

DRAVEN'S CROSSING

*Their passion may be the death of them...*

**HIDDEN  
DIVERSIONS**

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Purple Sword Publications



**Draven's Crossing III:  
Hidden Diversions  
Selena Illyria**

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DRAVEN'S CROSSING III:  
HIDDEN DIVERSIONS

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## Dedication:

*For the Readers who were so patient. Thank you! Thank you to PSP for your patience as well.*

*To: Cherise, Chris, Dawn, Tilly, Cynn timer, Jess, Andrea and Shar for your input, support, laughs and suggestions.*

*“Though this be madness, yet there  
is method in’t.”*

*- Polonius, Hamlet, Shakespeare*

## Chapter One

### SERIAL KILLER ON THE LOOSE

No leads yet. Mayor silent. -  
Isadora Jones, DC News Blast

Tension rushed through Torger's veins. One leg jiggled as he tried not to get up and pace. Draven continued to drone on about the Council's wishes on the serial killer matter. He didn't want to think about the killer, in fact he

didn't want to even be here. He was at the end of his rope on all sides. Everywhere he turned the press was on his heels, asking him questions that he didn't have the answers to, demanding time and energy that he couldn't afford to lose. There was nothing to tell anyone. Any leads they'd gotten when Jackal had stumbled upon that cult from a few weeks ago had evaporated. The leader had killed himself somehow and any members that hadn't been caught were in the wind. Frustration was a



constant emotional companion at the DCPD. All of his officers and detectives were working overtime and then some. All cases that could be put on the backburner had been. The main focus of his department was the serial killer. No one was more anxious for news than Torger. Not even Draven, the vampire mayor of Draven's Crossing, could compete with Torger's anticipation. Every day that a lead didn't pan out was a day lost.

Things weren't helped by DC News' top reporter, Isadora Jones

calling him for interviews. Lately, he'd been trying to avoid her at all costs. It didn't have anything to do with the case and everything to do with the erotic dreams that haunted the little sleep he'd been able to catch. Heat flared in his stomach. Arousal wound its way through his body as snippets of that latest dream surfaced. The fantasies had always been there, but they became more prominent with her daily phone calls and emails. She'd even taken to appearing at his home in the morning with coffee in hand,

asking for a quote for her column or her show or her blog. He could picture her features clearly, delicate features, fierce stare, full lips so plump and tempting, brown eyes hard and full of determination, jaw set, dark brown curls streaked with bright pink falling to her shoulders in a silken curtain that he just wanted to run his fingers through. The heat grew as need scratched through his veins and blood filled his cock, thickening it. His shaft pressed against his fly making his pants feel tight. This time he did

squirm a little as he tried to bat away the desire.

When was the last time he'd taken care of his arousal problem? He couldn't really remember. Work consumed him, weakening his defenses. His wolf's dark amber eyes gazed back at him filled with a question. It was the same query that the animal had asked the moment they'd met Isy: *Are you going to claim her or not?* Torger didn't have answers to give the beast. Isy was a dragon shifter; dragons normally stuck to their

kind. I sadora did go her own way in all things, stubbornly so, which he was both grateful for and annoyed by. He wasn't sure about her moods. She always left him feeling like he'd just been hit by a storm and left to clean up the damage. It was exhilarating but made him yearn for more time with her that had nothing to do with their jobs. Could they even have a relationship?

“Torger, can you please pull your head out of Never, Neverland and join us? I was asking you a

question.” Draven glared at him, his black eyes filled with annoyance.

Torger shifted in his chair again. He cleared his throat as he tried to decide how to contribute to the conversation but wasn't sure what to say. “There's nothing. We don't have a single lead that has panned out. Unless the killer gets sloppy, I'm pretty sure that his batting average will remain the same.” Just saying those words had bile rising in his throat and coating the back of his tongue with an

acidic tang.

Draven sighed and turned his back to face the window. “So we’re fucked is what you’re telling me. That’s unacceptable. There has to be something we can do. Short of telling people to stay away and institute Martial Law, which the citizens will be opposed to. They’re doing everything they can to help out and with the Ball coming up my plate is so full, I haven’t seen my desk in weeks. Rose is working herself to the bone with PR. Give me suggestions, guys. Anything. I

don't even want to discuss the ideas that the Council is suggesting to me."

Draven turned around, a plea in his dark eyes. Torger wanted to give his friend and boss help but there wasn't anything he could do. "I'll keep trying. I promise you, I'll have something for you, even if it's small, by the end of the week."

Jagger, Draven's vampiric man of all trades, looked skeptical and Draven looked surprised, but it was all Torger could say to ease the situation, even a little bit. He would



do whatever it took to find a clue on the killer even if it meant using himself as bait. As for Isy, those fantasies would have to stay where they were. There was no time for a pursuit of attraction, not when his city, his turf, was in danger.

\* \* \* \*

Isy groaned and wriggled as Torger kissed his way up her belly. Soft swipes of his tongue added to the sensations shimmering through her body. Delicious, sweet butterfly kisses that teased her and wound

her arousal up into a tight ball. She squirmed under his touches, she tried to lift her legs to wrap them around his waist but they wouldn't move, not even an inch. He'd tied them down tight to her bedposts, much to her delight. Her arms were the same way. She'd insisted that he take control, let his inner alpha wolf out and he'd complied beyond her wildest dreams. So far he'd flogged her, tied her down and blindfolded her and now was torturing so sweetly that she couldn't ask for anything else. If

only he'd fuck her senseless, then things really would be perfect. Instead, he took his time, teasing her with the lightest of touches. She wasn't sure whether to scream or lay there and take it all. Who knew when they'd get another chance like this?

*Bang. Bang. Bang.* "Isy! Isy! You're on in an hour."

Isy groaned and rolled over on the couch. She didn't want to wake up. Not now. Torger was so close to kissing her. She didn't want to delay that any longer. Months of

fantasies and wondering what his lips would taste like would evaporate if she woke up now.

*Isy! Get up! Come on, we need you. Ivan Evanson is here for the interview.*

Isy swore under her breath. "All right, all right, I'm getting up."

She opened her eyes with reluctance and prayed that she'd be able to continue the dream later that night. It was doubtful given her workload. So far, all she'd had were fleeting fantasies that evaporated come morning. With a

shake of her head, she dispersed the last of the dream though tendrils of arousal still wrapped around her tight. Her dragon didn't say anything, much to her relief. If her beast had decided to give her its input, she was sure that the dragon would harp on the unresolved desires that Isy was trying to hide from. All the calls and visits to his cabin didn't help matters. She'd say it was for work but in reality, she was worried about the toll the serial killer case was taking on him.

Torger looked more worn down and tired. There were bags under his eyes and he looked more inclined to bite a person's head off than answer a simple question. She couldn't even begin to imagine the pressure he was under but wanted to help. Only, everything she said came out about the case when she meant to invite him out for coffee or dinner. Whether that led to sex, she could only hope. *How can you talk to a person when your jobs clash?*

She smirked at the turn her thoughts had taken. "I need to get

laid and fast.”

With a sigh she sat up, rose from the couch and opened the door, praying the interview with Representative Evanson didn't piss her off. All that unburned sexual tension could lead to an outburst she couldn't take back and that would be bad. Especially since it would be live, which could lead to a viral sound bite she'd never be able to live down. Maybe she'd even lose her job.

“Isadora?” Hamilcar's gruff voice drifted from behind her.

She let out a small scream and whirled around. Pain lanced her fingers as they morphed into claws, ready to rip into anyone who dared attack her. Once she saw that it was only the masked black dragon of chaos and Draven's head of security, she let out a sigh of relief and willed her fingers to return to human form. "Damn it, Car, don't sneak up on me. Can't you use the door like everyone else? We may be cousins but for all you know I could have been naked in here." A small jolt of pleasure made her smile at



the teasing of her cousin.

Crimson splotches spread through his cheeks, and his black eyes glimmered with an unidentifiable emotion. He swallowed; his Adam's apple bobbed up and down making her smile, too. *Poor thing is nervous.*

She waved away her comment.

“Okay, what’s up?”

He cleared his throat. “It’s Torger, we’re worried about him. We think he’s trying to take on too much,” Hamilcar started.

Isy’s heart skipped a beat as

worry fluttered around her stomach. "What the hell has he done now? If he's trying to kill himself, I'll kill him first and then bring him back and force a vacation on him." The words came out before she could stop them or call them back or even phrase them better. So far, she'd hid her interest in Torger from her family pretty well. Up 'til now that was.

Hamilcar blinked. He shifted and said nothing. The black dragon pulled down the bottom part of his mask, exposing his full face. Sharp

angles, high cheekbones and thin lips were revealed. Dark bags hung under his almond shaped eyes. "We think perhaps you should stop asking about the case. We're asking all of the press to do so. He's so frustrated, we think he may take hunting the serial killer too far and hurt himself. We're asking for your silence and patience. Normally we wouldn't ask such a thing but for now..." His words trailed off.

Isy got the gist; she didn't need to say anything else. They weren't asking them to put a lid on

the story, just not pester Torger so much. She could do that but one question was on the tip of her tongue. "Why'd they send you?"

The crimson turned nearly black. "W-w-w-e are family," he stammered out.

Isy chuckled. "Poor, Hamilcar you were never good at communication. It's okay. I promise to back off of Tor but is there anything to report? We're getting pretty restless. The citizens are defying the killer by going out and living their lives. They're not

letting the bastard take away their freedom, and they'll fight the Council if they have to keep the city alive."

Hamilcar bowed his head. "We know and understand that, but unfortunately this killer is crafty. There's nothing. Which is odd in and of itself."

Isy understood that. "Yeah, tell me about it. Look, I have an interview to do. I'll see you at the family dinner this weekend."

Hamilcar didn't even say goodbye, he just disappeared in a

cloud of black smoke, leaving behind a perfume laden with incense, sandalwood and ashes.

Isy sighed. "My family really does need to learn manners."

\* \* \* \*

Pale pink walls gleamed with warmth like the fresh flush from a shy maid. The Easter egg yellow tiled floor shone happily, while the thin white lines of grout fairly glowed under the florescent overhead light. The faint scent of roses and a light metallic tinge of

human blood mingled with a hint of ammonia floating on the air. Abbott hummed along with the opening strains of the Sleeping Beauty ballet as the hush of voices from the television kept him company. He stood back and admired his work. The puncture points were perfectly spaced and neat. It was important to be tidy. No mistakes must be made. He gave a careless glance at the picture pinned to a large refrigeration unit across from him and nodded. Just like the photo. "Such a beautiful

man," Abbott murmured as he stroked the man's auburn colored hair.

A gentle heat rose in his body. Blood slipped into his groin and filled his cock. The shaft pressed against the formless, loose pants Abbott wore. The vague taste of mint and Irish crème rolled over his taste buds. Abbott sighed. He could still remember how eager the young man had been, and that had only added to Abbott's hunger. He flexed his fingers as minute tremors shook through him. His



gums began to ache as the muted pounding of hunger pinged in his belly. His stomach growled as he took a moment to admire the high cheekbones and collagen plumped lips. The deathly pallor of his now alabaster skin gave his hair a fiery tone that made it seem almost alive with red and blond highlights. Abbott looked over the naked form of the man. Carved perfection due to hours in the gym, his body was a useless temple. An empty husk that no longer housed a soul. From his carefully manicured nails to his

pedicured toes, every bit of artifice cultivated for attraction was useless in his eternal slumber.

The man had attracted Abbott, had been so eager for what he'd offered him. "All you wanted was a paranormal experience. Something to take back home to your small town, tell all the folks how you got to drink with vampires and flirt with werewolves. Draven's Crossing is richer for your coming, I assure you." Abbott gave the young human male's hair one last stroke. The night they'd spent

together had been beyond any of Abbott's expectations. He'd thought it would be a simple fuck and kill. But now regret filled him at having taken the life from this young man, whose name he hadn't even gotten, so soon. With a sigh, Abbott adjusted his thickened penis. Every bit of his willpower was put into turning away from the silent man whose shining blue eyes had been like a beacon, beckoning him to take him and show him what life was all about. It took great effort when all he wanted was one

last time with him.

The memories came flooding back, sensation sparked along his nerve endings flooding his body with warmth. So enthusiastic to learn everything that Abbott could give him. From the spankings to the hardest kiss of pain. And yet no marks would be visible, not even in death, Abbott had made sure of that. No, there was nothing left of that bright passion. With another heavy sigh, he turned away from the man on the slab; his erection had faded away. He picked up a

bucket. A bit of blood sloshed over the side, marring the yellow with a splash of nearly black-red. Abbott clicked his tongue in distaste and snapped his fingers.

A young, blonde woman appeared instantly, her head bowed, obscuring her plain features. Abbott never liked to look upon any of his adopted children. There was always something wrong with them, something he couldn't quite place about looking into the eyes of his prodigy, seeing the adoration and appreciation there

and yet feeling nothing in return. He was only truly alive during the seduction and kill.

“Master?” her voice soft asked, almost a whisper but high enough to be heard over the music.

“Clean him and place him wherever you feel is necessary. I am not to be disturbed for the rest of the evening.” Without waiting for an answer, he walked away, the bucket’s bloody contents splashing against the sides as he walked towards his desk at the far end of the room. He sat down and placed

the bucket near the small, white trash bin. With another snap of his fingers, pastel blue candles flared to life, the flames dancing happily before settling down to a quiet burn. Abbott picked up a remote and turned the volume up on the television. The nightly news was playing and soon Isadora Jones would be on to do her segment. Tonight she was supposed to be interviewing a politician. *Beneath her clever talent*, Abbott thought.

A small spot of heat started in his belly as a searing pain returned

to his gums. His fingers itched to touch her smooth, brown face. To memorize each streak of pink and find out why she'd gone with that hair style. Isadora Jones, the only other thing to make him feel anything other than apathy. He wanted to connect to that vibrant life force that blazed from her being. Her aura was a swirl of pinks, blues, yellows, golds, and silvers with bits of red and orange along with the faintest threads of black. It fascinated him that someone could be made of such



lightness and yet have the barest hint of darkness.

There had been nights when, bathed in sweat, hand on his cock, he pumped himself off as he thought of all the ways he wanted to fuck her and then kill her. A shudder rippled through him as pangs of pain filled his stomach. Bursts of searing heat filled his mouth as his gums bled and yet no fangs ruptured forth. Blood filled his mouth. Disgust welled up within him at his loss of control. He reached past the bucket of blood

and picked up the trashcan, spitting into it and watching the bright pink spittle slip down the sides of the once pristine white plastic. *Nothing ever stays untainted*, he thought as he put back the receptacle and turned his mind to more pleasant things.

With his mind's eye, he thought of the last time he had seen Isadora in person, draped in a seductive, deep V neck dress in a shade of the deepest magenta. The plush curves of her breasts and the low back that showed the barest

hint of the top of her ass had almost caused him to lose control in public. Well worth it if he'd succeeded in luring her away from Torger. Disgust churned in his gut at the thought of that overbearing, Viking of a werewolf who had lingered far too close to Isadora for Abbott's liking. *One day I'll lure him in and kill him too and then Isadora will truly be mine. No protector, no one to save her. She'll be my masterpiece.* With that thought, he turned toward his next task. The pain had subsided to a gentle tick

in his blood as he focused on the only other thing that truly mattered to him: Isadora Jones.

Instead of watching the newscast he picked up a thick, silver calligraphy pen, pulled a sheet of stationary towards him and began to write a missive he'd been thinking of for a long time.

*Dearest Isadora,*

*I am not going to bore you with words of praise that you've undoubtedly already heard a thousand times over. Instead, I must say that being part of the newscast is beneath*

*your immeasurable talents. But that is beside the point. Tonight I created another offering, another gift, to you, my love. Something to show you how special I think you are and how wonderful you make Draven's Crossing with your presence. Those news stories that they make you do aren't making use of your talents, as I've expressed before. To that end I've given you the unique honor of being able to cover an event that has shown how keen your instinct is and how stupid and ignorant the police of this town are. I hope you'll find my present*

*to your liking. I selected him especially for you. You said once in an interview that you had an affinity for men with auburn hair.*

*When I saw this man at the bar I knew he'd be a perfect tribute for you. You would like him, although I doubt he'd hold your interest for very long. He is rather artificial but attractive, so I won't hold his collagen plumped lips and his gym honed body against him. I hope you'll find him to your liking. I hope you'll enjoy reporting the details of his life. You've paid so much attention to detail, making my little*

*offerings to you seem alive and important. I appreciate that more than you know.*

*Until next time my love, yours,*

*The Ripper (I couldn't resist using such a signature as I'm sure you'll appreciate the humor in it.)*

Abbott folded the letter and slipped it into a thick envelope, addressing it this time with a simple ball point pen and block letters to disguise his handwriting and then set it aside to be put in the mail. Isadora Jones' segment started, and he turned up the

volume. Settling back in his chair he reached for the bottle of wine he'd put out beforehand to allow it to breathe and poured himself a glass. Savoring the tangy undercurrents and smoky undertones with a hint of spice, he relished sipping Isadora Jones' favorite wine from her personal vineyard and made himself comfortable to enjoy his favorite journalist's latest offerings.

\* \* \* \*

Exuberance filled Ariel as she



lugged the body to Lon Avenue and Lugosi Boulevard. She placed the dead man in front of a movie theater that was having a werewolf and vampire movie marathon. It was due to let out any moment. A sense of satisfaction hummed through her body at carrying out Abbott's instructions. It was the first time he had given her such a huge task and she didn't want to fail him. *Never* wanted to fail him. Ever. He'd been working so hard to find a cure for himself. *So many nights in the lab, alone.* She shook

her head. It made her heart ache that he couldn't trust her to help him. It was something that his creator instilled in him long ago: trust no one. That was before he'd abandoned him, like an unwanted child, leaving him in his current condition. Red hot anger burned in her stomach. Her heart ached as she thought of her poor master being so cruelly set aside. She shook her head to dislodge those thoughts. If the master didn't want to dwell on it neither would she, even if she still felt angry about it.

With a breath she looked down at the pale, unmoving body of her master's latest interest. He had been beautiful when alive and in death he was sublime.

It hurt that Abbott hadn't asked her to join them. They'd sounded so beautiful during the night when the master had brought him back to the mansion. She had only been able to imagine what it would have been like to be pleased by them both. A ripple of heat slid down her spine. Her pussy filled with cream as she thought of

finally, finally getting to fuck Abbott. It had been so long since he'd even given her a look of hunger or interest. He'd spent most of his time in his lab during the night and during the day he would be at the shop. She also didn't understand his interest in Isadora Jones. Revulsion filled her as she remembered finding the photo albums filled with pictures and articles of, and by, the woman. Isadora Jones was crass, slutty and completely inappropriate. Ariel scowled. Voices floated toward her,

jostling her out of her reverie.

*Stop dillydallying, you have a job to do,* she ordered herself. Ariel shook her head again and drew out her phone. With quick fingers she called the police hotline for the serial killer case and reported the body. He hadn't ordered her to call the police but she felt it was her duty to carry out his work and in doing so, spreading the word of his genius. The officer on duty took her information before she cut off the call when he asked for her name a second time. Later she would get

rid of the phone. For now they had to think she was a scared citizen who wanted to get home as fast as possible.

Ariel sped away from the theater just as the first few people began to trickle out of the front doors. There was a scream and shouts for someone to call the police. Sirens cut through the air at a distance. They wouldn't find her and they certainly wouldn't find any evidence of her on the body. She'd been careful. The body had been placed in a blind spot where

the cameras couldn't reach. The route she'd taken had been mapped out so no one would think it odd. Ariel would look like a woman supporting a drunk friend who could barely walk. She'd used a clever bit of magic for that part.

Pride surged through her at the pace with which her studies were going. Soon, she would be on par with the greatest wizards and witches there ever had been. Merlin would be a footnote in history compared to her. And perhaps Abbott would finally acknowledge,

maybe even fall in love with her. She could only hope. By the time she got to her car, the police were on the scene and her work had been done. *Abbott would be so pleased*, she thought.



## Chapter Two

### ANOTHER VICTIM OF THE SERIAL KILLER FOUND!

When will the police act? -  
Isadora Jones, DC News Blast

Torger arrived at the office after spending half an hour at his favorite diner for a late breakfast. Even though he had fed his hunger, physically he felt sick. There was no way he could find a lead by the end of the week, not with the way

things appeared. The killer had been very careful. Nothing Jackal had brought to the table during his time on the case had helped them get any closer to figuring out who was behind the murders. It felt as if he was grabbing at straws, looking at his ouster, and being voted out as Alpha of All Packs would soon follow. He let out a sigh as he settled into his seat and pulled a pile of files towards him. The murders were the only thing on the DCPD's plate at the moment Crime was at an all time low. The

town was acting as normal as possible. The Ball was going to go on no matter what happened according to Draven, which would, of course, include the Bachelor auction.

There didn't seem to be a bright spot ahead for him. "Might as well do my job," he grumbled to himself, praying for a miracle of some kind. His phone rang; he hoped it was good news. Picking it up, he waited a beat before saying hello. "Torger."

"Hey bro, just arrived at the

cabin and am all settled in. Do you have any bacon? I'm dying to make myself a croissant sandwich and all I see is ham and steak," Urban, his brother, said.

Torger groaned. "Urban, why are you here?"

"Was put on the vacation list. Apparently you can't do seven missions back to back without a break. They thought I was turning into a zombie and here I am. Soooo the bacon?" Urban chuckled and there was the sound of clinking and large items being moved around.

Torger stifled another groan. "Look in the game freezer. There should be a huge amount there."

"Sweet! I knew you wouldn't let me down. Okay, I'll call back if I need anything else. See you later." Urban hung up before Torger could get any more details about this vacation, like how long he was actually going to stay with him.

He just prayed that Isy wouldn't call him right now. There was nothing to say. His cell phone vibrated on his hip. Perplexed, he slipped the mobile device out of his

pocket and checked his text.

“Coffee?” The number belonged to Isy.

With apprehension, he responded. “Just coffee?”

It was a second before the reply came. “Just coffee. Tomorrow?”

“See you then.” A sense of happiness flooded his body. Pressure lifted off of his shoulders if only for the moment. *Now if only something else would go right.*

A knock at his door pulled him from his thoughts. “Come in.”

Detective Alyssa Santa Rosa strode into the room. She wasn't wearing a uniform, instead a simple plaid shirt and jeans with knee high brown boots. Her shoulder-length curly hair framed a flawless mocha colored face, no makeup to distract from her sharp features. There was a serious look on her visage. Without leave, she sat down. "No one is talking down in the hotel district. I think they're scared. Business is still good, but I think they need to be able to talk to people without the uniform

forming a gap.”

Torger thought about it before giving an answer. “Okay, so you want to take a few officers in plain clothes to canvas the area? Make the residents less jumpy?”

“Yes, sir.” Her green eyes glinted with determination. “I want to bag the son of a bitch that’s threatening our town. My family is from out of town. They’re too scared to come. Not even my little sister can visit me until the killer is caught.” Her hands formed into fists.



Anger crackled off of the feline shifter in waves. Lioness musk filled the air. His wolf responded with a snort. It wanted to hunt too. With effort, he tamped down his instincts.

“Take Illych, Peters and Jackson with you. Plain clothes, badges, guns and be on alert. First sign of trouble you call it in, understand?” Torger didn’t want any heroics. If they were going to catch this guy, then they had to be careful and keep everything above board.

“Loud and clear, sir.” She rose and left the room leaving behind the scent of electricity and resolve in her wake.

Torger took that emotion and used it as initiative to get his ass in gear. He began to look through the files. Even though he'd studied them over and over again, looking at them at all angles, blowing them up and minimizing things, nothing made sense. Within five minutes, everything warped and blended together in a blur until he pushed the stack away in disgust. Pinching

the bridge of his nose, he tried not to feel so worthless. He knew they were all trying their best, and he hoped that Alyssa would find something they may have missed, but he wasn't getting his hopes up. The killer was too damn careful, too clean.

Torger sat up. *Too clean. The bodies were too damn clean.* He stood up and grabbed his coat. He had to see the coroner about the type of soap that had been used as well as the clothes that the vics had been dressed in. You didn't redress a

body unless you fucked up the clothing that the bodies had been wearing in the first place. And if you screwed those up, you'd have to dump them or burn them unless the sick fuck had kept them as trophies.

He arrived at the coroner's office just before he went off to lunch. "Hey, I need to talk about the case with you. Basically I need to discuss the clothes, the wounds and soap."

Dr. Leopold held up a hand "I was going to call you about that.

The families are furious I haven't released the bodies yet but I know you wanted me to do a thorough job. Can we go to Bettie's Diner? I'm starving."

Hope expanded in Torger's chest. *Finally!* "Sure."

They walked to the eating establishment where Torger ordered five hamburgers, with a side of fries and green salad. Dr. Leopold stared at him, and Torger felt a flush run through his cheeks. "Sorry, I'm a bit hungry. With the full moon so near, my metabolism

is hyped up. So you were saying at the office?"

"Yeah," Dr. Leopold paused to place his order before answering him. "Like I said in my first report, the bodies were too damn clean. I just got back the results of the chemical analysis. The cleaner used on the bodies is generic. You can get it at any grocery store or online. The clothes, well, they're another story. They were washed before being put on the victims, the high end stuff not the generic stuff, so we know they can afford that since

it's available everywhere. No imbedded fibers or materials. No skins cells or DNA evidence of any kind. So it's a bust there but the bodies, oh my goddess, the bodies are a wonder!"

Torger leaned forward, hungry for the next words out of the doctor's mouth. He ignored the drinks that were placed in front of them and prayed they would finally have a thread to follow.

"I'd say it's a medical marvel but I doubt what I found has anything to do with medicine.

We're dealing with a vampire of some kind," the doctor said.

Torger opened his mouth to ask how but was cut off before he could get the words out. "The bodies are in perfect condition. I mean pristine as in they were just born. No evidence of sickness, wear and tear not even evidence of ever having had sex. With the women it was like their hymen had regrown!"

Torger ruminated over this new information and nodded. "Yes, sounds like a vamp's work but how do you know that these victims



weren't virgins?"

Crimson flushed through Dr. Leopold's cheeks. "I asked the families for a full medical history, including sexual. Two of the victims were married with a very active sex life. The others, I've been told had various lovers from what the family and friends were willing to tell me."

"Damn, so the killer, what? Drained the bodies of their blood, gave them his or her blood and then drained that out of them?" Torger's head began to hurt all over again. He hated listening to

vampire medicine crap.

“It doesn’t take a lot of blood just, I’d say...” Dr. Leopold paused “I’d say 140 ccs of blood will do it; depends on the strength and age of the vampire in question. I have to guess that he used an IV bag, putting his blood into it and then sticking a needle in the other person’s arm and introducing it into their system that way.” He adjusted his glasses. “There have been several tests in the recent decade involving the healing properties of vampire blood.”

“As well as shifter blood,” Torger couldn’t help but point out. The shifter community wasn’t too pleased at the way the medical community had decided to go about testing their theories; capturing shifters of all ages, locking them in cages, refusing to recognize their rights. Things hadn’t gotten better. The argument was that vampires were more human than shifters. Torger could only resist ripping out the bureaucrats’ throats when they uttered those moronic party lines.

He shifted his thoughts back to what the doctor was saying. There was a vampire out there killing people, filling them with their blood, healing wounds and then dumping the bodies. It didn't add up and he said so. "I don't get it, if we're dealing with a vampire, why didn't the corpses get reanimated? The blood healed them but didn't bring them back to life? I've heard of cases where the vampire in question wasn't strong enough but even a newbie can create a newling if there's enough juice."

Doctor Leopold adjusted his glasses again. “Well, there is that. Maybe the vamp in question is defective?”

Torger shook his head. “Oh maybe we’re dealing with someone who’s captured vampires and is using their blood to reanimate corpses. Part of this smells like a really bad military project gone horribly wrong.” Torger’s stomach churned.

The food was now cold and forgotten. It seemed like neither man was up for eating anymore. If

the military was involved in this killer plot, Draven's Crossing was well and truly fucked. The Council would capitulate as soon as the U.S government said jump. Torger sighed and waved over the waitress, he asked his order to be wrapped in a to-go bag. His mind went through all the people he had to call and talk to. First and foremost being Draven, then Jagger and then Isy. Now that they had a thread to follow, Jagger would have to ask his contacts in the government and military if they had heard of

anything like that. Probably black-ops shit. As for Isy, she'd want the inside scoop on what they'd found and ask around with her own contacts. She'd keep it hush-hush, he knew that much. Draven would shit a brick, then some kittens, and then goddess only knew what when Torger told him his theory.

It was one thing to battle the Council and a serial killer but government with a capital G was something else. His slight headache only grew in intensity. And on top of that, he had his brother to deal

with. Torger was tempted to ask Isy for coffee now. *What else could go wrong? What else would they learn?*

\* \* \* \*

Muffy Evanson grabbed a pen and began to scribe the details of the emergency Tourist Board meeting. The longer the person prattled on, the more faded the ink became until she threw it down in disgust. "Hold on, let me get another pen."

She searched for something to write with when the person uttered



a sentence that made her want to shriek and curse. "I'll just send you the details to your phone. Just be there, okay?" They hung up before she could demand why they'd insisted she write it all down. Muffy knew the reason. It was because of her name. No one seemed to be able to take her seriously with a name like Muffy. They all thought she was slow-witted and unable to grasp even the most basic factoids despite her graduating top three percentile in her class and having a degree in business and psychology.

It didn't help that she was also blond and busty. Everyone who didn't know her spoke to her slowly with low tones and thought she was easy. On one occasion, a guy actually propositioned her in a parking lot. She'd suggested they do it right here, right now and when he dropped his pants she screamed and called 911. As the police hauled him away, it gave her great satisfaction that the guy turned out to be the son of a powerful Representative. The incident hadn't gone over so well

with her husband who felt she'd somehow shamed him by not just rebuking the guy and leaving it at that. In her opinion, men who thought women were easy needed to be taught a lesson.

With a sigh, she waited for the telltale buzz on her phone to let her know she had a new message. A minute passed by before she remembered that her phone was in her husband's study. She'd left it there last night rather than put it in her office. It had been late, she'd been tired and had a headache. The

faint buzzing sound greeted her as she stepped into the darkened hall. Following the noise, she came upon the closed door. A sense of foreboding greeted her as she stood in front of the dark wood. Her gut tugged and a chill traced a finger down her spine. It always made her uncomfortable going into his domain. He'd made it a point to tell her she was welcome in his part of the house but the office was off limits unless he was there. No reason was given but all the same it annoyed her that something of his

was closed off to her. They were married, they shared everything. He had his man cave, she had her hobby room. They could pass into those spaces and be welcomed but in this office she wasn't at home.

