

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a crown and a long, white, feathered gown with gold embroidery, stands in a narrow stone alleyway. She is looking back over her shoulder. The background shows stone buildings and a blue sky.

The LOVE NO 2  
BILLY  
Series

*USA Today Bestselling Author*

FIONA DAVENPORT

# **THE LOVE BITTEN SERIES**

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VOLUME 2

FIONA DAVENPORT

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# **THE LOVE BITTEN SERIES**

## VOLUME 2

This collection contains the fourth, fifth, and sixth novellas in the *Love Bitten* series plus three brand-new epilogues.

### *A Touch of Moonlight*

Liam Bancroft thought he'd lost his chance at happiness more than five hundred years ago. He was positive his childhood friend was meant to be his consort and devastated when she rejected him. He learned of her death before having the chance to touch her and gave up all hope.

Amaia Greene learned that vampires existed three years ago. She's been looking forward to being claimed as a daywalker's consort ever since.

Can Amaia live with being Liam's second choice?

### *Lustre of Twilight*

Jareth Bancroft doubted he'd be one of the daywalkers who was lucky enough to find his destined consort. More than five hundred years of searching had yielded nothing. But one touch proved him wrong in the very best way.

Narkissa Anders thought vampires were make-believe...until she stumbled upon a nest of them and barely escaped with her life. She would've been happy to forget what she'd learned, except she was fated to spend the rest of her life with one.

### *Before Daybreak*

After spending five centuries searching for his destined consort, Braeden Bancroft stumbled across her at his cousin's



birthday party. He couldn't wait to start their lives together.

Callidora Yellen wasn't ready for her fate. She had goals she wanted to accomplish before settling down with an adoring, but overprotective, daywalker.

Can Braeden convince Callie that her dreams are safe with him?

# A TOUCH OF MOONLIGHT

Liam Bancroft thought he'd lost his chance at happiness more than five hundred years ago. He was positive his childhood friend was meant to be his consort and devastated when she rejected him. He learned of her death before having the chance to touch her and gave up all hope.

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Can Amaia live with being Liam's second choice?

# PROLOGUE

“Are you alright, Kate?” I asked the young girl sitting on the other end of the bench seat in the back of the armored SUV.

“I think so,” she replied softly, giving me a hesitant smile. “It’s a lot to take in. Especially right after almost being killed by vampires—thank you for saving me, by the way. If I didn’t say so—I can’t remember. Then I learn that not only are they real, but some vampires can walk in the sun, are immune to all the stuff we’ve read about, and basically live among us like humans...yeah, it’s going to take a little time for me to adjust to this new reality.”

“You can have as much time as you need,” I assured her with a warm smile. “There is a little more to learn, though. I can tell you now if you’d like, or you can wait until we get to the council, and they’ll explain everything much more thoroughly.”

“More?” Kate squeaked and then cleared her throat and tried to pretend she wasn’t freaking out. Actually, she was much calmer than a lot of the future consorts I’d rescued in my five hundred and thirty-one years. I had a feeling she’d take to this life just fine. She was pretty, strong, and seemed sweet. Any vampire would be lucky to be paired with her as his fate. She was young, but I would have been thrilled.

“Okay, um, I think I’d rather hear the gist of it from you. It might be a little overwhelming in an official setting.”

“Very logical. I like the way you think,” I teased. Kate blushed, and I couldn’t help thinking that it would have been nice to have a sister like her in my life growing up. My brothers and I loved each other, but we’d always thought it would have been fun to have a little sister to protect and spoil. Female daywalkers seemed to have a slightly easier time finding their consort, too. Perhaps she would have given my parents grandchildren centuries ago. Instead, they had four boys who were likely to live out their immortal days alone. Although, I was the only one who knew for sure that this was my fate. But I’d accepted it years ago.

The car turned a corner onto a long stretch of driveway. We had about ten minutes before we’d arrive. Settling back against the seat, I crossed my arms over my chest and relaxed. “You might have wondered how I happened upon you tonight. It could have been a coincidence, I suppose, but that would be very unlikely.”

“It did seem too good to be true when you appeared out of thin air and turned the men about to kill me into fire and ash. If you don’t mind my saying, you’re pretty badass.”

I laughed, and Kate blushed again as she chuckled with me. “Thank you. Anyway, vampires like myself, daywalkers, are born with a single destined mate. A consort. Unfortunately, there is no way to know when your fated mate was or will be born. It’s nearly impossible to find them without help unless you’re as lucky as my cousins, who just happened to have their consorts run right into their arms. Literally.”

Well, if you didn’t count the first time Athan and his consort, Selene, met. She’d run as fast as possible in the opposite direction, much to the amusement of his brothers and cousins. He caught her shortly after, though, and they were now happily mated with adorable kids.

“Millennia ago, the daywalkers created a council whose sole goal was to protect future consorts and help them find their mates.”

“Why do they need protection?”

“Because if nightwalkers had their way, they’d rid the world of us completely, and killing our consorts is easier than trying to wipe us out directly.”

“Well...that’s just...what jerks!”

Kate looked hot under the collar about it, and I almost laughed again, but I didn’t want to offend her. She was a sweet kid. “I agree. Hence the need for the council. When unmated consorts are discovered, vampires who work for them, such as me, are dispatched to collect them. Even if they choose not to take the council’s protection and help to find their mate, they need to know what they are so they can be prepared.”

“Wait...if that’s...are you saying I’m a vampire’s destined wife?”

I chuckled. “Well, the bond between consorts is much stronger than the legal one. However, I don’t know many mated vampires who don’t complete the traditional human marriage as well.”

“But, you’re still telling me, I’m destined to fall in love with a vampire, that this was determined before I was even born?”

“Essentially.” I hesitated to add the next part, but I had always been an honest and forthright person—except for during prohibition. But whiskey was my business, so I didn’t have much of a choice, did I? “As for love, though, there is no guarantee. However, you two will only ever physically desire each other, which helps to bond you together, even if it’s just as devoted and committed friends.”

Kate frowned. “Is that more common?” she asked, sounding worried.

“Not in my experience, but I will always be honest with you.” And if I were honest with myself, I would have taken that relationship over none at all. But there was no hope for me. My destined mate had died of cancer when she was just thirty.

“Oh, good.” Her expression brightened, and she nodded, then a thought seemed to occur to her, and she canted her

head. “Is this why I’ve never, um, wanted to...um...date anyone?”

“Yes,” I replied, holding in another chuckle.

“Phew,” she said with a whoosh of air. “I’d been starting to wonder if something was wrong with me.”

The Town Car began to slow down, and I looked up to see that we were approaching the compound where the council had their headquarters and guest rooms for unmated consorts.

“There’s nothing wrong with you, Kate. Your consort is a very lucky man.”

“How will I know? I mean, how will the person I’m destined to be with recognize me?”

“That’s one of the things that makes this process difficult. It’s through touch. After that initial touch, the bond between you will spark to life.”

She tilted her head to the side again and studied me for a few moments. Then she held her hand out and waited with a hopeful expression.

I hated to disappoint her, but it was my only choice. Shaking my head, I smiled sadly. “It’s not me, Kate.”

“How do you know for sure unless we touch, Liam?” She wiggled her fingers playfully. The car came to a stop, and I opened the door, stepping out before turning to offer my gloved hand to help her from the car.

I’d taken to wearing gloves because, despite knowing it wouldn’t happen, it had begun to fuck with my head every time I touched a woman and felt nothing. I’d been spiraling into a bad place, and my brothers had come up with the idea. Without hope, there was no disappointment, so the gloves stabilized me.

It was something I didn’t want to share with Kate. It wasn’t uncommon for vampires to lose their hold on reality and go insane if they lived too long without their consort. I’d been constantly amazed at my cousin Kieran’s strength. He’d waited nearly a millennium for his consort, Thana.

Hopefully, the gloves would keep me sane as long as possible.

“Liam, you said there was nothing wrong with me.” Kate’s voice shook me out of my thoughts as I helped her stand from the car.

“And I meant it, Kate. There is truly nothing about you that would be unappealing to a consort. In fact, if circumstances were different”—I gave her a crooked smile—“and perhaps you were a little older, I’d have been the first in line to shake your hand.”

“Then...I don’t understand.”

“I’ve already found my consort.”

Kate’s features crumbled into disappointment, and I felt the same emotion welling up inside me. Shit. I needed to get out of here. My cousins were having a huge Christmas party. As much as I dreaded these big gatherings and tried to avoid them whenever possible, it would help distract me. This time of year was especially hard on me since I’d received the news of Barbra’s death on Christmas Day.

“Why didn’t you say so right away?”

I sighed and put my hand on her shoulder. “Because she died many, many years ago.”

Kate’s eyes widened and filled with horror. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have...I...”

“Don’t,” I told her with a forced smile. “Don’t feel bad. You didn’t know.” I took her hand between the two of mine and gave her a bright, reassuring smile. “I wouldn’t worry about love, Kate. There is no doubt in my mind that whoever you are destined to be with will fall head over heels the moment you touch.”

“Thank you.” Kate went up on her tiptoes and kissed my cheek. I reared back and looked at her in surprise. She shrugged and gave me an impish smile. “Just checking.”

Normally, that would send a spiral of desolation through me, but instead, a laugh bubbled up my chest, shocking me



when it released. “Good luck, Kate.”

She waved and walked toward the front door where Mira, one of the oldest daywalkers on the council, was waiting with a giant smile on her face. “Welcome!” she exclaimed and threw her arms around Kate.

Knowing she was in good hands, I teleported home and showered before changing into my tux. “Because my cousins’ wives don’t do anything halfway,” I grumbled to absolutely no one. Not that my irritation made a difference, I’d do just about anything for them. They were like sisters to me, and if they cried...I was done for.

There wasn’t much my magic couldn’t do for me, but all of the Bancrofts, from my dad and his seven brothers to his dad and four brothers, were taught to fend for themselves and not rely on magic. Besides, I enjoyed a lot of the human activities like driving, showering, and cooking.

My stomach rumbled, reminding me I hadn’t eaten. I popped into the kitchen and retrieved a bag of cold blood from the refrigerator. Warm blood had a foul taste for daywalkers, so a lot of us relied on a delivery service to provide bagged blood.

I was anxious to taste the spread of delicious food at Stephan’s house—one of the only reasons I’d let them talk me into attending—but while we could survive without blood, we would become weak and waste away. So, I drank a mug of blood, washed out my cup, and set it in the dishwasher.

Then I grabbed the keys to my Astin Martin and drove—much too fast—two towns over to my cousin’s mansion. I parked next to the garage, around back. My tux jacket was draped over the seat next to me, so I picked it up and shrugged it on as I stepped out of the vehicle. I shut and locked the car before jogging to my cousin’s back door and bursting inside. “Merry Christmas!” I shouted.

“Uncle Liam!”

“Oof!” I grunted as a gaggle of little kids knocked me on my ass, just like I knew they would. As we laughed and

played, I immediately felt better.

These little monsters were the other reason I'd let myself be guilted into coming.

And I did feel bad about staying away because the real truth was that the gloves helped, but my true savior was my family.



As I stroked my hand down the billowy taffeta skirt of my dress, I couldn't help but think about how much my life had changed in the past three years. I'd grown up with so little, but now I lived in a mansion with a closet full of more clothes than I could wear in a year. The household staff catered to my every need, including gourmet meals that were more delicious than anything I'd eaten before. I had all the material things I could have ever hoped for, but I would happily give it all up for the one thing money couldn't buy—finding the daywalker I was destined to spend an eternity with.

“Are you looking forward to tonight?”

I pulled my gaze away from the mirror to turn and look at my sister, who was standing in the doorway of my huge walk-in closet. Forcing a smile on my face, I answered, “Yup, the Bancrofts throw one heck of a party. Especially during the holidays.”

Everleigh rubbed her hands together. “And who knows, maybe you'll get the best Christmas present ever, and one of the unattached daywalkers Stephan and Bronwyn invited will turn out to be the man fated to be yours.”

“That would be amazing.” When I'd been saved by Kieran, Athan, and Stephan three years ago, I had adjusted to my new reality fairly well. I hadn't freaked out upon learning that vampires were real and an evil nightwalker had tried to kill me. After they'd defeated the vampire, who had burst into flames before turning into ash, and Stephan asked if he could

transport me to the council, I didn't think twice about getting into the car with him. And when he'd told me about daywalkers and destined consorts, I was in awe of the idea of there being a man out there who had spent all of his days hoping to find me. Someone who would only ever want me. Who would never desire anyone else. Never love another woman.

My sister and I had been shuttled back and forth between houses after my parents got divorced when we were little. My mom had been bitter about the end of her marriage and hadn't hesitated to tell Everleigh and me about everything my dad had done wrong, including cheating on her. He denied the accusation, but the way he went through women after they broke up always made me wonder if my mom was right. He had a revolving door at his house, introducing Everleigh and me to a new girlfriend just about every month. When I was ten, he married his second wife, who he divorced two years later. The third only lasted a year. The fourth barely six months. The last I heard, he was planning wedding number five with a woman who was twenty-four, only three years older than me.

My mom went through plenty of relationships of her own, but she never married again. The men she picked always ended up cheating on her before she could get to the altar—or at least that was what she accused them of doing. Most of the guys seemed nice enough to me, but I couldn't blame them for not wanting to stick around. Not when my mom tossed accusations any time they went out without her. No man wanted to spend the rest of their days with a woman who tracked how they spent every minute of their time away from her.

My parents had taught me that love was fickle. That marriages weren't meant to last. But becoming a consort was forever, and I longed for that commitment. Only, none of the daywalkers I had met over the past three years was the man fate had paired me with.

My sister was luckier than me. Two years ago, shortly after she turned eighteen, she met Marshall. I was incredibly happy

for Everleigh but also envious of the happiness she had found with him. Living in their home and seeing their love grow stronger each and every day made me pine for the man who would look at me the way Marshall did my sister.

Turning back toward the mirror, I started to second-guess the dress I'd chosen to wear tonight. Holiday parties hosted by the Bancrofts tended to be formal affairs, so I probably should have picked something fancier. "Do you think I should change?"

Everleigh moved closer, her gaze scanning down the length of my body in the reflection of the mirror. When she lifted her head again, she beamed a smile at me and shook her head. "Absolutely not. It's very you. Besides, that dress does amazing things for your boobs."

I rolled my eyes and heaved a deep sigh. "I don't know why I even bothered asking. You're ridiculous."

"Hey, that's not fair," she complained, setting her hands on her hips. "How am I being ridiculous when all I did was compliment you?"

I waved my hand toward my chest. "Unattached daywalkers aren't going to care about my boobs. They don't feel desire for anyone except their destined consort."

"Um, you're the one who's worried about what they're wearing, not me," she pointed out as she shrugged her shoulders.

"True," I conceded with a jerk of my chin toward her floor-length black gown. "But I wasn't really nervous about how I looked, per se. My concern was more about being underdressed compared to everyone else. I don't want to stick out like a sore thumb."

"Don't be silly. You could go to the party in a potato sack, and you'd still look gorgeous." Everleigh tugged on my hand to lead me out of my closet, across my room, and into the hallway. Then she called, "Marshall, where are you?"

"Please tell my sister that she's worrying for nothing." Everleigh cast an imploring look at her husband. "She's

thinking about changing dresses because this one isn't fancy enough."

Marshall took in the white peasant bodice and full taffeta skirt of my dress. "I don't see any reason for you to change. Your outfit has a Renaissance flair to it, which daywalkers will appreciate since many of us were alive during the sixteenth century."

I glanced down at my dress, looking at it in a different light since my brother-in-law made an excellent point that I hadn't considered. "Do you really think so?"

"Definitely." Everleigh moved to his side, and he flung his arm around her shoulders. "You look beautiful."

"Thank you." I beamed a smile at him before my gaze darted toward the window at the end of the hallway. There wasn't any snow on the ground yet, but the forecast earlier today had called for some, and the night looked crisp in the moonlight. "I think I'll dress my outfit up a little more by using one of my more formal wraps since it looks cold out there."

"Great idea," Everleigh agreed with a nod.

Marshall brushed a kiss against her temple before suggesting, "You should bring a wrap, too. I don't want you to get chilled."

My sister shivered, but it had nothing to do with being cold. Her eyes darkened to a deep purple as she looked up at her husband and murmured, "I'm sure you can come up with some creative and satisfying ways to keep me warm."

"Mmm, you know damn well I will." He lowered his head to capture her lips in a deep kiss.

Taking that as my cue to make myself scarce before they were lost to their passion and forgot I was in the hallway with them—something that had happened more times than I wanted to count over the past two years—I twirled around and headed back to my room to grab a wrap. When I made it to my doorway, my sister whispered, "Oops," before calling out, "Sorry."

“No worries,” I reassured her as I flashed her a smile over my shoulder. “But if you two are going to disappear into your bedroom, you better be quick, or else we’re going to be late for the party. I don’t want to miss the spread they put out, and they’re serving dinner at five.”

Marshall pulled a timepiece out of his pocket and glanced down at it. “Sadly, your sister is right. We don’t have much time before the party begins.”

“Fine, I guess I’ll take a rain check for later,” Everleigh huffed as she stepped out of his embrace. “I’ll go grab a wrap, and then we can head over there. Do you want to drive or teleport?”

This was another big change in my life since I’d found out about vampires. Although Marshall owned a fleet of cars and a private jet, he usually traveled using teleportation. I preferred to drive since teleporting left me feeling dizzy, but my sister assured me that would change after I was claimed and made the change into a daywalker myself.

Everleigh quirked a brow at me instead of answering. “It’s your call.”

The Bancrofts lived one town over from us, so it was only a ten-minute drive to Stephan and Bronwyn’s house. Driving over was the logical choice, but for some reason, I found myself saying, “Let’s teleport tonight.”

“Yay, we’ll be there in no time,” my sister cheered as she did an adorable little dance and grinned.

Marshall nudged her toward their room. “Now that we have an extra ten minutes, I think I should help you pick out the perfect stole to use tonight.”

I laughed softly and shook my head as I headed toward my closet to retrieve a champagne-colored satin wrap that would look great with my outfit and dress it up a little. Then I wandered over to my vanity to touch up my makeup and hair since I had extra time with my brother-in-law “helping” my sister in the bedroom.



It wasn't until I was dabbing a bit of gloss over my lipstick that I heard their voices in the hall again. Closing my eyes for a moment as I let out a deep breath, I whispered, "Three years isn't long compared to how long daywalkers wait to find their consort, but a Christmas miracle would be much appreciated."



LIAM

“For fuck’s sake, Liam,” my younger brother by three years, Braeden, grunted. “It’s just family. I think you can remove the gloves.”

Jareth, who was ten years older than me, smacked Braeden on the back of the head. “Leave him alone. Or we’re going to start in on you and the rooms in your house that are growing old and dusty because you refuse to let anyone go in there.”

“Low blow, brother,” Braeden mumbled.

“Seriously, though,” Jareth said, turning to me. “They do make you look like a bit of a dandy.”

“With all that reading you do in that big publishing company you own,” I drawled, “I would think you’d have modernized your insults.”

Our youngest brother, who was seven years younger than Braeden, rolled his eyes. “How am I the youngest yet the most mature?”

“How are you the youngest and the most uptight?” Braeden gibed, but his attention was stolen when a bell rang, announcing dinner. He was gone before I could finish a blink. Ren followed at a measured pace, ever the studious, respectable gentleman.

I took a step to follow but paused when I felt Jareth’s hand on my arm. “You know we tease because we love you,” he said with a grin.

“Yeah. I know that. Until you decide to pour an entire shaker of salt in my blood before it was delivered. I question your brotherly love a little at those times.” I started walking toward the dining room again.

Jareth laughed. “Eternity is a long time, brother. What kind of life would that be without a little fun?”

“Payback’s a bitch.”

“Liam.” His voice went serious, and it brought me to a quick halt, worried something was wrong with him.

“What is it?”

“It’s been over five hundred years. Don’t you think it might be time to at least question whether she really was your consort?”

“No,” I stated emphatically before striding into an opulent room with several round tables that were quickly filling up with guests.

I spotted Marshall, my old friend from university, and assumed the pretty brunette he was making eyes at was his relatively new consort I hadn’t yet met. He saw me and lifted his chin in greeting, then gestured to one of the two empty seats at his table.

Nodding, I headed that way, but as I passed my cousin Athan and his wife, Selene, I scowled playfully. “I don’t recall Marshall joining the family.”

Selene looked a little guilty while Athan and his brother Stephan, who had just walked up in time to hear my complaint, both grinned and shrugged.

“Liam,” Marshall called out jovially when I arrived. He jumped up, and we gave each other a man-hug before he turned and gestured to the petite, violet-eyed daywalker sitting next to him. “This is my Everleigh. My love, this is my old chum, Liam.”

“Nice to meet you,” she said with a sweet smile.

“You as well. And congratulations,” I told both of them. “I’m sorry I haven’t had a chance to meet you and celebrate

your mating before now. My work keeps me busy.”

“I understand.” Marshall sat back down, and I started to sit on Everleigh’s other side since the only two open chairs were there.

“Oh, would you mind scooting down one? My sister is with us. She just ran to use the restroom.”

“Shouldn’t you be saving this seat for her husband?” I asked, concerned that some jealous, possessive daywalker was going to go for my throat when he saw me sitting next to his consort.

Marshall and Everleigh laughed, then he shook his head. “Amaia isn’t mated. Though she is destined to be a consort.”

Everleigh’s face brightened, and she sat up straighter. “Maybe you and—”

“No, my love, leave it alone,” Marshall requested softly. He was well aware of my history, and I appreciated him stepping in. However, my cousins...those men I was going to beat the shit out of.

Learning about this Amaia’s presence had me glancing around the room and spotting a whole lot of faces I didn’t recognize who all bore the mark of an unmated consort. *Oh, yes. Definitely going to kill my cousins.*

“Oh, hello.”

A beautiful voice tinkled in my ear like a bell, and I turned my head to discover the source of the enchanting sound. I was completely stunned by the beauty taking the seat next to me.

A man didn’t have to have working sex organs or a libido to appreciate the breathtaking woman beside me. She reminded me of the paintings in museums that you could stare at for hours.

She was average height, with long, silky brown hair that fell over bare shoulders and onto the pretty white peasant blouse she wore with a long taffeta skirt. It was a lovely ensemble, especially because it was unique, like her. And it enhanced her very curvy assets.

Her face was oval-shaped with a delicate mouth, a slightly upturned nose, and the most incredible violet eyes I'd ever seen in my entire lifetime.

“You're exquisite,” I blurted.

The beauty blushed and smiled at me. “Thank you.” Her eyes roamed my face, then dropped to my hands resting on the table, and they lost a little bit of their sparkle.

I was used to this reaction, of course, but it bothered me a little more than usual this time.

Marshall introduced her as his sister-in-law, Amaia. I nodded in greeting and went back to looking around the room, avoiding the woman seated next to me.

When dinner was served, my manners kicked in because you couldn't be as old as I was, living through the eras I did, without having them carved into your brain. So I removed my gloves and set them next to my plate.

“How's business?” Marshall asked.

“Great. We developed two new recipes to roll out this year, and I'm confident they're going to be bestsellers.”

“Recipes?” The question came from Amaia and—again, manners—I looked at her to answer her question.

“I own a company that develops, produces, and distributes high-end whiskey.”

“Really?” Her face lit up, and I was taken aback by the genuine interest I saw in her expression. “I'm a bartender at The Old Haunt, and they've converted me to a whiskey fan. The owner is brilliant, and he's been teaching me all about the process and how to choose the best ones. It's fascinating. I missed their event last year, but I made sure I'll be able to come this year. I heard the winning bottle was unbelievable.”

I didn't know if she realized she was rambling, but I thought it was enchanting, so I just kept listening. Also, I'd never met a woman so passionate about what I did for a living.

“It was a single malt. I'm trying to remember the name of the company. You'd probably recognize it.” She turned to her

brother-in-law, who was grinning, his eyes dancing with mirth. “Do you remember?”

“Bancroft Barrels and Tap,” he answered before shoving a bite of food in his mouth to keep from laughing.

“Right! Bancroft—oh...” Recognition slowly dawned on her face, and I couldn’t help it. I burst into laughter.

“You must think I’m such an idiot.” She sighed, her cheeks flushing bright crimson.

“Enchanting,” I responded through my chuckles.

She gave me a half-smile and reached for her drink but accidentally knocked it over, spilling the dark liquid on her skirt. “Oh, good heavens!” she exclaimed as she shoved away from the table.

“Are you alright?” I asked as she stood up and used a napkin to dab at the wet spots.

“Yes, thank you. I think I’ll go to the ladies’ room and see if I can keep it from staining.” She chuckled and shook her head. “And maybe wash off my mortification while I’m at it.”

Standing, I pulled her seat back to give her more room to move since her skirt was so voluminous. She smiled and started to scoot out, but I must have accidentally stepped on the hem of her dress because as she took her next step, she lost her balance and began to fall backward toward me. I quickly put my hands on her shoulders to help steady her and...

The world exploded in shades of purple while white-hot streaks of desire raced through me, down to my cock, which had instantly hardened.

Amaia turned her head, her violet eyes wide with shock. “Mine,” I growled before I sealed my lips over hers, groaning at the amazing flavor that burst on my tongue. She tasted like sugar and sunshine, and I vowed to figure out a way to bottle it into a whiskey someday.

But definitely not today.

Right now, I was going to bury myself in my enchanting consort and thank fate profusely for not only giving me a mate

to spend my eternity with but also one so lovely and amazing as Amaia.

Without breaking our kiss, I rotated her body to face mine, then I swept her up into my arms, and we were gone in a heartbeat.





Liam brought us to a luxurious bedroom, presumably in his home. I wasn't sure if my dizziness was due to teleporting or being in his arms, but I wasn't as bothered by it as I usually would be. A little lightheadedness was a small price to pay for finally finding the daywalker who was meant to be mine.

And what a man Liam was. I'd known he was a Bancroft before Marshall introduced us. The brown hair, bright blue eyes, and pale skin were a dead giveaway, although he was much more attractive than his cousins. While we'd been waiting for dinner to be served, his body language had made it painfully clear that he wasn't interested in small talk with me. I tried to honor his wishes, but it had been difficult to keep my focus off him while speaking with Everleigh and Marshall. My gaze kept straying in his direction as I took in his strong jawline, masculine features, and broad shoulders.

I'd never felt desire for a man, but I had felt drawn to Liam from the moment I approached the table. The pull between destined consorts was stronger than I expected...and so was the passion.

Twining my arms around his neck, I felt my heart race in my chest as he strode toward the king-sized bed. I didn't let go when he laid me on the navy-blue duvet, pulling him down with me. His body crashed on top of mine, and he stared down at me, his lips curving into a smug grin. "I take it that it's safe to assume you're feeling as impatient as I am?"

“Impatient doesn’t even begin to cover how I’m feeling.” I shifted my hands to cup his cheeks with my palms. “How is it possible that I’ve been going to events hosted by your cousins for three years, and tonight is the first time we met?”

A pained expression crossed his face but was quickly replaced by determination. “You have no idea how much I regret skipping parties where you were in attendance. I’m sorry I made you wait so long, my darling. I’ll spend every day for the rest of our very long lives making it up to you.”

“It isn’t your fault, silly.” I lifted up to brush my lips against his in a gesture of comfort. “Especially when you had to wait much longer than me. A few years is nothing compared to the decades or centuries you must have spent wondering if you’d ever find me.”

I could’ve sworn I saw a hint of guilt in his eyes before he squeezed them shut and dropped his forehead against mine. I assumed he still felt bad about the missed opportunities, but he captured my mouth in a deep kiss before I could convince him there was no reason to feel guilty. Instead, I lost myself to the feel of his lips moving over mine. When his tongue swept inside, I let out a little gasp and pressed my body closer to his. By the time he lifted his head, I was breathless and writhing in need.

“Wow,” I panted, pressing my thighs together to relieve the unfamiliar ache between my legs.

Liam’s blue eyes burned with desire as he murmured, “Incredible.”

I wiggled beneath him and whispered, “Just think, we’ve barely gotten started.”

“Thank fuck you wore this dress.” His hand drifted down my side to fist in the taffeta of my skirt. “If you hadn’t tripped over the material, I never would have gotten to experience this.”

“Impossible.” I shook my head and smiled up at him. “Fate would have found another way to bring us together. I have no

doubt that we would've met at another party or maybe even at The Old Haunt's whiskey event this year."

My cheeks filled with heat as I remembered how I'd babbled about that bottle my boss had given away as the prize last year. Liam had made me so nervous, and I'd been embarrassed to discover the whiskey I'd been raving about was one he'd provided. But now I took comfort in the knowledge that our shared appreciation of whiskey might have been the thing to unite us if we hadn't met tonight. I couldn't help but think that my job at The Old Haunt was destiny giving us a nudge in the right direction.

"Hmm, maybe." Liam lifted the hem of my dress until I felt the cool air against my thighs. Goose bumps popped up as his thumb stroked against my skin. "But I'm still tempted to frame this skirt and get you several exactly like it so you can wear them to celebrate each of our anniversaries."

"You won't get any arguments from me. This is one of my favorite outfits." Even as I agreed, my flush deepened. His suggestion made me think about a historical romance I'd read where the hero had hung the sheets from the rafters of his castle so everyone could see the proof of his wife's innocence. If my skirt stayed beneath me, framing it would basically end up being the same thing.

"Then I better do my best not to rip the material as I strip the clothes off your gorgeous body," Liam rasped as his fingers inched up my thigh.

I dug my nails into his shoulders and shook my head. "I would happily sacrifice every single piece of clothing I own for just one more kiss from you."

"You don't need to give anything up for me. You can have as many kisses as you want. They're all yours," he offered as his lips crashed against mine again.

My need for him grew, and I whimpered into his mouth. The chemistry between us exploded, and I tugged at Liam's tuxedo jacket. "Take this off. Please. I need to be skin to skin."

“Fuck, yeah,” he growled, rising to his knees to shuck off his jacket, bow tie, and shirt. While he worked on his belt, I sat up and tugged my sleeves down my arms to allow the bodice of my dress to fall to my waist. His gaze stayed glued on my breasts, encased in a lacy white bra, as he shoved his pants down his legs, leaving him in only his boxer briefs. His hard length pressed against the dark fabric, and I licked my lips when I saw the damp spot at the tip.

Twisting around, I lowered the zipper at my side to loosen the skirt, frantic to get my dress off me so Liam and I could explore each other’s bodies. As soon as the fabric started to slide down my legs, he pushed me onto my back and tugged it all the way down. His gaze raked up and down my body, his eyes gleaming with desire as they lingered on my chest before zeroing in on the white lace covering my pussy. “Your panties are already drenched. Need a taste before I sink inside your tight pussy the first time.”

His nostrils flared as he settled himself between my thighs, throwing my legs over his shoulders before he ripped my panties off my body. My hips jerked off the mattress when he dove right in, his lips latching onto my clit and quickly driving me close to the edge. Then his tongue slid lower to dip between my folds, and I gripped the back of his head and whimpered, “I was so close. Please, I need more.”

“Don’t worry, darling. I’ll give you exactly what you need,” he mumbled against my pussy as he licked and sucked at me while starting to work a finger inside my channel. My inner walls clamped down hard around his digit when he finally gave me what I’d asked for, sending me over the edge as he sucked my clit into his mouth.

He ate me through my orgasm and sent me right back up again for another, only this time he extended his fangs and plunged them into my flesh, sucking my blood and sending me soaring even higher while I screamed his name. As I collapsed against the mattress, he stripped my bra off and went up on his knees. After shoving his boxer briefs down, he pressed his body against mine, settling between my spread legs with the tip of his hard length nudging my core. “I’ve spent more than

five hundred years roaming this world, and I've never seen anything more beautiful than you in the throes of an orgasm that I've given you."

Wrapping my legs around his waist, I urged, "Take me now and show me the same beauty, Liam."

He lowered his head to capture one of my puckered nipples in his mouth, sucking it deep at the exact same moment his hips surged forward. With one brutal thrust, he filled me completely. I didn't have time to worry about the pain of losing my virginity, so my body hadn't tensed up. I wasn't sure if that was why it didn't hurt as much as I'd been expecting, but I was grateful. As he held himself anchored deep inside me, I gave my hips a little experimental wiggle. "Feels good."

"Thank fuck," he groaned, gliding out of me before slamming back in. "Not sure how long I can hold out. Your pussy is so fucking tight."

My nails dug into his shoulders hard enough to draw blood, but that only seemed to send him closer to the edge. Picking up the pace, he hammered in and out of me like a man possessed as his mouth toyed with my breasts. I felt each tug of his lips deep in my core, and the sensation combined with the shuttling of his cock in and out of me sent me spiraling out of control in no time at all. "Liam! I—oh—so good. Yes! Oh, yes!"

"That's right, darling. Give yourself up to the pleasure. Come for me."

I flew apart at his command, my cries of completion echoing off the walls as he bellowed my name. Burying his face in the crook of my neck, he sank his fangs into my artery and sent me flying even higher. Then he anchored himself deep, and I felt the hot jets of his come filling my pussy to overflowing. "Fuck yeah, Amaia. That's it. Milk every last drop from my body, darling. Yes! Fuck!"

Liam had been right. Nothing was more beautiful than seeing my man come—and I was a lucky, lucky woman because it was a sight I would get to see for the rest of eternity.



LIAM

It was twilight when I opened my eyes to the soft glow of our bedroom. I looked down at my darling consort and wondered if the glow might be coming from inside me. As cliché as it sounded, I'd never felt such happiness or contentment.

A tiny bit of guilt trickled into my veins when I thought about the years I'd assumed my mate died. If I hadn't been such a stubborn asshole and listened to my family, I might have found Amaia years ago. Especially since she mentioned attending Bancroft events—*oh, shit*, I mentally groaned. I was going to have to thank those bastards, wasn't I?

Amaia shifted in my arms, and my body stirred. I was tempted to wake her with my mouth between her legs—I already knew this was going to be my favorite breakfast—but I'd kept her up a good portion of the day. She'd also been a virgin, and I told myself to let her pussy rest before I broke it in a little more.

I sighed and snuggled Amaia closer to me, ready to fall back to sleep when a thought occurred to me. Well, fuck. It was Christmas Day. There was no way in hell I was going to let our first Christmas together simply pass us by. We would remember the day we found each other every year for eternity. I wanted the memory to be a spectacular one, and there was no better excuse for that than Christmas.

A glance at the clock to check the time was useless because nothing was open on Christmas Day. Then again, I



was used to getting around the standard hours that most businesses kept. Daywalkers got their name because the sun didn't turn us to ash like other vampires. But that didn't mean we couldn't get a bitch of a sunburn on our very pale skin. Plus, with light eyes made for seeing in the dark, daytime was just too bright. So, our lives were mostly nocturnal.

Judging by the darkening of the room, the sun was almost below the horizon, which meant I didn't have a lot of time. I'd worn Amaia out, but if she'd been living with Marshall and Everleigh and adapted to their schedules, it was likely Amaia wouldn't stay asleep for too much longer.

Gingerly, taking every care not to wake her, I reluctantly slid out of her arms and climbed out of bed. Then I quickly showered and threw on a pair of festive red pajama bottoms that I conjured up since I usually slept nude.

As I made my way down to the kitchen, I checked in with my mom to see if she was awake. She immediately answered my mental nudge. *Liam, sweetheart. What are you doing awake? Are you going to spend Christmas night with us?*

*Not this year. But I promise to be there from now on until I have little ones of my own. Then you'll have to come to us.*

Unsurprisingly, my mother remained silent, and I couldn't help grinning. A comment like this—from me—was probably something she'd never thought she'd hear.

*Us...*

*You heard me right, Mama. I found her.* My mother's excitement was palpable through our mental connection, and I could easily imagine her jumping up and down and clapping like a...well, a kid on Christmas.

*Liam, my boy. I'm so happy for you. And what do you mean you won't be coming for Christmas breakfast?? I want to meet my new daughter-in-law!*

*I found her yesterday, I thought dryly. We'll be a little busy today...*

*Oh...right. Well, how about Christmas dinner?*

*We'll see.* I understood my mother's wish to meet my mate, but I wasn't sure I'd be ready to share her by the morning.

*I wanted to tell you, but I also wanted to know if I could come get Nana's ring. The one she set aside for me.* My mother's parents were very much alive, despite their very advanced age, but my grandmother had decided a year ago to leave a ring she wanted me to have with my mother while she and Papa traveled the world. Just in case. Perhaps she had known something I didn't.

*Of course.*

*I'll pop over and pick it up in a few hours. I need to get some things ready before my sweet consort wakes.*

*Oh, Liam. I'm so happy for you. I'll tell your father and brothers.*

*Uh, maybe not the brothers yet!* I nearly shouted the thought. The devil only knew what those assholes would get up to while I was trying to have some alone time with Amaia.

