

A bouquet of white roses in a silver vase. The roses are in full bloom and are the central focus of the image. The vase is ornate and metallic. The background is a solid, muted gold color.

*Immortal
Promise: A
Vampire
Love Story*

L. R. Wards

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*CHAPTER ONE:
LUCAS*

VIOLET-BLUE EYES watched the amber liquid swirl in the thick crystal glass. Every now and then they shifted to the busy boulevard outside the limousine. He smiled to himself; it was a typical Friday night in Los Angeles everyone and their dog were out tonight. That's one of the reasons Lucas liked living here because the only difference between the night and day was the light. Then the crowds would shift from the streets to the clubs and provided him the cover he needed.

Lucas was on his way to a late gathering himself. He took a drink from the glass and shifted gaze shifted to a group of four young men walking along the sidewalk, obviously with too much liquor in them by the way they clung to each other to keep themselves upright. He gave a faint smile at the lewd whoops and hollers they emitted as they passed by a group of young ladies. Physically Lucas looked about their age, when in fact he was much older. Usually he liked to enjoy life the way they were, but unlike that group he didn't intend to enjoy himself tonight. It would be business meeting not a social event. Normally, he did attend public appearances and social events to keep suspicions' eyes looking in the other direction because he'd built up quite the name for himself over the years and reclusive tycoons were targets for bloodthirsty journalists. This didn't mean he still wasn't in the camera lens, but it kept most sneaking paparazzi out of his bushes. The other reason, and main reason why he kept a false front, was much darker.

His father, Valear frowned on his career choice, telling him that he drew too much attention to himself, but Lucas couldn't cut off all contact with the population as Valear and the rest have. His own kind wasn't enough for him. What he and the others didn't understand was that he still needed to be around them. It

was a grave recognition of his last coveted grip on mortality and he refused to let it go.

In the past, Lucas had been criticized for being sympathetic towards them, which wasn't far from the truth. Although he never harbored any ill will towards the race, he did not see them as a mere means of survival either. Humanity had endless reasons for why he wanted to remain attached to them and even though his father may not have liked his reasons for walking among the living, at least he never forbade him to do it.

Lucas turned his gaze to his companion across from him. Originally given to him as a gift from his father as a Protector, Lucas also considered him a close friend. Although Lucas loved his father, and would give his life for him, he didn't completely trust him. Jason on the other hand, was the only one that Lucas trusted implicitly with his dark secrets and his life even if he was a ruthless predator.

Right then, Jason turned his attention to Lucas and cocked his head in question as he felt his eyes on him, "What is it?"

Lucas silently shook his head indicating it was nothing, before returning his bluish-purple stare to the lighted busy streets outside and let his thoughts roam again. It had been centuries since he had savored daylight, but his world was now lived in darkness. More than seven hundred years had passed since that fateful night. He could still easily remember the terror he'd felt upon seeing Valear for the first time. It was a horror that could not easily be forgotten. Seeing Valear's terrifying form in the moonlight would have stopped the most fearless of men in their tracks frozen with fear. However, Valear brought him a new life and opened up an unthinkable world to him. He never regretted it or Valear because he was young and was the victim of a quicker sword on the battlefield. He wasn't ready to die. Of course he also didn't expect to live as long as he did either.

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Valear had a way of eliminating those who gain too much power and are stupid enough to try and overthrow him. Lucas never had that ambition and therefore outlived his brothers. Maybe it had something to do with the love he had for Valear and the thought of losing him, horrified him. Living as long as he did gave him the opportunity to learn so many things and he still yearned to learn more. He'd mastered a multitude of different languages, some now extinct, played many different musical instruments, studied with world renown scholars and lived and traveled all over the world. Valear had told him once that the urge to know everything will stop after a few hundred years, but it never did. He was still just as eager today. Religion fascinated him most of all, especially when there are thousand year wars being waged in the name of God. *Such hypocrites*, He thought.

He was distracted from his thoughts as he saw Jason glance over his shoulder at the driver. His protector was hungry. Lucas knew he wouldn't harm the man, he needed Lucas' approval. Jason's kind was fiercely loyal and that's what made his race ideal to protect Vampires.

No one knew how long werewolves protected their race, but they weren't like the books written about them. Jason used to get angry at some of the presumptions, but now he just accepted them stating the human race was just stupid. Although Lucas did understand his frustration, the human race was naïve, because they didn't live as long as he did to gain the intellect they possessed. Jason only scoffed when he relayed this to him, making him smile. He had expected that. Jason was arrogant, and rightly so. His skills were virtually unsurpassable and his intolerance for anything superior to him was common to the breed for they weren't just predators, they were a highly intelligent race and the books written about them never portrayed that.

As for the Chauffer, Lucas was thankful for the present

day conveniences that prevented senseless brutality that had been necessary in the past. However, there was still the rare need to take live prey to sustain his power. His quarry only consisted of those the world could do without. It somehow made what he was easier to live with. The driver wasn't in that group; therefore, he would live this night. He would have used his own driver, but this man insisted on sending his own. Lucas didn't want to lose the deal over such a petty thing and he was hungry, so he agreed. He figured it was just a control issue Michael Reese had.

Suddenly, his thoughts were violently interrupted by a powerful alluring feeling that enraptured his whole body like an electrical current. He shot forward in his seat, "Pull over." He spoke calmly to the driver despite his inner turmoil.

"But sir, Mr. Reese said to..." The driver began to politely protest while looking over his shoulder warily.

"I advise you to listen." Jason immediately warned followed by a chilling stare at the driver. *Fool*, he thought.

Lucas knew from Jason's menacing protective behavior that he flashed his eyes from dark brown to their animalistic amber. It was confirmed by the man paling several shades and instantly complying without another protest followed by 'yes sir' with a tremor in his voice as he eased the car to the curb. Despite the darkness in the Limo, Lucas could see as clearly as broad daylight. A whiff of adrenaline reached his nostrils and Lucas smiled. The hormone is released instantly following fear. *Fight and flight*, he thought with amusement. If he was any younger and less experienced he would take the man's life unable to resist the aphrodisiac-like lure the odor of adrenaline gave off. As it was his mouth became lubricated with a flush of saliva, but he was able to resist for his original reasons. The man was an innocent in all of this.

A cabby honked behind him at the sudden change of

direction, and screeched his tires as he sped by the limo. From the chauffeur's thoughts, Lucas knew he was still unable to shake that stare Jason gave him and didn't even hear the Taxi. That and the fact that his knuckles had turned white from gripping the steering wheel so severely which made Lucas feel a sense of pride that a small look from Jason was so highly affective. Lucas smirked at the Man's previous belief that he actually thought Jason was gay by the looks he was giving him since he picked them up. However, the more time passed with Jason sitting behind him he could feel the hair on the back of his neck raise whenever the he addressed him or glanced over his shoulder to look at him. The driver didn't even have a rear view mirror to sneak looks at him because Jason popped it out of its holder on the windshield and tossed it in the back without saying a word and they kept the lights off in the back. Nonetheless he could still feel the heat of the Jason's hungry stares on the back of his head and he began to feel very helpless. He was resisting the urge to reach over and push the little button to raise the divider between the cab and the back, but somehow he knew the bodyguard would be offended. *He was right*, Lucas thought, *He would*.

Jason returned his attention to Lucas, "Now what do we do?" There was obvious concern in his voice.

"We wait." He tilted his head as if trying to see something clearly in a distant field, "...It is close." It wasn't the sensation itself, he was used to it from his kind. The assault of emotion only occurs when one of his own was near. This was different. While his own kind gives a sense of presence or warning, this was sudden, powerful and...*alluring*.

"Do you want me to look around?" Jason directed his attention to the busy streets

Lucas knew Jason was unsure of what he would look for. He wasn't quite sure what Lucas had picked up on, but obviously he didn't miss the slight mix of emotion that passed over Lucas'

expression when he felt the surge. “No, it wouldn’t do any good.” Whatever it was he sensed, wasn’t close enough to see.

Jason was perplexed. He had never seen Lucas react in such a way to a feeling. It had him curious, no more than curious. He was fascinated because Lucas never allowed his emotions to grace his handsome expression. Yet, something stirred within him to elicit such a response. Jason was quite happy tormenting the driver up until that point. Now, he was distracted with Lucas’ physical disturbance. It meant that Jason had to be on alert for any threat that Lucas may encounter. If this was a threat. By the look on Luca’s face, he wasn’t sure what it was, but he would be ready.

CHAPTER TWO: ELSA

“THIS IS STUPID, I can’t do this.” Elsa looked at the clothes her friends Linda and Tanya had dressed her in, “This just isn’t me.”

“You can be so difficult. It’s time you got your nose out of those dammed books and had some fun.” Linda reluctantly admitted to herself that Elsa looked prettier than she thought she would. Linda was the only daughter of a wealthy senator and was used to getting what she wanted. She had spent the last two years in and out of universities such as this one. She preferred the night-life and her numerous boyfriends over a solid healthy education. When she flunked out of school her father would make a large contribution and get her in another one. She openly admitted that she had little use for anything or anyone that didn’t serve her purpose. That originally meant girls like Elsa. That is until Elsa ended up her dorm roommate. She had begged her father to not have her live in the dorms, but her father thought she could learn something from being among real people instead

of her high priced social friends and cut back on her allowance. She was disgusted and angry with him because Elsa was everything she hated; innocent, naïve, intelligent and pretty. On top of that, Elsa's modesty just made her angrier, because she didn't even know how pretty she really was. Of course, the extended time of living with someone such as that can bring about a change of heart.

Elsa listened to her when she bitched about her father, her life, her cut in her allowance, and whatever boyfriend was in style. She never protested Linda's foul treatment of her and barrage of insults over her choice of fashion. Incidentally, Linda started to feel guilty and selfish. Linda knew the words she chose must have hurt at times. Also, she had begun to notice that in the last six months of knowing her that no one ever called, or visited her and that she never got mail. Curious or just being plain nosey, Linda had asked her about her parents. With some coaxing Elsa confessed that she was an orphaned at a young age and had made it this far on a track scholarship with hopes of becoming a Doctor. Guilt overwhelmed her. She began to attend class and with Elsa's tutoring, her grades picked up slightly. Not enough to be proud of, but her father noticed. This made her feel like she was actually worth something to him. Something she never thought possible. She credited Elsa with this, and was determined to make up her poor treatment of her tonight after serious convincing that lasted days. Although she knew she could never repay what Elsa had done for her, she thought she could at least help her with something she knew she was good at. She noticed the way people looked at Elsa, especially men. However, Elsa was so unapproachable, never making eye contact with the opposite sex, nor answering in so much of a whisper when addressed. They quickly lost interest. Also, not to mention her attire always consisting of dress slacks and a baggy blouse, and her hair pulled into a such a tight bun that caused her

beautiful eyes to slant. Tonight would be different, it was the beginning of spring break, and neither one of them were interested in going home. Linda's father was in Washington and Tanya's parents were in Europe for the spring. So, Linda and Tanya, another friend of Elsa's that Linda had grown to like, changed her loose fitting style into one of Linda's tight fitting dresses. It actually was mostly Linda's idea.

"I don't know if these clothes suit her Linda, they're just not her style." Tanya said running her eyes over her friend.

Linda knew Tanya didn't fully agree with the makeover they were doing to Elsa. She thought she was just fine the way she was.

"That dress is not conservative enough for her." She made a helpless gesture with her arm in Elsa's direction. The dress was too tight, and too revealing for an innocent like Elsa. Tanya was concerned that men might get the wrong opinion.

Linda shot her a look telling her to 'shut up'. Being blunt was never an issue with her.

Tanya deliberately ignored her, "It's too tight."

Tanya seemed like another person of good virtue that Linda originally took a dislike to. She was honest, brash and outspoken with a strong sense of righteousness. Also, friendship meant everything to her. However, Linda discovered later that they had more in common than previously thought. Tanya also enjoyed her wild weekends as much as she did, yet she was always able to balance her studies with her social time. Elsa had met Tanya at a study group last year when she was taking some elective classes and they immediately hit it off. It wasn't long after, that she introduced her to Linda, who barely spared her the time of day. Then she met her at a party the following weekend, and along with Elsa had been practically inseparable since.

"Are you serious? Look at her!" Linda pushed Elsa in front of a mirror to show her how good she looked.

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“It’s just a surprise. This is too soon for her to do such a drastic image change. Maybe we should start with high heels for a day, and then maybe add a dress the next day....”

“...Don’t be ridiculous Tanya.” Linda laughed, “We’d all be done our degrees by then. Geesh, quit being so protective.”

Linda watched Elsa’s beautiful pale complexion turn crimson at her reflection, “I can’t believe I let you guys talk me into this! This dress is too short, tight and I feel as though everyone can see my breasts!” She tried pulling the material up, just to have it hike higher up on her thighs and pronounce the swell of her cleavage. She let out a frustrating sigh, “Linda I don’t know if I can wear this in public. It’s awfully revealing”

Linda lightly slapped at Elsa’s hands as she worried the material, “Elsa, quit it. That is the style. It’s not as bad as you think. You wait and see what everyone else is wearing. You’ll feel like you’re dressed in a quilt. Besides you have a great rack, it’s time you started showing it!” Linda did her best to squelch her jealousy at the image before her. She might have just taken all the attention from herself. *It’s just one night*, she thought.

“Linda.” Tanya interrupted, “She’s going to blush right out of that dress. Quit talking to her like that.” She turned to Elsa, “You do look stunning, Elsa. Linda did a great job. I may not agree with the extent that she went with you but you really look great! You need the time to relax. Linda’s right about that. You spend too much time in the books.”

“See?” Linda interjected and handed Elsa a pair of matching high heels. “It’s a good thing we have the same shoe size.” She watched Elsa reluctantly take them and put them on. It was obvious that she didn’t want to hurt Linda’s feelings about the choice of wardrobe. Linda was glad that Elsa was just too damn nice to say anything and would rather wear the outfit than hurt her friend. She smiled inwardly. Elsa stood straight then and the heels caused her athletically enhance legs to lengthen. It

was comical for Linda when she wobbled slightly and grabbed Tanya's shoulder to steady herself. "Have you never worn heels before?"

"No." She said sheepishly.

Linda shook her head, "You have legs like *that* and you've never worn heels. Jesus Elsa, you are a piece of work."

Elsa blushed yet again, but managed to smile at Linda's tease, "How long have we lived together?"

"Point taken." She giggled. Elsa was right; she should know her well by now. As she looked at her, the twinge of jealousy that haunted Linda resurfaced again and she did her best to squash it. She wasn't prepared for what she created. Elsa was indeed a rare beauty. Her heart shaped face was complimented by striking emerald eyes, thick lashes, full lips and high cheek bones. Linda had always envied Elsa's soft pale skin and flawless complexion. She never wore or ever needed to wear any makeup. Linda watched her absently sweep her naturally curly, ebony hair out of her face and off her shoulders so it cascaded halfway down her back. She silently scolded herself for her recently jealous feeling when Elsa shot her a vulnerable look of apprehension. She deserved a night of fun. Anyway, Elsa will be back to her no-shape clothes by tomorrow and the male species would still be hers for the choosing. She turned and examined her own appearance, her previous thoughts already forgotten. Yes, red is definitely her color. "Come on girls, I want to get there before all the good stock is taken."

"Where are we going Linda?"

Linda noticed Tanya's worried expression, "Don't be skeptical Tanya. An acquaintance of Daddy's son is having a bash at his beach house. He's invited me and a few of my close friends." She gave her friends a quick hug.

"This isn't a coke party is it Linda? I'm not sure about this." Elsa's nervousness was evident in her voice, "Why can't we

just go to one of the dorm parties?”

“Because, Elsa, compared to the parties I go to, dorm parties seem like afternoon checker matches.” She began leading her toward the door. Elsa still had a worried look on her face as Linda’s words really didn’t reassure her, quite the opposite, “Don’t worry, I’ll protect you,” She added with a reassuring grin.

“That’s what I’m afraid of.” Tanya stated seriously causing Linda to giggle again.

The wave of emotion washed over Lucas again, and he tried to catch the feeling and examine it, but it was too late. It was gone. At least it gave him a direction, “make a left up here at the corner.” The same direction the disgruntled Cabbie had taken only a moment ago.

“Yes, sir.”

He knew the driver wasn’t willing to argue again. He was thinking that if he kept his mouth shut, they would leave him be and Jason wouldn’t look at him again. Lucas watched Jason’s mouth stretch into a smile of amusement as the fear radiating of the driver reached him. *Jason was very good at what he did*, Lucas mused silently.

What is it, Lucas? What do you sense?

I’m still not sure. Lucas read Jason’s mind and responded in the like. He then continued to give the driver more directions. As the car wound through the streets, toward a long line of beach houses, the waves came again, closer, stronger. He glanced through the crowds on the sidewalks, his sharp predatory eyes able to examine every feature of each person as the car drove by. He didn’t know what, or who, he was looking for, but knew he’d recognize it when he found it.

At that same moment, the cab pulled up to a glorious beach house with elegant blue-grey brickwork that was well lit

and alive with music. Linda could see shadows through the illuminated windows and knew there was a large crowd within. Also the small crowd out front let her know they were at their destination.

“I can’t believe I’m doing this.”

Elsa’s voice was laced with apprehension. Linda put her arm around her shoulder to reassure her. “It’ll be fine. I won’t leave your side. I promise.”

“Me too.” Tanya added.

Tanya got out, then Linda. She turned back and spoke to Elsa, who was still sitting in the back seat of the Taxi. She looked like a baby deer cowering in the brush. Linda felt terrible for her vulnerability. “Trust me Elsa, we’ll be with you, there is nothing to worry about. Just wait until you see all the eligible men there.” Linda leaned over and took Elsa’s hand hoping to urge her out of the car.

She let Linda pull on her hand for a moment before reluctantly complying. “I’m not interested in any man, you know that. My education must...”

“...come first. We know.” Linda finished, “but just give us this one night and please try to enjoy yourself.”

“Okay, I’ll try.” She sighed in resignation.

Linda knew that Elsa began to feel guilty about all the work her friends put into her. She knew it was the only way she got Elsa this far and by manipulating her kind gentle nature, and she was determined to make her continue. *It was for her own good*, Linda thought. Finally Elsa gave in to Linda’s pulling on her hand and stepped out of the car onto the brick walk that led to the house. She saw Elsa’s eyes follow the cab as it pulled away and the grimace on her face when it disappeared. Linda knew that dashed Elsa’s hopes of escape. “You’ve made the first steps Elsa, “ she gave her a reassuring smile, “Only a few left....wow, look at the size of that car.” Linda spotted the stretched grey

limousine cruise slowly along the curb. She probably wouldn't have even noticed if it hadn't given a small squeal as the driver applied the brakes.

Lucas instructed the driver to pull down a circular driveway that led to a large beach house. Another typical Friday night gathering was occurring and it looked like a big one.

"Lucas we should go." Jason's voice interrupted his concentration.

Lucas reluctantly agreed, "Very well." He knew Jason's appetite was increasing as was his. It was getting to the point where he could no longer ignore the hunger. It was actually beginning to overpower the alluring feeling he had. He relaxed in defeat back against the cushioned leather not realizing that he'd been so tense.

Just then the car cruised by three women heading toward the entrance of the house when it hit him again. It was like someone had lit his insides on fire. "Stop the car!" he sat up straight in the seat, staring at the object that drew him, *called* to him.

She was unbelievable. "My God, Jason *look* at her!"

"It was a woman?" Jason said with surprise.

"Apparently." He answered. Although he could only see the elegant curve of her backside, long graceful shape of flawless legs, and long dark ebony curls that wavered slightly with each step she took, he *knew* she was the source. He couldn't explain how his senses picked her up, and at that moment he didn't really care.

Just when he thought he could tolerate no more, he caught her scent. His inhuman sense of smell near did him in. The innocence that blossomed off her was so intoxicating and enticing that he'd forgotten about one hunger and replaced it with another. His mouth started to water simultaneously with

the stirring in his groin. One thing was for sure, she was *mortal*. Every gorgeous inch of her was alive and pulsing with pure human.

He *had* to touch her.

He watched the beauty turn her head toward the car and mouth the words, ‘*What’s going on?*’ with her full perfect lips. *Sweet Christ!* She was stunning.

At that moment Linda turned her head to see the expansive stretch limousine that Elsa was referring to and smiled hopefully, “Wow, he’s rich; maybe he’s good looking too.”

“Could be a gangster,” Stated Tanya not masking the concern in her voice.

“Good. That would mean I’m right.” Linda added with more enthusiasm caused Tanya to scowl at her. It wasn’t like she’d dated anyone like that before.

“I can’t believe you just said that.” Tanya said with annoyance lacing her voice, “Let’s go. We don’t want to encourage them.”

“The one in black?” Jason asked.

“Yes.” Jason couldn’t smell or sense the innocence off of her like her could, but he had many other talents that proved to be quite useful.

“Ah...exquisite. I should have known.”

“She has to see me.” Lucas’ hand went to the window control.

Linda turned to argue when the familiar hum of an electric widow turned her attention back to the car.

“Oh, someone pinch me.” Linda spoke first as the lamps from the walk cast a light on the figure in the car. He was truly striking, roguish in fact. His strong square jaw held a hint of stubble, with long dark hair gently brushing his shoulders that framed his perfectly masculine face, just added to an already

perfect package. His eyes though, were different; a shade of blue? He turned his head in the dim light from lamp, and she couldn't tell. She took a step forward, but stopped when she noticed he wasn't looking at her. His eyes were unmistakably focused on Elsa. An instant wave of jealousy, anger and hate swept through her. Then as quick as it came, it was gone. She immediately felt guilty for even feeling it.

"Elsa..." The name came out in a thick Scottish brogue with the 'L' rolling off his tongue.

"Y...yes?" Elsa took a step toward the stranger.

Tanya put her hand on Elsa's shoulder stopping her from taking another step. "What are you doing? You don't know who this is and how the hell does he know your name?" Since when did Elsa approach a strange man in a car, better yet, since when did Elsa even go near any man? But there she was walking up to him without even hesitating. From Tanya's point of view, yes the man was very nice looking, and he was most definitely focused on her friend, but it gave her an eerie feeling. It was the way he *looked* at her, like anyone would look at a finely cooked meal. Then when Elsa bent over to him and he touched her, his expression changed. This one she knew very well. It was desire.

Lucas locked his gaze with Elsa, beckoning her closer with his violet stare not missing the protests of the red-head. He felt victorious when Elsa ignored her. What surprised him even more, is he didn't influence her in any way. She came to him on her own free will. He could have easily clouded her mind and willed her to do what he wanted, but it was unnecessary. Not that he ever had trouble having women approach him, but this one was untouched and he was certain this behavior was abnormal for her. It was confirmed when the red-head's thoughts came through to him and he felt a wave of smugness over his talent to be able to lure an innocent female to his side

without using his power.

Elsa shook Tanya's hand off, ignoring her questions. She stepped up to the car and leaned down to the open window.

Lucas watched the red-head reach for Elsa again and his eyes flicked to Jason with an unspoken command, before settling back on this untouched beauty that was inches from his hand.

Jason nodded at Lucas knowing exactly what he wanted, and got out of the opposite door just as Tanya moved to prevent Elsa again.

Lucas' hand came up and stroked Elsa's cheek, "so beautiful..." his eyes remain fixed on hers. His mouth was doused with another wash of saliva and his throat burned to taste her, but he fought desperately against it. Centuries of experience at least gave him some self control, even the little he had around this rare creature. It really didn't help that he was hungry. Really hungry.

Her warm soft skin felt like new spun silk.

"H...How do you know my name?" She turned her face into his hand and closed her eyes against the caress. This man, his touch, was so amazingly wonderful. All her worries seemed to melt away as he caressed her cheek. And he *smelled* incredible, but she couldn't quite describe it in words. Everytime she thought she had the scent pegged, she inhaled deeply and it seemed to change into something more intoxicating. Furthermore, he seemed familiar to her somehow although she knew she'd never met him before in her life. Is that why she walked up to him without any apprehension? Immediately her question was deleted when he smiled.

Lucas didn't smile often, but he couldn't help himself feeling smug at her reaction to him. As for her question, she didn't seem to need an answer and appeared to have forgotten

that she'd asked it. The waves of emotion that he'd found her with was now a steady pulse of attraction which was practically impossible to resist. Regardless, he needed to. There were other plans made for tonight.

Lucas heard the driver shift uncomfortably in his seat. *Yes, it was time they go.* He would stay, but there was his hunger to deal with. He had touched her. She would be easy to find now that he had her mental scent imprinted on him. Not only that he was hungry and her innocent blood did not help the situation. It took every inch of his being to resist luring her into the car and sample the treasure pumping in her veins. As hungry as he was, he knew he wouldn't stop and end up killing her. What a horrific thought to destroy a rare, beautiful, untouched woman. A woman such as this, who was able to summon him with such force and not have a clue about her power. What gave her that ability? It was a question that would haunt him until he found the truth.

Jason we must go. Without taking his eyes off the beauty in front of him, he sent the thought to his protector who had made his way around the side of the car to block red-head from interfering again.

Lucas traced a finger across her full bottom lip, studying her. It was as soft as a petal on a rose. Swallowing another rush of saliva, he wondered what the rest of her felt like.

Sighing heavily, he knew he had to leave. It was disappointing that he had another engagement, that couldn't be put off. *I will see you later Elsa.* He silently promised. Jason got back in the car, and he reluctantly tore his gaze and his hand away from Elsa and stated to the driver "We must go." The car began to pull away. As the tinted window began to roll up Lucas kept his eyes on hers until the window smothered their view.

"Well—" Jason stared at Lucas with a smile on his face as the car pulled away, "—that explains a lot."

Lucas nodded, "To say the least." He said evenly.

CHAPTER THREE

TANYA WAS CEMENTED where she stood by sheer terror. When Elsa completely ignored her warning, she moved to prevent her a second time. Then, a soft click sounded as the other door of the limo opened momentarily distracting her. A devilishly handsome blond got out of the car and locked his icy dark stare on her. His lips were pulled into a smile but his eyes were void of any amusement. She felt a prickly terrifying sensation creep up her spine. *Someone's walking on your grave*, her grandmother use to say when that feeling would strike her as a child. A wave of helplessness and terror washed over her. She tried to run, but was frozen with fear. She found herself unable to move. Those eyes, she just couldn't tear her gaze away from them. She tried to scream, only releasing a brief whimper from her lips. Her legs felt suddenly numb and she feared that in any moment she would crumple to the sidewalk. Tanya tried with all her might to will her muscles to move, but terror froze every inch of her being. She couldn't take her eyes off him, even as he casually strolled around the car until he stood directly in front of her. He was much taller than her, and she was five foot eight. She managed a small simper as his hand came up and caressed a piece of her auburn hair between his fingers without taking his cold stare off hers.

Jason could smell the fear, it was radiating off of her. Unfortunately for her, fear excited and attracted him, like bees to honey. However, she was desperately trying to fight it. He spared a glance at Elsa who was captivated with Lucas. Fighting it for her friend. How admirable. How impressive. He glanced around their surroundings; no one seemed to think the scene

looked suspicious. A few people passed them on their way into the house. Otherwise, it was just as though they were having a friendly discussion. The blond woman, who stood behind the dark-haired one, was too captivated with Lucas to even notice that he'd left the car. He turned his attention back to Tanya, he leaned close to her and smelled the lock that he caressed and notice her eyes widen. Then he'd heard Lucas summon him back to the car in his mind. His lips brushed the lobe of her ear, "*You will not remember me*" he said it with a deep softness, forcing her senses to absorb it as her own thoughts. He then turned and obeying Lucas, got back in the car. Then they were gone.

A full minute passed before someone spoke, it was Linda.

"I think I'm in love."

Tanya had not been able to shake the fear that she developed, though she didn't know what from. Was it because that man was a stranger, and Elsa didn't think twice about walking up to him? She knew Elsa was naïve, but anyone would have aired on the side of caution. "I don't like the feeling I got from him." Although it wasn't him, it was the whole situation, but she couldn't explain it. Then she noticed Elsa who'd not spoken at all. "Elsa, are you okay?"

Elsa said nothing. She was still staring at the corner the car disappeared around.

"I loved the feeling I got, and I certainly wouldn't mind doing a little feeling of my own," Linda made an overdramatic gesture by fanning her face with her hand.

Tanya ignored her, "Elsa?"

"Yes?" Elsa finally responded while her eyes were still fixed on the corner.

"What is the matter with you?" Tanya grabbed her hand, "You're trembling."

"I am?" Elsa looked at her hand which was visibly

shaking, “I don’t know why. I...I feel fine.” She admitted.

Tanya saw a blush creep into Elsa’s cheeks as she looked away. She could definitely understand why. Despite her apprehension, the stranger was gorgeous and he clearly only had eyes for Elsa.

“She’s in love too.” Linda voice was laced with venom.

“What exactly does that mean, Linda?” Tanya accused not missing Linda’s tone.

“I saw him first.” She defended.

Tanya placed her hands on her hips, “What does that matter? I didn’t hear him calling your name.” She still didn’t like what had just happened with the stranger and Elsa, but she refused to let Linda badger Elsa just because of her jealousy. She watched Linda turn her head away in angry defeat. She was right though; the stranger didn’t even spare Linda a glance or acknowledge her at all and rightly so, Linda paled next to Elsa tonight.

“Who do you think he was? Did anyone recognize him?” Elsa’s face was glowing with rich new emotion.

The two stared at her for a moment in awe. Tanya spoke first trying to downplay the episode, “Like I said Elsa, probably some mobster.” Although she said it, she didn’t believe it. She just didn’t want to get Elsa’s hopes up. She still couldn’t displace the deep terror the whole episode caused her. “What made you go up to him like that?”

Unfazed Elsa brought her hand up to where he’d touched her cheek, “I don’t know. He seemed familiar.” Then something else occurred to her, “How do you think he knew my name?”

“We were talking rather loud.” Linda interjected, “Come on, let’s go or we’re going to be too late and I’ll miss all the fun.” She smiled in excitement before turning and walking toward the house with a generous sway of her hips.

Tanya shook her head as Linda’s recent act of jealousy

was practically dismissed by her regardless of how hurtful she could be. Tanya and Elsa followed close behind. The scene that had just occurred seemed to be a distant blur to her.

At the same time two of the three friends were enjoying a night out, Lucas' violet eyes locked gazes with the driver who had the mishap of looking at him when he opened the car door for them. The driver blinked once before succumbing helplessly. Every sense he had was now controlled by the voice entering his every soul.

“You will not remember anything of my associate or me. You will drive home and forget you were even here.” Lucas could not deny he relished his power, and using it just heightened that feeling. His skills of persuasion have been perfected over the centuries, thanks to the teachings of his father. Otherwise he would not be able to spare the driver's life.

When the driver opened the door to allow his passengers out, Mr. Edwards placed his hand on his shoulder and spoke to him. “I understand.” He had no inclination of resisting Lucas. In fact, he wanted nothing more in the world right now to obey him. In his voice held such promises, promises of things he could never imagine. Images of his deepest wants flashed in his head as if he was really experiencing them. If the man behind him with the violet stare asked him to jump off a bridge, he wouldn't hesitate.

They watched the car pull away and disappear into the night.

“Can you trust him?” Jason watched the departing car, always thinking of Lucas' well being. Every time he influenced a mortal instead of killing them, he was concerned.

Lucas managed a half-smile, “He doesn't have a choice, his mind is weak.”

Jason knew that Lucas didn't like to take a life unless absolutely necessary. The driver wasn't an evil man, just an

honest man trying to make a living. However, it was his responsibility to be concerned for Lucas' safety and if the man remembered anything, there was a risk.

Lucas sensed his concern, "Don't worry, my friend that is one human we need not worry about." He turned his attention to the dismal warehouse behind them, "Now for business."

Michael Reese sat on one of the big crates that filled the endless building. He was a stubby man with a thick moustache, ruddy cheeks and dark brown eyes. He was richly dressed in a double breasted dark grey pinstriped suit. One of his hands was tucked inside the jacket. Two heavily armed men stood on either side of him.

"I was informed this meeting would be private." He kept his expression serious. The man may have been wearing a four thousand dollar suit, but he still looked like a grease ball to him.

Michael laughed, "of course, Mr. Edwards, but this is a private meeting." He stood up holding his arms out in a welcoming gesture. I am an important man, I need protection," he nodded toward Jason, "just as you do."

"Of course", Lucas forced a smile and opened his suit jacket, "however, as you can see we are not carrying any weapons." *We are the weapons*, he thought.

"Well, you must be careful of your friends when you are in a position such as I am. I know you can understand that." Michael didn't act fearful of Lucas. He really didn't need to be. He'd dealt with men much more powerful than Lucas Edwards.

"I never said we were friends." Lucas simply stated as he retrieved the briefcase from Jason and held it out to Michael.

Michael's smile faded slightly at the insult but then decided to let it pass especially with the contents of the case on his mind. "I assume it's all there?"

One of his men stepped in front and took the briefcase

from Lucas and he leveled his gaze on him causing him to hesitate as if he imagined something in Lucas' eyes. Then he snatched the case out of his hands like touching it at the same time as Lucas would cause him to be burned. Lucas smiled as he refused to have eye contact with him again. The big man placed it one of the crates and opened it. He began to count the bundles of one hundred dollar bills contained within.

“Of course it's all there. Take your time.” Lucas responded

Michael waited until his man finished counting and gave a brief nod. “Crack it.” He indicated to the crate he was perched upon when Lucas first entered the building.

The sound of splintering wood reached Lucas' ears as the man pried off the lid with a crow bar. He then pushed it back showing the contents being nothing but straw.

Michael stepped forward and dipped his hand deep into the crate pulling out a bag of white powder. “You can imagine my surprise when I heard that the Lucas Edwards wished to buy from me” He pulled a switchblade from an inside pocket of his double breasted coat and tore a small hole in the bag. “I never, in a million years, would have considered an antique art dealer such as you would be interested in dealing drugs.” He dipped his knife in the bag leaving a small amount of substance on the tip of the knife. He lifted it towards Lucas, “I always thought you were an honest businessman, with all the charities you support and fund raising events that you coordinate.” Michael stood grinning at him, “who'd ever thought you would deal with the likes of me? Then again, we shouldn't believe everything we hear, should we?”

Lucas wanted to rip his throat out right then, but restrained himself. He wanted to put fear into him first. He wanted to see this over-boasted dealer stare at him with ultimate terror as he drained the life out of him. The thought made him smile. He stuck the tip of his finger in the coke and tasted it.

“What do you think, Mr. Edwards? It is good, is it not?”

he stood there grinning.

Lucas nodded and his expression turned angry; he'd just about had enough, "What do I think? I think you are a drug dealer Mr. Rease."

"I have the best shit in L.A." he boasted, missing the change in Luca's expression.

"I'd hoped so." Lucas stood straight and stared down at the little stubby man. He was smiling but here was no amusement in his expression, "I dislike drug dealers, Mr. Rease. You people have small children manufacture this filth for you, then destroy them by selling to them on the streets."

It took a few moments for Michael to realize that he had just been insulted. "What the hell are you talking about? I just sold this to you!" He shook the bag of coke that he held in his hand creating small puffs of white clouds in the air as it spilled out onto the cement floor, "You're crazy!"

Jason took a step forward at the insult, Lucas held up his hand and motioned for him to stop without turning around, "You have created more death in your lifetime, than my kind has done in ours. Also, you are tainting our food supply. Something I really don't appreciate."

Michael reached into his coat for his gun. This guy was nuts. He didn't have a clue what he was talking about. He knew he was stupid to come here unarmed and it didn't bother him one bit to wipe him off the face of the earth. His men also leveled their guns on Jason and Lucas with their boss's movements. Michael was shocked at the fact that the two expressions of the men took on amusement at three guns aimed them.

Lucas smirked as his eyes flicked down to the paltry means of protection and back to Michael. When the smell of adrenaline reached his nostrils, he knew it was time. He kept his piercing stare on Michael and his voice deepened, "All that shit does for me, Mr. Rease, is give me a splitting headache. So, what

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I am talking about...” Lucas pulled back his lips to reveal his unnaturally elongated canines, “...is a little crime prevention.”

Michael staggered back in terror, his mouth gaped open, “What the hell!” His arms waved furiously, “kill him! Kill him!” he shouted.

His men opened fire without hesitation. Lucas stepped backwards at the force of the bullets as they found their mark. Jason lunged with lightning speed in a cat-like motion through the air knocking one to the floor and ripping out his throat with his bare hands. The other man screamed at the graphic scene and turned to run, but it was too late. Jason was already up off his first victim and seized the second man by his coat collar. He circled his arms around the man’s thick middle and crushed his rib cage, puncturing his lungs. He then broke his neck in an effortless fluid motion while an inhuman roar ripped from deep within his throat.

Lucas stood for a moment willing his body to repair itself. The bullets, one by one, exited his body and hit the ground with a tinny ‘plunk’ as his flesh immediately repaired itself. He didn’t feel pain like normal human beings; it was just a slight discomfort. He was willing to put up with it just for the prize. The more frightened his victims were, the better the feast. He took a brief moment to study the scene before him. Jason was feeding, and Michael was gone. Lucas tipped his head toward the darkness of the vast warehouse and released a snarl of satisfaction. He could hear Michael’s panicked footsteps echoing off the crates. More importantly he could feel the rush of blood mixed with adrenaline push through Michael’s thudding heart. By itself the taste of blood was bland, but mixed with a rush of adrenaline, it was a delicacy.

Somewhere in the dark recesses of the warehouse Michael stopped and rested against a pile of crates, his breathing heavy. He was out of shape and with the rush of adrenaline over

what he'd seen he was quickly exhausted. At least he knew that there was no way Edwards could find him. These warehouses go on forever. It was easy to get lost in them. He would figure a way out later. Right now he had to get away from that monster. "What the hell was that?" Michael whispered to himself. *No one could take that much lead and still stand.*

"You're right." Came an inhuman voice directly beside him. "No *one* could take that much lead and survive. But *I* can."

"Wha...!" Michael swung his head around just to face Lucas, who'd just stepped out of the shadows. He saw the definitive power held in Luca's luminescent violet stare and he turned stark white in sheer terror, "Oh...Jesus!"

In a flash Lucas seized Michael's throat in a vise-like grip of immeasurable strength, "No, but thank you for the compliment." He lifted the obese man effortlessly in the air so his toes were just touching the floor and slammed him back against a wall of wooden crates making him grunt in pain and echoing the sound of splintering wood through the warehouse.

Michael gasped under the pressure on his throat, "What... the...hell?"

"I think you know what I am, Michael." Lucas grinned hungrily.

Michael saw Lucas' mouth open revealing the inhuman teeth within, "Sweet god...this can't be!" he began to stutter prayers in Spanish.

