip of wine, she waited for his

next move. They entered a small, dimly lit room. Candles flickered on a circular table. A fire burned in the hearth. The atmosphere spoke of seduction, not business. “Draven—”

“I just love how you say my name,” he murmured next to her ear.

She jerked back, shocked at how close he’d gotten without making a sound.

“And this is a date. In my mind, I’m seducing you.”

“We said—”

“That was before that *woman*

came here trying to stake her claim on me.” Draven pressed a kiss to her temple, heating her skin and causing her heart rate to spike. She sucked in a breath. “I’m all yours. Remember that.”

Draven pulled away. This time the heat didn’t leave with him. Instead, it remained, spreading through her body like a gentle wave. Pushing back as much desire as she could, Rose straightened up. “You know, *Mayor*, this could be seen as going back on a promise. As a voter, I’d find that very hard to forget.”

He chuckled. “Ouch. But you don’t work for me. You’re working the ad campaign, and as for the voter aspect,

I'm sure you can overlook this.”

She rolled her eyes. “You’re such a charmer.”

“I’m sorry again, sir, there’s another call for you.” The butler entered the room and went directly to Draven. With heads bent together, they spoke in low tones. Draven’s face hardened. Anger flashed in his eyes, and his whole body went rigid.

“Son of a bitch. Get the fucking police chief now, and dial Jagger, too, and have Hamilcar meet me at the office. This shit has to stop. I’m sorry, honey. Dinner has to be postponed. Something’s come up.” He ran a hand through his hair

and let out a heavy sigh. His lips thinned until all she saw was the seam of his mouth. Nostrils flaring and fists clenched, he headed out of the room. “Put a plate together for, Rose,” he barked as he left.

She was left alone. Again, the heat left the room, and she felt a sense of loss and worry. Something was wrong. Her stomach pitched, and she felt nauseous. Rose couldn't fathom the sudden anxiousness that rose within her. Worry for Draven began to grow. Shaking her head, she waited for someone to come back and get her. The goons from before appeared at the doorway and nodded to her.

“Time to go,” Mr. Black said.

All she could do was follow them, wondering what had happened to cause Draven to call that many people to his office. *Has to be something bad.*

Chapter Four

Draven paced in his office, gritting his teeth. The predatory instinct to hunt and tear something apart pushed at his civilized veneer. His blood boiled. First, he was informed that they had found a body. Now he was being pulled away from Rose again; this time they'd found two more, all with bite wounds similar to a vampire's. His fists clenched. The urge to punch something

grew by the second. He looked around the room and took in each person gathered around the conference table.

“I want answers and I want them now. I expect to get a call from the Council any minute demanding some sort of answer. What the fuck am I supposed to tell them? Yeah, I have a rogue vampire on the loose, feeding on humans, and I have no leads whatsoever. That’s just asking for them to send someone to check on me and police this town themselves.” Draven grunted, hating that he felt helpless.

“Sir, this could be a move against you. Have you thought of that?” Jagger pointed out.

“Of course. I’ve upped the protection around those I care about.” His thoughts drifted to Rose, wondering if two security officers were enough. The idea that she wouldn’t be safe made him physically ill. Pushing that aside, he focused on the task at hand. “What did the coroner say?”

“The victims died of exsanguinations via the puncture marks on the neck. They look like bite marks, but he’s not sure. Said the entry wounds were too jagged, not smooth like most vampire bites. Also, the wounds were bleached clean of DNA and the bodies washed of anything that might link them

back to the sick freak responsible. The victims are two females and one male. No evidence of sexual activity, either. Witnesses around the areas say they've never seen them before. The clothing was all generic; tags were ripped off, but we're having the fibers analyzed to see if they can tell what social strata they're from. We've checked the in-town database; no pings yet, but we'll keep looking," Police Chief and top alpha werewolf, Torger, rattled off.

Draven clenched his jaw. He didn't like it. His stomach rolled in disgust. "No leads. Nothing."

The shrill ring of the phone filled the air, and he swore. "The fucking

Council is summoning me. Why do I feel like I'd rather face an hour of watching television white screen rather than listen to them berate me?"

With a sigh, he ducked around the desk and answered the call. "Draven, speaking. How may I be of service today, Councilman?"

The voice on the other end was a graveled one, so deep it was almost hard to hear his words clearly. "Draven, we've been informed of three deaths, human to be exact. Explanation?"

He hated the dry tone to the man's voice, as if he was talking about the weather instead of the loss of three

lives. Clearing his throat, he tried to sound as distant. “It appears to be the work of a rogue vampire, but there is nothing definite. I’ll have the coroner send over her findings.”

“Fine. We’re looking forward to having this wrapped up quickly. May God bless you. I pray this isn’t the work of a vampire, truly I do.” With that parting, the Councilman hung up, leaving Draven with a bitter taste in his mouth.

“Asshole. The Council doesn’t want God to bless us. They think we’re all demons from Hell who deserve to be put down.” After slamming the receiver onto the cradle, he turned back to the people assembled in the room. “Move

quickly. We need answers before they send a Fixer. Once their person is on the ground, there'll be more bloodshed. They don't give a fuck who gets hurt so long as the end justifies the means.”

With a wave of his hand, he dismissed his people. After digging his cell phone out of his pocket, he hit speed dial and waited for the other end to be picked up. “Did she make it home okay? Any problems?”

“No, sir. She's fine,” Flavio murmured.

“Good, I'll be over in a few minutes.” The craving to connect with someone outside of politics started in his

gut and moved up to his chest. He wanted to hold her, reassure himself that she was fine. They'd known each other a short time, yet he felt tied to her, enjoyed the verbal sparring and her defiance of him. A smile quirked his lips when he remembered walking into the room when Ileana had been there. It had felt right to have her by his side. Now, he wanted that connection and to continue the dinner that had been interrupted.

“Sir, should we set up a perimeter? Call more security?” Flavio asked.

“No, you two should be good for now. I'll pick up some food on the way. Don't tell her I'm coming. I want it to be

a surprise.” Draven hung up the phone before Flavio could protest.

He wondered what she'd answer the door in. Lingerie? Pajamas? Or maybe just her underwear. Either way he didn't care. Whatever she wore, he was sure she'd look sexy in it. His blood heated, and the remnants of need from their interaction earlier surfaced. An ache began in his gums as his fangs descended, poking his bottom lip. Marshalling his control, he pushed away the desire to feed and grabbed his jacket.

Once he left the office, he extended his aura outward searching for any possible threats. There were no

signs of life, human life that is. A cat padded delicately across the lawn. The sharp cry of a hawk pierced the night's calm. He felt a sense of peace descend on him. Night was his time. Their time. This was when the supernatural creatures were at their height of power. They owned this moment of the day.

A howl filled the air, followed by others. A glance up at the moon showed it wasn't full yet.

He headed for his car, continuing to keep an eye out. His security detail moved silently around him to form a large circle. They wouldn't interfere with his plans; Hamilcar wouldn't allow that. The tattoo on his forearm burned,

the link he used to call forth his black dragon, head of security. It rippled against his skin, and he sucked in a breath. Fire seeped up his arm raising goose bumps in its wake.

Hamilcar appeared before him, as usual, swathed from head to toe in black. “Did you need me?”

“No, just remembering you have my back. Any word?” Draven felt stupid having this discussion standing on the front steps leading up to the Mayor’s office, but he wanted to make sure that there would be no interruptions once he was with Rose.

“None. We’re working as fast as

we can on this.” Hamilcar bowed his head.

“Thank you. If at all possible, I don’t want anyone to disturb me, understand?” He waited, knowing he was asking for the impossible.

“We shall try, sir, but there is nothing to guarantee that something won’t happen.”

With a sigh, he nodded. “I know.”

Hamilcar disappeared into the night, and Draven headed for his car. He offered up a prayer to whatever gods were listening to let him have this moment with Rose. After a few stops at

some of his favorite restaurants that were still open, he had gathered a small feast of meats, cheeses and wine, with a chocolate pie for dessert. A few minutes later, he pulled up in front of her apartment building, checking the address on his iPhone again to make sure he had it right. Flavio met him in the parking garage.

“Sir, I really wish you’d requested her presence at your home. This is unsafe and ill-advised.” Flavio took off his glasses; neon green eyes flashed for a second before the sunglasses covered them again.

Draven shrugged. “I want to see her.”

“You’re making her more of a target than she already is,” he pointed out.

“I know.” He sighed. “I just...I want to see her. Make sure she’s okay with my own eyes. Connect with her.”

He looked up at Flavio, who nodded. “I understand that. It’s just, well, this is really fucked up with that person on the loose. Want to keep her safe? Take her out of town to the lake house or back to your place.”

Draven smiled at his friend, and one of his most trusted security officers. “Later, when she trusts me more. For

now, I need to see her.”

“If I didn’t know any better—”

“Don’t start.”

He made his way around Flavio and took the stairs, the bottle of wine rattling with each step. By the time he reached her apartment, his stomach growled with hunger after having missed dinner. Dieter, the other security guard assigned to Rose, nodded. “Sir, I hear movement and music, an opera of some kind.”

“Thank you.” He knocked and checked the time on his watch; it was half past eleven. He didn’t doubt Rose

would be pissed to find him here.

When the door opened, he found her standing there still in her green dress, shoes off and hair falling around her shoulders like a cloud of curls. Her make-up had been wiped away. She looked even more beautiful than before. His stomach tightened as hunger gnawed at his gut. Liquid heat seeped down to his groin, filling his cock. Thick with blood, the shaft lengthened and thickened, pressing against his fly. He bit down on his lip, shoving back the growing need. Unable to speak, he held up his bags.

“Wanted to have dinner with you.”
His voice croaked. Horrified, he cleared

his throat and tried again. “I brought dinner. I know I sent some food home with you, but I’d like to pick up where we left off.”

She giggled. Rose’s demeanor was much more relaxed now. Her eyes were glassy. He peered at her and sniffed the air. The scent of his best wine floated between them. A peek around her showed one of his bottles sitting on the floor next to the remnants of dinner.

“You’ve already eaten, um...” He glanced down at the bags in his hand. “I’m late.”

For the first time he wasn’t sure

how to proceed with a woman.

“Come in. We can eat the, um...”
She leaned down and poked around the bags. “The pie. We can have that. Your chef gave me a bottle of wine, said it was in apology.”

Draven made a mental note to thank her. With a grin, he nodded. “Wonderful. How much wine have you had?”

She gave him a dreamy smile. “Enough to be buzzed.”

Worry filled him. He would have preferred her clearheaded. For a moment, he considered turning around

and leaving, letting her sleep it off, yet something tugged at him to stay.

“I’m not drunk.” She poked him in the chest.

He laughed. “I think you’re tipsy.”

She waved off his comment. “Not even close, and don’t think this means I’ve let down my guard. Now, are you going to stand in the hallway all night? What if one of my neighbors opens their door and peeks out? How are you going to explain it?”

Her eyebrow rose in question, which made him smile. “Fine, since you insisted.”

Rose stepped back, but he didn't move.

“You have to invite me in.” He lifted his free hand and rubbed the back of his neck, embarrassed about that little hitch. Watching her eyes widen was amusing, until she pursed her lips.

“That's true? So, I could just take the bags of food and leave you standing there? Interesting.” The old spark was back. She looked more aware.

He held back a grin, looking forward to what she was going to do with this information. When she crossed her arms over her chest, her breasts pushed up. He could see the clear

outline of her nipples pressing against the fabric. A soft, musky scent drifted between them. *She's thinking naughty thoughts.*

“What’s going on in that gorgeous head of yours? Thinking bad thoughts about me?” He tried to act as nonchalant as she was. Draven lifted his arms to mimic her pose. The bags swung back and forth with only one arm resting against his chest.

“Just wondering what other things I can keep you from doing. Are vampires allergic to silver?”

He was amused by her lack of knowledge. Shaking his head, he

answered. “Nope, that’s werewolves. Most assume it’s holy water, but that’s not true, and as you can see, neither is sunlight. Invite me in, and I’ll inform you of all the things that aren’t true of my kind.”

Her eyebrow rose in question, and she stepped back. “Since it’s for my education, which can in turn help the campaign, please do come in.”

For a moment, he toyed with the idea of making her repeat the invite, but decided against it. As he brushed past her, he took his time savoring the scent of her perfume, and arousal, as he went. He looked around and saw an open floor plan; the living room flowed into the

dining area and kitchen, which was separated from the other spaces with a long island. The colors were a range of soft creams, neutral khakis, greens and warm reds and oranges. Remains of dinner, coffee and wine floated in the air to combine with her scent. Plush overstuffed chairs, couches and dark wood furniture were all arranged around a fireplace. A TV sat on a small rolling table in the corner playing something where two people were kissing. Gentle strains of the aria from Madam Butterfly floated from the speakers that were set in a dark wood entertainment center.

Magazines and mail were strewn over a glass table with gold metal work.

An empty wine glass stood alone near a corner. The place looked lived in and comfortable. Seeing her apartment told him a lot more about the woman than what he'd seen at dinner or the office.

“As you can see, I've already eaten, but I'm sure I can make room for dessert.” She picked up her plate, the wine bottle, and bypassed him to head to the kitchen, where she took down a wine glass and placed her dishes in the sink. The wine she re-corked and put away. He decided to settle on the plush couch. Rose returned, setting down the glass on a side table and cleaned off the magazines and mail. “Sorry about that. Was catching up. So, you were going to

tell me what other fables of the vampire are right and wrong?”

She uncorked the wine he'd brought with him and let it breathe, while settling back in the chair opposite of him.

“You're so far away.” He tried to pout only to watch her laugh.

“Don't even try it. Besides, pouting on a man does not look good.” She held out her hand. For a moment, he was confused.

“The pie. You can set up the rest of the food, if you want. How can you eat? I thought vampires couldn't digest

anything?”

He handed her the various plates and let her arrange it however she wished.

“Well, think of it this way; we drink blood and that gets our heart started, right? Gives us the look of being alive. Well, as alive as we can be. That spark, so to speak, must also animate other things. Only the older vampires can eat. Anything younger than a hundred years old would throw it up or get violently ill. Think of the ability to eat similar to that of a chameleon blending in with its surroundings. Hunters wouldn't look twice at a pale person eating a burger, would they? We've

learned tricks on how to look human. Eating and drinking is one of them, and yes, after we've consumed blood we can digest and do other things." He let his voice drop to a husky tone.

"Interesting, makes sense." She seemed to brush off the intimation by moving the plates around. "And what are you guys allergic to?"

"Well, the sunlight thing is true." He held up his hand to stop her protests. "But again, only for newbies. Their bodies, similar to that eating problem, haven't fully acclimated to being of the undead. As for stakes, I would assume everyone would be allergic to those.

And I love Italian food too much to be allergic to garlic. Holy water will warm my skin, but not make me burn, and holy relics depends on the belief of the person. If they think I'm truly evil, then yeah, I'll hurt."

She held out a glass of wine to him, which he accepted. "What about blood? Does it have to be a specific kind?"

"You mean do we only feed on human blood? Yes, only human. Animal blood doesn't jive with the way we digest things. Trust me, it's been tried over and over again to avoid detection, and something always goes wrong. For some reason, the blood doesn't absorb

into our bodies the way human blood does. So the defenses we've learned to use to blend in don't work. Our skin remains pale. In some cases, our fangs don't retract; in others, our skin doesn't warm, or we can't be out in the sunlight. Doesn't have to be fresh, just has to be human blood." He settled back, feeling a distance between them. Rose went about making up a small plate for him, and then one for her, as if nothing was wrong.

"Aren't you full? Chef doesn't believe in ignoring the calories." Draven was thankful he got a good variety of things. She seemed to like the various cheeses and bread the most.

She piled a small piece of cheddar on a slice of French bread. “Can’t let this go to waste, now can I? Besides, I skipped lunch. Was stuck doing a presentation for this demanding political figure.”

He threw back his head and laughed. “Minx. You should have said you were hungry. I would have stopped the meeting.”

“You forget that David was there,” she pointed out.

Scowling, he focused on his food. “Moving on, what other questions do you have?”

“So you guys can like, get it up, right? Everything works?” She didn’t look at him.

He nearly choked on the spoonful of stew he’d put in his mouth. As he struggled to swallow, his eyes watered. A look across the table at her revealed a seeming air of innocence that made him want to spank her until she writhed on his lap, begging for his cock. After taking a long drink of wine and ignoring the burn, he recovered before answering her question.

“Are you asking for a demonstration? Or perhaps maybe you’d like me to drop my pants and show you?” Watching her reaction carefully,

he was pleased that the perfume of her musk increased, and she squirmed in her seat.

Licking her lips, she shook her head. “Perv.”

“You asked.” He smiled, amused that she hadn’t answered him directly.

She still didn’t look at him. “A simple yes or no would have been fine. You didn’t have to—”

“What? Be so blunt? Again, you asked.”

When Rose said nothing, he decided to push the subject. “I’m hard

right now. Hard enough to hammer nails, but I'm behaving, even though I can smell your desire. Fuck, it smells delicious. I'd love to say screw dinner and just drop down to my knees and eat you." His eyes narrowed as he watched her squirm.

"Draven, stop." Her voice was low, breathy. Rose's pulse had increased. He heard her heartbeat like an erratic drum in his head. His nostrils flared at the increase in her arousal. She moved from side to side in her seat, even going so far as crossing her legs.

"You want me," he stated.

"And I said stop." Rose lifted her

head, a warning glint in her eyes.

He decided to pull back instead of pushing. It was clear by her expression that her limits had been reached. “I’m sorry. I was out of line.”

She said nothing, making him wonder if he’d screwed himself over. “If you want me to leave, I can. And you can rescind the invitation if you want. I’ll understand; we’ll keep it professional.”

He swallowed hard, hating the turn this had taken. Draven didn’t want to be just professional with her. A bolt of understanding hit him out of blue. *I want to know her, have her give herself*

to me of her free will, not out of some seduction. I actually want more with her. He stared down at his food and prayed she wouldn't kick him out. *Please, whoever's listening, let her give me a chance.*

“I could have had any job I wanted, was offered quite a few high paying positions. I was young, fresh from college. A lot of guys think that because you're in your early twenties. you're a moron.”

“I never thought—”

“Did I say you?”

The pointed look she gave him

made him wince. Pushing some hair off her shoulder, she looked down at her plate. “I found out early that sometimes older men don’t respect you, even if you have something to offer other than a great rack and ass. My first mentor pushed and pushed for us to be more. I gave in, and he dumped me the next day for someone younger with plastic tits and longer legs. I don’t mind you pushing. It excites me to know someone as sexy as you wants to fuck me.”

He opened to mouth to correct her statement, but she continued talking.

“But that’s all this will be, some fucking. You’re a vampire. I’m not sure how old you are, but I’m guessing

you've been around, seen this, done that. I'm nothing new." She calmly sipped her wine.

"First and foremost you are not nothing new to me. I've never met someone like you. You push me, challenge me. It's exciting. I know you'll never bore me, nor will you let me get away with crap just because you want something and will blackmail me later. The value you place on your job, and yourself, is sexy as hell. I love a woman who respects herself and takes her job seriously. I'll be honest, I do have an old fashioned streak. I'll want to take care of you at times, and the concept of you working will sometimes confuse me,

because I'd make sure you want for nothing, but I respect you in everything.”

Her jaw dropped, and he realized he was saying a lot of things that spoke more of a man in a committed relationship than someone trying to form ties with someone he was interested in. Mentally, he slapped himself, but refused to take what he said back.

“That’s how I feel. I’ve never met anyone like you. Someone who makes me think and keeps me on my toes, and for the first time since I took this job, makes me want to say fuck it and spend every waking moment worshipping your body,” Draven declared.