*Yes...well. Maybe you're right.* She knew her sons well enough to understand why I was worried. *All right, dear. I'll see you later, and please think about dinner. I'd so love to meet my new daughter-in-law. She brought my son back to me, after all.*

When you lived as long as we did, you learned not to dwell on the past. So, I pushed away my guilt for avoiding my family for so long and made a vow to make sure we were as close as we used to be.

I wished her a happy Christmas and strode purposely into the large grandiose living room in my mansion—which looked more like a castle. Few things in my life had brought me joy before Amaia, but for some reason, this house was one of them. I'd loved it from the moment I laid eyes on it. When I thought about it now, I couldn't help wondering if my subconscious saw my children running through these rooms and filling up the nursery.

I hoped Amaia liked our home, but I'd sell it and buy her whatever she wanted if she didn't. It wasn't like I couldn't afford the expense. The Bancrofts were very smart with money, and in over five hundred years, I'd built a healthy nest egg many times over.

As I looked around, though, this didn't seem the right space for an intimate family moment. It was more for when all of the relatives were here, and we needed much more space. Before I left the room, I waved a hand, and decorations appeared all over, including a grand twenty-foot Christmas tree in the front window.

I left decorations behind me wherever I went, making sure the house was bright and cheerful for my lady. Finally, I reached a spacious but cozy room near the back stairs that led up to the former servants' quarters and just beyond, the family bedrooms. It was close to the kitchen as well, which meant it would be easy to share treats whenever we were there together.

Magic wasn't the way I would have gone about this if I'd had more time, but I was grateful for it more than ever at that moment. Sweeping my eyes around the room, I pictured our family in future Christmases, and when I waved my hand again, the space filled with comfortable furniture that looked stylish but could take a beating from years of children roughhousing. However, the walls remained bare, waiting to be covered in family photos.

The Christmas tree was big and full, twinkling with hundreds of lights. All that was missing were piles of gifts for my beautiful Amaia. I looked forward to watching her smiles and excitement with each one, so it was hard to stop myself from stuffing the room from top to bottom with presents. I couldn't wait for her to open them all, but I was particularly excited about the ones in pink and black wrapping paper. And the one I needed to retrieve from my mother.

With that done, I quietly ascended the stairs and walked to the master suite. Amaia was still sleeping peacefully, so I silently changed into jeans and a red sweater.

*And how was your day, brother?* Jareth's sly voice slid into my head.

*None of your business. Go away.*

*You didn't think we missed the show at the party, did you?*

*One can only hope.*

Jareth laughed. *You used up all your luck finding your consort, I guess. Because everybody saw you mauling that poor girl and teleporting away.*

*Look, I have shit to do. You can be your obnoxious, brotherly self another time.*

*Why? What's wrong with now? Were you busy? Am I interrupting? I was hoping you'd explain the malt—*

*Jareth, I interrupted. I just want you to remember this moment when you find your consort.* With that, I closed my mind to keep out those pesky, nosy people.

I teleported to my parents' house and picked up the ring, giving my mother and father both hugs while they congratulated me. My mother produced a little box from the pocket of her apron, and I grinned like a loon as I took it from her and popped the lid. The ring was a twist of white and rose gold with tiny diamonds going up the center of the pinkish metal. A gorgeous pearl sat at the top. It was unique because every time the ring moved, the stone seemed to change color. I liked it best when the pearl appeared to be a soft violet. Anxious to return, I put the ring away and stowed the box in my pocket.

Then my mother, being the best, handed me a platter of homemade cinnamon buns, croissants, and other delicious pastries. "Almost no one is as amazing as you," I told her after kissing her cheek.

She chuckled. "I won't take offense to that since your consort should always be the most important person in your life."

"She is."

Braeden and Ren strolled in right before I left and started ribbing me about the party.

“I’ll tell you what I told Jareth.” I stopped and looked around, curious as to why he wasn’t in attendance. “Where is he, anyway?”

Both of them shrugged innocently, but I didn’t have the patience to force confessions out of them since I’d been gone from my girl for too long already. “Just remember this day when you find your consorts,” I warned, then teleported home.

Amaia wasn’t in bed, and I frowned, angry that I hadn’t been there when she woke. But my enhanced hearing picked up the sounds of running water and her sweet voice singing Christmas carols. As I grinned, the ring disappeared from my pocket before I shed my clothes and hurried to the master bath.

My breath caught in my throat at the sight of all those curves with rivulets of water running down them. My cock had hardly gone soft since the moment it came alive—which had come in very handy when I spent the day fulfilling the needs of my insatiable consort. But it turned to steel as I opened the glass door and stepped in.

I came up behind Amaia and cupped her breasts, pulling her back against me. She gasped when she felt my rod pressing into her lower back, and her nipples hardened against my palms.

“Merry Christmas, my darling,” I whispered in her ear.

“It is most definitely merry,” she panted, making me chuckle.

“And what would you like from Santa this year, Amaia?”

“You.”

“You have me, darling,” I told her softly, shuffling us around until she was facing a wall. “But I’m more than happy to remind you.”

I let go of her breasts to place her hands on the wall and used one foot to encourage her to widen her legs. Then I lined my cock up with her pussy and cupped her heavy globes

again, pinching the nipples as I drove inside her. “Fuck!” I grunted as I dropped my head into the crook of her neck. “So tight. You feel so amazing, Amaia. I could live with your pussy wrapped around my cock.”

“That could get a little awkward,” she giggled, then moaned as I gently squeezed her breasts and lazily withdrew before gliding back in. “Especially when I’m having our babies.”

I had no idea how it was even possible, but when she mentioned our children, my shaft swelled even more as all the blood in my body rushed down to it. “You want my babies, darling?” I asked as I languidly pumped into her a few more times.

“So much,” she breathed, and her walls clenched around me, making me see stars.

“Let’s see what I can do about making this Christmas wish come true.”

I didn’t hurry, despite the painful throbbing of my cock and the building tension in my spine. I made love to my consort, showing her with my body how much I cherished her.

Afterward, I washed us, making sure to thoroughly take care of her most sensitive places, before scooping her into my arms and shutting off the water. I tenderly dried her with a fluffy towel, then guided her back into the bedroom, where I’d magically left a couple of outfits for her to choose from.

She beamed at me as she pulled a soft, sparkly red cashmere sweater over her head and slid on black leggings with—I’d taken a risk here, but something told me she’d love it—candy canes all over them. “These are adorable!”

“I’m so pleased you like them, darling. But I have much more in store for you.” I held out my hand, and when she placed her palm against mine, a spark sent a thrill through my body like a shot of electricity.

Impatient, I teleported us to the kitchen where she exclaimed over the breakfast spread and filled a plate. Then I took her hand again and led her into the family room.

She gasped, her violet eyes growing big and round as she took in everything. “Are...are those all for me?” she squeaked.

I laughed and guided her over to a couch, helping her sit and set her treats on the little table beside her. “I will always give you everything and anything that is in my power.”





When I woke up by myself and called out for Liam without him answering, I'd gone searching for him. Then I spied the Christmas decorations from the top of the stairs and realized that I didn't have any presents to give him on our first holiday together. Luckily, he had a landline in the bedroom since I'd left my purse with my cell phone in it at Stephan's house last night. A quick call to Everleigh put me in touch with Liam's oldest brother, Jareth, who offered to grab a few things for me.

Once that was done, I hopped into the shower since I desperately needed to wash off after all the lovemaking we'd done over the past day. It turned out to be a great decision because I was just rinsing off when my sexy daywalker stepped into the stall with me and blew my mind again. So much so that I'd almost forgotten it was Christmas Day until I spotted the festive sweaters he'd laid out for me. Not that I would've been able to miss the significance of the day after he led me downstairs. The Christmas tree nestled in the corner of the room was more beautiful than any I'd ever seen before, and a ton of wrapped presents were stacked beneath it.

I tugged Liam down beside me and climbed onto his lap. Twining my arms around his neck, I whispered, "You didn't need to do so much. I already have the one thing I really wanted—you."

"It's my privilege to dote on you, my darling." He brushed his lips against mine. "I couldn't let our first holiday pass without spoiling you a little."

I jerked my chin toward the tree and giggled. “More like a lot. Nothing about that pile of presents is little.”

Liam tapped his finger against his chin with a chuckle. “I’m willing to admit that I may have gone slightly overboard.”

“Just remember, as a human, I don’t have any magic. So I couldn’t pull a bunch of gifts for you out of thin air.” I pressed my lips together to stop myself from spilling the beans about Jareth coming over soon, figuring it would be a great surprise.

He slid his hands behind my back and tugged me against his chest. His breath was hot against my ear as he murmured, “Like you said, you’ve already given me everything I could ever want just by being here, my darling.”

Butterflies swarmed in my belly at how sweet he was being, and I mentally offered up my gratitude to the fates for pairing me with such a wonderful man. “Please keep in mind that turnabout is fair play when I have the opportunity to dote on you, too.”

“Feel free to spoil me whenever you want. I’ll treasure any gift you want to give me. But in the meantime”—he swept his arm out to gesture toward the Christmas tree—“I’ll take immense pleasure from watching you open your presents.”

“Well, if you insist,” I drawled, pressing my lips against his in a quick kiss before I climbed off his lap to start making a dent in the ridiculously tall pile of wrapped packages. There were more clothes—sweaters, leggings, and fuzzy socks galore. Several items of lingerie made me blush...and sent my pulse skyrocketing as I pictured him tearing them from my body.

When I opened a frame without a picture in it, I turned it around so he could see the front. “I think you forgot something.”

“I left it empty on purpose. We’ll take a photo in front of the tree later, and it can be the first of many to go up on the walls.” The wink he aimed my way sent shivers down my spine. “You never know, it might be our only chance to snag a

holiday photo of just the two of us before the pitter-patter of little feet fills our home.”

The amount of thought and effort that he put into my gifts brought tears to my eyes, and that was before I realized he'd saved the best for last. Getting up and striding over to the fireplace, he retrieved a jewelry box that I hadn't noticed before. Then he dropped to his knees next to me and flicked the lid open with his thumb. “Amaia, my darling, would you do me the honor of wearing this ring to symbolize our bond?”

The ring was beautiful and unique, the luminosity of the pearl capturing my gaze. Holding out my hand, I whispered, “Yes, please.”

With the worst timing in the world, Jareth popped into the room as Liam slid the ring into place on my finger. “Great choice, brother. Nana's ring looks perfect on Amaia.”

Liam didn't look thrilled at the interruption, but I couldn't be too angry since he was here at my request. Jumping up, I grabbed a few of the presents from the stack in his arms. “And now it's my turn to spoil you, Liam.”

I moved closer to Jareth and gave him a peck on the cheek. “Thank you so much for helping me surprise your brother.”

A growl rumbled up Liam's chest as he yanked me back and glared at Jareth, making me giggle and blush.

Unbothered by his brother's flash of jealousy, Jareth patted his stomach and smiled. “I was more than happy to help, but now I must be off. I'm beyond famished, and there's bound to be a feast laid out at our parents' house by now.”

“Oh, wait. Please.” I pressed my hands together as I beseeched, “You've done so much for me. The least I could do is give you a snack before you run off. We have quite the spread ourselves in the kitchen. I could dash in there and fix you up a plate in no time at all.”

Jareth bent at his waist and swept his arm out in front of him in a courtly bow. “Thank you for taking pity on me in my time of need, dearest sister.”

Liam let out a huff of exasperation as I padded toward the kitchen, giggling over Jareth's antics all the way. I hadn't been exaggerating about the bounty of food we had available. I grabbed only one item off each tray, and the plate I put together for Jareth was still piled high by the time I headed back to the family room. To prevent anything from falling onto the floor, I moved slowly down the hallway. As I neared my destination, the low murmur of their deep voices floated toward me.

"I told you so." My lips curved into a grin at the hint of superiority in Jareth's voice. He sounded just like my sister and I did when we lorded it over each other when we were right about something. But my smile was wiped from my face as he continued, "I hate that you've spent the past five hundred years convinced you'd never get to experience the consort bond because you refused to listen to any of us when we tried to tell you how wrong you were about Barbra. At least now we won't have to see you wearing those ridiculous gloves of yours wherever you go."

I halted in my tracks, remembering the gloves Liam had pulled off when dinner had been served yesterday. I'd wondered about them since I had never seen another unmatched daywalker wear something that would prevent them from being able to touch a potential consort to discover if they were meant to be together, but I'd forgotten about them after we had learned we were destined to mate.

I was so deep in my thoughts that I missed Liam's mumbled reply, but unfortunately, I caught every bit of what Jareth had to say next.

"I understand that Barbra was special to you, but the pain of her rejection should have lessened enough for you to finally be willing to listen to what we've been trying to tell you for half a millennium. You let emotion cloud your judgment and put her on a damn pedestal for far too long, brother. Your refusal to see that woman for what she really was almost cost you your only chance at happiness."

I felt as though I'd been stabbed in the chest. What I'd just heard should be impossible. Daywalkers couldn't feel desire

for anyone except the person they were destined to spend an eternity with. They only had one consort out there, and fate made it damn clear who that person was. There was no mistaking the bond...but apparently, daywalkers could wish they were paired with someone else. And I had the unfortunate luck of being fated to spend my life with a man who'd fallen for another woman and pined for her for hundreds of years.

Although we'd just met and didn't really know each other, I had expected that the explosive chemistry between us would lead to an emotional bond that would develop over time. But the coupling of our bodies had been nothing more than biology for Liam. What I'd thought of as lovemaking had just been sex to him. I couldn't help but wonder if he'd been thinking of her the entire time, wishing that fate had paired them together instead of us.

The mental anguish was more than I could bear. Whirling around, I raced back into the kitchen, ignoring the cookie I accidentally dropped on the floor, and set the plate I'd been carrying onto the counter. Then I dashed over to the back door. I opened it as quietly as I could, not even bothering to close it as I hurried outside. I needed to get as far away from Liam as I could. And quickly.

Once I was safely away, I'd call Everleigh. I had no doubt that she'd come for me, and she could get me out of here in the blink of an eye. I didn't know what I'd do then, but I couldn't possibly stay with Liam after what I'd just heard. I refused to come in second place to a ghost for the rest of my life.



“I ’m not going to deny that you were right about Barbra,” I grumbled as I dropped onto the sofa. My eyes were glued to the door where my consort had disappeared, waiting for her to return. Even these few minutes without her made me ache to have her in my arms. “But I am going to look on the bright side of things. At least she saved me the ups and downs of wondering for centuries. I can be grateful to my friend, who is now just a fond childhood memory.”

“Are you going to tell Amaia?”

I looked at my brother and frowned. “Of course. There will be no secrets between us.”

Jareth nodded. “Good.”

“Now that I have Amaia, I feel even more lucky because what I feel for her could never be compared. I already love her more than I thought possible. She’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me, consort or not.”

He snorted a laugh and grinned. “I’m happy for you, brother. But a word of advice. Don’t tell her that today, or you’ll spend eternity trying to top it every Christmas.”

I rolled my eyes, and he laughed, glancing toward the doorway I’d gone back to staring at.

The contentment I felt when Amaia was near had begun to dissipate, and it made me wary. “I think I’ll go check on my mate and make sure she hasn’t lost her way. I haven’t given her a tour of the house yet.”

Jareth followed me from the room, and when we entered the kitchen, I felt something crunch under my foot and looked down to see that I'd stepped on a gingerbread cookie. "What the hell?" I grunted as I glanced around for clues as to what had happened. There was a plate of food on the counter, undoubtedly the one she'd made up for my brother. She must have dropped the cookie when she returned to the kitchen, but I didn't understand why she hadn't brought the snack into the den.

Unless...*shit*. Was it possible she'd come to the room while Jareth and I had been discussing Barbra? If she'd only heard part of the conversation, I could easily see how she would misinterpret what we'd said.

"Do you think she heard..." Jareth trailed off, but it was clear he'd come to the same conclusion.

The back door slammed open with a gust of air, making me realize that it hadn't been shut. I sprinted to the entrance and out into the multi-acre backyard.

The gate in the fence that opened to the side of the house was also swinging in the growing wind. A snowstorm was headed our way. I'd been looking forward to being confined to the house with my consort for a few days after completing our bond.

Right now, though, Amaia was still human, so this weather could make her sick. The miracles of modern medicine meant she would most certainly recover, but having lived as long as I had, I couldn't help picturing my sweet girl as she would have been a centuries ago, lying in bed, sick and dying. The thought sent me sprinting once again. I ran along the side of the house until I reached the front and glanced around the circular drive, hoping to see her waiting or, better yet, heading back to me.

This relationship was still new, so I couldn't blame her for not waiting around for an explanation, though I desperately wished she had. When I found her, I wasn't going to wait any longer to make her mine forever. All of this could have been cleared up immediately if I'd taken that step before tonight. We'd have the ability to share a mind once our bond was



complete, and she'd never need to doubt my feelings for her again.

"Where do you think she went?" Jareth asked as he jogged up next to me.

"My best guess is Everleigh." I squinted up at the moonlit sky as fat flakes of snow began to fall. "But I'm not sure she had her phone. Which means she's out in this weather, running from me, trying to find a place to call her sister."

Jareth sighed as the wind whipped the snow into our faces. Our blood ran colder than most, so this weather didn't affect us unless we had very prolonged exposure with very little clothing. But that didn't mean the sensation was pleasant.

"I'm going to send help, then go to Marshall and Everleigh. I'll explain what happened so he doesn't kick your ass. Then they can look out for her and let you know when she contacts them. If she had her cell and Everleigh already came for her, then I'll make sure she stays put until you can get there to explain."

"Thank you," I mumbled before taking off down the long driveway, keeping my eyes peeled for any sign of my dark-haired, violet-eyed beauty.

Stephan and Braedan popped in a minute later, immediately keeping pace with me. "When we get to the road, we'll each take a direction," Stephan informed me. "Ren is on an assignment, but Cian and his brothers are at Kieran's for the holiday. They offered to help if we don't find her soon."

I nodded, grateful that I came from such a robust family. Cian and his two siblings were the sons of my father's youngest brother.

Braedan handed me a belt that held a sheath with a stake and three little pouches, one filled with garlic, another with a cross, and the last held a vial of holy water. I had tried not to think about her encountering any nightwalkers, but Braeden thought rationally, and I gave him a grim smile in thanks. Armed, we jogged to the main road, and I went straight, while the other two split in opposite directions.

Despite our connection not being fully in place, I hoped I could get a sense of her nearness just through the bond of being mates. I'd realized shortly after finding out Amaia was gone that something in me had known. I'd sensed she wasn't there anymore, just as I did when she was near.

Suddenly, Braeden appeared in front of me, bringing me to a skidding halt so I wouldn't bowl right into him. "Let's go," he said right before he took my arm and teleported.

We landed in the dimly lit parking lot of a twenty-four-hour convenience store. I was about to ask Braeden what the hell he'd brought me here for when, through the heavily falling snow, I barely spotted Stephan darting around the side of the building into an alley. He was followed closely by Ren and Jareth, so I took off after them.

*What's going on?* I asked my brothers.

Ren answered, *We found her. She came in to use the phone and walked right into a fucking nest.*

Fuck. My legs worked harder as I darted around the corner of the building.

*There's another girl,* Jareth added. *Amaia managed to free her before escaping, but the nightwalkers are just about to close in on them.*

When I exited the alley into the area behind the store, I saw Stephan and my brothers engaged in a fight. Braeden ran into the fray to help. I swept my eyes over the scene until they landed on my beautiful consort. Amaia was huddled between two dumpsters with a terrified girl hiding behind her. Any time a nightwalker came close, she flicked droplets of holy water at them. *That's my girl.*

Knowing she was as safe as she could be for the moment, I shifted my focus to the fight. I went after the leech closest to the girls, and when the vampire jerked out of the path of the projected poison, she stumbled toward me. Then I grabbed her shoulder, spun her around, and shoved my stake into her heart. She burst into flames, and I didn't wait around to see her ashes blow away with the snowy wind.

Another vampire had jumped onto Braeden's back and was trying to twist his neck. I started toward him, jabbing my stake into a nightwalker who lunged at me along the way. Braeden saw me coming, and I tossed him the small wooden cross from my belt. He caught it and pulled out his own before pressing them against the nightwalker's forearms. He screamed in agony as the crosses burned and charred his skin.

He loosened his hold on Braeden, who was then able to throw him off, making sure to aim my way. The evil bastard hit the ground and rolled, using the momentum to get back on his feet. Except, he stood up directly in front of me. With a smirk, I thrust the stake in an upward motion, going under his ribs and into his heart.

I fought off two more nightwalkers and glanced around for another threat. But Ren plunged his stake into the last one that I could see. After the pop and flicker of flames, we waited for any to come out of hiding, but it seemed we'd destroyed them all.

Stephan, Braedan, and Rex walked into a huddle to talk while Jareth and I approached the frightened consorts.

"Amaia, my darling," I said as I dropped to my knees and pulled her into my arms, burying my face in her soft, dark hair. "Don't ever scare me like that again."

"Wha-a-a-...um...what the heck just happened?" a shocked and horrified voice stammered from behind Amaia.

I stood and moved out of the way, taking comfort in the fact that Amaia didn't try to break from my hold. Instead, she held me tighter. Sighing, I tried to calm myself with the feel of her body reminding me that she was unharmed and safe. She was shaking a little, so I lifted my head and tucked her into me, resting my cheek on her crown and rubbing soothing circles on her back.

Jareth had hesitantly approached the other woman, and he crouched down to be at her eye level. "What is your name?"

"Why would I tell you?" she snapped suspiciously.

Keeping his voice gentle, he responded, “Because we’re here to help, and I don’t want to call you ‘miss.’ So, let’s start again. I’m Jareth, and you are?”

She chewed over her next move for half a minute before answering, “Narkissa.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Narkissa. In answer to your first question, those were nightwalkers, or evil vampires intent on destroying you,” he explained.

“What? Are you crazy? Vampires don’t exist! And why would they want me? I’m nobody!”

My brother shook his head. “You are everything to someone.” Then he gave her a very brief overview of her destiny as a consort. Narkissa’s eyes had gone wide and as round as saucers, but they were plagued with disbelief.

“Even if vampires are real, that’s insane. Fate can’t just... just...pick someone for me!”

I sighed, not envying Jareth in the least. The consorts we saved had all kinds of different reactions to the truth, but the most frustrating were the ones who couldn’t accept it. A lot of times, they refused the council’s help, went off on their own, and ended up dead as a result.

“There’s a place we can go—”

Narkissa snorted and began to struggle to her feet in the small space between the dumpsters. “I’m not going anywhere with you. You’re obviously insane, and your hotness doesn’t quite beat out the crazy meter.”

Jareth rolled his eyes, and I stifled a laugh, earning myself a glare that promised retribution.

There was nothing for Narkissa to grip, so her hands slipped, and she landed on her ass again. Jareth growled in frustration and leaned in, grabbing her arms and hauling her to her feet.

The air around us suddenly thickened, and Jareth’s shocked expression told me all I needed to know. Narkissa’s mouth opened, and she stared at my brother, clearly in much

the same state. But when Jareth leaned in, she snapped out of the trance and landed a pretty impressive right hook into my brother's jaw.

*Ouch*, I thought.

*Shut it*, Jareth responded as he bent over holding his jaw and trying to catch his breath. *Damn, I think she broke it.*

After several minutes, he straightened and moved his jaw around, his accelerated healing having already mended the bone. His gaze landed on the spot where his fated consort had been standing, and when he saw it empty, he turned and swept his eyes all around.

“Looking for your consort?” I drawled with a sly grin. “She went that way.” I jerked my chin in the direction of the alley. While he'd been nursing his jaw, I'd heard a car door slam, the engine turn over, and the wheels burn rubber as the vehicle took off.

“Fucking hell.” Jareth would have killed me with his eyes if it were possible, but I just smiled as he jogged in the direction I'd indicated.

“Good luck, brother. I hope she leads you on a merry chase.”



I'd been lucky in the years since Kieran, Athan, and Stephan had first rescued me from vampires. The council had prepared me for the worst-case scenario of being attacked by them again when there wasn't a daywalker around to save me, but I'd never needed to use the holy water they'd given me until now. There had only been one close call where Marshall had to save me, and the nightwalker hadn't even had the chance to get close before my brother-in-law turned him to ashes.

Holy water could only do so much, though, and I'd been woefully unprepared to face off against an entire nest of the evil leeches. If Liam and his relatives hadn't appeared when they had, Narkissa and I would've been dead. The past ten minutes had been the scariest of my life, and coupled with the emotional upheaval that had sent me running in the first place, I was wrecked both physically and mentally. But once the adrenaline rush drained away, I realized I was clinging to Liam as though he was my lifeline. Although I had a deep-seated urge to stay right where I was—the bond between us was already strong—I stepped out of his embrace and put space between us.

“Thank you for saving me.” A tear slid down my cheek as I whispered, “Could you please reach out mentally to Marshall or Everleigh and ask them to come get me?”

I flinched when Liam raised his hand to wipe a tear away, and he looked devastated by my rejection. I hated the idea of hurting him, but I couldn't destroy myself just to make him

happy. And after what I'd gone through with my parents growing up, I knew that staying with a man who pined for another woman would wreck me. Even though I'd never be able to physically desire anybody else, I'd be better off alone than spending eternity coming in second place with the man who had already become the center of my world. The pain would be too much to bear.

"Amaia, please don't cry," he pleaded as he dropped his arm to his side, his hand curling into a fist. "There's been a horrible misunderstanding."

I crossed my arms over my chest, fighting against the urge to throw myself at him. "No, the misunderstanding happened last night when we touched. Now my eyes have been opened to the truth, and I realize how delusional I was for thinking that my happily ever after was guaranteed just because I finally found you."

"If you're delusional, then so am I. The past day has been the best in my life, and it kills me to know you're not looking forward to spending an eternity with me the same way I am with you. But you need to know, you'll get everything you've ever wanted out of this life if it's the last thing I do," he vowed, determination gleaming in his bright blue eyes. "When I told you that it was my privilege to dote on you, I wasn't referring to only material things. I want to make all your dreams come true, Amaia."

"But only because fate stuck you with me," I cried, tears starting to cascade down my cheeks in earnest.

"It's as I suspected. You overheard part of my conversation with Jareth." I didn't understand why, but he seemed thrilled by the fact that I'd found out about the woman he'd put on a pedestal so long ago. "But you missed the most important part."

I quirked a brow and muttered, "I highly doubt I failed to hear anything that matters."

"I beg to differ, my darling." The arrogant man dared to flash a smug grin at me, and my palm itched to slap it right off his gorgeous face. "You never would have run if you heard me



explain to my brother how it's impossible to compare what I feel for you to—”

“Don't you dare,” I hissed, cutting him off since the last thing I wanted was for him to try to explain to me how what he felt for me meant more to him because of the consort bond. “I heard enough to learn that you loved someone else before me. That I'm your second choice. To wonder if you pictured another woman while we had sex.”

“Never.” He took a step back as though my accusation had rocked him to his core. “I can't even wrap my brain around the idea of fucking someone else, let alone fantasizing about another woman while I have you beneath me. You're the only woman I've ever desired.”

“Well, whoop dee doo. I guess that's one thing I can be grateful for,” I drawled, sarcasm thick in my tone. “I hope you can forgive me, but I refuse to be your consolation prize just because I can get your dick hard.”

“I grew up with Barbra and cared for her as a friend, but my feelings were entirely platonic. You already know that my body didn't desire her and never would have, even if we'd touched.” He tapped his index finger against his temple. “But my brain never did either. She was my friend and nothing more.”

A kernel of hope sprung to life deep inside me, but none of what he was saying made any sense. “If she was just your friend, why did you think she was destined to be your consort?”

“I'm not sure I can explain this very well, but I'd do literally anything to get you to understand how much you mean to me.” Liam heaved a deep breath and scrubbed his palms down his face. “When I was a young boy, I grew close to Thaddeus, one of my great-great-uncles. I got my fascination with whiskey from him. He had a distillery set up in a shack on his property, and I'd spend hours on end watching him fiddle with his recipe. But when I was sixteen, Thaddeus decided that he couldn't face another century without finding the other half of his soul.”

Although the story he was sharing with me dated back five hundred years, I gasped and pressed my fingers against my lips. I knew how this part was going to end even though it boggled my mind since killing a daywalker was nearly impossible.

Liam nodded and flashed me a sad smile, “As you already guessed, he killed himself. I’m not sure how he got his hands on one since they weren’t in use much back then, but during a long weekend while I was away on holiday with my parents, he installed a guillotine in his home. Then he set fire to the place and beheaded himself while the flames closed in on him. When I came to visit the next day, the shack with his distillery was the only thing left standing on his property. I was devastated and didn’t have anything else to remember him by, so my parents moved it to our home.”

After all the time that had passed, I could still hear the pain of loss in his tone. “I’m so sorry.”

“It was a long time ago.” He shook his head, most likely trying to shake loose his sad memories. “But his death is a large part of why I was so fixated on the possibility of Barbra being my destined consort. She was human and unaware of vampires, so she thought my melancholy was strictly due to the loss of a beloved family member. As my friend, she tried to pull me out of the dark place I’d retreated to, but it wasn’t until almost a full year later when the daywalker who lived on the other side of her home found his consort that I shook off my grief.”

Transfixed by his story, I took a tentative step forward.

“All of the fated pairings I’d seen before had resulted in romantic love, but their connection was one of devoted and committed friends.” He closed the small gap that remained between us. “Terrified of the possibility that my fate would be the same as Thaddeus, I grabbed on to the idea of having the same kind of bond with Barbra and refused to let go. With the style of clothes women wore back then, I’d never seen her neck but was convinced she must have the consort marking. Rumors swirled around about an inappropriate dalliance with a suitor when she was sixteen, but I ignored them. I refused to

listen to reason and bided my time until she turned eighteen, certain that I would explain daywalkers to her, and then I'd be safely bonded. No need to worry about feeling as though my only option was to follow in Thaddeus's footsteps except for making whiskey."

Remembering what Jareth had said about her rejecting him, I asked, "But it didn't turn out that way?"

"Not even close." His chuckle held no humor. "Barbra ran screaming from me as though I was the very devil, and I was too shocked to chase after her. Nothing had gone as I expected, and when she died a dozen years later, I assumed that she took my chance at being safe from the darkness that plagued Thaddeus with her. But then you stumbled into my arms and blew all of my ill-conceived notions out of the water."

I clutched his biceps, butterflies starting to swirl in my belly. "You really, truly never felt anything more than friendship for her?"

"I did not." He flashed me a sheepish grin. "And if you'd stuck around to eavesdrop a little longer, you would have heard me tell Jareth that she's nothing more than a fond childhood memory. You have nothing to fear in regards to Barbra or any other woman. It took no time at all for me to realize that our bond would be much deeper than friendship. Consort or not, you're the only one for me. I love you, Amaia."

"I love you, too." When I ran from his home, I'd been convinced that nothing he could say would fix the hole in my heart. "I'm so sorry I misunderstood the situation and didn't stick around to talk to you about what I'd heard. It won't happen again."

"It's not as though I have room to judge you for the blunder, my darling. I've stubbornly held on to my misconception for five hundred years, after all." He pulled me close, wrapping his arms around my body before teleporting us to his family room. "My brothers and cousins are going to taunt me over my bullheadedness for centuries to come, and it

doesn't bother me even a little bit. I've never been happier to be wrong about something."



A maia glanced around the family room, and her face lit up. She pulled out of my arms, and I reluctantly let her go because she was clearly excited about something.

“Your presents!” she exclaimed as she pointed at the packages wrapped in bright colors stacked on the sofa. Not wanting to put a damper on her mood or seem ungrateful, I mentally sighed at being forced to wait a little longer for what I really wanted for Christmas.

In the blink of an eye, our bodies—soaked from the heavily falling snow—were clean and dry. Our wet clothes disappeared and were replaced with fresh ones. Festive red silk pajama pants for me and—I grinned salaciously when Amaia looked down at her outfit—a short, matching silk robe for her. Underneath was one of the gifts I’d given her that morning. A pair of barely-there, cream lacy panties under a wide band of cream silk that circled her hips and tied in the back right above her sexy ass. The top was the same thing, a silk sash that barely contained her gorgeous breasts, except the bow was in the front.

I couldn’t wait to unwrap her. *Best. Present. Ever.*

Amaia rolled her eyes when she peeked inside the robe, but her lips curved a bit, and crimson spots loomed on her cheeks. “Come and open your gifts,” she said breathlessly. A wicked smile slid across my face, and Amaia’s adorable blush deepened. “These,” she giggled, gesturing to the stack again.

“Whatever you want, darling.” With a flick of my hand, a fire roared to life in the fireplace, and I sat on the couch, patting the spot next to me. She narrowed her eyes and perched on the other end. I couldn’t help grinning at her perceptiveness. If she’d come close enough, I would have pounced and made her forget about everything but hunger for the pleasure only I could give her.

After opening the first box, I found myself getting into the spirit. Jareth had probably helped her by answering questions about my likes and dislikes, but with each present, it was obvious to me that Amaia had specifically picked it out. Her thoughtfulness made my heart swell with love for her.

When I’d opened the final gift on the couch, I held my hand out to my consort, urging her to come to me. She did so without hesitation, and I practically beamed at her. Lacing our fingers together, I tugged her down into my lap. I gave her a deep kiss, showing my gratitude, but also pouring all of my love into her. How the fuck did I ever get so lucky?

“I saved the best for last,” I murmured against her lips before we parted. “Am I going to get what I want most when I unwrap you, darling?”

Her eyes shined, and she giggled. “If you’re hoping your final present is to complete our claiming, then you must have been a very good boy this year.”

Before Amaia even knew what was happening, I stood with her in my arms and teleported us to our bedroom. I gently dropped her feet to the floor, and Amaia gasped as she looked around.

When I’d changed our clothes, I’d done a little redecorating in preparation for the claiming ceremony. The room was lit by dozens of white candles scattered about, barely illuminating the dark blue walls. I’d switched out the bed for an antique canopy—it fit our home, which looked more like a castle, so I decided to keep it. Besides, every time we saw the bed, it would be a reminder that we belonged solely to one another, forever.

The top of the bed was draped with dark blue silk that fell to the ground, creating a curtain on every side. The coverlet matched the canopy, but the sheets were a pristine white, and though she couldn't see them yet, soft blue ties were attached to the headboard.

"It's beautiful." Her voice was filled with wonder, and I turned her toward me before cupping her face. I kissed her tenderly, even as I fought the desire to rip off her panties and bury myself deep inside her tight pussy until she was screaming my name.

*Patience, Liam. You've waited almost five and a half centuries. You can last a little longer, draw this out, savor every moment.* The mental lecture helped a little.

I let Amaia up for air after a minute, then guided her by the hand to the chair tucked under a dressing table. "We need to talk about what's going to happen next," I told her softly as I sat and brought her down onto my lap.

My sweet consort blushed bright red and looked up at me through her lashes. "Um...Everleigh already explained it."

If I didn't know that Marshall would burn my limbs off, I would have sent Amaia's sister flowers and diamonds for preparing my gorgeous mate. "You know what to say?"

Amaia nodded shyly. "Good. I'm not sure I would have had the strength to go through it all with you without stripping you right here and fucking you on the carpet." I buried my face in the crook of her neck, inhaling slowly, trying to bolster my control again.

"We'll save that to try some other time," she teased, making me laugh. "Right now, I want you to make me yours for eternity."

"I will always give you anything you ask for that is within my power to do," I vowed as I brought my head up and stared into her violet eyes.

"Then what are you waiting for, Liam?" Amaia climbed off my lap and stood between my legs, facing me. With a



sultry smile, she pulled the tie to her robe deliberately, and maddeningly, slow. “Unwrap your present.”

The knot holding the sides together dissolved, and as it fell, her robe parted. My breath caught in my throat as I ogled the sliver of skin and cream silk peeking from the opening. Then she shrugged the wrap off her shoulders, and it fell to the ground, leaving her in the mouth-watering lingerie.

I wrapped my hands around her torso, my thumbs resting just below the roundness of her breasts that spilled out the bottom of the sash. It only partially covered the mounds, leaving a lot of skin exposed above and below. I teased the sensitive flesh with my thumbs, licking my lips when her nipples hardened and poked into the tightly bound fabric. Leaning forward, I sucked over one peak, leaving a wet spot on her top, and one in my pants when she moaned and shuddered.

My cock was so hard it hurt, but I didn't rush. I gave the other side the same treatment, but my patience was nearly at its end. So when she whimpered and thrust her chest forward, I shot to my feet, sweeping her into my arms. Then I stalked to the bed and laid her in the very center, taking a few seconds just to admire the sight.