Lucas effortlessly pulled his head to one side exposing the site of the jugular vein, "Your prayers cannot help you now, Michael. You have brought your own death upon yourself." With lightning speed Lucas sunk his teeth into his neck.

Jason lifted his head and grinned, showing his razor sharp teeth hearing Michael's scream echo through the vast building then abruptly stop. Lucas had found his prey.

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Elsa had a horrible time. The house was packed mostly with people several years older than her. Linda and Tanya got lost in the crowd as soon as they entered the house and her rear end was already grabbed at least a dozen times in less than an hour. She was feeling very exposed in the dress and humiliated at being treated like a piece of meat. She saw Linda through the crowd giggling and surrounded by at least five young men who were utterly captivated by her beauty. She watched her for a moment contemplating interrupting so they could leave, but couldn't bring herself to ruin Linda's evening just because she was miserable. When she found a hole in the mob she made her way outside the back of the house facing the beach. A well lit large deck had surrounded the back of the house with a staircase leading down to the sandy surface. The crowd had managed to spill out onto the deck and the beach but it was sparser than in the house, so she made her way down the half dozen stairs. Her heels instantly sunk into the loose surface so she bent over and removed her shoes. The cool grains felt wonderful between her toes. Surprisingly enough it lifted her spirits a little bit. She looked around and found a shady area next to the steps that the glow from the lights of the house didn't reach and sat down. The sounds of the waves washing up on shore filtered through the thumping noise of the music every now and then. She leaned back on her hands, stretched out her legs and was quite content to stay there for the next few hours until Tanya and Linda were ready to go home.

The next hour passed quite slowly, especially with the hub of partiers that were unable to hold their liquor and make their way to the beach to vomit. She screwed up her face in disgust, not understanding why people did that to their bodies. *It must be different when you don't grow up with an alcoholic in the family*, she thought. In between the vomiting guests, were couples looking for privacy or daring groups running down to the

beach to skinny dip whipping off their clothes as they ran. It just made her inch closer to the shadows of the stairs hoping that no one saw her. Something bounced off her shoulder and she reached up to brush it off feeling nothing soon forgot about it. If this is what Linda and Tanya's idea of fun was, they would never drag her out again, she promised to herself. She felt so out of place because she couldn't see why and event like this would be enjoyable. Again, she felt as though she was an outsider. However, she had to give it to Linda and Tanya, they tried.

Sighing she tried her best to concentrate on other things, like the feel of the sand between her fingers, the crashing of the waves on the shore and never too far from her thoughts, how many papers she had due by the end of the month.

Sometime later, she glimpsed a familiar pair of legs through the rails of the banister as they made their way down the stairs and stood at the bottom twisting side to side slightly as if looking for someone. It was Tanya. Elsa stood up and called her.

When Tanya turned and saw her, instant relief flooded her worried expression as she marched toward her. "Elsa, have you been here the whole time? I was really worried when I couldn't find you."

Elsa shrugged feeling silly. She wasn't having a good time and Tanya practically found her cowering in the shadows.

She studied her for a moment, then curtly nodded, "We're going home."

"No." She protested, "I don't want to ruin your fun."

Tanya smiled, "Leave it to you to worry about us. Don't feel bad, I'm ready to go. There's always another party like this in the near future. We'll leave together. Linda's checking upstairs for you. So we'll find her and tell her we're leaving. She can come if she wants."

Elsa nodded relieved.

Linda decided to stay after all, but Tanya and Elsa left in a

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cab. Elsa was elated to be back in the safe confines of her room where she wouldn't be mauled by strangers. She stripped off her clothes, used the bathroom and brushed her teeth before she pulled on a large t-shirt and crawled into bed. Violet eyes haunted her dreams.

Towards Dawn, Lucas lay back in his bed; his arms were folded behind his head as he stared, deep in thought at the crimson velvet canopy overhead. When they were done feeding at the warehouse, they shoved the remains of the corpses in a small crate that required some creative folding and bone breaking. They tossed the guns on top of the lifeless bodies and Lucas knotted several metal bands around it as easily as he was tying a shoelace. Then he effortlessly piled another three dozen, two to three hundred pound crates around and on top of it to hide the evidence. Of course no one will make the discovery for several months or even years, and by then the bodies will be too decomposed to make identification of their deaths. When they left the building, Lucas' limousine and driver were already waiting thanks to Jason. They got in the car which pulled out of the docks and headed in the direction of home. Lucas instructed his driver to swing by the beach house.

Jason cast him a worried look, "Lucas..."

"Don't worry friend I won't be long." He reassured.

"I'll go with you." He offered.

He shook his head, "Go home and don't worry." What Lucas didn't need is a two hundred and fifty-five pound six foot six bodyguard following him around. Lucas could move unnoticed and quicker without him.

"I am not comfortable with leaving you alone." He protested.

"Jason, this is important to me. Something about her drew me to her. I just need a few hours." He explained, trying to

dispel Jason's worries. He should have known that it wouldn't work.

Jason shook his head, "A few hours is all I need to have my gut in knots worrying about you. Don't make me do this." He pleaded.

"I've made my decision." He tilted his head slightly and stared at him with an unspoken order.

Jason nodded reluctantly and held his hands up in surrender. "As you wish." He gritted out. Slapping his hands on his thighs in frustration, knowing any further argument would be fruitless, he sat back in the seat of the limo, looking away from him, trying to control his anger. He had to obey Lucas even if he didn't want to. Lucas had the right to have a few hours alone, but it would only take a few hours for the rebels to kill him. However, he knew they weren't followed tonight, so at least he had that in the back of his mind. He actually thought about hanging around, but Lucas would sense him and then all hell would break loose for him not obeying him. *Fuck*, he thought.

He didn't need to read Jason's thoughts to know he was not impressed with his decision, but as always he knew he'd get over it. He stared at Jason's profile as he looked out the window not focusing on anything in particular. *Sorry my friend*, Lucas thought while watching the muscle bulging and pulsing in his jaw. After that, he ended up enduring the rest of the ride in silence except for the curses that kept coming through to him from Jason's mind. Lucas himself turned away so Jason couldn't see the smile that crossed his face.

Now that Lucas had fed, he wanted to see how the girl affected him. Maybe it was because he was overwhelmed with thirst before that she was able to illicit such cravings in him.

Then again, maybe not.

The alluring sensation hit him again when they pulled up in front of the house, then exacerbated when he got out of the

car. He willed himself to the roof of the house as the car pulled away and with it, Jason's thoughts cursing in four languages. Grinning, he watched the limousine disappear out of view before he focused his attention back on the girl. Already he was having difficulty resisting the pull she had. His shoes crunched lightly on the shingles as he walked around the peak of the roof to the back of the house where that delicious sensation lured him. Again her innocent scent washed over him like a sudden warm gust of wind. And again his mouth watered. *So much for a fresh feed*, he thought as he crouched down on his hands and looked over the edge of the eave. Instantly his predatory eyes pegged her in the dark. She was sitting in the shadows in the sand by the deck and she was completely miserable. Her shoes lay on the ground beside her and she was wishing she was anywhere but here. He smiled slowly. It was Interesting that a woman of her age didn't enjoy such functions. Not only that, it also gave him an indicator of her personality from that part of her mind that he couldn't read.

When someone leaned over the deck and vomited, disgust radiated off her and with it, memories of her childhood surfaced in her mind and he caught them. *Makes sense*, he thought, *why she isn't enjoying herself*. Someone in her family had problems with alcohol. He watched her lean back on her hands and knew it would be so easy for him to scale down the side of the house and possess her. He stretched over the eave and dug his fingers effortlessly into the stone wall like it was butter to get a better view. Small crumbles of stone fell behind her in the sand, and one bounced off her shoulder to which she absently brushed off, but she didn't look up. *Good thing*, he thought, *I would scare the shit out of her hanging above her head*. Now he was only about fifteen feet above her when he inhaled her innocence again and sighed, he could not kill her to remove that rich liquid that flowed in her pure veins. He wanted

to, badly, but not only was it against his principles to take an innocent life, this girl was special. He needed to know why he was attracted to her. To him it was an unfavorable weakness. One he really shouldn't explore, and if he had half a brain he would just leave her be. However, the unusual aching that he had for her was very...disturbing and impossible to ignore.

Just then the red-head...Tanya he was sure her name was, appeared. Lucas could sense the darkness in her. More so than the blond who had such shallow aspirations. He could tell from her thought processes that she was highly intelligent, eager and determined. Although she was still maturing so the darkness hadn't emerged quite yet. As soon as she had a taste of power and money, she would change. It was something he had been witness to for centuries, and he had never been wrong. He directed his attention back to Elsa with her long glorious legs stretched out in front of her. Highly intelligent also, but absolutely no darkness present anywhere in her beautiful soul. Pure as the sky is blue and so angelic, it's hard to fathom her mortal soul remaining untouched by the world's harsh realities even with alcoholism in the family.

He watched her get up, brush the sand off of her curvaceous bottom obviously spotting her friend. Although she wanted to leave she would have stayed for her friends despite the miserable time she was having. *Selfless too? What a combination. Could this mortal be any more desirable?* He was thankful that Tanya was considerate enough to take Elsa home. Backing up silently to crouch on the roof, he admitted that it bothered him that she was unhappy. It actually made him want to make her feel better. He shook his head. Why would he feel the need to do such a thing? He was not emotional, just the opposite. He hadn't let anyone close to him since Celeste and he certainly didn't want to open that door again. If he were any other vampire, he would have sucked her dry just to sample the

rarity that she possessed. Despite the hunger she brought out in him, the thought sent a wave of dread through him. Not this girl. She was unique.

When they went back inside to talk to the blond, Linda she was called, he stood up and casually walked to the other side of the roof, crouched down on his toes of his shoes perfectly balanced, and waited. Ten minutes later a Taxi cab pulled up and Tanya and Elsa walked out of the house and got in. He would follow to see where she lived. He leaped off the roof landed effortlessly on the lawn with a slight bend in his knees to absorb the shock from a three story jump and watched the cab pull away as he erected himself. He would tail them at a distance to make sure he wasn't seen. He could move quickly enough that mortals would not see him.

CHAPTER FOUR

FORTY-FIVE MINUTES later, he crouched on the roof of the dormitory concentrating on the thoughts within. The cab had pulled up a few minutes ago and this was the building both women went into. Closing his eyes to concentrate, he filtered through the occupants minds until he zoomed in on her familiar feelings. Her room was on the third floor facing the park to the East. Thrusting his hands in the pockets of his black slacks he casually strolled around the building.

Lucky for him there was a large Elm tree about twenty feet from her window. He launched himself into it and landed silently with precision expertise. Not even one leaf rustled. Floating outside her window at this point might cause her a slight fright if he was discovered. He smiled to himself at the image. So instead he stood there with one foot in front of another on a large branch as if he was walking a tightrope while one of his hands reached up and rested on another next to his head to wait.

It gave him a direct line of sight through her open window and she had just walked through the door. Unfortunately, her untainted scent kept wafting out to torment and batter his senses. It wasn't easy in the least resisting his urges, but for her sake, he would.

Silently he watched.

Then she began to pull off her dress she walked into the bathroom out of his view and he nearly cast aside his morals. Well, it was more like she was struggling with it. Of course it was totally unsuited for her and from the insecurities she displayed, obviously not her usual attire. Regardless, he was thankful she was out of sight for a moment because he didn't follow her home to be a peeping tom; however that wasn't to say that his curiosity was peaked. She came back into view while pulling an old t-shirt over her head, and he got a glimpse of delicate pink panties, the skin of her narrow waist, flat stomach, and her flawless long legs. This time his hunger was over something entirely different than his thirst. Without realizing it, he'd stepped forward on the branch and only when it creaked did he realize he'd moved and paused. Nothing had ever affected him so strongly. It wasn't just her beauty, for he'd had thousands of beautiful women, it was her purity. It lured him like a rare aphrodisiac.

She went back into the bathroom and he could hear her brushing her teeth before she came out, stretched her splendid limbs slowly, turned out the light and crawled into bed.

Then he waited, tilting his head slightly to pick up the subtle noise of her breathing within the room. He instantly recognized the deep rhythmic breathing of human sleep.

Confident she was sleeping, he entered her room through the open window, approached the single bed she lay in and stared down at her. She was fast asleep on her side facing him. He crouched down in front of her studying her face. She unconsciously shivered. While she wasn't aware of his presence,

her body was. He reached over and pulled her blankets higher over her shoulder allowing his fingertips to caress her soft flesh again. She didn't stir. His violet eyes gazed over the form under the thin blanket then back up to her face in obvious desire. Again the conflict began within him. How easy it would be for him to wake her, influence her, and make her give him what he wanted. But was that all he wanted was her pure blood to burn a heavenly path down his throat after he took her? No it wasn't. He wanted more, much more. Against his better judgment he leaned over, hovered his face inches from hers, and inhaled deeply. If there was such a place as pure paradise on earth, she was it. Then she released a soft sigh in her sleep and her sweet breath wafted over him. Instantly his eyes flashed luminescent as hunger ripped through him like an inferno, and along with it, burning desire. Too close, he'd gotten careless. He abruptly stood and backed away resisting the demonic urges. His response was completely unexpected. Where the hell did that come from? Being that close for another moment longer would have him violating his own laws. He had to leave, or his resistance would definitely weaken. With one final look over his shoulder he slipped out the window.

Jason entered his bedroom then, interrupting his thoughts and set a glass of brandy on the night stand by the bed, perhaps with a little more force than usual, causing Lucas to raise an eyebrow at him. "Something bothers you?" He knew exactly what bothered him.

"Lucas what are you doing with that young lady?" Although, he was overwhelmed with relief when Lucas appeared several hours ago, he was still harboring some anger towards him at being foolish. He was close to going to look for him, despite his ordering him home. He himself was intrigued over the hold that the raven haired, green eyed beauty had over Lucas, but not enough to let Lucas take risks over her.

"I don't know yet." Lucas smiled as he read Jason's

protective thoughts. *You couldn't keep up to me, my friend*, he thought to himself.

“Are you going to *pursue* her?” Jason’s brows went up in question.

Lucas spared him a glance. “I don’t wish to” *I haven’t a choice*. He thought to himself.

Jason smiled knowingly. He didn’t have to be a mind reader to know Lucas. “How old do you think she is?”

Lucas thought for a moment, “Eighteen...nineteen at the most.”

“That is very young Lucas.” Of course compared to Luca’s seven hundred years, everyone was young.

Lucas shot him a warning stare, “It doesn’t matter if she is nineteen or ninety; she is old enough to make her own decisions. It’s irrelevant in the fact that I *want* her.” He couldn’t set aside the feelings of desire he experienced around her. Hunger, he could, but not the yearning she caused within him. It had been eons since feelings such as that were aroused in him. There was sexual lust, yes, but not unequivocal desire. He wanted her more than just to sate his thirst for her innocent blood. He wanted to possess all of her. It was the first time since he became what he was that he ever thought in such a way about a female. Even Celeste didn’t touch the emotions that he experienced around this mortal woman and he’d always thought that was as far as it went with his female kind. Celeste was a convenience, but Elsa, is an undeniable need.

“I see.” Jason smiled despite the caution. He was right, and he had hit a nerve. Then his expression grew serious. If Lucas wanted the woman, he had to extend his duties to looking after her for him, “Then I should put a team on her to protect her.”

Leave it to Jason to think objectively in this situation, “Not right away, let’s wait a few days until we figure out her

situation a little more. I don't want to alert anyone unfavorable in the association of her. When we do decide to watch her, make sure she comes to no harm and more importantly, that no man *touches* her. I don't want her...tainted."

"Yes My Lord." Jason agreed. His expression then grew apprehensive, "Are you going to let Valear know, Lucas?"

Lucas stared at Jason as he read his anxious thoughts and silently agreed. "I have no choice in that matter, he probably already knows." Everyone feared Valear. They had reason too. He was terrifyingly unforgivable. When he made a decision there was no hesitation, no bargaining. Valear was omnipotent and reigned over them all with strict unwritten laws that must be obeyed. If the laws were broken it would sign your death warrant. Lucas was probably the only one that didn't fear him, he loved him as he would his own father and would have done anything Valear requested. The rest of the association knew of Valear's affection for Lucas also, and this flared jealousy and rebelliousness over it. Not only that, Valear never kept it a secret that he intended to pass his knowledge and power to Lucas who was honestly in no hurry to accept it.

Jason turned toward the fireplace, his memory sparked by the flames as he recalled the episode where he met the defiant redhead. Lucas' voice broke his thoughts.

"I suggest you stay away from her, for now Jason."

Jason cursed himself for thinking so freely.

Lucas chuckled at his self-scolding. He then grew serious, "It could...complicate things. Elsa is our concern."

Although the redhead did bring out a lustful hunger in him, Jason would obey, he always did, "I understand." He nodded to Lucas as he pulled the thick silk golden cords that tied the curtains to the four poster bed. The thick velvet fell with a swooshing sound to shroud Lucas in total darkness. He walked to the door and flicked a red switch beside the light switch and

steel shudders hummed over the large French windows concealing the room in total darkness. Jason didn't fall in love with women, he never did. He wasn't capable of it. Now sex was a different matter all together. He grinned to himself as he shut the door to Lucas' room.

The uncontrolled power of sleep washed over Lucas. He closed his eyes and allowed it to take him.

SATURDAY evening Lucas awoke with renewed interest in his life. He dressed in the clothes that Jason laid out for him and proceeded to his study to contend with whatever business that Jason had taken care of that day for him. After a few hours he realized that he wasn't getting anything done. His mind kept shifting to a raven-haired, green-eyed beauty.

Jason found him about three hours later pouring over contracts. Lucas looked up when he walked in.

"Are you taking off on me tonight?" He said apprehensively. Jason couldn't read Lucas' mind freely, and when he did it was a deliberate thought that Lucas gave him, so he never had an idea when he was going to do something unpredictable. The only solace he did have was that he knew Lucas very well and could anticipate certain behaviors from him.

"I don't know yet." He pushed the papers back and leaned back in his chair, "I'm thinking of trying to get her out of my system, before I do something stupid and go back to see her."

"How do you intend to do that?" Jason cocked a brow.

"Maybe a night out with the pack. I can't think of anything else right now. The woman's image is burned in my mind and driving me crazy. It has been less than twenty four hours and the urge to see her is like the temptation of an aphrodisiac." He ran his hand over his face in frustration as he confessed. "I think I need a night with *my* kind, to help me remind myself of who...or what I really am."

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“Interesting.” He took the seat opposite of him on the other side of Lucas’ desk, “I have never heard of this type of-attraction.”

“You and me both.” He sighed looking up at the larger man, “Maybe if I give it a few days, she’ll start to fade away. I’ve thought about this a thousand times tonight. I can’t have a relationship of any kind, and certainly not one with a mortal woman. If the rebels find out about her she’ll be torn to shreds.” Something he doubted he would take well.

“Maybe you need a female to help you forget.” He offered empathetically. Although Jason knew that when the urges hit Lucas, he did act on them, but the woman was distracting him and Jason found it disturbing. Nothing distracted Lucas, ever.

“It’s not that kind of frustration.” He managed a sly grin causing Jason to chuckle.

“It’s always mine.” Jason admitted

Lucas laughed, “What a surprise.” He stood up making his decision, “Get the pack, we’re going out for a bit.” He saw the elation in Jason’s eyes as he pulled his cell phone out of his pocket.

“As you wish.” He grinned.

The pack happened to be six muscle bound bodyguards all similar to Jason’s build and height in which Jason commanded. Lucas looked dwarfed in front of them and he was six foot three.

The hotspot that night happened to be hidden in a bottle depot’s basement. Their kind moved their clubs often to avoid detection. It didn’t take Jason more than a few hours to find it with a few phone calls and gather his team.

Jason walked a few feet ahead of Lucas with the other six covering his back when they approached the two Vampires outside the door. They immediately bowed their heads and

opened the doors when they saw who Jason was escorting. Lucas didn't even have to slow down.

Jack Skeat saw him first. He sat in the corner with a Vampiress on either side sensuously squeezing his thighs with their long hands and running their tongues over his neck and ears.

"I don't believe it." He said under his breath in astonishment while watching their future king enter with his impenetrable bodyguards. Even if he didn't know Lucas on sight, it was the entourage that gave him away. No other Vampire had a pack of werewolves the likes of those to guard them. Jack knew that if Lucas sensed him there would be a fight, and as the odds stood now, he would lose. He could easily take the leader of the pack and perhaps Lucas if they were by themselves, but certainly not the entire pack.

"What darling." Said one.

"Ladies." He nodded in the direction of the club's new patrons, "meet your future King." While the two redirected their interests towards Lucas and his muscle bound entourage, he slid off his stool and made his way around to the exit on the opposite side of the room Lucas was on. He couldn't risk his thoughts being listened to. Especially with his plans almost complete. With a final look over his shoulder, he disappeared into the night.

It was moments like this that Jason felt such overwhelming pride. However it was well founded and earned. His pack was a force to be reckoned with, and no one would oppose them when they were together. The others would follow his directions without the slightest hesitation, even if it meant certain death. It was the same as he would for Lucas. Their strength was legendary and feared among the Vampires, for it wouldn't take much for them to defeat any of them there tonight,

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with the exception of Lucas. His power was unequalled, save for Valear. To see them now, left images burned in the minds of the others there. The seven overlarge males, capable of such strength and mercilessness, guarding their race's future was a sight not seen often. Lucas would go to a mortal event more than he'd ever venture out into his own world probably in part to the risk to his life. Although, he was more powerful than any of them, in opposing numbers, he may not survive an attack.

Music rocketed through the club in earsplitting decibels but all eyes turned to them. The patrons immediately stepped out of the way and bowed at the sight of the group. Jason knew they were a sight to behold as they made their way through the club. Lucas always had an air of confidence about him that would make him recognizable even without Jason and the others. It was something that couldn't be learned but bred into him. He always held himself with the greatest style and poise, so even if he was by himself, his disposition gave off a sense of power that commanded respect.

Saturday afternoon when Linda awoke, Elsa was not in their room. She knew exactly where she was. The Library. The girl practically lived there. She sighed, got out of bed, showered, dressed, and carefully groomed herself. She felt guilty that Elsa had a terrible time the night before. She really should have known better. The whole party scene was too soon for her. Elsa was way too naïve. She knew exactly how to make it up to her though. Her father invited her to a charity auction for tomorrow night and gave her two tickets. She would take Elsa. Tanya would certainly understand if she didn't take her. That way there was no pressure on Elsa to meet someone, but just enjoy some artwork. Linda wasn't too keen on going, but she knew Elsa would enjoy the night. She stuffed a few items in her purse, threw on her jean jacket and left the room.

When Linda entered the Library twenty minutes later, she easily found Elsa pouring over several medical textbooks. All she had to do was look for the tallest pile of textbooks and the bent head loaded with ebony curls. She plopped down opposite of her almost startling her.

‘Linda?’ Elsa raised her brow in surprise.

Linda looked around the large hall, “Wow, I keep forgetting how big this place is.”

Elsa grinned, “Maybe if you visited more often...” She kept her voice low for the sake of the other students near her.

Linda waved a dismissive hand, “What for?” She made no attempt to quiet her voice. “Besides, won’t the roof cave in...or is that a religious thing?”

Elsa just shook her head with an amused smile, “What are you doing here?”

She leaned forward and put her elbows on the table, “Well, I was wondering if you wanted to go...”

“...No way!” She said in a harsh whisper which caused several others near her to ‘shh’ her. She blushed, “Sorry.” She offered with a sheepish look.

Linda finally lowered her voice realizing that they had to keep quiet, “Here me out. My dad gave me tickets to a charity art auction. Do you want to go? I promise no pressure...no guys...no drunken sophomores. Well, there might be some guys.”

“Your dad gave you tickets to an art auction.” She stated with disbelief.

“Yeah, I know, me. I think he’s trying to instill some culture in me somehow. However, “ she grinned, “I’m willing to make the sacrifice so you can go.”

Elsa giggled at Linda’s teasing. “Actually it sounds like fun.”

“Daddy sends me tickets all the time, but it’s not my thing, you know? I *knew* you would like it though.”

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“Is he going to be there?”

“No, he’s in Washington, but gets perks like this all the time. If it’s in L.A. I get the tickets.”

“Wow. That must be nice.”

“Only if you’re into that sort of thing. I’m not.” She looked at the heavy books on the table, “Come on, put those away and let’s get something to eat, I’m starved.” She watched Elsa’s brow furrow as she struggled with sparing some time for herself over her studies. To her surprise she actually agreed.

“All right, give me a minute.” She said as she began to close her books.

They had spent an hour in an on campus café sharing a plate of French fries and discussing what to wear. Linda calmed her concerns about dressing her again saying that she had the perfect evening gown for her.

“I don’t know if I can trust you again.” Elsa winced remembering the skin tight dress from last night.

“It’s a black tie event, I have to behave.” She teased.

“Thank God for that.”

Linda was hoping that Elsa would bring up the subject of the night before regarding the stranger. One thing was really bothering her about the whole episode. Not just her jealousy but the fact that she knew he said something to her and Elsa never offered to tell her what it was. She was resigned to the fact that he was focused on Elsa even though she wanted him for herself and it wasn’t usual for Elsa to talk about her feelings, but this was killing her. She watched her friend as her eyes drifted to the activity outside the window. She was daydreaming while munching half consciously on a French fry. Oddly enough, Elsa wasn’t a daydreamer either; she was one of the most focused people Linda had ever met. Yet as Linda watched her, she was momentarily distracted by the other woman’s profile. It was astounding. She had the most perfect little upturned nose and

delicate jaw line. Linda knew of women that would kill for Elsa's looks and have paid plastic surgeons a mint for it. It was unfortunate that Elsa didn't know what she possessed, for she could have any man she set her sights on if she just arranged herself properly. Then she remembered the jaw dropping stranger again, and realized that he saw her perfectly. That was definitely a man who knew woman and was probably legendary in the sack with them just from the desirable confident way he was staring at Elsa. Who could blame him, she was a woman and *she* was staring at Elsa. Smiling slightly she sat straight and cleared her throat. She just couldn't take it anymore.

"Elsa?" Linda noticed that she almost started. She turned her gaze toward her from the window almost embarrassed.

"Yes."

"I have to know...." She paused looking at her friend, "What did that man say to you last night?" Linda saw Elsa's cheeks pink up. She looked down at the plate of fries playing with one of them. When she spoke she didn't meet her gaze.

"You didn't hear?" she said quietly.

"No. And it's killing me." She confessed. She might have heard if she wasn't so dreamily mesmerized by his looks.

Elsa tried to stifle a smile at Linda's eager confession, but it was unsuccessful. "Well..." She paused. It wasn't easy for Elsa to talk about herself.

"Now you *are* killing me." Linda blurted in exasperation, "Come on Elsa."

She laughed, "It's embarrassing. Give me a minute." She finally met her gaze. "He told me I was beautiful."

Linda's brows shot up, "Really? You're kidding! That *man* told you that you were beautiful? That drop-dead gorgeous rich guy?"

"Crazy, isn't it?" Elsa shook her head and popped another French fry in her mouth to avoid Linda's stare. She made a face,

because the food was cold by now. She didn't believe it as much as Linda did. However, it wasn't for the same reason. She just couldn't believe that man called her beautiful.

Linda on the other hand, thought that man was more beautiful than anyone she'd ever seen and it had nothing to do with Elsa's looks. She reluctantly admitted to herself several times that Elsa could stop hearts with her beauty. "I'm totally jealous."

Elsa gave her a look of surprise, "What? Aren't you chasing Ted-what's his face?"

"Yes, but I'm not dead Elsa, that man was stunning." She leaned toward her across the table, "Did he ask for your number?"

Elsa suddenly looked surprised, "No...he didn't."

Linda sat up, "How the hell is he going to find you? It's not like you lived at that house we were going into."

Elsa shrugged, "Maybe he was drinking and didn't realize what I really look like. Or, we could easily admit, that he didn't want to find me."

Linda laughed, "Geesh Elsa, you are hard on yourself. I'm beginning to think that you need contacts."

Elsa just furrowed her brow at her.

The next evening, Linda had managed to find a very elegant black strapless empress style evening gown for her. It was light enough to keep her cool on a hot evening. She had to pick up the hem to walk because it trailed behind her somewhat. Linda gave her a silver sheer wrap to wear with it. It matched the flower beadwork throughout the material. Regardless of the night before, she was impressed with Linda's choice. "Linda I think you've redeemed yourself." She smiled looking down at herself.

"I'm saved!" She teased raising her hands to the sky.

Linda wore a white three quarter length strapless number that definitely showed her best attributes.

Elsa thought she was stunning.

Again Linda pinned Elsa's mass of ebony curls on top of her head to show her elegant neckline.

However several hours later Elsa's confidence quickly faded when they entered the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, she was overwhelmed by the famous faces present. Reporters were everywhere and the constant flashing of cameras began to make her head hurt. Of course they weren't taking pictures of her, but she definitely wasn't used to her crowd let alone this one. She must've shown her apprehension on her face because Linda tried to reassure her.

"Don't worry Elsa," she said leaning in close so she could hear her over the crowd, "the press doesn't bother us, just the actors, models, athletes and rock stars and whoever else that is outrageously overpaid to be famous." She squeezed her hand in reassurance. "We can walk through the gallery and look at the art if you like. I know nothing about it, but I could pretend."

Elsa gave her an appreciative smile, "Sure."

"You hold tight, I think we need some wine to walk around with." Linda saw a server walking through the crowd with a tray of filled wine glasses, "Be right back."

"Okay." Elsa turned her attention to the paintings on the walls, and walked up to look at the variety of mixed media. Some of it made her wonder how people could refer to it as art. An acrylic painting of chicken sitting on a box in the middle of a white room, A splotch of red in the center of a huge white canvas, and an odd photo of a brick wall. She pursed her lips. Maybe she just didn't get it, and this was supposed to raise money for...she grabbed her brochure and looked at it...homeless people. *They'll be still living on the streets*, she sighed.

Linda arrived back at that moment and handed her a

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glass of wine, “There you go, all set. Now you look very sophisticated.”

Elsa laughed as she brought the glass to her cheek and grinned posing for a fake camera.

Lucas turned his head at the delicious sound as if he'd just been slapped, while a flash of a camera went off in his face. *Damn press*, he cursed as his light sensitive eyes took a moment to adjust. Then lifting his head, he scanned the crowd knowing he wasn't mistaking the sound and with it, the familiar waves of desire. His hearing pricked up.

It was her.

He easily filtered out the thoughts of the others and stepped through throng in her direction. His date was busy chatting with some popular rock star that was twice her age and didn't notice that he left her side. She would come looking for him though; she was possessive about his attention in this crowd and although she didn't think he knew, had images of them in bed together later. He may have obliged her until he caught that delectable laugh. All his current attention and desires were redirected. So much for staying away.

He needed to see Elsa.

“Elsa, there's a cute guy over there that looks kinda single, do you mind if...”

She nodded her head, “Sure, go ahead, just don't abandon me.”

“Never.” Emphasized with feigned shock.

Elsa watched her smile and wave as she disappeared through the crowd, before returning her attention back to the artwork. She knew she wouldn't see Linda for the rest of the night. She sighed, at least she had something to interest her. Then her eyes settled on something alluring. An oil painting of

winter and sky. She loved it. She stared at it for awhile. Oil always seems to be so graceful if it's used right. It actually reminded her of home.

“Beautiful.”

She jumped at the deep husky voice and turned to face those same eyes she dreamt about the night before. She spilled a little wine out of her glass, just barely missing Linda's dress that she wore.

“I'm sorry if I startled you.” His eyes raked down her figure as she sidestepped the spilled wine with the grace of a dancer. Then fully settled back on hers before she glanced up at him.

Her jaw fell open in surprise and her heart skipped a beat as she stared up at him. He was really tall and she felt like an idiot just gaping up at him. *Say something*, she scolded herself, “Beautiful?” *What a dumb thing to say*. She berated herself again. He stood there in an immaculate three-button tuxedo with his hands in his pockets, erect, shoulders back and his legs slightly apart. You'd think he was posing for a photo spread in a fashion magazine.

An amused smile pulled at the corner of his mouth as he studied her face, “The painting.” He nodded toward it without taking his striking eyes from hers.

“Oh!” she reddened misunderstanding.

“But I meant what I said the other night.” He added with a heart stopping grin while leaning down toward her and lowering his voice so only she could hear, “You *are* beautiful.”

He remembered! Her cheeks flamed up even more but she still couldn't take her gaze off his handsome face.

“Do you like this?” He erected himself again and nodded toward the winter scene. God, he wanted to touch her. He balled his hands into fists in his pockets resisting the urge to do so.

“Oh yes.” She responded eagerly thankful for the change

of subject. She took the opportunity to tear her gaze away and stare at the painting, even though it seemed entirely less interesting now because he was here.

“Can I ask why?” If she turned around she would see that his eyes never left her.

His voice was laced with sincerity. He sounded as if he really did want to know, “It reminds me of home.” She confessed turning back to him.

“Interesting.” He said in a tone that had nothing to do with the painting.

She couldn’t help but just stare at him, because from the tone in his voice he actually sounded interested. However there she was again gaping like an idiot and feeling stupid. Thank goodness he spoke again because she didn’t know what to say to that and her lack of conversation was making her feel uncomfortable. Why would this gorgeous man pay attention to her?

One of his brows rose as if something amused him, before he gave her a charming grin that made her insides melt, “So what does the chicken on a box do for you?”

She tried to prevent the laughter, but couldn’t.

“She even laughs delightfully.” He commented as his grin widened.

She stopped laughing and stared at him trying to ignore the compliment, but still managed to flush pink, “The chicken on a box, could...well,” She paused, diverting her gaze, “I can’t think of anyone I *didn’t* like that I would give that to.” She stated truthfully.

It was his turn to laugh. It had been a long time since he laughed and it wasn’t forced.

She was captivated. What *did* she do to deserve this man’s attention? Then, almost as an answer to her question, one of the most beautiful women she’d ever seen came through the

crowd with her eyes were focused on the tall handsome stranger.

“There you are.” She approached the man and looped her arm through his, totally ignoring Elsa. “I’ve been looking everywhere for you.”

Her voice almost sung when she spoke. Elsa was washed over with disappointment as her gaze shifted from one to the other. This was *his* date? Of course she was. Elsa guided her eyes over the vogue-like figure, blonde hair and petite features. Only he would have the most beautiful woman here. The small amount of confidence that his attention gave her, left quickly. Why would she even think that he had the slightest interest in her?

“The auction is starting, and I want to bid on your chicken on a box.” She pulled the man’s arm who managed to give Elsa a sheepishly amused look before he disappeared into the crowd at the persistent tugging of his date.

Elsa thought she could’ve crawled into a hole at that last statement. That was a painting *he* donated? Could she have made a bigger fool out of herself? Not only that, the woman clung to him like saran wrap didn’t even acknowledge her. She was definitely out of her league in this crowd.

CHAPTER FIVE

LUCAS CROUTCHED BESIDE Elsa’s sleeping form again that night. He managed to ditch his date at her apartment when they left the charity event. She was not the least bit shy about her disappointment of him not joining her, but he made up some excuse that he had to be somewhere in an hour for a meeting. She didn’t believe him and he didn’t care. Models were frustrating, spoiled and selfish. It was all just show for him. He insisted on being who he was in the mortal world so he had to play the part. Yes, he could have stayed and had sex with her, but

he really wasn't interested after seeing Elsa. Especially after being reminded how desirable she was.

Being a confirmed bachelor just made it easier to flit around from one woman to another and denying any commitments that might cause questions. Beautiful women in L.A were not in short supply, but there was only one woman like Elsa. He smiled at the thoughts that Lydia had when she spotted Elsa and him together. She raged with envy. She should. Elsa was divine. If only she knew how she looked when he come upon her. Her back was to him and her head was tilted slightly while she examined the painting; A painting that he actually bought for her. She was a vision and no piece of art in that place could match how lovely she was. He scanned her thoughts when he spoke to her and found she was very modest. She didn't think she was worth the attention he gave her and allowed what little confidence she had, vanish when Lydia showed up. How wrong she was. So he decided to go see her again. Unfortunately when he went to see her again he ditched Jason. There would be hell to pay when he went home.

Again, he chanced touching her while she was sleeping. His fingers reached up and brushed the hair off her neck letting his fingers linger her warm flesh. Knowing he was pushing his resistance, he reluctantly removed his hand.

He'd felt that pulsing attraction at the charity event, but thought it was just reminisce from the night before because it never really did go away. It did increase with intensity while there, but again he thought it was a shadow of the night before. It was new to him, so he wasn't sure how to read it yet. Now he knew. It intensifies near her and explodes when he's thirsty. Where the hell did it come from? Why hadn't he ever felt it before? He was full of questions over all of this. The only thing he was sure of was, he had to have her. He thought he could get her out of his mind, but when she came to the art auction, his

feelings for her intensified. There was no way on God's green earth he could ignore this. His mind was already set in motion on how to deal with it all. He needed to be aware of everything he was responsible for; Valear, the association, his future....more importantly *their* future and how to make it all work together. His violet eyes traced the path of the pulsing artery beneath the skin of her elegant neck and his hunger surfaced. He could do it all right now, but knew that the betrayal would shatter her. She was too pure. Deceit wasn't in her soul, neither was an understanding of it. As the previous night he lowered his head and smelled her hair. She was like nothing he ever smelled before. He smiled as he pulled back, a vampire drug. That's what she was. Addictive. Just like heroin. His mouth started salivating again. At least this time it wasn't as much of a shock, because he began to understand his reactions to her.

Even though he wasn't near her at the charity event after speaking with her the first time, his mind kept with her. He had to stay away from her. She was too tempting. Not only that, he couldn't risk any media pictures of him and her together that might make the papers. She was appalled that she insulted his painting. Truthfully, he couldn't care less about the painting. He dealt in art, it made him money, that didn't mean he had to find meaning in it. His private collection housed many untraceable and missing pieces of art from famous painters that he did find meaning in. To name just a few, he had priceless pieces from Renoir, Dali, Rembrandt, Degas and even a personal piece from Michelangelo himself.

Before he bought the painting that she loved, she had left the museum. Of course he was disappointed. He wanted to give it to her, just to see her smile and let her know that her affections were reciprocated, but she was abandoned by her friend. Elsa had spent an hour looking for her to no avail. She finally gave up feeling uncomfortable in this setting and took a taxi home.