Drawing in a deep breath, she lifted her hand to the knob and turned the cold metal. The audible click told her that the lock wasn't in place. *Curious*. He always kept it locked. Not wanting to dally out in the hall, she opened the door and went into the space. The office was old world masculinity. Dark

paneled wood and rich red paint on the walls. The furniture was all heavy and varnished in a deep brown. Leather seating was placed around a low ottoman. Plush Oriental carpeting covered the floors. The curtains were closed. The only light came from the overhead chandelier. Cold air breathed across her bare arms as goose bumps rose in the chill. Resisting the urge to turn around and leave, she headed straight for his desk. That was where she'd left her phone. The bright pink casing

stood out against the stark white papers on the desktop. She scooped it up and pocketed it. Having gotten what she came for, she was about to turn around when the emblem of the Tourist Board on a piece of paper caught her eye. Her husband had nothing to do with the Tourist Board. That was her area. Curious, she reached out and picked up the missive.

*"Contest winners have arrived in city. Checked and settled."*

-A

*What the hell? Contest? I didn't*

*authorize a contest. We didn't vote on any competitions.* All thoughts of using games to bring in more out-of-towners to Draven's Crossing had been put on hold until the killer was caught. She read the date and nearly threw up. It was headed as a month ago. Anger blazed hot through her body and she nearly screamed. Who the hell was A, and why wasn't she told about this? The murders had begun over a month ago. No one should be trying to bring in vacationers. Instructions had been given. She picked up



another paper and read it, yet again, an email about a contest dated three weeks ago. Muffy rifled through his desk, reading more and more documents about contests from websites she'd never even heard of. *What the fuck?* She reached into her pocket to call him only to stop. He was in the middle of an interview with Isy. He wouldn't be reachable until maybe just before he got home. There were meetings and people he had to see. She continued to read the email. Each one only pushed her

further to the edge.

*"New contest uploaded to website. Will have results soon."*

-A

Disbelief rocked through her. Each line was like a stab to her heart, to her gut. She dropped what she was holding and picked up another document. Then another. And another. She stared at what she held in her hands, shaking her head. Nothing made sense. She read copies of the coroner's reports, police reports, memos to the Mayor, airplane tickets, train

tickets, hotel receipts. All of it he shouldn't have and yet there it was. It was all here. He had so much information and he'd done nothing with it. *Why hadn't he gone to Torger? Why was he running these contests without telling her? Who was A?* She didn't recognize the email address. Muffy knew she had to tell someone. She reached into her pocket and turned on the phone. She was about to hit speed dial when a soft clearing of a throat behind her had her whirling around and pausing. Perhaps she'd

get some answers from one of his minions.

Muffy held up the papers. Outrage emboldened her to ask, "Did you know about this? What the hell is all this? What are these contests? Why wasn't I told? Is he investigating the killings? Why hasn't he gone to Torger or the Mayor?" she demanded.

"You shouldn't be back here. You were told not to come here," the robed figure before her said. His low, hissed voice traced a cold finger down her spine, raising

goose bumps in its wake. The room temperature dropped a few degrees.

She smirked, despite her legs quivering in fear. "I can go where I please. I'm his wife and I live here too. Nothing is off limits to me." It was a lie but this thing didn't need to know that.

The figure shrugged. "We have our reasons for not telling anyone what we know. Besides the mayoral election is coming up."

She stared at him in disbelief. "An election? People are dying!"

“And we need to win, then we will tell the police all we know,” the figure replied. Calm and cool as you please.

Muffy gritted her teeth, outraged that her husband would go along with this, all for the sake of getting re-elected. “I can destroy you and this little scheme of yours. One word to Torger. One word. You and everyone who works with you will be hauled in and humiliated.”

She strode up to him and poked him in the chest, letting her anger shrug off the fear she felt for

the man.

“And why would he believe you?” the figure asked.

Muffy opened her mouth to reply when white-hot pain sliced through her throat. She reached up. Liquid heat flooded her hand, dripping down her neck, soaking her blouse. Her heartbeat began to slow as dizziness assaulted her. Standing was becoming hard to do. Thoughts formed and scattered. She stared at the person in disbelief. Her knees gave out. She barely felt the impact of the floor.

Shock continued to reverberate through her.

“Fuck! I didn’t tell you to do that. Clean it up. Now!” the figure roared and strode off.

Muffy didn’t even struggle against her fate. She couldn’t understand how this had happened. Why it was happening to her. As death took her, she looked up into pale silver eyes gazing down at her. There was no emotion. Neither hate nor anger stared at her. Pale skin glistened in the overhead light; thin lips formed



a line. Fear dug down inside of her as she resigned herself to what was to come. Closing her eyes she just wished that she could have gotten word to Torger, something to let them know what was going on. A sense of weightlessness took over. She drifted on clouds as life ebbed away. She felt the heavy fall of her hand away from her throat. Cool liquid continued to trickle down her throat. Her heart stopped beating. The last breath gushed past her lips. She couldn't feel any of it.

\* \* \* \*

*Coffee?* Isy'd asked him for coffee. Dinner would have been better. Hell, just fuck me now would have been perfect, but just coffee? She wasn't sure if the ghost of her mother had taken over her hands and typed that out. Okay, she would never have suggested they fuck, not without dinner and a lot of alcohol first but still, her hormones were driving her nuts. Since the dream and the tiny tête-à-tête with Hamilcar, her body had

gone in an interesting, if not scary, direction. It was like she was going through her mate heat all over again. Puberty had come back and smacked her in the ass and was getting revenge for not finding someone to fuck. With a sigh, she tried to refocus on her interview. Representative Evanson's people had handed her a list of topics that were off limits.

She'd scanned the list in disgust. Her gut twisted at the sheer audacity that they had indulged in this move. At first the

chat was supposed to be a small thing, a kind of catch up with the Representative to the Council. Now it seemed that he had bigger plans and ideas. Isy had a sinking feeling that he wanted to take on Draven in the upcoming election, which wouldn't go over with the out-of-state politicians that had made it clear that they liked dealing with Draven and didn't want change. None of her sources close to the Representative had indicated this was where his thoughts were, but it didn't take a lot of thinking to

know that something was going on. He'd reversed a lot of his positions in the last month alone. Evanson wanted harsher penalties for criminals, which wouldn't be so bad if Draven's Crossing was a crime ridden city. He'd demanded a crack down on vigilante justice, to which Isy asked where? There were no Batman wannabes running around, costume or no. There were also his new policies, like a demand for testing within the shifter community to determine which shifters were dangerous, and an

allowance for the medical community to take “dangerous” shifter subjects in for testing rather than put them in incarceration and therapy.

She wanted to scream at that one, only because a lot of her favorite relatives would be rounded up if that law went into effect. There were also the weird notions on vampires. She wasn't sure what exactly it was he trying to say but every time he brought them up, he made it clear that he felt that vampires weren't to be trusted.

She'd met a lot of vampires in her time, and she equated them to humans only with a skewered moral compass depending on the age and the level of interaction with normal people. There were still some vampires who thought they were royalty or gods. She'd be more than happy to flame-throw their asses to dissuade them of that notion but had no desire to be arrested no matter how sexy Torger was and what he could actually do with those handcuffs.

Right now her biggest

roadblock was Evanson. He'd made it clear—she doubted his handlers came up with this list—that he wouldn't be answering anything other than softball questions. That only made her job harder. She wasn't dealing with a Bat Scout Girl trying to raise money for her community and slinging those evilly delicious and deceptively addictive cookies, cakes and brownies, here. This was a fully grown, adult man who wanted to be taken seriously. Which only made her want to laugh but she'd save



that chuckle for later. There was an interview to get through and then a way to turn coffee into dinner to plan. At least, she hoped he wanted dinner. With a breath, she reread the questions as her makeup person finished up trying to make her look acceptable on camera.

She stepped on set and waited to be acknowledged. Evanson continued to talk to an aide without even giving a nod in her direction. Angered by his lack of courtesy, she sat down. The plush cushion of the chair did nothing to put her at

ease. She may be in her environment, but he was encroaching and she didn't like it, not one bit. Evanson finally turned toward her and smiled, the action didn't reach his eyes, then did nothing to greet her, not even a handshake. Before she could say anything, they started doing the countdown. *Must be professional. Must not rip out guest's throat or blow smoke rings at him. Must behave.* Her inner dragon snorted in response. Isy told the beast to shut the hell up seeing as how it hadn't

been helping her in the least lately.

The interview started, and I was prepared to be shown some respect. That wasn't to be. Halfway through, she knew that something was wrong. Her stomach threatened to rebel with each word he uttered. Her skin itched; sweat beaded along her brow. The longer she sat across from Ivan Evanson the more she wanted to claw off her skin. The smarmy bastard continued to talk about the new programs that he'd initiated since taking office. Every word was: *blah,*

*blah, blah* in her ears. The foul stench of deception hung in the air between them. He shifted in his seat and her dragon latched onto that movement, puffing pale pink clouds of smoke from its nostrils, watching him with great interest. She couldn't attack him, not physically anyway. She opened her mouth to counter his claims when movement caught her attention.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw her producer give her the wrap up signal. *Damn it.* She wanted to rip into his

*accomplishments*, point out that he'd recently supported a move to strip unions of bargaining rights and limit healthcare for the elderly and poor; he'd also made a deal with local big businesses and corporations for bigger tax breaks while putting more of the burden on the mom and pop shops. Also, she wanted to bring up his support of the new programs dealing with rogue and violent shifters, and his odd stances on vampires and the paranormal community in general. Instead, she had to wait until next

time. Gritting her teeth, she reined in her temper. With a smile, she thanked Evanson for his time and did the sign off. She hated every minute of it. Coffee or dinner with Torger couldn't come soon enough. Whatever they did, sex would be the dessert, damn it. She'd make sure of it even if she had to drag him back home with her.

*Be polite,* she admonished herself. "Thank you for your time, Representative Evanson. It's been a pleasure." *Lie!* Her dragon roared but she ignored the beast and

focused on trying to get through the pleasantries. Soon she'd be able to escape to her dressing room and her phone.

"The pleasure is all mine, Isadora. I'm just happy you found some time on your show for me." He gave her a genial smile.

*Oh, look he's actually being civil and acknowledging me, now that he got what he wanted.* She resisted the urge to ignore him and walk away. *Evanson forced his way into an interview and then gave me a list of things I couldn't ask him about, like*

*his recent trips to a well-known political backer's retreat.* “Maybe next time we can make this a real interview. With actual questions.” She bit her lip and waited for the explosion from him, his posse and Bill. Nothing. Which only made her leery.

He chuckled. “Maybe, but then I wouldn't be in control, would I?” His dark brown eyes glimmered with warning, and he turned on his heel and left without shaking her hand.

She didn't mourn the loss.



Instead, she turned and headed for her dressing room. Isy wanted to strip off the cotton candy pink dress and take a shower. She felt dirty after that encounter, as if just interacting with Evanson had smeared dirt and mud through her clothes.

“Isy!” Bill, her producer hissed behind her. “You need to setup for the next interview.”

She didn't bother to respond. Isy took off for her dressing room. And as for setting up, that was a bunch of bullshit. She was the only

one doing research so thorough that she could tell the interviewee what they'd worn for their kindergarten class picture. "Later, Bill. Let me change first."

She rushed to her dressing room, stripped off her clothes and headed into the bathroom. Bill would be furious but she needed time to herself. Once the door was shut behind her she leaned against the thick wood and blew out a sigh. Closing her eyes, she released the pent up negative energy in a plume of smoke that drifted around the

small space. A roar built up in her throat. As much as she wanted to let it out, the sound would freak everyone out. Instead, she channeled the sound into heat. Her body temperature built, stacking like blocks. Sparks danced on her skin, as scales rippled along her flesh. Her hair grew longer as her fingers became thinner. Just as the change formed her tail and she could feel her body growing in bulk, she stopped the change and ordered a reversal.

The energy that it took to

change and then reverse left her spent. All anger dissipated, the steady rhythm of her heart sounded in her head, drowning out her thoughts. The slow beat calmed her. Once she felt more like herself, more human, she dragged herself to the shower and stepped under the cool spray, not waiting for it to heat up. There was no need. Her body heat made up for the cold. Tilting up, she allowed the water to sluice over her head, washing away whatever it was that had attached itself to her during the interview.

As her thoughts ordered themselves, she ruminated over the interview. Something was wrong with Evanson. Deep down in her gut, she felt there was a story there. Something about him was off and she refused to let go of it. The reporter instinct that had long since atrophied due to no new leads on the serial killer case came back alive, hungry for a story. The serial killer stalking the town went on the backburner. Until there was something to tell, this was where her mind would be. Besides, getting

progress reports from Draven and Torger were hit and miss. The smallest details were repeated in the news, ad nauseam. She didn't want to tell people the same old thing all the time. It wasn't productive and didn't push anything forward. Isy knew that the taciturn attitude of the administration was due to lack of information.

Each time she'd spoken to Torger, she could feel his frustration. She could understand it. On the news end everyone was

feeling the pressure from the citizens and even outside of their city for something, anything, a scrap to tide them over. Good news or bad, they wanted it all. Isy was doing her best but it was like crawling around in the dark without a flashlight or a clue. She didn't know where to look or what to say to make things better. Hanging her head, she let the water continue to rush over her. She knew that once she stepped out of the shower she'd be getting a talking to from Enrique, her hair stylist, and

Desdemona, her makeup artist. She didn't care. Isy needed to be cleansed and she didn't have any incense with her, so she couldn't smudge and a chakra cleansing meditation needed time and a place of peace and tranquility. The studio was not an oasis. Could never be mistaken for one.

Scrubbing away the makeup and hair product she washed herself until she felt completely purified and got out of the shower. Drying off, her thoughts turned to Torger and the upcoming coffee



date. Her body heated, and her dragon perked its head up. A tug began in her stomach as blood pooled in her groin. Liquid heat filled her pussy. Gritting her teeth, she fought against the small wave of desire trying to pull her under. Ignoring her attraction to Torger was the norm for her. It had to be due to their jobs. The Werewolf Alpha hadn't acted on his attraction and at the moment she couldn't do anything until their date. In the past, she thought she didn't have time for romance. Most

of her lovers had hated the fact that she was a reporter, especially her more high profile paramours. She didn't think she could take it if Torger rebuffed her for fear of her profession but doubted that would be the reason. With a sigh, she wrapped a towel around herself and stepped into the dressing room area. Both Enrique and Desi were waiting for her. Her assistant, Michaela, gave her a small smile but looked distressed, as usual.

*Oh, what is it now?* she thought as she got dressed.

“Bill wants you in his office as soon as you’re done to do the commercials for your upcoming interviews about the Ball, and you’ve got a dozen messages and requests.” Michaela gazed at her with expectation in her eyes. “And then there’s the setup for the next interview. You still have to do that.”

Isy tried not to get stressed. *The Ball, ugh.* She’d forgotten all about that. It was the one thing she didn’t want to cover. With a deep breath, she fired off the right answer rather than what was on her

mind as she sat down in the chair. "Send the requests to my tablet. Which messages are the most important?" She knew the answer but needed to hear it. There would be no way she could claim that the emails were never sent. Michaela was nothing if not precise, organized and paranoid.

Michaela looked down at her clipboard. "Your mom called about the family dinner, again. Your agent said there was an offer for you to host a competition show on that new network for women, and

the liaison from the Ball committee called with more details on the activities and the upgraded RSVI list. She also wants to know when the interviews will be conducted."

Isy didn't miss the *again*. She'd been avoiding her mother for the last two weeks. The woman was on a matchmaking tear trying to pair her up with every available dragon there was. She'd gotten so desperate she'd even suggested a few female dragons. Isy refused to play along. She didn't want to give her mother the satisfaction of

pairing her up with anyone. That would give her too much power. No matter how desperate her mother was for grandbabies, Isy would say no. "Tell her I'll call her back, later, and make sure she understands how busy I am. Tell my agent to turn down the offer. I told him I wanted serious gigs, and I'll look over the Ball stuff when I'm done here."

Michaela nodded and scribbled everything down. "Got it. Anything you need me to do?"

Isy hesitated. She wanted to

do a little digging on the Representative but didn't trust that Michaela wouldn't blab what she was doing. The young elf was still new to her job and got intimidated easily around people with clout.

"Order in dinner, I'm thinking pizza. I'll be working late tonight." She decided that she'd do the digging herself. Anything she found she'd take to Torger but first, she needed some security. After Michaela left the room she reached for her phone and flipped through her speed dial trying to ignore

Enrique and Desi hovering around her like hummingbirds trying to make her pretty.

She found the number she was looking for and hit dial. The call was answered on the first ring. "Better be good. It's three in the morning and no I won't suck you off or call you daddy or send a picture of my tits to you."

"You are such a slut, Nads, and I have no clue how you would do any of that." Isy chuckled.

"Isy, my girl, how are ya?" There was the sound of sheets



moving. Nadia yawned over the phone and groaned. "Isy, do you happen to know who I slept with last night? There's a cute naked guy next to me, and my head is beginning to hurt."

"Okay, you really are a slut and no, I have no clue. I'm not there with you and seeing you screw someone is a bit too personal for me." She shooed Desi away from her, trying to apply lip gloss to her mouth.

"Ha! I thought you were a voyeur. Maybe you like to show off

a bit, eh? Eh? Anyway, enough slut talk, what's up?" Isy heard Nadia sip something through a straw.

"I need your help. Can't talk about it over the phone but how fast can you get to Vamp city?" Isy prayed Nadia wasn't on a job.

"As soon as I take a shower. Oh shit! There are two of 'em. Good god, Paris is bad for my brain. I'm gonna get out of here. See you in a few hours." Isy could hear the smile through the phone.

Her own lips were curled into a grin. She felt better about having

Nadia with her. Torger would hate it though. Anytime Nadia was in town someone either tried to kill her or Isy or both of them. Either that or there was trouble not too far on Nadia's heels. Didn't matter though. She needed her friend's special expertise and if something happened, so be it. She knew there was a story with Representative Evanson and she wouldn't stop until she uncovered something, anything to wipe that smug look off of his face.

Later, once she'd gotten the

itch scratched, she'd turn her attention toward Torger and how to turn coffee into dinner and from dinner into dessert of the sexual kind. She knew the attraction was there. He just needed a push. Okay, maybe not a push, more like a shove. Isy wouldn't stop until Torger was hers, tied or handcuffed to her bed. Or maybe it would be the other way around. With a grin, she allowed Enrique and Desi to finish making her up. At least now she was camera ready and she was a little happier doing her job. If

only she didn't have to speak to Bill. She was still sure he was chaffing at her treatment of Evanson. It wouldn't matter if Isy brought him some good dirt on the guy. And it may get her a partner in covering the Ball. More incentive to find out what Ivan Evanson was hiding.

\* \* \* \*

Ivan Evanson looked over his neat as a pin second study. Disgust roiled through his gut. "Why the fuck did you kill her? She was my

wife, not a threat to us. I could have talked to her, made her *see* and understand.”

The robed figure pushed down the hood to reveal a woman with midnight hair slicked back into a tight bun. Her jewel green eyes glittered as she cleared her throat. “She was going to go to the police. To Draven.”

“So? She was my wife. Who would believe her?” Ivan hissed again and began to pace. His heart felt heavy. “This is a disaster. A true and utter disaster. How am I

going to explain this?"

The woman came forward and laid a delicate hand on his shoulder. "You will play the part of the grieving widower."

Ivan groaned and tilted his head back. "I know I will but this is still a mess. You cleaned everything up, yes? All of it? Nothing can be traced back to me?"

The woman nodded. "But of course." She stood on tiptoe and placed a delicate kiss on his cheek. "I always take care of you and always will protect you, even

against your family. Don't worry. The police will find nothing. Nothing."

Ivan didn't know what to think. All he knew was that his wife was dead and the public would look very closely at him. He shook his head. "Take that shit off. It makes you look ridiculous. You know this means we can't be together. Not yet. Do you understand that, Sadie? We can't be seen as anything more than boss and secretary."

Sadie swallowed and nodded her head slowly. "Of course. I



understand.”

“Good. I need a shower. Join me?” He held out his hand to his lover. She gave him a smile that made some of the pain lessen.

“I would love to.” She placed her palm in his and allowed him to lead her out of the room. One last tryst before they would need to keep it business for propriety. He just prayed he could handle the separation. “Oh, and have someone call the police to report my wife, well, after our shower of course.”

“Yes, sir,” Sadie replied.

Everything was forgiven.

## Chapter Three

Are There Any Leads to Follow?

When are we going to get an update on the case? -Isadora Jones, DC News Blast

Isy did her duty; smiling at the camera, and gave the rundown of what to expect on tomorrow's broadcast. With her sign-off, the day was over. At least she hoped it was. She couldn't take being in the studio much more. Her producer

gave her the thumbs up before she ripped off her mic and got up from her chair. Relief swept through her. A weight was lifted. She could clean off Isadora Jones the reporter and put on Isy the regular person. There was also the matter of trying to revamp her date with Torger and it was a date, damn it, whether he wanted it to be or not. She didn't bother to stick around and gab with the crew or her fellow reporters. It wasn't that she didn't like them. They were all great, professional, giving, supportive and not one of

them had egos, which would surprise most people. Despite the misconception that everyone wanted Isy's job, no one actually did. They didn't want the pressure that was put on her to carry the network in bad times and in good. The ratings were good for the network, but Isy wanted more for herself. She wanted bigger name guests, not just the politicians mugging for the camera and their constituency. There were celebrities, world figures, controversial people to consider as

well but they had to come to Draven's Crossing, and for that to happen there had to be a reason for the trip. She let thoughts of how to lure in her ideal guests float away for now. Tomorrow was another day after all.

After another shower, dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt, she went into her office and shut the door. With a turn of the lock, she knew that she'd be left alone. She headed to her desk and opened the top of her laptop. The screen turned on and she logged into her computer.

Before she could hit the hay she wanted to do some research on Evanson. The interview still bothered her. He wasn't himself at all. *Looks like a night filled with junk food and eye strain.* She snuggled into her chair and started to run several searches, going to the more obscure corners of the internet for crumbs about the man rather than on the Representative's website. After an hour, she had nothing of real interest. His family life was so clean it squeaked; parents were childhood sweethearts who married

as soon as they left high school. His mother was a stay at home mom with no ambitions whatsoever and his father worked as a researcher for the Council. The only sad thing was that his twin brother had died after being attacked by a rabid werewolf who'd escaped from a science facility. It was sad but he'd spoken openly about his brother's death and why he was dedicated to the protection of the paranormal community, well up until now.

A knock drew her out of her search. "Isy? Pizza's here. You



here?”

Her stomach rumbled in response. She rose and walked over to the door. Unlocking and opening it she greeted Bill with a huge grin. “You’re a life saver! I was about to start eating my pen.”

Bill shook his head. “Why are you still here?” He handed over the cardboard box with dinner in it and a huge cup of the sweet tea she loved. So what if it latched onto her thighs later? That was what a gym and body cleanse was for.

“Doing research on a story.

Possible story, a history of masquerade balls.” The lie slipped out with such ease that she almost believed herself.

Bill snorted. “The Ball, uh h u h , don’t get our asses sued ‘kay?” He left, and for a moment she wondered why he’d taken the time to deliver her meal when Michaela was the one who was charged with her dinner. With a shrug, she didn’t look too closely at Bill’s motives. *Probably wants to make sure I’m not sucking down coffee to the point of cardiac arrest.* She

cleared off space on her desk and set her drink down. There was no need for plates; she didn't feel like being civilized. She grabbed some napkins and then freed a slice from the pit before turning her attention back to the screen. Time ticked by on slow hands as she scribbled notes with one hand and balanced pizza in the other. Her notes outlined what the public knew and what reporters had been given. Nothing really stuck out, which didn't surprise her. Everything was polished, clean, perfect. Too much

so.

There wasn't even any dirt found in the obscure corners of the net like the conspiracy forums, the open info sites and such. She decided to switch gears, turning her focus on the members of his family, what information there was of them. It almost seemed as if he'd hidden them and kept them out of the spotlight as much as possible. Despite the information on the site, she did learn something new. His mother and father had died soon after his brother. No word on the

cause, which made her wonder what Evanson was trying to hide. The rest of his life had been spent with his uncle, who had been a member of the Council until his retirement a few years ago. Evanson had taken over that seat unopposed. Any other relatives seemed to be missing or had shied away from the spotlight. Whether it was a request by him or their own desire, she didn't know. Isy turned her attention to his wife, Muffy Evanson. Muffy would have been considered the epitome of Stepford

if she wasn't such a lively, bubbly woman, who was sassy and had energy to spare.

She was a member of the Tourist Board and Isy had only two moments to talk to her, both brief and both under the watchful eye of Evanson's people. Once things got personal, Muffy would be escorted away under protest, while Evanson's posse told everyone it was due to another engagement. Despite dressing in pearls without a blond hair out of place, she didn't let the restrictions of being a

Representative's wife keep her down. She could be seen talking to average citizens and was considered a treasure. Muffy Evanson n<sup>è</sup>e Rogers did all the housework, had dinner on the table and managed to attend all her activities and her husband's special events. She had been quoted once, when asked how she did it, that she was secretly taking speed. Evanson and his people weren't amused and told everyone it had been a joke, which was obvious.

Isy didn't know how the hell

anyone could mistake Muffy's answer as anything but a joke. As for Muffy's background, there wasn't much there either. She'd been born into money. Her father supported the financial backing for every political run Evanson had done but stayed out of the picture. Carter Rogers was a mover and shaker with big money and a huge name back in Europe, other than that there was no information on him either. It was almost as if Ivan Evanson's family was made up, well if it wasn't for Muffy. I sy shook her



head. She couldn't see the cracks even though Isy knew they were there.

She picked up another slice of pizza and mulled over her notes. Everything made sense and yet nothing did. Politicians weren't this perfect. They had flaws, weaknesses, Achilles' Heels and yet Evanson didn't appear to have any. *Until today that is.* But even that didn't make any sense. His behavior could be racked up to stress. It was an election year, after all, but that didn't explain his need

for tight control. He could have taken on Draven in the area of the serial killer and yet even that wasn't addressed.

"Maybe I missed something," she muttered to herself. Clearing her browser, she started again, this time looking up information on everyone around the Representative rather than the man himself. After an hour, she felt she'd found something. Before becoming a Representative, Ivan had been involved in a minor scandal in which he'd cheated on

his then fiancée, Muffy, with a model before they came to the US. There had been rumors of an aborted pregnancy but even that set off Isy's alarms. It seemed too cliché. Her gut told her that was to give him some roughness, a bit of an edge. His wife had stood by him during the minor incident, as the press and his team had called it. The scandal was just too convenient. It rang warning bells.

She did a search on the supposed mistress and came up empty. The woman didn't have a

website, Facebook page, Twitter account, she wasn't even represented by an agency, no look books, nothing. Isy grinned, she felt she was on to something. A few calls waking more people up, she found out the supposed mistress in question was actually an actress. A few more calls and emails, and she found out that there had indeed been a pregnancy, but the gossip was that the baby hadn't been Evanson's baby but the heir to a massive oil fortune. That got Isy's brain cells spinning. She settled

back in her chair and allowed her thoughts to float. "Could it be that Evanson took the fall for someone else in exchange for favors later to be named? That would make sense and it would explain the Teflon on him."

A search of the name of the heir and some more digging got more gossip than she knew what to do with. She only jotted down the relevant facts. Anytime the heir had been involved in something, Evanson got him out of it in one way or another. Nothing stuck to

the man himself, which was of interest to her. She couldn't understand how someone could be associated with that much trouble and not have it stain them. It was all speculation, and no one would corroborate her theories but she got the feeling that she was right. A yawn interrupted her thoughts. A glance at the clock showed it was close to one in the morning. Thoughts of her bed and fantasies about Torger filled her head. Liquid heat slid through her body as her pussy swelled. Arousal slipped into

her veins. She shut down her laptop and got up. Her bed and Torgei were calling her. Isy reached for the door when it flew open almost hitting her. With a squeal she stumbled back, and her heart raced as her dragon reacted, pushing the shift onto her before she could call it back.

“Isy, you’re still here; thank the gods. We’ve got breaking news. Representative Evanson’s wife is dead! Get in makeup and hair. You’re going to be the one to break the story.” Bill dashed off before

Isy could respond.

She blinked as the news sank in. A chill chased away notions of sleep and Torger. Only a few hours ago she'd spoken to the man and now his wife was dead. She wasn't sure how to react, but she knew that something was wrong. Very wrong and yet she wasn't sure what it was. Her stomach dropped. She sent up a prayer that it wasn't due to the serial killer. The town didn't need another victim to that freak. Her thoughts went to Torger. She didn't relish talking to him, if it was



the killer. His lips would close tighter than a drum until they had something to say. *Looks like we won't be having dinner or sex or even coffee,* she thought as sadness trailed after her as she left the room and headed for hair and makeup.

\* \* \* \*

Tension ran through Torger's body. It had been a long, fruitless day. No leads to speak of and certainly no help from the Council. During the second meeting with Draven, he'd asked for an update

for the Council. Torger had given the idea that Detective Santa Rosa had put forth, which only made the vampire growl at him before telling the Council member he was talking to that they would get back to him. Then, Mayor Draven had proceeded to rip him a new one for not having enough to give anyone. It had taken everything in him not to point out that Draven wasn't exactly helping matters by promising the press that they would have this case wrapped up quickly. Draven had ignored him. Torger could understand that

the man was under pressure to get things tied up and fast but raising hopes like that helped no one, Torger in particular.

Draven had only bitten his head off, and Torger had left before they came to blows. The pressure was on everyone, especially the police station to find something, anything. He had his officers crawling through the archives for similar cases and yet they'd turned up nothing there, either. It made no sense to him that something like this was the first time for this type

of serial killer. Not even a little hint of what was to come. There weren't even any possible suspects, which confounded him. He focused his attention on the road ahead of him. Draven's Crossing disappeared behind him. The only indications of the town were the lights shining from the tall buildings. As the forest surrounded his car, he felt a sense of peace settle onto his shoulders. The deeper he got into the woods the less he felt the pressure until he found himself centered and calm once again. His

wolf didn't feel so antsy. There was no need to run, just to get away. He didn't look forward to starting the grind again but his strong sense of duty wouldn't allow him to abandon his position or the people of his territory.

Again, tension ratcheted up in his body. Also, the sense that whoever it was that was carrying out these killings would get away with it if he gave up just rubbed him the wrong way. He rolled his head to loosen the knots in his neck. Blowing out a breath, he tried

to focus on unwinding, letting go. Torger refused to turn into Javert. This was not a simple case of someone stealing bread. Breathing in and out he started to repeat the word *Ohm*, in his head to try and center himself, clear away the negativity that swirled in his body like a miasma. His shoulders slid down as his body sank into the leather seating of his SUV. By the time he pulled into his driveway he could handle his brother staying with him, his duties as the Alpha of all Packs, and the Serial Killer case

that haunted his tracks.

