



VAMPIRES OF BLOOD AND BONES  
VOL. 13

**THE  
COMMANDER'S  
FATE**

B.A. STRETKE

Unexpected Lover  
Vampires of Blood and Bones Vol. 13

B.A. Stretke

Superiorland Publishing



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# CHAPTER ONE

The woods were filled with a light mist tonight that trailed along the forest floor in places due to the warmth of the ground and the coolness of the air, and it gave the area an extra touch of mysticism. Gage stepped quietly through the moonlit darkness, following the badger he'd tried to catch on film before and being extra careful not to scare or intimidate. Badgers can be aggressive creatures if threatened, but Gage was not threatening; all he wanted was the perfect photograph.

He'd been in these woods many times over the past month, photographing whatever caught his interest, but a few days ago, he sighted a badger and got a few shots but not one that made him happy. Those creatures were fascinating, photogenic, and unusual, so he hoped to get a picture with the perfect ambiance. The right photo could help him win or at least place in the wildlife photo competition at the county fair.

Ever since he could remember, his dream was to make it as a photographer, and this was a way to get noticed. After graduating last year, he enrolled in a photography class at the community college and discovered a passion. He'd taken pictures before but needed the proper equipment and software and the skill to use them. Now his goal was to make it a career, and this competition could prove to be step one in reaching that goal.

He entered the woods off the main road where he'd parked his car. Gage knew that this section belonged to the state, and he was allowed to access it, but there was private property that butted up to the state land, and that's where his problems lay. The badgers he was following tended to lead him onto the private land. Their den must be in that area. It was risky crossing over once again since he'd already been caught twice by DuCane's security people.

They were getting progressively meaner each time they apprehended him, and he really didn't want to deal with those guys again tonight. But the badger and the perfect mist and moonlight were making him follow. He just needed to get the right shot, the perfect shot, and then he'd be done with these

woods. He figured the fact that badgers were not commonly photographed around here would give him an advantage in the competition.

Gage respected the law and wasn't usually a trespasser, but circumstances pushed him to once again take the risk of being caught. He kept his eye on the badger, and then it happened. The little beast paused, his head held high as if smelling the mist, and the moonlight shrouded his head and shoulders. It was the perfect shot. He started shooting multiple shots, knowing one of them would be the winner, when a series of cracking noises erupted, and the badger leapt and was gone in a heartbeat.

He knew what was happening, and although it was disheartening to have to go through the rough handling and verbal abuse of the security men, it was worth it for the pictures he had gotten. Gage stood still and waited as they came at him from all sides. He could see at least five of them, but with the sounds he was hearing, there were more that were out of sight.

“The property is posted... very clearly posted... so clearly posted that one would have to step over the no trespassing signs in order to enter this property.” The man was not impressed, and the look on his face was part irritation and part disgust, not a good combination from where Gage stood.

Gage did not respond to the man's statement, for there was nothing he could say. He'd entered... again... without permission, and he had no excuses. Gage had tried to explain himself before telling them he was just a photographer and that he meant no harm, but it didn't hold water before, so he knew it wouldn't now. He remained quiet and waited.

“You don't seem to understand that we are not joking. Our privacy and security are paramount, and your deliberate refusal to follow the law has left us with little choice but to deal with you more severely.” The man nailed him with a stare that had Gage quaking just a little and glancing away. Whatever was coming, he wasn't going to like it.

The guy shifted his gaze abruptly to the man beside him. “Contact Sheriff Keller.” Gage tensed at the thought of Sheriff Keller coming for him. He’d rather this guy gave him a brutal tongue-lashing like the last two times. If the Sheriff became involved, Gage’s stepdad would be contacted, and the repercussions would be awful and endless.

“I won’t bother you again. I was just taking pictures, and I’ll stop; no more pictures in the woods, no more chasing nocturnal animals. I’m done, I promise.” His stepdad could be a tough bastard; right now, Gage needed him. He provided Gage with a job and a place to live, and he didn’t want to lose that. He would lose everything if he brought the Coven and Sheriff Keller into their lives.

The guy stared at him once again and then took a phone call which seemed odd. “Yes, Commander Haas.” He said, and then it was all listening, and little talking. Whoever was on the other end gave this man a litany of orders. The guy continued to listen and then ended the call with, “As you wish, sir.” He then closed the call and looked at Gage with what appeared to be a growing sympathy.

“Trenton.” He barked the name without taking his eyes from Gage, and a man in the back came forward. The man had an air about him that was off-putting, and Gage turned his gaze away and took in the men standing around him. They were company men, all business doing their job except Trenton, who had a coldness that set him apart from the others.

“Take Mr. Montague to the exterior cells and impress upon him the importance of abiding by property laws.” The way the guy said this was chilling, and Gage found his breath catching in his throat. Trenton came forward and grabbed him by the upper arm, and began hauling him away. Gage tried not to resist, but his sense of self-preservation had him pulling back.

“Go with him and do as you are told.” The guy told him and then turned his attention to the other men. “We’re finished here.” He said, and within seconds they had all disappeared into the night except Trenton.

Trenton roughly pulled him through the woods to a clearing where a four-wheeler was parked. He tossed Gage into the back and zip-tied his hands together. Gage had his camera and phone in a shoulder bag, and he hoped that nothing would happen to his equipment because he could not afford to replace them. Coming to the woods this night had been a colossal mistake.

There was no talking as they drove through the clearing to a path that led to a manicured lawn with formal walkways, and the four-wheeler was parked just beyond a grove of fruit trees. Trenton then jerked him from the back seat. "We will walk the remaining distance." He said his words were flat and cold, but his actions held a level of anger that was scaring Gage.

They made their way through the trees and foliage to a large block building with very few windows and a foreboding aura. Trenton punched in a code, and the door opened. He then grabbed Gage by the scruff of his neck and violently pushed him inside. Gage stumbled but caught his balance before falling to the hard tile floor.

The tile floor and the various drains positioned around the room were not good signs. Gage felt his skin tightening and his heart rate escalating. Fear began to choke him, and reactions seemed to satisfy Trenton for the moment. This guy was bad, really bad.

Trenton cut the strap on his shoulder bag, dropping it hard onto the floor, and Gage scrambled to protect it but to no avail. Trenton kicked it across the room, and it hit the opposite wall.

"You have no right to destroy my things," Gage shouted at him but regretted the outburst almost immediately. The man turned on him with eyes that were now rimmed in red, almost glowing as they looked him over from head to foot. He then walked over to Gage's bag and stomped on it three times before opening it and dumping the contents on the tile floor.



Gage watched as his camera, expensive attachments, lenses, and phone were reduced to nothing but a mass of broken pieces. It was heartbreaking as his dreams and goals were snuffed out in seconds. Then Trenton turned on him, walking over very deliberately, holding him in the grip of his cold stare, and backhanding him across the side of his face.

Gage fell to the floor, this time feeling the blood run down his chin from the split in his lip. His face was numb from the strike, and he knew there was much more and much worse to come.

...

Deacon Haas, Commander of the North quadrant Security Forces of Coven DuCane, sat at his desk awash with conflicting feelings regarding his recent order concerning an incessant trespasser. The man was an irritant and refused to heed properly and lawfully posted property signs. He was warned repeatedly, and the fact he kept coming back made it clear he did not understand common courtesy and direction.

His presence was intolerable, and if it took corporal measures to get him to understand, then so be it. Trenton was the man for the job. He did it quick, clean, and emotionless.

The physical reminder of his trespassing crime would stay with him, and he would not return again. It was harsh and brutal considering the interloper was human but necessary; there could not be such irreverence of the laws of DuCane. Security needed to be tight and efficient, and outsiders needed to know that breaches would not be tolerated.

Deacon walked over to the tray by the window and poured himself a glass of whiskey. It all made sense when he explained it to himself, but still, he felt like a rank bastard for ordering the young man punished in such a manner. He could sense the derision in Lieutenant McKay's tone when he called him and put down the order for punishment. McKay didn't agree with him, but he didn't voice his opinion. He was a good and solid soldier and would do as he was told.

The young man would be dealt with and returned home. He was warned twice not to return, so whatever

happened this night, he earned. Deacon put the matter from his mind, satisfied that it had to be done for the sake of security. Sometimes you had to be firm, and this was one of those times.

Deacon went back to his desk and put in a call to Lieutenant McKay to meet him in his office after his shift. He wanted a briefing on the incident and also information on the young man, Gage Montague. Was this isolated, or was this young man working with others gauging our tolerance and pushing the envelope of our security. The Coven had been infiltrated in the past, and their enemies still existed. They could not let their guard down, not even for a hapless human.

...

Gage was hurting. Every molecule of his body was screaming after the beating that man, Trenton, had delivered. He had not anticipated such a brutal reaction. Before, when he was detained, they were obviously unhappy and made that quite clear, but they never physically hurt him. He assumed that calling the Sheriff was the worst thing that could happen to him, but that was before he was introduced to Trenton, a name and a man he would not soon forget.

He was driven back to town and dumped in the alley behind the bar, just left there bleeding on the cold, hard ground. The car barely slowed down before the guy pushed Gage from the back seat with his foot. He landed hard and rolled in the dirt, and although it hurt, he was thanking god that he was finally away from that maniac. The light at the back door was on, but there was no one around.

The bar was closed, and his stepdad was probably in his office going over receipts. He pulled himself up enough to make his way up the incline from the alley to the bar's back door. It was exhausting, but he needed to get out of the night flow of traffic that used the alley. He didn't want to end up as lunch for some rogue shifter or vampire.

He tried to lift his hand to feel his face but was pretty sure his left arm was broken or dislocated because it wasn't moving, and pain radiated to his shoulder every time he tried.

His face was a mess. He knew that without having to look since Trenton took great care in focusing much of his abuse on Gage's face. He just hoped that none of the local lowlifes found him before he was able to get to his feet and get inside.

The sound of the back door opening had his heart pounding in hopes of being found and helped inside. "What the hell happened to you?" It was Able, and Gage was so glad to see him.

"I was jumped." He said, and it wasn't a total lie.

"Out here? By whom?" He asked, but Gage was in no condition to answer questions.

"I don't know who, but they worked me over good."

"They sure did, come on, let me help you inside, and I'll see what I can do for you. I'm assuming you don't want to go to the ER." Able cocked an eyebrow at him, and Gage shook his head. "Just as well; we don't want them contacting the cops and getting them in our business."

Able got him up, and half carried him inside to the break room that had an old, down, threadbare sofa in the corner. It was the most uncomfortable piece of furniture on earth, but right now, it looked like pure perfection, and all Gage wanted was to lie down and rest. Able got him to the sofa and then left to get the first aid kit from his office.

When Able returned, he had the kit along with a washcloth, hand towel, and a basin of water. "They really gave you a beating. How many were there?"

"I hate to say it, but this was done by just one guy, but in my defense, I think he was paranormal." Gage knew for a fact he was paranormal. The guy was a vampire soldier but had to play it carefully with Able. If he knew Gage was sneaking onto DuCane's property and getting caught, he would be pissed. Able firmly believed in not drawing attention to one's self, and that was how he raised Gage from the age of five.

Gage's mother married Able Colbert after Gage's father died in Afghanistan. He was a soldier in the Army and

was killed when the transport he was on rolled over an IED. Able was a wolf shifter, and Gage's mother wasn't his true mate, but they married anyway, and Able took on the responsibilities of a wife and child.

Unfortunately, she never got over the loss of her husband, and when Gage was twelve, she left to supposedly find herself and never returned. Gage stayed with Able, who, although strict in some odd ways, was also a decent guardian.

The Zen bar had been his home since he was five years old, and at sixteen, Able let him start working part-time, first in the kitchen and then in the stock room. Now, at nineteen, he filled in wherever he was needed. It was considered a seedy bar with a sketchy clientele, but it had provided security when he had none, and it was home.

"What sort of paranormal?" Able was asking too many questions.

"Not sure, but he was well dressed." Gage knew he would draw the logical conclusion.

"One of DuCane's people?" Able was surprised. "That doesn't sound like the actions of one of his people."

"I don't know." That was an outright lie, but he didn't want to tell him the truth. Gage was shocked from his thoughts with a painful gasp when Able abruptly pulled his arm, putting his shoulder back into place.

"You won't see out of your left eye for a few days; the swelling is too severe. If you think you can take the pain, I'll stitch your lip for you. It's a deep gash and will most likely scar otherwise." Able was already sterilizing and threading the needle while he asked for permission.

"Yeah, go ahead. I don't want some gnarly scar on my face." Able stitched it up quickly, and Gage thought he might pass out from the pain, but he didn't.

"You didn't lose any teeth and no broken bones, so that's good, but you're black and blue from head to toe, and your face is a fucking mess." Able always spoke the truth even when it was uncomfortable to hear. "I'll help you up to your

room, and you'll need to stay there for a few days; otherwise, people will be asking questions, and there's always that busybody in the crowd that wants to call the cops. You just stay in your room until your face starts to look better ... agreed?"

"Sure, staying in my room for a few days sounds like a great idea right now." He answered halfheartedly, and Able laughed.

"You'll be fine." Able helped him off the sofa, and again half carried him up the back stairs to Gage's apartment on the second floor. Able didn't live on sight. He had an apartment a few blocks away. He got Gage into bed and then promised to check on him in the morning.

"Thanks for your help, Able." Gage was grateful that he was cleaned up, bandaged, and in bed; it sure beat lying outside in the cold and dark.

"No problem, kid." He tucked him in and put a glass of water and ibuprofen on the bedside table next to him. "I'll see you in the morning." With that, he turned out the lights and closed and locked the door.