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He glanced over his shoulder at the empty bed. Linda obviously found something more entertaining than her friend. It was good for him, but not for Elsa. He had a feeling this was a common pattern with her friends. Abandonment. He caressed the pulsing artery at her neck again, *it would only take me a moment to change your life and make you mine*. His original reasons for not doing it made him stand and back away before he acted. He wanted so much to stay with her, maybe even hold her, but it was too soon for both of them. He had to control his hunger, and find a way to court her without frightening her away. She was trusting, but fragile. Beautiful, but shy. He'd better go home and face Jason's wraith. Not only that, she always stirred his appetite. He needed to feed.

Lucas walked into his house several hours after the art auction ended and by the look of Jason's expression he'd been pacing in worry for that long. He smiled arrogantly at his protector's scowl.

"It's not funny Lucas!" Jason seethed. "You can't keep taking off after her alone!"

Lucas smiled, "Alright, point taken....put someone on her."

Jason shook his head in anger, not feeling as amused as Lucas was, "I'll put Julian on her now, but you know that's not what this is about! I'm not done with you." He snarled out the last bit as he pulled out his cell phone and shoved his other hand into his pants pocket in frustration while his searing eyes remained on Lucas'.

Lucas kept the smile on his face and went to his study. He sat down and proceeded to sign papers that Jason had left for him. About ten minutes later Jason came in unannounced. He could tell that his mood was still sour. Lucas dropped his pen and leaned back in the chair. *Here it comes*. He thought.

“You can’t do this anymore Lucas! Do you have any idea what you do to me?” He paced in front of him and his voice deepened to an inhuman growl. His eyes flashed amber from their mocha brown several times as he struggled to control the monster in him. “I have a responsibility. You are seriously interfering with my duty!” He stopped in front of him placing the palms of his hands on the surface of the desk and leaned toward him, “Just take the girl for your own! You will bring Valear’s wrath down on us both!”

“Christ! You sound like an old woman!” Lucas should have known not to tease him when he was so angry, but he just couldn’t help himself. Most likely the worse he would get is a painful bite on the shoulder. The only reason Jason was so upset, was because of the worry he’d caused him. They were connected and he knew Jason went through horrible anguish if he didn’t know where Lucas was.

Jason released an unfathomable inhuman growl that vibrated deep within his chest and curled his hands into balls causing his nails to cut deep grooves in the mahogany desktop.

Lucas’ eyes followed the movement and stifled a laugh behind a cough. “Okay...okay, I’m sorry Jason. Jesus, you’re going to end up thrashing me. Not only that, you’re ruining a perfectly good antique.”

“You’re bloody hell right!” he barked. “And fuck the bloody desk!”

Lucas’ expression nullified somewhat, “I really don’t want to get in a down out fight with you. Last time, it took us both days to heal. And remember when Valear found out, he threatened to end us both.”

Jason’s expression softened at the memory, somewhat calming him down. He smiled, “It was well worth it.”

“When the hell was that anyway?”

“I forget, around seventeen-fifty, somewhere. We were

both ridiculous juveniles. ”

“What was that about again?”

His eyes flashed again, “Same shit. You wouldn’t listen to me. Ran off by yourself, near got yourself killed. I tracked you with four others and by the time I got there you were being attacked by a dozen other Vampires.”

“Oh yeah.” Lucas smiled. Jason was magnificent. His solid muscle and legendary fierceness never ceased to amaze him when he was hunting. Jason and his pack ripped his enemies to shreds. “I just wanted some alone time.”

Jason shook his head and sat down opposite of him, “Valear near tore my limbs off over that. I came home and took it out on you.”

“We destroyed that house in Spain.”

Jason grinned as the memory resurfaced, “Rubble.” He paused letting the seriousness of the situation affect him again, “No more though, Lucas. You may be my Lord and Master, but if you keep doing this, I will flog you.”

“You can try.” Lucas let a slow smile spread across his face and his eyes flashed. Like any men their age they touselled in the past, usually with grim results to the surrounding environment. They were almost matched in strength, with Lucas having quite a few more talents. However, if he kept it fair, they have had good wrestling matches. Sometimes it was the only way for Lucas to let Jason release his anger toward him, because truth is, he didn’t always do what he was meant to. Like anyone that was destined to inherit so much power and responsibility, he rebelled every now and then. The only reason they stopped besides the harm to the environment of knocking down trees, crushing boulders and demolishing whatever estate they lived on, Valear threatened to replace Jason with someone tamer. Lucas couldn’t have that. He loved Jason like a brother. He was his family. So, over that last few centuries they behaved

themselves, for the most part.

“I can look after myself sometimes, Jason.”

“Lucas, if it were any other time or situation, we both know that.” Jason said, “But, let’s not try that theory. Now, there’s your girl *and* the rebels. The woman makes you vulnerable. When they find out that you have a weakness, this could cause—“

Lucas interrupted, “—Jason, the girl will be our priority from now on.” He said seriously, “Protect her first and foremost. I’ll take care of myself when it comes to Jack. If he gets his claws on Elsa, I’ll never forgive myself.” He released a deep sigh and ran his fingers through his dark hair in frustration, “This just keeps getting better.”

“You know I can’t do that. You come first.” He argued, “Are you are trying to get me killed? Valear will be angry that I took detail off of you to chase a mere mortal female.”

“Not when he finds out why. I just have selfish tendencies sometimes and I want her.” He stood and rubbed the back of his neck with his hand, “I’ll explain things to father.”

“I’m sure that will go over well, and could you pick selfish tendencies less harmful to my life? Every time you take off, I age.”

Lucas laughed knowing that like him, Jason will never age, “I will try. But I’m not promising anything.”

“Just take the girl Lucas.” Jason said in exasperation.

“I can’t.”

“Why the hell not?”

“Because she doesn’t understand darkness, betrayal, and hate, and if I take her too soon before she has a chance to make a choice, the betrayal will be too much.” A pained expression crossed his handsome features, “I can’t risk losing her. Can you imagine waking up to another life, another world like this?” His hand sliced through the air, “Elsa loves life too much to remove it

from her completely. Also she's entirely devoted to those selfish friends of hers. She must be shown that her life, as it is now, is nothing. It must be her choice and before you suggest I influence her thoughts, I can't. Then she's a puppet, not the woman I want."

Jason understood the pressure Lucas was under. He knew his role in the association was essential to the survival of both their races. Now, there was this girl...that affected him to the likes that Jason had never witness before. It really threw a wrench in the enormous responsibilities that Lucas already had. Yes, he wanted him to happy, but this couldn't have come at a worse time. Now Jason would make sure she was protected also because Lucas wished it. He looked at him, "There's a storm coming."

"Yes there is." Lucas said seriously.

The next week went by entirely too fast and Elsa threw herself into her classes because it seemed to be the only way that she could try and erase the tall handsome stranger.

That following Friday Tanya sat in the bleachers beside Linda, while Friday afternoon track practice was occurring on the field below. She was working on an essay that was due on Monday. While Linda, being her usual self, was watching football practice.

Linda's latest obsession, Ted Williams, was the star quarterback and Captain of the football team. He was tall, and had an athletic build which was tanned by the weeks of practice in the sun and his dirty blond hair was now sun streaked. Linda knew he was using his football scholarship to get a degree in psychology. She found a lot out by just being nosey. Although, she didn't really care what he was there for, he just looked good. Most importantly, he was single.

Elsa ran the track that circled the football field. She ran with controlled ease breathing in and out with each rhythmic step. Elsa knew that Linda only came to watch her run, because football practice was happening at the same time as track practice. She didn't mind. She never judged Linda for her faults, she knew her heart was in the right place...most times. Running always helped her sort out her thoughts. She was almost in a meditation of sorts, it helped her control her pace and her breathing. It was one of the rare things that made her feel free of the worries of school, her friends, and other things that have entered into her life. In fact she couldn't concentrate on anything since she met the stranger in the limo almost a week ago, then again at the auction. She couldn't think of anything else but the feel of his hand on her cheek and the masculine voice that caressed her name in such a way that thinking about it brought butterflies to the pit of her stomach. Who was he? He had made her feel so beautiful with a single touch. She couldn't explain how he was able to do that in the short few minutes that she'd met him. Was it possible to be attracted to a man that she'd just met? Then there was the charity auction where she made a complete fool out of herself. She was occupied with conflicting thoughts of self doubt when the football landed directly on the track in front of her.

“Elsa look out!”

Elsa snapped her head in the direction of Tanya's voice, pulling her out of her thoughts and her attention away from the track and the football in front of her. Her foot landed directly on top of the ball. She twisted at such an awkward angle that all the force of her weight was absorbed by her ankle. She felt the sharp distinct pain as her bone fractured under the force. She landed with a screech of pain. The oblong ball rolled off to the side of the track spinning clockwise before it lay down and came to a stop.

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She laid there for a few minutes afraid to move. Cuts and scrapes burned her knees and hands, but she was too concerned about her ankle to care about the minor cuts. She heard footsteps of approaching people and managed to get into a sitting position. Pain shot up her leg.

“Oh God! Are you okay?” It was Ted Williams. He squatted down beside her.

She looked up at him and only recognized him because Linda had pointed him out half a dozen times. His image became blurry as she viewed him through teary eyes, “I hurt my ankle.”

“Let me see.” Ted removed his helmet and kneeled next to her leg. He ran his hand over it. When she flinched he pulled his hand back. “It doesn’t look promising.” he gave her a sympathetic look.

That is when he *really* looked at her.

Small beads of perspiration speckled her brow. Her full lips parted in a gasp of pain as he set her leg back down. When her eyes met his, he had to stifle his own gasp. She possessed the deepest green eyes he’d ever seen. Even through the perspiration and thin wisps of hair that covered her face, she was positively gorgeous. He was sure he’d never seen her around before, because she was unforgettable.

At this point, Elsa didn’t care if it was the President himself leaning over her. She was only concerned for her ankle. She shook her head, her eyes brimming with tears. “This can’t be happening.” She struggled to stand up, and lost her footing.

Ted caught her before she hit the ground “Here, lean on me.” He wrapped his strong arm around her small waist, and she wrapped her arms around his trunk. He was too tall to put her arm across his shoulders. She could feel the warm perspiration through the jersey he wore, and he smelled like sweat and the outdoors. It was surprisingly pleasant. She may have allowed it

to affect her if it was under any other circumstance, but the pain she was dealing with took precedent.

Regardless of how upset she was, she was still thankful that he was there at that time, or she could have further damaged herself by falling. She managed a shy, “Thank you.” Elsa was distracted by the familiar voice of her Coach.

“Let me through!” Les Carver pushed his way through the small crowd of curious onlookers. “What happened?” he supported Elsa’s other side.

“I tripped on a football.” She felt so stupid. If she was looking where she was going and concentrating like she was supposed to, this would have never happened. Now more of the football team came to investigate the small crowd and why their quarterback hadn’t returned to the field. This made her even more embarrassed. Then Linda and Tanya were beside her huffing and puffing rushing to their friend’s side.

“Let’s get you seated so I can take a look at your foot.” He was evidently concerned for his star runner. He and Ted guided Elsa to a bench below the bleachers. Coach knelt down and examined her ankle. Shutting her eyes, Elsa hissed through closed teeth as pain shot up her leg again.

Coach swore under his breath. It was definitely broken. Just his luck, his star runner has a broken leg.

“It’s my fault,” Ted stated sheepishly, “I threw too high.”

“I didn’t make the catch,” Stated another, “it’s not your fault captain.”

Ted glanced over his shoulder at his team mate. It still didn’t make him feel less guilty.

“He could have easily caught that throw,” Linda defended, “It *wasn’t* your fault.”

Ted turned and looked at Linda for the first time and she gave him a striking smile. He looked her over quickly and resisted the urge to return it. He then turned his attention back

to Elsa and her coach, “is it bad?”

Coach Carver stood and shook his head, not wanting Elsa to know what he already knew, “It’s hard to tell. It might be broken, but I can’t tell with all the swelling. I think we should take you in and get some x-rays done.”

“I tried to warn you Elsa, I thought you heard me.” Tanya felt terrible for her. She watched Elsa bury her face in her hands and let out a sob.

A dark figure stood below the bleachers where Linda and Tanya sat only moments before taking in the scene that unfolded before him. As one of the master’s pack set to guard the girl, his height was distinguishable yet through experience he managed to conceal himself from the women and took up a position below them to watch between the seats. His topaz eyes flashed luminescent and narrowed on Ted Williams as the young man put his hands on his master’s desire. The gesture was more than helpful; it was an opportunity to *touch* her. From his point of view, the man had selfish motives. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out his cell phone and dialed Jason’s number.

CHAPTER SIX

THAT FOLLOWING NIGHT LUCAS was seated in his study at his desk supposedly working. However, couldn’t concentrate on business that night or for the last week for that matter. He kept thinking of *her*. He kept thinking of Elsa. He signed a couple of receipts and then pushed his ledgers away from him and leaned back in his high back leather chair folding his hands behind his head. He really tried to concentrate on other matters hoping to drive her memory out of his head. Nothing seemed to work. He meant it when he told Jason that he didn’t have a choice in pursuing her. He had wanted her from the moment he first laid eyes on her. She held an inexplicable lure over him, and

if he ignored it any longer, he swore he would go mad. What sort of intoxicating power did she hold? He'd never known of a mortal to be able to summon him or one such as him before. Yet, she did and without her knowledge. The only explanation was to say she was not human, which he already knew she was. He had touched her, "damn." He said softly. He smiled and looked down at the palm of his hand, *definitely human*. He felt the untainted crimson tide flowing through her veins. He curled his hand into a fist. Her pure innocence overwhelmed his senses. He could almost *taste* it. Yes, he did want her. Although he'd already resigned to have her, something in him kept resisting because of his other responsibilities. If he didn't have them, there would be no contest. Elsa would be his.

The experiences that have enriched him over the centuries allowed him to know when to and not to act on instinct. This was one of those times to act. He closed his eyes to summon up the image of her. He could easily remember her emerald eyes and the naiveté she held within them. Her ebony hair, high cheekbones, soft skin and exquisitely formed body, made him crave for her presence. Something he hadn't done with a mortal woman before. Even Celeste never brought out this yearning in him. Elsa was definitely someone different and she possesses a power she had no recognition of.

"Lucas."

A soft feminine voice raised him out of his thoughts and he swiftly concealed them. It was foolish of him to be thinking so freely. He opened his eyes, *speak of the Devil*. Celeste had appeared in his study and was walking toward him. He silently hoped she didn't catch any of his thoughts. He invaded her mind and not finding anything revealing was satisfied she didn't. However, she did have the ability to conceal her thoughts quite well. After all, he made her what she was and taught her well. His eyes glided over her completely magnificent figure as she

approached him with a sensual sway of her hips. She was elegantly clad in a dark delicious crimson evening gown. It was a trademark of hers to dress in theatrical fashion as if she was on her way to an extravagant Opera. She was a striking English woman with rich auburn hair and had the face of a porcelain doll. She had the unique talent to bring the male species to their knees with but a nod. She was also the most powerful female of the Association that he knew of, and was difficult for him to even resist. It had taken him a long time to overcome the sexual power that she wielded.

He'd found her in a London alley in 1339, during the time of the black plague. She was covered with purplish black spots, was very thin and frail with but a few breaths left in her body. Her once full lips were now parched and cracked and she managed a weak whisper, "kill me". So he obliged. At that time, the woman showed nothing of her former beauty, but he was experienced in seeing splendor through ugliness. That's how he amassed his fortune, with fine art and antiquities. So, within him stirred pity for a once beautiful creature. He was little naïve at the time also and could not let her fade from this world. So he gave her the gift of eternal life. They stayed together for a short time before she decided she would like a taste of her new found freedom and power. Or, in her case, a taste of a different variety of masculine company.

He was more than glad to release her, for he discovered very quickly that her beauty definitely did not reflect her inner being. He soon lost interest in her. She still managed to show up quite often, constantly trying to influence him, unsuccessfully. But she was never one to give up easily. Needless to say, he hadn't transformed any others since Celeste.

He was truthful to himself by admitting that he still cared about her, but it could never reach a point of involvement. He didn't trust her. Unfortunately she was here, in his study, while

he was alone and still had yearning thoughts for Elsa. “What is it Celeste?” He didn’t try to keep the irritation out of his voice.

She stilled, studying his features for a moment, not the least bit insulted, “Why Lucas, something is different with you.”

He turned away from her curious stare, “You should leave. I’m in no mood for company tonight.”

Her eyes lit up as she figured out what he was feeling. It was quite simple after knowing him for a few centuries. Her crimson lips pulled into a sensual smile. She laid her long scarlet painted fingernails on his desk, pausing to look at the new grooves carved into the shiny lacquered top, before walking around it toward him trailing them beside her. She didn’t ask him about the damage on the desk. “What is it Lucas that makes you—look--happy?”

He focused his irritated violet stare on her, “You always were a persistent bitch, weren’t you Celeste? Always showing up when you’re not wanted.”

She tsked, “You always get irritable when *I* show up. I think you’re hiding your affection for me.” She knelt before him placing her long elegant fingers on his thighs. “Are you going to tell me why you feel amorous tonight, my Prince?”

He despised her when she called him that, “I think you’d better leave,” he repeated. Despite the distaste of her words, it had been too long since he had had female companionship, “And do not refer to me that way again.” He wasn’t royalty when he was mortal and regardless of his rank in the Association, he never agreed with the title.

She ignored his protests and ran her hands ran the muscular thickness of his thighs toward the zipper in his black dress slacks, “Yes my Lord, but I’m not leaving.” She cooed. She stared at him with her azure eyes beckoning him.

He snarled a warning.

She just smiled wider, “You are very agitated, let me help

you relax.” She wasn’t the least bit intimidated by him. She knew he would never harm her.

He struggled within himself to regain control and his hand seized one of her arms. “Stop this!” He stood up taking her with him.

She hissed at him, “Let me help you.” She repeated as she raked her one of her long fingernails down the front of her gown, splitting the rich material apart showing her naked form beneath.

He growled, abruptly shoved her aside and left his study.

Celeste watched his retreating back and let out a huff of frustration. No one was able to resist her, yet Lucas managed over and over again. She stood there completely naked except for the French black lace thong she wore, with her hands on her sculptured hips, knowing she was completely powerfully desirable and couldn’t help but be disappointed. He was a virile and most attentive lover. In fact, of all the lovers she’d had, he had been the best. Part of her wished that she remained loyal to him so she could feel his hands on her, his body against hers, and sample the rare vampire blood he possessed. But then she wouldn’t be able to enjoy the freedom she did now by wielding endless power over other males with barely a thought, commanding them to do her every will and desire. Too bad she couldn’t have both.

Lucas returned a few minutes later. “Put this on.” He brought his housecoat for Celeste and roughly tossed it at her. She reluctantly put on but didn’t belt up. He then walked over and poured them both a drink.

Celeste sat on a nearby couch, her bared legs were crossed. She didn’t even do the housecoat up, so it didn’t make much difference that she wore it. She knew he was angry with her over her persistence to get him in bed, but she didn’t care. “Lucas, why do you resist me so much? I remember a time—“

“—That was long ago Celeste.” He interrupted without turning around. He finished pouring a glass of brandy for the both of them, handed one to her and sat in a chair across from her, his eyes on her shapely legs. “Do you ever stop?” he took a long drink from his glass and stared at her over the rim.

“It’s what I live for darling.” She cooed, and then her face became gravely serious, “Have you ever thought about us?”

“No.” it was said simply, as if he just declined a cup of coffee.

She gave him a hurt look. “Wasn’t I good enough for you? I remember a time when I used to be.”

“Don’t start with the games Celeste, I know you too well.” And he did.

“All right Lucas, but can you tell me if there is any feeling left for me?”

Lucas could feel the insecurity in her over his affections. It was genuine. She was worried that he cared less about her, which he didn’t. He just didn’t let her affect him in the ways she was used to. “I care about you.” He confessed. He cared about her like he would fine art, because she was beautiful. However, it wasn’t love, it never was.

She quickly dropped the hurt expression, exchanging it with a curious one. “Are you going to tell me why you were so preoccupied?”

He shook his head, stood and gently retrieved her glass, “I think you’ve overstayed your welcome.”

Surprised at his abrupt secrecy, she stared at him from a moment, then stood up, “You always were a private one, Lucas. I understand that you don’t wish to discuss this with me now. Maybe when you have had time to think, you’ll talk to me.”

“Not this time, Celeste.” He lifted his glass to her as she suddenly vanished. He waited for a moment until he was convinced that she was gone.

Jason walked in at that moment and tossed a black duffle

bag on the couch that Celeste occupied only moments ago he paused and inhaled deeply through his nostrils. He gave Lucas a familiar look, but didn't mention Celeste's visit because he had other things on his mind, "Are you going to see the girl tonight?" They had received word earlier from another of Lucas' loyal subjects, Julian, who had been watching her for the past few days that she was at the very hospital that Lucas was visiting tonight. Julian was as loyal as Jason to Lucas; and could be trusted. Lucas had many loyal servants, but there were very few he would trust with Elsa.

"It is not to be known." He picked up the duffle bag. His thoughts turned to Elsa. He knew that if he wanted to pursue her, he would have to move quickly, for Valear might interfere.

"I will get the car."

"Not tonight."

Jason paused and cocked an eyebrow. He'd already gone over this with Lucas barely a week ago. He didn't like Lucas going off by himself even if it was just a quick trip to the hospital for a fresh supply. It was no secret that others in the association weren't so fond of Lucas coming into the power that Valear possessed. Over the past few centuries tensions have been rising amongst the Association over leadership and the rebels will try to rid the Association of Lucas....again. They only needed to find an opportunity.

"Lucas—" Jason began to protest, "We discussed this."

"I know, but dragging someone your size around with me causes heads to turn." Lucas explained trying to quell his friend's worries.

"And you don't?" Jason looked over Lucas' four thousand dollar black double breasted suit and undeniable good looks with obvious disapproval. "Besides, like I said before Valear would have my head...literally...and I've rather grown attached to it," he furrowed his brow in concern, "Not only that, you know the

rebels are gaining power among the association—“

“—My friend, “ Lucas interrupted and looked at him seriously, “I understand your concern, but I *am* going alone.”

Jason growled his disapproval. “At *least* let me send the car to pick you up.”

Lucas sighed in frustration. Jason was being logical, protective, and his concern was authentic. He just hated being coddled. “All right.” He conceded.

He bowed his head in respect. It was minimal, but he would take it. Regardless, his concern was so genuine that his gut ached at the thought of Lucas going to the hospital unprotected. Lucas could hold his own against many, but it depends how many are sent to try and destroy him. Also, he knew Valear was near and would protect him. He always was close watching his prodigy son. So if something happened to Lucas, and Valear couldn't prevent it, he would take it out on the one supposedly protecting him. Not only that, Jason was bred and raised for his loyalty, this was killing him inside that he wasn't being allowed to do his duty. He knew as Lucas did that he was being watched constantly for a weakness, and now there was one with his attraction to the mortal girl even though it wasn't known yet.

Lucas could sense Jason's discomfort, “Do not worry about me. I'll be fine.” He turned to leave.

“Lucas...about the red-head?” It was way off topic, but Jason couldn't resist broaching the subject again.

Lucas had put some thought into this, unbeknownst to Jason. It might be a good idea to have her distracted. He smiled, “I will let you have her, Jason, but not now. I need to gain Elsa's trust first and then you can do what you wish with the other. Just keep her out of our way.” He didn't care for that one too much, and knew she would be trouble. He could feel anger and possessiveness in her. The sooner she's out of his way the better.

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Jason could hardly conceal his pleasure. Of course, he wouldn't damage her in any way, but he would definitely enjoy her. He sensed the deep sexual yearning within her and wanted to sample it. Lucas normally condoned such behavior mainly because he didn't find much amusement in Jason's sadistic primal behaviors, but it's what was bred in him. Literally, he couldn't help himself.

Linda, Tanya, and Ted sat in the waiting room. Ted felt responsible for what had happened to Elsa, so he insisted he come along. Much to his chagrin, Linda was more than happy to agree. He also couldn't shake the image of her sitting on the track holding her ankle, with tears welling up in her eyes. He was infatuated. If he could have done anything for her at all in that moment to take away the pain he'd caused, he would have. He couldn't get her sweet face out of his mind. He spared a glance at Linda. She introduced herself on the way over, not that she needed an introduction. He already knew who she was. Her reputation preceded her. She was well known on campus, for her beauty. She was also known for her lack of moral concern for others. She was one of those girls that you publicly display and screw, but never get serious with. He's had more than enough experience with women like that and has grown bored of it. He knew first hand of her conquest, because his best Friend and teammate Brad Thompson went out with her. She messed up his head pretty good. He was too damn nice to her and she used him. She obviously knew what she was doing. Ted nearly asked her out but his good instincts spared him that mistake. That was before Brad went after her. Whether he could handle her or not, fucking her wasn't worth the headache and he was sick of sleeping with women he didn't like. Shortly after Brad dated her, he dropped out of school and heard that he ended up in a mental institution somewhere. Ted hadn't been able to track him down

to find out if the rumors were true.

He turned his attention to Tanya. Like Elsa, he hadn't seen her before. Unlike Linda, she seemed very concerned for their friend. Tanya had already told him of Elsa's scholarship. If she injured herself permanently, it would be revoked. This just added to his burden of guilt. He realized that most of those tears that Elsa shed weren't for her ankle; it was for her loss of funding. Just then the Doctor walked in.

Coach Carver stood from his seat as did the rest of them.

Fighting self-pity, Elsa sat in a small bed in the emergency unit surrounded by a tan curtain staring at her damaged ankle that was now elevated on pillows and packed in ice. The doctor told her the swelling had to go down before they cast it. She sobbed when he told her it was unquestionably broken. She was thankful that the nurse pulled the curtain around her bed so no one could see her crying. He also told her that she managed to break her ankle and the tip of her fibula and tibia. She should expect not to run for at least six months. She gaped *six months!* Her hard earned, short lived education was for nothing. Complete despair washed over her. Her scholarship would be cancelled and she would have to drop out. She grabbed a pillow and threw it at the curtain in a small attempt to release her frustration just to have it caught by a familiar hand.

"For someone who is supposed to be injured that was quite a throw." Said a husky voice.

Her mouth fell open as he startled her. It was the man from last week. The man that had her thoughts and emotions in such a twist that she hadn't been able to concentrate on anything else. She wasn't prepared for the overwhelming enigma that he created by seeing him in the bright lights of the hospital. He was truly charismatically masculine and even with her lack of experience with men, she could see that he oozed sexuality. Her

breath caught in her throat. She must've looked like a fool with her jaw hanging open. All she could muster was, "I didn't hear you come in." Truth is, the words were very hard to speak, but she managed with hardly a stutter.

He smiled, "You seemed preoccupied." He walked up beside her and set the pillow on the bed.

She could feel her heart thud in her chest as he approached her. His dark curls fell slightly to his shoulders and dusted his brow in sharp contrast to his blue-indigo gaze. Then when he spoke, his deep voice laced with that sensual Scottish brogue was utterly hypnotic. She couldn't help but be fixated on him. Again, she must have looked silly, just staring, not saying a word. Thoughts filled her on the past week and how she couldn't shake the image of him. Now he was here with her and they were alone and that same feeling washed over her at seeing him for the first time, only stronger. She must've seemed like a ridiculous school girl being captivated with him as she was. She mustered her courage, "Who are you?"

His expression took on an amused look as he stared down at her. He reached inside his coat and withdrew a rose, "A friend....to cheer you up."

She smiled as she took the rose and smelled it. "How did you know I was here?" She questioned.

"I was here for a meeting and heard your name from the nurses. There can't be too many Elsas in this world." He reached over and brushed a lock of hair off her face wanting to touch her. Actually, now that he was so close and had her all to himself, there was much more he wanted to do to her.

She felt her stomach lurch at the gentle touch. "Are you a Doctor?"

He chuckled, "Not quite." He took a long slow look down her shapely legs, "I see that you have hurt yourself."

She watched his eyes traced the length of her bare leg to the

swollen dark purplish-blue injury at her ankle. She didn't know what possessed her to tell him how it happened but before she knew it, she spilled how she'd fallen and what the Doctor told her leaving out the reason why she'd been unable to concentrate, "He told me I couldn't run for six months." She had difficulty keeping the tremor out of her voice and preventing the tears from falling again. He seemed not to notice.

Lucas did notice. More than that, he felt the twisting anguish off of her like it was his own and against his better judgment, he was going to help her. "Really?" he walked to the end of the bed where her ankle lay packed in ice. He turned and stared at her, "do you mind?" this was something he would have never done for any mortal, but Elsa was different.

She shook her head unable to take her eyes off of his. When he laid a hand on her bare leg, he could have asked permission to cut it off and she would have agreed.

Her mouth opened, but not in protest. It was more akin to excitement. A tingling sensation ebbed from his fingertips and seem to penetrate her flesh and then deeper into the bone itself. When the sensation reached her ankle the tingling turned into undeniable warmth. The heat penetrated the pain and dissolved it. She sat up straight in bed, "How...?" She glanced up at him and saw that his eyes were closed

"Shhh..." he interrupted and she quieted.

She did as he asked, but could not deny the electrical feeling he gave her. It felt like every limb was tingling from his touch, not just her leg. She watched his handsome features until he finally opened his eyes and centered them on her.

"I suspect it's not broken."

"What did you do?" she finally breathed, not realizing she was holding her breath at his touch.

"*I didn't do anything. The Doctor made a mistake.*" He tapped into his ancient power and made the thoughts her own.

“He must’ve made a mistake.” She repeated as his voice bore the words into her mind like gospel. She believed him without a doubt and with it, the event of him touching her leg was just erased from her thoughts.

Lucas moved up beside her again, his gaze locked with hers and the whole time he trailed his fingers up her leg, not seeming concerned with the intimate contact. He could sense her apprehension, but more importantly, her own excitement. “Now, I need to know when I can see you again.” He glanced at his watch, “I’m late for my meeting Elsa. I have to go in a moment.”

“What? See me?” She was taken back taking her attention off his caress that caused a tingly sensation in its wake. Why would he want to see *her* again? “Even after I insulted your painting?” she blushed.

He laughed, “It was a terrible painting Elsa. I didn’t like it either. I admired your honesty and of course I would like to see you again.” His eyes followed an ebony curl as it fell across her face again and he brushed it aside allowing his hand to linger there.

“What about your girlfriend.”

“Not my girlfriend. She was a date.” He explained with a smile.

Elsa blushed, “Sorry.”

“No need to apologize. If I had known you liked art, I would have taken you. After all she bought that horrid painting.” He grinned.

Not able to help herself, she laughed. “Wow.” Then she remembered what else he just said. Was that the sound of her heart skipping a few beats? “You don’t even know where I live.”

“UCLA campus.”

“But...”

“I’m a wealthy man, I have my sources. I know what I like.” When she tilted her head with a puzzled expression on her face,

he wanted to kiss her. She had no idea how positively alluring that look of innocence was. However, he wasn't ready to kiss her. He knew it would be too much for him to handle and this wasn't the place. "I meant," he added, "I was smitten the first moment I saw you several weeks ago, then when you showed up at the auction, I knew I had to find out where you lived." He lied dispelling her worries.

"How did you find out?"

"You took a cab home from the auction. I saw the company name on the door and I contacted the company and found where they dropped you." Another lie.

"You watched me leave?" her eyes widened slightly. Did that mean that he was really interested in her? She couldn't help but feel a thrill go through her to know that this man actually followed her out of the building last Sunday. If anything women would be following him everywhere.

"I didn't want you to leave, and yes, I watched." This wasn't a lie.

She couldn't help but smile, but was it because he flattered her so much with his pursuit, or was it because he was there standing before her larger than life.

"However," he added, "I don't know which dorm room is yours."

She just stared at him while he patiently waited for her to tell him. Shouldn't she be a little wary of this stranger? Oddly enough, she wasn't. She'd let him touch her leg without thinking twice as if she'd known him for years. The only apprehension she felt was her unnerving attraction to him. Never in her life had she experienced such feelings over a man. Her stomach would knot, her heart rate increased along with her breathing, her skin felt tingly all over, and she ached to touch him. What was happening to her? She was surrounded by young men in her classes, yet she never even noticed one of them. She probably

couldn't even remember any of their names, but this man she couldn't forget, even with the brief crossing of paths. "Room 312" she finally said and watched a slow triumphant grin spread across his handsome face.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"CAN WE SEE her Dr. Evens?"

Fred shook his head, "She said she didn't want visitors right now. So maybe you should all go home. I will release her in the morning after we cast the leg."

Linda jumped in at that statement, "Excuse me Doctor, but it's late and we've been waiting all afternoon and into the evening to see her."

Fred stared at the beautiful blonde for a moment considering her words, "I'm sorry, I must go with the wishes of my patient."

"Have you heard of my father, Senator Stanten?" Linda beamed. "I'm sure he would be grateful if you were to help us out."

Ted rolled his eyes.

"No, I'm sorry Miss. Elsa is my patient, not your father." He didn't care who her father was. Yes, he knew of him.

She became defensive, "Look, if you value your job...."

Fred gave her a look of disgust, "...My job is safe, I assure you. This is a private hospital"

"My father has powerful friends", boasted Linda.

Tanya stepped in, "Don't mind her Doctor, she's just very concerned for Elsa. Could we just see her, even for a moment?"

Fred looked back and forth at the two then his eyes settled on Tanya. It was obvious that she had genuine concern for her friend. He took a deep breath and relaxed, "I will ask her again. If she refuses, there is nothing I can do."

Tanya nodded and smiled, "Thank you."

After the Doctor left, Tanya turned to Linda, "What the hell was that about?"

Linda shrugged, "Sorry, I'm just not used to not getting my way."

"Get used to it," interjected Ted.

She turned around, "Excuse me?"

Ted shook his head, "You didn't even seem to care about her being hurt until you didn't get your way, now it seems to be your main concern."

Linda smiled at him as if he never insulted her. "My friends are always my main concern."

Ted turned away, not wanting anything more to do with her. He sat down again. It was pointless to even talk to her. Tanya sat down beside him. He looked at her for a moment, "Why do you put up with her?"

"Linda?" Tanya managed a small laugh. "Because Elsa does." She shrugged.

"She's such a snob." Ted watched Linda pace the small room.

"She's not as bad as you think." Tanya stared at him for a moment. Linda was right, he was handsome, "She likes you." She confessed.

"I know." He couldn't help but sound disappointed.

Behind the curtain Elsa spoke in a low whisper. "Are you sure you want to see me again?" For the life of her Elsa couldn't fathom his request.

He chuckled, "Isn't it obvious." He sat down on the bed beside her, his gaze never leaving hers.

She could only manage a small shake of her head avoiding his steady fascinating stare.

"You are so beautiful, Elsa." He cupped her chin and

brought her gaze back to his. “I haven’t stopped thinking about you since I met you last week.”

Her mouth fell open and she felt her face flushed at his confession. She wanted to tell him the same. Instead she lingered on his first words. Also, she just couldn’t forget the stunning woman that he was with at the auction. Elsa knew she didn’t hold a candle to her. “You must not get out much if you think I’m beautiful.” She saw something akin to awe cross his features as he stared at her.

Lucas wanted to shake his head at her thoughts. How could she possibly think that she was less beautiful than that woman? She put her to shame and Giselle knew it. In fact the jealousy radiating off of her when she had seen Lucas talking to Elsa was almost revolting. Yet there was absolutely none of this sweet thing in front of him. She actually thought Giselle was beautiful. The woman was completely sinless. He let a smile pull at the corners of his lips. There was nothing more than he wanted to do at that moment, but to teach her some sins. He stared at her for a moment longer, then slowly grinned, “Accept what I say to you Elsa, I never give compliments lightly.”

She flushed even more than she thought possible. Yet, with every will of her being she didn’t want him to leave despite her embarrassment. She didn’t even know his name, or who he was, but she was fascinated by his presences that she completely forgot to ask him. She felt so undeserving of his attention because she thought he was too perfect, yet over and over, she kept seeing him and now, here he was with *her*. Is this a dream? Could he be real? Without thinking she reached up and touched his cheek to see if he was genuine. She traced her fingers along his strong jaw and saw the muscle bulge as he clenched his teeth at her stroke. Instantly, she felt ashamed. She had no right to just touch him and by his tense reaction, he was thinking the same thing. She was just so overwhelmed by his appeal that she

just didn't think. She went to pull back and his hand shot out of nowhere and stopped her. Her eyes widened.

"Don't be afraid, Elsa." To her surprise he was thinking the exact opposite.

When he spoke, his voice was as smooth as dripping honey. It made her numb to everything around her but him. His hand released her wrist and traced a path down her arm, over her shoulder leaving that same familiar tingle in its wake. She kept her hand on his face as his slid down her back and around her waist. Before she knew it he was pulling her up to him effortlessly. She automatically tilted her head up to meet his and he placed his cheek next to hers, flesh on flesh, breathing in her scent deeply.

He smelled like everything she found desirable in her life; fresh cut cedar, the sharp distinct aroma of leather and even fresh rain. How was that possible? All the scents took turns surfacing, assaulting her senses, making her want more. Then he started whispering in her ear with a deep spellbinding voice. The words weren't English; they were some other language she didn't recognize. At that point she didn't care. His words flooded into her mind, spilled through all of her senses like a warm wine and offered a million promises, making her feel like the sole object of his affection.

As he spoke into her ear, every now and then his lips gently brushed her ear lobe. She let out a euphoric sigh at the exciting sensation it sent through her. Unknowingly her hands wound tighter in his hair. To her, it was totally unexplained on how she could react with such a way when she hadn't any experience with intimacy. A wonderful feeling formed between them when they touched and vibrated through her whole body, enveloping her, beckoning her. She didn't try to resist, she didn't want to. She relished it, and never wanted anything more in her life than that moment not to end.

She felt his arms tighten around her waist pulling her deeper into his embrace. At some point he had stopped talking in that unforgivably hypnotic language but she was too caught up with his closeness to realize it. Her hands moved to his chest splaying her fingers over the thin silk material he wore under his suit jacket. She felt his hand move to her cheek and caress down to her neck and his thumb rested on the pulsing artery there. Suddenly he pulled back against her protest and sat erect again. She watched him take a deep breath, swallow hard and turn away. She sat up in bed and stared at him in astonishment and then complete humiliation as the realization of her actions hit her. What the hell was she doing? She had never been so forward with anyone like that before in her life. However, as embarrassed as she was she could not take her eyes off of him. He had turned his head away and she thought it was because of her shameless actions, and when he spoke, his voice was different. It sounded strained.

