

# Eternally OWNED

A DARK VAMPIRE ROMANCE



NYT and USA Today Bestselling Author

EDEN BRADLEY

# ETERNALLY OWNED



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*Midnight Playground, Book I*



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## CHAPTER ONE



*London, 2069*

Nissa was not the kind of girl who put up with shit from anyone. Pushing her way through the crowded tube platform and toward the green-tiled tunnel leading to the stairs —and shoving aside a morphie begging for change—she wished the ancient escalators still worked. Not that much in London had worked since the Anti-Monarchy riots in 2040, the year of her birth—the riots where her parents had died doing nothing more than trying to make their way home to her and her grandmother.

Nana had been gone for twelve years now, leaving Nissa alone in the flat in Camden Town, next to what was left of Regent's Park, but she was used to it. Being on her own since the age of seventeen had taught her to be independent, street-smart, and savvy about the rough world she lived in. She knew how to walk through a dark neighborhood without getting mugged, knew what to do about it if it did happen. She went where she liked, slept with whomever she liked, then kicked him out the next day without looking back. She was used to being entirely without connections, and that was exactly how she wanted things.

And being on her own meant there was no one to miss her if things went the way she hoped they would tonight.

Using her elbows and the occasional stomp of her stiletto-heeled boots, she finally got to the stairs, her legs pumping as she moved toward the small halo of dark sky above. Careful to keep a watchful eye on the others around her, she gripped her stunstick in her hand in case anyone tried anything. These dense crowds were even more dangerous than walking down a dark, empty street alone. Not that she would usually be so foolish, armed or not.

She was always armed.

Smacking away a groping hand just as she reached the top of the stairs, she turned her head and caught sight of a cocky grin on a handsome face—a pretty enough blond boy with a wicked gleam in his cool, grey eyes.

“Sorry, love.” He winked at her, giving her a quick nod as she moved away.

He really was pretty, and perhaps on a different night she would have encouraged him, but she’d had her fill of beautiful boys. Tonight she had much more in mind, and it had taken her too damn long to get this invitation for her to risk screwing it up over a common beautiful boy.

The damp air hit her as she pushed her way outside into the cold night, stepping over a pile of broken concrete.

“So much for the joys of the New Democracy,” she muttered under her breath.

There was never anyone around to clean up the streets after a bombing, and you had to watch your step everywhere you went, other than in the most exclusive neighborhoods. But Nissa never went to such places.

She moved down the block, into the heart of the old theatre district that now housed nightclubs, pubs and cafés, shops selling leather goods, personal protection devices, and sex toys. Jagged bolts of neon light reflected in puddles in the street, making glowing pools of eerie watercolor.

Noise came from every direction—the low rumble of voices, the rattle of an engine as a car, heavy with armor, passed by, the scratchy cry of a street player’s guitar somewhere, and in the distance, the shrill of sirens that seemed to be ever-present in London. She could smell the damp as it worked its way through her worn wool pea coat and into her bones, along with the scents of wet cement, smoke, the acrid smell of unwashed humanity, and the press of too damn many people.

Walking faster, she passed a group of morphies huddled in a doorway, a woman passed out in their midst as they muttered over her, passing a pipe around with shaking hands and glazed eyes. One called out to her, asking for money. She turned her head, moving faster. As if she’d be fool enough to take out her purse in Soho at night.

Anyway, she had someplace important to be, and she didn’t want to be late.

Someplace crucial—the place she’d dreamed of for years.

Midnight Playground.

She turned the corner onto Shaftesbury Avenue, and there it was.

The old Palace Theatre stood like an elegant fortress of red brick and arched windows, surrounded by high, intricate, iron gates to keep the rabble out. Nissa pulled in a breath, ignoring the London stench.

She was here, at the most exclusive vampire club in London. The most exclusive sex club. There was a Midnight Playground in nearly every major city in Europe: Berlin, Paris, Rome, Madrid, Amsterdam, Prague. These places were nearly impossible to get into—for humans, anyway—and they never accepted anyone over thirty into their membership. At twenty-nine, Nissa was close to being excluded forever, but she’d managed it, finally. Or her friend Ilana had managed it for her.

She moved in, tucking her stunstick into the pocket of her coat and clipping it into its harness, then flipping open the hidden pocket that held her identification and invitation as she approached the gates. The bouncers

were a pair of hulking, bald figures in black leather trench coats, arms crossed over massive chests.

She nodded to them. “I have an invitation.”

Holding it out, she pinched the heavy velum between her fingers, running her fingertips over the raised lettering and the embossed Celtic dragon’s head logo that matched the design in the center of the towering iron gates of the club.

One of the bouncers held his beefy hand out. “Let’s have a look.”

Nissa narrowed her eyes, looking for the telltale tinge of pink in the skin. Human. She supposed a vampire wouldn’t have to work as a gate bouncer. Vampires were an elite society—revered, feared. Desired.

She shivered even thinking about it, thinking about *them*. About the inherent sense of power that radiated from the few she’d ever come upon.

“Identification,” one of the enormous men demanded, and she handed it over. He glanced at the other man, holding out the invitation for him to peruse, as well as her ID.

“Is there a problem?” she asked, her heart thundering.

Both men turned to her. One held her identification up to the lamp mounted on the gate, then gave a sharp jerk of his chin. “You’re in, girl.”

Her heart lurched as the gate opened, and she stepped through and into another world altogether.

Immediately, the air seemed to clear of the ever-present London gloom, even to smell better, which was impossible, of course. But she was there, through the gate and walking up to the heavy iron doors, her boot heels ringing in her ears.

She was asked for her ID once more at the doors by another leather-clad bouncer, then she was ushered through, into a dark foyer lit only by red neon lights. There, an exquisite young woman in a short, tight leather dress palmed her identification card and silently helped her out of her coat, turning to take it away.

“Wait.” Nissa reached out and grabbed the girl’s shoulder. “Where are you taking my things?”

“You won’t need them here—everything you could ever need is inside. Everything, and things you’ve never imagined. Don’t worry, you’ll have your belongings back when you leave. If you do.”

The girl smiled, but Nissa understood she wasn’t joking.

She clenched her teeth. She hated to lose sight of her stunstick, even though she’d been told in advance that no weapons were allowed inside the club, but she’d been taking care of herself long enough that she felt naked without it.

Another woman approached, dressed as the first and every bit as beautiful. “I’ll take you to your sponsor.”

Nissa followed her through a pair of heavy velvet drapes that hid another iron door. On it was the dragon’s head, the insignia of the Midnight Playground, teeth bared, long tongue snaking out. The eyes were set with fiery red stones that caught bits of light, dazzling her vision for a moment. There was a cool draft of air as the curtain was pushed aside, then there was nothing but a slow, pulsing heat as the light shifted from red to gold in a sort of anteroom off the main club floor. Through another arched and curtained doorway Nissa could hear the primal beat of the music playing inside, enticing her, teasing her, an invitation to all she’d ever wanted. Her heart was racing, her palms growing damp.

Ilana was suddenly at her side in a faint cloud of perfume. She smelled like smoke and flowers and sex.

“There you are, Nissa. Excited?”

“Yes, absolutely.”

“Nervous?”

“Yes. Equally that.”

“You should be.”

Her friend was taller than she was by several inches, a willowy blonde whose narrow face was softened by a tousled head of wavy hair and enormous blue eyes. They'd met two years earlier in an online group of people who yearned to enter the vampire clubs. They'd quickly identified each other as those few who were truly serious about it, as opposed to those who played with the idea of having sex with vampires, of giving in to the Seeking Kiss, that sexual drinking of blood offered to a fortunate few. It was given only to the beautiful, the young, and those of a certain intelligence. When Ilana gained entrance a year ago, Nissa had been envious, making her feel farther from her goal than ever, yet somehow also understanding that it was actually possible. Agonizing. And now, wonderful beyond imagining.

"I still can't quite believe I'm here," she confided to her friend. "Ilana, thank you for making this happen."

She shrugged. "I didn't do much. They liked the way you answered your profile questions. And your pictures, of course. They wouldn't have chosen you simply on my recommendation. All a sponsor can do is vouch for how seriously you take this, how much you want it. And you want it as much as anyone I've ever met, even the humans here at the club. You're meant for this, Nissa." Ilana gave a small frown. "Probably more than I am myself."

She stood back, her blue gaze taking Nissa in from head to toe. It was a bit intimidating—Ilana was always a bit intimidating. She was elegant, cool, a little detached, almost as if she were a vampire already. But she hadn't taken the Turning Kiss yet, or it hadn't been offered to her. Nissa had never asked. It was far too personal a question, and the stakes too high, especially with them both facing their thirtieth birthdays. That was something those who had sworn to be one of *them* someday never spoke of.

"Do I look all right, Ilana?"

Nissa ran her hands over the short, tight silver skirt barely grazing the tops of her thighs, where her high black boots nearly met the hem, her black latex shirt with the buckles running from elbow to wrist. She'd spent a week's wages on it from her job as a barmaid. Didn't matter. All that mattered was that she was here, that she looked good enough, that she be invited to stay. And eventually, to become one of them.

"You look great. Adore the boots, and the whole outfit. Well done. And your hair is perfect, long and loose, just as they like it." Ilana reached out, touching the tips of Nissa's hair, twisting it between her fingers. "Black as midnight, smooth as silk." Ilana smiled at her. "They're going to fucking love you. They're going to eat you up."

A shiver ran through Nissa's body, a small frisson of energy that seemed to light up her skin. She felt as if she were hyperaware of everything around her, of her own heartbeat, even the aura of excitement emanating from Ilana that matched her own, despite her friend's outer composure. And the beginnings of a faint, warm pulse between her thighs at what was to come, what she was about to see.

"All right, Nissa, we've been over the rules," Ilana said. "You know the vampires are without disease, and they certainly can't get you pregnant, so there's no need for protection, is there? But other than that, anything and everything can and will happen in the club. You can watch whatever you like, if it's done publicly, but don't approach any group without being invited, or any individual unless they're human."

"How will I know for certain?"

"You'll know. It's unmistakable." Nissa nodded.

"And if you're offered a Kiss, the Seeking Kiss," Ilana went on, laying a hand on her arm and catching and holding her gaze, "don't turn it down unless you intend never to come back."

"I won't. I am as serious about this as you are, Ilana, you know that."

Ilana gave her a wry smile. “Some people find they’ve bitten off more than they can chew when faced with the reality of a vampire coming at their neck.”

“That won’t happen to me.”

Ilana was quiet a moment, watching her carefully. “No, I don’t think it will. You’ve dreamed of this as long as I have, but I’m required as your sponsor to make sure you’re clear on how things work. If one of them wants to drink from you, well, that’s now our entire purpose in life, isn’t it, love? To serve them in any capacity they ask of us, and to do it gracefully, and with the utter devotion they demand. But no, I don’t believe that will be a problem for you.”

“And the Turning Kiss? We’re allowed to choose if we want it from the one who offers, aren’t we?”

“Yes, we can choose who we want to accept immortality from, who we want to spend eternity with. But I don’t know that’s ever happened, a human turning down such a gift. I can’t imagine any vampire offering it without good reason. Why are you even thinking of such a thing?”

Nissa shrugged. She didn’t want to admit to the way her blood raced through her veins, her pulse hot and thready, but she had to make some explanation for asking again about things Ilana had already gone over with her. “Just nervous, I guess. I have to admit, my mind is spinning a bit.”

“That’s natural. You’d have to be completely mad not to be nervous your first time here, or maybe even your tenth. Just keep that shit to yourself, though, love. You can talk to me about it, but don’t bring it up with any of *them*. Come on, I’ll take you to the bar.”

She held back the heavy gold velvet drape and Nissa walked through, and into her deepest, darkest fantasy.

## CHAPTER TWO



He watched her walk into the club, all defiant bravado, but he could smell the sharp scent of fear beneath. The new ones were always a little scared, but this little one had only an edge of it. Maybe the bravado wasn't all defiance.

Hex had been just like that when he'd entered the club in Paris ten years ago, when he'd met Aleron. He'd been so damned ready. He hadn't regretted a moment of his decision. What could there possibly be to regret? Aleron was perfection.

He turned his attention back to the new girl. Sleek, long, dark hair like a curtain around her slender shoulders and nearly to her tiny waist. A tight little body with breasts perhaps just a bit too full for her small frame. Lovely. One of those pouting doll mouths that made the need to kiss her almost perverse—a sweet baby-mouth, pink and full. She would look innocent if it weren't for her eyes. They were green, tilted at the corners. Feline. Fierce.

