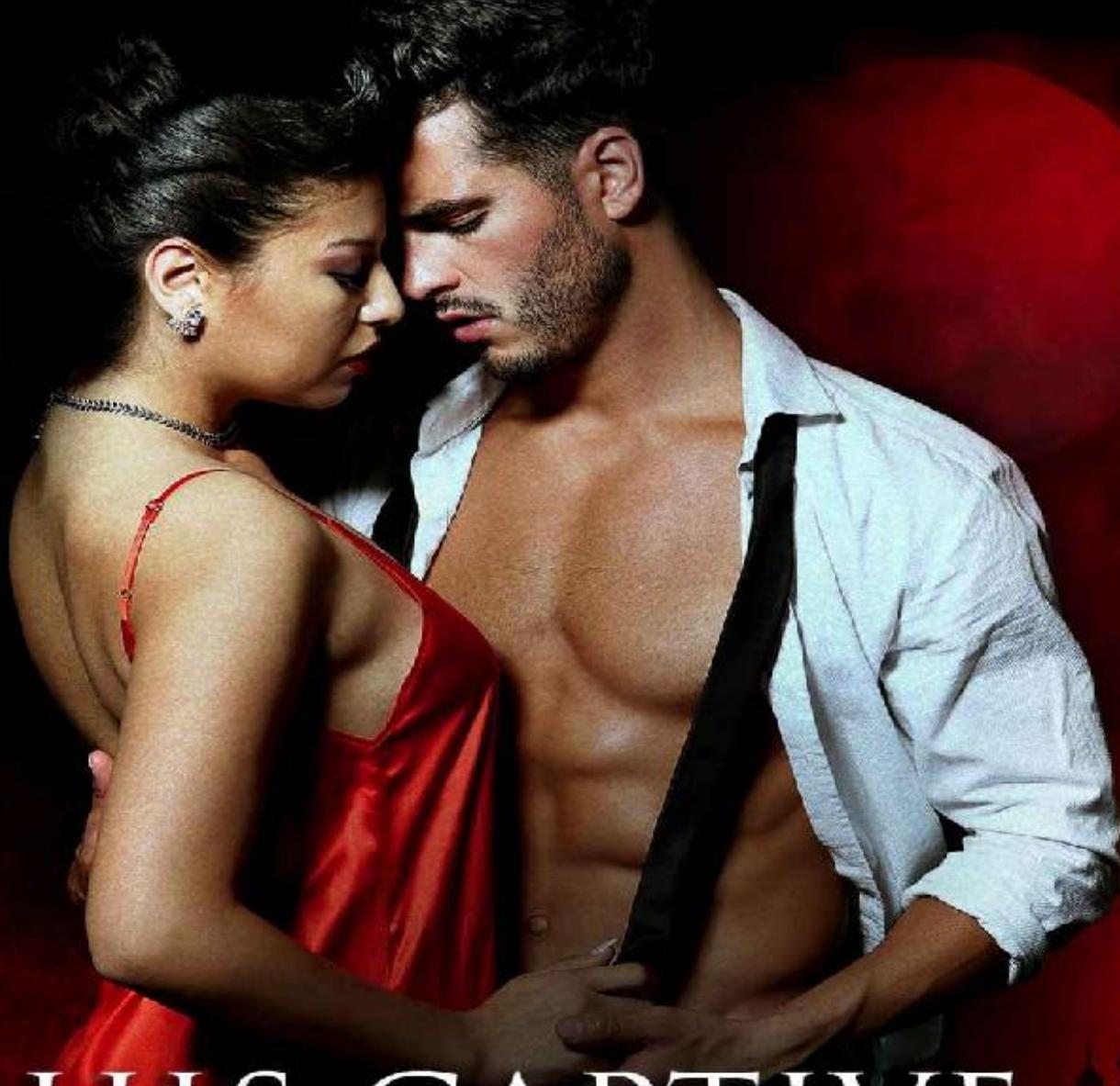


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HIS CAPTIVE MORTAL

A VAMPIRE ROMANCE



RENEE ROSE & LEE SAVINO

HIS CAPTIVE MORTAL

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C H A P T E R 1

Aurelia

THE MOON HANGS high in the night sky when I exit the Tucson Center for Developmentally Disabled. I walk slowly, wincing. My grey-with-white-polka-dots ballerina flats are super cute, but they're brand new and need to be broken in. Besides, any shoes I wear on a twelve hour shift that ends at midnight would leave my feet aching.

“Aurelia, wait up!” My coworker Gwen bounces out of the building and falls into step beside me. Her hair is high in a fresh ponytail, and her feet are encased in heels. I hurt for her.

“Girl, I don’t know how you have so much energy after a shift.” Although I can guess. Gwen’s younger than I am and part time, interning here before starting her master’s degree next fall.

“I’m a night owl, I guess.” She shrugs and extends her arm, keychain in hand, and unlocks the shiny new VW Beetle her dad bought her for Christmas. I wouldn’t have chosen bright banana yellow as a color for my car, but I have to admit, it suits my bubbly coworker. Added bonus for those on the late shift: it glows in the dark. “Hey, wanna go with me to a club?”

“Now? Are you serious?”

“Yeah,” Gwen pauses beside her car to redo her perfect ponytail. “There’s this new place I want to check out. Everyone says it’s straight fire.”

“What’s it called?” I ask politely, though I have zero intention of going anywhere tonight besides my bed. Maybe a short stop in front of the fridge if I’m feeling crazy.

“Club Toxic.”

Tingles run up my spine, and goosebumps rise on my arm like a cold wind just blew past me.

Gwen seems unaffected, blithely reapplying her shimmery lip gloss. I shudder, hard, and she notices.

“You okay?”

“Yeah.” I rub my arm. “Someone just walked over my grave or something.”

Gwen gasps, her half glossed lips parted in horror. “What?”

“Nothing. It’s something my nana would say. It’s an expression. When you experience a chill--someone just walked over your grave.”

“Ewww,” Gwen says, but she doesn’t seem too worried because she finishes applying her lip gloss and drops the tube back in her purse. “So...club tonight?”

“Rain check? I’m pretty tired.”

Gwen pouts. “You always say that.”

That’s because it’s true. “I’m getting up early tomorrow. Work and school.”

“So boring,” Gwen says.

“Yep, that’s my life. Not all of us can be as glamorous as you.”

Gwen bites her lip. “I’ve been trying to get Chad to take me there for ages.”

I arch a brow, wanting to ask why she didn’t just ditch Chad and go herself. But Gwen would look aghast at me suggesting she ditch her perfect fiancé for a night.

“Hey, I know!” she brightens. “I can ask Chad to bring a friend for you.”

“Oh, please, no.” A blind date arranged by Gwen? “That’s so sweet, but no thank you. I’m not really looking for anyone. And if I were, I doubt some random guy I meet one night will turn out to be ‘the one’.” I do fake quotes around *the one*. It’s a concept she and I have talked about at length.

Gwen believes we get one true love. I don’t.

I know I’ve made a mistake mentioning *the one* when Gwen’s eyes grow wide and out sparkle her lip gloss. “You never know. He’s out there,

looking for you. Fate could be trying to bring you together.”

“Well, Fate is going to have to send him straight to my apartment cause that’s where I’m going. Night, Gwen.” I turn to trudge home.

“Wait, you’re walking?” Gwen calls after me. “You don’t have a car?”

“Nope. It’s fine. I live close.” Five blocks—not that close, but close enough to walk. I walk faster in the opposite direction, declining Gwen’s offer of a ride with a wave.

The prickle on my neck persists, and I rub my arms as I walk. This is nothing new. For the past few days, I’ve gotten the sense that I’m being followed. So weird.

Out of the corner of my eye, something flickers. A ghostly white shape flutters towards me, and I jump five feet in the air before I realize it’s only a piece of paper. It lands at my feet, and I snatch it off the ground. I can read it clearly in the light of the full moon. “Black Tie Affair. Ladies Get in Free.”

It’s a flyer for a club. There’s a logo in the corner, and when I read it, I get another full body shiver.

Club Toxic. This is the club Gwen was talking about. If my nana were here, she’d say it was a sign.

Or...I’m just tired. My exhausted body’s overreacting. This Club Toxic thing is just a coincidence, not the universe trying to tell me something.

I crumple up the flyer and keep walking.



CHARLIE

MY MORTAL PREY tosses a piece of trash into the proper bin, shrugs her purse higher and keeps walking. According to my intel and what I’ve observed, she lives alone and keeps mostly to herself.

Which is perfect for my purposes.

I follow her down Congress Street. If all goes to plan, I’ll nab her tonight. The king of this territory can’t know I’m here, so I’ll get in, get what I need, and get out.

And only one poor mortal will ever know I was here...



Aurelia

I HOBBLE down the dark downtown streets, peering into alleyways. Congress is usually safe and busy, but it's late and a weeknight. The streets are mostly empty.

But the moon lights my way. I raise my face to the silvery light and breathe in. Taking a second to bask in nature's beauty always makes me feel better. After a moment of moon communion, even my feet hurt less.

I'm almost home when a tall shadow detaches itself from an alley wall and blocks my path.

I startle, but on second glance it's only a man. He doesn't look too menacing. Tall and pale, he's dressed in sleek black slacks and a white button down shirt with a thin black tie. A businessman probably headed home after dinner or drinks. Just in case, I hold my keys pointed through my knuckles the way I learned in a college self-defense class.

The man walks towards me. The closer he gets, the taller he looms, and my heart pitter patters faster. *It's fine, it's fine. He's totally harmless.* To calm my fear, I visualize a giant ball of white light surrounding me. It's a silly little exercise I came up with on my own, but it's always helped center me. Sometimes I imagine I can see the glow of the protective aura flickering just out of the corner of my eye.

And it works. As soon as I imagine the white aura, I feel calmer. But then something strange happens.

The man approaching me stops in his tracks. And he's staring at my aura as if he can see it.

I freeze like a rabbit catching sight of a hunter.

Goosebumps break out over my skin as a slow grin spreads across the man's face. "Is this for me?" he drawls in a sexy British accent. The moonlight glints over his unusually long canines.

Vampire.

I don't know why, but the word enters my mind clearly.

The man grins broader, showing sharp, way-too-long-to-be-human canines. “Yes,” he purrs as if I spoke the word aloud. “And you are...what? A witchling?” He cocks his head to the side, “Priestess? Or something special...something *more*?” His voice is reverent as he extends his fingertips in the air, touching what would be the edge of my ball of light. And in a flash, I see clearly what I’ve only caught glimpses of before—a shimmering white wall of protection that ripples and repels his touch.

A shiver shimmies up my spine.

Even in the low light of the street, I can tell he is beautiful. Dark hair, strong jaw. Cheekbones sharp enough to cut my palm. He’s pale, but there are deep shadows under his dark eyes.

I can’t stop staring at him. It’s worse than the time I saw a movie star in a coffee shop. If this guy asked me my name, I’d stammer gibberish. Maybe drool. He’s that fucking hot.

And he knows it. The corner of his mouth crinkles as he studies my creation with apparent fascination. He turns his glittering gaze on me, and his eyes lock with mine. Eyes so dark, I don’t know where his irises end and his pupils begin.

Energy shifts within me. The street feels like it’s sliding out from under my feet, and when I step to balance myself, my belly seems to move to the left while my chest moves right.

In slow motion, the man raises his hand. Still holding my gaze, he snaps his fingers.

And my bubble of light...*vanishes*.

I gasp, swaying. I’m panting like I’ve run a mile. I tense, ready to run.

He smiles wider.

“Oh yes, run, my little Tinkerbell,” he murmurs, his voice deep and smooth as if he’s saying sweet nothings to a lover. “I do so love a good chase. I’ve been looking for one of your kind for a long time.”

I stumble backward. I want to run by my feet won’t obey. “I-I don’t know what you’re talking about.” What did he say earlier? “I’m not a priestess or a witch. I’m nobody--just a counselor at the School for the Disabled.”

The man stalks forward slowly, a predator content to know his prey is stuck fast. Every cell in me screams to back away, but I can barely take one backward step. It’s like I’m mired in quicksand.

“Where’d you learn to do that?”

“What? The bubble?” The words pop out of my mouth before I decide whether I want to talk. *He’s controlling me*, a panicked part of my brain screams. But I can’t resist. “I don’t know—I just invented it, I guess.”

“Powerful,” he mutters, more to himself than to me. Those black-as-night eyes fix on me like a tractor beam. “Do you do other magic?”

I shake my head so hard my hair flies in my face, looking around for anyone who might help me. “No, sir.”

I don’t know where the *sir* comes from, but it feels right. And it seems to amuse the stranger. His lips curl into another toothy grin, his fangs lengthening before my eyes.

And I remember something about vampires. It had been his eye contact that burst the bubble. All I have to do is avoid looking directly at him.

With a full body shiver, I focus on creating another bubble. It’s harder this time, like I’m straining a muscle I haven’t used before. A magic muscle. But it works. As soon as the white sphere pops around me, I take off running as fast as I can. I dash around the corner, listening hard, but there are no footsteps following. Only the sound of laughter--a deep, chocolatey chuckle that makes my stomach dip not in fear but another reason entirely. It’s the sexiest laugh I’ve ever heard. Coming from the handsomest man I’ve ever met. Lean and fit, with that face. And under his shirt and slacks....

No! *Do not visualize the vampire naked*. But if I do, is it really my fault? He’s got some compelling mojo. Sex and vampires go together, right?

I race home, every hair on my body standing up in warning. *What else stops a vampire?* I jab my key into the lock. So far so good. I slam the heavy door behind me, throw the deadbolt, check the locks. Then rush to the back door. Locked. And the windows--latched. All the while, I’m breathing hard from adrenaline and running. But my body feels slow and languid, like I’ve just gotten out of a bath or, Goddess help me, out of bed after a two-hour sex marathon with a vampire.

A stake through the heart. That’s how you kill a vampire. And garlic. I pull open kitchen drawers, looking for any kind of wooden stick. There—the dowel in the little *Live, Laugh, Love* wall hanging my neighbor gave me. The dowel is three quarter inches thick and 18 inches long. It might work. I grab a knife and begin carving the end into a crude point.

Only to drop it and scream when someone bangs on my back door. My neighbor’s voice calls out, “Hey, Aurelia, got any smokes?”

I never should've told my neighbor I had the night shift. It's half past midnight, for Pete's sake. "No, Karen! I don't smoke, remember?"

A pause, then, "I accidentally locked myself out of my apartment. Can I come in?"

Crap.

I creep to the door, sharpened stake in hand, and open it.

And there he is next to my neighbor, my vampire stalker, tall, dark and toothsome as he leans in the door frame. Somehow I'm not surprised.

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C H A P T E R 2

Aurelia

“GO BACK TO YOUR SIDE,” he murmurs to Karen, whose eyes are glassy and unfocused. My neighbor trots obediently away, clearly mesmerized by the vampire.

Thanks a lot, Karen.

I frown at my dark stalker, and I make a mistake. My eyes slide to his and my world turns black. I hear his fingers snap, and just like before, I experience a weird swirly sensation in my belly and chest like I'm being rendered in two directions

“Come in,” my ears are horrified to hear my mouth say.

My vision clears, and the vampire flashes a fang at me as he pushes past me into my duplex apartment.

“Aurelia,” he says slowly, testing my name.

“Yes.”

“I’m not going to hurt you. At least, I won’t if you cooperate. I’ve been looking for you a long time.”

He’s been looking for me? I try to make sense of it, but his eyes are so dark. Fathomless. I could gaze at him forever until the world ceases to exist. Why was I so worried?

A little voice in the back of my mind screams, telling me to fight.

“I know this is unconventional,” the vampire continues. “But secrecy is of the essence. I can’t be found in Tucson, and if my enemies found you talking to me, your life would be forfeit. And we don’t want that, do we?”

A little bit of logic worms into my bedazzled thoughts. *Vampire. Enemies.* “No,” I whisper.

“You cooperate with me, and I’ll protect you. But cross me, and I’ll punish you. Do we have an accord?” His accent makes the words sound so polite and old-fashioned.

The pull on my chest eases enough for me to take a deep breath.

“Yes,” I agree, even as my fingers tighten on my homemade stake.

“Then let us proceed. Shall we sit?” The vampire turns to lead me into my own living room.

The moment our gaze breaks, my wits come rushing back. I launch myself. I aim for the middle of his broad upper back with the sharpened dowel.

Live, laugh, love, DIE!

The vampire whirls and catches my wrist so quickly I don’t see it happen. Irritation registers on his perfect features. His face twists as his fangs elongate, and he hisses.

Caught in the grip of a monster, I scream. A fresh batch of adrenaline dumps into my bloodstream. My wrist throbs.

“Naughty little mortal.” Wrestling the dowel from me, he snatches me up around the waist and carries me kicking and squirming into my living room. Another wall hanging--this time a quote by Marianne Williamson assuring me I’m powerful beyond measure--crashes to the floor. Another kick, and I take out my cute ladder bookcase. The complete works of Gabrielle Bernstein go flying. And for a second, the universe has my back because the vampire trips. But then he snarls--*freakin’ terrifying!*--and grabs me up again.

Whelp, that’s that. I’m done for. I should’ve eaten a head of garlic instead of trying the stake thingy.

He plops down on my second-hand sofa and, to my surprise, pulls me face down over his lap.

“That was extremely rude,” he informs me in his uppercrust accent, slapping my upturned ass. I don’t hear the irritation in his voice... he’s already recovered to his cool, manicured tones.

Rude?

I almost giggle. I thought he was going to drain me, but instead, I'm getting a smack on the ass.

Kinky vampire.

"You agreed to be civil with me, and so you shall—or suffer the consequences." He smacks me again. For a second, I get this crazy sense of déjà vu, like I've been here before. The whole scene—the vampire, my position over his lap—feels super familiar.

And I lose my mind. I wiggle my ass for more, suddenly needy for a spanking.

At the hands of a vampire no less.

He complies, and the sense of déjà vu fades in the sudden sting from his palm. Something between a laugh and a sob bursts out of me. It's mostly relief at not immediately becoming vamp-food. But then, he might be just getting his jollies before he bites into a vein. Not to go down without a fight, I flail against his hold, but his arm around my waist is like a steel band. Well, duh—vampires have superhuman strength. *But does he sparkle in the sun?*

He begins to strike my butt harder, and I squirm. Most of the sting is muffled by my jeans.

This is not how I imagined my night going. The thought makes me giggle out loud. The dam breaks, and my shock and stress rushes out in the form of sobbing laughs.

He stops, and I try to get up, still laugh-sobbing. A little humiliated, a lot turned on. He hauls me up and holds my hips, peering into my eyes. His expression is impassive, but I think I see a glint of curiosity in his gaze that mirrors my own. Heat creeps through my core, running down my inner thighs all the way to the arches of my feet.

Vampires and sex go together. And this fang boy is the sexiest thing I've ever seen.

The irritation's gone from the immortal's expression. His fangs receded. He looks like an ordinary man, albeit a stunningly handsome one. His lips twist in a smirk that's all amused arrogance.

"Pull down your pants, Tinkerbell," he purrs a command.

He must not have used his glamour, or whatever folklore calls vampire hypnosis, because I don't feel the odd pulling sensation.

My pussy clenches, but I'm not about to comply with his high-handed command. I clutch the waistband of my jeans.

“No way!” My protest would be more convincing if I didn’t sound so out-of-breath.

The corner of his lips lift. Slowly, slowly enough for me to stop him, he tugs my hands away. Again I get the sense of *déjà vu*. It hits me so strongly—the vampire’s face, his cheekbones sharp enough to split atoms, the curve of his fangs and cleft of his chin. I’m so lost in the feeling that I know him that I forget to fight.

The vampire unbuttons my jeans and unzips them. My stomach unravels with the zipper. He’s so sexy I can’t draw air.

Hooking his thumbs in the waistband of my jeans, he slips them down, taking my panties with them. My brain stutters to life, and I make a half-hearted move to catch them and stall out. My lady parts are bare, exposed to his satisfied gaze.

The muscles in my pussy quiver. It occurs to me to hold my shirt down, trying to cover my bare cleft as I stand on trembling legs. Do I want this? Do I even have a choice? I probably should figure out how to get away from him—or how to protect myself instead of standing here like a virginal offering, but I’m too enthralled by the eroticism of the spanking and now his undressing of me. Not to mention the sense that I’ve done this before.

What will the sexy, sadistic vampire do next?

“Defiance will earn you extra punishment, my dear.” His smile is predatory.

My belly flutters with excitement.

He is the cat, and I am his mouse. *Oh yes, run, my little Tinkerbell. I do so love a good chase.*

He’s playing with his food before he eats me. Or drinks me, as the case may be. Is it wrong that I hope he eats me first? It wouldn’t be such a bad way to go—ravished by a vampire.

But he picks up my wooden dowel and tugs me back over his knee.

Uh oh.

One smack with the wooden stick, and I squeal. The makeshift cane leaves a line of fire. Next time Karen tries to give me a wall-hanging, I will toss it back in her face.

I twist, trying to cover my naked butt with my hand, but the vampire catches my wrist and bends my arm behind my back. He thwaps the thin dowel down again.

“Oh, fork!” I yelp and squeeze my eyes shut.

The vampire pauses. “Fork?”

“Um, yes,” I pant, grateful for the reprieve. “I try not to swear. I work with kids.”

“Ahh,” he says and brings the dowel down again. The stake stings my bare flesh. I kick like a colt, and he chuckles.

“Fork!” I scream again. “Stop it!”

“Take your punishment, little mortal,” he says. “You earned it. There’s nothing you can do to stop it now. But if you cooperate, I might consider letting you come when it’s all over.”

“Let me come?” Why is his dominance turning me on?

“Your choice,” he says mildly, spanking a few more times.

He flicks it at my upper thigh, and I can’t take it anymore. “All right! All right, vampire...I’m sorry.”

“Ah.” He drops the dowel and rubs my bottom for a blissful moment before giving me three more spanks with his hand in quick succession. “Magic words. Say it like you mean it,” he purrs.

“I—I’m sorry, vampire,” I cry out in a rush. “I’m sorry I tried to kill you with a stake. I won’t do it again, I promise.”

He chuckles and gives me another spank. “I’m not sure I believe you. I came here simply wanting to talk, and you give me your poor imitation of Buffy the Vampire Slayer.”

“I didn’t mean to...”

He slaps my ass again. “Please, vampire. I’m sorry.” I hold my breath, hoping he accepts it.

“Not as contrite as I’d like, but I’ll accept.”

He leans down and grabs the dowel again, breaking off the sharp tip of my makeshift stake. Then he snaps the length in half, dropping the pieces on the floor. “That’s probably the best you can give me for now,” he muses, running a cool hand over my bare cheeks, making other parts of me come alive. I grow slick between my legs, my breath stays short for new reasons.

The vampire smells faintly like fancy cologne and something else--a rich, wild scent that reminds me of fresh air and cold stone.

His fingers stray near my neediest parts, and I open my thighs.

“No, no, Tinkerbell.” To my disappointment, he lifts me to stand and pulls up my jeans and panties. “You didn’t earn your reward tonight.” He guides me to sit on his lap.

I squirm, my butt stingy and sore, my girly bits throbbing. My hardened nipples scrape the inside of my bra.

If he doesn't want sex, then... I cover my throat.

"I didn't come for that, either."

"Then why are you here?" I demand.

"For your magic, my dear."

I am sitting on a vampire's lap after he punished me like his naughty school girl, and now we're talking about magic. This has to be a dream. Or maybe Karen used pot butter in those brownies she gave me, and I'm on a bad trip. "I don't have any magic."

"Ah, but you do, and it is quite powerful. Your protection spell out there dazzled me, darling. I'll need you to learn to use your skill because there's a curse that needs undoing."

A curse? "I can't help you. I don't know what you're talking about," I insist. Crap. What if he doesn't believe me? How am I going to get out of this?

He strokes a wisp of hair from my face, tucks it behind my ear. "I need your power, my little Tinkerbell. You may not even realize you have it, but you do, and I'm not going to leave you alone until you've solved my dilemma."

He's going to kill me. I begin to blink rapidly, my chest moving wildly with shallow breaths.

"Ah." His expression softens. "There are the tears."

"I'm not crying!" I croak, but my insides crumple, and a choked sob erupts from my throat.

"Shhhh, easy now. I don't want to break you."

I cringe, but he pulls me against his chest. His delicious scent envelops me as he cradles my head against his neck and strokes my back like I'm a kitten. For a second, I'm almost comforted. Maybe this isn't so bad.

"Sweet," he murmurs. "You smell so sweet, little mortal. Like strawberries."

Nope, he's definitely a psycho who's going to eat me. I wrestle against his embrace, but he holds me fast, not allowing me to pull away. I get the feeling he's not even using a tenth of his strength to subdue my struggles.

So I give up.

"Ready to submit, Tinkerbell?" His handsome face is inches from mine. My thoughts fuzz over.

“You’re a little old for Disney movies,” I blurt.

“Pardon me?” he arches a brow but looks amused. Like I’m a kitten trying to tear him with tiny claws.

I lick my lips. “The Tinkerbell references.”

“Ah.” He doesn’t explain.

And suddenly I’m giggling like a crazy person. “I can’t believe you spanked me.” I want to put my fingers between my legs and rub out my sexual frustrations. He definitely left me needy. If that’s part of his domination bit, it worked.

He touches my lower lip, tracing it. “Yes, I’m a bit old-fashioned when it comes to ladies. I come from a different era.”

I crack up again. “No, I mean, I tried to *kill* you with a wooden stake, and all you did was spank me.”

“You were afraid when you went all vampire-slayer on me.” Now he’s thumbing the moisture from my cheeks. “I can’t really blame you for that, can I?”

“How did you know I was afraid?”

“I could scent it.” He leans in closer. “Just as I can scent the salt of your tears now and your need.”

Need? And just like that, my clit throbs like a second heartbeat, insistent between my thighs. I press my legs together. “You said you wouldn’t hurt me.” I try to be brave, but my voice comes out a quaver.

“I did. But if you cross me, I will punish you.” He strokes my cheek. He touches me like he has a right to. I’ve never been manhandled this way before, but something in his scent, his presence, his aura lulls me into complacency. I don’t just allow his touch, I crave it. “I do hope you’ll cooperate, my lovely mortal. It’d be a shame to truly frighten you.”

C H A P T E R 3

 *charles*

MY LOVELY PREY shivers in my arms. Her pulse jumps, pounding in her throat. My fangs throb and sharpen enough to cut the inside of my mouth. I bite down, letting the taste of my own blood calm my inner predator. My cock throbs beneath her delectable ass.

She's a vision, my captive mortal. Long, silky dark hair and golden skin. Dark eyes made unique by little flecks of gold. She's terribly young and terribly beautiful. I noticed her even before she emitted the shining aura of a protection spell. My research told me the mortal I was looking for was here, in Tucson, but she drew me before I knew she was the one.

She's drawn to me as well. Even though she's frightened, the scent of her arousal rises like musk around us. She liked being manhandled by me.

I grip her jaw in one hand and bring her face to mine. "Just a taste," I murmur, and she stiffens, hardening herself as if expecting me to bite. I brush my lips over her full, pouty ones, and she relaxes. "Your lips... not your blood," I clarify, even though she's already caught on. She tastes as sweet as I imagined. I slide my lips over hers again, and she moves hers against mine, giving me a hint of tongue.

Her taste is fizzy and light on my tongue, intoxicating as champagne. And I haven't even sipped her blood yet. Her scent is crazy-making.

I have to force myself to pull away, the throbbing of my cock too painful.

And even though she knows better, she boldly meets my gaze. “What era are you from?” So adorably curious, despite her trepidation.

“I was turned in 1825.”

“Turned to vampire?”

I nod. I typically don’t tell personal details, but I can’t help myself.

A tiny shudder runs through her, but she continues to stare at me. She reaches out and touches my jaw, sending a tiny shock of electricity through me.

I catch her little hand and turn it over, my gaze inexorably drawn to the blue vein in her wrist. She notices and snatches her hand back, holding it against her chest as she eyes me warily.

“I’m not going to drain you, and I won’t turn you, but I do require your full cooperation.” I put a finger under her chin. “Can you give that to me, Aurelia?”

She lifts her chin. “What happens if I say no?”

I smile wide enough to show fang. “Nobody tells a vampire no. You’re my captive now. You’ll win your freedom when you’ve figured out how to rid me of my curse.”



Aurelia

“I TOLD YOU—I don’t have any magic.” My voice comes out a little quavery. My nana told me to trust my instincts, that there was more to me than meets the eye. But...magic? Little ole me, have magical powers? Is that what she meant?

The vampire gives me a look. We both know he saw my magic bubble aura thingy, whatever it is.

I gulp. “If I do, I don’t know how to control it. I’m not a witch.”

“No you’re not,” he agrees, tipping my face this way and that. “But you’re not entirely human, little mortal. You’re something special. Something more.”

“Like what?”

“Take a guess, *Tinkerbell*.” He emphasizes the Disney character’s name. The fairy in *Peter Pan*.

Fairy. I blink. “You think I’m a fairy?”

“I believe the proper term is *fae*.” He shifts me on his lap, just enough to remind me my butt still stings. Receiving a spanking by a vampire is surreal enough. Now I’m supposed to do magic for him? Get rid of a curse? And if I don’t do something I have no idea how to do, he won’t let me go. *No pressure*. I suck in a breath before I pass out.

“What makes you think I’m a fairy? Wouldn’t I have had, like, fairy parents? Or something like that?”

His lips twist into a sexy smile. “Yes. But I have yet to meet a fairy like that. My research has uncovered certain mortals who carry traces of fairy blood.”

“Research? What sort of research? Is there some sort of paranormal 23andme?”

His chuckle is sexy enough to unravel my panties. “Something like that. I’ve been searching a long time. I’ve found that, in some, the fae shows up stronger than others.”

“And you think that’s what I have? Fae blood?”

“Yes.” He lifts me off my lap. “And that makes you perfect for my purposes.”

“What makes you think I’d want to help you, even if I could?”