He shifted in his seat as his cock pressed against his fly. Draven looked her over. No make-up, relaxed, hair loose and free around her face. She was a goddess. He'd never been so enamored by one woman before. The air pulsed with unused sexual tension. The perfume of her yearning increased, as did the beating of her heart. Her chest rose and fell faster and faster. The sweet sound of her breath coming out in soft pants made him groan aloud.

“I know we've just met, and I'll try to go slow, I swear to the gods, I'll try. But damn it, woman, you drive me crazy, and I have no clue how I'll survive working with you without doing

horribly inappropriate things to your luscious body when we're alone together. I have fantasies of fucking you against every available inch of my office and anywhere within the building. And no, I won't stop it because you need to understand what you're getting into with me." He paused to organize his thoughts and give her a moment to compose herself. It was clear by the death grip she had on the edge of her chair that Rose was struggling.

"I'm mayor of this town, and I value this job, even the bullshit that goes with it and yes, there are expectations from you as my significant other, but other than that I don't care. Your comfort

and happiness is important, and I don't give a fuck what a past mentor did. I'm not him. I'll tell you upfront how I feel, no games, Rose, not anymore. So, if something happens, I expect no regrets. Just know there is danger that comes with being with me, and I'll protect you with everything I have." He meant every word and waited, holding his breath to hear what she had to say.

Draven watched, shocked as she slipped out of her chair. She placed her plate on the coffee table and whimpered. He put his food down and went to her.

"Rose? Rose, are you okay?" He placed his hands on her shoulders and gave her a gentle shake. In response, she

threw her arms around his neck, causing him to fall back. His head hit the edge of the couch, but he didn't care. He wrapped his arms around her waist and held her to him, savoring the feel of her breasts pressed against his chest. He ran a hand down to cup her ass. She moaned and pressed her lips to his. Rose pulled her head back and stared down at him.

“You win this round, Casanova.”

It took him a moment to understand what she was saying before she kissed him again. The contact was demanding, heated and possessive. Her hands tunneled into his hair, grabbing handfuls, controlling his head. Her tongue traced

the seam of his mouth. Groaning, he gave in to her control of the situation. Their bodies moved and maneuvered, not breaking contact. Draven managed to get on his back and lay his head on the floor while she straddled him. The heat of her pussy pressing against the crotch of his pants tested his self control even more.

The pounding of her heart echoed in his head; the call of her blood turned the hunger for sex into something dark, bordering on dangerous. Fearful of what could happen, Draven turned his head away.

“Rose, please, I can’t...” The words came out in soft pants.

Brushing her hair out of her face, she looked down at him. Concern filled her nearly black eyes. “What’s wrong?”

For a moment, he considered lying and making an excuse to leave. His gums and fangs ached. His stomach hurt from the new hunger pains, this time for blood. Hers.

“I want to drink of you.” He waited for her repulsion. It didn’t come.

“Then drink.” She tilted her head to the side.

He stared at her, unsure of what was going on. Normally people were hesitant, even scared. She embraced this

request freely. He shook his head. “First, I need your permission. I can’t just feed from you. Second, why aren’t you scared?”

“There’s something else you’re not telling me. And I know you’ll take care of me. Based on your grand speech, I know you wouldn’t hurt me on purpose or let anything happen to me. Besides, I assume you’re old enough to control yourself.”

The open, honest trust touched him, causing his world tilt. Lifting his hand, he traced his fingertips over her cheek. “You are so beautiful.” He marveled at how this singular woman touched him like no other.

“Thank you. Now tell me what else is wrong.” She settled down on top of him like he was a mattress.

Chuckling, he took a deep breath and stroked her back. “I’ve never fed while having sex before. You brought up something in me that was darker than what normally happens. I’m not quite sure what will happen—”

His words cut off when she rocked against him. He groaned and closed his eyes as sparks of pleasure threaded his spine then danced along the length of his cock. Biting his lip, he tried to push the desire away and concentrate on her.

“Then go with it,” she whispered.

“But—”

“Are you scared you’ll hurt me, and I’ll run away?” She pushed herself up, which left her straddling his thighs.

“Yes,” he whispered.

She caressed his cheek before reaching up to undo the braided strap that held up her outfit. The garment slipped down to pool around her waist. A lacy, strapless bra was revealed. With a flick of her finger at the front, the bit of lace slid away to reveal full breasts topped with dark brown nipples. Rose pulled the dress up and off, leaving her

in only a lacy thong. He clasped her hips and ran his hands up her sides, savoring her warm, silken flesh.

“You’re so beautiful,” he whispered, unable to say anything else. His brain had become numb. His cock throbbed, pressing against his fly with more insistence. “Not in all my five hundred and fifty years have I seen someone as exquisite as you.”

“Wow, you’re old. You sure you’re up to this? I wouldn’t want you to like croak on me just before I come.” She stuck out her tongue, and he swatted her ass.

Instead of a yelp, he got a moan.

She rocked her hips against his crotch. Need burned hot through his veins. His controlled frayed until he wasn't sure if he could hold out any longer.

“So wet for you, have been since I met you. Fuck me, Draven, please.” Her breathy voice inflamed him. He gritted his teeth, pushing back the desire that threatened to consume him. Swallowing, he focused on her body.

“That's all? You don't want me to feed from you, too?” He cupped her breasts, squeezing them, testing how much she could take before she said stop. Rose gave herself freely to him, lifting her hands to cover his to show him how she liked it.

“Yes,” she hissed. “Like that. God, that feels so good.”

Rose rocked against his erection, the perfume of her arousal increasing with each movement. “Pinch my nipples. Hard.”

He followed her request and was rewarded by another moan of pleasure. “Show me. I want to know how you like it, so I can please you.”

Following her movements, he canted his hips. It was an erotic sight watching her ride him. *This would be even better if she was riding my cock.* He let go of her breasts and struggled to

get his shirt off. Rose brushed his hands away and tore his shirt open, sending buttons flying everywhere. Parting the material, she ran her hands over his abdomen, pausing to pinch and roll his nipples. He rested his head against the floor and arched his back. Electric shocks shot straight to his cock as need buzzed around his balls.

“Even better than I could have thought,” she murmured.

Draven let her have her way. With eagerness, she moved back, undid his belt and fly before releasing his cock from its fabric cage.

“Commando. Will have to

remember that.” She pulled down his pants until the hem was at mid-thigh. Rose grasped his shaft, stroking him slowly. She looked at him, the heat of embarrassment colored the air with her need.

“What’s wrong?”

“No lubricant.” She looked away.

“You don’t want to spit or lick, do you?” He was amused that she was too embarrassed to spit on her palm to make things easier. “I won’t think less of you, honey. Besides, I need something.”

Draven lifted his hips, pushing his cock forward. The shaft thumped against

his stomach, smearing the pre-cum on his abs. “Want me to show you how I do it?”

He took her hand and brought it to his mouth. After licking the palm, he guided it back to his cock. “Let me show you how I jerk off.”

Chapter Five

A sexual pulse thrummed through her body as he wrapped her hand around his cock and guided her. Together they stroked him up and down. Her thumb brushed around the wide helmet head. She watched him shudder. His eyes rolled upward as he thrust his hips. Entranced, she watched as together they jerked him off. Rose was so hot. She felt as if she could have burst into flame.

Her pussy was drenched, the crotch of her panties soaked.

His cock was hot against her palm. The skin was so soft it surprised her, like velvet wrapped around steel. She took in his exposed torso and hips. Muscles rippled over pale skin. The tendons stood out on his neck as he bent his head and arched his back. The speed of his hips increased the closer he got to coming. Sticky, hot, seed trailed down from the slit at the top of his shaft and dripped down the stalk, coating both their hands. His head tossed to and fro. She watched as his fangs grew thicker, sharper and longer.

“Fuck, Rose, need you so bad.”

The air around them swirled with male musk, sweat, and her arousal. The aching bundle of nerves between her legs throbbed for attention. She slipped her free hand down her body to stroke her clit through the thong. Sparks of pleasure burst within her. Tingles burned at the base of her back and threaded through her pussy lips. Moaning, she worked her fingers faster as she matched the speed of her hand on his cock.

Draven released her hand, took hold of the sides of her panties and pulled, ripping the fabric. The shredded underwear came away from her crotch,

and she whimpered as the lace dragged over the sensitive head of her clit.

“Fuck me, Rose. I need to be inside you.” His words were breathy and harsh, as if from deep within him.

“Condoms,” she groaned, thankful that her mind wasn’t so deep in the fog that she’d forgotten protection.

“Wallet. Back pocket. Hurry.” He covered her hand again and stilled her, holding tight. His body shook beneath her as she scrambled, fumbling to slip a hand beneath him and extract his wallet. The aching pulse of arousal swelled within her as she took out the condom and threw the rest over her shoulder, not

caring about anything else but having him inside her. She ripped open the packet and rolled the protection over his hot, hard length. Rose scrambled up to position herself over him. Her cunt was soaked and juices slipped down her thighs. Her breasts felt heavy and full. Her nipples demanded stimulation of any kind.

Draven lay still beneath her. His gaze locked on where she was poised above him. He gripped her hips and held on. Taking her time, she lowered herself down. Her thighs shook with the effort it took to move so slowly. When the tip of his cock pressed against her entrance, she nearly lost it. Her pussy contracted

to grasp the thickness and pull him into her.

“Please. Now. In,” he gasped out.

Before she lowered herself further, he surged his hips upward, pushing his cock deeper inside. The thickness stretched her vaginal walls. Gritting her teeth, she relaxed, adjusting to his size. Squeezing her eyes shut, she focused on breathing through her nose and out through her mouth. Tears slipped from her eyes as she lowered herself down, taking him in, inch by inch.

“Tight. Heaven. Goddess. Rose,” he panted.

Draven pulled out and pushed forward, going deeper; in and out until he was balls deep inside of her. He throbbed inside of her. The pulse echoed her heartbeat. The pain faded as he pulled out, setting off a wave sensation. Rose shuddered as she began to move with him, grinding her clit against his abdomen on the down stroke. He cupped her breasts, massaging them before pinching and tugging her nipples. Shards of electricity burst as the tingles grew bigger. Bigger and bigger still until she felt as if she was burning and her nerve endings fried.

He fucked her harder. She leaned forward and rode him. The head of his

cock rubbed against that bundle of nerves inside of her that set off bursts of heat with each stroke. Her orgasm tightened in her cunt, spiraling higher. Looking down at him, his face and torso was bathed in sweat.

“Yes. Faster. Goddess. Fuck me. Own me.” His eyes flashed. Black obsidian glittered back at her as hunger and desire burned in his gaze.

She looked down at his fangs. Long and sharp. A thrill raced through her body. “Please, Draven, drink of me.”

Rose lowered her body down and tilted her neck, exposing the jugular to him. He dragged his fangs down the side

of her throat. The slight pain burned and increased her pleasure.

“Yes. Drink me.” Her pussy rippled around his cock as she rocked her hips. Desire seared through her veins as the heat inside of her increased. She moaned, pressing her throat closer to his lips. “Please,” she pleaded. “Want it.”

Every cell in her body hummed for this moment. Draven’s hands massaged her breasts harder. His hips moved faster. He pressed a kiss over her pulse point.

Her heartbeat seemed to triple by that one act. She moved her hands up and gripped his hips, her nails digging into

the skin. He growled low, the sound rough and dark as if it came from a shadowed place within him.

“Mine,” he whispered before biting down. Intense pain burst in the center of her chest. She released his hips and reached up to claw at his biceps as tears slipped down her cheeks. Her mouth dropped open in a wordless cry as the center of her world came down to that one act. The throbbing, pulsing ache turned into a hot thread of fire that burned through her, singeing her right down to her soul. The backs of her eyeballs felt hot. Her lips, fingertips and toes tingled. Fires exploded in small bursts through her body like fireworks.

She shook as her cunt contracted.

Rose felt as if she balanced on a knife's edge with darkness hovering just on the other side. The sensation of falling filled her as she screamed. Each tug of his lips pulled at something deep inside of her. He drank and drank and drank. The desire increased, multiplying tenfold until she sobbed. Their bodies continued to move. Her breasts slid against his chest. Electric strings shot straight to her core. Heat ebbed through her body as the orgasm welled up inside of her. The wave broke. She came on a cry, drowning in pleasure, pain, and darkness.

Draven released her neck and

continued to thrust into her until he found his climax. Body straining, his cock thickened and pulsed inside of her as he came. He continued to thrust into her through it all. Rose collapsed on him, breathing hard. Her heart raced. She felt lightheaded. The edges of her vision became black.

“Rose?” Draven murmured.

“Rose?”

“Hmm?” She lifted her head a small bit. It felt so heavy. It dropped back to his chest.

“Shit.” He struggled beneath her. She wasn’t sure why. It was so comfortable to lie there. Sleep tugged at

her. Closing her eyes, she allowed herself to drift. The blackness closed in. Not afraid, she allowed it to cocoon her.

* * * *

Draven wrapped his arms around her waist and held her close as he struggled to get them both upright. Fear held him by the throat. He called out, using his connection to Hamilcar to summon one of his most trusted friends. The black dragon appeared at the door. His eyes widened.

“Help me. We need to get her to bed.” Draven’s heart beat so hard he

feared it would burst through his ribcage. Hamilcar scooped up Rose and headed toward what Draven assumed was the bedroom. He watched as Hamilcar settled Rose on a cream colored silk duvet. Her eyes remained shut.

“Is she—” He couldn’t get the words out, refusing to say what was on his mind.

“Heartbeat is a bit sluggish but there. She’s alive. Fucking hell, Draven what did you do?” Hamilcar looked at him, worry in his gaze.

“She asked me to feed on her. Gave me permission. I should have said

no. Did I take too much?” He shook his head and began to pace.

“I’ll summon the doctor. Shall I teleport her over to your house? Much more discreet that way.”

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.” Tears welled in his eyes at the thought that he’d hurt her or nearly killed her. “Yes, get the doctor. But dress her first. I’ll be along shortly.”

As he hung his head, he felt a sense of shame descend on him. Never had he lost control and now, with the one woman he wanted most, he’d screwed things up. Flavio appeared at his side holding out his clothes. “We’ll

clean up, Drav. It will be okay. She's alive."

He glanced at his friend. "But I...I turned into a monster."

Flavio said nothing, which confirmed his worst fears. After stripping off the condom and disposing of it, he got dressed, not caring about washing up. "Clean up the apartment and then come to the house."

With a heavy heart, Draven left and drove back home without Rose, his mind on her health. By the time he pulled into the garage, he didn't have the energy for anything else. His sole concern was to take care of her and make things right

as best he could. Ross met him at the door, a phone in his hand.

“The police chief, sir. He says you’ll want to know what they’ve found.”

Draven looked at Ross then the phone. Disgust and anger filled him. “Not now, NOT NOW!”

Draven threw the offensive item at the wall and stalked upstairs to his bedroom, hating himself. Neither man had done anything wrong. “I acted like a fucking child. Shit.”

After running a hand over his face, he headed to his bedroom. He was

relieved to find Rose there, her eyes, much to his shock, were open.

“Jesus, can’t a girl get any sleep around here? By the way, I threw up on your Persian rug.”

Joy exploded his chest. Not bothering with waiting for the doctor’s okay, he gathered her in his arms and held her to him.

“I’m going to throw up on you if you don’t release me in a second. Oh God, don’t feel good. Bathroom?”

He let her go and watched as she scrambled off the platform bed and looked around.

He pointed at a door. She ran toward it and rushed inside.

Hamilcar entered the room with a wizened old man trailing behind him. “She’s awake?”

“Yes. As soon as she comes out, please give her a full physical exam. I want to make sure she’s in perfect health.” Well, as perfect as she can be.

Rose came stumbling out of the bathroom looking pale. She groaned and climbed back into bed as if she owned the thing.

“How are you feeling, beautiful?” He moved to her, pulled up the covers,

tucked her in and brushed back her hair.

“My stomach doesn’t like me, and I think there’s a pink elephant on the ceiling.” She blinked a few times.

“There’s a doctor here to make sure you’re okay, and that I didn’t hurt you too badly or take too much blood, or both.” He placed a gentle kiss on her forehead. “Do you want me to stay?”

“Do I have to get naked?” She yawned, which he found adorable.

“Yes, just to make sure.” The doctor nodded.

His body tightened at the thought

of her being nude again. Hamilcar had dressed her in a silver chemise. Her hair was a wild tangle of curls. She smelled of sex, sweat, cinnamon, and vanilla with a hint of sourness. His fangs ached. Shaking his head, he pushed away his desires and focused on her.

“And then I can shower?” she asked.

He hated that she would be washing his scent off of her body, but he nodded. “Fine. You should go shower. There’s no way in hell I’m repeating tonight. I’m too damn hungry and tired now. You can just feed me.” He heard her stomach growl.

Hamilcar made a coughing sound that caused Draven to lift his head and glare at the man. The black dragon shrugged.

“I’ll be back, honey.” Placing another kiss on her forehead, he exhaled and straightened. “Please take care of her. Hamilcar, go see the Police Chief, apologize to him for me, and tell him I’ll be calling in a few minutes.”

Draven left the room. After rushing through his shower and routine, he dressed in a pair of silk pajamas and left the bathroom through a private entrance that led down a short passage to his office. With a sigh, he sank down in his chair feeling exhausted. He picked

up his phone, hit speed dial, and waited. The Police Chief answered on the first ring.

“I’m so sorry for my behavior. It was inexcusable.”

Silence on the other end made him think the werewolf was pissed with him.

“Sorry, Drav, Hamilcar just filled me in. I understand. I’d be in a pissy mood too if my mate was sick and it was my fault. Totally fine. Okay, my people have been working quickly and quietly over this. Don’t want the media, namely, Isadora Jones, sniffing around here complicating things.”

Draven hid a smile. Despite the Police Chief's annoyance, he figured the werewolf had a soft spot for the Crossing Times lead reporter.

“As I suspected, the victims are vacationers from a neighboring town. I've contacted their police department, who is sending someone over to help in the investigation. They were apparently vampire obsessed fanatics who wanted to hang with the local crowd instead of sticking to the tourist routes. After canvassing the local haunts and showing their pictures around, we know that they all left the various local pubs alone, picking up no one, so we have to assume that they were chosen as soon as they got

to the more low traffic areas. Based on the info we got from their local police, they were middle class and their bosses said they were on vacation. As far as friends and family knew, they didn't know each other. Basically, we're fucked. We have nothing to go on. May as well be dealing with Jack the Ripper here." The squeak of springs told Draven that the werewolf leaned back in his chair.

"Damn, and the Council will want an update come sunrise." Draven ran a hand through his hair. "I don't need this crap. We could go to the media with what we know. Be honest and ask the public for answers."

“Aw, shit, Drav, why?” Torger whined.

“I’ll handle it. You don’t have to say anything.”

“You know that won’t work. They’ll want to ask me dumb questions after I’ve said we don’t have any leads.” He sighed. “Fine, organize a press conference. No questions.”

Draven smiled. “I owe you, man.”

“No, you don’t owe me anything. Let me do my job. Get me out of the freaking bachelor poll, and I’ll owe you something.” He hung up.

Draven chuckled. He was in that poll, too. He got up, headed downstairs and found his butler cleaning up the mess of the phone.

“Let me do that. I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have thrown it or yelled at you. I was being an asshole.”

“It’s all right, sir. I understand. Ms. Rose is a very special woman. I saw her when she came in and became worried myself.”

“I don’t deserve a pardon. I’ll replace the phone.”

“Already done. I believe the doctor is waiting in the parlor to speak

to you.”

“Thank you.” Draven bowed to Ross and headed for that room.

With trepidation, he entered the parlor and prayed for good news. Just because Rose had been awake didn't mean he hadn't screwed up. The doctor looked over at him while tapping away on his phone.

“She's fine. Will need a lot of sleep. For a first time donor she's recovered remarkably well. Feed her, make sure she gets rest and don't drink from her for, I'd say three to four days to help build up her supply. She's a fighter that one. Good luck. Have her come

back on day three for a check-up to make sure there aren't any side effects." The doctor slid his phone in his pocket, nodded and headed out the door.