Lucas was raging for a taste of her. Unbeknownst to her, he was telling her exactly what he wanted to do to her body with his own in perfect Latin. Of course she didn't understand any of it, but her reaction told him that her physical being did. However, he did more on raising his own lust than he'd meant to. Christ almighty, he wanted her. His erection was a painful testament of that. He wanted her writhing beneath him, hot and wanton. He wanted her to let loose the powerful unrelenting passion that he felt within her. He wanted to show her the sexual violent need he had for her in every possible way there was and when she reached her peak, he would taste her and heighten their ecstasy. Of all things he wanted to do to her, he couldn't do it here. "No. This isn't what I wanted. Not now." He rasped out in ragged restraint. God forbid if he gave in to temptation and did kiss her, nothing on earth would have stopped him from possessing her.

Suddenly she felt the need to explain herself, "Oh my God!

I'm so sorry. I don't know what go into me!" Her words made him look at her, but the look on his face was not the least bit accusing. In fact he looked guilty after her confession.

"You shouldn't blame yourself for this Elsa. It definitely wasn't *your* fault."

"I swear, I'm not like that." How stupid did that sound?

He chuckled, "I know."

"I mean...well, I've never..." Shut up Elsa! She thought.

He reached out and cupped her face in his hands, making sure she could see his expression of complete understanding, "*I know.*" He repeated this time with more conviction in his tone.

She stopped trying to explain herself as her eyes locked with his. He meant it. She didn't know how she knew, but the closest she could define was his expression didn't lie. She nodded slowly but still couldn't get rid of the heat that flushed her cheeks. "You have the most beautiful eye color I've ever seen." She said barely above a whisper.

He grinned "You manage to bewitch me Elsa. I can't possibly imagine what you invoke in men with less... experience than me."

She was bewildered at that statement. Up until now, with him, men never even knew she existed. And what was he saying to her earlier? She wanted to ask him, but was again rendered speechless.

Just then the Doctor pulled the curtain aside and entered.

Fred froze in place and openly gasped when he took in the scene before him, "Lucas, what are you doing here?"

"Lucas." She repeated his name as if she tasted it.

Fred watched Lucas turn and stare at her when she said his name. It was unmistakable the desire registering on his face.

"Lucas?" Fred repeated this time with a little more desperation.

Lucas turned to him, with one eyebrow raised in question at

the emotion in his voice. “Good evening Fred.” He said with complete composure.

Fred pulled the curtain aside. “Could I speak with you?” he spared an uneasy glance at Elsa, “Alone?” There was no denying that he was shocked by what he’d found. He wasn’t sure what had occurred before he’d found them together. He knew that finding a Vampire leaning over his patient made him very uncomfortable. Especially since it looked almost...intimate.

“Certainly.”

Fred watched him turn and placed a possessive kiss on Elsa’s forehead. She placed her hand on his cheek in silent farewell. He turned his face into the palm of her hand and planted another kiss, “I will see you later, love.” He added the endearment confidently and she didn’t even seem bothered by it.

She nodded, “I’ll still be here.” She managed a weak smile.

Fred didn’t say a word until he’d gotten Lucas alone in his office. “I don’t want to offend you Lucas, but what on earth were you doing. She’s one of my patients.”

“We were getting acquainted until we were interrupted.” He said, not elaborating anymore on the subject.

“But Lucas,” Fred stopped in front of him, “Not my patient, please. It would be such a scandal for this hospital if she turned up—“

“—Dead.” Lucas interrupted.

“I wasn’t going to say that.”

“But you were thinking it,” Lucas raised his hand to stop Fred’s protest, “before you disagree, you must remember my capabilities.” He then added with some harshness, “As for the girl, I don’t appreciate this accusation. You’ve known me a long time.”

Fred stilled himself. He knew Lucas for more than five years, when he first purchased the hospital and saved it from financial ruin. Lucas trusted Fred with his secrets and in turn

received fresh blood every few days. Lucas made it clear, that he would support a well trained healthy staff and gave Fred the position of Chief Administrator making crucial decisions on who to hire and how the hospital was managed. In all those years he'd never seen him lose patience until now. He didn't miss the emotion in his voice at his previous statement.

"You never need to fear me, Fred."

The Doctor stared at him for a moment then slowly relaxed, "I forget who you are sometimes and only remember what you are." He regretted his choice of words when Lucas winced.

"I understand."

"I have never seen you get remotely angry before either." He explained, feeling guilty at his assumption.

Lucas shrugged, "it is a delicate subject."

"The girl?" Fred wasn't sure if it was her or the reference he made to his blood lust.

Lucas nodded, "I met her last week." He admitted.

"Does she know about your...er..." Fred wasn't sure how to say it.

"No." Lucas interrupted forming a look of amusement at his trouble explaining.

"What is your intention?"

Lucas locked his indigo eyes on him, "I'm not sure." *She's mine*, he thought.

Fred wasn't sure what Lucas had planned, but he knew Elsa was very naïve and unaware of Lucas' true self. It bothered him that he had set his sights on her of all the women he could have. He went to the small fridge that was in his office and withdrew half a dozen bags of fresh blood. He retrieved Lucas' duffle bag and placed them in it. "I'm just concerned for her, that's all." Fred explained while his back was to Lucas.

"You sound like you're her father." Lucas chuckled.

"I'm a Doctor, it's my job to worry about people." He

defended

“I have no intention of hurting her.” Lucas explained.

“Lucas, she’s really young.” Fred added.

“She’s old enough to know what she wants. She’s not that much younger than I was.” Lucas held out his hand for the bag.

Fred handed it over, “she’s also very naïve.”

Lucas smiled, “I know.”

“Lucas...You don’t mean too...” He couldn’t finish his sentence as realization dawned on him over Lucas’ intentions.

Lucas began walking toward the door. “Don’t worry my friend. This is something neither you nor I have any control over. I will put your worries to rest though. I assure you that I will not influence her decision in any way even though, you both know that I am capable of it.”

“Why her? Why this girl?”

Lucas paused, “I don’t know. I suppose if I did know I would be able to exercise some control over this.” He paused staring at Fred for a moment, “You should really recheck her ankle, I think you made a mistake.” He left closing the door behind him.

Elsa’s friends had found her regardless of what the Doctor had said. However, she was in better spirits than before and appreciated their company.

Ted was still with her friends and spent most of the next hour talking to Elsa.

Tanya noticed that she seemed unusually open, and happy, considering the news she had received earlier. She watched silently as she spoke without hesitation and answered his curious questions about her. She even laughed at a few of his jokes with relatively little shyness. She didn’t know where the change came from but she was surprised it was so sudden. Also, there was no denying that Ted was interested in her. When Elsa reached for a

glass of water off of the side table he reached for it first, trying to do his best to please her. Tanya glanced at Linda and felt a twinge of sympathy for her. After numerous attempts to get Ted to notice her, even rudely interrupting the conversation a few times, she gave up and slumped in a nearby chair sulking. Doctor Evens came in at that moment to ‘check on the progress of the swelling. He removed the ice packs and noticed that the swelling was almost gone, along with all the bruising. He asked her to wiggle her toes and she did without any pain or discomfort. Tanya swore she heard him mumble something about Doctors being put out of business. He ordered more x-rays and asked that Elsa be left alone so she could rest. Tanya and the others agreed. They all said their good-byes. Ted’s seemed to take the longest as he didn’t really want to leave.

Elsa had more x-rays done and they came back good. There wasn’t any sign of the three fractures, just calcification around those areas which was indicative of healing bone. He shook his head in disbelief. He wouldn’t have believed it if he hadn’t seen the first x-rays. He had them side by side on the lighted panel. *If only we all had that ability*, he thought. He went and told Elsa the news. He made up something about a mix up in the x-rays. He hated lying, but it was better than saying *a seven hundred year old Vampire walked in here and used his phenomenal telekinetic power to heal your ankle and seduce you in the process*.

She couldn’t conceal her elation. The Doctor told her just to give it a few days before she ran again. Her thoughts turned to Lucas as the Doctor was leaving. She knew by the exchange between them earlier that they knew each other. “Doctor Evens?”

He turned back to her.

“What does he do?”

“Who?” Although he knew who she was talking about, he just didn’t want to discuss him.

“Lucas.” She stared intently at him.

He could see the yearning in her eyes and eagerness in her voice. And despite his apprehension to tell her anything, there was such an air of innocence about her that he couldn’t help himself. “He does many things.”

“Such as?”

He wasn’t sure what she knew about him already and he was really sure that Lucas wouldn’t appreciate him giving out information. Not only that, he didn’t want to encourage her to have a relationship with him. However, he reluctantly glanced at her green eyes and decided a little information couldn’t do any damage. “Well, he is a major contributor to this hospital.”

Her eyes lit up, “Really?” That would explain why he was here and why he just so happened to run into her.

“Are you two friends?”

“Yes.” Was all he said.

“How long have you known him?”

“Five years.”

“What is his last name?”

Fred was startled, “You don’t know?”

She shook her head obviously embarrassed. She could feel her cheeks flushing recalling the embrace that she and Lucas were in when the Doctor entered, “I’d forgotten to ask.”

“I see.” He was amazed at Lucas’ ability again. He was practically on top of this naïve little thing when he walked in and she knew nothing about him. He knew she was naïve. In his profession he’d dealt with all sorts, and she was reluctant and embarrassed just because he was touching her bare skin on her ankle. He had his share of relationships, but only because the women were Doctor seeking. Otherwise, he’d probably not have any affairs. He knew he wasn’t handsome by any means. Yet, here is a Vampire who gets such elaborate affection from a beautiful young lady with her not even knowing his name, or

what he does. He admitted to himself, that he was painfully jealous. “His last name is Edwards.” After that, he changed the subject and told her that he just wanted to keep her in overnight to observe the ankle and that she could go home tomorrow morning.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LUCAS DIDN'T RETURN to see Elsa then. He'd walked by and heard her friends in with her and decided against making an appearance in front of the crowd. He couldn't risk the attention he would draw. That and the possibility of bag full of blood he carried being discovered. Mostly, was his lack of control around her was shitty. He must be able to control himself instead of acting like a zestful schoolboy. He felt that the next time they met, it would be on his terms and he could prepare himself for the intense feelings she evoked in him. He left the building and got in his Limousine that Jason had sent for him.

Jason was waiting for him when he returned home and the look on his face was enough to let him know that they had a visitor. However, he already knew they did. He felt him.

There were only a few things on earth that could instill fear into a Vampire's protector and those were other Vampires. However, Jason was also under Lucas' protection in that aspect and because he was very powerful, Jason needn't fear any below him, just those that ranked above him. Lucas was created by a very powerful Vampire, *the most powerful*. So that meant one thing, Valear was here.

When a mortal is turned by a Vampire, they are slightly less powerful than the Vampire who turned them. Because Valear is the most powerful Vampire that the Association was aware of he was virtually unrivaled. Moreover, because he created Lucas, Lucas was the second most powerful. Therefore, it was known

that he was chosen out of thousands to rule his kind someday. Currently, he managed the brotherhood in Valear's absences. Although he had no desire to come into Valear's power, he wasn't even sure if he could handle it. Also he was content to be where he was, at least he still looked human.

No one knew exactly how old Valear was, but he was in true mythical form. He always wore his trademark full length black robes. It reminded Lucas of the frocks the priests would wear in the sixteenth century. It takes many centuries, maybe even eons to transform into such a horrific state of the walking dead. Most horrid were Valear's eyes that had long ago changed into solid crimson grotesque orbs that in contrast, jumped out from his boney face. Lucas was over seven hundred years old and still regained his mortal appearance if he were still twenty-four. There were others he knew of that were much older than he, and still did not display such features. In fact, according to them there were very few differences between them in appearance as when they were mortal. Valear's flesh was so thin and pale, it was almost transparent. His veins were visible under the pasty flesh. His face was long and thin, framed by ghostly white hair in deep contrast of his blood red lips. He was a true theatrical terror that Lucas had seen the toughest, soulless mortal men wet their pants at the sight of him.

Lucas handed the bag to Jason, "Store this. I'll go to him." He said seriously.

Jason nodded taking the bag and leaving at a quick pace.

Lucas entered the library where he'd sensed Valear's presence.

Valear stood in a shadowed corner of the dimly lit room. Any such light annoyed him. Lucas bowed in respect, "Father." Valear's expression was intense. His lips were pursed and his eyes could bore holes through cement. It was obvious to Lucas he was disturbed.

Valear nodded back, his fierce features would have terrified any other, save the few that were used to seeing him, “You have been busy Lucas.” It came out almost as a hiss with an emphasis on the last ‘s’ in Lucas.

Lucas walked to the glass decanter on a nearby table to pour himself a glass of brandy, without looking up he spoke. “You are referring to the young lady.” It wasn’t a question.

Valear no longer stood in the corner. He suddenly and silently appeared next to Lucas with his grotesque skeletal-like hand curled over Luca’s shoulder, “I feel a strong emotion within you Lucas. It makes me ...uncomfortable.”

Lucas stilled his glass half poured. If Valear felt threatened it could mean Elsa or his life was at stake. He set down the glass and the decanter and turned to face Valear, “I have no intention of betraying you.”

Valear studied him for a moment, while probing his thoughts, “Love does strange things to people, Lucas, whether they are mortal or immortal. You are my creation and I can trust your loyalty until you fall in love.” He tsked, “A *mortal* woman! Lucas, I wonder what desires possess you sometimes.” He couldn’t keep the disgust out of his tone. “After all of these centuries, you still act more human than the race itself. If I were to conclude that your love for this girl was greater than your love for me and the significance of our race, I would feel threatened.”

“She is innocent. She could not threaten you.” Lucas kept his voice calm despite the anguish that was rising in him.

“You are powerful, Lucas. Even you do not know the extent of your full potential or the hoards of loyal followers you have. I do. You are a beautiful male specimen of our kind. There is not one female of ours that wouldn’t bow at your feet and obey your every command. That alone says enough. If you were to turn against me to protect a mere mortal...”

“...I know where my loyalty lays father.” Lucas interrupted.

He was sincere. He'd proven his loyalty to Valear many times over.

"Do you?" Valear stated matter-of-factly and linked his long fingers together in front of him and stared at him with an ancient knowledge, "So, If I were to take this young lady's meager life..."

A reflexive snarl escaped Lucas' lips before he could stop it.

Valear remained unmoved, "As I thought."

Lucas' own feelings had betrayed him. He swore. For the first time in his life he feared Valear. Not so much for his life, but Elsa's as well. He got down on one knee in front of his master, his true father, his creator, "Forgive me." Lucas bowed his head.

Valear stared down at him. Lucas had purposely placed himself in a vulnerable position at his feet to show his loyalty, and it did not go unnoticed. "It is no secret that I covet you as much as I would my own child if I ever had one. I've nurtured, protected and trained you for seven centuries just to mold you for my purpose. It is my hope that you would take my place so I would be able to take a long rest that I have needed for centuries." He paused studying Lucas' submissive position and sighing with a rare emotion, "I *know* you love me, Lucas. However, I feel an unrest in you that really disturbs me. Such emotions aren't natural for a Vampire. Especially over a mortal woman. There is more at risk here than the selfish act of love."

Valear always spoke in the same dispassionate tone. It took Lucas a moment to realize that Valear was complimenting him. "It is more than that." He said softly keeping his head bowed.

"With you, there is no doubt. You are not one to do things without a thorough calculating thought, but there is our race to consider. You keep the Association in line when I am absent. You allow them their freedom and there have been no senseless massacres for centuries that would draw attention to us. They respect and fear you as they do me. Your disagreement with slaughter has left the Association well managed. I had hoped,

though, that *you* would be a little more aggressive in that aspect.

“I kill, just not the innocent.” Lucas defended finally bringing his gaze up to Valear.

“Your sympathy for humanity is touching.” Valear said it in a way that meant the opposite, “ I bring this up often in hopes to change your desires,” he gave Lucas a gruesome smile, waving a long thin hand in front of him, “Get up Lucas. I must meet this mortal of yours. I must see what brings me here to question your loyalty and what creates such emotion within you.”

Lucas complied and stood. He wanted nothing more than to prove himself at that moment. Although he was shocked at his own admission to protect Elsa he'd always sworn foremost to protect Valear and his own kind. Maybe Valear sensed something within him that he couldn't. Valear could easily read his mind, whereas Lucas couldn't make sense with the little fragments he extracted from Valear. Valear knew this and enlightened him.

“You wish to know why this unsettles me. Very well.” Valear paused, never taking his hellish eyes off of Lucas' face. “The girl can create a weakness in you Lucas. She threatens your power. If you wish to take her as a bride...” Lucas' silence was an affirmation, “...She would make a deadly enemy. Some things you don't know Lucas. A Vampiress can be a worse enemy than a vampire because they have an unusual seductive power. That is why love is not a common emotion among us undead. It could consume us. She has the potential manipulate you with such power and turn you against me. As a mere mortal she wields a hold on you the likes I have never felt. Can you imagine that power a hundred fold as one of us? That is my concern.” He stared intently at Lucas, who listened keenly and respectfully, “I have a decision to make tonight, Lucas and my weakness...” he paused for a moment, his expression emotionless, “...is you.”

Lucas was taken aback by Valear's admission. To even

admit a weakness was almost forbidden among them. It could be used against him. Although everyone knew that Valear favored Lucas, they also knew that Valear had killed without hesitation if he felt threatened. However, now Lucas understood Valear's real dilemma. If Valear killed Elsa, then he ran the risk of turning Lucas against him, and if he let Elsa live, Valear had face the fact that Elsa could manipulate Lucas to her will. Which would be a greater threat to Valear? The only solution would be to destroy Lucas. Only he just admitted that he couldn't do it. Valear would have to trust Lucas' control over her, only the emotion he had for her was a loss of control already. All Lucas could do was trust Elsa not to be consumed by the power she would inherit from him. Trust was something not common among his kind. Lucas felt selfish putting his needs above so many others. Deep down he wished he'd never met her, but it was too late now. He couldn't shake her image from his thoughts. He'd given it a few days trying to purge her memory out of his mind after a brief meeting in the street and at the auction. After the incident in the hospital, he knew it would be impossible. Again he begged for forgiveness, "I was selfish. I didn't think." Lucas humbled himself before Valear, "I swear on my life, I won't let it come to that."

Valear shook his head, not willing to allow any promises, "I will see her now Lucas."

Elsa hadn't the chance to continue her conversation with the Doctor after he'd left. She wanted to find out more about Lucas. She was thankful that they gave her a room for the night all to herself. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that Lucas knew her. She really wasn't sure, but it made her feel better. Although she was restless, she became tired of staring at the sterile white walls and drifted off to sleep. Elsa's dreams consisted of the dark stranger called Lucas. She dreamt she was walking to class during the day and that he watched her among a

crowd of students, unmoving, with his violet stare on her. She could see something in his eyes that was sinful and menacing, and wanted to explore it further. She walked down the hall and went to enter her classroom, when she spotted him at the end of the hall watching her still. His handsome face remained, unreadable, still sinful. She turned to go into her class and bumped directly into him. She awoke with a start, not knowing what time it was, but she was concerned with the feeling that she was being watched. She reached for the bedside light but found it didn't work. Something told her she wasn't alone. She tried to peer into the darkness of the room, "Is someone there?" the window cast some night light over her and the bed but she couldn't quite glimpse the recesses of the room.

Valear stepped into the dim light of the moon.

The sight of the horrid figure made a silent scream lodge in her throat. It was monstrous, like something out of a horror movie. No, it was worse. Blood red orbs peered at her from ashen flesh.

It pained Lucas to see her so terrified, her lip quivering in absolute fear. He could do nothing. Both their lives were at stake. He watched Valear approach her and her beautiful mouth fall open in a silent scream. She managed to gain enough strength to scramble against the wall at the head of the bed, curling her knees under her chin as if somehow it would help her disappear.

She knew there was someone else there but she couldn't tear her wide eyes away from the horror in front of her. A long thin boney hand came up and stroked the side of her face. She trembled as the chill of the icy touch ran over her flesh.

Born of angels. He sent the thought to Lucas.

Yes. Lucas responded and shifted uncomfortably. He felt a strange emotion from Valear, however he couldn't examine it before it quickly vanished.

“It is amazing that humanity could make something so pure”. He waved a hand over Elsa’s terrified face, “Sleep and forget dear, have pleasant dreams.”

She slumped helplessly against the wall. Valear ran his hand down her cheek to her jaw and turned her head sideways exposing her vulnerable neck. A long fingernail traced a path down a thin vein.

“Father.” Lucas pleaded. Valear was lingering too long in that area causing Lucas to worry.

Valear raise his hand but did not take his eyes from her. “ I can understand why you desire her Lucas. She is a credit to her race even though she is mortal.”

“Can you feel that?” Lucas asked wondering if he was the only one that the wave of emotion hit. “It’s like an addiction.”

“Yes.” Said Valear remaining unmoved, “I can.”

“Now you understand.” Lucas interrupted his thoughts.

“ I understand that this has gone too far for me to prevent.” He said quietly.

“She is harmless” Lucas defended.

“You have no idea.” He ran his aged skeletal-like fingers through her silken ebony tresses.

“It is impossible for her to change.”

“Everyone changes when they become one of us.”

“I didn’t”

Valear stopped examining the girl and turned his serious gaze to Lucas, “True, but you were out of thousands of transformations over a Millennia and you do not fully understand the darkness within mortals.” He waved a long fingered hand in front of him, “This—feeling,” he explained, “that you refer to as an addiction, will be felt by others. You are not the only one that will be lured to her. I warn you Lucas, this is dangerous.”

“Trust me.” Lucas pleaded.

Valear smiled. It was almost genuine in his ghoulish way. “That is not the problem Lucas, I do trust you. That may just be my undoing.”

Lucas’ fear dissolved, “You will not take her life?”

“No.” Valear turned back to Elsa, just to look at her again. “I do not fear the hold she has over you anymore. Her soul is pure, she could never betray you. However, I fear the weakness this could cause you. Others will know soon. They might find this an opportunity to destroy you.”

“I had Celeste at one point as mine. You didn’t show such interest then. Why now?”

Valear scoffed as his face took on a look of disgust, “Celeste was a whim. She was no threat. Her beauty dulls each time she opens her mouth and her simple desires, dreary intelligence and selfish cravings never had the power as this one has within her.”

His expression softened, and Lucas could sense an air of intrigue in his voice when he spoke of Elsa. Then he watched him close his eyes.

“Can...you...not feel that powerful draw that she has?” he enunciated every syllable slowly as if tasting them.

“Yes, father, I can.” He offered softly.

“As a mortal woman, it’s very rare Lucas. I’ve encountered it once before in all my eons in this form. She is unique.” He opened his eyes turned to Lucas. “You can count on that.”

Lucas felt the odd emotion off Valear again, “What is it that you are not telling me?”

Valear gave him a gruesome smile again, “In time, Lucas, you will know. “ Then his expression became grim and his voice stern, “Now, you know the risks, and you have been warned.” Unknown to Lucas, Valear saw the girl as an opportunity to test him.

“It is a risk worth taking.” Lucas approached her reaching out and taking a lock of hair between his fingers.

“You *must* remember what is most important to us, Lucas. Do not forget *who* you are.” Valear reminded.

“That is a difficult thing for me to forget. I am constantly reminded of who I am” Lucas snarled. It wasn’t directed toward Valear. He was just angry at the timing of all of this. He never had ill thoughts of his position in the Association before, but now there was Elsa. He never realized he had needs the likes of her. Bending over, he gently lifted her back down into her bed and pulled the blankets over her.

Valear smiled again, “You would do well to remember your importance to your race.”

Lucas tore his eyes from Elsa to face Valear, “ And because of that, must I set my needs aside?”

“No, but you must shorten your courting. Transform her now Lucas, it would make you less vulnerable.”

Lucas’ violet stare went to Elsa’s exposed elegant neck as she slept peacefully, “If I don’t would you interfere?”

Valear considered this for a moment, “No. Not yet.”

“I had promised myself that I wouldn’t interfere or influence her decision. It has to be her choice. I can’t betray her trust.”

“And if she doesn’t”

“She has to.” Lucas stared at him, raw emotion etched on his face.

“I see.”

CHAPTER NINE

THE NEXT DAY ELSA got home early from the hospital after receiving a clean bill of health from her Doctor. She had strict instructions from him not to run for at least two weeks. She was too elated at the new diagnosis to be upset about even a two week delay, for it was better than the six months. Although she thought she slept well, she was exhausted. She hardly listened to

Linda who was bragging about the ride home the night before when Ted sat beside her in her car. It was greatly exaggerated of course. She would never admit that she had been shunned numerous times which she found out from Tanya later.

The door swung open just then and Tanya marched into the room unannounced waving the campus newspaper, "Look at this! It's the third one this month!" She set the paper down in front of the other two. The headline read *Third Victim of Sexual Assault*.

Elsa let out a breath of disbelief, "Again?"

"Who is it?" Linda cut in.

"They won't release her name." Tanya sat on Elsa's bed beside her.

Elsa cringed at the thought of what the victims went through. The thought of some unknown person touching her, forcing her against her will sent a sense of dread through her.

"Are you okay?" Tanya's voice brought her out of her grim thoughts

Elsa nodded, "I just can't help but think of what they went through."

"If I met that bastard, I'd kick him where it counts," chimed Linda as she picked up the paper, plopped herself on her bed and flipped to the gossip column.

Tanya rolled her eyes, "Linda," she sighed annoyed, "Sometimes you don't have that chance. What if he came up behind her and pinned her against a wall, or held a knife to her throat or a gun to her head. I certainly wouldn't kick someone in the balls if they were pointing a gun at me."

Linda shrugged her shoulders; she really wasn't worried about the rapist. She never walked around campus alone. In fact she rarely walked anywhere on campus including going to class. Of course she wasn't thinking of the victim's feelings. She rarely felt for others that she didn't know. Although she would feel

what Elsa was feeling now, if it was Tanya or Elsa that had been raped.

“Let’s just change the subject,” Elsa grabbed one of her Chemistry books and began to thumb through to the chapter they would be going over on Monday in class.

“Good idea.” Linda tossed aside the paper, “About Ted Williams...”

“...What about him?” Tanya cut her off, still miffed about Linda’s previous statements.

Linda narrowed her eyes for a moment, “You’re just jealous.”

Tanya stifled a laugh and tilted her head toward Elsa, “Not exactly, Linda, you know *who* he likes.”

Linda spared a glance at Elsa who was deep in her book. “I *can* get him Tanya. He will realize who is the best for him.”

“The *best*?” Tanya raised her eyebrows at her.

“Well, yes. I am more experienced in getting what I want.”

“That doesn’t make a difference!” Tanya shot, sick of Linda’s insults toward Elsa.

Elsa who was involved in her textbook, looked up to see what the rising voices were all about their conversation no registering on her, “What is with you two?”

“Ted Williams had a crush on you.” Blurted Tanya, while giving Linda a triumphant smile.

“What?” Elsa sat up quickly with a look of disbelief on her face, “Me? But—”

“I don’t think so!” Linda jumped off the bed and glared at Tanya.

“It’s true Elsa,” continued Tanya, despite Linda’s warning glare, “he couldn’t stop talking about you.”

“That’s impossible, Tanya, I was there, he was all over me.” Argued Linda.

“Only in your dreams!” Tanya shot back.

“Why would he want her when he could have someone even more attractive and experienced?” Linda stood defiantly in front of a full length mirror admiring her attributes.

“Linda sometimes you go too far.” Tanya stressed.

Linda saw Elsa bow her head as the insult hit home. She felt horribly guilty, “I wasn’t trying to hurt you Elsa. I didn’t mean it that way. It’s just that I’ve had a few more years in dealing with men of his caliber.” It was a poor apology, but the best Linda could do.

“Too *many* years.” Added Tanya who was angry about the stab at Elsa.

Linda faced Tanya, “What the hell does that mean? You’re no Virgin yourself!”

“At least I’m choosey.” Tanya spat.

“Stop it!” It was Elsa’s voice. She jumped between them. “This is ridiculous. We are supposed to be friends!” She turned to Linda, “How do you know he doesn’t find me more attractive than you. It isn’t always about looks Linda!”

Linda just gaped at her.

She then turned to Tanya who had a smug look on her face and nodded in agreement, “ And you...!”

Tanya’s smile faded.

“...I don’t need you to use me, just to try and get the upper hand on Linda!” *Christ! That felt good!* She grabbed her books off her bed ignoring the two open mouthed girls who stared at her in disbelief. “Now if you will excuse me. I have to study.” She marched to the door and yanked it open.

Tanya mouthed the word ‘*Wow.*’ to Linda.

Linda shrugged and smiled at Tanya in a ‘who knew?’ gesture.

Both girls were startled with Elsa’s sharp intake of breath as she pulled open the door. *Holy mother of God!* Was the first thing that came to Elsa’s mind. The man on the other side of the

door with his fist raised as if he were about knock was possibly one of the biggest men Elsa had ever seen. Elsa was around Tanya's height of five foot eight, but this man was at least two full heads taller than her! He wasn't just tall, he was thick, not fat thick, but by the way his dark suit fit over his form, muscular. Not only that, he was *gorgeous*. In fact, he looked like a human Ken doll on steroids. He had a flawless complexion. Clean shaven face and neatly trimmed short blond hair. His eyes were dark chocolate brown and were set directly on her on her as if he knew exactly where she would be standing when she opened the door. Oddly enough, despite the man's size and looks, she felt immediately comforted by his presence. She couldn't explain where the feeling came from, except maybe it was the way he *looked* at her. His eyes held such warmth in their depths that she could quite easily just stare at him all day.

"Hello Miss. Collins, I am Lucas' associate. My name is Jason Markham." He spoke as if he didn't hear the rising voices within the room. "He sent these for you," Jason handed her a gift box and an envelope.

An English accent, no less, she thought as she stared at him, no denying from the crimson color of her face that she was embarrassed over her screaming match with her friends and maybe the fact that she was ogling him like an idiot. If he'd heard them, nothing in his expression or body posture let on. She knew there was no way he didn't hear them.

"I must await your answer." Jason glanced over her shoulder at the red-head, who stiffened under his gaze. He managed a smile at her reaction.

"Answer?" Elsa looked bewildered, unable to shake her embarrassment.

Jason pointed to the envelope.

"Oh." Feeling stupid, she quickly opened it. It was a hand written note in nothing less than perfect script on a beautiful tan

parchment with a gold embossed Lion in the bottom center.

It read;

Dear Elsa;

I am hosting a gathering at my home for friends and some business associates. I would be most honored if you joined me as my escort for this evening. Tell my associate which time would be most convenient for you. I look forward to seeing you again.

Lucas

“What is it?” Linda grabbed the note out of her hand, “He’s invited you to a party? Who is Lucas?”

Elsa turned to her two friends, “The man in the Limousine two weeks ago.” She didn’t mention the art auction where she made a complete fool out of herself.

Tanya felt the man’s eyes on her. There was something chilling in his stare and she couldn’t quite displace the feeling that she knew him from somewhere, “How did he know where you lived?”

Elsa shrugged sheepishly, “I met him again, at the hospital. I told him where I lived.”

“And you didn’t tell us?” Linda was surprised, but intrigued.

“I was afraid of what you two might have thought.” She confessed, “It was odd running into him again.” She looked embarrassed. No one there knew what had happened between them and she couldn’t hide her modesty at the incident.

“That is odd,” Tanya stated suspiciously, eyeing the rising blush in her friend’s cheeks. “How is it he was at the hospital?”

Jason spoke, drawing Tanya’s gaze in his direction. Something she was trying to avoid. “Mr. Edwards is a major

contributor to the Hospital. He had a meeting that evening.” He raked his heated gaze up and down her body deliberately provoking a reaction from her.

He’d gotten it; Tanya stepped behind Linda, who hadn’t noticed because she was enthralled with Elsa’s invitation. There was something so frightening about this man, yet she couldn’t put her finger on it. She was certain she’d met him before. But where and when? There was no way she could have forgotten, because he was so attractive-and *big*. Yet, he was looking at her as if he knew her. Something familiar in his dark brown eyes *told* her that he knew her. Without taking her eyes off him she addressed Elsa, “Elsa, you can’t go to this party. You hardly know this man.”

Jason gave her a devastating smile, “Of course, your friends are more than welcome to accompany you.”

Linda was ecstatic, and without hesitating spoke, “Count me in.” She did not forget how stunning that man Lucas was.

Tanya stood behind Linda. She turned her head away, no longer able to hold his gaze. She felt the burning feeling on the side of her face knowing he was still looking at her. She was still struggling to recall where she’d seen him before and how she felt about him indicated to her that it wasn’t a very pleasant experience. Maybe it was one of those parties Linda dragged her to and drank too much. She looked at him spite her fear, “I don’t want to go.” To her surprise, he smiled again. It was a rakish smile that made her hold her breath. He was gorgeous, there was no denying that. But again, she couldn’t shake that feeling of fear. Then she felt a warmth in the pit of her stomach. Fear or not, he also began to excite her.

Jason knew he affected her. His sensitive ears heard the quickened heart beat and the shallower quickened breaths. He knew what excitement was. He’d had plenty of experience.

“Of course she’ll go,” Linda interrupted breaking their gaze.

“We’ll all go.”

“Where is Lucas?” Questioned Elsa, wondering why he didn’t come himself.

“Yes, why didn’t he come?” echoed Tanya suspiciously.

“Mr. Edwards has pressing business; otherwise he would have. He does send his regrets and is looking forward to seeing you.”

Elsa seemed to accept the answer.

“He sent a gift hoping it would be a sufficient apology.” Jason indicated to the beautiful red gift box with adorned with a gold bow and a gold signature of the store it was purchased from.

“Oh yes. I almost forgot.” She stared at the box in her hands.

“Is that a party of three?” He purposely glanced at Tanya. He would have her, Lucas promised.

“No.” blurted Tanya.

“Of course she’s going....Mr...?” Linda stepped forward. His looks didn’t get passed Linda. Dressed in a sharp dark gray suit, he looked like he’d just stepped straight out of GQ magazine. Only she’d just now really noticed him because her thoughts were occupied with the gorgeous man in the limo a few days ago. She was actually a little surprised that she had let herself get so sidetracked with this handsome hunk of masculine splendor standing right in front of them.

“Jason. Just, Jason.” He saw an opportunity happening, “And you are?”

“Linda Staten. You know Senator Staten’s only daughter.” She walked seductively toward him.

“Pity, there’s only one.” He took her outstretched hand.

Linda laughed flirtatiously.

Tanya steamed. Why the hell did Linda have to make a play for every male out there? Before she stop herself she said, “I’ll go.”

Linda gaped when Jason brushed passed her. He entered the dorm room approaching Tanya who backed up a couple of steps. He took her hand and kissed the back of it, his gaze locking with hers. "I'm glad you changed your mind." He said huskily.

She regained some of her courage, her eyes narrowed. She snatched her hand out of his grasp like she was stung while looking at him like he had no right to touch her. She spoke softly to him hoping the other two wouldn't hear. "You purposely did that, just to get a reaction from me."

He set his mocha eyes on her with his deep voice as low as hers, "I already had one Tanya, long before today." He turned away from her, stopping by Elsa on the way out of the room, "Mr. Edwards will pick you up after dark Miss Collins." He gave Tanya a final look before leaving.

Tanya was stunned. Now she wasn't sure if she feared him or was attracted to him. He wasn't holding back in his interest toward her, and didn't give her any reason to fear him, but she just couldn't shake that eerie feeling.

"What the hell is the matter with these men lately?" Linda flustered. She was referring to the way that neither one of them noticed her.

"I don't know." Tanya sat on Elsa's bed, equally confused.

"I can't believe he's interested in me." Elsa stared down at the box in her hands, "he sent me a gift."

Linda's previous thought was instantly forgotten while she focused on the intricately wrapped gift, "Well for God's sake open it!"

Tanya was curious also and stood to see what she'd gotten.

Elsa grinned and tore the box open impatiently. Three separate gasps were heard as she withdrew the sleeveless, low-cut, backless evening gown. It was halter top style made out of iridescent emerald green satin. A bead of encrusted glass gems

flowed across the front of the waist and followed the line of the slit in the skirt to mid thigh. “Oh my God! I can’t believe this!” Elsa fingered the rich material, “It’s beautiful.” She breathed.

Linda grappled for the label, “This dress is worth at least a thousand dollars!”

“You’re lying,” Tanya grabbed the dress from Linda, reading the label; she looked at Elsa in awe, “she’s right.”

Elsa grabbed the dress back, “Well, I can’t possibly accept this.” She began to put it back in the box.

Incredulous, Linda stopped her, “Are you crazy! Accept it! Accept it!”

“She can’t,” piped in Tanya, “its way too expensive.”

“So? It’s gorgeous.”

“So? Men always want something in return for such expensive gifts. She can’t possibly accept this.” Defended Tanya.

“Well for God’s sake, give it to him.” Linda laughed.

Elsa and Tanya couldn’t help but laugh also. They knew Linda wouldn’t hesitate.

CHAPTER TEN

LATER THAT EVENING Linda came running into the room waving a magazine excitedly. “I knew I’d see that man Lucas before.” When she was out buying herself a new dress for this evening’s social she passed a magazine stand and a familiar face caught her attention.

Tanya was in the middle of pinning up Elsa’s curls on her head and had several bobby pins in her mouth, She mumbled something no one could make out when she saw what Linda was holding.

She held the tabloid magazine in front of Elsa’s face, “*Megastar?* Linda, what is this?”

“Look!” she shook the magazine again.

That's when she saw the familiar violet blue eyes, "Holy cow!" the headline stated, *Billionaire Playboy raises \$1.3 million at Local Art Auction*. Underneath the headline was a picture of him and the woman he was with. *Giselle Hall, Estee Lauders new model....*she stopped reading and pushed the magazine away while a lump formed in her gut.

Tanya spit out the bobby pins, "That's what I said!"

"...He's rich Elsa. Very rich! His great grandfather built a fortune on fine art and antiques, then Lucas massed an empire in real estate. He's got investments all over the world. Daddy says his deals are like a sure thing. I phoned him and asked what he knew." She pulled the magazine back toward Elsa and began flipping through the pages to the main story.

Elsa turned numb, Linda's words faded into the background. *The* Lucas Edwards? She doesn't know why she didn't put it together sooner. It had just never occurred to her that Lucas Edwards would show the slightest interest in her. It's not like she would have recognized him if she'd seen a photo of him, because she never paid attention to gossip columns, or watched much television. As Linda turned the pages a well known gorgeous movie star was leaving with him from a fancy restaurant. Another photo showed him with a different woman she didn't recognize, outside a five hundred dollar a plate charity event, but she was equally as beautiful. What would a man, who had access to any woman, want with her? Were those few moments she had with him a lie? Did he affect all women that way? It couldn't possibly be as special to him as she thought it was. She flipped it closed and tossed it aside feeling very crestfallen.