He tilts his head to the side. His dark hair falls over his brow, framing his glittering black eyes. “My dear, what makes you think you have a choice?” He gives me a toothy smile. “I’m your master now, little one. Satisfy me, and I’ll reward you. Disappoint me, and there will be consequences.” His gaze is heated, like the idea of delivering more consequences turns him on.

My nipples tighten to diamond points.

“Do you need me to punish you again to remind you I am your master?”

Yes. My pussy clenches. “No.”

“Then I propose a partnership. But first, a test of obedience.” He studies me so long, I shift from foot to foot. “Something simple...I know.” He raises his finger and snaps before pointing to the kitchen. “Make me a snack.”

Seriously? What is this, the 1950s? And why am I so turned on?

Confusion makes me snappish. “Why don’t you make your own snack?”

He pulls me back down on his lap and tugs my head back by my hair. His fangs slash out, and there’s no humanity in his expression as he stares at my exposed neck. “Shall I?” he rasps.

I make an incoherent sound, somewhere between a groan and a whimper.

He lowers his head until his hair brushes my face, and he touches his long fangs to my carotid artery. “Shall I choose my own snack, little fairy? Or will you make me something from your kitchen?” Underneath my butt, his dick is long and hard. I don’t know why I’m so aware of it, but I am.

“I’ll make it,” I choke out.

He releases my hair and helps me stand. “Such a gracious hostess. Thank you.” His British accent is the height of condescension.

I stagger towards my kitchen. “I didn’t think vampires ate food,” I say in a quavering voice, falling flat in an attempt to sound unaffected.

“We don’t have to,” he says. He follows me, hands in his pockets, and leans against the doorway in a sexy pose. “But we can. I certainly prefer blood.”

I shudder.

“Aurelia...” The lilting way he purrs my name is almost musical. “If you behave yourself and do what I ask, I won’t ever hurt you.”

Not reassuring. Like hurting me would be the norm for vampire behavior.

“You already spanked me,” I mutter.

“And you laughed. You liked it, and I didn’t even allow you to come afterward.”

I shut my mouth. I’m not going to dignify that with a response.

I open my fridge and glance inside. What does one feed an unwelcome vampire? Will he notice if I spike a snack with garlic?

My shelves are pretty bare. I’m too busy with school and work to cook much, even though I enjoy it when I have time.

A glance behind me shows me my vampire stalker has gone back into the living room.

“Master, what shall I cook thee?” I snark under my breath.

“Be careful, love,” he calls from the other room, making me jump. “I’ll punish you again, and I promise this time it won’t make you laugh.”

I stick my head back in the fridge. My bottom seems to tingle in response, the warmth traveling even lower, to my sex. What's wrong with me? I know he's super hot, for an evil vampire, but is the idea of being punished actually turning me on?

I close the refrigerator door and fish out a box of graham crackers from my cupboard, along with a jar of peanut butter and the bottle of chocolate syrup. Pulling out a plate, I arrange eight crackers on it then spread each one with peanut butter and drizzle chocolate over the top.

I carry the plate back to where the vampire now lounges like a king on my couch and hand it to him.

For the first time, he looks less assured. "What is this?"

"My version of s'mores."

His lip curls.

"Just try one. They're tasty." I pick up a square and hold it to his perfect lips. My heart skips at my own bold gesture. "I promise I didn't poison them with roasted garlic spread or anything."

His mouth twitches in amusement, and he opens it a crack, as if only to let the tiniest bit of food in. Nibbling a corner, his eyes hood as he samples the treat. "Not bad." He takes the cracker from my hand and accepts the plate. "I guess I won't make you crawl around on your hands and knees and lick my hand."

What the fork? I don't know whether to laugh or kick him in the shin. "I beg your pardon?"

"My dear fairy, I have many ways of punishing you, and all of them involve your subjugation."

I stifle a shiver, meeting his eyes with a narrowed gaze.

"In my day, women were taught to obey men."

I cock my head to the side. He sounds so serious, but there's a twinkle in his dark eyes. "Something tells me you're full of shizzle."

Another chuckle. "You are most amusing. If you would like to sit at my feet, I always enjoy subservience, but you are also welcome to sit beside me."

Am I seriously verbally sparring with a vampire? "I don't know if you're kidding or not."

"Come and find out," he dares with that sexy smirk. And this time, it doesn't scare me. I must be warming up to him or something because I give

a nervous bark of laughter. I plop down beside him and make a show of snatching one of the crackers from the plate on his lap.

I bite into the cracker and watch him chew, studying his beautiful face.

He's loosened his black tie and leans back against the cushions, but his show of studied casualness and businessman attire doesn't make him look any more normal. If anything, they're a costume, an act. His beauty makes him remote, otherworldly. *Not human!* my senses scream. *Vampire! Run!*

But another part of me is fascinated. My body warms sitting next to his, and I'm all too aware of the contact of his shoulder against mine.

I finish my cracker and reach for another one, but he slaps my hand, holding the plate away. I make a sound of outrage.

"Say please," he orders.

"They're *my* crackers!"

"Are they?" he challenges, his black eyes connecting with mine in a stare-down I cannot not win.

I grit my teeth and look away. "Nevermind."

He crosses one long leg over the other. "You see, there's a pecking order here, love. The sooner you learn it, the easier things will go between us."

"Go to hell," I mutter, pushing to stand up.

He scoops me up like I weigh nothing and plops me onto his lap. "I am your hell, sweetheart. Believe it."

I would be more annoyed, but I sense he's just trying to get a rise out of me. I reward him with a roll of my eyes.

Maybe I'm not taking all of this seriously enough, but come on. Magic?

"Listen, I'm not a fairy. I don't know anything about curses or magic. Even if I wanted to help you, I can't."

He reaches out and wipes the corner of my mouth with his thumb, showing me the dribble of chocolate syrup he swiped before popping it in his mouth to suck it off. His lips are smooth and full, and for a dizzying moment, I imagine him drizzling chocolate syrup on other parts of my body, so he can lick it off...

Crap on a cracker, I'm perving on a vampire! My nipples tighten. As if he can see through my clothing, his gaze drops to my breasts before traveling slowly back to my face. "I believe you don't know or understand your abilities," he says. "But I will help you get up to speed."

"How?"

He shrugs and offers the plate of crackers. I reach for one, and he pulls it away, “Say please.”

I huff. “Please?”

He grins. “You see? That wasn’t so hard.” He lets me take one. “As for how, I’m not sure yet. It’s been a long time since I’ve been around anyone with fae blood. We thought them mostly extinct by now, most moved to living in a parallel dimension where *nature ever grows.*” He says the last part about nature in a falsetto tone, like he’s quoting someone. “But you have so much natural power, it can’t be that hard.”

“What is the curse?”

His eyes hood and a muscle twitches in his jaw. “You’ll know when the time comes,” he says stiffly.

“Okay.” I rub my face. I’m done. Vampire, curse, fairies. This is not something I’m prepared to handle at one a.m. on a school night. “Look, it’s way past my bedtime. I know you’re nocturnal, but I need my sleep, or I get very crabby. So...ah, are you going to let me go to bed?”

The corner of his mouth curves. “I’m glad you’ve realized who is master here.”

My heart does a slow flip at the glint in his eye. Dang if his dominance doesn’t light my fire. “Alone?” I clarify.

He lifts me to stand and rises before me. He’s much taller, and although he has a lean build, he’s much bigger than me. Grasping my jaw, he tilts my face up to his.

I stiffen, staring at his glinting fangs. He bends his face to mine, his heavy-lidded gaze mesmerizing. There’s no hint of fang when he brushes his soft lips across mine. He kisses me as if we’ve reached the end of a first date, rather than the bizarre exchange of attempted murder, spanking and...what? Kidnapping? Hostage situation? My thoughts are shorting out, shooting sparks as the kiss continues. I’m paralyzed under his light caress, smelling the sweet chocolate on his breath.

“Aurelia.” He repeats my name as if committing it to memory. “Lovely little fairy. Be a good girl and go straight to sleep. If you run, you won’t like the consequences. Understood?”

“Yes, sir.” What else can I say?

For a moment his dark eyes search mine. He must like what he sees because he nods.

And then he disappears. Poof! Gone. Leaving my senses tingling, searching for the solid body that was just standing in front of me. But he's gone, and I'm alone in my living room, my heartbeat doing a wacky tango.

I reach out and let my hand hover in the air, in the blank space where the vampire used to be.

"Wait," I say. I should be relieved, but instead I feel empty inside. "I don't even know your name..."

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C H A P T E R 4

 *charlie*

As soon as I materialize in my bedroom, I want to return to Aurelia's. If I didn't know better, I'd say the little fairy cast a spell on me.

But no, she wasn't lying when she claimed to have no knowledge of her true power. She's a virgin magic user, untouched, untried, but not unwilling. Not with the right motivation.

I won't let this one get away.

I gather my things quickly. A threat might hold my little fairy fighter but not for long. Fortunately, I have the power to dematerialize and reappear again. Not every vampire can do it, but I'm one of the lucky ones. It'll help me go undetected in Lucius' city. I'll have to restrict myself to Aurelia's apartment, but that will be no hardship. Little Miss Tinkerbell might protest, but her scent tells me she's as intrigued about me as I am with her. Which will make things easier. I'd rather master her body and win her cooperation through the dance of sexual domination than to actually harm or threaten her or her loved ones.

But I'm willing to do whatever it takes to get what I want. As a lone vampire, I have one allegiance: to myself. The one time I trusted another, I got hit with a curse.

I won't let my guard down again. Not even with Aurelia. Not that she'll let me.

So adorable, the way she came at me with the sharpened stake. Quick thinking on her part, assuming she'd never met a vampire before or contemplated killing one. Impressive. And, dare I say, sexy. I'm drawn to her.

And not because of her lithe body or beautiful face. Perhaps it's her innate power or the way she stood up to me even when terrified. It makes me want to grab a handful of her thick, shimmery hair in my fist and bang her hard from behind. Show her who's master.

But no. Satisfying myself with her body is the last thing I need. It'd be of no use. The curse has seen to that.

I hoist a box of supplies and trace back to Aurelia's. Her living room is empty, but the door to her bedroom is open a crack. She's curled in a ball under her covers, her brows drawn together as if in concentration. Her face looks so young and innocent in sleep. It stirs my lifeless heart. Watching her dream, I almost feel...what? Compassion? Affection? Caring of any kind?

No. Impossible.

I return to my apartment and transport another batch of supplies, then repeat until I'm done.

Now, to make this apartment mine. I grab a roll of duct tape, and cover every window in the place. Next I'll nail sheets of plywood in front of them in every room but Aurelia's--I'll save her bedroom for last. I close the door to keep from waking her. She will need her rest to begin her studies tomorrow.

My preparations for dawn are crude but effective. When all the moonlight is gone from the place, I finally relax.

Operation Break My Curse has begun.



Aurelia

I RUN DOWN CONGRESS STREET. A monster is chasing me--a giant black shadow with white fangs. Ahead, in the middle of the road, Gwen dances on top of her yellow car to K-pop music. The faster I run, the slower I go, my feet aching. There's a rhythmic banging--like someone's hammering

something just out of sight. The monster is catching up, and flyers for Club Toxic rain down on my head--

“Shhhh, wake up little fairy. You’re having a bad dream.”

I flail and someone catches my wrists. I squint in the dark at a narrow face. As soon as my gaze meets his dark eyes, my body softens. “Vampire,” I breathe. “You came back.”

“I did. I’m going to be staying for a while.”

“Here? With me?”

“Yes, sweetheart.” He bends his head and whispers a series of commands. The words sink into my bones--*don’t touch the windows, don’t touch the doors, don’t leave without permission.*

“What?” a small part of me rouses enough to struggle. “What are you doing?”

“Shhh,” the vampire easily presses me back into bed. He whispers more commands I don’t quite catch and traces my lips with a finger when he’s done. “Sorry, love. I hate to compel you. I wish it could be different, but there’s no time.”

“What are you talking about?” My thoughts are heavy, my voice sleepy. He’s so pretty, this vampire in my bed. I don’t know why I was panicking at all.

“You’re not quite as compliant as my usual prey,” he murmurs. “A natural defense side effect of your fae blood?” He strokes back my hair. “No matter. I enjoy a challenge.” His tone turns wistful. “It’s been so long since I’ve had one.”

“Happy to oblige,” I say with a sigh, burrowing deeper into the covers and pressing closer to the solid body next to me.

The vampire goes unnaturally still. “What are you doing?”

“Snuggling.” It’s weird snuggling with someone who’s dead. I listen for a heartbeat or breath, but hear nothing. But I’m too tired to really care. “It’s nice.”

“I’m not nice, love.” But his fingers in my hair feel so good. I murmur in pleasure as he pets me like a kitten. I get the sense that I’ve been here before, done this before, but I don’t need to think about that right now. Right now, I want to enjoy the snuggle.

Moments pass before the vampire murmurs. “I haven’t done this in a long time.”

“You’re good at it. Like riding a bike.”

“I suppose.” A long pause. “I didn’t used to be this way. Believe it or not, I had a lady love.”

“Yeah?”

“I don’t know why I’m telling you this.” His hand rests on the back of my neck. “I’ve never felt this before. A compulsion to confess.”

“What?” My eyes flutter, but I can’t open them. They’re heavy, like they’ve been cemented over.

Cool lips brush my forehead.

“Sleep. You won’t remember this tomorrow.” But his final comment follows me into my dreams. “I better be careful with you. Seems little fairies are my weakness.”

C H A P T E R 5

A urelia

I WAKE with the whisper of a dream still surrounding me. I remember nothing of it, but the magical feeling—I felt safe and loved. Not my usual state of being by any means.

I didn't have a traumatic childhood, but I was on my own, at least emotionally, for most of my life. My mom was a single parent who struggled with making ends meet, getting ahead in a crappy career and her own dating life, which wasn't particularly rewarding. Me and my brother were latchkey kids, and I've been supporting myself since the day I graduated from high school.

I keep my eyes closed, wanting to stay in the lovely feeling. Memories of the night return with a jolt—the vampire and the spanking. And the kiss. Rather than throw me out of my pleasant mindset, they fill me with a delicious sexual awareness, my entire body tingling in memory of being handled. Though my logical mind screams danger, my body has no interest in caution where that very sexy male is concerned.

My body will take any punishment he has to give and want more.

I toss one leg over a pillow, undulating my pelvis to create friction against my mound. The cushion provides exactly what I need, fitting between my legs, hard and firm. I rub myself against it, drifting in the

delicious place between sleep and awakening, heat burgeoning as the hard pillow rubbed over my clit—

Hard pillow? My eyes fly open, and I choke on a gasp.

Beside me lies the vampire, grinning sleepily and reaching to cup my ass, which lies sprawled over his thigh. I was grinding on him, my folds slick and plump, dripping wet.

I yank my leg off and roll away, leaping off the bed. “What the—”

“I’m going to sleep a while longer, but you are welcome to hump me all you want,” he says in a dream-thickened voice.

“What are you doing in my bed?” I demand, but his eyes already slipped closed again. Sprawled on my mattress with his shirt off, his masculine chest and arms are as cut as a Greek statue. He lies on top of the covers, and I still wear my pajamas—that’s a good thing. He didn’t have his way with me while I slept. Although... the thought tweaks my already aroused core.

What time is it? I peer at the clock and then gasp. Four in the afternoon?

“Fork! I overslept!” And that’s not all. It doesn’t feel like dusk because my windows are boarded over with plywood. “What the—?”

Well, of course, the vampire can’t be out in daylight, and he declared his intent to stick with me until I remove his curse. I rub a hand over my face. This is all too weird.

The vampire lies in my bed, sleeping like the dead. I guess, in a way, he is dead. Not that that keeps me from perving on him.

I pad out to the living room to see, not surprisingly, every window sports the same covering.

Darn him all to heck. This better not affect my rent deposit.

For a moment, I consider tearing some of it down, but my skin gets prickly. The idea repels me. Of course I won’t remove it—he would die. And while I tried to kill him last night, I don’t really want to end his life now.

He hasn’t bitten me. Or tried to drink my blood. He hadn’t hurt me, other than the spanking.

I eye him sleeping as I head toward the bathroom. How had I not noticed him climbing in bed with me? Or nailing boards to my windows? And what about those incredible dreams? I’ve never dreamt like that before. Does it have something to do with the proximity to him?

My stomach flips like it's on a rollercoaster. Perhaps it does have something to do with the vampire. I don't think I've ever been this turned on.

I sneak into the bathroom and lock the door, pulling off my pj pants to finger my sex. And I clench my teeth to keep from groaning at the prod of my fingers. The sensitive pleats are engorged from my shameless masturbation on his leg. Fork me. I humped a vampire. How am I going to face him after that display?

It takes great willpower, but I withdraw my fingers and climb in the shower, keeping the water cool to clear my head. I need to wrap my mind around my current situation. I have a live-in vampire roommate who wants something I don't know how to give him. Fantastic.

How the hell will I get myself out of this mess?

I step out of the shower and dry off, wishing I brought my change of clothes into the bathroom with me. Wrapping the towel under my armpits, I peek out of the door to make sure the vampire still sleeps. His eyes are still closed, long lashes fanning over his cheeks. He's even more pretty than I remembered. *Stop perving on the vampire!*

I tiptoe out and snatch a pair of shorts and tank top, putting them on speed-dresser style, like I do at the department store when I've got ten items in a changing room and fourteen more in waiting.

I grab my hairbrush and walk out to the living room, dismayed by the darkness of the place without the windows. I will have to turn on the lights during the day. I'm the opposite of a vampire. I need light. Living in Arizona has helped my seasonal affective disorder, and I want to stay healthy. Just how long is this vampire planning on keeping me like this?

You're my captive now. You'll win your freedom when you've figured out how to rid me of my curse.

I make myself a bowl of cereal and eat in a sort of stupor, my brain short-circuiting on the *vampire* part every time. What curse? Did I really have special powers? I try to remember where I'd learned to put the bubble of protection around myself but come up short. Seemed like I've always done things like that. I figured it was just a quirk of mine left over from childhood, like kissing my hand and hitting the ceiling of the car when I run through a yellow-turning-red light. Which I don't do these days since I have no car.

Did my nana know I had magic? Did she? If so, it would make sense why she was always trying to teach me. I wish I had asked more questions and paid more attention. I was the one in the family who was closest to her, so whatever nana knew is gone with her.

Now my best chance at understanding my power is my vampire captor.

I should be planning my escape, but I really want to stay. The rational part of me wants to run to the cops, but I don't want to leave this vampire. It's not just curiosity about my powers. It's something stronger. A compulsion--and not one put on me by a vampire. This comes from deeper down. It's real. I don't want to leave the vampire's side. I can't bear the thought of never seeing him again.

Which is crazy, but there it is. My nana was always telling me to trust my intuition. I doubt this was the scenario she was referring to, but my gut says I need to stay. I need to see this to the end.

But right now, I need to get outside to my garden. I'm not running away, just getting some space. A compromise. Watering, pulling weeds and tending my vegetables always helps me sort through my thoughts.

I wash my bowl in the sink, setting it in the drying rack. Walking to the front door, I reach for the handle and then stop. Maybe I shouldn't leave before checking my email.

I sit down at my computer, but as it turns on, the mud in my thoughts clear. The garden. I was going to the garden. Not abandoning the vampire but not obeying him, either.

But when I get to the door, my fingers hesitate before touching the knob. Why not just check my email? Or tidy up a bit?

This I catch myself before I fully turn away. Something's wrong here.

I turn back to the door. Slowly I reach out to grasp the knob, my fingers trembling. It's like I'm pushing through lead.

All my instincts scream to snatch my hand away, but I push forward, half-expecting the door to burst into flames when I touch it. My hand arrives, but I can not make myself turn the knob.

I swallow, my temples throbbing from the exertion of will.

Open it, I order my hand. Open the forking door.



CHARLIE

“WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME?”

I open my eyes, the heavy stupor of the day receding as a lovely woman climbs atop me, straddling my waist. Aurelia. The gold flecks in her eyes flash as she tosses her black hair back from her lovely, angry face.

My fangs shoot out so fast, they almost cut my lip. I grasp her hips and push her further down my body, so her core rests directly over my concrete-hard cock. Her heat brings a shock of pleasure, and my eyes half close.

“Stop it!” She wriggles against my hold.

Bad idea, little mortal. I love it when my lovers struggle. I let my lip curl up.

Her eyes widen when she catches sight of my lengthened canines.

I find her struggles amusing, her warmth and gyrations only increasing my hard-on. “Calm yourself, love,” I murmur. “When you fight, it just excites me.”

She makes an indignant sound but stills then moves in a slow grind. The scent of her arousal hangs heavy in the air, and her pupils are blown. I don’t think she’s aware she’s grinding on me.

“Let me go,” she says, breathing hard.

I reluctantly release her hips and interlace my fingers behind my head.

She dismounts, wisely scrambling out of my reach. “What did you do to me?” she repeats, still eying my fangs.

They retract as she watches. “What do you mean?”

She stands quite still, her chest still heaving. “Why did your fangs get long?” she asks, her voice no more than a whisper.

I sit and swing my legs to the floor. “I wasn’t going to suck your blood,” I say in a bored tone, padding past her to the bathroom where I splash water on my face.

“Are you...hungry?” she asks, trailing behind.

“No,” I snap. “I was aroused. Feeding satisfies a sexual urge in addition to providing nourishment.” The truth is, I probably do need to feed soon, it’s been a couple weeks since I’ve had any blood, but I don’t want to scare her.

“Oh,” she says.

I glance over to see her nipples protruding through her bra and tank top. I inhale, breathing in her scent, longing to grasp her breasts and knead them possessively, pinching her nipples into points. I wrench my thoughts from her perfect anatomy. Staying with the little fairy might be as much torture to me as I intend to inflict upon her. Drying my hands and face on the towel, I saunter up to her, eying the vein at her throat. “Are you going to let me taste you, Aurelia?” I purr.

She takes a quick step backward. “No!” Her voice pitches higher than usual.

I smile, flashing fang.

She draws herself up, her hands balling into fists at her sides. “I can’t open the front door,” she says.

“I know.”

“What did you do to me? Vampire hypnosis?”

“Yes,” I admit, knowing it would probably enrage her. “I couldn’t take the chance you would open the door and let sunlight in while I slept.”

Her shoulders lower and the fists unclench, as if my argument holds some merit with her. “Oh.”

I’m mildly surprised she’s acting so reasonably. She might be more easygoing than she lets on.

I head past her into the living room.

“Well, you might have just left a note or something instead,” she says, following.

I turn and lift my brows. “After what you tried to do to me last night?”

She bites her lip. “Well...”

“Well, what?”

She stares at the floor. Her shyness is adorable. “Did you give me the dreams?”

I remember the way she rocked her pelvis over my thigh when she woke and smile. I felt the dampness of her arousal through her shorts, and now, fully awake, I wish I helped her come. I can’t wait for a repeat of that scene. “What were you dreaming about, anyway?”

She flushes, and the smell of her arousal blooms, making me want to forget Operation Break My Curse and carry her off to the bed to ravish her naked body until she screams. Last night I tasted her lips. Now I want to taste between her legs.

“Nothing! I don’t know...”

I let her squirm a bit more under my scrutiny before confessing, "I didn't wish to wake you with my hammering, so I suggested you fall into sweet dreams...literally."

She nibbles her lip as she digests that.

"Were they?"

"What?"

"Sweet?"

"Oh...um. Yeah."

I can tell she's torn between being pissed off about my manipulation and appreciating the gesture.

"Don't do it again," she says although she lacks conviction.

I ignore her, seating myself on her couch like I own it.

"Did you hear me? Vampire?"

"Charlie," I correct her. "Charles Edward Holbrook, the third. Come over here." I crook a finger.

I don't expect her to come. She was all sweet defiance last night, but after a moment's hesitation, she walks over to me.

I catch her hand and guide her over my lap. She goes willingly. Almost eagerly.

Interesting.

"Who gives the orders around here?" I ask softly.

I hear her swallow, the increased rate of her delicious heartbeat.
"What?"

"I said, who gives the orders around here, you or I?"

She kicks up her chin, tossing her hair as she looks over her shoulder at me. I'm surprised she stayed in the position I put her. She must enjoy my games as much as I do. I'm certain of it when she dares to snap, "Go to hell."

I chuckle and slap her ass pinning her wrists with my other hand. "I thought you didn't curse, little mortal."

She holds her breath like she's waiting for more. I smack her other cheek then squeeze roughly. She has a full, juicy ass. I want to sink my cock between those cheeks and show her who her master is.

"Who says you get to give the orders?" Her voice is breathy, and it goes straight to my cock.

I spank her again. "It's a given. Little mortal, you're lower on the food chain."

“Fork you!”

I love it that she doesn’t have a filthy mouth. It’s so damn cute.

I turn her around to face me and give her a taste of vampire strength, lifting her by the waist to sit her up on the arm of the couch. She blinks in surprise. I pull her shirt off over her head.

“Hey, what are you doing?” Even though she’s wearing a bra, she covers her breasts with one forearm.

“Every time you sass me, you will lose an article of clothing. You may earn it back by showing your subservience to me.”

“Are you forking kidding—wait,” she cries as I reach for her shorts. “I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry, your royal highness.”

I hide my smile and purse my lips. “I think I’m going to go with sassy on that one,” I decree, grabbing her pink bra in between her breasts and lowering my head. I slice the fabric in two with my fangs and let it fall down her arms to the floor.

Her hands fly to cover her breasts, and she flushes with outrage. This time she seems to consider her words before she speaks. “You owe me a new bra,” she says sullenly.

Aw, I love it way too much when she pouts.

I lift a brow. “You may never get to wear a bra again at the rate you’re going.”

And my eternal case of blue balls will probably kill me.

She glowers.

I make a show of letting my eyes travel to the two pert breasts protruding from behind her hands. I let her see my hunger. “Do continue to defy me, little mortal,” I drawl.

She glances down at the bulge in my pants and flushes even more pink. “What do I have to do to earn it back?” The little vixen licks her lips, which nearly kills me.

“Kneel,” I order because it’s the only thought rushing through my brain. How badly I want her on her knees in front of my cock, servicing me.

“What?” she asks indignantly, even as her eyes plead for mercy. Of course, I wouldn’t make her suck my cock. I’m not a complete bastard. Close, but not complete.

“You heard me. On your knees at my feet.” I take her waist and lift her from the couch arm, showing off my strength by holding her suspended in the air for a breath before lowering her.

“What for?” she asks warily, her eyes traveling to my crotch.

My cock thickens in response.

“I could just go put another bra on,” she tests.

“And I could just glamour you to walk down Congress Street topless.”

“You wouldn’t dare!”

“Try me, little fairy. I can be a real dick.”

She stands there, the muscles in her jaw clenching and releasing for a long moment. Finally, she huffs and lowers to her knees.

My face splits into a wide smile. I slide my fingers into her thick glossy mane and tug her head back. “Thank you for your obedience, Aurelia. Remove your hands.”

Her eyes shoot to mine, her mouth opening, forming a protest, which she seems to think better of. She throws down her hands all at once, lifting her chin and her sternum as if to inform me she has nothing to hide.

Indeed, she has not. Her breasts are perfection, the size of apples, the rosy nipples ripe for sucking. I reach out and cup one, running my thumb over the pebbled tip.

She shivers but doesn’t move, color flushing her cheeks and neck, her breath short.

“I thought—” She stops and clears her throat when her voice cracks. “I thought you weren’t demanding this sort of thing,” she reminds me.

I drop my hand with an effort at self-control. “I’m not. But if I must punish you, all bets are off.” It’s not true. I wouldn’t take her against her will. Even though her body screams for me to. Even though half of her wants me to.

I scent her arousal again. I crouch before her and reach a hand between her thighs, trailing my index finger over the seam at her crotch, causing her to draw a sharp intake of breath. “Will you be good, Aurelia?”

“Y-yes,” she warbles.

I pinch the outer lips of her sex through her shorts, and she whimpers. “Good girl,” I murmur. “You may get dressed.”

I release her and toss her the shirt, standing up and walking away as if I don’t have the bluest balls on the planet.

Yes, torturing her would be a torture to me too... but the sweetest kind.

C H A P T E R 6

A urelia

“I ORDERED books for you to study,” Charlie informs me from my bedroom. He’s walking around it, picking up my things and examining them. “But they won’t be here until tomorrow, so we’ll practice with your bubble today. Is that your only trick?”

I nibble my lip. “When I was a kid, I swore I could make the wind blow.” I remembered last night, as I’d considered Charlie’s claim that I possess some kind of power.

He looks at me thoughtfully. “Can you make it blow inside?”

I give a bark of embarrassed laughter. “I don’t even think I can do it outside anymore. I don’t know if it ever really happened, or I just believed I could do it.”

He leans his back against the wall and folds his arms over his muscled chest, considering me. In a crisp button down with the sleeves rolled up, he looks straight out of the pages of a men’s fashion magazine--virile, handsome and debonnaire. “You could,” he says, as if he knows it definitively. “Try it--right here and now.”

I close my eyes, remembering how I used to climb to the top of a hill, spread my arms and lift my face up, saying, “blow wind, blow!” I imagine the feel of wind on my face, of my hair lifting in the currents.

A wisp of air, so light it could be in my imagination, breezes past my face.

My eyes fly open. “Did you see anything?”

Charlie smiles. “Very good, fairy. Now send it my way.” He holds up his palms.

I draw a breath and imagine feeling the wind at my back, blowing my clothing forward. A tiny current of air ruffles my sleeve, then dies away.

“Again,” Charlie orders.

“Did you feel that?”

“I did. I want you to do it again. Stronger this time.”

Already the two tries have exhausted me. “I don’t know how,” I complain.

Charlie strides over to me, looking every inch the authoritarian. My belly flutters with excitement and nerves. What would he do this time? Spank me again? Scold me? Bite my bra off with his sexy sharp teeth?

He cups my chin and looks down at me warmly. “You’re doing very well, little fairy. The more you use it, the more power you’ll have. I need you to keep practicing for me.”