Pulling in a deep breath, he took in her fragrance from across the room, separating out the perfumes and sweat of the others, the alcohol, the cigarette smoke, the hash smoke. Yes, there she was, like honey, as sweet and innocent as her face, except that there was a dark musk underneath it that spoke very clearly of sex, of desire. Oh yes, this one wanted to be here,

to be among the vampires. Wanted the bite of their razor sharp teeth, and everything else that went with it.

*Have to show her to Aleron. Have to have this one.*

She glanced up, and for one moment her gaze caught his. He kept her there for a long moment, until she stumbled, and he let her go. There would be time later, once Aleron arrived. Aleron would help him bring the girl to him. To them.

His groin tightened.

They'd taken many women together, he and Aleron, in the years since Aleron had Turned him in the club in Paris. They'd come to London together only last year, wanting a change of scene. They both loved the British girls—there was a certain hardness about them the French women seemed to lack. And the British boys were beautiful and tough and smart, which was some sort of odd thrill for them both. But the boys were almost too easy. He and Aleron fulfilled each other's need for men anyway. It was the girls Hex wanted, that Aleron craved.

Yes, they would bring the girl to *them*. Together. He could hardly wait.



The pulsing beat of the music seemed to push Nissa across the room as effectively as Ilana's hand on her shoulder. She barely had time to take in the multilevel dance floor, the old balconies of the theatre hung with their golden scrollwork and life-sized cupids, paused as if about to take flight. The rest of the place went by in a blur: marble walls, enormous vases filled with exotic flowers she'd never seen before—it was all insanely lush. But her mind wasn't on her surroundings—she could hardly think at all, her pulse was thrumming so hard, making her hot all over. Except it wasn't her pulse causing the heat to shoot through her system like a small, delicious bomb going off inside her.

It was that man—that vampire—looking at her. Not just looking, but *looking*. Into her. *Seeing* her.

She shivered as though he'd touched her skin, could almost feel the cool contact of his immortal flesh.

Ilana had been right—there was no mistaking them for human. His dark gaze glittered as though filled with the distant light of the stars, and it was searing, searching, in a way no human's possibly could. Even in the dim, throbbing glow of the club lights, his skin was luminous, his lips impossibly lush, smooth and pink. He had one of those compact, muscular bodies, broad shoulders beneath his white T-shirt, narrow hips in his black leather pants. And he seemed impossibly clean, somehow, in a way she didn't quite understand—she wasn't even certain what she meant by the words as they filled her mind. All she really understood was that she wanted him, with a simmering desire she could barely contain.

But Ilana was gesturing her toward the long marble-topped bar at one end of the enormous room.

“Nissa, have a drink with me. It’ll calm you down.”

“What? All right. I’ll have a scotch, I guess.”

“You seem a bit... distracted.”

“No, I’m fine.”

“I saw him.”

“Who?”

“That dark one watching you—over there. You can’t miss the way they look at you when one of them zeros in on you, and he is laser focused on you right now, love.”

“Oh.” Nissa smoothed her hair from her face. She was always utterly confident when it came to men, but this was entirely different. *He* was different. He wasn’t a man, after all, but so much more. “It’s just... a lot to take in at first. I’ll be perfectly fine in a moment. Better after a drink.”

“Just don’t drink too much. They won’t let you here, you know.”

“Yes, I know. And I never get drunk—I don’t like feeling out of control. Just something to take the edge off, but only the barest bit. I’m rather liking the edge in this place. I want to feel everything.”

Ilana smiled at her. “I thought you might. There is a certain thrill simply being here. It’s like nothing else in the world.”

Nissa smiled back. “I didn’t want it to be.”

“That’s why you’re here, why you’ve been accepted. They always know who can really handle this, and who can’t. I’m told they’ve never made that sort of mistake.”

“That doesn’t surprise me. They seem... all-knowing. But then, I suppose you learn an awful lot in a hundred years, in three-hundred years.”

“Yes, but it’s more than that, of course. They’re different, super-human in ways I don’t think we can even comprehend until we become one of them.” Ilana gave a small shiver.

“You want that very much, don’t you?” Nissa asked.

“Of course. Don’t you? Don’t we all, all of us humans in this place?”

“I don’t understand how anyone wouldn’t want this. I’m so ready to get started.”

“Let’s get you that drink, then. You’ll need to get yourself pulled together before he comes over to talk to you.”

Ilana turned and ordered Nissa’s scotch and a vodka for herself. Nissa lifted her drink and sipped, her gaze wandering around the room. It was frankly thrilling as hell when she spotted a vampire among the humans, and after a few minutes, impossible not to recognize them immediately. They were the most beautiful creatures she had ever seen, every single one of them, although they came in every form. But all of them had that same flawless, gleaming skin like polished marble, eyes sparkling like jewels, with the most enormous pupils. The way they moved, with absolute grace, as though their limbs were made of liquid, was like a dance in itself. And

that aura of power they seemed to wear like a halo was intoxicating, even from a distance.

“Nissa?”

“What? Sorry. Were you saying something?”

“I asked if you’re done with your drink.”

“Oh, yes, sure. I’m finished.” She swallowed the last bit of amber liquid and set her empty glass on the long polished bar. “What now?”

“Do you need me to go over anything else with you? How this works?”

“We’ve already discussed it all, haven’t we?”

They had talked at length, and Nissa had read over and over again the material that had been dropped at her flat by courier—a courier, for God’s sake, in these times. She knew all about the club itself, how the vampires had taken over the old theatre fifteen years earlier when the London culture could no longer support live theatre. She knew that those who entered Midnight Playground clubs were offering themselves as servants, sexual partners without limit. She knew about the Seeking Kiss, in which they would drink from her during sex, or while dancing, or possibly at any time while she was the club. And if she were very lucky, one would offer her the Turning Kiss, the ultimate gift of eternity.

She shivered, a long shimmering undulation of desire working its way up her spine.

“I’m afraid I have a date,” Ilana went on, “so I’ll have to leave you on your own now.”

“He’s gone,” she murmured, looking for the dark, beautiful vampire who’d had his eyes on her. “But I expected you’d wander off at some point. I’ll be fine.”

She always was. But she couldn’t deny the nerves trembling in her stomach, making her neck hot and tight.

“He’ll be back for you. Or he’ll beckon you. Either way, you won’t be alone for long. Meanwhile, if you go through the doors at the back of the

auditorium you'll find a handful of small, semi-private rooms with tables and booths, for drinking, eating, talking. On the next floor up are the sex rooms. You're welcome to watch if a curtain is open. If it's closed, walk on. You'll find a large, central room for more public displays, and on the top floor is the dungeon, if you're ready for that."

Nissa's heart sped up, knocking in her veins like a hammer. "I'm ready for anything."

"You'll be all right?"

"Ilana, I am here because I wanted this. All of it. To meet them, to become one of them. And to be touched by them. To have them drink from me. I understand perfectly what I am getting myself into. I wouldn't be here if I hadn't been well educated as to what goes on in this place. I want this. I've waited so long, and I'm dying to get started frankly. Trust me, there is no overload for me."

Ilana smiled once more. "Ah, they really will love you."

"I hope so."

"All right, love. I'll ring you in a few days. Don't expect to see me again tonight."

Nissa smiled, nodded.

Her adventure was about to begin.

She knew exactly where she wanted to go. She didn't want to hang out in the bar, far too impatient to sit there and wait for one of them to approach her. No, she wanted to dive right in, to see it all. She was growing damp simply thinking about it, her heart a thundering beat.

She moved into a hallway lit by dimly glowing wall sconces. Even in the faint golden glow she could see the walls paneled in marble and onyx, everything perfectly polished, gorgeous. In front of her was a wide marble staircase carpeted in plush red, the railings in intricate gilt. People lounged on the stairs, talking and drinking. And there were several of *them*. Vampires. A male with waist-length, dark hair, gorgeous olive skin, and a

high forehead, his black eyes glittering like twin orbs of polished jet, was surrounded by four women in all shapes and sizes. All of them beautiful, of course, and scantily dressed in jewel-toned silk. Nissa watched as he threw his head back and laughed, light glinting off the sharp canines at the corners of his lips.

They were too exquisite, these creatures. They needed a more glamorous name, something less sinister. But what were they if not sinister? These men and women who lived off human blood, who essentially took humans as their slaves, no matter how willing.

Oh God, she was willing...

Breathing in the musky nighttime perfume of the vampire, she moved up the stairs past him, past his small harem of beauties. Somehow she sensed she was not for him, so she didn't pause.

At the top of the grand staircase a hallway led in both directions, decorated with the same tall panels of onyx and marble, punctuated here and there by gilt-trimmed, marble-topped tables holding more of the tall vases of rare, real flowers she'd seen downstairs. Lilies, she thought, remembering pictures she'd seen in a book. Their perfume was intoxicating as she passed by, seeming to cling to her skin. And she remembered the stories her Nana had told her, of the flower garden she'd had before the riots, the scents of earth and flowers blooming. But she couldn't think of all that now: Nana, her long lost childhood. There was too much grief at all that had been lost. And there was too much happening at this moment.

The first curtained doorway was closed tight with a knotted golden cord pulled across it, as was the next one. But the silk drape at the third doorway was parted. Nissa stood uncertainly for a moment before stepping close enough to peer inside.

In the small room were a female vampire and a human male on a high bed draped in blood-red velvet, both of them gloriously naked. The woman straddled his body, her hands on her small, firm breasts, twisting the dark

red nipples while he bucked beneath her. Her curling brown hair hung in a graceful cascade down her back, swinging as she moved, her hips pumping, his thrusting up to meet hers. The only sound was a quiet panting, the steady beat from the music downstairs nothing more than background, like the pulsing of blood through the veins.

The woman turned to look at her, a small smile on her lovely face, revealing her eyeteeth. Then, lifting the young man's hand to her lips, and with her gaze steady on Nissa's and a smile still on her lush mouth, she bit into his wrist—just the tips of her fangs sinking in, causing two small trickles of blood to weep from the wounds. The man sighed as her tongue darted out, licking at the blood. He groaned then, a deep sound coming from his throat as she planted her mouth over his wrist and sucked in earnest. And all the time Nissa stood shivering with need and heat. But the woman turned her attention back to the man, and Nissa was not invited to join them.

*These two are not for me.*

Her body burning, she moved down the hallway, passing several more closed curtains. She was more certain than ever that this was what she wanted, craved. *Needed*. She passed several doorways, open in invitation, without looking in. Something made her keep moving down the curving hallway. Something compelled her.

When she found another parted curtain, she knew this was where she was meant to stop. What did that even mean? But she didn't have time to think about it. She could hear quiet moans coming from inside, and it was as if those quiet sighs were hands smoothing over her skin. And as she approached the doorway, the scent that came to her was earthy and dark. Pure sex. When she looked in, her heart stuttered.

Two males, vampires both, twined together, stood naked in the small room. One was tall, well over six feet, with short spiky hair in such a pale shade of platinum blond it appeared almost white. His skin was as milky as

the marble panels on the walls and looked just as hard and smooth. He had long, lean muscles, his thighs strong, the curve of his buttocks and back a flawless flow of lines. His mouth was on the throat of his partner, working, sucking, one hand on the other male's back, holding him close, the other hand behind his dark head.

And the dark one...

He was the one she'd seen downstairs in the main room, that midnight stare that went right through her. She could only see his profile, his full lips parted in ecstasy, but she knew it was him. She *felt* him.

He was all hard-packed muscle beneath naked skin, gold and gleaming and so incredibly beautiful, just looking at him made her breath catch in her throat. His hand was between the taller man's thighs, his fingers stroking his partner's long, hard cock.

*Oh God...*

Desire lanced into her body, a hard shock of it like lightning, like fire. She was shaking. The tall one drew his mouth from the dark one's throat, leaving a small smear of blood that ran in a tiny rivulet over his collarbone and down his broad chest, bright scarlet against that golden skin. Nissa licked her lips.

*Yes, to have my own mouth there. To have them do these things to me...*

The tall one turned the other in his arms and pulled his muscular body in close, broad bronzed back to his angular, pale chest. With one hand he stroked slowly down his back, then using his sharp nails, he punctured the skin at the edge of one shoulder blade. Nissa heard a sharp hiss from the dark one, but she knew it was in pleasure, not pain. The blond leaned in and licked at the droplets of blood, and they both moaned, a low hum in the back of their throats. Her body was weak with desire, warm, her pussy soaking wet and aching. She squeezed her thighs together, but it didn't help. And she was held there, enraptured, unable to turn away.