Gage lay there feeling better and feeling worse. He was on the mend, but his body ached all over, and he could no longer consider himself a photographer. His camera and phone and everything were smashed beyond recognition. Trenton had taken particular pleasure in reducing his belongings to dust on that tile floor. He had a few shots uploaded to his computer but not the killer shots he got tonight, the shots that would have given him a possibility of winning that fucking contest.

Trenton had destroyed a couple thousand dollars worth of equipment, and Gage had no way of replacing it, not now or for a very long time. It wasn't a top-of-the-line camera, but it was a damned good one, and it had taken him almost a year of saving to afford it used. The phone was not very old; he'd bought it new this year on a payment plan which he would still have to pay for another six months even though he no longer had the phone.

Gage wondered about his car as it hit him that it was still parked on the side of the road near state forest land. If it got impounded, Able would find out the truth of this night and his involvement with the DuCane Coven. His only option was to call the only friend he had. Friends were difficult for Gage. Having grown up in the Zen bar community, few parents wanted their kids hanging around with him.

His friends consisted of Eddie Boone and Joe Banks, two odd fellows much like him. They were a little older than Gage but had worked together at the Italian Restaurant for a few months and forged a loose comradery.

He hadn't had much contact with Eddie since he married that vampire soldier and moved in with him at the DuCane estate. He totally lost contact with Joe when he hooked up with the Frenchman and moved overseas. Thankfully he still had a landline in the apartment, and he could reach it from the bed because there was no way he could muster the energy to get up.

Gage checked the time and decided to give him a call in the morning and take his chances on Able not finding out. He doubted Eddie's husband would appreciate him getting a call to pick up a car in the middle of the night, and he didn't want to get on the wrong side of any more vampire guards. Visions of Trenton flashed in his mind, and he winced, reliving the brutal punches and kicks, all disturbingly strategic to produce the most pain with the least physical damage.

He closed his eyes and tried to rest, relaxing his body and focusing on how to come up with the money to buy a new camera. Another job or ask Able for more hours. He would look into it once he was back on his feet. Sleep came gradually like a heavy warm blanket that blocked out the day's events and quieted his mind.

## CHAPTER TWO

Just before dawn, Lieutenant McKay stopped by his office to submit his report regarding the trespasser. “Sit down.” He instructed once McKay had entered the room. Deacon remained seated behind his desk. He’d spent several hours going over CCTV footage of the Northern quadrant and contemplating if new security measures were in order.

He caught sight of Trenton leading the young offender away. The guy was much smaller than he had imagined. Deacon switched off the screen, seeing the young man in Trenton’s custody gave him a sinking feeling. He’d been angry when the call came in, reporting that the trespasser had returned, and he took his anger out on that young man. It made him feel small in retrospect, but what’s done is done, and the young man was far from innocent in the matter.

He only half listened to Lieutenant McKay as he was already aware of the incident and most of the details. “Trenton reported that he delivered the offender to his home following punishment.” McKay finished the report covering all the facts with no opinion of his own.

“What does that mean?” Deacon wanted details as to the offender’s return home.

“For a soldier like Trenton, that means Gage Montague was pushed or tossed from a moving vehicle into the vicinity of his home. He is most likely recovering on the side of a road somewhere or in a front yard.” McKay did not pull punches on the delivery, and suddenly a shadow of judgment appeared.

“Don’t stop there,” Deacon ordered. “You have permission to speak your mind.” He sat back in his chair and readied himself for some truths which he deserved.

“Gage Montague, although irritating, was no threat to us. He was a photographer taking pictures of badgers, and the badger’s den was on coven property.” McKay stiffened his back and looked straight ahead at his commander. “He needed firmer handling than just a talking to, but that could have been achieved through involving the Sheriff, which is normal

procedure. It is my belief that Gage Montague did not deserve to be handed over to Trenton.”

“You don’t like Trenton?” Deacon knew he was being an ass but wasn’t ready to admit his mistake with Gage Montague. He’d asked for McKay’s opinion, and he got it, unfortunately.

“Trenton is a good and loyal soldier who lives and thrives upon orders and will do anything without question. He’d pistol whip his own mother if you order him to do it. Trenton will never be a leader. Trenton is a tool, and it is our responsibility to use him correctly.” McKay finished and sat in a stiff silence as Deacon contemplated his response. He’d been taken to task in a very few and clearly spoken words, and he was feeling every one of them.

“So noted.” He stated, then stood up, and McKay did likewise. “You may go.”

“Yes, sir.” McKay turned and was leaving when Deacon made a further comment.

“Contact medical services and follow up with Gage Montague to make sure he made it home.” Deacon knew he had a responsibility to the young man, and his anger was no excuse for losing prudence in this case. McKay nodded and left the room, closing the door behind him.

Deacon felt the weight of shame coming down upon him but managed to push it aside. He was doing his job, and although harsh, the punishment was not lethal, and the young man had broken their laws repeatedly. He wasn’t proud of how he handled the situation, but he wasn’t going to beat himself up about it either.

Finally, he gave into the urge and headed out to the blockhouse, also referred to as the exterior cells, to check the aura and get a feel for what Mr. Montague suffered. He hoped it would put the matter to rest in his own mind, and he could get on with his work.

It was nearing dawn when he punched in the code, and the door to the blockhouse opened. He stood outside for a few



seconds readying himself to enter, knowing full well that the young man had suffered at the hands of Trenton Shift.

The room was used for corporal punishment, so the floor was solid smooth tile, and the walls were concrete blocks. There was a large drain in the center of the room, and the floor sloped very slightly toward it. A hose hung on the far wall is used for cleaning the area quickly and efficiently.

The room had not yet been cleaned after Trenton had used it. The air reeked of fear and pain, and the tile showed areas of blood spatter. He moved further into the room and took a deep breath; something was telling him to stay even as his better sense was urging him to walk away. The young man would heal, and Deacon would learn to better control his anger in the future.

One step after the other slow and thoughtful, brought him to the right corner of the room. The floor there was covered in blood spatter, and the emotions emanating from the walls reached out to him. He took several deep breaths hoping the sensations running through him were wrong, a misunderstanding, and simply situational effects, but the burning in his mind and the heaviness in his heart told him what was true. Deacon got down on one knee and touched the dried blood on the floor, and it called out to him.

He got back to his feet and walked over, grabbed the hose from the wall, and turned it on. In several sweeping moves, he washed the blood from the floor, where it was concentrated in the right corner and along the back wall. He had to remove the essence that was torturing him, and washing it away seemed the only remedy.

When finished, he returned the hose to the wall and walked out of the block house, locking the door behind him. The sorrow and the pain of that room was tearing him apart, and he needed to get somewhere private before he lost all control and went after Trenton Shift in a murderous rage.

He couldn't say the words. He couldn't admit it to himself until he reached his quarters on the second floor east wing. He had no neighbors in the apartments directly to his

right and to his left, so his breakdown would not be overheard. He closed the door and instantly put his fist through the wall of his foyer and then repeated the action in his living room, punching a hole through the wall by the couch. His heart was breaking, and his breath was choking him.

The discovery that the young man, Gage Montague, was, in fact, his Fated beloved was something that hit him like a sledgehammer and left him crushed by the realization that he'd ordered his beloved beaten to a bloody pulp. His mind refused to process the truth when it hit him at the blockhouse, but his heart was shattering with the aura of fear, pain, and sadness that permeated that room. Washing the blood and the tears away did not lessen the agony of his discovery, and he found himself unsure of how to move forward and if it were even possible.

Deacon pulled his fist from the wall, fell onto the cushioned leather chair next to the couch, and dropped his head into his hands. Fate had screwed him over to the point that he may never know the love and attachment of his Fated beloved. After years of watching and waiting for his beloved to appear and Fate sends him disguised as an enemy.

He had to do something to try and rectify this massive misstep. Deacon leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, wondering as to the type of man his beloved was and whether he had a chance in hell of ever putting this right. A few minutes of misplaced, irritated anger may well end up coloring the rest of his life. The sun had risen, and the day was beginning, but he felt as if the world were ending; his world was ending.

...

Gage put in a call to Eddie at just after eight in the morning. Able would not be in until after ten since the bar opened at noon, so there was time to have his car returned. Able hadn't mentioned it last night, not having noticed that his car was not in the lot, but this morning he would see and question him about it. Eddie was his only hope at this point.

“Hello, Gage; it’s so good to hear from you,” Eddie answered, always chipper even at eight in the morning.

“I’m sorry I haven’t kept in touch, but you know... the palace and DuCane and all, it’s really intimidating.” Gage began casually with the intention of getting to the point as quickly as possible.

“I understand; Joe felt the same way until he got his own intimidating boyfriend.” Eddie chuckled. “So, what can I do for you?” Eddie made it easy on him, and Gage loved him for that.

“I had a run-in with DuCane security last night. I was taking pictures and wandered onto Coven territory.” Gage was trying to explain in as few words as possible, not wanting to get into the details of the nightmare he had endured last night.

“Are you okay?” Eddie was genuinely concerned.

“Yeah, I’m fine, but they dropped me home after, and my car is parked on County Road 48 near the Maple Ridge turn-off. Able doesn’t know about what happened, and he’ll be pissed if he finds out. I was wondering if you’d pick up my car and park it in the lot here before he comes to work at 10. I left the keys under the seat. I have no way of getting out there apart from hiring a cab, and I can’t afford that.” Gage held his breath, and the answer came immediately.

“Of course I will. No problem. I’ll leave the car in the lot and let you know when it’s there. Able will never know.” Gage thanked him, and they said their goodbyes. Gage lay there for another ten minutes before struggling to his feet and stumbling into the bathroom to wash up.

He pulled on a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt and then went back to bed. The exertion and effort it took to do so little was shocking. He lay there, ready to answer the phone, when Eddie called. He didn’t want Able to inadvertently pick it up downstairs. He sure hoped Eddie returned the car before Able arrived, not that the man would hurt him, but Able had his rules, and he never bent those rules.

His two primary rules were never involving the cops in private business and never involving the Coven in private business, and Able saw all his business as private. The last time he broke one of these rules was in high school when he inadvertently shared with one of his teachers that Able sometimes kept the Zen bar open past two-thirty for special customers.

The teacher shared that tidbit with the cops, and Gage found himself sleeping in the broom closet off the kitchen for a month and with the constant threat of being kicked out. That was a stressful time of his life, and he had no desire to revisit that period. It was nine-thirty-five when the call came in, and relief flooded Gage.

“It’s in the lot, and the keys are back under the seat.” He told him.

“Thank you so much. You saved my life.” Gage gushed.

“Not a problem; glad I could help.”

“Do you need a ride home?” Gage asked him, but was hoping he didn’t since getting out to his car would be a sure test of endurance.

“No, Robert followed me in and will drive me home.”

“Thank him for me.”

“I will, and let’s try to keep in touch this time. Maybe you could come to dinner this weekend.” Eddie was a good guy, but Gage could not imagine showing his face on coven land again so soon.

“I think I should stay away from the coven for a while until they forget about my trespassing.”

“Think about it, and I’ll check with you again on Friday.” Eddie was not going to take no for an answer.

“Okay, I’ll think about it, and thanks again.” With that, he closed the call and went back to sleep. It seemed like just seconds before, someone came barreling into his room, ranting and raving about stupidity and betrayal.

It took Gage a few seconds to get his one good eye open, and what he saw was Able standing over him, looking like he wanted to kill him. Fuck, this was going to get a lot worse before it got better; he could just feel it in his bones.

## CHAPTER THREE

Deacon showered and changed and tried to prepare himself to go see his beloved. It was a terrible situation, but he had to somehow find a way to make things right. He hadn't seen Gage or the extent of the abuse he suffered from Trenton, but Deacon was hopeful that there was still a way forward for them.

Deacon decided that he needed to discuss this with someone, get the thoughts out of his head, and get a little advice and guidance. He came up through the ranks with the field operatives. Bastian was a good friend but not available, and Raul but he and his beloved were on holiday in the Caribbean.

After taking the post of commander at the Coven proper, Deacon became friends with Robert and Quincy. Quincy was off with his two hellhound beloveds, but Robert was at the Palace, and they'd spoken just yesterday.

"Do you have time to meet with me this morning?" He called him, and it sounded like Robert was in a car.

"Sure, I'll be back at the palace within the hour," Robert responded and then added. "I had an errand to run with Eddie, so after I drop him off, we can meet. Is it business or personal?" Robert chuckled.

"How about we meet in the dining hall? I could use a good cup of coffee," Deacon suggested and then added. "It's personal."

"I'm intrigued. See you there around eleven."

"Thank you." He had a few minutes before he needed to head to the dining hall, so he put in a call to the medical services to inquire as to whether they had checked on the condition of Gage Montague.

Just saying the man's name filled Deacon with a surge of joy and sorrow, a mix that was playing havoc with his heart. He was over the moon at having found his beloved and crippled with guilt for the way the young man was treated. He

wanted to think it wasn't so bad, but the blood and pain saturating the block house told a different story.

He walked over to the large window in his living room that looked out on the hedge garden; in the past, he'd found the designs relaxing to study, and it always brought peace to his mind. But today, he could not engage with the peacefulness before him. The garden held no balm for his tortured mind. The block house filled his thoughts, and terrible images plagued him.

"We tried to see him, but his stepfather refused to allow us entry. Gage Montague lives in a studio apartment on the second floor of the Zen bar, and access to the apartment is through the bar. There's a stairway off the kitchen. He wouldn't let us anywhere near the kitchen and kept demanding that we leave." That left him with no more information than he already had, and his irritation was growing.