Relief lifted the weight of guilt off Draven's shoulders. With much lighter steps than before, he headed to the kitchen and put together a platter of food before returning upstairs to make sure she ate something.

Ross stopped him on the steps.
"Sir?"

"Yes, Ross?"

"The doctor gave these to me before he left. I assume it's to help Ms.

Rose recover. Do you want to give her the dosage now or in the morning?”

Draven took the bottle. “I’ll take them to her now. Thank you.”

On the way to the bedroom, he rehearsed how he was going to apologize.

He pushed open the door with his hip, entered the large room, and started the apologies.

“I’m so sorry, honey. It won’t happen again. I swear. I won’t feed from you ever again.” He walked toward her, waiting for an answer. When she said nothing, he became worried again.

Placing the tray on the end of the mattress, he took her in. She was settled against a mountain of pillows. The blanket was tucked around her, and she looked pissed.

“I can’t get out of here,” she grumbled.

“Huh?” There was nothing holding her as far he could see, although the duvet did seem a bit tight around her.

She wiggled under the sheet, and he saw the problem instantly. Rose could barely move under the covers.

“The doctor told Ross to tuck me in. He thought I might fall out of bed or

suffer some sort of dizziness. Ross tucked me in too tight, and I need to use the bathroom again. Ugh, help.” She began to writhe under the blankets, making him think that she was going to hurt herself if he didn’t step in and do something. After moving the nightstand, he then tugged the duvet out from under the mattress and helped her down from the bed.

“Just make sure he doesn’t try to shove a pea under there and stack up more mattresses.” She rushed toward the bathroom door and slammed it shut.

Smiling, he loosened up the sheets and blanket, switched on the TV, and grabbed some paperwork to look over

while he waited. When she returned, he sat on her side of the bed with a file, looking over the details of a zoning request for a new park.

“I have your food and medication. Hop in, and I’ll tuck you in again. I promise not too tight.”

She looked skeptical, but got in bed anyway and allowed him to tuck her in and place the tray on her lap.

“So, what happens now? You’ve fed from me. Can you like track me or something? Find me wherever I am? Read my emotions? Know my thoughts?” She dug into the stew. Her eyes brightened, and her body relaxed against

the pillows. “I think I just had a stew-gasm.”

He raised an eyebrow.

“You know, like foodgasm, but with stew. This is so good. What is it? Where’d you get it? Is there more?”

Draven held up his hands and chuckled. “Whoa, slow down. First of all, it’s a simple beef stew, but modified. The recipe is a secret, and the owner won’t give it out even on threat of death. And I’ll get you more if you want. As for your other questions, I’d have to give you blood to track you. That’s it.”

The metallic flavor of her life

essence rolled over his tongue again, and the mixture had an edge of spice and fruit that went to his head, just as it did when he drank of her. With a deep breath, he focused on the here and now, not on the pulse of hunger pinging around his body demanding another sip.

“What’s it like? The feeding? Have you ever been fed on?” She shoveled another spoonful of stew into her mouth and took a sip of orange juice.

He settled against the far poster of the bed and looked at her, taking her all in. Rose’s color was much better than before, and her hair was a wild mass of curls around her face. Her eyes were bright and inquisitive. He felt a bit more

for her. Draven wanted to wake up to this sight for as long as she'd allow him to.

With a shake of his head, he pushed away those thoughts and focused on her questions.

“If it’s just a feeding, it’s tunnel vision. All your focus is on the taste of the blood, the feel of it sliding down your throat, the way it’s energizing you, and the pain of the hunger. There’s pleasure there too, like tasting good food, but it depends on whether or not the person takes care of themselves. If they don’t, it can be like drinking sludge.”

She scrunched up her face in response.

“If you’re drinking and having sex of any kind, it’s sensory overload. Everything feels bigger. Your body comes alive on all levels. You can feel everything. As for being fed on, yes. When I was changed. I was human once and then changed on my thirtieth birthday, once my parents felt that I’d lived a good life.” He watched the thoughts and questions forming in her mind and waited for her to ask or respond.

“Is it an exchange? Three bites, what?” She leaned forward and studied him.

“Three bites and then an exchange. My turn to ask questions.”

Rose opened her mouth, shut it, and then opened it again. “Go for it.” She shoveled another spoonful of food into her mouth, her gaze not wavering from him for a second.

He held back a laugh. “Where were you born? Were you happy? Why did you come here?” Setting aside the file, he waited for her answer.

“Born in New York, grew up in Brooklyn and was happy, yeah, as I could have been for a kid. My parents were all you could ask for, supportive,

kind, caring, loving. They were part of an advertising firm and showed me the bones of the business. I decided to follow in their footsteps, but I didn't want to return home, so I went here and there. Worked in Chicago. Fucking hell, those winters are cold.”

He grinned, remembering his time in the Second City. “That they were, but it's a wonderful metropolis.”

She nodded. “Loved it there, but the pizza threw me. I couldn't get over eating it with a fork and knife. Sorry, I'm a New Yorker; fold it in half and chew. What's so hard about that? Why make a pizza so thick? Anyway, I came here for a fresh start, a clean slate. People found

out about my mentor and me. He got drunk, told everyone he banged me and, well, here I am.” She shrugged.

Anger sparked hot and dark in the pit of his stomach. “What’s his name?” Draven growled.

“It doesn’t matter. Water, bridge.” Her gaze was shuttered, emotions blocked off. He couldn’t even smell them in the air. She’d shut herself off from him.

I’ll find out, and I’ll make him hurt. Pulling in a deep, calming breath, he focused on her. “And do you like my little niche of heaven?”

She visibly relaxed. “I love it here. I was scared in the beginning. Terrified, actually. I saw someone walking a wolf the first day I moved in. I ended up ordering take out for a week just so I wouldn’t have to go out. Got lost a lot and it was two months before I dared to walk around my neighborhood without pepper spray in my hand. Those damn werewolves were so nonchalant, would change right in front of the building. Scared the crap out of me one morning. I left for work early, and there right on the bottom stoop was a naked man putting on leather pants. I nearly had a heart attack and thought I was having a waking wet dream.” Spice flitted through the air, and he inhaled deeply.

Musk chased it, making him wonder what about the werewolf she'd found so damn arousing.

Not looking at him, she traced a circle on the silken duvet cover. "You know, you could wear leather pants for that bachelor calendar they've got coming out. Could give it away or sell to help out the Ball even more. You could even autograph it." She gazed at him through a fan of dark lashes, and for a second, he almost said sure. Almost.

"Baby, I'll wear almost anything you tell me to, even a clown costume, but if you want me in leather pants, then it's for your eyes only, and no, I won't pose for that damn calendar. They get a

generic picture. That's it." He put aside the file completely and crawled to the center of the mattress. She squeaked and focused on finishing her stew and orange juice.

"You're finished with both. Time to take your medicine." He picked up the tray and grabbed the spoon before getting off the bed. After reading the instructions, he popped the top and shook out two pills. "These are supposed to help you sleep as well as strengthen your blood."

He handed her the pills and gave her the water that had been included with the meal. Once she took them, he

watched her slide further under the covers and yawn. “I’m going to put this away and come back. I’ll be gone for a minute,” he murmured.

“You gonna work in bed?” She yawned again and turned her head. Her eyelids fluttered, and he smiled.

“Do you mind? I didn’t get much done today.” He leaned down and brushed his lips across her forehead.

“Don’t mind at all.” Her eyelids fluttered once more before sliding shut. He left the room and made his way downstairs to the kitchen when he heard the shrill ring of the phone. After placing the dishes on the counter, he picked up

the receiver, wary of the news.

“Drav? It’s Torger. Sorry to call so late. Just wanted to let you know that we may have a lead. I’ll be at your office in the AM. I need sleep. I’d tell you now, but it’s not so important that it can’t wait, and it may help us with leverage with the Council. I’ve put Jagger on it, since you were taking care of your mate. He’ll let us know what he’s found when the sun is up. Get some sleep, man.” Torger hung up, leaving Draven to wonder what the wolf had found.

He returned upstairs to find Rose fully asleep, curled up on her side and facing the place he usually slept in. With

a sigh, he grabbed the file and slipped under the covers, determined to do some work before tomorrow's meeting. He sighed when Rose moved closer to him, curling her body around his with her head resting against his side. Wrapping an arm around her, he settled in to read over the file and approve their request. The heat of her body seeped into his, her breath dampening his silk shirt. Sliding the paperwork back into his briefcase, he then locked it and set it on the floor before moving until her head rested on his chest. Draven pulled her close and shut his eyes. He didn't need to sleep, but did so anyway.

He reached over, turned off the

light and settled down. The sound of her gentle breathing calmed him. A hint of yearning drifted up from her. His cock stirred in his pants. Blowing out a breath, he decided to count sheep and ignore his own rising desire. His thoughts drifted from sex to what needed to be done with the ball and how to get her to see the town the way he did.

“I’ll take her to Talbot Park for a picnic then guide her through Block Party week, which starts on Friday. After that, what else? She gets a taste of the parks and the local businesses. Maybe a pub crawl to introduce the night life? I could even take her to the Siren’s Call district.” He felt a sharp pain in his

side.

“Stop talking to yourself. I need to sleep.” She snuggled closer and sighed. Smiling in the dark, he fell silent, hoping this moment would never end.

Chapter Six

Bright lights blinded him. Draven blinked a few times to see the throng of reporters that had been personally invited to his little press conference. Expectant looks focused all on him. *Piranhas*. Swallowing hard, he gripped the podium tight and took in a deep breath.

“Thank you all for coming here on

such short notice. Remember the rules: no questions. I'll be blunt. There is a serial killer on the loose. Last night, three victims were found, blood drained and re-dressed in clothing not of their own. It appears that we have a rogue vampire on the loose, attacking tourists who are fang-fans. We are doing everything possible to ensure public safety. The police and my office are working closely to follow all leads, and it is encouraged that anyone who has a tip to please call the hotline. The number will be handed out at the end of this press conference, along with the details of the case as it stands. We are giving you everything we have on hand. We ask that the details marked confidential not

be published in your newspapers, magazines or blogs to prevent copycats and confusion. I present Police Chief Torger Sanderson to give you more specifics.” It was a relief, handing the podium over to the werewolf. For a few minutes, it was amusing to watch the man squirm under the questioning gazes of the media, but all too soon it came to an end.

“Let me remind you again, do not share the marked details of this case with the public. Also, let me remind you of what’s at stake. As you know, all paranormal cities and towns answer to the Council. We’ve been in contact, and they are letting us handle this case as we

see fit. For now.” He paused on that sentence and watched the words sink in. Instant anger and annoyance perfumed the air with a variety of spices and sour scents. “I have no doubt that the Council will be sending, or has already sent, a Fixer to deal with this. We all remember the Thanagian trials, where a good vampire was accused of killing over a hundred people. No evidence, no defense whatsoever, and he was put to death. It was only after the trial was over that evidence was found to contradict the claims of the witnesses. Also, don’t forget this is the same Council that slaughtered over a hundred packs in Europe without a single bit of remorse due to one rogue werewolf

biting a child. They don't need provocation, just an excuse. Let's not give them one. Understood?" The gathered masses nodded. "Thank you. We'll meet again once we have more to go on."

Without waiting to see if anyone would break the no questions ban, he left the room. Once the door closed behind him, he pressed his back against the wall and slid down until he crouched. He closed his eyes and let the unease creep through him. His stomach rolled, and he wanted to throw up. Just that morning he'd felt calm, happy. Rose had shared breakfast with him and they drove up to the office together, where he dropped

her off at the P.R. office. It had been hard letting her go. Every inch of his body wanted to take her back home, put off the press conference and make love to her. His fangs ached to sink into her delicate throat and drink of her one more time. Hunger burned through his veins at the very thought of tasting her blood again. *This time I'll be in control*, he vowed.

All that was pushed away by the press conference and rehashing the past. The press understood what was at stake if they screwed up and shared too much with the public at large, but that didn't mean he trusted any of them. Some were too nosy for their own good. The soft

chirp of his cell phone pulled him out of his reverie. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled it out and answered without glancing at the number.

“Draven.”

“What are the official colors of the town?”

Rose’s husky voice twined around his spine and settled at the base of his back. Arousal buzzed through his body, reminding him of what it was like to have her pressed against him. Sucking in a shaky breath, he tried to ignore the sensations of her breasts against his chest and the feel of her pussy around his cock, clenching and relaxing. Her

breathy cries and moans, the sweet pain of her nails scratching down his biceps stung anew, as if they were making love again.

Groaning aloud, he couldn't stop the fire flaring to life.

“Mind—on—work. Colors of the town, what are they?” she pushed.

“Spoilsport.” It was a struggle not to track her down and drag her back home. “Red, silver, and blue. Red for blood, silver for the moon, and blue was because we couldn't decide what other colors to go with. Purple seemed too royal. Anything else?” He sat down fully on the floor and crossed his legs at the

ankles, not caring what anyone passing by would think. Torger hadn't come out of the press room yet, which was a bad sign.

“Now about the Mardi Gras theme; how about making things look very New Orleans?” Papers being shuffled and keys on a keyboard being tapped filled his ear. “Or too pedestrian? I mean, everyone does something like that. Don't get me wrong, love the look and ambiance, but we need something different, traditional I think. What do you think? Katey agrees with me.”

He grinned. “I knew you and Katey would get along.”

“She’s a great head of P.R. No bullshit whatsoever. So what do you think?” More keys tapped.

“I’m starting to feel neglected,” he joked.

“And I’m doing my job. Ideas please. We’re not sure what you want here.” Irritation came loud and clear came through the phone.

He winced. “I’m sorry, honey. It’s been a rough day so far. I just want to keep you on the phone as long as possible. There used to be a thing called the Vampire Ball. Katey should know about it, as she’s been to a few. I think

that would be a great theme for this year.” He rested his head against the wall and waited, praying she’d ask to see him. All he wanted was a few minutes to touch base with her. His fingertips tingled with the need to touch her skin again. Draven wanted to be surrounded by her scent, to breathe her in, and get lost within it.

“I’m sorry, Draven. It’s been hard over here. I shouldn’t have taken it out on you. We’ve been bombarded with requests for info about the ball with nothing to tell people.” She sighed. “If it helps, I miss you.”

The last was said so quietly he was sure he was hearing things. A smile

curled his lips. “Picnic dinner tonight. You and me.”

“I don’t know. I have a lot of work... Besides does this mean I’m dating the mayor?”

He couldn’t help but laugh. “Baby, we started dating when you accepted my dinner invite yesterday.” Draven sucked in a breath, shocked. “We’ve been dating for a day. Jesus, it feels like...”

“I know.”

Again, she fell quiet.

“Are you scared?” He prayed she wasn’t. Things had moved at a lightning

pace, but for him it was fine. He was happy with it all and couldn't have asked for anything more. Once, it was believed by vampires there was such a thing as a Soul Bond or Blood Bond, someone who kept the soul while a vampire slept or was the one person to satisfy their constant need for blood, the one and only. Draven hadn't believed those stories. Thinking of Rose and how safe he felt, he almost admitted to believing something like that could be true. Snorting, he dismissed that idea to focus on the here and now.

“Honestly, no. I still hold you to what you said to me last night.”

Her voice had become husky,

filled with a soft heat for his ears only. The burn in his veins increased as his body tightened. Hot, thick blood filled his cock. His balls contracted. Drawing in a deep breath, he fought the twitches of his body. Every muscle and tendon wanted him to move, to do something. Instead, he remained where was, relieved to know she wasn't running, at least not yet. "Thank you for giving me a chance." He couldn't express his gratefulness enough, nor could he find the words. It touched a part of him he hadn't known existed. The words seemed to slip right into his soul and fuse themselves there. Calm descended over him. Her confidence in him electrified him to the core, shaking away

some of the stoicism that had settled there.

“A picnic dinner sounds nice. Clothing?”

He grinned. *You're making this too easy.* “Optional.”

She snorted. “Pervert. I'm not a nudist. I mean what kind?”

“Barely there.” His smile widened even more.

Rose let out a growl of frustration. “Causal, dress up, what's the theme here?”

“Sexy, short, tight dress, easy access, no underwear.”

Her muttered curses brought out a chuckle.

“I swear to God, how the hell do you get anything done? Does your cock do all the thinking for you? I’ll wear pants and underwear.”

“No, top?” he teased.

She growled at him. An actual growl that he felt would make any female werewolf proud. “Yes, a top, too. God, I have to be so specific with you. I thought werewolves were the horny beasts of the paranormal world.

Apparently, I was wrong. Vampires are just as obsessed with sex.”

A full body laugh built up until he couldn't stop it from coming. Opening his mouth, he let it go, his body shaking. He laughed long and loud until tears streamed down his cheeks.

“Uh, should I come back?”

Draven looked up to find a haggard looking Torger standing over him. Shaking his head, Draven scrambled up. “No. Give me a second.”

Torger nodded.

“Honey, I have to go. Duty calls.

I'll see you for lunch later?" He prayed she'd agree to see him.

"It'll have to be your office. We're putting together a package to show you what we've come up with." A faint voice filtered through the phone, and he heard Rose murmur something back. "Sorry, hon, gotta go. Lunch? I can do a presentation. Do you need all your people there?"

His heart contracted at the small endearment she'd slipped into the sentence. He started to nod but stopped himself. "Yes, baby, that's fine. I'll order up. Turkish food?"

"Anything. I'm starved. Gotta go."

She hung up the phone before he could say good-bye.

It shocked him at how teary he felt.

Torger looked him over.
“Problem, Drav?”

Draven felt silly. “No. What’s up?”

“Nothing but the same ol’, same ol’ on the reporter front. No news and no bodies, which is good and bad, but on the Council front, I just got word from one of my contacts about the short list of who they could send. You should get Hamilcar.”

Draven focused on his tattoo and called forth the black dragon. The mysterious man appeared, his eyes a bit glassy.

“Tired my friend?” Draven was worried by the way Hamilcar looked. He’d never seen his friend like this.

The dragon shook his head. “Been meditating, seeing the outcomes. I’m concerned. I don’t think this attack is natural.”

Anxiety pushed back any desire he’d felt. “What do you mean?”

“Something is off,” he said.

Draven frowned.

Torger began to walk. “Which jives with what I’m hearing. The coroner can’t find anything, and I mean that. Nothing on the bodies, the clothes. I’ve got my best people looking everything over. It’s gonna take time, but we should have at least found something by now, you know?”

“It is a lot to process,” Draven started.

“No. I put my whole fucking department on this. Pulled people working on other cases, and nada. I’m beginning to wonder if this whole thing is too perfect, too clean. No one is that

good.” Torger paused to smash his fist into the wall. The brick face cracked; flakes and chunks fell to the floor as dust rose up in the air. “Fuck, sorry about that. I’m just so... My town, damn it. My fucking turf and some asswipe comes in here and kills people under my protection. This shouldn’t be happening. I’m the alpha of all the werewolves and this is what I get?”

Draven understood Torger’s anger and frustration. This was his town too, and someone was imitating one of his kind and bringing everyone down. “You’ll get whoever is behind this. Use Jagger and his contact; see if he’s come up with something. Keep me updated. I

have other things to take care of, like this grand gesture ball.”

“Will do, boss. Shall I call in the dragons as well? Really pull people in, make this a community thing?” Torger looked at Hamilcar, then Draven.

Draven shrugged. “Can’t hurt. Hamilcar, can you take care of that?”

The dragon nodded and vanished, leaving in a puff of black smoke, sulfur and ash.

“I hate when he does that.” Draven smiled, and Torger laughed.