The tall one slid his palm over that lovely golden skin, down and down, until he reached the smooth curve of his buttocks. He slipped a hand in between them and the dark one tensed for a moment, then his hips surged back, angling so that Nissa could see his hard, golden cock, not as long as the other's, but thick, the head dark and succulent.

*Have to touch him, to take him in my mouth. Yes...*

As she watched, enthralled, the blond lifted his head, his gaze meeting hers. His eyes were a piercing, shocking blue, with large black pupils, and she saw in them the depth and knowledge of centuries. It was as much a shock as the keen desire knifing into her system. And as she watched, he parted the younger vampire's buttocks and thrust his cock in.

The dark one cried out, his head thrown back, his neck corded, and Nissa felt it as though her own body had been impaled. She was shivering with pleasure, the pulsebeat between her damp thighs nearly unbearable, and the tall one watched her still, his blue gaze unwavering on her face. When he began to pump his hips, the dark beauty pushing back against him, she swore she felt a stirring deep in her body, a ghost of sensation, too powerful to deny. With a shock, she felt that long, marble-pale cock pushing into her pussy, feeding her desire. Stronger and stronger as she watched them together, watched them fucking in some beautiful and purely animal way. She grasped the edge of the doorway next to her, her fingers twisting in the heavy curtain.

Their bodies were perfect, unbelievable. And as pale flesh came down upon golden muscle, she began to really shake, pleasure rising in one hot wave after another. She watched them both, but even with the blond one's gaze on hers, she silently prayed for the dark one to turn to her.

*See me...*

He lifted his head as if he'd heard her silent plea, one hand reaching back to grasp the tall one's thigh. His head angled and his dark gaze landed on her face.

Another shock, pure pleasure, like a wall coming down on her. And all at once she could feel that lovely cock thrusting into her pussy and ass at the same time, and she realized they were inside her head somehow, that they were feeding her sensation in some inexplicable way, and sharing with her their own.

The blond one held out his hand.

“We’ve been waiting for you, Nissa.”

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## CHAPTER THREE



Her mind was emptying out, too much sensation going on to think, too much of her most treasured fantasies come to life. Was this really happening?

But the tall one pulled out, stepping away from his partner, and reached out to take her hand. His skin was hard and cool on the surface, with a strange sort of warmth lurking beneath. He drew her in, and the dark one stood, his arms coming around her body from behind. They began to undress her, and it was as though it was all happening in a dream. Except that it was real and she was wide awake, and she knew it. Fantastic.

The tall one stroked her exposed flesh—her collarbone, the top of her breast, and her nipples hardened until they hurt. And all the time she was aware of the dark one's hands on her waist, holding her up, holding her tight to them both. His flesh was a bit softer than the other vampire's, in a way that was difficult to explain, even to herself. So, so beautiful, both of them, and she thought she'd die if they didn't kiss her soon.

“Soon enough,” the blond whispered to her, his voice tinged with a French accent.

She heard his name in her head, like some distant sort of echo. *Aleron*. And then the other, the tone gentler, full of smoke, and she knew his voice would sound just like that. *Hex*.

Their hands were everywhere at once, stroking her thighs, her stomach, her breasts, the small of her back. Their mouths followed, their lips surprisingly warm as Aleron lifted her arm and trailed kisses down that sensitive skin on the inside of her forearm, Hex kissing her back. Small, fleeting kisses, too fleeting. Pleasure like fire skittering over her skin, making her tremble. Her pussy was soaked, throbbing. *Needing.*

“We hear you,” Aleron told her quietly.

Hex took her then, turning her in his arms so that she faced him. The masculine beauty of his face was staggering, his eyes so dark they were nearly as black as his hair, with shots of whiskey and amber lighting them, and unbelievably long lashes. His mouth was ripe, the tips of his eyeteeth resting on that lush flesh. She swallowed, unable to speak, to think. He smiled at her, and his smile was like pleasure itself, working its way deep inside her body.

“We know you, Nissa,” he said, his voice that low, husky whisper she’d known it would be. “We know you, and we are here to give you what you need, what you desire.

We can feel it in you—we can *hear* it. You want *us*, yes?”

She nodded her head, her throat dry, and it was several moments before she was able to speak. “Yes. Yes...”

“And we want you. Beautiful Nissa. Beautiful girl. It’s as though you were made especially for us. We believe that, you know, Aleron and I—that there are always a few special ones, destined to be ours. And you are one of those. I knew it the moment you walked into the room, as Aleron knew it the moment he read you in my thoughts.”

She shivered once more, his words, his voice, almost as lovely as his touch. Then he did touch her, his hands gathering her bare breasts, kneading them gently, then a bit harder. And she leaned into him, sighing with pleasure as he took her nipples between his fingers, pinching, twisting. Oh yes, pleasure and pain and the exquisite knowledge of what they were.

Vampires. Immortals. And she had some sense of the eternity of their existence, as though they fed her a bit of it, along with the ghostly sensations of what each of them was feeling that they transferred to her somehow.

She blinked and found them both staring at her face—blazing blue eyes and hot liquid brown. Aleron gave the slightest nod of his chin before slipping back behind her, his hard body pressed against her spine, like sun-warmed stone. Hex smiled down at her before lowering his face to hers and kissing her.

God, his lips, like nothing she'd ever felt before in her life. Hard and soft, yielding yet unyielding. Then his tongue, as hot and silky as any human's, yet sweeter, more pure, somehow, pushing its way between her lips, twining with her tongue.

*Love him already...*

And the pleasure pushing its way into her body in long, undulating shivers of desire was making her dizzy. She was lost in the kiss, in him.

*Hex.*

Aleron put his hands on her once more, stroking her hips, her thighs, with impossible feather-light strokes. She'd never imagined one of *them* could be so gentle.

And her sex was lighting up with need, wet and hurting.

When Hex pulled away to look into her eyes once more with that riveting gaze, she whispered, “Please touch me.”

Hex's hands came down to cover Aleron's, and together they slipped their palms between her thighs, four sets of fingers brushing the tender skin there, the swollen lips.

“Ohhh...”

She could hardly believe this was happening.

*Don't think. Just feel.*

“Ah, so wet for us,” Aleron whispered into her hair.

“Yes...”

She arched her hips into their touch, but they pulled away.

“Not yet. Not like this,” Aleron said. “I want her on the bed. I want her open to us completely.”

They guided her, helping her climb onto the high, velvet-covered bed, laying her out on her back. They stood, one on each side of the bed, and she was trembling all over.

*Need you. Please.*

Aleron’s voice was so low she had to strain to hear him. “Yes, Nissa. You shall have us both, and we shall have you. With our hands. With our mouths. With our cocks. And with our teeth. We will drink from you. You will have the Seeking Kiss tonight.”

She was shaking so hard she could barely hold still. This was what she’d wanted for so long—to belong somewhere, to have some sense of family again—and it was happening, like some sort of strange dream she never wanted to wake from. Her mind was a tangle of need, sharpened by an edge of fear. What would it really be like, to have them drink from her?

“You are about to find out, beautiful Nissa,” Hex told her. His eyes were glowing amber in the dim light, and she felt some of his power in his gaze. Not as strong as Aleron’s, but it was there, palpable.

“Yes,” Aleron said, his French accent apparent even in that one simple word. “I am older than he is, by centuries. And the Kiss will be different with each of us. But it is always a mixture of pain and pleasure, and you will love it—you will drown in it a little. But we will care for you. You have nothing to fear—nothing but the need you will feel, a need that will drive you. But you will learn to cope with that, and will find it is well worth the great pleasure the Kiss brings, that we bring.”

Their hands were on her then once more, long strokes down the length of her body: her shoulders, her breasts, her stomach, and the sensitive skin

on the inside of her wrists, until she thought she might die simply from needing them to really *touch* her.

“Please...” she begged.

A small laugh from Aleron. “Ah, she grows impatient.”

Before she had a chance to think, his hand was between her thighs, his fingers pushing into her needy pussy.

“Oh!”

Pleasure like a knife—that keen, that sharp—stabbing into her body. Her back arched, and she came up off the bed, but Hex was there, holding her down, his hands warm and solid on her hip and shoulder, grounding her somehow.

“Hex... I need you... I need you to kiss me,” she begged, barely believing she was making demands of these exquisite, powerful creatures.

He smiled, his teeth a stunning flash of white, the long canines glinting. Then he lowered his head, his mouth pressing to hers. His tongue slid into her mouth, all soft and hot and piercing, like Aleron’s fingers working inside her, pushing, pushing, into her pussy, into her mouth. She was writhing on the bed, her body on that lovely edge already. Her mind was spinning.

Hands held her down, pressing onto her belly, her breasts, her thighs, as the first wave hit her. Hex’s tongue was like silk in her mouth, and Aleron’s fingers drove into her, pumping, thrusting, until she couldn’t take it any longer.

She cried out as she came, pleasure shimmering through her in glass-sharp waves. It rose, higher and higher, her body, her mind, filling with nothing but sensation, coursing through her, taking her over. She was yelling now, out of control. Lost.

When she opened her eyes, she was in Hex’s arms, half lying in his lap as he sat behind her on the bed. She could feel the flawless surface of his

chest and stomach against her back, his bare skin an absolute epiphany against hers. Lovely.

Aleron still stood, smiling down at her.

“That was beautiful, Nissa. You are beautiful. But the night just begins.”

They had given her a glass of very good wine, a rich red that slaked her thirst and seemed to help her come back to Earth. She felt... beautifully shattered in some way, and still in a half-dream. But her body knew this was real.

They lounged together on the bed now, propped up on a pile of silk pillows, all of them naked, one of the exquisite vampires on either side of her. Hex had one arm looped around her waist in a possessive manner she loved. She loved the oddly solid feeling of his hard muscles—hard in a way no human’s could be. Aleron was leaning against the pillows, a commanding hand on the back of her neck sending a steady pulsing heat into her system.

“Better now?” Hex asked her, stroking her long hair from her face.

“Yes, better. Better than I’ve ever felt in my life.”

“But you have questions,” Aleron said with his slight accent.

“Yes,” she admitted.

“You’re welcome to ask us anything,” Hex said. She could feel his warm breath in her hair.

She shifted so she could see him better. God, he was as beautiful as anything she had ever seen in her life, outshining even Aleron’s pale, unearthly light. Hex’s gaze on hers was dark, his eyes with that gleaming gold at the center of the deep brown iris. Liquid. Bottomless. She had read about the vampires, of course, and talked to a lot of people about them, but she had never imagined how amazing they would be close up, how flawless, how that aura of power they wore like their own skin would make her melt.

But yes, she had questions. She wanted to know everything.

“I’m not sure where to begin.”

“Begin anywhere. We have all the time in the world,” Aleron said, a small smile on his lush moth, exposing the tips of his fangs.

She smiled. “All right then. What is Hex short for? Or is it?”

Hex and Aleron laughed.

“This is your first question?” Hex asked, grinning, his eyes sparkling. “Not ‘What is it like to be a vampire, or how old are we, or what does blood taste like?’ Very well, then. It’s a nickname, one given to me by Aleron the same night we met. My full name was, unfortunately, Hector Luis Severiano Zacaraís de los Reyes. Part of my Spanish heritage, which I have great respect for, but you can see the need for a nickname.”

“That is a mouthful.”

“So are you, lovely Nissa.”

“You’re making her self-conscious,” Hex said, casting a look at Aleron. “Don’t blush, pretty girl.” He swept her hair back from her cheek. “Go on, ask us more.”

“Well, how did you two meet? How long have you been... together? I mean... is it all right for me to ask such a thing? Or is that too personal?”

Hex nodded. “Anything, as I said. And we vampires have a different sensibility for what might be considered too personal. You’ll get used to that.”

Aleron lifted his hand, stroking a long finger down Hex’s arm as it rested on her waist. “I will tell you our story. It is not a long one, in terms of the existence of our kind. We met in Paris, at the Midnight Playground club there. Hex came into the dungeon. I like a little of the rough play now and then. I love the chains, the floggers—it reminds me of times past in the France I knew as a young man, in some perverse way. I was with a woman that night, but I sensed him the moment he entered the room—I could *smell* him, smell his desire. For me. For the roughness he saw there. I was pulled completely out of the scene I was involved in because I knew instantly he

was for me.” His blue gaze flicked to Hex and a small frisson of energy passed between them. “You understand these things about us, Nissa? That we know these things, that we feel it? That it is some unidentifiable thing, like a sixth sense. Even we do not understand it completely—we only know it exists.”