He couldn't see or even speak to Trenton because he didn't trust himself not to kill the man. Everything in him was raging to find him and give him a taste of what he gave Gage. But he did it under orders, and they were Deacon's orders.

Deacon contacted Bastian, who was working in the field, a situation Master DuCane was following in California, and asked to have Trenton transferred to his team. He didn't give a lot of details but made it clear that Trenton was better suited as a field operative. Trenton would be notified by his superior, Lieutenant McKay, and would be leaving immediately.

It wasn't Trenton's fault; as McKay stated, he was merely a tool, but regardless it was impossible for Deacon to tolerate his presence. Trenton needed a leader that could make the most of his talents, and he needed to be away from the Coven.

At ten-forty, he left his quarters and headed for the dining hall. He chose a table off to the side near the back, which was somewhat secluded. It wasn't long before he saw Robert enter and head over to his table.

He stood and extended his hand. “Thanks for coming, Robert.”

“No problem, Deacon.” They got a bite to eat and coffee and settled in, seated across from one another at the small table. Deacon told him of the incident with Gage Montague and his handling of it, and Robert listened, nodding his head from time to time but made to comment until Deacon finished.

“What are you asking me? It sounds like standard procedure he was caught repeatedly trespassing, and you decided to make an impression. It was severe; I know Trenton and how he rolls, and personally, I would have assigned it to someone else simply because the offender was human, but that’s my call. You did what you thought was appropriate.” Robert was going by the book, and if there were no extenuating circumstances, Deacon could possibly accept that he was following procedure.

“There’s more to the story.” Deacon dropped his head for a moment and then raised it to hold Robert’s gaze. “I was angry and irritated about the perceived softness in the Northern border. It is where infiltrators have penetrated on two separate occasions.”

“Those issues were corrected once you took over leadership of the area. There hasn’t been another breach since you became commander of the Northern quadrant.” Robert pointed out.

“Until Gage Montague.” Deacon clarified. “He wantonly ignored the posted boundaries on three separate occasions. He was dealt with by Lieutenant McKay the first two times, and he gave him a blistering verbal dressing down, so the third time, I lost my patience and engaged the services of Trenton Shift and ordered corporal punishment to be delivered.”

“Again, you were well within your rights to order punishment on the third offense and understandably angry.” Robert again pointed out. “I get that you don’t like to operate from a place of anger, but it happens, and there is usually a



good reason. I don't see that you did anything wrong. You have nothing to be concerned about."

"I have since discovered that the trespasser, Gage Montague, is my beloved. The young human who I had brutally beaten is my Fated life partner." Deacon got to the crux of the issue. Robert set his cup down and just stared at Deacon for a minute or two as if waiting for him to laugh or tell him it was just a joke.

"Perhaps you should have led with that information. It certainly colors the entire event," Robert spoke with care, watching Deacon for clues as to his state of mind, and Deacon understood his uneasiness, for some vampires could become quite volatile in such a situation. Deacon was on edge, and his blood was indeed boiling with rage, but he also held enough self-discipline not to act out on those wholly unconnected to the issue.

"He's hurt, badly hurt, and I don't know how to fix this." He sat back in his seat and looked over at Robert and waited for something, a word, a plan, anything.

"Does he know it was you who ordered the beating?"

"I don't know, but regardless it is not something that I could or would wish to hide." He said this, and Robert nodded, his mind clearly working, trying to present a solution.

"Gage and my Eddie are friends; as a matter of fact, he called Eddie this morning and asked him to get his car from where it was parked on County Road 48 and bring it to the Zen bar parking lot." Deacon's interest was piqued.

"Did Eddie see him this morning?" He was hoping for a report on his condition, but Robert shook his head. The fact that he was well enough to call and make arrangements with Eddie gave Deacon a modicum of relief.

"Gage's stepfather, Able Colbert, is a difficult man set in his ways and paranoid beyond belief. He's a wolf shifter, but I'm sure you already know that." Deacon nodded that he did, so Robert continued. "He likes to keep a low profile, no police, and no coven interaction. Gage knew he would be in

trouble if Able found out he'd trespassed and was caught. That's why he asked Eddie to pick up his car before Able realized it was missing and started asking questions." Deacon appreciated this bit of background on his beloved.

"Is Able abusive?"

"Not physically, but he's a hard man in some ways, according to Eddie. I don't know him personally, just through meeting him at the bar. Gage does his best not to run afoul of the man." Robert fell silent for a few minutes and then gave his advice on the matter.

"Go to him and figure it out when you get there. He's your beloved, so whatever has happened can be resolved. Fate does not bring people together and destroy their union on the first day. Trust me, Deacon, follow this through and go to him."

Deacon nodded, knowing that he wouldn't be able to stay away from his injured beloved for much longer. The thought of seeing him was both exciting and distressing, but Robert was right. The sooner he began to try and put things right, the better his chances of being forgiven.

He was hesitating simply because he feared his own reaction when he came face to face with the consequences of his actions. Gage would be within his rights to deny and disavow their connection, and that thought was devastating.

"Go to him, Deacon."

"I will."

"What did you do about Trenton?" Robert questioned, knowing full well that Deacon's vampire instincts would be screaming for revenge.

"I sent him away. He will be serving with Bastian in California," Deacon stated flatly. "It wasn't his fault he was following my orders, but still, I feared what I might do to him if we were to ever come in contact. He's a good soldier, but there is a part of me that would like to see him dead."

"Wise decision." Robert smiled. "Now, finish up and go win the heart of your beloved." Deacon smiled wearily.

“I’ll contact Silas and take a few days off to figure this out. I need to be focused only on Gage.” He decided.

“Good luck and congratulations on finding your beloved.”

“Thanks.”

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“Get you worthless ass up and out of bed.” Able yelled, and Gage froze for a few seconds before scrambling as best he could to a sitting position on the edge of his bed. “I want you out of here in the next ten minutes. Find yourself someplace else to live and someplace else to work because you’re not welcome here anymore.”

Gage wasn’t sure if he should ask why or just assume, he found out the truth of last night. He got to his feet and tried to swallow the pain that rocketed through him with each movement.

“You’re bringing the Coven down on me, and I won’t stand for it. You went on coven property and were stupid enough to get caught.” Able grabbed some of Gage’s clothing and tossed them at him. “Get dressed.” He yelled. “You deal with them yourself from this moment on. I don’t know you.” Gage didn’t answer just dropped his head and pulled on his jeans and then his sweatshirt.

Able walked over to the door and then turned back and pointed his finger at Gage. “If you aren’t out of here in the next ten minutes, I will throw your things out the back window, and you can pick them up from the alley.” He left, and Gage grabbed his duffle bag and a messenger bag and began filling them with the things that were important to him.

Ten minutes wasn’t enough time to pack everything, and Able did not make idle threats. If he wasn’t headed down the back steps in ten minutes, things would start to get really ugly. He never should have stayed under Able’s control as long as he did. Thinking about it now, he should have gotten out after he graduated, but the rent was cheap over the bar, and he thought it would give him time to save for something better.

He would have to use his meager savings to see him through until he could heal and find another job. Staying in that rundown apartment and following that badger onto coven grounds were two of his worst decisions. He left his keys on the hook at the back door and headed out to the parking lot and to his car. Thank god Eddie had gotten it for him; otherwise, he'd be on foot, and in his condition, he wouldn't have gotten far.

After stowing his things in the backseat, he got behind the wheel and rested for just a few minutes. The packing and hurrying had really done a number on him, and the pain in his head was making him dizzy.

He knew he couldn't stay in the parking lot for long. Able would send someone to roust him out. For lack of a better idea, he drove to the strip mall and found a quiet corner of their large parking lot, and settled in for a few hours. He needed to sleep and recuperate.

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Deacon contacted Silas Patronne, leader of all security forces in and around the Coven, and requested a few days off. He kept it simple without too many details letting Silas know that he'd found his beloved and wanted the time off to pursue him. Silas gave him a week off and wished him well. "If you need more time or if I can be of any help to you in this matter, let me know." He added.

"Thank you, sir," Deacon responded, and then, like Robert, Silas wished him luck. It was going to take some luck for Deacon to be able to navigate the twists and upsets of this relationship that had yet to even begin. He had Gage's address and had worked out a tentative approach to explaining himself, so it was time to go and claim what was his.

It was his understanding that even humans felt the pull of Fate, so Gage would recognize him on some level, and he would have to work with that. First, he had to find him and apologize.

The bar was one of the most sordid and sleazy joints on the main and was one of the most popular with the paranormal

citizens of Mt. Pleasant. Deacon didn't frequent the place, but now that he discovered his beloved had been working there for the past three years, he wished he'd spent every waking hour at the place. Perhaps he could have prevented the terrible misunderstanding that led to his beloved's mistreatment, and their bond could have had the time and familiarity to grow.

Unfortunately, Fate decided it would be better if he met his beloved under the worst circumstances possible. Deacon had no idea as to the level of Gage's injuries or what to expect when they met. He knew very little about the young man apart from the fact that he worked and resided at the Zen bar, he liked to trespass on coven property, and surprisingly he was a good friend of Eddie Boone.

Why hadn't he mentioned his friendship with Eddie to Lieutenant McKay? It may have got him the entry he so desperately craved, but instead, he took the punishment each time. Gage was confounding in several regards, and he looked forward to figuring him out.

The minute he stepped inside the bar, the atmosphere changed. It became quiet and watchful. His presence was suspect, and those closest to the doors left. Deacon walked up to the bar and asked for Able Colbert. The rough-looking shifter behind the bar looked at Deacon and decided to lie.

"He's not here." Deacon leapt over the bar and grabbed him by the throat, slamming him up against the wall. The move had not been anticipated, and the shifter was shocked and began choking and sputtering that Able was in the kitchen.

"Don't ever lie to me." Deacon held his panicked stare and drove home the seriousness of his threat. The shifter nodded and dropped his gaze. Deacon released him and charged into the kitchen just as Able was attempting to exit the back door, obviously having heard the commotion out front.

He grabbed Able and threw him across the room. He landed on the floor and scrambled to his feet. "I don't know what you want. I run a reputable establishment, and you have no right to run roughshod over us." Able held his hands out in

front of him as if to ward him off, but Deacon was in no mood to play games with this idiot.

“What have you done with Gage Montague?” Deacon barked and took a step toward him as Able backed up. “I can feel his pain, panic, and sadness radiating through the air, but he is not here.” Deacon’s vampire instincts were raging, and he was on the edge of destroying this place and anyone stupid enough to go near him. Gage’s panic was like a piercing knife to his heart, and he was wild with the need to ease his fears. Whatever happened here left his beloved feeling lost and afraid, and Deacon was going to find out what happened.

“Where is he?” Deacon shouted in Able’s face, and the shifter stiffened with fear. He didn’t know where Gage was, and he feared for his own life if he didn’t give Deacon an answer. Deacon was exceptionally skilled with mind reading, especially with shifters, and Able was an open book.

“Tell me the truth.” Deacon pressed and took another intimidating step toward him.

“He brought the scrutiny of the Coven down on me, and I threw him out. He packed and left in his car a little over an hour ago.” Able looked appropriately uncomfortable. “I don’t know where he went.” He paused for a moment and then blurted. “I can’t afford trouble here, not from the coven or the cops.” His business was clearly not as reputable as previously stated.

“Oh, you will have trouble, you will have plenty of trouble if anything happens to Gage.” Deacon abruptly turned and disappeared through the back door. He stopped as soon as he reached the side parking area and took a deep breath hoping to catch the scent of his beloved so beautiful and aromatic.

Deacon got a description and the license number of Gage’s vehicle and first checked all the motels, hotels, and B&Bs and even drove through the state park, but Gage was nowhere to be found. In his heart, he felt that Gage was still in Mt. Pleasant. His injuries would make it impossible for him to comfortably travel very far.

As he was taking another run through town, checking lots and parking garages, his phone rang. It was Robert, so he answered immediately. He'd put in a call earlier to see if Gage had contacted Eddie again after being kicked out of his home, but Eddie had not heard from him. The search was putting him on edge. The longer he looked, the more desperate he felt.

"Hello." He barked when he opened the call.

"His car was spotted at the strip mall on Lexington parked near the laundromat," Robert told him, and he instantly turned his car around and headed to Lexington. "I gave the description to Sheriff Keller and his men and asked them to look but not approach. They said he appears to be sleeping."

"Thanks, Robert. I was about to go out of my mind." Deacon was awash with relief.

"Be careful what you say to him, and good luck. Gage can be very skittish on a good day, so considering the events of the past day, he's going to be extremely agitated." Robert added a warning.

"I will be careful, and thanks again." With that, he closed the call just as he was pulling into the strip mall parking lot and driving over to the laundromat. It was secluded and a good place to get some sleep. He understood why Gage would choose it. It had some tree cover and very little foot traffic.

Gage's dark blue sedan sat about fifty feet to his right. Deacon didn't want to spook him by parking too close. He got out of his vehicle and approached quickly. He couldn't bear to go slow at this point. As he drew nearer, he saw the dark brown hair pressed against the driver's side window and marveled at how soft and shiny it appeared. He didn't wake or move when Deacon came to stand next to his door and stare down into the car.

Gage's hair was partially covering his face, but still, Deacon could see the dark bruising around his jaw and the stitches in his lip. The swelling was also prominent. The sight hurt his heart, and he cringed at the brutality that he'd released on his beloved. He stood and just stared at him for a few seconds before reaching out and tapping lightly on the glass.