His approval should not warm me, turn me gooey inside.

“It’s...tiring,” I manage to say, still lost in his dark gaze.

“Do you need a snack?” When I nod, he moves his hand to my nape, turns me and guides me toward the kitchen. There, he pulls a chair out for me. “Sit,” he orders. “Now, try again. Blow the curtains over there.”

As much for my own curiosity as to satisfy his demands, I continue to practice the skill. After several attempts, the curtains lift and wave in the air as if the window weren’t boarded shut.

“Well done, little mortal.”

“My magic brings all the fang boys to the yard,” I brag.

With a grin, Charlie sets a plate of the same graham cracker treat I made last night in front of me. “Now, show me your protective bubble again.”

I throw it up, and he blurs backward to give me room. As with the initial time, at first I can’t see my creation, but once he shows me the edges with his hands, my eyes find the invisible outline, catching the shimmer.

He pokes and prods the bubble, able to distort its shape, but not puncture it. “Can you make it thicker?” he asks. When I try and succeed, he demands I make it rigid then change its color. It seems there’s no limit to what I can do: I simply use my imagination to cast the image. Excitement

bubbles up in me. Is this really all true? I possess magical abilities? I feel like Harry Potter must have felt when he first got the letter for Hogwarts.

Despite my trepidation and annoyance over Charlie barging in and making his demands, I can't help but feel gratitude for this gift.

"Come over here and face this white wall," he says. Every time he gives a command, my pussy clenches, like he owns me with nothing more than his sexy voice.

I stand as he directs, and he stands behind me, grasping my shoulders. "Hold your hand out in front of you and look at the energy surrounding it. Tell me if you see any colors."

"What is it, an aura?"

"I don't know. I see it only faintly, and most mortals don't see anything at all. But that doesn't mean it's not there." He speaks with his lips close to my ear, so I can't concentrate on anything but the thrum of excitement at his nearness, his masculine scent and the memory of his fingers tweaking my sex. "What do you see, love?"

I shiver at his hot breath feathering over my ear, seeing nothing.

"Shall I tell you what I see?"

"Yes, please."

"Mmm, so polite. I see a layer of yellow, then turquoise blue, then green."

I blink at my hand, trying to see what he sees.

"Focus past your hand at the wall but still look at your hand."

"That makes no..." I twist around, my breasts brushing against Charlie's firm chest. "...sense." My nipples tighten, heat travels up my neck.

He smirks down at me. I'm sure he knows I find him attractive. He turns me back around and smacks my ass. "Try again."



Aurelia

I'M tired but happy when it comes time for my shift. I feel hollowed out but triumphant.

I'm surprised Charlie even lets me go to work, but I guess he knows I won't run. Already there's a bond between us. Weird but true.

I pick up a burrito on my way to work from one of the food trucks, eating it as I walk. I can't stop thinking of the vampire. Was he really born in 1825? What has he seen? And how much lore about vampires is true? Are vampires incapable of telling lies? Would eating garlic keep him away? Where would he get his blood if not from me? Did he kill people often?

Maybe I don't want to know that. I hurry into work, looking forward to getting a boost from the children.

"Aurelia-aaa!" several shout when I walk in. Willie zips over in his wheelchair to greet me, and Shelly and Matt run over and hug me. I greet the kids and fall into my routine of supervising their free time, dinner and recreation.

"What are we doing tonight?" Shelly asks after dinner. I always lead them in one last recreation activity before bedtime, a chance to get their last wiggles out before they wind down.

"We're playing charades," I announce in an excited tone accompanied by jazz hands.

"Yay!" the kids cheer.

"Who's ready?"

"I am, I am," goes the chorus.

Those who want to play gather up, and I begin the game, splitting the group into teams and taking the first card for my team. I stand on the stage, trying to get my team to say *Mission Impossible*, which seemed to be a mission impossible in itself. These kids have no idea who Tom Cruise is. I pantomime the best I can while the kids giggle. "Fast and the Furious," Gwen joins in, laughing. I roll my eyes at her.

And then I freeze.

Charlie stands in the doorway, his arms folded across his muscled chest, a bemused expression on his face.

Holy forking shizz. He came to my place of work. What is he thinking?

The timer goes off, and the kids gleefully inform me that I lost. I superglue a beaming smile on my face and head to my group, not looking at Charlie. But I'm well aware of exactly where in the room he is. May as well be a giant blinking light on a map. *Vampire alert!*

Gwen turns and visibly starts at the vampire. Her jaw goes slack. Either she's stunned to silence by Charlie's good looks, or she knows something's

wrong.

Before I can call her name or head over, her expression turns blank. She looks away from Charlie, almost past him, and continues cleaning up as if she didn't realize he was there.

Did Charlie just hypnotize my co-worker? Dang it. What other havoc will he wreak here?

He saunters my way.

"What are you doing here?" I hiss under my breath when he reaches my side.

He shrugs. "I told you. You won't be rid of me until you've lifted the curse."

"But I'm working. You need to leave—right now."

"Ah, luv." He folds his arms. "Who's going to make me?"

My fists clench automatically, but I have absolutely no way to make him do anything. Putting up with his presence at home was one thing, but to think I endangered these innocent children by exposing them to a vampire makes me want to puke.

The kids don't seem to notice him. I'm not sure if that's a good or bad thing.

I lean towards him, anger burning through me. "If you so much as touch
___"

"I'm not here to harm the children," he interrupts, appearing offended.

"Why are you here?"

"We have work to do. After sundown is my best time of day. Hence, I will be working here with you."

Her shoulders sag. "No way."

"Then change your schedule to work days," he says, like it's that simple.

I grit my teeth to keep from cursing out the arrogant fang boy. "I would love to, but it's not up to me. I'm low woman on the totem pole around here."

He cocks his head. "Is the person in charge of that decision here tonight?"

My stomach lurches. What would he do?

"Yes," I say, warily. "Why? What are you going to do, hypnotize her?"

"Why not?"

“Well, it may not be so simple. Like perhaps she doesn’t have anyone to switch me with, or management has a rule against...”

“Where is she?” he cuts me off.

I stare at him, my thoughts tumbling. On one hand, I would prefer to work days, so what harm could there be in trying? On the other hand, the more the vampire interferes in my life, the more complicated things might become.

Or maybe it’ll all turn out all right. I put a hand on my stomach to steady it. “Edith Johnson—tall, salt and pepper hair. Her office is down that hall on the right.”

He winks. “I’ll be right back.”

I half expect him to simply disappear as he did the night before, but he turns and walks away, the muscles of his back rippling under his tight shirt, the faded seat of his jeans molding to his ass.

“Miss Aurelia!” I tear my thoughts away from my arrogant vampire’s perfect butt. It’s my team’s turn again, and the children want me to do the charades.

Unfortunately, two of the children begin arguing over the answer, and one of them, Tommy, an eight-year-old with impulse control issues, among other things, goes to grab the other child. I intercede, restraining him in the way we were taught, his arms crossed over his chest with me holding him from behind in an embrace as I speak calming words.

Tommy thrashes with more strength than I might guess a child of his size would have, and I almost lose my grip.

The cool scent of Charlie’s cologne hits me before I realize the vampire is back. He’s at my side faster than humanly possible. I jump and Tommy fights harder.

“Everything’s all right, Tommy. Take it easy. Breathe,” I soothe.

“Look at me, Tommy,” Charlie says.

“No, don’t!” I snap, my heart racing.

My panic only fuels the boy’s, and he frees one hand, which smacks me in the face. I catch his wrist again and pull it to his waist. This situation’s getting worse. First of all, if the other counselors show up to help, I have Charlie’s presence to explain. Unless he glamors them all, Tommy included. But most of all, I don’t trust him not to hurt the boy or cause trouble.

But Charlie catches Tommy’s eye, and the boy’s body softens and relaxes. I ease my hold on him, and he turns around and hugs me. “Sorry,

‘Relia,’ he chirps, his fit completely vanished. I hug him back. “It’s okay, Tommy.”

I shoot a glance at Charlie, and the vampire arches a brow. “See? No harm done. Now he’s happy.”



CHARLIE

IF LOOKS COULD KILL, Aurelia’s would’ve bound and staked me instantly. But when I saw her struggling with the boy, an irrational protective urge surged, even though she had a handle on the situation. I acted automatically.

I shouldn’t have interfered.

I dematerialize, tracing to Eclipse, a bar on Congress Street owned by a werewolf named Garrett. A powerful vampire named Lucius is in the process of taking over Tucson. He already has a club established, but I’d rather not attract his attention. This werewolf bar is open to all sorts, and as long as I don’t cause trouble, the shifters won’t tell Lucius I’ve been here.

I order a Stoli and Seven and sit down on a bar stool. A group of cheetahs play pool in the back. A few mutter “leech” in my direction, but I ignore them. No love lost between vampires and shifters. Not that I’ve gotten along with many of my own kind either. But I enjoy Eclipse. There’s a certain comfort in hanging with other creatures of the night. No need to explain my presence or intentions at Eclipse—no one asks questions here.

A pink-haired bartender slides my drink across. She’s mortal, but I doubt she knows what’s really going on in this club. Some humans are attracted to paranormals. Like the goth crowd—many of them have an affinity to vampires whether they recognize them or not.

“How’s it going?” the woman purrs, leaning over the bar to give me a full display of her stunning cleavage.

“Well,” I answer as blandly as I can.

“Well, what?”

“It’s going well. How are things here?” The small talk bores me, as does the human’s attempt to flirt. The cheetahs at the pool table are shooting more dirty looks in my direction. Garrett only employs his wolves as

bouncers, but his pack is well allied, and the cheetah shifters won't hesitate to act as enforcers if I give them a reason.

Meanwhile, the bartender squeezes her arms against the sides of her breasts with her upper arms, so they move together and forward, like an offering.

Unbidden, the image of Aurelia's lovely pair rises in my mind. I remember the flustered little sound she made when I sliced off her bra with my teeth. I plan to do so much more to her. I can hardly wait to do all the things I imagine. She's so responsive, it'll be a joy to train her to be mine—

But no.

That's not why I'm here. I'm not training her to be mine, I'm using her to free myself of the curse. Period. End of story.

I don't need to get involved with another Fae in any sort of romantic fashion. Already, my little Tinkerbell is dredging up emotions I'd happily forgotten existed. Like guilt.

I nurse a drink until midnight, when I walk out and trace to Aurelia's workplace. My little mortal has already exited, walking down the sidewalk with small, tight strides.

"Where's the bubble?" I drawl. I take one stride to her two, but my leisurely pace overtakes her.

She quickens her steps, her nose pointed to the sky. I don't have to catch her scent to know she's mad at me.

I stroll alongside her, hands in pockets. "I don't think I like you walking home alone at night. Do you always use the bubble or just when you see vampires?"

She doesn't answer.

"I caution you not to use that bubble around vampires unless you really have to. You don't want someone less savory than I taking an interest in you."

"Vampires *less* savory than you? God forbid," she mutters. She doesn't turn to look at me as she continues to stomp up the street.

"There are," I say, thinking of vampires I've met over my lifetime. Most view humans as chattel, food. "And they would drain you, Aurelia, the moment they saw your power."

"Thanks for the warning," she says, each word frosted with sarcasm. "I'd hate for a creepy vampire stalker to find me on the street and follow me home." She marches on.

She's lucky I find her fit of temper amusing. Her ass is so cute. I admire the way it twitches as she power walks home.

I shouldn't have left my guard down. When Aurelia reaches her doorway, she unlocks it and scurries inside. Whirling, she snaps, "You are *not* invited in." She glares as I approach.

"You are uninvited," she repeats, as if testing for the right combination of words.

Either phrase does the job. My face and body tingle like I've been zapped by an electric fence. I hiss at the invisible barrier.

Aurelia grins coldly in triumph and slams the door on my face.

I pound on the door. "Aurelia."

When she doesn't respond, I pound louder until her neighbor's door opens.

"What the hell is—"

"Go back inside, Karen," I order. The woman's mouth closes. I add a few suggestions. By the time I'm done, Karen won't hear any sounds from Aurelia's place and won't remember seeing me at all. Karen toddles back into her side, and I resume pounding.

"Knock it off, or I'll call the cops," Aurelia calls through the door.

"What do you think they'll do?" I demand.

Silence from the other side of the door. I wait. Aurelia's smart. She'll come to the logical conclusion that the cops will be hella useless against a vampire. No human can touch me.

The silence stretches to a minute, and I give up on patience. "Shall I start busting in your windows?"

Aurelia throws the door open. For a moment she's surrounded by a glow--like Madonna with a halo. "Won't that be inconvenient for sleeping during the day?"

I simply smile. She knows she's defeated.

"Why don't you go away?" She's gorgeous in anger, eyes flashing. My mouth waters at the scent of her magic.

But my patience is gone. "Invite me in. Now, Aurelia ."

She huffs. Her chin tips up in a show of pride.

"You will regret making me wait," I inform her. It's not a threat—it's a fact.

"Fine, come in," she snaps.

I blur past her, snatching her up by the waist and hoisting her off the floor as I shut the door. She kicks her shapely legs, thrashing and beating me with her fists. “Let. Go. Of me!”

“Do not lock me out,” I growl.

She must realize I mean business because her tone changes. “Wait. Stop,” she wheedles. “I’m sorry. Please calm down. I won’t. I won’t do it again, I promise!”

I touch my fangs with the tip of my tongue, but they haven’t lengthened. So what is she afraid of?

I draw in a deep breath and scent what she’s trying to hide. Arousal. The tiny bit of fear barely tinges the scent, like a bit of chocolate swirl garnishing a large wedge of cake. She’s not afraid of me. She’s afraid of what she feels.

I fist her hair and tip it back, tugging a little to introduce a little pain to the situation. Her scent grows rich and absolutely delicious--strawberries and sunshine and champagne.

Pain makes a vampire victim’s blood sweeter. Over the millenia, my kind have capitalized on this phenomenon through prolonged torture of our victims. More refined vampires, though, like the vampire king Lucius Frangelico, the one who seeks to make Tucson his, utilize sexual fear and pain to create their sweetbloods. Donors come voluntarily to his BDSM dungeon to suffer and receive gratification and offer up their veins for their masters to sample.

I’ve played at the practice, but the curse made it an unsatisfactory game for me, other than the taste of the blood. Now, though, with sweet Aurelia squirming in my arms, I’m suddenly interested in exploring it.

In depth.

I carry my little fae to the couch and arrange her straddled over my thighs. I fill my hands with her ass and squeeze. “That was a very nice apology,” I rumble. “I love the sound of desperation in your voice. But do you really think it’s going to get you out of punishment?”

She relaxes into our game. On some level, she wants to submit to me. “Are you going to spank me?”

“I’m not sure. You might enjoy it too much.”

She flushes.

“I apologize for upsetting you today,” I offer. “But really, I think a bit more trust is in order. I am a vampire, but I was human once. I would not

harm the innocent.”

“Your fangs were half out,” she accuses.

Surprise flickers. Were they? I remember blurring to her side. I’d been afraid for her. “For a moment, I thought you were in danger.”

She stares, her eyes rounding. “From a little boy?”

I give a quick shake of my head. “Illogical, I know. I just saw you in a tussle when I walked in, and I had the urge to protect. But they only came out a little. When they are fully elongated and I’m angry, you must be very cautious.”

“You...you had an urge to protect?”

“Odd, isn’t it? Goes against my vampire nature to look out for anyone but myself.” I grin. “I must be quite confident you can truly cure me of my curse.”

The way her gold-flecked eyes travel over my face with curiosity tell me she doesn’t quite buy my deflection. I’ll have to guard my feelings from the little fairy.

“I got you moved to the day shift. You see? I’m not all bad.”

“Yeah,” she says, her eyes focusing on my lips. “Thanks for making that happen.” To my utter shock, she lowers her head and kisses me.

I surge into action, cupping her face, holding her in place to return the gesture. My tongue licks into her mouth, teasing her lips. She wraps her arms around my neck and thrusts her own tongue into my mouth just as my fangs lengthen with arousal. She yanks away from me with a gasp of pain, her tongue sliced on a sharp tooth.

The smell of blood makes my fangs punch out. I grasp her head to pull her face back down to my mouth to repair the damage.

She makes a screaming sound in her throat, pushing her hands against my chest as I suck her tongue into my mouth, sealing the cut and promoting its quick healing.

I release her, and she scrambles back from me, her face pale and terrorized.

“I was sealing the cut.” I keep my tone reasonable although her lack of trust irritates me more than it should. I’m the one who’s played the asshole with her. She has no reason to trust me. And yet I’m offended, just the same.

When did I become so sensitive?

“My saliva has quick-healing and analgesic properties.”

“Please, don’t,” she begs, scrambling off my lap.
Fuck.



Aurelia

THE VAMPIRE LOOKS ANNOYED, his brows lowering as he stands and stalks to the kitchen.

I didn’t mean to act so bitchy, but for a minute there, I thought it was the end, and I was about to get sucked dry.

Now that I see I’ve offended him—maybe even hurt his feelings—it occurs to me that he might be right. A little more trust might be in order.

Opening the fridge, he regards my empty shelves. “Why don’t you have any food here? What do you eat?”

I hate it when people find out how poor I am. “Well, sorry. I didn’t know his royal highness would be requiring food. Maybe you’d like to pitch in for groceries.”

He turns. “Is that why you don’t have food?”

I shrug.

“Is it?” he demands.

“That and I don’t have a car, so I don’t buy a lot of food at one time.”

He rolls his eyes and vanishes.

Will I ever get used to him disappearing and appearing like that? I blink at where he stood, heart lurching. I rub my chest, feeling abandoned. But that’s stupid. Good riddance is more like it.

Will he come back tonight? Will he bring food? Rummaging through the kitchen, I realize I truly hope he’ll bring food for me, too. But surely that’s too much to hope for. He made it plain he looks out for no one but himself.

I try to stay pissed but keep coming back to one thing: he was protective of me with Tommy. Maybe it’s just because he needs me. He certainly tried to play it off that way. But there’s no denying our chemistry. We are fire together. *Everything* about the sexy vampire turns me on, even when he acts like a jackass.

Or was it *especially* when he acted like a jackass? Because as infuriating as I find him, some part of me doesn't want him to ever stop.

But that's messed up.

I need to steel myself against his charm because I'm in way over my head. I don't even know if he plans to kill or turn me when he's done with me. I don't know if he'd take any compunction in forcing me to do whatever he wants—lick his boots, serve as his sex slave...damn. Why did that turn me on?

I flip on the tv, waiting, I suppose, although I have no clue if he'll even return.

An hour later, a car pulls up and parks outside my duplex. Not able to look out the window, I open the door a crack and peek outside.

No. Way.

Charlie walks up the sidewalk carrying at least four bags of groceries, maybe more. I throw the door wide and run out in bare feet to meet him. "Let me take some of those."

"Don't be ridiculous." He cranes his neck around the pile of bags to look at me with amusement. Sexy vampire.

"Oh so now you're chivalrous?" When he doesn't answer, I ask, "Are there more?"

"Yes, but I will get them. You may put things away."

Bossy pants.

I guess I should be used to it by now. I peer into the first bag he sets down and get excited.

It's silly—I wasn't starving. But I was living on a shoestring ever since I moved to Tucson to attend the University of Arizona to get my teaching degree. By the time I graduated, budget cuts had reduced teaching staff across all the districts, and I couldn't find work, so I'd taken the job at the center. It didn't pay much more than minimum wage, but at least I'm using my degree, and eventually it should help me find a teaching position.

But I don't have money to splurge on all the things he bought: steak, shrimp, scallops. The most expensive brand of ice cream. Organic produce and imported crackers. Fine wine. European cheeses. I felt almost giddy about it.

He bought food from the deli, too, containers with shepherd's pie, Greek salad and sweet potato french fries. Despite the imperious act, he

pitches in with efficient ease, taking over the arranging of food in my refrigerator, opening the deli containers and setting plates out on the table.

“Thank you.” Now I’m slightly ashamed about my earlier demand that he contribute. I hope we aren’t taking turns with groceries because I can’t afford half of what he bought. I grab two forks and sit across from him, stealing peeks at his beautiful face, the way his canines extend just a little farther than a mortal’s, even when retracted. Why do I find that so appealing—especially when they should scare the bejeezus out of me? Or is it *because* they scare me?

I wolf the food down, and he raises an eyebrow when I clean my plate within just a few minutes.

“Do you want more? By all means.” He gestures with his fork toward the deli containers.

“No, thank you.”

“Go on, you ate like you were half-starved. I wouldn’t mind seeing a little more meat on your bones, too.”

“I’m not eating to suit your predilections about my body,” I say primly, standing up and carrying my plate to the sink. But then I spot the Belgian chocolate shortbread cookies on the counter. Softening my tone, I ask, “May I try one of those cookies?”

“Help yourself,” he says. “The food is for you.” As I rip open the package, he asks, “Do you start day shift tomorrow?”

“No, I get a day off.”

“What is your new schedule?”

“I work eight to five, like a normal person.”

He made a sound of disapproval. “Of course now you’ll want to sleep at night. I might have to make you quit that job.”

I half choke. “*No*,” I say in the hardest tone I can manage.

He raises a dark brow. “Do you love it?”

I cock my head and chew a cookie slowly before swallowing. “I love parts of it. I hate parts of it. But those kids need me. I couldn’t quit. I would drive a stake through your heart before I left that job.”

He turns back to his plate. “That’s a pretty cavalier way to talk about ending my life,” he observes. “Would you kill anyone who interfered with your career?”

“Well no, but—”

He turns back. “But what?”

I swallow.

“But I’m a vampire, so my life doesn’t count?”

I fiddle with the cookie packaging, not looking up.

“I see,” he said drily.

I break the cookie in two and lick at the chocolate part, closing my eyes to savor the rich treat. When I open my eyes, Charlie is looking at me like I’m a cookie, and he wants to take a bite out of me.

“What?” I bluster to hide my uncontrollable flush.

“That is disgusting,” he sniffs.

I wrinkle my nose, trying to think of a witty response.

“And rather cute.” His voice is deep and dark and delicious as chocolate.

My insides turn gooey, and I bite back a giggle. Fork, am I flirting? “Thanks again for buying groceries,” I say softly, giving the cookie another lick.

He lounges in my kitchen chair, all arrogance. “Well, you’ll need them, so you can cook for me.”

“I don’t really know how to cook.” Not exactly a witty comeback, but my vampire keeper needs to know.

“Well, I guess you’ll be learning that along with magic. You’ll have to study hard and prove to me you can handle working that job and still achieve the level of competency I need from you.”

I start to roll my eyes and yawn wide enough to crack my jaw. The clock reads three in the morning.

“You may go on to bed,” he pronounces his authoritative tone.

“Are you in charge of my bedtime, too?”

“I’m in charge of all of you, little mortal.” His gaze rakes up and down my body, and suddenly all my clothes feel too tight. I’m suddenly greedy with the desire for him to take charge immediately. Which is a bad plan all around. What is it about this vampire that makes my IQ plummet and my SQ rocket?

Unable to make an intelligent response, I flee to the bedroom.

C H A P T E R 7

 *charlie*

THE LITTLE MORTAL is trying to escape. Adorable. I flash to her bedroom, materializing on the edge of her bed in a casual, observer's pose, one leg crossed over the opposite knee. Like a patron settled in to watch a show. I will watch her undress, just to remind her who's in charge.

Aurelia doesn't realize I'm here. She has her back to me, her shirt off, revealing the ropy muscles of her slender back. She unbuttons her pants and shucks them, tossing them in the hamper. She has simple gray cotton panties on, but they couldn't look more erotic, clinging to her muscular ass, showing enough cheek to thicken my cock.

She turns and shrieks when she sees me, clutching her pajama top to her chest. "W-what are you doing here?"

"Watching the show." I wait for the fury. I'm looking forward to it, really.

Instead she stands stock still, rubbing her lips together, her breastbone lifting and lowering at a rapid pace. *Oh Lord. She's turned on.* "Get out," she whispers, but her voice holds no conviction. The way her eyes skitter down to my crotch and linger, I half expect her to take it back.

"You don't need to put that on." I indicate the pajama top. "I don't mind sleeping with you that way."

“You...” she spits. “You aren’t sleeping with me.” Her expression grows uncertain. “I don’t want you in here.”

“Your scent tells me differently.”

She snaps her eyes to mine. “What?”

“Admit it, Aurelia. Your naughty parts are tingling right now.”

A flush spreads across her cheeks and down her neck. “What do you want from me?” she demands.

“Come here,” I murmur. Her feet begin to move, and I celebrate the tiny victory. When she’s close enough, I snatch the skimpy pj top from her hands, dropping it on the floor.

She jerks and covers her breasts with her forearms.

I grip her wrists and pull her arms away from her chest, pinning them down by her sides. “You have a lovely pair of breasts,” I tell her, my fangs lengthening.

The fresh bloom of her arousal fills the bedroom. Is she more turned on from my commands, the physical restraint or the sight of my fangs growing long for her.

“Please,” she manages, her voice cracking.

I lift my gaze from my study of her breasts to her face, tickling her skin.

“Please, Charlie...”

“I like it when you beg,” I murmur.

The scent of desire grows stronger. “Please.”

I lift her wrists and place her hands on her head. “Keep your hands right here, love. Show me you can obey.”

She swallows, pupils blown. “What do I get if I obey?” Her voice sounds husky and smooth.

I hook my thumbs in her panties and slowly drag them down her thighs. Her thighs twitch together, and I watch in fascination as a droplet of moisture trickles from her pussy. I gather it with my fingertip and bring it to my mouth. The nectar makes my dick punch out hard against my zipper.

The fucking torture.

I don’t know why I’m even doing this to myself, yet it seems impossible to leave this beautiful, barely-touched woman unsatisfied. She craves something I know how to give.

And she deserves satisfaction after she’s borne my sudden presence and endless demands so well.

Her pillow lips part, nipples pull taut. I gently stroke the pads of my thumbs over them.

My cock throbs.

I make an approving rumble in my throat as I slowly walk around her body, admiring the display. I trail my palm over her ass, then draw it back and smack her on one cheek.

She gasps and wobbles but satisfies me by staying in position.

I slap the other cheek. She shivers, her breath short.

“You like being spanked by me,” I observe.

She drops her arms and tries to turn, but I catch her wrists and stretch them above her head with one hand, shifting her weight to the balls of her feet, shifting her balance forward.

I deliver another stinging slap to each cheek, then rub her heated flesh. “You look good in pink.”

“Why,” she pants, “why do you do this?”

I soften my touch, making it more like a caress now, soothing the sting away. “Vampires often mix pain and pleasure when they play with mortals,” I tell her. “It makes our partner’s blood sweeter.”

She stiffens, but I press my body against hers and murmur in her ear. “You surrendered to me. Why?”

“You made me,” she lies, as she shifts her weight back to her heels, a whisper closer to me.

“No, Aurelia,” I breathe in her ear. “You want it. You’re curious. You want to know what happens next, don’t you?” When she doesn’t answer, I give her ass another slap. “Don’t you?”

“Yes,” she gasps.

Her admission floods my chest with the warmth of success. I caress her backside, my fingers trailing up her inner thighs. She jerks when they brush her swollen sex. She clamps her legs together as if to keep me out.

“Come, Aurelia. You and I both know you aren’t serious about that.”

I slide my fingers between her legs again, wiggling to get through her tightened thighs until the tip of one finger touched her slick entrance.

“Your kitty’s ripe for me,” I murmur, my voice sounding thick.

She lets out a shaky moan.

I screw one finger inside her, and she wriggles against me, wanting more.

“Beg me for it,” he said.

“No.”

“No?” I remove my fingers.

“Wait—”

“Ah,” I say with satisfaction. I wrap one arm around the front of her and splay my hand across her belly, bringing my lips to her ear. “What are you more afraid of, Aurelia? Enjoying it or giving in to me?”

Her legs buckle, as if her knees went weak. I hold her up and nip her ear. “You can let go of that pride, can’t you? Admit you want pleasure from your master?”

“Please—”

I flick her earlobe with my tongue. “Please satisfy me, Master? What would you like me to do?”

“I don’t know,” she whimpers.

I step back to give her another spank.

“Ooh!”

“You do know, but you’re too afraid to admit your desire.”

“No,” she insists, sounding stubborn.

“No?”

“No,” she repeats firmly.

I draw back to study her face. She lifts her chin. Her face is lit by her magic, fairy light illuminating her skin. She literally glows. It’s amazing she doesn’t see it.

What am I doing? Aurelia isn’t my lover. She’s a means to an end. I could seduce her, but with the curse still on me, there’s no point.

As soon as she lifts the curse, I’m gone. Anything else is a distraction—her hot body, her fearlessness, her pretty face. And I swore I’d never be distracted by a woman again.

“Get some sleep. You’ll need your strength in the morning.” And with that order, I release her wrists and disappear.



Aurelia

I LURCH into the space where Charlie stood, but he's already gone. My arms grab air.

Damn. I didn't really want him to leave. Stop being an arrogant ass, yes. Pump the brakes on the dirty talk...maybe.

But he left.

I run a hand down my face and steady my shaky breath. My legs wobble as I head for my bed, and my sex pulses in time with my backside. Mechanically, I find my pajamas and pull them on with trembling hands.

Where did he go? Is he still in my apartment? Where does he always disappear to?

But the real question is: Why did I tell him to go? Why did I say no? I wanted him, I *did* want to know what came next. What kept me from admitting it?

I walk to my full length mirror and stare at my face as if it will tell me the answers. I hardly resemble myself. My eyes are wide and glassy, as if in some kind of stupor. My cheeks are flushed and my hair rumpled. I look like I had hot sex with a vampire. And I could've. I had my chance.

I let my forehead fall gently to the mirror, resisting the urge to bang it against the glass. Why. Did. I. Say. No.

Was it out of pride?

My pussy gives another pulse. I'd bet my last pair of panties Charlie would rock my world in bed. Any man—or...vampire—who gets me that wet just by sliding his finger between my legs would have to know how to make me scream in pleasure. One touch from Charlie is a million times better than a whole night with Wilson, my lazy ex-boyfriend who never lasted more than two minutes.