“Yes. Just as I knew I belonged with you two tonight. I don’t understand it—of course I don’t—but I felt so certain. No, more than certain. I felt right. Compelled to be with you. I still do.”

“Yes, that’s it exactly. That night, nearly ten years ago, I knew Hex was to be mine. I handed the woman, as lovely and eager as she was, over to a friend and went to him. It had been a long time since I’d offered the Turning Kiss to anyone, but to him, I gave it that very first night. We have been together ever since.”

Hex reached over Nissa’s shoulder, smiling, and laid a hand on Aleron’s shoulder. She felt the current sparking between them—mental, sexual. Emotional. She hadn’t expected that, somehow, the emotional connection the vampires might have with each other, and it was as powerful as everything else about them.

“There are often others, but only for a night, and no more.” Hex picked up where Aleron had left off. “We’ve always had each other, but ultimately, it’s just the two of us.”

“Until now, perhaps.” Aleron’s tone was low, his French accent suddenly quite thick.

“What do you mean?”

They couldn’t be talking about her. Could they? Her pulse hammered in her veins, a current of need and hope and the fear that she’d misunderstood—as well as the fear that she had understood exactly what they meant, and what it might mean for her.

“You are meant for us, Nissa,” Aleron went on, “whether for a week or a century remains to be seen. But you are here now for a reason, and you will

be with us for more than this one night. Unless you choose otherwise.”

She was shaking her head, but Hex stilled her, cupping her cheek in his palm.

“Think carefully, Nissa. We will take your blood tonight. And even with those who do this only once, a bond is created. You know already that your admittance to the club is representative of your desire to do these things. But anything further, giving *yourself* over to us in any more permanent manner, that we have to hear from your lovely lips.”

“I can hardly think at all, I’ll admit that to you,” she told them. “But I am absolutely certain of this—of my desire to be here with you both. To accept the Seeking Kiss. To be more to you than this one night.” She was shaking again with need so strong, she could barely manage to hold still, to keep her hands at her sides. “I will tell you this too, because I feel I must... I have always enjoyed sex, but everything is different with you. It’s... *more*. Your power is immense—especially yours, Aleron—and I can feel it as if it’s a low vibration in my bones. Power, and this intense, driving attraction... I don’t think I could pull away if my life depended on it. And yet, I *know* you aren’t trying to compel me in the way people speak of in fairy tales. It’s simply who—or what—you are. And no matter what I’ve been told by my sponsor, I didn’t expect this. But I want it, yes. I want you, both of you.”

She turned her head to Hex, then to Aleron, and found them both smiling at her. Then Aleron pulled her in and kissed her.

His lips were harder than Hex’s beneath the velvet-soft surface. As her hands came up to rest on his stone-smooth shoulders, she found the rest of him to be the same, and wondered how ancient he was. But in moments she was lost in the wet heat of his mouth, his snaking tongue, his hands in her hair. And God, the touch of his lips on hers, the strange hardness that was also unbelievable softness—she couldn’t begin to describe it to herself, but it was unlike anything she’d ever felt before. It was as if she’d discovered

some new sort of sensuality, and her body was responding like mad. She felt almost as if she could come again simply from the vampire's kiss.

Together, they pulled her down, laying her on the bed with Aleron's hand at the back of her neck. Hex slid over her, incredibly strong, sinuous muscle gliding over her breasts, her stomach, between her thighs, and she was soaking wet once more, her legs parting, opening herself to him.

*Please... touch me. Kiss me.*

Aleron's tongue pushed deeper, sliding, sliding, exploring her mouth. He tasted of wine, though he hadn't drunk any. Hex's lips were on her skin, his tongue flicking at her nipple. She gasped into Aleron's mouth, and his hands came around to hold her face, keeping her still as Hex sucked her hard nipple into his mouth.

Pleasure raced over her skin, into her system, an electric arc that threatened to burn her alive. Hex's mouth at her breast, sucking, licking, making her pussy pulse with hunger. He pushed her breasts together, his tongue gliding over one peaked nipple, and then the other, his fingers kneading her flesh. Her hips arched, wanting to feel his body, and found his strong thigh between hers. She pressed upward, wrapping one leg around his, until her sex met the hard muscle of his thigh. She was slick against him, her flesh slipping against his, and growing wetter and wetter every moment.

Aleron kissed her harder, his mouth responding to her driving hunger, his hands firm on her cheeks. She was overcome, one sensation melding into the next. And when Hex slid lower, his head moving between her thighs, his silky hair tickling the skin there, she cried out against Aleron's lips.

"Spread for him, our beautiful Nissa," he whispered to her.

She did, letting her legs fall open, and Hex pushed them wider, then settled between them. Her sex quivered deep inside in anticipation. And then she felt his warm breath against her swollen pussy lips.

“Oh,” she breathed.

Aleron kissed her cheek, the corners of her mouth. His tongue darted out to tease her lips as Hex’s tongue flicked the tip of her clit, and it was as if it were all one sensation, somehow.

“Oh!”

Pleasure lanced into her, biting deep into her belly, spreading outward, into her limbs. Hex’s hands slipped beneath her buttocks, holding onto her, and as Aleron plunged his tongue into her mouth, Hex thrust his tongue into her aching pussy.

It was too much, too much, as they both used their tongues to impale her—soft, hot, damp flesh in her mouth, in her pussy. And Hex’s fingers digging into her buttocks, Aleron’s hands holding her face still, as though he never intended to let her go.

*Never let go...*

As if in answer, Hex sucked her hard clitoris into his mouth, sucking, sucking, his fingers slipping into her needy sex. And she was coming, so damn hard she was out of her head. Her hips bucked as pleasure shimmered inside her, shocking, electric, scorching her inside and out. And as she came Hex plunged his fingers deep inside her, pulling his mouth from her still-pulsing clit, and replaced his tongue with strong, stroking thumbs, driving her climax on.

“You are ours,” Aleron whispered against her mouth before kissing her again, his tongue driving deep.

Somehow through the hammering waves of her orgasm, she felt Hex’s lips soft on the inside of her right thigh, at that apex so close to her sex, then the sharp pleasure as he sank his teeth into her flesh.

Her head reeled, her orgasm exploding in a blinding flash—dizzying, powerful, out of control. Pleasure rolled over her, again and again, pounding into her body, and all she could do was give in to it, give herself over to *them*. Lovely, shattering, leaving her weak and breathless. And in

between the hot flood of pleasure were brief, hazy images, as though she were peeking through a fluttering curtain: Hex in Aleron's arms for the first time, the older vampire's teeth sinking in, drinking from him. Hex's delirium as pleasure rose in his body, as it came crashing over him, taking him under, then that strange sensation of his body changing, everything clear and unbelievably brilliant. The two of them taking a lovely woman, a beautiful young man. Lust, hunger, fed and sated. And through it all, her orgasm like a thundering wave pressing her down into the bed, into their hard and waiting hands.

It seemed to go on forever, even as they gathered her into their arms, kissing her cheeks, her mouth, her eyelids. It was like an endless climax, surges of pleasure still skittering over her skin, through her veins, the scent of her own blood tangy in the air.

And she floated, safe in their arms, in her dreams of Hex, of Aleron, of the Seeking Kiss.

She was part of them now.

Soon it really was too much, and the world went black.

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## CHAPTER FOUR



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## CHAPTER 4

She awoke to a diffused, pale light behind her eyelids. Opening her eyes, she blinked, taking in her surroundings.

She wasn't at the Midnight Playground any longer, but in a big bed covered in a blanket of midnight-blue velvet. The light was seeping in through sheer curtains at a trio of tall, paned windows. Outside she could see the tops of trees, their leaves such a dark green they were nearly black in the early morning light. The walls of the room were covered in striped damask paper, as she'd only ever seen before in books with images of stately old English houses. The ceiling soared overhead, the center domed and decorated with plaster scrollwork. It was an incredible place. Other than the club itself, she had never been anyplace so luxurious.

Stretching, she realized she was naked, and that Hex was lying beside her. When she turned her head, his dark gaze was on her face.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to startle you." He reached out, drawing one finger along her jaw. "But I can't stop looking at you. You've been so beautiful these past hours as you slept."

She didn't know what to say in response. When was the last time a man had unsettled her? But this wasn't a man.

"Where am I?"

"Aleron's house in Highgate. If you look out the windows, you'll see Highgate Cemetery. Aleron has an odd sense of humor at times."

Hex grinned at her, and she had a first real glimpse of the part of him that was still human. Her heart surged, but she only smiled back.

"He's gone, off on some business having to do with the club. I don't ask. He should be home in an hour or so. We often sleep in here during the day, so he'll want his bed soon enough—especially with you in it, pretty girl. You slept well. Are you still tired?" he asked her.

"No, not tired. I feel good. Just a bit dreamy."

“Yes, that’s part of it, taking the Kiss, especially for the first time.”

“Was I... Was it all right then? I mean...” She pushed her hair from her face. “God, I sound like a girl with her first lover.”

“It’s fine—and usual, under these circumstances. You’ll probably feel strange for a few days. It gets easier, in time. Meanwhile, you can stay here with us. We’ll care for you.”

“I should go home at some point. To... God, I don’t know. Nothing seems very important right now.”

He shrugged, an almost feline motion of his gorgeously muscled shoulders. “That’s normal too. You may need a bit of time alone at some point to get your head around what’s happened to you.”

“Was that how it was for you?”

“No. I was in it all the way from the first moment. There was a sort of recklessness about it for me, but I’d always been like that.”

“You’re American,” she realized suddenly. “I’ve been trying to place your accent. It’s faint, and it’s a bit of a mixture.”

“I was, yes. I came to Europe to find adventure when I was eighteen, as soon as I was old enough to leave home, to get a passport without my father’s consent. He was a real bastard, and I couldn’t wait to get away.”

“And your mother? The rest of your family?”

“She died when I was three years old. I never really knew her, and I have no other family in the U.S., no other family I knew well enough to be close with. My father’s temper had isolated us from our relatives.” He shrugged once more. “Leaving was simple for me, which is always the best scenario for our kind. We have to make a new family, and leave the ones we were born to behind. But in my case, there was nothing to miss.”

“I’m sorry. About you having nothing to miss. About whatever you went through with your father, growing up motherless. I understand it. It doesn’t make for an easy life.”

“What’s an easy life in these times, for humans? Ah, don’t think we aren’t aware of that fact, that many of us aren’t sympathetic, even when we use it to our own ends. We vampires are a contradiction in savagery and emotion, even empathy—especially once we drink from you, and can see into your mind, into your past, although some of us don’t want to know, and block it out. And my life...it was nothing more than anyone else goes through, growing up. We all have our history. You lost your parents too.”

“Yes. You know that from drinking from me?”

“I admit I was a bit distracted at the time, but I saw a little of your life, just as you saw some of mine.”

She nodded. “I did.”

“But none of that matters anymore, my human life, my past. It hasn’t since I left home and came to Europe.”

“And is that when you discovered the Midnight Playground?”

“I heard about the vampire clubs as soon as I arrived in Berlin. But Berlin is a hard place—even harder than London—and it was intimidating to me in those days. I never approached the club there. I was young, uncertain, although I wouldn’t have admitted to either at the time. And I was still so angry. I spent another few years traveling all over Europe, took off for Southeast Asia for a year, lived in South America for a while, then came back to Europe—and landed in Paris. I was there for a few days when I met a woman by chance who had been to the club. Or maybe it wasn’t entirely by chance. I’ve always believed in destiny, and when she told me about what went on there, what *really* went on, I knew I had to be there, that I had to find my way in. That I was meant to be a part of that dark life. She offered to sponsor me, and my invitation arrived about a month later, and I met Aleron right away. He offered me the Turning Kiss that first night, as we told you. He is the only vampire I’ve ever taken as a lover.”

“So you’re young, a new vampire. But, Aleron... he seems ancient to me.”

“I know that he’s been on this Earth for several centuries. But again, I don’t ask, not for specifics, or explanations. He tells me what he wants to.”

“I can feel his age—does that make sense?”

“Yes. We can all feel it with the old ones, humans and vampires alike, although humans aren’t nearly as attuned to it as we are with our own kind.”

“I didn’t expect it, to sense what I do with you—and I mean you and Aleron, and maybe all of your kind.”