Gage jerked and then groaned, having caused himself pain with the movement. His head tilted to the side, and Deacon got a full view of the damage done, and it sickened him. Gage's right eye was black and blue and so swollen that he could not open it. The other eye was bloodshot, and his injuries were many. He was dressed in a sweatshirt and jeans. Gage tried to focus on him, but he appeared to have trouble seeing him clearly. After a few seconds, he rolled down the window.



## CHAPTER FOUR

Gage came awake with a start when he heard someone knocking on his window. He just wanted to rest for a few hours, and no one seemed willing to allow him that time always something to disturb him. He looked out at the man standing there and struggled to get a good look. The sun was at an angle that cast him in a shadow, and Gage only had one good eye at the moment.

He was tall, and well-dressed, and from what he could make out, he was quite handsome, but then most vampires were handsome. Gage had been around paranormal beings long enough that he could recognize most, especially vampires and wolves. This man was important; the cut of his suit indicated coven leadership, and that realization had Gage's heart surging into his throat. Hadn't this day been bad enough? Did he have to deal with more coven people?

Reluctantly he slowly rolled down the window and noticed a subtle smile creep into the man's dark eyes. It made him seem almost human. He thought about the vampires he dealt with last evening, and a chill shot up his spine. He hesitated before looking up at this man through the open window. Whatever he wanted, Gage just wanted to get it over with.

"Gage Montague?" He stated or asked Gage wasn't sure, but he answered anyway with a nod. "Deacon Haas." He announced and held out his hand. Gage was confused but didn't want to insult, so he took his hand, and the man held it and did not immediately release him. It wasn't a grip, just a gentle hold, but Gage felt that he could not pull away.

"Mr. Haas, what can I do for you?" Gage pressed, eager to end this contact and get back to lying still and closing his eyes.

"Call me Deacon." He then let go of Gage's hand and leaned on the open window. Gage felt the loss of his touch in a deeply personal way that confused him. He didn't know this man, and the contact should have been impersonal, but it

wasn't. There was something in it that went beneath the surface.

"I'm sorry for what happened to you last night," Deacon stated abruptly and to the point, and then he took a deep breath as if he was having difficulty saying what he wanted to say. Gage was surprised that a man that looked like Deacon Haas could ever be uneasy or unsure.

He glanced up at him with his good eye and saw a man who was flawless. His eyes were dark as the night yet held a strange, unexpected warmth in their depth. His hair was impeccable jet black and swept back from his face in a short, sophisticated style. He was tall and solid like the coven soldiers, but he had an air of authority which meant he was not simply a soldier.

"You're hurt. Please let me help you." That offer was so unexpected that Gage could not respond. He simply stared at Deacon, certain that he'd misunderstood. Deacon opened the door and squatted down next to Gage once again, taking his hand but just holding it loosely, and the touch was gentle and comforting.

"It's my fault that you were hurt. Please let me make it right." Gage still was not understanding exactly what was happening, but he felt a growing trust in his gut that told him this man was genuine. He didn't believe that Deacon owed him anything. He wasn't there last night. Gage would have remembered such a stunning-looking man.

"I'm alright I just need a little rest, and then I'm leaving town. I need a fresh start somewhere bigger and without all the paranormal influences. Somewhere people don't know me, maybe Detroit." Gage noticed that his speech was being affected by the stitches in his lip and the swelling of his jaw. He just needed to get out of there, go somewhere new, and rest on the way.

"I have to go." He said and attempted to grab the handle of his door, but Deacon interfered by moving to block the door. Why was he being so insistent?

“You’re not well enough to drive. You need time to recover and to be treated for your injuries. Did your stepfather take you to the ER?” Deacon was feeling Gage’s head and running his fingertips along his jaw and across his bottom lip. “Let me help you.”

“How, what can you do? Able dressed the wounds and stitched up my lip. I don’t need the ER. I can heal I just need to rest for a while.” Gage tried to be firm, but the look on Deacon’s face told him his words were not being heard.

“Come with me.” He said and stood, taking Gage’s hand and helping him from the car. He hadn’t intended to exit his vehicle, but here he was, being led away by this man with the deep, sexy voice and commanding power. Gage just went with him feeling the security that he was radiating and falling into the need to be cared for. It was probably going to turn into one more big mistake, but right now, it felt good.

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Deacon was shocked when Gage got out of his car and moved with him toward his SUV. He thought he’d have to do more convincing to get him out of the car. His beloved was hurt, and in order to help him, he had to put aside his guilt and rage and focus only on Gage’s needs and his best interests.

He brought him to the passenger side and helped him get seated. “Where are you taking me?” He asked, his tone soft and slurred like all his speech. The injuries to his face were severe and interfered with his ability to talk. Deacon ached to place a kiss on the haphazard stitches in his lip and on the deep bruises around his eye.

“Somewhere safe where you can rest, and your injuries can be properly treated.” Deacon left it at that and closed the door rounding the front of the vehicle, and seated himself behind the wheel.

“I have a few things in the backseat of my car. I don’t want to leave them,” Gage stated, and Deacon got them and stowed them in the back of the SUV without question. When he returned to the driver’s seat, Gage reached over with his

badly bruised and battered hand and placed it on Deacon's arm.

"What about my car? They'll tow it if it's left here overnight."

"I'll take care of it. Don't worry."

"Okay." Gage seemed too tired to continue talking or to worry any further about his car or where he was going and settled his head back and closed his eyes.

Deacon had to think fast after finding out Gage was sleeping in his car and had plans of leaving for Detroit. It was doubtful he'd be willing to return to the Coven even the Palace would cause bad memories considering what he'd been through. Instead, Deacon decided to offer up vague assurances and convince him to follow.

Deacon owned a log cabin in the woods located east of the interstate about twenty miles from town. He bought it a few years ago for the solitude and relaxation it afforded, and he liked to fish. He figured it would be the perfect place for Gage to recover and for them to build their bond. Gage was much more agreeable than expected, but that would probably not last long once he healed and was back to himself.

He stopped and picked up supplies at a store along the way, and Gage did not wake, which was a testament to the trust he was feeling. It was a product of the pull and Fate herself, but still, Deacon took it as a compliment. Gage did not wake until he turned on the narrow dirt road that led into the dense woods and to his cabin.

He hadn't been there in a couple of weeks, but he kept it locked up tight and had cameras on the cabin and around the property. It was his place of peace and tranquility, and he hoped Gage liked it as much as he did.

"This place of yours is really off the beaten track," Gage commented.

"It's comfortable, and I think you will find it restful."

"I should be concerned, but I don't get a creep vibe from you."

“I’m glad to hear it.” Deacon glanced over at him with a smile, and Gage reciprocated. His smile was so sweet, and Deacon was surprised at the effect it had on him. He wanted more. He wanted his beloved to be happy, healthy, and healed.

Deacon pulled into the circle drive in front of his log cabin and parked. “This is it cozy yet roomy and, most of all, private. The coven doctor, Dr. Evens, will be here soon. I called him when we left town and asked him to meet us here so he can give you a proper examination.”

“Able checked me over and said it’s just bruises, nothing too serious.” Gage offered.

“I want a doctor to look at you.” Deacon was firm on that matter, and thankfully Gage did not fight him.

“Why do you even care?” He asked the question that would lead to all the answers, but Deacon wasn’t prepared to get into it all here in the SUV.

“I will answer all your questions after we are inside and comfortable.” He stated, and Gage appeared to accept this and carefully eased his sore body out of the SUV. Deacon could see that he was hurting even if he refused to complain. Rounding the front of the vehicle, he took hold of Gage and helped him inside, and seated him on the couch.

“Lay back and close your eyes while I get everything inside and put it away.” Gage didn’t answer but nodded and closed his eyes. Deacon carried in Gage’s things and the groceries and supplies, all the while keeping a close watch on his beloved. Dr. Evens arrived just as he was finishing. He noticed Gage begin to stir when the Doctor walked into the room.

“This is Dr. Evens, and he’s going to check you over to make sure your injuries aren’t more serious than they appear.” Deacon moved to stand behind the couch that was situated to the left of the large stone fireplace. He put his hands lightly on Gage’s shoulders, and it seemed to help calm him.

“You’re the coven doctor.” It wasn’t a question, and the tone spoke to Gage’s distrust which was understandable.

“Yes, I work for Master Louis DuCane, and I assure you that I will do a good job because the Master accepts no less.” The doctor smiled and began the examination getting his vitals and then looking to Deacon for permission to go further. Deacon nodded, and the doctor-assisted Gage in removing his sweatshirt.

His wounds were quite extensive. Trenton did a thorough job. Deacon gritted his teeth at the vision before him wanting to reap retribution but also taking responsibility for he was the one who had ordered the beating. His guilt would not release him, and he had to find a way to make this right with his beloved.

Dr. Evens redressed his wounds and replaced the suture in his lip, making a neater job of it and less likely to scar. Part way through the exam, Gage reached up and took Deacon’s hand. He was seeking comfort, and Deacon channeled everything he could toward his beloved.

The trust he showed in the last few hours touched Deacon like nothing before. His beloved, although hesitant and fearful, was reaching out to him just as it was meant to be. He was strong and resilient, two important qualities in life.

“You’re doing great, Gage.” He bent his head down next to Gage’s and spoke near his ear. Gage turned to look at him, and the closeness was intoxicating. He wanted so badly to take those lips in a loving embrace, and when he smiled, Deacon almost lost it. He managed to pull back from attacking those gorgeous lips and kissed him lightly on the forehead.

The kiss shocked Gage, and he smiled larger. Deacon felt his heart grow and beat wildly at the glorious sight. “You are so beautiful.” He said the words before thinking and noticed Gage instantly blush and glance away.

“Certainly not beautiful, but thanks for trying.” Gage raised a hand to instinctively cover his black, swollen eye. Deacon gently pulled it back and placed another kiss just to the side of his injury.

“You’re beautiful to me and always will be.” This time Gage’s expression was confused more than embarrassed, but

he didn't comment. Deacon turned his attention to Dr. Evens but kept his hand on Gage's shoulder, needing the contact with his beloved more and more as their connection started to take root.

"Gage has severe bruising on his front torso and face. There are lacerations on his hands and face which I have treated. No sign of internal injuries or broken bones." Dr. Evens rattled off his findings. "Given the situation, he will start to heal faster now that he is with you." Deacon raised his hand to stop him from saying more, given that he had not yet told Gage they were beloveds.

Dr. Evens understood immediately and shifted the conversation to Gage and instructed him in how to change the bandages, and gave him the ointment for his lip and his eye. "You'll heal, but there may be some scarring on your lip. We'll have to wait and see. The previous stitches were functional but somewhat sloppy."

"Able did his best." Gage offered, and Deacon was confused by the support for Able when the man had quite literally thrown him out to fend for himself at the time; he needed help the most.

"He should have taken you to the hospital." Dr. Evens stated firmly in a tone that gave away his attitude toward Able.

"Able doesn't do hospitals or the cops or the Coven. He's afraid they'll interfere with his business." Gage took Able for who he was and didn't expect any more. Deacon was slowly discovering that his beloved was a good man.

"Able not your concern any longer. Leave that man behind and begin your life anew." Deacon told him.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Gage was at a loss to fathom why Deacon Haas, a man he'd never met before, was coming to his rescue in such an overprotective manner. The kisses were a complete shock, although they felt marvelous, and Gage was not ashamed to say he wanted more. Deacon had brought the doctor to check him over and had taken him to this beautiful cabin in the woods to apparently recover, and Gage had no explanation for it.

Vampires don't normally associate closely with the human residents of Mt. Pleasant, keeping to their own and other paranormal beings. There were several human beloveds, but that was a different story. Those people were special, and the vampire treated their beloved like a king or queen. Those humans had a life that was to be coveted. Their wants and needs were always met, and they were owed a love that was faithful forever. Gage held Deacon's hand for the comfort it afforded him.

Once the doctor finished, the pain eased, and oddly enough, whenever Deacon touched him, the warmth of that touch seemed to seep into his bones, making his body relax and the trauma ease. It was probably psychosomatic, but either way, it helped.

"I'll show you out." Deacon walked Dr. Evens out, leaving the door open. He returned a few minutes later and closed the door behind him. He went to the kitchen, got a bottle of water with a straw, and set it on the side table within Gage's reach.

"Are you hungry? Would you like me to prepare something?" He asked.

"No, not hungry, and thanks for the water." Gage watched him walk over to the chair opposite the couch and sit down. He kept his eyes on Gage, holding him in a dark, contemplative stare. Gage took a tentative sip of his water and waited to find out why he was there and why this man cared.

"Do you know who I am?"



“Deacon Haas, vampire.”

“Is that all that I am?” That question threw him for a second, but then it dawned on him, and he thought he knew what Deacon was getting at.

“You’re here to make sure I understand the consequences of breaking coven law. You’re a leader; you have a title; I can tell by your suit and demeanor. I understand very clearly and will never trespass on coven grounds again; you have my promise.” Gage touched his lip when he finished his statement.

Deacon leaned forward in his chair, placing his forearms on his thighs and lacing his fingers together in a firm grasp. His eyes took on a quality that was both frustrated and saddened. Gage squirmed in his seat, feeling the scrutiny of this man weighing down on him.

“When we were in the car, you asked me why I cared.” Deacon started, and Gage nodded, eager to discover the reason behind all the concern.

“You were found by one of my security teams, and I was notified that it was the third time that you’d been apprehended on Coven property.” Deacon broke eye contact and shifted his gaze to the side. “We had several serious breaches of that border in the past and have worked tirelessly to keep it secure. When I received that call, my anger at the blatant deliberateness of the breach reached a peak, and I ordered the offender to be dealt with in a manner that would leave an impression.”