I flop down on my belly with one hand between my legs. My fingers press into my sex, trying to rub my clit the way Charlie did. My fingertips dance over my swollen folds, seeking the same pattern. I imagine him working himself over me, his hardened cock pressing my low back.

I push my mound against the heel of my hand, my fingers undulating over my sex, some hitting my clit, some slipping in and out of my entrance. Charlie wouldn't ask, he'd just prop up my hips and slide in. He'd bang me from behind, sinking in balls-deep, punishing me with his cock. He'd hold my hips firmly, shoving in and out of me roughly, dominating me until I exploded.

I explode. My release makes my hips buck as I press all five fingers over my convulsing sex.

Is Charlie off somewhere, jacking off? He seemed as aroused as I was before he left. If he's touching himself, is he thinking of me?

Or is there someone else?

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C H A P T E R 8



I TRACE TO CONGRESS STREET. Tucson bars close at two, so things are quiet, even in the heart of downtown. I'm in Lucius' territory, and I should be lying low, but I can't go back to Aurelia.

My cock literally throbs. I kick a bit of trash out of my path. But I did it to myself. Even if my little fairy let me go on, there's no rest for the wicked. No coming for the carnivorous. No relief for the rabid. Not until Aurelia lifts the damn curse. When she does, I'll fuck my Tinkerbell so hard her teeth will rattle.

But no.

Damn fairy's in my blood, and even though I crave her, I won't take her against her will—not even if I were capable of getting off. I want Aurelia to want me. Correction: I want her to need me with the same lust burning under my skin. Hell, I want her to beg me. I want her weight on my lap and her shrieks cracking the windows. I want my name on her lips and her nails scratching furrows down my back. But only if she's willing.

I want to win not just her obedience but her submission, her desire...her heart.

I still in a puddle of moonlight. *Her heart?* Seriously? Since when did I become a teenage sap in a vampire movie? I could give a fuck about love. Look how well it worked out for me last time. Once cursed, twice shy. If a

hundred year old curse isn't enough to break me of falling in love, I deserve my current hell.

I pass an all night diner full of people getting their dinner. I need my own dinner—I haven't fed since finding Aurelia. Not smart to do it in Lucius' territory, but surely a little sip from a random girl won't give me away. But my stomach turns at the thought of holding any human but Aurelia. When I pass a few tasty morsels, my fangs lie dormant.

Stupid. Why am I acting like a mated vampire who will only take blood from his lover? Aurelia will never consent to let me feed from her.

Still, I end up tracing back to her apartment and crawling into bed beside her, staring at the golden glow of her skin in the lamplight. I brush her thick hair away from her face, studying her sleeping form. She has a heart-shaped face, with high cheekbones and a small nose. Delicate but not fragile. Beautiful in a healthy, outdoorsy way.

Her brows furrow, and her legs twitch like she is running. A nightmare, perhaps. She lets out a whimpering cry, and I can't stand it any longer. I pull her into my arms without thinking.

"Shh, love. It's just a dream," I murmur.

She stirs, her eyes blinking open. "Charlie," she sighs, still half asleep. "I'm glad you're here. You're always here when I need you." Her eyes close again, and her breathing deepens.

What was that about? No use asking. I doubt she'll remember any of it in the morning. Even though she sleeps peacefully now, I don't release her, reluctant to put any distance between our bodies. Her soft form nestles so sweetly against mine, her champagne smell soothing. Her presence makes my spirit lighter. Fae are special creatures, but this is all Aurelia.

With my Tinkerbell nestled in my arms, I drift off to sleep. But instead of dreaming of my sweet mortal, I find myself on the narrow shadowy streets of Paris, on errand for Anka. *The scent of blood rises off my clothes. I've just killed a man, drained him, and now I'm returning to my lover's bordello for a reward.*

One second, I'm in a stinking alley, then next, I'm in a lush and perfumed bedchamber. I carry the scent of the dead man's blood—but Anka won't mind. She loves the stench of death.

"Sweet vampire," Anka says, stroking my face. "I can always count on you, can't I?" She lets down her thick hair, the dark mass falling from the

curls pinned on the crown of her head. She allows her robe to drop, displaying her magnificent body, clad only in a corset and stockings.

I growl and flash to my knees before her, releasing the garters and peeling down the silk. She runs her fingers through my hair, guiding my mouth to her sex. “I save it only for you,” she tells me. Even in the dream, I hear the lie. But I pretend not to.

I pleasure her to climax then lift her to stand with my mouth still at her cunt. Carrying her to the bed, I lay her down, free my cock and plunge into her warmth. I stroke deep into her pussy as my fangs seek her neck.

“Charlie,” she moans. She’s writhing, wild. Her hands are claws, tearing at my body.

“Charlie...Charlie! Char-lie!”

The golden scent slaps me in the face. I open my eyes to find Aurelia struggling beneath me, screaming in terror. My fangs are at her neck, and she is pushing my face away with the heel of her hand. The gyrations of her hips aren’t sexual but panicked.

I jerk back, lifting my weight onto my hands and blinking my eyes into focus.

“Oh thank God,” she cries, nearly in tears. She pushes at my shoulders, trying to scramble out from under me.

My cock is thick and hard, but I’m still clothed. My hips hover over hers. I’d been grinding against her, about to take her vein.

“Aurelia,” I mutter, shaking my head.

Damn. I scared the hell out of her after vowing not to bite her without permission. I shouldn’t be sleeping next to a mortal when so blood-starved.

“Who is Anka?” she demands. Is that a trace of jealousy in her voice? The thought cheers him.

“She’s the witch who cursed me,” I say.

“Oh.” She studies me. I enjoy being the subject of her scrutiny, her chocolate and gold eyes so full of intelligence and light.

“I’m sorry I scared you,” I murmur.

“You were really going to bite me,” she sighs. “I couldn’t wake you up. What if you drained me before you knew it?”

“I wouldn’t do that.”

“Do what? Bite me or drain me?”

“Drain you.” My head pounds even though all the blood in my body has rushed to my cock. “As for biting, I promise, you would enjoy it.”

Her scent flares up. My fangs sharpen enough to cut the inside of my mouth. I'm helpless against her, my hips nudging forward to grind my cock against her mound. Before she can start to wrestle, I lower my body to pin hers, my hips rolling against hers. I can feel the peaked tips of her nipples even through our layers of clothing.

My mouth finds her ear. "I can't help it if I find you irresistible while I sleep. You just feel so...delicious." My tongue traces the silken edge of her ear.

Her pelvis tilts to meet mine, and she starts to pant, even as she grips my shoulders, trying to push me off.

"I just want to taste you. I'll make it feel good, I promise," I purr, running the tips of my fangs lightly across her skin.

"No." She pushes with real effort.

"Shh. There's nothing to be afraid of, sweet Aurelia. It's just a little prick and then orgasmic ecstasy. I won't take too much blood, and I'll hardly leave a mark. It heals within a couple days."

Her struggles slow, but she refuses to look at me, turning her head to the side. "Please," she whimpers. "Please let me up." A tear slides out of the corner of her eye, traveling across her nose.

Pain squeezes my unbeating heart. Another surprise—her genuine distress bothers me. I roll off immediately and help her to sit, lifting her to her feet beside the bed.

"Thank you," she mutters, looking down, obviously trying to hide her watering eyes. When she lifts her gaze, she looks so vulnerable my heart twists once more. "May I please go outside?"

I love the way she asks, as if she's finally admitting I run the show. I rise off the bed and reach for her, cupping her face and tilting it up to catch her eyes. I change the hypnotic suggestion, probing deep into her mind. When I'm done, she may only open the door during daylight if she's made certain I'm safe first.

I break our connection reluctantly. She sways in my hold, and I stroke my thumbs over her cheekbones.

"Did you undo it?"

I nod. "What time is it?"

"Quarter til seven." Almost dawn.

"Be back by dusk."

To my shock, she stands on her tiptoes and gives me a peck on the lips.
“Thank you.”

Once she’s gone, I sink back into the bed, letting lethargy roll over me. Her scent rises from the pillow. I still feel the press of her lips on mine. My fingers twitch, but I refuse to touch the place she kissed.



Aurelia

I SERIOUSLY NEED to masturbate again. Why didn’t I let the vampire go to town on me? I was freaked out beyond belief at first, but having one hundred eighty pounds of muscled vampire grinding over me flipped my switch pretty quickly. And the way he murmured in my ear...

I climb into the shower and lean my forehead against the wall, pressing my fingers over my sex.

Charlie is a conundrum. My captor—and I think he likes it that way. He could do anything he wants to me. He can out-power me if he likes it that way or hypnotize me if he wants me willing, but he’s done neither. The moment he saw my tears, he released me.

I’m not even sure what made me cry. Probably just the need to let go after the terror of thinking he would drain me. But he made sense—the way he’d been going after me hadn’t been angry or violent—it was sexual. So presumably that meant he wouldn’t have killed me.

Fucking vampires. So confusing. Too bad he didn’t order textbooks on vampires when he sent for the magic ones.

I continue to work my fingers over my clit, remembering the feel of his hardened bulge between my legs, the tickle of his fangs at my neck. I trigger a short, unsatisfying orgasm and have to sit down on the edge of the tub, dizzy from the hot water and the blood rushing...away from my head.

I’m not as shy this time walking into my room dressed only in the towel. Charlie’s fallen back into a deep sleep, judging from the sounds of his breathing. I study him, and a wave of déjà vu comes over me, as if I’ve seen him in my bed a hundred times before. As if I’ve known him forever but had just forgotten until now.

Weird.

After dressing and gobbling down some breakfast, I head to the door. My hand hesitates before touching the knob, but there's no weird push on my thoughts to keep me from going outside. Charlie lifted the compulsion.

I grab a floppy hat and my gardening gloves. I double check that my bedroom door is closed completely and return to the door, opening it just enough to slip outside.

Outside smells so delicious. I breathe in the dawn and let the familiar peace I always feel when I'm out in nature settle around me. Even in winter, I crave the smell of the earth, the feel of the plants between my fingers.

My orange tree has dozens of fragrant blossoms, and the winter greens have grown bush-like. I pull weeds and cut some of the kale ready for harvest.

After an hour or two, my neighbor, Karen, comes outside to sit on her porch, lighting up a cigarette. We often passed time this way, having become friends since she moved in.

"What's with the boarded up windows?" Karen asks, blowing out a column of blue grey smoke.

"Oh. Um...I just got a little nervous about security. You know, being on the ground floor and all."

"Yeah," Karen says. "Seems like I saw a guy hanging around your door, but now I can't quite remember...Are you having trouble with someone? Like an ex?"

"Yeah, kind of. I guess so," I say, trying to think up a story..

"Well, what's the deal?"

"Um. You remember Wilson, my ex-boyfriend?" I go with Karen's suggestion.

"Yeah."

"Well, he's been bugging me lately, and I just don't want him showing up..." I trail off. This is the lamest story ever.

"Didn't he break up with you?"

I blow hair out of my face. "Well, no. He was cheating. Or—he refused to commit. He wanted an 'open relationship'. I wasn't into it." I should've made something else up. I don't like talking about Wilson. He was a pathetic excuse for a boyfriend, and now, comparing him with Charlie's powerful presence, he seems downright remedial as a human being.

"Wait, so why do you think he's going to try to break into your house?"

Fork, I am the world's worst liar. Good thing I'm not a spy or undercover. "He forgot his....uh, lava lamp."

Karen stubs out her cigarette. "Riiiight," she drawls. She's not buying it. "I'll keep my eyes open and let you know if I see him around, okay?"

"He's mad because I'm dating someone new," I blurt.

Karen's eyebrows flash upwards. "Ooh, really?"

"Uh huh. His name is Charlie. You might have seen him around—dark hair, dresses well." *Hot body. Long fangs. Sexy as hell.* I squeeze my thighs together, feeling the phantom pressing of his bulge between my legs.

"Oh yeah? That's awesome. Stop by and introduce him sometime, okay?" Karen says, rising.

Suuuuuure.

I work until my arms ache and my head is clear. I clean up and, on a whim, cook breakfast for dinner. It's almost dusk

I glance at my watch. Two hours passed, and it's almost five. I brush off the dirt and go to the door, hesitating before I open it. What if he's already woken and is sitting in the kitchen? He'd be killed. No wonder he hypnotized me the day before, his very life's at stake. No pun intended.

Lifting my fist, I knock on the door and press my ear to the wood to listen for movement. Good thing Karen isn't still outside, or I would really look crazy.

"Wait." I hear Charlie call out.

Thank God for my foresight.

"Count to ten first and then open," he says from the other side of the door.

I follow his instructions and open the door cautiously, shutting and locking it behind me. "All clear," I call out.

My bedroom door opens and...damn. My vampire looks sexy walking toward me in nothing but his jeans, his naked torso spectacular, hair still rumpled from sleep.

"Thanks for the breakfast, love." He grasps my nape and stoops to kiss the top of my head as he passes by.

I stand rooted to the spot. Why does he make my heart beat so erratically? "Which did you eat?" I manage to ask after a moment.

"Both," he grins, sitting down at the table where both plates are in front of him. He takes a bite of pancake. "And I love this whipped cream," he says, his mouth full.

I have a skin-flick fantasy moment, imagining him smearing my body with it and licking it off. But no, with him, it would be more whips and chains.

“You’re staring at me,” he says in his sexy British accent, without turning to look.

“What are we doing today, Master?”

He turns, his lips stretching into a broad smile, teeth gleaming. “You’ve finally accepted me as your one true god.”

I don’t mean to grin like an idiot, but I’ve felt all warm and gushy toward him, ever since our interlude this morning. The compassion he showed when I lost it and teared up proved it was all a game to him. He may actually expect me to remove the curse, but he wouldn’t hurt me. And he wants me. And now that I know he won’t take my life, I find the vampire irresistible. It’s not like me to fall hard for a guy—in fact, I never have before. But this one...he does something undeniable to me, turning my insides to hot liquid with a single flick of his eyebrow. I’d have to work hard to keep up the resistance toward him, or he’d have me crawling on my knees for him without any pride at all.

To that order, I ball a napkin and hurl it at him.

He catches it easily, his hand moving so fast I miss the motion. “That’s another thing...I require tidier surroundings.”

I look around. My place isn’t dirty, but I have a fair amount of clutter lying on coffee tables and counters. “I can’t cook, clean and study to do magic. Maybe you could try doing something useful during all those night hours when I’m asleep.”

He throws the napkin back at me, hitting me in the face. The sound of the doorbell makes him dematerialize, and this time I see it happen. Like he pixelated out, breaking into millions of tiny atoms before they vanished. He reappears in the doorway to my bedroom, where he shuts the door.

I answer the bell to find the mailman has left a bundle too big to fit in my mailbox. The books! I bend to pick up the package and letters and shut the door.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are!” I call.

Charlie materializes directly behind me, one hand cupping my breast and the other between my legs. He pulls me against him as I scream and try to leap away. “Did your package come?”

I jerk at the feel of his firm fingers against my sensitive cleft, pleasure running down my inner thighs and making them tremble. But I'm not about to let him know how badly I want it. "Get away from me, vampire," I cry, wrestling free and staggering back, feigning indignation as my pussy thrums, hungry for more.



CHARLIE

THE SCENT of Aurelia's arousal fills the room. She may want to pretend she doesn't want it, but we both know the truth.

I love flustering her, watching color splash across her cheeks, the way her eyes flash. She's adorable.

I choose to ignore her snit. "Open it." I lift my chin toward the package.

She seems happy to change focus, eagerly picking up the box and carrying it to the kitchen, where she slices it open with a knife. "Wait..." She holds up a plastic bag containing a black corset/panty set and package of thigh-high stockings. "What are these?"

I smirk. "I happen to be fond of old-fashioned underwear."

She throws me a condemning look. "I hope these are for you to wear."

I make a show of sweeping my gaze up and down her tight little body. "They're for me, but I won't be wearing them. But don't worry—I won't force," I promise, making my tone smooth like honey. "You'll put them on because you want to please me."

She tosses them at me. "Fat chance!"

I catch the hurled items and open the bag containing the corset, holding it up in her direction with a critical eye.

"Stop it."

I love seeing her blush. I blur to stand behind her, trailing my fingertips lightly across her shoulder. "Come, Tinkerbell, you know you want to try them on."

Heat comes off her in waves, a heady sensation on my cool skin. My fangs elongate, and I have to close my eyes, willing myself to think of something besides tying her up and making her come until she weeps.

Instead of pulling away, she turns to face me, inching closer, as if magnetically pulled to my body. She lifts her face. I can hardly deny what she's asking for. I wrap my hand around the back of her head and kiss her, my lips twisting over hers, my tongue licking into her mouth.

I catch myself before moaning her name, desire mounting at the taste of her, the sensuous pleasure of contact. I reach for the hem of her shirt and slowly pull it up. She lets me for a moment but seems to remember herself and flinches away.

"Stop," she says, breathless. "I...I'm not ready for that."

I don't remind her I already saw her magnificent tits yesterday. She's right to stop me—what the hell am I attempting? Do I think tumbling her will alleviate my unquenchable lust? It would only make it worse, and then I'd be blood-starved *and* blue-balled, which would equal one extremely crabby vampire. And we have real work to do here.

I pick her up by the waist and carry her to a chair at the kitchen table, plunking her down and shoving the box of books at her. "Get busy learning magic, little fairy."

She tips the box and peers inside. Pulling a suede flogger out of the box, she looks at it critically.

"Ah yes, that one is for me. To use on you, of course."

She lifts it to hurl at me but seems to reconsider, perhaps knowing I'll use it on her. Tossing the flogger back in the box, she changes the subject. "Which book should I start with?"

I shrug. "You're the fairy—call it to you."

Her jaw goes slack. "How, exactly, do I do that?"

I don't answer but return her gaze steadily, daring her to try it. I don't know how fairies or witches do what they do, but I spent enough time around Anka to know it's what she would have done.

She turns slowly back to the box and peers inside. A glow appears around one of the books.

"There! Do you see it?" I grin, pointing.

She whips her head around to look at me, confusion on her face. She looks back to the box and stares at it. The book remains lit up from my view. "Can't you see?"

I suppose as an immortal, I have the capability of seeing things ordinary humans don't. Like the bubble of protection she used when I first saw her.

After a long moment, she picks out the glowing one and holds it up. “This one?” Doubt laces her voice.

I smile so wide my cheeks stretch, a surge of—is it pride?—running through me. “Brilliant girl. Clever little fairy,” I praise. “I knew you’d be a quick study.”

I love the wonder in her expression. She really doesn’t know how powerful she is.

“You read the book, I’ll tidy up around here.” I’m feeling downright magnanimous. When her eyes widen, I add, “Just this once. I shall expect you to keep a neater house going forward.” I throw a wink because my vampire master thing is honestly just a big game for me. I could care less if she keeps a neat house or not.

She flips me the bird and turns to the book, opening it with curiosity on her lovely face.

I arrange her clutter into neat piles and begin to make dinner. Despite my edict that she cook, I actually enjoy preparing food. Some vampires choose not to eat at all, preferring to take all their sustenance from blood. I love food, the years I spent in France providing me with a discerning palate.

I met Anka in Paris, where she owned a bordello. The raven-haired madame had seemed as immortal as I, her magic giving her the appearance of eternal youth. She had flawless olive skin, almond-shaped black eyes with thick, curling lashes.

She had a French aristocrat for a father but was born to his mistress, a former prostitute, from whom she inherited the gift of sight and healing. At age fourteen, her father died and the stipend she and her mother lived on disappeared. Anke found her way to Paris to make her living first as a prostitute and later as the proprietor of one of the most expensive brothels.

Thinking of Anka now doesn’t bring up the usual seething. I almost pity her. Alone, with no one to help her, she had to use every bit of magic, every manipulation she knew to get ahead. Using me had been out of habit. The fact that she cursed me showed she truly cared. Else she never would’ve minded my finally walking away. I open the refrigerator and take out the steak to marinate. I also grab a few potatoes and set them to boil in a pot of milk and crushed garlic. I have a hankering for *gratin dauphinois*.

I haven’t thought so much about Anka as I have in the last two days. The possibility of ridding myself of her curse brings the memories to the forefront of my consciousness.

As I work on the food preparation, I catch Aurelia stealing looks at me from under her lashes. She appears to have a mystical intelligence, as if she sees beyond my self-centered vampiric existence straight into my blackened heart, where she sifts through my flexible morals to determine whether there's anything left to redeem. An old soul, it would seem. Descended from the Fae.

I have to admit parts of me I presumed dead have come to life in the past two days. Something about this little mortal soothes my spirit, makes me feel human again.

Her cell phone rings, and she picks it up. "Hey, Gwen, what's up?" She looks over at me. "Tonight? I can't..." She twirls a piece of hair between her fingers and looks at me again before walking toward her room. "I met a guy," she says in an undertone.

I smile. My little fairy doesn't know vampires have heightened hearing. Good thing because this is one conversation I don't want to miss.

"Yeah, well...I met him at work...sort of. And we've just been...hanging out for the past couple days...Charlie. Yeah. I don't know," she says with the suggestive lilt to her voice that teenage girls use when telling secrets.

Something in me turns warm and sugary. I love hearing her talk about me as if I'm a love interest. Her youth and innocence shines through in the conversation, bringing out a protective instinct in me. I have no intention of developing a relationship with Aurelia, but the idea of her wanting one somehow changes things.

I'm prepping the steaks as Aurelia emerges from the bedroom.

"If you work very hard, I might let you go out with your friends."

"Shut up, vampire," she says, but wears a flirtatious smile.

"Are you going to introduce me to them?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"Why you want to meet them."

"I'm going to kidnap them and keep them as blood slaves until you free me of the curse."

She snorts but then darts a glance at me to make sure I'm joking.

"Nah, that's only if you haven't figured it out by Tuesday."

"I don't perform well under pressure."

"I don't believe that." I give the potatoes a stir.

Aurelia walks up behind me, and I find myself longing for her to touch me of her own accord. Instead, she says, “What can I help with?”

“You could work on making a salad.”

I move out of her way, and she takes the salad fixings out of the refrigerator.

“So how did you become a vampire?” she asks as she begins chopping fresh vegetables.

I fold my arms across my chest, leaning back against the cabinets and watching her work. “I was the carriage driver and groom for the Duke of Lynton. His wife, the duchess, had a penchant for being bent over the hitching post and taken roughly from behind.”

Aurelia stops and stares at him, a mixture of fascination and shock on her face. “By you, you mean?”

“Yes, although I imagine I wasn’t the first groom she’d recruited for her recreation. The night I was turned, I’d just driven her to London and had thrown up her skirts in the stables when the Duke found us and shot me.”

Her eyes round, the knife suspended in the air.

“I managed to stumble out onto the streets of London. He let me go—I imagine he didn’t think I’d get very far, but I must have walked a few blocks before I collapsed. And then a beautiful woman lifted me into her arms as if I weighed no more than a child, and she carried me to her apartment. She asked if I wanted to die or if I preferred eternal life. I chose eternal life.” I wink.

“Is that true?”

“Yes.”

“What else? Does garlic keep you away?”

“No. But it does make your blood taste foul, so I can see where the legend was derived.”

“And the only thing that kills you is a stake through the heart?”

“Not exactly. We heal quickly, so most injuries wouldn’t kill us, but decapitation or some other major injury which might cause us to bleed out before regenerating would. Sunlight, obviously.”

“Silver bullet? Or no, that’s werewolves, right?”

I chuckle. “Silver can harm us too, actually. Takes away our strength and burns our skin. Not fatal but not a friendly element for us, either.”

Aurelia returns to chopping celery, but her eyes remain on me, bright with interest. “Ouch.” She jerks her thumb up to her mouth.

The smell of her blood reaches my hunger-starved brain before any thought. I blurr to her, taking her sliced thumb into my mouth and sucking hard.



Aurelia

I yank my hand out of his mouth, terrified. He did his blurring trick, appearing right in front of me with his fangs fully elongated and a look of pure hunger on his face. Not lust this time. He looked like a drug addict who needed a fix.

Without thinking, I draw back my palm and slap him across the face as hard as I can.

Surprise flickers over his features.

“I’m sorry,” I exclaim, somewhat shocked at myself. A little afraid of how he’ll react.

I remember now that his saliva seals cuts. He probably was just trying to help, and I overreacted again. I definitely should not have struck him. A dumb move. Who slaps a vampire? I give a prayer of thanks that my vampire prefers kink over real violence when it comes to retribution.

As if reading my mind, Charlie clucks his tongue. “Naughty little mortal. Never lift your hand to your master.” He slowly walks me backward until my butt hits the kitchen table, then turns me and presses my torso down over it. He gives each cheek a spank, then works the button open on my shorts and tugs them down and off, along with my panties.

Sliding his thumbs between my legs, he pries them apart and outward, exposing my pussy to his view. He inhales deeply as if drinking in my scent.

“Somebody is turned on,” he remarks.

“No, I’m not,” I bite out too quickly to sound convincing.

He covers my hand on the table with his own and drags it down, past the edge of the table, threading it between my legs, from the front. He pushes both my fingers and his own against my slit, moving them up and down across my slippery folds. “Keep your fingers here,” he murmurs in my ear.

My sex is wet, the tissue swollen with need. Every thrust of my fingers sends zings of pleasure rippling through my body.

He draws his hand away, and I instantly miss it. Fingering myself was not so exciting as having someone else guide the motion. A sharp slap lands on my tingling ass then another. I draw in a breath, dizzy. Charlie begins to spank me again, at a slower tempo. With the next slap, I shove my fingers inside my channel. They almost sink there involuntarily, as if they know that's where they belong. He swats me again, and I repeat the plunging, growing more eager with each thrust as pleasure begins to take over, outweighing the sting of his slaps.

"The spanking won't stop until you come," he informs me.

I groan, my knees buckling.

He reached his left hand around my hips and adds his fingers to the mix again, still spanking with the other palm. "And don't even think of faking it because I can feel your muscles."

He needn't have worried, I'm just a few strokes away from orgasm. But then he begins to slap harder, causing enough pain to distract me from the pleasure. I bite my lip. Will I be able to make myself come with my ass starting to smart like this?

I still my thrusting, but he insists, pinching my clit, then thrusting my fingers and his inside my sopping channel, stretching me wide. "Oh, God," I whisper. I need to come. *Desperately*.

I whimper with desire, wanting more than fingers inside me. Charlie seems to know because he begins to finger fuck me with several, or maybe all his fingers together, his knuckles pounding against my clit on the in-strokes as his opposite hand continues to spank the daylights out of me.

"Oh...God. Oh, Charlie, oh please...yes, yes, yes," I babble incoherently, almost weeping.

My body jerks, my core spasming as the best orgasm I've ever had ripples through me. "Ohh—oh!" I moan, digging my fingernails into Charlie's forearm, holding his fingers inside me as I contract around them. "Oh my God," I sob. "Oh, yes."

When I finish, I literally collapse over the table, my entire body going limp. Within seconds, Charlie scoops me up in his arms, carrying me honeymoon style to the sofa where he sits with me sprawled on his lap. He cradles my back, lowering my torso and lifting my shirt up over my breasts with his teeth.

Even completely spent, my pussy gives a squeeze of excitement. He flicks the nipple of one of my breasts and the pain shoots as another signal of desire, straight to my molten core. My shorts and panties still tangle around my thighs, and he pulls them off, tossing them to the floor. While some part of my brain registers the vulnerability of lying completely naked and open to him while he sits totally clothed and in control, I feel sexier and more desirable than I've ever felt in my life. The wolfish way he looks at me tells me how enticing he finds me, and there's a possessiveness about the way he holds me, surveying my body with unabashed appreciation.

Mine. He seems to project the thought. I startle at my first moment of clairaudience. Or is it telepathy? Thoughts slide away again when he tugs my knee up to expose my pussy. Too relaxed, too exhausted from my orgasm, I'm not ready for more, but he slides his hand up my inner thigh until his fingers reach my opening. Inserting two fingers, he pushes them deep inside me and finds what must be my g-spot.

I jerk in surprise at the intensity of the sensation. "No," I moan.

He raises an eyebrow, beginning to pump in and out, hitting the sweet spot every time. "No?"

"I can't come again," I protest. "It's too soon. Please..."

"You can and you will. Do you need another spanking?"

"No." I arch into his hand, my head thrown back, my knees open wide to give him access. It's already too much—I fear I'll explode from the sensations he creates within me.

My hands wave wildly, one of them smacking him in the head.

"Hold your ass," he tells me. "Squeeze it hard and remind yourself of the spanking you'll get if you don't come."

I cup my cheeks, hot from the spanking.

"That's it." His fingers still work their terrible, wonderful magic. "Hold it up for me, Aurelia. Offer your pussy to me."

I lift my pelvis in the air, arching even further, opening my most sensitive anatomy to his plunder.

"I want to see you come. I want to see your face this time."

His words shatter me. That he wants to watch, cares so much about my release, sends me careening over the edge, my legs kicking out as my hips buck. Wetness gushes from me, and I realize I achieved the elusive female ejaculation.

“That’s it, love,” Charlie croons, slowing his strokes as my muscles clench and release over his fingers.

“Charlie,” I choke.

My head swims as if I had too much to drink and lost track of time although it’s probably no more than a few seconds. Charlie slips his fingers out of me and licks one. “You taste so good.”

“What are you doing to me?” I croak, lifting my head to look at his face.

“I don’t know.”

I realize, with a start, he’s being perfectly honest.

He lifts my belly up and plants a kiss on it, then cradles me in his arms, stroking my hair with a tenderness I haven’t seen from him before.

Wanting to reciprocate, I push myself off his lap to kneel at his feet, reaching one hand to cup the rock-hard bulge in his pants as the other tries to work the button on his jeans.

“*Don’t.*” He stills my hand.

I meet his eyes, surprised.

The affection is gone from his face, replaced by that superior mask.

“You may never touch my cock without permission,” he dictates.

Oh for fork’s sake.

I sit back, annoyed. Okay, he wants to play dominant and submissive games with me. I roll my eyes but say, “Sir, may I please suck your cock?”