“You are so fucking beautiful,” I whispered in awe as I climbed on the bed. Moving over her and bending down onto all fours, I caged her in with my fists pressed into the mattress. “All in silky white, like a virgin bride on her wedding night. If I hadn't already popped your cherry, I would have been tempted to hang the sheet out the window like they did in my early days. Proof that the wife now belonged to her husband.”

“Wife?” Amaia squeaked.

I laughed at her shocked but hopeful expression. “Did you think that ring was only symbolic of our vampiric bond?” She shrugged, her cheeks once again sprinkled with pink. “I'm going to bind you to me in every way possible, my darling. Claiming you, marking you, marrying you, and putting cute little Amaias in this sexy stomach.”

“What if I want little Liams?” she asked with a cheeky smile.

“I’ll keep trying until we have plenty of both,” I told her with a wink. “Starting tonight, I’m going to fill you with my come every chance I get until you’re breeding.”

“Okay,” she breathed. Her eyes glistened, and I frowned at the gathering moisture.

“Is something wrong with that plan? Because—”

“No!” Amaia cupped my cheeks and smiled tenderly. “They’re happy tears. I-I had no idea I could ever be this happy.”

I sighed with relief and matched her expression. “Neither did I, my love. But it’s about to get even better.”

Sitting back on my heels, I clenched my jaw against the onslaught of desire as I pulled the ends of the bow on her top and released her gorgeous breasts. “So fucking gorgeous.” I cupped the ample globes and rubbed my thumbs over the sensitive tips. Amaia moaned and pressed her chest deeper into my hands.

I was fast approaching the end of my rope, and ancient magic swirled around the room, fluttering the curtain and making the flames on the candles flicker. Linking our fingers, I pulled her up into a sitting position and kissed her deeply. When I ended it, I released one hand and tipped her chin with a finger so her head was nearly all the way back, and she was looking directly into my eyes.

“Amaia Greene, do you accept my claim on you?”

Her violet eyes were bright with love when she answered, “Yes, Liam Bancroft. I accept your claim on me, body, heart, and soul.”

I squeezed my eyelids shut for a moment, savoring her words as my heart overflowed with love and gratitude. Amaia was more than I could have ever dreamed of as a mate for me, and she was giving herself to me forever.

Once again staring into her purple orbs, I moved forward in the ceremony. “You’re prepared to be mine from now until the end of time?”

“And beyond, my love,” she said softly, her voice trembling as she cupped one of my cheeks with her palm.

My arousal was eating away at me, and as Amaia pledged herself, I scented hers growing, and it nearly snapped my restraint. However, I was a tiny bit hesitant about what came next, I didn’t know how far Everleigh had gone in her explanation.

Before I could voice my concern, Amaia nodded reassuringly. “Keep going. I’m ready.”

The mating instinct took over, and the need to possess, to dominate my sweet consort consumed me. “To cement our mating bond, you must trust me unequivocally. Are you prepared to demonstrate the depth of your faith in me?” My tone was threaded with steel. If she agreed to this last demand, she would be at my mercy while I was ruled by my base urges, a wild and animalistic part of me that needed to bite, to mark, to fuck, to own. To fully claim Amaia.

“You are all I will ever want, Liam. Every part of you,” she replied, her gaze sincere and...excited. “Take what you need from me. My faith in you is unshakeable.”

“Fuck,” I grunted as the last shreds of my sanity snapped. “Mine.”

I took her mouth in a savage kiss, plundering and tasting as I guided her back down to the mattress. Gliding my hands down her arms, I circled her wrists and slowly raised them over her head.

Tearing myself from her lips, I panted from the effort to keep from coming right that second. Fuck, what this woman did to me. But she would come many times before I filled her with my seed.

At my command, the soft blue ties wound their way around her hands until she was securely shackled to the headboard.

My eyes swept over her curvy body, and I growled when I saw the barrier still covering her pussy. With one strong yank, I ripped away the lacy gusset of her panties. “Perfect,” I rumbled. “So pink and wet.” I drew a finger up her slit, and it came away dripping with her nectar. “Is this for me?” I asked before sucking the digit clean. I knew she couldn’t desire another, but for some reason, I was still desperate to hear her say the words.

“Yesss,” she moaned when I dipped my finger into her channel, testing how tight she was. “All for you. Only you.”

“Damn straight,” I grunted. I slid my hands beneath her and untied the bow to the sash at her hips, tossing it away. Gliding underneath her again, I palmed her ass cheeks and squeezed them while playing at the tight hole in the back with the tip of my finger.

Amaia gasped and tensed, but I sensed curiosity. “Another time, perhaps,” I told her while my hands traveled down her shapely legs and grasped her ankles. Raising them up, I kissed each one before pushing them forward until her feet were nearly at her head. The position offered up her pussy to me on a platter. I scooted my knees under her back to help support her and lift her center even more. Leaning forward, I parted her lips with my thumbs and licked up her slit from bottom to top.

“You taste so fucking good,” I groaned. The flavor burst on my tongue and sent shockwaves of pleasure straight to my cock. Diving in, I devoured her sex like a starving man and grunted in approval when she began thrusting up her hips, begging for more while she cried out in ecstasy.

“Yes! Yes! Please, Liam! I need to come!”

Feeling indulgent, I sucked hard on her clit as I shoved two fingers into her channel. Amaia screamed as she shattered, and my cock threatened to explode. I moved back and lowered her legs to the bed, then I straddled her and shuffled up until I could tease her lips with the tip of my engorged shaft.

“Open,” I demanded.

She did it immediately, and I groaned at the sensation of her warm, wet mouth wrapped around my dick.

“Suck it, Amaia,” I ordered. “Hard.” Again, she obeyed, and I groaned at the intense pleasure. I bent forward and grabbed the headboard, holding on for leverage as I began to thrust in and out of her mouth. “That’s it, darling. Harder, baby. Oh, fuck, yeah.” I was close, so close. “Swallow it, Amaia. Fuuuuck!” I shouted when her throat closed around me, massaging the tip as she swallowed. She gagged a little, but I was too far gone. I powered in and out a few more times before warning her, “I’m going to come down your throat, darling. Keep swallowing until you’ve milked every drop.”

Amaia nodded as much as she could with my cock filling her mouth. I thrust twice more before my climax hit me like a ton of bricks, and my dick burst, sending jets of come straight down her throat. “Oh, yeah, Amaia. Fuck! Keep swallowing. Fuck! Fuck!”

When I was empty—though still hard as a fucking baseball bat—I withdrew. Amaia gasped, trying to catch her breath, while I also panted, feeling a little dizzy.

My body didn’t want time to recover, however. After spilling so much seed, I was a little shocked to see my dick start leaking again while I watched my consort’s breasts bounce with each choppy breath.

Gnawing hunger roared to life, and I was desperate to finish this. My teeth ached with the need to sink into her neck, my tongue tingled with the thought of tasting her blood, and my cock throbbed with the memory of her pussy gripping it tight.

I quickly flipped around and scooped up her legs, bringing them toward me. Then I opened them so I was situated between, pushing them into the position they’d been when I was eating her pussy—with her ankles near her ears. It was hot as fuck to see her center like this as I eased inside. It opened her up so I could easily watch my cock disappear into her channel. “Fuck! You’re tight as hell in this position,” I grunted. Her muscles ripped as she clenched, and stars danced

in front of my eyes. “Oh, yeah, baby. Fuck, that feels so good. Fuck, yes! Fuck!”

Amaia’s body was shaking, and she cried out every time I sank in to the hilt. “Liam! Yes! Yes! Oh, Oh! Yes!” Then she bucked up as I came down, slamming us together and ripping shouts from both our mouths. “Harder, Liam, please! I need more. Faster—oh, yes! Yes!”

My mind officially blew to smithereens when she met my thrust like that. She didn’t have to beg for more because I was no longer in control, and my body was bound and determined to fuck Amaia like a madman. I grabbed her hips and pulled her even farther forward, then pounded into her over and over. My balls slapped her clit with each slam, and her cries became screams. The bed banged into the wall with my vampiric strength, creating a hole the shape of the headboard in it.

My spine began to tingle, and my balls drew up. I was close. I glided one of my hands around to her thigh and under where we were connected, quickly finding her little pleasure button. With one flick, Amaia screamed my name as she fell into another mind-blowing climax. Except, she had no idea what mind-blowing truly meant, but I was about to show her.

She cried out in protest when I pulled out. “Patience, darling. I promise, I’m not nearly done with you.” I pushed her legs down and flipped around, lying on top of her, between her thighs. Once again, I drove deep into her womb, bottoming out and groaning at the snug fit. Her ankles locked around my waist as I picked up my speed again.

I urged her up again, driving her closer to another orgasm, but before she reached it, I put my lips to her ear. “Are you ready, sweet consort? To be mine completely? To feel the greatest pleasure you will ever know?”

“More than ready,” she whimpered. “I need you, Liam. Make me yours for all eternity.”

On my next thrust, I moved my mouth to her neck and sank my fangs into the little round birthmarks.

The second her blood hit my tongue, rapture overtook my body, and it was incredible. But my mind immediately focused on Amaia. My father had warned me that the change would give my consort not only pleasure but also incredible pain, and I hated knowing I was the cause of it.

Tears streamed down Amaia's cheeks, and the only thing I could think was to try to drown out the pain with its opposite. My cock swelled, and I took deep pulls of blood as I plunged in and out of her slick, tight pussy. I hoped it would help distract her from the agony of her body as each molecule rearranged so that her chemical makeup went from human to immortal.

Finally, I felt her tension shift, tightening with need as she squeezed her inner muscles, trying to milk my cock for another orgasm. I gladly sent her over the edge, grateful she was no longer in pain.

While she was still in the throes of her climax, I removed my fangs from her neck and licked the wound to seal it. Then I quickly untied her and cradled her head with one hand, bringing her mouth to the place on my chest where my heart beat only for her. "Drink, my darling," I urged. "Then we'll be one, forever."

Amaia looked up at me with violet pools glazed in passion. She ran her tongue over her gums, and though I knew she was aware that this would happen, I wasn't surprised to see her a little stunned. It was a big change and would likely take some getting used to.

I kissed her softly before cuddling her closer and guiding her mouth back to my chest. "Drink."

She stared at me, locking our gazes as she struck. With the first tug of her fangs, I finally let myself go. And it was beyond anything that I could have ever imagined. No words could describe the overwhelming love I felt for Amaia or the complete ecstasy, the utter bliss, of the moment.

It was a good thing Amaia and I were sealed together for eternity because no way would I ever be able to live without her again.

Much later, when we were snuggled together, our breathing steady, our hearts beating at a regular rhythm, I kissed her forehead and murmured, “Are you alright? I hope the pain wasn’t too much.”

She tipped her head back and smiled at me. “There is no pain I wouldn’t have endured to be your forever, Liam.”

Amaia was so very perfect for me. My true soul mate. “I love you entirely, my darling.”

“I love you, too.”

Then we drifted to sleep, content and...whole.



# EPILOGUE

I was turned to the side and staring at my reflection in the mirror when Liam came striding into my walk-in closet, most likely to see what was taking me so long. Gesturing toward my stomach, where my pants were fastened with the help of a hair tie, I explained, “I think it’s past time for me to admit that I need to start wearing maternity clothes.”

Liam moved behind me, switching my pants to the kind with an elastic band at the top before wrapping his arms around my body to place his hands over my baby bump. “Our little banana is growing.”

Liam had jumped into the dad-to-be role with both feet, reading several different pregnancy books and signing up for a couple of newsletters about what to expect each week. One of them equated the size of the baby with a vegetable or fruit each week, and I found it so freaking adorable how he switched the nickname he used as the baby grew.

I twisted my head around to smile up at him. “It might also have something to do with my voracious appetite lately.” I joked since the only weight I would ever gain was from the baby.

I’d been horribly nauseous for the first few months of my pregnancy, but I’d more than made up for it over the past six weeks by eating pretty much anything and everything I could get my hands on. Which was a lot since I was a daywalker who could make whatever I was craving magically appear. Not to mention that Liam had been serious about spoiling me, and

his tendency to pamper me went into overdrive when I got pregnant. If he so much as caught a whiff of a craving through our bond, he used his magic to get it for me before I realized what I even wanted.

Liam brushed his lips over my mating mark, sending a shiver down my spine before he murmured, “You’ll never hear me complain about your appetite.”

My shiver turned into goose bumps at his sensual tone. “I was talking about food, not sex.”

“Maybe we should combine the two when we get back,” he suggested, his hand dipping lower to cup my core. “I bet you’d taste even more delicious with a touch of whipped cream painted over your pretty little pussy.”

I licked my lips as I nodded. “So would your thick cock.”

“It sounds as though we have a plan for later.” He turned me in his arms and claimed my mouth in a deep but quick kiss. “Ready for our appointment?”

“Yup.” My lips curved into a grin as I thought about what was in store for us today.

Sliding his palm against mine, he gripped my hand as we teleported to my obstetrician’s office. When I’d first learned about the existence of vampires and the council filled me in on the details of their day-to-day lives, I hadn’t been surprised at the number who chose to become doctors. The risk of being exposed by humans in the medical field was too high, and specialists were notorious for their limited hours and schedules. Trying to convince a human doctor to see you in the middle of the night would’ve been difficult, to say the least.

But there were no such problems with a vampire doctor. Plus, they understood all the ins and outs of our species. For example, since daywalkers were notoriously possessive of their consorts, only female doctors went into the OB/GYN field. Which was a damn good thing because Liam had enough trouble when Dr. Wright had to do pelvic exams. I didn’t want to imagine how he’d react if she was a male daywalker—or even worse, an unmated one.

We popped straight into the exam room—another handy advantage to being a daywalker, the ability to telepathically communicate with the nurse and teleport to the office when they were ready to see us. After the nurse checked my weight and other vitals, Dr. Wright joined us. “Are you ready to see your baby today, Mommy and Daddy?”

“Absolutely,” we replied in unison, making me giggle.

After I leaned back on the exam table, Liam rolled the stretchy band at the top of my pants down to my hip bones. Then he settled in place at my side and laced his fingers through mine.

“This is going to feel a little cold,” Dr. Wright warned before squeezing some gel onto my belly.

I barely noticed since all of my attention was on the monitor to my left. I didn’t want to miss even a second of the ultrasound. Liam and I stared in awe as our baby’s image appeared, and the room was silent until Dr. Wright asked, “Would you like to know the sex?”

Although I sensed Liam’s answer through our bond, my gaze darted toward him to see what he wanted to do. The excitement in his bright blue eyes as they stayed locked on the screen confirmed it. “Yes, please.”

Dr. Wright tapped her finger against the monitor. “You’re having a boy, and he’s definitely not shy about showing off the goods.”

“We’re having a boy,” Liam murmured in a raspy tone.

I squeezed his hand, happy tears filling my eyes. “And with the Bancroft genes, I’m sure he’ll have his daddy’s dark hair and bright blue eyes.”

Dr. Wright scooted off her chair and handed me a tissue. “You’ll probably want to wipe off while I give you two some privacy. I’ll see you again in one month, and then we’ll move to every two weeks.”

Liam waited until she left the exam room, and then he rounded the table and pressed a kiss against my belly. “I’ll always be happy with whatever we get, but I have to admit

that I love the idea of a mini-you running around our house sometime in the future.”

“It’s bound to happen at some point,” I reassured him with a watery smile. “We have all the time in the world, and with as active as our sex life is, you’re bound to get me pregnant again before too long.”

# EPILOGUE

“Happy anniversary, darling,” I whispered in Amaia’s ear before kissing a path down her neck and over her shoulder.

She giggled and rolled onto her back, allowing me to loom over her and gaze down into her beautiful face. “I feel like you add an ‘anniversary’ to our list every year. We’ve already celebrated the day we met, the day we had our claiming ceremony, and the day we were married. Let’s see...” She tapped her chin thoughtfully. “The day we found out we were pregnant with our oldest...and each one after, the first whiskey we created together, the day you kept me awake during our whole daysleep to set a record for most orgasms in twenty-four hours, and all the rest. How is it possible you’ve found yet another one to commemorate?”

“Every night with you is one to celebrate.”

Amaia’s pale cheeks turned pink, and her violet eyes sparkled. “I feel the same way.” Her lips curved up, and she looked at me expectantly. “So? What anniversary is it today?”

I grinned wickedly, but before I could tell her, I was interrupted by a banging on our bedroom door. “Mommy!” our oldest daughter, Tempest, shouted. “Draven ate all of my cookies!” Then she stomped her foot on the ground like only a wronged six-year-old could do.

“That boy,” Amaia sighed, shaking her head. “His consort better be able to bake if she’s going to be able to handle his sweet tooth.”

“Or learn to cook for himself,” I chuckled. When it came to our children and their magic, we had strict rules about what they could use it for. We wanted them to be self-sufficient without it. However, our eight-year-old son was too clever for his own good. He often found loopholes...such as eating his sister’s cookies, rather than making them himself.

A sniffle from the hallway tugged at my heartstrings. I hated it when any of my girls cried.

“Those were for my school treat,” she said in a watery voice.

“Oh, dear,” Amaia said, her tone sympathetic. “She was so excited.” Then she called out, “I’ll be right there, baby.”

Today was the first day of the school year for our children. Two years ago, an unmated female daywalker had moved into a house down the block. She’d become a schoolteacher a couple of centuries ago, and when she found out there were so many of us in this area, all homeschooling, she put forth the idea of creating a school for “nocturnal” families. We’d all loved the idea and had donated enough money to buy and renovate an old building and pay her salary for at least a decade.

The kids had flipped when they found out, and though she didn’t show it to anyone else, I knew my consort had been a little sad at their enthusiasm to be away from her. But I’d gently explained that it was more about being cooped up inside and being able to see their friends and cousins every day. Then I cheered her up with my mouth between her legs.

They were all starting their second year in the new school, and our very dramatic kids believed the first day set the tone for the rest of the year.

“I’d better get up and help them get ready.” Amaia pushed at me gently, and I reluctantly flopped onto my back. I exhaled heavily, trying to talk my cock into relaxing.

Watching my wife’s round hips and naked ass sway as she walked to the closet did not help the situation. After a minute,



I sat up and got out of bed. With a flick of my wrist, I was clean and dressed in a pair of jeans and a white, fitted T-shirt.

Amaia stepped into the room wearing yoga pants and a long tank top that hung loose enough around her middle and hips so that she could keep wearing it as the bump in her stomach grew. She was only six months along, but she was bigger this time around. I wanted her to see Dr. Wright about it, but she kept insisting it was because she was eating more with this pregnancy.

It was complete bullshit since daywalkers stopped aging in their early to mid-thirties. And, though we were not predators by nature, our bodies were still made to entice, so we were frozen in our most appealing forms. However, for the time being, I let her live in her little fantasy, but I kept a close eye on her.

“Cheater,” she mumbled as she took in my appearance.

I laughed and padded over to my beautiful mate. “I’m over half a century old. I don’t have rules when it comes to my magic,” I teased with a wink.

“No,” she huffed. “But I’m trying to set a good example.”

“You are a perfect role model for our kids, darling.” I gave her a soft, slow kiss before grasping her hand and leading her to our bedroom door. Before I opened it, I said, “I’ll deal with our little cookie thief if you handle Tempest.”

Amaia snorted and rolled her eyes. “You just don’t want to see your baby girl cry.”

I shrugged and didn’t bother to deny it. “Nope.”

She giggled, and we opened the door, ready to face the day.

An hour later, I crouched on the front porch with my girls.

“Have a wonderful day, sweetheart,” I said as I kissed Tempest’s cheek. Then I did the same to our three-year-old, Elora.

“Bye, Daddy!” they called as they ran down the drive to the Town Car where our driver was waiting to take them to

school.

“See ya, Dad!” Draven went running by me, but I caught his collar and brought him around to face me.

I stared at him until he sighed. “Fine. I won’t eat anymore of her class treats.”

When I raised an eyebrow, he groaned and shuffled his feet. “And I won’t take anything from my sisters’ lunches.”

“Excellent,” I replied before pulling him in for a hug. “Go now. Have a fantastic day.”

“Thanks, Dad!” He beamed at me before sprinting to the car.

Slender arms wrapped around my torso, and I raised my arm so Amaia could tuck herself into my side. “You’re an incredible dad,” she said, looking up at me with a sweet smile.

“Only because I have you to make up for all my mistakes.”

“Do you think it’ll be easier this time around? After three?”

“Maybe,” I shrugged and chuckled. “I’ve never had four kids before.”

Amaia glanced down and rubbed her tummy before meeting my eyes again, her violet pools sparkling. “You aren’t ever going to have four kids,” she giggled.

“Pardon?” I was confused. I would have sensed if something had been wrong and made sure she went to the doctor.

“We’re skipping right to five.”

I stared at her for a whole minute, speechless. A giant smile split my face, and I picked her up to twirl her around. “Twins!” Then I set her on her feet and kissed the hell out of her. “You’re amazing,” I mumbled against her lips.

“Pretty sure we both did our part,” she snickered.

I winked and swung up into my arms before heading inside. After I shut the door, Amaia lifted her head from where

it had been resting on my shoulder. “What anniversary were we supposed to celebrate today?”

With a devilish smile, I leaned in and whispered in her ear.

Amaia gasped, and when I pulled back, her face was ten shades of red, and I couldn't help the laugh that bubbled up. Her violet eyes had darkened to nearly black, and hunger for my gorgeous consort hit me hard.

A second later, we were standing beside our bed, and I set her on her feet.

“I love you, my darling.”

“Forever.”

# **EXTRA EPILOGUE**

Liam had brought me to many places in the years since we'd found each other, and I had always enjoyed London. But this trip held more meaning than the other times we'd visited.

"Don't be nervous, darling. We'll have plenty more chances if we don't win this year." Liam pulled my back against his chest and met my gaze in the mirror just as I finished putting on my lipstick. "That's one of the advantages to immortality, after all."

Bancroft Barrels and Tap had built quite the name for itself over the years, and our small batch single malt was up for the World Whiskies Award. We were in London for the ceremony, which luckily was held at night so it was easier for us to attend. Getting all dressed up to celebrate the success of our distillery was thrilling, but also nerve-wracking.

"I know." I turned in his embrace to smile up at him. "But I'm so proud of the single malt. I really want it to win."

He cradled my cheeks in his palms. "It's the best batch we've ever made, which is due to your impeccable taste. If they don't select it as the global winner in its category, then the judges are a bunch of fools."

"You give me too much credit." I went up on my toes to brush my lips against him, but as I pulled away, he gripped the back of my head to hold me close. Crushing his lips against mine, he deepened the kiss, his tongue sweeping inside to tangle with mine.

When he finally lifted his head again, my eyes were heavy-lidded with passion and my panties were damp.

“There is no such thing as giving you too much credit,” he disagreed, smoothing out my hair in the back with his fingers. “You didn’t just fill my life with color and passion, you made me a better man all around. I can’t imagine how bleak my life would have been if you hadn’t found me, darling.”

“Neither can I.” I shook my head with a soft laugh. “And to think, we discovered we were destined to be together because I accidentally knocked over a glass of whiskey.”

“It’s only fitting that we should win tonight.” He held his arm out to me and led me to the door of our suite.

The hotel we were staying at was owned by daywalkers—which came with lots of perks, including blackout blinds on all of the windows—and was next door to the hall where the ceremony was being held. So we didn’t bother teleporting and took the elevator down to walk to the venue. Right before Liam opened the door for me, he murmured, “If we don’t win today, we will eventually. When I finally figure out how to come close to the sugar and sunshine flavor that is uniquely yours.”

My cheeks were still pink as we walked inside and were greeted by other distillers we knew. After we mingled with everyone, we found our seats and sipped on some delicious double cask—with hints of honey, citrus, and ginger—while we waited for the ceremony to begin. We also took full advantage of our telepathy, conversing back and forth while those around us were none the wiser. At least until it took a sexy turn.

*You look so damn hot tonight. I must confess that I’m tempted to teleport us out of here and back to our room so that I can slam my thick cock into your perfect pussy until you clamp down around me, screaming my name while you milk the come from me.*

His dirty talk made me choke on my drink, and Liam acted as though he had no clue what was wrong with me. Taking my

glass from my hand, he set it aside and gently patted my back. “Are you okay, darling? Should I get you some water?”

“I’m fine.” I cleared my throat to ease the burning sensation. “Just went down the wrong tube.”

*I’ll be the one going down...on you when I devour your pussy later tonight.*

Placing my napkin back on my lap, I surreptitiously reached over to squeeze his thigh. *I’m already a sticky mess and can’t take much more of your teasing.*

“Better to sip it. Slowly.” He lifted his glass to his lips and took a small taste. “Mmm, delicious.”

*More of your sugar and sunshine for me to enjoy later.*

I was seriously considering teleporting us out of there myself when the editor of the magazine who hosted the annual awards tapped the microphone to get everyone’s attention.

*Saved by the bell.*

Liam’s deep chuckle filled my head. *For now.*

His hand slid down to wrap around mine, and he gave me a gentle squeeze when our category was announced. I held my breath, and then let it out on a big sigh of relief when the winner was announced. “Bancroft Small Batch Reserve Single Malt!”

Liam surged to his feet, pulling me up with him as we accepted the congratulations of the people seated nearby. Then he pulled me in for a tight hug, pressing a kiss to my neck before whispering, “Something else to celebrate.”

My life with Liam had turned out to be one moment to commemorate after another. And our celebrations always entailed plenty of orgasms. “Sounds perfect to me.”

# LUSTRE OF TWILIGHT

Jareth Bancroft doubted he'd be one of the daywalkers who was lucky enough to find his destined consort. More than five hundred years of searching had yielded nothing. But one touch proved him wrong in the very best way.

Narkissa Anders thought vampires were make-believe...until she stumbled upon a nest of them and barely escaped with her life. She would've been happy to forget what she'd learned, except she was fated to spend the rest of her life with one.



# PROLOGUE

**I**n nearly five and a half centuries, only two things ever made me lament being a daywalker vampire. Shopping—okay, I complained about being alive at all when I was forced to shop—because it could be such a hassle to try to go to stores that weren't open late or twenty-four hours. There were shops owned by other daywalkers, but they couldn't account for every single need, so when I wanted something that I could only acquire from a store that was open nine to five, I either had to bribe the shop owner or venture out during the day. The term daywalker was quite literal. We could walk in the sun without bursting into flames—as opposed to nightwalkers, who were the typical vampires that filled books and movies. However, our extra pale skin was incredibly sensitive, and getting sunburned was a bitch, so we much preferred living a nocturnal life.

The other thing was the possibility of spending eternity alone. Daywalkers had only one true mate, a consort that fate paired us with before we were born. Whenever I had to explain this to someone, the first question they usually asked was how do you know who they are and how do we find them?

*How indeed.*

The unfortunate truth was that there was no guarantee we'd ever find our consort, even if we spent eternity searching the world over. There was no way to know when they were born, if they were human or another daywalker, where they lived, if they were even still alive... If the consort was human,

they were always born after their vampire mate. That wasn't much comfort, though, because they could still have come and gone while we continued to search. Worse, you could have been standing next to them and never know if your skin never made contact. It was the only way for us to recognize each other. Daywalkers and consorts didn't have the ability to feel desire for anyone except their mate. *Yep. I'd spent over half a millennium with a floppy cock.*

Sadly, I'd seen the toll it took on vampires as they aged, and I'd seen the result when that devastating loss pushed them over the edge. My brothers and I had been crushed when our great-great-uncle managed to commit suicide because he simply couldn't live without hope.

It was difficult not to lose faith then, but I'd done my best to keep my hope and my sanity. Perhaps because I'd been too focused on my brother Liam to worry about myself. When the woman he believed to be his consort died, I began to watch him carefully. I was vigilant in making sure we spoke at least once a day. In his depression and despair, he'd tried to push us away, but I wasn't about to leave him to his pain and wake up one night to find he'd joined Uncle Thaddeus.

I was convinced he'd been wrong about his childhood friend, but there was no convincing him. Until yesterday.

I'd never been happier to be right, and I didn't give one fuck about being humble either. I said, "I told you so," more than once and with enthusiasm. Happy couldn't describe what I felt for my brother. And it also renewed my faith in fate, same as it did for our other two brothers.

So, for the first time in my very long life, I didn't mind shopping on this Christmas night because I was helping my new sister choose presents for my brother.

I'd made some suggestions, and she'd picked what she wanted before sending me out to purchase everything. Luckily, I'd managed to acquire most of it from a couple of shops—one owned by a daywalker and the other by a human whose son was the consort of a daywalker.

However, the last thing I needed was only available at a high-end jewelry shop in town. The owner was a pain in the ass. Usually, I braved the dusk or twilight sun to go there—which was almost never. But circumstances being what they were, I didn't have time. I was going to have to wake him...on Christmas night. This was going to cost me triple the price of the damn watch.

Then a second Christmas miracle happened, I called the shop owner's number, and his wife, Patti, also the co-owner, picked up. I explained (in human terms and with a little stretching of the truth) that my brother and his fiancée, who hadn't expected to spend Christmas together, had a stroke of luck, but now they didn't have any gifts for each other. And my poor soon-to-be sister-in-law was devastated to spend their first Christmas together—in a long time—and not have something to give him that showed how much he meant to her. I might have sprinkled in a small bullshit story about why this particular watch, from this particular store, was so special to them.

Patti was a hopeless romantic, which shocked the fuck out of me, considering the curmudgeon she was married to. She was actually excited to help me, and it didn't hurt that Norman was apparently out of town caring for his sick mother.

Fifteen minutes later, she unlocked the door, and her son, who also worked there occasionally, went to the display with the watches and put it on top of the glass counter. "Thank you so much for this. Be sure to tack on an inconvenience fee," I said with a boyish smile.

The son, Johnny, chuckled, but Patti beamed at me with a little more swooning going on. "Don't be silly. You are so welcome. I love being a part of a good love story!" She looked a little dazed for a moment, then seemed to snap out of it as she walked over to stand by Johnny.

Daywalkers were not predators by nature. We don't even like the taste of fresh blood and generally have bagged blood delivered by a service set up for just that purpose. However, we were still vampires, which meant we possessed traits that lured in unsuspecting prey. Patti had no idea she'd been a

victim to my natural charms. It could be really annoying sometimes. Girls were seriously vicious when they fancied a guy—another positive to being nocturnal, no teens on the street.

As I moved toward the case, I passed a glass display that twinkled and sparkled with engagement rings and eternity bands. I'd never paid them any mind before, but with my brother's mating on my mind, I found myself passing it a little slower than usual.

"Are you considering proposing?" Patti asked. I looked up to see her watching me, and I would swear there were actual hearts in her eyes.

I smiled and shook my head, but then a particular ring caught my eye, and I leaned closer, practically pressing my nose against the glass. "May I see that one?"

Pattie reached in and retrieved a delicate gold band that had tiny daffodils carved into the rose gold. "It's amazing," I said in awe as I turned the ring a full rotation. "My maternal grandmother set aside four of her rings, one for me and each of my brothers, and this...damn...it could have been made with mine as a set."

"Kismet," Patti sighed, making me laugh. If only she knew...

I handed it back, and to my surprise, she didn't immediately put it away. She left it on the blue velvet cloth they used when showing customers jewelry. Of course, as I picked out a watch and talked with them about the warranty—when you live forever, warranties mean a lot more—my eyes kept drifting back to the ring. It seemed to shine brighter than it should in the glow of a small lamp.

"I'll bag this up for you," Johnny said as he fitted the watch in its box. "We still have a few rolls of Christmas paper if you'd like me to wrap it?"

"If you don't mind, Amaia would be so happy with me. I just might get a kiss on the cheek before my brother breaks my

jaw,” I pretended to joke. Yeah, Liam would rip my head clean off if I put a single finger on her.

Johnny laughed and walked into the back while Patti rang up the charge. I had to pass the ring again on my way to the register. I couldn’t stop thinking about Liam finally finding his consort. Did I still have a chance to find mine? If I did...would I regret not having this band to match my grandmother’s ring? It wasn’t as though I couldn’t simply store them away together and forget all about it. Better to have the ring and not need it, right?

Actually, the ideal situation would be to have it and *need it*.

I was handing Pattie my black credit card when I paused and squeezed my eyes shut for a second. This was stupid. There was a one in a million chance that I’d be as lucky as Liam.

My eyes opened, and I turned my head to stare at the band for another second before meeting Patti’s laughing eyes. “You’ll take it?”

I sighed. “Yes.”



## NARKISSA

“I know they say that scotch gets all the air it needs after it’s poured, but I swear I can taste a subtle difference when I use a decanter.” My dad set down his glass of scotch and asked, “Where did you find the one you gave me, Narkissa?”

I glanced down the long length of the table toward him and smiled. “I got it from Tiffany’s. The style I wanted was on backorder, and I had to go with another one. I was a little worried you wouldn’t like the decanter, so I’m really glad to hear that you did.”

“You had nothing to worry about. You’ve always had a knack for picking out the perfect gift.” His attention shifted to the other end of the table where my mother sat. “Isn’t that right, dear?”

It took a moment for my mother to realize he was speaking to her—which wasn’t a huge surprise, considering we were seated at a table for twenty even though there were only four of us. Christmas dinner at my parents’ house had been a formal affair as far back as I could remember. When I was a little girl, I loved dressing up in frilly dresses, sipping sparkling grape juice while pretending it was wine, and nibbling on each of the courses as they were served. Eventually, I realized that other families didn’t celebrate Christmas with stilted conversation while sitting on opposite ends of the room from each other. I started to long for fun holiday traditions like building snowmen and baking cookies as a family, but my mother disabused me of those “silly notions” in no time at all.



“Mm-hmm, one thing we can say about Narkissa is that she has excellent taste in gifts.” She stroked the Hermès silk scarf I gave her and flashed me a smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

My mother was the master of backhanded compliments, especially when it came to me. I wasn’t the perfect daughter she wanted—that role fell to my younger sister—and she never hesitated to let me know all the ways I fell short. Any praise she gave me had an edge to it, and I’d learned long ago not to take her criticism personally. We were very different people with goals that were worlds apart from each other. The only way I could live up to her standards would be if I tossed all mine out the window, and that was never going to happen.

“It’s just too bad that the same can’t be said for her taste in men.”

I should’ve known she was going to go there. I couldn’t remember the last time I’d come over for a family dinner when she hadn’t brought up the fact that I was single.

“How would we even know what kind of guy she likes?” my sister snorted. “She’s twenty-one and never so much as gone out on a single date.”

I was used to Minerva’s little barbs, but this one still struck a nerve. It wasn’t that her opinion mattered to me that much. It was more that I’d wondered for several years if something was wrong with me. Not because guys didn’t ask me out on dates—that happened plenty even though my sister would be the last to admit to it since she’d gone out with several men who’d asked me first. But I had never met someone who had caught my interest.

There had been no schoolgirl crushes for me. I’d never felt butterflies swirl in my belly over a guy.

The smile our mother aimed Minerva’s way held all the warmth missing from the one she had just given me. Born two years after me, my little sister was everything my mother had ever wanted in a daughter—a carbon copy of herself, in looks and personality.

“Exactly my point, Minnie.” I bit my lip to hold back my usual giggle at her nickname for Minerva. In my head, I always heard a silent “Me” at the end. Our mother couldn’t have picked something more appropriate if she’d tried, but she was utterly clueless as to why I found the nickname hilarious. And after Minerva had accused me of laughing out of jealousy, there was zero chance I was ever going to share the real reason I thought her nickname was ridiculous.

My dad took another gulp of his scotch before setting the glass down again. “Narkissa will date when she’s ready, dear. There’s no reason for either of our girls to rush into a relationship with a man until they find the right one.”

“I already did, Daddy.” Minerva wiggled her left hand to show off the huge diamond ring on her finger. “Charles is perfect for me.”

Her fiancé was far from perfect by any reasonable standard. They’d just gotten engaged two weeks ago, but the man couldn’t even be bothered to join us for Christmas dinner. When I’d asked what he was doing tonight, she’d offered some lame excuse about an international conference call. I wasn’t sure how she’d kept a straight face when she’d said it, as if business meetings on the most celebrated holiday around the world were totally normal. My best guess was that the jerk gave her the ring to get her off his case and was now spending the holiday with his mistress.

“He’s quite the catch,” my mother agreed. “You did an excellent job attracting his eye. He’ll make you a fine husband.”

“He certainly will.” Minerva flashed me a smug grin before she took a sip of her champagne.

I lifted my glass and mumbled, “Only because his bank account will keep you happy.”

“If you have something to say, do it loudly enough that we can all hear you,” my mother scolded. “It’s rude to mutter to yourself at the dinner table.”

After taking a big swig of my champagne, I pointed the empty glass toward my mother and said, “You’re right. I was raised better than that. I should’ve kept my thoughts about Minerva’s pending nuptials to myself. Or even better, I should be impressed that she’s willing to marry a man she doesn’t love and who also doesn’t love her just because he’s incredibly wealthy. Even if he’s off banging some random woman while we have Christmas dinner together.”