“It was you that Lieutenant McKay was speaking to?” Gage decided to comment, remembering the call and the look on McKay’s face. That was the moment he knew he was in deep shit, and he wasn’t getting away with just a firm talking to like the other times he’d ignored the border.

“It was me who put you in the hands of Trenton Shift.” Deacon clarified, and Gage stiffened at the memory of being handed over to that cold bastard and being taken away. He didn’t know what to say to that Deacon sounded unsettled by

his actions, but as far as Gage could see, he was just doing his job.

“That was the third time I crossed your border. I wasn’t intentionally trying to break your laws; I was following a badger, and I think his den is on coven property. I deserved a harsher punishment because, like I said, it was the third time.” He noticed a glint of humor touch Deacon’s countenance at the mention of the badger.

“Why were you following a badger?”

“I wanted a good picture, and that night with the moon full and the mist that was covering the ground, it made a perfect mood for a night picture. I wasn’t paying attention like the other two times and followed the badger.” Gage wasn’t sure why he felt the need to make this man feel better, but it bothered him that Deacon was taking responsibility for his own bad behavior. Actions have consequences, and that’s just the way of the world.

“Did you get the picture?”

“Yes, but Trenton destroyed my camera and my phone and made me watch while he did it. That was more painful than the beating he gave me afterward.” Gage reached over and picked up his water, needing to do something to take his mind off the loss of his things. The camera and its SD card were ground into the cement floor of that horrible building. Trenton took pleasure in watching the misery in Gage’s expression, and the memory still broke his heart.

“Is wildlife photography a hobby of yours?” Deacon brought him back to the action and away from the loss.

“I wanted to participate in the photo competition at the State Fair this year. The grand prize is five thousand dollars, and the exposure for anyone who manages to place is extensive. I thought it would help me get more recognition and bookings.”

“You’re a professional photographer.” Deacon seemed taken aback.

“I’m trying to be, but it’s a struggle. I thought the competition would help me, but I guess not. I’ve done a few birthday parties and graduations, but I also want to get into weddings and private contracts.” Gage hung his head at that point, feeling ridiculous talking about professional photography when he no longer owned a camera. That dream was way off in the distance once again.

Deacon moved from his chair to sit next to Gage on the couch. He didn’t look at Gage, but his aura was intense. It was obvious that he was a powerful vampire just by the energy that was radiating off him. “There is more to you and me than just my need to be forgiven.” Deacon sighed deeply.

“What does that mean?”

“It means that when I went to the blockhouse where Trenton abused you, I discovered something.” He paused for a moment before continuing and still did not make eye contact with Gage. Gage found that he was holding his breath, wondering what he was going to say. The air was suddenly filled with anticipation.

“You didn’t know me yet came here to this isolated cabin with me and showed no fear after everything that has happened to you. You accept my touch and even, I think, yearn for it just as I yearn for your touch. Since we met, your injuries have begun to heal more quickly, and a good share of the pain and discomfort has eased.” He turned and regarded Gage with a sense of hope. His dark eyes bore into Gage, penetrating seeing all.

“Something about you called out to me, and I was compelled to find you. I went to the blockhouse to seek out the young human I’d sentenced to punishment. I couldn’t understand what I was feeling at first. It wasn’t the first time I’d ordered corporal punishment. In my position, necessary orders are not always kind or gentle, and never before had I questioned my decision. For some reason, I had to find you. I had to know you were okay.” Gage listened, wondering where he was going with this declaration.

“I’m okay. You don’t have to worry about me.” Gage wanted to let him off the hook if that was what he was looking for. “I’ll heal, move on, find a place, and try it all again. A larger city would better my chances at making it in photography, and maybe I could find a job in the field and gain some practical experience. I forgive you if that’s what you need to hear.” Why was he having such difficulty getting to the point?

“What are you trying to say to me?” Gage burst out.

Deacon nailed him with that dark stare one more time before making the statement that managed to shock Gage to his core. “You are my beloved.” Silence fell for a few seconds while the words sunk in, and Gage’s fears surged to the surface again.

Gage understood the word and what it meant for the paranormal involved. They called them fated bonds. His mother and Able were not a Fated bond, and it was one of the reasons his mother ended up leaving, or at least that was what she claimed. Able spoke of finding his mate someday after she’d left them, and he explained the power and the drive behind such a union. Gage knew that to be this man’s beloved would require much more change and acceptance on Deacon’s part than on his. Instead of happiness at the discovery, Gage found himself struck with a foreboding feeling.

No vampire of Deacon’s class and status would welcome a beloved such as him, and now this cabin in the woods and the kind words were starting to make sense. This wasn’t what it appeared to be but rather was a system of isolation and disposal. His life just kept getting worse by the day.

“I won’t hold you to that.” Gage needed to make it clear he had no expectations. “I will be going to Detroit or further away if you wish. I will make myself scarce, and I will make myself gone. You don’t have to worry about me messing up your life, position, aspirations, or whatever.” Gage leaned back and away from Deacon, who was leaning forward and making him nervous as hell.

“You’re going nowhere,” Deacon stated firmly and reached out to Gage, who dodged away and tried to stand.

“I won’t make trouble for you, I promise.”

“Do you think that I don’t want you?” Deacon broke in, took Gage’s upper arm, and held it tight, preventing him from leaving the couch.

“I’ll disappear; you’ll never see me again.” Gage kept up with promises in the hopes he was allowed to go on breathing. This was going to end badly for him. He just knew it.

“Settle down.” Deacon barked, and instantly Gage quit pulling away and became still. “You are my beloved, the center of my existence, the promised love of my life. Why would I want you anywhere except by my side?” He spoke very clearly, enunciating each word for better understanding.

“You’re not upset by the discovery?” Gage was skeptical but gave Deacon his undivided attention. The man looked pleased, not angry or disappointed, but how could he be.

“The only reason I hesitated in telling you the complete truth of our connection was because of the awful manner in which you were treated by my men and on my order. I thought you would turn your back on me and not accept someone such as me into your life, someone who had caused you so much torment.” Deacon began his explanation. “I hoped that if we spent some time together, the natural bond would help you see me as someone who could be trusted and relied upon.”

“You want me, Gage Montague, as your partner in life?” Gage was still at a loss to understand. Even the flowery manner in which Able had pictured the mate bond hadn’t prepared Gage for this kind of attraction. He would not deny that he was drawn to this man his presence, his aroma, his aura, and his voice were like a growing addiction. The voice snagged him from the beginning, driving deep into his heart and mind.

“More than anything in this world.” Gage caught his breath on the sincerity in his tone and in his eyes. “Breath, baby.” He said, and Gage slowly released his breath, astonished by this unbelievable outcome. His mind was scattering as he tried to make sense of it all.

“You really want to bond with me, take me to the coven, and present me to the Master as your beloved.” Gage was struggling. “This isn’t pity, is it? Are you sacrificing yourself because you feel sorry for having had me beaten? You don’t owe me anything, and I don’t owe you anything. Our debts are paid, yours and mine. I took a beating, and you tended to my wounds. It’s all done and over.”

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Deacon was making a mess of this, and he knew it. The more he tried to explain, the more confused Gage became. “You are my beloved. I scented you in the blockhouse and searched for you until I found you. It is not pity or a misguided sense of responsibility. It is my destiny and yours.”

He didn’t say anything in response, but he stopped pulling away, so that was progress. Deacon kept his hand on Gage’s arm, a connection that they both needed. “This is real, Gage. What I feel for you goes beyond anything imaginable I feel you in my heart and in my mind, and in the marrow of my bones, you are my beloved.” He slid his hand down Gage’s arm to grasp his hand and raise it to his lips. “I will follow you to the end of the earth and beyond; you will never be rid of me, no matter how hard you might try.” He held his cautious stare with his own determined one and waited.

“I want to believe you,” Gage whispered.

“You can believe me.” Deacon pushed the hair away from Gage’s face and carefully leaned over, placing the lightest kisses on his tender, swollen lips. Gage responded fervently, grasping Deacon’s arms and holding him in a tight grip. His condition was still fragile even though he’d already begun to mend due to their bond and growing connection. Being near to Deacon had jump-started his healing, and his

right eye was partially open now, and the swelling had gone down.

Still, he had a way to go before he was truly sound and fit. Deacon eased back and looked down at Gage, who was still holding firm to Deacon's arms. "You need to get well first, and then we take this all the way." Deacon was resolved that although the desire was fierce, nothing would happen until his beloved had recovered. But that didn't mean there couldn't be some gentle intimacies.

The crooked smile that graced that lovely mouth was absolutely exquisite. This young man was fast becoming the source of everything delightful in Deacon's life. The bond was powerful, and Deacon accepted that he would not be able to live nor be happy unless this man was by his side, in his life, and loving him.

"You're a damn handsome man, Gage, and I look forward to getting to know you so much better, but for now, you need to rest and heal."

Gage raised his hand and ran his fingers down the side of Deacon's face. It was sensory perception learning through touch, and once again, Gage smiled, and Deacon's heart melted. "I can wait, but not too long." He teased.

"It won't be long; I can guarantee you that." Deacon turned his head and kissed Gage's hand. "Let me help you into bed and to get settled."

"I am rather tired, but I also want you so badly." Those words burned through Deacon, and he closed his eyes for a moment gathering his fortitude and tamping down the raging desire to take his beloved fast and hard right here and now.

"You're playing with fire, my love." He warned, and again that smile stroked his desire making him think so many thoughts. "Come give me your hand." He abruptly stood and reached out for Gage.

"Okay, I'll rest, but I want you to know I'm feeling much better. I can see from both eyes now, and my joints have stopped aching." Gage took Deacon's hand and allowed

himself to be pulled to his feet. He brought him close and wrapped his arm around Gage's shoulders.

"Our connection and being so near one another is what is healing you, and once we have completely bonded, you will heal completely. In the future, your injuries will be rare and will heal immediately, just like mine. There are perks for you if you agree to be mine." Deacon winked at him, and Gage leaned into his side as they walked to the back of the cabin to the one large bedroom.

"I'll sleep on it and let you know in the morning." Gage goaded.

"Like I said, you're playing with fire, baby." Deacon cuddled him close and dropped several kisses on his sweet lips and across his cheek. "You make my blood burn."

"You're welcome to stay." Gage stretched and placed a kiss on the underside of Deacon's chin.

"Rest first. I want you well and strong." Deacon brought him over to the bed and helped him off with his shoes before making him comfortable. He tucked the thick quilt around him, and after another kiss, he straightened and took a step back from the bed.

"This is so crazy that I am fully expecting to wake up at any moment from this magnificent dream." Gage reached up to him, and Deacon took his hand.

"It is a dream, Gage, a dream come true for both of us." He kissed Gage's hand and then tucked it back under the quilt. "The cabin has a landline, so if you need to call anyone, feel free to do so. There's a phone on the bedside table and one in the kitchen." He pushed the soft silky hair back from Gage's face and noticed again that the bruising and swelling were diminishing rapidly, which lightened his heart considerably. Another kiss, and he excused himself to the other room but left the bedroom door open in case Gage needed him.

Deacon returned to the living room and poured himself a whiskey before taking a seat on the couch. They'd worked through a lot in the past few hours, but there was still plenty to



discuss. The important matter was that Gage seemed accepting and fully aware of the meaning of a paranormal Fated bond. He also appeared enthusiastic, which set most of Deacon's fears at ease.

He was a gorgeous young man, even with the bruising. Deacon was excited to move on with this union and to begin their time together. The stepfather was still a sore spot as far as Deacon was concerned. His lack of care and thought for Gage was riding Deacon. He needed to settle the score with that man and hoped Gage did not object.

Deacon glanced back at the open door and heard the steady rhythm of his beloved's heartbeat. Gage was asleep, and the total harmony Deacon was feeling at that moment was beautiful. His life was reaching a fulfillment that he longed for but never knew if it would belong to him. The circumstances of their meeting were appalling, and his guilt still hung on the edges of his mind, but Gage was not blaming him or pulling away, and that was more than he'd hoped for.

His beloved had a big heart and a lovely disposition, so much more than a man like him deserved. He would willingly die for this young man. He would willingly give his heart and his soul. Gage was his center, and they had more than a lifetime to figure each other out. He took a long sip of his whiskey, laid his head back, and closed his eyes for a moment.

## CHAPTER SIX

Gage lay there feeling the plush comfort of the soft bed and pillows and let his mind wander to the previous day and the chaos that had led to him being homeless. Then Deacon came along a tall, handsome, capable, and concerned man who turned his mess of a life around. He went from his lowest point to his highest in the span of a few hours, and his head was still spinning.

He didn't know much about Deacon apart from the fact that he was the security team leader who captured him and laid down the subsequent punishment. Deacon apologized for it all, and Gage really couldn't blame him for doing his job.

He received a harsh verbal warning the first two times he was caught, which he should have headed. The third time they administered corporal punishment, a natural progression of penalties for breaking their law. It all made sense to Gage, although the beating was severe and left him hurting in every part of his body.

That beating was effective if nothing else, and Gage would not have ventured over their border again for any reason. But then everything took a turn for the unbelievable, and now here he was at Deacon's cabin in the woods, being told that he was the answer to his prayers, the center of his universe, and the love of his life. He was a vampire's beloved, and it was blowing his mind.

Gage wasn't sure what the future held for him, but he couldn't turn his back on Deacon. The draw to this man was too strong, and his heart would not allow him to dismiss the feelings that raged within him. It took a while, but finally, he found himself drifting off to sleep with thoughts of bonding with that great man filling his mind and his dreams.