“No.” His expression closes. He stands and strides past me. “I’m going to take a shower,” he says. “You finish the salad.”

I stare at his empty place on the couch, reeling.

Ouch.

What the hell was that about?

C H A P T E R 9

 *charlie*

THE NEXT EVENING, I watch, fascinated, as Aurelia stretches and grows a ball of light between her palms. It sometimes wobbles and flickers out, sometimes grows larger but loses its density. The little fairy has learned how to channel power. We're sitting in the living room after eating the scallops and black rice I had waiting when she got home from work.

After the debacle of her asking to give me a blowjob, she was cool and aloof through dinner, as if my refusal hurt her feelings. I chewed on that fact the entire night, heading to Eclipse after she went to bed at midnight.

Why would she object to receiving but not giving? Wouldn't that be most women's dream? It certainly would have been Anka's preference. But he probably shouldn't judge women by Anka. She beat even vampires on self-centeredness.

As if Aurelia senses my thoughts—is she growing more clairsentient?—she looks up at me and demands, “Why wouldn’t you let me give you a blow job last night?”

I hurt her. I shouldn't care. The fact that I do underlines the fact that this thing between us needs to stop. So I drive the nail in deeper. “Because you don't have the skill yet to please me.”

Offense registers on her face right before she throws the ball of light in her hand at me, faster than even my vampire senses can follow. It strikes

my cheek with a searing pain.

I jerk. It burns as if she tossed a ball of sunlight at me, frying my skin and sending my entire body into overdrive with the shock. My defensive instincts kick in at once, fangs slashing out, vision going dim and tunnel-like as I launch on her, tackling her to the floor, fangs poised to tear out her throat.

She screeches a blood-curdling scream, beating her fists against my face and head. I struggle to regain control, to resist the overwhelming urge to sink my teeth in her flesh and drink her dry. I hover above her as the scream goes on and on. Eventually, the blackness in my vision lifts, and the animal in me recedes until I become aware of my surroundings.

I force myself to relax and smile lazily down at my angry mortal, as if I'd been in control the entire time. The scent of her rage makes my skin prickle. She's pissed at me.

I'm covering her entire body with mine. I become aware of her soft curves writhing beneath me, and my cock grows hard. I rock into the cradle of her legs, grinding up against her clit. "Ah, here we are again, little fairy."

"Get off of me," she snaps, still fighting. I sense her heart pounding beneath my still one. Emotion is an aphrodisiac to vampires, and now that I'm back in control, the smell of her anger stirs my desire even more.

I catch her fists still trying to pummel me and pinion her wrists above her head. "You're in for some serious punishment now, Aurelia. You must never use magic against me," I chide.

This time I see it coming, but still can't dodge it. The ball of light appears out of nowhere and flies directly into my mouth.

I choke and recoil in pain, the hot light burning the inside of my throat. I scramble up to my knees and cough until the ball comes out. Dragging in a ragged breath, I cough again and blood splatters the floor from my seared throat. Anger barrels through me—a rage fueled by hundreds of years of sexual frustration wrought by Anka. But Aurelia doesn't even know what she's doing.

I draw a long breath to calm my ire and retract my fangs.

Aurelia stares at the blood on the floor with a look of horror, covering her mouth with her hand. "I-I..."

Poor little mortal. She has no idea how powerful she is. Which doesn't mean I won't punish her for her transgression.

And I will certainly enjoy every moment of it.

I turn to her, grasping her shirt at the collar and renting it in half. She shrieks and stares at me, eyes wide, a mixture of trepidation and arousal in her scent.

“Wh-what are you doing?” she asks, her words tumbling out on top of the other.

I slice her bra with a fang and haul her to her feet.

She covers her breasts with one forearm, her face flushed, her chest heaving. “What are you doing?” she repeats, her voice no more than a whisper now.

I unbutton her shorts. “Punishing you,” I say, voice raspy from the damage in my throat. I expect her to fight when I yank off her shorts and panties, but she stands still, looking shocked.

“I really hurt you, didn’t I?” she whispers.

I don’t answer, but when I take off my belt, she begins to back quickly away, throwing up her bubble of protection, even as she babbles, “Okay, just calm down.”

“It’s for your wrists,” I explain. “Remove your bubble and hold them out for me.”

She stands still, staring at me with her wide eyes. Her gaze traveled to my cheekbone, where the first ball of light struck. I must have an angry mark by now, perhaps even blisters.

The bubble flickers and dissolves. My little mortal has a conscience. Far more than I could ever say for Anka.

“Thank you. Now hold out your wrists.”

She looks at me uncertainly.

I wait. It’ll be up to her to surrender.

She gulps and holds out her hands. Her gaze drops in submission.

My cock hardens. My captive fae is naked and at my mercy. After looping the belt around her wrists, I tug her to the doorway of her bedroom. I toss the end of my belt over the top of the door, pulling on it until she lifts up on her toes, then shut the door to trap the belt so she can’t pull her wrists down.

“You are on clothing restriction until you can show more respect,” I inform her.

She twists around, leaning her weight on the belt in an attempt to pull it free.

“Take it easy there, or you’ll hurt yourself,” I order. I dig into the box with the leather flogger and pull it out.

She eyes it nervously, twisting her backside away from me as I advance.

I’d tested this flogger out on my own thigh once. It delivers a surface sting without imparting much damage.

“Turn around,” I command.

Her jaw tightens, and she doesn’t move right away. Very well. I’ll teach her to obey me immediately, or suffer the consequences.

With a flick of my wrist, I let the leather strands fly. They rain down on her golden skin.

Auriela squeals, jerking in surprise and turning her head to the side.

I flog her breasts in a rapid figure-eight swing. The leather tassels punish one peak first, then the other.

“Turn around,” I repeat.

This time she spins around immediately, dancing on her tiptoes.

I go to work on her lovely ass, using the same motion to catch first one side, then the other. I love the sound of the suede striking her flesh, the way her twin moons bounce in response to each blow. I whip her until her arse takes on a rosy glow, then I move down and whip the backs of her thighs. When I swing it between her legs, she shrieks, crossing her legs and spinning from her wrists.

“Very naughty,” I scold. “You don’t get to cover any part from me when you are being punished. I’m going to find something to help you remember.” I hold the handle of the flogger to her mouth. “Open.”

She glares at me, but opens her mouth and lets me place the handle between her teeth.

“Hold this,” I order, and she does. I flick her nipple with my index finger. “Good girl.”

Walking to the kitchen, I pull out the ginger root and a knife and peel a long section, carving a finger-shaped length with a bulbous end. I bring it back, holding it up for her to see. She squints in confusion, the flogger still clenched dutifully between her jaws.

“Wha ib at?” she attempts to ask.

I saunter behind her. “Arch your back.”

She hesitates for a moment, but to my delight, she does tilt her pelvis, lifting her ass toward me.

I pull her cheeks apart. She squeals and tries to dance away, but I give her ass a sharp slap. “Hold still, or I will make your punishment far worse,” I warn.

She whimpers but stops moving. Her legs tremble as I part her cheeks once more. I bring the tip of ginger plug to her anus and she flinches again, trying to squeeze her cheeks together against the intrusion. I slap her rosy ass once more. “Open for it,” I command in a hoarse voice. My cock throbs.

Finally Aurelia holds still, mewling as I embed the tortuous root. I push it in and out while she squeaks. It will take a few minutes before the heat of the ginger will begin to burn her anus and warm her entire pelvic region. I walk around to the front of her and take the flogger from her mouth.

“Thank you,” I say.

Her eyes plead with me for mercy, but I also see concern as she glances at my burn, then at the corner of my mouth.

“Are you bleeding?” she asks in a small voice.

I swipe at my mouth and find a little blood from my coughing fit. I give my head a quick shake. Showing weakness isn’t my thing, even if it did win her remorse.

“It’s nothing,” I assure her. I open the door and lower her wrists a bit. “Stand with your legs wide apart,” I order.

She obeys, still wide-eyed. I almost miss her more rebellious self. Almost. But submissive Aurelia is sweet enough to eat. I step behind her and bend to lick from the two dimples above her ass to the vein at her throat. My tongue drags over her smooth skin. The taste of her is intoxicating.

She begins to wiggle her ass, her chest heaving with quickened breath. “Erm...ooh...ah.”

“Has the burn begun to set in, little fairy?”

She bites her lip. “Ow. Oh. Take it out, Charlie,” she says, swaying her hips to and fro. “Please?”

“Keep those legs apart,” I order, slapping the flogger up between her legs to punish her little pussy.

“Ack!” She jerks, but keeps her legs open.

I strike again and again, going lightly, judging by her noises what is too much and too little until she is moaning, her breath coming in sobs. I move around to the front of her and continue my assault on her sex from that direction, interspersing the slaps with blows to her peach-tipped breasts.

“Oh my God, it’s too much. Oh Charlie, take it out, oh...oh,” she moans. If her voice didn’t sound so completely wanton, I might believe her.

But she’s wrong. She can take more. A lot more. I’m about to show her how much more, when someone knocks hard on the door.

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C H A P T E R 10

Aurelia

“AURELIA?” a muffled voice calls from outside. It’s Wilson, my ex-boyfriend. *Crap on a cracker.*

“Aurelia?” Wilson shouts again, repeating the knock.

Before I can think of anything to say, I hear the sound of the key turning in the lock and Wilson walks right in.

“What the fuck?” he gasps, taking in my position. Mother forker! I’m naked, wrists bound together with a leather belt, legs spread wide, a mother-fucking vampire with lengthened fangs standing in front of me. Charlie looks furious at the intrusion. And to top it off, the ginger in my ass has begun to burn. My pussy is dripping, but I’m shifting from leg to leg with discomfort.

Before I can say anything, there’s a blur. In a move too fast for my eyes, Charlie pins Wilson against the wall. The vampire’s got one hand around my ex’s throat, holding Wilson up off the ground.

“Charlie, stop,” I scream

Charlie’s head snaps my way. He looks over his shoulder at me, his fangs long and deadly, his eyes an unnerving red... “Who is this?” he hisses.

I twist about, trying to reach the doorknob to free myself. It’s no use. I’m completely helpless. “Wilson. He’s a friend.”

“A *friend*?” Charlie thunders, pulling Wilson from the wall and then banging him back up against it. My ex is no lightweight—5’10” and over two hundred pounds—but Charlie tosses him around like a stuffed toy.

What the fork is going on? Charlie looks completely demonic. His eyes are red. Is this some sort of jealous reaction? Or is he feeling threatened?

Fucking Wilson. Of all the times for my ex to come back. And use his key—the one I told him to get rid of.

Under Charlie’s grip, Wilson gasps, trying to draw breath.

“He’s just a friend,” I repeat. “An ex. He still has a key, but he shouldn’t. You should take it away from him.”

Charlie turns back, examining Wilson, whose face has turned a frightening shade of red. I don’t doubt Charlie will kill Wilson if he wants.

“Please, Charlie,” I beg. “Please let him go. He’s harmless, I swear. Please don’t hurt him.”

Charlie’s eyes narrow, and he looks back at me and then to his prey.

“Please don’t kill him. Please, Charlie.”

How long has Wilson’s air been cut off? I’m convinced it’s all over, that Wilson’s gonna die, but at long last, Charlie eases his grip on my ex’s throat.

Wilson gasps for breath, doubling over.

“What are you doing here?” Charlie demands.

When Wilson doesn’t answer, Charlie wraps a fist in his shirt and hauls him off his feet again. “I said, what are you doing here?”

I shiver, oddly turned on by the masculine display of aggression. Somehow it makes his gentleness with me all the more apparent. Or maybe it’s just the ginger in my ass, heating my naughty parts until I can’t think straight.

Wilson stares at Charlie with wild eyes, presumably freaked out by the fangs and having almost been choked to death. Oh and probably also from seeing me trussed up naked like a sex slave.

“What are you doing here, Wilson?” I ask as calmly as I can. Maybe he’ll answer me, if not the vampire.

Wilson’s eyes dart from Charlie’s face to mine. “Wh-what’s going on?”

“I’m asking the questions,” Charlie snarls.

“Answer him, Wilson,” I warn. I know I’m safe with the vampire, but I doubt Wilson is. Charlie looks ready to drain him.

“I just...thought I’d stop by. You know, I missed you. And then I saw the windows all boarded up, and I got worried, so I used my key.”

“Okay, listen,” I say quickly, as if I’m not hanging by my wrists with flogging marks on my ass. “We’re over. You don’t get to stop by, and you don’t get to keep the key. Give it to Charlie.” I nod to the vampire. I wobble a little. I’m probably not sounding as in control as I hope I am. It’s super hard to sound authoritative when strung up naked in one’s living room.

Wilson fumbles for the keys, dropping them on the floor. Charlie releases him with a shove in the key’s direction.

“Pick them up.” Charlie’s British accent is sharp enough to slice bone.

Wilson bends to pick them up, his hands shaking as he pulls my house key off. “Are you in some kind of trouble?”

“I’m trying to get laid, now get out!” I snap, trying to sound as bitchy as possible. The last thing I need is Wilson deciding to play hero and trying to rescue me from Charlie because that’s a good way for him to end up dead.

Charlie’s eyes aren’t red anymore. He seems calmer, more in control. He plucks the key from Wilson’s grip and Wilson’s eyes lose focus. My ex walks out without another word, clearly hypnotized.

Fork. That was close. I sag in my bonds. I expect Charlie to interrogate me, but he blurs to my side, wrapping an arm around my waist and lifting me gently to release me from the door. He unloops the belt from my wrists and threads it through his belt loops without a word.

I wince at the sensation of blood running back into my arms. I open and close my hands, breathing through the pins and needles. The ginger root still burns in my ass, making my pussy weep with readiness. Oh, heck with it. I dance around, shaking my arms, squeezing my cheeks together and whimpering.

Charlie catches my wrists and rubs the place where the buckle left a red mark on my skin.

I twist out of his grip and grab his hands. “What did you do to him?” I can’t forget Wilson’s glazed look. My neighbor, my coworker and now my ex—who else is going to be collateral damage?

“I made him forget what he saw and told him not to come around anymore.” Charlie sounds perfectly calm. He slips my grip in a move too fast to see. The next thing I know, he’s grabbed hold of my hair and pulls my head back. I’m panting now. Between the burn in my ass and the bite in

my scalp, I'm wetter than I've ever been. It's not just the pain—it's Charlie, all the way.

The vampire studies me, his gaze caressing my neck. Is he angry with me? What will he do now? I lick my lips, trying to think of the right words to calm him, but his gaze hoods and drops to my lips, and suddenly I can't think at all.

He tugs me closer to whisper in my ear, "I really, really like it when you beg like that."

I moan. My insides melt into molten syrup. My pussy is pulsing, already so swollen from his whipping and the heat of the ginger.

He picks me up by the waist and lifts me toward the ceiling, until his arms lock. Then he tips his head back and lowers me until my pelvis is head height. Until my pussy meets his mouth.

Fork me. He flicks his tongue over my clit and activates every screaming nerve ending that hungers for his touch.

"Oh my godfathers," I shriek, stunned by both the sensation and the impressive position.

He carries me that way, dipping to fit through the door. We enter my bedroom where he lays me on the bed. I writhe on the comforter as the pressure makes the ginger burrow deeper within my back channel. Charlie crawls up between my legs, holding my thighs open to continue his expert assault on my clit. I try to clamp my legs together and can't. I might as well try to crush a rock.

Charlie is merciless. He pushes the ginger finger in and out of my burning anus as his tongue flicks my clit. I claw at his shoulders, the sensations overloading my system.

"Charlie," I scream. "Charlie?"

He lifts his head, still wiggling the ginger.

My pussy gushes, practically soaking the bed. The warmth of the ginger makes me positively wanton for sex. "Please...I want you."

The corners of his mouth tip up but his eyes look sad. "Want me, how?"

My cheeks grow warm. "Inside me."

He shoves a finger inside my sopping wet pussy. *Oh, fork!*

"Like this?" he teases, moving it in and out.

"No," I whine, writhing and trying to bear down on his hand to get more stimulation. "I want your cock inside me."

"You want me to fuck you?"

“Yes.”

“Say it.”

“I want you to fuck me,” I cry. He wants me crude? He’s got it.

He pinches my clit, and I cry out, my whole body jerking.

Picking me up behind the knees, he lifts my pelvis off the bed and drags me down, flipping me over when he reaches the edge, so I’m bent over the side. He shoves the ginger in and out some more, and I stamp my feet, dizzy with need.

“Oh, it burns so bad...Charlie, please.”

I hear the jingle of his belt and turn to see his cock spring free from his boxers. As I suspected from the size of the bulge in his pants, his dick is impressive, jutting straight out, long and proud.

I let out a whinny-like sigh, excited to feel him in me. “I have a condom —in there,” I point to my bedside table.

“Vampires don’t need condoms,” he says. “No STDs, no chance of pregnancy. We get to go bareback.” He grabs my hips and impales me with one deep stroke, his pelvis shoving the ginger deeper inside my bottom.

“Oh yes!” I cry. My pussy clenches on his thick length, and my toes scrunch. I’m one stroke away from orgasm.

“Not yet,” Charlie orders. “You don’t finish until I say you can come. Understand?”

“Charlie, I can’t wait!” I moan, taking a mouthful of bedspread in my teeth and biting down, hard.

“*Don’t. Come.*”

He sounds so forbidding, I can’t disobey. I can only hold myself open to him, trying not to scream in ecstasy as he plows in and out with long, pounding strokes. I hear his breathing quicken, the sound of his panting winding my coil even tighter.

He makes a choking sound and barks, “Now!”

I contract every muscle from my waist down, my legs going stick-straight, my butt clenching, my vaginal walls gripping his cock so tightly my pussy pulls it even deeper. The seconds tick on and on, my release continues, shudders rolling through my body. When they slow and then stop, I collapse, a gooey mess.

Charlie eases out and removes the ginger plug as well.

I turn to look at him and catch a grimace on his face, as if he’s in physical pain. His cock is still stuck out straight, as if he never came.

He didn't come.

"I'm going to take a shower," he mutters, turning away.

I scramble off the bed, My muscles are watery. I stagger a little. My legs are having difficulty obeying the command from my brain. "Wait, Charlie?"

He doesn't turn around, continuing toward my bathroom.

"Charlie?"

He stops and whirls, looking annoyed. "What?" In the low light his eyes glitter.

I draw back and swallow. "Charlie," I say, my voice soft and coaxing. "Why didn't you finish?"

His beautiful face turns to stone. "Go back to your studying," he snaps, pointing toward the living room.

"Talk to me. Did I do something wrong?"

"Do as I say." He's pulling away, and I don't know why.

"No, wait—" I touch his arm.

He disappears. One second here, clothed except for his beautiful cock. The next, gone.

No! I stumble and scream his name, "*Charlie!*"

A flicker of his image appears. I hold my breath as he slowly returns, staring at me with some deep, unrecognizable emotion.

"You didn't come."

He just looks at me. He's not giving me anything, but at least he's still here with me.

"Is this some sort of vampire mind trick?"

"No." His deep voice is too bland. He's hiding something.

Think, Tinkerbell, slow down and think. "It wasn't me? It's not something about me?" I gulp.

His voice is painfully soft. "No, little fairy. It's not anything to do with you."

And I know. "Is—is that the curse?"

He slowly dips his chin and gives a single nod.

I stare at him. I just experienced the most comprehensive orgasm of my life. But Charlie's still hard. And no matter what we do, he'll remain that way.

I burst into tears.

Charlie's brows knot together, but he remains where he is.

"I'm so sorry," I warble. I don't even know why I'm weeping. "It's just so horrible." I swipe at my eyes.

Charlie's forehead wrinkles. His hands are out as if he wanted to reach for me but stopped. He's bewildered, his customary arrogance gone.

I throw myself at him, wrapping my arms around his waist. "I'm going to fix it for you... I promise," I say although I've got no clue how I'm going to do it. "You shouldn't have to live like this. I'm sorry."

He grasps the back of my neck and brings his lips to my ear, his fang running lightly over the edges of it. Scooping me into his powerful arms, he carries me back to the bed and lays me down, stretching out beside me with his head propped in his hand and an arm around my back. I snuggle close but am careful not to touch his hard cock. Poor man.

"Aurelia," he murmurs, sounding choked with emotion. "So sweet." He kisses my temple. "So much fire..." He kisses my eyelids "...so much heart. I'm humbled by your example."

I run my hand over his chest, then sit up and tug at the hem of his shirt. I want to see him naked, even if we can't have sex.

He sits up and allows me to remove the shirt.

I toss it on the floor and push him back down, running my fingernails through his curly chest hair, admiring the lines of his sculpted torso. "You're beautiful," I murmur.

He looks tired, his face still drawn as if in pain. His cock has relaxed slightly, but still remains engorged.

"Would ice help?"

He gives a bitter laugh. "Don't fuss over me. Just keep to your studies, little mortal. I believe in you."

My eyes smart again. I've got to release this spell.

I concentrate until a tiny bubble of soft pink light forms in my palm. I send it floating toward him.

He smiles, watching it gently glide toward him. "What is that?"

I shrug. "I don't know," I lie.

It's love. It poured out of my heart and into my fingers as I formed it for him.

"Is it for me? It's beautiful." He ducks his head to dodge it and touches it with his finger, only to yank his finger away quickly as if burned. "I can't have it. Can you tone it down a little?"

I cock my head to the side, looking from him to the ball. I focus on the ball and imagine its light dimmer, its color lighter and softer, so it's almost translucent, like the bubble a child blows through a plastic ring.

Charlie watches with a tired smile. His fingers stretch towards my creation, fascinated. He cups the ball and ushers it into his chest, where it melts into his heart.

Does he know?

He holds his hand over his heart for a long moment. His eyes are too dark for me to read.

“Thank you,” he murmurs at last, as if touched beyond words.

I shiver, a sense of *déjà vu* running through me.



CHARLIE

TELLING AURELIA the secret I've kept to myself for over one hundred years eases some terrible fissure within me, but it also makes the pain resurface. As if I've encapsulated the wound with a protective coating and now that I've shared it, I feel the original pain full force.

The pink bubble my little fairy sent seems to go right to the source of my pain, deep within my unbeating heart. It moves me that she would give her gift so freely, without any coercion or bargain, without any promise of return. It's been so long since I've trusted anyone. Maybe not since Anka, and that had been a mistake.

“Why did you scream when I dematerialized?” I ask, staring up at the ceiling.

“I hate when you disappear every time you feel emotionally challenged.” She snuggles against me, throwing one leg over mine.

I snake an arm behind her and hold her against my side. “I do not.”

“Yes, you do. Anytime things get too difficult to handle, you’re gone. It’s your way of not dealing with the present situation.”

“Who are you, Dr. Phil?”

She snorts.

“Where do you go, anyway?” She runs her hand across my chest.

“Downtown, usually. Where I first met you. I like to prowl the streets or hang out at Eclipse.”

She rises up to her elbow. “Eclipse? You have to be kidding me.”

“What?”

“I always knew there was something different about that place.”

My laugh barks out of me before I can stop it. “Because you’re magic.”

“Can you go anywhere in the world?”

“Anywhere I have already been.”

“Do you ever go back to England?”

“No.”

“What about France?”

“What about it?”

“Have you been there?”

“Yes.” My heart picks up pace, tripping in my chest. It’s as if she’s drawn to my secret, knowing all the questions to ask. But perhaps it’s important for her to know the details in order to reverse it. I inhale on a count of eight and release it. “I lived in Paris a long, long time ago. I had a lover there. Her name was Anka.”

Aurelia stills, as if knowing the story holds importance.

“Anka was a witch, magic like you, only a different, darker energy. She was my lover in the true sense of the word—I worshipped her. She had me wrapped around her finger, and I did anything and everything she asked of me.”

“You did evil things for her,” Aurelia murmurs.

My gaze jerks to her face. How does she know? Aurelia stares into space without focus, as if her gold flecked eyes are viewing the invisible.

“Yes,” I whisper. Images of the body I drained flood my vision. Clearing my throat, I speak in a normal voice. “I did anything and everything she asked of me. I killed her enemies, I changed people’s minds, I set the stage for her success. She used her gift of sight, and she had a powerful understanding of manipulating energy, like you. Anyone she cursed ended in ruin. She became the wealthiest and most famous madame in all of Paris. And it turned out, I was just a tool she used for her ambition. She lied to make me believe she loved me, that I was her only lover. But I had doubts. When I found out for certain—” I break off.

“What did you do?” Aurelia prompts.

“I took up residence with another madame. Just to hurt Anka, I suppose. To inflict the same sense of betrayal I experienced. When Anka found out, she threw the curse.”

“There’s a lot of darkness in that tale,” Aurelia says softly.

“Yeah. I never believed in the good witch vs. evil witch thing. To me, a witch is someone who harnesses nature’s power for her own intent, be it to heal or to curse. But now that I’ve met someone like you, whose magic is so different, I think perhaps she was just evil.”

“What about vampires?”

The corners of my mouth tug upwards in a bitter smile. “We’re all evil, love.”

“No,” Aurelia disagrees softly. “Not you. You might have loose morals, but you are not evil.”

“How do you know?”

“I just know.” She thrusts her chin forward. “No, I think you were right the first time. No one is either good or evil. We are all capable of both.”

I kiss the top of her head, hardly believing how much things had changed between us. “I’m sorry I almost killed your friend today,” I offer in an attempt to redeem myself.

She giggles. “I’m sorry he showed up. That was embarrassing.”

“I can assure you he will remember nothing about seeing you like that.”

“Oh I know. I meant I was embarrassed about you seeing the kind of loser I used to date.” My Tinkerbell peers up at me from under her lashes. “Were you, um, jealous?”

I roll her to her back, covering her body with my own stronger one. “Of course I was. Why do you think I wanted to kill him?”

“Does that mean...you like me?”

I rain kisses on her temple, her jaw, her neck. “Yes, little mortal,” I admit. “I like you.”

“Are you going to erase my memory and disappear after I figure out how to lift the curse?” Her tone is light, but she’s still and wide-eyed, waiting for my answer.

I chuckle. “I wasn’t planning on it. To be honest, I haven’t thought that far with my agenda. All I have so far is: A) torment Aurelia and B) torment Aurelia naked and C) torment Aurelia into getting rid of curse. That is the end of my list.”

She glowers at me, so I know she knows I'm joking. Or at least, half joking.

So much for redeeming myself.

"I'm open to a change of agenda. What do you have in mind?"

She blinks without answering. A silence stretches between us. She's really thinking things through. Could she be considering any kind of future with me?

"Where do you sleep normally?" she asks finally, changing the subject.

"I have a place," I say. First rule of Vampire Survival: don't tell people where you spend your days. The lethargy makes us helpless.

It's been a long time since I've trusted anyone enough to sleep beside them. Aurelia is an exception in all things.

"You have a place? Good gravy, Charlie, enough with the details." Aurelia rolls her eyes.

I pinch her and she yelps. "Why do you want to know?"

She shrugs, her gaze down. "No reason."

I want to probe, but her eyelids are heavy. She's been through a lot tonight. And if she really is thinking about a future with me, well, it's only a matter of time before she realizes a being like her doesn't belong with someone like me.

I hitch her closer. "Go to sleep, darling."

"What if I don't want to sleep?" She pouts. Her lower lip juts out, puffy and delectable. My fangs sharpen to needlepoints. I want to feed so badly, I'm dizzy.

"Then I'll think of something to tire you out," I sit up and blur to my box of goodies. I move slowly enough my Tinkerbell can see where I go. I return to her side with the sexy corset and filmy stockings. The old fashioned lingerie triggers memories I've long let dormant. I push them away.

"Put them on," I order in a silky tone and lounge back on the bed while my slave fairy does as I command. I have to help her hook the corset, but the result is stunning. The tight garment pushes up her breasts into firm mounds begging for a bite, and the naughty stockings and garters frame her pussy perfectly.

I drag her over my lap. Her wriggling caresses my cock, but it's worth it. "A spanking and an orgasm, just what my little fairy needs."

She giggles, her feet kicking as I deliver what she needs.

I may as well have fun with my captive mortal now because as soon as she breaks the curse, I'm gone.

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CHAPTER 11

A nka

SHE WAITED in her long burgundy silk robe, leaving the cord at the waist untied. She'd washed up after the Viscount de Marmont, not wanting Charles to know she'd been with another man. She found the Viscount's adoration too much to turn away. Today he had brought her a sapphire bracelet and begged her to become his mistress. She had laughed lightly and told him to go home to his wife, even as she knew he'd be back the next night, like a love-starved puppy.

She didn't know why she still took the men to her bed. She had told Charles, sworn to him, even, that she'd given them all up save for him. And she always meant it, especially when the vampire pinned her wrists above her head and hovered over her, his fangs long and dangerous, looking like the devil's most beautiful son. He was the only man she'd ever let dominate her. Even when she had just begun as a painted lady, she never took the rough ones.

But Charles...Charles made her go weak in the knees. Knowing the power he possessed—the sheer strength, the dangerous fangs, his ability to throw a glamour over her and make her do his bidding—knowing even with her magic, he could break her bones or take her life with one snap of his hand. Yet he only ever showed chivalry. Even when inflicting pain.

Especially then. Charles was the only person in the world she trusted. They were a team, she and Charles. Two dark beings who lived for the night.

Why then, her dalliances? She couldn't help herself. The power over the men was exquisite. They built her magic by worshipping her. And the gifts and money...ah. She'd never grow tired of those, despite her already enormous wealth. The actual act meant nothing to her—it was just sex, not an expression of love or intimacy or any other insipid thing the poets like to ascribe to it. She had no reason to feel guilty over it. She was not betraying Charles if her heart still belonged to him. But she could not tell him because the vampire had a jealous temper. Yes...she'd seen it at the beginning of their relationship. and she had no desire for her lucrative clients to come to harm.

Maybe part of her liked playing with fire, too.

A flicker of lamplight made her turn, and she drew in a breath. Her vampire had appeared. He held her Mardi Gras mask up to his face, the blue of his eyes standing out against the satin frame.