"...It's like he's a genius where money is concerned. It's funny Elsa, that we didn't see him there that night when we were at the auction. After all it was for his charity and he was the host." Elsa's cheeks flushed a little and Linda finally realized that *she* didn't see him there that night, but Elsa did, "Why didn't you

say something?”

Elsa shrugged, “It was an embarrassing encounter.”

She glanced from Tanya to Elsa with disbelief registering on her face, “Tell us.” She stated with extreme curiosity.

“He was there with that woman,” Elsa pointed at the model on the front page, trying not to let the woman’s beauty bother her, “and when I was admiring a painting that reminded me of home, he came up behind me.”

“What did he say?” Her eyes widened in astonishment.

“He said he meant what he said the other night.” She said quietly not believing it one bit.

“That you were beautiful?” Linda said with wonder.

Tanya was stunned, “What do you mean, he said you were beautiful?”

“That’s what he said to her the first night we saw him.” Linda explained.

“Oh?” Tanya looked back at Elsa. She thought remembered that night as clear as day, even the apprehension she felt over it, but she didn’t know the man had spoken to Elsa. She felt really odd at that moment, like something was missing, but she couldn’t put her finger on it.

Elsa nodded, took a deep breath and blurted out the rest, “Then I insulted his painting he donated to the auction, the model showed up and dragged him away. I felt like crawling in a hole.”

Linda smiled reassuringly, “Elsa, obviously you made an impression on him. I mean, *wow*, he asked you out, bought you a dress, an outrageously expensive dress, “She added with awe, “and extended the invitation to your friends. I have never heard of that before.”

Elsa smiled subtly, “Really?”

“*Never*.” She added with conviction, “I know he liked what he saw. Who knows? Maybe he’s been watching you for the past

few days since he's first seen you. The guy's disgustingly rich. It would explain why he didn't ask for your address or phone number."

"Watching me?" she said with surprise, "I can't imagine..."

"Who cares?" She laughed, "What matters is, he's interested in you." She straightened herself up, "And, *I* get to go to one of his private parties."

Neither one of them saw Tanya frown at her.

Elsa looked up at her beautiful friend thinking that Linda was perfect in every way. No matter what she wore or did, men fell all over her because of her looks. She radiated sensuality and knew exactly how to act to get attention from the opposite sex. Elsa knew nothing. So everything came full circle again, and she couldn't figure out why a man of Lucas' caliber would be interested in her.

Linda took notice that Elsa looked upset, "Elsa what's wrong?"

"I don't understand this."

"What's not to understand, he's hot....and rich!" Linda couldn't stress the *rich* part enough. She wouldn't hesitate to date someone such as Lucas Edwards.

"That isn't it." Elsa was crestfallen, "Why me?" she looked at Linda. Tanya remained silent.

Linda suddenly understood what she meant. "Oh Elsa, this is my fault. If I hadn't said those things that made you feel so insecure, you wouldn't be doubting yourself."

"No Linda. You are right. How could he possibly want to go out with me, when he could have an experienced woman? I mean look at this magazine! He's got rich and famous women all over him, in every photograph." She tossed it on the floor.

Linda noticed the look of defeat in her eyes. "I'll regret this and deny I ever said it in if either one of you ask me later, but maybe all he has had is experience and now he just wants

someone who sees life in more than just dollar signs and designer labels.” Linda bowed her head guiltily, “maybe Tanya and I should consider your feelings more often, or this could’ve been avoided. Not only that Elsa, but you put all of those women to shame. You just don’t see it.”

“I would have felt this way regardless of what you said.”

“I doubt that,” Linda continued, “Tanya is right about me when it comes to men. I use them. I don’t think I ever loved one of them. I’m use to getting what I want though means that are totally unthinkable by you.”

She gave Linda a reassuring smile, “No one knows you like we do Linda. No matter what it seems to an outsider you really consider us more than you show it.”

Linda knew she really didn’t deserve a friend such as Elsa. She always put her put her down and insulted her. Truthfully she was insanely jealous of Elsa’s sweet innocence, and compassion. Even now, Elsa forgave her for her ignorance. It was no wonder why men such as Lucas and Ted fell for her. “It’s understandable why he would want to get to know you. You’re smart, and very sweet. You always put your friends before yourself. And really, you are quite hot, when you’re made up right.” She winked at Tanya who smiled sincerely back at her. “So, what do you say we knock his socks off?”

Elsa laughed nervously. “I don’t know if I want you to come near me again!”

Tanya spun her around, and gave her an encouraging smile “Then let me finish what I’ve started.” Regardless of her feelings over Lucas, she listened to Elsa’s insecurities. Linda was right, Elsa needed some sort of a boost and if he would do it for her, she would help.

It took an hour to transform Elsa from the athletic medical student into a stunning woman. Also the other two had to find time to get their makeup and dresses on. Tanya stood back and

admired her handiwork on Elsa. The dress fit her perfectly, and elegantly. Maybe too *perfect*. The back showed the elegant curve of her spine and flawless skin. It draped just above the crease in her buttocks. Several lines of linked clear gems hung across her back to steady the front of the dress in place. Tanya thought it was quite refined. The front was a different story. The dress was open between her breasts and scooped in a vee just below them. Her breasts were encased in the emerald satin and left nothing to the imagination. You could easily see how perfectly round, full, and even they were. Tanya didn't doubt Lucas had plenty of experience in picking out women's clothes. He couldn't have picked a more ideal dress to show off all of Elsa's attributes. The same glass gems were sown into the material around the waist over her voluptuous hips and down the left side of the gown where the full length slit bringing a focal point to her lean muscular thigh. Tanya pinned up most of Elsa's ebony tresses except for a few that she let fall to tease the base of her neck and show off her heart shaped face.

Elsa gasped at her image in Linda's mirror, "I can't possibly wear this out in public."

Linda jumped in, "Remember who you're going out with Elsa. Fight for it. You said, why you. Well look at yourself. That is why. Those other women don't have a chance when you look like that."

Elsa looked at herself again. Her reflection seemed to be a stranger. She raised her eyebrows, just to see if it was her in the mirror. The reflection did the same. "Oh God, I just can't believe this." She looked down at the beautiful gown. It was revealing, but it was still very graceful and unbelievably comfortable. She sighed, and nodded, "Okay. I'll do my best."

Linda gave her a hug, "Atta girl."

Tanya really wasn't that comfortable with Elsa going out with this man, or wearing the dress that he picked out for her.

And she really wasn't at ease seeing his Associate again, but she would try and stick to her original reasons for supporting her.

There was a knock at the door. Linda rushed to open it. Ted stood on the other side.

He gave Linda's elegant red evening dress a brief glance before he spoke, "Is Elsa here."

Linda frowned, "Yes, but she'd going out."

Ted frowned back at her, "Oh? Where is she going?"

"She has a date." Linda felt good about telling him that, now maybe he'll know she's off limits, "We were invited too. I don't have an escort, if you would like to come along..."

"I don't think so." He answered quickly. The last thing he wanted to do was go out with Linda Stanten. Even if it meant being near Elsa, the headache wasn't worth it.

"You never know Ted, You might enjoy yourself." She shot him a stunning smile that many other men haven't been able to resist.

"I really don't think I would Linda." He frowned at her.

Her smile completely vanished, "you really don't like me that much, do you Ted?"

He ignored her question, "Can I speak with Elsa, Linda?" his expression remained impassive.

"Just a minute," She felt defeated. To say he disliked her was an understatement. Despised was a more suitable word. Her hopes were shattered. She turned and spoke over her shoulder, "Elsa, it's for you."

"Is it Lucas?" She rushed to the door to see Ted standing there instead. A week ago she would've been quite flattered. Now she was focused on someone else. A man who seemed to steal her very breath with just a whisper. She managed a shy smile for him. "Hi"

Ted gave her a charming smile, that he wasn't going to waste on Linda. Then he saw what she was wearing and couldn't help

but linger his eyes down her body. His smile faded and desire set in. “Good *God*,” he choked out.

Elsa felt very uncomfortable being stared at and crossed her arms in front of her trying to hide the exposed skin.

Ted felt embarrassed at his ogling and desperately tried to recover, “I..uh see your feeling better.” *Stupid. Stupid*, he scolded himself.

“Yes, the Doctor said there was a mix up in the x-rays.” She bit her lip, “Thanks for helping me.”

Ted almost moaned at that gesture, she looked so vulnerable at that moment, “It was my fault anyway. Besides, I would have never met you.”

She flushed, “It’s no one’s fault, because I’m fine...really.”

“I’m glad.” He looked past Elsa and saw Linda primping herself in the mirror, there was no mistake that her gaze was still fixed on him, he lowered his voice so only Elsa could hear, “I was just wondering. Maybe you and I could go out sometime.”

She looked down at her feet not sure how to answer. “Ted...I...”

A noise down the hallway distracted both of them. Ted turned to see a tall dark haired man wearing an expensive tuxedo and a black overcoat with a white scarf striding towards them. The man’s gaze was unmistakably fixed on him. He felt Elsa brush past him, “Lucas.”

Lucas didn’t miss the desire he felt off the young man speaking to Elsa. Instinctively, he wanted to rip his arms off. However, when Elsa stepped out into the hall, he really couldn’t fault the poor bastard. She was a sight to behold. He knew she was beautiful, but no words could describe her at that moment although he tried, “Elsa. You are ravishing.” He took her hand and placed a soft kiss on the back of it. She blushed. He then turned to the young man as Elsa introduced them. *So he has his sights set on you, my love. I might have to discourage him.*

Ted watched the two together and it bothered him. It wasn't because he was worried about her, it was obvious the man was sincere in his feelings and also, her friends were going with her. It was the way they looked together, and for the first time in his life he felt very insignificant. He watched the way they looked at each other. There seemed to be a silent understanding between them, like shared secrets. Even though it was obvious they didn't know each other long from the way she blushed at his compliment. When Elsa stared at him with such adoration, he knew he couldn't compete. Ted never gave up easily but knew when he was beaten. He shook hands with Lucas when Elsa introduced them. The man had a fierce steady grip and possessed undeniable confidence by the steady gaze he gave him.

Linda and Tanya came out in the hall at that time, Linda shot Ted another inviting look and he silently shook his head at the invitation.

"Shall we go ladies?" Lucas placed his palm on the small of Elsa's back possessively as he lead the way, "The car is parked in a tow away zone." He chuckled

The car happened to be a stretched black Hummer. Linda and Tanya stopped the sight, Linda couldn't contain her joy. She half dragged Tanya to the car. Jason stood by the car and opened the door for the two. Tanya stiffened a little at the sight of him. His gaze was fixed on her. Lucas held Elsa back a little because of the apprehension he felt off her and managed to slip his hand from her back to her waist, drawing her close.

"The *car*?" Elsa repeated not noticing the change of his hand on her body.

He chuckled. "I must remember, that you aren't used to the luxuries that I am."

Tanya stopped, looking back at Elsa. She didn't like the way Lucas had his arm around her. He was taking liberties with Elsa who just didn't know any better.

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Linda pulled on her arm, seeing Tanya's concern. "Leave them alone Tanya."

She allowed Linda to pull her toward the hummer's open door. She was also trying to avoid Jason's stare.

Linda hopped in giving Jason a vivacious smile. He returned her smile which picked up her spirits a little. She was already raving about the interior and found the bar immediately.

"Nice of you to join us." Jason remarked to Tanya.

She gathered her courage, "I'm watching you." She shot.

"I sincerely hope so." His eyes raked up and down her body.

That wasn't the reaction she was hoping for, "I'm only here because of Elsa" She lied

"I'm sure you are." He said in a way that he didn't believe her.

"I don't trust you." She continued, her brown eyes meeting his. She summoned all the courage she had to face him.

His hand reached out and boldly touched her cheek then slid off her chin. Her mouth parted in surprise at the gesture. "I know you don't trust me Tanya," he stated confidently, "I hope that will change. I was thinking that what we have in common won't involve much talking."

Her mouth fell open, "You should be so bold!" She suddenly slapped his hand away and jumped in the car. She could've sworn she heard him laugh as he shut the door behind her.

Lucas waited until the car door was closed before he addressed Elsa, "What is bothering you?"

She near coughed, Her green eyes met his, "Well, nothing." She tried to lie.

"Elsa." Came his reply, his voice a little deeper, "There shouldn't be secrets between us."

She blushed, too surprised to say anything.

"I didn't get to this point in my life without knowing what people around me are thinking," it was a bit of an

understatement but she seemed to accept it, “Also, You’re a terrible liar.” He gave her a roguish smile.

She took a deep breath and stared at her feet for a moment to gather her courage. “Okay...here it goes.” She looked up at him. “I just don’t understand why you want to go out with me. Linda brought this magazine home and it had all these pictures of you with famous women, beautiful women, and I...”

“I’m going to stop you right there Elsa,” He took both of her hands in his and clasped them together, brought them to his mouth and kissed them. He looked at her over the gesture, his violet eyes meeting her emerald ones, “Those magazines never show what really goes on in our lives. All of that...it’s not me, it’s just for show. With you it’s not about money or power,” She opened her mouth to speak, but he silenced her, “I *know* it isn’t. If it was about my money Elsa, I wouldn’t be standing here with you....”

“...You *don’t* know that. How could you?”

He laughed, his hand reached out and stroked her cheek. Her eyes closed against the tender caress. “Easy, like the way you react to my touch. That just can’t be bought. No amount of money could pay for such genuine affection.”

Her eyes opened and her skin flushed. Embarrassed, she pulled her hands away from him.

“A man’s money has nothing to do with how you feel about him.”

“There’s no way you could know this in the short time we’ve known each other.”

“Like I said, I’m a good judge of character.” His arm boldly circled her waist and he pulled her against him, “It’s not a fling I’m after Elsa,” he said deeply, looking down at her, “I’m a selfish man. I want much more than that.”

“What the hell are they doing out there?” Peered through the

tinted windows, and saw the couple in an embrace. “Look at him! He’s all over her!”

Linda glanced out the window squinting in the darkness, she giggled, “Who’s all over who?” Lucas stepped up to Elsa and pulled her into his strong embrace. Linda’s smile faltered over it unable to stop the jealousy. Just the way the man’s hands caressed her cheek, down her shoulders and around her back made it look like he already completely adored her. Linda can’t remember a time in her life that a man cherished her like that.

Elsa could feel the texture of his suit and hard body against her stomach and breasts through the thin satin material. She splayed her hands over his chest as he held her to him. A warm feeling built in the pit of her stomach, she felt like she was floating on air. She laid her head against his chest and sighed at the closeness. She didn’t know what possessed her to do such a thing, but it just felt so right.

Lucas’ other hand went to the back of her neck and caressed the soft flesh at her nape as he rested his chin on top of her head. It seemed to be the most natural thing in the world to hold her and have her body fit so perfectly against his. After a moment of holding her close he felt that undeniable urge to taste her innocent blood rise in him. He was able to hold it at bay, but it wasn’t easy. He nearly lost control in the hospital the other night just by the mere scent of her innocence. He could *feel* the blood flow through her. Combine that with the powerful pulsation of desire she created within him from pressing her delicious body against him. Also, it didn’t help that she was a sight behold tonight and he had more than one kind of hunger to contend with. How the hell was he going to try and pull this night off without influencing and seducing her? He pulled away and gazed down at her for a moment. He had sworn an oath that he wouldn’t take what wasn’t freely offered. He wanted her to be

able to plead with him to fulfill her, so she could never look back and have regrets. It must be a decision of her own choosing to never return to the life she knows now. She had to know how essential it was that they are together and she had to know the truth about him first so she could choose freely. He began clenching his fists in resistance, trying to fight the urge to caress her body. He cleared his throat, "We must go." The desire in his husky voice was unmistakable, but she didn't seem to notice. He slid his hand possessively around her waist.

Elsa was afraid to even speak, she just nodded. She thought he made his point quite clear. Though she doubted she'd be able to forget the feel of his arms around her for the rest of the night. Just the thought of it brought butterflies to the pit of her stomach.

"You know, there is something wrong with this whole thing." Tanya grabbed Linda's glass and drank the contents. "These two men," her finger darted from the Jason to Lucas outside the tinted window in a swishing motion, "I don't trust either one of them."

Linda narrowed her eyes at her.

"Don't you think it's suspicious that they are here? I mean with Elsa and us. Elsa's right, he could have anyone!" she pointed her finger to the window again. "And he's so bold to take such Liberties with Elsa! What happened to dating someone? He just wants a piece of her because she's never been with anyone."

"That's enough Tanya," Linda warned.

Tanya ignored her warning, "I mean it, Linda. It's written all over her that she's a virgin! He's just trying to buy her affection. And that associate of his! He threatened me."

That sobered Linda, "He what?"

"He told me that he wanted me!" now that she said it, it sounded very stupid.

Linda stilled for a moment staring at her, and then burst into uncontrollable laughter.

Tanya reddened, "Shut up Linda!" she scolded, "you weren't there!"

Linda ignored her, "what will we tell the arresting officer. Yes sir, he threatened me with his tally-whacker." She flopped over on the seat laughing.

Tanya felt so stupid. Linda was right. It wasn't what he'd said, it was how he said it. She couldn't really describe that to her. She watched Linda enjoy the fool she'd just made of herself.

"Are you sure about this Lucas? I mean about me?" She still didn't understand why the man was attracted to her despite his words. Although, they did ease her worries a bit. She couldn't deny that she was hopelessly attracted to him. In fact, she had never felt like this about any man, but in the short time she'd known him, she couldn't seem to get him out of her head.

Lucas had looped her hand over his arm as he escorted her toward the car where Jason was patiently waiting. "More than sure," he looked down at her. "You should never doubt how attractive you are to me. Please trust me when I say this to you."

She smiled up at him, "I do trust you."

Yes, you do. Lucas could feel it off her.

"Good Evening Miss Collins" Jason opened the door for them.

"Elsa," she spared him a small smile, "please." It was just a little too formal for her. She wasn't used to it.

He smiled over her head at Lucas, "As you wish."

"It would do her some good to get laid, Tanya. She will know what she's missing then." Linda giggled and poured another drink to replace the one Tanya had taken.

"How can you say that Linda? She doesn't know what she's

doing.”

“Looked like she was doing pretty good to me.” Linda giggled again.

“Aren’t you the least bit worried about her?” Tanya tried to guilt her into listening. She should’ve known better when Linda was concerned.

Linda suddenly turned serious. “If you continue like this, Tanya...if you dare make her feel the least bit uncomfortable, I’m going to throw you out of this limo, while it’s still moving. I know you care about her, so do I, but we have to let her live once in a while. You have no idea how hard it is for me to put my needs aside and not throw myself at that man and steal him from her...”

Tanya *hrrmphed*, “Like you could.” She mumbled.

Linda ignored her and continued “...but I’m not going to, because I want her to have some fun. So what if he just wants a one night stand or whatever...” she waved her arm in the air. “...she’s gotta know, there’s more out there than just study, study.....study...”

“She’s just so naïve.” Tanya stated softly.

“It’s about time that changed.” Linda looked out the window at the approaching couple.

Tanya was about to blast her when the door opened, and Elsa, Lucas, followed by Jason got in. Elsa sat between the two men. And Tanya hugged herself like she had a chill as Jason just stared at her. Elsa was busy with Lucas who leaned over her to whisper something in her ear, she giggled. The limousine slid into motion and Elsa had crossed her legs causing the soft material to spill to one side and expose one of her beautifully shaped legs. She didn’t even seem to notice. Tanya kept her gaze on those two mainly to avoid Jason’s eyes.

Lucas could feel Tanya’s suspicion and knew she’d be trouble from the first day he’d met her. She was headstrong and

seemed to designate herself as Elsa's protector, much like Jason was for him. He grinned to himself, however Jason was more gifted for the position because he was born, raised and trained just for it. He glanced down at Elsa's bare leg who was now engaged in a conversation with Linda. He confidently laid a hand on the warm flesh of her exposed thigh, his gaze on Tanya.

She turned her head away and looked out the window, disbelieving what she'd just seen and Elsa didn't protest, never said a thing. In fact, she didn't even seem to notice.

She's worried. Tanya's apprehension didn't escape Jason.

Yes.

Do you think she'll be a problem?

Perhaps. Lucas studied Tanya's profile as she stared out the window. *If she is, take care of it. I'm not wasting any time on her.*

Jason couldn't help the grin that spread across his face. It was the permission he'd eagerly been waiting for. He settled back into his seat and continued to stare at the object of his desire.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FORTY-FIVE MINUTES later the Hummer coasted down a private road to an estate framed with a set of eight foot high wrought iron gates and a solid stone wall of equal height. Another Limousine was just allowed entry by two security guards stationed at the gates. They just waved the Hummer through, obviously knowing who was in it.

Tanya eyed the tall gates as the car slid through, "Afraid of visitors, Mr. Edwards." She smiled and stated it in a joking manner, although she was being sarcastic.

He didn't miss the sarcasm, "I have nothing to hide." He locked his gaze on hers, "I'm not afraid of much of anything Tanya." He purposely used her first name

“I can understand that *Lucas*.” She dropped the formality as he had. “But isn’t that the price for fame.”

Elsa’s eyes shot to Tanya, catching the tone in her voice. Lucas squeezed her hand reassuringly. He managed to give her a cold smile, “You ever pull a journalist out from under your bed?”

“Your *bed*?” Elsa and Linda said in unison.

He chuckled, “Yes.”

Linda sat up, “How did that happen?”

“It was before I moved out here. I had a penthouse in the city. He paid off a couple of the Hotel staff, who snuck him in.” He didn’t tell them that he had Jason work the man over and threaten to kill him next time he caught him near Lucas or so much as published his name in the future. He never did.

Tanya began to open her mouth again when Linda gave her a hard nudge. She looked at her just to get a warning stare back. Linda indicated to Elsa.

Elsa was embarrassed at Tanya’s behavior. She became silent, and couldn’t make eye contact with her.

Tanya felt ashamed of herself after seeing Elsa’s obvious humiliation, but it was quickly forgotten when Linda spoke.

“How much land do you have, Lucas?” Linda boldly asked

Elsa couldn’t believe the behavior of these two. What the hell got into them? She could’ve crawled under a rock, if there was one available. She felt Lucas squeeze her hand reassuringly again. She looked up at him as he answered Linda, the question didn’t seem to bother him at all.

“About thirty acres.”

“Wow, that is pretty expensive for prime real estate.”

“You are more than welcome to explore the house, if you like.”

The *house*, wasn’t a house at all. All three women stared in awe as the castle came into view. Vast endless stone walls lit by amber lights hidden within a massive landscape of gardens. A

cobble stone circular driveway, donned by a center piece of a stone fountain which vaguely looked familiar to her, was filled with exotic cars and limousines of all varieties.

“*Fontana del Tritone.*” He answered Elsa’s unspoken question.

She looked up at him confused.

“The fountain.” He pointed to the massive structure. “It is a replica of Bernini’s Triton Fountain located in Piazza Barberini in Rome.” Depicting the Grecian sea God kneeling on an open scallop shell atop of four dolphins, while his head was thrown back as he blew into a conch shell that water spouted out of.

“Oh yes.” Elsa did recognize it now. It was beautiful. “How did you....”

“I had it commissioned through an artist that specialized in replicas.” He admitted.

“...And the *house*?” Linda used his word to describe the massive structure before them.

He chuckled, “A replica of the Castle Caerlaverock in Scotland with some modern adjustments of course.” He’d stayed in the original castle during in the fourteenth century while war waged between England and Scotland. He’d never forgotten the regal beauty it held for him. The castle took almost five years to build and contained ten immaculate bedrooms with adjoining baths, a grand Ballroom, dining room, his study and a massive library that contained rare and ancient books and manuscripts that aren’t even known to exist today.

Linda laughed “of course.”

The limo pulled around to the front stone stairs and an older gentleman that was dressed in a blue overcoat with tails trimmed in gold and a creaseless white shirt with a bowtie opened the door. Jason got out first, then Lucas who took Elsa’s hand and helped her out. Jason held out his hand for the other two ladies. Linda eagerly took it, while much to his amusement, Tanya

insisted getting out herself.

The stone walls carried on the inside of the grand entrance way which was filled with hundreds of Lucas' guests. A large marble staircase could be seen through the throng of people elegantly curving to the upper floors followed by a carved marble railing.

At that moment Lucas felt a familiar surge through him. He flashed his gaze to Jason, *we have a visitor. Find him.*

Jason nodded and left without a word leaving Linda without a word. She stuck her bottom lip out and crossed her arms across her chest. *Everyone was crazy*, she thought and began to glance around. If Tanya didn't want the man, she didn't mind substituting in the least. His sheer size was quite sexy and she wondered what it would feel like to have all that muscle and flesh on her in bed. Her eyes guided over his strong back while images flashed in her mind. She bet he was a good lover too, if fact, by the way he was around woman, it was a given. He had such sinful confidence besides being drippy sexy. *Oh well*, she thought glancing around, it looked like there was more rich men here than the parties she usually went to. So she immediately left to mingle through the crowd of wealthy guests. Tanya managed to stick close to Elsa and Lucas as they made their way through the crowd.

Lucas introduced Elsa to the guests that they stopped to greet. His hand stayed on the small of her back possessively the whole time and he could feel her welcome the touch. He spotted three men in almost identical suits heading toward him and suppressed a grin, "Elsa, do you see those three there?"

She nodded catching a glimpse of them through the crowd.

"They are my three senior accountants; Jason refers to them as the three stooges." Just at that moment they bumped into a server with a tray full of wine glasses that went tumbling to the floor. In unison they bent over to help the poor man clean up the

mess and brush his suit off with their hands.

She laughed, “Really?”

He chuckled, “I guess we know where he gets that nickname from.”

Then Lucas felt the familiar surge again and spotted Ian, one of their own, through the crowd. Jason didn’t locate him in time. At the same time he saw Jason come up behind Ian. Lucas called him off as Ian approached the trio. He turned to Tanya, “*Tanya, go wait by the staircase for Jason.*”

Tanya stared at him with an expression of surprise, then it changed to something of confusion as if she was trying to solve a math problem in her head. Without a word she turned and left.

Elsa was watching Tanya’s receding back, “Lucas, I had a strange impression that Tanya wasn’t interested in your assistant.”

He looked down at her expression of bewilderment and smiled, “Well, obviously she is.”

“Well...I mean, he’s seems very charming and seems interested in her, but she didn’t seem to reciprocate.”

He protectively circled his arm around her waist as Ian stepped through the crowd in front of them, “Like I said Elsa, she must be now.” When he spoke to her his eyes were on Ian.

Ian was a tall lean man, though not as tall as Lucas. He was dressed in a black shirt that was unbuttoned down his chest sporting several gold chains. He wore a black slacks and a leather jacket.

“Oh!” Elsa suddenly noticed the man and he startled her.

Lucas looked down feeling her fear. Ian should know better to show up here.

“Lucas,” the stranger nodded. He arched his head and inhaled deeply settling his piercing gaze on Elsa.

“Ian.” Lucas allowed a trace of warning in his greeting.

Ian’s brow shot up obviously catching it, but chose to ignore

it, “Are you going to introduce us?” His gaze raked down Elsa’s divine figure.

“Not bloody likely.” He could feel Elsa’s gaze on him as she caught the anger in his voice. Then he gently guided her behind him.

She’s mortal. Ian sent the thought to Lucas still not heeding his warning. Without thinking his hand reached out to touch her. He couldn’t help himself, the woman was a delicacy. Lucas’ voice boomed in his skull.

Enough! With lightning speed Lucas’ hand grabbed Ian’s arm painfully. The grip could possibly crush granite.

He should have known better than to ire Lucas. Yet it was her fault. Never in his life had he smelled something so sweet.

Lucas knew that Elsa would have that affect on all of them. He was just more seasoned and powerful to resist the temptation. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that Elsa actually flinched, almost as if she heard his thoughts when he warned Ian. He looked down at her and she gave no indication of it, but she couldn’t take her frightened eyes off of Ian.

Lucas could hardly conceal his anger. Although he knew Ian could see it, he was able to keep his voice steady, “We need to talk.” The look on Ian’s face told Lucas that he knew he’d gone too far and he released him with a warning in his eyes.

Ian bowed his head in respect, “As you wish.”

Lucas turned and whispered an excuse in Elsa’s ear before leaving with Ian at his heels.

Ian still spared a glance over his shoulder at the stunning beauty that Lucas was with while he followed him out of the room.

Jason spotted Tanya over by the grand staircase staring into the distance. *I see Lucas has been influencing you my little red-head. You must have been a pest.* He thought to himself as he

made his way through the crowd. He placed an arm on either side of her head and leaned down to bring his mouth to her ear, "Waiting for me?"

She blinked twice as if being brought out of a trance. She almost jumped, "What the hell are you doing here?"

"I live here, what's your excuse." was his deep teasing reply.

She pressed herself back against the stone wall trying unsuccessfully to put distance between them. Her eyes widened as he fingered her soft fiery curls. Fear crept up from her toes, "I'll scream." She managed a faint whisper.

"I love a screamer," was his seductive reply.

"Back off." She said unconvincingly.

"I don't think so." His lips brushed the side of her cheek and she gasped in response.

She let out a breath of excitement.

He spoke into her ear, his lips gently brushing her lobe. "There are very few females who could be so frightened and so excited at the same time."

She drew a deep breath and closed her eyes as his deep voice entered her senses

He drew back and waited until her eyes opened and their gazes met, "You excite me. Tanya. I admit that." His gaze raked down her figure slowly, deliberately.

She shook her head slowly in denial, but stepped toward him.

A slow smile slid across his face. It was all on her own desires that she succumbed to him.

Strong arms slid around her waist. "Who are you?"

"Whatever you want me to be." Came the deep reply

He captured her mouth swiftly almost painfully. Regardless, she relished it.

"Tanya." It was Elsa.

Her eyes shot open to find Elsa standing beside her looking

at the two of them in confusion. A moment ago she was sure he was still holding her and she was looking at him, but now it almost seemed like she was dreaming. Then she grew angry. Angry that Elsa snapped her out of her fantasy.

“Are you okay?” Elsa was filled with concern.

“What?” Tanya narrowed her gaze on her in apparent irritation, “Leave me be Elsa.”

Elsa’s mouth gaped. Tanya had never spoken to her like that before, Linda yes, but not Tanya. Tears brimmed her eyes as she spared a glance at Jason asking for an explanation. He turned his head away from her offering none. She shot Tanya a distressed look before rushing off.

“I think you hurt her feelings,” he watched Elsa’s receding back.

“She shouldn’t be so sensitive.” Tanya turned her face into Jason’s neck completely at his mercy.

“You will leave Ian.” Lucas knew he wouldn’t disobey him. Ian loved to be mischievous, but he wasn’t disobedient. Lucas was even glad it was not anyone else that decided to show up at such a time.

Ian smiled and bowed,, “Yes my master.”

Lucas was not amused. There was no secret he hated those designations, “Why are you here?” there had to be a reason why Ian would dare enter Lucas’ home without his permission.

Ian bowed his head in respect once more, “I bring word that Jack is forming a movement against you.”

“Is that so?” Lucas smiled, unfazed, “How pathetic.”

“Shouldn’t you let Valear know?”

Lucas shook his head, “He probably already knows. I never need to tell him anything.”

“Lucas, about the woman...forgive me, but I’ve never smelled anything so *pure*...” Ian’s eyes flashed luminescent.

Lucas' expression grew dark, "She is *mine*. You will not touch her."

"This is important." Lucas' seriousness caught Ian's attention.

"Again, Ian, this is none of your concern!"

Ian's eyebrows raised and his jaw dropped as realization dawned on him, "you intend to turn her!"

With lightening speed, Lucas' hand shot out and seized Ian by the throat, "you would be wise to conceal this!" His eyes glowed and he could feel his canines extend at the growing anger he felt. If any of this got out to their enemies, Elsa's life was at risk.

"I think you're right," He choked in fear.

Vampires rarely show fright, but Ian had a good reason, because Lucas had the strength and the permission to kill him if need be, he just never expected it. He'd always respected and obeyed Lucas. Lucas was known to be aggressive with his dealings of the Brotherhood, but not to protect a mortal woman. It wouldn't have ever been considered, even though he held compassion for the race. Vampires held a strong brotherly bond, yet the gain for power can somewhat eliminate that. If others found out about Lucas' obsession, it would cause chaos among the brotherhood and those that vie for Lucas' power would see this as an opportunity. Ian himself craved for the power that Lucas wielded but wasn't willing to risk his or Valear's wraith to claim it. Unfortunately Ian was a very weak Vampire and couldn't conceal his thoughts properly as some of the others. Most didn't confide in him, to do so would most likely seal their doom. He found this information out by chance. He heard a two of Jack's followers talking and they weren't aware he was there.

Lucas' hunger began to swell with his anger and the smell of fear off of Ian.

Dread washed over Ian like an icy wave. He began to beg as

he saw Lucas' handsome features begin to alter to the demon that lived within him. "Lucas, please." He knew Lucas' legendary self-control began to crumble. Not many of them had seen him in his altered state, and if he was changing, this was bad. Very bad.

With a thundering yell muffled by the sounds of the party continuing outside the door, Lucas effortlessly tossed Ian across the room, freeing him. He concentrated for a moment to regain control, he then turned and walked up to Ian as he struggled to stand. His calm demeanor restored. He focused as much of his power that he needed from the black source which controlled his curse. "*You were never here Ian.*"

Ian nodded, falling immediately under Lucas' influence, "*You are thirsting for blood.*"

"Yes." Came the slow reply.

"*you have a desperate need to feed.*"

"Very hungry..." Ian's features began to alter as his hunger became apparent.

"*Your kill will be the last thing you remember.*"

"Of course."

"Go!" Lucas forced the thoughts into his head and Ian faded into the darkness. Lucas felt hungry himself after that episode. It was effortless to influence mortals. Vampires took a little more effort. He needed to find another source of attention for Ian to blind the current one he was focused on. It was done. Now, he must calm himself before he headed back to her. She couldn't see him the way he was now. "Damn," he cursed, he needed to feed. He needed to regain his strength, and her innocence, the way it was too alluring. He released a growl as he felt her just before she opened the door and called his name. Christ! He was famished and she was so tempting.

She saw him back into one of the dark corners in the dimly lit room.

He was thankful for the meager amount of light present in

the room when she entered. *Shit*, she was upset. His hunger increased achingly in the presence of her vulnerability.

She ran to him putting her arms around him, “what is with everyone. They’re all acting so weird. Tanya was with your friend and was awful to me. I’ve never heard her speak like that before.”

Lucas’ blood fired, he grabbed Elsa’s head in his hands and forced her to look at him. Her eyes flew wide with shock at his forcefulness and gasped when she saw that his eyes no longer held their violet color, but turned crimson in front of her eyes.

“*You will sleep and not remember me this way.*” He caught her as she crumpled in his arms. He lifted her and carried her to the couch that Celeste had occupied only days before, gently laid her down, then stood up and without a backward glance left the room to quench his thirst. He had to get away from her before he broke his promise to her. Things were definitely not going as he’d planned. He never thought that she would see him in this state so soon. He knew he would have to let her know the truth soon or later, preferably later. She was indeed a danger to him....as a mortal. Valear was right.

“Where are we going?” Tanya followed Jason as he led her up the long stair case by her hand.

“My room.” He felt her hesitate only slightly before falling in step behind him. He was amused that she still had that little bit of fight left in her. Regardless, he was taking her for himself no matter what her reservations were. Lucas gave her to him and he was going to have her.

When he reached his sleeping quarters, he opened the heavy oak door and stood aside for her to enter. He never did sleep here, for he rarely ever slept. However it came in handy for nights such as this.

She hesitated beside him before entering. She turned to

him, "I will stay on one condition."

"Name it." His gaze met hers.

"If you promise not to hurt me. You frighten me Jason." Her expression became vulnerable for the first time.

"You would take my word?" His hand came up and brushed her cheek, then undid the pins that held her hair up letting the fiery locks fall past her shoulders.

She silently nodded.

He laughed out loud, "I cannot promise that." The door slammed behind them cutting off her sharp intake of breath.

CHAPTER TWELVE

LUCAS ENTERED HIS study where Elsa still lay in a peaceful sleep. He approached her and went down on one knee in front of the couch watching her for a moment. He then followed Valear's movement by gently turning her head to one side exposing her neck. He traced a path down her neck with his fingertips. "For someone who usually knows how to handle just about anything, I'm at a loss when it comes to you." His answer was slow rhythmic breathing. He lowered his forehead to hers and closed his eyes.

"You should be more careful, Lucas on openly showing her." Valear suddenly vaporized behind him.

Lucas remained unmoved. It had taken him centuries to get used to Valear's sudden appearances. Another long developed talent of his was being able to sense Valear before this happened. He was too preoccupied with Elsa and never felt him arrive.

Valear knew this, "You are becoming a danger to yourself."

"I know." Lucas stood to face Valear.

Without warning, Valear raised one of his boney hands just to crack it across Lucas' cheek, "Wake up." It was said in Valear's slow monotone.

Lucas brought his hand up to ease the sting. One of Valear's slaps definitely stung and would have probably crushed bone in a mortal.

"You are a fool Lucas." Valear's crimson orbs probed Lucas' face. His thin lips drew back in disgust.

Lucas lifted himself straight to face him. "Call it what you want, father. I couldn't expect you to understand."

Valear's expression softened slightly, "You still manage to amuse me." He shook his head, "But the risk is getting to be too great."

"Yes." Luca agreed.

"You should take her now."

"I can't." Lucas turned to look at Elsa's peaceful form.

Valear took a step toward her, his eyes focused on her throat and his expression unreadable.

Lucas stepped in front of him. "You gave me your word."

Valear stopped and stared at him for a moment, "I suppose I did." He set his eyes on Elsa then back to Lucas, "You're time is running short Lucas. I give you a week. After that, her life is mine. If I feel the least bit discomfort in the Association prior to that, her life is mine. "

Lucas knew that Valear was being generous. Not another could brag about this. Valear took what he wanted and no one questioned him. Lucas bent and kissed large insignia ring on Valear's boney hand, "You are too kind father."

"You are indeed odd in your ways Lucas" he referred to Elsa. "Contrary to your belief, I *do* understand your motives. I was in love several times. I am beyond that now."

Lucas grinned, "I don't think Love is beyond anyone's reach, speaking from one dead soul to another."

This brought a gruesome smile to his features, "Quite right Lucas." Valear's eyes guided toward the ceiling, "I see your protector is entertaining himself."

The noise of the party outside the doors bounced through the room. Only the most sensitive of Vampire ears could possibly pick up such sounds if they are focused on enough. Lucas himself could hear Jason and Tanya.

“She’s a pest.” Lucas said with annoyance.

“I see.” He glanced at Elsa, “A friend of hers?”