Rose gathered up her files and headed to Draven's office. She felt as if there was sand on the surface of her eyes. Her body was so tight, it hurt moving her shoulders. Spending the last few hours hunched over the computer to find information about the Vampire Balls of Europe was difficult. There was so much contradicting information on the internet she wasn't sure what to believe. Katey was a big help, but she had other things to deal with, so Rose was left mostly to herself with no one to help her.

It didn't help that she was also hungry. Usually, she stopped to have a mid-morning snack to keep up her

metabolism, but there had been too much to do, and she still wasn't done. The saving grace was getting to see Draven. A small smile began. Pressing the button for the elevator, excitement rushed through her. Waking up with him that morning, with his arms around her, had been such a surprising welcome.

Despite the occasional sense of lightheadedness, she felt strong. After the elevator door slid open, she stepped inside and pressed the button for the top floor. The car jerked before it started to move upward. She leaned against the wall, shut her eyes and let her thoughts drift. Satisfaction yawned through her body. Never in her life had she felt so

content. Despite it being a day since they'd started to see each other, and having sex, she felt good about it. No regrets. Not even the thought of people finding out about them irked her in the least. It didn't matter. She was sure that Draven wouldn't stray from her.

For whatever reason, she felt safe with him, and secure. It helped that every time he looked at her there was heat in his silver eyes that told her he would devour her whole if she let him. Her pussy lips and inner thighs began to tingle. She sucked in a breath as she remembered what it had been like to be filled, fucked and bitten by him. The wound on her neck throbbed. Not even

that small ache could stop the sense of her breasts becoming full and her nipples beading to aching points.

Desire slid a sharp finger down her spine, causing her to thrust out her chest. The ache between her legs intensified as the distance between her and Draven closed.

Ding.

The door slid open, and she found Draven standing there waiting for her. Dark hunger burned in his eyes. All she could do was whimper before he grabbed her arm and pulled her into an embrace. Stumbling off of the elevator, she went willingly and gave herself to

his scent and heat once again. Something inside of her clicked, and she relaxed against him.

Draven buried his head in the crook of her neck and sighed. Moist breath fanned her skin. Goosebumps rose as her stomach dropped.

“I’ve missed you. Been thinking about you, waiting for this moment.” He sounded so tired, which worried her.

“What’s wrong?” Moving her body back a bit, she slipped the files under her arm and slid a free hand into his hair. Combing her fingers through his silken tresses, she smiled when he sighed at the touch. His hand pressed in

the small of her back, urging her to move closer. No protests; she went with the guidance. A small moan began in her chest and moved up her throat when she felt the press of his erection against her stomach. He rocked against her and groaned aloud.

“It’s been a long day. Need to get you into the office before I drop to my knees and eat you out here in the hallway.” His hand slid over one cheek of her ass. As he squeezed, he drew another groan from her. Heat flooded her sex and spread outward.

“Draven,” she started.

He scraped his fangs down her

neck. That one small touch burned her skin and sent tendrils of fire tingled at the base of her back.

“I know what you’ve got under here. I watched you dress this morning.” He caressed her bottom again before giving her a hard slap. The momentary pain caught her off guard before the burn began, heightening her need for him. Moisture slid out of her cunt, staining her panties.

“No sex. Not now. Home.” She groaned as he lifted the back of her skirt. Cool air brushed against the tops of her stocking clad legs. The fabric moved all the way up to caress the heated flesh of her ass. His fingers traced the cleft of

her bottom. Up and down, stroking the skin, but not giving her what she needed. Rose pushed her hips back, asking without words for a more intimate touch. Draven disappointed her by removing his hand and stepping back. He didn't bother with being discreet as he adjusted the large bulge in front of his pants before grabbing her hand.

“Office, food, presentation. Home and picnic dinner where I'll spend all night eating you out. Vampire. I can hold my breath for a long time.” He gave her a wicked smile, his mercurial eyes glimmering like a shark's.

She shuddered and nodded, unable

to respond. Her pussy spasmed at the thought of being spread out, his head between her thighs as he worshipped her most intimate flesh, giving her orgasm after orgasm with his mouth alone.

He paused and turned back. “Then, once you can’t move, I’ll slide my cock inside you and fuck you until you’re hoarse.”

The low, husky sound of his voice enflamed her need. Again, the sense of his cock sliding into her rose up. She could feel his thickness stretching her, sliding in and out of her wet heat. Her wound pulsed in time with her heartbeat. She moaned again. “Need you.”

Draven shook his head. “Not here. Work.”

Rose almost asked to call it a day, but said nothing. Her self control was battling her desire, and the yearning was winning. She tried to ignore her aching breasts and the demanding throb of her clit. It was difficult. None of her past lovers had made her feel so needy. Her fingertips tingled, wanting to feel his skin. Her nipples beaded with need.

He pulled on her hand, and she followed him, remaining silent as he shut the door of his office behind them. The soft click of the door echoed around her head. It became difficult taking air into her lungs. She had to order herself to

breathe normally or pass out. In a matter of seconds, the cool air of the room became heavy with sexual need as every nerve ending burned. Slick with desire, her pussy contracted. She felt empty. Longing for some relief, Rose glanced around the office hoping to spot the door to the bathroom.

Draven slipped past her, grabbing her hand as he went, and guided her to his desk. On numb feet, every step felt weighted down as the desire coiled into a small ball in her stomach. The press of his palm against hers sent an electric shock up her arm to ping around her body.

“Draven—”

He sat down and pulled her onto his lap. He grabbed the hem of her skirt and yanked it up until it was around her waist. She spread her legs without protest and moaned at the first touch of his fingers ghosting over the damp crotch of her panties.

“Said no sex in the office, but this is masturbation.” He pressed soft kisses down her neck, nipping the skin over her pulse before pressing a soft touch to the hollow under her ear. She reached out and gripped the edge of his desk as she began to shake with want.

“So wet, baby. Fuck, you smell

good.” He added more pressure, teasing her clit with a harder touch. Through the damp silk, he rubbed the aching bundle with his thumb while rocking his fingertips against her covered entrance, teasing her. She moved with him, pushing her hips forward.

Rose lifted an arm and wrapped it around his neck. With her free hand, she stroked and pinched her nipple through the thin fabric of her blouse. A gasp was torn from her when he pushed the wet fabric aside to touch her.

“So wet. So hot.” He pushed three fingers inside of her. She moaned and tightened her vaginal muscles around the invasion. Draven pressed down on her

clit as he finger fucked her. The wet sounds of his fingers mingled with soft grunts and groans. He moved against her, his erection stroking her ass. “Need you, home. Want to fuck you now.”

“Then fuck me.” She gasped when his fingers curled inside of her. The tips stroked her G-Spot and set off an avalanche of sensations that shuddered through her. Her orgasm grew until it felt too big for her body to contain. Grabbing handfuls of his hair, she held on, anchoring herself to something solid and real as his fingers moved faster and faster.

When his fangs traced her neck,

without hesitation she tilted her head to the side, allowing him free access. “Please,” she pleaded.

Draven muttered something she didn't understand before tracing his fangs along her jugular once more and bit down. She screamed. Her body bucked, and pain and pleasure clashed into each other. The darkness was back, pulling her under. Fire sizzled along her nerve endings as small explosions burst inside of her. This time she wasn't falling, but felt weightless. She was aware of his fangs pulling out of her throat. He lapped at the wound, setting off small electric sparks with each touch. His fingers continued to drive into

her. Her body tensed. A stillness took over before she came, crying out. Draven released her clit, but continued to finger fuck her. She came again and again, shaking as the pleasure consumed her.

“Later, going to be inside of you. Going to make you scream,” he murmured as he pressed hard kisses along her neck.

As the desire ebbed, she turned over, placing her forehead on his desk. Panting, she tried to keep her eyes open. Sweat slipped between her breasts, down her back, and over her face. Her hand was still curled around the edge of his desk. Her nerve endings tingled as he

withdrew his hand. The maelstrom within her died away leaving a smoldering pile of embers.

“So beautiful and all mine,” he murmured. All she could do was nod. Her body felt like jelly. She had a hard time focusing.

A gentle knock at the door jolted her into action. Draven wrapped his arms around her and picked her up. She didn't protest as she allowed him to carry her across the room.

“Can you stand, baby?” He placed a kiss on her temple and continued to hold her around the middle.

Nodding, she felt him lower her to the ground. When her feet touched, for a moment, she was sure her legs would give out. She reached out her arms, placed her hands against the wall and leaned on it for support as she found her balance. Once she was sure she could stand without assistance, she nodded, and he let go. The knock sounded again.

Draven didn't look the least bit concerned about the person at the door. Instead, his focus was on her. He reached over and turned a knob; the door swung open. "Bathroom."

With small steps she moved toward it until she was sure she could walk normally. Once inside, she shut the

door and leaned on it for support. With a sigh, she slid down the hard wood and let her head drop forward.

“He’s going to screw me up, I just know it. Somehow that man will get me naked in public.” The idea had her nerve endings tingling and her pussy tightening in response.

“Sluts, all of you are sluts,” she groused. Her body’s response was to heat up. “For fuck sake, he’s turned me into a nympho.”

Chapter Seven

Draven licked Rose's cream off his fingers, taking a moment to savor the salty, tangy taste. Desire shuddered through his body. His cock jumped in his pants and, for a moment, he contemplated the ramifications of saying screw it and following her into the bathroom. The knock came again. Sighing, he went to his desk and extracted some wet naps from a drawer

before answering the door. He prayed it was good news. Bracing himself for word of another body or some sort of emergency, he opened the door to find, much to his relief, a deliveryman with bags of food.

“Hey, Nate, how much?” Draven greeted him.

Nate grinned and handed over a large carton of food and drinks. “Thirty-seven fifty.”

Draven dug his wallet out of his back pocket and handed him a fifty. “Keep the change and thank Allison for opening up her kitchen for me. I know the restaurant is under construction, but

there's no one else I'd rather get food from.”

Nate grinned. “No prob. Mom was getting antsy not being able to cook like she usually does.”

Draven nodded. “Tell her to give me a call about catering for the Ball. I'll talk to the organizers; see if we can make it an international affair.”

Nate's eyes lit up. “Oh really! That'd be wicked, man. She'd love that.”

“How's college going? Good? They giving you a hard time?”

Nate shook his head. “No. Everything is great. I love it. Thank you for the scholarship. My family owes you one.”

Draven grinned as pride filled him. “No need for thanks. I just gave you the application and then put it with the right people to look it over. You earned it yourself.”

Nate ducked his head with a blush staining his cheeks. The soft, tangy scent of embarrassment wafted through the air along with the sweet smell of pride. He shook head. “No, I’m not that smart to get into DCU.”

Draven bit back a harsh retort.

Instead, he reached out and gripped the young man's shoulder, giving it a squeeze. "Yes, you are. Don't put yourself down. You're an intelligent young man and very good at sports. But most of all you're creative. I can see your art being put up in the DC Art Institute."

Nate lifted his head, eyes wide. "Really?"

Draven smiled. "Yup, and I'm not just saying that. I've gotten a lot of compliments on that painting you did for me."

Draven nodded toward a large floor to ceiling painting of a bird's eye

view of Draven's Crossing done in an abstract style with bright colors. Many people who'd come into his office had admired it. "A few people wanted to buy it off of me. I turned them down, of course. A little birdie told me that there's a competition going on for a few spots in the summer courses at the *Fondazione di Studi Storia dell'Arte*. I'll make a deal with you; I'll pay for you to go if you make straight A's this semester."

Nate's eyes grew wider. Draven didn't mention that he'd had a conversation with the school's head of admissions when the school year started about securing a spot for Nate. The

admissions director and dean all seemed to think that Nate had talent but needed a bit more polish, and they would be honored to have him with them.

“But—but—that’s a lot of money,” Nate sputtered.

“And I’m a vampire who’s been around a long time. Think about it.” The sound of the doorknob turning drew his attention back to Rose. “Now off with you. I have a lunch meeting to get to. Think about what I said.”

Nate’s head bobbed. The young man whirled around and rushed down the hallway.

“You’ve already secured a spot for him, haven’t you?” Rose came up behind him and wrapped her arms around his waist.

Draven shut the door and sucked in a breath as her hand molded around his erection, stroking him through the thin fabric. He gritted his teeth as pleasure splintered and burst along his spine. The need from before flared to life like a match to dry tinder. He groaned aloud when she gave him a squeeze. She slid her other hand between his legs to caress and massage his balls through his pants, while she continued tormenting his shaft.

“If you don’t stop...”

She cut off his words by pressing herself more firmly against his back. “You’ll come? I’d prefer if you did that in my mouth or my pussy.”

“Minx.” He groaned when she released both his cock and balls and undid his belt. She pulled down his zipper and slid her hand into the opening. He hissed when her fingers made contact with his shaft.

“Mmm, so hot, and yet so soft. Wonder how it would feel in my mouth? Wonder how you’d taste. Should we find out?”

A whimper floated into the air,

and he was shocked to realize that the sound had come from him. Taking a step away from her, he placed the box of food on a nearby table, redid his fly and secured his belt. “Can’t. Later.”

Ignoring the throbbing in his balls, he focused on trying to get through the meeting without throwing her to the ground and fucking her senseless. Giving her an orgasm had satisfied a small part of him. It had been important to him to take the edge off of her sexual desire so they could work together. Now he was the one struggling and needing release.

“You need to come, Draven,” Rose murmured.

He picked up the box and used it as a shield to cover his straining erection.

“Later. We need to work now.” Each word had been hard to utter.

“But—”

He shook his head. “No, not now, baby. As much as I’d love to sink into your sweet pussy and fuck you senseless, I can’t. I have work to do. So do you.”

It shocked him that he was the one being professional when just yesterday she’d been making sure they both stayed on track. He walked past her, placed a kiss on her temple and moved toward his

desk. “I’ll set up the food. You tell me what you guys came up with.”

He expected a sigh or protest. Instead, his answer was silence. The soft thud behind him said she was still there. A glance back showed her forehead scrunched up, while she chewed on her bottom lip. “Problem?”

“Why—” She stopped, shook her head and then tried again.

“What’s wrong?” He put the food down and went to her. “Talk to me. I want to know what’s bothering you.”

“Why didn’t you want me to...?” Rose still didn’t look at him. She turned

her face away.

She didn't have to finish the sentence. He knew what she was asking. Slipping a finger under her chin, he pulled her head toward him and tilted it up. Concern, confusion, and doubt swirled in the coffee colored depths that stared back at him.

“Honey, I am harder than a diamond here. I want to fuck you so badly, but I also want to take my time. As tempting as it is to bend you over my desk or take you against the wall, we have things to do.” He bent down and brushed his lips against hers. “Besides that, we still have our picnic dinner, and I think I've developed a new outlook on

nature.”

Her eyes widened. “Oh, hell no. I’m not fucking you in public. What we do is private.”

He grinned. “And it will be. I know of a very secluded spot for us.”

Moving in closer, he wrapped an arm around her waist and drew her to him. She went willingly, much to his relief. The doubts were gone from her eyes, replaced by a simmering heat that made him want to chuck his schedule out the window and spend all day with her. “But I’m going to remind you that this isn’t just about sex for me. I want to get to know you, understand?”

“I remember what you told me. I was just hoping...” She turned away. Her embarrassment floated in the air, and he smiled.

“Say it.”

“I wanted to suck you off. Give you the same pleasure you gave me.” The soft, huskiness of her voice rippled along his skin like a heated caress.

He bit his bottom lip and tried to hold back the groan that had started to form in his chest. It came out anyway. He shuddered. His cock twitched in his pants, demanding freedom. Taking a few moments, he shut his eyes and concentrated on anything but the image

of her on her knees as she took his hard length into her mouth inch by inch. He gritted his teeth to keep from making a sound. Taking in big breaths through his nose and blowing it out through his mouth was the one thing keeping his self-control in check.

“You’re testing me, honey, and that will be punished,” he managed to force out through clenched teeth.

“You asked,” she replied sweetly before stepping out of his arms. “And you’re right; we have work to do. I’ve never been so horny on the job before. Never. Can vampires turn people into nymphos?”

“Don’t blame me, darling. I’m just as fucked as you are in this. And I’ve got the more obvious equipment.” He palmed his cock through his slacks and allowed the groan to slip out as pleasure shattered and burst through his body at that small touch.

“You better take care of that in the bathroom. Otherwise I may be tempted to...”

“Don’t,” he warned. “Just don’t say it. Goddess knows how much I can handle right now. Start on the food. I’ll be back.”

Taking her advice, he headed into the bathroom. Once the door was shut,

he felt some of his control return, only to have it slip away when the door opened. A glance over his shoulder showed Rose with a skewer in her hand leaning against the doorjamb.

“You didn’t think I’d miss the show, did you?” She took a bite of the meat and lifted an eyebrow.

“Baby, I can’t—”

“You need blood?” She reached up and traced her jugular with the tip of her finger.

“I’ve already fed. Don’t need it.” But it tempted him. Saliva pooled in his mouth at the thought of tasting her blood

again.

“You fed already? From who?” A flash of jealousy dotted across her face.

“Blood bag. Can you just turn around please? I’m not going to jerk off in front of you.”

She pouted. “Why not?”

“Because, sweetheart, I can’t right now. A cold water compress should help.”

“Such a waste.” She shrugged one shoulder then turned and left, shutting the door behind him. “You will show me later,” she called out.

“Good Lord, she’s trying to kill me.” He turned on the cold water tap and let it run, while taking off his shoes, socks and pants. After wetting a small towel, he squeezed out the excess and ran it over his cock and balls, hissing at the icy temperature. Latching onto the uncomfortable sensation, he used it to push back his need. After a few minutes, his arousal had ebbed away to nearly nothing, and his cock was flaccid. The throbbing of his balls had lessened. He dried himself then got dressed and headed out to the office to find Rose sitting at his desk, a plate of food set before her. In front of his chair was a stack of files neatly arranged next to her.

She didn't look up. "This lamb is divine. It melts in my mouth. Where'd you get this food? I made you a plate. Hope you don't mind."

He grinned. "Not at all."

Walking toward his desk, he felt a sense of calm. The atmosphere in his office buzzed with sexual desire. It was time to work. Normally he hated having anyone in his office unless they needed to be there, but she seemed to fit. He slid into his seat, picked up a fork and dug in, savoring the spices and sweetness.

"Try the stuffed eggplant. You'll love it. So what is the plan for the Ball? Anything?" He pulled a file toward him

and opened it.

“We’re thinking of making it like a traditional Vampire Court setting. The food, we haven’t figured out yet.” She pushed a few pictures toward him. “Like that, but a bit simplified. I highly doubt I can find a place with a fountain indoors or such elaborate chandeliers.”

Draven shook his head. “Baby, I’m going to have to take you around some time. We have a place like that. A castle actually. I’ll get you a meeting with the owners. A nice vampire family had their castle shipped to the States brick by brick and rebuilt here. You’ll love it, and I’m sure they’d be willing to donate the castle to the Ball for the night.

As for the food, I'd suggest buffet, international style to display the talents of our local chefs."

"Wow, I'd love to get a look at it, and I like the idea, despite the formal atmosphere, to keep it relaxed while displaying some of the best food the town has to offer. If we can use the castle, then we can set up some of the spaces to look how we want for the Ball and use it in the ad campaign, give our target audience a taste of what to expect. What about music?"

He looked over the pictures of the Vampire Balls. The rooms looked so elegant and plush, decorated to the hilt in

opulent fabrics. A table depicting an elaborate spread of food made his stomach grumble. He shoveled another forkful into his mouth.

“Can castle walls dampen the sound of music? I was thinking we audition some local bands and have the orchestra in the main room. Oh, these dumplings are so good. You have to tell me where you got them.” He watched a look of satisfaction and pleasure dawn on her face. Draven fell in love with that look and wanted to see it every day of her life.

“It’s a secret. One day I’ll take you to the restaurant. And yes, the walls can dampen the sound. The owners had

the castle modernized, so the music should be no problem. I love it. Now what about how you're going to highlight the town? Not the usual stuff, please. We tried the beauty shots and highlight reel. Didn't increase our tourism one bit." He sighed and shook his head. A heaviness began in his chest and sunk down to his stomach.