He pushed the button to raise the garage door and felt a sense of calm as that familiar mechanical rattle welcomed him back. After parking his car, he got out and stretched his body. Aches and pains pinged throughout him, attesting to the long day he'd had. A long hot shower, a nice dinner and a chance to catch Isadora Jones' latest interview was what he called a perfect end to the day. There was coffee to look forward to tomorrow. When he unlocked the

door he could hear the blast of the TV. There was no scent of steak to welcome him, not even a beer on the counter. Nothing to show Torger that his brother was happy to be staying with him and wanted to show his appreciation.

Torger shook his head. Rather than poke his brother about a lack of hospitality towards the host, he headed straight for his room and shut the door. For a second, he just leaned against the thick slab of wood. The quiet darkness and solitude of the space embraced



him. Far from the lights and noise of Draven's Crossing, he could breathe and hear nature all around him, well, the outside noises that weren't being drowned out by whatever show was on. He flicked on a light and went straight to his gun safe near his bed. Automatically, he entered the code and unholstered his guns. The door popped open and he put in his weapons, badge, wallet, the watch his father gave him when he became Alpha of Packs, and his security access card.

The only things he didn't put into the safe were the files on the case. Once he had a shower and ate something, he'd go over them with a clear head and in a relaxed environment. The television volume rose and Torger resisted the urge to grind his teeth. That's if he didn't try to kill his brother first. Instead, he placed his briefcase on his desk and undressed. His wolf wagged its tail within, happy to be in a natural state. The full moon was close, and soon he'd be able to let the canine out to run free.

Lately, they hadn't had too much time to really get some exercise. The late nights of pizza, burgers, take-out and beer were catching up to him. His metabolism may be high but it wasn't high enough to battle against lots of nights of crap food and calorie-laden alcohol. Stress wasn't helpful, either. There was also the sexual buzz that he hadn't been able to ignore. All the phone calls between himself and Isadora, as well as her showing up on the scene demanding information, wasn't helping him try

to ignore his attraction to her. Now there was the coffee date they had. He wasn't sure how to respond. Was he supposed to read into it? Maybe that it was more than what it seemed; a simple meeting of two people? He had hopes but didn't want to push them too high. His wolf wanted to fuck the living daylight out of her and sate both of them, to finally release some of the pent-up tension and stress as well as attraction they had for her.

He shook off the direction of his thoughts and turned on the

shower. Steam billowed over the cut glass door as he stepped inside the small cubicle. Hot water deluged over him, pulling a hiss from his throat as his skin heated close to the burning point. He grabbed the shower gel and began to clean up, hoping that he would be able to relax. The scent of mint drifted into the air. His skin tingled, flushing cool then hot and back again with each swipe of his hand. He saved his cock for last. The feel of the salve prickled over the sensitive flesh of his penis and

balls. Torger groaned as pleasure flooded his stomach; shards of heat slid up his spine and down to his toes. Pressure began to build as blood pooled in his groin and filled his cock. The shaft thickened and rose up as he pumped the rod with slow strokes. Not neglecting his balls, he gave his testicles a gentle massage.

His mind turned to Isadora Jones. Her image rose in his mind's eye: her smooth, flawless cocoa colored skin, her deep brown eyes with hints of pink in them. A smile

played on his lips as he thought of the pink streaks in her hair that changed color with her mood. Torger shifted in his chair as his pictured her long, slender fingers that would feel so good on his skin, around his cock. He could see her athletic figure with generous breasts and hips and her small waist that would fit against his body. She was as persistent as her inner animal and just as fiery. He wanted to see that fire turned on him in passion. He groaned at that thought. *Isy*. His eyes slid closed as

he pictured her in front of him completely naked, water sluicing over her skin. Isy, her flesh shone in the overhead golden light. Her nipples would be dark and tempting, the buds thick and tight just asking to be suckled. He licked away droplets of water on his lips as he thought of taking those tips into his mouth and tasting her.

She would trace her figure, outlining her sides, drawing attention to her flat stomach and wide hips. He wondered if there would be pink pubic hair there too,



a thin line of it. Torger grinned at that thought before refocusing on her nudity. He wanted to sink into her balls deep. Another groan issued from his mouth as his cock twitched in response. The dream continued to build.

A loud banging sound seeped into the fantasy, pulling him out of the temptation of dream Isy.

“Bro, we’re out of mayo,” Urban shouted through the door.

Torger stifled a curse and clenched his jaw. The urge to rip his brother’s throat out rose up as

his vision became bathed in red and fantasy Isy began to fade. His body temperature spiked as a growl started in his chest, slid up his throat and filled his mouth before coming out between shut teeth.

“Bro? You trying to drown yourself in there?” The banging continued.

He had to push away the rage. Closing his eyes he thought of one word: *Ohm*.

“Bro?” Urban kicked the door.

Torger tried not to shout back.

*Ohm*.

“Broooooo?” Urban called out.

His body shook with effort as the anger threatened to consume him. *Oooooohm*. The chanting wasn't working.

“Broooooo? You dead? Does this mean I can have your porn collection?” Urban had stopped banging on the door thankfully.

*Enough!* “All right, all right. Keep your shirt on.” Torger shut off the water and dried off before wrapping the towel around his waist. He opened the door to find Urban rifling through a bookshelf.

“What are you looking for? There’s no mayo or porn in there.” He wasn’t about to tell him where he kept his adult video collection.

Urban looked up and grinned. “Ah ha, you *were* listening. Just checking out your book collection. Pretty interesting reading material here, didn’t know you liked corset rippers and BDSM booksDude.” Urban chuckled.

Torger’s anger melted away. He’d forgotten all about those books. A flush of heat spread over his cheeks, down his neck and

through his chest. He wasn't sure whether to kill his brother or just ignore him. Torger decided for the latter. "Can I get dressed in peace?"

"Sure." Urban slid a book off the shelf and left the room, making Torger wonder just what his brother was up to. He pulled on a pair of jeans and a sweater and joined Urban in the kitchen. "What do you want to eat? I can order out or I can cook something. Totally up to you."

His brother didn't answer immediately. His attention seemed

to be glued to the book he'd chosen, a BDSM book, much to Torger's amusement. "Um, steaks."

Torger rolled his eyes. "Do you eat anything else? What did you want the mayo for?"

"Was gonna make sandwiches. And uh, yes? I do eat other meat besides cow. This is pretty good. Got any of these in ebook?" he asked without looking up.

"You read that stuff?" He wondered if his brother would make some facetious comment.

“We all need a break from the shit we see and let’s be honest, romance is the furthest thing from our jobs that we can get. Sci-Fi and fantasy are getting too crime oriented as of late.” Urban stood up and grabbed a bottle of beer from the fridge before settling back down again at the dinner table.

Torger took out the steaks from the fridge and began to season them. The silence between the siblings didn’t weigh on him. His mind was clear and for the first time in days, he was relaxed. By the

time he got the meat into the broiler, he was completely at ease. The shrill sound of his cell phone's ring tone broke the companionable atmosphere. Stress flared along his limbs. "Goddamnit," he muttered before going to fetch his phone. He answered after the fourth ring, praying that it would be good news this time. It wasn't. Another body had been found outside a theater. Torger paced in his kitchen, back and forth. He ran a hand through his hair and tried not to growl into his phone. He could feel it



rumbling deep in his chest though. His wolf wanted to start barking and growling and biting something, anything. "Anything on the cameras?"

He waited for the answer and tried to ignore Urban's raised eyebrow. His hand tightened around the plastic shell as Officer Duggan gave him his answer. No Nothing on the cameras. *Nothing. As in there was another murder and they were still at square one. No leads, no suspects. Nothing.*

The growl that had been

trying to escape clawed up his throat and came out. The phone went silent, and Torger had to take in a breath and count to ten before he could give any orders. "Keep working on it. Find something. Have the media caught on yet?"

His thoughts drifted to Isadora Jones. If she had a scoop she would be at his doorstep right now with a camera crew. Her absence didn't make him feel easy. She could be on her way. He wandered into the living and drew aside the curtains. Nothing to

indicate that the protective wards he'd had placed on his property had been tripped, and the only lights he could see were from Draven's Crossing proper. He wasn't sure whether to feel relieved or worried that she was off playing investigator on her own.

Torger turned back into the conversation. "Sorry Doug, look, just keep me informed. I'm not going in right now, I'll be in later. Oh, has Detective Santa Rosa checked in? No. Okay, ring her and let her know about the latest body."

He ended the call before any more questions could be brought up. Torger would have gone in, but knew he'd be next to useless. His stress level had risen so high that he'd be snapping at anyone even if all they were doing was offering him coffee. Besides that, Draven didn't want him in the office so much. He was beginning to feel useless. The sense of being dragged down started to press on his shoulders. A sense of tiredness weighed on his eyelids. Part of him wanted to get into bed, curl up and

not greet the world come morning. The serial killer case was an albatross around his neck and there was no end in sight and no one else to help with the burden. No one had answers. It was frustrating and depressing. Even the little things that helped lift him on a usual day weren't working, and he wasn't sure what to try next. Moonlight filtered in through the window over the sink. The trees and grounds were bathed in silver light. His wolf whined. The urge to run, to hunt and howl, to release his true nature

beat in his blood as his hearing and sense of smell sharpened.

“Whoa there, slugger. Calm down or I’ll be stripping off my clothes and running out the door,” Urban warned.

A glance over at his brother told him everything he needed to know. Urban’s face was sporting a light coat of pale brown and his eyes were now a pale amber rather than green.

Guilt pinged him, and he pulled back the urge to shift. “Sorry,” Torger muttered and

turned back to cooking the steaks. He grabbed some vegetables out of the fridge and began to make a salad.

“Wow, vegetables? What’s the occasion? Trying to watch your waistline?” Urban teased.

The small jab broke some of the tension, allowing him to push back some of his frustration. Torger chuckled. “No, just figured we needed to eat something green, a break from all the meat.”

Urban laughed. “Awww, worried about my health, are you?”

Look, I can see you're stressed. This isn't an easy situation, I know. I've been there, but you've got to ask for help."

"I have asked for help, and Jackal almost got killed. It's like this bastard is a ghost. I don't know where to look for him. The archives have turned up nothing like this, and my international contacts have nothing to offer. The underground is quiet, scarily so." Torger blew out a breath and ran a hand to his hair. His frustrations began to rise again and needed to be vented.



Running in wolf form was looking better and better.

“And how do you hunt a ghost? You bring in a witch.” Urban grinned.

“Do you know a witch that can find this kind of spook?” Torger turned to look at his sibling, skeptical that he knew someone he could call.

“You’ve got me, and I’ve got contacts you don’t have. But we have to address a bigger issue. When was the last time you got laid?” Urban gave him a look that

made Torger cringe. “Has hitting the gym helped?” Urban pressed.

Torger thought about it. Laying a few punches on the heavy bag wasn't working either. Nothing seemed to be helping. He was over-caffeinated and frustrated with no way to vent properly. “Well....”

“See? Let me help you while I'm here. I dropped in unannounced and you didn't bite my head off, which I'm thankful for.” Urban said nothing else.

Torger closed his eyes and took a deep breath as he tried to

remember that this was someone related to him, not a stranger, that he knew people and could help. He looked over at his brother who swiveled around in his chair and started to tap away on his laptop. Torger took that as an indication that Urban was going to help whether he wanted it or not. Grinning, Torger went back to cooking. Some of the weight seemed to be lifted off his shoulders, and his head felt a bit clearer.

“So, when are you gonna start

dating, Tor?" Urban asked, his tone conversational, no teasing anywhere.

Torger clenched his jaw in annoyance and tried to rein in his temper. He'd hoped that Urban would've dropped that subject. He was just thankful that he hadn't pushed the issue of his workload. Besides, it wouldn't do to snap at him. He was just looking out for him, not wanting him to be lonely. At least, that's what he hoped. Besides, it was better than hearing their mother ask him when she'd

get grandchildren from him.  
“When I feel like it.”

He wasn't sure what else to say. Isadora Jones was on his radar, but neither of them had time to really pursue the attraction. Besides that, she was a reporter. How would the Chief of Police and a reporter ever be able to talk about anything but work? He couldn't see her just leaving things alone when he told her to drop it and he had no desire to watch her interview the hot new guys who were in town for whatever reason. He wasn't a

jealous guy, but Isy was a gorgeous woman. How could any red-blooded man not hit on her or want to bed her?

“You can’t date someone from work you know? Are you not dating because of you know who?” Urban looked him over, an unasked question in his eyes.

Torger growled. “Don’t go there.” He didn’t want to bring up his ex. She was in the past. There was no attraction for him when it came to Sheila. She’d made her decision, and he was thankful for it.

Now he knew what true attraction was instead of just basic mating lust, and he preferred the former. He just didn't want to talk about it.

"Why? You haven't dated since Sheila. Look, it wasn't your fault. She fell for someone else. It happens." Urban shrugged.

Torger rolled his eyes. Sheila hadn't just fallen for someone else; she'd been fucking him from the start and hoped to wed Torger for his position as Alpha of all Packs. "It has nothing to do with her."

"Hey, you know the bachelor

auction is coming up.” A cheeky smile curled on his brother’s face. “Maybe you should take part.”

Torger narrowed his eyes. “You wouldn’t. Anyway, you’re too late. I’ve been volunteered. And it has nothing to do with Sheila or anyone else. It’s this damn case. All I’ve got are dead ends and nothing to go on.” He sighed and settled into a chair. Torger knew he was leaving out one big bit, but his brother didn’t need to know about Isy, not yet anyway.

“Good and I’ll be there to



make sure to up the price.” Urban looked up and grinned.

“That’s just weird, bro, and creepy. ‘Sides you’re not going to be here long enough to take part in the auction unless you want to be an entry. I can ask Rose to add you to the list.” The horrified look on Urban’s face was reward enough for him.

“Okay, let’s talk about the case.” Urban finished his beer, grabbed another one and sat back down, his laptop sitting ready.

“You’re not law enforcement.

I can't share the details." It was the normal excuse he used to dissuade people from asking anymore. Too bad his brother wasn't anyone.

"Try again. Maybe you need a fresh pair of eyes. Give me the details. 'Sides you need help. With or without your permission, I'm going to lend you a hand." Urban rested his chin on his arms and stared at his brother.

The look unnerved him. Unblinking, his brother continued to gaze at him, dark green eyes devoid of emotion. He tried not to

shift in his seat, yet couldn't resist moving around just a little. Torger shuddered. "Cut that out. Okay, here's what's been going on, in case you haven't been watching the news." He recounted the first killings and the latest two deaths, details the public knew and didn't know and what they had found out when Jackal had come to town. Torger also threw in the latest details on Muffy Evanson's death and the body found in front of the movie theater and Detective Santa Rosa's theory.

Urban whistled. "Damn. And there's nothing? Not even a partial or DNA, not even skin? Jesus. Who is this person, Mr. Invisible? It makes no sense that there's nothing. It also is very unusual. The perp doesn't fit any profile I know. He or she doesn't seem to have a type, just out-of-towners and that's just out of character. What kind of psyche profile did Jackal do when he came to town?"

Torger thought. "Jackal isn't your usual profiler. He gets a sense for people but didn't do a formal

work-up on the person.”

He waited for Urban to explode at the lack of procedure. Nothing.

“Okay, so we start from scratch. Give me the case files. I’m gonna need to talk to the cops on the case, see what they’ve seen. You, on the other hand, need to unwind so you can have a clear view of things.” Urban began to type.

“But—”

“No. Your frustration is rubbing me raw. I can feel your

urge to shift and your urge to mate. It's fucking with me, big time, and I bet it's confusing you. So you can either take a powder now or I make you take a time out." Urban looked up, his green gaze was hard and unwavering.

"Fine but what am I supposed to do?" Torger sat back and waited for the answer.

"Read, jerk off, I don't care, just get away from me for an hour or so." Urban turned back to his laptop and began to type. "But first, get me the files."

“Yes, sir, your highness, sir,”  
Torger growled.

“And don’t you forget it,”  
Urban threw out as Torger left the  
table to get his briefcase. He  
fetched his satchel and brought it  
to Urban, hoping that his brother  
could see something they hadn’t.

“All the vics were identified,  
right? And they were all found in  
various places all over town, right?”  
Urban continued to type without  
looking up.

He wasn’t sure where Urban  
was going with it but answered him

all the same. “Yeah, we assumed that they were just vacationers, but the spots they were found were where locals usually congregated.”

Torger hadn't given much thought to the identity of the victims since they ranged in genders and sexual orientations. Also, he figured that the perp wanted the bodies to be found rather than have them lying out in the middle of nowhere. *Nothing like hubris*. But that didn't give them any leads to speak of, which was frustrating as hell.



“Give me an hour. I may have thought of something.” Urban continued to type, leaving Torger feeling a sense of loneliness closing in. A black funk rose up inside of him, chilling him to the bone. His mind had become a blank wall. Weight pushed down on his head and shoulders. Energy buzzed through his tendons and muscles demanding movement. Another run was looking really good at that moment.

\* \* \* \*

Abbott leaned against the dark wood bar. Smoke mingled with the stench of stale beer and peanuts and the tang of sweat. The dull drone of the late night news played out on a flat screen TV against the far wall. The murmur of conversation floated around him, but he didn't give it any mind. Tonight he was looking for someone. Hunger gnawed at his stomach. His gums ached as anger pounded in his head. So much life, so much need and he could feel none of it. Not yet anyway. He

sipped his vodka, allowing the burn to drive away the desire for the kill.

“Did you hear about the body found on L and C in front of the theater?” someone close by asked.

“Yeah. When the fuck is Torger gonna do something about it? Fucking werewolves. How can you trust ‘em to get anything done? And that vampire in office is no better,” another person responded.

Abbott kept his mouth shut. It amused him that the unclean masses were bitching about their elected officials. The town had been

at peace for years and now a few murders and everyone was ready to sell anyone up the river for a little slice of how it used to be. He continued to sip his vodka. The icy chill of the liquid helped cool his body down some. The hunger had been beaten back for now. Taking in his surroundings, he observed the locals. No out-of-towners here. But hunting for his next date wasn't his goal. Tonight he wanted to see what others were saying before he returned to his job. A few more minutes went by with nothing else

said on his offerings. Once he finished his drink, he paid and left. The night felt warm and welcoming. The lights of the town shone brighter. Always after a kill everything looked beautiful. But the cracks were there, you just had to look hard enough.

He arrived at his shop and unlocked the door. A sense of Zen calm came over him as he stepped over the threshold. A gentle perfume of flowers and greenery drifted toward him. With a sigh, he flicked on the lights and shut the

door behind him. This was his paradise, his sanctuary, his little shop: The Gossip Shack. It was part cyber café, part information center, part memorabilia store, part café all rolled into one. The Tourist Board had called it essential to the city for whatever your needs were, whether you were just visiting or if you had just moved here. He had glowing reviews from various newspapers and magazines. He'd even been featured on a TV show or two. But that didn't matter. None of it had any importance until Isadora Jones

had graced his little shop with her presence to do a segment on him. She'd been so warm, so curious. The reporter exuded a sense of seduction, sexuality, confidence and perfection. So untouchable, he was just in awe of being allowed to be near her. And so his infatuation began and to this day his devotion only grew.

Abbott could only hope that she would understand and feel honored by his small offerings.

"Master? Did I do well?" Ariel's dreamy voice came to him

from the doorway of the storage room.

His little reverie vanished and his mood darkened at being interrupted from his thoughts. He looked at Ariel; her pale shimmery blond hair covered her delicate features. The small tips of her pointed ears peeked out from among her thin golden tresses. Her subservience angered him. The dull flames started in his belly and spread through his arms and legs and swelled through his head until he shook with it. Hunger crowed as



it rattled in its cage, demanding release. Swallowing hard, he shoved the desire down and turned away from his progeny. "Yes, very well. Hopefully she'll appreciate my latest offering. Now let's get ready to open for the night."

They worked in silence to prepare for their customers. Despite the killings, the hotels were still full of visitors and they would all want the latest scoop and a place to gather information. The evening wore on but there was no one that caught his eye. As midnight

approached he felt a sense of disappointment. There hadn't been a single person to trigger his desire to end his loneliness. Five minutes to closing time a person walked into the shop and took off a cap. A fall of curling brown hair covered her shoulders; chunky red highlights surrounded her face. She had dark brown eyes, a straight nose and plump lips. The hunger roared back to life as his gums began to throb and saliva filled his mouth. *Oh!*

The woman looked up at him;

a small smile played on her features. She reached into her pocket and flashed a badge. "Hey there, I'm Detective Santa Rosa. Mind if I ask you a few questions, Mr. Lance? We could sure use your help on this case."

Abbott grinned. The demon inside of him purred at the husky cadence of her voice and her curvy figure under the tight padded jacket and jeans. "Of course, Detective. Please, have a seat. Let me get you a coffee and some cake, on the house."

He shut the door and headed behind the counter. The night was looking up.

## Chapter Four

### *POLICE STILL SILENT*

What are the cops doing exactly? -Isadora Jones, DC News Blast

“The police are working on the second body found. We were lucky that another murder took place tonight.” Evanson sat back and looked over at his assistant. “Next time we need to be more careful. Now that I’ve released my

statement we can continue with the plan. What is Draven doing to stop the killer? What do our sources in the Police Department say?"

Sadie consulted her notes. "Nothing. They don't have a clue." She smiled. "We have time. Shall we send out the next candidate?"

Evanson thought over the ramifications of progressing with their plan this way. The floor work they were laying down to dethrone Draven was in a tricky spot. If they pushed too hard, the people would love him and not want him out. If

they went too light, the impact wouldn't help them in the least. Anger surged through him, rattling his nerves, setting his chest afire. Acid churned in his stomach. Bile seared up his throat.

Sadie went to him and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Calm down, sweetie. It will be all right." She stroked the side of his face. A sense of peace slipped into him like silk, cooling the acid and fire.

He let out a soft sigh and turned into her touch, willing the sweet serenity to seep into every

pore and bring back his clarity. Once he felt his mind follow the harmony, his body sagged into the deep cushion of the chair. He reached up and covered her hand. "I'm fine now, love. Thank you." Evanson turned his head and placed a kiss on her palm. "All right, I think it would be good to send out the next candidate."

Sadie pulled her hand from his grasp and scribbled in her notes. "All right, then. I'll contact the professor and let him know what we want to do. Now let's go



over your schedule for the next week. We have a funeral to plan.”

Evanson shook his head. He didn't want to think about death at the moment. “No, we have some serious lovemaking to catch up on. I haven't had you since this morning. Come here.”

Sadie giggled and set down her notebook and pen. “Yes, sir.”

\* \* \* \*

Urban sat back and blew out a breath. “So far, nothing. Sorry bro. Can I have a little more coffee?”

Torger nodded and grabbed the pot. He felt sick. If Urbar couldn't come up with anything, then they were truly screwed. The bodies had been dissected to kingdom come, they'd brought in outside help, even consulted a psychic and came up with nothing. Where could they go next?

"Hmm, okay, usually you focus on the body. So let's take that out of the equation, shall we?" Urban rose and began to pace. "The victims didn't have ID on them, nothing to tell us who they were.

Why would the killer do that unless there was something significant about each of the people?"

Torger poured out a cup of coffee for himself and his brother. "Nothing that I can see."

"Ah, but that's where you're wrong. The blood is what's significant. Why take something that has, for centuries, been thought of as life, soul, essential. We need it to live. It contains the spark that makes our hearts beat and our brains function. It's what makes air, water, food essential.

Why take it? Why go to all that trouble of draining the bodies dry?" Urban stretched his arms over his head, grabbed the mug and downed the java in one gulp.

Torger winced but said nothing, instead, he chose to think about what Urban had said. "Well, we thought it was to make it look like a vampire attack. What better way to drive out visitors than to make it look like the blood drinkers couldn't be kept in line?"

Urban nodded and held out his cup for more fuel. "Yeah, true,

but why not just make it look like an animal attack? A rabid shifter would instill more fear than a vampire. Most vamp sluts would think that the victims wanted to die.”

Torger winced at the use of the insult to vampire fanatics. “Don’t call them that. Anyway, you do have a point.” He sat down and took a sip of coffee without giving Urban more to drink. “There was no evidence of illness. In fact, despite the lack of blood, all the organs were in perfect condition.”

He gave Urban a quick rundown of what the coroner had told him.

“And who do we know that can make things look all shiny and new even if they’re not? And not a vampire?” Urban grabbed the pot, poured out the dark brown liquid into his mug and filled it to the rim. He stuck his tongue out and put the pot down.

“Java junkie,” Torger spat out.

“Tea snob,” Urban shot back and grinned. “Moving on. Yes, I’m inferring that we’re dealing with a possible vampire impersonator.”

“Yeah, we thought that, but why?” Torger scratched his chin, unsure of how to express his doubt on this theory. They’d picked apart that idea to pieces and it still didn’t add up.

“I can hear the hamsters in your head working and I can see you have doubts. But let’s posit that this is a vampire impersonator, someone who wants people to believe that vampires are acting up. It limits Draven’s Crossing’s ability to look stable but also it makes our little slice of heaven look

dangerous. No tourists and Draven's out as mayor because he can't protect our people or anyone else. But then who takes his place? Evanson? No one trusts him, not as far as they can throw him."

Torger mulled over Urban's words. "So then who? And what are we really dealing with?"

Urban shrugged. "Not sure of what but as to who, look to the Council. Or a Council lackey. Remember there is still opposition to Draven's Crossing and to Draven. Also, they'd get more



control if they put a lackey into public office.”

“Sure but the citizens would refuse. They’ve dealt with Council lackeys before and it never went well. Why now?” Torger pointed out.

Urban grinned. “Cause now there’s more to lose. Haven’t you been reading the revenue section of the newspaper? Draven’s Crossing’s intake has nearly doubled in the last three years. We’re almost as popular as Disneyland. If they fuck up then

they lose out on a place that could refill their coffers. The Council is almost broke due to runaway spending and mismanagement of funds and scandals galore that cost them millions in lawyer fees. That little stunt from last year, where they put Hyde Range City in quarantine not only cost them money but also trust. They need Draven's Crossing. As in, they need this town or they'd be bankrupt."

Torger grimaced. "Okay, fine, but why not put up a patsy. A serial killer is just too much even for the

Council. We could be dealing with an actual psycho.”

Urban took another sip of coffee before giving him an answer. “And I think we are dealing with a psycho. Someone that let him or her loose to run all over here roughshod.”

“And yet I hear nothing about how to stop them,” Torger pointed out. His brain hurt from all the supposition. “There’s no precedence for this person. Nothing in the archive to suggest that this person got their ideas

from someone else or even from a case in Europe. You haven't found anything and Jagger's network of undesirables is coming up dry."

"And that should tell you that people are scared to talk." Urban refocused his attention on the screen.

Torger shrugged. "I can see that and I can see the other side of the argument that there is no information to tell. We're stuck."

Urban shook his head. "God, you're such a fun sucker. Okay, fine. I'll keep looking. Let's hope

that we don't have to look to the reporters for info then we'll know we're really fucked over."

Torger's thoughts turned to Isy once more. The notion of calling her sent a tingle racing down his spine. He told himself that it was for work, that it wasn't personal.

Urban gave him a look. "Call her. You know you want to. Whoever she is, she's got you smiling, which is good."

Torger blanched. *Smiling? Did it show that much? What else did Urban see?* Rather than ask, Torger

left the room and went into his office, closing the door behind him. He didn't waste any time and sank down into his plus leather executive chair, picked up his phone and hit speed dial hoping she wouldn't give him the deep grill.

\* \* \* \*

The shrill ring of the phone jarred Isadora from the mesmerizing nothing on the computer monitor. She groped around for her cell phone only to realize she wasn't in her usual

comfortable surroundings but in the archive room doing research on Muffy Evanson. The day had ended on a shitty note with having to report on not only her murder but another body being found in front of the theater. She wasn't sure whether to feel paranoid or angry. Her inner dragon was pissed, blowing out streams of fire, which rose her body temperature and had the makeup people trying to make it look like she wasn't stuck in a sauna every few seconds.

When the broadcast was over,

she almost sagged in relief only to realize she'd have to do a full hour long report to pay tribute to Muffy Evanson tomorrow night. It wasn't because management was demanding it but only because the woman had contributed so much to the community. In her opinion, Muffy was a far more important addition to Draven's Crossing than her husband. *Why couldn't the killer have killed Evanson instead of his wife?* she grumbled silently. The phone continued to ring. Isy patted around her pockets before she



found it. "Should have put it on vibrate," she mumbled to herself before hitting the talk button.

"What?" She didn't mean to be rude but she was tired, out of coffee and chocolate, and she'd forgotten her jacket in her office. Plus, her ass had fallen asleep. Isy didn't look forward to having to walk upstairs since the elevator was still under repair.

"Is that how you greet people nowadays?" Torger's smooth, deep cadence with just a hint of gravel around the edges sent a bolt of heat

straight to her core. Her vagina filled with cream, and she had to fight to keep from squirming in her seat.

Licking her lips, she answered, hoping she didn't sound as flustered as she felt. "Sorry, I've been trying to figure out what to say and what to write about concerning Muffy Evanson. What can I do to you?" Heat flushed her cheeks at the mistake. "I mean what can I do for you?"

*Nice*, her dragon chuckled.

She ignored the beast and

focused on the man on the other end of the phone.

“I need to know what you’ve heard about the serial killer from your sources.” The creak of leather followed his words.

The soft sound sent a thrill through her, making her wonder if he was home. Was he shirtless? Naked? Maybe in just a towel, his skin slightly damp from a shower, his long, blond hair a dark spun gold with strands sticking to his forehead. Closing her eyes, she stifled the groan growing in her

throat. *Stop this, act like a professional. There's a story here.* "What do you mean, what do I know? The police haven't issued a statement on the murders."

She settled back in her chair and waited for his move.

"Well, I was just wondering what you'd heard," he responded, dodging her question.

"You're avoiding me, Torger. What exactly am I supposed to tell you if you guys haven't told us anything?" *Take that, wolfie.*

Torger's rich chuckle filled the

earpiece and sent ripples of warmth through her body. This time she did move around in her chair.

“Touché. To be honest and this is totally off the record...” He paused, which caused her to press the phone closer to her ear in hopes of hearing more of what he was doing, wherever he was. “We don’t have anything. No leads. Nothing has panned out. I’m at my wit’s end. I want to know what you guys have found out. You have access to information that we don’t.”

She preened at his

acknowledgment that the reporters could help rather than get in the way. "Well thank you for not calling me a nuisance. To be honest, we haven't heard anything. All is silent on this front. Up until this morning when Muffy Evanson was murdered, we didn't have movement." She nibbled on her bottom lip as she tried to decide whether or not to share her suspicions with him. Isy didn't want to be called crazy, especially by a guy she was so attracted to. Torger was firm and fair; he'd never

made her feel stupid or too much of a bother. Although he acted annoyed when dealing with her, he didn't try to push her too far away and always told her exclusives off the record that would give them the scoop before anyone else.