My mother and sister gasped in outrage, their cheeks flushing with anger. But my dad stepped in before they could gang up on me.

“I’ll have your tea brought to you in the library, Narkissa.” There was a thread of steel in his voice that left me with no doubt that he expected to be obeyed. “Take however long you need to pull yourself together before you head home.”

My mother sniffed in disapproval. “And I expect you to apologize to your sister before you leave.”

“But—”

My dad heaved a deep sigh as he lifted his palm toward me. “You heard your mother.”

“Okie dokie, then.” I pushed my seat back and stood. Turning to Minerva, I murmured, “I’m terribly sorry I implied that the reason you got engaged to Charles was because he’s wealthy. Since he’s not actually here to celebrate Christmas with us, please do pass my apologies along to him as well.”

“Narkissa,” my mother growled.

Luckily, my dad interrupted before she could get going. “That’s enough, Carmilla. Narkissa has apologized. I’m not going to spend the holiday listening to the three of you bickering. It’s over.”

“Fine,” she huffed.

I made a beeline toward the door, mouthing to the housekeeper, “Please bring me some dessert, too,” along the way. About five minutes later, she brought me in a pot of chamomile tea and a chocolate souffle. I had planned to leave once I was done with them, but with my belly full and curled

up on the couch, I drifted off to sleep and didn't wake up until hours past midnight.

The teapot, cup, and dessert plate were gone, and a cashmere blanket was tucked around my body. I must've been totally conked out because a fire was also blazing in the hearth. I was half tempted to stay where I was until morning except I didn't want to bump into my mother at the breakfast table. So, I forced my feet into the heels I'd slipped off and went in search of my coat before heading out to my car.

It was windy and bitterly cold outside. I was freezing by the time I made it into my car, and I was grateful that my dad had talked me into getting a model with seat warmers. As I made my way across town toward my home, I decided to make a quick detour to a twenty-four-hour convenience store to pick up some supplies in case the snowstorm headed our way was a bad one. I was perfectly content to get stranded at my place for a few days without having to see anyone, but only if I had plenty of snacks to tide me over.

No other cars were parked in front when I pulled up, so I was able to snag a spot near the door. In the short time it had taken me to get here, the snow had already started to fall. I raced inside as fast as I could, hoping to stay dry and relatively warm.

I had expected the store to be empty except for a clerk, but several men were inside. As the door shut behind me, I came to an abrupt stop, second-guessing my decision to pop in and grab supplies. I didn't like how their conversation had ended the moment I'd stepped into the store. Or how they were looking at me. My imagination must've been going haywire because I would almost swear their eyes had a red glow to them. They were staring at my neck, and I had an odd urge to cover my birthmark. The two little circles on my neck were yet another thing my mother looked at as a blemish.

Deciding that I'd rather starve in the middle of a blizzard than get any closer to them, I swiftly turned to throw the door open again, but I crashed into a hard, male chest instead. "Where do you think you're going?"

“What? How?” I didn’t understand how he’d slipped behind me when the bell on the door hadn’t jingled like it had when I’d opened it. But then my fight or flight instinct kicked in when he wrapped his hands around my upper arms and started to push me deeper into the store. The self-defense training my dad had insisted I get when I moved out of their home took over, and I kned the guy in the balls before ripping myself from his grip. Only I didn’t get far. There were too many of them for me to make my escape.

I quickly found myself hauled off my feet and carried to a dimly lit back room. “Help! Somebody help me!” I screamed.

The man closest to me chuckled darkly. “Nobody is going to come and save you, consort. Our master will be very pleased with us for capturing you.”

*Consort? Master?* What in the heck did that even mean? Were these guys on drugs or something?

I was dropped onto a chair, my arms and legs zip-tied into place. The man who’d carried me trailed his cold fingers down my cheek to my neck and brushed lightly over my birthmark. When I tried to jerk away, someone else shoved my head back, and I opened my mouth to scream again, but they stuffed a piece of cloth inside.

Then in a move that freaked me out even more—which was saying a lot, considering the current situation—they all turned in unison to look toward the front of the store. Their eyes did that glowing red thing again, and one of them rasped, “Mmm, more fresh blood.”

A man I hadn’t seen before stuck his head into the room and grinned, showing off abnormally sharp teeth. “The fates are finally showing us their favor. Two consorts in one night. The master will be very pleased.” He looked at me and licked his lips, sending a shiver of icy dread through my body. “Perhaps he will reward us with a taste of their blood.”

In the blink of an eye, the men surrounding me were gone. Poof. Just like that.

I was left wondering what in the literal hell had I stumbled into. *Taste my blood??* And then my freak-out meter climbed even higher when they carried another woman, kicking and screaming, into the room and tossed her on the floor next to me. One of the men muttered something about getting another chair, and after he walked out, all hell broke loose. The woman pulled a bottle of something out of her purse and started to flick droplets of whatever was inside at the men. They hissed in pain and backed away from her.

I would've gasped in surprise when she pulled a knife out of her purse, except for the gag in my mouth. But that was quickly removed after she cut the restraints away from my arms and legs. I didn't have any time to ask questions, though. I was too busy making my escape to care.

I still had no idea what was going on, but one thing was clear...this was seriously the worst Christmas ever.



## JARETH

**T**hat was a hell of a fight, I thought with a grin. It had been a while since I'd faced more than one nightwalker at a time in pursuit of a consort. Easy kills just weren't as much fun. And it had been ages since my cousin Stephan and my three brothers, Liam, Braedan, and Ren, had brawled together. Fisticuffs and carousing had been so much more acceptable a century ago. Sometimes progress leaves behind great traditions.

As the adrenaline ebbed, my worry over my brother's new consort returned to the forefront of my mind. She was huddled between two dumpsters where she'd been protecting herself and another woman by flicking holy water at the vampires. Ren had glimpsed a birthmark on her neck as Amaia pulled her into their little crevice, so we knew she was a consort. I knew Liam's first thought would be for Amaia, as it should be, but someone needed to take care of the other consort.

While Stephan, Braedan, and Ren walked into a huddle to talk, Liam and I approached the terrified women. He immediately dropped to his knees in front of Amaia and embraced her.

My attention lasered in on the pretty brunette who hugged herself close as her eyes bounced around wildly. "Wha-a-a... um...what the heck just happened?" she stammered in a shocked and horrified voice.

Liam stood and pulled Amaia away so I could handle the frightened consort. Now that I had an unobstructed view of



her, I was struck by how absolutely gorgeous she was. Long, wavy brown hair was pulled back from her delicate face and cascaded down around her shoulders. Even with the way she was huddled, I could tell she had a slender build. The bodice of her baby blue dress hugged her high round breasts, the long gossamer sleeves showed off toned arms, and the skirt made of many layers of chiffon, nipped in at her waist.

Her face was made for an artist's canvas. Chocolate brown eyes fringed with full lashes, high cheekbones, a slender nose, and pink lips that would make any man, who had the ability, hard as a rock from the thought of them wrapped around their cock. Mine didn't so much as twitch. My reaction to her was purely mental, like an appreciation of fine art. Except I'd never seen so fine a masterpiece as this gorgeous consort. There was just something special about her.

She watched me warily as I slowly closed the small distance between us and crouched down to be at her eye level. "What is your name?" I asked gently.

"Why would I tell you?" she snapped suspiciously.

I almost grinned widely at her show of fire, but I didn't want her to mistake me for a predator, so I carefully kept my expression and voice kind when I responded, "Because we're here to help"—I smiled, but softly—"and I don't want to call you 'miss.' So, let's start again. I'm Jareth, and you are?"

She didn't answer right away, still appearing skittish, but eventually, she said, "Narkissa."

*Narkissa.* It was a beautiful name, befitting of its owner. "It's nice to meet you, Narkissa. In answer to your first question, those were nightwalkers, evil vampires intent on destroying you," I explained.

Narkissa recoiled and gaped at me as if I'd grown two heads. "What? Are you crazy? Vampires don't exist! And why would they want me? I'm nobody!"

My eyes dropped to her neck before I shook my head. "You are everything to someone." I gave her a very brief overview of her destiny as a consort, and by the time I

finished, Narkissa's chocolate eyes had gone wide and round as saucers, but they were plagued with disbelief.

“Even if vampires are real, that's insane. Fate can't just... just...pick someone for me!” She sounded more outraged than anything, which might have been amusing if I wasn't the one who had to convince her that this was real and let me take her to meet with the council for protection.

The consorts we saved had all kinds of different reactions to the truth, but the most frustrating were the ones who wouldn't accept it. A lot of times, they refused the council's help, went off on their own, and ended up dead as a result. Although, it was usually more about accepting the reality of the supernatural, whereas Narkissa seemed to be royally pissed at the idea of an omnipotent matchmaker.

In any other circumstance, I would have enjoyed her uniqueness and bold personality, but I had a job to do, and her protection came before anything. “There's a place we can go —”

Narkissa snorted adorably and began to struggle to her feet in the small, confined space. “I'm not going anywhere with you. You're obviously insane, and your hotness doesn't quite beat out the crazy meter.”

I rolled my eyes, then tossed a warning glare at my brother who was stifling his laughter. *Jackass.*

Narkissa had nothing to grip, so her hands slipped on the grimy walls of the dumpsters, and she landed on her ass again. I growled in frustration and leaned in, grabbing her arms and hauling her to her feet.

*Holy fucking shit.* The warmth of her skin radiated through the transparent fabric of her sleeves. Judging by the steel shaft that had just spring to life in my slacks, the material was thin enough for our bond to snap into place.

*Mine.*

Visions of tearing off all her layers and everything I would do to her naked body flooded my mind. It was hard as fuck to rein it in and remember where we were and that Narkissa

would be falling right into my arms and begging me to fuck her.

Narkissa's mouth opened, and she stared at me, clearly experiencing the same overwhelming flood of arousal. Perhaps that was the only convincing she would need. Keeping our eyes locked, I bent my head and leaned in for a kiss. Before our lips touched, my head snapped to the side when Narkissa delivered an impressive right hook to my jaw.

*Motherfucker!* I almost cried out, but the slightest movement of my jaw sent pain ripping through me.

*Ouch*, Liam said in my head.

*Shut it*, I responded as I bent over holding my jaw and trying to catch my breath. *Damn, I think she broke it.*

It took several minutes for my accelerated healing to mend the bone, but when it felt solid and pain no longer radiated from the cracked bone, I stood and moved my jaw around to test it. Good as new.

Returning my gaze to Narkissa—I scowled when I saw that the spot where she'd been standing was now empty.

“Looking for your consort?” Liam drawled with a sly grin. “She went that way.” He jerked his chin in the direction of the alley. Since there had been only one car in the parking lot, I assumed Narkissa had taken off in her vehicle.

“Fucking hell,” I sighed. Liam grinned, and I threw him a glare that promised I'd get even before I jogged around the building to try to find a clue as to where my mate had gone.

As I suspected, one of the cars had disappeared, quite quickly if the tire marks on the pavement were any indication.

Closing my eyes, I thought back to when I'd arrived and what the other car in the lot had looked like. A silver Audi.

*She's turning onto Haven Drive from Grand Street*, Braeden said telepathically.

*You see her?* If my brother knew where she was, I would send him my entire collection of the whiskey Liam had concocted for me. All right, not all of it...Liam owned a bar

and brewery. He was brilliant, and his brand was in high demand. For my birthday last year, he'd created a new recipe that was mine alone and made me several cases. It was the best thing I'd ever tasted. Until now...I had no doubt Narkissa would far surpass it.

*With the punch she delivered—kudos to your consort, by the way—I figured you'd be a few minutes, so I followed her. Been running after her car from several feet away so she doesn't spot the blur in her rearview mirror.*

*I owe you.*

*Not to worry, big brother. I'll collect.*

Rolling my eyes again, I teleported to the next intersection she would come to on Haven. My timing wasn't the best, though, because she was only a few feet away. When Narkissa saw me, she screamed and swerved. I didn't want her to get caught on a patch of ice hidden under all the snow, so I put my hand on the hood and stopped the Audi in its tracks.



## NARKISSA

I shook my head, unable to make sense of what had just happened. My brain couldn't wrap around everything I had seen and heard over the past thirty or so minutes. I couldn't help but wonder if Minerva had spiked the eggnog I'd drunk while we opened gifts before dinner. Or if the housekeeper had mixed up the chamomile tea with a hallucinogenic by mistake. Being drugged was the only reasonable explanation that I could come up with for the wild things that had happened.

"I don't care what I saw. Vampires aren't real," I muttered to myself as I jammed my index finger against the button to undo my seat belt. Only it didn't release, no matter how many times I pressed the darn thing. My heart already felt as though it was about to pound through my chest—which was no surprise since the hot, crazy guy I was running from had just appeared out of nowhere in the middle of the road and somehow stopped my freaking car with one hand! My pulse skyrocketed further when the driver's side door of my car swung open, and Jareth crouched in the opening.

My reaction had nothing to do with my unexpected attraction to the ridiculously handsome man. Or at least that was what I told myself. There was no way in heck I was willing to admit that the thudding of my heart was because Jareth was the first guy I'd ever physically responded to. Sure, he was beyond gorgeous with his dark hair, bright blue eyes, and tall, muscular body. And he looked debonair in his black dress slacks and wool coat, especially while fighting. But he also had to be out of his mind if he believed all that crap he'd

told me about vampires and the women who were destined to spend the rest of their very long lives with them. After all these years of wondering if something was wrong with me, I'd been betrayed by my own body.

“Are you okay?” Jareth asked as he leaned inside to fiddle with the buckle on my seat belt. His woodsy scent filled my nostrils, and I tried to jerk away from him. I was wedged between his hard body and the driver's seat of my Audi, so I didn't get far. “Don't move, sweetheart. I need to check if you're hurt first.”

“I guess it's only fair for you to make sure I'm okay since any injuries I may have would be all your fault,” I grumbled. “How in the heck did you stop my car? I mean, I wasn't going that fast because of the snow, and I hit the brakes as soon as I saw you. But you still shouldn't have been able to do that.”

He jerked his thumb toward his broad chest with a sexy grin. “Vampire, remember?”

I pressed the back of my head against the seat's headrest and squeezed my eyes shut. “Did you seriously chase me down by some miracle I don't understand just to try to sell me on the garbage you were spewing back at the convenience store?”

“The only miracle around here is you.” His shoulder brushed against my nipples as he worked to free me from the seat belt, making them pebble. It was the barest of touches but still sent a zing of sensation directly to my core. “And every single thing I told you was true. You'll never get any lies from me.”

“Uh-huh. Sure, I won't,” I drawled, pushing against his chest when the buckle finally released.

He backed up, and I heaved a deep sigh of relief. I wouldn't have been able to move him on my own, judging by the wall of muscle my palms had encountered. If he'd stayed close, I might've done something ridiculous like drag him all the way into the car with me so I could attack him...and not in the fending off a scary guy kind of way. Even with the space limitations in my Audi, I would've been all over him until I

finally learned what the big deal was about kissing. And sex. Plus, orgasms if I was super lucky.

I scrambled out of the car, hoping the cold air would shock the outlandish thoughts out of my brain. Something was very wrong with me. I'd somehow gone from being a virgin with a libido that had never switched on to a woman who couldn't stop thinking about sex. Maybe I was suffering from a disorder where a kidnap victim falls for their rescuer. Kind of like Stockholm syndrome but with one of the good guys instead.

When I rounded my car, my eyes widened when I saw a hand-shaped dent in the hood. Whirling around to gape at Jareth, I asked, "Psychedelic tea is a real thing, right?"

"Shit," Jareth bit out, his bright blue eyes searching my face before scanning down my body. "Did you hit your head when I stopped the car?"

"No." I batted his hands away when he pushed my hair off my forehead. "I don't have a concussion or anything like that. I'm asking a perfectly reasonable question, considering the circumstances. Nothing that's happened to me since I left my parents' house makes any sense. I went into a convenience store and was carried into a back room, tied up, and my captors were talking about asking their master if they could taste my blood. Then they took another woman who got them to back off by flicking water at them, as if that makes any sense. When they chased us into the alley, you guys showed up out of nowhere, fought them, and the bad guys literally burst into flames and turned to ash. And to top that all off, you appeared out of thin air in the middle of the road and stopped my car by putting your hand on the hood. I have to either be dreaming because I'm still asleep on my parents' couch, or I'm hallucinating because someone drugged me."

"Master?" he echoed.

"That's seriously what you took away from everything I just said?" I rolled my eyes when his only response was to nod and quirk a brow. "Yeah, they also spouted some mumbo-jumbo about him being happy that they captured two consorts in one night."



“Capture, not kill. How odd,” he murmured.

“Gee, try not to be so happy I’m still alive,” I huffed, balling my hands into fists and planting them on my hips.

His gaze dropped to my hands, and his lips curved into a grin. “You have no idea how thrilled I am that they didn’t kill you, sweetheart. Even if it meant getting my jaw broken.”

I squinted at him through the snow, which was starting to get heavier. I felt a little guilty for punching him, but I wasn’t going to apologize for doing what was necessary to get away from him and all his crazy talk about my destiny as a vampire’s consort. I hadn’t bowed to my mother’s pressure to find some wealthy guy to marry like my sister had when she’d accepted Charles’s proposal. I’d been holding out for love, but if Jareth was right, then the choice was going to be taken away from me. I’d be stuck with whatever vampire fate had paired me with. “It doesn’t look broken.”

“Luckily, I’m a fast healer.” His grin made it obvious that he wasn’t mad about the punch, which only made me wonder more about his sanity because it had been one heck of a hit.

The wind picked up, and I wrapped my arms around my body and shivered.

“You’re cold?” he asked, his deep voice full of concern.

“Um, yeah.” I circled my hand in the air, more than a few big flakes of snow clinging to my skin as I brought my index finger and thumb close together. “The storm is this close to becoming a blizzard. Maybe if I was an immortal, cold-blooded creature like you, I’d be impervious to the weather. But I’m not. I’m just human. Of course, I’m cold.”

He wrapped his fingers around my wrists, and goose bumps spread up my arms. “C’mon, let me get you somewhere warm.”

“That sounds like a great idea.” I jerked my chin toward my car. “Except my Audi doesn’t look like it’s safe to drive without getting some repairs first. Unless you got here in an invisible automobile, we’re going to need to call someone or request a rideshare. And it’s the middle of the night during a

snowstorm, which means finding someone willing to come out here isn't going to be easy."

"No need to call anyone or try for a rideshare. I have our transportation covered."

I doubted that the amused gleam in his blue eyes boded well for me. "But what about my car? I can't just leave it here, in the middle of the road."

He flashed me a reassuring grin. "Don't worry, sweetheart. One of my brothers said he will take care of your car."

"But how?" I asked, my brow wrinkling in confusion as I scanned the area and didn't see any signs of another person nearby.

"You're sharp as a tack." His thumb stroked against the inside of my wrist. "I have no doubt that you'll figure it out in no time at all, which is about how long it'll take me to get us home."

I had no idea what he was talking about until I found myself standing in an unfamiliar living room a blink of an eye later. My head was woozy and my knees weak, but my brain was still working fine. It only took me a split-second to understand what he meant and the implications. Jareth truly was a vampire, with the ability to teleport. If I had to guess, I'd go with telepathy for how he'd been able to communicate with his brother. And if all that was true, then odds were good that he'd been telling the truth about destined consorts...and me being one.



## JARETH

Narkissa blinked a few times as if to clear her head, then her eyes swept the room. Her brow crinkled just the slightest amount, but I was watching her closely. Drinking in the sight of my gorgeous consort and desperately trying not to throw her over my shoulder and teleport to our bedroom. I had no doubt I would be able to seduce her into our bed, but that wouldn't bode well for us in the long run. She needed time to adjust, and I would always do my very best to give her anything she asked for—as long as it didn't involve her safety or our children's.

“You're rich.”

It was a statement of fact, but her words sounded like an accusation.

I glanced down at her designer gown and shoes, as well as the diamonds in her ears and around her slender, succulent neck. “True,” I agreed. My fingers toyed with her diamond pendant for a second before brushing along her collarbone and up to the small, round marks that would make her mine forever. She shivered at the touch, and I bit back a satisfied smile. “Is wealth something you are unaccustomed to?”

Her eyes fell to her outfit for a beat before returning to meet mine. “No, I suppose that's clear by the way I'm dressed and the car I was driving. It's not really the money itself that bothers me.”

She hadn't pulled away from me when we arrived. I didn't think she'd even realized how relaxed she'd become in my

arms. But if my groin didn't get a little distance from hers, all my good intentions would fly out the window.

I stepped back and dropped my arms, but grasped one of her hands and gently led her over to a couch. I took the seat beside her, staying close since I couldn't have her on my lap. She half-heartedly tugged on her hand, but I didn't let go. I at least needed to be touching her. "I'm not sure I understand. Will you please explain it to me?" I requested softly.

"I don't like what money does to people," she grumbled after a short stretch of silence. "It makes them shallow and arrogant."

I chuckled, and she glared at me adorably. "We all have our moments, but with three brothers who make it their mission to be a pain in the ass, my feet stay firmly planted on the ground."

Narkissa cocked her head to the side and studied me curiously. "You don't sound very bothered by the fact that your brothers make your life hell."

Laughing again, I shook my head. "I should have been clearer. We drive each other nuts, but we also love and respect each other. There is no one I would trust more—with the exception of my consort—than my brothers. Although the rest of my family comes close."

"The rest...?" Narkissa looked confounded by my answers, and I wondered what her life had been like before me.

"My father has seven brothers, and they all have multiple children—so I have a lot of cousins, mostly boys. Though we're all basically as close as siblings."

"Wow, I didn't think families were like that anymore. My mother said my ideas of a happy, close family were silly."

I frowned, angry with the woman who'd tried to squash the sweet dreamer inside my consort. The longing in her voice had told me all I needed to know, and I silently promised to make her hopes and wishes come true.

*Braeden tells me you found your consort.* The voice of my youngest brother, Ren, popped into my head. His tone was mischievous, and I held in a sigh, annoyed at the interruption.

*Go away.*

*We want to meet our new sister. Is now a good time?*

Before I could respond, Braeden and Ren appeared in the room, their faces split with wide grins.

“Hello, I’m—ow! Son of a bitch!” Ren’s introduction was interrupted when I used my vampiric speed to move so I was instantly standing between them, holding their ears.

“If you’re going to act like children, I’m going to treat you like I did when I changed your diapers,” I snapped. A second later, we were in my parents’ kitchen, and I shoved my brothers forward. “Found my consort. I’ll call soon. Keep those two on a leash, would you?” I asked my mom, who was holding her mouth while her shoulders shook with laughter. She was used to our antics after half a millennium.

When I popped back into my living room, Narkissa was staring at the spot where we’d disappeared from. I returned to my seat, and her brown eyes slid to my face. “Hard to deny the vampire thing when I see stuff like that,” she admitted.

I chuckled. “I can cross that off my list of things to convince you of, then?”

Her expression turned wary. “I suppose. What else is on there?”

A wicked smile curved my lips. “I don’t think you’re ready to hear all of it. Let’s start with fate.”

Narkissa’s face scrunched, and she narrowed her eyes. “If you’re referring to the whole destined to be your consort-wife-mate-thing, you should probably prepare for disappointment. I didn’t let my mother force me into a relationship, and you—or anyone else—won’t be able to either. I don’t believe in fate and destiny.”

She looked at me expectantly, and I realized she’d finished talking, but I’d barely heard her because I’d been enthralled

and unbelievably aroused at her show of fire. This girl...she was amazing. I'd obviously won the jackpot when fate assigned consorts.

"First, sweetheart," I said tenderly as I brushed a wayward strand of her silky hair away from her face. "I will never force you to do anything you don't want to." I paused and gave her a second to absorb what I'd said before asking, "Do you believe me?"

Narkissa frowned, and I briefly worried that she might say no. I heaved a mental sigh of relief when she said, "I do. I don't know why, but I do."

I took her hands and gave them a soft squeeze as I smiled at her. "Thank you. Second, I think you do believe." She opened her mouth, but I put a finger over her lips and winked at her. "You are obviously intelligent and sensible, but there is also a part of you that holds on to fairy tales and dreams, hoping they might one day come true."

Without warning, I picked her up and settled her on my lap. With her knees straddling me, her center hovered just above my swollen cock, and I could feel her heat through the barriers. I was dying to slide inside her tight, virgin pussy, and it had my dick painfully hard. *Slow, Jareth. Slow, dammit.* To fucking hell with slow.

I grabbed her hip with one hand and cupped the other behind her head. "If that doesn't convince you," I rasped. "Your body's reaction to me is proof that we were meant to be." Then I jerked her forward so her center pressed against the large bulge in my slacks as my mouth crashed down onto hers.

She tasted as sweet as she smelled, like strawberries and fresh cream. I'd shocked her enough that by the time she realized what was happening, my tongue was already exploring her mouth, and the heat between her legs had intensified immensely. Her breasts pillowed against my chest, and her beaded nipples poked through the bodice of her dress. "Have you ever felt like this for another man?" I growled against her lips. I was making a point, but just the thought of

her with another man sent a surge of possessiveness through me that nearly broke my control. “Tell me,” I demanded.

She shook her head.

I moved my hands to cup her ripe breasts and slid my lips down her jaw and neck, murmuring, “Have you ever burned this hot, sweetheart?”

“No,” she whimpered.

My mouth had reached her birthmark, and I kissed each spot, then returned to her lips while my hands tunneled under all the layers of her skirt to glide up her thighs until I reached her panties. I dipped a single digit inside and dragged it up her soaked center to circle her clit. “Have you ever been this wet?”

“No.” Her voice was breathless, and when I took away my finger, her hips bucked, chasing after it.

“Has your pussy ever ached to be filled, Narkissa?”

“Please,” she whispered. “I can’t take it.”

I kissed her again and rubbed the gusset of her panties before catching the material and ripping it away. She cried out, and I squeezed my eyes shut as I fought to contain my hunger for her. “I won’t take you until you agree to be mine forever, sweetheart. But I can give you relief and a preview of what it will be like when we finally come together.”

I plunged a finger inside her channel, groaning when I felt how tight she was. A little come leaked from my tip as I imagined her snug pussy gripping my cock. *Fuck*. I needed to do this fast, or I was going to come in my pants.

My mouth devoured her lips as my finger worked in and out. After a few minutes, I was able to insert a second finger, and when I pressed the heel of my hand against her clit, she ripped away from me and cried out.

“You have no idea how fucking sexy you are,” I grunted. I used my free hand to yank the bodice of her dress down, letting her breasts spill out, and latched onto one of her rosy peaks.



It wasn't long before she began riding my hand, and calling for more with every thrust of my fingers. I switched to her other tip, nibbling and sucking as I pushed her higher. It seemed like for-fucking-ever before she finally threw her head back and screamed my name as she shattered with an explosive climax.

My pants were utterly destroyed by the amount of come that burst from my cock, yet I didn't soften in the least. I wouldn't know peace until I was buried deep and filling her womb with my seed.

When her orgasm began to ebb, she collapsed onto my chest, still breathing heavily, and she shuddered when I pulled my fingers out. I brought them to my mouth and licked them clean, moaning as her sweet flavor burst on my tongue. A gnawing craving to lap up her juices at the source clawed at me, but I tried to refocus on Narkissa and get back to convincing her to accept our destiny.



## NARKISSA

**W** *hoa*. After that mind-blowing orgasm, I never needed to worry about my inability to feel passion again. Jareth had given me more pleasure than I'd ever thought possible, and he'd only needed to use one hand to do it. Maybe there was something to the whole destined consort thing, after all.

I still had questions before I would be willing to commit my life to this man, though. Especially if it was going to be an eternal one. I needed a little distance between us if I had any hope of holding out long enough to decide if becoming his consort was what I wanted. The pull between us had already been strong back in the alley outside the convenience store, and it had only grown since then. It had taken everything I had inside me to run from him, drawing on all the anger I'd been feeling at the idea of having no control over my future. But my orgasm had drained any lingering resistance from my body, and I wasn't sure if I'd be able to stop myself from giving him any promise he wanted so I could feel him moving inside me.

I scrambled off his lap, and Jareth's bright blue gaze dropped to my chest. He didn't bother masking the lust in his eyes, and goose bumps spread across my skin. "You can't look at me like you're going to devour me."

"Sorry, sweetheart. That's a promise I can't make." His lips curved into a smile of pure masculine satisfaction even while I tugged the bodice of my dress up to cover my breasts. "There's no hiding how much I want you. I'm always going to be in the mood to sink my tongue, fingers, cock, and fangs into you."

His possessiveness earlier must have sparked something inside me because instead of telling him off for his presumptuousness, I narrowed my eyes and growled, “You better not know that because of past experiences with other women.”

“Are you jealous, sweetheart?” His grin widened and turned smug before he slowly licked his bottom lip. “You have no reason to be. I’ve never so much as felt the tiniest twitch in my dick until I touched you. I’m as much a novice when it comes to sensual pleasure as you are. Your pussy is the only one I’ve ever tasted, and you can rest assured that it’s the only one I’ll ever want to devour.”

My nipples pebbled beneath his stare, so I crossed my arms over my chest to hide the visual proof of how quickly he was able to turn me on again. “Only because of destiny.” I tried not to sound like I was pouting, but it bothered me that I was more than physically attracted to Jareth. Yet, his desire for me was a trick of fate.

Jareth scooted closer, his thigh pressing against mine as he leaned in to stroke his thumb against my cheek. “You say that as though it’s a bad thing, but I’m thanking my lucky stars. Fate saw fit to pair me with a gorgeous woman with a fiery spirit who’ll always keep me on my toes.”

I pressed my lips together to stop myself from smiling at his compliment. “Even though I’m not going to just meekly accept that we belong together, and you’ll have to work for it?”

“I’m more than happy to do whatever it takes to make you mine, Narkissa.” Butterflies swirled in my belly as he stroked his nose against mine. “Ask me as many questions as you want, and I’ll answer every single one of them honestly. If you’re in the mood for candlelight and romance, I’ll arrange a date you’ll never forget. Want an orgasm or a dozen? I’ll give them to you. Just maybe try to refrain from punching me again.”

“Sorry about that,” I whispered, pressing a quick kiss against his jaw before pulling away to put a little space

between us again. “The self-defense training my dad insisted on kicked in, and the next thing I knew, I was slamming my fist against your jaw.”

“You’ve got one hell of a right hook.” He stroked his fingers over the dark stubble covering his jaw. “It hurt like a motherfucker, but you can be damn sure I’ll be thanking your father for looking after you so well for me.”

“I’m fairly certain you won’t want to do that once you get to know my parents.” I heaved a deep sigh and leaned against the arm of the couch, propping my chin up in the palm of my hand. “From what you’ve told me so far, my family isn’t anything like yours.”

A muscle jumped in his jaw, his bright blue eyes burning with anger as he asked, “Your father isn’t any better than your mother?”

“I wouldn’t say that, exactly.” I shrugged and wrinkled my nose. “It’s just that she sets the bar so darn low. He can pretty much step over it with very little effort.”

He gave me a sharp nod. “Your family is the reason you’re leery of people with money.”

His words were a statement instead of a question, but I answered anyway. “Without a doubt. My mother married my dad for money, my sister is following in her footsteps, and none of them understand why I don’t want to have anything to do with any of the men my dad has brought home for dinner at my mother’s urging.”

Jareth shook his head and fisted his hands. “Yes, you’re right. I won’t be thanking your father for shit. I’ll be too busy trying to stop myself from kicking his ass.”

His growly response made me smile. “On the plus side, I’m fairly certain you’ll get my mother’s stamp of approval.”

“I couldn’t care less about her opinion of me. Yours is the only one that matters.” He flashed me a sexy grin. “But just in case you’re worried, my parents are going to be thrilled as fuck with you. And not just because I’ve waited so long to find you. They’re going to thoroughly enjoy your fierce

personality. I have no doubt you'll fit into the Bancroft clan quite nicely."

I wasn't sure how the whole consort thing worked, but with every moment we spent together, I felt the bond between us growing. And with everything he said, I found myself wanting to belong to him more and more. I couldn't possibly have found a man more perfect for me if I'd searched the rest of my life. Jareth seemed to be everything I'd ever wanted in a partner, and I couldn't help but wonder if it was silly for me to fight against my destiny when I was being handed my dream man on a silver platter. Especially when my fate was certain to include more pleasure than I ever thought possible.

"When you said you wouldn't take me until I agreed to be yours forever, was that because I'll officially become your consort once we sleep together?"

"You're already my consort, sweetheart." His gaze drifted lower, lingering on my pebbled nipples as his lips curved into a wicked grin. "Something your body has already conceded, even if you're determined to deny the reality of our situation."

I let out a little huff of exasperation. "You know what I meant, Jareth."

"True," he conceded as his smile widened. The man definitely hadn't been joking when he said he enjoyed my feistiness, which was yet another mark in the plus column for him. The minus column remained empty. "There's more to the claiming than just sex. The rituals involved will amplify every sensation. From what I've been told, the pleasure of regular sex, no matter how good, will pale in comparison to what'll happen when I claim you. And that doesn't even take into account how the exchange of vows will make us feel. The cementing of our bond is supposed to be a powerful thing."

My orgasm already had me wondering how much better sex would be than him getting me off with his hand. "I guess it'd have to be if we're going to spend eternity together."

"There are no ifs about it, Narkissa." He slid across the couch cushions until he was only a few inches away from me. "I get that this is a lot to take in, especially after what you

went through with the nest at the convenience store. It's understandable that you might need some time to wrap your head around everything you've learned tonight. I'm okay with giving you what you need to come to terms with it all. I want you to be one-hundred percent on board when you accept my claim. But you need to know that it *is* going to happen, just on your schedule."

I pressed my thighs together to relieve the ache between them as I muttered, "I wish I hated your confidence, but it's really sexy."

"What can I say?" He flashed me a completely unapologetic grin as he shrugged. "Now that I've finally found you, I have every reason to be optimistic as fuck."

"Here's the thing." I reached out to snag his tie with my hand, wrapping the silk material around my fist to yank him closer. "If I learned anything about relationships from my parents, it's that the only way this thing between us is going to work is if it's a two-way street."

He leaned in, and his breath was hot against my lips as he murmured, "I'm not sure I understand, sweetheart."

"You already have a bunch of advantages over me. You're a daywalker with superpowers, and I'm merely human." I shifted to the side to brush my mouth across his jaw. "I might have a heck of a right hook, but we both know you could easily subdue me with one hand tied behind your back."

"You have more power over me than you realize."

I felt emboldened by his soft admission. Releasing his tie, I slid my hand down his chest to his groin, surprised to find his pants were damp. "There needs to be give and take between us, and so far all I've done is take pleasure from you. I'd like to give you some, too."

His hips jerked up, pressing his hard-on into my palm. "You already did, sweetheart. I tried like fuck not to come while I was fingering you, but I couldn't withstand how sexy you were when you came, and I spilled my seed in my pants."

I stroked his hard length and licked my lips, suddenly desperate to get a taste of him. “Sorry, baby. As thrilled as I am that you found that much pleasure in making me come, it doesn’t count because you were still the one giving to me when it happened. Now it’s my turn.”





## JARETH

I mmortal or not, Narkissa was going to be the death of me.

I had only so much strength, and my reserves were nearly depleted. When her hand cupped my hardness, and she begged to give me pleasure, all the blood in my body rushed to my cock, taking the last of my resistance with it.

“You want my cock in your mouth, sweetheart?” I rasped.

She nodded, licking her lips again and causing another small spurt of come from my dick.

“Take whatever you want from me.”

Her hands quickly grasped the bottom of my shirt and tugged it out of my slacks. She hurried to remove my tie and undo my buttons, then pushed the material off my shoulders, and I shrugged out of it. After her heated eyes swept over my chiseled muscles, she attacked my belt, and when the waistband of my pants loosened, my big, long cock shoved its way up. The purple head poked out, shiny from my arousal.

Narkissa’s mouth formed a little O at the sight, but she gasped when my shaft sprung free after she popped the button and lowered the zipper.

“You’re, um, really big...not that I have anything to compare it to...but, um. I don’t think your size is, um, normal.”

I laughed, and my dick twitched, eager for Narkissa’s touch. “It doesn’t matter what’s normal, sweetheart. What matters is that my cock was made just for you. For this dainty

hand”—I pressed her palm against my swollen girth—“this pretty mouth”—I traced her lips with one finger, then dropped it between her legs to glide through her wetness—“and this hot little pussy.”

Narkissa shifted restlessly on my lap, and a little more of my thick cream oozed out onto my stomach. She stared at the moisture as it dripped down toward my groin, then to my surprise, she scooped a bit up with two fingers and put them in her mouth. “Mmm,” she hummed with a soft smile.