“I don’t trust her.” Lucas nodded in answer to Valear’s question

Valear’s voice rose, “You do well to keep your guard up. But that would better serve you if it were toward certain members of the Association, not mere humans.”

That brought Lucas back to the episode with Ian.

Valear half smiled, “Your powers are increasing. I cannot quite understand what it is you wish to tell me.”

“Ian was here.” He confessed. It never even crossed his mind to lie to Valear.

“I sensed him when I arrived,” Valear’s eyes focused on Lucas. “He knows of your feelings for the girl.” It was more of a statement than a question. Valear knew the answer by the softening of Lucas’ features.

“I made him forget.”

Valear’s expression grew fierce. “He could remember in a matter of time! You are playing a fool’s game Lucas!” He snarled.

“I will protect her.” Lucas argued

“You cannot be with her all the time, nor protect her from the rebel masses of the Association.” Valear was angry over Lucas’ sloppiness. Then he suddenly stilled himself as if he was in deep thought. His eyes shut for a moment.

Lucas knew as he patiently waited that Valear was up to something...something grave.

When he spoke his thoughts and expression were unclear to Lucas, “I will be back in six days Lucas.” Valear had regained his calm composure. He glanced down at Elsa, “Or sooner, if need

be.” His form suddenly melted into the darkness, leaving Lucas unsure of Valear’s morbid design.

Jason left Tanya in a deep slumber; her naked body was entangled in the satin sheets. He mass of red hair covered her face. She almost looked lifeless with the exception of the rise and fall of her chest. He got out of bed and dressed feeling arrogant at exhausting and satisfying her. He turned and looked at her once, his expression unreadable before leaving the room, closing and locking the door behind him. He made his way downstairs unaware that Valear had just left. He wasn’t in any way near sensitive as Lucas was in picking up such things.

A beautiful brunette was leaning against the rail as he ascended the stairs to the grand room below. She smiled at him and he failed to return it, he’d already had his lust sated. For the next hour anyway.

She was persistent. She seductively placed a cigarette in her mouth, “you wouldn’t happen to have a light on you?” her lips pouted when she said ‘you’.

He stopped and gave her an uninterested look. Then looking at the object of her ridiculous flirtation blandly said, “No I don’t. Don’t you know those things will kill you?” he continued down the steps to the crowd below grinning to himself.

Emily Shanks narrowed her gaze at the man’s back. She angrily plucked the cigarette out of her mouth , placing her hand on her hip. She then dug through her handbag to find a lighter. She lit her cigarette and took a long drag while she continued to watch the man disappear into the crowd. She knew that he was Lucas Edwards’ right hand man. Lucas rarely went anywhere without him. She figured if she could get to him, she could get near her target. She honestly didn’t think he’d be so handsome in person or so friggin’ big! Lucas’ face was plastered all over the papers most times, so his looks weren’t a secret, but Jason

Markham was a shocker. She tossed the butt in a wine glass that a waiter carried passed her dousing it with a small fizzing sound before following the path the man took earlier. She was determined to get a story about this secretive millionaire even if it killed her.

What she didn't know, was it just might.

Linda didn't get too far with the man she'd met earlier, before his date caught up with them. She ended up making up some excuse that he was helping her find her date that she came with, that they knew each other. The man quickly nodded to the lie desperate not to be found out. The woman accepted her story and Linda ended up making her way back to the party alone. She attempted to drown her sorrows in alcohol without much luck. She had been refused three times today by very handsome men and being compared to never being refused by anyone, she was taking it hard. The alcohol wasn't much help it just seemed to make things worse. The she saw Lucas. His strikingly handsome features stood out from the plain group of party goers. She quickly checked her hair with her hands to make sure it was neat. She handed her empty glass to a surprised elderly woman after she downed the contents, "here, hold that for me grandma." Her words slurring slightly. She then followed him.

Lucas ran into Jason part of the way through the room on the way to change his shirt. Some over-liquored actor happened to spill his drink on him.

"Elsa's in the study" he said simply.

"I'll watch her." He said obediently.

"There is no need, I locked the door." Lucas managed a smile, "I was going to tell you to enjoy yourself, but I think that's a little redundant."

Jason smiled arrogantly in response.

“I don’t wish for her to leave.” Lucas ordered

“As you wish.” His eyes glistened. *You won’t get an argument from me.*

Lucas chuckled and patted him on the shoulder before he continued to his room.

Jason went and guarded the door of Lucas’ study even though he was told to relax. He was just doing what he was used to.

Lucas closed the door to his bedroom and removed his soiled shirt. He tossed it on his bed and selected another from his immaculate wardrobe. He started to put it on but paused when he sensed a movement in the hallway. There were a few people out there when he came in. They all wanted a view of the castle interior and all its fine art. However this movement in particular caught his attention, because it was deliberately towards his door. He turned and inhaled deeply, his nostrils filled with a familiar scent. Perfumes travel faster than the human scent because it’s denser than the surrounding air and doesn’t dilute easily. This one was unmistakably familiar. He slowly smiled to himself. Linda.

Linda followed Lucas to two large wooden doors. She saw him enter and he was alone. It didn’t even occur to her that Elsa would be in his there with him. Elsa would never go into a man’s room so quickly and easily. She must be downstairs still. She had too much alcohol and her envy was eating her up. She wanted Lucas. Hell, she wanted any man right now. He just happened to cross her path at the right time. She wanted to show him what he was passing up. She was more experienced, and knew how to please men, whereas Elsa didn’t. girls like Elsa never ended up with the Lucas Edwards of the world. Girls Like Linda did.

She passed several people in the hallway, no one took notice of her as they examined the paintings and statues that occupied

the walls and alcoves. She looked around to make sure she wasn't being watched, before putting her ear to the door that Lucas disappeared behind. She couldn't hear any movement. Nothing. She licked her lips and placed her hand on the door latch. She gave it a small tug and it moved. He hadn't locked the door. It opened about six inches before the heavy wood began to creak. She quickly jumped in and slammed it behind her.

Lucas had his back to her when she first hopped in. Now he turned to face her, his shirt unbuttoned, "Lost?" He tilted his head slightly, not the least bit surprised that she was there.

She shook her head, her eyes probing his naked chest. *He was perfect*, she thought. *What a gorgeous body.* From his thick chest to his flat rippled abs, there wasn't an ounce of fat on him. It made Linda itched to run her hands down the sprinkle of hair that splayed over his upper half. Hell, she'd like to trail her fingers down the thin line of hair that dissected his flat stomach to disappear into the waistline of his expensive slacks.

"Hiding from an angry wife?" he said doing his best not to display the disgust in his expression from reading her thoughts.

She looked up at him, a sensual smile slid across her lips, "Not quite" Her voice slurred a little.

"I'm running out of guesses Linda. What's left doesn't leave much to be desired." It really didn't. Without taking his eyes from her he began to button up his shirt.

She licked her lips again. Her eyes followed the movement of his fingers. "I saw you come upstairs."

"I'm sure a great many others did also." He dryly remarked.

She pushed away from the door and began to walk toward him, "I'm much better you know."

He gave her an expression that told her he didn't understand what she was talking about, when in fact, he knew more than she wanted him to.

"Then Elsa, I mean." She clarified.

Lucas grinned, “How do you know Linda? Have you slept with Elsa?”

“She’s a virgin Lucas, you need someone with experience.”

“I know she is.” He answered evenly, “And it makes her more appealing than you think. Women like you are a dime a dozen.”

She stared at him for a moment, and then she smiled, trying not to let the insult bother her, “I think you’re teasing me.”

“I think you’d better leave.” He was no longer amused. Although his tone wasn’t threatening, it had an air of authority to it. This mortal had no scruples.

“I won’t tell her.” She took another step toward him while licking her bottom lip. “God Lucas, you practically ooze sexual magnetism.” She sighed.

He knew he did, it was common with the males of his race and mortal females felt the affects more than his own kind. Unfortunately, it exacerbates with the power they wield, and Lucas was very powerful. Usually he would just influence her to leave him alone, but he knew she was drunk, he could smell the alcohol on her breath. Therefore, he couldn’t alter her thoughts. It was a waste of time to even try. He couldn’t get her to focus enough on his powerful stare for even a moment. “It’s not working Linda, I have no interest in you.”

She placed her hand on his to stop him from doing up his buttons. She then slowly began to undo them, her face lifted to his with a well practiced seductive expression, “don’t you want just a sample Lucas? I could make you very happy for a short while.”

Damn, she was good. Any other in the Association would have had her by now then left her in a gutter somewhere. However, Elsa erased all desire for other women, even one as well practiced at seduction as Linda was.

He stopped her from unbuttoning his shirt by placing his

hands on hers, "That's enough."

She retaliated by nuzzling her mouth into the nape of his neck and slowly licking him there.

He snarled and thrust her back onto his bed and stood posed over her, "You should be careful what you ask for Linda. Your dreams could turn out to be nightmares."

She gave him a sloppy smile and raised herself up on her elbows, not the least bit intimidated. "Any nightmare from you ought to be worth having."

Much to his surprise his humor returned, "You have no idea Linda." He threaded his arms back into his dress jacket, "Now if you excuse me, I seem to remember the very tempting date I left downstairs." He opened the door, "I seem to have some dreams of my own." He then left.

She collapsed back on his bed throwing an arm over her forehead staring at the canopy that draped over the bed, and found she had difficulty focusing on one spot. "shit."

Jason saw the same brunette from the stairs, watching Lucas closely as he disappeared into his study. His eyes narrowed in suspicion. He should have taken a closer look at her earlier. She was either a fortune seeking female or by the eagerness on her face, a reporter. He would tell Lucas about her.

"Elsa," he said softly. He placed his hand on her cheek and turned her head to face him, "Elsa."

She stirred.

He waited another minute for her to open her eyes.

She blinked a couple of times to focus her gaze, "what happened?" She slowly sat up with Lucas' help.

"I think you fainted." He lied

She placed her hand on her forehead as if to ward off an imaginary headache, "What? How...?"

“...You were upset. Something about Tanya.” He sat beside her.

She looked at him, “I don’t think I ever fainted in my life.” The she remembered how her friend treated her, “she was very rude. It wasn’t like her at all.”

“Maybe she had too much to drink.” He placed his arm around her to pull her closer to him. “Don’t worry, she’ll be fine in the morning when it’s worn off.”

His voice was so soothing that she easily forgot her problems. She nodded, agreeing with him. It was selfish of her to act this way when she was supposed to be enjoying herself with him. She didn’t want to ruin this night by feeling sorry for herself. It was then that she realized that they were alone in a darkened room, and he was so very close to her. She abruptly stood, “It sure is dark in here.” She took a few steps back from the couch he was sitting on.

“You had fainted, the light was better for you.” His eyes went to her mouth. It was tempting to kiss with its slight bow and enticing pink hue.

“Maybe we should go back to the party.” She did want to be alone with him as before in the hospital, but this was different. There were people on the other side of the thin curtains there. Also, she was in a public setting. This was his house, his things, and she was overwhelmed by all of it. Not only that but she just couldn’t ignore the heat that began in the pit of her stomach whenever she was around him and it seemed to grow stronger the more she was with him. It was something she had never felt before and it began to scare the wits out of her.

Not after all the trouble I’ve been though to get you alone. He shook his head, “I don’t think so Elsa.” His deep voice seemed to penetrate her very soul, exciting her.

“but my friends...” she stammered.

“...Are having the time of their lives.” He finished. *Trust me.*

The music from the string quartet seeped softly into the room.

She smiled at the sound of it, “It’s beautiful.”

He held out his hand while his eyes beckoned her, “Would you like to dance?”

She shook her head, but still put her hand in his, “I can’t dance to this.”

“It’s simple.” He took her hand and pulled her close, “just follow my lead.”

She started to look down at his feet to try and follow the steps. He stopped her and tilted her chin back up, “Look at me Elsa. You have a better chance of following my steps if you aren’t looking at my feet.

“I don’t understand. I’m just not a dancer.”

“Just look at me Elsa, and you won’t have a problem. Every step is thought of up here before it is placed down there.” He started off in a simple waltz. As Elsa’s steps fell into place with his, he began to change the pattern.

She grinned at him amazed at her ability. She couldn’t understand for the life of her how she could dance in such a way, but her eyes never left his. He was right; she could almost see the movement of his actions, before he did them. Yet, the steps weren’t in action; they were in waves of emotion. She knew where to step before he led her. She could feel his body through hers, and was made aware of the excitement they shared. Before long, all nervousness and apprehensiveness she previously felt faded away. They moved in liquid beauty, floating around the room barely aware that others were in the same time-space. He twirled her suddenly and she laughed.

God she was exquisite! Her laugh even affected him, for all of its innocence and vulnerability that she held radiated within it. Not only that, she allowed herself to be free and trusting toward him and he hadn’t influenced her thoughts at all. He watched

her closely, studying every movement and expression on her lovely face as he spun her around the room. She was perfect. The way she smelled, looked and acted appealed to him more than he needed to admit to himself. He almost shook his head in disbelief. Where the hell has she been all of his life, and how could she possibly remain untouched? Ian even felt the innocence off her and had difficulty resisting. There were thousands of his kind, and for her not to be discovered by one of them floored him. He may have been powerful enough to sense her across several city blocks, but even the most muted and weaker of his race could not mistake the lure she elicited.

Emily made her way outside around the far wall skirting the gardens along a small cobble stone path. She was looking for the windows to the room that Lucas disappeared into moments ago. She glanced around confirming that she was alone and reached into her bag pulling out a camera. She looked up the wall blanketed with vines to a window. She suspected that window was to the room Lucas was in. What could he possibly be doing in there, when all the guests were in the grand room? Maybe he needed a nap. She doubted it; rumor had it he was a night owl.

She gave a brief tug on a thick vine to make sure it was secure on the solid stone wall. Convinced it would hold her she tossed off her high heels and bravely started to hike up the side of the building. The window was only about eight feet from the ground so she figured if she fell, she would recover well enough. She gritted her teeth as she slowly pulled herself up the wall. She had done much worse to get lesser stories. This was just another risk of the job. Only this one would get her foot in the door at the paper.

It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the inside of the room. It was dimly lit. Fortunately for her the small desk lamp gave her some perception of the room. Also to her advantage, it

was slightly lighter inside the room than outside. The only problem was that the room was quite large and she couldn't see into the corners. She began to think that he'd gone back to the party and was about to climb back down, when a movement caught her eye.

Oh this was too good to be true! He was dancing ...with a young lady; and rather skillfully at that. She couldn't be more than twenty. Emily took some quick pictures of the couple, and then watched them for a moment. They moved magnificently together, their eyes never leaving each other, moving as one. She felt jealous from the way he was holding and guiding her. When he spun her around and she laughed, Emily thought she would burst from envy. Instead she snapped out of her daze and took a few more pictures. She smiled as she thought of herself as the one that gave the world information on this reclusive wealthy bachelor. First, she had to get some dirt on the girl. Unexpectedly, he turned and looked out the window that she peeked through. She quickly ducked to the side of the pane out of view and held her breath. Her heart thumped in her chest. He couldn't possibly see her against the blackness outside the window. She waited a moment convincing herself that she was safe. Concealing her camera back in her handbag, she carefully made her way down the vine and landed with ease on the soft grass thanking her aerobics instructor silently for the fit body she had.

Jason stood outside in the fresh air. He knew she was around somewhere, he could smell her. He shoved his hands in his pants pockets and casually started down the steps onto the walk that Emily had travelled moments ago. Following her scent, he strolled towards the side where Lucas' windows from his study faced the north side of the property.

As he rounded the corner, she came the other way and they

nearly collided. “Oh excuse me...” She stopped when she saw who it was.

He tipped his head at her, “Lost?”

“No,” Her mind went to work quickly, “I just came out to admire the gardens.”

“In the dark?” Jason said with chagrin.

She quickly changed her story. “Actually, my date and I were looking for a little privacy we...”

“...Oh? Then where is he?” Jason interrupted.

“I was saying, he didn’t show, so I was going to look for him”

“hmm, well then maybe I should help you look.” He grinned down at her knowing she was lying, “After all this is a big place.”

She was going to protest, but he held out his arm and she reluctantly took it. It was obviously that she was lying. She just hoping he didn’t know her true intention. “Yes, of course—thank you.”

Lucas and Elsa were wrapped in each other’s arms when there was a knock at the door.

“Don’t answer it.” She didn’t want him to leave her, if even for a moment.

He smiled at her boldness, and kissed her softly on the forehead, “I’ll be just a minute.” He strode towards the door.

Jason stood on the other side.

“Who is she?” Lucas knew Jason exactly why Jason interrupted. It was over the woman that was spying on him a few minutes ago. Lucas studied his expression, as his thoughts came through to him. He didn’t know who she was, but he suspected more than likely that she was a reporter. He guided his eyes back to the woman. She was standing with a man but her eyes darted towards him for a moment and then she quickly diverted her gaze when she realized he was watching her. “What does she

know?” he didn’t miss her invasion of his privacy. Although, he was preoccupied, but was still able to hear the foolish women climb the vines

“it’s unclear.”

Watch her. He silently seethed. Now it starts.

Jason bowed his head in acknowledgment before turning and heading back through the crowd.

Lucas turned to Elsa, “I’m afraid it’s time I play the host, Elsa. Care to join me?” He held out his arm.

She gave him a stunning smile and accepted his it.

Lucas led them over to Emily Shanks and her date, which he recognized as one of his real estate consultants.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LATE AFTERNOON THE next day, Elsa crawled out of her bed. She looked over to the other bed in her dorm room and it was occupied. Linda also came home. She must’ve not found herself a date for the night. She wasn’t sure if Tanya had made it home or not. She last saw her with Jason and remembered seeing him later in the evening, but not Tanya. However, the way she was hanging off him made her know that they had something going. However, there were a huge amount of people there, she didn’t remember seeing Linda later either. Lucas must’ve sent her home in the car like he did with her but she was so tired she didn’t hear her come in.

She was still stinging from Tanya’s words. It was just so unbecoming of her. Part of her was angry at her, besides being curious to the sudden change in attitude. However, she never went out with her before, except that first night she met Lucas. Maybe she was like this around men. She walked to the window that looked out onto the street and park below watching the people who were already up for the day and playing soccer,

studying, or just going for a walk. Lucas was a perfect gentleman. She surprised herself by finding that disappointing. She didn't want to leave last night, but he insisted. She smiled to herself as she thought of what he said to her. He told her it was rushing if she stayed. She didn't care. He told her that she had to be sure on what she wanted first. This made her nervous, not about staying with him, but something else was in his words and eyes when he spoke to her. She felt as though he was asking her for something. Something from the look in his eyes that was causing him some inner turmoil. But what? This was a man who could have anything he wanted by merely taking it. Yet, he was so patient and gentle with her. He told her numerous times that he'd wanted to be with her, but she felt he was waiting for something from her, before he went further. What was it? Linda stirred in her bed and briefly interrupted her thoughts. Elsa turned just to see her roll over and pull the covers over her head with a disgusted moan at the bright light of the day. Elsa returned her attention to the world outside her window. She wondered how long it would be until she saw him again. The heat in her gut remained, even after she said goodbye, now it almost felt like hunger pains. However those go away when you eat. These seemed to increase in strength after each time she was with him. They actually felt pretty good. It made her feel alive. She glanced at the clock. It was late in the day and she had to get to the library to get some of her assignments done. She couldn't afford to have her grades drop, even if it meant compromising time with Lucas.

About the same time, Tanya awoke to a knock on the door. Laying on her stomach, she groggily propped herself up on her elbows and took in her surroundings making her hair spill around her face. It took her a moment to focus and remember where she was. She was still in Lucas Edwards' home and she

was alone in the room. Jesus, she slept like a rock. The knock came again. She crawled out of bed and found a beautiful three-quarter length satin lilac robe draped over the end of the bed. After a quick scan of the room she noticed her clothes were gone. She put on the robe with a hiss through clenched teeth as it slid over the tender cuts on her back. She remembered the night very well. She had never experienced such ecstasy and painful pleasure before in her life. Her heartbeat increased with the images in her mind. *God, the man was a woman's dream as a sex machine*, she thought with a rueful smile. She shook her head to pull herself together and opened the door a crack. It was a woman with a tray of food. She had the most beautiful big brown eyes she'd ever seen.

"Hello mistress, I have instructions to bring you breakfast."

"Oh." Tanya stepped aside and let the woman in.

She hardly spared Tanya an interested glance as if it was common knowledge that women wake up alone and naked in this house all the time. She wore an olive green dress that showed no form to her figure with black stockings. It was buttoned up to the neck. Her salt and pepper hair was pulled back into a tight bun. By her appearance, Tanya presumed that she was in her late fifties. Without looking up the woman spoke.

"My name is Sadira." She had a thick accent, "I've been instructed to let you to know that if you need anything just to ask." She pointed to a gold colored rope and tassel coming out of the wall at the head of the bed. "You only need to pull on the cord."

Tanya guessed that her accent was polish or Hungarian. She watched the women set the tray on a nearby table and gave her a respectable nod as she turned to leave. Tanya stopped her before the door closed, "Wait."

The woman hesitated

"Could you possibly tell me where Jason is?" She felt so

foolish, she didn't even know his last name.

"Yes mistress, I think Mr. Markham is in the study."

"Is Mr Edwards with him?" She didn't want to see him. After all, she did spend a rather exclusive evening with his assistant in his home. She was a little ashamed of her lack of discretion.

The woman gave her a strange look then shook her head. "Mr. Markham is alone."

"Thank you, sorry for keeping you." Tanya shut the door behind Ingrid.

She wasn't sure what she was going to say to Jason, but she certainly wanted her clothes so she could go home. As beautiful as Lucas' home was, it felt very cold and alone to her. She glanced around the room and saw tray Sadira had brought in and realized she was really hungry. She popped a few grapes and ate a piece of toast thankful for the food. Then she did a more thorough search of the room looking for her clothes. There was nothing but expensive men's clothing in the large walk in closet. She fingered some of the material, imagining Jason adorned in the tailor made suits. He was so handsome. She smiled, even better looking naked. She let images of his naked muscular form pop into her head. She sighed and turned and walked out of the closet and took another look around the room, "Great. No clothes." She looked at herself in the antique mirror that hung on one of the walls. Her hair was a mess, her makeup was all worn off and the robe left nothing hidden. The satin clung to her every curve. She certainly couldn't go home like this. However, she could go hunt down *Mr.* Markham. She opened the door and glanced down both sides of the hall making sure it was empty before bare footing down the hallway toward the stairs.

Jason was going over details of a few contracts Lucas' lawyers sent over earlier in the day, when Tanya burst in

unannounced.

He passively glanced at her. He could hear her heart racing and her face was flushed. She was angry, "Is there a problem?"

She took a deep breath at the sight of him in the bright light of the day that reflected through the same large window that Emily was peeping through the night before. They stared at each other for a moment, he patiently waiting for her reply and she trying to overcome the desire she felt for him, "where are my clothes?" she said with a shaky breath.

He leaned back in the chair and stated casually, "I had them burned."

Her mouth fell open, "You had them *what!*"

He grinned, "Burned. What is the matter with your hearing?"

She grew irate, "Why, may I ask you, did you think you had the right to take my clothes?"

"You're not leaving Tanya." His calm tone remained unchanged regardless of the fuming hellcat in front of him.

She lost it, "You are a real bastard! You can't tell me what I can or can't do," she was determined to show him that she wasn't afraid of him and walked around the desk to face him.

With his eyes on hers he stood and slowly walked towards her. She was defiant and remained unmoved. "You may have forgotten for the moment Tanya, but you are mine, given to me as a gift and I don't intend to let you go until I am told otherwise."

It felt as though someone poured a bucket of cold water over her. It was the way he spoke to her. There wasn't any teasing in his voice. He'd meant his words. She took a few deep breaths trying to control her fear and regain her nerves, "I haven't forgotten anything. I think someone just neglected to tell me." She stated acerbically.

"No, you have forgotten." To her relief he stopped several

feet from her. “Last night I owned you, all of you. I control you sexual desires. You need me.”

She held her hand up, “Listen, that was great sex—okay—fantastic sex—but I think we are from different cultures. Where I come from that doesn’t mean you life is...”

“Come here.” He interrupted.

It was only two words, but it’s what was said within them, the images of last night, the ecstasy, her true desires being fulfilled. Despite her lips mouthing the word ‘no’, she stepped forward. Her heart hammered in her ears and her breath quickened.

His hands threaded through her red curls to the back of her head and he pulled her toward him. Their lips met without hesitation and she felt liquid fire well up in her. She moaned against him. He slipped off her robe without her knowledge, caressing her and teasing her until she thought she would scream with want. Then he stopped. She cried for him to continue.

“No, I’ve made my point.”

She stood dumfounded, and then rage stepped in, “you’re a pig!” She tried to hit him.

He caught her fists, “You are going to stay with us for awhile Tanya.” His eyes were emotionless.

“You can’t make me do anything, I have rights! This is kidnapping!” Her words were brave, but her voice quivered a little. She struggled to free her arms.

“Stop it.”

To her surprise she listened,

“I need you to stay out of Elsa and Lucas’ way.” He easily held her arms.

“Why?” Tears began to flood her eyes.

He ignored her question, “When Lucas says, I’ll let you go.” He released on of her arms and his hand came up to caress her face. She closed her eyes against the deliberate touch, “Although,

I must admit, I won't be happy that day."

Her voice was reduced to a small whisper, "What have you done to me?"

"I haven't done anything you didn't want done. You must remember that it was you who gave yourself to me. I never forced you."

"You drugged me."

"You know I didn't have to." He released her other arm and tangled his fist in her hair pulling back almost painfully.

She gasped, "You're lying."

"Don't deny it Tanya. I can feel the excitement running through your blood this very moment." He lowered his head and his tongue licked a delicate spot on her neck. "You have to quit fighting me and give in to your desires." His voice deepened, "I know what you want Tanya, I can almost *smell* it."

Her breath quickened as her excitement increased, "You're wrong." She breathed

He smiled seductively at her, "Tell me Tanya, that you want me to stop and I will release you." His hand traced a path down her back. He saw her lip quiver as he circled it around her waist.

"I don't want you to..."

"...Yes." He interrupted

"...to...to stop." She gasped.

"As you wish..." he turned her swiftly and pushed her against the desk slamming his body against hers. His mouth covered hers with a guttural growl.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THAT EVENING ELSA finished a term paper in the library then went back to her dorm room to get some studying done. Linda was gone when she returned, most likely out with friends. She sat cross-legged in a chair at her desk and chewed the end of

her pencil thinking of Lucas and wondering if he was thinking of her. *This was no way to get any work done*, she scolded herself. She stared out the window at the fading daylight, and suddenly realized she'd spent most of the day daydreaming. However, she was thankful that she at least got one paper done. She hadn't heard from Lucas all day and let the thoughts creep into her head that she'd turned him off her the previous night. If she really thought about it, she cried, fainted and acted very needy. She blushed at the incidents. No wonder she could never get a date, some fun she was. Not only that her two friends were so much prettier and were probably better entertainment than she was. At least they knew how to treat and act around a man with Lucas' caliber. Although the words he spoke to her last night seemed very genuine at the time, it seemed like eons ago that she heard them. She looked down at her paper and noticed that all she was doing was doodling. She crumpled it up and threw it in the wastebasket joining several dozen more pieces of similar crinkly balls. She blew her hair off of her face in frustration, stood, and walked to the window to look down at the street and the small park across the road that signified the center of the campus. There were a few people out walking, biking and some just packing up their books after a day of studying in the park as dusk settled in the sky. Just then a knock at the door startled her.

"Elsa, phone's for you!" Yelled another female voice.

Her heart rate increased in her excitement, "Okay thanks!" she hollered back through the closed door while grabbing her sweater and pulled it on as she rushed through the door and down the hall about as quick as her legs would take her to find the receiver balanced on top of the payphone. She looked at her hand as she reached for it. It was shaking. "Hello."

"Elsa" it was Lucas.

"Hi." She tried to tone down the excitement in her voice but doubted it was effective because he chuckled.

“We need to go shopping.”

“Shopping?”

“I’ll be there in an hour.”

“Shopping for what?”

“One hour.” Was all he would say and then he hung up.

Shopping? What the hell for? She thought as she looked at her watch. She had an hour to get changed and try and do something with her messy hair. She went back to her room and couldn’t find anything remotely appeasing when she dug through her closet. Pausing over the pile of clothes she had on the floor she slowly turned and looked at Linda’s closet. Linda would definitely have something and she was sure that she really wouldn’t mind if she borrowed it. Linda was always trying to get her to wear her clothes. Sighing, she walked over and opened the doors. It took some digging but she did find a pretty yellow and green sundress that suited her more than the rest of Linda’s clothes and pulled it over her head. It seemed a little tight on her chest and hips, but she could hear Linda’s encouragement in her head, and thought it really wasn’t as bad as that black dress she made her wear to the party over a week ago. She found little yellow sandals and put them on. Then she stood in front of the mirror and pulled her hair up off her shoulders pinning it to the top of her head. She’d just finished pinning the last delinquent curl when the knock came at the door. Her heart jumped at the sound. When she pulled it open she wasn’t prepared for how handsome he was in a charcoal grey suit and black shirt.

“Elsa.” He leaned down and kissed her cheek then stood back and let his gaze rake over her form.

Then she saw his brows furrow as he looked at her hair, “What is it?”

He smiled, “Something’s wrong here.” He took her hand and pulled her back into her dorm room to her desk and stood in front of her. He reached up and began taking the pins out of her

hair, and tossed them on the desk's surface. "I prefer it down."

She blushed as her curls fell, one by one, off the top of her head to cascade down her back and shoulders.

"Why is that?" Her heart skipped several beats as he answered her with his husky Scottish burr. She didn't even realize she had held her breath as his hands gently search her hair for more pins.

He glanced down at her and grinned, while continuing to pull the pins out, "Because love, it's one of the things that make you natural."

Did his accent have to sound so appealing? She flashed him a teasing disapproving smile trying to ignore how he made her feel senseless, "Do you have any idea how long this took?" She pointed at her head.

He laughed, "I can only imagine." He pulled out another pin and entangled his hands in her hair at the back of her head, looking for more. Her expression became serious as she stared up at him. His eyes went from searching her mass of soft curls for another pin to her emerald gaze as her thoughts came through to him. His hands stilled in her mass of curls and he locked gazes with her.

She wanted to kiss him.

He took a deep breath to fight his urges and to his ultimate surprise, she sensed his resistance and reached up to place her hands on either side of his face. How did she know? Could she possibly sense his thoughts somehow? He gave his head a mental shake. Impossible. Regardless, the soft feel of her hands on his flesh was his undoing. She pulled him down to her and this time he didn't resist. He was captivated by her unknown sensibilities. At that moment, she was so stunning in all her alluring innocence that his defenses shattered. He wasn't prepared for what happened next. His lips captured hers and when they met the electrifying feeling they shared in the hospital went a

hundred-fold and coiled throughout their bodies meeting in a collision where they touched. It seemed if the whole planet stood still in that moment. Every sound and movement of the outside world diminished and there was just the two of them. Mortal and immortal, fused and forbidden. When she moaned against him he had to stop them. He was losing control. The supernatural animal in him was emerging.

He lifted his head with all the force nature would give him. He had to regain control of his features. He could feel the change surface in him over his desire and his hunger for her. He had even gorged himself before he came to get her because he knew how she affected him, but at that point it seemed useless. *She tasted like summer rain*, he sighed. He was thankful that she still had her eyes closed and her full lips were parted in a moue so she didn't see the change in him. He quickly calmed himself while staring down at her. He wasn't ready for the feelings she invoked in him from that kiss. Next time he would be. However that didn't mean he would have the power to stop. *Michelangelo would ache to preserve her beauty in stone*, he thought while memorizing her face. He watched her slowly open her eyelids and settle her emerald gaze on his. He stared down at her, "Do you have any idea the affect you have on me?" He saw her soft skin instantly flush crimson. His hand brushed the soft flesh at her cheek.

"No." She said shyly.

"hmmm.....Well maybe I'll tell you some day." He pulled her against him, lowered his head and inhaled her pure scent.

She had to bring herself back to reality. Being this near to him clouded her thoughts so easily, especially after the way he kissed her. She then remembered why he was here and looked up at him, "What do you mean shopping?"

He chuckled and pointed to the pile of clothes that she'd forgotten about, "Clothes shopping for you."

She immediately protested, “You’re not buying me clothes Lucas.”

“Yes, I am.” He said seriously.

“I can buy my own clothes.” She defended.

He shook his head, “Not the ones you need, not on a student’s income.”

She narrowed her gaze in frustration, “You can’t do this....I...”

“Elsa...” He interrupted and cupped her lovely face between his hands, “Indulge me please. “ He kissed her cheek in gentle persuasion, “The places I want to take you...” He kissed her other cheek, “to show you off require a very expensive wardrobe.” Kissing the corner of her mouth, “It would mean a lot to me if you let me do this. “

Oh-my-God, she near groaned at the tingling sensation his gentle kisses were doing to her skin. She stood there speechless on wobbly legs, with her face tilted toward him and eyes closed for at least a full two minutes before her lashes fluttered and she remembered where she was and what he wanted to do for her. She gaped at him for a moment, “I can’t.” It was said weakly and he knew it.

A knowing smile tugged at the corner of his lips, “Allow me to spoil you a little, okay?”

“Lucas, its just....unethical.” *oh please don’t smile, I’ll be lost* she thought as the corners of his mouth twitched.

He laughed, “I assure you it’s not. You’re just not used to it. Well, you should be, but I found you first.” His expression turned serious again, “I couldn’t be more insistent on this Elsa.”

“Lucas, do you have any idea what you’re asking me? This goes against my principles, my upbringing....everything. It’s not fair.”

“I’m not expecting anything in exchange. I don’t expect you to owe me anything at all. This is something I personally wish to

do for you. It is a gift.”

“You’re putting me in a very uncomfortable position.” She shook her head, “I can’t possibly accept this *gift*.....I barely know you. Not only that, if I don’t you’ll be angry with me. I don’t want that either.”

“I couldn’t be angry with you Elsa.” He said softly, “You will accept this though, because I’ve already set up the appointments, we are expected.” Her face took on an expression of astonishment, “...and I don’t wish to take another woman to all these events I’m expecting to attend...with a date.” He added.

Her jaw dropped, “You’re saying if I don’t accept thisgift, that you’ll take other women?”

“That’s not what I said.” He winced in distaste at her words. The thought never even crossed his mind.

“Lucas, you are playing dirty. Do you buy other woman clothes?” her brow furrowed.

“No.” he said honestly. The women he dated could afford an expensive wardrobe and almost as if she read his mind she continued.

She let out a huff of frustration, “It’s because you know I can’t afford them and you have no idea how that makes me feel. You’re used to dating fashion models.” She could feel tears welling up and tried her best to stop them from falling, but he noticed anyway.

He reached for her again and held her tight, “I can see how I’m making you feel, but this is important to me. I would like to do this for you.” He cupped her face in his hands again, “Elsa If I had my way, you’d be moved in my estate yesterday and in my bed sooner.” She blushed at that statement, but he continued, “I’d have you by my side twenty-four seven so your not a breadth away from me and I could stare at your loveliness endlessly.”

She gaped in disbelief at that one.

“I’d shower you with expensive gifts, and jewelry befitting of

your beauty. Also, I'd have flown you halfway around the world by now just to spend time alone with you. Trust me." His voice softened, "I'm totally restraining myself here."

Her face softened as she stared at his serious expression and his words sank in. Her voice was barely a whisper. "You really mean that."

"Yes. I do."

"But Lucas, you really don't know me. How could you possibly want so much with me?"

He gave her an adoring smile, "I've been alone for so long and didn't realize it until I saw you. You evoke such feelings in me that I thought were long gone. If you knew what that meant to someone...like me, you would understand. Now, will you please let me take you shopping? If you don't, I'm going to start trying to persuade you again with my mouth, and then we'll both be in trouble."

She couldn't help but give him a ravishing smile, unable to contain the feelings of what he did to her when he kissed her, or just to know that it affected him much the same, made a thrill go through her. To her surprise, she reluctantly, slowly nodded. Her reward was another one of his strong embraces

It was almost five hours of trying on clothes at the most expensive boutiques on Rodeo drive. He insisted on casual wear, evening gowns and to her complete mortification, lingerie. Although she never modeled any of it, the sales women would hand them to her in the dressing room telling her he'd picked them out and what did she think. Of course she could barely get the words out because she was too embarrassed. She would just mumble, 'whatever he wants.' It was true she was crazy about him, but for him to buy her underwear after knowing her for only a few days, didn't seem right. Not only that, he was discussing *her* underwear with four other women! Fact is, she wanted to talk to him about it but was way too humiliated to even bring the

subject up, so she let it go.

Each time she walked into a boutique the sales people would meet them at the door. Lucas would just hand over his credit card and she was rushed off by at least three to five salesladies dotting on her and for the first time in her life she felt like she was special. She was reluctant to enjoy herself while someone was insistent on spoiling her in such an extravagant way, but as the evening wore on, she actually began to. One by one, she would don outrageously expensive clothing and sheepishly come out of the dressing room and twirl in front of Lucas who would then turn and tell a woman with a pen and notepad whether he wanted to purchase it or not and what other colors was it available in. Somehow a comfortable chair would appear for him to sit in and the person taking notes would either stand or pull up another comfortable chair beside him. At times she thought that the chairs might be a little too close together. The second shop they were in the woman had the nerve to place her hand on his leg in obvious flirtation and laugh at something he said that Elsa thought wasn't even funny. Not knowing how to deal with the feeling of jealousy, because she'd never experienced it before, she wanted to punch her in the cosmetically enhanced nose.

Lucas looked up at her at that exact moment and gave her an amused smirk as if she'd spoken her thoughts out loud.

The look on her face must've been easy to read because he slowly shook his head with the same smile telling her that what she was thinking probably wasn't a good idea. She wasn't sure if it was because of Luca's money or his ridiculously good looks that would cause them to giggle or turn all their attention on him when he spoke. It really was annoying her, but who could blame them. He was very charming and wore his sex appeal like a neon sign. Actually if it hadn't been for him redirecting their attention back to her by asking them what they thought of that one, whatever it was she had on at the time, she doubted they would

even know she existed.

When she changed back into Linda's clothes and came out of the dressing room he was already at the counter paying for her new wardrobe. Jason showed up right when they were ready to leave just like he did at the previous four boutiques taking her parcels to the car. Lucas wrapped his arm around her waist as he thanked the sales people for keeping their shop open late. Again the women showered him with attention and Elsa refrained from rolling her eyes, but Lucas tightened his hold around her waist and leaned down to kiss her affectionately on the top of her head. If she didn't know better it was reassurance of where his affections lay over her current insecurity. She looked up at him and again he smirked down at her in amusement. She shook her head, there's no way he could know what she was thinking.