“What are you thinking?” It was as if he'd read her mind and heard her debate.

She sighed. “How do you do that?” Isy took a moment to lick her dry lips and then told him what was bothering her. “I did an interview with Evanson today and it just

didn't feel right. He bullied us to ask basic questions, nothing hard hitting. It would be normal if it just didn't feel like he was setting himself up during that interview for an attack on Draven."

"I haven't seen the interview yet. So, I have no clue what to think, but it wouldn't surprise me. Evanson is the Council's man on the ground if they want someone other than Draven in office. It kind of strikes me that the killer would murder Muffy, especially with the placement of the body. It wasn't



dumped but everything else screams the usual MO. So, I'm not sure what to say on that front."

She did. "Which makes me wonder, was she really murdered by the serial killer or was this a cover-up to blame on the killer?" Isy let that idea sit between them. No one wanted to say it, but she knew that other reporters were thinking it.

"But why kill her?" Torgeir asked.

"Because she either discovered something or they

needed her out of the way." So far, he hadn't called her crazy, which made her feel secure in her ideas.

"Okay, but what exactly did she discover? I suppose you've heard the gossip about the Evansons?" The question was asked lightly but she could hear how serious Torger was.

She decided to just go for it. "Yup, his mistress is his assistant. Maybe she and the missus had an argument, things got out of hand, and Muffy was killed, and they had to cover it up. But why is there

nothing to indicate foul play? They must have really done a fabulous clean up job.” I sy hated to tack that last bit on but knew that if she didn’t, she wouldn’t be able to respect herself. The question of whether there was a cover-up going on had to be asked.

Another soft creak of leather before Torger answered. “Plausible but we’d need probable cause to get a warrant, and the public would riot if we didn’t find anything. Muffy was very well loved, and if they thought we were desecrating

her memory and putting Evanson through the wringer, we'd be strung up. They're really taking her death hard. We'd have to tread lightly and don't think that we wouldn't get ripped a new one by Draven if we came up empty handed. From what I understand Evanson is really laying on the grieving widower card thick."

Isy gave a disgusted snort. "You should have read his statement to the public about the death of his wife. I mean *really*. I thought I was going to throw up."

Torger laughed, the sound was full-bodied and lush, that turned from gentle warmth into a full on fire. Her lips tugged up into a smile and she felt safe and comfortable, like sitting in front of the hearth on a cold winter's night with a cup of hot cocoa. She loved the sound and wanted to hear more of it.

"I probably would have. I don't have much tolerance for bullshit lately, not even Draven's politics," Torger confessed.

That small admission made

her feel included in his inner circle. She was honored by it.

“I love the guy dearly and he’s one of my best friends but the pressure is getting to him. Anyway, what is the assistant? Is she a shifter? If she’s a vamp, it would explain no other injuries. What do you think?” There was a tapping sound that made her nervous.

“I don’t know. I can check it out. I never really paid much attention to his staff. He sort of sucked up all the air in the room, you know? I can find out. Do you

want me to work on this angle? Maybe it will help with the serial killer line." She prayed he'd let her help him. *Please. Please. Please gods, if you're listening, let him put me on the case.*

"Sure. I need all the help I can get. We've run into so many walls, I'm starting to think I'm imagining all of this. Thanks." A male voice calling him bro could be heard in the background.

*Torger had a brother?* She filed this piece of information away to examine later.

“Gotta go, family is demanding my attention. Talk to you later.” He hung up, leaving her with a buzz of warmth. Any pain had melted away. The stairs didn’t look so intimidating, and she could feel a new boundless energy surging through her. Isy was ready to work. She had an idea on how to get more info about Evanson and his staff, especially his assistant. And the great part was it wouldn’t make that vein in Bob’s forehead throb as he tried to control his temper.



\* \* \* \*

Torger hung up the phone feeling a bit better about their prospects of finding out more information, at least on one case.

“Bro? We don’t have anything else to eat, besides steak. Can I order pizza?” Urban continued to type one handed and didn’t look up. “Thanks, I’ll just use your credit card.”

Torger stood up. “Whoa, whoa, didn’t you just eat an hour ago, and why the hell are you using

my card? What's wrong with your plastic?"

"Cause you're the host. 'Sides I think I found something." Urbar left the room without telling him anything.

Torger gritted his teeth and resisted the urge to go after his brother and beat the crap out of him. Despite the conversation with Isy he still didn't feel too sure that they would find any leads. With deep breaths, he gained control over his temper and followed Urban out to the kitchen where his

brother continued to type one handed while holding a phone with the other.

He seemed to be only ordering food for him. "Yeah, three large pizzas, the meat lovers. Extra pepperoni and sausage, sure throw in breadsticks and some of that dessert. Uh huh, fifteen minutes? Awesome. Thanks." Urban hung up and beamed at Torger. "Don't worry. I didn't forget about you."

Torger rolled his eyes. "Wonderful. Okay what did you find?"

“I called in a favor with a friend—we won’t talk about it—but anyway, some of these victims were lured here. They won a contest; hotel, airfare or gas or train fare was paid for, and they were given five thousand dollars in prize money. The ones that you found when Jackal came to town weren’t contest winners, but came of their own freewill. Muffy Evanson is the only deviation. I don’t have all the details, but this sheds some light on the case, right? The killer lured his or her victims here via the

contest. I still have to find out if the latest victim is connected to the contest but we have a lead. And I'm still tracking the money on how everything was paid. Isn't that great, bro?"

Torger's head hurt. He couldn't wrap his mind around what Urban was telling him. "So, this really is a conspiracy. Great. I have a headache."

"Could be. We need more pieces to this puzzle. Check with Jagger, maybe that's why he hasn't heard anything. The contest

wouldn't look fishy to anyone. Cities hold them all the time to lure in vacationers. Now, all we have to do is check into the websites that they used to enter the contests and find out who's behind them, as well as who paid out and follow the money." Urban turned to his laptop and began to type away.

Torger tried to understand why anyone would want to do what was suggested. First Urban, and now Isy, were telling him that this could be a setup of some kind? In all his years as Police Chief

everything had made sense. They'd never had a lot of crime to begin with and now this. He sank down into a chair. "And where does that leave the theory about Draven and possible assassinations?"

Urban shrugged. "Well, there are lots of VIPs in this town to begin with, starting with Draven, you and several others. We have to consider all options. It could be a heavily plotted, deeply intricate plan that involves many players." His brother drained his coffee and held up his mug. "More. *Please.*"

Torger got up to make more java. "Why can't things be simple? I'll contact Jagger to put him on this line of thought. Maybe this time he'll have more luck." Torger's phone rang.

"Torger." He prayed that this wouldn't be another body or more bad news.

"It's Jagger. You got a minute I have an idea," the vampire said.

*Speak of the devil.* "Sure, just me and my brother. Come on over. We're talking the case."

Jagger hung up and Torger



resisted the urge to swear. The vampire never said good-bye or anything. Just as the timer on the coffeemaker dinged, the doorbell sounded. "Son of a bitch." Torger went to the front door and opened it. Jagger stood before him looking like the Prince of Darkness in leather and pale skin. Without bothering to ask for entrance, Jagger just brushed past him and headed into the kitchen. Torger resisted the urge to growl at him. "Well, come on in. Make yourself at home. Have some coffee."

He followed Jagger into the kitchen to find the vampire doing just that.

“Already did that.” He sipped the brew slowly and looked at Torger.

“Son of a bitch.” Torger shook his head and grabbed another mug, poured him and Urban more java and sat down. Jagger continued to stand near the counter drinking his coffee and looking over both men. “You gonna stand there or join us?”

“Do you have anything to eat?” Jagger didn’t smile or answer

the question. He just went over to the fridge and pulled it open. "Jesus, don't you have anything besides meat?"

"Please, make yourself at home, look in my fridge, eat my brother." Torger gestured toward Urban.

"Hey!" the other werewolf protested.

"That's disgusting. I'm not a cannibal." He withdrew a loaf of bread and last night's baked ham. "Besides, he's probably too stringy. All that lean muscle."

“Hey! I can hear you, you know?” Urban uttered.

Torger stifled a laugh.

“So what are we doing besides forming a knitting circle? I can crochet a mean scarf, and I heard Draven can make some mittens,” Jagger said as he sliced the ham.

Torger tried to picture that and couldn't. “Sorry, I don't have any blood on hand for you,” he said instead.

“Already fed tonight. Let's talk about the case. So what do you have for me?” Jagger put away the

rest of the ham and bread and cleaned off the cutting board and knife before sitting down next to Torger.

Urban filled him in while he typed away on the keyboard. "I have to say, it's a pretty pickle you got here. I don't have all the pieces but at least we have a start. The question is what's he or she doing with the blood? Clothing can be for trophies but blood?"

Jagger shook his head. "It doesn't make sense. It does give credence to the whole vampire

angle but I'm wondering about these contests. What if they're legit but someone running them isn't? What do you know about these contests? They're a pretty sweet deal, too sweet if you ask me."

Torger had a thought, although he was hesitant to say it aloud. It sounded insane. Even to his tired brain, he didn't think it was possible but he said it anyway. "What if it is a vampire? And what if he or she is doing the contests to get a blood supply for themselves?"

He looked over at Jagger and

Urban who turned to him, puzzlement on his face.

“Poor Tor, he’s going insane.” Jagger clapped him on the back. “Why would a vampire imitate its race when there is an abundance of people willing to offer up a vein for us and blood banks open twenty-four seven for us to pop in and get something to help keep us going?”

Torger decided to take a shot in the dark. “Because maybe there’s something wrong with them?”

Urban rubbed his eyes. “Okay, so there’s something wrong

with them. Why the clothing change, the death, the clean up and dump? Wanna explain that, Yoda?"

Torger smacked Urban on the back of the head. "Don't mock *Star Wars*. Anyway, maybe shame? They take too much, they panic and don't want to be arrested or put to death. Newbies don't have the control that older vampires have."

"True." Jagger nodded. "But then this person is going overboard. No, doesn't jive with what we have. It's just too complex for a newbie to carry out. I barely



remember my first few years when I was turned and I was crazed. It was eat, sleep, survive, nothing about trying to hide the bodies of victims that I'd drained of life."

"Yes, but what if we're not dealing with a newbie?" Torger threw out the question. It had to be said.

Jagger shook his head. "Okay, I'm going to need more coffee and food. Anyone want to order out for burgers or pizza?"

Urban's stomach growled. "First you already ate, and we

already ordered food. It's close to the full moon and my metabolism has increased. Maybe we should order burgers as well?"

Jagger ordered some food while Torger headed out to the garage. The information about the victims was bothering him and he needed to see things on the big screen. He got a white wash board and hauled it into the kitchen.

"Urban, can you do a chart of all the victims both past and present, all the information that we know. Let's start again." Torger

knew that he'd get groans and moans but if they had to start at the beginning to stop whoever it was, they would.

“Fine, fine and what do you want the blood sucker to do?” Urban focused on the laptop screen and tapped away at the keyboard.

“The blood sucker is going to visit the night ME and see if he has something new for me. I'll be back. Shouldn't take too long. It's his smoke break.” Jagger left before either of them could say anything.

Urban threw his hands up in

the air. "Okay, let's follow our threads. We know that the first set of victims won a contest with everything paid for. The contests would have to be approved by the Tourist Board. The board is very selective about what contests are allowed to use our town name."

Something poked at Torger's thoughts. It took a moment before he realized what had been bothering him. "Muffy Evanson was part of the Tourist Board. So there's a connection to the first bodies." He wrote all of that on the

board.

Urban typed away on the keyboard. "Okay, added into my notes. As for the second set of bodies when Jackal came to town?"

Torger reminisced on the time that Jackal had helped him out. "The victims from that case had been tortured. A total deviation from the MO."

The doorbell rang. Torger answered it while Urban shouted to answer him. "Since there's divergence, I'll posit that the second set was from another

possible killer. Someone who took advantage of what was happening at the time and built on the mythos.”

He carried the food into the kitchen and placed it on the table. The brothers grabbed napkins and ate out of the box. Urban switched his coffee for soda. Torger grabbed a beer before taking a seat. He nodded. “So now we can see that there are two sets of killers, I suppose. One that’s thought this out carefully and the second who’s using the details of the case to

cover-up their crimes. Although, no evidence of sexual violence to speak of, which is interesting. There's always something sexual about these cases."

Urban ran a hand through his hair. "That you can see. Remember, if we're dealing with a vampire, they can heal any evidence of torture. That makes things more difficult. One of the things that remains the same is the lack of blood and the puncture marks."

Torger agreed and took a bite out of his pizza before he gave an

answer. "True, so all we have is the contest, redressing the victims, lack of blood and the wounds. Nothing else. Okay, what's new? What did we learn?"

"The connection between the Tourist Board, Muffy Evanson, and the first victims. Looks like we may have a reason why Muffy was killed. She may have stumbled onto information about the killer or the unapproved contests." Urban took a sip of soda and reached for another slice.

They were already halfway



through one pie. *If Jagger didn't move his ass, he'd miss out.* Torger grinned in satisfaction. He refocused on the case. "Yes, we have a possible motive for her death. I suppose we can take her out of the victims of the killer category. This is a start. I can tell Draven we're actually making progress, even though the Council won't care."

Urban looked up at his brother. "Who gives a fuck what the Council thinks? Let Draven deal with them. We concern ourselves

with the cases. Now, as for the victims that Jackal found, they were tortured and then dressed up like the serial killer's first bodies. Any information on that end?" He grabbed two slices, sandwiched them together, and ate them in a few bites.

Torger shook his head. "Nope, nothing. The guy we caught isn't talking, which pisses me off."

Urban tilted his head to the side. "Maybe there is nothing to get from him because he was just a pawn. But we can rule out those

killings as connected to the serial killer. Now we only have four victims.”

Torger felt better about the case now that they had eliminated some things but there was still something that bothered him. Muffy Evanson was possibly killed because of what she discovered. This meant that the killer could be connected to the Tourist Board or worse, Evanson. Draven wasn't going to be happy about either likely scenario, not in the least. He thought back to his conversation

with Isy. She'd mentioned that her interview with Evanson had bothered her. He wanted to see exactly what the Representative had to say and what Isy was talking about, and then talk it over with Jagger and Urban.

"I'm going to go watch Isy's latest interview. Maybe that will help." Torger ignored the snort that came from Urban's direction and headed to the privacy of his room. As he shut the door, Torger hoped he'd spot something in there that could help them. There was a slight

throb in the back of his head that he wanted to make stop, but anything he'd take wouldn't last for long. Instead, he decided to ignore it. The stress was back now that he was alone. He could sense that they were on the right track, but the pressure only increased now that they had a track to follow. He wanted to banish the frustration so he could focus. The only possible release he could have, he didn't want to do. At least not like this.

Without turning on the light, he used the pale glow from the

window as a guide to his armchair and sank down into the plush cushions. Patting around, he found the remote control and turned on the television. He brought up the DVR menu and selected Isadora's Interview segment and settled in. Normally, he'd have a beer and a sandwich while watching her show but this time he wanted nothing to distract him. If something was off with Representative Evanson, he'd figure it out. Isadora riled him up and yet centered him. He couldn't figure out why, but she had an

effect on him that no other person had.

The opening of the show set his nerves at ease. The strain on his mind began to clear. His muscles relaxed as his body sank into the cushions. Her introduction of the segment continued the process until he was mindless and able to watch the show without being engaged. His thoughts floated as the interview with Representative Evanson progressed. Torger's eyes took in the scenes without really understanding or processing what

it was he was watching. It wasn't until after it was all over that he understood what had happened. His instincts were screaming that something wasn't right. The Representative had been too evasive and the questions had been too softball. Isy looked angry and uncomfortable. Her gaze was too hard, and her lips would thin after a particularly light answer. The Representative was hiding something, especially when it came to the murders and Draven's handling of things. Anger boiled in



the pit of his stomach.

There was also something else going on. It was as if the Representative wasn't his usual calm, effervescent self. There was no calm, no tact. He was off center and irritable. Despite the smiles, he didn't seem to be listening. The questions had already been run by him, and he was just on autopilot. Torger compared the Representative he'd met and interacted with versus the one during that interview. It was almost as if he wasn't the same person.

That puzzled Torger. Evanson had never acted that way. In fact, he was always a pain in the ass but took pains to be pleasant to everyone. Was he having a Hyde moment? He strode into the kitchen with the wheels of his brain turning over and over. "There's something wrong here. Evanson is acting out of character, Muffy gets murdered, and we get a new body around the same time. Is there a connection?"

Urban looked up. "Talking to yourself, bro? That's the first sign of insanity, you know? What are the

little voices telling you this time? Gotta jerk off again?"

Torger resisted the urge to smack his brother on the back of the head. "Shut it. Anyway, I just watched Isadora Jones' interview with Representative Evanson. Something was just off with him. He wasn't acting like himself, like he wasn't all there. I'm not sure if it has anything to do with what's going on but still, something to file away. He's not getting the same pressure that Drav does. I wonder what Jagger's got, if anything. Have

you found anything about the contests?”

Urban sat back and took a sip of soda before answering him. “Nothing concrete, but I’m thinking that these contests weren’t authorized by the Tourist Board. No one I’ve contacted knows anything about these contests. At least not on the record. Looks like you’ll need to pull some people out of bed.”

Torger groaned. He could feel another headache coming on. “The Tourist Board is running around

putting things in place for the upcoming Ball and making sure that they are in line with the PR department. I'd have to look at the roster and see who I can talk to. I'll have to move fast though."

The stress ramped up inside of him. A dull throb started at the front of his head. He let out a sigh. His stomach grumbled as hunger pangs began. "Too bad I can't stay and wait to see if Jagger brings back the burgers."

"So all this new info will make a difference." Urban's stomach

grumbled as well. It seemed like both siblings were suffering from Full Moon hunger pangs.

Torger shrugged. “Yeah, where the hell is that vampire? Did he eat the damn ME.? Anyway, I’ve been treading on a thin line since the first murders. Nothing will be different. We have to figure out what she found out and why she was killed, but also what the connection is between each of the victims, if there was any besides these contests. The vics have to have the same something to attract

the killer.”

Urban opened his mouth to answer when the front door opened and slammed shut. Jagger appeared within a few seconds. “Sorry for the delay. Had to get the food.” He held up the bags of burgers and fries.

Urban’s stomach growled again. “Took you long enough. You missed the pizza.” He put the pizza boxes into the oven and ignored the last remaining full pie at the bottom of the pile. He doubted Jagger would care. The food was

passed around before everyone settled at the table.

“So what have you found?” Torger asked before taking a bite into his bacon cheeseburger. He prayed that Jagger found something, anything to help them along the trail.

“Well, the ME looked over Muffy Evanson’s body and, well, you’ll love this—her throat was slit and the healing was sloppy. So we’re not dealing with a vampire. I don’t know how the hell he got the clout to get the official report



changed, but she was killed. We have to keep it quiet it though.” Jagger shook his head and ate his meal.

Torger swore. His fingers itched to call Isy and Draven. “Do you think Draven knows about the cover-up?”

Jagger was quiet for far too long. It made Torger uncomfortable. Anger surged, red hot and scorching, spreading up through his chest to his throat where it came out in a growl. “Motherfucking politicians.” He

slipped out his phone and speed dialed Isy. Torger didn't care what kind of shit storm he caused. He refused to be part of a cover-up. This could endanger more lives and embolden the real serial killer.

She answered on the first ring. He ignored Jagger and Urban's protests. "Isy, I have a scoop for you. Can you swing by my cabin?" The words came in a rush before he could get his thoughts clear.

*Shit!* He wanted to take back the invitation immediately. She would be meeting his brother and

he'd never hear the end of it from Jagger.

“I'd love to! I have to convince Bill to let me invade the Evanson compound. I can't wait to see what's really going on in there.” She practically purred the words. Her excitement came through the phone loud and clear. His wolf sat up, tail wagging, eagerness showing in its eyes. Thoughts of handcuffs and spankings filled his head as blood surged to his cock. The shaft filled with liquid life as it tented his fly, pressing against the

metal and denim with the need to break free. Isy hung up before he could say anything. All his words were choked in his throat as arousal took over his body.

“Why the fuck did you do that?” Jagger demanded as he threw away his trash.

“His cock was doing the thinking; so was his anger.” Urban chuckled and brought out more beers. He offered one to Jagger who took it with a nod.

Both men shook their heads while Torger got his body under

control, or at least some semblance of command.

“I can smell his need; feel it on my skin. I might need to do a midnight run tonight to burn off my own arousal.” Urban’s husky voice came from a distance, and guilt threw cold water on Torger’s simmering need.

Torger swallowed, feeling like an idiot. “Sorry, bro. Really, I just got so caught up in...”

Jagger held up a hand. “No need to explain. I don’t like it either. Trust me. But Draven fel-

that it would be better to make everyone think that it was the killer. He hoped to lure the bastard out and end things once and for all. I can't say I blame him. But what can you do when you're running into walls, well, until now."

Torger sank down into a chair. "He should have given us some time. Now, we're really under the gun. Let me check in with Detective Santa Rosa. Hopefully she'll have found something to go on." He dialed the Detective's number. It went straight to voice mail. After

leaving a message, he checked in at the police station. The reporters were camped out waiting for news. He gave instructions on what to tell them and organized a press conference for around noon the next day. As much as he hated to, he had to tell the press something.

Once all the calls were done, he turned to his brother and friend. "Okay, boys what do I tell them?"

The doorbell rang and a pang echoed through his heart; it sped up and his palms became sweaty. "Shit." Torger got up and answered

the door but felt as if he was going to his doom. I sy wouldn't give away the game but still, she was part of the problem, wasn't she? For all the trust he had in her, she had to give her readers and viewers some information. When he opened the door, there was a sparkle in her eye he didn't trust. Her excitement jumped from her to him; it was infectious. She didn't bother asking for an invitation and brushed past him. Her hair was a bright neon pink that almost blinded him. Instead of commenting, he



followed her and found she'd made a beeline to the kitchen where she helped herself to a mug of coffee. Her stomach rumbled.

"Don't worry, brought my own food." Isy made herself even more at home by pulling out a baggie of pizza slices and grabbing a plate from the drain board. She put the food on the platter and slid it into the microwave, then sat down. She held out her hand to Urban first. "Hi. Isadora Jones."

Urban had a shit eating grin on his face as he shook her hand.

“Urban, Tor’s brother. Nice to meet you, Isy.”

She blinked but didn’t comment. Isy turned to Jagger and nodded but said nothing. He returned the gesture and settled against the back of his chair. Tor grabbed a seat from the living room and settled down between Urban and Isy. He recounted what’d they’d found out and waited for her to blow a gasket. Instead, she grabbed her food when it was done re-heating and settled down, coffee close at hand. “Figured as much.

The Council is shitting bricks and Muffy's murder doesn't help matters. I had to pull a lot of strings, but Bill's letting me interview Evanson in his home." This time it was her turn to have a shit eating grin on her face. "We'll do it after your press conference to give him time to respond. It is an election year after all."

Speech left Torger. In a matter of hours, she'd managed to setup a way to get into the house and investigate without much hassle. She continued talking. "Now that

I've met your brother, I figure he can pose as a sound tech—ours is on maternity leave—and snoop around for the perfect room for the interview. Maybe snoop around the room that Muffy was killed in? I'm sure it's been scrubbed spotless but still, they could be sloppy."

She shrugged and began eating while the men stared at her. Isy'd pushed them further than they'd been yet. Torger turned his attention toward Isy, about to ask her opinion on the contests. She spoke. "As to the contests, I have to

say I've heard of shady competitions to lure in tourists but this is new. I'll talk to my sources in the Tourist Board to get the dirt, but I doubt they know anything about it. Which means it's not *official* or from them."

"So you think someone is... what? Forging official's signatures and holding illegal contests to enable the killer?" Jagger sounded skeptical.

"That could happen, but not to feed the murderer's need. It's a byproduct. They invite tourists and

the killer gets new victims. One doesn't necessarily lead to two in this case; it just happens. Let's be honest. If the killer is a local and he or she killed locals, everyone would know it. But if they killed vacationers, who'd identify them?"

Urban ran a hand over his face. Torger could feel the beginnings of another headache. "So what if the killer is a local and killed a local, everyone would know it? How?"

"Um, you do realize you live in the biggest gossip hub in the

whole United States? No one's business is secure for long. How do you think everyone found out about Rose and Draven after only a few hours? Gossips. I knew about them within a half an hour of her leaving his office after their first meeting. We all knew. It's what makes this town so wonderful for info. Someone has to have seen something. The problem is if the vics are vacationers, locals don't care. They're more interested in what goes on with the people who actually live here. Besides, out-of-

towners are too loud, get drunk and throw up everywhere, and act like star struck groupies when they meet real, live monsters of myth." She made a face.

Torger could understand that. "Okay, which explains why no one comes forward. They're so disgusted with all the tourists that they just don't watch out for them when they're here, even now."

"Why should they?" Urban asked. "The tourists are only here for a week at the most. Unless they're moving here, Dravenites



don't care. I can see the point. The tourists are the police's concern."

Torger became annoyed at that statement. "Why us?"

Jagger snorted. "'Cause you keep the peace and the newbies are raising hell, so yeah, it's on you guys to handle them if they get too out of hand. We need a section of the Tourist Board to help show the tourists how to act. I've been suggesting that for years but no one cares, so I just don't say it anymore." He took a sip of beer.

Torger began to see the full

picture. "So that's why they're so pissed and pressed for information. We're supposed to handle the out-of-towners. Okay, I can see that, but what do we do about the problem now? The killer is still out there."

"Yeah, but now you know." Isy scooted her chair closer to the table. Her leg brushed his, sending a warm tendril up his thigh, straight to his groin.

His thoughts scattered and he ignored the sensation. *Now now, later I'll deal with my attraction to her,* he told himself. Aloud he

refocused his thoughts to their discussion and said, “How does this change things? Do we have to orchestrate the buddy system?” He saw that instituting this line of action would cause some issues but in the long run, it would help.

“The residents would be pissed off, having their lives disrupted, by having to find a buddy and make sure they are all on schedule. It would especially freak out the parents. Plus, the Council would find it both amusing and a show of Draven’s inability to

handle the situation, which would put more pressure on him. And I really don't need him to ride my ass any harder than he already is."

Jagger snorted. "Let me check with my contacts in the underground about these contests. I have to check in with the old man anyway." He rose and left without saying good-bye.

"Yeah," Urban yawned. "I've got some snooping to do and then I'll hit the hay. Nice meeting you, Isy." He grabbed his laptop, the food, and left the kitchen.

Now it was only Torger and Isy. He wasn't sure what to say. She hadn't said she needed to leave. Instead, she'd finished off her pizza and had risen to refill her coffee cup. Silence fell between them. It wasn't uncomfortable in the least. Seconds ticked by but neither said anything. He finished eating and she sipped her coffee. Torger resisted the urge to ask what she was thinking. It just seemed so stupid.

“Wanna walk me to my car?”  
She drank the rest of her coffee and

stood up.

Caught off guard, all he could do was stutter. "S-s-sure." He got out of his chair and walked her to the door. Opening it, the chill night wind blew against him. The soothing scents of pine, oak and night blooming flowers brushed against his face, mellowing him out and taking his arousal down a few pegs. The nearly full moon hung in the sky, silvering the forest. In the distance, an owl hooted. Torger smiled. His wolf wanted to run.

"Goddess, it's gorgeous here.

I love the woods. I have a cabin nearby, closer to the mountains.” Her lips were curled in a small grin. “Peaceful, well until my family stops by.”

Torger chuckled. “I can relate.”

“I’m sure you can.” She grabbed his hand and dragged him to the car. “You’re supposed to be a gentleman and walk me to the car.”

He didn’t argue and strode with her toward her vehicle parked close to the end of the drive. In the darkness, his protective wards were

glowing even brighter than the moonlight. “Couldn’t wait until I’d brought down the wards, could you?”

She laughed, a musical, tinkling sound that caused sensation to shimmer through him, like castoffs from a sparkler showering his insides with warmth. She released his hand but the burn remained. “And what fun would that be?” Isy stood up on tiptoe and gave him a kiss on the lips. It was small peck that sent liquid heat straight to his cock and balls. “Until



next time, sheriff.”

She gave a strand of his hair a bit of tug, unlocked her door and got into her car. With a wave, she gunned the engine and took off, leaving a spray of dust in her wake. All Torger could do was stand there and stare, wishing she'd stayed and given him more of a kiss.

## Chapter Six

HOW WILL REPRESENTATIVE  
EVANSON'S GRIEF AFFECT HIS  
CHANCES AT KEEPING HIS  
SEAT?

While Evanson grieves,  
Draven's Crossing waits to see  
what he'll do next. –Isadora Jones,  
DC News Blast

Isy let Bill drone on about decorum, precedent, and sympathy like she didn't know how to act.

Urban shifted in the backseat of the Big Pink Wonder, known as her TV Van, painted a cotton candy blush color to announce her arrival anywhere, and checked his equipment for the umpteenth time. If she didn't know he wasn't a sound tech, she would have thought he was the perfect substitute. She felt a bit paranoid about how perfectly he played the part, giving her tech babble off the cuff about what would be perfect to use during the interview to make it seem more intimate. Now she

thought she was going to suspect every substitute they brought into the studio for any reason. He was just that damn good. Things weren't helped by him smelling like his brother either. Urban had his own unique scent but Urban was wearing his brother's motorcycle jacket. The siblings were about the same size, with Urban being just a smidgen smaller. She wanted to snatch the jacket away from him and cuddle into it. Her lips still tingled from their kiss last night.

She could still smell Torger's exclusive cologne: pine, night air, wolf musk and pure male with just a hint of vanilla and spices. The echo of his body warmth pressed against her skin, sending a bolt of heat straight to her pussy. *Must act professional, now is not the time.* Ignoring the sensation, she refocused on Bill's lecture until she'd heard enough. "Fine. Fine. Okay, tread carefully. Got anything else to tell me that I haven't already heard, Mom? Nothing? Good. Let's go so Ed can setup." She and Urbar

had decided it would be better to use a cover name rather than his real one in case the Representative's staff got paranoid and decided to do a background check. One never knew what the Representative was thinking at the moment. In grief he could go nuts and lash out at everyone around him. She'd seen it happen and didn't want to give him any reason to do that to them. Too much was at stake in her opinion to get kicked out. They wouldn't get another chance unless something major

happened.