“No, I don’t imagine you would have. For humans, it happens only if you come close enough, have some contact. What else has been unexpected for you, Nissa?”

He traced his fingertips over her cheek, his gaze searching hers, and a thrill went through her that wasn’t entirely sexual. But she couldn’t figure out yet what was happening to her—it was complete overload, physically and emotionally, but she liked it.

“All of it feels like a surprise, somehow. I learned what I could by reading, by talking with people on the internet, and with my friend Ilana, who helped me get into the club. But I never knew it would be so... intense, which seems sort of silly now. I didn’t know to expect this sense of connection. And being told that you, the vampires, can sense what we think is one thing, but to experience it is something else entirely. There is no way to prepare yourself for this.”

“I felt the same way. Overwhelmed, but wanting it, without question.”

“Yes, exactly.”

“But is this what you wanted, Nissa?”

He leaned over her, his brows drawn together. So beautiful, this man. This vampire, with his gleaming, polished skin, his lush mouth, and those dark eyes that saw inside her head. She wanted to give him everything.

Her stomach clenched. In need. In fear of what she was getting herself into, because for the first time in her life, she wasn’t certain she could keep

her emotions under control. She was out of control already.

“This is all I wanted and more. You are...”

Could she tell him? Could she even admit to herself that while Aleron was exquisite and amazing, a lover beyond any she could have imagined, his power and age compelling, irresistible, it was Hex who drew her in some other, inexplicable way?

“I feel it too,” he whispered urgently. “I feel it, Nissa. I feel you.”

Her heart lurched in her chest, as though it wanted to reach out to him—to this beautiful, powerful creature who made her feel more than she ever had in her life. His arms came around her body, and he rolled onto his back, pulling her on top of him. His hands glided over her skin, her back, her waist, her hips, and it was like being stroked by stone and silk. Then he pulled her up, until they were face-to-face, and he sighed into her mouth as he opened her lips with his tongue.

She was wet immediately, needing, yearning. Her breasts ached against his hard chest, and she had one brief moment to wonder at how different his vampiric body felt from that of a mortal man’s—that strange and lovely hardness beneath the silken skin. And the way he smelled, like the dark earth, yet utterly clean and pure, was absolutely inhuman.



“Nissa. Where is your mind, beautiful girl?” He lifted her wrist to his lips, kissing her there softly.

“This may sound ridiculous to you, but I’m wondering if there’s something almost holy about the body of a vampire, immortal as you are.”

He laughed. “There is nothing holy about us. We aren’t either evil or sacred, we simply *are*, as you are. We all have the power of free will. We make our choices, just as humans do.”

“But do you think it means something, that you live forever? That it means something—says something—about me, that I’ve chosen to be here with you?”

“Well, we *can* live forever, at least in theory. The oldest of us is maybe a thousand years old—we aren’t really certain. And you know we are breathing creatures, that we can be killed by drowning, by suffocation, although it would take one as powerful as we are ourselves to do so. But as to your questioning what it says about someone like you, who comes to us, there are people who make their judgments—of course there are—but only because they’re afraid of what they can’t comprehend.” He kissed her wrist once more, then opened her hand and kissed her palm, making her shiver. “Do you question yourself, Nissa? What you’re doing here? Do you need to make it sacred in order to justify your choices?”

She shook her head. “No, it simply *feels* that way to me. Sacred. A bit above me, maybe.” She stopped, staring into his bottomless dark eyes, her heart hammering in her chest. “*You* feel that way to me.”

“Ah, Nissa. My beauty...”

He could not believe this girl. She was so damn lovely. So wide open to him. They’d taken other girls before, of course, but never, in his human life or in the years of his existence as a vampire, had he found anyone else like her. She was different. He didn’t know why.

But she was squirming on him, her naked flesh pressing into his, and he didn’t want to think anymore. His cock was coming up hard, pressing into her belly. That wasn’t where he needed it to be.

“Nissa,” he whispered into her neck as he pulled her down harder against him. “I am going to fuck you now.”

“Oh, yes please.”

He laughed with the pure joy this girl brought him. Then he reached down and guided his rigid cock between her sweet thighs, up against that wet and waiting hole. Her soft moan made him shiver, pleasure driving into

him as he pressed the head of his cock at her entrance, her hot, soft pussy lips against his rigid flesh were exquisite.

“Now, Nissa.”

He gave one hard, driving thrust, burying himself deep inside her. Loved it when her body arched hard against him, when she cried out his name. He pulled back, desire a hard, scraping need in his belly. Then he began to really fuck her, his hands holding her hips, moving her up and down on his body, plunging deep. He loved the ecstasy on her face, her wild green eyes, her pink lips parted. Grinding into her, he felt her lovely, hot pussy clench around his cock, felt her pleasure as though it were his own, like trembling shafts of pure heat as she began to come.

“Hex! Oh God...”

Tears streamed down her face as she came, a lovely blush rising on her perfect, full breasts, her nipples dark red, swollen. And still he thrust into her soft body. Still she came. He was shaking with pleasure, hard waves of it as he tuned into her climax, felt the thrumming sensations pouring through her body. And he saw in that oddly shadowed way the images and thoughts in her mind, and was shocked to find the only thing there was *him*.

Potent, insistent, dizzying.

There was power in this girl. But he couldn’t think of it. Her sensations were joining with his own, with the feel of her tight pussy wrapped around his pulsing cock. He was going to come at any moment.

He pulled her wrist to his lips, whispered, “Need you, Nissa,” before sinking his teeth in.

She screamed with pleasure as he drank from her, her blood sweet on his tongue, like nectar, and with her blood he drank in her energy, her orgasm. And his own climax rolled over him, like the waves of the ocean—that keen, that powerful.

She was bucking against him, milking his cock, milking his climax, making it her own, until he no longer knew where hers ended and his

began. They were coming together.

They *were* together.



Nissa opened her eyes to find herself in Hex's arms, their bodies twined. Aleron was on Hex's other side, one arm looped over his golden chest. They both slept.

So strange, to see them sleeping. She knew vampires slept, mostly during the daylight hours, being nocturnal by nature. But it was incredible to see them like this, their power banked, slumbering, as they did. This was her fifth day with them—or was it her seventh? Her tenth? She'd lost track. Time had ceased to matter after that very first night. And they had never ceased to amaze her, in every way.

The days and nights had gone by in a blur of naked flesh, the scent of sex, the taste of their flawless skin on her tongue, the overpowering sensation of them taking her blood in the Seeking Kiss, over and over. They had fed her, massaged her, bathed her, all with the greatest care. It was wonderful. Surreal.

She watched them, their slow, even breath causing their chests to rise and fall. Their faces were incredibly beautiful in the late afternoon sunlight shafting in through the high windows. It caught at the tips of their lashes, Hex's thick and black, tipped with blue fire, Aleron's pale gold. The sheets were gathered around their waists, and she thought once more how different they were, how gorgeous the contrast. She loved to see them touch each other. That moment when she'd come upon them at the Midnight Playground, naked and entangled, had been one of the most erotic moments of her life—until they'd invited her to join them.

But something had changed since that first night. Her body craved Aleron's touch, but her heart yearned for Hex.

He'd told her that first morning he felt it too, but did that mean he was simply aware of her need, or that he shared it? She couldn't bring herself to ask him. And who was she, a mere mortal woman, someone they'd just met, to think of taking Hex from Aleron?

She groaned, turning onto her back to stare at the play of light and shadow on the ornate ceiling high overhead. She'd never really been afraid of anything in her life, but she was scared now, absolutely overwhelmed. Not by being with the vampires—no, that was her every erotic dream come to life. What scared her was what she was feeling for Hex, and how quickly it had happened.

She didn't believe in soul mates or any of that nonsense, and that wasn't what was happening here. But *something* was, something powerful. Maybe it was nothing more than the intensity of the vampires, of sex with them, simply *being* with them. And it would be perfectly natural for her—for anyone—to crave one more than the other.

Maybe she needed to stop questioning everything and simply bask in the fulfillment of her desires, of desires she'd never even known she had.

*Hex.*

She turned and found his gaze on her.

"Are you all right, Nissa?" he asked quietly.

"What? Yes. Just thinking."

"Too much perhaps?"

"Perhaps." She smiled, and he smiled back, and once more she could not get over the pure beauty of his face.

"I understand, you know. I remember how it feels to be human in the presence of a vampire. To feel awed by everything. And I'll tell you, I am in awe even now, being with Aleron, being a vampire myself. I still cannot comprehend the eternity of my own existence. But it's also amazing and beautiful."

"Maybe we're not meant to understand it."

“I think Aleron understands much more than I do. He’s had more time to think about it, to get used to the idea. Even my ten years is nothing to such a creature. It’s nothing to me now.”

“Does it ever... frighten you? To know there is no end, ever?”

“The only thing that makes me afraid is the idea of being alone in this long life. But I have Aleron. He would never leave me. I know that.”

Nissa’s heart stuttered in her chest. No, they would never leave each other. Where, then, did that leave her?

Hex reached out and stroked her cheek. “Nissa,” he whispered, “I want you with us. You know that.”

“But does he? Will he have me?”

Damn it, why were tears pricking at her eyes? She never cried. Never.

Hex wiped at her eye with his thumb, watching her, his dark gaze gleaming, intense, as he brought his thumb to his lips and kissed her tears from his skin.

She was shivering all over, with need, with emotion.

Aleron rose then, sitting up to look at her. He took Hex’s hand in his own, kissed his still-damp thumb. “Don’t cry, Nissa. There’s no need. I want you. I want you both.”

He leaned over Hex and pulled Nissa over Hex’s body and into his own arms, and she felt soothed and surprised at how incredibly turned on she was amidst her tears. And as Aleron began to kiss her neck, his soft-strong lips moving down her throat, over her breasts, her nipples came up hard. Hex was stroking her thighs with gentle hands. Her sex grew damp with wanting as Aleron’s cock hardened beneath her buttocks, pushing between them.

“I need you both,” Aleron said, his voice low, his French accent thick.

He picked Nissa up, as though she were nothing in his strong arms, and he held her on his lap with her back to his hard chest, holding her thighs apart until she was spread wide open.

“So beautiful,” Hex murmured, his gaze on her open sex.

Aleron’s hands came around to slide between her legs, his fingers going to work on her aching clit while Hex leaned in to stroke her body with his tongue, long, silky strokes over her stomach, swirling at the undersides of her full breasts. When he curled one hand behind her so he could take Aleron’s cock in his fist, she could feel the rhythm of him stroking against her back, and pleasure swarmed her system—her own, Aleron’s, and Hex’s unmet need. She glanced down to see his engorged cock, golden and dark at the swollen head. She licked her lips.

“Hex, please...”

“Please what, my beautiful girl?”

“Let me take you in my mouth.”

“Ah, yes...”

He moved, straddling her on his knees and raising his hips, he helped guide her hands to his strong buttocks. She swallowed once before taking that luscious tip into her mouth.

His flesh was sweet, and she licked at the pearly drop on the plump head, swirled her tongue, shivering at his groans while Aleron pushed his fingers inside her. She felt beautifully impaled, arching her hips into Aleron’s hands, sucking Hex’s cock deep into her throat.

She needed more.

Hex bucked into her mouth, his hands going to her nipples and pinching. She moaned around his thick shaft, sucking him deeper, until her eyes watered. Her clit was on fire with need as Aleron plunged his fingers in and out of her, pausing to flick at her swollen clitoris. And still it wasn’t enough.

“I know what you need,” Aleron told her.

Once more he shifted her body, Hex’s lovely cock slipping from her lips, and she felt momentarily empty, bereft.

“Do it, Hex,” Aleron instructed.

Then Hex's hand was between her thighs, his fingers sliding in her juices. Desire was a trembling rumble deep in her body, and she gave herself over to it, to whatever they would do with her as his dark gaze bored into hers.

Hex moved his hand back and forth, over her wet slit, then farther back, between her ass cheeks, his fingers, wet with her desire, making small circles around her anus.

"You've done this before?" he asked her, sliding the tip of one finger inside.

She gasped. "Yes."

"And did you enjoy it?" Hex pushed his finger in a bit deeper, desire spreading deep into her belly, her pussy, her ass.

"Yes."

"And do you want this now, Nissa?"

"Oh, yes..."

She ground her ass onto his seeking hand, taking his finger deeper.

She heard Aleron's low laugh, saw Hex's smile.

"Then you shall have it," Aleron whispered, his breath warm on the back of her neck.