“Fucking hell,” I grunted before I grabbed her face and yanked her forward to crash our mouths together. My tongue plunged inside, tasting the mixture of her sweetness and my saltier flavor. My mind became overwhelmed with hunger, with a soul-deep craving, and there was nothing left of my sanity.

My hips bucked, jolting her lower body closer to me so that her naked pussy pressed down on my bare cock. She was so wet that with every little movement, I slid easily between her folds. I groaned as my hands clawed at the back of her dress, ripping the material apart so I could tear it from her body.

When she was straddling me in nothing but a sheer, baby blue bra, nude thigh-highs, and silver heels, I took a deep breath, trying to calm the animalistic urges inside me. They demanded I fuck her now, make her mine, so when I filled her with my seed, it would take root. I was nearly mindless with need, and Narkissa looked in much the same state.

“Jareth,” she panted. “I wanted to give you pleasure.”

“You can take me in your mouth another time, sweetheart,” I grunted as she slid along my drenched cock again. “First, I’m going to take my pleasure inside your tight, virgin pussy, Narkissa. But I made a vow, and I intend to keep it. So, even if it kills me, I won’t go any further unless you’re ready to be mine.”

She opened her eyes, and the chocolate brown depths looked like velvet. “I am. I want to be yours, Jareth.”

I grasped her ass and jerked her hips forward while punching mine up, causing us both to cry out in ecstasy. “You better be sure, sweetheart, because once I’m inside you, there will be no more contemplation, so more convincing. You. Will. Be. Mine. Forever. Do you understand?”

She placed her palms on my cheeks and stared deeply into my eyes as she answered in a firm tone. “I’m yours. Take me now.”

With a low growl, I raised her up and lined my fat cock up with her slick channel. Slowly, I eased her down onto me, using all my might not to slam all the way into her with one hard thrust. I didn’t want to hurt her. But I was quickly losing the little bit of sanity I’d gained in order to make sure she understood what this meant. What she was agreeing to.

Narkissa wiggled, and I hissed, my hands clenching her hips so hard I knew she’d have bruises the next day. Which only turned me on even more. “Don’t. Fuck, don’t move like that, sweetheart. I’m trying not to hurt you.”

“I am hurting, Jareth,” she whimpered. “I’m aching, and I feel...I feel so empty.”

“Fuck,” I muttered as her words swept through me like wildfire. I was burning too damn hot to think about anything except making her scream my name. “All right, sweetheart. I’m going to pop your cherry and make you come so fucking hard you won’t remember your name.”

“Yesss,” she gasped, arching her back. “Please!”

I flipped us around so she was lying on the couch with me on top of her. Grabbing the leg between me and the couch, I pushed it up and hung her calf over the back, leaving her spread wide open. My eyes were glued to her pink, wet pussy as it sucked my shaft into its depths.

Bending down, I used my fangs to shred her bra so her full, round breasts spilled free. Then I withdrew to the tip and rubbed her clit in firm circles with my thumb. She gasped as pleasure arced through her, and while she was high on that

sensation, I drove in fast and hard until my tip hit her cervix and my balls slapped against her ass.

“Oh, fuck, Narkissa!” I roared as my body locked up, ready to climax. I held still and fought it, but it was Narkissa’s whimper that managed to give me back some semblance of control. “Are you all right, sweetheart? Dammit, I knew that would be too painful. Shit!” I started to pull out, but she whimpered and wrapped her legs around me like a fucking vise.

“No! I’m not hurting from that, Jareth. I ache because I need you to move,” she moaned as she rocked against me.

“We can’t have that,” I murmured. Bending low again, I licked around the tip of each breast before giving the peak a little bite, making her jump. The movement pushed me even deeper, and we both moaned. “Fuck, sweetheart. You’re so tight,” I grunted as her pussy gripped me, barely allowing me to withdraw so I could drive back in.

“Yes! Jareth!” she yelled, her head thrashing from side to side as her nails bit into the skin of my shoulders.

“Mine,” I growled right before I started pounding in and out of her, hard and fast, thinking of nothing but our pleasure. Her breasts bounced each time I slammed my fat cock into her sheath. I dragged my fang around one nipple, leaving a tiny trail of blood, then I licked it up and sealed the scrape before doing the same to the other side.

Her blood tasted like her pussy, cherries and cream, my own personal ambrosia. I couldn’t wait to sink my fangs into her neck and officially claim her for all eternity, but not this time. She’d conceded to be mine, and that was enough for now. A claiming was too special to happen without preparation and proper reverence.

I focused instead on the feel of her inner walls massaging my dick as I filled her over and over. Her body had begun to stiffen, and her cries had escalated to screams, indicating she was close. I was grateful because my own spine was tingling, warning me of my impending climax.

“Narkissa,” I grunted as I pushed harder, faster. “You are so perfect, my sweet consort. Fuck! Fuck! Oh, yes! Squeeze that pussy, sweetheart! Yes! Oh, fuck!”

Narkissa shattered just as I lost the battle to hold back my own orgasm. I roared her name as rapture blew through me and my cock exploded, filling her with jet after jet of hot come until it was leaking down her ass.

I gathered her close to me, and we rode out the storm together, as we would for the rest of our lives. Narkissa would always be my safe place, my home, and I knew right then that I was completely, desperately, hopelessly in love with her.



## NARKISSA

With the way Jareth had insisted that I admit I belonged to him before we had sex, I'd expected him to push to complete the claiming as soon as possible. Instead, he'd surprised me by backing off quite a bit. Or at least as much as he could when we spent every minute together.

We'd lived in our own little bubble for the past several days, just the two of us, getting to know one another. Seeing him drink blood had been a little unsettling at first, but even that had faded quickly. Unfortunately, our alone time was coming to an end tomorrow night. Jareth's family had a big New Year's Eve party planned, and I was a little nervous about meeting them. Okay, more like a lot. After three mind-blowing orgasms, I should be completely relaxed, but I was still obsessing over what I should wear to the party.

Turning over in Jareth's arms, I pressed a quick kiss over his heart before tilting my head back to smile up at him. "Any chance you'd like to teleport me to my home so I can pick out a dress for tomorrow night?"

"Nope." He gripped my hips and lifted me on top of him, cradling me in his strong arms.

I nipped at his chest. "How come?"

"Because you're already home." He cupped my cheeks and lifted up to claim my mouth in a deep kiss. "Right here with me, sweetheart."

How quickly my view of Jareth had changed. When we first met, his high-handedness would've driven me up the wall.



But his domineering, bossy ways had grown on me. Big time. We'd already grown so close, I couldn't imagine spending even one day without him. "How about instead of teleporting, we drive over to my old place so I can pack up some of my stuff and bring it over?"

"Now that's a plan I can get behind." He tangled my hair in his fist and tugged my head back to scrape his fang over my birthmark. "I'm eager to take the next step in our lives together."

Pushing against his chest, I sat up until I was straddling him. He'd come inside me only ten minutes earlier, but he was still semi-hard, and I had to fight to keep myself from grinding against him. I wanted to talk about something serious, so I scooted up before I got more turned on. There was a knowing gleam in his bright blue eyes, but we'd gone well past the point of me being embarrassed by my never-ending need for him. "I think we should start the new year off with a bang."

His lips curved into a grin of pure masculine satisfaction. "Isn't that already how we start every night?"

"That's not what I meant." I playfully slapped his chest and shook my head. "Well, I guess it kind of is...but more."

"Whatever you want, sweetheart. If it's within my power to give to you, consider it done," he vowed.

"After we're done moving my stuff in here and come back home from the New Year's Eve party, I want you to claim me."

His fingers dug into my hips hard enough to leave bruises as a huge smile split across his gorgeous face. "Abso-fucking-lutely."

The claiming ceremony would bring huge changes to my life, making me immortal. But I didn't have an ounce of doubt about my decision. "Then we definitely need to head over to my old place. I already wanted to look my best for the party since I'll be meeting your family, but now I want to pick out an extra-special outfit because this is going to be a night I'll remember forever."

“Don’t worry too much. You’d look gorgeous in a brown paper bag, sweetheart.” His hands drifted around to cup my butt cheeks. “But I get where you’re coming from. Just having you tell me you’re ready for our claiming ceremony is cause for a celebration.”

He started to shift my core closer to his hardening member, but I held firm and murmured, “No. We better get a move on if we want to be done before it’s time for us to crash.”

There were only a couple of hours before sunrise, and it would have almost been the start of a new day for me only a week ago. But my internal clock had turned nocturnal in the days I had spent with Jareth. The transition had been so seamless I had barely noticed that my nights had turned into my days and vice versa.

“Fine,” he grunted, lifting me up and twisting around to set me on the floor next to the bed. “But as soon as we get back, I’m going to eat your pussy without letting you go over the edge until you’re begging me to let you come.”

I bent low to brush my lips against his and whispered, “Look at you, threatening me with a good time.”

“Fuck, you’re perfect,” he growled as he rolled off the mattress. His hand drifted down the front of his body, clothes following in its wake.

He did the same with me, and I glanced down at the stylish leggings and sweater he’d dressed me in and laughed. “It’s going to be so cool when I can do that myself.”

“Soon. Very, very soon,” he promised as he wrapped his fingers around my wrist and teleported us to my house.

When I found myself in my living room, my head jerked back in surprise. “I thought we were going to drive over so I could bring a bunch of stuff back with me?”

He flashed me a quick grin before explaining, “I figured we’d save some time if I brought you over first, and then I’ll grab my SUV. This way, you can pack up whatever you need before I come back.”

“Brilliant idea.” I went up on my toes to brush my lips against his. “Hurry back.”

He patted my ass before disappearing into thin air, and then I raced upstairs to go through my closet. Flipping through the hangers until I found the dress I’d been searching for, I was so focused on finding the perfect outfit that I didn’t notice the signs that my personal space had been invaded until it was too late. Strong arms wrapped around me from behind, but I knew immediately that it wasn’t Jareth. I jerked my head back in the hope that I’d do enough damage to break free. All my effort earned me was a creepy laugh that freaked me out even more.

Twisting my neck around, I met the bright red gaze of a vampire—a nightwalker. Struggling in his crushing hold, I hissed, “I don’t know what the hell you think you’re doing, but if you want to live, you’d better run now while you still can.”

His nostrils flared as he inhaled deeply, his lips curving into a cruel smile. “You’re awfully bold for someone so breakable.”

If only I’d urged Jareth to claim me already, I wouldn’t have been human anymore. As a daywalker, I would have had a fighting chance against the vampire. But my only hope now was to delay the inevitable long enough for Jareth to have the chance to rescue me. “Maybe there’s a reason for my confidence.”

He turned me around so we were face-to-face. “I don’t see how that’s possible, but please do tell.”

I lifted my chin and muttered, “I’ve already survived an attack from a whole bunch of vampires before. There’s only one of you, but there were at least a dozen of them.”

The vampire didn’t look surprised by my boast. If anything, he seemed amused. “Yes, I’m aware that the daywalkers rescued you from my minions before they could deliver you to me.”

Holy crap, he must be the master they’d spoken of. The one who they’d seemed to be waiting for after they’d captured

me. I didn't know what he had planned for me, but it couldn't be good. "Jareth will kill you for this."

"He'll certainly try." The vampire trailed his finger over the birthmark on my neck. "But the odds of him succeeding will greatly diminish after I've claimed his destined consort as my own."

His bold claim went against everything Jareth had told me about daywalkers, but a shiver of dread still went up my spine. This vampire hadn't just stumbled across me. He'd been lying in wait for me in my home so that he could force me to spend an eternity as his plaything. I sent out a mental plea for Jareth to hurry, just in case this evil creature had found a way to cheat destiny.



## JARETH

I hurried out to my garage and hopped into my SUV, one of five cars I owned—I'd tell Narkissa about the rest after I'd claimed her. Although, she seemed to have gotten over her hesitation with my wealth that first night. She hadn't mentioned it again, but she'd spent a good portion of the last several days with her mouth otherwise occupied.

Breaking a few speeding laws, I rushed back to the little duplex she used to live in and parked in the shared driveway. The lights next door were dark, not surprising since it was nearly three in the morning. I paused for a moment when the scent of human blood tickled my nose. It was faint, but that was probably because the dried blood was old.

Thankfully, the scent wasn't coming from Narkissa's former home, but it still concerned me. I crept around the side of the house and tried a window, but it was locked, and the shades were drawn, as were all the others. However, the sliding glass door on the patio out back was cracked, and I heard the murmur of voices.

The scent of blood was stronger through the slight opening, and the hanging slats over the door were at just the right angle for me to get a small view inside.

*Fucking hell.* A pale, lifeless body slumped on the couch, and it was clear he'd been drained a day or so ago.

It was a damn good thing my woman hadn't come back to her place before tonight, but I wanted to kick myself for

leaving her alone to go get the car. She could have stumbled right into them if she'd decided to visit her neighbor.

“The master took her to his house across the street from the store,” a man muttered. “He said we can have her after she's made him a daywalker.”

A woman's voice replied, “Don't sulk, Clive. We can wait a little longer to drink the consort's blood. Once we're all daywalkers, you can drink all the pussy you want, and nobody will be able to do shit about it. Especially when there are enough of us to wipe those born assholes off the face of the earth.”

*What the fuck?* They were clearly nightwalkers, and it sounded as though someone had told them there was a way for them to become like my kind. That person must have gotten their wires crossed because there was only one very specific scenario where someone who'd been bitten and turned could make the transition to daywalker, and I highly doubted any of these motherfuckers were destined consorts who hadn't found their match yet.

But they seemed to think—

“Besides, we don't even know if it will work with this one,” another male voice piped up. “The last two didn't survive his attempt at claiming. This one has been paired with a very powerful daywalker, though, so maybe she'll be different.”

Apparently, someone had made them believe that they could claim a daywalker's consort to gain the ability to walk in the sun. And their master had made more than one attempt. *Fuck.* I needed to help the girl he'd taken. They said she was a consort—probably a relation of the man they'd killed—and even if it hadn't been my duty to protect her, I still would have reached out to my family to save her.

First, I needed to take Narkissa home where I knew she'd be safe, then I'd meet up with my brothers to take this master and his minions down.

“The Bancrofts are the most powerful family I know of. If \_\_\_”

At the mention of my last name, it hit me just how fucking stupid I was. I popped into Narkissa’s old room and saw the open suitcase on the bed and a beautiful, blue gown dropped on the floor by the closet—still on the hanger.

*Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!*

*What the hell is going on?* Ren’s voice floated into my mind.

*How do you know something is wrong?* I asked as I teleported back to the alley behind the convenience store.

*You’re so worked up, you’re projecting your emotions through our connection.*

Usually, we only spoke through our link, but on occasion, we could catch each other’s feelings, so they must have been pulsing from me pretty hard. Not that it was surprising, considering the situation.

Braeden and Liam’s voices followed Ren’s, asking the same questions.

*Narkissa’s been taken by a nightwalker.*

My statement was met with silence, so I added, *The master of those minions we killed when we found her.*

Their relief was almost audible. Under just about any other circumstance, if a human was taken by a nightwalker, they were a lost cause. By the time anyone arrived to save them, they would already be dead or in the process of turning.

But by a stroke of luck or fate, Narkissa seemed to have been abducted by a delusional master who thought she could turn him into a daywalker. I quickly filled them in on what I’d learned about his motives for keeping her alive.

I told them where to meet me, and one by one, they appeared beside me. In the few minutes I’d been watching the house across the street, I’d counted at least six minions patrolling outside, and I’d spotted three more inside when they



passed by a window. The master was obviously paranoid. *He fucking should be.*

“I’m going to see who’s available to back us up,” Braeden whispered.

Over the next minute, our cousin Kieran and his brother Athan arrived. Followed shortly by another cousin, Cian, and his twin siblings, Aura and Abel. They brought a belt for each of us, ones specifically made to hold the tools we needed to take down nightwalkers. A stake, a cross, holy water, and garlic.

Braeden and Abel went to take care of the guards. Kieran and Aura crept around the front of the convenience store to take care of any vamps from the nest we missed last time or new ones they’d created since then. Cian, Athan, and I would be going inside the house to save Narkissa.

Two blurs went up the porch, where two guards stood by the front door. They circled the vampires and then came back down, disappearing behind the house. All that was left of the guards were two piles of ash.

“Let’s go,” I told Cian and Athan in a low tone. We teleported to the porch and waited to see if any trouble showed up. After a minute, I tried the doorknob and rolled my eyes when I found it unlocked. Minions or not—people should keep the fucking doors locked if they didn’t want someone to come inside and kill them.

I pushed the door open to just a slit and sighed when water splashed my face. Idiots. Since I couldn’t see my attacker, even after the water cleared my eyes, because of the angle, I had to retaliate on instinct. I wiped at the wetness on my face and, quick as lightning, reached through the opening and grabbed the arm of a leech while shoving the door open all the way. He tried to scream in agony as his flesh burned, but he barely uttered a sound before my stake went into his heart, and he burst into flames.

The sound had been enough to draw two more minions from a dark hallway behind the stairs, right in front of us, that led to a second story. Athan and Cian handled them while I

sprinted up to the next level. I didn't know for sure where he was holding her, and the basement would usually be my first guess. But something about this asshole made me think he wasn't going to do the obvious.

Clearly, he was obsessed with the idea of walking in the sun, and I was willing to bet that he kept his room above ground because of it. If his plan worked, he'd be able to walk to the windows and throw open the curtains.

My stomach lurched at the idea of Narkissa in another man's bed, but it was the most logical plan, so I forced myself to keep it together by focusing on nothing but finding my consort.

Upstairs, the hallway was lined with two doors on one side and a single door on the other. At the end was a set of ornate double doors that looked as if they'd come from a fifteenth-century building. I suspected the inside of the room would be just as gaudy. The master must have thought becoming a daywalker would essentially make him royalty. *Stupid asshole.*

A board on the stairs creaked behind me, but I recognized Cian's scent, so it didn't cause my focus to waver. I had to be slightly more wary when dealing with a master. Minions were usually a pretty easy kill, but masters fed from both humans and the vampires under their leadership. The combination made them stronger, a little faster, and more deadly.

Not that this asshole was any match for a Bancroft. We grew up learning how to fight and defeat nightwalkers practically from the cradle. Still, arrogance could get you killed.

Athan appeared at my left and Cian at my right. They gestured to their respective doors, and I nodded. I removed the vial of holy water from my belt and twisted off the cap. Then I gripped my stake in my free hand.

Cian held up his fingers indicating three, two, one. Then he and Athan kicked open the doors while I rushed into the end room, sweeping my eyes around to find the undead son of a bitch who'd taken my consort.

When I didn't see him, my gaze landed on the bed, and I roared with rage at the sight. Narkissa was in her bra and panties, tied spread eagle by thick rope. She gasped, though the sound was muffled by the gag in her mouth.

I replaced the cap on the water and returned it to my belt. Then Cian tossed me a knife before he and Athan left, no doubt to hunt for the master. I made quick work of the gag and restraints, then scooped my sweet love into my arms and—

Glass shattered and Narkissa screamed as a strong arm wrapped around my throat and a knee pushed into my back. In this position, with the right amount of torque, my neck would easily snap.

“Let him go!” Narkissa yelled.

“Shut up, bitch!” the master said, his vile breath nearly choking me more than the limb pressing on my airway.

She pulled and tugged at the arm until I gave her a tiny little shake of my head. Following my lead, she went still, and I slowly set her on her feet.

“Get back on the bed, little one,” he snarled. “I’m going to break your daywalker’s pathetic neck and let you watch his head burn in the fireplace while I claim you.”

I growled. *This motherfucker is going to suffer before I turn his ass to ash.*

With as little movement as possible, I opened the hand curled around the vial of water. I’d retrieved it from the belt as I set her on the ground. Narkissa’s eyes dropped to it, and she wiped away a fake tear, then grabbed the liquid when her hand dropped to her side.

“Do it!” the asshole shouted.

She backed up a step and turned as if to do as she was told, but shuffled up to the head of the bed, rather than climbing on right where we stood. Her shoulders moved up and down with a deep breath before she whirled around, flinging the contents of the vial at the nightwalker.

Her aim was on target because when a girly scream ripped from his throat, his knee jerked out of my back. It gave me enough leverage to break his hold on me, and I whipped around, my hand going straight to his junk. His screams were music to my ears as the cross in my palm burned through his pants and into the skin of his dick and balls.

I slammed my other fist into his jaw, enjoying the satisfying crunch when it broke. Then I dropped the cross and grabbed my stake, shoving it below his navel where it wouldn't kill him but would be incredibly painful.

Kieran walked into the room and rolled his eyes when he saw the state of the master vampire. His gaze carefully avoided Narkissa, which was a good thing because I currently had no desire to stab him too. "Stop playing and kill the motherfucker. I want to get home to tuck my kids in and have some alone time with my wife."

"Fine," I agreed, trying not to pout. I yanked the wooden weapon out of his belly and drove it into his heart. He burst into flames for a moment, then disintegrated into a pile of gray ash.

Suddenly, the drapes were flung open, and sunlight streamed into the room. The pile of ash shriveled and turned black. Kieran laughed, and I glanced over to see Narkissa standing by the glass, her hand on her hips, and a triumphant smirk on her lips as she stared at the remains of the vampire.

"So fucking perfect," I murmured with a grin.

I closed the distance between us faster than any human could and pulled my consort into my arms. After giving her a thorough kiss, which was interrupted by my cousin loudly clearing his throat, I touched my forehead to hers and muttered, "I'm never letting you out of my sight again."

"Never is a long time," she whispered back.

"It's not nearly long enough."

She smiled and snuggled closer. "Well, then we better make sure I have forever for you to keep me by your side."

"You don't have to ask me twice."

I glanced at Kieran and lifted my chin. “Thank you.”

He nodded. “You would have done the same for me.” It was absolutely true. “We cleaned out the nest across the street, and Ren burned it to the ground. Once you’re clear of this place, he’ll do the same here.”

For the first time, Kieran’s eyes went to Narkissa, though they stayed on her face, and he smiled warmly. “Welcome to the family, Narkissa. My wife is dying to meet you. When your mate decides to stop hogging you, he can give you her number.”

“I’ll make sure he does!” Narkissa replied with an excited smile.

Kieran disappeared, and I gazed down at my consort’s beautiful face. “Not nervous to meet the family anymore?” I teased.

“They can’t possibly be any scarier than this lot,” she said with a shrug, making me laugh. “Now, take me home.”

“With pleasure, sweetheart.”



## NARKISSA

He teleported us directly into our bedroom, which worked perfectly for me. Wrapping my fingers around his wrist, I tugged him over to the bed. “Remember how I said I wanted to start the new year off with a bang?”

“Of course, I do. I’ll never forget the moment you told me you were ready for our claiming ceremony. Second happiest day of my life.”

I narrowed my eyes and asked, “Only the second?”

The grin he flashed me was blinding. “The night we met is at the top of the list.”

“Oops, sorry.”

“No need to apologize,” he assured as he pulled me against his chest. “I love how fiery you can get.”

“And I just plain old love you.”

His hands came up to cup my face. “I love you, too.”

I pulled my head back when he lowered his mouth to mine and smiled at his disgruntled look. “I’m not turning down a kiss. I just know that the second your lips touch mine, I’ll forget what I was going to say.”

“Then hurry up and tell me whatever it is, sweetheart,” he rasped, his breath hot against my mouth. “After what just happened, I need to get you under me and don’t have a lot of patience left.”

“Good, because neither do I.” I stepped back and sat on the edge of the mattress. “Which is why I want you to claim me. Right here. Right now.”

“Fuck yes.” With a wave of his hand, lit candles were spread throughout the room, my bra and panties were replaced by a gorgeous light-blue negligee with matching panties, and Jareth’s clothes were switched out with a pair of black pajama bottoms.

His hard-on tented the silky material, and I couldn’t wait to feel him move inside me while his fangs pierced my birthmark. I shifted to the center of the mattress and stretched my arms out toward him as he joined me on the bed. “Thanks for the sweet nightie.”

“Don’t get too attached to it,” he growled with a nip at my earlobe. “I figured you’d want to wear something beautiful since our claiming ritual is a special occasion, but that’s not going to stop me from ripping it off your body.”

I twined my arms around his neck as he pressed my back against the mattress. The sheets beneath me were softer than what we normally used, and they were a deep red that reminded me of blood. Very fitting. “Totally fine by me.”

“Do you remember what to expect?” he asked as he kissed down my neck to lick over my birthmark.

“Uh-huh,” I breathed. “I memorized the claiming words and everything.”

“Such a good girl.”

His voice was filled with a hunger that matched my own. I wasn’t certain if it was the adrenaline from what had happened with the master vampire or the lure of the claiming ceremony already working its magic, but I felt as though my senses were in overdrive. We’d barely even touched, and my body was already primed for release.

As he cupped my face with his palms again, his bright blue eyes burned into mine as he asked, “Narkissa Anders, do you accept my claim on you?”



“Yes, I accept your claim on me with all my heart and soul, Jareth Bancroft.” Although he had taught me what to say, there was a deep knowing inside me, as though the words came from my soul.

My eyes drifted close as he lowered his head to press his lips against mine in a quick kiss. “You’re prepared to be mine from now until the end of time?”

This time, I was the one who kissed Jareth with my eyes wide open so I could see his gorgeous face before I answered, “And beyond.”

“To cement our mating bond, you need to trust me without question. Are you ready to demonstrate the depth of your faith in me?”

I had expected this to be the hardest part of the ceremony for me because I had always been fiercely independent. But I had no issues with handing control over to the man I loved. Jareth had more than proven himself to me. “Yes, Jareth. There’s no limit to my trust in you. Whatever you need, I’m beyond ready to provide.”

His gaze raked down my body, taking in my pebbled nipples and the dampness between my legs. The negligee he’d conjured up hid none of my need from him. “I’m not sure what I did to deserve you, but I’m going to be grateful from now until eternity.”

“As will I.” My voice was husky as he pushed my legs apart and settled between them.

He skimmed his hands up my inner thighs, goose bumps following in the wake of his touch. When his thumbs teased at the gusset of my lace panties, I shuddered in need. Then he made good on his promise, wrapping the silky material of my negligee in his fists to rip it from my body. “So fucking beautiful. And mine. Only ever mine.”

“And you’re mine,” I whispered, feeling just as territorial as he was.

He smirked at me and nodded. “And I wouldn’t have it any other way, sweetheart.”

Feeling bold, I widened my legs farther and urged, “Then take me and complete the bond. I need you.”

His nostrils flared, and his cheeks darkened as his control snapped. “Oh, I’m going to take you all right.”

He slid his hands under my butt and yanked my panties down my legs. Since he hadn’t included a bra with my lingerie, I was completely naked. A split second later, he took full advantage of my state, bending low to suck on one of my nipples. I arched my back, pressing my breast deeper into his mouth. When I stroked one of my hands through his hair to cup the back of his head, he released my nipple with a pop and growled, “No, sweetheart. I’m in control. Not you.”

His commanding tone sent a sensual thrill up my spine. I dropped my hands to my side, but that wasn’t good enough for him. Gripping my wrists, he lifted my arms above my head and ordered, “Keep them up here.”

“Okay,” I agreed as I dug my fingers into a pillow in the hope that it would help me remember not to move my arms. He rewarded me for my quick compliance by licking my other nipple as he kneaded my breasts. I felt each tug of his mouth deep in my core and was getting more turned on by the second.

I was already nearing an orgasm when he moved lower, his tongue flicking over my belly button before he hiked my thighs over his shoulders. “Mmm, you’re drenched. I love how responsive you are for me, sweetheart.”

His breath was hot on my pussy, and I wanted his mouth on me so badly. But no matter how much I squirmed and pleaded, he took his time toying with me. Testing if I could keep my hands off his gorgeous body while he drove me higher and higher without letting me come.

“Please, Jareth. I don’t think I can take much more.”

“Then come for me while I devour you. Over and over again,” he murmured against my damp flesh before plunging his tongue inside my channel while his finger circled my clit. Stars exploded behind my eyes as my body was swamped by

pleasure. When I came down from my orgasm, he built me right back up, working two fingers into my tightness. My next release was even bigger, and so was the one after that. I could barely see straight when he finally lowered his body on top of mine, and the crown of his dick nudged my entrance. “I’m the luckiest man in the world, having you all to myself. I’m the only one who’ll ever get to feel the perfection of your pussy clenched around my cock.”

He pushed inside with one powerful thrust, burying himself to the hilt. “Oh, yes.”

Jareth set a hard and fast pace right off the bat, fucking in and out of me like he was trying to hammer me into the mattress. The sound of our skin slapping together echoed around the walls, along with his grunts of exertion and my mewls of pleasure. I took everything he had to give me, but I desperately wanted to hold him. “Can I move my arms?”

“Not yet.” He bent my legs at the knees and pushed them to my chest, going deeper as he continued to power into me. “Oh, fuck, yeah. So damn good.”

“Please,” I whimpered.

He circled his hips. “Just a little bit longer, sweetheart. You can do it for me.”

I clenched the pillow so hard, I was surprised I didn’t rip it open. I continued to hold on even as my body began to tremble. When my pussy started to ripple around his hard length, and I felt the first splash of his seed against my inner walls, he finally rasped, “Now, sweetheart. Wrap your arms around me and hold on while I fill you with my come and finally claim you as mine forever.”

Releasing the pillow, I did as he instructed and just in the nick of time. As my arms circled his neck, he twisted my head to the side and sank his fangs into my birthmark. His bite triggered another, bigger orgasm. The pleasure was unlike anything I’d ever felt before. Power surged through my veins, bringing pain in its wake. Jareth was my anchor in a sea of sensation, the only thing that made sense as my body made the

transition to immortal. And when the process was over, and the pain was gone, he rode me through another orgasm.

As the pleasure waned, he cupped the back of my head and pressed my mouth to his chest. “Drink from me, sweetheart. Seal our bond for eternity.”

I had assumed the taking of his blood would be something I’d have to force myself to do, but there was no hesitation as I parted my lips and sank my newly formed fangs into his flesh. My need to taste him was overwhelming, and I found his spicy taste to be delicious. After I drank my fill, I licked the wound to seal it—as he always did with mine. As I tilted my head back, our gazes met, and the bond snapped fully into place, triggering another orgasm for both of us. My pussy clamped down hard, his come filling it to overflowing until our mixed releases spilled down my thighs.

“Whoa,” I breathed, squeezing my eyes shut as I reveled in the strength of our bond. “I’ve never felt anything like this before. Even after everything you told me about the claiming, I didn’t expect it to be so...so....”

“Overwhelming.”

I wasn’t surprised that he was able to finish my sentence. All our mental barriers had dropped, and we were totally open to each other. I had a front-row seat to all his thoughts and emotions, and quickly confirmed what I’d already known—I was the center of Jareth’s world. Just like he was mine.

# EPILOGUE

## JARETH

A maia said goodbye and left the exam room with Liam right on her heels. They'd stopped in after their appointment with the OBGYN. We used the same doctor, and our appointment had ended up being right after theirs on the doctor's schedule.

Narkissa sighed, and I frowned when I saw the frustrated expression on her face. I laced my fingers through hers and gave them a gentle squeeze. "What's wrong, sweetheart? Is your back hurting? Your feet? Do you need to go to the bathroom or throw up?"

She giggled and patted my hand. "I'm fine. I promise to let you know if any of those things come up." I smiled and kissed her knuckles before resting our joined hands on the table by her side. I knew I hovered too much and could be a bit of a "worry wart," as she called me. But she never got mad about it or asked me to stop. She said she loved that I was so invested in the pregnancy and cared for her so much that I was always intent on seeing her as happy and comfortable as possible.

The doctor came in before I could drag out whatever was bothering her.

"The results of your blood test look great, and your measurements are right on track."

Narkissa's frown deepened. "Are you sure?"

The doctor sat in a little rolling chair in front of the ultrasound machine and pulled it over to the side of the exam

table. “Absolutely. Now, let’s see how things are progressing inside Mommy’s tummy.”

She squeezed some gel onto Narkissa’s bump and began moving the wand around. The first thing she always did was take some measurements of pretty much everything but the baby, so I took the opportunity to grill my wife about what was bothering her.

“Tell me what’s wrong,” I demanded softly.

“It’s nothing.”

I drilled her with a hard stare. “It’s not nothing. Now tell me so I can fix it.”

She chuckled and shook her head. “You can’t fix this.”

My eyes narrowed. “Try me,” I challenged.

Narkissa sighed. “It’s just...I feel like a freaking elephant.”

“Sweetheart, you aren’t anywhere close to even the pinky toe of an elephant, but I’m told those feelings are normal.”

“But—” Her cheeks bloomed with pink.

I raised an eyebrow, and she sighed before continuing. “Amaia is only a month further along, and I’m so much bigger than her.” Moisture welled in her eyes, and I quickly cradled her face in my hands and kissed her before wiping away the tears with my thumbs.

“It doesn’t matter what anyone else looks like, sweetheart. You’re fucking gorgeous, and you outshine them all.”

She gave me a watery smile but still sighed. “I just don’t understand why I’m so much bigger than her!”

“It’s to be expected when you’re carrying twins,” the doctor interrupted in a conversational tone.

Narkissa and I were both speechless as we stared at the OBGYN who was still clicking and writing, taking measurements. She looked up when we were silent for an extended period and frowned. “You didn’t know?”

We shook our heads simultaneously.

“For Pete’s sake,” she grumbled. “Ever since my office manager mated and moved away, things have been slipping through the cracks.” She put her hand on her forehead and groaned. “I can’t believe the lab tech didn’t tell you at the last ultrasound.”

Our doctor had been delivering a baby during our last appointment, so an assistant had taken Narkissa’s stats and done the ultrasound. Then the doctor called after she’d looked everything over.

“Holy cow. That phone call makes so much more sense now...” Narkissa said.

I thought back, and she had a point. We’d been a little confused with some of the doctor’s questions and answers. In hindsight, I could now see that she’d been talking about twins.

“I guess she thought you’d want to give us all the results yourself?” Narkissa wondered.

“And I figured she told you at the appointment,” the doctor concluded. “I’m so sorry.”

“Twins,” I rasped, saying something for the first time since she dropped the double bomb on us.

“That’s what she said,” Narkissa giggled. “You okay there, Daddy?”

“Twins.”

Narkissa’s smile fell a little, and her brow puckered. “Are you okay? Does this upset you?”

*Fuck.* I hadn’t meant to make her think I was unhappy about the news, especially when I was the complete opposite. “I’m...” I jumped up and strutted to the door, flinging it open before putting my hands in the air. “We’re having twins!” I shouted with a giant smile. Then I shut the door and went to the window, yanking it open and shouting the news again. After I closed it, I swaggered back to Narkissa and perched on the table beside her on one hip, still grinning like a loon.

She was beaming at me, but her smile was a little sly. “Pretty proud of yourself, aren’t you?” she asked, patting my



chest—which I had to admit was a little puffed up.

I shrugged. “I’m just excited about two babies.”

“Two babies you put inside me at once.”

“Fuck yeah, I did.” I grinned smugly and she laughed, falling back against the raised portion of the exam table.

“You’re such a man.”

I kept grinning and tapped her baby bump. “Too fucking right, sweetheart. All man.”

She found that even funnier, and her peals of laughter traveled straight to my heart, reminding me how very perfect she was for me.

I grasped her hands and pulled her up so I could give her a quick, hard kiss. “Thank you for being my everything, sweetheart. For giving me an eternal life filled with happiness and love.”

“You’ve done the same for me,” she replied with a sweet smile.

“I love you, my sweet Narkissa.”

“I love you, too.” Then she rose a little higher and whispered in my ear. “Double the babies, double the hormones. Do you know what that means?”

I swallowed hard and nodded.

“I’ll tell you anyway. It means when this appointment is over, I’m going to need you to take me home and give me multiple orgasms for each baby.”

My cock swelled and I shifted, trying to find a more comfortable position.

“I’m hungry, too...” She leaned back, and her eyes bounced down to the bulge in my pants and back to my face.

I jumped to my feet and whirled around to face the doctor, my mouth open and ready to demand she hurry. But she beat me to it.

“I know, I know. Hurry up,” she sighed. She wrote down a few more things, then we all paused in awe as she showed us the adorable little blobs that were our munchkins.

But I had a printed picture to stare at later, so I hurried to help Narkissa dress and rushed her out the door.

Three hours later, Narkissa collapsed back against my chest, panting and holding her belly. My hands still cupped her breasts, and my semi-soft cock was buried in her tight pussy. But her hands on her stomach worried me. “Are you all right?” I asked in her ear, wondering if she’d hurt herself riding me too hard.

We’d started out with her on all fours, but then she’d pushed me back and climbed on top of me to bounce on my dick reverse cowgirl style. She shook her head, but I wasn’t satisfied with that. “Narkissa,” I warned in a low tone. She knew I hated it when she was in pain or when anything was wrong, and she tried to hide it.