"So?" she asked. She'd been expecting him, otherwise they would have had words over his appearing in her room without knocking. She insisted he not materialize into her room, arguing that she might be dealing with sensitive matters involving her girls.

Charles tossed the mask onto her bed with a casual flick of his wrist. "He had a sudden change of heart and signed it," Charles said, a smug twist of his lips as he handed her the contract for the purchase of a fine new property across the street where she wished to expand her business.

She reached for him, pulling his head down to reward him with a deep kiss. Kisses she reserved for him. No other man touched her lips. Ever.

She opened her robe and let it fall to the floor, standing only in her corset and stockings.

"Mmm," Charles murmured appreciatively, pinching one nipple through the fabric. He twisted the little nub, causing her to gasp at the sharp pain. "Show me your thanks," he said, pushing her to her knees.

"I thought I was." She reached for his trousers, opening them to free his spectacular cock. She swirled her tongue over the head of it. "Do all vampires have such beautiful cocks?" she asked him.

His breath grew ragged, and he gripped her hair.

"Hmm?" she asked, taking as much of his length as possible into the pocket of her cheek while using her fist to squeeze the base.

He tightened his hold on her hair. “Stop talking,” he ordered, but her power over him was evident in the deepness of his voice.

“I love to suck your cock,” she cooed, moving one hand to his balls.

“Naughty witch,” he said, lifting her to her feet. “I think you must desire my punishment.” He pushed her over the edge of the bed and picked up the riding crop he kept there for their fun. “Count them,” he ordered.

No matter how many times they had played this game, she always felt a shiver of fear. Perhaps that was the appeal of Charles as a lover. He was not wholly safe. He turned animal when angry or when blood starved. He thrilled her with his ability to overpower her, and yet he never, ever missed knowing when she’d had enough or what was too much.

He brought the crop down smartly across her derrière, and she drew in her breath. “One,” she murmured. He snapped it down again. “Two.” The first weal began to burn as she felt its full effect. “Three!” she cried when the next stroke fell. “Slow down!” she gasped.

Charles lifted her head with a fist in her hair. “Who is in charge here?” His voice was low and sultry, his fangs glittering in the flickering light.

“You are?” she whispered.

“I am.” And to prove it, he laid the next five strokes too fast for her to even count.

She screamed into her silk bedspread. “Forgive me,” she gasped, writhing over the bed, her aching breasts enjoying the friction, the fire across her bottom only stoking the one between her legs.

“That’s better,” he purred, sliding the tip of the crop between her legs and rubbing it back and forth over her honeyed opening.

“Oh,” she moaned.

“Climb up on the bed and spread your legs wide,” he ordered.

She crawled on her hands and knees to the center of the bed, where she sat, leaning back on her hands and spreading her feet wide with her knees bent.

“Touch her,” he said, pointing with the crop to her sex.

She reached in front and slid two fingers into her folds, rubbing her rosebud of pleasure.

Charles startled her by blurring between her legs, his hands grasping her thighs, his tongue licking into her with the authority of ownership.

“Yes, Charles,” she whispered, her head falling back.

He licked and nibbled and sucked until she screamed. At the moment she crested the peak, he plunged two fingers into her cavity and struck his fangs into her inner thigh, sucking deeply with the pleasure of a climax. Her muscles contracted and released until she fell onto her back in bliss, the sensation of his licking the wound closed, a delicious completion.



Aurelia

THE ORGASM WAKES ME. I'm lying on my belly with one hand between my legs, drool moistening the pillow. Good gravy. Fortunately, I didn't wake Charlie with my lusty dream this time. He's cold and stiff as a marble statue beside me.

Charlie. Charles.

The memory of the dream rushes back to me. Charlie whipping my bare back with a riding crop and biting my inner thigh. I slip my legs out from under the covers and inspect them. No sign of bite marks.

Just a dream.

But it was so real. I try to recall other details of the scene. I'd been in candlelight—no, it had been an old-fashioned lamp, and I'd been wearing a corset and stockings, like the ones Charlie bought for me. It must have been his insistence that I wear them that inspired the old-fashioned dream. But what had happened before he'd come? Something I'd wanted to hide from him. Another man? That didn't make sense. I can't even handle one man, much less two. And I've never cheated in my life. Unlike Wilson, my asshole ex.

I scurry up and get ready for work, but I'm reluctant to leave. Charlie's suggestion I quit the job suddenly doesn't sound so bad. But that's ridiculous. How would I support myself? Would Charlie support me? And what does he do for money, anyway?

I shudder. Knowing him, it's something unsavory or illegal. His moral flexibility probably wouldn't stop him from robbing banks or old ladies or...

I push these thoughts away. I'd be a fool to believe I can rely on Charlie just because we slept together once. Especially considering I doubt he'll stick around after I remove the curse.

Even if he did, what kind of future could I have with a vampire, anyway? Duh. He's immortal, and I am...not. No, I need to be practical. Have fun but don't forget it will end.

I play with magic all day at work, practicing the fuzzy focus thing that enables me to see the energy around people. I see streaks of red over a child's head when he gets angry, and billowing clouds of pinks and yellow when children are playing happily.

I try to clear dark clouds that seem to gather over certain kids—the ones who seem more troubled or difficult. At first, I use my palms to shine light and dissolve the grey, but then I remember how I hurled the ball of light into Charlie's throat simply by thinking of it. I practice using my mind alone to direct the energies.

By five o'clock, I'm tired like I've been tilling the garden all day, an all over body ache like I've been using muscles normally dormant. But it feels good.

I walk home, my pace quickening and a silly smile coming to my face when I think of seeing Charlie.

I find him still in bed, his face even more pale than usual against the white pillowcase. I touch his cheek.

His hand shoots out to grip my wrist. I shriek and try to snatch my hand back, but he hangs on. Fangs out, he rolls to one side and pins my hand to the bed, hissing.

Then he opens his eyes. He relaxes as his sleepy gaze focuses, and he takes me in. He does not release me, though. Instead, he smiles wide enough to flash fang. "Aurelia." He sounds like the spider who caught a fly.

"You just scared the bejeezus out of me." I'm trembling, but my nipples have tightened, as if his aggression turns me on. I never thought I'd be into a bad boy. Is it the danger of him? Do I like to be scared?

I shake my head, not even wanting to contemplate why that might be.

"Never wake a hungry vampire," he says sleepily, his eyelids half closing. He draws me close and kisses me on the lips before settling down beside me. His arm draped across me grows heavy.

"Are you hungry?" I ask, wondering if he meant for blood or food.

He doesn't answer. He's fallen back to sleep.

Drat. Disappointed, I scramble up and head to the kitchen to make another salad, since that's one thing I can't screw up. I eye the package of organic free-range chicken, but I'm not up for cooking meat yet. At least not meat that didn't come out of a can or frozen carton.

My nana would be shaking her head at me. Food is the way to a man's heart.

I stifle a giggle. What about a vampire's? My nana's mole sauce has over twenty spices in it, but none of her secret sauces have the necessary ingredient: blood.

Wandering back to the bedroom, I study my sleeping vampire. Perhaps he usually sleeps past sundown and has only been up early the past few days to make sure he keeps me on task. I could read more from the books he bought, but studying words on the page is much less appealing than actually doing magic. And so far, Charlie has been the best tutor.

So I peel off my clothes and don the corset and stockings. I tremble a little as I do up the hooks. I can't believe I'm trying to seduce a vampire. Not only that, but I'm wishing he has a riding crop. If he does, we can re-enact my dream.

I'm not sure why my dream is on my mind, but it was so real, it seems important.

I climb over my vampire, speaking softly, so he wouldn't startle. "Charrleeee. Wake up, vampire. I have a surprise for you."

Like before, his hands move before his eyes open, but they grip my arms without force and tug me down on top of him. The bulge of his cock nudges me through the covers, and I angle slightly, seeking the hard shape of it with my core, so I can rub my mound over it.

He cups my ass and his eyes widen in surprise, as if he just realized the state of my undress. Pushing me back up to straddle him, he surveys me, fully awake now, his fangs lengthening. "Let me see you," he says, his voice thick.

I thrust my breasts into the air, showing off the black corset, which fits perfectly.

"My dear Tinkerbell. You look good enough to eat," he purrs.

I stifle a shiver, trying not to take him literally.

"Stand up, let me see the rest of you."

I rise, giving him the full view of my freshly groomed sex and the black thigh-high stockings.

“Turn around.”

I spin around, my heart revving up. “What do you think?” I look over my shoulder in what I hope is a seductive pose.

Before I can draw another breath, he’s pulled me onto my back beside him and covered my body with his, kissing me with a passion that makes my stomach dip and swoon. I meet his desire with my own, yanking his head down, arching my pelvis against his, writhing beneath him. I want him to take me in every sense of the word, but he breaks away, pulling back with a wicked smile. “Lusty wench, aren’t you?”

“Wench?” I sputter, pretending to be insulted. I wrap a fist in his shirt and attempt to pull him back down. “Which century do you think you’re in?”

He ignores my attempts to tug him, as well as my question. “There should be a few more items in the box. Go fetch them.”

My belly flips like an Olympic gymnast. I’ve purposely ignored the remaining two items in the box. One appears to be some sort of stainless steel sex toy, and the other was lubricant. Still, his command propels me into action.

I crawl off the bed and find the lube and the toy and bring them to him. He sits on the edge of the bed, and he yanks me in for another hard kiss before he bends me over his knee. My feet still stand on the floor, but my torso folds over the bed and his lap. He gives my ass a slap. The sound echoes, but it’s more bark than bite.

“Do you know what this is, Aurelia?”

“Not exactly,” I say in a small voice.

“Reach back and pull your cheeks apart for me,” he orders.

Fork.

Is he really gonna do this? I think about refusing, but I no longer want to play that game with him. I do as he instructed, tentatively grasping my bottom cheeks and spreading them. Something cold lands on my anus, and I flinch. The lube.

I tense, realizing exactly where the toy will be going. Sure enough, the cool bulbous tip of the toy presses at my back entrance.

I squeeze my eyes closed and press my lips together.

“No,” I whimper although I’ve given my consent by lying still across his lap, waiting for him to do what he will. He presses the cool tip forward, and it stretches my anus.

“No...I can’t,” I protest.

“Shh. You can. You will do it because I want you to.”

He’s right. And what does that mean about me? How has he taken control of me so easily? Wasn’t I fighting him tooth and nail just a day or two ago? And what had changed my mind? Hot sex?

Probably.

Decidedly. I’d crawl for the rewards he’ll give me, the pleasure he’ll bring me.

The plug stretches my back hole even wider. I make a screaming noise in my throat although I keep my lips pressed together.

And then it’s in. Once seated, the plug doesn’t hurt. It just gives me a curious “full” feeling and creates an urgency in my pussy, like I need to orgasm. Or get fucked really, really hard.



CHARLIE

“Aurelia,” I mutter, nearly dizzy at the sight of the plug stretching her asshole. I lift her, so she’s standing between my knees and cup her hot cheeks. “You did so well. Turn around so I can look at you.”

She lurches around, and I have to support her as she turns unsteadily. But she does it. She’s doing her best to obey me.

I’m not sure how I won her obedience, and I’m not stupid enough to think the game is over, but she’s certainly given me this round.

Winning never made me feel so powerless.

My cock aches, a hot throbbing that only made my blood hunger worse. She looks incredible, the black corset and stockings framing her shapely ass, the stainless steel plug and raw cheeks symbols of her submission to me.

“Beautiful.” I turn her back around and pull her down to take her lips in a bruising kiss.

Her face flushes a healthy pink, eyes glassy and wild.

“You could not possibly please me more,” I praise her. I know she wants release, but I intend to drag out her sexual frustration. “Now, I want you to make me dinner...” I pat her ass and twiddle the plug between her cheeks, “...dressed like that.”

She moans, lips working to frame a protest.

I give the plug a shove, causing her to gasp and her eyes to round.

Grasping her nipples, I tug her down until she's bent at the waist, and her face is level with mine. "The proper answer is *yes, master.*"

No more playing. Game, set and match.

She starts to roll her eyes, but I shove the plug in again, and she tips over, falling against me. I catch her, and her hands grasp my shoulders.

"Yes, master," I prompt.

"Yes, master."

Yes. I give her a satisfied smirk and stand.

"Come on, slave." I smack her ass and lead her to the kitchen. I open the refrigerator and find she already made a salad. "Little fairy, you were such a good girl," I lay it on thick. "You will be rewarded for this. I'm going to spread you out on my bed and fuck you all night until you scream for mercy."

She shivers, and I wink. But then her brows pull together. She's thinking about the curse.

"It's all right," I assure her. "I've been fucking without satisfaction for one hundred years. It hasn't stopped me yet."

Her lips twist into a wistful smile.

Her caring lances my chest. I don't deserve such sympathy.

"Set the table, Aurelia." I snap a finger and point, waiting for her to scurry into obedience before pulling out a few chicken breasts and placing them in a baking dish with pesto spread on top and slices of lemon beneath. I like caring for my captive mortal.

Out of the corner of my eye, I watch Aurelia, more erotic than anything I've ever seen. She takes small, shuffling steps, the heel of the plug shining between her cheeks. The only way she would move slower is if she wore chains restricting her movement.

Now there's an idea. I file it away for later.

"Come here," I order when I've put the chicken in the oven to broil.

She comes to my side immediately.

I sit in a chair and pull her onto my knee, keeping one hand on the plug, so I can manipulate it within her. "Have you studied today?"

"Not the books, but I practiced at work."

I squeeze her breast, pushing it up until the nipple crests the top of the corset and peeped out. I draw it into my mouth and suck, pushing the plug

in and out of her at the same time.

She mewls, a desperate, wanton sound.

“Not yet, little one.” Her scent is delicious.

“You’re killing me,” she mutters.

“Good,” I purr with satisfaction. “Now show me what you learned today.”

She sits back and cocks a brow. “You don’t have one.”

“What?”

“An aura. I was messing with people’s energetic fields today. Cleaning them up, that sort of thing. I think I may have learned how a curse works.”

I drop my hand from teasing her nipple. “How?”

“Well, I saw two girls arguing, and one of them sent a dagger-like shape of energy at the other one. It lodged right in her heart and stayed there, and the victim cried for a long time, actually rubbing the spot where I saw the invisible dagger go in. I don’t think this other child meant to cause her any harm, but I’m thinking someone like Anka, who understood how energy works, intentionally sends it in what we think of as a curse.”

I lift her to stand and spread my arms and widen the stance of my legs. “Do you see any daggers? Or...I don’t know, corks?”

She gazes in the direction of my cock for a long time. “Well, I’ve never looked at the energy of a cock before. But yeah, I think I do see something.”

She kneels before me and reaches for my pants, pausing to ask silent permission. I nod, and she pulls my cock out of my boxers, gripping the base and holding her fingers like pincers at the tip.

I hold my breath. Could it be this simple? Will this work?

Aurelia makes a pulling motion, as if trying to pull out a thread or splinter. She repeats the movement several times.

A sharp pain stabs through my cock near in the direction of the head. I hiss.

“I can’t budge it,” she said, looking up at me with a grim expression. “Maybe you have to do it. Or you have to sever your bond to her first or something.”

I snarl and stand, not waiting for her to scoot back before I shove my cock back into my boxers and stalk to the bedroom to get dressed. Damn this curse.

Aurelia stands in the doorway, looking uncertain. “Should I get dressed, too?”

A pang contracts my unbeating heart. It's been so long since I considered anyone's feelings but my own, but seeing Aurelia's hunched shoulders and timid face pulls me out of my snit.

I clench my fists and exhale. "No," I say, trying to speak more gently. "I need my slave fairy ready and accessible to me at all times. And I will require you to attempt to extract the curse with your mouth and tongue later, as well."

She gives me a small smile, but her eyes are still worried.

Damn. I care about her.

"Come here," I say, opening my arms. I wait until she's folded close enough to murmur, "I'm sorry." Before Aurelia, I would never apologize to a human.

The oven timer buzzes. What is it the mortals say? Saved by the bell. I have no wish to continue expressing any of the odd feelings banging around in my chest.

I pat my Tinkerbell's delectable bottom. "Let's eat."



Aurelia

SITTING down with the plug in my ass sends rivulets of heat pulsing through my body. Discomfort, need, desire all jumble together. Charlie serves the dinner, surprising me with his modern-man ease in the kitchen and with our roles. Odd for a nineteenth century man, but I'm growing used to his unpredictability.

I wolf down my food, eager to move on to other matters. When I lay down my fork, I see he's finished as well. I jump up and collect our plates, washing them in the sink as my anus contracts around the foreign object in my ass.

"I can smell your arousal," Charlie murmurs in my ear, appearing directly behind me.

My pussy clenches, wanting more of his attention.

He wraps his arms around me from behind, and my stomach drops as a terrible whooshing sensation yanks me back. Every atom of my body splits

apart and comes whole again. I blink. My home has disappeared. We're in totally different surroundings.

"You wanted to see my place," Charlie murmurs in my ear, nuzzling my neck.

My mouth drops open.

Charlie's bedroom looks much like the boudoir from my dream. Rich fabrics in silk and velvet drape the walls and cover the bed. The furniture appears to be antique—great pieces of beautiful wood carved with intricate details. The colors are burgundy and red and gold.

I can't believe he brought me here. He was so cagey about it, and it makes sense. He's spent centuries keeping his secrets.

"Where is this place?"

"A bunker. We're at the base of Sombrero Peak."

I twist in his hold. "Why did you bring me here?" Is it possible he's opening up to me?

"So I can fuck you in my bed, of course." His smirk gives away nothing, but I know better. He's brought me to his secret lair. He can deflect all he wants, but this means something.

"On your knees, slave," my vampire master orders.

Excitement bubbles in my low belly. I lower myself to kneel at his feet and reach for the button on his jeans.

He makes a censuring sound. "Did you ask permission?"

"Please, master, may I suck your cock?"

He smiles. "Yes, you may."

I open his jeans and allow his engorged cock to spring free. Before I can touch it, he grips it in his fist and uses it to slap my face, first one side then the other. As always with the vampire, the degradation of it raises my hackles, but of course that's why he did it. He's testing me. And deep down, don't I like surrendering to him? I've never known such satisfaction.

So I close my eyes and hold out my tongue, so his cock swipes across it as he dick-whips my face.

"Mmm, good slave," he murmurs, gripping the back of my head and holding me in place. "Open wider."

I relax my jaw, and he pushes into my mouth, filling it beyond capacity, pulling out just when I start to gag. He moves in and out, controlling the movement, fucking my face. The vulnerability of the position doesn't escape me—one thrust too deep, and he could cut off my airway, stuff his

cock in the back of my throat and strangle me with it. My basic survival instinct screams at me to pull away, free myself from the degrading position, and yet for some inexplicable reason, I want to please him. Because his torture always ends in reward.

“Stand up and turn around, Aurelia,” Charlie orders, his voice thick. His hand catches under my arm to help, and I remember scoffing at the idea of him being chivalrous. I was wrong. He turns me around and guides me to the end of his bed, where he pushes my torso down. “Are you ready for me to fuck you?”

“Yes, master,” I breathe. My sex tingles, electrified and waiting for his touch. I groan when he presses the head of his cock at my entrance, the mixture of soft and hard something no fingers or dildo could ever replicate.

He slides into me, my natural lubricant so plentiful I hardly feel the stretch. Or maybe it’s the distraction of the toy in my ass. All I know is I want it all and more. I want to be fucked hard, used, wholly taken by him.

“Please,” I whimper when he moves too slow.

He chuckles. “I set the pace, little girl. And you don’t come until I let you. Understand?”

“Yes, master.”

Despite his words, he does pick up the pace, stroking in and out, caressing my pussy with his cock, pushing his pelvis against the handle of the butt plug every time he plunges in.

I tremble, my legs scarcely holding me, need growing to a fever pitch. I lose track of our surroundings, everything shrinking to the feel of his length moving inside me, the way my very cells seem like they would explode if I don’t find release.

“Oh Charlie,” I whimper, rolling my face in the covers, biting at the luxurious fabric. “Charlie, please let me come. Please, please, please.”

“You’re so adorable when you beg.” His fingers tighten on my hips, and he slams in hard. Over and over, he thrusts, pounding my inner wall as his balls slap my clit, and the plug fucks my ass.

“Charlie?” I swear I won’t last one more second.

“Now, Aurelia,” he growls.

My orgasm explodes the moment he gives me permission. Stars splinter before my blackened vision. Wave after wave of ecstasy rolled through me, contracting my core, sending corresponding tremors down my inner thighs to the soles of my feet.

I hold my breath, nearly passing out from the tsunami of pleasure.

When I fall from its jaws, I pant, collapsing over his bed. I blink to regain my vision and bearings.

Charlie eases the plug from my ass and lifts me into the air, placing me gently on my back. As reality returns, I see the cords stand out in his neck, the pain in his face as he crawls over me. Guilt pricks me. I enjoyed my release so thoroughly while he never can.

I stroke the side of his face, but he jerks away, impatient with my pity. He pushes his hard length between my legs, and I open for him, despite the soreness holding me. He moves inside me, neither rough nor gentle, but with a grim determination, as if he would fuck me all night just in case the curse might dissolve.

I bring my focus to it, imagine drawing the blockage out.

Charlie rests on his forearms, his head hanging over my shoulder, his breath labored in my ear. He starts to groan as if in pain, and the muscles of his low belly jerk.

Without warning, his fangs strike my neck. I scream in surprise, shoving him away and convulsing beneath him. He strokes my cheek with his thumb as if to calm me, as he continues to pump his cock inside me and suckle.

“No,” I sob. “Get off me. Stop it!”

He sucks for a few more seconds then licks my wound closed with long slow laps as if I wasn’t struggling beneath him.

The moment he releases me, I scramble to my feet, anger burning hot. “What the fuck was that?” I demand.

Charlie climbs off the bed as well, looking tired, his cock still waving horizontally with unspent passion. “I didn’t mean to do that.” He sounds defeated. “Is it really that big a deal?”

“Yes, it’s a big deal! I need my blood. I didn’t want it sucked. You knew that, and you did it anyway.”

He stabs his fingers through his hair. “Did it hurt? Are you light-headed?”

“No, but you had no right. I didn’t want to be bit!”

He blew out his breath, his face turning stony. He pulls on his clothes.

“Where are you going?” I demand, panic surging. Fork. He’s about to pull his disappearing act. My stomach tightens. “Don’t you dare leave me here—”

He’s gone.

“Dammit!” I scream.

And then he reappears, as if he heard me screaming at him. He strides purposefully toward me. My heart thunders.

What would he do?

He wraps an arm around my waist, and for one glorious moment, I believe everything will be all right, but then my body yanks back, cells splitting and reforming. A second later, we’re standing in my living room.

And Charlie vanishes once more.

Damn it all. He only came back to deposit me in my house. I guess I should be grateful he was that thoughtful. He could have left me to find my way back in the dark with no clothing but the corset and stockings.

But no. Fuck. This. I stomp to my bedroom and pull on a pair of jeans and t-shirt. He doesn’t get to run out on me every time things get difficult. He brought me to his inner sanctum, and it meant something. But the moment he shows weakness, he abandons me.

If he’s mad, he needs to stay and tell me. I can’t take the leaving.

I can’t.

I put on my sneakers and grab my keys, marching out the door. He said he liked to go downtown—I’ll find him there.

The idea that he might be angry with me gnaws at me. Something tickling the back of my mind surfaces: the color in his face looked different after he bit me. He was so pale when I tried to wake him and...hadn’t he said he was hungry?

My belly twists into a knot of guilt. Why did I freak out on him, anyway? He was right, it didn’t hurt, and I experienced no after-effects, so he hadn’t taken too much. Maybe he really needed to feed. Or maybe it was his substitute for orgasm, and when I denied him that, it was like adding insult to injury.

Proud vampire.

I walk briskly downtown, looking for any sign of him. When I see none, I head to Eclipse.

There are a few motorcycles in a lot nearby. Their tattooed owners are talking in a group. These guys are all huge, with muscles stretching their white tank tops. It’s January and cold for Arizona, but only one is wearing a leather jacket.

As I scurry past, one of the guys turns. He’s got a pierced lip and a shaved head. In the dark, his eyes seem to glow silver—but that can’t be

right. No human's eyes could glow that way--oh. He's not human.

I walk faster.

"Can I help you, little lady?" he calls. The group of guys stop talking and turn to see what's distracted their buddy. Crap on a cracker.

I duck into Eclipse, rubbing my arms. I shouldn't have come here alone. Without thinking, I throw up my bubble of protection, my trigger reaction to being nervous.

Three heads in the back whip around to stare at me. My blood runs cold. Oh crap. Vampires.

And Charlie was right. They're all in identical suits, but they look more unsavory than he does. I look right and left, scanning the crowd for any sign of him. I back toward the door, trying not to look scared. No sign of Charlie, but the vampires stand as one and saunter toward me. I scan the bar one last time and turn, walking swiftly out.

A vampire blurs and stops directly in front of me, blocking my path.



CHARLIE

BLUE-BALLING it never fails to put me in a foul mood. I try to shake myself out of it, but the darkness creeps back.

The scene back there with Aurelia reminded him too much of Anka. Why I'd thought she was different—or any woman was different, for that matter—baffles me. Love isn't a genuine concept. People—and vampires—are selfish creatures. In the end, everyone just looks out for him or herself. I was stupid to offer her pleasure without being able to receive my own, stupid to think she would reciprocate with the one thing I need from her.

I stop and rub my face.

No. She isn't like Anka. Aurelia was scared, and she always lashes out when afraid. I like that about her—enjoy her pluck in the face of adversity. And she was right about me disappearing every time things make me uncomfortable. But if I stayed, I would have said some of the stupid things I'd been thinking, and that would have hurt her.

And despite my assertion of selfishness, I couldn't stand to see her hurt. Even as I'd traced away, her pain had tripped me.

I walk downtown, the stars and fresh air soothing my frayed nerves. Something makes me stop and listen. Not a sound, more a feeling: fear. And not my own.

Aurelia.

I had her blood, and as my own emotions calm, I can sense hers. Something's wrong. Before I can move, a scream splits the air, sounding just a few blocks away. I blur to the alleyway behind Eclipse just as another scream sounds. My blood turns cold.

Fuck.

Aurelia, immobilized through a glamour, has her head tilted back to expose her throat, and the vampire Abe Fenman and his two cronies lean over her as she screams.

"Looks like she's already been bitten tonight," Abe remarks just before I materialize behind him and yank him back.

The fight moves at vampire speed, bodies blurring, blows violent enough to crack bones. Three against one makes it difficult, but I channel the rage inside me. Forget all concern for myself. I have to get to Aurelia to disable the glamour that left her frozen and vulnerable. I twist and kick the wiry vampire named Andre, but take a hard blow to the gut from Abe, and the third vampire slashes at my throat with a broken bottle.

The glass catches the tendon between my neck and shoulder, missing my vital artery. I catch Aurelia's face in my hands, taking the few seconds necessary to release her from the thrall. "Bubble up, make no eye contact. Run as fast as you can."

The distraction costs me, as the three undead attack at once. One catches and holds my arms back as the others kick and punch me in the gut. I lift both feet and kick the immortal in front of me square in the chest then slam my head backward to bash the nose of my captor.

Aurelia makes a bubble, but she doesn't move; she stands staring in horror.

"Run!" I bellow. Dammit. I should've enthralled her to enforce her obedience.

My attention on her causes the vampires to adjust their focus, one of them turning to her while the other two continue to fight me.

The broken glass slashes his forearm, but I tackle Andre to the pavement and bash his head repeatedly against the asphalt.

“Charlie!”

Aurelia’s scream makes me jerk my head up in time to see her hurling a ball of light squarely in Abe’s face. The furious vampire lunges towards her with a roar.

I blur between them, catch Aurelia up around the waist and try to trace, but I can’t focus. Abe’s fangs bite into my back, ripping my shoulder.

Aurelia throws a bubble of protection around both of us, and the vampire falls back.

“Hey,” two big guys round the corner. They’re huge and covered in tats—most prominently a wolf paw tattoo on their right shoulders. “You leeches aren’t welcome. Get the fuck outta here.”

Great. The werewolf patrol. I better get us out of here before they call Lucius, and the vampire king imprisons and tortures us all. There’s a reason I’ve been trying to lay low. Vampire politics are bad for my health. Bad, as in deadly.

I close my eyes and calm myself, picturing Aurelia’s living room as I pull her into the ether.

When we materialize, I feel her tremble.

Fuck. I almost lost her back there. I haven’t been so afraid since...probably since I was mortal.

“What the hell were you doing?” I snap. “First of all, I told you I didn’t want you walking around alone at night. Secondly, I told you to use your bubble and run.” I toss her over my shoulder and carry her to the bedroom where I drop her on the bed. “When I give you an order, I expect you to obey it, especially when it’s for your own damn safety!”

She lies still, watching me with wide eyes.

“Why didn’t you go when I told you to?” I demand.

“I wasn’t going to leave you!”

Something painful turns in my chest. Was it just a few hours ago I’d believed her to be selfish?

I was dead wrong.

“I am a vampire, love. *Immortal*. My wounds heal unless I am decapitated or I bleed out. You, my dear fairy, are not. And those vampires wanted to drain you for your power. I warned you of that.”

Tears shine in her eyes, and I freeze.

Oh hell. A wave of her emotion rolls over me—regret? Despair?

I drop on the bed beside her to cradle her in my arms. She burrows against me, clinging to my neck and nestling her face against my chest. I brush her tears away as I stroke her back. “Shh, love. You’re safe now. Did those thugs scare you?”

She shakes her head, pulling back to look at me, tears still spilling out of her eyes and dripping down her cheeks. “I can’t believe you did that.”

What did I do? I rack my brain. “Those vampires--”

“I don’t care about them. I’m talking about you!” She slaps her hand against my sternum. “You walked away again!” She strikes me again. “You always just disappear, and I’m left trying to figure out what I did wrong and how to fix it.” She smacks my chest again and again, saying, “I don’t. Want. You. To leave.”