The touch of her hand startled him. He glanced down to watch her fingers curl around his. "Don't worry, honey. We'll figure out how to get more tourists here. Just let me work my magic." The earnestness in her eyes moved him.

"You haven't really seen the town

and yet... Thank you.” He squeezed her hand and let himself fall a bit in love with her in that moment.

She shrugged. “It’s what I do.” When she pulled away, he refused to let go.

“Uh, I can’t eat one handed.”

He laughed, allowing the lightness of that statement to slip into the darkness and break apart. “Fine, but I can assure you, I can drive one handed.”

“Oh my God, so filthy.” She pulled her hand back and made a face at him.

“I meant I don’t need both hands on the wheel.” He shook his head and watched her back up her chair.

“Stop, just stop. That is so wrong.”

He grinned. “Baby—”

“Don’t baby me, you pervert. To think I was trying to be nice to you.”

The look of outrage on her face was too adorable. He chuckled. “Would you please come closer? I meant I could hold your hand while I was driving, geez. Whose brain is in the gutter now?” He raised an eyebrow and watched her lips twitch.

“Is that a euphemism for something else? This holding hands you speak of?” Slowly, she pulled her chair closer.

Shaking his head, he dug into his food. “No. Now tell me your ideas for showcasing the town.”

He listened as she rattled off a list of the hot spots.

“We can use those and aim it at the young and hip, while using the secret niches and nooks of the town for those that want to discover this place for themselves. But I want to highlight the Ball. I looked up the list of interior designers in the area and found none.”

“There used to be a few people who did that, but they moved to the big cities. Why interior designers? Why not party planners?” He couldn’t understand her logic.

“Because I want the spaces to look homey, more like they’re kept like that every day of the year.” She flipped through a few of her files and showed him some pictures. “I like this feel. Do you think those are party places or if the house is like that all the time?”

He studied the photos. The rooms she showed him didn’t have the sleek artifice that he expected, a place where a hot party happened; it looked too cozy, too comfortable. There was an intimacy

and personality displayed in the spaces that made him feel comfortable. “I see your point. I would have thought this was in fact part of a person’s home rather than a hot spot. I like it.”

“We want the people to loiter or drift from room to room, feeling comfortable. But only the floor where the Ball is taking place would be decorated like this, not everywhere.” She took back the pictures and checked her watch. “My lunch hour is almost over.”

“Damn, I wish you could stay. I like having you here, working in my office.”

“But you get me for dinner. That didn’t sound right.” She shook her head. “Anyway, I have to go home and change. I’m going to wear jeans and a sweater, since it’s outdoors. No, I won’t change my mind for you. This was awesome. Can you bring some of this food with you for the picnic?”

He watched her come around the desk, kiss him on the cheek, and steal a bite of his dish before heading to the door.

“Uh, yeah. Sure. Bye, honey.” Draven sat there in shock at her actions.

“Later.” The door closed behind her, leaving him to wonder what had

happened. It didn't feel like they had just started dating. It was as if they'd been together centuries. That one action spoke of comfort she hadn't had with him when they'd first met. He wasn't sure whether to be scared or pleased.

* * * *

Rose settled behind her desk and began to work. Her thoughts drifted back to Draven. It had felt so right, so comfortable to walk around the desk and give him a goodbye with a kiss. Placing an elbow on the desk, she rested her chin in the palm of her hand and sighed. *I'm acting like we're in a relationship. Like*

we're dating. This isn't typical in the least.

“Okay, what’s got that pensive look on your face? I was gonna suggested we go raid Mina’s candy stash, but you look like you need some girl talk.” Katey, her new boss, sat on the corner of her desk and handed her a piece of chocolate.

Rose opened her mouth and then shut it, not sure what to say to her. This woman was her boss. They’d known each other a few hours. *How can I possibly tell her about my issues?*

“Is it Draven? Is he being an ass? I can skin him in five seconds flat.” Katey

proceeded to shock her by unsheathing the largest claws she'd ever seen, each about an inch and half long, curved and wicked. "Cat shifter. Don't worry, he'll heal. Now tell me what's up? Don't worry, you won't be fired. I actually like having another woman in Manville."

She gestured around her and for the first time, Rose noticed there weren't a lot of women milling around the P.R. department. There were only four of them out of fifteen members of the staff.

"How did you know?" Rose asked.

Katey tapped her nose. "Shifter. We know scents, and his is all over you.

Don't worry, no one cares. See those two?" She nodded toward two men milling around the water cooler. "Fucking like bunnies whenever they get a chance. Now, if they'd only let me watch, I'd be such a happy kitty They think we don't know 'cause you know, they're like human and all that." Katey rolled her eyes. "Scent is how we know who to stay the fuck away from and who is friendly and what not. Very, very helpful in a dangerous situation. Anyway, what's up chicken pup? Ignore that. I've got a weird child staying with me. I swear to the goddess if my sister doesn't come get her kid, I'm never gonna be able to look at porn again. So spill." Katey unwrapped another

chocolate. Her body language was relaxed as if she had all day to sit there rather than run the Public Relations department.

“It’s just so natural. We’ve only been seeing each other a day, already had sex, and I’m okay with it. Shouldn’t I be freaking out? He’s the Mayor, for Christ sake, and to top that off, a vampire.” Tingles raced along her pussy lips, reminding her of her time in his office.

“Do you feel like you should run screaming into the night? Do you feel shame for what you did?” Katey readjusted her position on the desk and dug into her pocket, drawing out a

handful of chocolates. She dropped them on Rose's desk and dug through the small foil wrapped treats. "Does it matter that he's a vampire and you're human or that he's Mayor?"

After unwrapping the foil, she popped it into her mouth. Her gaze never left Rose's face. Cat green eyes peered at her unblinking as Katey chewed. Taking the silence that had fallen between as thinking time, Rose pondered her situation.

"I don't feel like running. I'm quite comfortable where we are right now. I guess I feel like we've skipped from courting right to commitment and bed."

Rose reached over and plucked a chocolate for herself.

“And totally understandable. It’s not the normal flow you’re used to, but if it works, it works. Anything else on your mind? Can we get to the Ball and what he said about it, or did you two fruck like bunnies?” Katey grinned.

Ignoring the last comment, Rose showed her the files. “He liked where we wanted to go with it, but we still need to give them a reason to stay past the Ball. So we gear our ad campaigns to the different groups we want to lure here.”

“Which is gonna give the budget

elves a fit. I can hear them now, ‘you want to spend how much for that? Why can’t you use photos and magic?’ And I’ll say, ‘because magic doesn’t show up well on camera.’ Research budget friendly ways to make the masters of number crunching not want to go all Legolas on my ass.” Gathering up the rest of the chocolate, Katey left her desk.

Rose felt a bit better about her current situation with Draven, but deep in her gut, she couldn’t throw off the sense that something was wrong.

Chapter Eight

“So far, no other bodies have shown up, and all we have are a few hazy accounts from drunks of everything from Jack the Ripper to a giant bat. We’ve increased police patrols, and the local wolf packs have lent us some of their men to help with security and watching tourist areas. We found the inns and hotels where the victims were staying, but no evidence of break ins.

I've got the crime lab looking over the scene to make sure we didn't miss anything. The newspapers, websites and magazines have put out their stories and we've got nothing. On the upside, the public is royally pissed. There's a lot of talk of telling the Council to go fuck themselves and all that loveliness."

Draven heard Torger's smile through the phone. "Good. If the Council wants to shut this town down they're gonna have a fight on their hands. That and too many governments are already pissed with them about the dictates. Too many rules about having a paranormal town or city, not to mention the rules of interaction with us. I got a call from the

Governor, and he just wants to say fuck it and open trade with us fully to help bolster the economy.”

“I’d say go for it, but I’m not you. I’ll update you if there are any developments. If Hamilcar is right, then we’re dealing with a professional who knows how to clean up after himself. I’ve been looking through murders similar to this and nothing jumps out at me. I’m calling in a specialist in serial killings from Washington to look this over, agreed?” Torger’s eager tone was infectious.

Draven felt the call of the hunt to find this person and make them feel the pain they’d inflicted on those three

innocent people. “Agreed. Tonight’s the full moon, my friend. Be safe. I’ll be out in the woods with my mate.”

“We’ll steer clear of you. Have fun.” Torger hung up, leaving Draven smiling.

The day was looking up. Despite feeling tired, he couldn’t wait to spend time with Rose. *Rose*. A smile tugged at his lips, lifting them up. A sense of contentment radiated outward from his chest to envelop his whole body. New energy poured into him. He gathered up his paperwork and subsequently headed out of his office and down to the floor where the P.R. department was located.

He found Rose at her desk shuffling papers.

“Ready? I have to drop you off at your apartment.” Draven didn’t mind this one bit. He sensed her unease despite her relaxed posture.

“Thanks, I need to get some clothes. Unless—” She stopped to look at him, indecision in her eyes.

“Unless?” He wasn’t sure what she was going to say, but had a feeling what the subject was.

“Unless, you don’t want me to stay over tonight?” Rose ducked her head. The heat of embarrassment rose up

between them, and he smiled.

“It’s up to you, honey.” Stepping closer, he wrapped an arm around her, not caring who saw. He lowered his head, nuzzled her neck, and breathed in her perfume. “I’d love for you to stay tonight.”

“For Christ’s sake, get a room you two! Bad enough I’m not getting any.” Katey wedged a hand in between them and slipped in front of Draven. “I love my job. Anyway, before you go, check this out.” Katey handed Rose a piece of paper. Delight filled her face, making her eyes shine. Her full lips parted in a full grin as a squeal of excitement pierced the air. “I know, right? Like

ohmygod, we can so pull this off. Those little number crunchers can kiss my furry ass!” Katey punched the air with a fist and hugged Rose.

“Uh, what’s going on?” Draven stepped closer and peered around Katey’s head.

“The couple that owns the castle is giving it to us for the Ball free of charge. And the interior designer is also working for free. They’re all pissed about the serial killer business and the possible Council invasion. Oooh, when we get mad.” Katey high fived Rose. “Now if only we can work something out on food and we’re set; we just need

music and a few other things. Have fun. I'm off to go stick it to the accountants.”

Katey took back the file and slid out from in front of Draven.

“She’s quite the excitable cat, isn’t she?” Rose slid her arms around his waist and rested her head on his chest. “Oh! I don’t hear a heartbeat.”

She gazed up at him in shock. He ran a hand through her hair. “Vampire, remember? I need to feed.”

She shuddered against him, and he sucked in a breath. Rose slid a hand around his waist to trail down his stomach. He let out a small gasp when

she pressed her palm against his groin. Tilting her head back, she pouted up at him. “No erection. We’ll have to fix that.”

“Will we now?” He raised an eyebrow and rubbed her back. “How?”

“Tonight at the picnic, you’ll have to feed from me,” she whispered.

She showed no fear or reservation. The statement slipped past her lips as easy as taking a breath.

“You sure? I can drink a blood bag. Maybe this is for the best, no sex.” He rushed to put her at ease and make her feel as if she wasn’t obligated to do

anything.

“I offered, didn’t I?” Rose stepped out of his arms and gathered up her things.

“You’re not comfortable with something. I can sense it.” As much as he didn’t want to bring that small point up, he felt he had to.

“Vampire sense tingling?” she teased.

“Rose—” he started.

“We’ll talk at the picnic. For now, I need to shower and change and put together an overnight bag. Let’s go, big

boy. Daylight's wasting." She grabbed his hand and tugged him toward the door. A sinking feeling began in his gut as he saw this perfect moment with her begin to splinter. *What if she wants to leave me?*

The drive to her apartment was heavy with silence and things unsaid. Whenever he opened his mouth to say something, he shut it again. For the first time in centuries, he was terrified of loss. He'd always racked up death and loss to a fact of life but now, he had something precious he wanted to keep for as long as she'd allow him to. It felt as if the time was shorter than he'd thought it would be. *Two days. That's*

all we had before it fell apart. As he pulled into an empty parking spot, she unbuckled her belt, leaned over the console, and slipped a finger under his chin. He allowed her to turn his face toward hers, even though he was scared. She placed a soft kiss on his lips. He let out a sigh.

“I won’t be long. Come back in say an hour. That’s more than enough time to get what I need done. And stop acting like you just saw Old Yeller, please.” With another kiss, she opened the car door and slipped out.

He sat in shock, watching her walk into the building. No one had ever been so attuned to his moods, and certainly

not when they'd known him for two days.

* * * *

Rose made her way through her apartment. She kicked off her shoes and sighed in relief at the freedom her toes now had. Her thoughts trailed back to Draven's statement about something bothering her. He was right, as much as she hated to admit it. The blood donor thing didn't bother her; it excited her, turned her on. She could deal with dating a vampire, and as for being the Mayor's arm candy, strangely enough, she didn't mind that either. It was the pace of the

relationship that poked at her.

The phone rang at the same time she entered her bedroom. Hoping it was Draven, she answered without looking at the caller ID. “Honey, I’m not even showered yet. Please don’t tell me you want phone sex now. I don’t think this handset is waterproof.”

“TMI! Oh—my—God, TMI. When the hell’d you become so kinky? Next you’ll be talking about anal plugs, lube and public sex. Speaking of which, you dirty woman, when are you gonna get some time off? I have some vacay time coming up and want to crash with you.”

Rose let out a girlish squeal and

began to laugh. “Sabrina. It’s so good to hear your voice. Where have you been this time? Milan? Paris? Hawaii?”

“None of those places. I’ve been working out of the office for the last few months. I’ve missed you so much. It’s been a madhouse around here. So how about say in a week, or will you be busy?”

Rose headed back to the living room and rummaged around her purse. “I’m planning a huge Ball thing here, but I should have time. Hey, maybe you can help? Take photographs? Beauty shots? What’re your rates?”

“For you, free; I can’t take money

from you, hon. You're letting me crash at your place, and you already know I'm a bed hog and cuddler." Sabrina laughed.

"Katey's gonna love you for this. Okay, give me the day and time, and I'll take off early to pick you up from the airport. I'm so excited, and I can't wait to introduce you to Draven. You're going to—" She stopped short as she realized what she'd said.

"Okay, what's up? You were all mega-bunny energy woman then slam, right into a wall. What's going on?" The phone line went quiet, and Rose knew that Sabrina wouldn't leave until she had the whole story.

“Don’t make me do that whole ‘I refuse to hang up’, and if you hang up on me, I’ll just keep calling back, eating into your weekly minutes. Mawhahaha, I am evil.”

Rose smiled and headed back to the bedroom. “Draven is the Mayor of this town, and my new boss.”

“Kinky. Office sex time! Wait, what happened to the ad agency you joined when you got to town?” The soft creak of leather drifted through the phone.

“Didn’t work out. My boss was an asshole. Draven gave me an upgrade to his P.R. staff. Things got heated between

us, things were said and well, we ended up having sex on my living room floor, and now I'm acting like we're dating and all committed." Rose gathered a few things and put them in an overnight bag.

"You're leaving things out," Sabrina poked.

Rose debated giving her the full details, and then broke down and told her everything.

"Holy shit! Can I get what you have? So what's the big issue here? His cock not long enough? Big enough? He's got dead man's breath? He beats puppies? Hates kittens? So far you've told me he's committed to you, wants to

fuck you into oblivion, and is determined to take care of you. I say marry the dead man. But that's just me."

She hated how matter of fact Sabrina was. When said like that, Rose felt like she was kicking a gift horse in the mouth, or whatever the saying was. "That's just it, Sabs. He's everything I could want and then some. Two freakin' days. That's how long we've been together. I'm acting like we've been dating for months, kissing him on the cheek or lips when I leave the room. Doing the whole PDA hugging thing in the office when before I was bitching about what people would think. You know me. I've never been like that."

Sabrina snorted. “Um, yeah, which is why you jump on this bronco and not let go. Here’s the deal. You’re worried about the time it took from meeting to dating. You’ve always been cautious when it came to love and relationships. Now you find something, and it’s all comfy and happening like lightning, but you’re scared. Knock, knock, anyone home? He’s giving you space, backing off, giving you options to put distance between you two. That, in my book, says he cares a hell of a lot more than this being a fuck buddy kind of thing.”

Rose allowed the words to sink in.

“Look, take a day or two apart from him. If you can. If it were me, I’d

handcuff him to myself and not let him out of sight. But I'm kinky like that. Separate yourself fully and see how you feel, okay? Crap, they found me. I gotta go. I think they want me to do this thing called work. Lubs you, Rosie Posie." Sabrina hung up leaving Rose feeling as if she'd found her center again.

"I think I'll do that." Ignoring the lurch in her heart, she took a shower and got ready to meet him. *I'll stay with him tonight, and then see what happens. I have the Ball to concentrate on anyway.*

She grabbed her overnight bag, purse, and headed out the door to the

parking lot. An Aston Martin DBS UB-2010 sat idling at the curb. She gave a low whistle, admiring the sleek black car. A small part of her giggled at the thought of riding around in James Bond's car. Draven got out and made his way around the front. "Bag?"

She gave him her overnight bag and waited while he opened the passenger side. Before she slid into the car, Rose got up on her tiptoes and pressed a kiss to his lips. He groaned and wrapped his free arm around her waist. Sighing against his mouth, she melted against him, savoring the hard wall of muscle and heat of his body. Heat? She stepped back and eyed him

more closely. He had the flush of life in him. Placing a hand over his heart, she felt the steady thud. With a frown, she looked up at him again, feeling a bit hurt that he'd fed, but not on her.

“Blood bag, honey. When I got home, I realized that my energy was lagging.” He bent down and kissed her lips before moving away to place her bag in the trunk. Once she was inside and buckled up, he joined her and they were off. “I’ve got everything ready. Do you want do the picnic now or drop everything off at the house?”

“Picnic now. I have to talk to you.” She didn’t miss the way he stiffened. Rose didn’t have to be a

vampire or shifter to know he was scared.

Chapter Nine

Draven's heart tattooed an S.O.S in his chest. His grip on the wheel tightened as his body heat spiked. Licking his lips, he tried to go for nonchalant. "About what?"

He sucked in a breath when she placed a hand on his thigh and gave it a squeeze. "We'll do this now, if it will help. I'll be honest; the speed with

which this relationship is going scares me. We've known each other two days, and half of the first day you irritated me. I've decided to spend the night with you tonight. But until the end of the week, I want to keep things at dates, slow down. You've tried giving me space, and I didn't take it. Looking back now, I suppose part of that was fear. I've been burned in the past, and you're too good to be true."

Her hand stroked up and down his thigh, setting off another wave of heat that flowed straight to his groin. His balls drew closer to his body, while his cock thickened, filling with blood. He loathed the decision to have a blood bag

before meeting her. His brain was already floating away, allowing his libido to do the thinking. Gripping the wheel tighter, he tried to ignore the tightening of his body and the way the interior of the car became smaller and hotter. Her hand moved closer to his groin, and for the first time in his life, he found himself praying to a higher being that she wouldn't touch his cock. If she did, he knew he'd pull over the car and fuck her. Getting arrested for public indecency was not on his itinerary; what was, was getting to the picnic in one piece without crashing.

The air around him thinned as the scent of her need increased.

“I just want to take things slow, but not break it off with you. Do you understand?”

Her nails dug into his thigh, and he whimpered in response as his cock jumped. He wanted to feel those nails biting into his skin, raking his back, chest, anywhere she could reach. Blowing out a breath, he nodded.

“Draven, tell me you understand.”

He couldn't. He didn't even know what the hell they were talking about. Her hand moved closer, her fingers mere inches away from his aching shaft. Biting his bottom lip, he jerked the wheel, turning into the parking lot of the park.

Her little scream heightened his desire. Once the car was in a spot, his hand scrambled to unbuckle his belt. Fumbling, he managed to push the button when he felt a slap on back of his head.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Rose demanded.