The Representative's mansion was located near the Mayor's official residence. As they got out of the car and headed for it, Isy noticed the doors were already open and the Representative's assistant stood in the doorway, a tight smile on her lips. Dressed all in black right down to her stockings she looked like Death's secretary. Her features were sharp, almost hawkish. There was a glint in her green eyes that set Isy off her center. Isy's stomach lurched at the

sight. All thoughts of Torger died in the face of that woman. Long and lean like a whip, unreadable emotion glittered in her eyes. Her pale skin was so tight it looked stretched over bone and sinew. Isy felt as if she had been transported back to middle school, in Mrs. Tingley's class, with her strict face and her let the ruler fly on your knuckles attitude for even putting a toe out of line. Isy stifled a shiver and marched up to the house. She smiled and stuck out her hand, "Isadora Jones, here for the



interview with Representative Evanson.”

The woman didn't return the gesture, instead, turning on her heel into the darkened interior without a word to them. Her shiny ink black hair was pulled back into a tight bun that seemed to steal light as she moved into the manor making the surroundings seem darker.

“Okay. Let's follow the icy draft, people.” She walked after the woman and hoped things would get better.

“Isy,” Bill hissed. “Be nice. They’re in mourning.”

*I’ll bet.* She didn’t say that out loud, even though she wanted to. Rather than answer Bill, she focused on the interior design of the mansion. It was nice, albeit dark and heavy on the masculine side. There wasn’t a trace of Muffy Evanson anywhere, which struck her as odd. Not even a family portrait or small pictures from their wedding. It was almost as if the woman hadn’t existed.

“It would be best to have a

sunny room. Nothing to do with sound but it would look good on camera,” Urban threw out.

“No. Need a darkened room, would add to the mourning mystique,” Bill retorted.

Isy snorted. “I agree with Ed Sunny would be better. Or at least, a well lit room. Where the hell is she leading us?”

They’d been walking for a bit without any sign that they would be stopping. The corridor seemed to be getting darker. There weren’t any windows. The walls seemed to

close in on her. Beads of sweat popped up on her brow and upper lip. *Screw the makeup artists, this is just fucking creepy.* There weren't even any pictures on the wall. There were patches of lighter squares as if there had been things there before, not now. Not even of past Representatives to Draven's Crossing. It was weird, almost as if he didn't want anyone to know who had come before him. Fingers of ice trailed down her spine as they came to a large, paneled oak door. The assistant stopped and turned

toward them. Her disposition hadn't seemed to improve any. In fact, she seemed even more frigid than before.

"I hope you'll respect Mr. Evanson's mourning period and not push him too hard. He does have other duties to attend to," the assistant said in a chilled tone.

With those words of warning, she turned the knob and gestured for them to enter the room. Isy strode into the room before fear could make her say some sort of nonsense excuse and then run

away. Things weren't helped by the sense that Urban and Bill wanted to run just as much as she did. Representative Ivan Evanson sat in a chair by a roaring fire. He wore all black which only made his pale pallor stand out even more. His blond hair was slicked back, brown eyes downcast. She almost bought the act. Almost. His hands were clenched in fists on his lap, and his jaw was tight. His lips were a thin, rose pink line that made his handsome face look distant and cold. He was seated even farther

away from her than during her interview with him.

Isadora held out her hand and approached him. “Representative Evanson, I’m so sorry for your loss. Muffy was truly a jewel. A wonderful woman. Thank you so much for sharing this time with us. Your constituency will be most appreciative.”

He rose, smoothed his jacket down and shook her hand. “Thank you for wanting to do a piece on my wife. She was an extraordinary woman, her loss is...unbearable. I

just hope Torger catches this maniac.”

She didn't miss the implication that Torger was incompetent. Isy bit back a retort defending Torger.

“Please, do have a seat.” He didn't wait for her action; he returned to his chair and rested his ankle on his opposite knee.

Urban worked quickly to mike everyone up and Bill handled the camera work. Evanson's people had insisted on only having three people in her entourage, as if they



were going to trample around his house with a hundred crew members. For some reason Bill had volunteered to go behind the lens, as if he wanted to make sure that his star reporter didn't step on any toes while she intruded on the grieving process. The camera was setup and everyone was ready to go within a few minutes. They had to work quickly; his assistant had made it clear that time was a luxury the Representative didn't have. I stayed softball questions. Mostly

background information about Muffy, how people can continue her legacy and where they can send their condolences. Evanson's answers were mechanical, no tricks that she could see but he continued to act distant.

Maybe it was the death of his wife or maybe it was having Isy ask him questions, she wasn't sure. But it felt like she wasn't talking to Evanson at all; he was a completely different person. There was a hitch in his voice that didn't sound right. Every few minutes his eyes would

shift from brown to green to hazel and back to brown as if they weren't stabilized in color. She wasn't sure if his eyes had ever done that before. A red flush appeared on his neck and in his cheeks and every so often he'd swallow or clear his throat. Then he would go back to being pale. Muscles would ripple under his skin as if he was a shifter fighting back a change. Then there was his scent; normally subtle and woodsy it would become bright with a metallic tang to it.

Her suspicions seemed to be confirmed, and now she had Urban and Bill to back her up. Well, Urban. She doubted Bill noticed anything. By the end of the interview, she'd learned nothing to indicate a setup of Muffy's death but Ivan Evanson was hiding something big, that she was sure of.

"Sound was perfect. Um, can I use your bathroom? Drank a lot of coffee," Urban said.

Isy looked up, thinking nothing of the request. He had been downing coffee like he had an

addiction. Bill grunted something but Isy didn't catch it. Evanson nodded and called his assistant, who showed Urban out of the room. Once everything was packed and pleasantries were exchanged they were led back down the dark corridor of depression. Urban joined them at the entry with a shit eater's grin on his face. Isy didn't ask but her curiosity was piqued. Bill muttered about how unprofessional Urban was but strode to the van like his ass was on fire. Isy sidled up to Urban.

“What happened?”

Urban shook his head. “Not here. At your office,” Urban said.

She bit her lip to hold back the questions that were flitting through her head. The ride back to the studio was far too long in Isy’s opinion, and Bill drove like a paranoid grandmother with a horrible sense of direction. He kept taking turns that the GPS didn’t instruct him to and he kept looking in his rear view mirror, speeding up and slowing down depending on if a car was behind them or not.

When they reached the studio Isy snatched the keys from him. "Never. Again. Do you understand me? Never again."

She marched into the studio with Urban trailing behind her. "And I thought Torger was a horrible driver, total road rage, but that one? Good goddess, he makes most spooks look totally easy breezy, no one following us at all."

She didn't ask him why he thought Bill suspected that they were followed, she was far too glad to be back on stable ground. They

rushed to her office where she shut and locked the door as soon as they were both inside. “Spill,” Isy demanded. Even her dragon was curious to see what he’d found.

Urban dug into his pocket and produced a piece of toilet paper. Before she commented on his fascination with other people’s toiletries, he unwrapped it and held out his hand. In his palm was a tiny blue tablet.

“Viagra?” Isy scratched her head. She’d never heard of a man becoming standoffish due to taking



the little blue pill.

Urban shook his head. "Nope. Not sure what it is but it was in an unmarked medicine bottle, with only his name on it. No address, doctor, instructions or side effect warnings. It was in the mirror cabinet over the sink. They didn't bother hiding it. Makes me wonder. I'll have a lab analyze it. Thanks for having me along. I'll go check out."

He left before she could ask him more questions. Rather than go after him and demand more information, she called Torger and

let him know what his brother had found. Once she hung up with him, she still felt as if she'd been left out of the loop. "Well, at least we have something." *And there's also what I saw, if I saw it.* She still couldn't grasp what it was that she'd witnessed. It was almost as if Ivan Evanson was on the verge of a shift, but he wasn't a shifter. No one really knew what he was as he'd never said.

Rather than pester Urban for information or call Torger for hour by hour updates, she focused on

what she had to do for that night's broadcast. There was a momentary distraction by the mail. Her fan mail bag was bigger than usual. She assumed it had to do with viewers asking for more information, any snippet of something, about the killer or what the City Hall was going to do or say next. She would have had Michaela go through everything but extra energy and a need to burn off her curiosity had her going through everything and sorting them into piles; gifts and letters. Once that was done, she

ordered lunch and began going through the letters first. Anything that had to do with a photo request went in one pile, things that should be shown to the police in another, simple words of praise went into a keeper stack and the naked photos and pervy mail she didn't want went into the to be destroyed and never looked at pile. The only thing left was an envelope that looked old and dated. Very expensive in her opinion. The paper was heavy and smooth; it even smelled fancy with just a whiff of her favorite cologne.

Curious, she ripped open the flap and slipped out the letter.

Her hands shook as she read the missive and her stomach threatened to rebel as revulsion filled her. With a quaking, hand she reached for her cell phone and hit speed dial, willing Torger to pick up on the first ring. He seemed to get the message.

“Torger.”

“Tor, get over here. I need you!” A scream bubbled up in her throat. She wanted to cry, crawl into a corner and curl up into a little

ball. Why the hell had the killer contacted her of all people?

\* \* \* \*

Torger's heart pounded against his ribcage as he drove through yet another red light. Isy's voice had scared the shit out of him to the point that he'd left a meeting with Draven to check in on her. It didn't matter that Draven was threatening to give his job to someone else or what Urban had found. All that mattered in that moment was getting to Isy and

keeping her safe. His wolf paced within him, whimpering, its impatience reverberating through him. It wanted him to get out of the car and shift and run the rest of the way.

He pulled into the studio's parking lot with a screech and rushed into the building, flashing his badge as he went. He'd been to Isy's office before, so he knew the way without needing directions. When he got there, Isy was lying down on the couch. She lifted a hand without looking at him and

said, "Over there, top letter." Her voice was so low it was a raspy whisper. He almost didn't hear her at first.

Torger strode over the pile and picked up the indicated correspondence. After a cursory read through, his stomach threatened to rebel. The son-of-a-bitch was so calm, so cocky, so confident it made him sick. As much as he wanted to stay with Isy he had to get this to the lab. He called the crime scene unit and then Draven before leading Isy out



of her office and putting her in the hands of her assistant, Michaela. "Get her somewhere she can sit down, I'll be back to take her statement. I'm going to seal off her office."

Michaela nodded and led a visibly shaken Isadora out of the room. Torger went to his car and got out a roll of police tape, a recorder and notebook. Just as he was shutting a door, several cars screeched to a halt in front of the building. Urban and Jagger were the first to reach him.

“What the fuck happened? Draven is shitting kittens right now,” Jagger demanded as he strode up to him.

Torger gave them a quick rundown of the situation.

Jagger ran a hand through his hair. “Shit. Well that’s something. I’ll call boss man and calm him down. Cocky son-of-a-bitch.”

“That’s what I said,” Torger answered as he and Urban headed into the building. They found Isy in her dressing room with a cup of herbal tea. She’d changed into

jeans, a sweater and thickly padded bedroom slippers. She was wrapped up in a loose cardigan that swamped her hands.

Torger crouched down beside her. "Hey," he started off softly. "I'm gonna have to ask you some questions, okay? They're going over your office right now. I've got Urban here with me. Do you want to start?"

As much as Torger wanted to clear the room, he needed his brother there to help him. His emotions were a complete wreck.

His wolf wanted to comfort her, and he wanted to find the killer and beat the shit out of him. Rage throbbed under his skin and pulsed through his veins. His territory yet again, his woman this time. Torger focused on Isy and resisted the urge to pace and howl and run. The last bit had more to do with the full moon than the situation at hand.

Isy licked her lips. The little pink tip of her tongue darted out to wet her plump bottom lip. For a moment he latched onto that movement and allowed it to calm

him and remind him that she needed him. Her usual steely control was rattled. He could feel her unease and vulnerability. Her emotions were spilling out of her, and every one of them hit him in the chest. It was as if tiny fists were pelting him. He shook off the feeling and focused on getting Isy's statement. He had to keep telling himself that she was a witness rather than his mate. *She's a victim, not mine. She's just any other person, not someone special.* Telling himself those lies calmed him a little and

let him grasp what she was telling him but that was about it. Every instinct he had was to take her home with him, settle her in his bed, get her feeling safe and secure and then go back to work with his brother in charge of her safety.

As soon as they were done, he gave her arm a squeeze and left Urban and Michaela to make sure she didn't have a breakdown. After supervising the situation with her office, he called Draven and gave him an update and then went back to Isy. The crew had found nothing

else in the office from the killer and they could release her space back to her within the hour. Draven sounded almost relieved to have new evidence from the killer pop up, it was something he could give the public an update on and then give the Council his report. Urban came up to him just as he was about to return to the DCPD. "Hey bro, I'm gonna take her back to your cabin. She's really shaken up and wants a safe place to process and decompress, then she'll come back and do her report. I'll make

up the guest room next to your room. I'll order out."

Torger could have honestly kissed his brother in that moment. It was what he'd wanted to do for Isy but hadn't been able to bring himself to say anything about. It wouldn't have been professional in his opinion, even though no one would really protest or care. He gave Urban a nod. "Go for it. Send out for Chinese, she'll like that. I have to go back into the office, do my official report and then see Draven to give him all the details I



couldn't over the phone. I'm sure Jagger is doing a happy dance now that they have something to go on."

Urban chuckled. "The man is probably salivating and chomping at the bit to track down the paper and everything. Go do what you have to do. I'll send her assistant to go get her clothes and stuff and hold down the fort here. See you when you get home."

Torger grinned and left. Things were finally looking up for him all around. By the time he got back to his office, the place was

practically buzzing with activity. Jagger was waving a report like it was a victory flag, and there were detectives vying for his attention with information. *Looks like the killer had finally tripped up.* He grinned as he moved to his office with his new entourage in tow. The first person to grab his attention was Jagger. As soon as Torger sat down behind his desk, the vampire shoved his way to the front waving a piece of paper out in front of him. "Got the blood results from the ME." His shit eater's grin scared

the crap out of Torger as he was also flashing fang as well. Torger had never seen him smile before. It was so fucking creepy that he felt as if he should cover up his neck and any exposed skin just in case.

“And?” Torger demanded as he tried to mask his discomfort.

“Blood type matches the last victim found at L and C and it’s also the same blood type on file as well as the first vic. He’s checking into the other victims in the case but we have something.” Jagger slammed down the report and

strode out of the room, head held high like a king or conqueror. Torger could only shake his head and read over the report before taking more information from the detectives around him. Detective Santa Rosa gave the next update "Abbott says the victims did stop into his shop but that he didn't see who they left with and that the security feed has been recorded over; it's a twenty-four hour cycle. We're checking into the surrounding shops and hotels again to see if we can get more

information.”

“Thanks, keep up the good work. Check back with Abbott again. Maybe his staff has seen something. The guy’s an institution for the vacationers. He’s their first stop in the city once they leave their hotels. Someone had to have seen something.”

“Will do.” Santa Rosa left him with other Detectives demanding his attention. By the time they were all done he had more information to go on. The stationary had been discovered to be special order, with

only one shop carrying it. The customer list was limited, but they had them combing their database to find who had ordered in the last three months. The leads were starting to flesh out but it wasn't fast enough, in Torger's opinion. They still needed to figure out a way to keep people safe and give the Council and Evanson enough meat to keep them off their backs. Stationary and blood types weren't going to be enough. They would mock their findings and ask if they wanted tourists with those blood

types to not come to the city at all. Besides that, there was the Tourist Board lead to pursue. Those contests weren't running themselves and there were no updates from Urban on that front. Not that Torger blamed his brother. He had other things to do, namely taking care of Isy. Once the report was done, he went to Draven's office to touch base with him.

Draven was in a more jubilant state of mind than the last few weeks. He was practically beaming

at him. "So, what are the updates? I knew you'd find something."

Torger resisted the urge to shake his head. Of course he was happy now that they had leads. Torger gave him the rundown of what they had and how they were proceeding. Draven nodded but said nothing until he was done.

"Okay, great. We have a start, a real start. And I can see your concerns loud and clear. I can also see the mocking we'll be in for, especially about that blood report. As a vampire, from my point of



view, there is a rarity in our community where a vampire can only have a certain type of blood. That they're allergic to all other types and only one would do."

Torger blinked. "Why the hell didn't Jagger tell me this at the station? So, our perp may be targeting people with a certain blood type due to an allergy? Jesus, I've heard everything now."

Draven shrugged. "Well, we were human once. But yes, that's possible. So you have to go back and see if the other victims can fall

into that new theory. Sometimes it can also be the maker's fault."

Torger rubbed the bridge of his nose. He could feel himself getting into a lecture about Vampire 101 and wasn't sure how much information he could take without feeling it would be overload. "Okay, hit me."

"Well, sometimes if the process of conversion is interrupted, the maker can unintentionally cause an anomaly in their intended victim and complications can ensue." Draven

took a breath before he dived back into his explanation. “Such as allergies, inability to feed on blood but still crave it, no immunity to sunlight, no fangs or their digestive system can’t handle the intake of blood, so feeding would have to be taken intravenously rather than orally.” He stopped again and looked Torger over. “You getting all this?”

Torger nodded as he allowed his brain to wrap around this new knowledge.

Draven continued. “All of

these cases are rare but have been known to happen. You should see Madcap Madigan in archives for more examples of vampire conversion failings. He'd know all about that. You can ask your girlfriend, Isy, too. She's done enough research on vampirism to be an expert." Draven grinned at the last comment and Torger resisted the urge to cuff him on that prod.

"How do I get an audience with the Mad one? He hates company and refuses to see anyone

without the proper credentials.” Torger didn’t want to even think about the hoops he’d have to jump through to get a pass just to get to archives. Madigan wouldn’t take a word from Draven. He had to have a paper trail, oral permission, written permission, passes, keys... the works.

“If you want to avoid all that, get Isy to help you. Madigan loves her. Lots,” Draven teased.

Torger resisted the urge to scowl. “Fine,” he spat out. “I’ll talk to her tonight. Urban is watching

her at my place after the whole letter thing. I'm sure he's been doing more background and investigation on his end."

"Will it stand up in court? Urban's stuff? We have to make it stick." Draven's face was serious as he said this, and Torger knew he was thinking about the future, and the fanfare of the trial.

"It will. I'm sure of it." Torger left before Draven could ask him more questions about the case. He didn't want to give away too much since he didn't have a lot to go on

to begin with. His mind was filled with questions. The foremost one was if this killer had an allergy and all the victims have the same blood type, how was this guy finding out that they're a match to his need? A contest is one thing but breaking into medical records, especially in different states, is something else entirely. It speaks of a more sinister agenda, something pointed and direct. Unless they were dealing with two killers, one for the contests and the other just hunts random vacationers. The idea sent

an icy finger down his spine. He shivered as goose bumps broke out over his arms despite the covering of a jacket and long sleeved shirt.

As soon as he got into his car, he decided to swing by the station just in case there was anything else. As much as he wanted to check in on Isy, he had to do his job first. As soon as he pulled onto Excalibur Avenue his phone rang. He answered it via the Bluetooth hands free option in his car. "Torger."

"Sorry to bother you boss, found a body. It's... You'll have to



see it." Detective Santa Rosa's voice was weak, almost as if she was trying to fight back vomit. A sense of anger shook him. Could the son of a bitch have struck again and this time taken his anger out on the victim? He hoped not. There was already enough hell to pay as it was. Torger would rip up all the afterlives if he had to, to get the killer.

Tightening his grip on the steering wheel, he responded. "I'll be there."

Detective Santa Rosa gave him

the address and rang off. He blew out a breath. "Here we go again."

\* \* \* \*

Blood splattered the floors and walls. The crimson liquid formed pools on the linoleum. All he saw was red. It bathed his hands, covered his vision, stuck in clumps of his hair. There was nothing neat or tidy about this killing and yet the hunger gnawed at his stomach, scratched through his veins, quivered along his muscles. His body throbbed with

the pangs. The echo of the metallic ambrosia floated on the air. He could taste it on his tongue, feel it slide down his throat in thick rivers until he was practically choking on the memories of gorging on the victim. It had been nothing short of glorious delirium. Euphoria made his mind and body soar even though he was still on the ground. Finally, he'd fed. And fed well. Now it was all over and his thirst gnawed through his satiation of the good meal. Demanding more. The need for another, the never ending

unquenchable hunger tormented his mind and roiled through his veins.

The metallic aftertaste rolled over his taste buds demanding that he take more, find another, quench the need. The high pitch of a whistle pierced through the night air, fracturing his thoughts. With a snap of his head, he rose up off the filthy floor. His instincts forced him to follow the sound until he came upon a shrouded figure in a dark cloak. "Enough," the person hissed. "You've fed well twice tonight.

Time to go home. Now.”

Anger seared through him at the interruption of his blood fest. He considered making the shadowed figure his next victim but knew that would be futile. Obeying for now, he licked the remaining blood off his fingers, following the figure to a black SUV parked at the curb outside of the house and climbed in. The hunger punched him in the gut, but he smiled in spite of it. Soon there would be another unknown victim and another chance to feed. And *no one*

would stop him this time.

## Chapter Seven

THE KILLER HAS STRUCK  
AGAIN. WILL IT NEVER END?

The killer has hit close to home.  
When will this phantom menace be  
caught? -Isadora Jones, DC News  
Blast

Nervous tension filled Isy.  
She paced the wooden floor in  
Torger's guest room. Urban had  
settled her in before going to his  
computer and typing away. Blues

music blasted through the tinny speakers of his laptop while he searched for whatever it was that he was looking for. Urban had shut off her cell phone. Supposedly to relax her. Instead, she felt as if she was missing a limb. News was happening right now and she wasn't party to it. Damn him for not letting her leave the house to do her nightly broadcast. Damn the killer for putting her in this position. Right now, she was the story and she couldn't even tell anyone what had happened or what



she knew. It was as if by bringing her here, Urban and Torger had secreted her away from the world. She longed to hear the chirp of her text alert or the ring of her cell letting her know Bill had a story for her or a source had a scoop. Isy needed to see Michaela walk through the door, arms laden with clipboard, diary, and a whole bunch of newspapers and magazines that she'd comb through to decide what next to cover. Now, all she had was Torger's cabin and a warden who refused to let her check her

email.

Sure the letter had been a shock. Wasn't it her job to report the news, damn it? He had no right to treat her like a prisoner. There was no way for her to get back to town unless she went on foot. The forest may be a safe place but she didn't want to go trouncing into the underbrush alone, in the dark and certainly not in the heels she'd stupidly decided to put on when leaving. It would have been idiotic to go to Torger's house in her bedroom slippers, no matter how

cute the plush, pink dragon shoes were. He wouldn't have cared about her footwear but there was no way she'd not look her best in his home. So, full makeup, cute outfit, and the perfect shoes to match. Besides, her dragon refused to allow her to appear anything but her best. The reptile had pitched a fit about her choices in fashion, yelling as she'd pulled on the sweater and jeans, rather than the cute minidress that wouldn't have made sense for a shock victim. Isy refused to play a victim card with Torger. A: he

wouldn't buy it. B: he'd think she was up to something and C: she refused to be a victim. It had been a shock, now that it was over.

A glance at the clock showed that it was close to her broadcasting post. Anxiety crawled all over her skin like ants at the thought of her vacation replacement telling everyone what had happened to her at the studio. People would think she was weak! Unable to stop herself, she marched out of the room, right up to Urban. "I need to call Bill. He needs to tell me what's

going on.”

“No.” Urban didn’t even look up when he answered.

Fury shook through her body in a red hot wave. She clenched her fists as she tried to keep from smacking him upside the head. “What do you mean no?” Her tone sounded calm to her ears but there was a slight edge.

Urban still didn’t look at her. “No. Torger doesn’t want you to work. Unless he says so, you don’t get your phone back. Now what do you want on your pizza? I’m

hungry.” The loud growl of his stomach punctuated that declaration.

She let out a resigned sigh. “You’re always hungry. Pepperoni and is pizza all you eat?” She settled down in a chair next to him, hoping to get him nice and comfortable before she made a play for her phone.

“No, sometimes steak and sometimes, during a blue moon, actual veggies.” Urban slipped out her cell from his pocket and dialed a pizza place.

She watched in silent anger at his audacity to use up her *All the Time* minutes. First, he ordered a pizza, then he used it to call someone named CyberCat. The conversation lasted so long the pizza had arrived and been half done by the time he hung up. All Isy could do was glower, eat and stew silently while he withheld information. A scream built up in her throat as her mind swirled over the possibilities of what he could have been talking about. None of what he'd said to CyberCat made

sense. He was talking about illegal contests and medicine to suppress a Hyder persona. She'd never heard of any of it. Her mind traveled back to the house and the pill he'd found. Was he talking about that? Could Urban be talking about the new medicines aimed at the paranormal community to help newbies with the unending thirst they experienced in the beginning of their transformation? The questions didn't stop there. She began spouting out theories of her own, that Evanson suffered from



some unnamed medical condition. Maybe he was secretly a vampire who wasn't trying to shove down the urge for blood. No one knew exactly what he was, but human was not an option. There had never been an answer given as to what he was and the questions were dropped as soon as they were asked during the first time he ran for office.

Unable to keep quiet anymore, she decided to take a shot and ask Urban what was going on. He wasn't Torger but they still

shared the same DNA. “Okay what’s going on? This is driving me crazy.”

Urban looked up from the laptop, a slice of pizza in his hand and a beer in the other. “Um.” He put down the food and drink. He scratched the stubble on his chin before giving her an answer. “Well, CyberCat is a hacker. This is off the record, understand?”

She nodded and turned on her mental recorder. *May be off the record for him but could be a sweet news bit for me, maybe in a blog post.*

“Sure. Of course.” Isy gave him her sweetest, butter-wouldn’t-melt-in-my-mouth smile but didn’t miss the tension lines around his eyes and the way his lips thinned before he returned her gesture. She doubted that he trusted her as far as he could throw her in dragon form. “Soo, CyberCat?”

Urban settled against the back of his chair, grabbed his beer, took a sip, and then fixed her with a hard stare. “Off. The. Record. No ifs, ands, or buts. If she gets nabbed, I’ll stick so many crimes on you,

you won't be able to move and Torger won't be able to help you in the least." He gave her another smile before continuing. "CyberCat was telling me about the tracking info for the illegal contests that were being held by the Tourist Board. People were asked to enter certain information, such as place of birth, birth date and blood type. The last part was optional and supposed to be all in fun, a sort of matchup with your favorite vampire type thing. Something stupid and directed at the vampire

lovers.”

Isy didn't miss the tinge of disgust that edged that last sentence. She wasn't sure if it had anything to do with hatred for vampires in general or for this scheme that was unraveling before him. Rather than push, she waited for him to continue.

He took another sip of beer before he began talking again. “The winners of the contest seemed to be based on who added information to that part of the entry. There were other winners who hadn't entered

any info besides the basics that were required, but I assume that had more to do with making the contest look legit. Right now, we're matching the contest winners with the victims and whether or not they gave their blood type or not. I was also tracking down more info on that pill I found in Evanson's house. Basically it's a prototype that hasn't been approved by the FDA yet. In fact, there haven't been any trials for it."

Isy bit her lip to keep from asking any questions. Her brain

was bursting with ideas, theories and speculations. It was hard to keep quiet. She squirmed in her seat. Her mouth ached from keeping her lips pressed together. Her fingers clutched the arms of her chair in a death grip as she tried to stay calm and not launch herself at him, pelting him with a million questions. Frantic energy coursed along her legs, demanding that she move, pace, and think out loud. She couldn't take it anymore. "What the hell are the pills for?" she blurted out.

Urban stopped talking. He blinked as if he had just realized something. "Oh, sorry, thought I said. They're an experimental drug for suppression of hunger. According to CyberCat, they're used for werewolves and vampires when they've been newly changed. Unlike natural born shifters, a made shifter deals with rage and hunger issues. Sometimes they're uncontrollable. They deal with bouts of violence and severe depressive cycles, almost suicidal. And during the shifting times, they



can change without thought or even the revolution of a full moon. So it's a cocktail for both races. I'm not sure what it would do to a natural born shifter or an older vampire or any of the other races. There's not a lot of information on it yet. I'm going to have my people look into it."

Isy thought about it and tried to add in what she knew and what she'd witnessed during the interview with Evanson. "Can it block off emotions? You know, I can help. I know people in the

medical industry. Please, let me have my phone. Let me do some digging.” She waited for him to turn her down or ask about the emotional question.

He had a poker face on. No indication whatsoever at what his thoughts were. Seconds ticked by as the moments stretched out. Isy began to pray for Torger to come home and interrupt things. *What’s he thinking? Where is Torger?* Her palms dampened as the tips of her thumbs itched to send out a text to her informants and network to get

the information they needed. Urban licked his lips and opened his mouth before shutting it again. A small whine of irritation slipped out before she could catch it. Urban smirked.

“Damn it, let me help you!” she shouted.

Urban chuckled. “Impatient little thing, aren’t you?” He grinned. “Fine.” He handed over her phone, which she snatched away from him.

Not waiting for him to say anything, she began to scroll

through her contacts list and started calling people. "Name of drug?" she asked as she snatched a napkin and pen poised to write.

"PXR90-1," Urban responded before taking a bite out of his pizza.

She got to work calling people and searching the web for more, as well as emailing people she knew who could possibly have the connections to get her what she needed. Urban tapped at his laptop, and the hours whittled away with no appearance of Torger, not even a phone call. She didn't think

anything of it, she was too deep in research mode but a small part of her missed him, wishing he were there, safe with her.

\* \* \* \*

Abbott paced around his sanctuary. His anger lashed out at the air as he tried to tamp down his rage. Isadora Jones hadn't done her usual spot, nor was there any information on why or where she was. There were rumors of police at the studio. People said that someone tried to attack her and

that's why she wasn't on air. He picked up a bottle of his special ink and threw it against the wall. Black liquid with red glints burst against the pale yellow paint, forming a bloody Rorschach test. Tendrils of onyx and red slid down the wall like dark tears. His rage only grew at the mess. He picked up a chair and threw it. The legs gave a deep twang as it fell mournfully on its side.

Ariel rushed through the door, red splotches on her face, fear dancing in her bright blue eyes.

“Master?” Her voice quaked as her hand clutched the knob. She shuffled further into the room without taking her eyes off of him. But she didn’t let go of the handle.

“Get out,” he roared as he pushed aside the books and papers on his desk. Abbott picked up a vase and threw it. Flowers floated in the air as drops of water danced and glittered under the florescent lights. Candle flames flickered as he wound his way around the space in a storm of emotion. All he could see was the fact that the center of

his world hadn't been where she was supposed to be. His hands shook as he tried to rein in his temper. He reached up and clutched his hair as he tried to find his way through the maze of anger. "She's been hurt, threatened. I must show her my solidarity in the only way I know how."