Jason finished piling the parcels in the trunk when Elsa and Lucas exited the shop and opened the door for them; Lucas took her hand and helped her in first then got in and slid beside her. As usual he was a perfect gentleman. Jason shut the door and walked around to the driver's side.

"There's no reason for you to be jealous Elsa." He spoke softly.

She reddened and knew there was no use denying it because he was right, she was a terrible liar, "Well, really Lucas, could those women be anymore obvious?" She sighed, "I'm really not used to any of this. I've never been jealous before in my life. Anyway, how did you know?"

He chuckled, "You scowl."

"I don't!" She defended staring at him in disbelief.

"Your face can be an open book." He explained

She thought about it for a moment and settled back against the cushioned leather, "Now I feel silly. Like a little school girl. I can't believe I'm behaving so badly."

"You *are* a school girl." He chuckled again. "And I like the

fact that you are jealous over me, though it isn't necessary. Still, I like the fact that you care about me." His eyes glittered.

She laughed, "I guess you're right, but I still shouldn't act like a juvenile. I'm sorry about that."

"Like I said it's not necessary, I only have eyes for you."

"So you say." She said quietly. Although she still couldn't get past all of the beautiful woman he'd been with in public and how complete strangers throw themselves at him. It just put too many doubts in her mind.

"Elsa, come here." He put his arm around her causing her to lean against him. She didn't protest and actually fit perfectly in the crook of his shoulder. He looked down at the top of her head and decided to let her last statement go. She had absolutely no idea that she put all of those women to shame. *Not too much longer and she will*, he thought. "If the roles were reversed and those were men fawning over you. I'd probably hit a couple of them."

"You would?" looking up at him, her eyes brightened.

Actually I'd probably have killed them. "Yes." But he wasn't going to tell her that.

Lucas dropped her off at her dorm building and explained to her that her evening wear are staying at his place but she may have all the casual wear. She didn't know it yet but he already had several rooms set aside for her, one of them was a large dressing room. "That way, you have to come to my place sometime. Then I can get you alone."

She agreed, because she knew that Linda wouldn't be able to keep her hands off of them and it's not like she could wear an evening gown to Gross Anatomy. She smiled thinking of how absurd that would look.

He walked her back to her room with Jason carrying her new wardrobe in his arms. She offered him help but he just refused and shot Lucas a look like he was offended. It made her

feel like an idiot for offering.

When Jason went back down to retrieve the rest of her parcels Lucas explained, “He has his duties Elsa, and he’s happy to do things for you.”

“He shouldn’t have to feel that way toward me. He’s not my employee Lucas.”

Lucas laughed at that statement, “All that brawn he has isn’t just to protect me. He does have other talents and if he finds pleasure in this, leave him be. He wouldn’t do it if he didn’t want to. ”

Her brows rose like she didn’t believe him, “Really?”

He grinned, “I’m not a slave driver.”

“Well, of course....I know that.” She mumbled and turned away from his gaze feeling silly again.

Just then, Jason returned with the rest of her parcels and stacked them neatly in her room. Lucas leaned down to give her a small meaningful kiss on her forehead wishing her goodnight while pausing to stare at her for a moment, “I’ll see you tomorrow night” He promised. He kissed her in the same spot one more time before turning and walking away. He couldn’t risk kissing her like he did earlier or, God forbid; he would end up biting her. Even though he could feel her disappointment that he didn’t, the temptation was too great.

“Goodnight Miss. Collins.” said Jason before he turned and followed Lucas.

“You too,” she answered watching them disappear around the corner.

She went into her room and Linda still hadn’t returned. She was thankful in a way, she was exhausted, it was one in the morning and she had classes in the morning. She stared at the pile of boxes and bags with the boutiques labels stamped on them. It would take her a while to put them all away, she would leave it until morning. She stripped off her clothes and crawled

into bed without even bothering putting on pajamas. She had a feeling Linda wouldn't be home tonight either. She immediately drifted off to sleep.

"That went well." Jason said from the front seat.

"So far." Lucas answered.

"Julian will watch her for the rest of tonight and tomorrow while you rest."

"Excellent." Lucas sighed and looked out the window, "Let's hope the rest of the week goes this well."

"She's not used to this attention Lucas."

"I know. It may be too much too soon, but I need her to have no reason to turn back. I need her to understand my love for her and have it returned."

"Leave it to you to find the least selfish woman on the planet. Are you sure you can't pick another?" Jason teased.

Lucas' brows went up. "Not bloody likely."

Jason laughed.

"She may be the death of me yet. I'm starving." He leaned forward and put his face in his hands while his elbows rested on his knees. Being close to her for the last five hours was excruciating. Especially trying to keep his human attributes while smelling her innocent blood. He couldn't get out of her dorm room quick enough. "I'm sure finding out a lot about my own self restraint." In fact, his normal sustenance had increase three fold since he met her to try and quell his hunger, but it still seemed unaffected.

Glancing over his shoulder, Jason grinned, showing his deadly sharp, white teeth. "How about a hunt then, before bed?"

Actually that wasn't a bad idea. It would sate him better than bagged blood from the hospital. He would be able to endure her presence better for the next night. Although killing Michael

Reese didn't prevent him from thirsting around her, but it did ease the craving and he was still able to pull away from her before he did the unthinkable. He had twice the amount that he normally ate before he went to see her tonight and it still barely held him. He lifted his head, "That works for me."

Jason's grin widened, "Good, I know just the place."

"No junkies Jason, they give me migraines."

"I was actually thinking of sweatshop owners."

"I'm interested."

"There's this place down in Chinatown owned by the mob that brings in children from European countries and slaves them for up to eighteen hours a day. It's ideal, and owned by a couple of Russian born brothers who have gotten rich off them."

One thing about Jason was for sure, he was thorough. He knew that Lucas didn't hunt innocent mortals. So he always made sure he had a line on something that was dirty and involved innocent lives being saved just incase Lucas had a craving for live human blood. They were like insects. You kill one evil mortal and a dozen more spring up, or so it seemed.

"Alright. Anyway I think I owe you from the other night."

"Just the other night?" One of Jason's eyebrows rose.

Lucas laughed.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MONDAY MORNING PROVED difficult to crawl out of bed at seven to meet her eight o'clock class of chemistry. There was a lump in Linda's bed under the covers. Obviously she finally came home. Elsa actually stopped to ponder why someone would take such an opportunity to get an education for granted. Sighing and shaking her head she turned away not wanting to think anymore on the subject. Linda was her friend.

Elsa was still very tired but was able to make her first class

with a few minutes to spare. She even managed to quickly rifle through the boxes still piled on the floor in front of her closet and found a nice summery soft green blouse, white above the knee skirt adorned with small daisies, and white sandals. She quickly glanced in the mirror to fix her hair and decided to leave it down like Lucas preferred.

Jason stood under a tree in the park across from her dorm building as Elsa skipped down the stairs. He had dismissed Julian and took up the task of watching Elsa. Julian was trustworthy by all counts, but he felt it was his duty to make sure that Lucas' interests were looked after. He was thankful she didn't notice the stares she was receiving as she made her way down the sidewalk and across the courtyard to the science building. Every male within sight had to pretty much pick their jaws up off the ground. One by one, a group playing an early game of soccer in the field next to him all stopped and nudged each other as she rushed by oblivious and obviously worried about being late for her first class. One man stopped to ogle her causing another to run into him and knock him to the ground. Jason stepped out from under the tree and followed her at a distance. He had his orders to keep an eye on her and keep her safe, and that's what he would do. However, thanks to Lucas and his purchases, this would prove to be difficult, she was undeniably stunning. He knew there was no way that any man would not approach her today. She even left her hair down. Something she'd never done before and the gorgeous ebony curls hung almost to her waist.

Elsa finished her day of classes and as the day wore on she actually found more energy. Could it be because Lucas said he would call her tonight? And she couldn't contain her excitement at seeing him again. Regardless it wouldn't be for many more hours because he said 'tonight'. She sighed and went to the Library hoping to get a start on another paper that she should've

done last weekend but thanks to her occupation with Lucas Edwards, nothing got done. Throughout the day an odd thing started to happen from the time she sat in her first class. People actually paid attention to her in her classes, by people she meant the boys that usually sat around her but never gave her the time of day before, not that she cared, but today they kept interrupting her note taking and asking her questions that seemed irrelevant over the course content. It wasn't like she was the brainiest in the class, although she was in the top ten percent. But the questions they were asking were very straightforward and easily answered. She was beginning to feel very uncomfortable, and when she lifted her head once to look around the class, at least a dozen male and female eyes were on her, or was she just being strangely paranoid? Did she smell funny? She thought maybe that was it and couldn't remember if she put deodorant on that morning in her haste. She couldn't smell anything. But most times people can't really smell themselves, bad odor or not. When each of her classes ended she rushed for the door, trying to avoid more questions and odd stares. When her last class ended, she was thankful that day was over and immediately rushed out of the room. Instead of going back to her dorm, she would make her usual stop at the Library to work on her assignments.

Elsa was pouring heavily through medical textbooks when Ted Williams walked into the Library. Thanks to Tanya, he knew she spent most of her free time there, so he knew exactly where to look for her. She was quite absorbed when he walked up to her and stood unnoticed for a few moments before she realized he was there.

“Oh Ted, I didn't hear you.” She looked up from her books and gave him a small shy smile.

“Yeah, well you were pretty absorbed in your....uh...*three* textbooks there.”

She laughed, “Mid-terms in a few weeks.”

“Me too. Mind if I sit.” He indicated to the chair next to her.

“No, of course not.” A week ago she probably would have fell off her chair if he’d asked that same question.

He sat next to her and glanced at the textbooks, “You making any headway?”

“Trying.” She smiled

“Having trouble studying?”

She shook her head, “Not studying, concentrating.”

“What’s the problem? Man troubles?” he hoped.

She didn’t seem to notice the eagerness in his voice, ‘No, on the contrary. I’m just having problems concentrating.”

“Maybe I can help. I’m great a problem solving.”

She looked at him, “This isn’t a math problem.”

He shook his head, “No. I mean psychiatry, that’s my major.”

“Really? You’re not pulling my leg are you?”

“I don’t think there’s any gain in that,” he joked, “What did you think I was? Some empty headed jock?”

She blushed, “I’m sorry. I really shouldn’t put any faith into stereotyping.”

He waved his hand, “No problem. I can be judgmental too. I can honestly say I’ve never noticed you before because you never hung around with the popular girls, except for Linda. I wouldn’t have looked at you if I didn’t try to kill you with my football.” It was his turn to be embarrassed. “If I dated anything under that crowd, I thought it was beneath me, yet you’re the only decent girl I’ve met in a long time.”

“Thanks....I think.” She did understand what he was trying to say. In his own way, he was apologizing to her for his ignorance. She wasn’t the least bit offended. It was just the way cliques went no matter where you worked, lived, or went to school. Elsa was never interested in cliques and just minded her

own business and focused on school.

He stared at her for a moment. How he ever missed seeing her run the track before was beyond him. He could understand if she wasn't in sports because campus held up to thirty thousand students. He just couldn't get beyond how beautiful she was. He decided that if he was to have a chance with her, he would have to act now, "Say, did you want to go out for a drink or something? Like maybe to Deter's."

Deter's was the club just off campus that all the in-crowds went to. Obviously she never set foot in there. "I can't Ted. I'm not old enough. I'm only eighteen...and well, I'm kind of seeing someone. Not only that I'm supposed to be meeting him tonight" Lucas said he'd call and there was no mention of them getting together, but she wanted to leave it open for him. She would have never turned Ted down a few days ago. She probably wouldn't have looked him in the eye either. Being around Lucas for those few moments seemed to have given her confidence.

He held up his hands in defense, "The guy at the door is a teammate of mine, it won't be a problem and I meant...as friends. Not only that, if we leave now, you can spend a few hours with me as friends and be home before nightfall. You don't think your boyfriend would mind you going out with your friends, do you? Also, I owe you a drink for trying to kill you."

She laughed, "Well, I guess it couldn't hurt."

Ted triumphantly stood up, "Great! I'll pick you up in an hour."

She nodded and he left smiling.

Monday afternoon Linda dreaded to wake up to a hangover. "Augh! Linda, will you ever learn." She sat up slowly, her hand on her forehead to ease the pain. She drank too much last night and the night before. Memories of Saturday night's events

began to flood back to her and made her feel like a fool. She had put the moves on Lucas. Elsa would be ready to kill her when she found out and he probably already told her. Of course she could blame it on the amount of liquor she consumed. But that was an old pathetic excuse. She'd felt so guilty that she'd crashed at a friend's the last few nights to avoid the guilt she felt, but sooner or later she knew she had to face Elsa. She moaned again and reached for her nightstand drawer to remove a couple of Alca Seltzer tablets and drop them in a glass of water. She didn't even wait for them to completely dissolve before she downed its contents. She reached back in her nightstand and pulled out her hand held mirror, "Some people have bibles, I have a mirror." She glanced at herself, "Ech! Linda you look like a hag." She tossed the mirror back in the drawer and waited a minute before she felt she could drag herself to her feet. As she stood Elsa walked in startling her.

"You're awake." She hardly paid any attention to Linda's disheveled appearance. She'd seen it a million times before. She had to get ready for this evening.

Linda misunderstood her preoccupation with anger, "Are you angry with me?"

She stopped and looked at her, "Me? With you? For what? You always drink too much when you go out. It doesn't bother me." Elsa did notice that she looked worried, "What's wrong?"

Linda shook her head, "Nothing...Nothing at all." She forced a smile.

"You just looked like you wanted to say something."

"No. Did you happen to talk to Lucas much Saturday night?" She tried to make it sound casual.

Elsa's whole face lit up. Her previous thoughts forgotten, "Yes, quite a bit, he's wonderful." Her heart jumped at the mention of his name. She told Linda everything that had happened between them Saturday night and her shopping

experience on Sunday.

Linda was stunned; Lucas didn't say anything to Elsa. If he did there was no way her innocent face would hide the betrayal. Then she felt even worse. He obviously didn't want her hurt, but Linda didn't seem to have a problem at the time. Linda noticed the parcels that Elsa pointed to when she discussed the shopping trip and her face lightened considerably, "Oh my *God!* Elsa he must've spent a fortune on you!"

"I tried to stop him." She flushed

"Are you crazy?" She rushed over and started rummaging through the bags, "Why would you want to do something like that?" She couldn't contain her excitement as she pulled out the expensive clothing. "These are all so beautiful!"

Elsa blushed again, "He bought me lingerie too."

Linda laughed, "You don't say! Obviously he likes to have his lady wear *everything* in style. I really hope you get the chance to model it for him." She wiggled her eyebrows.

"Linda!"

"Come on, Elsa, he's crazy about you. No one does this sort of thing....good *God* is this a *Garavani skirt?*" She held the garment up in front of her.

"I don't know..." Elsa said feeling stupid that she didn't know any of these designers.

Linda pulled out several more, "Elsa, these skirts cost at least four hundred dollars a piece."

She grabbed the skirts out of her hands and stuffed them back in the bags clearly embarrassed, "Okay, that's it, they are going back. I can't possibly accept these. It's no wonder he wouldn't let me see the charges." She was visibly upset, "I don't even know how much he spent on the other stuff."

"Oh no you don't." Linda grabbed the skirts back, "You would insult him. Not only that Elsa, you deserve this... She paused and looked at her, "...What other *stuff?*"

Elsa shook her head as if she couldn't feel any worse, "The evening gowns, he insisted on keeping at his place so I would have an excuse to go there when he takes me out."

"Oh you don't say! He's definitely a keeper." She stared at her in awe. "Did you sleep with him?"

"What?...God....no..." she flushed bright crimson, "Linda!"

Linda burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, "You didn't sleep with him and he's spending a fortune on you.....he's got it bad."

"Okay, I'm changing the subject now. This is getting too embarrassing for me." She began to reluctantly tell her about Tanya's sharp words

"So Tanya finally showed her dark side, did she?" Linda seemed unfazed.

Elsa tilted her head at her, "Tanya doesn't have a dark side."

"Of course you don't think so."

Elsa shrugged, "She's always been nice to me."

"Until you got in the way of her and a man."

She gave her a wide-eyed look, "I didn't!"

"Elsa, you are very naïve. I didn't mean that you had your sights set on that hulking bodyguard of Lucas', I meant you interrupted her getting down and dirty with that hot guy. She can be quite possessive, even more than me when she sets her sights on someone. Now, before you protest, I've gone out with her many times even though you were friends first."

"I just find that hard to believe."

"Don't worry Elsa," She laughed, "She'll be on her knees begging for your forgiveness in awhile. Her conscience is big enough for the both of us, which is why I let her carry mine."

"I think she's still there."

Linda smiled, "Well I can't blame her, that man was absolutely striking, all muscle bound and good looking. Hell, I

bet he's big *everywhere*." Elsa fell her face in her hands and Linda laughed again, "Sorry. I forget sometimes that I'm in the presence of the last eighteen year old virgin on the planet."

Elsa lifted her head and looked at her with exasperation, "Oh God, do you ever stop?"

It was Linda's turn to shrug, "I knew she had a thing for him even though she refused to admit it."

"How come every time I try to tell you something you turn the subject to sex?"

"Don't knock it." She giggled, "Until you know better. I mean it's a fact that men think about sex every fifty seconds and women about three times a day, or thereabouts. However, when that Ted Williams is around..." She fanned her face with her hand, "I have to admit I think about it more often than fifty seconds. Look at that hot body and all that sinewy muscle."

Elsa blushed and started feeling extremely guilty, "Linda, I have something else to tell you." Elsa reluctantly told her about running into Ted at the Library. She was the last person that wanted to hurt her.

Linda's eyes narrowed. He had some nerve, "Well," She said, "Ted did say as friends. Then do you mind I come along?"

Elsa breathed a sigh of relief, "Please. He did say it wasn't a date. Not only that, it feels sort of weird, like I'm cheating on Lucas." Elsa did feel uncomfortable about accepting the invitation, although it was all in innocence. She didn't think he would mind if she invited Linda along, because he did say 'as friends'.

"Nonsense. Let him chase you down." She laughed. "After he spent so much money on you, trust me, he's not going anywhere."

Elsa flushed, "Geez Linda, you are impossible." She remembered Tanya, "What if she comes home and we're not here?"

Linda shrugged, “So?” She was amazed that after the way Tanya treated Elsa, she still was concerned about her.

“Well, what if she needs to talk?”

“Fine we’ll leave her a note.” Linda grabbed a piece of paper and began writing. “Not that she deserves it.” Linda turned her conversation to Ted babbling away about him as she discussed what she was going to wear, and her plan of attack. Her hangover disappeared quickly with her new excitement.

Elsa was convinced the mention of any man’s name could cure Linda’s hangover.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THAT NIGHT, JASON entered Lucas’ room, his ritual brandy held in his hands. Lucas wasn’t awake yet. The deep slumber doesn’t end until the sun fully sets. He set the glass on the bedside table and searched Lucas’ closet to prepare his clothes for him. He then switched on the television so Lucas could watch the evening news. Lucas seemed to always want to know what was going on in the world while he was asleep. Jason pulled the drapes back from the bed and secured them against the posts. These protected Lucas from any sunlight that could escape through the heavy opaque blinds. It was just an extra precaution. Jason then walked over to the fireplace and lit a fire to heat up the room. Though hot or cold temperatures didn’t bother Lucas, he still wanted the image of warmth.

When he was done he turned back toward the bed. Lucas was up and already dressed, sipping his glass of brandy. He never made a sound.

Jason didn’t hear him, he never did, even with his acute hearing. “Good evening Lucas.”

Lucas nodded as he did up his shirt cuffs. His eyes focused on the television.

“...The body found on the north side of the city in a sewer drain late this afternoon is puzzling city officials. They claim that when they attempted to remove the body, it disintegrated. The sewer workers who discovered it said it was too torn up to identify. Emily Shanks our new field reporter is with them now...Emily?”

A familiar face flashed on the Television. “Thank you, Bob. This is Emily Shanks reporting live from Selton Street, above the drain they discovered the body in this afternoon. I am standing here with one of the workers who came upon the grim scene while repairing a broken line. Jose Hernandez.” She turned to face the man and stuck the microphone in his face, “What can you tell us about the body?”

A nervous looking man wearing a hard hat and a bright yellow slicker stared into the camera. “Is that thing on?”

“Uh, yes it is,” answered Emily.

“Well, I don’t know what happened. It was real disgusting, like something you see on the television.” He squinted his eyes at the camera like he was trying to look into the world’s living rooms.

“Do you suppose some sort of sewer animal could have done this? I mean we’ve all heard rumors about rogue alligators.”

“Are you kidding?” he looked at her dumbfounded. “I’ve worked in the sewers for twenty years and the only thing down there are big rats. This guy had a huge hole in his chest and his head was missing. I don’t think rats could do that.”

The camera focused on Emily again, who didn’t look so well despite the smile she was forcing, “Thank you Jose, is there anything else you could tell us?”

“Oh yeah, “ The camera swung back to Jose, “It was really weird. I mean if a guy were to lose his head, you’d think there would be a lot of blood, but nothing. He was just laying there like all the blood was drained from his body.”

“Thank you Jose.” This time Emily looked rather pale, “No identity is released at this time, mainly because they only had a few moments to examine the body. I have heard that the investigators had take a few pictures before attempting to remove it from the sewer.”

“Emily,” the newscaster interrupted, “they say the body disintegrated.”

“Yes, Bob. Officials state there might have been some toxic chemical in the sewer that contributed to the rapid decomposition. They are hoping to discover something in the ashes. This is Emily shanks reporting live from Selton Street.”

The newscaster started talking about other events when Lucas turned it off.

“Wow...”said Jason with an edge of surprise in his voice, “She *really* sucks.”

Lucas laughed.

Jason pursed his lips in disappointment, “She can’t seem to put a proper story together.”

“Seems that way.” Lucas said still laughing.

“I can say one thing for sure. She’s gorgeous.”

“Jason.” Lucas warned, his eyes flicking to his protector.

He chuckled, “I know, I know...what can I say. I’m a male predator.”

Lucas smiled, *no argument there.*

“Well, at least we know where she works and who she is.”

“yes.”

“Do you want me to take care of her?”

“Not yet. Find out what she knows. I don’t want to exterminate her unless absolutely necessary.”

“Yes my Lord.”

“Jesus, there are getting to be too many loose ends.” He shook his head speaking his thoughts out loud.

“You will handle it Lucas. You always have.” Jason stated

with admiration in his voice. “That is why you are still alive.” He chuckled.

Lucas smiled at him, “Leave it to you to cheer me up. Shit. And the only reason I’m still alive is because I’m Valear’s prodigy son.”

“Well, Lucas, you didn’t come by that easily.” Jason reminded him.

“True.” *Very true.* He sighed, “Who’s watching Elsa?”

“Julian.”

“All right.”

“She’s was in the library studying after her classes.”

“I guess she can’t get into too much trouble there.”

“I have to warn you though; she raised a lot of heads today.”

Lucas stopped what he was doing and looked at him, *another complication*, “You don’t say?”

Jason nodded, “Whatever you saw in her, or whatever drew you to her, is starting to emerge and others are noticing. There were a group of young men playing soccer that came to a standstill when they saw her. The wind could’ve have knocked them over for how stunned they looked.”

Lucas swore.

“Do you want me to send a few others to watch her?”

Lucas shook his head, “It would draw too much attention, I can’t risk that. It would only take one curious vampire to sense how pure she is or why I have shown interest in her, and then her life is over.” *This is just getting more complicated*, he thought.

“That makes sense then.” Jason stated, “We are kind of trapped between a rock and a hard place.”

“So to speak.” Lucas answered with a heavy sigh, “I’ll take Gabriel with me tonight, and you go see what Emily knows Jason. She’s working now so her residence will be vacant.”

“I understand.” Just then Jason’s cell phone rang. He answered it and his eyes immediately shot to Lucas while

listening to the male voice on the other end, “Yeah, all right Julian. I’ll pass it on.” He hung up.

Lucas raised his brows.

“It seems that Elsa and the blond friend went with some fella to the campus bar a few hours ago. Julian says he approached your girl in the library earlier that day.”

“Did he touch her?” Lucas had difficulty keeping the rage out of his voice.

“No. I guess he’s been very cordial according to Julian. He understands your orders Lucas. If the man touched her intimately in any way, he’ll take care of him.” Jason added with absolution

“Of course.” Lucas said without a doubt. “My anger isn’t at the pack Jason.”

“I understand.” Jason inclined his head in an apology, “The anger from you isn’t normal and I must admit it throws me off balance.”

Despite his earlier rage, Lucas smiled, “Me too friend, me too.” Suddenly he inclined his head sideways.

“what is it?”

“Celeste.” He turned his attention back to Jason, “Go, don’t worry. I’ll take Gabriel and collect Elsa and...” he added to dispel Jason’s worries, “We’ll take the bloody car.”

Jason laughed and turned to leave.

Lucas watched Jason exit through his bedroom door. His thoughts turned to the body that was found. He knew who it was. He couldn’t forget the image of Valear the other night when he’d mentioned Ian. He knew it was a matter of time. Then he heard Celeste’s voice.

“Hello Lucas.” Rang the soft English accent.

“Celeste.” Lucas stared at the lovely woman that had just invited herself into his bedroom through his closed window.

“You look smashing as always.” She approached him with a

sexy sway of her hips, reached up and straightened out his collar without any objection from him.

She was wearing a low cut black velvet evening gown.

“What do you want Celeste?” he knew precisely why she was here.

She paused for a moment, and looked at him. “You’re a little touchy tonight.”

“No more or less when it concerns you.” He turned away from her and downed the contents in his glass.

She ignored his sarcasm as usual, “That’s unfair Lucas.” She was referring to how he knew why she was here, “It doesn’t leave much of a mystery when you pry into minds that way.”

“I’ve outlived mystery. It helps me sort out my enemies.”

“Oh Lucas, you can be such a bore, ”She approached him again, reaching out to touch his forearm, “besides, I’m not your enemy.”

Although he already knew, he wanted her to ask him, “What do you want Celeste?” He repeated, unmoved by her gesture.

“Oh yes. Seeing you makes me forget my head sometimes.” Her arms circled his neck, “I wish to know who killed Ian.”

Lucas grinned at her, “I don’t have the slightest idea.” He lied. How she found out so quickly was beyond him.

“I may not be able to read thoughts as well as you Lucas, but I know you well enough to know when you are lying.” She released him and walked toward the fire.

Lucas felt her emotions, “You and *Ian*?” Lucas missed that before when she was here and when Ian was here because he had other things on his mind. Elsa. He was too preoccupied with protecting her and his feelings for her from Celeste that he missed something important. He was angry with himself. Again Valear was right.

“Ian was my lover.” She turned and gave him a distressing look.

“I see.” He knew she wasn’t lying. Celeste had many lovers.

“I suppose you knew that. Just like you know everything.”

“No.” he stated honestly, “It wasn’t on my list of concerns. I still can’t help you.”

She move towards him again and placed her hands on his chest hoping to inspire some sympathy in him. She gave him an incredibly alluring stare, “Why not Lucas. I use to mean something to you.”

Lucas’ expression softened a little, “You still do Celeste, that is why I can’t tell you.” He didn’t want the same fate to befall her that happened to Ian.

She laughed, a beautiful seductive laugh, “I think you are teasing me.”

He gave her a serious expression, “I wish it were that simple.”

She thought for a moment.

“No Celeste.” He probed her thoughts, “It wasn’t me.”

“Damn Lucas, I hate it when you do that! You can’t blame me for thinking it.” She sat on his bed and tried one last tactic, “I loved him.”

He chuckled while staring down at her, “You think you love everyone.”

“Oh that’s not true, Lucas. I don’t love everyone. I loved you.”

“You’re perception of love is different from mine. It always has been. You seem to misconstrue sexual need and love. That is why it didn’t work between us.”

She stared at him, “You are the superior Vampire Lucas. You have the talent to read minds, influence any in the association without effort...”

“...it takes effort.” He interrupted.

“You know what I mean. Yet, you refuse to look within me to see that I do not lie to you this time.”

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Ian had meant a lot to her. He could feel her pain, but she didn't know what love was, he did. That is why he refused to fall into her deliberate trap. She wanted something from him. He probed her thoughts again. A small inkling of curiosity floated through to him, however, nothing about Elsa. He himself was feeling badly for Ian's fate. It was because of him that Valear took his rage out on him. Ian's only vice was that he was curious and stumbled in on something he shouldn't have. Lucas studied Celeste's features for a moment and refused to be lured in by her again. He couldn't risk letting her know about Elsa. Although, he could comfort her. He approached her and gathered her into his arms, "I'm sorry for your loss Celeste, but there is nothing I can do about that."

"Why Lucas." She looked up at him through watery eyes.

"Because it is out of my hands." His gaze went to the dark sky outside.

Jason found Emily's apartment no problem; she was in the phone book. It wasn't that difficult. When he tried the door, it was locked. He grinned and used a little more force. It gave way with a muffled metallic snap. He placed two fingers on the door and gave it a gentle push. It swung open freely. He loved his inhuman strength. Shutting the door behind him, he glanced around; she had a small but tidy apartment. A small laptop sat on the coffee table. He walked over and sat on the adjacent sofa powering it up. It was easy to operate and he had valid computer experience. He easily found the menu and Lucas Edwards just happened to be one of the titles. He laughed, "She's not very careful." He spoke out loud as he opened the file, which wasn't password protected. *She must've thought we didn't know what she was up to.* There was nothing in the file the public didn't already know about Lucas. However, there was little bit about his relationship with Elsa. She even had her last name.

Although, nothing to who she was, or what she did. She must be after more information about her before she submitted the article. She signed it Jean Watson. It must be her pen name for the tabloids. It looks like she was trying to pave the way for herself as a serious reporter too after seeing her on the evening news. *Good luck*, he thought with a grin remembering how terrible she was. She must have taken Photographs by the way she described the events of that night. If one of Lucas' kind read this, Emily and Elsa wouldn't live five minutes beyond dark after the story was published. Jason knew that if the male Vampires got a hold of Elsa, they would do unthinkable things to her. He knew even though he wasn't a Vampire, because that's what he would do. Mortals were easy to influence. They would control her, turn her, and use her to manipulate Lucas and he would end up risking his life to save her. Not only the male species, but the females would want a piece of Elsa too. Even Celeste wouldn't hesitate to suck the life out of her. After all, Lucas was the most powerful eligible bachelor in the Association. If only Elsa knew what Lucas was risking for her. Jason didn't realize that he agreed with Valear in which Lucas should just claim Elsa and convert her before this went too far. He plugged a flash drive into one of the computer's ports and opened the virus into her hard drive. Then, out of spite he twisted the laptop into a crumpled ball. He then searched through her apartment for the photos. He found a camera, but the film was missing. "Shit." In his frustration he twisted it into a ball and placed it beside the remains of her lap top. Then, he walked throughout the apartment looking through her things. He went into the Kitchen, looked through the cupboards and the fridge. There was a very scant amount of food. She obviously didn't cook often. He grabbed a can of beer, opened it and took a deep swallow while he continued to nose around. He went into her bedroom. She had no pictures anywhere of anyone...*orphan? Estranged?* He

thought to himself. He picked up her pillow and smelled it. She smelled just as good as Tanya. It was too bad Lucas wouldn't let him have both women. He grinned to himself at the thought. He put her pillow back and opened the drawer on the table beside her bed. Nothing significant, a notepad, pens, some chewing gum and he picked up a small box of cigarettes. *Such a bad habit*, he thought as he crumpled the box into a small ball and left it on top of the table. Then he smirked as he found an unopened box of condoms and almost laughed. Even her sex life was lacking.

Satisfied that he left enough indicators that he was there, it was time to go. Maybe she'll take the hint and leave Lucas alone. He finished the beer and set it beside the mangled package of cigarettes before leaving.

Celeste left, still grieving somewhat over the loss of Ian. Lucas needed a good feeding. She always left him tired. She was difficult to resist sometimes, but it was Elsa who gave him a reason to overcome what little weakness he had left for Celeste. After he had fed he would go to her.

Deter's was packed with university students, on a Monday night. *Doesn't anyone study?* Elsa thought to herself noticing the crowd. She recognized a few people from some of her classes.

Ted wasn't impressed that Elsa invited Linda along. Although he didn't blame Elsa, he knew it was Linda's doing. However, he did say it was just a friendly get together. It screwed his plans up. Nevertheless, he played the polite escort to both of them through gritted teeth, but no one seemed to notice. Linda was the object of his hostility, but she was too busy talking to people she knew to notice. Ted really wanted to be alone with Elsa, even if it was in a crowded bar. It was the only way she would go out with him, he knew that. He watched her backside as she followed Linda through the crowd looking for a table. She

was stunning as usual. However, she was different somehow. It was in the way she walked, talked and just her whole demeanor. She was much more confident than when he'd first met her on the track. He couldn't deny that it was intoxicating. She wore a short red dress with over the shoulder spaghetti straps that fit nicely to her form. He ached to be the one to slide them off her shoulders and see what treasures lay beneath. He managed to sneak a peek at the crests of her breasts while she was talking to Linda. He could have licked his lips over the way they strained against the material. She was so perfect in his eyes. Regardless of Linda's insistence to tag alone, he was still going to try and convince Elsa that he was worth her attention.

As the evening wore on, he was trying to stay close to her, but he had some trouble with Linda hanging off his arm. He didn't want Elsa to know how much he despised her friend by telling her off especially when he was trying to make a good impression. He was thankful to find a table and seat the girls. Then he went to the bar to get them drinks. He knew she had to be somewhere else, but managed to distract her enough that she had carelessly forgotten the time. Hopefully, this Lucas fella would be put off and leave her alone so he could step in. Originally he wasn't going to pursue her after seeing her with Lucas, but when he saw her in the library earlier, as beautiful as she was, he couldn't resist. He knew one thing, it would take a hell of a lot for Lucas Edwards to be put off. If it was him, she could have run him over with a car and he would still want her.

One of his football teammates, Dirk Robinson was standing by the bar when he arrived. His eyes were on Linda who was chatting with Elsa.

"Hey man.....Linda Stanten. I'm impressed." He held his beer in one hand and slapped Ted on the back with the other.

Ted ordered his drinks then turned around and leaned against the bar. "Well don't be, it's not her I'm after. I would like

to peel that woman's hands off me for five minutes, so I could focus on someone else." He confessed while staring at Elsa.

Dirk squinted his well beyond-sober eyes in the direction Ted was looking. "Well, well, well. Who is *that*?"

"Elsa Collins." Ted watched her flip her ebony curls over her shoulder completely naïve on how alluring the gesture was. Obviously Dirk saw it too.

Dirk silently studied her and he jaw fell open. "Wow. She puts Linda to shame. Hey, isn't that the one you tried to impale on a football the other day?"

Ted winced at the memory, "yeah."

Dirk laughed, "I don't remember her being such a hottie."

"She kind of kept that hidden."

Dirk didn't seem to hear him, "Would you introduce me?"

"No way."

Dirk chuckled, "Then how about an introduction to Linda. Maybe I can help." He gave Ted a wide grin.

Ted grinned back, "That would be my pleasure."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LUCAS STOOD OUTSIDE the club. Anger well up in him, "We shall see about that." *Smug bastard*. He'd made his intentions clear to Ted regarding Elsa, the moment he'd met him. He knew Ted could not deny the attraction between him and Elsa. Obviously he didn't intimidate him enough. It was a rare occasion when Lucas felt deceived and equally rare when he felt the need to kill.

Linda gave Dirk a false smile. The man was a slobbering idiot. She saw Ted whisper in Elsa's ear. She laughed and Linda saw red. It took great effort to keep her temper in check and her mouth shut. She knew Dirk was Ted's way of keeping her occupied and away from him. Little did he know that she had a

few tricks of her own.

She stood up, “Ted, would you like to dance?”

Ted gave her a surprised look.

“...I’ll dance with you.” Dirk broke in.

“Linda looked at him, “I’m sure you would, but I didn’t ask you.”

“Linda!” Elsa gasped.

Ted knew that Linda was purposely causing a scene in front of Elsa. She knew he couldn’t refuse, because it would make him look like more of a jerk than she was. Before Linda went any further, which he knew she would, he agreed, “Yes Linda, let’s dance.”

She swiftly hooked her arm through his before he changed his mind and gave him a triumphant smile, “Thank you.”

When they were a brief distance away he spoke, “You just won’t take no for an answer, do you?” he glared at her.

“No, I always get what I want.” She looked directly at him, ignoring the angry stare he was giving her.

When they reached the dance floor, the tempo changed and to his dismay a slow song started to play. She put her arms around his neck and he reluctantly placed his on her hips.

“You are willing to even embarrass your best friend,” He didn’t hide his disgust.

Linda was stung, but she wasn’t willing to give up yet. “Look who’s calling the kettle black. Just friends huh? It seems your tactics are as devious as mine.” She grinned knowing she was right, “You seem to get off praying on her innocence.”

He stilled himself for a moment, then continued to dance with her. She was right. He did. It made him angry that she knew and made him realize that he was no better than her.

Dirk excused himself bluntly saying that he had to take a leak. He left Elsa sitting wide-eyed staring at his departing back.

He turned to look over his shoulder and winked at her before he disappeared into the crowd. She was now alone. A few moments passed. She turned around to try and peer through the crowd to see if she could locate Ted and Linda without much success. Elsa really wasn't enjoying herself. It was like being around a crowd of drunk Linda's. The drink Ted brought her remained untouched. After watching everyone else's behavior, she thought she would prefer to remain sober. She turned around in her seat beginning to feel awkward sitting alone. Her eyes darted uncomfortably through the crowd. Suddenly, her heart stopped as her eyes set on a familiar face. It was Lucas. He was standing there just looking at her. Her mouth fell open.

"Come on sweetheart, let's dance." Dirk had returned and grabbed Elsa's arm hauling her to her feet not waiting for a response.

Elsa's eyes left Lucas' form to look up at Dirk as he half dragged her out of her chair. She looked back but he wasn't there any longer. She could've imagined it. It was so packed in the bar. She continued to glance over her shoulder scanning the mob as Dirk dragged her through the crowd to the floor.

"Elsa."

She snapped her head around and saw him standing in front of them. His expression remained unreadable, and she worried he was angry with her. Despite this she still was relieved to see him. "Lucas." She breathed with a small smile.

"Who are you?" Dirk blankly asked. Wondering how he knew Elsa.