Looking up, the fog of arousal had cleared enough to see fear dance in her eyes. Her chest rose and fell as she panted. “You almost got us killed!”

Hanging his head, he groaned. “I’m sorry, baby. I lost my head. Your hand was on my thigh and it hasn’t been even an hour since I’ve fed. I lost my head and let my cock do the thinking. Do

you want to go home?”

Sending up a silent prayer that she still wanted to do the picnic, he waited. A small tap on the window caused her to scream again.

“Drav, you in there?” Torger called out.

Hesitation stayed his hand, fearing the worst, before he hit the button to let the window down. His voice was shaky, and he felt a bit jittery. “Yes?”

“You okay? I was just asking if you could point me in the direction of the trails. You know me and directions.” Torger rubbed his neck. A bright pink

stain appeared on his cheeks, neck, and across his bare chest. A glance down had Drav closing his eyes and praying for mind bleach. Torger had an erection.

“Fine, um, can you point that thing in another direction. And, um, straight until you hit the pine trees; the trail is there.” Draven prayed his friend would leave quickly and that Rose hadn’t seen any of Torger’s package.

“Ooops, sorry man, full moon. Okay, thanks. Take care and be careful, okay? Saw the way you came into the parking lot; scared the shit out of me; thought there was trouble.”

Still not looking at the other man,

Draven squeezed his eyes shut. “You’re telling me. I’m fine, a bit blood drunk. Fed about thirty minutes ago. It’s still infusing into me. Went a bit uh, nuts due to outside stimuli.”

“Yeah, well be careful. Gotta go. The wolf wants to run.” The sound of Torger’s retreating footsteps was a relief. Draven didn’t open his eyes until he was sure that Torger was far away from the car.

“Um, he’s naked,” Rose pointed out.

“Yes.” For a moment, jealousy flared inside so hot it scared him. A glance at Rose showed her wide eyed,

yet the air in the car remained the same. Relief stole through him at the realization that she wasn't attracted to his friend. "It's the full moon."

"I know, but he's naked. Like isn't that illegal or something?" Rose rubbed her eyes.

Her question drew out a chuckle. "Honey, they need to be naked to shift. So everything is okay."

"Yeah, but he's like, really naked, no shoes," she said.

Draven reached out and caressed her cheek with his fingertips. "Do you want to be naked, too?"

“No, I want to smack you again. Next time, don’t drink and drive.” She unbuckled her seatbelt and got out of the car. He in turn started laughing, long and loud.

After he out of the car, he popped the trunk, hit the toggle button and locked the car. No one would steal it, but he didn’t put it past someone to plant something in his car. It was close to an election season. He grabbed the picnic basket and blankets out of the trunk. After taking her hand, Draven guided her into the woods. A cool breeze blew around him, bringing with it the scent of wolves, evergreens, and earth. He began to calm down and breathe it all in. That

small contact from holding Rose's hand set him at ease. The world and his job didn't exist outside of these woods. In the here and now, he could find out more about this special woman following him into the woods, despite his actions.

“I'm sorry. When a vampire feeds there's a time period for them to adjust, even the older ones need to acclimate to the new blood in their system. So everything is intensified: touch, arousal, scent. When you had your hand on my thigh, I lost it. It felt so damn good. I got too eager to touch you, taste you, fuck you again. I'm sorry I scared you. I don't ever want to do that again.” A glance back showed Rose's gaze squared lower

than his back. He smiled. “Are you watching my ass?”

“What?” She looked up and gave him a sheepish grin. “Sorry.”

“I’m pleased you find it attractive. Did you hear anything I said?” He hoped he wouldn’t have to repeat himself.

“Yes I did, and I understand, but next time, warn me, or better yet, wait another half an hour until you’re fully adjusted and call me if you’re going to be late. I don’t mind. Where are we going anyway?” Her gaze lifted, her eyes dark, inquisitive.

“To watch the wolves run. It’s a

wondrous sight, and I think you'll love it." He prayed she would.

"I'm sure it is. I've heard of it, but was always told no human should be out in the woods during a full moon. It's not safe." A tremor laced its way through her voice.

"You have me. I won't let you come to harm, on my life and blood, I swear it." That last part was an oath vampires swore by, it was unbreakable, and to go back on his word after such a promise would make him inferior and no better than those who used vampirism as a way to get laid.

"Wow, pretty heavy promise

there. You could have just told me you'd let me run while you fended them off, but I'll take it."

He burst out laughing. Her levity had lightened the mood. "Thank you. I needed that." Silence fell between them as he lead her deeper into the woods. The scent of earth increased, joined by the light perfume of night flowers. The crunch of their shoes on grass sounded. Not even the animals or insects stirred. It felt as if the Earth held its breath for what was to come. A howl came from the distance. The mournful sound slithered down his back and raised goose bumps. Somewhere out there, Torger was running free in his wolf

form.

They arrived at a small meadow. High grasses and wild flowers swayed in the gentle breeze.

“We’re downwind of the usual trails that the wolves use during the run.” He released her hand, took out the blanket from the picnic basket, shook it out and placed it on the ground. After smoothing out the material, he started to set up the food. Rose moved around him.

“This is beautiful. I never knew I could come here.” She sank down on the blanket, her gaze wandering around their surroundings.

“Yeah, most of the places like this are sectioned off as shifter only spaces. These trails are for the wolves. To the north are for the feline shifters, and to the west are for the reptiles. The south is for the lesser groups of shifters, like bears or ferrets, raccoons, rabbits, deer, those kinds of things.” His mouth twitched as he held back a smile. “The birds are free to roam wherever they want, if they can fly.”

“Wow. Will we see all of them out and about tonight? Or will we only see the wolves?” She settled down on the blanket, stretching out her legs in front of her and leaning back on her hands. The mood around them settled

into a relaxed vibe.

“Maybe the bats or birds, but only the wolves. If we see another species out and about they probably got lost.” He poured the wine, handed her a glass and settled down across from her.

“Thank you for sharing this with me.” She gave him a smile that warmed his heart. “How are you feeling? Better?”

Taking a mental inventory of his emotional and physical state, he felt centered. “I’m good, much calmer now. Thank you for asking.”

She shrugged a shoulder and took

a sip a wine. “Can I ask you a question?”

“You can ask me anything you want. I’m an open book to you.” Draven watched her face for any signs of hesitation.

Rose rocked a bit before opening her mouth. “Why don’t you like your connection to Dracula mentioned?”

He licked his lips and drew in a deep breath. “To the outside world, Dracula is a rock star, the first vampire. To us in the community, he was a glory whore who allowed himself to be exposed. The details were exaggerated, but it put us all in danger. If someone

had thought it was real... It didn't help that he wasn't the least apologetic about it.”

“So, it's not just a sore subject for you, but everyone. It's understandable.” She nodded. “I guess if everyone asked questions about your connection to Dracula then you wouldn't get anything done, huh?”

“Yeah. I try to keep my distance from him. He's tried to email me a few times, but I don't respond. Mother and father don't even mention him.” A sense of loss and confusion rose up.

“Do you want to know him? Get to know him?” she asked in a soft, soothing

tone, as if trying not to set off a powder keg. He wasn't sure why she was acting like this.

“Yes and no. The stories may be exaggerations, but he's done some terrible things. Awful things. I don't know. What's wrong?” Studying her face, he watched her chew on her bottom lip.

Without looking at him, she answered. “Before I came here, I had a client. He was a nice person, always sending me gifts and stuff. Anyway, after the whole fallout with my mentor, he stopped by the office and saw me packing, asked what happened. I told the whole, sordid tale. I don't know why I

did that. I mean he was a stranger and all. He may have been nice, but it was weird how I found myself telling him the intimate details of my humiliation. After I was done, he handed me a brochure for Draven's Crossing, and after that, I got an offer from the agency, all expenses paid, including the move and my rent paid for the first six months. I was floored. I almost didn't take the offer; it seemed so out of place. I think maybe... his name was Vlad, the client."

She twisted the hem of her sweater, still not looking at him. "Today, I got an email from him saying he'd be in town to see his great-grandson, and he wanted to catch up with me. I just,

something about how you described him. Whenever he walked into a room, all eyes would go to him. He seemed to revel in the attention. Always made a show of his appreciation with lavish gifts, although you couldn't get him off his Blackberry to save his life.”

Draven felt as if he sat on pins and needles. “What makes you think that it's him and not someone else? Vlad was a popular name among the vampire community for a bit, well, for the newbies. They didn't understand why we came to hate that name.”

“I don't know, I...at the end of the email he told me to tell you hi.” She moved away.

Anger welled inside of him. He growled. “This is bullshit. He used you to get to me, the asshole.”

He rolled onto his hands and knees and crawled over to her. Trying to calm the maelstrom at the outrageous behavior of his ancestor, he reached out and caressed Rose’s cheek. “It’s okay, honey. You’re not in trouble. I just don’t like him using you. It’s okay. I don’t care how you got here. What matters is you’re here now.” He settled down next to her, wrapped his arms around her and pulled her to him.

“I didn’t really think about it until I asked about him, and then it clicked. I

thought maybe he was a campaign donor or something. Your description of him struck a chord in me and made me remember.” Rose buried her head into the crook of his neck. Her hot, humid breath pressed against his skin, pushing away his anger and reminding him that there was much she didn’t know about the paranormal world.

“You couldn’t have known.” He ran his hands through her hair and placed a kiss on the top of her head. “He’s a master politician, which is why he wasn’t exiled. It’s also been said he has the gift of foresight, short visions into the future. So he was probably positioning you where he wanted you. This, here and

now is us, our decision. I would understand if you wanted to take time to figure things out, though.” As much as he didn’t want to utter those words, he could feel her tension. “This is as new for me, but I can see that we’re moving too fast for you.”

The sounds of the nights and distant howling cut through the silence that had fallen between them. Her body stiffened against his. He waited for her to say something, confirm what he’d thought.

“I am scared about the way things have progressed,” she started off.

“We have gone from zero to three

hundred in under thirty seconds,” he admitted. “What do you want to do?” Draven buried his head in her hair and inhaled the soft, sweet scent.

“I want to see how I feel if you give me two days or more. Let me work on this campaign and see what happens. No dating. Just work.”

He wished he could see her face. The tone of her voice was gave him nothing.

“What do you want to do tonight?” He didn’t want to agree to giving her space yet, but knew if she was going to willingly be with him and agree to keep seeing him, he had to do this. A tightness

in his chest began to form. It became hard to breathe. He tried to hide the panic that began to rise. Her hand pressed against his stomach. She moved it up until it came to rest over his heart. The organ skipped a beat. Heat rose in tendrils through his body. Yearning thrummed through his veins as his blood thickened.

“I want to spend tonight with you, but I also want to take the next week concentrating solely on the Ball and how to improve the town’s image. I need to figure out how I feel about you without you in it. I knew what it was like to live in this town before you, but now? Not sure of that now.” She pressed a kiss

over his pulse point. “I like being with you, but I need to figure out how to deal with this new relationship. I’ve never jumped into anything so quickly without knowing first.”

Slivers of heat trailed down his arms. His fingertips itched to feel her skin. He stayed where he was, not daring to move for fear she would retreat. Her lips ghosted down his neck.

“We have tonight, and I want to be with you.” She nipped the crook of his neck, sending a shudder of sensation. Pain and pleasure racked his body as his cock grew thicker, his balls harder. Tension built inside of him as he fought with himself to stay still, let her have the

control. Rose shifted her body to face him. He closed his eyes and breathed in her scent, the mixture of arousal with cinnamon and vanilla was the headiest aphrodisiac that he'd ever encountered. When she took hold of the hem of his shirt and pulled up, Draven didn't protest.

He helped her remove his top, put it to the side and lay back without her having to ask. Her hands pressed against his pecs. He sucked in a breath as an electric charge burst through his body, touching every corner of him. Draven felt the warmth of that simple contact drowning out the fears that had assailed him earlier. Giving himself up to her

exploration, he closed his eyes and relaxed.

A tight pinch followed the soft flick of her tongue on his nipple. He groaned. Tingles of fire lapped at the base of his back. She squeezed his cock through his jeans, drawing out a moan. He pushed his hips upward, asking for more. Rose rocked her palm against his erection as she nipped and lapped at one hardened nipple. After transferring her attention to the other turgid bud, with one hand she worked his belt until it came free. The harsh ripping sound of the fly being pulled down caused his cock to twitch. Hard fingernails dragged down the length of him. Clenching his jaw, he

held back a plea for more than a teasing touch. Again and again she touched him with the tips of her fingernails. Her hard caress wasn't enough. He wanted more. No, *needed* more contact.

“Please,” he groaned. “Touch me.”

Rose's mouth moved down the center of his body. When her tongue dipped and swirled into the shallow well of his navel, he sucked in air and blew it out in one jagged breath. The waistband of his jeans was yanked down. Cool air ghosted over his overheated flesh. Digging his heels into the blanket, he tried to thrust his hips

higher into the air.

A whimper floated up when she wrapped a soft hand around his shaft. He bit down on his bottom lip. A sharp pinch caused him to cry out as his fangs pierced the sensitive skin. “Rose,” he rasped.

“What?” Her lips now traced over the thin line of pubic hair that disappeared into a thick patch of curls. His body shaking, sweat formed and slipped down his forehead. He tried to calm down. When he felt her lap a ring around the base of his shaft, he nearly lost it. Shudders of pleasure racked his body from that single touch.

“Mmm, so hot, soft, yet hard.”

With the flat of her tongue, Rose traced a path up the underside of his cock. He nearly wept as desire flared hotter inside of him. Draven's hands dug into the blanket. His legs shook as she lapped at the slit on the top of his cockhead. One flick. Two flicks. Three flicks. He was ready to grab her hair and push her head down to take more of his cock into her mouth. His shaft throbbed in rapid time with his out of control heartbeat.

He groaned again, when she cupped his balls and rolled them. Her moist, breath brushed against his crest, causing his cock to jerk in response. When he felt the soft brush of her lips

close around his sensitive cockhead, he almost wept in relief. *I have to see this.* Draven opened his eyes and lifted his head. He watched Rose take more of his cock into her mouth. The soft, seductive slide of her lips down his shaft drove him crazy. She rolled her eyes up to meet his gaze. Heat simmered in the nearly black gaze.

Lifting her head, she released his dick and grabbed his hips. “Relax and don’t move until I tell you to.”

He opened his mouth to protest, but snapped it shut, deciding to allow her this moment of control. Lowering his body to the blanket, he forced himself to stay still. Rose gripped his hips and

settled between his thighs. She lapped at his crown like it was an ice cream cone, catching drops of semen with her tongue before swirling it around the wide mushroom head. She scrapped the rim with her teeth, which set off a cascade of fire up and down his spine. He'd had blow jobs before, but none like this. Rose acted as if they had all the time in the world, as if nothing else mattered.

“You’re trying to kill me.” He groaned as she swallowed the tip of his shaft, bobbing her head, taking more of him into her mouth with each down swoop.

Up. Down. She ran her tongue

over the underside of his cock, lapping at the slit and hollowing out her cheeks to increase the pressure, driving him mad. His brain was short-circuiting. Tunnel vision took hold. All he cared about was what she was doing. She flicked the V at the base of the crest. Stars burst before his eyes as pleasure simmered through his body. Fire exploded in his veins as his heart hammered against his ribcage. He drove his hips forward in silent demand that she take more of him into her mouth. Rose stopped. Her lips slid up and cold air whirled around his shaft.

He stared down at her. A wicked smile curled on her lips.

“I’m the one in control. Do that again and I’ll stop and let you use your hand.”

He was astonished. *How the fuck can she be so cool about this? I’m losing my mind.*

Rose lowered her head again, took his cock into her mouth and bobbed her head. This time the pace quickened, the pressure tighter. Passion bubbled up inside of him. Every cell in his body became saturated with need and fire. He wanted to move, but didn’t want the sensations to stop. When she gave his balls a gentle squeeze, he almost lost his mind.

“Please,” he moaned.

She bobbed her head faster, dragging her teeth over his sensitive flesh. He gritted his teeth and held back a grunt as pain and pleasure collided. Rose released his balls and wrapped a hand around the base of his shaft. Working her hand up, she moved her head down. Colliding sensations and desire built, stacking the fire higher until an inferno consumed him. She released his cock with a pop and worked him with her hand.

He couldn't stop himself. Shaking with unspent energy as the need to move increased, his legs twitched. His hands began to ache from holding the blanket

too tight.

“Rose, please,” he pleaded.

“Please, what?” She slowed her hand and continued to gaze at him with a lazy smile on her face.

He growled. “Fuck me, suck me, do something. I want to come.”

“Didn’t I say you couldn’t come?” Her hand stopped completely.

His cock throbbed as the ache increased in his balls. “Damn it, Rose.” His voice was hoarse as if he’d been yelling. Everything in him wanted to burn up. Energy coasted through his

muscles, demanding that he do something to relieve the tension.

She chuckled, dipped her head, and lapped up a trail of his seed. Desire burned hotter watching that one act.

Rose cocked an eyebrow and squeezed under his dripping crown. “Do you want to come?”

He gasped.

“You know,” she murmured as she leaned forward, planting kisses on the underside of his shaft. “I thought vampires were supposed to be these big, bad predators. Stuff of legends, and yet all I have to do is get you by the cock

and you're a kitten.”

Time to stop being nice. Draven snarled. He reached down and pried her hand from around his cock and sat up. He then grabbed her shoulders and pulled her up his body. “Play time’s over.”

She gasped, but didn’t pull away. “Show me.” Rose planted a kiss on his lips. He growled and rolled them over.

Chapter Ten

Rose released his cock and brought her hands up to his face. Cupping his jaw, she gazed into his eyes. Heated steel gray swirling with desire stared back at her. His fangs were fully extended. Heat shivered through as her body tightened, ready for him. It had been maddening trying to control the situation; a heady madness that made her feel equal parts sexy, and at the same

time, fraying at the seams. She stroked his cock; the sensation of hardness and softness drove her to her breaking point. She surprised herself by refusing to beg him to take back control. The salty, spicy tang of his cum lingered on her tongue. She wanted to slide down his body and take one more taste. Watching his body shake, and his tight, white knuckled grip on the blanket had been one of the sexiest things she'd ever seen.

Draven had held back. He could have stopped the whole thing, yanked her up his body like he had, ripped off her clothes and filled her to the hilt. The fact that he was partially clothed and she was still dressed was a surprising

aphrodisiac. She liked it, and for a moment wondered what it would be like if their positions had been reversed and she'd been the one partially clothed with him fucking her. Rose shuddered underneath him.

“Draven, please—” She stopped herself from saying anything else. *This time I want him to tell me what he wants to do.*

He buried his head in her neck and dragged his fangs along her collarbone. “Please, what?” Now he was in control. She felt the switch, like a light that had been turned on. He was now the cool, confident man he always was instead of under her thrall. “Tell me.”

When he took hold of her neckline, she waited, unsure of what he had planned. Part of her hoped he'd rip the shirt off her. The material had long since become an irritation. Instead, he dragged his hands down her sides, took hold of the hem, and lifted it up. Without having to be told, she lifted her arms. He stopped pulling the shirt up once it was over her head. He traced his fingers over her lace covered breasts. She cried out when he plucked the sensitive tips through the rough fabric. For a few moments, he twisted and tugged at the nubs, flicking them through the bra before planting opened mouthed kisses down her abdomen to swirl his tongue in

her belly button.

Just like I did.

He used one hand to undo her jeans, and with a hard yank, pulled them down to her knees. Draven removed her boots and then pulled the pants all the way off, leaving her partly in her sweater, bra, panties and socks.