Abbott grabbed his coat and left his inner sanctum. The night would provide him with the answer to show Isadora his appreciation for her. He wandered the streets in a haze of anger and as the hunger



throbbled through his body, his blood thickened in his veins and his body heat increased. The sweetest scent floated toward him; sugary, floral with a bite of metal underneath. He followed the aroma until he came upon a lithe beauty of medium height with mousy brown blond hair, pointed ears, glasses and a slim figure. She hugged a few books to her chest. Her small worn leather purse swung at her side. Her gaze darted from side to side as she walked a little faster. Abbott smiled and

approached the woman. "Hello dear, you shouldn't be out all alone, not with a killer on the loose. Why don't you have a nice strong escort to take you home?"

The woman blinked up at him. Up close, her eyes were a beautiful brown, almost amber in hue. Her pale pink lips thinned. "Mr. Abbott," she ducked her head. "I'm okay, really."

Abbott smiled. "I'm sure you are, but a killer stalks the night. Let me guide you home. I promise not to try anything. What's your name,

my dear?" He held out his arm, and she slid hers through it.

"Michaela, Mr. Abbott." She gave him a winning smile and allowed him to lead her along the sidewalk.

A ping sounded in the back of his brain. *This is Isadora's elfin assistant.* The night was looking up, finally.

"Where are we going, Michaela?" He tested out her name on his tongue. Not as sweet as Isadora's name but almost as close. Hunger thudded in his veins,

wrapped around his heart as his blood turned to lava and need squeezed his dick. Hot liquid desire pooled in his groin, filling his shaft as the dull ache of arousal pulsed in his balls.

“To the Black Lagoon Condos.” She gave him a small, shy smile.

“A lovely place.” *And quiet*, he mused silently. Abbot knew exactly how to show his appreciation for Isadora. It would involve flowers, candles, and this lovely young lady. She would understand. She had to

understand what his gift would mean. And then she would come to him, find him. Isadora Jones was clever; of course she would figure out it was him. As Michaela buzzed them past the gate and into the complex, he mentally noted the security camera watching their progress with its red eye tracking their movement. *Must fetch that tape later.* He allowed Michaela to lead him to her home.

“Please, come in Mr. Abbott. A drink?” she asked, her soft voice, shy, a blush on her cheeks bringing

out her beauty.

“I would love to, my dear.” He accepted her invitation and shut the door behind him.

## Chapter Eight

### IS THE KILLER GETTING MORE VIOLENT?

Latest body found, a real horror show playing out. When will it end?

-Isadora Jones, DC News Blast

Torger stared down at the body. Bile burned the back of his throat at the sight of what looked like deep teeth marks all over the arms, legs and neck. Blood painted the wall in splotches, drops and

lines. Even the ceiling was stained with it. The room smelled like old pennies, sweat and decay. The coroner had estimated the woman had been dead for at least a few hours. There weren't even any flies, not a single bug, which was odd. There was no scent of bleach and this wasn't like the other scenes. It was as if the killer had just gone insane and went to town on the body. He wasn't even sure that this was a vampire attack. It was just so brutal. There was no finesse at all. He would have thought the person



had been attacked by a shifter if the bite marks didn't look like punctures. He glanced over at Detective Santa Rosa. "We sure this was only one person?"

She nodded. "No indication of anyone else. House has been abandoned for over a year. Neighbors say they saw a black SUV in front of the house but saw no one going in or leaving. They didn't see anything. I'm not sure if they've been bewitched or not. We're having our resident wizard check to see if there's any trace of

magic or spells. I'd say we're dealing with someone other than the serial killer based on the wounds. This looks too violent for someone so calculating. Thoughts?"

Detective Santa Rosa gazed up at him with inquisitive green eyes.

Torger nodded. "Sounds like it. Maybe this time we'll be able to get some trace evidence, maybe even DNA."

He thought about what he was going to say to Isadora. She would be salivating over this story.

Thankfully, Urban was keeping her under control. At least he hoped that his brother had her occupied. “Okay, guys wrap this up. We’ve been here long enough. I have to call Draven and let him know we may be dealing with some other sicko.”

His gut clenched. He didn’t doubt how that conversation would go, mostly with yelling and demands for answers and then a call from the Council. *Yaaay, not.* Torger left the crime scene with a sense of anger and hopelessness

trailing after him like a train. As he got into his car, he resisted the urge to call Urban and do a check in. If he called his brother, then Isy would want to know what the call was about. Rather than face a firing squad of questions from either one of them, he called Draven. The vampire was getting used to being called away from home, but it didn't make him any friendlier.

“What now?” Draven's surly greeting made Torger sit up straighter. His wolf growled at the anger in Draven's voice. The alpha

in him woke up ready to fight. It wanted to bite and scratch.

“Listen you bastard, it’s been a long night. I don’t give a fuck what kind of pressure you’ve been under. I’m dealing with a pile of your shit so bench the attitude,” Torger growled.

Silence.

“We have another body,” Torger continued, trying to take his tone down a notch and not succeeding. An edge of anger still laced his voice. “More violent but doesn’t seem to be connected to the

original case. We're thinking magic is involved. I'm going to split the task forces to handle each case separately until proven otherwise. You better start getting a press release ready. I'm heading to your office now."

"Don't bother. I'll meet with you in the morning. We'll talk then. You need a full night's sleep and space. Jesus." There was a rasping sound coming from Draven's end. "I hate this fucking case. I hate this whole thing. It's playing havoc with everything and everyone around

me. Look, I'm sorry. I'll see you in the morning."

Draven rang off before Torger could respond. It felt as if a balloon had been deflated. His anger had no outlet. Tension shivered along his limbs as he turned the car toward the police station. As much as he wanted to go home, he couldn't. He wanted to get a report on the progress of the case. It had only been a half an hour, but that didn't mean there hadn't been progress. Once he arrived, the tension in him ratcheted up until

he practically ran from the car into the building. Meeting Duggan on the steps, he managed to get himself under control. With a nod, the police officer greeted him with a smile. "We found some DNA, sir no matches yet but we're still searching for them. We got a license plate number and a description of the driver who looked human. There was also a report of a shrouded figure getting out of the vehicle."

"Good, good. Anything else?" Torger prayed there was more



information.

“We’re still working on it, Chief. Get some sleep, okay? You have the werewolf summit in a few weeks.” Duggan wandered off.

Torger mentally called himself all sorts of idiot. He’d forgotten about the summit. The fact that it was happening during all this mess only amplified his stress levels. He got back into his car and drove to his cabin. He made a mental list of the topics that needed to be dealt with. Torger couldn’t keep track of it all; he needed an assistant.

Weariness pushed down his shoulders, his limbs felt as if they were weighted, his head felt burdensome with all the thoughts and tasks he had to do.

With a groan, all the anger faded out of his body. He just wanted to go to bed, wrap his arms around Isy and hold her tight. Torger wanted, no *needed*, an anchor. His world was spinning out of control, and he didn't know how to handle it. Killers stalking his people and there were political games being played all over the

place at his expense. Never had Draven's Crossing been so active as far as crime was concerned. It felt like a direct challenge to his alpha status.

He felt like he needed to call the pack together to figure out how to utilize them. Up until now, he had kept the werewolves that weren't police out of things. Draven hadn't called the vampires together. None of the elders of the paranormal groups had gotten involved. Maybe it was time to get them together and see what

everyone thought. *Yeah, that would be easy,* he mused to himself. Getting all the elders together in one room without them getting distracted with trying to catch up and focus on the task at hand would be harder than trying to distract a werewolf during the full moon.

He sighed. *I'll just talk it over with Urban.* Torger needed to touch base with the packs anyway. Pulling into the driveway, he dreaded meeting Isy. She'd been cooped up in his house for hours. He doubted

Urban had even let her go back to the studio. They'd cleared the area, since the letter had come from the outside. The postmark had said someone from town, but there was no return address and no fingerprints on it. Which was a blow, but still a message from the killer was something to go on. He stopped the car and hesitated in turning it off.

No one would blame him for not turning right back around and putting in a few extra hours in the office. Not even Isy, but he couldn't

just leave her with Urban. Knowing his brother, he was driving her crazy with all his searching and typing and phone calls to his network of *friends*. He shut off the engine and got out. Hunger pangs echoed around his stomach. *How long again since I last ate?* He couldn't remember, which was a bad sign. Normally, eating was a huge priority to keep up his strength and stamina. Now he felt weak, as if he was dragging himself around.

Striding to the door was a

struggle when his limbs wanted him to sink down to the ground and sit there until someone found him. Anger shook through his lethargy. He wasn't taking care of himself like he should. If the killer struck again, Torger wouldn't be of any use. The door opened with light flooding his vision, blinding him for a moment. Blinking, he tried to identify the figure bathed in a soft golden glow. It was smaller than he was but definitely not female. "Who...?"

"Jesus, you look pale. Get in

here. We have food. When's the last time you've eaten? I've got news." Jagger grabbed his hand and pulled him into the living room. The touch of his cold skin against Torger's warmer one was a jolt to his system.

The vampire yanked him from room to room until they came to the kitchen. Cooking smells wafted around his body as his stomach gave another demanding grumble. His gaze zeroed in on the table laden with a large bowl of spaghetti and meatballs, bread sticks, pizza



slices and various other pasta dishes, along with bottles of beer, some empty, then some full and empty plates. Without hearing what was being said, he loaded up a plate without changing or even taking off his guns and putting them in the safe. He was that hungry. Jagger, Isy and Urbar talked around him while he shoveled forkfuls of food into his mouth and gulped down beer. He hadn't realized how thirsty he was until the ale rolled over his taste buds.

“You haven’t eaten since breakfast, have you?” Isy’s matter of fact tone cut through his gluttony and stalled his hand from reaching for more bread sticks.

“Um...” He wasn’t sure how to answer that. Torger felt like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

“I swear you need a keeper. Finish your plate, put your stuff away, take a shower and then you’ll get another plate.” Isy took away his empty dish and the empty beer bottle. “Go on, go.” She shooed him

away, making him feel shut out.

With snickers from Jagger and Urban following him out of the room, he put away his gun and various pass cards, undressed, took a quick shower and rejoined them in the kitchen wearing sweat pants and a T-Shirt. A new plate of food was placed in front of him with a tall glass of milk instead of beer. He looked at the container bewildered, then up at Isy.

“You need your wits about you, not getting drunk.” She glared at the all-out chuckles coming from

Jagger and Urban. "No more bees for anyone until we've made some progress. Jagger, I believe you wanted to tell Torger something."

Jagger spoke. "Yeah, we've got security footage of a man in a trench coat, collar turned up, about medium height and build at the post office dropping off the letter in the *In Town* slot. The postage was bought at Abbott's place, so was the stationary. We've sent people there to do a check of receipts. I'm going to go out on a limb here and say we are dealing with a local.

None of the other stationary stores we've spoken to have had anyone but out of towners buying that kind of paper. My gut is telling me look to our citizens. The question is do we tell the public or don't we? Madame Press here says they're entitled to know. I disagree."

Torger looked to Urban as he weighed the options. Urban nodded. "I disagree too. We'll have a *Monsters on Maple Streets* situation, everyone reporting their neighbors. That quiet guy is too quiet kind of shit. So, no."

Isy sputtered. "But what if someone saw something? What if they have information that we didn't have before? We wouldn't be utilizing all of our resources. Torger?" she demanded.

Torger sighed. "I can see both sides of the argument, but I will not have friend against friend. No matter what the danger is. We'd have every Tom, Dick and Harry flooding the tip line to report even the stupidest shit like their neighbor putting out the trash on Thursday when pick up is on

Monday. We have to think strategy. Anything more on the envelope? On the cologne?"

Jagger looked down at his tablet. "Local too. Similar to what you wear, in fact." He gave Torger a cheeky smile.

Torger sighed. "And?"

"It's almost the same brand but with a few modifications. We're thinking it's used to mask his natural scent. I'll look deeper into it. Wolf boy over here has more info about the contests." Jagger nodded to Urban.

Urban glared at Jagger. "Thanks, Count Dracula." He proceeded to tell Torger what CyberCat had found about the contests and blood type question. Urban also added the information about the pills found in Evanson's residence.

Torger stroked his chin. "There's never been a record of him having any kind of affliction, especially associated with vampires or werewolves or any other shifters. But this has to do with his personal life...for now," he added before



anyone could protest. "Unless it adds to the case before us we have to concentrate on the killer and the new bodies. This blood type thread is interesting and it does speak to intent to lure people into his feeding ground. Those contests need to be shut down. I need to go to Draven with this new information. I will say that this gives us an excuse to poke around. I'll call in a warrant. Urban you want to do a computer forensics search of their tech? They'll be pissed, but at least we have this

now. All right, people get to work.”

Isy sidled up alongside of him. “What should I do?”

Torger gazed down at her. “What do you mean?”

She blinked. Dark brown eyes filled with impatience. “I missed my show today. I’ve been working with Urban on the pill line. Do you want me to continue that or do something else?”

Her energy crackled around them. He could feel it pushing his lethargy and filling him with the need to be active. He could think of

something for her to do, but it would be inappropriate to say aloud much less think about. Torger had to focus on the case at hand. "Yeah, do that, keep looking for information about the pills."

He wasn't sure what else he could ask her to do. As much as he wanted to get her to stay out of it, he doubted she would. She'd just had a brush with the killer. There was no evidence of nerves or fear. She seemed to be chomping at the bit to go and dig deeper, follow the trail, find out what Evanson was

hiding. Isy beamed up at him.  
“Thanks.”

His heart melted a bit as a wave of warmth crashed into his chest. He felt his lips tug up into a smile. “No problem. But take it easy, okay?”

A well plucked eyebrow rose in question. “And you too? Last I checked, bags under the eyes weren’t sexy. You’re too hot to look like you haven’t slept in a hundred years.” She gave him a cheeky smile before she danced away.

He watched her go as his

brain processed what she'd just said. They had always flirted, but she'd never come right out and said she was attracted to him. The tiresome day that he'd had faded away in that light. "Well, fearlessness isn't exactly the sexiest thing in the world," he shot back.

She frowned while Urban and Jagger concentrated on trying to look busy. Isy crossed her arms over her chest. "Are you saying I'm not sexy?"

Torger chuckled. "You get me some dirt about that pill and we'll

talk. I'm going to catch some sleep. I need it. It's been a long day."

He turned and left the room. Once in his bedroom, he placed a call to Draven on what they'd found. Draven ordered him to get some sleep before he benched him. Torger didn't want that. It wasn't that he didn't trust his second in command, Petra Anderson, he just liked to be in control. He stripped out of his sweat pants and T-shirt before sliding into bed, naked. It wasn't exactly the best thing to do. At any second Jagger or Urban, 01

even Isy, could come banging through that door with news but he couldn't sleep otherwise.

Besides that if his wolf decided, during sleep, to take over and go for a run, he wasn't going to hinder it with clothing that would be ruined and cumbersome. Lately, his wolf had been desperate to break out and feel some freedom. It had nothing to do with the full moon only days away and everything to do with the unspent tension that this case was bringing on them both. There were two

options that Torger could see to help ease the stress: sex with some random woman or shifting, using all the energy that the transformation brought on to gain some sense of release. His wolf would have preferred sex, with Isy especially.

But sex was off the table, at least for now. There wasn't time. At least in his head there wasn't any. His thoughts came to his duty to Draven's Crossing and his alpha status came first. Any love life he wanted would come later. Even if



his yearning for Isy was growing.

He could smell her in his house, track her progress by where her perfume drifted. The imprint of her nearness weighed against his body. He could see the mischief light up her eyes as she teased him. He knew that once she left, Urban and Jagger would give him no end of grief. Not to mention that Jagger would tell Draven and Draven would try and play matchmaker, even going so far as to get Rose in on it. They would then have to insist on double dates that would

end in discomfort. Draven and Rose would act like they were the only people in the world and end up almost having sex.

How Isy would take it he didn't know, but his wolf would want to fuck and if Isy was near, it would be a disaster. Torger focused on trying to get some sleep. It would be the only thing he could do right that day.

\* \* \* \*

Torger's cologne trailed after him leaving a teasing cloud around

Isy. She tried to concentrate but her dragon wouldn't leave her alone. Images of a naked Torger flooded her brain. Pearls of sweat formed at her hairline. Isy wanted to bury her nose in his neck and inhale, lick and nip his skin and search out if he smelled like that all over. The words on the computer screen meant nothing to her. They were gibberish in the face of him being home.

His presence was all over the house, but it wasn't until he came home that things coalesced and it

became *his* place. The cabin felt empty without him. It lacked the warmth and presence that he brought. Every nook and cranny now made sense from the handmade wool quilted throw on the arm chair near the fireplace to the howling wolves salt and pepper shakers, to the huge hunting locker filled with meat he'd hunted, killed and cleaned himself.

There were pictures on the wall of nature scenes and books about Zen and calm and relaxation as well as animals. At least those

were the books on display in the more open places, not in his room. While Urban had been snooping online, he hadn't paid her much attention. She'd slipped into Torger's room and found some interesting things. Items that she'd only dreamed about him having an interest in. There were books with bondage scenes on his private shelves and sex toys in a chest at the foot of his bed. The thought of him using those implements of pleasure on other women had her and her dragon seeing red.

Envy colored her emotions until she was forced to close her eyes and breathe until she calmed down. Then her curiosity had been piqued, and she couldn't help but search for more. There was no evidence of another female presence, which went a long way to keeping her relaxed. But barely. The urge to mark him shuddered through her body in a hot tide that filled every pore and saturated every limb until she was left shaking and needed to sit down.

As she sat on his bed, the

mattress sank beneath her as if welcoming her weight. She had laid back and rolled onto her stomach, burying her face into the covers and inhaling deeply. Isy wanted to strip naked and climb under the sheets. But that wasn't all. She wanted to strap him down to the bed, explore every inch of his body until he couldn't take it anymore and then she wanted to give him release.

Isy felt the tension from him. It radiated off of him in waves and turned her stomach into knots. The stress made her dragon jumpy. The

beast wanted to come out and end whatever it was that was making her nervous. Rather than kill it, she would just do what needed to be done. Seduce! Besides that, she was tired of denying her attraction to him. It was tedious.

With a glance at Jagger and Urban, she saw that they were both ensconced in whatever it was they were searching for. She was pretty sure that they wouldn't notice her disappearance. In fact they'd probably be grateful that she left them alone. No questions and no



reporter presence to worry them that she might feature whatever they said in an article or blog post, or report. Isy stood up and smoothed her hair. "I'm going to go take a nap. I need to recharge. I'll be back."

Urban waved her off without saying anything, and Jagger just grunted. With those lovely parting sounds and ministrations, she walked off to have her wicked way with Torger, and she wasn't taking no for answer. Besides, he needed it and her.

## Chapter Nine

NO PROGRESS. NO BODIES.

Is 'no bodies' good news or bad? - Isadora Jones, DC News Blast

Torger tossed and turned in his bed. He could smell her on his covers. Her scent drifted around the room like an enticing trail he wanted to follow. His skin burned as his muscles contracted. Blood flowed straight to his cock,

thickening the shaft. His balls hardened and throbbed with the need for release. With a groan, he rolled onto his stomach. His mind was split into two parts: one half didn't think it was right to want sex much less have it with so many bodies piling up, and the other didn't give a shit and needed to feel something good in a world full of crap. He didn't want to think about anything. He had the All Packs meeting that was coming up after the full moon. His mind was abuzz with thoughts and lists. There were

things he had to do and things he had to discuss. Torger hadn't met with his Beta yet, nor had he met the new leader of the Branson pack after the old one had been ousted. Then he had to make sure that Draven would get the old ones to meet with him about the killer. There was Evanson to deal with, and he didn't want to think about the shit storm that could come out of accusing him of anything, especially not with the man's wife dead. Whether he had anything to do with it or not, the public

wouldn't be happy. Muffy Evanson was a beloved figure in the community. If the Representative had anything to do with her death, there would be chaos. He needed to be sure, to dig deeper. Torger knew he'd have to ask Isy to dive into the archives and see what she came up with.

The sweetest perfume drifted under his door. He snorted and sat up. She was near. His eyes had already adjusted to the darkness. He saw a shadow move in front of his door but it didn't go to the

guest room across the hall. He waited; the seconds ticked by. Each moment like a drip of water on his face, it seemed to last forever and there was no end in sight. He swallowed. His lips became dry as his heartbeat sped up. The jangle of a hand on the door handle rang in his ears. The delicate shells prickled at the musical sound. He waited. His heart stuttered and then crashed against his ribcage in a heavy drum beat. His body heat spiked as his wolf waited. Need coiled in the pit of his stomach. He

licked his lips again, hoping, praying for what, he didn't know. All he saw was that if she didn't do something soon, he would. And then there would be no turning back. Everything would change for them, and he wasn't sure how everyone would react or how everything would land.

As the seconds ticked by, her shadow remained at the door. The hand had stopped jiggling. Opening up his senses, he allowed her emotions to wash over him. He tasted the tang of hesitation with

the sweetness of eagerness. All of it was tinged with the bright spice of lust. Underneath it all, there was Isy's own unique natural scent. Not wanting to let the torture for both of them continue, he called out, "Isy, you can come in."

There was a moment and then the door knob turned. Her perfume and emotions rushed into the room, driving away the stale trail she'd made before. It was as if someone had turned on the sun in his room. Heat poured over him in waves as she advanced into the



space and shut the door behind her. Both of them were covered in darkness and yet he knew she stood between the door and his bed. So close and yet so far away as the cliché went. His fingers ached to hold her, to feel the silken warmth of her skin and bury his face in her neck and inhale deeply. Torger's lips tingled with the need to kiss her, to feel her lips against his and slide his tongue into her mouth and taste her. He wondered what he'd find there. He didn't want to think about it anymore.

“Isy? What’s wrong?” Torgei knew what was wrong but didn’t want to come out and say it. His wolf on the other hand wanted him to get up off the bed, strip off her clothes, bury his face between her thighs and eat her out until she came. His cock jerked at that urge. Heat flared along his skin, flushing through his cheeks, down his throat, and crashing into his chest. Prickles danced along his flesh as his nerve endings came alive. His sense sharpened as his wolf came into play, pushing at its restraints,

demanding that they finally get what they'd longed for after so much denial. And he couldn't move. Frozen by his guilt as his responsibility pushed forward to the forefront of his mind. *Pack. Duty. Draven's Crossing.* Those words screamed in his head, and he felt a tinge of shame.

*No shame!* His wolf cried out and growled at its master's retreating libido. His skin cooled as his heart went back to its normal rhythm.

“Torger. Shut up. Stop

thinking.” Isy’s voice came out as a low, husky command. Just like that, the fire inside burst to life. It went from simmer to all out firestorm as Isy advanced toward his bed. How she knew about the war going on in his head he didn’t know. *Do dragons smell things the way other shifters do?* The question pushed back some of his doubts.

The bed dipped under her weight, which served to shove back more of the pressure on his mind.

“Can you...” The question caught around a lump in his throat.

It had formed when he wasn't looking. A nervous sweat began on his forehead. He felt large and unsure of himself, like a teenager during his first experience.

"Your stress and frustration reeks. It's time to put an end to that. Your doubts and concerns won't save the people of Draven's Crossing and it sure as hell won't help you catch the killer. Now didn't I tell you to shut up?" Her hands closed around his ankles. He felt them slide up his legs. The cloth abraded his skin. Even though

it was smooth cotton, it felt a thousand times rougher than before. He swallowed again, not used to this side of Isy.

Rather than ask, he did as she said and stayed quiet. He didn't move or even dare to breathe without her say so. His thoughts drifted away with her touch. She ran her hands over his thighs. The scrape of her nails over the cotton intensified his sense of touch. The blunted pain only enhanced his need. Desire crawled through his body as blood thickened in his

veins. Her unique aroma became his air. Each gulp sent his head spinning and his mind drifting. He was lightheaded with her nearness.

“You’re going to let me take care of you. I’ll be handling your pleasure tonight. You do what I say and want without a single word, understand?” She placed a butterfly kiss on his stomach, so light it could have been the brush of the wind for all he knew. Her humid breath told him otherwise.

Torger nodded his acquiescence. He let out a yelp

when he felt her teeth sink into one ridge of his abdominals.

“No. Let me hear you say it. Tell me, yes, Isy, I understand.” She lapped at the pained flesh with quick licks of her tongue. Each lap pulled a soft groan from his throat as the pain turned to pleasure.

“Yes, Isy, I understand. Please.” He reached for her, wanting to bury his hands in her hair and pull her close but did nothing until told to. His alpha male self went to war over giving power to Isy. It had nothing to do



with her being a woman or even a dragon. Everything in him was designed to take care of people, solve problems, and yet he was rescinding control to her. He was allowing her to take care of his problem, solve it for him and take care of him. He wasn't sure how to respond so he did nothing. Curiosity peeked out from the wolf. It wondered how this would go, not in the least bothered by the shift in power.

Torger remained still as Isy nibbled and licked her way up his

stomach. “Your safe word is microphone. Now lie back down, arms extended over your head. I already know where all your toys are, and I’m going to use them on you.”

Torger’s eyes widened and protests filled his mouth. In the past, he’d allowed sexual partners to use his toys on him to see how it would feel but once was enough.

“Don’t worry, it won’t be so bad. I promise.” She purred and added a flick of her tongue to his nipple.

He still wasn't sure he was up for it.

"Torger," she began. "Let me take care of you. Give me control. Complete control and you won't regret it. Now lie back."

With silent protests still swirling around his mind, he begrudgingly accepted her order and lay back on the mattress, extending his arms over his head to wait. Torger sent up a silent prayer that she wouldn't go too far.

She slipped off of his body, taking the imprint of her flesh with

her but not her warmth. That sensation hummed over his flesh, making him yearn for her return. He heard the opening of his chest of toys and her rummaging around. Different thuds on the wooden floor made him wince and pray even harder. By the time she got back on the bed, his heart was hammering against his ribcage for a whole different reason. The lump returned to his throat, and his cock had lost some of its rigidity in the face of the unknown. Still, he didn't utter a peep. Not when she grabbed

his left wrist and slapped the cuff on it and then attached the other manacle to the bed post and did the same to his right.

“Torger, close your eyes and spread your legs,” she ordered in that same husky tone.

Slowly, he followed her command, wondering what she was going to do to him tied down. He had ideas and not all of them sounded too bad, but the echo of the thuds came back to mind and the fear crept back on him. Thin trails of sweat slipped down his

temple and dampened his hairline. The sheet was removed leaving him totally naked. He felt so open and vulnerable to her. *What if she doesn't like the way I look naked? What if my dick is too small? What if I look fat? I know I'm lying back but I've been eating a lot of junk food and downing a lot of beer lately.* His anxiety became more prevalent as she wrapped a Velcro cuff around his ankle and attached it to the post on the footboard. She did the other and then climbed back up his body, placing kisses as she went, until she

was once again over him. Not saying a word. No compliments or anything to put him at ease. He tugged at this bindings, even going so far as to call his wolf for help. The animal, much to his annoyance, didn't respond. It just stared back at him, satisfaction in its gaze at finally being with its mate.

“It's okay,” she said softly. “I won't hurt you...much.” Isy nipped the side of his neck before sucking the patch of skin into her mouth. “God, you're gorgeous. So tan. Muscles everywhere. I could play

with you for days. Jesus, this is going to be so much fun.”

*Fun?* He wasn't sure if he was going to have a heart attack in relief that she liked the way he looked naked or that she was going to play with him...for days. His heart continued to beat erratically against his ribcage as his breathing wheezed out of him. With every breath, his lungs couldn't take up enough air to get him stabilized and calm. The human portion of him was scared that she'd leave him like this and Urban and Jagger



would find him. They wouldn't let him hear the end of it, telling everyone about the time Isy tied him up and left him there. Maybe even covered in whipped cream or some shit like that. Torger began to pull on the cuffs in earnest. The bottom ones gave with a loud rip that split the air, but the handcuffs remained stubbornly intact.

“Torger. Stop!” Isy ran a hand over his chest, her touch only calmed him a fraction as his fears ran rampant. He wanted to scream out for help. His brain wouldn't

shut off as more nightmares inundated him, with images even. He was panicked and cornered and unsure of how he'd get out of it. Isy could turn out to be the killer. Even more absurd notions bombarded him, yet he didn't utter a single word. None of the formed sentences or phrases could get past the lump that had increased in size in his throat.

“Torger, you'll hurt yourself. Stop!” Isy's voice came from a distance. It was garbled and low. All he heard was his name. Isy

pressed her lips to his. The world stopped and tipped on its axis as all thoughts came to a screeching halt. His arms relaxed and his legs stopped moving. His heartbeat slowed. He couldn't breathe but didn't care. Their lips moved together in a slow dance. When he opened his mouth, her tongue slipped in to twine and glide against his, teasing and taunting him. She pulled back and gave him another peck before running a hand over his face and then into his hair. "Better?"

Torger nodded. "Better," he croaked out. Heat filled his cheeks at how he'd acted. A sense of embarrassment took hold.

"Good. You sit tight while I placate the gossip hounds at the door." She slid off of him before he could respond. All he knew was that his brother and Jagger had probably heard what was going on and came to check but didn't want to intervene in case it was a good thing happening.

He could only groan and hope she would hurry back to him.

\* \* \* \*

Isy climbed off the bed feeling a bit shaky. She'd never seen anyone so scared about being tied down before. But then again Torger was used to giving orders and being in charge. It was understandable that letting go of control would be extremely hard for him. There had been moments when he'd struggled to get out of his bindings that she thought he would go and hurt himself in the process. Sweat dotted her brow as

her heart returned to a normal beat. Her dragon had been going ape shit. The sight of Torger so terrified had led to its own anxiety for the health of her mate. Isy had barely been able to keep her head clear with all the emotions swirling through the air. As she moved away from him, she decided to give him a bit of time to himself, just to relax into being cuffed to the bed. She'd only redo his ankles if he wanted her to. Isy hadn't blindfolded him yet. He'd been too scared for her to do that. As she opened the door,

Urban and Jagger stumbled into the room.

“Jesus! I’m blind! Oh my god I’m blind!” Urban shouted and stumbled away, banging into walls as he went.

“Alcohol! I need alcohol. I’ve seen Torger’s dick.” Jagger groaned. “I’m not gonna be able to forget that. Where the fuck is the good stuff?” He moved toward the kitchen as well.

Isy shook her head. “If you hadn’t been leaning on the door like a bunch of morons you

wouldn't have seen jack shit. Now go investigate and leave us in peace. We don't want to be disturbed unless it's an emergency. And your blindness and stupidity is not the end of the world."

She slammed the door shut and began to laugh. Torger's deep chuckle joined in, filling her with relief that she hadn't traumatized him. Isy returned to the bed and settled down between his splayed legs. She took him in. Even in the darkness of the room she could see he was a well formed man who,



despite an atrocious diet remained in tiptop shape. She hadn't been lying when she'd told him he was gorgeous. Seeing him live, in person, and naked was a hell of a lot better than all her fantasies and imaginings combined. Despite the late winter going on outside, he had a tan. His abdominals were well defined with tight ridges and shallow indents. Torger had thick, athletic thighs, a testament to how much he ran in wolf form. His chest was dusted with light brown hair. The mounds weren't too large and

his nipples were tight rose red peaks that tempted her to take another taste of them. He had a thick corded neck, square jaw covered in brown stubble. Shoulder length blond hair formed a halo around his head. Sharp cheekbones, a crooked nose and navy blue eyes completed the look.