It was dark outside when he woke, filling the room with shadows, and for a moment, he wondered where he was, and then the memories flooded in and with them a sense of calm. This was Deacon's home. They were together, and he was safe. After a few minutes of lying there enjoying the

restful relaxation of Deacon's soft bed, Gage sat up and threw his legs over the side.

He listened and heard faint sounds from the outer room. Gage stretched, reached over, and grabbed the house phone from the side table. He punched in Eddie's number and waited.

"Hey, how are you doing?" Eddie burst as soon as he answered. "I heard that Commander Deacon Haas is your beloved. That is so fantastic." Eddie continued, quite elated with the fact that Gage would be part of the Coven now.

"He told you?"

"He told Robert they're friends and asked Robert how best to approach you considering how he had treated you." Eddie paused. "He's really sorry for his actions, and I hope you can find it in your heart to look past it and see what a fine man Deacon is and what a fine partner he will make."

"I never held it against him in the first place," Gage told him, and he heard Eddie's sigh of relief, and Gage chuckled. "I wouldn't want to meet Trenton in a dark alley any time soon, but again I guess he was just doing his job as ordered. There is no one to blame but myself for breaking their laws repeatedly."

"You are amazingly understanding." Eddie cut in, sounding a little shocked.

"Yeah, I found that holding onto blame and grudges is exhausting, and I don't have time for that sort of bullshit in my life."

"I wish I had half your resolve."

"Who are you holding a grudge against? I've always found you to be super nice to everyone." Gage was surprised by Eddie's statement.

"There are people who rub me the wrong way, but that's a conversation for another time. When you move here with Deacon, we can have many long discussions." Eddie was a character, and he found the thought of moving to the Coven was not as objectionable as he thought it would be.

“We’re at his cabin in the woods. It’s about twenty miles from town. It’s nice and quiet and relaxing.” Gage described as he laid back on the pillows enjoying the warmth and comfort.

“He’s a nice guy and a good leader. According to Robert, he has a real future in security. Deacon started out as a field operative and was involved in a lot of coven business around the world.” Eddie shared what he knew, and Gage enjoyed learning a little about the man he was so rapidly falling for.

“Why did he come back to work at the Coven? Didn’t he like fieldwork?” Gage was just curious.

“After a century in fieldwork, they like to cycle you back to the coven for a few years, and Deacon said he was ready for a change.”

“A century? Holy cow, how old is he?”

“A few years older than Robert; he’s around one-hundred-eighty or maybe ninety years old, I think,” Eddie said it so matter of fact that it made Gage laugh. He knew that paranormal beings lived long lives, but it was surprising to find out the man of your dreams was pushing two hundred.

“He doesn’t look a day over thirty.”

“Isn’t that true,” Eddie commented. “Very few at the Coven have actually started to age. They all look in their thirties or younger, except for Chef Reid; he’s starting to go gray. I can’t even imagine how old he must be to be finally showing some age.”

“I’m nineteen, and I already have gray hair.” Gage threw in.

“Once you bond with Deacon, you won’t get any more.”

“Good to hear.”

“The perks are many.” Eddie’s innuendo was clear and brought a smile to Gage’s face.

“That’s what I’ve been told.” They talked for a while, and Eddie answered his questions regarding beloveds and what to expect. He described it as the most wonderful relationship ever imagined and a love that transcends the galaxies, and at the end, Gage was ready to fall at Deacon’s feet and beg him to claim him as soon as possible.

“It’s beyond anything you could imagine, so embrace him, Gage, and you will never regret it.” Eddie ended his pitch.

“You had me at transcending the galaxies Eddie. Thanks for talking to me. I appreciate your perspective, and you’ve really eased my mind.” Gage told him honestly.

“You’re welcome, and I look forward to your commitment ceremony here at the coven.” With that, they said their goodbyes, and Gage hung up the receiver. It was a good talk, and Eddie gave him a lot of things to think about.

Gage washed up and then ventured out into the living area. Upon checking himself in the mirror, he felt much better and noticed that his face was nearly healed. All that remained was a little discoloration around his eye and jawline. His body felt as if that beating had never happened. Both Deacon and Eddie had told him that being near his beloved would speed his recovery, but he never realized it would happen so fast.

When Gage entered the outer room, he saw Deacon in the kitchen, and it looked like he was preparing something. Deacon had changed out of his perfectly cut black suit into a pair of jeans that hugged him in all the right places, and a cotton pullover that accentuated his muscled chest and arms. Gage had to force himself to focus to avoid drooling at the sight.

He turned around and waved Gage over. “I’m just about finished thought we could both use a bite to eat. Would you grab the salad, and I’ll carry the chicken and potatoes?” Gage grabbed the salad and the juice and carried them to the table. Once they were seated, Deacon poured their juice and offered him coffee or tea, but Gage declined.

“Did you rest well?”

“Very well, I feel so much better than I did when I woke up this morning.”

“You look nearly healed.”

“I feel great.” The conversation went on like this, an easy back and forth until they finished the meal and Deacon dished up dessert.

“Apple pie and ice cream.” He announced and set the plate in front of Gage.

“My favorite.” Gage dug in, loving every bite. “I spoke with Eddie, and he’s very happy for us.”

“Did he answer your questions?”

“How do you know I had questions?” Gage challenged, and Deacon cocked an eyebrow as he gave him a sideways glance. “Okay, yes he answered my questions. Able spoke of mates but didn’t get into much detail, so Eddie gave me some details.”

After clearing the table, they finished their dessert; Deacon led Gage back into the living room and sat on the couch side by side. Deacon held Gage’s hand in a loving touch and leaned back into the cushions.

Deacon went through the motions of trying to find something to watch on the television and then, frustrated, just turned it off and tossed the remote on the coffee table. “I want you, Gage. I want you so damned bad.” He said abruptly and turned to him, waiting for a response.

Gage felt the same way and did not hesitate to throw himself into Deacon’s arms. “What are we waiting for? I feel great.” Gage pressed his lips to Deacon’s and wrapped his arms around his neck.

Deacon took over the kiss and moved to stand, taking Gage with him while never breaking the kiss. He swung him into his arms and cradled him for a few seconds before walking off toward the bedroom. Gage was getting everything he wanted.

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Deacon tried to remain calm and allow his beloved the distance he needed to heal, but there was no stopping when he turned and took Deacon's lips in an urgent and needy kiss. His explosive desire took over, and he stood, picked Gage up into his arms, and headed for the bedroom.

The kiss went on, and the taste of his beloved filled him, and he demanded more. The softness of Gage's lips and the firmness of his body in his arms pushed Deacon to hurry. The need to own this man's body and soul was building to an uncontrollable level.

He would bond with his beloved this night. There would be no further waiting or attempts at finding the right time. The right time was now, and Deacon's body was demanding satisfaction, and his instincts were insisting that they bond. He rarely questioned his instinct, and he certainly wasn't going to do so now. This was their time, and to wait would serve no purpose.

He laid Gage down on the bed and sat next to him on the edge while leaning over him. Deacon wanted to clarify his intent and give Gage one chance to refuse. He moved closer with his face mere inches from Gage's.

"I want to claim you, mark you as the beloved of the Commander; I want to make you mine tonight," Deacon spoke clearly but with a fervent desire that showed in his eyes and was evident in the heat of his touch. He could see the answering heat in Gage's expression and began a fiery trail of kisses down the side of his face and across his jaw.

"Claim me, Deacon everything in me longs to be yours." Gage's tone was raspy with pent-up emotion, and his breath came out in ragged pants. "I'm yours, Deacon."

Deacon moved his hands under Gage's sweatshirt and eased it up, baring his midriff and chest so soft and smooth beneath Deacon's hands. He kept pushing until the garment was off and Gage was bare to his touch. The bruising had all but disappeared, and Gage moved with a fluid grace that indicated he was no longer in pain. Seeing him whole and

healthy was a blessing, and Deacon vowed that no harm would ever befall him again.

He made quick work of Gage's remaining clothes, stripping him gently and baring him to Deacon's admiring gaze. He found his heart racing with the need to taste, and he did not deny himself. Deacon flipped Gage onto his stomach and slid down his lovely body to sink his teeth into his luscious ass. The flavor was out of this world, and Deacon drank deep for a few seconds and then pulled out, licking the little wound until it was healed.

"You taste like heaven." He spoke faintly against the soft roundness and kissed the area while his right hand searched and found Gage's tight entrance. Gage was muttering incoherently and rubbing his face against the pillow. His pleasure was on full display, and Deacon took pride in his beloved's pleasure.

He took the lube from his pocket where he'd put it earlier and covered his fingers and Gage's hole liberally with the slippery substance. Deacon worked the tight muscles stretching and penetrating, filling his beloved and listening to his sounds of delight.

"Oh, that feels so good." Gage hummed and squirmed, reveling in the stretch and the sensitivity. Deacon plunged his fingers deeply, seeking and finding his pressure points, and hit them repeatedly with each thrust, building Gage's excitement, and exhilaration, stimulating him to the point of release and then pulling out.

"Don't stop, don't stop." Gage chanted, dismayed by his sudden retreat.

"Not stopping, baby. Don't worry; I will take care of you; I will always take care of you." Deacon told him while pulling off his shirt and tossing it away. He kicked off his boots and opened the front of his jeans, releasing his hard, throbbing cock. Taking it into his hand Deacon stroked it several times, coating it in lube and prepping himself for entry.

He grabbed Gage by the hips and pulled him backward toward the edge of the bed to where his legs dropped over the



side, and his ass jutted up toward Deacon. Gage spread his legs apart in anticipation of what was to come and looked back over his shoulder at Deacon with a look that was pure lust.

Deacon stroked his cock a few more times for Gage's benefit and saw the lust burning in his eyes, and it was beautiful. "Are you ready to be mine?"

"Yes." Just one word, sharp and clipped and filled with want. Deacon was at the point he was craving this man, and if he didn't get inside him in the next few seconds, he would surely die. He grabbed his hips and pulled him back slightly and lined up the head of his now leaking cock, and nudged the loosened opening.

"Open for me, baby." He said, and Gage spread his legs wider, and Deacon plunged inside, pulling Gage's hips back as he buried himself to the hilt inside his gorgeous beloved. The sensations were singing along his nerves and igniting an all-consuming fire. The tight embrace held him fast, and as he pulled back and then slammed inside once again. Gage fell into rhythm with him and soon hammered his way to completion as Gage cried out and begged for more.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Gage was flying so high he thought he would never come down. Deacon was nailing him and making every inch tingle with outrageous sensations. He was mastering him in a way that brought every feeling to the surface and making his body sing. “More, Deacon, more.” He chanted as his climax surged, and he teetered on the edge.

Deacon held him fast as he filled him over and over, pounding to their mutual limit pushing Gage to new heights of pleasure. Was it this man or the bond that made this a world-shattering connection? All Gage knew was that he never wanted it to stop and never wanted to lose this amazing man.

Deacon slammed inside and held Gage up and off the bed in a beautifully aggressive show of desire and dominance that Gage needed and craved. He felt Deacon break and come in hot titillating bursts filling him full. Gage shook with the overload of sensations.

He held on, throwing his head back, and came when Deacon sank his teeth into his throat’s tender flesh. The feelings and awareness that flooded him was like a raging river touching every part of him, mental, physical, and emotional. Everything was alive and on fire.

Deacon fed and continued to thrust while holding Gage to his chest, wrapped in his strong arms, safe from all things that sought to do harm. Gage had never felt so safe and secure and so loved. No one could do the things Deacon or the feelings he produced without there being a deep-seated emotional bond.

Gage closed his eyes and leaned against Deacon, letting him take all the weight. He slowly extracted his teeth and licked the area until it was sharply sensitized, sending a thrill through Gage at every touch.

He then pulled out and, with one hand, pulled the quilt off the bed and tossed it aside. He then lay Gage back onto the bed. Gage realized Deacon was still wearing his jeans. They were slung low and wicked sexy. His large cock, which was

again beginning to harden, was on full display. The vision before him was so beautiful and so erotic he felt his heart begin to pound and his balls tighten at the sight.

Deacon removed his jeans, moved up to lay down next to Gage, and pulled him into his arms, wrapping himself around Gage's body. "We are one, my beloved. You are mine to love and to hold. You will not regret accepting me as your own I will strive every day of my life to honor you."

Deacon's words were slow and thought out and delivered with a sincerity that touched Gage deeply and thoroughly. He did not doubt his pledge and promise and knew his life would be better in every and all ways with Deacon by his side.

He felt Deacon's hand slide across his hip and reach around to cup the cheek that he'd bitten earlier. The bite was out of this world and never had Gage thought such an immediate full-body arousal was possible, but it happened every time Deacon bit him, and Gage lived for it.

"I don't want you feeding from anyone but me." He figured to put that out there right away because he could not bear to think of anyone else experiencing that level of excitement at Deacon's hands. The mere suggestion brought a wave of jealousy so powerful he felt himself stiffen with anger.

"Easy baby, I will never touch another. You are it for me from now until the end of time itself. You never have to wonder or fear that anyone will ever take your place, for it is impossible and unthinkable. I desire only you, and I love only you. That is another perk of the Fated bond." Deacon whispered the words right next to Gage's ear, and he calmed instantly.

"I feel the same for you," Gage admitted. "I look at you, and I see everything I will ever want and more. You are my beloved, and no one will ever compare to you." Gage gave a similar pledge, and just having said the words made him feel even closer to Deacon. The bond had opened his mind in a

way that he could see this man so clearly, and now his heart was open and accepting of all that was being offered.