“Now, we fuck. Don’t move your arms. Stay just like that.” Draven sat up on his heels and dug into the back pocket of his jeans. Rose bent her knees. The sound of a wrapper ripping filled the air. She watched as he rolled on the condom and then position himself over her. He lowered himself down. His skin burned

against hers. Hard muscles pressed against her body. Her nipples throbbed at the increased pressure from his chest. He reached between them and positioned his cock at her dripping entrance. There was no need for foreplay. She needed him now. Her body was one pulse point of need and desire. The pressure of his crest against her cunt made her moan. She needed him inside of her. Now.

“Draven.” Rose struggled to get the sweater off.

“I said, don’t move your arms.” He pushed up, taking away the delicious pressure that had been pressing her to the ground.

“No, please. Draven.” She stilled and waited for his return.

“No moving your arms. Let me love you,” he murmured. He returned to his position over her and placed soft kisses over her forehead, the tip of her nose, and both her cheeks before finally touching her lips. The contact sent a jolt straight to her clit. She groaned, opening her mouth for him. He slipped his tongue past her lips, stroking hers with slow movements. Moaning, she arched her back and prayed to feel more of him; his skin, his mouth, his body, everything.

When he finally lowered down, she sighed around his tongue. He drew

back and stared down at her, his expression unreadable. Reaching between them, Draven positioned his cock and pushed forward, sinking into her. They both groaned. She contracted her inner muscles around him, drawing him further inside. They rocked against each other. He pulled back then pushed forward, sliding his cock into her slowly, rubbing against her nerve endings. She clung to the moment. The pressure built. Each time she thought she was going to come, he would retreat and slow down. The scent of the earth, sex and sweat blew around them as he increased the pace. Wet flesh slapped against each other. He pushed in and pulled out. His lips pressed against her

throat.

She sucked in a breath, waiting for the dark pressure followed by the pain and the burst of pleasure. It didn't come. When Draven reached between them and massaged her clit, her orgasm coiled tighter until it snapped. Rose came in a rush of fire and sensation, crying out his name into the night. He pulled out and slammed into her, refusing to stop. Continuing to work her clit, he drew out another climax as he fucked her faster.

Rose became lost. Each stroke of his cock pulled her close to the edge. Over and over he made her come until her body became weak and spent. She lay under him panting, watching as

Draven withdrew and slid home once more before he threw back his head and let out a cry. His body tensed as his cock pulsed. He came, crying out her name. Draven drove into her three more times before lowering himself down to take a kiss. He slide out of her completely and rolled next to her.

“Fuck, I love you,” he panted out.

She stilled, not sure if she'd heard him correctly.

He rolled over and wrapped an arm around her waist. “Don't want to let you go, but have to.” Burying his head into the crook of her neck, she giggled when he flicked his tongue over her

pulse point. Sighing, she turned into his embrace and closed her eyes. The sounds of the night and the howling of wolves filled the air.

A deep male voice grumbled nearby. “Oh, for fuck’s sake. I should arrest you for that. Jesus, put some clothes on.”

Draven groaned. “Go away, Torger. We’ll be out of here in a few moments.” To her he said, “We’ll just lay here, honey and then go home.”

Home. She didn’t contradict him. Rose looked forward to snuggling with him in bed, and waking up beside him.

* * * *

“Okay, let me get this straight. You’ve voluntarily stopped sleeping with tall, dark, and fangly? Are you sick? Does he have an STD? Oh my god, he does have dead man’s breath, doesn’t he?” Sabrina followed her around the office like an incessant, yapping puppy.

“Yeah, what she said.” Katey walked next to Rose, making her feeling boxed in.

“I needed space, time to think, adjust,” Rose replied through gritted teeth.

“Uh oh, she’s irritated. Don’t care. And he said he loved you? What’s wrong with you? Getting ILY from a guy is like pulling teeth and denying them sex. They’d have to do something wrong for that. How’d you do it? Is your vagina magic or something?” Sabrina took another sip of coffee and tapped her foot while Rose put the files away.

“No, not a magic pussy. How about an enchanted mouth?” Katey offered.

“Guys, I just needed time to adjust, and he understood. It’s okay. We’re not broken up.” She stopped, realizing what she’d said. Her stomach clenched, and she felt sick. “Besides it’s only been two

days.”

Katey snorted. “Two days in the dating land of love is like two years. So what are you thinking on? Anything good? You do realize that he’s the most sought after bachelor in the city, right? And since the bachelor auction is coming up, women are going nuts. I saw some woman throw her panties at him as he was entering the building. Panties! I wouldn’t throw my water bra at him if he were on fire. I need it; these puppies need enhancing.”

Sabrina burst out laughing. “Want some of my boobage? Bachelor auction? When does it take place; can I go into

debt for it? And what kind of bachelors are we talking about? Not like the ones on that TV show, right?”

Rose was relieved when Katey led Sabrina away to the kitchenette area. With a sigh, she trudged back to her desk. Each step was like walking through sludge. She wanted to call Draven and check on him. The morning that they'd parted he'd moaned over the upcoming auction and prayed he wouldn't have to take part.

“I have a girlfriend. Why do I have to still walk down the runway like a piece of meat?” he groused.

Rose had teased him about all

unwanted attention he was getting, and she wanted to make sure he wasn't stressing too much about it. Then there was the serial killer on the loose. She reached out, her hand hovering over the receiver before she pulled it back.

“No. I won't call him.” She was about to turn away when her phone rang. Jumping, she snatched up the receiver and answered it. “Hello? Rose Andrews speaking.”

“Fuck distance. I need to see you. I miss you. Can you come up here and have lunch with me?” Draven's haggard voice tugged at her heartstrings.

She laughed. “I can't. Sabrina's

here.”

“Ah, your friend that’s visiting. How about pizza at my place? Bring her along. I’m bored and tired, and I need to hold you.” He sighed. “You can’t. She’s your guest. It would be awkward to have her hang around your boyfriend.”

“I’m sorry.” She did feel bad. The phantom of his warmth surrounded her. “If it’s any consolation, I miss you too.”

“That helps. Damn it, they’ve come into my office. Time to work. Talk to you later, honey.” He hung up.

Sabrina returned and settled in the visitor’s chair next to Rose’s desk.

“Katey suggested a girl’s night with pizza, chick flicks, the works. What do you think? I want to stay in tonight.”

Rose chuckled. “Draven suggested the same thing, well minus the chick flicks part.”

“Will we hang out in our PJs and braid each other’s hair?” Sabrina teased.

Rose laughed. “No. I told him you were in town so we couldn’t do that.”

“Girls’ night I can do, but I do want to meet him.” Sabrina’s face hardened. “I want to make sure he’s good for you.”

Rose smiled at her friend's concern. "How about this? Tomorrow night, dinner, if he can swing it?"

Sabrina's lips curled up into an impish smile. "I would love that."

Rose turned back to her computer. "Now, I have to work."

"Well, put me to work then. You've given me a tour of this place, and I want to help." Sabrina's eyes took on a mischievous sparkle.

"Ask Katey if you can help out at either the Bachelor auction or the Ball. I think we need someone with an artistic eye." Rose hoped that would keep

Sabrina out of trouble.

“Cool! I’ll get you more coffee and be off.” Sabrina got up, grabbed more java for Rose, and then headed out to find Katey.

Left alone, she shot off an email to Draven’s private account asking about dinner with Sabrina tomorrow night. His response was immediate.

Nothing going on tomorrow night. Would love to. Indian restaurant? I can bring along a friend so she doesn't feel like a third wheel. Miss you.

Drav

She answered him with a yes to everything and got back to figuring out how to arrange the pack leaders so that everyone would feel important. The screen began to blur and her head throbbed as she finally found an arrangement she liked. Shooting off the plan to Katey, with a CC to Draven and the other pack leaders on it, she sat back and took a sip of cold coffee before moving on to the next task: picking the non-musical entertainment.

Katey came up to her desk and rested a hip against it. “Okay, there’s a thought going around to hold the auction

at the same time as the Ball. What say you?”

“Yeah, it works. That puts an even bigger spotlight on the event, but what do we do with everything else? Cut the week’s festivities short or add a new event?” Rose settled back in her chair and watched her boss for clues to her thoughts.

“Well, the auction was going to be held before the Ball, so how about after the event we have a huge dessert in the park party? We have ice cream carts milling around there already, why not highlight the smaller, more dessert oriented businesses? Have them set up

booths. People can wander around. We can have the in park entertainment with the puppet booths and musicians who have permits. It will be a day for recovery.” Katey grabbed a few brochures off of Rose’s desk and held up one for a spa. “We could invite the spas out to do a free day of manicures and pedicures. Maybe even get the beauty parlors involved.”

Excitement crackled through Rose. “I love it.” Her fingers moved swiftly over the keyboard, typing up the ideas, as well as a few of her own.

“Can Sabrina and I check out some of the spas tomorrow, you know for research and all that?” Rose kept her

focus on the computer monitor. Her lips twitched as she tried to hold back a smile.

“I hate you both. Take Toby with you. He knows some good places. Don’t forget the receipts, nothing over fifty bucks, and I need a full report by Friday, understand?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Hey, look at me,” Katey ordered.

Rose peered up to see the mirth on Katey’s face. “And don’t forget to bring me back the free samples that they sometimes give out. Oh crap, we can ask the local beauty businesses for samples

to make gift bags.”

Rubbing her hands together, Katey wandered off with a look of determination on her face. Rose returned her focus to work, writing up a plan for this new day and sending out feelers to her contacts at the local spa businesses. By the time five o'clock rolled around, she was exhausted and ready to go home.

“Done?” Sabrina asked.

Rose jumped in her chair. Her heart pounded against her ribcage in hard thuds. A glance to the visitor's chair showed Sabrina settled in with a mug of coffee and a book.

With a hand on her chest, she glared at Sabrina. “How long have you been there?”

Sabrina gave her a blasé shrug. “Long enough to watch the sunset. You ready to go?”

Once she got her pulse under control, Rose nodded. After shutting down her computer and grabbing her purse, she stood up and looked around. Katey and Toby were the only ones left in the office. Saying a quick goodbye to them, she dragged Sabrina to the elevators and out the building to hail a cab.

“Gotta say, I like it here. Katey’s

awesome. Hell, everyone in that office made me feel so welcome. The atmosphere is so easy here.” Sabrina leaned against the seat of the cab, head bent, her hair covering her features.

Rose raised an eyebrow at the soft tone in her friend’s voice. “What’s up?”

“I’m tired, Rose. The office back home is filled with so much competition. I can take it, but it grinds you down after awhile. I know I’m young, but still... I’ve been doing this since I was eighteen. Didn’t go to college like most. Here my ideas matter; over there I get overlooked. I guess it doesn’t help having multi-hued hair and tattoos, huh?” Sabrina looked up with weariness in her

eyes.

Rose gave her friend a smile. “I know what that’s like. So come on, move here. You can bunk with me until you find your own place.”

“Already found a place. Katey told me about a loft in the resurrected warehouse district on the lake side of town. The price is good and the pictures are awesome.” Guilt flashed on Sabrina’s face.

“Seriously? You’re really moving here?” Excitement buzzed through Rose’s body at having her friend so close by. Not bothering to wait for an answer, she launched herself at Sabrina,

giving her friend a tight squeeze. “We’ll check it out tomorrow while canvassing the spas and beauty parlors. We’re supposed to take Toby with us. Isn’t that cool?”

Sabrina nodded. “I just have to give notice up north, and then move my crap here. Okay, what’s the best pizza joint here? I’m hungry and the coffee is catching up with me.”

“I know just where. We can pick up movies.” A thought of Draven popped up, and she wondered what he was doing tonight.

Draven stared at the pile of paperwork and sighed. “At least I didn’t have plans.”

A knock at the door made him pause. Fear and hope threaded together. He wanted to see Rose, but knew she had a friend to entertain. “I just don’t want it to be another body. Please, let it not be another body.” He closed his eyes. “Come in.”

Torger strode into the office. His tall, broad shoulders encased in the blue of his uniform seemed more imposing. The werewolf held up a pizza and a six pack. “Dinner and a talk. Don’t worry,

no more bodies have shown up. Figured I'd update you and eat at the same time."

He settled down in the visitor's chair across from Draven and placed the pizza and beer on the desk.

"Thank goodness you're not one of the neat freaks. Anyway, Jackal will be arriving soon. He has a case in DC he's tying up." Torger twisted the top off the beer and took a healthy swig. "The media is playing nice for once. I think they understand what's at stake here."

He stared at Torger in disbelief. "Even Isadora?"

Torger nodded. "Yup. I think her

bosses are threatening to take away her pretty pink microphone.”

Both men snickered.

“No, seriously. I think she understands what’s at stake here. It’s tiring, though. Everyday I’m getting requests for more details, and I have nothing to give them. This quiet is worse than when bodies show up.” Torger took another pull of beer. “Just between you and me? I’m worried about the reporters. I really am. I know some of them are irritating little gnats, but some of them don’t have the good grace to use the sense that the goddess gave ‘em.” He shuddered.

Draven nodded an agreement. “If you’re so concerned, call in some help. We have extra in the budget for that.” He reached over, flipped up the top of the pizza box, and grabbed a slice of pepperoni and sausage. His stomach growled, reminding him that he’d skipped lunch. “How are your officers taking it? How’s morale? I’m trying not to push because I know you run a tight ship. Any news would be sent to me immediately. So far, the Council has been quiet, which scares me more than a serial killer on the loose in my city.” Taking a bite, he groaned aloud at the sweet spiciness of the sausage and pepperoni.

“Hungry? I don’t blame you. Coffee was my breakfast and lunch. My stomach hates me right now. The guys are good. Frustrated that there are no leads, but they’re working their asses off. It helps that the local businesses are giving us food and stuff to make sure we keep our strength up. We want whoever this is out of the fucking city before the shit storm rains down on us, but I’m taking a wild guess that it’s already here?” Torger took another sip of beer.

“Yeah, that’s what I’m afraid of. The Fixer may be here and we won’t know. Although my gut says not yet. I think the Council wants to wait until we’re truly in the shitter before they

send someone. What are your thoughts on that? Why so quiet?” Unease made his stomach lurch.

“Like you said, they’re waiting for us to fuck up royally before they step in all magnanimous and shit. Sort of like how they stepped in during that riot in the paranormal suburb in Cleveland. They waited until the natives were so pissed off by the police response, they swooped in to clear things up.” Disgust hardened Torger’s face. “I’m more worried about our people and the humans living in the city. Is it wrong to be thankful they’re not locals? I’d be more pissed off if the victims were local humans.”

Draven nodded. “I know it’s bad, but to lose our people, I think that would make things worse.”

His thoughts turned to Rose and her friend Sabrina. “Hamilcar is looking after Rose and her friend. From afar of course. I don’t want to spook them.”

Torger pointed his beer bottle at him. “Just be careful, man. Don’t want anything to happen to your pretty mug. Then who else would be tortured by the Bachelor auction?”

Draven laughed. “Aww, come on, don’t you want to prance around in a towel? Oooh, maybe wear your police uniform. Really get the bids rolling in.”

“I’m not whoring myself. I’ll wear jeans and a shirt, that’s it.” Torger took a sip of beer.

“What no socks and shoes? Ahh, beach surfer vibe. I got you.” Draven ducked when Torger threw a napkin at him.

“No, I’ll be fully clothed, asshole. Anyway, what’s the deal with all the arrangements for the event? I need to know how many people to put on security detail, how much I can spare for regular stuff, and how many to hold back for emergency cases.” Torger grabbed another slice.

“I’m calling in favors all over the

place to give you support so you're not stretched too thin. I'm even resorting to blackmail to ensure that we won't be without. The other mayors and governors are giving me major shit. Acting like they'll be the next state, city or town with a faux-vampire serial killer problem." Draven sighed. "But I have a feeling they'll cooperate. That does lead to another issue. Dracula is coming to town. Don't ask me how I know. I'm too tired to get into his machinations. Just know he's on his way."

Torger's eyes widened. "When? Do you have details? A VIP like him could be a huge draw for the serial killer or the Council."

“I have someone getting the details. I’ve had to call in the Vampire Trackers for him. God, I wish I could take a vacation.” Draven rested his head on the back of the chair and closed his eyes.

“I don’t blame you man, not one bit. I’ll call in a few favors of my own to help you out.”

Draven nodded to Torger in silent thanks. “Okay, let’s finish this pizza and beer and get back to work. I wish I could get drunk.”

Torger’s barking laughter filled the air. “So do I man, so do I. Only thing I envy about the humans.”

Draven grinned. They began to talk about sports and which model motorcycle was better. The hour grew late. By the time Draven got home, he was exhausted and aching to hold Rose.

Chapter Eleven

Rose sat crossed legged on the floor while Sabrina made her way through a large bucket of popcorn chicken.

“Um, they did feed you back at the office. You do remember that, right?” She lifted an eyebrow and watched her friend pop another morsel into her mouth.

“So good, almost as good as KFC. You do remember that I have a high metabolism? Besides that, I need all the food I can get since we’re going to be walking a lot. I looked over a map of the area that we’re going to visit tomorrow. There’s so much to see. I know I’m moving here, but I still want to get in as much sightseeing as I can. I have a feeling Katey will make me her work bitch.” Sabrina laughed.

“Katey offered you a job? You didn’t tell me that.” Rose sat up, wondering what else she missed while working on the aspects of the ball.

“Yup, for the events. I’ll be one of the official photographers. After that,

she's going to hook me up with a few friends of hers who need to replace a photographer on their team. It's all good." Sabrina sipped her soda and looked up at her. "What?"

Rose's shoulders slumped. "Wow. You guys moved fast. I feel a bit left behind."

Sabrina threw a pillow at her. "Shut up. You were busy, and it's fine. Anyway, let's talk about Draven. We haven't discussed your relationship beyond what you told me on the phone. I want to know more."

Rose wasn't sure where to start. "Like what?"

“Oh, like everything. I know you weren’t too crazy about the time it took between meeting and dating. How do you feel now with some distance?” Sabrina settled back against the couch.

“Um, well, I miss him. A lot.” She looked down at her plate of untouched pizza.

“So why not go to him? I’m fine by myself.” Sabrina gave her a pointed look.

“I can’t do that. It would be rude of me to just up and leave; besides, I can’t leave you alone. You’d eat all my ice cream,” she teased.

“But you want to leave, don’t you?”

She twisted her hands in her lap. “Yes and no. I want to see him, make sure he’s okay, and yet I don’t want to go back on what was agreed upon. I want to wait out the week.”

“Um, hello, we’re going to dinner with him and his friend tomorrow night.”

“Yeah, but I’m talking about being alone with him.” Rose picked up her pizza and took a bite. Her stomach growled for more food. Hunger hit her hard.

“Sex.” It was a statement not a

question.

Rose looked up. “No. Not sex.”

Sabrina grinned and threw another pillow at her. “Sex and you know it.”

She chucked the pillow back at her. “You’re obsessed with sex, you know that?”

“You’re not answering the question.” Sabrina popped a handful of popcorn chicken into her mouth.

“There is no question. You made a statement. I miss him; the sex is secondary.” Taking another bite of pizza, she watched Sabrina make a face.

“Liar. So tomorrow night, do we have to dress up? I didn’t bring anything fancy to wear.” She drank her soda and sighed.

“I’ll ask. I don’t feel like dressing up. Um, you gonna help with this pizza?” She pushed the box toward Sabrina, who shook her head.

“So full. We’ll have it for lunch tomorrow. Now we’ve established you miss him, and this relationship goes beyond sex for you. Good, now the question is does he feel the same way? We’ll find out tomorrow night.” An evil smile curled on her lips.

Rose opened her mouth to protest.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be gentle,” she assured.

Somehow Rose doubted that. They spent the rest of the evening eating, watching movies, and catching up. For the first time since arriving in Draven’s Crossing, she felt settled. She had a man she cared about, and her best friend was moving closer. Now all she wanted was for the event to go off without a hitch, and she’d be the happiest person on the planet. She was exhausted by the time she snuggled into bed. Reaching out blindly, she grabbed her cell phone and hit speed dial.