It was the face she'd seen a thousand times in her mind and interviewed. Looking at him never got old. "You really are beautiful, you know that?" She reached out and ran her hands along his sides,

reveling in the ripple of muscles and sinew under hot, smooth skin.

“Can a man be beautiful?” he asked, humor still in his voice.

She smiled. “He can if I say he is. Do you feel better?”

Seconds ticked by as she waited for his answer, hoping he had calmed down.

“Yeah. I’m better. I’m just used to being in charge, you know?” He gave her a small, sheepish smile.

“I understand, which is why I’m taking control for you. Torger,

you think too much, especially when you've got a case going on. You need to let go. Trust me, please." Isy waited for him to say he did. Her heart sped up just a bit.

"I trust you. I just needed to relax. I feel pretty stupid. Especially since Itchy and Scratchy won't let me hear the end of it now. But I'm okay, I promise. You can tie down my legs if you like." This time his grin was wider.

Relief came over her. "Okay, but if you feel any panic or fear, let me know."

“I will. Now get on with it, woman,” he growled.

She smacked his thigh. “Don’t call me woman.” Isy turned around and reattached the cuffs around his ankles before grabbing the blindfold. She trailed the stringed ends up his leg, tickling his inner thigh with light passes. Isy bent down and placed light kisses along the soft flesh. She could smell his musky masculine scent, with a hint of arousal as she moved up his leg. Moving over his distended cock and hardened balls, she trailed ends of

the scarf along his side, across his stomach and up the other side with slow wipes, making sure to give him only a hint of the sensation before moving on. With those touches she kissed him, sucking on the skin lightly before lapping away any pain. Isy took her time. She wanted Torger to concentrate on only the sensation, make him dependent on what only she could give him. It was important to her that his mind let go of all stress and his body relax. When she got to his nipple, she circled the strings

around the tightened tip before sucking the bud into her mouth. Salty, with a hint of mint rolled over her taste buds as she tongued, flicked and circled his nipple. He rewarded her efforts with groans and moans of encouragement as his body squirmed underneath hers.

She transferred her attention to the other turgid bud. Torger yanked against his bindings. That didn't worry her in the least. Isy could feel his lust weaving through the air. The spice of the emotions rolled over her tongue, adding to

the taste of his skin. She moaned as she nipped and sucked the skin along his neck. His pulse leaped under her tongue. The steady rhythm entranced her. To feel his life made them seem closer. Their hearts seemed to be beating at the same time. She sucked harder, wanting to mark him as hers. *All mine*, she thought with each tug until he grunted and she pulled back. A small ring of dark red marred his bronzed skin. Satisfaction purred through her at the sight. Isy continued on her path



until her lips met his. She slid her tongue into his mouth, teasing and tempting his tongue, tickling the roof of his mouth before she moved her face back and placed light kisses all over his face.

“Isy, please, need to feel you against me.” He grunted as he moved under her. She felt the burn of his flesh through her clothes. Her own skin felt tight. Her pussy lips were thick and her clit throbbed with the need for stimulation. Each movement she made caused her nipples to brush

against her bra sending a shower of sparks straight to her sex. She moaned and slid over to the side of him. Rather than address her clothed state, she explored his right arm. Isy kissed and nipped the flesh over his bicep, circling her hands around the muscle. She could feel the contraction and hardness underneath the skin.

“So strong,” she murmured as she trailed nips and kisses up his arm. “You take on so much pressure. I’m going to take care of you.”

Isy climbed over to his other side to show the other arm the same attention before she got off the bed and stood up.

Torger squirmed on the bed. "Get back here." He looked over at her, fire burning in his eyes. He lifted his chin in determination.

She chuckled. "You don't give the orders here; I do."

Isy got back on the bed and grabbed the blindfold. "And right now, you're going to have to close your eyes and let me have total control over you."

“Didn’t I let you tie me down?” He did as she asked and shut his eyes, but a smile remained on his lips.

“Good, wolfie.” Isy made quick work of tying the kerchief over his eyes before she got off the bed once more and went back to the trunk. She rummaged around for candles. It was too dark in the room, despite being able to see him clearly. Golden light would make him look even more seductive than he did now. Plus, she liked setting the atmosphere.

She found what she was looking for and began placing them around the room. "Where do you keep the matches?"

"What the hell do you need matches for? Isy, I'm not into fire play." Torger began to struggle again, much to her annoyance.

"Stop. Calm down. I've found your candles and I want to light them. Now, matches, where are they?" she demanded. Isy went over the nightstand, flicked on the light and looked in the drawer. "You need another nightstand.

Where am I supposed to put my stuff?" Isy stilled after she realized what she'd said.

"How much shit do you have? Geez, already taking over. Why not just put your clothes in my closet too? The matches are in the armoire, middle drawer." He settled back down, much to her relief.

She went over to the armoire, grabbed the lighter and lit the wicks. Now that the room was aglow, she focused on Torger. He was temptation in manacles.

Unable to fight it anymore, she had to feel him skin to skin. Without preamble, Isy stripped off her clothes and climbed back onto the mattress. For a moment, she sat on her heels between his splayed legs and looked her fill at him.

His cock lay against this stomach, flushed and thick, just waiting for her kisses, licks and sucks. She nearly groaned aloud as the pulsing in her clit increased. "Goddess, so perfect." Isy licked her lips, got up onto her hands and knees, and crawled forward. Laying

down on her stomach, she reached out and trailed a fingertip over the thin line that bisected his testicles into two sacs. He rewarded her with a shiver, and his legs shook around her.

Isy moved forward and licked along that strip, tasting the salt of his skin. He gave her another groan and shifted. She reached up and took hold of the base of his cock and began to work his shaft in slow pumps as she sucked one of his sacs into her mouth. Rolling the egg around, she teased and sucked



it with strong pulls.

“Isy,” he grunted. “Please.”

His heels dug into the mattress as his legs shook. She transferred her attentions to the other sac as her hand worked over his cock, increasing the speed, pausing to swipe her thumb over the crest and smear his pre-cum over the thick rod. Up and down, she worked him again as she teased his testicles and even went down to his anus, giving him light, gentle flicks.

He didn't protest to her

ministrations in the least.

“Goddess, please, suck me,” he groaned.

“Not yet,” she murmured as she kissed her way along his inner thigh, tracing the tip of her tongue over the skin that separated his torso from his leg. Barely any hair there. She sat up again and looked at his groin. His cock rose up from a neat thatch of medium brown hair curls. Temptation, pure and simple.

“I can’t believe I’m here and doing this,” she said in a hushed

tone, edged in desire.

“And I can’t believe that you’re moving so slow. Suck. Me,” Torger growled.

She chuckled at his impatience and gave him a smooth, slow stroke, ran a finger along his slit and lapped up the moisture. Saltiness rolled over her taste buds and she moaned. “Yum.”

“Yeah, yeah, yum. Suck. Me,” he groaned. His head thrashed on the pillow, and the bed shook under her.

“You’ve tasted yourself?” She

couldn't resist teasing him, and she really did want an answer.

In the dim golden light, she could see a crimson flush on his cheeks and along his chest. "Once. I was curious," he insisted.

She laughed. "So cute. I did that once, tasted myself," she confessed. Isy watched his reaction and grinned when he let out a louder groan.

"Damn it, get your pussy over here and let me taste you. You can suck me at the same time."

The idea wasn't a bad one,

and they'd both get pleasure from him. Did she dare? "No, at least not yet," she said. "I like where I am right now."

Isy gave him another stroke before moving forward and lapping at his slit. More of that saltiness filled her mouth as his musk increased. His hips surged forward, and she shook her head. "I'm in control. Let me give you pleasure." Isy waited for his response.

"Fine," he grumbled and stilled.

She took the bulbous head of

his cock into her mouth, letting her tongue trace over every dip, along the underside of the rim and again at the small opening to lap up more of his desire. Isy gazed up his body. Tension and need flitted across his face as she sucked and teased the crest. She took more of his shaft into her mouth, sliding her lips down the stalk. He was heat and velvet in her mouth, stretching her lips almost to the point of discomfort. She worked her hand up and down from the base to where her lips were to give him

extra stimulation.

Her eyelashes fluttered before they fell down, and her world was seen through a slit. Isy focused her entire attention on giving him pleasure and matching his movements with her own. He pumped his hips in short pushes, pulling back as she bobbed her head up. They moved in opposition with each other as her hand continued to stroke him. Isy gently scraped her teeth along the underside of his cock. From what she knew, most werewolves liked

pain with their pleasure. Torger, thankfully, was no different. He growled, and his hips shoved upward, sinking more of his dick into her mouth until the head hit the back of her throat.

She didn't mind in the least and swallowed him down, allowing the flex of her throat to add to the pressure. Up, down, lick around his cockhead and back down. Tension shook through his body. His muscles bunched and flexed as he struggled with his bonds. His heels dug into the mattress as he groaned



and moaned out his pleasure. She could feel him getting closer, the very air heated, filling with his desire as sweat beaded on her brow and misted over her back.

Her own need increased. The more pleasure she gave him the higher her arousal increased. Being in charge didn't matter so much as being able to take care of his needs. All her being was focused on giving him the best blow job he'd ever had.

## Chapter Ten

NO STATUS UPDATES.  
Nothing to report. -Isadora  
Jones, DC News Blast

Torger thrashed his head as he fought not to pull on his bindings. The chains rattled with each movement. The swirl of Isy's tongue over the crown of his dick and the glide of her lips over his skin sent ribbons of heat outward, wrapping his body up in fire and

need. Electric shocks buzzed around his balls, at the base of his back, and up and down his spine.

Everything in him fought not to try and take control, rip the cuffs, grab Isy and roll her onto her back and drive into her until he was balls deep inside of her. Allowing her control seemed to be a mistake, yet he couldn't bring himself to do anything about it. Delicious sensations filtered through his body, lighting up every nerve ending and fiber of his being. She scraped her teeth along the delicate

skin of his shaft, setting off more sparks. Tension grew to envelop him; he was so close to climax. His balls ached for release, and his heart threatened to burst out of his ribcage. Breathing became a difficult thing. He wasn't sure how to do it. Grunts, groans and moans filled the air as his wolf howled within the closer they got to coming.

“Isy,” he panted. “Please.” Torger was now begging, and he didn't care one bit how it would look.

She released his cock with a pop.

“Please,” he said again, his voice a deep, rough growl he didn’t recognize.

“Please what?” she asked as she dipped her head to delicately trace her tongue around his cock, flicking the V at the base of his crest.

Torger’s toes curled as another blast of heat and pressure filled his body. He gritted his teeth, trying to remember what it was that he was doing. His thoughts had

shattered completely. She repeated the action and he swore.

“Please, what, Torger?” She blew on his sensitive flesh. Fingers of desire scratched at the walls of his stomach as his muscles clenched. Sweat drenched his face, chest and arms.

He licked his lips as he tried to figure out what she was asking and what he was supposed to say. “Please,” he tried again. “Come.”

“You want to come?” she asked as she flicked her tongue over his slit.

He nodded. "Yes," he rasped out.

"Okay." With that single word she lowered her head again and took him back into her mouth, swallowing him down in one gulp. Her throat clenched around him as her hands gently massaged his balls. He let go the wave within and gave himself up to the tension until it exploded, taking him down until he was consumed in fire. Electricity buzzed around his balls, up and down his spine and around his head as he came, his body shaking.

Isy's mouth continued to work his cock until she swallowed every drop of his seed.

Silence filled his head as he floated on a cloud of bliss. He felt the bed shake but couldn't give a hoot about what was going on. She pulled off the blindfold. Torger hissed as he felt the press of Isy's overheated body against his. He looked up and saw her breasts were perfectly placed over his face. If he could, he would have lifted his head to suck one thick nub into his mouth, but he didn't have the



energy. All he could do was stare. His arms were lowered from their overhead position, and Isy massaged his shoulders and each arm in turn right down to his hands. There wasn't even the sensation of a thousand ants crawling over his skin or the painful prickle of holding his arms in a position for too long.

Everything was comfortable, warm and safe. When he felt the drag of a damp, warm rag over his chest, stomach and around his groin, he didn't comment. He

closed his eyes and allowed Isy to take care of him. She would protect him, keep him safe, and now he knew she could give him what he wanted sexually, even if he hadn't thought it would work out.

He wondered if she would be willing to allow him to tie her down and pleasure her. The scent of her desire still floated on the air, and he could taste her banked need, but she said nothing about her current aroused state.

"Isy," he started, his voice gruff and slurred.

“Shhh, it’s okay; just relax. No need to take care of me yet. Just recover and then you can tie me down and make me cry out.” Isy pressed a kiss on his thigh as she got off the bed and returned a minute later to finish cleaning off his dick.

*Goddess, Isadora was truly perfect.*

\* \* \* \*

“Stay away from me!” Michaela screamed as she threw a vase at his head.

Abbott ducked out of the way and kept running after her. Sweat bathed his face, and his shirt was stuck to his back. His fist clenched the large syringe. He had to get her back to his house; his DNA was all over the place. *I have to call Ariel to come clean this mess up.*

Michaela stopped running, yanked a sword off the wall and then rushed at him with the weapon. A warrior scream echoed in a language he didn't understand. All he knew was he had to avoid getting skewered. She lunged at

him and the sharp edge sliced a neat opening in his shirt, barely missing his flesh by millimeters.

Abbott called upon the gifts his maker had bestowed upon him to make him stronger and faster. His gums ached and bled as hunger ticked in his veins and pinged around his stomach. His muscles heated up as he sped around her and grabbed her wrist. He wrenched the sword from her grip. She let out a howl of pain as she sank to her knees. Her hand was pulled back in an odd angle.

He didn't give it much thought. Instead, he took the pause in the action to jam the needle into her neck and depressed the plunger. She let out a scream, eyes widening, pupils dilated and body shuddering as her small mouth fell open. Finally, she fell to the floor in a heap, eyes lifeless, body slack, and wrist broken.

Abbott drew in a deep breath, smoothed his shirt down and looked around. A quiet calm descended upon him. Michaela was done. No more fighting. He could

focus as the haze of need turned to a simmering heat in his body, but the hunger continued to beat in his blood. A swift assessment of the situation showed that the condo was a complete mess. There was no time to get things cleaned up. He saw droplets of blood on the floor. The distant howl of sirens drew his attention. The sound was too close for his comfort.

“Damn it.” He spat out. There was nothing he could do except pray that the blood was hers and he hadn’t left behind any DNA that

could lead back to him. He gathered up Michaela's lifeless body, grabbed his coat and rushed out of the house, leaving the door open behind him. There was no use in trying to hide now. One more offering to Isy to show his affection for her and this last body was perfect for his ritual. He sped through the dank, damp back streets of Draven's Crossing until he got home.

"Ariel! *Ariel get in here!*" he shouted as he entered his house. His progeny milled around the



living room, watching some program featuring a shouting chef. They gazed at him as one, hunger in their eyes.

Ariel appeared in a flash, chest heaving, panting out a breath. She bowed before him. "Master?"

"Get my lab ready. Send out a group of children to the all night florists, take the petty cash and make sure they're not seen. I need at least a hundred perfect roses, different hues and colors." He shifted his burden in his arms and gazed around the room. Abbott

had acquired at least twenty children over the years, carefully selected from the homeless and runaways. No one anyone would miss. "Build a pyre stage and then call Ivan. I'm going to need his help."

Without any explanation, he went to his lab and deposited Michaela's body onto a stainless steel examination table. His hands shook as he pulled back. One last body, one last offering. This one had to be right. She had to understand this gift, *had to*. Ariel

came into the room as Abbott began stripping off his clothes. He handed them to Ariel. "Burn them."

She gave him a phone, which he accepted with some trepidation. Ivan Evanson wouldn't be happy.

"What? I'm busy over here." Evanson's tone was clipped and heated with anger.

"We have a problem. I found another candidate, Isadora Jones' assistant, but she fought me. We were loud. I need you to step in." Abbott waited for Evanson to shout

at him.

“Fine but she better have been worth it. I’ll give them something else to chase.” Evanson hung up without a good-bye.

Abbott felt uneasy. He didn’t like what Evanson did, not in the least, but it was necessary to advance their ideals. The Councils’ ideals, even if they didn’t know it. Cold air caused goose bumps to rise over his bare skin. Rather than get dressed he got to work, first dragging two canisters over to the table, arranging Michaela’s body

and readjusting the table so that she was strapped in and hung upside down. He slashed at one of her wrists and allowed the blood to start draining into the metallic bucket. It would take some time, so for now he had to establish an alibi.

He headed upstairs and showered then came downstairs to the living room where he settled in on a couch. Normally, he hated to interact with his children but this was necessary. He picked up the remote and brought up the DVR menu, selected an episode of a

show that had aired an hour ago and began to watch the show about overly tanned people running a business and partying on the weekends. His stomach rebelled at the drivel, but he had to know every second of the show in order to prove that he was indeed here. His children would give him an alibi, no problem, but no one would believe them. They all had that glassy eyed drugged-out look that made people unreliable.

Besides that, he didn't want the police to look too closely at

some of his progeny. The younger ones had parents that were looking for them and until he was done with them he wouldn't be giving anyone back.

\* \* \* \*

Evanson walked around the cage. "Is he ready for another venture out?"

The doctor in the lab coat looked over the chart. "Yes, sir. He fed last night but could use another hour or two out. He's been a bit aggressive." The doctor gazed at

him expectantly.

Evanson moved closer to the cage and stuck his hand in, ignoring the gasp from the doctor. "I need you to behave, okay?"

The man in the cage pressed his face against Ivan's palm and purred. He gazed at Evanson with pained brown-green eyes. His mottled skin shifted from tan to alabaster and back to bronze. He nodded at Ivan.

"Good boy. You'll also be getting a new infusion soon, something to help with the pain. I



promise. You've been so good to me so far. Don't fail us now." Evanson smiled and turned to the doctor. "Prep him. My assistant will give the address."

Evanson left as a ripple of heat rolled over him. Pain lanced his stomach. He gritted his teeth to hold back the howl of pain that formed in his throat. His hands shook as he staggered up the stairs. He rushed to the nearest bathroom and threw open the medicine cabinet, shoving various bottles around until he found the right

one, popped the top and shook the contents out into his mouth. He just wanted the heat and ache to stop. Evanson swallowed down the tablets and sank to his knees as the fire in his body increased and the ache grew until it shuddered down his arms.

He curled up in a ball, tears in his eyes as he allowed his symptoms to take over his body, praying for it to end.

## Chapter Eleven

NO STATUS UPDATES.

Nothing to report. -Isadora  
Jones, DC News Blast

Detective Santa Rosa looked around the room. She could smell the slight sweetness of decay that vampires couldn't cover up, well as far as shifters were concerned, and yet this one had a bit of bite to it. And then there was the earthiness of the Elves mingled into it along with the metallic tang of blood. It

looked like an enraged teenager's room with things broken and thrown around carelessly but no sign of the vampire or elf. The coroner had said the blood they'd found on the scene was vampire mixed in with elf but until she could run tests to determine if it was the same person or two different people and what their sexes were, they had only the neighbors accounts to go on.

Her full body suit and booties crunched as she walked around the place. Since this wasn't a murder

she hadn't called in Torger. As far as the DCPD was concerned until proven otherwise it was a domestic altercation gone bad. Right now their techs were combing through the security footage to see who Michaela O'Connor, Isadora Jones assistant, had come home with. Neighbors hadn't really paid much attention until they heard screams and shouting and things breaking. Other than that, they minded their own business. It was a nice area, quiet, filled with the working lower middle class.

She looked around. Every condo looked alike with the exception of the yards. Some had gardens or trees or just grass but that was it. White siding, same number of windows, all neat little houses that were only a few feet apart, yet no one had heard or seen anything to really help her. She shook her head. *I'm getting too old for this shit.* Alyssa turned and went back into the house. Sweat bathed her face as a roll of thunder sounded in the distance. She put her goggles back on, pulled the

mask back up and entered Michaela's home.

Police officers milled around and someone with intelligence had called the HellHound unit. It irked her that they didn't consult her, she was ranking officer here, but she decided not to bite someone's head off. If this got them answers faster, then whatever. She walked around the scene one more time.

"Bag everything and have the techs recreate the scene back at the station's warehouses. Let's wrap things up." She walked up to the

head of the HellHound Unit, Mike Sampson. "Mike, you know what to do. Just make sure no one is bitten, okay? We're too close to the full moon, and I don't want more bloodshed just because tempers are high."

Mike nodded. "Understood."

He walked off and for a second Alyssa allowed herself the moment of watching his tight, muscular ass covered in denim. *God I need a man*, she thought to herself. She took one more look around the living room then the foyer area and



shook her head. *Please, don't let this be the serial killer. We don't need another body.* Her gaze snagged on the blood trail. *But if he's fucked up, then I'll take it. What the hell are you doing, Torger? Where are you?*

\* \* \* \*

Torger secured the handcuffs around her wrists and gave them one last check over before he went to the foot of the bed and looked over the Velcro straps. Wicked delight tingled down his spine. He had Isy at his mercy. Her hair

formed a dark halo, streaked with dark pink threads. In the golden light of the candles, her cocoa skin was gilded as her eyes burned with desire. Ripples of pink scales appeared and disappeared on her skin. For a moment, he stood fixated on the rare display. Her dragon had decided to come out to play.

Fire appeared in her eyes, turning them to a molten gold. "Are you gonna stare or are you gonna fuck me?" she challenged.

He grinned. *All that fire for me.*

If he could purr, he would. Instead, he climbed onto the bed and settled down on his stomach, like she did earlier. Her glistening pussy lips, flushed red and her thick, distended clit beckoned him. He inhaled her musky scent of desire, impressing it to his memory to replay later. This would be his first time with her, and he wanted to take his time, give her as much pleasure as she could handle and push her beyond her limits.

Rather than dive in and eat her out, he turned his head and

pressed his mouth to her inner thigh. Her skin was silken heat under his lips as he gave her open mouthed kisses, nipping and sucking her flesh. His reward was her gasps and groans as her legs shook and her body writhed. He transferred from one leg to another as he gazed up her body to watch her reactions. Full lips parted as she gasped and thrashed her head on the pillow. Sweat shone on her face and her chest. The tightened tips of her breasts begged for his touch and mouth.

He refocused on her glistening pussy lips. He took a slow lick, first up one side and down the other, pausing to rim her dripping entrance. Tang and salt rolled over his taste buds. He groaned. Torger needed more, he needed to gorge himself on her cream. He buried his face between her thighs, licking, sucking, nipping and drinking her honey until it smeared his chin and mouth. His nose nudged her clit. She rocked her hips against his lips.

His name was a chant that

filled the air along with her cries. Her body shook around him as she came. He didn't bother to stop it. His whole world narrowed down to making her come over and over again. Torger shifted on the bed as blood filled his shaft, thickening it. He couldn't stop the movement of his body as he flexed his hips, driving his cock against the blankets to get some friction, but it wasn't enough. He wanted to feel the sweet squeeze of her vagina around his dick. The bliss of driving into her body over and over

again as he sucked and nipped the tips of her breasts.

Instead, he continued to eat her out until her body twitched and her moans of pleasure fell silent. He lifted his head to take her in. Her eyes were shut and her breath came out in pants. He grinned and kissed his way up her body, going over her flat stomach and traced the under sides of her breasts with his tongue.

“Still alive?” he teased as he circled one breast with his tongue.

“Barely, but I can take

anything you dish out, wolfie," she growled. She opened her eyes and lifted her head. Her eyes burned with deep brown fire and pink sparks.

He and his wolf accepted the challenge and sucked one of her thick nipples into his mouth. With strong tugs and pulls, he drew out more gasps and groans. He could feel strength coming back to her body. Varying shades of pink scales rippled over her skin as blush colored smoke issued from her nostrils and mouth. Her body heat



increased with each suck of his lips. A tremble of heat wound around his spine as her dragon emerged.

Torger wasn't scared in the least. He continued his ministrations to her body, going from one breast to the other. He could hear the rattle of the handcuffs and metal clinking against wood. The bed shook underneath him as she became more animated. Her cries, moans and groans were deeper, with an edge of a growl in them. He didn't stop, instead, he kissed his way up

her chest and neck to take her lips, swallowing the noises as he pressed his body to hers. Her nipples scored his chest as she moved underneath him.

Isy's curves complimented the hardness of his body. He wanted to keep her against him, hold her to him always. Torger closed his eyes and savored their closeness. A sharp prick on his shoulder made him look at her. Anger filled her eyes. "Fuck. Me," she ordered.

Her legs shook in their bonds and he heard the rip of Velcro in

the air. She wrapped her legs around his waist and pressed her wet heat to his cock, grinding her hips against his. The sweet friction sent threads of electricity through his body, rushing up his spine. The ache in his balls increased with each brush. He gritted his teeth as his wolf howled in his head, demanding the union.

Pain lanced his body, shearing the heat of passion as his wolf's energy surged forward to initiate the change. His fingers became longer and thicker as his fingernails

grew to sharpened talons. Fur blossomed on his skin in ripples, coating his chest, back and arms. Torger let out a howl and took her lips in a hard, demanding kiss as he gave himself over to the wolf completely. A sharp snick of metal snapping sounded from a distance. Isy's arms twined around his neck as she responded to his kiss. Their bodies rocked against each other and rolled around the bed as both fought for dominance.

Pain reverberated through his body and stole his breath when his

head and spine smacked against the floor. Isy took that momentary pause to grab his cock and press the blunt, wide head to her entrance. In one swift move she pushed down, taking him into her tight sheath without a single pause. She placed her hands on his chest and held him down as she rode him, up and down in a hard ride that sped up the searing pressure in his body.

Torger growled and snapped as the alpha in him didn't want to be at her mercy. He grabbed her

hips and rolled them around, took hold of her wrists, raised them over her head and held them there as he took over the rhythm. He pistoned his hips, fucking her hard and fast. Torger bent his head and took another possessive kiss before turning his head and biting down onto her shoulder. His teeth popped through the skin. Blood, salt and spice filled his mouth as he used the claiming bite to make her his mate. He poured the wolf magic that made him a shifter into her, binding their souls as the fire of the

dragon merged with the earthiness of the wolf. Vines of heat wrapped around them, pulling them closer as he pressed his body down to hers. Her nipples scraped against his chest as he rocked against her.

The flex and flutter of her vaginal muscles grasped and massaged his cock with each thrust. He held the bite until the telltale tingle filled his balls, buzzed around the base of his back and up his spine and swathed his brain. His testicles pulled closer to his body as he came. His shaft

twitched, semen filled his rod and spurted deep into her core. He continued to fuck her until his balls were empty and he could no longer move. His body went limp as he rolled off of her panting with his heart racing. It was official now. Isadora Jones was allhis, and no one could tear them apart.

\* \* \* \*

Abbott placed the last of the roses on the pyre. Michaela looked peaceful in her eternal sleep. Her skin pale and luminous, features



relaxed and dressed in a gown that Ariel had found from one of his children who acted in local plays. *It's a shame I have to give her to the public.* He shook his head and tucked his letter to Isadora under Michaela's hand and then waved Ariel forward. "Put her in the hearse and drive her to Isadora's studio. I would send her to the cabin but there's no telling if the police have allowed her home yet."

His children picked up the wooden platform with care and carried it out of the room, Ariel at

the head of the group directing them. Abbott collapsed in a chair at his desk. Worry gnawed at his nerves. Hours had passed by and not a single slip of news; not from Isy or her blog or even the studio. The DC news sites were quiet. No word yet on the disturbance at Michaela's apartment. When Arie had gone to get the surveillance tapes, they were already gone and the place taped off with officers standing guard. When she'd inquired as to what happened they said a home invasion gone wrong.

From the neighbors, they'd said the DCPD's inferna HellHound unit had been sniffing around but there was no sign of the beasts around his home. That didn't mean he wasn't being watched. Evanson wasn't answering his calls. Being out of the loop was infuriating but there was nothing he could do. All he had was time and to pray that his offering was understood. If she got the message, then he would give himself up without a fight. He pulled some stationary toward him and began to

write out his instructions to Ariel. After his death, she would have to lead his children, guide them and make sure that the lost little lambs wouldn't go astray and do everything that Evanson told them. Their research was important.

\* \* \* \*

He licked the blood off of his fingers as the hunger slithered through his veins. Pings of fire burst in his stomach. Anger lanced his heart in a quick slice of pain as he let out a howl. Still hungry.

Need scrabbled around his gut as his cock throbbed. Saliva pooled in his mouth as thirst took hold of his throat and squeezed. The robed figure in the corner snapped her fingers. He glanced up, annoyed that his feeding wasn't enough. More meat, more blood, more, more, more. He growled as the figure snapped her fingers again. She threw back her cowl. In the dim light of the apartment, her black hair glimmered, pulling in any color from the walls. Her emerald green eyes flashed as her thin

mouth pulled taut into a slim line.

“We must go. You’ve had enough.” She hissed. She slipped out a whistle and held it up for him to see.

He growled again. *That damned thing. Not again.* Anger colored his vision, bathing the world in a blood red hue. Without thought he moved, tackling her to the ground. He pinned her hands to the floor and inhaled. Sickly sweet fear with just a hint of his brother’s cologne on her parchment thin skin. His stomach recoiled,

threatening to expel his latest meal.

She was at fault, denying him more meat, more drink, his brother. She separated them, kept Ivan from him. He let out a howl and brought his head down. His teeth sunk into her skin, breaking the surface like a pimple. Metallic life flooded his mouth as she struggled under him, shouting at him in a language he didn't understand, didn't care to try and translate. He ripped out a chunk of her throat and buried his face in the wound gorging on her blood, letting the fire and heat of

her body saturate his being.

He lifted his head and let out another howl and bent down to feast on his prey. Her body continued to struggle but there wasn't much energy there. It didn't matter. She would soon be gone and Ivan would be all his. Just like it used to be.

\* \* \* \*

Ivan paced outside the apartment. They were taking too long. He could sense the HellHounds close by. If he was



found here it would all be for naught. He punched the wall as he cursed Abbott's failure. *Candidate? Isadora Jones' assistant was a candidate?* How the fuck were they supposed to clean this up? Couldn't he have found another elf? Or another human who fit the bill? *Godsdamnit,* he growled silently. Another check of his watch showed that his brother, Kristopher, had been in there for an hour. They'd found an old woman who fit the bill for his brother's appetite. Perfect blood match and

weak as a kitten due to cancer treatments. Why was this taking so long? Nervous energy dictated his movements. He yanked open the door and whistled. "Let's go!" he barked out.