I catch her two wrists and hold them in one hand against my chest. “Okay,” I whisper hoarsely, her distress shaking me. I thumb away another tear and try to tuck her head back into me, but she pulls her head free.

She seems to gather herself. “I’m sorry I was a....a brat about the blood.” She looks up with brave humility.

I let out a short bark of surprised laughter, not expecting such an apology. Of course, I hadn’t expected her to slap me, either. “You weren’t a brat.” All my previous irritation dissolves.

“Yes, I was. You needed to drink, didn’t you?”

I nod, once, not liking to admit any weakness, even to her.

“Why didn’t you tell me? Why haven’t you fed?”

I draw a breath. “I guess I’m just a one-woman kind of man.” I shrug. “I always have been.”

She blinks up at me, the gold flecks in her eyes glimmering. “Do you mean...” she trails off, looking uncertain. “Because it’s sexual?”

“Yes. I’ve only wanted your blood since the night I first met you.”

“And I refused to give it to you.” Her voice is soft with regret.

I stroke her hair back from her face and put a finger under her chin to bring her gaze back to my face. “You were just scared.”

She swallows and nods. “I’m not anymore. I’m yours to take as you please.”

Her words go straight to my cock. I cradle her head and lay a soft kiss on her lips. “I’ve been telling you that since the day we met.”

She twines her arms around my neck and starts to bury her face in my shoulder, then jerks back with a gasp. "Oh my God," she says.

I glance down at the dried blood from my cut. I pull my shirt back to show her. "Look at it," I urge. "Vampires heal very quickly. You see how the flesh is already knit back together? Never worry about me." I lift her in my arms as I stand. "I'll take a shower. You need to get to bed. Please call in sick tomorrow. I don't want you showing up to work on three hours' sleep."

"Yes, master," she murmurs. I pull the covers back for her to crawl in, and she pulls me down by the shirt, kissing me. "Charlie?"

"Yes, little mortal?"

"If you're mad at me, just punish me, okay?"

I draw my brows together. "I'm not mad at you."

"I mean next time. Don't walk out. I don't like to be abandoned. I'd rather you stayed and yelled or...you know," she says, fluttering her lashes.

"Tied you up and flogged your beautiful arse?"

She giggles and waggles said arse for me. I give her twin moons a few sharp slaps, then lean over and kiss each cheek.

"Sweet little mortal," I murmur, my chest feeling crowded. I pull her jeans and panties off, then tug her t-shirt over her head and unlace the corset she's still wearing from what seems like ages ago. "You're on clothing restriction again. No clothing while in this house until further notice. Understand?"

She groans, but I can tell she loves it. "Even while you're asleep?"

"Yes," I say firmly. "Even while I'm asleep. Disobedience will be severely punished."

"But isn't that like, punishing you, too? I mean since you can't..."

I touch her lips with the pad of my index finger. "An exquisite torture." I leave her and walk to the bathroom to wash the blood off. I turn on the water and strip off my bloodied clothes. Stepping in, I close my eyes, and let the water splash over me.

I hear the door open and figure she wants to brush her teeth before bed, but the shower curtain opens, and she steps in.

"I don't want to be alone," she says softly.

My unmoving heart twists, and I open my arms. "Come here, little fairy."

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CHAPTER 12

Anka

HE LEFT HER.

A panic like none she'd ever experienced filled her chest, threatening to drown her with its very nature.

No. Not Charles. Charles would never leave her. He loved her. He alone knew and loved the real Anka, flaws and all. He accepted her pride, ambition, moments of insecurity. He'd been her rock.

But Anais had just reported he'd taken Madame de Olivier as his consort, deliberately aligning with her greatest rival.

With a sweep of her arm, she cleared everything from her dressing table, bottles of eau de cologne and her articles of toilet flying off in all directions. How could this be? She would kill him. A stake through the heart. No, worse, she would torture him. Confine him with some form of silver to hold him—chains or a cage and keep him in her bedroom, forced to watch her every trique.

But that thought sickened her. She had cuckolded him, after all.

Damn him—why did he have to materialize in her room when she had a young man in her bed? An Adonis-beautiful, wealthy young man, no less, who paid her to teach him how to pleasure a woman. She'd expected Charles' fury. Perhaps part of her had even craved it as proof of his love for her. She had thought she might have to protect the boy from murder,

imagined a delicious dramatic scene in which she would use her feminine wiles to distract him. Perhaps she hoped he'd beat her mercilessly with the riding crop.

But leave her? Non et non!

Bitter tears burned her eyes. She hated him for this. How would she go on without him? She had no one in the world who cared for her now. No one at all.

She hurled a silver pitcher at her looking glass, shattering it.

Damn him.

She would show him. She would best Madame de Olivier and her traitorous vampire.

Summoning the full force of her anger and pain, she collected it in her gut, drew it up her center column and down her arms to her hands. Picturing Charles naked with the Olivier bitch, she hurled her curse, striking his cock with a magic more potent than she'd ever wielded, punishing him for all of eternity for scorning her.

She wrapped her robe around her with a snap.

“Adieu, Charles. You will never take pleasure with another woman, so long as you live.”



Aurelia

I sit up in bed, trembling.

Anka. And the curse.

Why was I dreaming as if I were Anka? To help heal Charlie?

I pull the blankets up around me as if they could stave off the chill within. Even as I think it, I know it's not true. That feeling. That panic Anka experienced over being left by him was way too familiar. It perfectly mirrored my own the night before. I thought my anxiety about his leaving seemed overblown, and now I understand. Something deep inside me knows the truth. Fork. I've always known it. I fell in love too quickly. Had trusted too wholly. Had ached more than the situation warranted.

Charlie didn't find me by accident. I am Anka. Or I was in a past life.

I know it on a cellular level.

The thought terrifies me. How could I have done something so terrible to him? And what would happen when he finds out? He's just beginning to trust me, to open up and share his vulnerabilities. How could he ever forgive me for what Anka did to him?

I climb out of bed and walk to the shower on shaking legs. Turning on the water, I stand under it, numb.

I never gave much consideration to karma. My nana taught me to believe in past lives, and I do but more as a concept that doesn't really concern me. I know I came into this life with quirks—everyone does. Things that couldn't be explained by life experience. People have irrational fears of water or choking. A hatred of men or screaming children. A sensation of never having enough time.

My nana always said people in our lives are the same people from past lives—family members are recycled into different roles. Lovers become parents in the next life, children become sisters or brothers. I don't know how that works with the immortal, but I know for certain Charlie walked back into my life for a reason. And healing him is the only way to release the karmic damage Anka instigated.

I sigh and turn off the water. Now that I've experienced how Anka threw the curse, can I undo it?

I lean into the emotions of the dream—fury, jealousy, betrayal, pain. I gather it like a ball around me, hold out my hand and picture Charlie. Then I try to suck the piece of it lodged in him back to me, drawing it like a magnet.

I gasp when I feel it move, jumping and quivering. Charlie moans from the bedroom.

Does it hurt him?

I intensify my effort, sweat beginning to gather on my upper lip, the magnitude of concentration all-consuming. The blockage continues to quiver. Charlie cries out in pain, busting up my concentration. The connection breaks, the cork in Charlie grows still. My head throbs in protest, and I fall back against the bathroom wall, exhausted. I open the door and start to get dressed before I remember Charlie's edict.

I look at the clock. Nine thirty. Crap! I forgot to call in sick to work. Snatching up my phone, I wrap the towel around my torso and run out to the living room, dialing my work number on the phone.

“Hello, Edith?” I try to sound feeble. “Hi, It’s Aurelia. I’m so sorry, I was up puking all night, and I just now woke up. I don’t know if it was food poisoning or the stomach flu, so I think I’d better stay away from the kids today.”

“Okay,” Edith sighs. “I hope you feel better.”

“Thanks. And I’m sorry, I should’ve called and left a message last night when I first got sick.”

“Yes, I would’ve appreciated that. It will be hard to find a sub now.”

“If I feel better this afternoon, I’ll come in,” I offer, guilt eating at me.

“No. You’re right. If you have a flu bug, we don’t want all the kids getting sick. Stay home and keep me posted.”

“Okay, will do. Thanks.”

I end the call and walk back into the bedroom, worrying the inside of my cheek as I take in my sleeping vampire. He probably won’t wake for hours. So technically, I could get away with putting on some clothes and then taking them off again before he wakes. Plus, he said I had to be naked *inside* the house, which meant I could get dressed and work in the garden, and if he caught me in the house with clothes later, I could say I’d only just come inside.

But no, the idea of being sneaky didn’t appeal. And obeying him felt naughty in the best possible sense of the word. I want to play our game... to a point. I leave the towel wrapped around my body, reasoning that it doesn’t qualify as clothing.

I return to my study of magic, finishing one of the books and starting on another. So far nothing clued me in on how to rid Charlie of the terrible curse.

“What are you wearing?”

I look up from my reading to find Charlie leaning in the doorway, looking relaxed. His face still holds the color from feeding the night before, and I realize he didn’t sleep so long, either.

“Not clothes,” I insist, lifting my arms to show him.

“Stand up.”

I stand, holding the towel in place with my arms pressed against my sides.

“Drop the towel.”

I hide a smile because I knew the command would come, and a frisson of excitement runs through me. I lift my arms and allow the towel to fall in

a heap at my feet.

Charlie folds his arms across his chest, surveying me with a critical eye. I know by now it's all an act--his way of playing master. He's not really the prick he pretends to be.

He makes a circling motion with his index finger. "Turn around."

I slowly rotate, looking over my shoulder as I do. I'm already wet just from his seemingly critical gaze, as if he were measuring my attributes like a piece of meat.

"You like showing off for me," he notes, the corners of his mouth lifting in a smirk.

"What makes you think that?" My voice isn't as steady as I attempted to make it.

He strolls forward, flicking first one nipple, then the other. "You're pointing at me," he observes smugly.

I note the bulge of his cock in his jeans, and a wave of guilt washes over me. How can I look him in the eye when I know I was Anka?

Charlie grasps my hair and pulls my head back. "You wore clothes today," he accuses.

"No, I didn't."

"Don't lie to me, I sense your guilt."

The hairs stand up on my arms as a pang of even deeper remorse plows through me. "You-you can feel that?"

"Mmm hmm. I've had your blood, little mortal. There's no hiding secrets from me now."

My mind whirls. "You're right," I lie. "I'm sorry. I just felt so uncomfortable naked."

He cocks his head to the side, studying me, as if he can also sense the lie.

I force myself to think of something sexy, to distract him with amorous intentions before he ferrets out the truth. "Are you going to punish me?" I use my best innocent school girl voice. I don't know whether it turns him on, but I get slick between my legs, warming at the thought.

He must detect the scent of my arousal because he slides a finger there, just brushing my outer lips.

My entire body jerks in response.

"Mmm...sensitive."

"Charlie..."

“Yes?”

I don’t know what I meant by uttering his name with such appeal. *I’m sorry. Please forgive me. I want to fix this.* I close my eyes. Even pleasure’s too barbed with the pain that he can’t share it.

Because of *me*.

My eyes flick open. “Why are we doing this?” I ask, all traces of playfulness gone from my voice. “I don’t want to see you tortured.”

His expression stiffens. He covers my breast in a possessive grip. “That’s too bad.” He circles behind me. “Because I love torturing you.”

I inhale, my nerve-endings enlivening, waiting for his next touch. “I’m yours,” I whisper.

“Hands clasped on your head,” he orders.

I interlace my fingers and rest them on my head, lifting and spreading my breasts for his examination. He completes his circle of me and pinches both nipples, twisting them until I mewl from the discomfort. He releases them both abruptly and slaps one of my breasts.

“Disobedience requires punishment,” he asserts.

“Yes, master,” I concur, my skin tingling where he slapped, nipples aching from his pinch.

“Spread your legs,” he commands.

I widen my stance, increasing my sense of vulnerability with both breasts and now pussy exposed for his torture.

He slaps my pussy from the front, his hand swinging in a graceful arc to connect with the delicate tissue.

I jump, stepping my legs together to protect myself.

He delivers several sharp slaps to my ass. “Naughty girl. I told you to spread your legs.”

I swallow and open my legs once more.

“I expect you to stay in position for your punishment. Do not move, or I will make it far worse for you.”

The sternness makes my belly flip like a pancake, more warmth flooding my core. He holds my gaze as he slaps my pussy again and again.

I moan. My legs wobble beneath me. The pain incites desire. My pussy wants more, even as I cringe for each new slap.

“Do you like having your pussy spanked, Aurelia?” he asks in a low, seductive tone.

I give my head a quick shake.

“Don’t lie.” He sounds amused. “You’re dripping wet. You want me to spank you until you come, don’t you?”

I let out a small whimpering sound, not sure whether I mean yes or no by it.

He walks around behind me. “Bend over.”

I bend at the waist but find the balance with my hands on my head too difficult, and one knee buckles.

Charlie catches me around the waist with strong, sure hands. “You may place your hands on your knees,” he says, as if granting me a great boon.

“Thank you, master.” I try for sarcasm, but falling short. I sound like a true submissive, trembling for my dominant’s touch, whether it be in pain or in pleasure.

He claps his hand over my pussy from the back, his forearm spanking my anus a split second before his fingers smack down over my clit.

“Ahh!” I cry out in surprise.

“Naughty, naughty girl,” he says, spanking my pussy with each word, sending my eyes rolling back in my head as a dizzying wave of lust overcomes me.

“Remember when I spanked you until you came, Aurelia?”

I can’t speak at first, his continued assault on both holes fogging my brain with lust. After a moment, I realize he spoke. “Yes, Master,” I whisper.

“This spanking won’t stop until you orgasm, either. But this time you don’t get to use your own fingers.”

I give a sob of emotion, my pent-up passion on the brink of release.

He grips my left hip, spanking with his right, his hand both punishing and pleasuring with each firm whap.

“Oh...Oh, God!” I cry. “Oh please?”

He seems to understand because he spansks me even harder, faster until by the fourth stinging slap I crest the peak, my sex gripping and releasing as I nearly fall forward. Charlie catches me, his left arm circling my waist, as he continues to spank through the orgasm.



CHARLIE

I HOLD Aurelia up as her legs buckle, and she pitches into a beautiful climax. If orgasm was an Olympic sport, I'd bet anything on Aurelia taking the gold. Truly, to be able to give herself over to such powerful pleasure is a special talent—no, an art.

When it passes, I stop spanking and admire her lovely form draped limply over my arm. Her hair falls like a shimmering curtain around her face, her fingertips stretching for the floor, but not quite reaching.

I lift her upright and gently turn her to face me, pulling her close.

She loops her arms around my waist, pressing her cheek against my chest, her entire body trembling.

I kiss the top of her head. “Sweet little mortal,” I murmur endearingly. *I love you.* I don’t allow myself to say the words aloud, but they’re true. How had she so thoroughly captured my heart in such a short amount of time?

I sense waves of bliss roll off her and realize with surprise that her pleasure’s enough. I don’t need my own release. Even if she never manages to lift the curse, I could be content with this. Not even the ache in my balls sours the moment. In fact, I accept the throb, almost relishing it, perhaps the way my sweet mortal likes her spankings.

I lift her face from my shirt and kiss her deeply, trying to express the emotion I feel for her.

She stands on her tiptoes and wraps her arms around my neck, kissing me back.

“Go put on something pretty, I’m taking you to dinner,” I say when we break apart. I have the urge to spoil her a little, or show off, like some crazy caveman who just dragged a woman home and wants to show he’s a good provider.

Her eyes light up. “Really? That sounds great. I’ll be right back.” She heads for the bedroom.

A few minutes later she pokes her head back out. “Would you say you’re more of a skirt man, being from the nineteenth century?”

I grin, the idea of her dressing to please me turns my chest warm. “Well, if you went by that, it would be full skirts to the floor, so no. I prefer to see your curves.” I make an hourglass shape with my hands.

She laughs. “Got it.” She disappears again.

“Aurelia?” I call out.

“Yes, master?” she sings sweetly.

“I’m going home to change. I don’t want you flipping out about me disappearing or anything.”

She emerges and throws a flip flop at me.

I laugh. As much as I adore her submission, I like her feisty, too. Dematerializing home, I shower and change then return to Aurelia’s living room.

When she comes out of her bedroom thirty-five minutes later, I catch my breath. She put on the bustier I bought her over a sheer long-sleeved shirt that hugs her body. A pair of skinny jeans shows off her shapely legs and tight little ass, and high-heeled sandals dress it up. Even with the sexy bustier, she makes the outfit look classy, so I could take her to the finest restaurant in the world without her feeling uncomfortable.

She took special pains with her makeup, mascara making her eyes appear bigger and a dusting of rouge accenting her cheekbones. She curled her hair and pinned most of it up on the back of her head, mimicking the Georgian styles of my day.

I almost turn and run. Trace away just to gather myself. She was right about that—I do disappear when my emotions rise. So wise for her years. I find my voice, forcing myself to speak when her smile fades, and she begins to look uncertain.

“I-I can change if you want. I wasn’t sure where we were going.”

I collect myself. “You look incredible.” I hold out my hands.

She walks forward, her heels clicking on the hardwood floor, and I take her fingers and kiss her cheek, not wanting to smear her fresh lipstick. She wore some kind of perfume, but not the synthetic, chemical smell of most scents, not the kind that gives me a headache. Something sweet and earthy. Perfect for my nature-loving fairy.

“You are the light that shines.”

She giggles nervously, fingering the corset. “Is it okay?”

I close my hand over her fidgeting one. “Yes, love,” I murmur in her ear. “It’s perfect. It pleases me that you wore it.”

A smile lights her face, and it hits me again that my pleasure was her goal. My still heart swells, almost paining me with the emotion.

I step close and slide my hands over the small of her back, pressing her close.

“Where are we going?”

“It’s a surprise,” I say with a smile. I trace, taking her with me.

The wind tugs at my shirt as we materialize. We’re on a lit walkway on the side of a rugged cliff. Far below our feet, the ocean froths against the rocks.

Aurelia gasps. “Where is this?”

“*Polignano a Mare*,” I say the town’s name with the proper musical accent.

“Italy?” Aurelia gasps.

“Italy,” I confirm and beckon. “Come, *bella mia*.”

Aurelia clings to my hand, letting me lead her down to the restaurant. The glowing rooms are carved right into the cliff. My captive fae’s eyes are round with wonder as we enter the restaurant cave. We’re promptly seated at a cozy table right up against the iron railing. The wind tugs at Aurelia’s hair.

“This is wonderful,” she mouths. But when the waiters appear, her eyes drop to the white tablecloth.

I order in Italian. As soon as the waiters retreat, I take her hand. “Why are you nervous?”

Her gaze shoots to mine in surprise, and then she flushes. “I don’t know.” She shrugs. “I don’t really go to fancy restaurants, so I get nervous about eating with the right fork and stuff.”

I laugh. “Come on. It’s a restaurant not a court of law. You’re the customer. Everyone here,” I say, circling a finger in the air, “works for you. Got it?”

She smiles and relaxes. She looks at me from under her lashes. “It’s a little disconcerting to have you sensing my emotions.”

I wink. “I have all kinds of powers over you, little girl. That’s why vampires are higher on the food chain.”

She wrinkles her nose, and I lean closer. “Careful, slave. Even though we’re in public, I won’t hesitate to punish you.”

She knows I’m kidding. “Char-leee.”

I give her my crocodile grin.

The *sommelier* pays our table a visit. Normally, I would banter about the perfect bottles to order with dinner, but tonight I keep it short.

Aurelia looks at her wine glass, nibbling her lip. I sense the undercurrent of anxiety rise again.

“Aurelia.”

“Hmm?”

“Look at me.”

She lifts her eyes, her brow wrinkling in concern.

“Tonight is for you. You’re going to stop over-thinking things and enjoy yourself.”

“But--”

I raise a hand. “You belong here. With me.” As soon as I say it, I know it’s true. She belongs with me.

Aurelia gulps and nods.

Still in dom mode, I lift my chin towards her wine glass. “Take a sip. Good girl.”

She does as she’s told and relaxes as she looks out over the water.

I marvel at her innocence, nerved up over a fancy dinner. The same woman who didn’t hesitate to defend herself against me with a sharpened stake. She has heart. So different from me. She lives with great courage and compassion, giving herself to the children at her work, giving herself to me. Demanding I give more of myself to her.

“You keep looking at me like that...” she says, peeking up through her long lashes.

“Like what?”

She looks shyly down at her napkin in her lap. “Like you think I’m beautiful.”

I smile. “So beautiful it makes me ache.”

I toast her with the wine *il cameriere* brings to our table. We dine on *frutto del mare*, risotto with locally made cheese and lobster, fish so fresh it was swimming in the sea two hours ago. With every bite, Aurelia’s eyelashes flutter. She forgets to be nervous and moans like she’s orgasming.

Halfway through the meal, I set down my fork. I sip my wine and feast on the sight and sounds of her pleasure.

Dessert is a lemon and cream concoction that melts in your mouth. I’ve had it before, but never stolen from a sweet mortal’s lips. I grasp the back of Aurelia’s neck and have a taste. Her tongue darts against mine, and I’m tempted to trace us back to my bed and spend the rest of the night painting her with *parfait al limone*, so I can lick and suck it off.

When I draw back, Aurelia’s eyes are heavy. Her lips are swollen from the fierceness of my kiss.

“Come,” I say as soon as I’ve dealt with the bill, and lead her from the table. We walk back up the path. Once we’re around the corner, I tug her close and sip at her sweetness again. My fangs are razor sharp, so I’m careful not to slice her.

When I’m done, I hitch her up against me and trace. We appear in my bedroom, but only for a moment, so I can grab a heavy fur robe.

“Charlie?” she asks as I tuck her into it.

“Hush, lovely.”

She bites her lips but obeys. Once she’s swathed in the warm fur, I hold her close and trace again.

We reappear in a dark, cold corner of the world. Aurelia stumbles, but I steady her.

“Where are we now?” The chill hits her, and she shivers a little.

“Iceland.”

She peeps out of the cleft in the rock where we’re tucked in, hiding against the wind. We’re on another cliff, but this one overlooks a vast snowy plain.

I tuck her against me, making sure the robe is tight around her.

“Look up,” I whisper into her ear.

She does and gasps. Overhead, swirls of bright green and blue shimmer in the air. The entire sky is lit up with the eerie glow.

“The Northern Lights,” she cries. “Charlie, this is incredible.” She tries to turn, but I won’t let her. “Keep looking. We won’t stay long.” The fur won’t warm her feet.

I keep my cheek against hers, my body pressed around hers to help ward off the chill.

“I can’t believe this,” she whispers like she’s in church. I understand. The lights are achingly lovely. Stained glass windows in a cathedral look like a child’s clumsy paint-by-number effort compared to this living masterpiece dancing on the canvas of the night. “It’s so beautiful.”

“The second most beautiful sight in the world.”

“Second?”

“The first is you and your magic.”

She shakes her head, but I’m not lying.

We watch the lights fare for another minute, then Aurelia starts to shift on her feet, trying to stay warm.

“Ten more seconds,” I warn her.

She stills her fidgeting. “I’m okay,” she says, but her teeth chatter. “Enough. It’s too cold.” In a blink, we’re back in my bedroom. “Worth it.”

I lay her out on my bed, unwrapping her from the heavy fur. I undo her shoes and rub her freezing toes, checking her over.

Her cheeks are flushed, but her eyes sparkle. “That was amazing. A night to die for.”

Her feet are fine. I can’t stay away from her any longer. I climb over her body, letting my weight settle on her. She’ll warm up faster.

“There are perks to serving a vampire.”

“I’m not sure the perks outweigh the annoying work conditions,” she says, but she’s laughing.

“I’ll show you annoying,” I retort. Not a stunning display of wit, but the fluttering pulse in her neck has me distracted. I lick and suck the skin of her neck until she’s restless under me. Then I start kissing my way down her body. I slip her breasts out of the corset, the better to kiss and torment them.

“Charlie,” she moans and tugs me up to face her. At first, I think she wants me to kiss her again, but she turns her head and bares her neck. “Do it.”

“No.” But I’m panting, my fangs aching.

“Charlie, please. I want this.”

With a shudder, I succumb. I scrape my fangs over her pulse, and she stills for the bite. What she doesn’t expect are my hands wrenching at her jeans and my trousers. I set my cock at her wet entrance and thrust inside. Then and only then, I sink my fangs into her skin.

Her cries fill my ears. I draw her hot, rich blood into my body as I pump my cock into her.

And I experience something more beautiful than the Northern Lights or Aurelia’s smile when she blows a heart shaped bubble my way.

Aurelia, opening her body to mine. Giving me her blood. Climaxing on my cock. It’s everything. It’s all I want and all I’ll ever need.

She’s all I’ll ever need.

“Aurelia,” I whisper against her neck. “My own.”

“Charlie.”

My fangs throb, and I pierce her skin again, but not before I tell her, “You belong to me.”

She thinks I'm dangerous. But she's the one who could so easily destroy me. Because tonight we gave ourselves fully to each other, and now I want forever.

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C H A P T E R 13

A urelia

I CONTINUE WORKING on pulling out the spell every time Charlie sleeps. I try dreaming as Anka again, but the Parisian madame doesn't surface. By the end of a week of effort, I resolve to try the one thing I've been avoiding —attempting to *be* Anka.

I sit cross-legged at the foot of her bed, watching Charlie sleep. His dark hair stands out as if he ran his fingers through it, tousled in that sexy casual look he embodies so well.

I close my eyes and try to place myself in the dream again, experiencing the emotions of lost love, of fury.

I will never take pleasure with another woman, so long as you live.

My eyes fly open. Perhaps that's the loophole. Perhaps, to break the spell, he needed to have sex with *her*. With Anka.

The thought terrifies me. Could I somehow become Anka while making love to Charlie? And if so, would he notice?

I look over and start.

Charlie's eyes are open, and he lies watching me. "What are you doing, love?" he asks softly.

I draw a breath. The closer I stick to the truth, the better, especially considering the way he reads my feelings. "I want to try something."

He waits for me to go on.

“I want to try to pull the curse while we’re making love.”

He nods. “Okay.”

“I may not seem like myself—will you just go on, no matter what happens?”

He leans up on his elbows. “What does that mean?”

“I guess I mean...” I hesitate. “You’re an extremely attentive lover. But maybe this time you could sort of ignore me, so I can do my thing?”

He laughs. “I see. I will not pay you any attention at all.” He crawls over to me. He seizes my arms with vampire speed and throws me onto my back, climbing over me. “But I am allowed to get you ready for my plunder.” He yanks down my pants.

I lift my butt to let him pull them off, already warming at the way he handles me so easily, his vampire strength a turn-on.

He pulls my shirt over my head and unsnaps my bra, tossing it to the floor. “Spread your knees for me,” he orders.

I draw my knees up, opening for him.

He settles between my legs, gripping a thigh in each hand as he bends his head and licks into me. He swirls his tongue around my clit, sucks the sensitive nub.

I gasp, my body jerking and coming alive as he plays it like a musical instrument.

He penetrates me with his tongue, nips at my labia with his teeth, teases and tortures me into a frenzy.

“Please, Charlie,” I gasp, tugging his hair with my fingers. “If you don’t stop, I’ll lose all my concentration. You have to stop.”

He lifts his head and grins. “All right, love.” Lifting himself over me, he releases his cock from his boxer briefs. “Okay, so I’ll just do my thing, and you’ll do yours, is that the plan?” he asks with a wink.

I blink, finding it difficult to recall what they were doing after my near-orgasm. “Oh. Yeah,” I croak. But just then he plows into me. I arch in pleasure, forgetting my purpose once more.

“Get busy, fairy,” he murmurs to remind me, his expression soft with affection.

My heart twists. I don’t want to lose him—he’s become my whole world in such a short time. I squeeze my eyes closed and bring myself to the dream in which I, as Anka, was making love to Charlie—no, I called

him Charles. I try to become Anka. Search in her own consciousness for the memories I might have.

A flicker of something comes in—I see the boudoir again, the floor strewn with the items flung from the dressing table. I experience the rage.

Then, I—as Aurelia—reach out to my past life self.

Anka, Charles is here. He came back to you.

The rage grows, thrashing about in my chest.

Punish him. He hurt me. He will do it again.

No—forgive him. You have punished him enough.

No!

The depth of Anka's blackness scares me, and I pull back. But then, I realize, it's that very intensity I need. That was the power behind the curse, as frightening as the darkness may be. I remember one of the books discussed connecting with spirit guides or one's higher self. Presumably, if I have a higher self, it governs Anka as well.

Before I can explore that thought, Charlie brings me back to reality, pulling out. "There's very little appeal for me in this."

I open my eyes, wincing. "I'm sorry."

He gives me his usual smirk. "Turn over, so I don't have to see how much you are not enjoying this."

I roll to my belly, looking over my shoulder. "I'm really sorry."

"Hush." He kisses my temple. "I love you for doing this."

I turn my face into the sheets, not wanting him to see the effect of his words on me. He didn't say *I love you*, period. He said *I love you for doing this*. Not the same thing. Conditional. He loves me in this one instance. And I'm supposed to be concentrating on removing the curse right now.

He enters me from behind, the sweet sensation of being filled by him makes me moan.

I follow the directions in the book, summoning my higher self and imagining it like a ball of light surrounding me.

Charlie hisses.

I whip my head to look over my shoulder.

"I'm okay. Go on. It's just a little hot."

Well, at least I know something happened.

Please help me release this spell, I entreat the ball of light.

Instantly, Anka appears in my consciousness, the anger closing my chest. And yet I sense at the same time, the higher self beaming light into

me, thinning the density of the darkness.

Do you wish to feel this way? my higher self asks Anka.

But he—

Do you wish to feel this way?

No, I scream in my head.

No, Anka answers at last.

Release it, our higher self urges.

Something loosens in my chest. I draw a shaky breath.

Charlie pulls out of me again.

I roll over, feeling horrible. “I know this is awful.”

He shrugs. “I wouldn’t call it awful,” he says although I can tell by his expression he’s running out of patience.

“Let me suck your cock?”

He shrugs. “Be my guest.” He settles beside me.