Draven answered immediately. “Hello?”

His sleep roughened voice sent liquid heat sliding down the center of her body to pool in her core. “Hey. Just wanted to say good night.”

“Hi,” he murmured. “Miss you.”

There was a soft creaking and the rustling of sheets. Her pussy contracted as tingles threaded through the sensitive flesh of her inner thighs, nether lips, and the base of her back. She pictured him naked, with the silk sheets covering his erection. A small groan built in her chest, sliding up her throat. Pressing her lips together, she refused to make that sound, refused to let him know that the desire had begun. Squeezing her thighs

tightly together, she tried to ignore the throb of pleasure in her clit. The steady beat reminded her that he wasn't there to ease the need. Heat flowed through her body and extended soft wisps of fire that threaded through her veins.

Tilting her head back, she closed her eyes and focused on control.

“How was your day? Did you get everything done?” More fabric shifted. She sighed, missing his heat and the firm wall of his body against her back. If he were with her, Draven would have stroked her stomach, teased her nipples and slipped his hand between her legs to ease the ache. Blowing out a breath, she tried to remember what her day had been

like, but got shadows of frenzied movements.

“I got some work done. The plans for the Ball are coming along, and we’ve decided to shift the bachelor auction to after the Ball, then ending the event with a day of relaxing afterward in the park.” Rose grinned at his grunt of dissatisfaction.

“Can’t you guys cancel that? I’m not looking forward to strutting down the runway, even if it is for charity.”

She pictured his face; the handsome facade turned into a mask of pain and irritation. “Just focus on the charity part and you’ll do fine. I promise

to outbid everyone.”

“And then we can have a filthy, dirty date.” His tone deepened, becoming more intimate.

Her stomach muscles tightened as notions of just what that date could be like swirled around her brain. Shaking her head, she shoved away any idea of doing a date entirely in bed and focused on something fun, clean and camera ready. “No, we can’t do that. It has to be in public and child friendly.”

“We’ve done public sex before,” he pointed out. “As for child friendly, I don’t think kids should witness what I need to do to you.”

Rose squirmed, her panties becoming damp as his husky cadence wove through her body, setting her nerve endings alight and reminding her of what he could do to her. The ghost of his hands slid over her skin, teasing her nipples, stomach and hips. Swallowing, she tried to ignore her desire. “Can’t. Need to behave.”

“Have you been naughty? Do you need a spanking?” His voice got deeper, darker. A thrill raced through her. Her core clenched as more liquid drenched her panties. She’d never thought of a spanking, but the way he put it, she was sure it would be wicked and sexy as hell. An image of her bent over his desk

flashed before her. Her breath hitched in her throat, and this time she did groan aloud. He chuckled, the sound heavy and weighted with things unspoken.

“Mmm, sounds like someone is having naughty thoughts.” He laughed again, this time lighter; mirth threaded through the wicked tenor.

She pulled the phone away from her ear and glared at it. “Behave. I’m not having phone sex with you.”

Pressing the receiver back to her ear, she listened as his laughter continued. “Says you,” he managed to throw out between guffaws.

“I’ll hang up,” she threatened.

He continued to chuckle. “And I’ll just call back, honey.”

“Phone sex over.” She waited for him to respond.

That got his attention; he stopped laughing immediately. “I didn’t even know we were having phone sex. Tell me what you’re wearing.”

“No. We’re going to behave.”

He snorted. “Do you even know what that word means, honey?”

She growled at him. “Yes, do

you?”

Silence. She smiled in satisfaction. “See, there you go. Now, focus. Your day, what was it like? Did they catch the serial killer yet?” Rose bit her lip, hating that she asked. “You don’t have to tell me,” she added quickly, praying that the question hadn’t killed the mood.

He sighed. The sound dragged out. She winced as an ache began in her chest. “I’m sorry. Really, you don’t have to tell me.”

“I want to, baby. We’re still figuring things out. We’ve got nothing to go on, and everyone is scared the

Council will step in.” There was pain in his voice that she wanted to wipe away.

“I wish I could be there for you. Hold you.” She clutched the bedspread, stifling the urge to suggest she go to him.

“You have company. Besides that, it’s late and as much as I want to hold you right now, I can’t. Not with this weighing on me.” He blew out a breath. “I don’t want this to taint what we have. Thank you for giving me an out. I can tell you that hearing your voice and talking to you helps immensely, and I’m grateful to have you in my life right now.”

She grinned, the pain in her chest evaporating. She settled back against the

pillows and closed her eyes. “I’m glad.”

“Do you still want to do dinner tomorrow night?” Hesitation colored the question.

“Yes, I want Sabs to meet you, and I want to see you.” She hoped that they would get along.

“Good. Shit, it’s my other phone. I’ll have to hang up, honey. I’ll see you tomorrow. Can I call you during the day?” His voice had become lower, a hint of heat in the innocent words.

“You can call me anytime; just behave if I’m at work.” She tried to sound serious, but ended up giggling.

“I’ll take that as a yes. We can have phone sex while I’m at work.” He groaned aloud. “Fuck, Stop ringing. I have to go, baby. I’ll talk to you tomorrow. Sweet dreams.”

Before she could wish him the same, he hung up. A smile pasted on her face and warmth pulsed through her body. The arousal simmered in the pit of her stomach, but she ignored it. After putting the receiver back in the charger, she snuggled down under the covers and hoped whoever was calling him didn’t bring bad news.

* * * *

While sitting in his office the next day, Draven ran a hand over his face and scrubbed the sleep from his eyes.

“My mother wouldn’t get off the phone. I swear to god, she could talk the dead back to life.” He accepted the proffered coffee cup from Torger. “Thanks.”

“Be thankful you don’t have a werewolf mother. They won’t hesitate to pull up your pants if they’re sagging, do the spit to palm thing to wipe away dirt or smooth out your hair in front of people. They’ll even tell random strangers about your most humiliating childhood moments.” Torger settled into the chair across from him.

Draven trembled and decided to switch the subject. “Anything to report?”

“Nope, nothing. Which I’ll take as good news for now. I’m considering a few of my options. Jagger is skulking about as usual, turning a few stones over, pissing off a few people. I’ll know more soon. Jackal is on his way, but he’s stopping off to help out a friend down in Baltimore. Once he hits town, I expect the sky to start shitting itself. Other than that, it’s all quiet. The people aren’t restless, just pissed. I’d say as soon as we find this serial killer, they’ll want to get in a few punches for putting them through this.” Torger gave him an evil

smile filled with malice.

Draven took a sip of the coffee and winced. “I’m so glad you’re on our side. Although, your taste in coffee is horrible. What is this? Motor oil? This could clean the dirt off my hubcaps.”

He put the cup down and pushed it far away from him. Torger shrugged, grabbed it, and downed the whole thing in one gulp.

“Jesus! Slow down.” Draven admonished. “You know I could have the flu or something.”

“My werewolf antibodies would take care of that in an instant, so no

worries on that front, and I need all the fuel I can get. I promised Isadora an update.” Torger made a face, and Draven had to stop himself from laughing.

“Whoring yourself to the media? Didn’t think you did that,” he teased.

Torger shrugged again. “Got to keep the public updated, and it’s an election year. I like my job. Free doughnuts and all.”

Draven snickered. His office door opened, and his harried P.A. walked in. “Sir, these need your signature.” He put a large pile of files and papers on his desk and stepped back.

“Thanks, Vince. Can you get me some real coffee? Torger’s brand of java can burn a hole through my stomach.” Draven grinned.

“Wuss.” He stood and smoothed the shirt over his stomach. “I’ll update you if I have anything.”

Once Torger left, Draven got back to work. He was so immersed in filling out paperwork, approving requests and looking over files that the time flew by. When he looked up again, it was almost time for dinner with Rose and Sabrina. He stretched his arms over his head and yawned. After placing a quick phone call to his friend, Ben, a local writer to confirm dinner with the ladies, he

headed home to get ready. Despite his eagerness, he felt nervous, like a teenager before the big dance. After a quick shower, he got dressed, unable to shake his nerves.

“It’s not like we haven’t seen each other in ages,” he mumbled. “We talked last night. It was a good talk.”

He spent the next few seconds trying to tie a simple Windsor knot, only to fail. With long strides across his bedroom, he went to call Ross, but stopped short by the door. “Why the hell am I wearing a tie?”

Pulling the silk accessory from around his neck, he threw it on a nearby

dresser and began to tuck his wallet and cell phone into his jacket when the phone vibrated. With a sigh, he answered it.

“This better be good,” he growled into the phone, praying it wasn’t news of another body.

“Uh, Drav? It’s Ben. Sorry, man. I know I said I could make it to dinner, but I can’t. Dena has gone into full labor and Max isn’t around. I’m the only one she’s got, since mom isn’t in the area—”

There was a loud scream followed by a harried female voice yelling that Ben should get back there this instant.

“Shit, I gotta go. I’m so sorry. There are some mysteries in the universe I didn’t need, and childbirth is one of ‘em.” Another yell for Ben, and Draven winced.

“It’s okay, Ben, we’ll talk later.” He wasn’t sure whether to be relieved or nervous. “Great, now I’m going to be alone with them. It’s going to be a tag team, with Sabrina taking the lead. That much I do know.”

With another sigh, he slipped his phone back in his pocket and headed out, partly thankful it wasn’t news of another body. When he made it to the restaurant, his first thought was that they wouldn’t come. Pacing in front of the doors, he

tried to calm down and get his head on straight. By the time peace had descended, he felt he could face anything Sabrina would throw at him.

“Sorry we’re late; traffic was hell. There’s some sort of construction going on at the end of the street.” Rose lifted up on her tiptoes and gave him a kiss on the lips before pulling back. “This is Sabrina.”

She gestured to a tall, curvy woman dressed in jeans, a T-shirt and a leather jacket. Her expression was open, but he felt as if she was wary of him. Holding out his hand, he waited for her to accept the offering. She surprised him

by taking a step forward and hugging him.

“You can call me, Sabs. I think we’re going to be good friends. Come on.” She grabbed both their hands and pulled them into the restaurant.

He glanced over at Rose, who was grinning. After they hung up their coats, she took him aside.

“Sabrina can’t stay long. She got a call from back home that there’s a family thing going on, and she’s needed there. Is that okay?” Worry flickered through her eyes. Cupping her face, he leaned down and gave her a full kiss on the lips, allowing the touch to linger longer than a

peck.

Having this moment set him at ease. He felt more confident. When he pulled away, he brushed her hair from her face. He frowned when he realized she'd straightened it. It now hung in long layers framing her face. As usual, her makeup was natural, with only a hint of color around the eyes and cheeks and a deep pink gloss on her lips that was now muted.

“I like your hair.” Running his fingers through the softness, he watched her eyelids flutter shut as she let out a sigh.

“I've missed your touch. I've

missed you,” she whispered. Rose leaned into him. He wrapped his arms around her and closed his eyes.

“I’ve missed you, too.” Any lingering anxiety he felt about the possible interrogation melted away under the press of her body. Placing a gentle kiss on the top of her head, he exhaled and breathed in the soothing perfume of vanilla and cinnamon with a hint of her desire. He slid his hands down her back to cup her buttocks, giving each cheek a squeeze. She groaned and buried her face in his chest.

“Not now.” Her voice was muffled by fabric.

He chuckled. “The bathroom is right—”

“No. Dinner. Tomorrow night I’ll go home with you. Can’t tonight. Have to help Sabs pack.”

Tilting her head back, she gazed up at him with passion darkened eyes. He watched her as need unfurled in his stomach. Draven held back a groan and glanced up to find Sabrina watching them, her expression thoughtful.

“Let’s go before your friend starts getting interesting ideas.” He pulled away, but kept an arm around her waist as he guided her back to the coat check area.

Rose laughed. “She already has ideas, and wicked, naughty ones, but we’ll talk about that later.”

Draven said nothing. His mind was focused on his own sinful thoughts, all having to do with sex in the bathroom or coat check room.

“Wipe the smile off your face and prepare to be interrogated,” Sabrina declared as he pulled out her chair for her.

Clearing his throat, he went to Rose and pulled out her chair before taking a seat himself. The minutes ticked by as they looked over the menu. A quick glance showed an evil smile on

Sabrina's face.

She knows exactly what she's doing. A look over at Rose showed the same expression. Draven sighed inwardly. *Yup, being double teamed.* After ordering and the wine poured, Sabrina pounced.

“Okay, first off how old are you, fang man?” She took a sip of wine and settled back in her chair.

“Sabs!” Rose admonished.

“It's okay.” He moved his chair closer and placed an arm on the back of Rose's chair. “I'm five hundred and fifty years old.”

Awe showed on both Rose and Sabrina's face.

“Wow, I've never met a vampire as old as you, and normally the older the vamp the more they stay close to Europe. Why is that?” Sabrina leaned forward and placed her elbows on the table, her expression open and filled with curiosity.

He took a sip of wine. “Well, it's where most of them were born. As this world progresses into new technology and such, it can be very scary to some vampires. Older ones go home to Europe to be closer to tradition. A sort of reminder of where they came from.”

“Would you like to go home?”
This came from Rose.

He looked at her, reached over and brushed her hair back so he could see her face. “Home is here. Although mother and father want me to visit them in Europe.”

He sealed that declaration with a soft touch of his lips to hers. Smiling, he rested his back against the chair and waited for the next question. He picked up his glass and took another sip.

“Obviously, you like Rose for more than a bed buddy—”

Draven sputtered. The wine

burned at the back of his throat and went down his windpipe. Rose slapped him on the back as his eyes watered. It took a moment before he could breathe properly. The waiter came over, concern clear on his face. “Is everything okay, sir?”

Draven nodded. “Fine,” he rasped out. “I’m okay. The wine went down the wrong pipe.”

“I’ll get you some water.” The waiter moved away, but not before Draven caught a look of worry on his face. “I’m okay, really.”

“Oops, sorry about that. Should have warned you. I can be very blunt.

You okay?” Sabrina handed him her napkin, which he declined.

“Fine, really, I am. Ask the next question.” Rose stroked his back and moved her chair a bit closer.

“Okay. Are you serious about my friend? I’m looking at you and wondering if this is a true attraction or are you just bored?” Sabrina’s features became hard with an unreadable glint in her eyes.

For a moment, he wondered if Sabrina had been hurt by a vampire before. With a deep breath, he glanced at Rose, who looked vulnerable and open. Giving her arm a squeeze, he answered,

“I am falling in love with her. She’s everything I want and more. I adore her. She’s never far from my thoughts. I can’t think of a day ending where I haven’t spoken to her. I’m serious about having her in my life as my lover, and significant other.”

He waited for a reaction, anything from either woman. This was the second time he’d laid it out on the line with Rose. She’d believed him the first time. Draven couldn’t help but wonder if having her friend here had put doubts into her head. The soft touch and warmth of her hand on his thigh sent a jolt through him. It heated up his stomach. His shaft hardened as his heartbeat sped.

Shifting in his chair, he pushed back the growing tide of desire and ignored the painful pulse of his fangs wanting to distend. Rose didn't help things by moving her hand closer to his groin. Sucking in a breath, he tried to cover his growing lust with another sip of wine and found his glass empty. *Shit*. He spotted the wine in the bucket of ice beside their table and poured himself more.

“Looks like I made the big, bad vampire nervous.” Sabrina's chuckle was full and robust, which made him smile in response.

“Yes, I'll admit to being nervous. What else do you want to ask me?”

Draven took a sip of his wine, this time savoring the crisp, dry taste with a hint of floral, citrus flavor. He watched questions flit across Sabrina's face.

“Well, with the time we have, and since I'm hungry, I'll keep it to one question and a warning. First the warning. Don't hurt her, or I will hunt you down and make you watch hours of Barney the Dinosaur. And now for the question. Are you going to hog the wine all night, or can we have some, too?” She held up her empty glass and raised an eyebrow at him.

Laughing, he refilled her glass. “Point taken.”

Their meal arrived, and the conversation turned light as Rose and Sabrina recounted their experiences in the town. He especially appreciated Sabrina highlighting all the things she liked and the ones she disliked.

“I figured you’d like to know, for when you launch that new ad campaign to get out-of-towners to vacation here. Although my opinion could change once I move here.” She dug into her brownie and ice cream.

“Ah, you’re moving here? For a job? Or did you fall in love with this town and had to stay?” He smiled.

“A bit of both, actually. Your head

of P.R., Katey, offered me a job. I'm a photographer, so I'll be taking beauty shots of the town." She closed her eyes and moaned when she put the brownie into her mouth.

"Ah, you'll be working with Ben. He's in charge of writing up the glowing review of the town for the booklets. I meant to say earlier, he couldn't make it. His sister had gone into labor, and he was there when it happened. No other family in the area, and the husband is out of town." Draven didn't want to think of what his friend was going through.

"Oh, man I feel for him. Poor guy. Is he a vampire, too?" Sabrina looked up. Curiosity was back in her eyes.

“Lion shifter. Good guy. I think you’ll like him.” He didn’t miss her muttering, “As long as he hot.” Draven smiled, but said nothing. Ben was also one of the bachelors up for auction.

Rose yawned next to him.

“Tired, honey?” He rubbed her back.

“Yup, it’s been a long day.” She turned and kissed him at the pulse point in his neck. “I’ll see you on Saturday, when I finally have time to spend with you.”

The women stood up, and Draven

called for the check. He gave Rose a kiss. “I’ll take care of the bill. You get home safely. I’ll call you later.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Checking in on me or phone sex?”

“Ewww, let’s go before you two start making out.” Sabrina grabbed Rose’s hand and dragged her away as Draven looked on laughing.

When he arrived home later that night, he couldn’t help but feel like nothing could bring him down. After a quick shower, he dried off and climbed into bed, settling against his pillows. For a moment, he debated calling her or letting it go. Unable to resist, he hit

speed dial on his phone and waited for her to answer.

“Hey, was just about to call you. Sabrina likes you. Thank you for having dinner with us tonight,” Rose said.

“Anything for you. Do you feel better about us now?” His heart stuttered, waiting for the answer.

“I think, just seeing how you interacted with Sabs, it made me realize you could get along with my friends. Next up, meeting my family, but that will be later. Maybe for the holidays?” It was posed as a question, but he knew that this request wasn’t that simple. Meeting her family and seeing where she came

from would be a huge step for them. One he wanted to make, but first they would need time to cement as a couple.

“I’d like that, but no hurry. I know you need more time, and I’m willing to give it to you.” He closed his eyes and rested his head against the headboard.

“I know. You’ve told me that, and I appreciate it. Spending time away from you made me see how much I want you in my life, and I’m ready to step into this relationship. Also, I’d like a unicorn. Think you can rustle one up for me?” She snorted before falling into loud peals of laughter.

“Well, I could ask one of the

unicorn shifters to be your friend, but I doubt they'd take too kindly to being a pet. Well, some might. I heard they're a kinky lot," he joked.

She giggled. "You're so silly. I found out something new about you."

Silence descended between them. He heard her yawn, and grinned. "Go to bed, sweetheart. I'll see you tomorrow."

"What...no phone sex?" It was her turn to taunt.

His cock twitched at the question. "No, baby. Not tonight. Besides, I want to be with you, but not over the phone."

“Fine. You’re so damned considerate. Geez, what kind of vampire are you? You didn’t even try to seduce me,” she mocked.

He laughed. “I’ll show you seduction. You just wait until Saturday.”

“I’ll hold you to that. Night, honey.”

“Good night.” He hit the off button and sighed. Happiness filled him with warmth. His world was very good at the moment. If only the serial killer would be caught, then he could truly be at ease.

The End

About the Author

Interracial author Selena Illyria was born with an overactive imagination. With great curiosity and a love of writing that pushes her imagination there are many worlds she'd love to explore, from paranormal to sci-fi, from cyberpunk and beyond.

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