Kristopher looked up, face a crimson mask in the low light of the flickering television. Ivan took in the scene and shook his head. Kris needed to get stable quickly, otherwise they were always going to have to watch him when he fed. His brother rose, a mirror image to Ivan with only the blood separating

their features. Ivan took a moment to look at the scene. Two bodies. Two women. His head whipped around as he inspected the second body. "Shit!" Ivan shouted.

Kris had killed Sadie. Ivan's knees turned to water as he stared at the love of his life's body, throat ripped out, face covered in speckles of blood.

Kris pulled Ivan up and dragged him away. "Come, go, now."

Ivan let him, his head and heart filled with the image of Sadie

on that grimy floor, dead.

## Chapter Twelve

THE BODIES ARE PILING UP.  
DO WE HAVE A NEW SERIAL  
KILLER?

Mangled remains are found and  
Michaela O'Connor is missing. Do  
we have more than one killer? -  
Isadora Jones, DC News Blast

Detective Santa Rosa pinched  
the bridge of her nose. She felt the  
start of an ache at the forefront of  
her head. Torger still wasn't

answering his phone, and his brother refused to say where he was. Jagger was MIA too. Her innelioness wanted to rip her boss apart and track down that irritation of a vampire but instead she walked around the apartment and took in the details while the Crime Scene Unit was doing their job and officers were taking statements. So far, they'd gotten nothing. No one had seen or heard anything. But the most interesting thing was that they were right around the corner from Michaela O'Connor's condo.

She didn't want to make connections but she couldn't help it. To make matters worse than two bodies was that the second female body, of unknown origin, looked a little too much like Ivan Evanson's assistant, Sadie Mayflower, for her liking. Right now their people were running her prints. If they got a hit, she would have to go drag Torger from wherever he was and into the office. She sure as hell wasn't going to deal with Draven.

"It's official. It's Sadie Mayflower," Officer Duggen

announced.

Groans went up around the room and Alyssa sighed. She turned on her heel and left the room. "Going to get the boss," she called over her shoulder.

"Good luck!" Duggen called after her.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm gonna need it," she muttered as she pushed back her hood, ripped off her goggles and headed to the bike with the suit still on. She could put on a new one when she got back but first she needed Torger here,



now.

\* \* \* \*

Torger rolled over onto his back. His stomach growled but he didn't want to move. Isy was draped over his chest, her fingernail tracing a circular path around his nipple. Life was bliss at the moment. All tension had drained away. There was no job, bodies, Draven, or politics to deal with. All he had was Isy and that was fine by him. If only it could stay that way. With a grunt, he sat

up. They were still on the floor much to his amusement. With a smile, he got to his feet and held out his hand to Isy.

She stared at it as if it were a foreign object. "What?" she asked as she grasped his hand and got to her feet.

"Shower and then eat," he said as she pulled her toward the bathroom.

"Why?" she asked as she followed him.

"Because we can't work naked, and I don't want Urban to

know what you look like naked. Jagger won't care." He chuckled.

Isy snorted. "Fine." She wrapped her arms around his waist and shuffled behind him. "But you better make it up to me later."

"I look forward to it." He pried her arms open, turned on the shower and waited for the water to heat up.

Once everything was ready, they got into the stall and did a quick clean up. As much as he wanted to take his time and maybe get in a quickie, there was still stuff

to do. Once they were dried off she got dressed in one of his shirts and pajama bottoms, which looked ridiculous on her, like she was swimming in cloth. He, on the other hand, put on denim and a simple cambric shirt. They headed out of his room hand in hand to find both Urban and Jagger at the kitchen table working.

“Thank god, you’re done!” Urban declared as he looked up. “I thought we’d have to go deaf in order to get work done.”

Jagger for his part was staring

at a file, not saying a word. He didn't even look up. "Went to Madcap Madigan, got the records. Seems this has happened before, but it was at the beginning of the town's founding. Before the advent of technology and the news stations, magazines and newspapers haven't gotten around to logging all the info into the system. Take a look."

Torger let go of Isy's hand, accepted the file and took a seat. Isy sat across from him and got to work on a stack of files near Urban.

“Interesting,” Torger said as he skimmed over the paper.

“Seems bodies had shown up, similar in fashion to what we have but nothing was done. The police marked it up to a rogue vamp. They put down some crazed lunatic and that’s when it ended.”

Urban handed him a cup of coffee. “And there’s more. A buddy of mine got back to me about that pill. There’s a program that’s been going on to develop medicines geared toward people who’ve been attacked by both vampires and

shifters. Those instances are rare, yeah, but the outcomes can be extreme from blood cravings, uncontrolled body temperature, massive headaches, cravings for meat or live prey, and the urge to shift but only going through the symptoms and not actually changing." He took a sip of coffee before he continued. "It's a government sanctioned program but the testing pool is limited seeing as how the attacks, as I've said, are rare. Evanson gave money to the program which, at the time,

had two candidates. Both died. Now there are two more taking the drug. Evanson is one of them, and a relative of his is the other one."

Torger looked up. "But he doesn't have any relatives. Not that I know of. His parents are dead, brother's dead. He had an uncle who was part of the Council, but he died and gave his seat to Evanson."

Urban shook his head. "According to my source, it's a close relation. Shares the same father and mother. I'm guessing his brother isn't as dead as we were led



to believe. As we know, those who suffer from para-lunancy were thought of as better off dead. It's really rare to get through that and come out with enough sanity to control both sides of your new personality."

Torger stared at his brother. "Shit. So what does this mean for us?" Dark thoughts swirled around his mind, but he didn't give them voice. His stomach knotted.

"That Evanson's brother may be the person responsible for those secondary attacks," Isy said quietly.

“Shit. Shit. Shit.” Torge slammed his fist down on the table. It rocked and coffee sloshed over the edge of the cups onto the surface. He stood up as tension ramped up in his body. “Draven’s gonna go postal. Do we have proof? We need tangible leads, things we can nail him on. We need threads we can grasp or we’re gonna end up with more than egg on our faces.” He gazed at his brother and then at Jagger in turn, praying one of them might be able to give him answers or maybe a way out.

The doorbell rang and Torger let out a growl. Another body, bad news, he just knew it. He stomped over to the front door and yanked it open. Detective Santa Rosa stood before him in a white suit, anger and relief on her face. "Finally, I've been trying to call you."

She brushed past him into the room. "We've got some news and you are definitely not going to like it."

Torger didn't miss her looking over Jagger before taking over his abandoned seat and downing the

rest of his coffee. He didn't protest. Instead he just grabbed a new cup, refilled hers and rested a hip against the counter. "Tell me."

Alyssa went through the night's happenings from the incident at Michaela O'Connor's apartment and finding Sadie Mayflower's body.

"Oh my goddess! I have to call her parents. Do they know yet?" Isy stood up and paced.

"We've sent a police officer out to notify the family. But we have a lead. The lab is running the

blood found on the scene and we're looking through the security tapes. The HellHound unit is following the trail of the blood. They have yet to check in. Everything is high priority."

Torger shook his head. "Good job. I'm gonna go change and head into the office. Jagger, update Draven. Urban, look for tangible things we can use in court. Our case needs to be air tight. Isy, you stay here."

Alyssa's phone rang and everyone froze, they all gazed at

her, waiting. The seconds stretched into eternity between the time Alyssa dug her phone out of her pocket and answered it. "Shit. I'll let him know." She hung up and looked at Torger. Regret swirled in the green depths of her eyes. "Michaela's body was found, blood drained, matches the serial killer's MO. Letter addressed to Isadora Jones under her hand. She was setup on a flower strewn pyre."

Isy sank down onto a chair. Her hands shook as tears slipped down her face. "Michaela's dead?"

she whispered.

Torger wanted to go to her, hold her, hug her but he had a job to do. "We'll get the son of a bitch, I promise you, honey. Let's get going guys."

They didn't have time to lose. He got dressed in his uniform and checked his cell phone, ten missed calls all from Alyssa and the department. Nothing from Draven yet. He wasn't sure if that was relief or an omen. By the time he got back out into the living room Jagger was gone, Isy was on Urban's laptop

typing away and Urban was on the phone. Alyssa waited for him by the door. He darted over to Isy and pressed a kiss to her temple. "Let me handle things," he whispered.

"Just catch the bastard," she hissed as she continued to type.

"Will do." He went to Alyssa and followed her out to the driveway. "I'll follow you in. I've got my cell phone turned on so you'll be able to reach me now."

Alyssa just waved, got onto her motorcycle and started it before taking off. Torger followed in his



SUV, worry gnawing at his gut. Was Evanson tied up in more than just the mauled bodies? Draven really was going to shit kittens when Jagger brought him up to speed.

\* \* \* \*

Evanson curled up in a ball as the ache in his heart continued to thud away. Why did Kris have to kill Sadie? What had she ever done to him? Kris refused to talk about it, instead saying things like they could be together now like it used to be. That Sadie had been an

obstruction and things would be better now. *Better how?* The police could be knocking at his door any second now once Sadie's body was discovered, and there was no telling what Draven would say or do. Everything was falling apart. To top it all off he still had to contact Abbott about the latest blood batch he'd taken. The scientists assured him that once they had enough, they'd try the infusion trial run to drain away the infection from both of them.

Then he could return to being

normal. *Normal, ha!* There was no normal with Sadie dead. He had nothing to live for, not even his seat. Kris had taken it all from him. Muffy was gone, Sadie was gone and now his career was dust. Anger filled him as rage saturated his body. Kris had to go.

\* \* \* \*

Torger arrived at the station. It was a madhouse of police officers all over the place dashing from one desk to the next. Reporters were seated in the waiting area with cups

of coffee and looking at their smart phones. For once they weren't asking questions. The reason why became apparent. An officer darted over to them with a paper, read them something off it and then moved away.

Without him, they'd setup a system of what they would tell reporters, minor details and the news hounds were accepting and reporting. Isy would be pissed that she was missing out. He slipped out his phone and called her.

"What? Calling to rub it in?"

I'm not there and your brother's an asshole," she growled.

In the background he heard Urban yell, "She fucking bit me when I tried to take her cup from her. She wouldn't let me refill it."

Torger could only shake his head. He flagged down the officer doing the updates and handed him the phone. "Talk to her. I have to go see what's going on."

The officer accepted the cell with trepidation and began talking while Torger walked off to the conference room they'd closed off

solely for investigating the serial killer. He'd have to talk to Draven about forming a new division for specialized crimes like this. Up until now they'd never needed it, but this made him realize how understaffed he was. They'd have to bring in new people; maybe Urban could head it up with Jagger

He entered the room to find Alyssa at a table with a lab tech.

"What do we have?" he barked out.

The tech stood up and began explaining things in scientific

jargon. All Torger could do was stare until Alyssa translated it. "One sample matches Michaela O'Conner and the second one matches Abbott."

He stared at her.

Alyssa continued. "The only reason he's in the system was for the annual blood drive. We have to enter their blood type, history of disease and health."

A.

The ending of the letter came back to him. "Fucking hell, could Abbott be A?"

Alyssa stared at him. "Oh my gods. We have his signature on file. I've been so stupid!" She rushed out of the room and returned ten minutes later. "I had him write out a list of local businesses that have active security systems that we could crawl through."

She had both letters as well. She spread them out without removing them from the clear evidence envelopes and compared it to the list and his signature.

"Well, I'll be damned. They look similar. Call in our



handwriting expert," Torger ordered.

"Don't need to." Alyssa nodded to the lab tech who came over. He brought out a magnifying glass and looked at Alyssa's list and the letters.

"I'm looking over the formation of similar words and letters, such as the, and, a; you know common words used in business names and they match up with the letters. I can attest to it in court." The lab tech, whose badge said his name was Blake stepped

back.

“Thanks. Alyssa, get a warrant. Judge Alberts should still be up, since he’s a night owl. Then go bring in Abbott.” Torger tried not to grin but couldn’t help it. They were getting close, damn it. He had something good to tell Draven. He went to his office and put in the call to Draven and gave him the rundown of what was happening.

Draven had sent Jagger over to Evanson’s place to pull him into the Police Department for a

statement, but he'd first have to check into a few things to confirm what Urban had told them. Everything had to be in place. The Council had been notified and they weren't putting up a protest but they wanted to do their own trial and no publicity.

Torger sighed. Another cover-up, but if that's how they stopped the bodies from piling up, he'd take it. The Council wouldn't skimp on the justice.

## Chapter Thirteen

THE POLICE HAVE LEADS.

Does this mean the killings will end? -Isadora Jones, DC News Blast

Ariel came into the room, head bowed, eyes lowered. "Master?"

"Yes?" Abbott looked up from his letter. The police still hadn't come, but that only gave him more time to get his thoughts together. "I've been working on instructions

for you and the children. You won't be left unattended. There's money in the bank for all of you, so you have nothing to worry about. The business will be left to you. I'm just finishing up the last of my thoughts."

He turned back to his writing, adding a few more sentences and signed his name. Ariel remained silent.

"Is there something you wanted, Ariel?" He rearranged his desk, irritated at her silence.

"We won't allow you to be

taken and your work to be perverted, master," Ariel replied softly.

The thud of footsteps filling the room caught his attention. He looked up to find his children, all the people he'd taken in and given the gift of longer life and healing, a home, before him. Their heads were bowed, but their energy crackled with expectation. Like a leashed predator waiting for their shot. He looked over each person. A sense of nervousness slithered along his spine.

“You can’t prevent such a thing. My time is done. Besides we sent enough data to Evanson to help his research and perhaps he can find a cure for me later. Besides, I’m sure he’ll help me with the charges.” Abbott doubted it but the crowd didn’t know that.

“It won’t matter. The press, Isadora Jones, they will slander you. We won’t allow that,” Ariel replied.

Anger flared in the pit of his stomach. “What do you know of Isadora? She will understand. She

will get the message and appreciate my work, whereas, clearly you don't," he spat out.

Ariel shook her head. She lifted her chin and her eyes flashed to a dull red hue. "No she won't, but I won't try to make you see that. You're so wrapped up in trying to impress her that you've forgotten your children. We won't allow that any longer. Nor will we allow your hard work to be defiled."

As if a signal had been shot into the air, the crowd moved as



one to swarm him. He glared at them. "Stop this, this instant!"

"No," Ariel said.

With that single word, they attacked. As one, they ripped and tore Abbott apart. He tried to scream and fight but there were far too many of them. Pain throbbled through his body as the agony turned to blinding, searing fire that engulfed him.

"Isadora," he gasped out as the blackness took him over.

\* \* \* \*

Torger went over the evidence and reports to make sure they hadn't missed anything. It was beginning to look like a long night ahead. They had to make sure that the bases were covered. The Council wouldn't be sending a Fixer, but Draven was sure that they would want everything they had to make sure that DCPD hadn't tried to fabricate evidence to point to Ivan Evanson. They were still looking for excuses to shut Draven's Crossing down and quarantine the town until they

could take over the political duties and shove Draven out of office. As he shuffled through the paperwork, the evidence trail, and made sure that all the evidence was accounted for, his phone rang.

“Torger,” he said while trying to read over the latest report from the HellHound Squad.

“Boss, Abbott is dead. Looks like a massacre. Seems his boarders killed him and then themselves. We do have a written out confession that says he’s responsible for the vampire bite victims and that he

was put up to it by Evanson. Says it was for experimental research for fixing people with blood disorders, aimed at vampires. I'll bring it all in." She rang off before he could respond.

Torger hung up the phone and resisted the urge to whoop in victory. He put in a call to Draven immediately and then checked the time. There hadn't been an update on Jagger, which was unusual. Unless his task had taken too long he should've brought in Evanson for questioning. Draven's private

line rang and rang before he answered it. "Torger?"

Torger panicked.

A kernel of worry formed in the pit of Torger's stomach. "What's up, Drav? What's going on?"

"I sent Jagger to Evanson's over an hour ago and haven't heard back. I'm getting antsy over here. Did he arrive at the police station yet?" Draven asked.

"No, I was calling you to let you know we found conclusive evidence against Evanson, which

should satisfy the Council. I'm gonna go check on Jagger myself." Torger unlocked his security drawer and took out his gun and badge.

"Take your brother, just in case. I have a bad feeling." Draven hung up before Torger could ask what that was.

The next call he made was to Urban who would meet him at the mansion. Isadora was asleep. She was emotionally exhausted. Torger couldn't blame her. An ache in his heart formed for her. Michaela

hadn't just been her assistant, she'd been her friend and under Isy's protection. *As soon as this is all over I'm going to take some time off to be with her,* he decided before he closed the call and headed out of the office. Rather than tell the officers where he was going, he told them that he'd be back in an hour and to tell Alyssa Santa Rosa to wait for him in his office once she'd logged everything in. With Abbott dead, he wanted to get her firsthand account of how everything looked. He had to

interrogate her himself because that's exactly what the Council would do to make sure no funny business had come into play during this latest step in the investigation.

The ride over to Evanson's was uneventful. Despite the continued night life, there weren't as many people on the streets due to the killings. He was sure that everyone would breathe a sigh of relief at it being over. There would be shock and outrage over Evanson's involvement, but the citizens would get over it and



they'd get to vote in a new representative. He thought of the likely candidates and couldn't pick one that he wanted to work with; after all, they'd all be Council lackeys in the end, no matter how nice they started out.

Draven wouldn't be happy to have to work with someone new, that was for sure. There would be long nights away from Rose for him, and Torger wouldn't be immune. There would be the werewolf summit that he'd need to deal with, which would mean time

away from Isy and pack business. Thankfully, Urban was here to help keep him calm, for now. He'd have to talk him into staying in town until that was over.

He pulled into the driveway of the Evanson mansion and saw Urban had arrived. *Must've run some red lights.* Torger smirked. He turned off the car and got out. Jagger's black Mercedes SLS AMG was parked in front of the double doors.

Urban walked over to him as Torger got out of his car. "Car is

cold, no life signs in the house but I can smell blood even from here.”

Torger's stomach dropped as the worry turned to all out panic. Fear for his friend drove his actions. He drew his gun and took the safety off. With it at the ready, he kicked open the double doors and allowed his senses to guide him. The lights were on but there was no movement. Not even a servant had come to check on the noise. He nodded to Urban, who flanked his side. Together they moved through the house, making

sure they were alone.

Torger led the way as they followed groans coming from down a darkened hallway. A sliver of light peeked out from a darkened doorway. Urban crept forward and nudged it open with his toe, gun at the ready. Torger rushed into the room. The scene was one of pure carnage. Jagger was on the floor while Evanson lay in a pool of blood. Groans of pain gurgled out of his mouth. Urban checked on Jagger while Torger knelt down, put away his gun and looked over

Evanson. “Kris, gone...Jagger.. Jagger...” His voice was thready and weak.

Torger swore and got out his cell phone while he checked Evanson over for injuries and the source of the blood. The sound of sirens filtered through a cracked window. A light breeze tickled the thick curtains. Torger looked over at Urban. “Who the fuck called the cops?”

Urban just shrugged and Jagger sat up and groaned. He rubbed the back of his head. “What

Mack truck hit me?"

"Don't say anything. Someone called the cops," Urban said.

Jagger squinted from one brother to the other. "But you are the cops."

"Yeah, but we don't know why they're coming here. Get him to Draven's office; make sure you're not seen." Torger watched as Urban dragged Jagger out of the room.

Torger refocused his attentions on Evanson. The blood seemed to be coming from a wound on his side. Torger opened

Evanson's shirt and found a deep gash. "Jesus."

He looked up at Evanson's face, took his pulse again and swore. Ivan Evanson was dead and Jagger had been on the scene. Alyssa Santa Rosa burst through the door, five cops filtering in behind her. They fanned out, guns pointed at Torger. He put down his gun and held up his hands.

"Chief?" Confusion flowed over Alyssa's face.

"Was sent here by Draven, came in and found him like this.

He's dead." Torger decided to fudge the truth until he knew more. He could trust Alyssa but the rest of the officers, he wasn't sure of yet.

The guns were put away and Alyssa broke out her notebook while the officers fanned out. Some were already on the phone calling in the ME and others the CSU. "I'm going to give this scene over to you," he said once she'd taken his statement. "I need to go see Draven, tell him what's going on."

"And the other car outside?"



Alyssa's eyebrow rose in question.

"Impound it until we find out whose it is." Torger knew that as soon as Jagger heard about it, he'd pitch a fit, but there was no way to get that car out of the driveway without things going pear shaped quickly. Before he left, he turned to Alyssa. "Who called it in?"

Santa Rosa shrugged. "Some old woman who was walking by said she heard screams. Name of Ackroyd. She says she'll be at the station later to make an official statement. Said she saw a man with

long black hair, all in black, running out of the house. She described Jagger pretty well.”

Alyssa gave Torger a hard, assessing look that made Torger want to shift from one foot to the other. Her nostrils flared, expectation glowed on her face. Torger shook his head. “I’ll talk to Draven, see if he sent Jagger over here but I haven’t spoken to him.”

It wasn’t a lie. He hadn’t really had a conversation with Jagger, he’d ordered both him and Urban gone. Now they had a

witness placing Jagger at the scene, which made things worse.

“Fine, but if you have contact with him, let me know, okay?” Alyssa said.

Torger nodded, not trusting himself to speak without lying. “I’m going to go update Draven.”

Alyssa agreed and let him walk. Torger had to fight not to run to his SUV. Thankfully he wasn’t blocked in. He backed up and pulled out and headed straight for Draven, not passing go and checking his rear view every few

seconds to make sure he wasn't tailed. He arrived at the mayor's office in record time and got through metal detectors and passed security with very little problem. He burst into Draven's office, which caused both Jagger and Draven to turn to him, fangs and elongated nails out while Urban fought not to shift.

“Stand down. I don't have much time, but Jagger you've been identified as a possible suspect. Some old woman put a call into the DCPD with a description of you

saying that she saw you flee the scene. You need to go to ground,” Torger let the words rush out. He didn’t want Alyssa marching in at any second, warrant in hand.

“Fuck no,” Jagger growled as he returned to vampire normal. His eyes burned red with rage. “I’m not guilty.”

“And Evanson is dead. We don’t know where his brother is,” Torger stated. “We closed the serial killer book, but now a new shit storm has opened. Someone is targeting you. It’s the only way I

can explain the phone call fingering you or the fact that they didn't even mention mine and Urban's arrival. The night was dark and you'd have to have super eyesight to get your features as correct as she did. Besides that, you fleeing Evanson's mansion makes you look guilty as shit, regardless of what we think." Torger's stomach twisted as his mind skimmed over the details they knew so far. "All this makes me think the Council is behind this. It's just too damn neat. Makes me think they were watching Evanson's

place and you got there before they could get to Evanson and clean up his mess. That is if they even knew. You need to go underground, gather info and find out who's behind this new clusterfuck."

Draven came forward. "He's right and to be seen with you, defending you after Evanson's death would make the Council think we're at war with them." Draven put a hand on his friend's shoulder and gave it a squeeze. Concern on his face. "The people won't understand so soon after

Muffy's death. You have the connections; find out who did this. We'll cover for you as best we can. I have to call a press conference to announce the end of the terror and notify them about Evanson. Jagger, go. Now!"

Jagger grumbled something that Torger didn't catch, but he left the office without a word of protest. Torger turned to Draven. "What do we do now?"

Draven sighed, looking older than his years. "I call a press conference, you give a statement



and then we go to our respective homes and pray that Jagger works quickly.”

\* \* \* \*

The press conference didn't last long, but by the end Torger felt a thousand years older and carried a new weight on his shoulders. All he wanted to do now was go home, cuddle up with Isy and not go into work tomorrow. They'd gone from one mess to another. Jagger was in trouble, and Torger couldn't help him. He was also pretty sure that

Alyssa would make it her life's mission to find Jagger and get the truth out of him.

If he didn't give Alyssa lead detective on the case, she'd go ape shit. He couldn't win either way. One of his best friends was going to be pursued by one of his best officers. Life truly sucked. At least that's how he felt until he saw Isy standing in the doorway as he and Urban pulled up in the driveway. She wore one of his shirts and nothing else.

Desire surged in his blood. He

knew the perfect way to forget his troubles. "I'll see you in the morning, bro."

"Yup," Urban said as he walked out into the forest. "I'm going for a long run. You guys have fun."

"Oh, I will," Torger said as he followed Isy into the house and into his room.

## Chapter Fifteen

### ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

At least for now. -Isadora Jones,  
DC News Blast

Isy could see the weariness in the set of his shoulders and the tiredness in his eyes. They'd only been apart a few hours, yet she knew how worn down he was. The day's toll hadn't just wrecked him, it had broken her down. In the

quiet and solitude of his room, she'd curled up around his pillow and cried until she'd felt empty. Even when Urban had knocked on the door offering food, she'd sent him away. Michaela was dead. Her friend, assistant, the person she was grooming to replace her, wasn't around anymore.

Had she told Michaela that she wanted her to take over for her when she took vacations or emergencies? Did she compliment her enough? Talk to her about life beyond the studio? Take her out to

eat, get to know her? I sy felt like a failure. What did she really know about her elvish assistant other than she'd been twenty-five, shy, sweet, loved tea and cashmere sweaters?

A stone held the place where her heart should have been. When she thought of Michaela's smile or laugh, it hurt to breathe. She wanted to run away but didn't have anywhere that wouldn't remind her of the friend she'd lost. Only here, in Torger's cabin, did she feel safe enough to breakdown. Now,

looking at Torger, she could see he needed her as much as she needed him.

Isy held out her hand to him and withheld a sigh of relief when he accepted her proffered palm and threaded warm, big, roughened fingers through hers in a firm grasp that anchored her world.

“Bad day?” she asked, not wanting the details. Isy wasn’t a reporter now. She was his lover.

“It had its moments. We can talk about it tomorrow. Dinner?” he asked as he let go of her hand,

shrugged out of his jacket and headed for his bedroom to put away his gun, badge and passes. She went to the kitchen, brought out two plates and ladled out large helpings of spaghetti. Before Urban had rushed out, she'd started making the pasta as a way to get them off of fast food. Not that she didn't love pizza and burgers but she needed more substantial food with fresher ingredients. She enjoyed cooking and had even made some garlic bread and a simple salad. Isy poured some



wine, lit some candles and put on some jazz before she placed the dishes on the tabletops and settled down in a seat across from his.

He entered the room and placed a kiss on her temple, which lit a flame of heat in the pit of her stomach as blood pooled in her pussy. Memories of last night filled her head, causing her vaginal walls to flutter. She shifted in her seat and tried to focus on talking to him rather than on her growing arousal.

“Ready to eat? I made garlic bread and a salad. Next time I’ll do

more from scratch but you guys seriously need more veggies and flour and such. How's a girl supposed to feed her man if he's only got meat in his freezer?" she teased.

He chuckled. "So, I'm your man now? We haven't even gone out on a date yet."

She waved away his comment. "We don't need to go in order. Like normals."

Torger shook his head. "I will be taking you on a date. I just have to figure out where we should go

and if we should even go anywhere.”

“Want to keep me all to yourself, do you?” she purred.

“Of course I do.” He leered before he dug into the meal. “Anyway, I was going to avoid this but do you want me to tell you what they found and the details of Michaela’s death?”

Isy’s breath hitched in her throat as all arousal disappeared. Michaela. For a moment she’d forgotten about her friend. Tears burned her eyes, and her vision

blurred as the ache and emptiness in her heart began to throb. Torger reached across the table, took her hand and gave it a squeeze. "She fought, hard, honey. She didn't go down gently and she wasn't sexually assaulted."

"That's a small relief," she mumbled. Isy didn't know how else to respond. *Thank goddess Abbott hadn't raped my friend. At least she's at peace now.* Hot tears slid down her cheeks, and she began to snifle. She was unable to let go of his hand. It was the only thing

giving her something to hold on to.

“I just...it doesn't matter. She's dead,” Isy whispered.

“I know, honey.” Torger got out of his seat and came around the table without taking back his hand.

She gripped his palm tighter as a sob grew in her throat. “It hurts so much, Tor. She was my friend and I didn't protect her, didn't get to know her better. I failed her.” The sob came out as a ragged cry. She collapsed against his chest and wrapped her arms around his waist as she let it all out.

Torger stroked her hair and made hushed sounds. She felt a sense of shame at breaking down like this, yet she couldn't stop the wave of emotion that washed over her as she cried. A scream built up inside of her until she let it out as a howl.

She wasn't the only one in pain; her dragon felt the ache too. Its emotions melded with hers until it formed an immeasurable wall of throbbing, crystalline ache. Dragons were protectors, fierce in battle and defensive of what was theirs. Anger rippled along the

barrier, filling her with heat and fire. Abbott had taken what was *hers*. Michaela had been *her* friend. *Her* assistant. *How dare he take her from us*, the dragon hissed. She pounded on the hard wall of flesh before her, screaming and raging as her dragon pushed its own emotions into her, shoving its fury and helplessness into its human vessel until Isadora sagged against Torger exhausted, hollow, and raw.

Torger had held her through it, stroked her hair and allowed her to use him as a punching bag. Isy

gazed up at him, head heavy, eyes hot and a sense of shame filling her up at her outburst.

“It’s okay, honey. Why don’t we go to bed? It’s been a long day. I’ll put this away for tomorrow, and I can make us breakfast in bed, and we can watch a movie.” Torger gave her a small smile.

Heat filled her chest as she wiped away the last of her tears. Torger didn’t think her weak. He understood. “Okay.” She nodded.

Isy got up and headed back to Torger’s bed, climbed in, under the



covers and settled down to wait for him. Her eyes felt heavy. It really had been a long day, and now the shadow of the serial killer had been withdrawn. They were all safe. Her town, her people, and most importantly her man and family and friends were safe. She closed her eyes, allowing exhaustion to take hold. Isy yawned. Yes, they were all safe for now.

\* \* \* \*

Torger put all the dishes away and headed into the bedroom to

find Isy asleep on his bed. Rather than join her, he undressed, took a shower, and then slid under the covers. He wrapped his arms around her and held her tight against him. Everyone was safe. Abbott was dead, the serial killer was gone and his town was once again okay. Well, not everyone. His thoughts drifted toward Jagger. With a sigh, he pressed a kiss on the top of her head and closed his eyes. He'd deal with that headache tomorrow. For now, he'd savor this small respite. He had his mate and

his brother was staying with him for how long, who knew, but he'd take it. Draven's Crossing was safe, his territory was his once again and everything was as it should be.

For now...

## About the Author

Author, part vampire, part pixie, Selena Illyria was born with a need to write and enable. Her imagination takes her into the paranormal, sci-fi and fantasy genres and all sorts of mischief. When not writing she enjoys catching up on her TBR pile watching some of her favorite programs and listening to her favorite music as well as teasing people with posts on decadent food

and plot bunnies.

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