Deacon kissed him hard, eating away and consuming him heart and soul. He moved and seated himself between Gage's thighs and began nudging at his entrance once again. "I need you." He said, and Gage wrapped his arms around him and juttred his hips upward in open invitation. Deacon thrust inside and once again filled him full, stretching and sensitizing the area once again. Making love with Deacon was fast becoming his favorite pastime.

...

Deacon was intoxicated by this man. He couldn't get enough, and every second brought new discoveries and excitement. He plunged deep inside, feeling the tight, velvety touch of his beloved's channel, loving the embrace and riding high on the sensations it advanced. He continued their heated kiss and started a rapid rhythm of thrusts that had Gage moaning with delight and holding on tight.

Gage's body was made for him. They fit together perfectly and moved as one to the rhythm of their wants and needs. He began to thrust hard, still holding the kiss, the taste and the touch of his beloved driving him fast to the edge. He reached his peak and plunged forcefully inside, burying his cock to the hilt, and came. Deacon tore away from Gage's lips to once again sink his teeth into the lovely bonding scar on his throat.

Deacon came again and again, filling his beloved once again with his essence and marking him as the beloved of the Commander. He drank deeply, reveling in the invigorating flavor of his sweet lover and the energizing quality it contained.

Feeding had never been like this, exciting and emotionally charged. He finished slowly licking and healing the scar and placing a loving kiss on the area before pulling out and wrapping his beloved in the security of his arms.

"I will never get enough of you, my love." He stated and pulled Gage even closer as the touch of his skin provided

both comfort and thrill.

“I’m glad to hear you say that,” Gage mumbled against Deacon’s chest where he lay his head. “I never want you to leave.”

“I will never leave, that I can promise.” Deacon was amazed at the feelings that surged and the desire that exploded when touching this man. He was his world, and Deacon would do anything to keep him close.

...

Silas put in a call to Robert asking him to meet in his office as soon as possible following a report he received from Bastian, who was currently running a team of field operatives in California.

“Commander Haas put in an immediate transfer for Trenton Shift to join the team in California investigating the dark prince,” Silas stated.

“Yes, after finding out that Gage Montague was his beloved, he had to remove Trenton from the area for fear he might hurt Trenton or treat him unfairly, considering he was the soldier who delivered Gage’s punishment for trespassing,” Robert added the detail and Silas nodded throughout.

“I am aware of the circumstances, and it was truly unfortunate that Deacon had not discovered their connection before the punishment took place. But none of us are privy to Fate’s plans or motives. We simply have to play it out and hope for the best.” Silas stood and walked over to stand at the window.

“Master DuCane has ordered that the blockhouse or the exterior cells, as they are sometimes referred, be demolished and removed from the grounds. It is an unnecessary and redundant facility. We have cells and interrogation rooms on the basement level here at the Palace.” He turned to regard Robert, who remained seated by the desk. “Besides, he doesn’t want it to remind Commander Haas of the violence that took place there involving his beloved.”

“Yes, sir, I’m sure Deacon will appreciate that gesture,” Robert commented.

“With that said, I will get back to the reason for this meeting.” He began again, and Robert gave him his undivided attention. “I’ve been contacted by Bastian, and Trenton never arrived. He should have gotten there sometime yesterday morning at the very latest. His quarters are empty, and according to Lieutenant McKay, he left two nights ago on a flight out of Mt. Pleasant on a private jet along with other transfers and supplies.”

Silas walked back to his desk and sat down. “There is no record of Trenton Shift boarding that flight, and he is not answering his phone.

“As far as I knew, he left. I don’t know what the issue is, but I will investigate.” Robert was about to stand when Silas motioned for him to stay seated.

“Lieutenant McKay indicated that Trenton was not pleased with the transfer and made several remarks about Gage Montague before he shut it down,” Silas informed and waited for Robert’s comment.

“You think he may go after Gage? That seems a little out of character for Trenton. He’s a rule follower.” Robert added.

“Where are Deacon and Gage staying? They should be warned regardless.”

“Deacon has a cabin in the woods about twenty miles east of the highway. Eddie talked with Gage last night, and things were fine.” Robert was getting concerned.

“Call Deacon and warn him,” Silas instructed, and Robert agreed.

“Right away, sir.”

...

He slept with his beloved secure in his arms, a restful sleep warm and sound, and woke to the sound of birds outside the window. He loved this cabin, such a peaceful place, and

now he loved it even more because it was where he claimed his beloved. Gage was still asleep, and he listened to the soft beat of his heart and felt the feather lightness of Gage's breath against his throat. This was truly paradise.

The sun was up, and the clock told him it was time to get up. They'd had a lovely and eventful night and had slept well into the morning, but now he wanted time with his beloved. They were fully bonded, and Deacon wanted to spend some relaxing hours with Gage and to learn more about him, about his past, and about his dreams for the future.

His photography goals were fully doable, and Deacon would see to it that his equipment was all replaced. It was unfortunate that Trenton saw fit to destroy his property that was not part of the order, but there was nothing to be done about it now. When he began to move, Gage woke and stretched but did not move away from Deacon; instead, he wrapped his arm around him, hugging him close.

"Good morning, sweetheart." Deacon kissed his forehead and ran the palm of his hand down Gage's side, reveling in the smooth warmth of his flesh.

"Good morning." Gage reciprocated and then asked. "What time is it?"

"Eleven thirty."

"It was good to sleep in ... with you." Gage yawned and stretched.

"How are you feeling?"

"Great, like the beating never happened." He lifted his head to look down into Deacon's face. "How do I look?"

"You look gorgeous." That brought a soft giggle and a delightful smile. Deacon rolled, pinning Gage beneath him. "Let's have some breakfast and then take a walk. This area is really lovely. I want to discuss some things with you." Gage became instantly wary.

"Like what?"

“Like, will you move in with me? I have my quarters at the Palace, a nice place plenty big enough for the two of us.” Deacon felt Gage stiffen slightly, but he didn’t say no, so that was good.

After a few seconds of thought, he answered. “Sure, I know that you’re important and that you have a good job with the Coven, and I wouldn’t want to interfere with that” Gage was a very practical man, and it made Deacon smile.

“Thank you, my love. I’ll make it good for you, I promise.” He kissed him then and sat up, moving to the edge of the bed and put on his jeans. “Pull yourself together and meet me in the kitchen.” He said and headed out because if he didn’t, he was going to ravage his beloved once again. He honestly could not get enough of that young man. He heard that infection giggle once again as he proceeded down the hall toward the kitchen, and it brightened his entire day.

He washed up and pulled on a t-shirt and boots before fixing scrambled eggs, bacon, fried potatoes, and toast for breakfast and preparing two cups of coffee. He loved providing for his beloved, and it didn’t hurt that Gage was appreciative of everything he did. There was a lot he didn’t know about Gage, and he looked forward to learning all his likes and dislikes and hearing his life experiences and opinions on everything.

The bond had opened up a deeper familiarity with his beloved. He could sense and identify his feelings, fears, and some thoughts, which told him Gage was happy, and that was all he needed to know for now. He set the table and decided to give Robert a call while he was waiting for Gage.

Trenton should be in California by now, and Deacon wanted to make sure he was there and settled. Trenton needed to be far away from him and his beloved. Gage, although putting forth a façade of strength and acceptance in regard to the beating, was actually still traumatized by the event. Their bond allowed him to feel the fear he held where Trenton Shift was concerned.



He searched for his cell phone and then realized he'd left it in the SUV, so he picked up the house phone and dialed Robert. He heard Robert answer, and then the phone went dead. He tried again, but nothing. After checking the connections and finding no issue, he decided to make his call later after he retrieved his cell from the SUV. It wasn't uncommon for him to lose service out there, so he thought nothing of it.

When Gage entered, all thought of calls and service fled his mind, and all he could think of was how handsome he looked. His hair was brushed back from his face, and his soft brown eyes took in the room and Deacon in a single sweep. "Breakfast is ready, my love. Come and take a seat; I shall serve you." He was feeling gallant, and he loved taking care of his beloved.

"Thank you." He said as he took the seat that Deacon was holding for him. Once comfortable, Deacon dropped a kiss on his cheek and then sat down opposite him at the small table. They talked and ate, and it was shaping up to be a very enjoyable day until Deacon saw a movement by the window out of the corner of his eye. Someone was outside, and he had no neighbors and was expecting no visitors.

He jumped to his feet and rushed out the door, but not before instructing his beloved to stay inside. Gage was alarmed, but he did as he was told, which was a relief. Deacon scented the area, but nothing stood out, then walked the property around the cabin looking for evidence of someone having been there.

He found nothing, so he searched the area and part of the woods a second time while keeping his eyes on the cabin. Nothing seemed out of place, but his instincts were telling him that something was off. He returned to the cabin and stood surveying the yard and the tree line beyond but did not sense movement or a presence. After a few more minutes of observing, he went inside.

Gage was standing at the door somewhat wide-eyed and anxious, which he expected considering how abruptly he'd run from the cabin. "I thought I saw someone or rather

movement through that window.” He pointed to the window to the right of the front door. “I searched the area, but I didn’t see a sign of anyone.” Deacon glanced out the window again before turning back to regard Gage.

“Who would be out here? This is pretty isolated from what I could tell on the drive-in.” Gage voiced his concerns without being too obvious.

“It could be hunters or hikers.” Deacon offered a simple answer. “I’ve run across both out here.”

“But you don’t think that it is either a hunter or a hiker.” That was a statement and not a question. Gage was astute and even more so now that they had bonded. He could sense Deacon’s uneasiness.

“I don’t know for sure, but something is striking me as off.” He tried to lighten the mood by reaching out and pulling Gage in for a hug. “Don’t worry, baby, I’ll keep you safe.” He said with a smile that he was not completely feeling. The tension in his shoulders was telling him to be careful and watchful.

“Why don’t we postpone our walk until a little later.” He suggested trying to make it sound casual and not a concern for his safety and then added. “I left my phone in the SUV. I’ll be right back.” He planned on giving Sheriff Keller a call but didn’t want to share that with Gage just yet.

As he approached the SUV, his mind was on ending this outing and driving his beloved back to the Palace. He didn’t know what was in the wind, but he didn’t like it, and he refused to put Gage at risk.

He was about ten feet from the vehicle when it suddenly exploded. It was a deafening sound that sent debris scattering around the yard and throwing Deacon several feet in the air, and he landed on his back among the destruction. The shock stunned him for just a second, and then he was on his feet and racing back to the cabin, fearing for the welfare of his beloved.

Gage met him on the porch as he was running out the door to help him. Deacon pulled him back inside, then slammed the door and locked it. Deacon recognized that the cabin and its locked door would be of little consequence to a bomber.

“Oh my god, are you okay?” Gage was clutching his arms and searching his face frantically, trying to ascertain his well-being. “What happened?” He cried out.

Deacon brought them both further inside the cabin and away from the doors and windows. “Someone is definitely out there.” He stated and pushed Gage toward the hallway. He moved with him but seemed confused as to where they were going.

“The cabin isn’t safe.” He told him while grabbing his gun. It was a powerful handgun and could kill most paranormals if that was who was stalking them. He took a hunting knife and strapped it to his belt, and stuck a short sword in his boot. These were the only weapons he had in the cabin; everything else had been in the SUV.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Gage wasn't sure what he should do, but he trusted Deacon, so he was following his lead and doing as he was told. The explosion was unbelievable. It reduced that large SUV to scrap that was now scattered all over the yard and woods, and some parts even hit the cabin. Gage had been frantic until he saw Deacon running for the cabin and relief flooded his heart.

He watched him gather arms as he directed him down the hallway toward the bedroom. Halfway there, Deacon stopped and grabbed the runner from the floor and tossed it aside. Beneath the runner was a trap door. Deacon pulled it up and revealed a rough-hewn ladder that led to what appeared to be a dugout cellar.

Gage suddenly feared getting trapped and turned to look at Deacon, who understood his concerns just from the look on his face. "The cabin will not protect us if he is lobbing bombs. I need to get you somewhere safe while I seek out our attacker."

"Is the root cellar safe?" Gage looked down into the darkness below them.

"It's not a cellar. It's a tunnel." Deacon helped him down the ladder and then followed him and closed the door behind him. "It runs downhill to the stream to the east of the cabin. It will place us about a half mile away."

Gage nodded, content that Deacon knew what he was doing. When they reached the end of the tunnel, it opened onto the banks of the stream that Deacon had mentioned. It was well hidden among trees, brush, and a rock cliff. "I'll be okay here, Deacon, don't worry. Go and do what you need to do." Deacon was a warrior, and Gage had no doubt he could handle himself. "Go and take care of that bastard and then come back and get me. I'll be waiting."

Deacon pulled him in for a tight embrace and a kiss that he could feel to his toes before abruptly releasing him. He handed Gage the hunting knife from his boot and tucking him

back inside the tunnel, then covered the opening with some nearby brush. "I'll be back, my love. Stay quiet, and don't move." He stated softly, and then it was silence.

Gage listened, tuned in for any sound, and unfortunately, in a forest, there were many. He was constantly getting spooked, wondering if the bomber was close by or looking for him, and then things would get quiet again. It was nerve-racking sitting there waiting and wondering. Even though he had full confidence in Deacon's abilities, he still worried, and he didn't want anything to happen to him.

The time they'd spent together had been great, and Gage had very little greatness ever happen in his life. Although only having known him for such a short while, Gage did not want to imagine never seeing him again. The thought was terrifying. It was all he could do to stay seated, hiding there in the tunnel, and not go out and try to help him. Deacon could function better without him in the way, and he kept telling himself that.

He heard something, a crunching of the undergrowth, a sound that could not be mistaken for anything except footsteps, and he froze. Gage held his breath as the sound grew nearer. "There you are." The sound was terrifying, and Gage's heart leapt into his throat.