I crawl over him, taking him into my mouth, tasting the tang of my own juices as I swirl my tongue around the head of his dick. I close my eyes and return to the boudoir. Anka takes over, working his cock with an expertise I never dreamed of.

Charlie groans with pleasure and a sense of satisfaction rises—not just mine but Anka’s too.

Let it go.

I sense Anka waver, torn between feeling good and the power of the blackness, caught between pleasure and pain. I try to stay in the background, knowing this is Anka’s choice not mine.

Anka seems to flitter between good and evil, as if testing each one.

Something overcomes my past life self. Tears begin to stream down my face, but they aren’t out of suffering. More like relief. Anka takes Charlie’s cock deep in her throat in a shocking move I didn’t know was physically possible.

I suck hard. And then I realize Anka made her decision. She’s drawing the curse out of him.

Charlie rolls his hips, making little grunts of pain. Or is it passion?

All at once something terrible—something black and heavy—flies out into my mouth. I fall back with a sickening thud.

Charlie cries out in pain, his body convulsing with the power of it.

Send it to the light, I hear, and I begin to cough, the darkness pouring out of my mouth in bursts of bruise-colored shapeless forms. They swirl up

toward the light, dark plumes of smoke floating up and away.

Trembling, moving with an urgency to see things through to the finish, I return my attention to Charlie's cock, licking from balls to tip, flicking my tongue around the head. A drop of pre-cum emerges. My heart leaps, and this time the tears are mine. Charlie's healed—Anka released him from her vengeance!

My lover's head jerks up, and he props himself on his elbows, staring in shock, as if he doesn't dare believe it.

"Yes," I whisper, lifting my mouth from his member. "Yes," I repeat, fresh tears coursing down my cheeks. "Come for me, Charlie."

As I take him into my mouth, I experience an incredible surge of power—not the dark evil power of before but a light, joy, joyful one.



CHARLIE

CUM MOVES down my shaft in surges. The sharp pain that normally blocks it from leaving my throbbing length is gone. It felt as though the very head of my cock was being wrenched from my body, but now I experience an incredible rushing sensation, as if the pathway opened.

"Come for me, Charlie." Aurelia's face glistens with tears, a golden light surrounding her body.

My muscles jerk. I stare as she engulfs my cock in her hot, wet mouth, sucking it, making love to it.

The cum surges forward again.

"Aurelia," I choke.

She takes me deeper and makes a humming sound, and the added vibration is like a love song to my cock.

"Aurelia," I try again to warn her, but it's too late. I ejaculate with an explosion of pleasure, lifting my hips into the air, shouting with surprised ecstasy.

I come and come, the pleasure rocking my body off the bed.

Aurelia pulls off and takes my seed across her tits, her face glowing, her mouth stretching in a wide smile.

I reach for her, pulling her down on top of me, nuzzling for the vein at her neck.

“Forgive me, Charles.” It’s Aurelia’s voice, but the words come out in French.

What the fuck?

My body convulses in shock. What. The actual. Fuck?

A hundred year’s worth of rage surges forth toward the woman who ruined me.

I spring to sit, lifting a palm to strike her face. But even if I was sure she was Anka, I couldn’t slap her.

I still love the evil witch.

Rushes of hot and cold roll through my body, and as I blink, I swear I see the black glitter of Anka’s eyes gazing from Aurelia’s beautiful face.

I draw in several deep breaths to calm myself.

What just happened?

I exhale slowly, willing myself to relax. Did Aurelia somehow channel Anka’s ghost?

Christ, I need to find out.



CHARLIE

AURELIA PULLS a t-shirt over her head. The heartbroken expression on her face rips my chest open, but I hold myself back from offering anything to her. Fuck, I can’t be sure I trust her. “What just happened?”

I sense her guilt, and my body turns to ice.

Tears swim in her eyes. “I-I...I don’t know. I think I must be Anka. Reincarnated.”

No. No fucking way.

Not Aurelia. Not my sweet, submissive fairy.

“No,” I roar, shoving her dresser and causing it to flip upside down and slam against the wall. “No,” I repeat, as if by insisting, I can make it untrue.

She doesn’t speak, just beseeches me with her eyes, lips trembling.

“How long have you known?”

Her eyes fill with tears. “About a week. I’ve been putting pieces together. I didn’t know it all. I was trying to fix it, Charlie,” she pleads.

Hot anger makes me flex my fingers. Before I even form the thought, I trace away. When I rematerialize, I’m still in the house, standing in her kitchen. As if my body, or my subconscious, refused to leave her this time.

I hear a sob from the bedroom.

Aurelia. The stricken look on her face the moment before I traced burns in my mind. *But she’s Anka.* My heart feels leaden.

You always just disappear, and I’m left trying to figure out what I did wrong and how to fix it.

I draw a breath. Fuck. She at least deserves a goodbye.

I return to her bedroom.

She stands in the middle of the floor, looking lost.

I take hold of her shoulders. “I need to leave, Aurelia. I need to be alone.”

“Are you coming back?” she whispers.

I stare at her, my gut clenched like a fist. I can’t speak. “I don’t know,” I say at last. The pain in her eyes closes my throat. “I have to go.”

She nods mutely.

“Don’t follow me.”

Her eyes glitter with tears.

I stand there like an idiot. There’s nothing more to say. I can’t be here, and yet I can’t leave.

A tear slips down my cheek.

I close my eyes and trace to my place.

Fuck. I can’t be here, either.

I trace downtown, then to the top of a parking garage. I look out over the city, fighting the urge to hunt and kill like a newly turned vampire. I crave violence, the taste of blood taken without consent. I hold very still as the animal within me rages.



CHARLIE

IN MY BEDROOM, I open the safe in the wall and remove the wooden box I've kept since 1865. Inside lies the ruby necklace I bought for Anka, the one I'd meant to give her the night I found her with another man. I've kept it all these years—a symbol of why women can't be trusted. Why no one should be trusted.

I take it out of the box, holding it up to the light. I remember how pleased with myself I was, knowing how much Anka loves jewels. I close my fist around the gemstones, the pain of her betrayal so fresh I still smell her scent, feel the satin of her bedding.

She *can't* be Aurelia. She just *can't* be. They have nothing in common, except for their power. Aurelia's not driven by ambition or pride. She gives her heart openly. She gives without asking in return.

And yet...how can I be with her, knowing she was Anka? What if Anka speaks to me through her again? I can't trust myself not to hurt her. My hand had twitched to reach for her throat and squeeze!

I'm free of the curse, I should be celebrating. What a bitter irony to be healed only to discover the one woman I wanted to make love to is my worst enemy.

No. I don't see how I could ever be with her without hating her for what she did. For who she is.



Aurelia

I WANDER through the streets of downtown, a terrible anxiety twisting and churning inside me.

It's been three days. Three forking days, and Charlie hasn't returned.

I moved through my days numbly, trying not to think. Caught in a nameless hell of hope and mourning. I see Charlie everywhere I look: in my boarded up windows, the overturned dresser, the bed, the sofa, the kitchen.

At work, I remembered how he calmed Tommy. How I'd been wrong to mistrust him. I think of his cool stares, the sardonic twist of his lips, the arrogance which had been more an act than anything.

Anka doesn't return, and yet something in me has changed. I seem to know French, for one thing. And I feel wiser, like I absorbed Anka's life experience to become more of an "old soul".

I read the rest of the books Charlie bought for me and found my magic has grown even more powerful, perhaps from Anka's integration as well. I worked in my garden, using the light from my hands to support the growth of my new plants, and I watched them respond, doubling in size in just two days.

But I can't keep waiting for Charlie.

I need to find him. I need to convince him Anka's gone, that I'd never hurt him. I could not take it if Charlie never came back. I need to fight for him, even though I have no idea how I'd manage a relationship with a vampire.

I stake out Eclipse but see no sign of him or the other vampires. Just the big tattooed biker dudes—the shifters. And I doubt they'd care about a missing "leech."

My only lead is his secret lair. The bunker at Sombrero Peak. I just need a ride.

With a sigh, I pull out my phone and dial Gwen.



"THIS IS SO EXCITING!" Gwen gushes.

I fiddle with the fake yellow daisy in the little holder on her VW Beetle's dash and slump in my seat. I don't need to respond to Gwen. She's been making little exclamations this whole time. Apparently this is a "girl's trip," and we're having an "adventure." Gwen even packed a picnic basket and a white-and-red checkered blanket. Her whole life is Instagram worthy, but I don't think it's an act. I think she really is the sweetest person alive.

I'd be in the mood to play along if I wasn't so worried about Charlie.

"Turn left here," I instruct and sit back for the rest of the ride. Sombrero Peak juts out of the cacti studded dessert. I don't know exactly where Charlie's bunker is, but I'm hoping I can find a private road that looks vaguely official.

I hold the image in my mind, and as we reach the foot of the mountain, I see exactly what I'm looking for.

“There.” I point to an old dirt road. There’s a rusted out sign warning us not to trespass.

“Are you sure?” Gwen asks, but she’s already following my directions. Gwen’s yellow Beetle rolls down the road, kicking up thick brown dust. Her poor car’s going to be covered. I make a mental note to pay for a car wash when we’re back in town.

The road ends at another huge yellow and black sign with the nuclear symbol stamped on it.

“Okay, this is it. You can stop here.” I instruct.

“Okay.” Gwen sounds unsure, but the Beetle glides to a halt. “Is this where you want to picnic?”

“No...um...” For a second I wish I had a vampire’s power of mind wiping. But I don’t want to do that to Gwen. “Can you do me a favor? A huge favor. I need you to drop me off and go back home.” I’m already out of the car. Something tells me I need to hurry.

Gwen rolls down the window on the passenger side. She gnaws her lip. “But what about you? How will you get back?”

“My friend will give me a ride.” I cock my thumb in the vague direction of the nuclear sign.

“What friend?” Now Gwen is suspicious.

“A guy friend. Remember, I told you about Charlie?”

She perks up. “Yes!”

“He’s really handsome and mysterious. I think he’s super rich, but he hasn’t been in a relationship for a while because the last woman he was with burned him.”

“Oh no,” Gwen is totally buying this story. Which is good because it’s pretty much the truth.

“He’s very private and eccentric, which is why he lives out here. But he brought me here the other night.” I take a deep breath. “We shared a wonderful night together, and I thought we were meant to be. He even said I belonged to him. But then he disappeared.”

Gwen nods vigorously. “He got scared and retreated. He’s afraid of intimacy. He opened up to you, and he knows you’re the One, but he’s been hurt before. I read a romance novel with this exact type of hero last week.”

“Uh, yeah. Good. So...I just know we’re meant to be.” The words tumble out of my mouth, and I feel how true they are. Huh. “It’s Fate. We’re soulmates.”

“Oh,” Gwen has her hand over her heart and stars in her eyes. “You must go to him.”

“I am. That’s why I’m here. I’ll be okay, but I need to do this alone.”

“Of course.” She nods. “Get your man.”

“I will. I promise.” I shut the car door and back away. I stop to awkwardly wave goodbye, hoping she’ll get the message.

“Use protection!” she trills and hits a button to roll up the window. She puts the car in reverse, and in another minute, she’s gone.

That went better than I thought it would. I make a mental note to buy Gwen more romance novels. Then I turn and hike past the sign, disappearing into the creosote.

“Goll darn it, Charlie,” I mutter, shading my eyes to look up at the mountain. Dusk is falling, which is good. I need Charlie awake, so I can yell at him.

Darkness falls, and I stop to hold out a hand and call a ball of light onto my palm.

“Help me find him,” I whisper. Tingles spread through my body, and I sense the direction I need to go. And not five minutes later, I literally stumble across the rusted-out iron platform lying among the creosote. The top of the bunker.

Charlie is in there. I’m sure of it.

From the outside, it’s not much to look at. Just a bunch of metal panels in the ground. One of the panels has been moved aside to reveal a staircase. Which is weird because Charlie can trace in and out of his home. He doesn’t need to exit through the door. The only reason this panel would be open is if someone else is here.

A chill runs through me.

I jog down the stairs. “Charlie?” There’s a door at the end that’s hanging half off its hinges, like someone broke it down.

Oh fork.

I push open the broken door and freeze.

The three vampires from the fight in the alleyway are gathered in the living room, holding Charlie down. One of them wears a leather glove and holds some sort of silver cup in his hand, which he thrusts against Charlie’s bare belly.

Charlie hisses, and I hear the sound of sizzling skin as the silver burns his flesh.

“We can go on all night. Hell, we can go all week. Eventually, you’re going to tell us where your pretty little fairy is.”

“Fuck. You.”

The vampire strikes Charlie across the face with the silver cup, leaving another terrible burn.

I cover my mouth to hold back my scream.

Charlie catches sight of me, and his eyes widened. Before I understand what’s happening, my belly lurches sideways, as if he was hypnotizing me. He doesn’t complete it, however, because in the next instant, his torturers also see me, and the leader blurs directly in front of me.

I keep my gaze away from him, hitting him with a ball of light. My powers have increased; this time my weapon knocks him back on his ass.

Charlie roars, struggling against his two captors. “Aurelia, get out,” he yells. “Leave me!”

I send another flash of light at one of the vampires holding Charlie, and all four vampires in the room bellow in pain.

An idea occurs to me, but before I can move, the gloved vampire blurs behind me and picks me up by the neck, slamming my face up against the wall and pinning me there.

Pain explodes in my cheek and nose.

Charlie roars with anger.

I try to cast another ball of light, but the radiating throb in my face consumes too much of my energy.

The vampire twists my arms behind my back, holding both my wrists in one of his, the other hand pressed against my nape.

“Aurelia!” The anguish in Charlie’s voice brings me back.

He cares.

And I came here to fight for him. The ape holding me thought I needed my hands for magic, but I don’t. I picture Charlie and surround him in a black bubble, its walls too dense to penetrate.

“Aurelia, what are you doing?” he shouts.

I flash the brightest light I can imagine into the room—light as bright as the sun.

Terrible screams filled the air, and my skin grows hot where the vampire had been holding me. I squeeze my eyes closed, my own vision blinded by the intensity of the flash. I spin around, but can’t move, my retinas burning from the light.

“Aurelia! What’s going on? Get me out of this damn bubble!” Charlie’s furious protests bring me back, and I release him from the black sphere.

He rushes forward, then stops, looking at the piles of ash where the vampires were. I stare, round-eyed.

“Did I...kill them?”

Charlie looks at me, a grim expression on his face. “Yes.”

“I’m sorry,” I say inanely.

He wraps me in his arms, squeezing too tightly. “I’m not.” But then he releases me again, as if remembering who I am. Who I was. “I told you not to follow me.”

I draw a breath and shut his front door. “I know, but I just had to talk to you. Please, Charlie—you can’t hold me accountable for something I did in a past life.” When he doesn’t speak, I say, “Or maybe you can, but I’m telling you I’m sorry.”

He continues to say nothing, just looks at me with the same expression—as if I’m dead to him. But no, I know he cares. He just refused to give me up under torture. He must feel something for me because he isn’t the gallant type.

I try to explain my thoughts. “I don’t know how karma works, but I think we met again, so I could fix this, to heal the rift between us.”

He swallows and nods once.

“It’s not going to happen again... is that what you think? I would never hurt you.”

A muscle in his jaw twitches like he doesn’t believe me.

“Please, Charlie, I need you. I never wanted to be magic. You came along and showed me my power and turned my world upside down. I can’t do this without you.” My eyes fill with tears. “I want to be your little fairy again. Please?”

Nothing in his expression changes. “Come here,” he beckons.

I walk to him. He wraps my hair in his fist and pulls my head back, his fangs lengthening as he looks at my vein. As if in slow motion, he lowers his head to my neck, trailing a sharp fang along my vein. My breath comes in quick pants, my heart racing.

Fuck, how well do I really know Charlie? Would he drain me to get even with Anka? Maybe he didn’t turn me over to the other vampires because he wanted to destroy me himself.

He lifts my head and releases me all in one swift motion. “Take off your clothes.”

My gaze snaps to his, heart leaping. Has he forgiven me? Or is this an evil torture? It doesn’t matter. I just begged to be his. I wanted to prove my faithfulness, my trust. To be his submissive. I shuck my clothes, dropping the articles at my feet one by one.

He watches with glittering eyes.

“Kneel.”

My belly somersaults. A game. This is our game. I drop to my knees.

“Hands behind your back.”

I grasp my wrists behind my back and lower my head submissively.

Charlie crouches beside me, stroking my hair back from my eyes. I see emotion this time, but before I identify it, he lunges, tackling me onto my back, his hand cupping the back of my head to protect it from the floor. His fangs strike my neck, and he drinks, pushing the bulge of his clothed cock between my legs.

Relief, love, passion, pour through me. I exhale and wrap my legs around his waist. I twine my arms around his neck and close my eyes, allowing the motion of his cock beneath his jeans to drive my passion.

The scrape of his jeans over my vulnerable bits comes as a pleasured pain—the more it digs into me, the more I want to feel it. I follow the sensations until I come from the friction against my clit, a small release, but satisfying just the same.

Charlie licks my wounds closed. “Did I say you could come?”

My belly flutters. *Our game.* “No, master.”

“You’ll be punished for that.”

I shiver, excitement and heat flushing through me.

He rolls me to my belly. “Bring your knees up under yourself.”

I rise to my hands and knees.

“Did I say you could use your hands?”

His imperious tone makes butterflies flutter in my stomach. I lower my head and torso back to the carpet, dropping my arms beside myself.

“Reach back and hold your cheeks open.”

I suck in my breath, realizing his intention. I reach back, taking one buttcheek in each hand and pulling them apart to expose my most private of places to him.

I hear a zipper and wait, the butterflies flapping their wings.

He rubs the head of cock over my pussy, and I relax, relieved. But as soon as he dips inside my slick channel, he withdraws and pushes against my back entrance, using my juices as the only lubricant.

My anus contracts. "You're too big," I pant. "It won't fit."

"Relax, little fairy." He wraps an arm under my waist and moves my hips forward and slaps my ass. I let go of my cheeks and squeak, trying to catch myself with my arms. There's no need. Charlie holds me easily suspended as he gives me another spank then another. My pussy drips from his dominance. I hold still, relishing his mock punishment, knowing we both need this.

He dips his fingers into my dripping pussy and wipes them on my anus, working a digit into my hole before I realize what he means to do.

I gasp, the sensation more pleasing than I think it should be.

He lowers my torso. "On your forearms, love."

I assume the position and wait, a rivulet of sweat trickling down my breast.

He removes his finger and brings the head of his cock to my back hole once more. The pressure stretches.



CHARLIE

I REACH a hand around and flick Aurelia's clit. "Open for me."

Her surrender cracks the remaining armor I'd put up, my mistrust of her fading each time she gives herself to me. She kneels, her ass in the air for me, reddened by my hand, willing.

I circle her clit and she relaxes, arching her beautiful ass toward me. I press my cock against her anus with more insistence.

"Open, Aurelia," I advise.

She holds perfectly still, and I continue the pressure forward, easing into her hot, tight tunnel. I grip her hips and pull them back, impaling her ass with my cock, then easing back and repeating the slow movement.

Aurelia moans, a noise somewhere between protest and encouragement.

"Give me your wrist," I command.

She looks over her shoulder, confused as she reaches one wrist behind her, leaning on the three points of her shins and one forearm.

I grip the wrist. “Now the other.”

Her eyes widen as she realizes what I want. She has to rely on my hold on her captured wrist in order to lift her weight off the other arm. She leans into it tentatively, lifting her arm reaching it back with a look of slight panic. I hold both wrists in one hand, her torso suspended over the floor. If I let go, she’d fall on her face. With my other hand, I grip her hair and pull her head back.

Aurelia mewls, but the scent of her arousal’s grown so strong it fills the room. She wants this as much as I need it. I pump in and out of her, fucking her ass, knowing this is the path back to all that’s good between us.

I move slowly, taking care not to be too rough. Aurelia’s cries grow more insistent, and I pick up speed, sensing the surging of cum, and remembering I’m capable of orgasm.

Thanks to her, my sweet fae mortal.

I let myself go, pumping in and out, her tight channel hugging my pulsing cock until I lose control and shoot my load with a groan. “You may come,” I remember to say, and she lets out a high-pitched squeal and orgasms. I sit back on my heels and pull her to sit back on me, gently releasing her wrists and hair. I lift her off my cock, and she groans and collapses on me, her head falling back over my shoulder.

After we catch our breath, I finally speak. “I don’t know what to think of all this, Aurelia,” I say, the weariness of my sleepless days sounding in my voice. “But I do know that you *are* mine. Nothing can change that fact.”

Aurelia’s body begins to shake, and I tighten my arms around her, smelling the salt of tears. The depth of my response to her pain answers any remaining doubt I might have had about her or us. I couldn’t walk away from her no matter what challenge we faced—even having Anka between us.



CHARLIE

ANKA CAN'T HURT me again, even if she lives on through Aurelia. My little fairy loves me with a heart big enough to heal all wounds. My eyes burn as I kiss her, releasing my last reservations. I stand, lifting Aurelia to straddle my waist and carry her to the shower, where I turn on the water and step in.

The droplets run over our heads, cleansing away burnt smell from the crisped vampires. Knowing Aurelia had the power to destroy me so easily and yet still surrendered, making me her master makes me ache with love. I pull off my shirt, soaked now, and toss it over the curtain rod. Running my hands across Aurelia's shoulders, I worship the magnificent curves of her lithe body. I pick up the soap and run it over her skin, lathering circles around her breast, down the cleft of her ass.

Control slips away, and I shove her up against the shower wall, pinning her there and forcing a knee between her thighs. "I need to be inside you, Aurelia," I murmur in a dangerous voice. "Now that you've released me from the curse, I might need you ten times a day. Or more."

Her mouth opens, and she arches into my hands, water running in rivulets down her golden skin.

I bend my knees to fit my cock to her cunt, sliding into her without needing to prepare the way. I tuck my palms behind her shoulders to cushion the shock, then begin to thrust hard, trapping her between my body at the tile wall. My fangs lengthen, and I long to strike again, but hold back, knowing I can't drink from her every time I have my way.

The wall seems too hard to slam her body against, so I wrap her in my arms, keeping close and using my muscles to protect her from the force of my passion.

She lifts one leg and wraps it around my waist, changing the angle of her tunnel. I pound into her until she gasps, "May I—?"

"Yes," I choke, losing control and finding my own peak at the same moment she convulses against me.

C H A P T E R 14

Aurelia

CHARLIE TRACES us back to my place after our shower. When he sees the bruise appearing on my cheek from where the vampire smashed me against the wall, he hisses, baring his teeth. Pushing me to sit on the bed, he vanishes, and I start to curse before I hear him in my kitchen, opening the refrigerator door. He blurs back, holding an ice pack wrapped in a kitchen towel. I jerk my head back instinctively when he tries to touch the bruise, so he presses the ice in my hands. “You do it,” he says softly, still looking grim over it.

He picks up the dresser he overturned and replaces it. “Sorry,” he mutters. He stands with his hands on his hips and looks around. “What are we going to do, Aurelia? A fairy doesn’t belong in a hole in the ground. You need to live in nature with room for a big garden, so you can do things fae do with plants.”

I blink, surprised.

“Let’s buy some land and build a house. With a basement for me and a light-filled ground floor for you.”

I tremble, hardly believing how well he seemed to understand me and my desires. “Do you...how would we pay for it?”

“I have lots of money,” he says dismissively.

“What about my job? How will I get there?”

He considers me. “I have a car you can drive. I won’t make you quit, but I think I’ll have another discussion with Edith to reduce your hours. Or perhaps I’ll get a job there too.”

“What?” I laugh.

“Yeah. Why not? I was good with that kid.”

I giggle. “I can’t decide if you’re serious.”

“I don’t know—why not? What else do I have to do? I might as well be of some use in this world.”

I gape, hardly able to assimilate it all. “So...does this mean you’re my boyfriend?”

He grins. “I am most definitely your boyfriend, along with your vampire, lover and master.” He moves closer and wraps his arms around me, sliding his hands down to cup my ass. “Do I get to meet your friends now?”

I bite my lip. “I suppose I’ll never be able to tell them, will I?”

His expression sobers. “It’s better if you don’t.”

I look up, seriously contemplating how life would be, mated to a vampire—the difficulties of his nocturnal restrictions, or of my mortality. “Is it done much? A vampire with a mortal?”

“There’s another vampire in town who is married to a mortal about your age. They even have a baby—no one knows how. Probably artificial insemination. We could hang out with them and see how they do it.” He smiles down at me warmly.

The idea encourages me. “I guess we’ll...figure it all out?”

He kisses my forehead. “Yes, love. I don’t know how, exactly, but we’ve established the main points.”

“Which are?”

“You’re mine. And I’m not going to walk out on you.”

Tears fill her eyes in a rush.

“What?” Concern appears between his brows.

I shake my head, trying to duck my gaze.

He puts a finger under my chin and lifts it until I look at him again. “I have something for you,” he says softly. “I bought it for you when you were Anka. I kept it all these years, but I never knew why.” He smiles. “Now I do.”

He pulls a gold chain out of his pocket, from which dangle dozens of red gemstones.

“Garnet?”

“Rubies, love. They’re supposedly good for blood and circulation.”

I laugh. “Ah. This is really a gift for you. Kinda like the corset and stockings.”

He makes a twirling motion with his index finger.

I turn and lift my hair from my nape, waiting as he fastens the incredible necklace. “This must be worth a fortune.”

“I’ll buy you any and every stone or crystal you want. They each have special powers, or so Anka believed.” He kissed my neck in the place he’d bit it earlier.

The necklace buzzes on my neck, and I sense the truth of his statement. Excitement about continuing to develop my powers in partnership with Charlie makes my pulse quicken. “You’re really sticking around?”

“There’s no getting rid of me. You’d have to drive a stake through my heart.”

I giggle, sniffing. “I’ve tried that. I already know how that ends.”

He grips my ass and squeezes. “Want to try again?” he asks in a low seductive voice.

I laugh, my eyes still moist. “I love you, vampire.”

His face grows serious, and he strokes my cheek with his thumb. “I love you, little fairy.”

EPILOGUE

A urelia

OF ALL THE sights in the world, my favorite is Paris after dark. Well, second favorite. My first is the sight of Charlie lounging in our bed after a massive sex marathon. He's naked and beautiful, his dark hair fanned over the crisp sheets. Everything about him is lazy and languid--except his gaze. I feel his eyes on my bare back as I step out onto our balcony for a breath of air.

I stand at the iron railing, drinking in the sight of the Eiffel Tower. It's a good thing it's night time. I'm hoping no one looks up and sees me because my vampire master's in a mood. Apparently his motto is: *when in Rome, do as the Romans. When in France, dress your fairy sub as a French maid.*

I'm in sheer black stockings and garter, and a bustier dripping with frothy white lace. He even got me a feather duster, though he's mostly used it on me. I had no idea how much torture it was to be tickled.

My outfit is a bit rumpled now, but he wouldn't let me put on a robe. So when I lean on the balcony railing, it's his fault he gets an eyeful of my bare rear.

"Full moon tonight," I snark.

"Oh yes," he purrs. A breath of wind caresses my face, and I know he's blurred to my side. A second later, his hard cock rubs against my folds. I push my bottom back into his crotch and grind.

“Open your legs, Tinkerbell.” His foot pushes at my instep, making me widen my stance.

“Charlie,” I start to straighten, but I can’t back off the balcony—he’s in the way. “Let’s go back inside. People will see.”

“Only if they look up.” He puts a hand on my back and pushes me back down.

“You’re naked.”

“And you look perfect.” He reaches under my flimsy apron and fondles my folds. “Hush,” he says, when I whimper. “No more back talk. Or I’ll punish you right here.”

“You wouldn’t,” I whine.

“I would. Behave or I’ll spank you and fig you, and then I’ll fuck you.” His hand crashes on my rear cheek. I yelp.

“Shhh, someone will hear.” I bite my lip as he squeezes my bottom. “They’ll look up and see everything. But if you remain very, very quiet...” his fingers dance down to my labia again, finding my clit and circling it.

I stare out at the Eiffel Tower and try to keep my breathing under control. The view is beautiful, but I barely see it. Especially when Charlie stops playing, positions his cock at my pussy, and glides right in. My knuckles whiten as I brace myself on the railing and push back against his shallow thrusts, trying to get him to go deeper.

He grabs a handful of my hair and jerks my head back. His cock rams me hard, driving me to tiptoes. He’s fucking me in full view of anyone in the alley below, and I don’t care anymore.

“Say it,” he orders, tugging on my hair in time to his punishing thrusts. “Tell me who you belong to.”

“You, master. I belong to you.” I’ll scream it if he wants. But he takes pity on me and accepts my whispered surrender.

He tugs me up so I’m bowed back, my head back against his chest. He secures me with his arm like an iron band around my front. His hand grips my neck, drawing it back further to expose my pulse.

“And I’m yours, Aurelia. Forever.” And as his fangs pierce my skin, my orgasm blows up inside me, a supernova of ecstasy.

And in the distance, lights burst around the Eiffel Tower. Colors explode in the sky, bright as fireworks but lingering like the Northern Lights. A million tourists are fumbling for their cameras, and tomorrow news

channels will consult scientists on the phenomena. But Charlie and I will know the truth.

“Is that for me?” he asks, staring at the sky. Multicolored shadows flit across his face.

I nod as much as I can with his hand locked on my chin.

“Beautiful,” he says, but he’s looking at me.

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ABOUT RENEE ROSE

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR RENEE ROSE loves a dominant, dirty-talking alpha hero! She's sold over a million copies of steamy romance with varying levels of kink. Her books have been featured in USA Today's *Happily Ever After* and *Popsugar*. Named Eroticon USA's Next Top Erotic Author in 2013, she has also won *Spunkylife*'s Favorite Sci-Fi and Anthology author, *The Romance Reviews* Best Historical Romance, and *has* hit the *USA Today* list five times with various anthologies.

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ABOUT LEE SAVINO

Lee Savino is a USA today bestselling author, mom and chocoholic.

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