He lifted her once more, and she felt Hex's finger slipping from her, then Aleron's cock pressing at the entrance to her ass. Her body clenched in anticipation, but it was all exquisite yearning.

"Please..."

Hex's hands slid under her ass cheeks, holding her open for Aleron's cock. He slipped just the tip into that tight hole, and pleasure poured through her, skittering over her skin like fire, hot and hungry. She was shivering with need.

"Aleron..."

He pushed in another fraction of an inch. "For you, Nissa," he said, his voice a ragged pant.

“Please, more,” she whimpered.

He moved deeper, slowly, his cock pushing past that first tight ring of muscle. It burned a little. But it felt so good, she could barely hold still, could barely keep herself from plunging down onto his stiff cock.

Aleron began to move, the smallest motion of his hips, but each thrust driving deeper into her body. Pleasure was hot and liquid, in her ass, in her aching, needy pussy. He pushed in, farther and farther, until she felt his body tight against hers, and knew he was as deep as he could go. She was trembling, his cock buried in her ass, filling her, his hot breath on her neck. And Hex’s beautiful face watching them, sharp with lust, making it all more intense.

It was still not enough.

Hex leaned over her, his lips inches from hers. “Ah, don’t worry, our little Nissa. We have you,” he told her, pushing her back onto Aleron’s chest and spreading her thighs.

Hex kneeled between her legs, pulling them over his, and Aleron’s cock shifted inside her, seeming to fill her even more, making her gasp. They were a tangle of legs, Aleron’s beneath hers, and Hex’s knees on either side of his. Hex held onto her, his gaze on hers.

“Do you like Aleron’s cock in your ass, Nissa?”

“Yes... yes.”

Aleron gave a small thrust, carrying waves of pleasure deep into her body.

“But you’d like it better if I were inside you too, wouldn’t you? Isn’t that what you crave?”

“Yes, please!”

Aleron’s arm snaked around her waist then, reaching out to grasp Hex’s golden cock, and Hex moaned softly, his gaze never leaving Nissa’s face as he bit his lip, one sharp fang piercing his own flesh. He was so damn

beautiful, his features twisted in pleasure. She could hardly bear to look at him. But she wanted him inside her even more.

Hex was pumping his cock into Aleron's hand, and Aleron was moving in her ass, small, lovely thrusts of his long shaft. Everything ached with need, with pleasure—her ass, her soaking pussy, her breasts.

"I need you, Hex. Fuck me."

He took Aleron's hand from his cock, smiling as he kissed the pale wrist. And with the other hand he parted her pussy lips and slipped his swollen cock inside.

She gasped, pleasure driving hard into her, so intense she was momentarily blinded, her mind going numb. It was too much, Aleron in her ass, pushing, pushing, and Hex's cock in her pussy. She was coming already, clenching all over, pleasure like glass, shards of it ripping through her body.

"Nissa, look at me," Hex commanded, and somehow through those first wild waves of climax she heard him.

She opened her eyes, and Hex grabbed her face, forcing her to watch him. Her climax built, spiraled, her mind spinning with kaleidoscopic colors. And still they pumped into her, ass and pussy, filled and fulfilled. And Hex's gaze hard on hers, until she could see inside him, feel his pleasure, and through him, Aleron's. She was *with* them, inside them as much as they were inside her body, cock and ass and pussy all throbbing, pulsing with an indescribable pleasure.

When Hex bit into Aleron's wrist, the vampire called out in pleasure, in pain, and she felt it too, as though Hex were drinking *her* blood. Her mind filled with the deep scarlet of the blood, and it was beautiful and shining like a garnet in the light of a summer moon. And she saw in small glimmering flashes a thousand nights—women and men, writhing bodies, silk corsets, velvet brocade. Grass sparkling with dew in the French

countryside, a castle with ancient walls made of even more ancient stone, horses running, their muscles working beneath their fur.

She floated, went deeper, heard the beating of a human heart, saw a lovely face, heart-shaped beneath her veil of curling auburn hair. She saw Aleron's pale hand reaching out for her, cupping her cheek. She saw his brilliant blue eyes reflected in the woman's soft, grey gaze. She saw love. And then, as though watching a film in fast-forward, she saw the woman aging, her hair going grey, her features softened by years, her face against a pile of snowy pillows. And then she was gone. And she felt the grief of more than a hundred years gone past.

Her own heart broke, tears gathering in her blinded eyes, and all was black once more.

## CHAPTER FIVE



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## CHAPTER 5

HEX WATCHED HER, WAITING FOR HER TO WAKE UP. SHE'D BEEN OUT NEARLY THREE HOURS.

He hadn't meant to show her Aleron's private sorrow, hadn't meant to see it himself. He'd known for years, since the first time Aleron had shown him, and there had been no need for words between them. He'd understood how Aleron had loved, and what he'd lost. He'd understood that he would never be to Aleron what *she* had been, and that was fine for him. He didn't need that. Not from Aleron.

But Nissa...

Everything was different with Nissa already. It didn't matter that he'd known her for only a handful of days. Time was different than it had been during his human years.

But even then, he would have known.

He loved her.

Aleron adored her, even loved her, but not in this terrible, beautiful, all-consuming way. Not as though he would die for her, if he could.

He reached out and touched the tips of her long, black lashes. They were silky against his fingertips, making him smile. He loved the fiery green of her eyes, so sharp and full of intelligence and life. She *wanted* so acutely. There was a passion in her unlike any he'd ever come across before, and it made him feel his own more profoundly.

From somewhere in the distance, sirens wailed, as they did so often in London. He half hoped the sound would wake her. He wanted to see her, talk with her, touch her, fuck her again. And again and again. But she was too purely pretty like this. Sleeping. Innocent.

He moved his hand lower, brushed her full, pink bottom lip, then the delicate line of her jaw. Yes, so beautiful.

He sensed Aleron coming into the room, and turned to find him in the doorway.

Naked. As beautiful as Nissa, yet in such a different way.

“Hex.” Aleron’s voice was soft. “She sleeps still?”

“Yes, and she’s deep into it. She won’t wake for some time, I think.”

“Good. I need you for a while.”

Hex raised a brow in question, but saw how hard Aleron’s cock grew between his lean thighs. His own filled with need. He rose from the bed, as naked as Aleron was.

They came together in the middle of the room, and Aleron pushed him back with strong hands, until he was against the wall. Aleron slid down, kneeling on the floor in front of him, and took his cock into his mouth.

Hex moaned, pleasure rising, his cock hardening. And Aleron’s sleek mouth moved up and down on him, sucking, his tongue drawing over the head. So damn good, that powerful mouth. His balls tightened, drawing closer to his body, and his hands went to Aleron’s shoulders, hard as stone, yet the skin as soft and smooth as polished wood.

Aleron sucked him deeper, and he pumped his hips, driving his cock down Aleron’s throat. He heard Aleron’s groan, glanced down and saw that he had his hand on his own cock, the rigid flesh driving into his pale fist. Desire kicked hard into his gut. He wanted to take that beautiful cock himself, into his mouth, into his body.

“Aleron, let me take you. Let me fuck you.”

Aleron pulled his mouth away long enough to murmur, “Not today. Today you are mine.”

He sank his teeth into the head of Hex’s cock, and it was pleasure and pain, searing, hot, indescribable. His body shook, and he came, hard, as Aleron sucked on him. And he could feel it through Aleron’s mind, through his body—the sweet taste of come and blood on the tongue, the musky

scent of arousal, of Aleron's ancient flesh, and in the distance, the scent of Nissa as she slept in the big bed.

But there was no time to think of any of it. Aleron had him in his hands, his fingers digging into Hex's flesh as he was pulled to the floor. Aleron was on him, pushing him down onto the silk carpet, amid the swirls of amber, black, and midnight blue, the texture soft against his hands and knees.

He knew Aleron was lost in blood lust, that, ancient as he was, he could do him real harm in such a state, but he didn't care. The scent of it was on him too, that base, animal edge, and he wanted it nearly as badly as Aleron did—the pure, driven fucking that only another vampire could withstand.

He braced himself on hands and knees, his cock hard as rock once more. Aleron crouched over him, his teeth scraping the back of Hex's neck. He felt that wild stab of need, deep in his belly, the scent of his own blood driving him higher as it dripped down the side of his neck.

“Just do it, Aleron. Come on.”

A quiet roar from Aleron before he wound a rough arm around Hex's waist, pulling him in tight, and sank his hard flesh into his ass.

Hex groaned, pleasure shafting into his body as Aleron began to pump into him.

“You are mine, Hex. Now.”

“Yes...”

Thrusting hips, driving Aleron's rigid shaft ever deeper, driving pleasure just as deep. He moved faster, his plunging cock hard and punishing, but Hex pushed back against him, opening himself further, his arms shaking with the effort.

“Fuck me, Aleron. Harder.”

“Goddamn it, Hex...”

Aleron was gasping, his hips plunging wildly, the sound of flesh hammering upon flesh like thunder in the room. Then Aleron's rough hand

on his chin, forcing his fingers into Hex's mouth.

"Drink," he commanded.

And as Hex bit into his fingers, Aleron bit hard into the back of Hex's neck, his eyeteeth sinking deeply into his flesh. Blood upon blood, they both drank, Aleron's cock pumping into his ass, his fingers pumping into his mouth, his ancient blood pouring down his throat. Sweet and salty and pure.

Aleron drank, sucking hard, fucking him so hard he could barely stay on his knees. His cock was pulsing with pleasure, and his mind was beginning to spin. He felt too much of Aleron, felt his pleasure, his pain, his old grief. And even as he climaxed, his come spitting out into the air as Aleron came, pumping hard into his ass, he knew they both understood this was the last time they would be together.



Nissa stretched, her muscles stiff from too much time in bed. How long had she been there? But she felt rested. She felt wonderful. And for the first time in days, she was alone.

She listened for any sound of movement in the big house, but heard nothing.

Maybe Hex and Aleron were out? It didn't matter. She knew they'd be back eventually. They wouldn't leave her alone for long. She trusted them to come back to her, to care for her.

It was strange, this sense of being cared for, something she hadn't felt since she was a small child, with her grandmother. And at the end, it was she who had cared for Nana, their roles reversed. There had been no going back to being a child after that. There had been no one to watch out for her in a very long time, and never a man. She'd never let anyone that close, had never wanted anyone to take care of her. Not that she needed it. But it was

lovely and heady and intoxicating in a way she hadn't expected, perhaps because being cared for by someone had never occurred to her.

Throwing back the covers, she got up and moved toward the bathroom, the bedroom rug soft beneath her bare feet, the room lit by one small lamp on an antique wood table with delicately carved legs. Outside, the sky was dark through the sheer curtains, the moon and stars obscured by the London fog. She glanced about for her clothes, but didn't see them. When had she last worn clothes? She hadn't needed them. Hex had brought her meals in the big bed, rich, spicy dishes he had prepared himself. She'd only been up to shower, which was where she was headed now.

She'd come to love the enormous, luxurious bathroom. Her entire flat could have fit in there. It was all done in white marble, the towels the heaviest, most plush white. The enormous mirrors, even the light fixtures, were gorgeous. And the shower itself... it was a huge expanse of marble and glass, with a bench seat built into it, multiple shower heads in shining chrome. Reaching in, she turned the hot water up high, and stepped under the steaming spray.

Even the soap they used was pure luxury, silky smooth and fragrant on her skin. She'd never seen anything like this in her life, and she'd quickly become used to it. Hex and Aleron had taken her into the shower each day, sometimes several times a day, bathing her carefully. She'd come to love the heat of the water sliding over her skin as they touched her, their soapy hands eventually slipping over her breasts, between her thighs. They loved to fuck her in the shower, to fuck each other, which she never tired of watching. There was something so utterly primal about two men together, and with two vampires, there was even more intensity to it, more heat. The sight of their bodies coming together, one light, one dark, both so powerful, graceful, and with that inherent purity and flawlessness of the vampire flesh. No matter how dirty the sex was, it was always beautiful with them. It could never be anything else.

An ache was growing between her thighs as she thought of them, her nipples hardening beneath the sharp spray of hot water on her breasts.

Slipping a hand between her thighs, she felt her own slick juices there.

*“Need you now...”*

“Nissa.”

Aleron. He was there with her suddenly, as if by magic. Maybe there was magic in the way they could read her thoughts, but she didn’t really care. She was simply glad to see him, her pulse running hot as he stepped into the shower, his naked body hard and beautiful as ever. His cock was rising, thickening, as he leaned in to brush a soft kiss over her cheek.