...

Deacon went back to where the SUV had been destroyed and tried to pick up on the signature of who placed the bomb and any indication of where they were hiding. But everything smelled of gasoline, oil, burned parts, and foliage. There was no hint of who was responsible. The odd thing about it all was the prevailing smell of daylilies, and yet there were none in sight, and he'd never noticed lilies in the area.

He found the scent the strongest in the center of the blast, so he started there and followed. It didn't make sense, but it was the only lead that he had so far. It circled the cabin strong in some areas and fainter in others. He was starting to believe that someone was using the lily scent to mask their own.

Some varieties of daylilies were pungent to the point of covering other scents. He hadn't heard of them being used as a masking agent, but it could be done. He now knew that whoever was stalking him was paranormal, for humans would not take into consideration their scent or the fact that he could follow them by their scent. The stalker knew him and knew he was a vampire.

Deacon moved swiftly through the forest, focused on finding the source of the aroma but paused when he came to the edge of a large clearing. It was tall grass with a scattering of rocks, and if he crossed it, he would be completely in the open for anyone hiding in the adjacent woods. The scent crossed through it, but his gut was telling him to be careful. He felt a heaviness, and his mind was suddenly filled with visions of Gage and the need to get back to him.

He contemplated circling along the edge to his right, but it would be a longer walk, and he felt an urgent need to get back to his beloved. He would have to take his chances and cross the clearing. He must have paused long enough that his stalker grew impatient and called out. The minute he heard the voice, he knew what was happening, and his fear for Gage's safety skyrocketed.

"Good afternoon Commander. Are you surprised to see me?" Came the dull, dark tones of Trenton Shift. Deacon did not respond and began to walk towards him. He was standing half hidden behind a dilapidated deer blind, but Deacon could see him clearly now. "Not so close, Commander; stop where you are." He shouted, but Deacon kept walking.

Trenton stepped out from behind the blind and showed Deacon what he held and then told him again to stop. There in the grips of this madman was his precious mate. Deacon stopped and started calculating attacks figuring out methods to extricate without harm. His mind was racing, and his heart was breaking.

"This little bitch right here signaled the end of my chosen career path." He chuckled and moved onto the edge clearing. Deacon kept his eyes on Gage, channeling peace and calm to his frayed nerves. Trenton held him with an arm

around his neck and a gun to his head. The gun was a small caliber but was fully capable of ending Gage's life.

“Because of him, you sent me to field operations in California. I wanted to make a name for myself at the Coven to rise in the ranks and take a leadership role at the Palace. This little bitch ruined it all.” He pulled Gage up closer to his chest with his arm across his throat, restricting his breathing.

“It will be decades before I'm reassigned to the Coven proper just because this little bitch is moving in and doesn't want to see my face.” Trenton was showing more emotion than Deacon had ever witnessed before, but it was all anger and resentment and fomenting rage, unfortunately.

“I decided that you had to leave, not Gage. Let him go and deal with me.” Deacon stated, but Trenton simply shook his head like it was a terrible idea.

“You are both going to pay. I will kill him, and then I'm going to kill you. I know that he's your beloved, so his death will weaken you enough that it should be easy to kill you. Then I will dispose of your bodies, probably incineration, and request a change of assignment from Lieutenant McKay.” It was an insane plan with zero chance of success, but Trenton was currently incapable of reason.

“Be a man, be a warrior; Trenton, kill me first.” Deacon moved to the side, circling to the right causing Trenton to shuffle to his right to maintain a visual line.

“Stay still.” He shouted and pressed the gun flush to the side of Gage's head.

“Are you a coward, Trenton? You have to weaken me first. You can't just take me on man to man, hand to hand? Are you a coward?” He sought to push him and convince him to release Gage and come for him. He was seething the anger in his eyes, and the way his vampire was coming out full force indicated he was definitely reacting to the insult.

“Come on, show me what you got. Quit hiding behind that small human. If you want a promotion and the respect, you will have to kill me and show them how tough you are,

Trenton. Drop the gun, and let's do this like real men." Deacon tossed his gun to the ground and waited. Finally, Trenton reacted by throwing his pistol off to his left and dropping Gage to the ground. He then charged at Deacon in a blind rage. Trenton was losing control.

Deacon countered by faking left and then pummeling him with two shots to the midsection. Trenton leapt upon him, using his sharpened nails to rake across his shoulder and down his arm. It was painful, but minor, and Deacon was able to wrap his arm around Trenton's neck and wrestle him to the ground.

They fought hard, and although Trenton was off his game, he was still a vicious opponent. Trenton freed himself by rolling and loosening Deacon's hold. He then jumped to his feet and charged Deacon again, driving his nails into his side and opening a significant wound.

He tried to knock him off balance, but Deacon countered with a brutal punch to the side of his head, causing him to stumble and lose his grip. Trenton scrambled and retrieved the pistol that Deacon had tossed on the ground.

Deacon's gun was much more powerful than the one Trenton had brandished. This gun could kill Deacon if the bullet hit him in either the head or the heart. Deacon grabbed the short sword from his boot, but it was little defense against his Smith & Wesson model 500.

He took a quick glance at Gage, who was keeping low and off to the side and, with his eyes, begged him to run, but he shook his head, and Deacon's heart fell. If Trenton started shooting, it was unlike either of them would survive. He'd miscalculated. He should have never allowed Trenton to get close to the gun. Trenton smiled a truly maniacal smile and pointed the gun at Deacon.

"Say goodbye, Commander." A gun went off, and blood splattered across Deacon's shirt. He paused for a moment and then realized he had not been shot. He watched the shocked look on Trenton's face fade as he fell to his knees, and a growing blood stain spread across his chest.



“Say goodbye, Trenton,” Silas stated as he stood behind Trenton with Robert by his side. Deacon released the breath that he’d been holding since Trenton had taken the gun and, with a smile, turned and rushed over to Gage. He picked him up in his arms and squeezing him tight to his chest. His love and relief spilling over.

“Thank you, sir, and thank you, Robert.” He rained kisses down on Gage’s upturned face, so happy to have him safe in his arms.

“I’m sorry that crazy bastard managed to get so close to you.” He whispered and wrapped Gage tightly in his arms, needing the closeness of his beloved and the knowledge that he was well and safe.

“It wasn’t your fault Deacon and thank you for saving me.”

“It was Silas Patronne who saved you. He saved us both.” He turned to look at Silas and Robert, who were currently dealing with the remains of Trenton Shift. “Thank you.” He couldn’t say it enough because, without their intervention, this day may have ended much differently and tragically.

“How did you know Trenton was stalking us?” He asked curiously as to why they showed up there when he needed them.

“Bastian called and said Trenton never arrived, and we discovered he’d never boarded the plane,” Silas explained. “He was angry and unhinged, and then Robert told me that he was unable to get ahold of you either by cell or landline and that you were out here at your cabin.”

“We wanted to warn you, so we decided to drive out here and tell you to watch out for him,” Robert added.

“I’m glad you did.”

“Me too, man.” Robert patted him on the shoulder.

“Are you two ready to return to the Palace?” Silas asked. “I have a call in for clean up, so they will take care of

the scene. Come on, let's get out of here. I think you and Gage would be more comfortable in your quarters."

"I'm ready." Gage voiced emphatically, and Deacon chuckled.

"We're ready, sir."

...

They were driven to the Palace and, after a quick debriefing, headed up to Deacon's quarters. Gage had never been inside the Palace before. As a matter of fact, he'd never seen the place until that night he was taken to the exterior cells. He saw it for a moment at a distance and marveled at the grandeur of the place. Now seeing it inside and up close, he was knocked for six at the size, the regal air, and the beauty. It was truly out of this world.

His avoidance and fear of the place dissipated when walking through with Deacon by his side. The power and presence of his beloved made all things right and good. Deacon swiped the keypad, and the door swung open, revealing a lovely apartment. They were situated on the fourth floor and overlooked the terrace and an elegant, skillfully designed garden.

"Make yourself at home, my love," Deacon told him and took his hand, walking him through the large apartment to the back and into his bedroom. "This is your home now, Gage. Tomorrow I'll take you around and introduce you and help you get familiar with the place. Master DuCane has asked to meet you, so we will be having lunch with him and his beloved Ezra tomorrow." Deacon pulled off his shirt and tossed it on the floor by the closet.

"He wants to meet me. Why?" Gage was surprised since Louis DuCane was not someone who socialized.

"You're one of us now, Gage. You are considered a member of Coven DuCane, and you now possess all the rights and privileges that go along with being a member." Deacon kicked off his boots and removed his socks.

“This is fantastic. Thank you so much for letting me move in with you.” Gage took off his shirt and tossed it over with Deacon’s and then kicked off his shoes.

“You are my beloved, and what’s mine is yours. I’m glad you’re here with me.” He unbuttoned his jeans and lowered the zipper and walked up to Gage, and took him into his arms. “I love you, Gage; I love everything about you.”

Gage laid his head against Deacon’s chest and listened to the steady beat of his heart feeling so safe and secure. Deacon had fought for him and was ready to die for him, and Gage knew that he would do the same for him. He was ready to commit and pledge his very life to this man.

“I love you too, Deacon.” He said the words, and they came directly from his heart. He’d never felt a connection like the one he had with Deacon Haas.

“Show me, baby, show me how much you love me.” Deacon pulled his jeans down and off, and Gage was treated to a lovely view of Deacon’s cock hard and throbbing and making Gage’s mouth water.

He dropped to his knees before Deacon and rubbed his cheek on that lovely prize feeling the silky heat. He wrapped his hand around the base and took just the head into his mouth at first, just savoring the flavor and the sensations that rushed through him. He took him to the root and felt the erotic sensation of Deacon’s cock slipping down his throat.

Gage was having a hard time as his own cock hardened to the point of pain, and his need skyrocketed. He began a steady rhythm taking him deep and stroking him in a firm embrace. Deacon trembled, and the act sent a thrill through Gage, and he wanted him to melt to come apart.

“Pleasure yourself, my love. I want to watch you touch yourself.” Gage took his own cock in hand and began a punishing stroke, fast and hard, needing the satisfaction and the release. He felt Deacon tremble once again, and his cock stiffened, signaling that he was close, but before he came, he pulled back, popping off Gage’s lips, leaving him reaching for more.

Deacon pulled Gage to his feet and tossed him onto the bed. He removed the remainder of his clothing and rolled him onto his stomach. "I want to finish inside you, my love." Gage nodded eagerly to get the show on the road as his need to come was painfully close. He reached down and gave himself a couple of strokes while Deacon applied lube to his hole, stretching and preparing him once again for his large, hot cock.

Deacon pulled him up and spread his thighs apart, and entered, not waiting or hesitating, going to the base and pressing hard before pulling out and plunging back inside. Gage was moving with him trying to intensify the sensations and seek his own release.

The rhythm became fast and wild, and Deacon rode him, slamming inside his channel and filling him until he felt himself stretching to accommodate the size and length of his lover. It was mind-blow just like before, fierce and aggressive but also tender and loving. It was a strange but intoxicating mixture that had Gage hooked.

Deacon plunged deep with a growl followed by breathless pants and came forcing stream after stream of his seed, filling him full while he continued to thrust. Gage took his cock in hand and stroked vigorously and with a wild abandon and came in an explosive climax. His body tightens, holding Deacon in a merciless embrace, and Gage felt him come once again, pumping more of his seed deep within the hot, velvety confines of Gage's body.

Deacon dropped down and sunk his teeth into the tiny scar and drank, thrilling Gage with a full body sensation that titillated from head to toe. "That feels so damn good." He declared, and he felt rather than heard Deacon's chuckle. Between the bite and the large cock that filled him, he was about to come apart from the wild passions that raged within him. Making love with Deacon was an experience he would never tire of if he lived to be a thousand.

"I am fast becoming addicted to you." He mumbled after Deacon had released him, and they lay together in the

middle of the bed. Deacon lay on his back with Gage draped over his side, resting his head on Deacon's chest.

"I'm having the guest room converted to a studio for you," Deacon told him while they lay there with their bodies entwined, simply resting and enjoying one another. "Your photography is important, and I will replace the equipment you lost and anything else you may need."

"You don't have to do that. I don't have a job right now and won't be able to pay you back for a while." Gage disclosed. "Able kicked me out and also fired me, so I have to find another job."

"You don't need another job. I want you to pursue your dream, and I will help you in any way that I can." Deacon made himself very clear. "There is still time for you to enter the photo competition at the Fair. I'll go with you and make sure no one bothers you while you chase down that badger."

"You'd do that for me?" Gage lifted his head so that he could look down into Deacon's eyes.

"I'd do anything for you, sweetheart." Gage smiled, and Deacon pulled him down for another one of his breathtaking kisses. Gage knew that he'd finally found his home right here with this man in the last place he ever thought he'd end up, let alone find such happiness, Coven DuCane.

**THE END**

## About The Author

### **B.A. Stretke**



B.A. Stretke is a Gay Romance and fiction author who publishes through Dreamspinner Press, LLC, and Amazon.com.

B.A. Stretke began writing as a hobby. He read his first Jane Austen novel as a teen and was instantly hooked. The age-old dream of being a novelist took hold. Now long into adulthood, and a few years as an editor under his belt, B.A. is a full-time writer.

B.A. spends his days reading, engaging in sarcasm, and plotting

the next storyline, often leaving little head space for much else. He loves hiking through the Northern Michigan woods he calls home, often finding inspiration for his books. Writing and finding that perfect cup of coffee occupy the rest of his time.

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