“Seriously, babe,” she sputtered, trying to catch her breath. “They’re moving. I just couldn’t talk yet to tell you.”

“What?” I exclaimed, sitting up straight. The movement caused her to sink down on me a little more, and my semi turned into a full-blown hard-on in seconds.

She made a noise that sounded like a muffled moan but grabbed my hands and put them on her stomach. After a minute or so, I felt a tiny little push against the palm of my hand. My mouth dropped open in wonder, and I sucked in a breath when it happened again.

“You’re amazing,” I whispered to my love. I grasped her chin with one hand and turned her head so I could kiss her long and deep. Her muscles suddenly contracted around my cock, and she moaned into my mouth. “Fuck, sweetheart. Don’t do that,” I grunted. She needed some rest. When we’d arrived home, I’d eaten her to two orgasms, then fucked her with her legs on my shoulders, made love to her, and fucked her again, ending where we were a few minutes ago.

“You promised to give me whatever I want,” she said breathlessly as she curled her hips.

“I think you should rest,” I told her half-heartedly.

“And I think you should fuck me.”

My eyes went wide, and my cock, which had already been hard as steel, swelled to the point of pain. “If this is what pregnancy hormones do to you,” I rasped, “Expect to be knocked up for the foreseeable future.”

Gliding my hands back up, I cupped her full, ripe breasts. “I can’t say I’m not enjoying how these have grown, too,” I growled as I squeezed them before using my thumb and forefinger to twist and pluck her nipples.

“More!” she cried out as she moved restlessly on my shaft.

I bucked my hips, and she began to rise and drop in rhythm with my thrusts.

“Jareth! Yes! Yes!”

I swung my legs around and dropped them to the floor on the side of the bed so I could use the leverage to pound into her hard and fast until we were both dangling on the precipice of climax. “I love you,” I grunted. Then I sank my fangs into those precious marks just as I moved one hand to her pussy to pinch her clit.

She screamed as she shattered, and her orgasms milked my dick, pushing me over the edge with her.

“I’ll never get enough of you,” I growled once I’d retracted my fangs and sealed the wound with my tongue.

“Never is a long time,” she said, and I could hear the smile in her voice.

“Not nearly long enough.”

# EPILOGUE

## NARKISSA

“**W**hy am I the one who is always stuck playing nursemaid?” Braeden complained as he glanced over at the cluster of females giggling on the other side of the room.

I had to bite my lip to stop myself from chuckling over how disgruntled he sounded. “I think the word you were going for there was babysitter since none of the girls are sick.”

“I said exactly what I meant—nursemaid, not nurse.” He heaved a deep sigh and crossed his arms over his broad chest. “When I was a young lad, many centuries ago, it was the nursemaid who looked after us when our parents were off on a mission.”

“Sorry.” I laughed and shook my head. “Even after five years with Jareth, I still sometimes forget how long you all have lived.”

“Which is exactly my point,” he muttered, pinching the bridge of his nose between his index finger and thumb. “I’m too damn old to be hanging out with a bunch of teenage girls.”

“True, but most of them aren’t *just* teenage girls. They’re your cousins. Family.” I’d learned the true meaning of that word from the Bancrofts—unconditional love, support, and trust.

“Point well made,” he conceded with a smile. “And I suppose it makes sense for me to be the one to stay behind with them since they’re not done celebrating yet. The rest of you have little ones who need to be put to bed.”

“Except for Ren.” I scanned the room and didn’t spot him anywhere. “Who seems to have disappeared at just the right time.”

Braeden’s upper lip curled up into a snarl. “Yes, my little brother is quite adept at avoiding babysitting duty.”

I grinned up at him and bumped his side with my shoulder. “Probably because he’s the youngest of the bunch and always had Liam, Jareth, and you to look after him. He never got tapped for babysitting duty growing up, so he’s not comfortable doing it now.”

“You might be right.”

“Of course, she is,” Jareth murmured as he came up behind me and pulled my back against his chest, wrapping his arms around my body.

Braeden quirked a brow. “You don’t even know what we were talking about.”

“Doesn’t matter.” Jareth brushed a kiss against my temple. “My consort is as brilliant as she is gorgeous. Take her advice, whatever it was.”

Braeden jerked his chin toward the group of girls. “I’m not sure which is worse—whatever trouble Sheridan and her friends are going to try to get into or your endless public displays of affection.”

“Someone’s grumpy,” Jareth whispered in my ear, pitching his voice just loud enough for his brother to hear.

“Damn straight, I am,” Braedan grumbled.

“Sheridan isn’t ready for the party to end, but Kieran said the only way the girls can stay was if one of the adults volunteered to chaperone.” I pointed at Braedan. “And your brother drew the short end of the stick since he doesn’t have anywhere else he needs to be right now.”

Jareth laughed. “You’re such a sucker.”

“What was I supposed to do?” Braedan shrugged. “I couldn’t disappoint the birthday girl.”

I twisted around to glare up at Jareth. “It’s not as though you have any room to talk. Our children have you wrapped around their little fingers.”

Jareth’s sexy grin sent a shiver up my spine. “Just like their mom.”

“Seriously. Go home. I’ve had enough of hanging out with loved up daywalker couples,” Braedan complained. “I’ve got this.”

“Too bad Cian, Aura, and Abel took Ronan out for a drink. I’m sure he would have been more than happy to help.”

Most twenty-one-year-olds wouldn’t have wanted to be stuck hanging out with their eighteen-year-old sister and her friends, but Jareth was right. Ronan adored Sheridan and wouldn’t have complained about staying behind so she and her friends could finish celebrating her birthday.

“I should’ve gone with them,” Braedan muttered. “At least then I would’ve done something to earn the headache I’m sure to end up with tonight.”

I laughed as Jareth and I walked over to where our four-year-old twin boys were shoving cake into their mouths as though we never fed them. It took us several minutes to get Bryson and Griffin cleaned up, and we were just getting ready to teleport home when I heard Sheridan’s happy cry. “Oh my gosh, you guys are destined to be together!”

When I glanced over my shoulder, I found Braedan standing in front of one of Sheridan’s friends. I’d only met the girl tonight and didn’t know much about her except that she was a daywalker who’d recently turned eighteen...and she was apparently Braedan’s destined consort.

“Ooh, how exciting,” I sighed, happy tears filling my eyes. “Now Braedan won’t have any reason to grumble about how loved up we are since he will be, too.”

“Grab your mother’s hand,” Jareth instructed Griffin as he took hold of Bryson.

I puffed my bottom lip out in a pout. “But I wanted to see what happens with your brother.”

“Hurry,” he urged our son. “Before Sheridan realizes that she needs to talk someone else into staying and one of us ends up trying to get both of our sugared up boys down to bed.”

“Oh, darn,” I sighed as I wrapped my fingers around Griffin’s small hand so we could teleport back home. “I guess I’ll have to pester him for details later.”

I’d assumed everything would go smoothly since Braedan and his fated consort were both daywalkers, but I would soon discover how wrong I was.



# **EXTRA EPILOGUE**

## JARETH

“This is your fault,” Narkissa growled at me.

I tried to hold back my smile, but I failed spectacularly, which only made her scowl darken. However, nothing I could say at that moment would appease her, so I stayed silent and let her rant. Besides, it really was my fault.

“I can’t believe you did this to me *again!* Oh, my gosh, Jareth! Stop looking so freaking proud of yourself!”

I couldn’t help it. After Bryson and Griffin turned five, we decided to try again and were blessed with two more twin boys, Darik and Alarik. When they were three, I convinced Narkissa to let me knock her up one more time. I wanted a little girl. One who looked just like my gorgeous consort.

The doctor had assured us that the likelihood of another set of twins was very low.

While we had plenty of family around to help, twins were a challenge—and all boys made for a rambunctious household.

So when the doctor informed us that Narkissa was carrying another set of twins, my wife had turned her wrath on me. I knew she wasn’t unhappy about our babies, she was just shell-shocked. And probably feeling exhausted just thinking about double newborns, yet again.

But she just looked so damn adorable when she was mad. All that fire made me want to throw the doctor out of the room and make my woman scream with pleasure.

Instead, I tenderly touched her cheek and gave her a soft kiss. “I’ll be right by your side through all of this. We’ll do it together.”

Narkissa sighed. “I know.” Then she smiled. “At least we have double the chance of having a girl this time around.”

The doctor cleared her throat awkwardly, and I turned an icy stare her way.

“After two boys, the chances of having a girl go down.”

Narkissa’s smile faltered, and I was tempted to drive a stake into the doctor’s heart. We would love our children with everything we had, no matter their gender. But that didn’t mean we wouldn’t be a little disappointed if we never had a girl.

Then again...never was a long fucking time when you were immortal.

“Stop thinking with your dick, Jareth,” my wife growled. “Just because we can physically have babies for centuries doesn’t mean I’m going to let you keep me pregnant until the end of time.”

I bit my lip to avoid pouting like a spoiled brat. Narkissa was hot as fuck all the time, but there was just something special about seeing her round and swollen with our babies. Plus, she was horny as hell when she was pregnant. *Absolutely insatiable*. My cock twitched at the thought.

Narkissa rolled her eyes and asked the doctor some questions while she finished the exam.

Later that night, after tucking the boys in bed, I took my consort into our bedroom and made sweet love to her. I told her how amazing she was and how grateful I was for her. And for the gifts she’d given me.

“This is it. You know that, right?” she asked, propping her chin on my chest. “Even if they are both boys.”

I found myself trying not to pout again.

Narkissa’s eyes narrowed. “Jareth,” she growled adorably.

“We can discuss it another time,” I conceded.

“Fine. But I know exactly how that discussion is going to go.”

I flipped her to her back in the blink of an eye and plunged my cock into her snug channel, sheathing myself completely. “Something like this?” I purred in her ear before I started moving. “My fat cock convincing you until you’re screaming ‘yes’?”

Narkissa moaned and squeezed her pussy, clamping down on my shaft as I withdrew, making it difficult to pull out.

“Fuck, baby,” I rasped. “I can’t get enough of you. So damn wet and tight.”

My cock dragged along her walls, and she locked her legs around my hips, her pelvis bucking up to meet each of my thrusts.

“Jareth,” she cried. “Yes!”

“That’s what I want to hear, baby,” I grunted.

I sped up, slamming into her over and over, driving us both higher until we reached the peak, then we fell over together. When the rhythm of our heart beats slowed and we caught our breath, we were lying in an exhausted heap. As soon as I found the energy, I cuddled my beautiful consort close to me.

“I love you, baby,” I whispered in her ear.

“I love you, too. But if you think that magic dick of yours will change my mind, think again.”

I couldn’t help laughing and placing a kiss on top of her head. “Duly noted.”

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“I’VE GOT EXCITING NEWS,” the doctor said as she wrote something in Narkissa’s chart. “Baby number two is a girl.”

My consort gasped and clapped her hands over her mouth. I grinned before peeling them away so I could kiss her.

She started up at me, her eyes warm with love and twinkling with excitement. “That girl is going to be so spoiled,” she giggled.

“I’m sure she’ll have me and her brothers wrapped around her little fingers.” I would do anything for my boys, but I had no doubt that I would be as overprotective of my daughter as I was of my wife.

“So this means we’re all done now, right?” Narkissa asked.

I shrugged, not ready to commit either way.

“Jareth,” she growled.

Smiling, I kissed her thoroughly, then turned my attention to the doctor, ignoring my consort’s annoyed huff.

I glanced down at her and thought, *damn, I’m a lucky man.*

“Thank you,” I whispered.

“For what?”

“Loving me, giving me an amazing family, being by my side for eternity.”

Narkissa’s face turned soft as she gazed up at me. “Even if fate hadn’t paired us together, I would never have been truly happy if I wasn’t spending forever with you.”

# **BEFORE DAYBREAK**

After spending five centuries searching for his destined consort, Braeden Bancroft stumbled across her at his cousin's birthday party. He couldn't wait to start their lives together.

Callidora Yellen wasn't ready for her fate. She had goals she wanted to accomplish before settling down with an adoring, but overprotective, daywalker.

Can Braeden convince Callie that her dreams are safe with him?

# PROLOGUE

## CALLIDORA

Most daywalkers learned how to fight at a young age, but all of my training had focused on self-defense. My parents wanted to make sure I knew how to get away from a nightwalker on the rare chance one of them got close to me. Whenever I insisted that I was ready to advance to the next stage of training and get to the good stuff, they put me off with some garbage about how I'd never need it. Being the only child of centuries-old daywalkers had certain disadvantages. Like being figuratively wrapped in bubble wrap for your first sixteen years and wondering if the rest of your immortal life would be the same.

"You're sure Ren doesn't mind training me?" I asked my friend Sheridan, twisting my hands together as my nerves got the better of me.

"He wouldn't have agreed if he had a problem with it," she assured me.

The Bancrofts were a massive family, especially compared to mine. Sheridan had lots of aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings. Asking her if one of her male relatives would be willing to teach me how to battle nightwalkers seemed like the perfect idea at the time since my parents had categorically refused to discuss the possibility with me. But now that the day had come for me to do my first training session with him, I was starting to second-guess myself.

My uneasiness was probably in large part due to the fact that I'd only met Ren in passing once before. But I'd spent



plenty of time with Sheridan's immediate family. "I kind of thought your dad or brother would be the one doing this. Not one of your many cousins."

"I think Ren is my second cousin, actually. Or is he my first cousin once removed?" Sheridan shook her head and sighed. "I always get confused by how it works."

I narrowed my eyes at my friend. "You know what I meant."

"True." She flashed me a smug grin. "But getting on your nerves seemed like a smart plan. I figured if I irritated you enough, maybe you'll forget to be nervous."

"Nice try, but it's not going to happen." I crossed my arms over my chest and tapped my foot on the floor. "Now, spill. Was your dad against the idea of me training at your house?"

"Not hardly. Ren is cool, but he wouldn't have agreed to meet you here if my dad wasn't okay with the plan. They're more like brothers than cousins." Her bright blue eyes twinkled with mischief. "Now that I think about it, I wonder why I haven't been calling him my uncle all this time."

"Sheridan," I gritted out through clenched teeth.

"Sorry." She held her palms up in a gesture of surrender. "Back to your original question. My dad doesn't agree with how your parents have neglected your training. He thinks they're putting your safety at risk by limiting your ability to fight. And he's not okay with it."

He'd never voiced his censure to me, but I wasn't surprised he felt that way since he was incredibly supportive of Sheridan. "Yeah, but actively going against their wishes is totally different than thinking they're wrong."

"My dad was the one who asked Ren to train you because he's worked with other female daywalkers before, while the only ones my dad has trained are my mom, Aura, and me."

"Oh." Knowing the plan had Kieran Bancroft's stamp of approval filled me with relief.

“And Ren has done some of my training, too.” She executed a perfect spinning roundhouse kick and grinned. “He’s got mad skills, and he’s going to help you become a badass vampire slayer just like he’s been doing for me.”

I already knew what she was going to say, but I still asked, “And you don’t think it’s dumb for me to do this?”

Sheridan shook her head and smiled. “Not even a little bit. How else are we going to face off against nightwalkers together after we turn eighteen?”

Her answer was a big part of why we got along so well. Most teenage daywalker females dreamed about the day when they’d meet the man they were fated to spend the rest of their life with. But not Sheridan and me. We wanted to make our mark on the world first. To help save the humans who were destined consorts of our kind. To hunt down and destroy the evil vampires who wanted nothing more than to eliminate all daywalkers from the face of the planet.

I’d kept my dream to myself until I met Sheridan and she flat out told me she was going to become a badass vampire slayer when she grew up. I knew there would be no support for my goal from my family. My mother pretended I was no different from the daughters of her friends, and my father still acted as though I was six years old. “My parents are going to pitch a fit if they find out what I’m doing.”

“They’re not going to find out, and even if they did, they have nobody to blame but themselves. It’s their fault you had to search out a trainer on your own.” Sheridan clenched her fists and set them on her hips. “I get being protective of your kids. My dad has shielded all of us from the evil in this world as much as he can, but he’s also made sure my siblings and I can handle anything that comes our way. Your parents have done you a disservice by coddling you the way they have.”

“Which is why I didn’t hesitate to volunteer to head up your training when Kieran asked,” a male voice said from behind us.

I whirled around and found Ren standing only a few feet away. Sheridan hadn’t been kidding about him having mad

skills—I hadn't heard a thing when he teleported into the room.

Although I'd never felt the tiniest hint of attraction to a male—and never would until I met my destined mate—I subjectively knew that Ren was gorgeous. With the stereotypical Bancroft dark hair and bright blue eyes, I was certain he got a lot of unwanted attention from human women. And judging by the smug curve of his lips, he was well aware of his attractiveness.

The man was doing me a huge favor, so I refrained from rolling my eyes as I walked toward him and thrust out my hand. “Thanks. I really appreciate it.”

There wasn't a single speck of reaction when his palm slid against mine. Not that I expected there to be. Not until I reached the age of majority and could I sense my fated pairing.

Ren's expression softened, and I couldn't help but wonder if he had the gift of clairvoyance when he murmured, “No thanks are necessary. You never know, we could discover when you turn eighteen that we're destined to be together, and I've been helping you out of a selfish instinct all along.”

I yanked my hand from his grasp and took a step back, shaking my head. “I hope not.”

His eyes widened as his head jerked back in surprise. “Come on now, I'm a hell of a catch!”

“It's not you, it's me,” I mumbled.

He chuckled softly and shook his head. “That's what everyone says when they're trying to let someone down easily.”

He was right. He deserved more than a cliché for an explanation. “I had to sneak behind my parents' back to meet with you today. They think Sheridan and I are hanging out doing teenage girl things at her house.”

“That's technically true.” He waved his hand in a circle. “You're both sixteen, and you're in the basement of Sheridan's home. Hence, you're doing teenage girl stuff at her house.”

“I’m a sixteen-year-old daywalker, and the only thing I’ve been taught is to run if confronted by a nightwalker. Maybe land a good punch or two before taking off. But that’s it.” I strode over to the weapons on the wall across from me and trailed my fingers down a wooden stake. “We have a training room in our basement just like this one, but I’ve never been allowed to touch any of the weapons there.”

“I’m more than happy to teach you how to use them.” Ren shrugged as his brows drew together. “But I don’t understand what any of this has to do with not wanting to find your fated mate.”

I heaved a deep sigh. “You know how daywalker men can be.”

“Um, yeah...because I am one,” he joked as he pointed at his broad chest.

“And when you meet your destined consort, I’m sure you’ll be just as overprotective with her as all male daywalkers are with their women.” I pulled a wooden stake from the wall. “She’ll probably never need to use any of the training she had before you found her. Because you’ll be there to do all the killing for her.”

“You’re wrong.” He shook his head, his expression turning utterly serious. “I hope like hell my destined consort never has to fight for her life, but if she hasn’t already learned how to kill a nightwalker, you can be damn sure I’ll teach her everything she needs to know.”

“But what if mine wants to wrap me in bubble wrap like my parents have done my whole life?” I asked, giving voice to my deepest fear about meeting the man who could own my heart but would also have the power to break it.

Ren gripped my shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze. “Fate wouldn’t pair you with someone who couldn’t be exactly what you need. Your partner won’t try to stifle you. He’ll help you become the best version of yourself that you can be.”

Hopefully, I wouldn't have to test that theory for a long time. I'd hate to find out he was wrong before I'd achieved what I set out to do.



“Too bad Cian, Aura, and Abel took Ronan out for a drink. I’m sure he would have been more than happy to help,” Narkissa, my brother’s consort, said with a decidedly unsympathetic grin.

I’d been stuck with the job of playing nursemaid for a bunch of teenage girls who were celebrating the eighteenth birthday of my cousin’s daughter, Sheridan. Her older brother, Ronan, had skirted the duty because he only recently turned twenty-one, and they had whisked him away, taking him out for a drink. I mentally groaned at the thought of all the fun they’d have without me.

“I should’ve gone with them,” I muttered. “At least then I would’ve done something to earn the headache I’m sure to end up with tonight.”

I couldn’t really be annoyed with Ronan, though. Narkissa was right that he would have been more than happy to help. He adored Sheridan and wouldn’t have complained for a second about staying to babysit the girls.

My brother and sister-in-law were about to take their children home, so I wandered off to check in with Sheridan about the plan for the night—so to speak since it was nearly five in the morning. Though our kind of vampire could walk in the sun, we preferred the nocturnal life due to our incredibly pale skin and sensitive eyes that were much sharper at night. It also helped keep the fact we weren’t aging less noticeable.

Sheridan stood with ten young girls—okay, to be fair, most of them were eighteen, and the rest were only a year younger. Still, compared to my five hundred and forty-three years, they were practically in diapers. My eyes strayed to the female my cousin was speaking with, and I immediately revised my generalized categorization.

The dark-haired daywalker was clearly young, but she had the body of a woman with curves in the right places despite her slender frame. My body had absolutely zero reaction to her, but I still appreciated her beauty.

They both turned to look at me when I approached, and I was struck by the woman's incredible eyes. They were hazel, but the greenish-brown was so bright they appeared gold. The maturity in them and the way she held herself with confidence took me aback a little. Most girls her age retained some childish qualities, still developing and finding themselves. But while this female had an innocence about her, she obviously knew who she was.

I smiled, a little relieved because I had a feeling she would be interesting to talk to, so I wouldn't have to suffer through a night of inane teenage chatter.

“Hey, Braeden,” Sheridan greeted me happily.

“Happy birthday, cousin,” I said, giving her a side hug and a kiss on the top of her head, which only came to my shoulder. I liked to tease her about being short, but in reality, the height discrepancy was because I was six-foot-six.

“Thanks!” She beamed up at me, then gestured to her friend. “This is Callidora—we call her Callie—Yellen. She lives a few blocks away from me.”

I inclined my head and smiled, “Very nice to meet you.”

“You, too.” Callie cocked her head to the side and smirked. “You got stuck with babysitting duty, huh?”

I laughed and shrugged, holding my hands out to the sides. “Guilty.”

She sighed dramatically. “Well, there went our plans to sneak out to a strip club.”



Sheridan snorted with laughter, and I shook my head with an amused smile. “And what exactly would be fun in that for you girls?”

“Shock value.” Her tone and expression were completely serious, and I wasn’t sure what to think until she winked.

I laughed and began to reply when suddenly, she pitched forward from someone bumping into her from behind. I reached out to catch her, but it turned out, she didn’t need any help. With an agile move of her body, she caught her balance and stayed upright. However, the cup she’d been holding had been crushed to her chest, and red liquid was splattered on the bodice of her dress.

“Oh, crap,” she sighed, looking at the blood rolling down the front of her clothes. “My mother is going to kill me. She loves this dress.”

“We can get the stain out if we take care of it right now,” Sheridan assured her and grabbed her hand, about to drag her off. “Braeden, will you take her drink, please?”

Callie smiled gratefully and held out the almost empty glass of chilled bagged blood. Daywalkers found the taste of warm human blood incredibly distasteful, especially when it was fresh. Most of us used a service that delivered bagged blood.

I reached for the glass, and our fingers brushed.

The cup dropped from my fingers and shattered on the hardwood floor. My body sprung to life, my blood turned hot, my pulse raced, and my cock hardened to steel.

Callie’s golden eyes had gone wide with shock as we stood there with our hands hovering between us, our fingers just barely touching.

“Oh, my gosh,” Sheridan cried out happily. “You guys are destined to be together!”

A wide grin split my face, but it faltered when Callie snatched her hand back, her expression one of...was that dread? *What the fuck?* No, I had to be reading her wrong. She was probably just nervous.

This was the moment most daywalkers lived for. At my age, I'd begun to wonder if it would ever happen. Now, I knew it was because Callie hadn't been born yet. My eyes swept over her, and I silently patted fate on the back. *Absolutely worth the wait.* Not only was she stunning, but Sheridan didn't have friends that weren't on her level. So I already knew Callie would be kind and intelligent. And thinking about her earlier teasing, she had a great sense of humor.

We would be an excellent pair, and not just as friends. I had no doubt that we'd be just like my brothers and cousins. I could see myself falling for her in no time.

Unable to keep from touching her, I grabbed her hand back, then tugged her into my chest when I decided to move us somewhere more private. In a flash, we were in my—make that our—bedroom.

“Wait, I still need to take care of my dress,” she protested as she tried to wriggle out of my embrace.

“Forget the dress, beautiful. I'll buy you as many as you want.” Slipping my hand into her hair, I cradled the back of her head to hold it where I wanted it. “Later.” Then I sealed my mouth over hers.

There was no other word to explain what happened when our lips touched than magic. Sparkly fireworks burst behind my eyelids, and I felt an enchanted wind whipping around the room. I could only imagine what would happen when we made love. Although, I doubted my imagination could conjure up anything to compare with what it would be like to be inside my consort.

I yanked her head back just a little, and she gasped—which had been my intention because it gave me the opening I needed to thrust my tongue inside. Almost immediately following her quick intake of air, she moaned and stepped closer to me, her arms curling around my neck as she went up on her tiptoes.

The party had been on the formal side, and Callie had dressed for summer in a spaghetti-strapped gown that left me plenty of skin to explore with my hands as I plundered her

mouth. The bodice was covered in cream lace, leaving only peeks of the pale pink that matched her voluminous skirt and sash.

As she pressed closer, her nipples poked through the fabric, and my blood thundered in my ears when my hands encountered no sign of a bra. Easy access. I would definitely be buying Callie more of these.

With one hand, I began to lower her zipper while I dragged my mouth down her silky skin until my lips touched the spot on her neck where I planned to mark her as mine when I claimed her. “I can’t wait to taste you,” I growled. “I bet your tight, virgin pussy tastes just as sweet as your mouth.” I licked the two little circles and let one fang scrape across the skin without drawing blood. “I’m told the taste of your mate’s blood is like ambrosia. You smell so delicious, I have no doubt it’s true.”

Callie froze for a moment, then began pushing against my chest. “Please, let me go, Braeden. We need to talk, and I can’t think when you’re doing all this stuff to distract me.”

I grinned until I clocked the dead-serious expression on her face without the slightest glint of humor in her golden eyes. Reluctantly, I released her and let her take a few steps away. It took a minute for our bodies to cool off—but not completely because we would burn for each other until we completed the claiming—and our heart rates to slow to a mostly normal pace.

“We, um, we can’t do...” She gestured to the bed and then to the very large bulge in my suit pants.

It was adorable how she stumbled over the words. “Sex?” I suggested with a smirk.

“Yes. That. We have a lot to talk about before we do that.” She walked over to a small, windowed alcove where I’d put a table and two comfy chairs. Glancing over toward the bed, she shook her head and muttered, “This isn’t going to work.”

Relishing the fact that she was feeling the pull between us enough to be disturbed by the close proximity of a bed, I stifled a grin as she led me into the hallway and peeked into

the nearest room. Upon seeing that it was a den, she dropped my hand and stalked over to the small couch. Taking a seat, she watched me warily, as if she were afraid of the reaction I was going to have to whatever she had to say.

She needn't have worried, though. As long as she didn't tell me she was rejecting our mating, I would take whatever it was in stride.

I joined her, carefully lowering my body onto the chair across from her since every movement made my incredibly stiff cock ache even more.

*This definitely wasn't the ache I'd expected to be suffering from tonight.*



## CALLIDORA

I couldn't believe I was sitting across from the man who would end up being the center of my world. Whether we fell in love or not, Braeden was going to be the most important person in my life. I'd always understood that on a logical level, but now that I was experiencing the tug of the consort bond myself, it seemed so much...stronger than I expected.

Female daywalkers tended to find their match sooner than most males—a quirk of fate that no one understood—but I never thought this would happen only a few weeks after I turned eighteen. I assumed that I'd have more time, even if it was only a few years. But then Braeden's fingers had brushed mine, and my entire world tilted on its axis. There was no denying who he would be to me, no matter how scared I was about what was going to happen next. I had no choice but to face the situation head-on and hope that Braeden would turn out to be the mate I needed. Just like his brother had told me he'd be a couple of years ago, even though Ren had no idea he was talking about Braeden at the time.

I'd been told enough about the magnetic pull between daywalkers who were fated to be together to know that it was going to be difficult to resist. But I'd severely underestimated how strong the feeling would be. I clapped my hand over my neck, the skin tingling with the need to be pierced by Braeden's fangs. I wasn't sure it was possible to have this conversation while my body urged me to jump his bones and beg him to claim me right here and now.

Braeden seemed to sense how much I was struggling, and he reached out to take my other hand in his. “You can tell me anything, Callie.”

When his palm slid against mine, most of my tension drained away. I was amazed by how the lightest touch from him settled me. We’d barely exchanged any words, but I already had this soul-deep knowing inside me—as though we’d sat together like this a million times before. I softly admitted, “I’m not sure how to explain where I’m coming from to you. I’m afraid that I’m going to say the wrong thing and mess this all up.”

His lips curved into a reassuring smile. “Nothing you could say or do would ruin our relationship. I have your back, no matter what.”

I shook my head and whispered, “You can’t possibly know that.”

The trust shining from Braeden’s bright blue eyes made me feel even worse. I hated the idea of hurting him, but I didn’t want to put myself in the position of giving up everything I wanted to keep him happy. I was afraid I’d grow to resent him, and that would be a huge problem when you were meant to spend eternity together.

Heaving a deep sigh, I asked, “Even if I confessed that I’m nowhere near ready to be claimed by you?”

“Callie, baby. Is that what’s got you so worried?” He squeezed my hand and shifted to the edge of his chair. His knee bumped against mine, and I found myself leaning into his touch instead of moving away. “I’ve had five hundred and twenty-five years more than you to prepare for this moment, and I’m still having a difficult time wrapping my head around the fact that you’re sitting in front of me. Finally.”

I flashed him an uncertain smile. “Yeah, it’s kind of unbelievable.”

“I’m more than willing to take it slow so we can get to know each other first. There’s no rush. We have our whole

lives ahead of us,” he assured me. “I don’t expect you to be ready for the claiming ceremony tomorrow.”

*Crap.* Braeden was talking about tomorrow while I was thinking more along the lines of years. He was being so darn sweet and understanding, and I had no choice but to burst his bubble so he didn’t think I was going to be ready anytime soon. “It’s a good thing you’re not going to be pushing for tomorrow because I’m going to need a lot more than a day to come to terms with what I’m going to be giving up to become your destined consort.”

He jerked back, his eyes going wide before they narrowed. I felt the loss when his hand released mine, but then he quickly moved to wrap his fingers around my wrist and tug me to the edge of my seat. His expression was fierce as he growled, “Let’s get something straight, with or without the claiming ceremony, you’re *already* my destined consort. Nothing is ever going to change that.”

“I know.” I twisted my wrist in his grasp to grip his forearm, driven by the need to prevent him from walking away—which was probably the same reason he’d changed his hold on me. Even without the claiming, we were both feeling the territorialism that came with being daywalker mates. “I did warn you that I wasn’t going to explain this well.”

“And I meant it when I promised that whatever you said wouldn’t change anything between us.” A muscle jumped in his jaw. “I just wasn’t expecting you to feel as though you had to make sacrifices in order to be with me. I want to lay the world at your feet, Callie. Not take shit away from you.”

I didn’t know how to help him see this from my point of view. He was a male daywalker who’d spent hundreds of years doing pretty much anything he wanted. He’d been on countless missions for the council and saved many human consorts. My goals were things he’d achieved long ago. But maybe if I explained it in a roundabout way, he’d have a better chance of understanding my perspective. “How old were you when you started combat training?”



His brow wrinkled in confusion—totally understandable since the question came out of nowhere for him—but he didn't hesitate to answer. "It was so long ago, the memory is a little fuzzy. Probably five or six if I had to guess. Maybe a little younger. But I'd already done some self-defense training before then."

Over a decade younger than me, just like basically every other born vampire in the world...except for me. "I was sixteen, and I had to go behind my parents' backs to make it happen."

It was probably a good thing I didn't mention that his brother was the one who trained me since he already looked shocked by my answer. The littlest things could trigger jealousy in a daywalker, especially during the time between when they found their destined consort and claimed them. I'd be better off saving that news for a day when I wasn't already trying to convince him to wait much longer than he'd want for our claiming ceremony.

Refocusing on the task at hand, I asked, "What about when you first went on a mission for the council?"

"Now that I do remember." His lips curved into a big grin. "I was nineteen. My older brothers, Liam and Jareth, went with me, along with two of our uncles. We took down three vampires that night and saved a consort who turned out to be destined for a member of the council. Since it was my first time, I went along to drop her off so I could learn that part of the process. I got to see the moment he realized that his seven-hundred-year wait had finally come to an end. It was amazing."

"That's what I want," I whispered.

"No worries there. We're going to have an amazing life together, baby." He tugged me closer, his lips only inches from mine when he murmured, "I'll do whatever it takes"

I shook my head again. "I wasn't talking about their relationship."

"Explain then. Help me understand, Callie," he urged.

“My parents love me, but they’ve never listened when I’ve tried to talk to them about my dreams and goals.” Fighting against the tears that welled in my eyes, I looked up and took a deep breath. I wanted him to see me as a capable woman, and crying over something I had come to terms with wasn’t going to help.

“I’ll pay attention to anything you say, baby,” he swore.

I opened my eyes, stared into his bright blue orbs, and blurted, “I want to be a badass vampire slayer.”

His gaze drifted down my slender frame, a muscle jumping in his jaw again. “And you don’t want to be claimed until after you’ve accomplished this goal?”

I quirked a brow at him. “How comfortable are you going to be with me leaving your bed to go out on missions?”

“It’ll definitely take some adjusting.” He pressed his lips together, and a growl rumbled up his chest. “But I still want you here with me while we’re figuring this all out. If you’re going to be crawling out of a bed in the middle of the night, it damn well will be mine.”

Thinking of our naked bodies tangled together on his sheets sent a surge of sensual need through my body. The air crackled between us, and one word slipped through my lips before I realized what I was saying. “Okay.”



BRAEDEN

Callie stared at me with her golden eyes full of passion, and I wanted her with every fiber of my being. I felt the ancient magic wrapping around us, urging me to stake my claim, but I argued with it to back off and let me handle my consort.

When I told Callie I would give her everything and support her dreams, I'd meant it. Even though it would be hard to know she was out risking her life, and it was bound to drive me crazy. Perhaps if she didn't go without me...I shook off that thought. I wasn't sure I could stop myself from stepping in, and Callie might see my intervention as doubting her abilities.

I'd sensed her strength from the moment we met, inside and out. I had no doubt she would be amazing, but it didn't make me feel much better since she would be in high demand.

It would be hard as fuck to handle my desire for her, my possessiveness, and my jealousy. They would ease up some once I'd claimed her, but daywalkers were notoriously protective of their mates and selfish when it came to sharing them with anyone but their children.

Kids...fuck. We hadn't even touched on that subject. The thought of seeing my consort with a swollen belly, growing the life we created together...it intensified my craving for her.

*You've waited half a fucking millennium, Braeden, you can damn well last a little longer to make your consort happy.*

We'd work all this shit out. Somehow, I was going to convince her that she could have the best of both worlds. I wouldn't make her choose between me and the dream she'd worked so hard for.

Right now, I couldn't stand another second without tasting her. "I may not be able to claim you yet, baby," I growled, "but I'm going to make sure you remember who you belong to as much as possible until you're officially mine." I grasped her chin and brought her face directly in front of mine before tilting it back and sealing my mouth over hers.

Knowing Callie would be spending every night in my bed made waiting to claim her a little easier to deal with. But I gave in to the growing desire to mark her in some way.

I didn't break our kiss as I laid her back on the couch, covering her body with my own. She moaned as I pressed her into the cushions, and my cock nestled into the apex of her thighs. I could feel the heat of her center through all the layers of fabric, and thoughts of how amazing it would feel to thrust into that hot, virgin pussy were enough to have me on the verge of coming.

Groaning, I rocked my hips, and when Callie gasped, I swept my tongue into her delicious mouth. After a few minutes, I angled my head to deepen the kiss and glided the hand resting on her hip up to cup her plump breast. The rounded globe fit perfectly in my hand, and her stiff nipple poked my palm enticingly.

Tearing my mouth from hers, I licked my lips in anticipation as I stared into lust-glazed, liquid gold eyes. With our gazes locked, I gripped the bodice of her dress and ripped it down the center. With my vampiric strength, it was like pulling apart tissue paper.

Callie sucked in a breath, and though she looked shocked, her back involuntarily arched, causing the fabric to separate and fall to the sides. "I loved this dress," she panted with a frown.

"Like you don't know I'll buy you as many as you want," I replied dryly. Then I smirked. "And don't pretend that didn't

turn you on, baby. I heard your pulse spike, and your body is practically begging for more.”

“Okay,” she breathed. “So that was pretty freaking hot. Don’t let it go to your head.”