He smiled at her, then ducked his head under the water for a moment, clear droplets clinging to the tips of his white-blond hair. His blue eyes were glittering.

“What do you need, my dear Nissa?” he asked, moving in closer, his long arms wrapping around her waist.

His hard body, wet and warm against hers, was too good.

“I need you, Aleron. I need you to touch me. To fuck me.”

“Ah... feel how I need you already.”

He took her hand and guided it to his cock, which was hard and long in her hand, the flesh like silk over steel. Then his mouth came down to hers, and he skimmed a kiss across her lips before moving lower and licking at the sensitive skin at the hollow of her throat. She let her head fall back.

“Yes, Aleron. Have me. Drink from me.”

A small shard of pain as his teeth sank in, then nothing but that now-familiar ecstasy as he drank, along with those flashes into his past.

The woman again, and this time she heard a name—Emeline.

Such a lovely face, her lips a perfect pink cupid’s bow, even as she grew older. The lovely curve of her cheekbone as his hand came to rest there for a moment before moving lower, over her neck, her bare breasts, which were small and firm, with nipples like two pieces of dusky pink candy. Sweet in

his mouth as he sucked and licked. She squirmed gently on the bed beneath him, and Nissa felt the weight of his body as though she was in his arms. But wasn't she?

She no longer knew what was happening now and what was memory as she slid deeper into the Seeking Kiss, into Aleron's mind. It was all hot, naked flesh, his silky tongue, the sharp edge of his teeth—on her throat, her stomach, her thighs, then finally, between them. Hot and sucking, her pussy wet and pulsing, her beasts aching. The scents of sex and blood in the air. Hers. Emeline's. Was that her long curling auburn hair coming down over her shoulders, like spun copper? But no, hers was black. Wasn't it?

Water on her skin, even as she lay amidst the silk sheets, everything happening at once, somehow. Her own fingers traveling over the small creases in her skin from a corset she'd never worn. And Aleron's mouth on her clit, drawing it in, circling with his tongue as his fingers moved to push into her ass. And as his teeth grazed the lips of her sex, cut into her tender flesh, the blood seeping onto his tongue, there was no pain, only the most exquisite pleasure.

Her hips arced toward him as the first waves hit, and she was shaking. But he had her, holding her tight in his arms, his mouth sucking, sucking. And she was coming hard, shuddering all over with the force of it, as though she came *with* Emeline, both of them together, pleasure upon pleasure, their climaxes entwined in some way that wound through time.

She came to her senses in Aleron's arms as he carried her, wrapped in a thick towel, into the parlor. She'd never seen it before. She blinked in the dim golden glow of light coming from a fire burning in an enormous marble fireplace, and from a few low lamps scattered around the room, shaded in silk and glass.

The room itself was magnificent, filled with antiques in dark wood and everything in creamy silk and damask, heavy velvet, rich old French brocades. She barely had a moment to take it all in before Aleron laid her

on a large chaise, against a pile of fringed pillows. He sat next to her, his eyes almost midnight blue in the half-dark room, the firelight reflected in his black pupils, like two orbs of glass, deep and mysterious as he always was to her.

“You have questions about me, Nissa?” he asked, his fingers reaching to tenderly move her damp hair from her face.

She nodded. “I don’t know much of anything about you, other than what I’ve experienced with you myself. What I sense from you. And... what I’ve seen in those moments when you or Hex are drinking from me. But I feel as though I shouldn’t ask about any of that.”

“I’ve had many lifetimes, some more crucial than others to who I am now. What you see when I drink from you is what was most important to me.”

“She still is,” Nissa said quietly, feeling his pain as acutely as though he were drinking from her even now.

“Yes.”

“But you are with Hex.”

“And I’ve been with others in between, women and men both. But I’ve never given the Turning Kiss to a woman since... I lost her. I have only made male companions.”

“And what’s happened to them?”

“They all move on, eventually. But I never intend anything else with them. I have loved them all, but I understand the impermanence of love. All too well.”

Nissa reached out, laying a hand on his arm. It was like polished marble beneath her palm, but she could see the softness in him that lay beneath the stony enigma of the face he presented to the world. “I’m sorry, Aleron. Truly sorry.”

“Don’t pity me, Nissa. I’ve had a great love. It is more than most people can ever expect. And I’ve loved all of my companions, as I said, although in

a different way than I loved her. My Emeline.”

“She was very beautiful.”

“Yes, in every way.”

There was so much sorrow reflected in his eyes, along with the firelight. Nissa had to swallow a lump in her throat.

“You are every bit as beautiful, Nissa. You and Hex both.” He paused, stroking her hair again. “You are meant for each other, you know.”

“What do you mean?”

“We often know these things—we’ve talked to you about it before. And I know that you are for Hex. Being with us, together, was simply your introduction to him.”

“Do you really believe that?” Her heart was pounding, with hope, with sorrow.

“That people, vampires, whoever, can be *meant* to be together?”

“I know it to be true. It is not some sort of religious thing, not preordained by any sort of god. I don’t believe in gods, just as I don’t believe we vampires are evil, despite the myths that persist even after our emergence from the shadows. It is a spiritual thing, the connection between two beings that is amplified by the power inherent in being an immortal.”

“But then... what now?”

“Now I stay with you only long enough to take you safely through your transition into this dark life. If you want it still.” He gazed into her eyes, searching. “Do you,

Nissa?”

*Hex.*

“Yes.” It came out as a whisper, her heart beating too hard, emotion choking her.

“Then you shall have it. And I will be there. But it will be Hex who gives you the Turning Kiss. And you will be his.”

Tears gathered in her eyes. “Aleron...”

“There is no need to be sorry. Don’t you see? Don’t you feel it?”

“Yes, I feel it. So deep in my bones I can barely stand to be without him for an hour, even when I’m with you, Aleron. And I am sorry—sorry to take him away from you. Sorry that although I adore you in a very true way, I love him so fiercely... I can’t stand it, not to have him. Even if that means hurting you. And it feels so wrong, but I feel... helpless to do anything else.”

He smiled once more, his face hard and frighteningly beautiful, but his blue gaze soft on hers. “This is *right*, Nissa,” he told her. He took her hand and lifted it, brushed his lips across the back of her knuckles in a gentle, old world gesture. “You are taking nothing from me I am not entirely willing to give, I promise you. I will be with you. I will help you. And you will always have a part of me, as I have a part of you. There is no need to be sad. I am never alone, if I choose not to be. And there’s the Midnight Playground. All the pleasures of the world await me there. I am enough of a sensualist to appreciate such a place.”

His smile widened into a wicked grin, and she couldn’t help but smile back.

“Shall we prepare you for your journey into this new life, Nissa? Are you ready to come to us, to be one of us?”

Her heart was racing, hammering in her chest like the powerful roll of thunder outside the windows. But she had never felt so certain of anything in her life. Other than her need for Hex. Her love for him.

“Yes. I’m ready.”

## CHAPTER SIX



Nissa stood naked in the center of the rug in the bedroom while Aleron himself brushed out her hair. When Hex came in, he smiled, that lovely flash of strong white teeth making her go liquid all over, making her nipples harden.

“Nissa, my lovely girl, my love. Aleron called me.”

“She is ready for you, Hex,” Aleron said, his hand coming to rest reassuringly on her shoulder.

Hex’s smile widened, and he came to her, taking her in his arms. They were solid around her, her bare flesh rubbing against his clothes. She wanted him as naked as she was. She simply *wanted* him.

“Ah, I want you too, my Nissa,” he whispered to her, leaning in to kiss her cheeks, her lips. “Has Aleron explained this all to you? The ritual of the Turning?”

“He’s told me that we are going to the Midnight Playground, that he’s chosen to make a formal event of this because of his love for us both. And that you will both be with me.” Her heart was racing at the thought of being Turned. Of being eternal. Of being with Hex forever. “I don’t need to know any more.”

Hex nodded, then looked over her head to where Aleron stood behind her, his hand still on her shoulder. Hex laid his hand over Aleron’s, and she

watched their gazes meet. There was love there. Tenderness. Her own heart swelled with love for them both.

They spent some time readying her then, Hex dressing her himself in the most gorgeous black silk lingerie he'd brought for her, and a short leather dress. Aleron brought her a long trench coat made of the same butter-soft black leather, draping it over her shoulders. It felt like a ritual already, as she stood silently, allowing these two amazingly beautiful creatures to care for her almost as if she were their child. Except that there was nothing child-like about the purely sensual weight of expectancy in the air.

Finally, they were ready, the two men dressed mostly in black leather as she was, Hex in leather trousers and a black T-shirt, Aleron more formal in his billowing white silk shirt. They led her down carpeted stairs, through a long hallway, and out into the night, where a dark, sleekly armored car waited at the curb. The driver was silent as Aleron helped her into the back seat, and though she could see nothing of the driver but the back of his head, she could sense right away that he was a vampire himself.

She sat between Aleron and Hex, her hands in each of theirs as they raced through the dark London streets. She was too filled with anticipation to speak, and they remained quiet on the drive.

They wove through the calm avenues of Highgate with its stately old homes, then through the lesser neighborhoods, passing storefronts in flashes of neon signs and iron bars over the windows, dark, dilapidated apartment buildings, much like the one she lived in herself. She knew she wasn't going back there. Where she was going remained to be seen, but it didn't matter. What mattered was that she would be with Hex. She turned to him, and he smiled at her, leaning over to brush her lips with his, sending a warm shiver through her, as well as a wave of anxiety. She pulled back to stare into his beautiful face.

“Hex? Is this... Tell me this is the right thing to do. To leave my life behind. To be with you.”

“Ah, Nissa... This *is* right.” His hand went to her cheek, his thumb tracing along her jaw. “This is right because there is something in each of us that responds to the other, like two ends of a magnet. It’s right because you feel it too, even though you’re scared right now. It’s right because we love each other.”

“I do love you, Hex.”

“I know it. I feel it. And I love you.”

He moved in, his lips coming down on hers once more, and the kiss was soft and sweeter than anything she’d felt before. That sense of wanting him was still there, but love shone through, brilliant, dazzling her heart and her mind.

The car came to a stop, and Aleron helped her out. As she stepped onto the curb, a small thrill went through her. The Midnight Playground towered before them, its stone façade as solid as ever, but no longer as mysterious to her. She now knew some of the secrets held behind its gates, knew in some unfathomable way that this place would be a sort of home to her, a refuge. That she was about to become one of *them*.

Heart pounding, she let Aleron and Hex lead her through the gates, then the tall doors and into the club itself, no one stopping to question them. Inside, the club looked the same as before, but everything more brilliant to her, as though touched in a golden light.

“It begins already,” Aleron whispered to her. “Do you feel it? It is as though your body senses the impending change.”

“I feel it, yes. That’s it exactly.”

They took her down a hall, then down a flight of wide, marble stairs she hadn’t seen before, her booted heels clicking on the hard surface. Hex held tightly to her hand, making her feel safe, even as her pulse raced, hot and thready in her veins.

They went through another pair of heavy doors and into a large room. In the center was a high dais of sorts, a pedestal made of carved marble. When Nissa looked closer, she saw figures of gorgeously fashioned angels and demons, and smiled to herself. On the dais was a bed draped in black velvet and strewn with pillows in gold silk.

The room was crowded, and as Nissa looked at each of the ethereally lovely men and women there, she realized they were all vampires, all gleaming, flawless skin and glittering eyes like a hundred jewels in the soft light coming from a low-hanging chandelier made of thousands of small crystals. Music played so softly she could barely hear it, something gentle and trance-like.

She could feel the collective energy in the room, a hundred hearts beating with purpose, with excitement.

Hex turned to her. “They are ready to welcome you, Nissa.”

Her eyes burned with tears. When had she ever belonged anywhere, but to her lost Nana? When had she ever felt the need to? She’d lived her life as she’d had to, never needing anyone, anything. Always taking care of herself. And now, even before her Turning, she felt a powerful sense of community with these strangers. And she understood why Aleron and Hex had wanted this public Turning for her.

Hex leaned in close to her side. “We sensed that loneliness in you, Nissa. We knew this would be good for you.”

“Thank you.” She smiled at Hex, and then at Aleron, who squeezed her hand.

They moved toward the dais, the crowd parting for them. Heads nodded as they passed, smiles with flashes of sharp, white teeth. She could not get over how utterly flawless these people—these vampires—were. And she was about to become one of them.