“Oh, it’s already gone to my head, baby,” I said with a wicked smile as I rocked my hips once again. “It’s already painfully swollen.”

“That’s not—oh my gosh!” Callie cried out.

I dropped my head and took one of her pink nipples into my mouth, sucking it gently while my hand massaged the globe. Then I braced my knees on either side of her to help alleviate some of my weight and cupped her other breast. After loving on one for a few minutes, I switched to the other and gave it equal treatment. The possessive beast inside me needed to mark her, so I left little love bites all around her breasts.

The buds were just as sweet as her mouth, and I was desperate to find out if her pussy was even sweeter. I kissed a trail down through the valley of her breasts and to her navel, where I stopped to lick a little circle around it. Then I scooted back until I could grab fistfuls of her skirt and shove them up to her waist.

Her sex was covered with pale pink lace, and the center was soaked through, making them almost transparent. I inhaled sharply when I saw the bare folds of her pussy. “Fuck,” I grunted. Daywalkers were frozen in a perfect state, except for the hair on our head (and face for men) and nails, which grew as they would on a human. The only other place a female daywalker had hair was on her pussy, and since I had zero experience with this area of a woman’s body, I’d never thought about whether or not they’d choose to remove it like Callie had. I didn’t care what anyone else did anyway. I only knew that I found it sexy as fuck, and my mouth watered.

I drew my finger from top to bottom over the wet fabric, then tore the panties from her body and tucked them into the pocket of my pants.

“Um, Braeden?” Callie’s voice was unsure but also trembling with desire.

“Relax, baby,” I soothed. “If I can’t feast on your blood, I’m going to eat your pussy until I’m full.”

Without another word, I bent my head and dragged my tongue up her center. “So fucking sweet,” I groaned before repeating the action. Blood pulsed heavily in her veins, and my fangs elongated, longing for a taste.

I’d never craved human blood, and it was a bit unsettling even though I’d been told that my mate’s blood would be like ambrosia to me. That thought didn’t help soothe my hunger, so I attempted to sate it by feasting on Callie’s juices.

I licked and bit her folds and swollen clit, thrust my tongue in and out of her channel, pushing her up and up until she was crying out for relief.

“Braeden!” she gasped. “Oh, yes! Yes! I need...I don’t know! Please!”

Never having experienced an orgasm didn’t mean I was completely clueless about what was happening to her. I’d done my research so I would know how to please my consort when I finally found her. “Stop thinking and just feel, baby,” I murmured. “Trust me to give you what you need.”

I went back to my meal, trying to ignore the tingling at the base of my spine and my very heavy balls. My cock strained so hard against my pants that I wouldn’t have been surprised if it burst through them.

This wasn’t about me, though; this was all for my beautiful mate.

When she was at the pinnacle of her pleasure, I thrust a finger inside her and curled the digit up to scrape along her most sensitive area. At the same time, I wrapped my lips around her little bundle of nerves and bit down, allowing my fangs to prick her skin just enough for a few drops of blood to bead on the surface.

*Holy fucking shit.* The ecstasy that filled me from that tiny taste was mind-blowing. What the fuck would it be like when I

drank fully from her neck as I claimed her?

Callie screamed, and her back bowed as her knees drew up so she could clamp me between them. Her hands delved into my hair, and she clutched the strands, sending delicious streaks of pleasure through me. She held me in place—as if I would go any-fucking-where right now. I would've been happy to live in her pussy while she shook with waves of rapture.

My mouth filled with her arousal that now had just the faintest hint of her blood. I greedily drank it down, and when she clutched my hair even tighter, I lost the battle with my control. With the amount of come jetting out of my cock, I had no doubt these pants were ruined. And I didn't care in the least.

Finally, Callie settled, her heart rate returning to normal, though small shudders wracked her body every once in a while. She released my hair, and I pried her legs loose before guiding them down. Then I licked up any remaining evidence of her orgasm and sat up.

I grinned at her stunned and blissed-out state. She yawned, and I glanced at the clock to see that it was nearly six in the morning. We were exhausted. With a flick of my hand, I removed all of our clothes, then scooped her into my arms. After teleporting to the bedroom, I laid her down on the mattress and quickly followed. She rolled onto her side, and I scooted up behind so I could wrap my body around hers. Another thought had the blackout curtains covering every window, then I drew the covers up and over us.

Other than her delectable ass being snuggled up against my steely length, I felt content and relaxed. Falling asleep with her in my arms and waking up to her gorgeous face were only some of the moments I anticipated most about our future.

Yawning, I drew her closer and buried my head in her silky hair. When she sighed and cuddled in further, my heart skipped a beat before it was bathed in warmth. When it started beating again, it had synched up with Callie's. I'd known it



would happen fast, and I smiled happily at the thought of spending eternity with the woman I loved.

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MANY HOURS LATER, I opened my eyes to a dark room, but with my enhanced night vision, it was as clear as it would be to a human in the sunshine. My mouth curled down into a deep frown when I didn't sense Callie anywhere in the house.

This definitely wasn't how I'd seen my morning going. Had she changed her mind about being with me and run off? No, I couldn't believe that, so I shook my head to clear away the thought. I maneuvered up and around until I was sitting on the side of the bed. That's when I saw the note on my nightstand.

*Braeden,*

*I don't want to disturb your sleep, but I'm sorry it means I can't be here when you wake. I have a session with my trainer three nights a week, and he's rather grumpy when I'm late. I'm usually done by about nine. I'll call you after.*

*Callie*

My eyes narrowed as I finished reading, and I tossed the paper back to where I found it.

I hated that she wasn't in my arms this morning, but that wasn't what had rage coursing through my veins. He? Her trainer was male? No fucking way in hell would that be continuing. If anyone was going to train her, it would be me. Just the thought of anyone, man or woman, with their hands on my Callie was enough to make me lose my shit.

Jumping to my feet, I bathed and clothed myself in jeans and a T-shirt with a single thought. Many daywalkers preferred to live more like humans by showering, dressing ourselves, driving cars, etc. But using our magic was a nice shortcut when you were in a rush, and the possessive, jealous beast was clawing its way into control.

Once ready, I stood still and closed my eyes. When Callie and I completed the bond, we would have total access to each other's minds. And though we could communicate telepathically, she probably wouldn't divulge her location. If she were on a mission without me (something I intended to make next to impossible), I wouldn't want to risk distracting her. Until then, I knew I would never survive without a way to check on her and assure myself of her safety.

I wasn't sure if Callie had even been aware of what I'd done last night when I lapped up those few, tiny drops of blood. It had been a compulsion, irresistible, but hunger hadn't been the only reason. After tasting her blood, it sang to me and the smell was unique, both of which would make it easier for me to find her.

Drawing in a deep, slow breath, I listened carefully and waited until I heard and felt her blood calling to me. The second I sensed it, I teleported.

When I blinked into the room, the scene before me set the beast free. *I'm going to fucking kill him.*



## CALLIDORA

“I didn’t realize until just now how awkward our sessions could get now that you’re of age,” Ren muttered after he pinned me to the mat with his muscular body pressed against mine.

I’d trained with him several times since my birthday, but I hadn’t thought twice about the amount of touching that was involved until today. Something was different since the last time we’d met, and I knew just what—or who—was at the root of the change. “Yeah, it’s amazing how weird things are now that I’ve found the male I’m fated to spend the rest of my life with.”

I had felt his muscles bunch in preparation for pushing off the mat, but his entire body froze at my announcement. His bright blue eyes were wide as he stared down at me. “Holy fuck! Seriously? When did that happen?”

“Last night at Sheridan’s birthday party.”

“Damn.” He let out a low whistle and shook his head. “Sounds like bailing early was the wrong call. I missed all the fireworks.”

“You can say that again,” I murmured, thinking about the jolt of electricity I’d felt when Braeden’s fingers had first brushed against mine.

“Who’s the lucky guy?” he asked.

“Me, you fucking bastard,” Braeden growled, appearing out of nowhere to prowl across the mat and fling Ren off me.

“Whoa,” Ren gasped as he crashed down on the other side of the room. “You’re my brother’s destined consort?”

Braeden didn’t give him the chance to say anything else. He was too busy trying to beat Ren to within an inch of his life. Braeden bent low and nailed his brother with a solid blow to the jaw while he was still on the floor. Ren had spent two years teaching me how to battle evil vampires, so I knew firsthand how skilled he was, but he didn’t put up much of a fight against Braeden. In the time it took me to jump up and race across the room, Braeden had already hit him two more times.

“What in the heck are you doing?” I cried, wrapping my fingers around Braeden’s right bicep to yank his arm back before he punched Ren again.

Gripping the front of Ren’s shirt in his fist, he muttered, “Committing fratricide.”

It took a moment for Braeden’s matter-of-fact reply to register in my brain. “Why in the world would you want to kill your brother?”

I gasped in shock when Braeden turned to look at me, unsure how he was able to speak at all. He was more beast than man with his vampire side at the forefront. His fangs were extended, and his bright blue eyes practically glowed with magic. The room was filled with the power emanating from his muscular body, and he somehow seemed to be taller than he was a minute ago.

He looked so different from the gorgeous man I’d left sleeping in bed just a short time ago, but I was no less drawn to him. Maybe even more. He was even hotter when he went into fierce, territorial warrior mode, which was saying a lot since he’d already been darn close to irresistible before.

“Because the mating urge has made him lose his damn mind,” Ren grumbled as he swiped a drop of blood before it dripped from his bottom lip.

“What the hell did you expect would happen?” Braeden growled, his focus returning to Ren as he fisted his shirt in his

hand and lifted him off his feet. “I teleported in and found you laying on top of my woman, for fuck’s sake.”

I was tempted to roll my eyes over how ridiculous it was for him to think anything remotely sexual was going on between Ren and me. Not only was Braeden the only man I’d ever desire, but Ren couldn’t even physically react to anyone. And even if we weren’t constrained by our daywalker nature, neither of us was the kind of person to betray Braeden.

But I had to cut Braeden some slack because I couldn’t imagine how I’d react if I walked in on him touching another woman—no matter how innocent the situation. “You know darn well it wasn’t like that,” I snapped.

My fated mate was beyond reason, the animalistic side of his nature pushing for violence instead. He strode forward and shoved his brother against the nearest wall. “You will never put your hands on my woman again. Got me, little brother?”

“There’s no need to get your knickers in a twist. I was just teaching the girl how to fight properly.” I switched my glare from Braeden to Ren, my irritation with him growing as he added, “In fact, you should be thanking me for all the shit I’ve taught your destined consort. If it wasn’t for my efforts, you would’ve had to worry a fuck of a lot more about her safety.”

Neither of them paid the slightest bit of attention to me as I huffed, “You make it sound as though I didn’t put in a ton of hard work. Or that I wouldn’t have found someone else to train me.”

Ren grimaced and jerked his chin toward his brother. “Cut me some slack here, Callie. All of my focus is on trying to stay alive right now.”

“Don’t even look at her,” Braeden growled, lifting his brother another inch and slamming him against the wall again, with enough force to rattle the lights and make them flicker.

Ren snapped his gaze back toward Braeden. “I get it. She’s all yours, brother.”

The situation needed to de-escalate fast, and Ren didn’t seem able to talk his brother off the cliff. Moving to Braeden’s

side, I pressed my chest against his arm and stroked my hand up his back. “C’mon, babe. You don’t really want to hurt your brother, do you? He might be an idiot sometimes, but you’ve managed not to murder him for more than five hundred years so far. Right?”

Braeden’s bright blue eyes cut toward me as he growled, “I have two other brothers who’ve already found their consorts and haven’t touched mine.”

Ren looked like he was going to protest, but the last thing I needed was for him to make the situation worse, so I shook my head and tried to appeal toward Braeden’s softer side. “How will you explain killing Ren to your parents? It would break your mom’s heart to lose one of her sons.”

His muscles loosened just a little bit beneath my palm, and I smiled up at him. “How about you let your brother go and put those big, strong arms around me where they belong?”

He blinked, and when his eyes reopened, the man was back with me. His lips curved into a smile of pure male satisfaction as he released Ren’s shirt and slid his arm around my shoulder to pull me close. “I know you’re attempting to placate me, but I like hearing you say that too much to give a damn.”

“I wasn’t just trying to appease you.” Going up on my toes, I brushed my lips against his jaw. “It’s the truth.”

“And that’s why your tactic worked, baby.” He yanked my body flush against his and captured my mouth, his tongue sweeping inside to tangle with mine. It didn’t take long for me to get lost in his kiss, completely forgetting Ren was in the room with us until he said, “I think that’s my cue to leave you two lovebirds alone.”

Braeden lifted his head to glare at his brother. “Not so fast.”

“Fucking hell, I should’ve just left without saying anything,” Ren muttered.

Braeden kept me tucked against his body as he nodded. “Probably would’ve been a good call. I’m not too thrilled with

you right now.”

Ren’s eyes narrowed, and he jabbed a finger toward his face. “You have to be kidding. I was nice and let you beat on me without fighting back. If anyone has the right to be pissed off right now, it’s me.”

“I’m not debating this with you.” Braeden quirked a brow. “How come you’ve never mentioned before that you were working with Callie?”

“I’m not a child.” Now that I’d calmed Braeden down, Ren apparently felt safe to throw some attitude his way. “I’m five hundred and thirty-six years old. I don’t share every little thing I do with you. Besides, I’ve trained hundreds of slayers, and you’ve never asked about any of them. How the fuck was I supposed to know this one was different?”

“You’ve been training my destined consort for what?” His gaze slid to me. “Two years now?”

I nodded, happy to learn that he’d paid close enough attention to what I’d told him last night that he remembered such a small detail. Being heard was a powerful aphrodisiac. Especially since my parents tended not to listen to me since they assumed my thoughts were perfectly in line with theirs.

“Yeah, and I’ve turned her into a damn fine slayer, if I do say so myself.”

Ren was a tough trainer and didn’t give out a lot of praise, so my chest puffed out in pride at the compliment. A growl rumbled up Braeden’s chest at my reaction, making me shake my head in exasperation. It was going to be a long few years waiting for our claiming ceremony if he was on edge so much that he couldn’t even handle his brother paying me a compliment about my fighting skills.

“I’ll be taking over from here,” Braeden grunted, pointing his index finger at Ren. “No more meeting with Callie behind my back.”

Ren waved his hands in the air. “I didn’t even know she was your destined consort until about thirty seconds before you showed up.”



Braeden's hold on me tightened. "Then I guess that's a conversation for Callie and me to have."

*Oh, crap.* I had a lot to learn about relationships. I'd thought leaving the note when I left was the right thing to do, but now I was second-guessing myself.



**S**till on edge from losing my cool, I pulled Callie tighter into my body and took a deep breath, inhaling her sweet, floral scent. With one thought, we were back at our home, standing in the den where I'd first brought her the day before.

I'd almost gone straight to the bedroom but had enough sense to know we wouldn't get any talking done in there. Although, as my eyes fell on the couch where I'd eaten my mate's pussy for the first time, this hadn't been much of an improved choice.

"What were you thinking, Callidora?" I asked, my voice hoarse from holding back both my hunger and anger.

"I was thinking that you told me I wouldn't have to choose between you and my dreams," she retorted, her body going a little stiff. "I had a training appointment, and since I'm behind the curve of most daywalkers my age, I don't like to miss them."

I scoffed and grasped her shoulders, moving her away just far enough so I could stare down at her beautiful face. "You know damn well I'm not talking about leaving to go train." I narrowed my eyes. "With only a note—but we'll get to that later."

Her cheeks stained pink, and she looked down, her lips curling into a frown. "I guess I should have thought that you'd prefer to know it was Ren training me."

"Prefer to know?" I repeated in a tight voice. "As your consort, I deserved to know."

She didn't respond at first, but then her gaze met mine, and she nodded. "You're right. I'm sorry."

Her apology mollified me a bit, but I was still steaming from what I'd seen when I popped into the gym. That sight would be burned into my brain for a few hundred years, at least. "And you should have told Ren straight off that you'd found your mate," I growled. "Then he would have been smart enough to stay away from you."

Callie gasped, her face a mask of outrage. "That's ridiculous! I'm his student. Do you think he stops training every woman who finds her mate?"

"Yes." My tone was matter-of-fact, and it obviously surprised her. "I admit, I went a little crazier because it was my brother. But, baby, you know how hard the mating instinct is riding me. Seeing any man with his hands on you, no matter how platonic, will drive me to the brink of my sanity." I decided not to tell her that it wouldn't be a whole lot better even after I'd claimed her. I had a feeling that little tidbit wouldn't go over well at the moment. "Ren would have helped you find a new teacher—a female—so you could continue without his life being in danger."

"Oh," she whispered. "I guess that makes sense."

"Regardless, I'll be the one training you now."

"Why can't I just find a woman to continue to work with?"

I slid my hands from her shoulders down to cup her biceps and raised her body until our faces were level. "Because you're mine." The adrenaline and possessiveness hadn't waned yet, and they burned beneath my declaration. The beast was no longer in the mood to kill. He wanted to fuck, to remind Callie who she belonged to in a way that would brand her forever.

My mouth crashed down on hers, and in seconds, we were standing beside our bed. I ripped her T-shirt open and did the same to her bra, then I cupped her full breasts as they spilled free.

She moaned as my thumbs swiped over her taut nipples and pressed her chest deeper into my hands. After massaging them for a few seconds, I glided my palms down her heated skin and ripped away her skintight pants and underwear. Knowing how much of her curves had been on display with those flimsy bottoms only fueled my jealous desire. I raised my hand and brought her underwear to my nose, inhaling deeply and groaning at the mouthwatering aroma. As I tossed them away, I realized she'd been wearing a thong and fucking lost whatever control I'd still possessed.

Picking her up, I tossed her on the bed and immediately followed, straddling her while on my knees. By the time I was in place, my clothes were gone as well. I grabbed her wrists and raised her arms above her head, securing them to the headboard with my magic.

Tweaking her nipples, I lowered my hips until my cock was flush between her thighs, pressing against her glistening pussy lips. "As tempted as I am," I rasped. "I'm not going to claim you until you're ready." I rocked my hips and plucked her rigid buds. "But I am going to fuck this delicious, virgin pussy. Pop your cherry and fill you with my essence until it spills out of you, reminding you with every drop that you're mine." I moved my hands to press into the mattress on both sides of her head and bent low, nipping her lip. "And when that's gone, I'm going to do it all over again, leaving my scent on you over and over again so no other motherfucking man will doubt who you belong to."

Callie's center was gushing with arousal, making slippery sounds every time I slid my cock up and down her slit. She moaned, and I nibbled at the corners of her mouth before murmuring, "You want it, baby, don't you? To feel me moving inside you. To be owned by me."

She moaned, but I wanted more. I lifted my hips and smiled wickedly when she whimpered in protest. "Tell me you want me, Callie. That you're mine and always will be. Even if we haven't completed the claiming. Tell me."

"I want you inside me," she gasped, and I rocked into her as a reward, letting the tip of my dick glide through her folds

so it bumped her clit.

“What else?”

“I’m yours.”

“For how long?”

“Forever.” She moved restlessly, her eyes burning with passion as she stared into mine. “Please, Braeden. Take this ache away.”

“Anything for you, my love.” The term of endearment slipped out before I could think about holding it back. Callie stiffened for a moment, but then she wrapped her legs around my waist and begged me to make her come. Who was I to argue with that?

I sat back up and spread my knees as I smoothed my hands over her silky flesh. Then I hooked under her knees and gently urged her to release her hold on me. She was clearly not happy about it, and if I hadn’t been so overwhelmed with need, I would have laughed.

The magic around her wrists disappeared, and I grabbed her arms, pulling her up until she was kneeling in front of me. Her breasts swayed with each choppy breath, and I was tempted to feast on them first. But the craving to possess her was too strong.

Palming her ass, I brought her flush against my body, forcing her to spread her legs wide so she was straddling me. With my hands still on her round globes, I raised her up and lined my cock up with her drenched opening. Then little by little, I brought her down, easing myself into her tight channel. “Fuck,” I grunted. “I knew you’d be tight, but damn, baby.”

I had to work my way in, and I attempted to be careful, knowing her first time would be painful. But all my good intentions shattered when I felt my tip bump the barrier of her innocence.

Knowing she was mine and experiencing my desire for her and her reciprocation was one thing. But for some reason, feeling this proof that I was the only one to ever possess her, who would ever possess her, it took over my mind and body. I

thrust my hips up as I slammed her down on my cock, seating myself fully inside her heat.

She cried out, and the sound broke through the haze enough for me to study her face to make sure she was all right. I was shocked and ecstatic when she licked her lips and squeezed her inner muscles around me. “Don’t stop, Braeden,” she panted. “Take me.”

The beast inside me roared with satisfaction, and I began to bounce her on my dick, punching my hips up each time she descended.

“Braeden! Yes!” Callie dropped her head back, exposing her throat, and I yanked back on my inner beast just before he sank his fangs into her neck to mark her as ours forever. The claiming between two daywalkers was slightly different than between one of us and a human. Technically, one could do it without the other’s consent. But most daywalkers went through the ceremony as a gesture, and we would too. Because forcing Callie to accept my claim would only prove to her that she’d been right to assume her consort wouldn’t respect her goals and wishes.

Even the beast inside wanted Callie to choose me, which was the only reason I was able to take control again.

Callie’s inner muscles clenched, and she cried out my name as I drove into her as deep as possible, trying to make us one. Stars exploded before my eyes as shots of pure bliss rocketed around my body. “Oh, fuck, baby. That feels so good. Oh, yeah. Fuck! Squeeze that pussy, baby. Oh, fuck yes!”

Without warning, I dropped forward, taking us down so Callie was on her back, and I loomed over her. I grabbed her legs and pushed her knees to her chest, then opened them wide so I could watch, mesmerized, as my cock slid in and came out shiny with her juices.

It was the sexiest thing I’d ever seen, and a tingling built at the base of my spine. “You have no idea how unbelievably hot it makes me to watch my cock fucking your pussy, baby,” I grunted. “Coming out glistening and smeared with your virgin blood. Fuck! My fangs are aching to taste you.”

“Take it,” she breathed, making my head fly up to meet her eyes. “Not that,” she said quickly. “But you can drink from me, Braeden.” She bucked her hips, and her nails dug into my biceps. “Take it.”

My fangs extended, and I pulled out, only to grab her ass as I bent over and lifted her pussy to my mouth. I licked up her slit and the sweet tang of her virgin blood sent my senses reeling. The tip of my tongue circled her clit twice before I sank my teeth into her pink, swollen flesh and sucked hard on her clit with every pull of her blood.

“Braeden! Oh, yes! Yes! Yes!”

Drinking from one’s mate was the strongest aphrodisiac for a daywalker. And it caused a pleasure like none could ever imagine until they experienced it for themselves.

Callie flew apart, screaming my name and shuddering from her violent climax. I was about to explode along with her, so I straightened and thrust inside her, my balls slapping against her when I bottomed out. I slammed in and out a few more times, then planted myself deep and shouted her name as my orgasm hit me.

My body had barely recovered when I realized my cock was still rock hard inside her, and when Callie moved, it sent streaks of pleasure straight to my cock. Fuck. I needed to calm the hell down and let her rest.

Then her legs wrapped around me, and she whispered in my ear, “Can we do that again?”

A while later, as we lay in each other’s arms, recovering from two rounds of earth-shattering sex, I wondered if Callie would bring up the subject of my inadvertent declaration earlier. But when I leaned back to glance down at her face, she was fast asleep. I’d worn her out, so I decided to let her rest and soon joined her in slumber.





## CALLIDORA

Mind-blowing orgasms had to be nature's form of the perfect sedative. I'd barely broken a sweat before Braeden interrupted my training session with Ren and had gotten a great night's sleep, but I'd still passed out after two rounds of amazing sex. Taking a nap with my destined consort's arms wrapped around me was my new favorite thing—behind making love with him, of course.

I had a sneaking suspicion that “love” was the apt word in that phrase...and not just on my part. I'd been half out of my mind with pleasure when Braeden had called me “my love.” If I hadn't been distracted, I might've freaked out over how quickly things were moving between us. Not with the physical stuff—I was more than okay with losing my virginity less than twenty-four hours after meeting Braeden. I hadn't expected my emotions to be involved quite so much this quickly, but there was no denying my feelings for my destined consort were already growing by leaps and bounds.

“Our second start to the day is a fuck of a lot better than the first,” Braeden murmured, his arms tightening around me. “This is how I want to wake up every night from now until eternity.”

“We could've experienced this sooner if I hadn't rushed away earlier without waking you up.” I rolled over and brushed my lips against his. “I'm so sorry.”

“You already apologized, baby. No need to do it again.” His kiss was no quick graze of his mouth, like mine had been.

Instead, one of his hands cradled the back of my head while his tongue swept inside. He didn't lift his head again until I was breathless. "Just promise me you'll never leave me alone in this bed again."

I flashed him a playful grin. "Not even to go to the bathroom?"

"No exceptions. That's what never means," he confirmed with a rueful smile. "Maybe in a hundred years, I'll be okay waking up without you."

Any insecurities he was feeling about us were my fault, and I didn't know how to fix them. He would only be truly reassured by claiming me, but I was nowhere ready to take that step. All I could do for now was avoid doing anything to add to his uncertainty. "Then I promise to wake you up anytime I need to leave the bed, no matter the reason. And in a hundred years, I'll check to see if you're ready to lift the restriction."

"Remind me to kiss you before asking you for favors in the future." He captured my mouth again and didn't let up until I rocked my pussy against his hard length in an attempt to relieve the ache between my legs. "It makes you much more agreeable."

I couldn't argue with that logic. His kisses had the power to scramble my brain...and so did his bossiness. "You didn't really ask. It was more like a command."

"What can I say?" he asked, mischievousness gleaming in his bright blue eyes. "You proved how well you take orders from me when I had my cock inside your perfect little pussy, so I figured it might work for this, too."

The sensual thrill racing up my spine came to an abrupt halt when a familiar female voice called, "Callidora Yellen, get down here right this instant."

"You've got to be kidding me," I grumbled, burying my face in the crook of Braeden's neck. "My mom's pushiness is a mood killer."

"You heard your mother," my dad hollered.

“I suppose that it’s safe to assume your parents decided to pay us a visit?” Braeden asked, his chest shaking with suppressed laughter.

I pushed up to an elbow and glared down at him. “This isn’t funny.”

“Sure, it is,” he disagreed with a grin. “I’m five hundred and forty-three years old and finally experiencing the time-honored rite of passage of getting busted by my girl’s parents.”

“Do I need to remind you that we’re naked and reek of sex?” I hissed, poking his chest with my index finger.

“But are we?” He swept his hand down the length of our bodies as he used his magic to clean and clothe us.

“You’re actually enjoying this,” I accused, heaving a deep sigh when Braeden slid off the mattress and tugged me with him.

He shrugged his broad shoulders and conceded, “Maybe just a little, but can you blame me? You’re so fucking adorable when you’re freaking out over nothing.”

“Yeah, well, my parents tend to have that effect on me,” I grumbled as we headed toward the door. “And it’s not nothing. I know they love me, but they’re impossible.”

Braeden flung his arm around my shoulders. “This time will be different.”

I narrowed my eyes at him. “How?”

“You’ve never had me at your back.” We reached the top of the stairs, and he brushed a kiss against my temple. “The whole dynamic will be different with even numbers. We’ll provide your parents with an unbreakable united front.”

I’d never had unwavering support from anyone in my life, not when it came to what I truly wanted at least. My parents meant well and had my best interests at heart—or at least what they thought was best for me—but they couldn’t move past seeing me as their little girl. They’d been together for centuries before my mom had gotten pregnant with me, and the long wait made them extra protective of me. The idea of me going

on missions for the council and risking my life was something they couldn't wrap their brains around, so they'd steadfastly ignored the subject whenever I'd brought it up.

Since I knew where they were coming from, I wasn't angry with them. I couldn't help but be hurt over their willful obliviousness of my dreams, though. But having Braeden's support took away a lot of the sting. Especially since it seemed to come without any strings attached so far...except for me admitting to something I already knew to be true—that I would always be his. “Hopefully that'll be enough for them to behave.”

“I heard that,” my mom called from the kitchen.

“I assumed you would,” I yelled back. Tapping my ear, I mouthed, “Her hearing is incredible, even for a daywalker.”

Braeden laughed softly as we made our way down the stairs, but I was too nervous to find any humor in our situation. I wasn't sure what to expect from my parents. I assumed they would be happy that I'd found my destined consort, but I wouldn't be surprised if they found a way to overreact since they almost always did.

When we walked into the kitchen, my mom was at the stove stirring something in a bowl, and my dad was seated on one of the stools at the counter. Shaking my head, I sighed, “Gee, Mom. Make yourself at home, why don't you?”

My mom finished pouring pancake mix into a heated pan before turning and pointing a spatula at me. “This is my son-in-law's house, is it not?”

“Yes,” I answered hesitantly.

My mom nodded and turned back toward the stove. “Then why wouldn't I make myself at home? Braeden is family now.”

“Not that you bothered to tell us you'd found your destined consort,” my dad muttered after taking a sip of his coffee. “We weren't aware of the happy news until one of your mother's friends called to offer their congratulations.”

“If Delores’s daughter hadn’t been at Sheridan’s party, who knows how long it would’ve been before we learned of your good fortune,” my mom complained as she flipped the pancakes.

I wasn’t surprised that Lucinda had gone rushing home to spill the beans to her mother. She’d always been a blabbermouth, and the apple didn’t fall very far from that tree. The only reason we were friends was because my mom kept pushing me to spend time with her. With her at the party, I should have realized the news would reach them quickly. “Sorry, Mom. If I’d been thinking straight, I would’ve let you know what happened.”

My mom’s gaze drifted toward my dad, and she smiled. “I guess I can understand. Finding your destined consort and being claimed is an overwhelming time for all daywalkers.”

“It’s hard to believe our baby girl is old enough to have found hers,” my dad sighed with a shake of his head.

The next half an hour passed in a blur of introductions and breakfast—a meal my mom insisted on cooking, and my parents invited themselves to enjoy with us. Just as I was starting to think that I’d been worrying over nothing, I realized my mom had just lulled me into a false sense of security.

Braeden flashed a grin at my mom as he handed me the last plate to load into the dishwasher. “Thanks for making breakfast.”

“I was more than happy to cook for you both. You need to keep up your energy, after all.” My mom beamed a high-wattage smile at us and winked. “I don’t want to wait forever to become a grandmother.”

I dropped my head against the counter and muttered, “Someone, please, just shoot me now.”

“Shooting you wouldn’t do any good, baby. I’d have to chop off your head and set you on fire or else you’d still survive,” Braeden teased, remaining completely unflustered by my mom’s mention of babies within the first hour of meeting him.

“Now that breakfast is over, it’s past time to stop ignoring the elephant in the room.” My dad’s gaze settled on my neck, and I braced myself for what was coming next. “Why haven’t you claimed each other yet?”

I’d only been mildly embarrassed about my mom’s mention of babies, but my dad’s question was mortifying. My lips parted, but I had no idea what to say. They would never be able to understand why I wanted to wait.

Luckily, Braeden didn’t have the same problem. He pulled me against his side, and his voice was firm as he said, “Mr. and Mrs. Yellen, while I appreciate your excitement over Callie and me finding each other, the timeline of our relationship is nobody’s concern but ours.”

“But we’re her parents,” my mom argued.

“And I’m her destined consort.” His tone made it clear the subject was finished as far as he was concerned.

I was stunned when my dad moved closer to my mom and gripped her shoulder. “Braeden is right, my dear. He’s her priority now.”

“Fine,” my mom huffed. “But I still reserve the right to pester them about grandbabies from time to time.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less,” I murmured, relieved that they’d let the matter drop so easily.

I couldn’t help but wonder if I was wrong about needing to wait for the claiming. From everything I’d seen in the short time Braeden and I had been together, he only supported me in anything I needed. Even if it was the opposite of what he wanted.





“Let’s go, baby,” I whispered in Callie’s ear as I leaned over her sleeping form.

Her eyes fluttered, and she smiled at me, making my heart pound like it always did whenever I was reminded that she belonged to me. Our hearts didn’t beat often, except when it came to our fated mates. My heart beat only for her now.

“Go where?” she asked sleepily as she stretched like a cat, causing the sheet covering her body to slip below her delicious breasts.

She was tempting. So very tempting. But if I was going to let my woman run around, putting herself in constant danger, without losing my shit, I was going to make damn sure she could protect herself.

“Training.”

Callie’s soft smile flattened, and she glanced at the bedside clock. “It’s seven o’clock at night!” she grumbled. “I don’t have to be up for another two hours.” She pulled the covers over her head and turned away, only to yelp in protest when I yanked them off her completely.

“Ren might have been able to meet later in the day, but I have shit to do. I’m meeting with the council at ten, Liam asked me to help him with a new whiskey recipe, and—”

“Okay, okay,” she interrupted me with a frown. “I get it. I’m getting up now.”

I moved backward and laughed when she practically slithered out of bed. She turned to grab her phone from the nightstand, and that was when she spotted the fancy coffee she loved so much. Snatching the cup, she held it to her nose and inhaled deeply before letting out a satisfied sigh. “Oh my gosh, I love—”

She broke off, and her eyes went wide while I narrowed mine. I’d decided to let the love incident slide for a little while, not wanting to overwhelm her with too much too soon. Considering the plans she’d made for her future and how they’d been blown to hell by meeting me, I didn’t want my love for her to be seen as a manipulation to make her stay with me.

But hearing her almost say the words had me rethinking my strategy. She was staring at me like a deer in headlights, unsure what to do next. Option one was to toss her back onto our bed and devour her pussy until she admitted the truth about what she felt for me. Option two was to have our training session and give her just a little more time to adjust to the idea before we talked about our feelings for each other. But we *would* be talking about it before we went to bed in the morning.

Since I had other things to do today—that involved her though she didn’t know yet—I decided to give her one more small reprieve.

“Move your sexy little ass, baby. I’ll be in the gym.” I teleported to my basement before I could change my mind. After I bought the house a couple of decades ago, I’d renovated the whole basement and turned the level into a gym and martial arts studio.

Callie popped in just a few minutes behind me, and I groaned as I glared at her outfit. Or what there was of it to call an outfit. She had on a black sports bra and spandex shorts that stopped only a couple of inches below her pussy.

“If you think you’re going to distract me with all that”—I gestured up and down her gorgeous body—“I’m not going to fall for it.”

“Is that a challenge, Mr. Bancroft?” Her tone was sassy, and I suppressed a smile, loving her attitude despite the torture she was inflicting on my dick. She walked across the studio, adding a little extra sway in her hips, and I curled my hands into fists to keep from lunging at her.

“Not a challenge,” I rasped when she bent over to pick up a jump rope, putting her firm, round ass on display.

I blinked a few times and forced myself to look away, gulping large amounts of oxygen as I tried to clear my mind. Finally, when I felt I was at least a bit more in control, I looked at her again. “If you want to prove to me that you’re ready to go on missions, then you shouldn’t be distracting me with your feminine wiles.”

Callie giggled at my terminology, but I kept talking. “If you plan to take nightwalkers down using that method, think again. Or you’ll find yourself chained to our bed with magic you can’t break.”

She pursed her lips as she contemplated, then nodded. With a flick of her hand, she was in a tank top and pants made of the same material as the shorts but extended to her ankle. “I suppose you’re right. I don’t want there to be any doubt about my skills when I kick your ass.”

I grinned and stepped onto a mat in the center of the room, then made a “come at me” motion with my fingers. “Bring it, baby.”

For the next hour, we sparred, switching up techniques and styles so I could gauge the range of her hand-to-hand combat skills. Ren had done an excellent job, but she had a ways to go before I would feel comfortable sending her out in the field.

I let her take me down again, not wanting to hurt her. “That was great,” I praised her with a smile.

Her response was to glare at me and emit a growl as she jumped to her feet. “Stop it!”

Confused, I sat up and studied her as I asked, “Stop what? Complimenting you?”

“Yes!” She shook her head. “No! I mean don’t compliment me when it’s not really my skills that took you down. You’re holding back as if I were a child learning my first moves!”

“I can see how well you’re trained, baby.” I pushed up and got to my feet. “But I don’t want to hurt you.”

She shoved her hands onto her hips and scowled. “Do you think Ren ever took it easy on me?”

My good mood evaporated at the reminder that my brother had put his hands on my woman. Even if he hadn’t known she was mine at the time.

“I’ll never improve if you don’t push me, Braeden. So, start acting like a real trainer, or I’m going to go find Ren to teach me again.”

“Over my dead body,” I growled.

“It’s your choice, babe. Either stop taking it easy on me or watch me train with your brother.”

“Fine,” I gritted out through clenched teeth.

It was one of the hardest things I’d ever done since my natural instinct would always be to protect my consort from harm before anything else. But I schooled my focus and tried to remember that the nightwalkers she faced wouldn’t pull their punches.