Aleron and Hex lifted her onto the dais, then both followed. Her pulse was hot, wild in her veins as they slowly undressed her. Then, naked, they

laid her down on the bed. She felt no sense of self-consciousness on the small stage before their audience of vampires. She felt nothing but a keen excitement at what was to come, and even more when her two lovers stripped to their beautiful, gleaming skin and came to lay with her, one on each side.

She could feel the buzz of expectancy in the room as Hex and Aleron began to stroke her body. Pleasure raced over her skin at their every touch, fingers and palms skimming over her arms, her sides, her thighs. Then Aleron pulled her into his arms and kissed her, hard, his tongue pushing between her lips, searching her mouth. She wound her arms around his neck as desire rose in her belly, between her damp thighs. His skin against hers was firm, smooth, but cooler than usual, as though he were already separating from her, and she felt sad and exhilarated all at once.

He kissed her harder, his tongue driving deeper, his arms so tight around her she could barely breathe. She was panting into his mouth, exchanging his pure, sweet breath with her own.

Pulling back, he said quietly, “I love you, Nissa, as I would love one of my own. But you are for Hex. I give him to you, and you to him. Do you accept this gift?”

She nodded her head, overcome by desire, by emotion. She saw for one fleeting moment a hint of sadness in Aleron’s brilliant blue eyes, then he smiled to her, lifted her wrist to his lips, and bit into her flesh.

Pleasure raced through her veins, as though his hands were between her thighs, on her breasts, all at once. And those snapshot images once more of Emeline—her lovely face, broken by age, but still softly beautiful. Aleron lying with her in a field at night, beneath a starry sky, holding a cup of wine to her lips, pledging his love to her. Undying love, for he would not die. But she would. Sorrow flashed, dark and heavy in her heart.

But Aleron pulled away, a small droplet of her blood clinging to his lips.

“Do not be sad, Nissa. I have had love. And now, you shall have it too. Take Hex, and all I feel for him, all I feel for you. And know I will be happy that you two are together.”

He shifted, handing her over to Hex, who had sat quietly behind her. Now his strong arms wound around her. And as Aleron transferred her to Hex’s embrace, the two of them leaned in, and Hex kissed her blood from Aleron’s lips.

Her heart was thundering, her body aching with need. Hex pulled her in closer, kissing her harder, and she tasted her own blood sweet on his tongue, and a strange craving went through her. For Hex, yes, but also for blood. It was beginning already, as Aleron had said.

Hex kept kissing her, until she was breathless with desire, her body hot, her sex damp. His hands were on her, and so were Aleron’s. She was held by them both in a tight embrace, safe, loved. Then Hex pulled back.

“Are you ready, my love?”

“I’m ready.”

“I will make you mine, Nissa. We will belong only to each other after this. Forever.”

She nodded, swallowing hard, and Aleron’s arms tightened around her.

“I am here with you,” he whispered to her. “I will be here for you both always.”

Hex gave her one last kiss, a sweet brushing of his lips, and then he bent his head, kissing her throat, soft, sweet kisses, making her shiver.

“Say goodbye to the life you have known,” Aleron told her, “and prepare yourself for this final journey.”

She heard the low murmur of a hundred voices, felt a surge of energy from the audience, could sense them pressing in, closer to the dais. But all that truly existed for her were Hex and Aleron. Her lovers. Her mentor and the one who would be hers for life.

Eternal life.

She let her head fall back in surrender, and smiled as Hex sank his teeth into her neck, into the carotid artery.

There was no pain. Pleasure swarmed her as her blood pumped hot into his mouth and down his throat. Her mind spun, images of her own life flickering behind her closed eyes—her Nana’s sweet face, the smoking and neon-lit streets of London, her favorite childhood doll, the smoothed pile of dirt that was Nana’s unmarked grave, the dimly lit bar where she’d worked all these years, her first lover, her last lover.

And then she saw Hex’s life, the Arizona desert where he’d grown up, a priest trying to explain to him that his mother was dead, his father beating him, the strange images of all the places in the world he had seen, beauty and misery side by side. And she understood him completely for the first time. Understood that his truest nature was for him to remain sweet, free of bitter regret. Instead, he took on life as it came to him, was true to himself, no matter what, and she understood that this was why she loved him.

The pleasure rose, intensified, until she grew delirious with it. The images faded away, leaving her in a sensual pool of dark, liquid scarlet, glittering like a handful of jewels. Her blood was sharp and tangy in the air, and she could taste the scent of it in the back of her throat. And Aleron held her safe in his arms.

Finally, Hex pulled away, using a silk handkerchief to wipe the blood from his face. He was panting, breathless, as he moved in to kiss her once more. She was weak, limp in Aleron’s arms. Hex held his wrist to her lips.

“Drink, Nissa.”

But she was too dizzy, too warm and safe, with her beautiful lovers. She wanted to slip into the dream of Hex’s life once more.

“You must drink,” Aleron told her.

“I can’t...”

“Nissa.” Hex grabbed her face, holding it in his strong hand, and she smiled at him.

“I love you, Hex,” she whispered, and even saying the words was almost too much for her.

“I love you. And that is why you have to stay with me.”

She sighed, her body growing warmer. She wanted... what? She felt good, lovely, floating. And Hex was there with her, and Aleron. What more was she supposed to want?

She let her eyes flutter closed. Too lovely to move. To do anything.

“Nissa!” There was alarm in Hex’s voice. “Stay with me.”

She heard the murmur of voices all around them, soft and vague.

“He loves you.”

“Stay with us, Nissa.”

“Stay with Hex.”

And Aleron was saying to her, “Fight it, Nissa. Be strong.”

“Nissa. Look at me, my love. Look at me.” Hex’s hand was hard and hurting on her face, forcing her eyes open. “I love you. I love you!”

Her heart melted, bursting. All she wanted was to be with him. *With him.*

“I love you, Hex,” she whispered once more, trying to make him understand.

“Then be one of us. Drink from me.” He lifted his wrist to his own mouth, biting into it. She could smell the blood immediately, *his* blood, and it was like honey, like wine. Like something which belonged to her, and her alone.

He held his wrist to her open mouth, and her tongue darted out, tasting. Ah, it was sweet, sweeter than anything she had ever tasted. Pleasure flooded her at a dizzying rate, filling her up, flooding her body with need.

She drank. And the more she drank, the more she needed. The blood was hot on her tongue, sliding down her throat, and she swallowed so hard, so fast, her throat ached with the effort. Desperate with need now, she sat

up, holding onto his arm, her hands biting into his flesh. Hex groaned, but it only served to drive her hunger for him, for his blood.

Strength began to gather in her body, along with a desire so keen it nearly hurt. Her eyes flew open, and she saw Hex's gaze on hers, his eyes like two pieces of amber lit from within. And as she watched, as desire built upon desire, everything began to change.

Hex had always been beautiful, but now he was absolutely radiant. His skin was so polished, she could see every silken plane of it, could *feel* it in a way she'd never felt anything before in her life. She felt Aleron's arms around her, holding her safe, his skin as much an epiphany as Hex's. And she knew in some strange way that she was aware of their mood, of their thoughts, and it was nothing like seeing those memory bites when they'd drunk her blood in the Seeking Kiss. She understood it would always be like this.

She drank and drank. Soon she became more aware of the voices around them, more acutely aware of the lights in the room, of the scents of Hex and Aleron, of the scents of those around them. She could pick out by scent alone who among the crowd was new, who was ancient, by some level of earthiness that was sweet and sharp in her nostrils.

Her own body was different, coming alive as though for the first time. She felt her own strength, and had a few moments of fear when she realized it would take some time to learn to control it.

She was so distracted by these new ideas she didn't notice for several moments that Hex was swooning.

"Enough, Nissa," Aleron told her. "Even from another vampire you can only take so much, especially from one as young as Hex."

"Oh!" She released Hex's arm, and he fell back against the pillows. Aleron let her go, and she leaned over Hex, concerned. But he was smiling up at her. He reached out to stroke her hair, and she shivered all over. When

he wiped his own blood from her lips, taking his fingers into his beautiful mouth and sucking, her body filled with indescribable desire.

“Hex, I need you *now*. Right now.” She ground her hips against him. “I can’t wait. I feel hungry in a way I never have before.”

“I understand, my love. It is because you are one of us now, because you are born brand new.”

Aleron stroked a hand over her shoulder, leaned in and kissed her cheek, then kissed Hex’s lips. “I leave you two to each other.”

Then he was gone and it was just the two of them as Aleron disappeared into the crowd of watching vampires.

Hex reached for her, pulling her down, until she was lying on his body, skin to skin, every pore alive with desire. She shivered as his thigh came up between hers.

“Ah, so wet for me, Nissa.”

“Always,” she told him with a smile. “Truly always and forever now.”

He took her shoulders and rolled over, until he was on top of her, his beautiful body pressed close to hers.

“Spread for me, Nissa. Let me take you.”

Her legs opened for him, and he kissed her neck, biting her here and there, every sharp prick of his teeth drawing desire from her body along with tiny droplets of blood. And everything was sharp, crystal clear, as though lit with electricity, with the light of the sun. With love.

He wrapped his hands around her knees and drew them up high, so that she was wide open to him.

“Come into me, Hex. I need you.”

“And I need you. I love you, my Nissa.”

His cock was at the entrance to her sex, pushing softly for a moment against her pussy lips, swollen with need. Then he slid inside, his beautiful cock impaling her as pleasure drove into her like a sweet-edged knife.

He began to move in that primal rhythm, pounding into her hard and fast, and she was breathless with sensation. Her legs wrapped around his narrow waist, his rigid flesh driving ever harder into her. And as he leaned in and latched onto her neck, drinking from her once more, she lifted her head and bit into the soft flesh of his shoulder, pulling his blood into her mouth.

Pleasure rose, hot and impossibly sharp, flowing into her veins along with his blood. He drove into her body even harder, his hips pistonning, hammering into her. Her body spiraled, that first edge of climax hovering—pleasure and smooth skin, soft lips and hot tongue, and the blood beneath it all like some sort of divine nectar.

She moaned into his shoulder, her mouth releasing him as he released her to rise up on his hands. He gazed into her face, his twisted in beautiful agony.

“Love you, my Nissa. *My* Nissa.”

“Yes, Hex. I am yours. And you are mine.”

He pumped into her, his cock hard and solid, pleasure pushing deep into her body, her soul, his hands holding her shoulders down on the bed, claiming her.

Her hips arced to meet his thrusts. And as they moved together, truly together in a way she'd never felt before, her climax rose, crested. When she shattered, she heard the moans and sighs of all who watched them, their energy feeding her, their pleasure joining hers, Hex's pleasure twining with her body as he came inside her. And she came apart, falling, blinded by pleasure. By love. By Hex. *Her* Hex.

“Love you, my Nissa. Forever and ever.”

“Yes, Hex. I love you. Forever.”

Forever was more beautiful than it had ever been to her. She had never been able to comprehend what that might really mean. She'd wanted this, wanted to be Turned, but she'd had no idea how wonderful, how glorious, it

would be. And she had never expected to find love in this strange life. Amazing. Yet now, she had Hex, and he had her. They had a love she knew she'd never dared to hope for, never even thought to dream of. But he had given it to her—he and Aleron. It was a gift of eternity, body and soul. She had Hex's love, and she knew she had *everything*.

Forever.

## The End

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## ABOUT EDEN BRADLEY



**New York Times & USA Today Bestselling author Eden Bradley** has written erotica and erotic romance for Red Hot Romance, Berkley (as both Eden Bradley and Eve Berlin), Bantam/Delta, Harlequin Spice/HQN and Black Lace Books, as well as indie publishing. Her novel FORBIDDEN FRUIT was profiled in Cosmopolitan Magazine's Red Hot Reads column in 2008 and her BDSM novel THE DARK GARDEN hit the top paperback fiction charts in the UK. She has received or been nominated for numerous awards, including the Holt Medallion and the Passionate Plume, and several of her books have been RT Book Reviews Top Picks. Her books have been translated into thirteen languages.

As someone who has been involved in BDSM practice for much of her adult life, Eden also offers sex-positive educational courses for women, teaches classes on BDSM safety, practice and psychology, as well as courses on writing craft. She has appeared regularly on Playboy Radio's 'Night Calls', and at the Hollywood In the Flesh readings. She loves art, shoes, tattoos, her Boston Terrier, reading smutty books, cupcakes and sex, of course, not necessarily in that order.

**\*\*Sign up for Eden's newsletter and be sure not to miss all her latest book news, special contests, appearances, online workshops and sneak peeks!**



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