I grabbed a bottle of water, drank it in a few gulps, and tossed it in a bin. Then I wiped my face with my towel before throwing it onto a nearby bench and prowling to the center of the mat. “All right, baby. Let’s see what you’ve got.”

By the time my alarm went off, I was thoroughly impressed with Callie’s skills. She was a natural. She’d only managed to take me down once, but she’d come close many times, and I had over five hundred years of experience on her.

“Well?” she demanded as she stood before me, legs braced apart and her hands on her hips again. Sweat trickled down from her temples, and her breaths were coming out in rapid pants, but she looked as though she could keep going on determination alone.

“I didn’t give you enough credit,” I admitted. “You’re one hell of a force to be reckoned with.”

“Really? You’re not just trying to placate me because I’m your consort?”

“You really think I would do that?”

“No,” she replied, a beaming smile forming on her face. “One of these days, babe. I will knock you on your butt every time.”

“I look forward to it,” I teased with a wink. I had no doubt that her natural ability and work ethic would elevate her to my level eventually.

My phone pinged again, and I walked across the room to silence the alarm. “Let’s shower and dress. I’m taking you with me today.”

“Taking me where?”

I smiled at her and shook my head. “You’ll see.”

Getting ready took a little longer than I’d intended since I insisted she shower with me, which led to me on my knees, licking her to orgasm before taking her up against the tiled wall.

Luckily, we were daywalkers and could teleport, so we managed to arrive two minutes before my meeting.

“Braeden,” Mira—one of the oldest vampires on the council—greeted me with a smile as she walked up to us. Then she turned her bright gaze onto Callie. She reached out her hand and they shook. Then Mira’s smile stretched even bigger. “My, my, didn’t you hit the jackpot with your consort. Beautiful, kind, smart, and can kick ass.”

Everyone knew about Mira’s unusual abilities, but how she came by them was a huge mystery that no one seemed to be able to solve. With one touch, she knew everything about you.

Callie blushed but beamed back at Mira proudly.

“Damn straight,” I agreed, making my mate’s cheeks redden further. She was so fucking adorable.

“I’m pleased you brought her. It can be very helpful for them to speak with a mated pair.”

Mira waved in a gesture for us to follow her as she began to walk away. “Well, come now. They’re waiting for us.”

Callie glanced up at me, questions shining in her eyes, but I just shook my head and murmured, “You’ll see soon.”

Mira led us into a sitting room that could easily fit over a hundred people, but they’d worked hard to make the space homey and intimate. There were men and women scattered about, some excited, others openly curious, and some were clearly wary of what was happening.

“Are they all human?” Callie whispered.

I nodded. “Each one is the destined consort of a daywalker. They’ve all agreed to come to the council, but now they need to have everything explained to them. It’s our job to convince them that this is all real, and it’s their destiny. Mira likes to bring in all sorts of different daywalkers so that hopefully, there will be at least one whom each human will connect with.”

“Wow, I guess I didn’t really understand how all this worked.”

“Most don’t. They just let the council handle it. But after bringing enough consorts here and leaving them terrified and confused, I decided one day to take them inside myself and hoped it would make things easier for them. Mira went over everything with me as I watched others do what we are about to do, and it just sort of stuck with me. So, now I help out around once a month.”

“That’s...that’s really amazing, Braeden,” Callie said quietly. I glanced down at her, and my whole body warmed at the sweet expression on her face.

I shrugged, feeling—for the first time ever in my life—a little bashful. It was mortifying, so I cleared my throat and kept going with my explanation. “For those who accept the life and stay, the next step is to try to find their destined consort.”

“What is the success rate?” Her eyes turned a little sad because we both knew what a rarity it was to find your mate.

“Higher than you would think actually. The council has incredible resources at their fingertips. And...” I paused because the next part was mostly kept secret. Except, I would never keep anything from Callie, so I told her the rest. “You can’t share this with anyone else, or the council would be inundated with daywalkers, and the volume would make it difficult to continue.”

She nodded seriously, letting me know she understood the gravity of what I was divulging.

“As you know, it’s only possible for consorts to recognize their bond through touch. Well, what many people don’t realize is that ‘touch’ can be a relative term.”

Callie frowned, her forehead puckering in confusion. “I don’t understand.”

“Each council headquarters has a lab attached to it. There are thousands and thousands of live DNA samples. When a consort is brought to them, they give a sample of their own DNA. Then the council uses some kind of process that I’m not familiar with, to expose the consort’s DNA to as many of the other specimens as possible.”

“They can tell by the interactions of their base DNA?” Callie gasped.

“Correct.”

Callie gawked at me, her rounded eyes blinking owlshly. “No freaking way,” she finally whispered.

I laughed and hugged her close. “That was pretty much my reaction, too.”

“But...what about everyone else?”

“Like I said, they can’t exactly do this for every daywalker in existence. It would take hundreds of people to run the tests alone, and even going twenty-four seven, it would never be enough to help all of us. It sucks, but their biggest concern is for the human consorts since their lives are in danger.”

“I guess that makes sense. Wow, I still can’t believe...”

“You know, my cousin Athan found a ring that belonged to an ancestor of his consort, Selena. It was a hundred years before she was born, but something about it called to him and he wore the piece of jewelry all the time until he found her.”

“You think it was because of her shared DNA with her ancestor?” Callie guessed.

“Possibly. I don’t think we’ll ever know for sure, but I’ve seen several instances like that, and knowing what I do, it definitely makes me think that a similar principle is involved.”

Callie shook her head, her face a mask of wonder. “This is incredible. I can see why you want to be a part of it.” She paused, then met my gaze with a hopeful expression. “Do you think I could come with you every month?”

I grinned, happy that she understood my passion for this and wanted to be a part of it with me. “I was hoping you would want to,” I replied, tenderly stroking her cheek. “You are more than I could have ever imagined in a mate, baby. How the hell did I get so lucky?”

Callie grinned and flicked her long hair back over her shoulder. “I am pretty awesome, aren’t I?”

I burst with laughter as we fully entered the room and prepared to help others find the joy we’d discovered together.

If I could only convince her to accept my claim and admit she loved me...my life would be perfect.

Well, nothing was ever perfect, but my Callie came insanely fucking close.





## CALLIDORA

After spending a couple of hours with humans who were destined to be paired with a daywalker, talking about how special that bond was, I knew what I had to do the moment Braeden and I were alone again. As soon as we teleported back to our house, I wrapped my hands around his wrists and led him into the master bedroom. His bright blue eyes heated with desire when I used my magic to change into a sheer white nightie.

“You’re so damn gorgeous, baby.” He trailed his finger down the spaghetti strap on my right shoulder. “But you didn’t need to bother with this negligee when I’m just going to rip it from your body.”

I pressed my breast into his palm when his hand drifted lower to cup the rounded globe. “I beg to differ.”

“Oh, you’re going to beg all right.” He dipped his head to trail kisses along my jawline. His breath was hot in my ear as he whispered, “Over and over again while I eat your perfect pussy. I’ve been thinking about getting you under me ever since you taunted me with your tight little body before we trained earlier.”

I was so turned on, the white lace panties I’d paired with my nightie were already drenched, but I couldn’t let my need for Braeden distract me from what I had planned. “As amazing as that sounds, I had something else in mind for tonight.”

His hand drifted down to cup my pussy. “You must have big plans if you’re turning down the orgasms I’m offering.”

I used my magic to scatter lit candles around the room and change the sheets on the bed to a set made from a deep red silk. Once the scene was properly set, I twined my arms around Braeden's neck and murmured, "The biggest."

"That sounds promising." He gripped my butt cheeks and pressed me against his hard length. "Coincidentally, I already have something big for you."

"Think bigger," I chuckled as I tilted my head to the side, giving him better access to my neck. "Today made me see that I don't need to wait until my dream of becoming a badass vampire slayer comes true. Finding your consort is so difficult for too many of our kind, and the bond is too precious to be put off. I want you to claim me. Right now."

"Baby, no." His fingers dug into my hips as he set me away from him, but I didn't care if he left bruises behind. Not when I knew how much it must be costing him not to take my offer and sink his fangs into my neck to claim me. "That's not why I brought you with me. The last thing I wanted to do was pressure you into a commitment you aren't ready for. Today was about sharing something special with you."

"I know." I went up on my toes to brush my lips against his. "That's a big part of why I'm ready. We've been together for such a short time, but you've already shown me in so many ways that I can trust you with my dreams. Even though it wasn't what you wanted, you didn't hesitate to agree to wait for the claiming. When my parents asked questions about why we hadn't claimed each other yet, you put your foot down instead of letting them pressure me. After a little persuasion, you didn't hold back during our training session and really paid attention to what I can do. Then you topped all that off by taking me to an incredible meeting with all those potential consorts and shared a council secret with me. I have no doubt that my future is safe in your hands, Braeden."

His bright blue orbs were serious as he scanned my face for any sign that I wasn't one-hundred-percent certain about my decision. "Are you sure, my love?"

*My love.*

Upon hearing those two sweet little words again, butterflies swirled in my belly. It was amazing how I hadn't been prepared to tell him how I felt when I'd almost slipped up only hours ago, but now I had no fear over giving voice to the depth of my emotions. "I love you, and I'm beyond ready to be claimed by you."

His expression turned to one of pure joy. "I know it hasn't even been two full days, but I feel as though I've waited forever to hear those words from you."

His reaction was everything I could've hoped for...with one small exception. "I'm still waiting."

"My new pet name for you wasn't enough?" he teased, tugging me against his chest.

I shook my head. "Nope."

"I'm madly, passionately, deeply in love with you, Callie." Capturing my mouth, he swept his tongue inside to tangle with mine as he guided me over to the bed. My eyes drifted shut as I lost myself in his kiss, only opening again when my back hit the mattress. "And I'm going to spend eternity loving you."

My heart swelled with emotion at his declaration. Stretching up, I brushed my lips over the crook of his neck. My teeth ached as the scent of his blood filled my nostrils. "I can't wait to sink my fangs right here and finally taste you."

His body shuddered, and he groaned, "Fuck, yes. I bet yours will taste even sweeter because I'll be making you mine."

My neck tingled in anticipation of being marked by him. Now that I'd made my decision, I was eager to fulfill our destiny as a bonded couple. I wanted the connection between us to deepen. To feel the walls between us fall until we were completely open to each other.

Filled with a sense of urgency, I called upon my magic again to strip Braeden out of his clothes. Before I could do the same with mine, he growled, "Wait. I want to enjoy the experience of ripping this pretty scrap of fabric from your gorgeous body."

Goose bumps spread across my body at his sexy rasp. Stretching my arms above my head, I murmured, “Knock yourself out, babe.”

Braeden used his magic to tether my wrists to the headboard, and I arched my back off the mattress when he fisted the front of my nightie and ripped the material straight down the middle. His gaze raked down my body as he cupped my breasts with his palms. “You’re so fucking gorgeous.”

He scraped the tips of his fangs over one of my pebbled nipples, making me whimper in need. When he nicked my skin and licked up a small droplet of blood, I moaned, “Braeden, please.”

“Don’t worry, my love. I’m going to take very good care of you.” He switched to the other breast before moving down my body, swirling his tongue around my navel. Then he kissed his way to my pussy and ripped my panties off before wedging his shoulders under my legs to lift me closer to his mouth. “Gonna claim you with my come dripping down your thighs, but not until I make you fly over the edge first.”

He quickly went about turning that vow into reality. Licking, sucking, and biting me until I was writhing beneath his body and crying out his name in satisfaction. Twice. When he finally lifted his head, he got to his knees and ran his hands up the insides of my thighs until they reached the drenched folds of my sex. Then he settled between my legs and nudged my entrance with the tip of his dick. “I don’t know what I did to deserve you, but not a single day will go by that I won’t give thanks to fate for finding my perfect match. I love you so fucking much, Callidora.”

Although we’d have an eternity together, I’d never grow tired of hearing those three little words from him. Or giving him the same in return. “I love you, too.”

We hadn’t said the claiming words yet, but there was a weightier feeling to our lovemaking. What had already been amazing had reached a new level, as though we were using our bodies to forge the bond before giving voice to the ritual. And

we hadn't even really gotten started yet. But the time had finally come.

As his bright blue eyes stayed locked with mine, power swirled in them. The time had finally come. "Callidora Yellen, do you accept my claim on you?"

"Yes, I accept your claim on me with all of my heart and soul, Braeden Bancroft. Are you prepared to be mine from now until the end of time?" My magic swirled around him, answering the call of his power as I waited for his reply.

"And beyond."

My eyes filled with tears of joy as Braeden thrust his hips forward, anchoring himself deep in me. He set a fast pace, pounding in and out of my body. My hands clenched around the headboard, and my pussy fluttered around his hard length. The pleasure he was building between us had already reached a level that far surpassed anything I'd ever felt before. "I'm so close, Braeden. Yes!"

"That's it, my love. Give me what will only ever be mine. Come for me," he growled, pressing me into the mattress with his body as he wrapped my hair in one fist and turned my head to the side.

His command triggered my orgasm, and he anchored himself deep as he followed me over the edge. Then his fangs pierced my neck, bringing my pleasure to all-new heights. "Never tasted anything sweeter," he murmured before his tongue swiped over the punctures.

"My turn." The magical restraints disappeared from my wrists, and my hands went to the back of his skull. My fangs extended as I twisted his head to give me better access to his neck. When I sank them into his flesh, I moaned as his taste burst in my mouth, rich and sweet. After only a few pulls of his blood, I was already completely addicted. I had to force myself to lift my mouth, but I was richly rewarded for the effort.

Power rushed into the room, circling the bed before racing through our connected bodies. Our inner walls dropped, and

the bond between us snapped fully into place. I was able to feel all the love he felt for me. His euphoria over our claiming mirrored how I felt, and I could sense his determination to make all my dreams come true. Destiny had given me the perfect partner, and I couldn't be happier.

# EPILOGUE



“Are you ready?” Callie asked as she strapped another stake to her thigh.

*Fuck, no. But I have to be.*

Callie laughed, having heard my thoughts before I could voice them out loud.

“It’s not that I don’t have confidence in your abilities,” I assured her.

“I know, babe. That never crossed my mind.”

I loved how much she trusted me, and I worked hard to make sure I never damaged her faith, and that meant letting her spread her wings and fly.

However, if I was going to let her do that, I would damn well be doing it right beside her. She was everything to me and doing this together meant there wasn’t much chance of her being injured or killed. Which was how we ended up right where we were. About to venture out on her first mission.

“Okay, let’s go.”

I nodded, but as she turned to walk away, I grabbed her arm and spun her around so she slammed into my chest. Then I captured her mouth for a deep, passionate kiss that left us both shaking with need by the time we came up for air.

“Just a reminder of what you have to live for,” I rasped before turning her back around and patting her sweet ass. “Let’s go.”

Callie walked in a bit of a daze, and I laughed as I took her arm once more. She was in no condition to teleport, so I took us to the location we'd been given. A twin girl and boy, Odessa and Olivander, lived there, and they were both destined consorts. They'd moved in a few weeks before, right after their eighteenth birthdays.

The council had located them shortly after and decided to back off and give them some time unless we felt they were in danger. They soon learned that there was rumor of a nest close by the apartment building, though no one had been able to ferret out the location. Unfortunately, before they could bring the brother and sister in, Odessa was attacked. She only survived because the daywalker assigned to watch her was damn good at her job. But she'd faced five or six nightwalkers alone while trying to protect the girl. They'd both been pretty severely injured, which meant they'd been taken by the council. Callie and I had been assigned to collect the brother before he either attracted the vamps or made a big splash with the police and media over his sister's disappearance.

Odessa's attack had only happened last night, and Ollie worked the graveyard shift as a desk clerk at a nearby hotel. We checked out the area, keeping our eyes peeled for evidence of the supposed nest. When we struck out, we headed to the hotel to wait for Ollie's shift to end.

Marcus and Parris, two daywalkers I worked with often and respected, were already standing guard. With the number of leeches who'd attacked Odessa and Lilith, the council had sent all four of us to make sure we were able to bring Ollie in safely.

He would be finished with work at three o'clock in the morning, which left plenty of sunless hours for the nightwalkers to prey on him. At about twenty minutes to three, Callie went stiff and lifted her nose, inhaling deeply.

Before I could ask, the scent drifted to me, then to Marcus. Parris had gone on a perimeter check, so I sent him a mental message to get his ass back immediately.

The wind picked up, and the smell grew stronger. There were nightwalkers nearby. A lot of them.

“Well, well, seems the boy has a fan club,” a smooth female voice said.

Shit. Vampires were natural predators and possessed traits that drew in their prey. But most of those who fell in with a master ended up losing all of their finesse, outwardly becoming the monsters they were inside.

But masters, they only grew more dangerous as they collected minions. They fed off them and took their essence, essentially stealing the magic that made them so attractive to humans. Which was the biggest reason they became so grotesque.

Female masters, though...it made me sound sexist, but I only spoke the truth. They were the worst of their kind. Manipulative, seductive, evil, demanding, and they had the ability to appear like a sweet damsel in distress. Not something male masters had been able to achieve, go figure. And to make matters worse, they were even more possessive and as catty as the mean girls in high school.

Fucking bitches. Every single one of them.

“Well, well, seems the queen of the damned wants her ass kicked,” Callie drawled in return. I grimaced, wishing I had warned her not to poke the blood-sucking chick with claws and—if the number of approaching minions was any indication—an army at her disposal.

The nightwalker flicked her shiny black hair over her shoulder and tapped one of her long, sharp fingernails on her ruby red lips. I had a scientific understanding of how she drew humans in, but personally, she made my cock shrivel as if it were running away.

“Who’s the smart-mouthed little twit, Marcus?” she asked in a low voice meant for seduction.

I looked at Marcus sharply, ready to tear his head off if he gave even the tiniest indication of having been turned. But I should have known better.

Marcus's face twisted with disgust. "None of your fucking business, Mariah. The only thing you need to know about her is that I will happily watch her set you on fire."

Mariah threw her head back and laughed. "You couldn't catch me, so what makes you think this pathetic little girl has a chance?"

I grinned right along with Marcus and waited for her to get her answer. "I'll let her explain," he drawled.

Mariah's eyes went to the empty spot beside me where Callie had been standing. She whipped around but wasn't fast enough for my mate, who had her in a headlock seconds later. One of Mariah's minions ran up, and I threw a stake at him, hitting right through the heart. Marcus knocked another, then hurled a vial made of thin glass that contained holy water at two more. The vial shattered before it even hit one of them, and the droplets burned four vamps, taking them to their knees but not killing them because of the small concentration. It gave Parris the perfect opening to put a stake in one as I took down another.

"Braeden!" Marcus shouted. "On your left!"

I spun around just in time to see two stakes whistle by me, each one hitting their mark, causing the nightwalkers to burst into flames before falling to the ground in a pile of ashes. I turned, knowing what I'd see, but I was still in awe at the sight of my consort as she winked and held out her hand.

I grabbed both stakes and tossed them to her. She caught them and spun around to stab another approaching vamp. Curious, I glanced around and couldn't help but chuckle when I spotted Mariah on the ground, writhing in pain from a broken neck and blisters all over her from drops of holy water.

"I guess female daywalkers can be a little catty, too," I said to Callie as I darted around to grab a leech who sprang at her.

"Where's the fun in killing her fast and easy? She wouldn't be around to witness how awesome I am."

"Magnificent, baby," I corrected, my tone filled with awe. I'd trained Callie for the past three months. I knew how

fucking good she was. But seeing her in action...it was something else. Instead of being afraid, I was excited to work with her. Privileged to be her partner.

I tossed my stake to Parris, who had just stabbed two other vamps and had a third coming at him. He caught it and swiftly plunged the wood into the chest of his attacker.

Looking around, I grunted with satisfaction. The only one left was the bitch on the ground, most certainly regretting her underestimation of Callie.

My consort and I walked over to Mariah. Callie jerked her chin at the master's head, and I immediately fulfilled her silent request. I locked Mariah's arms behind her back with one hand while the other wrapped around her throat, keeping the broken bones in her neck from healing.

"If you tell me where the nest is, perhaps my consort will take pity on you and convince me not to let out my inner mean girl who will torture you endlessly. For fun."

Mariah whimpered but pressed her lips into a thin line.

"Don't be petty," I growled. "You have no loyalty to the minions in your nest, and you're going to die either way. You might as well tell my mate what she wants to know."

Callie pulled a cross from her belt, and Mariah jerked, then spewed, "The big house on Spring Street. With the green shutters."

"Thank you," Callie said sweetly as she replaced her cross. Then she picked up a nearby stake and plunged it into the master's chest.

"If you were going for badass, I'd say you more than accomplished your goal," Marcus said with a laugh as he walked up to us. He held out a hand to help Callie stand, and I growled as I jumped to my feet, furious that another male had dared to touch my consort.

He let go of her as if he'd been burned and backed up a few steps, holding his hands up in surrender. "Sorry, man. I haven't been around many mated pairs. I forgot."

“Remember next time, asshole,” I snarled as I tucked Callie into my side. She giggled, and it brought a tiny smile to my face, causing some of my anger to fade. “How did you know that chick?” I asked Marcus, gesturing to a pile of ash on the ground.

“I went to high school with her. She was just as big of a bitch back then. She was beautiful, so some master offered her immortality if she’d join his nest. She was too vain to turn down the opportunity to live forever. The idiot underestimated her greediness, and she made a power play less than a month after she fully turned. She killed him and half his minions, then went on a reign of terror, collecting minions and draining them, assuming that one day she’d be powerful enough to attract anyone, including daywalkers. She came to the States two years ago, and I’ve been chasing her ass all over the fucking country.” He bowed to Callie. “I thank you for taking out the biggest pain in the ass that ever walked this earth.”

My consort laughed and rolled her hand in a regal gesture. “You are ever so welcome. I’m curious, though. If you haven’t been able to catch her, what brought her out of hiding? Especially with you here?”

Parris pointed at the back door of the hotel and answered for Marcus. “The kid. There’s clearly something special about him. The council will be able to figure it out. But if he’s attracting masters, it’s even more important that we get him the fuck out of here.”

Normally, we would do our best to convince humans to come with us willingly, but we didn’t want to risk attracting any more nightwalkers. So, when he walked outside, Marcus took him out with chloroform, and we teleported back to the council building.

Mira awaited us on the front steps.

She looked nervous and was wringing her hands, but when she saw us, relief washed over her. She waved Marcus and Parris—who were carrying the kid—inside. To us, she said, “I’m sorry, but I need to send you out on another mission

tonight. We found a consort a few hours from here and need to get to her immediately.”

Mira handed Callie a notecard with an address on it, and when I peered at it over her shoulder, my eyebrows shot sky-high.

“Isn’t that a hospital?”

Mira nodded. “She has terminal cancer.”

“Do you know who her mate is?” I asked. If she was dying and they didn’t already know who her destined consort was, there might not be a way to help her.

She shook her head. “She still has several months, and we’re hoping to find him soon.”

“What’s the rush?” Callie asked. Nightwalkers avoided hospitals. There was too much blood, and they couldn’t control themselves.

“There’s a very, very old nightwalker stalking her. He’s spent more than two millennia as a vampire and has perfect control of himself.”

Callie gasped. “He approached her in the hospital?”

Mira sighed. “Yes. And he’s convinced her to let him turn her. She has an ailing grandmother and a little brother who she cares for. It’s why she didn’t get checked until her cancer had spread too much to be able to help her. She’s incredibly vulnerable, scared to die, scared to leave her family, and just the kind of mark he looks for. He’s supposed to come tomorrow night, so I need you to get her out of that hospital discreetly tonight.”

“Consider it done,” Callie said firmly.

Two hours later, I carried a sleeping woman into one of the rooms in a council medical center. I placed her on the bed, and Callie sat in the chair on the opposite side and took her hand.

“Sadie told me she’d teach me how to work in the lab,” she murmured. Sadie was another member of the council who ran the DNA center in our area.

I raised my brows, surprised to hear her talk about something other than going on missions. “As a backup?” I asked.

Callie shook her head as she continued to gaze at the unconscious woman. “It’s been on my mind since she gave me a tour last week.” She raised her eyes to meet mine as she continued. “Working with you tonight was amazing. Everything I ever wanted. And I’m not saying I want to give it up completely. I’d like to go on missions from time to time. But...”

I rounded the bed and crouched down in front of her. “Baby, you know I will support you in whatever path you choose.”

She smiled and placed her palm on my cheek. “I know, and I love you so much for it. And honestly, that’s just it.”

“You’re not considering working in the lab to make me happy, right?” I frowned at the possibility that she might be choosing something she didn’t want because she thought it would make me happy. I knew she would do it, but that was the last thing I wanted.

“No. You’d just pester me until I changed my mind,” she teased. She wasn’t wrong, so I didn’t say anything. “I love you more than anything. And I’m constantly amazed that I get to spend eternity with you.” She glanced at the woman destined to be some daywalker’s consort. “She deserves that, too. I can’t stand the thought of her never experiencing it. And worse, her mate being doomed to walk this earth alone forever. I want to help them find each other and get their happily ever after.”

I was speechless for a few moments, then I shook my head to clear the daze. “You’re amazing, you know that? Do you have any idea just how much I love you?” I grasped her hand and brought it down so I could kiss her palm.

“Probably as much as I love you,” she replied with a soft smile.



A nurse came into the room just as I stood and pulled Callie up from her seat. “Let’s go home, my love,” I whispered. She nodded, and with a pop, we were standing in our bedroom.

It was late morning, and we were exhausted, so I stripped us both, and we climbed into bed. I yawned and tugged her into my side, my eyes already drooping.

“Damn, I’m tired,” I grunted.

Callie leaned up and placed her hand on my chest, making me crack one eye open to see her.

“Working in the lab is a first step to getting the other thing I want,” she said with a smirk as she drew the pads of her fingers around my torso. My cock stirred, very interested in what her hand was doing.

“What’s that, my love?” I asked with another yawn.

She didn’t answer at first, and when I cracked the other eye, I realized she’d been waiting for my full attention. “Babies.”

In a flash, she was on her back with my body covering hers, my big, fat cock already hard and weeping at the thought of coming in Callie and knocking her up.

She laughed and quipped, “I thought you were tired.”

“Not *that* tired, baby,” I answered before thrusting into her tight, slick pussy.

“You’re suddenly full of energy,” she teased as her back arched, and she wrapped her legs around me.

“You’re about to be full of my come,” I growled as I moved inside her.

I kissed her before sinking my fangs into the mark I’d left when I claimed her. As I drank her delicious blood, I couldn’t believe how lucky I was.

Forever just kept getting sweeter.

# EPILOGUE

## CALLIDORA

I had a whole new appreciation for holidays after I had my first child. My parents had always gone big with the festivities when I was growing up, and Braeden and I hadn't been slouches in the celebration department during our first year together. But we took it to a whole new level when Maxine was born five years ago, a little less than a year after I started working at the council lab. Seeing everything through the innocent eyes of my baby made all the difference. It also made it difficult to say no when she and her little brother asked for something holiday-related.

"I cannot believe you let them dress up as vampires this year." Braeden shook his head and pinched the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger.

"Me?" I waved my hand toward our four-year-old son's face. "I'm not the one who got them retractable fangs and painted blood dripping from the corner of their mouths. That was all you, babe."

Marshall grinned up at me and licked the tip of one of the pointed teeth. "I wuv my fangs."

*Don't worry, sweetie. Your real ones will come in when you're older.*

His smile widened at the reminder I telepathed to him that he wouldn't need the costume fangs when his adult daywalker teeth came in.

Maxine didn't look away from her candy stash as she asked, "Is Daddy whining 'bout our costumes again?"

A muscle jumped in Braeden's jaw, and I had to bite back a giggle. In all fairness, he had complained more than a few times since we'd left our house to go trick-or-treating. Knowing how much the kids loved a popular cartoon movie about vampires that had been released last month, he'd been such a good sport about their choice of costumes. Then he got razzed about it by fellow daywalkers at the first few homes we'd visited and had been grumbling ever since.

Jerking his chin toward the next house, he growled, "Go hit up that house for more candy instead of giving your poor old dad a hard time."

Maxine's bright blue eyes—the signature Bancroft shade—widened as she took two steps back. "But that place is s'posed to be haunted."

"Nuh-uh." Marshall shook his head and pressed his lips together in a flat line, his brows drawing together as he cast a suspicious glance at the house in question.

Braeden clasped Marshall's shoulder and gave him a reassuring squeeze. "You don't have anything to worry about. Your mom and I would never let anything bad happen to the two of you."

Marshall's little chest puffed out as he slipped his hand in Braeden's and asked, "Walk wif me?"

"Of course, buddy."

"I'll go with her," Ren offered with a big grin as he came striding toward us from the darkness between the two houses nearest to us. He must've teleported there to avoid popping up in the middle of nowhere with too many humans present.

"Uncle Ren," Maxine screamed as she threw herself into his arms.

Ren gasped in shock and turned accusing eyes in my direction. "Is that a fucking vampire costume?"

"Yup." Maxine grinned up at her uncle while several nearby parents glared at him for the bad language. "Marshall's a vampire, too."

Ren shook his head. “I don’t even know what to say.”

“I’m being i-iro—” Maxine heaved a sigh of frustration and asked, “What was it again, Mommy?”

“Ironic, sweetie.”

She nodded as she tugged on Ren’s wrist to lead him up to the house she’d been afraid to stop at only minutes earlier. But with her brother almost to the door, now she was in a rush to get up there too. “Uh-huh. That.”

“You do realize you’re going to have your hands full when she’s a teenager, right?” Ren murmured as we flanked my daughter and hurried up the sidewalk.

“Absolutely.” I beamed a smile his way and used telepathy to add, *but at least we won’t have to deal with the boy-crazy stage human parents go through.*

Ren’s laughter hung in the air when we reached the steps to the house. It wasn’t difficult to guess how the rumor had started since the owner had done a great job decorating for Halloween. The ceiling over the covered porch was swathed with cobwebs, and a very convincing-looking witch’s broom sat in the corner. A black cat peered out the first-floor window, and candles flickered upstairs. The woman who opened the door was dressed in a gorgeous, hooded cape, and there was a smoking cauldron on a table to her left.

“Twick or tweek,” Marshall cried, smiling up at her as he held out his bag.

I held back as Ren brought Maxine next to her brother so she could get her share of the loot, too. When she echoed the saying, the witch held a bowl of candy out to them. “The two of you are such convincing vampires, I think you should get extra treats. Go ahead and pick out a few.”

“Yay!” Maxine did a little excited dance while she waited for her brother to grab his candy. “Thank you.”

“My pleasure.” When she pulled the bowl close to her body again, a few pieces fell out. “Oops, sorry. I’m not usually quite so clumsy.”

“No worries.” Ren bent low to retrieve the candy she’d dropped. Instead of dropping them back into the bowl, he handed them directly to her, letting out a surprised hiss when their fingers brushed. The faint smell of brimstone filled the air, and power swirled around Ren and the woman—or more accurately, witch, since that was what his destined consort appeared to be.

# **EXTRA EPILOGUE**

## CALLIDORA

Over the past two decades, Braeden and I had gone together on hundreds of visits to the nearest council headquarters to meet with humans who had recently discovered the paranormal world existed and they were destined to be the consort of a daywalker. Smiling up at him after we teleported outside of the building a few minutes before our meeting, I murmured, “It doesn’t matter how often we do this, I always look forward to that moment when we connect with a new consort and see the acceptance in their eyes when they realize they can be as happy as we are together.”

“It’s pretty damn amazing, baby.” He brushed a kiss against my lips. “But I have to disagree with you on one small detail.”

My brows drew together. “What’s that?”

“Nobody will ever be as happy as we are together because fate gave me the most perfect consort in the entire fucking world.”

“Every daywalker feels that way about their match.” Butterflies swirled in my belly as I twined my arms around his neck. “But I love that all these years together hasn’t dimmed your love for me.”

“Not even a tiny bit,” he growled, capturing my mouth in a deep kiss that left me breathless.

“Let’s keep it rated PG,” Mira drawled from the doorway. “We wouldn’t want to give the human consorts the wrong idea



about what kind of demonstration we're putting on here today."

Braeden stepped away from me with a sigh. "As if I'd ever let anyone see my beautiful mate in the midst of le petite mort."

"True," Mira conceded with a grin as she waved us inside. "You do have a reputation for being terribly possessive of our dear Callidora."

"*My* Callidora," Braeden corrected, wrapping his arm around my shoulders to pull me against his side.

Mira laughed. "Thank you for proving my point."

"Quit pushing his buttons," I grumbled.

"But it's so much fun," Mira complained.

I shook my head. "For you maybe."

Braeden lowered his head to whisper, "And you too... later."

A delicious shiver raced up my spine at the sensual promise in his voice, and I had to shake off the need coursing through my veins as we entered the sitting room where about fifty humans waited. Although large, the space was warm and inviting, but that didn't help settle the nerves of the destined consorts who were leery of the information that had been provided to them so far.

The ones who were curious or even excited about what their discovery would mean for them were the easiest to transition, but Mira tended to give us the harder cases. Not today, though.

She didn't have the chance to ask us to speak with anyone in particular before I felt myself drawn toward a young man with light brown hair and gentle, green eyes. He was standing off to the side by himself, but he smiled when Braeden and I got close.

"Hello," he greeted. "I'm Theodore Barlowe."

“It’s nice to meet you, Theodore,” I replied with a smile. “We’re Braeden and Callidora Bancroft.”

His attention was on me as he asked, “Did you go through all of this before you met your...daywalker?”

I shook my head. “No, I was born a daywalker as well.”

“Ahh, right.” He raked his fingers through his hair. “I guess it would make sense that not all consorts would be human.”

I experienced the completely unexpected desire to give Theodore a hug. To comfort him as I would Maxine or Marshall. I gripped Braeden’s hand tightly as a possible reason occurred to me.

I briefly considered asking Mira if we could run Maxine’s DNA against his, but I didn’t want anyone to think that I was willing to abuse my position in the lab for the benefit of my children. The work we did there was too important for it ever to be tarnished, even if the circle of daywalkers who knew about its existence was small. Besides which, there was an easier way to confirm if what I suspected was true.

I sent a mental nudge to my daughter, my lips curving into a smile when she quickly answered.

*Everything okay, Mom?*

I felt her surprise through our connection.

*Aren’t you at the council headquarters?*

*Yes, please come. Now.*

Instead of replying, she appeared in front of me with a worried expression on her face. “What’s wrong?”

“Damn, that’s going to take some getting used to,” Theodore muttered, his eyes wide as he stared at my beautiful daughter. “I mean, the guy who rescued me from those vampires did it too. And that’s how I got here. But it’s not something I’m used to seeing yet.”

“Oops, sorry.” Maxine turned to him with an apologetic smile. “I probably should’ve teleported into the hallway

instead, but Mom told me to come right away, so I was worried.”

“And now I am,” Braeden murmured. “Why did you ask Maxine to join us?”

“Because I have a hunch about Theodore.”

The young man’s eyes widened even more as he pointed at his chest. “About me?”

“And my daughter.” Wrapping my fingers around her wrist, I tugged her closer to the human who was destined to be a daywalker’s consort. “Please humor me and shake hands.”

“You think...” Maxine breathed, her fingers trembling as she stretched her arm toward Theodore.

Braeden looked as though he was ready to jump between the two, so I moved to his side and slipped my arm around his back. Letting his baby girl go to another man was going to be difficult for him, but if Theodore was destined to be with her, then he’d accept him into our family. Eventually. Once he accepted that our daughter wasn’t a little girl anymore—which he was in denial over, even though she was almost a year older than I’d been when we met.

The moment Maxine and Theodore touched, the spark of attraction between them was palpable. Then they were gone in the blink of an eye, leaving Braeden glowering at me.

“You just had to go and find her destined consort.”

“Of course I did.” I grinned up at him, my heart full with joy for Maxine. “Now our little girl has the chance to be as happy as her parents.”

I thought about mentioning the grandbabies we’d get to spoil...but I wisely kept that to myself. The last thing he needed to consider was that our darling daughter was going to have sex for the first time in the very near future.

While you wait for Ren and his witch’s story in [The Witching Hour](#), Elle & Rochelle (the writing duo behind Fiona Davenport) have lots of paranormal romances for you! Dive into Rochelle’s shifter world with [Crying Wolf](#) and grab Elle’s

first shifter book, [An Unexpected Claim!](#) Both are available in Kindle Unlimited!

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The writing duo of Elle Christensen and Rochelle Paige team up under the Fiona Davenport pen name to bring you sexy, insta-love stories filled with alpha males. If you want a quick & dirty read with a guaranteed happily ever after, then give Fiona Davenport a try!

For all the STEAMY news about Fiona's upcoming releases... sign up for our [newsletter!](#)