"None of your concern. Take your hands off of her." He said it calmly and stepped past him to Elsa and easily removed her hand out of Dirk's. He ignored Dirk and turned to Elsa, kissing her on the cheek, then speaking softly in her ear. "What are you doing here?"

"I...I came with some friends." Her eyes narrowed slightly

trying to understand his mood. He seemed very calm and pleasant despite the whole situation.

The look of apprehension on her face let him know that she thought he might be angry with her. *No, my love, it's not you I'm angry with.* Lucas thought to himself as his eyes focused on Ted dancing reluctantly with Linda. *I'll deal with you later.* He turned his attention back to Elsa and lowered his head to speak in her ear through the noise in the bar, "Let's go. You don't belong here."

"I'm beginning to think I don't belong anywhere." She bowed her head.

He placed his hand under her chin and tilted her head up to meet his gaze, "That's not true, I know *exactly* where you belong."

A slow smile spread across her lips and she mouthed the words, *Do you?*

Lucas grinned down at her and nodded and for a brief moment it felt like they were the only two standing there until Dirk spoke again.

"Hey buddy, asked you a question." Dirk put his hand on his shoulder.

Lucas reluctantly tore his gaze away from Elsa and turned to face Dirk. He looked him up and down with an amused smile, not answering

"Are you a deaf-mute, or what?" slurred Dirk

Lucas watched him sway slightly.

"Lucas, let's just leave." Elsa stepped between them facing Lucas.

He looked down at her then back up at Dirk. She was right; he got what he had come for.

"What are you doing with my pal's girl?" Dirk put a hand on a nearby table to steady himself. He was desperately trying to provoke Lucas into a fight.

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It wasn't working, now Lucas was just becoming more amused. "She's not your *pal's* girl." Although he was in a rage when he had gotten there, when he scoured the thoughts of those there, he knew Elsa was not having a good time and Ted was preoccupied with Linda. Not only that, the relief that emanated off of her when she saw him just tampered any anger he had left.

"You can't do that." Dirk may have been half corked but nobody stole one of the team's girls. Especially the team captain's.

Lucas stood calmly while Dirks voice began to rise in accusations. A few people began to look at them, hoping for a fight.

Again Elsa urged him to leave, "Lucas..."

Lucas spotted Ted, and changed his mind on leaving at that time, "Just a moment, Elsa." He said calmly. He needed to make sure that Ted knew where he stood, "You should let your friends know you are leaving." It was his excuse to cover the real reason he remained where he was.

Ted was coming back from the dance floor against Linda's protests just in time to see Dirk and Lucas in a confrontation, and knowing Dirk, edging closer to a fight. It would have happened if Ted hadn't arrived at that moment. He grabbed Dirk by the shoulders and asked him to calm down. Elsa stood peeking out from behind Lucas while he dealt with Ted's drunk friend. Ted could tell that Dirk wasn't that far from taking a swing at Lucas. That was something he didn't want, especially with Elsa present.

Lucas cast his luminescent stare on Ted letting his eyes flash indigo, "I think your friend has had too much to drink."

Ted took an unexpected step back, "yeah, sure Mr. Edwards. Sorry about that." Ted could have sworn he'd sent the man's eyes glow. When he took a second look, his eyes were normal. He almost thought he imagined it until Lucas grinned. The grin was

emotionless. It was enough to let him know he didn't imagine anything. Lucas wanted him to see it. Ted didn't miss it. He felt a chill crawl up his spine. Without saying another word Lucas turned and left with Elsa in tow.

When Lucas and Elsa approached the car, she noticed it wasn't Jason who held the door open for them. It was someone else. She supposed that Lucas had a great many employees. She didn't say anything as he took her hand and helped her into the car. She was really embarrassed about the episode that took place in Deter's. Not only was she there with someone else, her friends' behaviors were abashing. She felt so stupid.

Lucas slid next to her, "What is it?"

She spared him a serious glance, "I'm sorry. "

One of his eyebrows raised, "What for?"

She shrugged her shoulders, "Well, for one...I shouldn't have been there with Ted...and I lost track of time. You told me you would call me tonight. I didn't realize it was that late."

"...Linda was there too Elsa. And your life isn't on hold for me." He knew Ted made the loss of time deliberate.

She couldn't look at him, "You know what I mean."

He chuckled, "If you think that was inappropriate behavior from you, think again."

"What do you mean?" She was confused. He'd found her there with a couple of other men and he wasn't upset with her.

"Elsa, give me some credit. You are allowed to go out with your friends. I just didn't appreciate one of them manhandling you, and that wasn't your fault." He didn't mention that he knew Ted manipulated her into going and he felt like ripping the bastard's arms off and shoving them up his ass. She was worried enough. He made sure that piece of meat knew tonight that she was his. He was also thankful that she didn't ask him how he knew she was there.

“but Lucas, to anyone else it looked...”

“...You forget, I’m not everyone else.”

She looked at him, “You make this too easy.”

“It should be.”

She buried her face in her hands and sighed, “See, I don’t know how you know all that and all the other things I feel. I’ve never felt like this before and you’re so sure about yourself and how you feel,” She looked at him, “I just don’t know how to deal with this.”

“There is no need to be afraid.” He pulled her closer to him and left his arms around her, “just go with it. “ he nuzzled the top of her head with his nose, closing his eyes at her exhilarating scent, “And I’ve never felt this way before either.”

She pulled back and looked at him her eyes wide with wonder, “really?”

He smiled, in all of her wide-eyed innocence she was very breathtaking. “Really? You don’t have to worry. It will take care of itself. ” His hand came up and stroked her soft cheek as she laid his head against his arm.

“I hope so.” She murmured.

He leaned down and kissed the top of her head tenderly and inhaled deeply once again. He just couldn’t get enough of her scent. At least now he had become somewhat accustomed to his reaction to her and was able to control himself a little better, not much, but it served its purpose for now.

She looked up at him, “Can I ask you something?”

He grinned, “Of course.”

“Well, I mean, some questions.” She clarified. “I would like to know more about you.”

His eyebrows rose, “Well, I guess you can’t get everything out of a gossip magazine. “So ask away.”

She furrowed her brow, “In my defense, I didn’t read that article Linda gave me; I was too intimidated after learning who

you were. I just looked at the pictures.”

“Oldest excuse ever.” He laughed.

“I really mean it.” She said with sincerity, “Your whole persona intimidates me. Not you, but the ambience surrounding you. The tabloids, newspapers...and magazines, not to mention gossip.”

He shook his head in amusement and kissed her tenderly on the forehead, “Ask your questions.”

She hesitated for a bit. She had done a lot of thinking over the past few days and needed some things clarified. She took a deep breath and gathered her courage, “Since you have been insistent on buying me a new wardrobe, which by the way, I thank you for, and please don’t do it again, but I need to know if we are dating now.”

He pretended to look surprised, “You don’t believe what I said the other night?”

She shrugged.

“Dating is such a sad description for people who are much more infatuated with one another. Don’t you think?”

“Infatuated?”

“Crazy about...” He added.

She blushed a little at his words, “Okay, that aside...”

“I would like to think that we are dating Elsa.” He answered seriously, “Actually, I would like to think that we are *strongly* affectionate for one another.” *I am in love with you.*

“But you are never seen with the same woman twice...or is it three times?” she puzzled as she tried to remember what Linda told her.

He watched her expression, “Okay, now I know you didn’t read the articles about me.” He chuckled, “But that is true. I do have a reputation, and it is well founded. I won’t deny that.”

“So what makes me different?”

“Many things.” *You.*

“So I am different from those women?” her brows raised.

“More than you give yourself credit for.” He added softly.

“How are you so sure?”

“I *feel* it.” He stated honestly.

“Oh?” her interest peaked, “So what is it like?”

“You really want to know?” There was a hint of warning in his voice but she didn’t catch it.

“I do.”

“It is like possessing a bottle of the most expensive finest wine ever made. Wine that needs to be opened on a very special occasion, so instead...” his voice deepened huskily, “You keep it close, and all the time you thirst to sample such a delicacy, but you don’t. You keep it close, and remember what it took you to possess such a rare gift, and know that there will be a day you open the it and let it’s sweet nectar flavor your pallet like nothing ever could, but until then it lures you back over and over again to long for its taste.”

“I am wine?” She looked incredulous.

“You don’t know how much I love wine.”

She laughed. “I admire the metaphor Lucas, it was sweet.” She had feelings of her own, and in her way was hoping he would come close to describing them so she could confess to him exactly how she felt. How he distracted her thoughts to the point where she could not concentrate on her work, how she fell on the track, and how thoughts of him crept into her mind when she awoke first thing in the morning.

Not far off either, he thought. “Next question.”

She thought for a moment, “How old are you? I mean you look in your early twenties but you seem so much older.”

“Twenty-four.” *physically*

“Where are your parents, then?”

“Dead, and before you ask, I am an only child.”

“Oh, I’m sorry...” she gasped.

“Don’t be. It was a long time ago.” He reassured.

“So you’re alone, like me.”

“You’re an orphan?” although he already knew, thanks to the investigative efforts of Jason.

She nodded, “Did you have anyone after your parents died?”

“Yes, he means as much to me as my real father. His name is Valear.”

“Does he live here in L.A?”

“No, Elsa, he lives all over the world, but he still checks in on me from time to time. You will meet him soon. He’s in L.A. for a bit.” He promised.

She smiled, “Hmm, so you’re going to introduce me to your adoptive father? I’m not sure I’m ready for that.”

“When I do, you will be.” He said seriously.

She looked at him not missing the seriousness in his tone, “How many girlfriends have you introduced to your father?”

“One.”

She sat up and looked at him, “One? That’s it? Out of all the women you’ve dated.”

“You don’t believe me.” His eyebrows rose in question, but his smile was one of amusement.

“Well, I’m surprised. That’s all.” She looked down, “Was she special?”

He paused before answering her, and a look of aversion crossed his features at the memory, “Elsa, it was a long time ago. I thought she was. She didn’t think I was. It ended. That’s all.”

She looked back up at him, “So she hurt you Lucas.”

“No, not really. I thought I loved her. I didn’t. I thought that what I felt was love. She was beautiful and that was all she was capable of. My feelings faded long before she left me.”

“I’m sorry to pry.”

He cupped her face in his hands, “You want to know these things, I don’t mind answering them. If I didn’t I wouldn’t tell

you. So, anything else?” He gave her a ravishing grin.

She blushed at his attentiveness, “Did your father like her?”

“You’re worried he won’t like you.” He stated, “I can guarantee he will.”

She settled her gaze on him, unmistakable worry registered in her eyes, “It’s important to me that your family like me.”

“My family does like you. Jason is as close to me as a brother, he likes you. Valear will have the same opinion because he wants me to be happy.”

“Did he like your other girlfriend?”

“You are asking too many questions now.” He smiled.

“You’re avoiding this one.” She searched his expression, “So I think I can guess.”

“He didn’t. No.” Lucas confessed.

“That doesn’t help my self-esteem Lucas.” she shot him a apprehensive look. “Did Jason like her.”

“He never said.”

“You said he was like your brother. Wouldn’t he tell you?”

“No.”

“But you said he liked me?” She stared at him in question.

“Yes I did, and he does because *you* interest him, not *her*.” In truth, Celeste always treated Jason like the help, insulting him and commanding him about, which of course caused some rebellion from him. Many times, Lucas had to sweet talk Jason in not tearing her from limb to limb. He was perfectly capable of it.

“Lucas you are not making any sense.” She was really confused now.

He laughed again, “I told you don’t worry, he will definitely like you. Next question.”

“Well...” She looked down at her hands. “I was, just wondering how are you so sure on how you feel?”

“Stay with me tonight and I will show you exactly how I

feel.”

Her mouth gaped, “Lucas...I...” *what the hell did he just say?*

He watched her discomfort and laughed, “It’s not that hard of a decision.”

She reddened, “Lucas, I don’t think I can. I mean...that is...I...” How could she tell him that she’d never been with anyone before? Is this how it started? It was just expected for them to be together because they were seeing each other? Is this how Tanya and Linda handled their relationships? When a man asked them to stay the night, they just would? “...I have class in the morning.” She blurted out.

His expression took on that amused look again, not believing her, “Class? I’m sure I could make sure that you didn’t miss that. I have a first class taxi service at my disposal” stretched his arm out in the interior of the Limousine.

“I have to study.”

“Liar.” He stated thickly with a bemused smile on his face.

She took a deep breath and gave him a pleading look, “Don’t make me say it.” To her complete astonishment he chuckled.

“Is that all?”

“It’s not funny Lucas. You *knew* didn’t you?” she realized from his reaction that he wasn’t the least bit surprised. She should have known. The man probably had women crawling all over him and could tell if one wasn’t experienced like he was used to.

“I suspected.” He pulled her into his embrace, “It doesn’t matter. Nothing has to happen. Just stay with me.” He laid his head on top of hers.

She relaxed against him. All those wonderful smells began to enter her nostrils again. *Imagine having that next to you all night....*she sighed. “All right.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

“WHY DID YOU let him take her?” Dirk slurred.

Ted sat silent for a moment, staring at the path that Lucas and Elsa exited. “I didn’t have a choice.”

“What the hell does that mean. Half the football team is here, they would have backed you. Besides it was only one man.”

Ted looked at his buddy, “Somehow, I don’t think that would have helped.”

Linda came up behind them and heard him, “What do you mean?” She was concerned for him. He looked very sullen. She had never seen him in such a state. He always projected confidence. He didn’t get to being team captain by his popularity alone. He had to prove to his team that he wasn’t afraid of much of anything. To show fear over one man wasn’t in his character. She concluded that it had to do with his fame. “I know he’s a powerful man Ted, but that doesn’t mean he has the right to intimidate you?”

Ted looked at her, “You don’t understand.” He got up, grabbed his coat and headed for the door.

She started to go after him when Dirk stopped her by grabbing her arm. “Let him go Linda, we still have the night.”

Linda gave him a disgusted look shaking off his hand, “Not if I hadn’t been laid in a month!” She turned and ran after Ted leaving Dirk with a dumbfounded look on his face. She caught up with him outside of the bar. “Ted, wait up!”

“Oh, great, this is all I need.” He rolled his eyes when he saw her. He tried to ignore her by turning around and continued walking but she grabbed his arm surprising him. When he turned to face her, he noticed that she was enraged.

“I have taken your ignorance long enough!” She flared, “You’re not that big of a hot shot. I could choose someone else.”

“Why don’t you.” He shot back at her.

Her eyes narrowed, “I have had enough of your insensitivity. It’s no wonder Elsa doesn’t fall for you. You are rude, sarcastic and a liar.”

He glared back at her, “What is it with you? Why can’t you just leave me alone? I have tried to tell you that I’m not interested in you, but you just can’t take the hint! You’re like that cat that came back. Take a hint! You are a spoiled rich daddy’s girl who cries if she can’t get what she wants and you treat your friends like dirt.”

Her mouth fell, “Oh! Really! At least my friends have a higher I.Q. than a rock,” She was referring to Dirk by a thrust of her thumb over her shoulder at the door of Deter’s, “and I’m not the one who tricks naïve girls into your little love schemes...” He was about to protest, she refused to let him interrupt, “Give me some credit, how obvious was that with Elsa? At least I’m honest and up front about the things I want!”

He grew angry, and seized her by the arms. The only time he ever laid his hands on a woman in anger, “You dare judge me, when a woman like you manipulates a man into a mental institution.”

Linda studied him for a moment trying to figure out what he was raving about. Then it dawned on her, “you have o idea what you are talking about!” She struggled to free herself.

His grip tightened and she winced. “Why don’t you explain it to Brad, Linda.”

“You are an idiot, Ted. Why don’t you ask him yourself? He was already a mental case when I met him. He was heavily into cocaine...”

“You’re lying!” he spat through clenched teeth and shaking her.

“Why don’t you ask your Coach!”

Ted released her suddenly, “What the hell are you talking about?”

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Linda's voice toned down somewhat, "Your coach knows about Brad, Ted. He was so badly into drugs that he got suspended for two weeks. No one knew why. Your coach protected him telling the team it was a knee injury. Only coach Winters and I knew. You're his best friend, how come you didn't notice? You were too busy with your own little life to know that he had a problem." She shot at him, "You thought it was me that drove him to a mental institution? How could you possibly think that you arrogant prick? He had problems Ted, and you were too selfish being popular to realize that your best friend had a drug problem." She accused.

"You're lying." He said it again, but this time it sounded weak.

Tears brimmed her eyes and she slapped him, "You're a bastard! I can't believe I ever thought there was something special in you. Even after the way you treated me." She turned and walked away from him without a backward glance.

Lucas led Elsa into his house by her hand she was laughing out loud at something he said.

"How touching." Tanya stood at the top of the stairs. She glared at the couple below.

Lucas and Elsa turned to watch her slowly descend the stairs. She was beautiful...she wore a long green satin gown that brushed the tops of the stairs as she walked down them.

"Tanya, you look great." Elsa couldn't get over how stunning she was, "Have you been here all day?"

Tanya gave Elsa an icy stare. "Why Elsa, where else would I be?" She watched Elsa flinch at her words.

"Tanya." Lucas warned.

Tanya shifted her gaze to him, "Yes Mr. Edwards, is there a problem?"

"Tanya, what is going on? Why are you behaving this way?"

Elsa stared at her in surprise.

“Behaving as what?” she snapped.

“Cruel.” Elsa replied just as quick.

“Cruel?” Tanya laughed wickedly, “Elsa, you have no idea what that is.”

“Elsa go to my study.” Lucas said calmly not taking his gaze off of Tanya.

Elsa protested, “But Lucas, I...”

He turned to her, “Just do as I say. I’ll be with you in a moment and explain everything.”

Elsa nodded reluctantly. She didn’t want to leave. She wanted to know why Tanya was so angry with her and Lucas. On the other hand, Tanya was beginning to frighten her. It was a side of her she had never witnessed before.

After Elsa was far enough away from the two Lucas spoke, “I suggest you return to your room.”

“Oh great! Another order...You two make a terrific pair.”

He narrowed his gaze on her, “You have no Idea Tanya.” He walked slowly toward her, “You think Jason can frighten you. He’s nothing compared to what I can do.”

She grew a little scared and stumbled back up a few steps, holding onto the railing for support. Her voice faltered, “I only want to go home. Everyone around here seems to think I need to stay.”

“I think your attitude needs serious adjustment.” He stopped directly in front of her.

She gathered some courage, “You think *I* need an attitude adjustment?”

His voice deepened to an eerie echoing calm that came from all directions. His eyes, Tanya swore, flashed and glowed. “I control your life Tanya. I suggest you act civil to Elsa or I just might terminate it.”

Tanya gasped, fear creeping into her flesh. “What the hell

are you?" she choked the words out.

"Cross me Tanya and you will find out." His voiced boomed in her ears deafening her.

She could no longer look at him. She turned and ran up the stairs as fast as her legs could carry her. Her heart pounded in her chest in ultimate terror. She could hardly feel her legs by the time she reached her room.

Lucas watched her leave, satisfied with her reaction. Now she will know to stay away from Elsa, for the time being. It would hopefully give him enough time to explain himself to her. Then he wouldn't have to take Tanya's life. He would do anything within his power not to exterminate someone Elsa cared so deeply about.

Keeping Elsa in his thoughts he turned and headed towards the door that she went through moments before. He would have to explain some of Tanya's actions to Elsa. Not all of it, just enough to satisfy her.

When he entered his study, he saw Elsa sitting in his sixteenth Century Victorian wingback chair. Her fingertips creating a hollow tapping sound as they drummed on the wooden arm. She looked up at him and he sensed anger off of her.

"She had no right to treat me that way." The tapping of her fingers increased.

"No she didn't." He stood by the door admiring her. Anyone else would have been feeling sorry for themselves over a friend's rude behavior.

"What has happened to her Lucas?" She questioned.

"People change Elsa."

The little red-headed twit had become quite troublesome. Lucas and Jason had nothing to do with the change in Tanya's attitude. It was all her own. Up until now, she ran too much of Elsa's life, only Elsa couldn't see it. She had also tried to inhibit any interest Elsa had in him. Lucas had seen the dark side of

many, mortals and otherwise. He had seen morals change when given immortality. It wasn't always the pleasant side that survived. Their darkness emerges from within and consumes them. Of course all vampires weren't bad...just the majority of them are overwrought with greed, the lust for blood, and instinctive survival. Tanya would be among those that thirsted for greed. He knew that she wasn't a normally cruel person, but he could sense the darkness in her. She herself didn't even know of it.

"Tanya has never been so horrible."

"Why do you think that is?" He already knew, but it did surprise him that she figured it out quickly.

"I have no idea." Her emerald eyes focused on his, "Do you suppose it has something to do with me dating you?"

"Jealousy is not something I haven't dealt with before Elsa, but I don't think Tanya is interested in me." He stated honestly. It was actually Elsa that the woman was jealous of. Her beauty, and the unfathomable way she could light up a room by just walking in it. Although he could easily change her mind with barely a thought, he wasn't the least bit inclined to do that. The darkness he had felt within her didn't appeal to him. Not only that, he only had eyes for Elsa and right now she had no idea how delicious she was to him.

You would have to be crazy to not be interested in him, she thought to herself. "She's being a hypocrite. She has no problem consorting with Jason."

Lucas inwardly smiled at her thoughts as he approached her. His hand came up and caressed the top of her head. She instantly blushed.

"How selfish of me. I shouldn't dwell on something like this when I'm with you."

He pulled her to her feet and embraced her inhaling her sweet aphrodisiac scent, "hmm...there is absolutely nothing

selfish about you.”

She looked at him, “It’s just so weird. I trust you so much and I don’t understand it. What is it about you that makes me lose my head?”

He grinned, “If I knew that I would be able to keep my head straight on business and other important matters. As it is, I put you ahead of all my vital affairs. I am at risk because I feel about you. So you are not the only one who is struggling with this.”

“You are so caring and understanding...”

“...No Elsa,” he interrupted and his face darkened, “I haven’t always been this way. I haven’t cared about anyone in such a long time, too long of a time, but when I saw you, I knew I had to have you.

“Lucas you are not that much older than me.”

He nodded, “True, but I have a lifetime of experiences. I run several multibillion dollar companies, chair several charities and I am a member of a very unique organization.” He managed a small chuckle, “Only if you knew what I have molded myself into. I’ve forgotten what I used to be when I was younger.” He grew serious for a moment, “You have to understand that I’m not this affectionate with anyone else.”

She studied his features for a moment. “I haven’t dated much...at all.” She confessed, “But I know there is something very different about you. It’s weird though. I feel like I know you or have met you before. Does that make sense?”

None of this made sense to him. That’s why he was so fascinated with her. Of course the intense hunger and desire he felt for her didn’t help either. Looking at her now, in that little red dress that clung so nicely to her curves, with her hair cascading gloriously over her shoulders, framing her perfect delicate face and flawless complexion near had him come undone. It could have been that or the fact that she had no idea on how beautiful she was at that moment. “No. But the past

couple of days have caught me off guard too, so I'm not surprised." He watched her eyes brighten innocently at his words. Her luscious lips pursed together for a moment while she gathered courage to speak.

"I feel guilty Lucas. I'm sure you have other things you need to deal with, besides spending all of your free time with me."

"Not that I can think of." He confessed.

She smiled, "I think you are just saying that to make me feel better."

"No." *I'd much rather spend it with you.*

She tilted her lovely head at him, "Really?"

"Truthfully. It's one of the perks of being filthy rich. I have many people who can do things for me."

Her cheeks pinked up again, she believed him.

He smiled down at her and cupped her face in his hands like a delicate flower. Her flesh was so soft and inviting. He was trying to cushion her for his next words. "How would you feel about a bodyguard Elsa?" He watched her brows knit together.

"A bodyguard? Tell me you are kidding."

"I'm not." He wanted to be honest with her about the things he was doing. Not only that, he needed her to understand how important she was to him, besides protecting her.

She shook her head slowly, "Why would you think...?"

"The same reason I have them. I don't know how long it would take for word to get out before reporters, paparazzi and whoever else to pester you, but I really don't want to find out."

"Lucas, I can't have someone follow me around campus."

"You wouldn't even know he was there." It was true. He'd been having her followed for two days now and she had not seen any of them. "They are highly trained just for such a purpose."

"I don't know..."

"Elsa, they have already been watching you." He admitted.

She pulled back and looked at him. "You had me followed?"

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Was Linda right and he was watching her the whole time?

“Protected.” And hearing her thoughts he added, “It was just in the past few days, when I came to terms with my affections for you.”

“Without my knowledge.” She added with a hint of displeasure.

“Would you have agreed?”

“That’s not the point.” Her expression became puzzled, “When did this start?”

“The day you ended up in the hospital.”

Her mouth dropped, “But you didn’t know me then...”

“You say that, but you are wrong. I knew what I wanted.”

“That’s how you knew I was there?”

“Yes.” He could feel her frustration and surprise, “Are you angry?”

She took a deep breath, “Yes...well, no...I don’t know what to think.”

“Think that you mean a lot to me.”

She shook her head, “It seems deceitful, that you did that without my knowledge or consent Lucas.”

“Elsa,” he sighed, “I already had to pull a reporter off of you. I assure you, I wouldn’t have done it if it was unnecessary.”

Her eyes widened, “Are you serious?”

He leaned down and kissed the top of her head, “Very.”

“I didn’t know.” When he touched her it practically erased the small amount of frustration she had for him. She loved it when he touched her.

He near groaned at her thoughts. “It’s not just the media Elsa, I have made enemies in amassing my fortune. There is a reason I’ve not been in a serious relationship for a long time. I just need to make sure you are safe.”

“I think I understand.” Now it made sense. She wouldn’t have agreed to such a thing, but she also never considered his

side.

“So, the bodyguards are okay.” His blue-violet eyes implored her to agree.

She gave him a forgiving smile, “I *never* said that.”

“Then leave it to me.” His hand caressed her soft cheek, “I’m only looking out for you and you won’t even know they are there.”

“All right Lucas,” She was surprised she agreed. Actually she was amazed she agreed to a lot of things with him. She didn’t know why it didn’t seem to bother her that she was handing over her independence so freely, but when he looked at her and touched her like he did now, it seemed so easy.

He wasn’t telling her what to expect, for he still couldn’t tell her everything, not yet. He must introduce it slowly to give her time to adjust. Well, slowly within the remaining time that Valear gave him. He was hoping it wouldn’t be a great shock when she found out the truth. Only if he had more time, they would be beyond the point of no return and she wouldn’t leave him no matter what the cost. However, time wasn’t something he had. It wasn’t enough for her to love him without caring about what he really was.

He knew he was deceitful. She was speaking from one human being to another, not considering that one of them wasn’t mortal. He regretted even telling her this much, but she deserved to know some of the risks in the choice she was making. Lucas knew that it would come back on him if she knew the truth later. He would deserve to have her angry at him. He just knew he must convince her to trust and love him enough before then or her feelings of betrayal might make this unforgivable. She may never forgive him, if he destroyed her trust. The more he thought about this, staring down into those striking emerald eyes, his selfish realization hit him. Could he do this to her? What right did he have to claim her mortality, to destroy her

innocence? He wouldn't be able to live with himself if she died for him, or was converted by another and the thought of her being used as a pawn against him, controlled by another, and worse, having another touch her was unthinkable. Yet she stood in front of him unaware of so much, with hope and trust registering in her green eyes. He turned his head away from her not being able to face what he'd almost done. What about her happiness? Immortality angers so many after the dark rebirth. It's a violation, a rape of the soul and her soul was so naive. He brought his hand up and ran it through his hair outwardly displaying some of the conflict he was feeling. She clouded his judgment so intensely; he couldn't even think enough to control a rat experiment, much less the association. There would be destruction and death if he lost control. What kind of future would that be for her? "I'd better take you home."

She heard the steel edge in his voice, "What did I say?" She felt panic rising. Did she offend him?

"It wasn't what you said Elsa, it's what I almost did." He threaded his fingers through hers to lead her toward the door. She didn't move.

"I'm not leaving." She had already told him that she didn't care of the consequences. He couldn't change his mind now.

"You can't stay." His voice was full of emotion. He was in turmoil on what to do with her, with them.

"Watch me," she faced him, "Not this time Lucas. I'm not leaving. I'm staying where I belong." She didn't know where those words came from, but they felt so right to say.

Belong. It sounded so good to him, "Elsa I can't risk losing you. You don't understand the extremes."

"Lucas, I don't give a damn about the extremes. Or your terrible secrets...which is what I assume this is about. I'll take the bodyguards....all of them. Please don't ask me to go." It felt like every inch of her was rattled with fear. He was turning her

away, and something told her, that if she listened to him, she'd never see him again.

It was his turn to look surprised.

"I told you that that this feels so right to me. I would rather live like this for a few days then not at all. So be it. "

"You don't have any idea..." he began to contest.

She put her fingertips on his lips, "Then let me stay and maybe something will change on how we feel, and that this is just mere infatuation. Or maybe it will just reinforce how we feel for each other and this is *real*. Either way, I have to know."

She had a valid point. He knew this was real, because this was new to him and he'd been infatuated many times. This wasn't just infatuation, "I have a dark side Elsa."

"We all do."

"You may not like what you see."

"Impossible." She breathed.

He groaned and for the second time kissed her. She had won.

Ted lay in his bed staring wide awake at the blanched plaster ceiling of his dorm room. He was pissed off at Linda for laying the blame at his door about Brad. He fumed about it for the last two hours before he rolled over and succumbed to a restless sleep.

When Emily returned to her apartment, she noticed the door had been pried. Without thinking someone could still be in her apartment, she pushed open the door and walked in. She turned on the light and headed quickly for her computer. She saw the crumpled masses left deliberately on her coffee table, "Nice touch." The camera alone was almost three grand. She looked around briefly and satisfied that nothing else was taken, "What the hell were they after."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

JASON OPENED THE door to Tanya's room, she was still awake. She stood in the corner of the room admiring herself in the satin dress.

"Tanya,"

She turned around at the sound of her name, "Go away."

"I don't think so."

Her expression became angry and she snarled at him, "You two are some sort of demonic spawn."

He chuckled and leaned against the closed door watching her as she started to pace erratically around the room. "Not exactly."

She stopped seething at him through clenched teeth, "Your boss is a monster and you are too."

Jason grew serious, "He is a powerful master, Tanya. Do not call him a monster again. You have no idea what he is capable of." He stated his words calmly, but the effect of them stopped her cold.

Tears began to fill her eyes, "He's going to hurt her."

"No, he won't." He started walking toward her, "He will protect her, we all will."

She looked up at him through her tearful eyes, "Please let me go. I won't tell anyone."

"That is up to him, not me. I will keep you with me so you are not a danger to either of them. Only when she is safe, can he even consider releasing you." His hand caressed her arm and then to her hip. "You and I both know that you will tell someone. We cannot risk this. So we will make your stay as comfortable as possible and you will not say anything here, because of the risk to your life."

Elsa stood in Lucas' bedroom. She didn't see Tanya on the way up and was thankful for it. She didn't want to be subjected to her sarcasm again. He was down on one knee lighting the fire. She was overwhelmed and impressed by the design of the large room. Most of the furniture was very old. The four poster king-sized bed was enclosed in heavy crimson draperies that were tied back with braided gold colored cords. She tilted her head back and stared at the ceiling, it had paintings of cherubs, winged creatures and angels. "You have your own private heaven."

Lucas followed her gaze from where he crouched, "sometimes you have to create what you can't have."

Elsa watched him for a moment, "Everyone goes to heaven Lucas." She understood that for him to get where he was he probably created a few sins and maybe he thought he wasn't worthy.

"Do you believe that?" Lucas asked

She nodded.

He chuckled, "Of course *you* do."

"I do, I used to attend church when I was young, but not now. Most of my saddest memories were in those days."

"It's hard to believe that you have sad memories." He could feel her pain deep within her. He remembered the sadness at the party she was at the first night he had met her, but not this type of pain. It was strange that he never sensed it before. Obviously it was painful enough that she'd kept the memories deep within herself.

"My mother was a very sad woman. She didn't really notice me. So I kind of did my own thing. It was a very strange relationship. I don't think you could understand it. I knew she loved me, but she was too afraid to show it. She drank a lot, as if trying to drown her life out. I never did understand it. My aunt told me, that's who I stayed with after my mom died. She told me that my mother was never a sad woman growing up. She was

always happy and carefree. I only saw the tortured part of her” She managed a small shrug of her shoulders, “I would have never imagined her happy. Something must’ve happened to change her. She never talked about it, so I don’t know what it was. I assumed it was my father. Anyway, she was the one who used to make me go to church all the time with my aunt and sometimes my neighbors. Yet she would never set foot in one. I guess she didn’t think she was worthy either.”

“I’m sorry about your mother.” He said sincerely at the wash of pain he felt off her, “Where was your father?”

“I never knew my father. My mother never talked about him. She spotted a sword mounted on a back of black velvet with an open frame of dark walnut and walked over to it. “She must’ve been one of those women who would get stung once and hate men for the rest of her short life.” Her fingers caressed the flat shiny metal of the blade. “When I asked her why she insisted I go to church every Sunday, she would answer by saying it was good for my soul and that one day I might need saving.”

This made Lucas curious, “What did your mother mean when she said you might need saving? Did she not have any faith in you?” Lucas knew there was more to her than even his senses could discover, or that she was even aware of. He still hadn’t been able to figure out how she summoned him without knowing it. Maybe if he knew more about her past, it would unlock some of her secrets.

Elsa turned to look at him, “No, that was the confusing part. I know she had faith in me. She just kept telling me about having faith in the church because one day it may save my life. When I prodded her more about the subject she would turn to another topic. So I just left it at her being a religious person even though she didn’t play the part.”

“You loved her.”

“Doesn’t every child love their parent no matter what they

do to them.”

“I suppose.” *It was so long ago.*

She smiled, “it took a few years for me to realize that. Now I work hard to make something of myself.”

He admired her, “It amazes me that you have not led such a wonderful life and yet you are so innocent.”

She laughed and blushed, “You keep making me sound so perfect. I do have faults.”

“No. None that I can see.”

“How can you be sure I’m not a psycho?” She teased

“I told you. I am a good judge of character.” He started to walk toward her. He loved to hear her laugh. It brought such light to his dark world.

She stopped laughing, “How do you think you know me so well, we’ve only known each other a few days?”

“Easy, the way you walk, talk, laugh...”

“...okay, I catch your drift.” She stopped him before he embarrassed her further.

He pulled her close and stared down at her, his expression serious, “Are you sure about tonight Elsa?” his eyes followed his hand as he caressed her cheek and neck with his fingers, “I could still have Jason take you home.”

She laughed, “No. I have bared my soul to you Lucas. I would feel silly just leaving now. Not only that, after tonight you may want nothing to do with me after you have heard my whole life story.” Her life was not exciting, it was boring. Yes, she was an orphan and all her remaining family had died last year. Her aunt never married or had children so she was now alone. It was depressing to tell her story, that is why she never did. Even Linda didn’t know everything that she told Lucas tonight.

“How wrong you are.” He said with conviction.

She blushed.

“Come here love.” He held out his hand.

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A gorgeous smile spread across her face at his words as she took his outstretched hand, “Your accent is very attractive.”

He raised an eyebrow, “Is that all?”

She flushed further, “Well...no...”

“Please Jason. Just let me go. I’ll leave the state.” She begged.

“As I told you, it is not up to me. Besides I enjoy you too much.” His hand ran down her hip to the slit in the gown. He slipped his hand inside, and between her thighs caressing her. She gasped and he backed her up against a wall. One of his eyebrows shot up, “No panties, Tanya? I think you enjoy me.” He pressed against her.

“You’re wrong.” She breathed, “Oh Christ! How do you do that?” She tried to resist, but his expert caresses were making her lose her mind.

Her grinned and kissed her neck and shoulders. She moaned in sheer pleasure. He removed his hand and she protested, “Shh my sweet.” He lifted her thighs on either side of his hips and entered her. She couldn’t remember him removing his pants. She didn’t care. She screamed in pleasure, her hands raking her nails down his back. His voice was hoarse with pleasure, “If I have my way, I’ll keep you for a very long time. If you behave.”

“Yes. Yes.” She gasped.

Lucas laid her down on his bed and stretched out beside her. He pulled her up next to him so her head rested on his shoulder. She didn’t protest, and actually fit perfectly next to him. The heat of her body warmed his soulless heart. He had been able to squelch his hunger to a moderate craving most of the evening, and didn’t expect it to ache with need as much with her in such an intimate position next to him.

Jason crouched low on the ground. The stimulating smells of the damp night filled his nostrils, and something else. He paused, listening. Hearing a movement, he silently turned his head and inhaling deeply welcoming the scent. He was closing. A grim smile spread across his face, showing a mouth full of deadly sharp teeth. He wasn't in human form anymore, he was a creature on the hunt.

The movement came once more.

Prowling on all fours, he neared his target.

Very close now,

Darting out of a nearby brush, a lone deer made the run of it's life.

Jason sprang in pursuit releasing a loud terrifying roar.

Lucas' hand caressed her waist, "Comfortable."

"Definitely." She murmured. Until she lay next to him, she didn't realize how tired she was. Even with his hard body pressed up against hers. Although she was sure he said something, she didn't hear what it was and was soon dreaming.

"*Sleep love.*" He couldn't take it anymore. He was ravenous for her, and now he would take her.

She dreamt of Lucas. He was kissing her, and she could feel the undeniable pleasure of his weight on her body, and his hands caressing the untouched recesses. The heat that was created between them was scorching but it didn't burn her, in fact, it just made her want more. It seared through her like a wildfire. Elsa arched toward him and gasped at the new sensation. Bewitched by his caresses, and a dream that she didn't want to ever wake up from, she gave in to him fully. She'd never felt such joy at the feeling of his flesh fully against hers. His firm body pressed her into the mattress and she relished the protection of his weight. She could feel his hand down her leg and gently, pulled it up

against his waist as he settled between her thighs. His hand then circled down and cupped her bottom, causing her to lift her hips against him. She struggled to catch her breath against the electrifying feeling his hands did to her skin. She needed something from him that she couldn't say or know. He'd awakened an immeasurable desire in her and every inch of her being flared with tingling heat. She gasped loudly as he entered her. He covered her mouth with his bringing her back to their ecstasy. She moaned against him and he began to move within her. She expected pain, but there was none. The feeling was electrifying and it created a hunger in her. She wanted more. She moved underneath him in time with his thrusts.

Jason loved the chase; it was almost his favorite part of the hunt. Almost.

He neared it now. He could feel it's fear wash over him like a bucket of warm water in contrast to the cool night air. He heard the animal take a wild turn to the right, through a thick brush hoping it's pursuer wouldn't follow. Jason leaped over the thicket regarding it as a small obstacle.

Orange and amber flames danced in the fireplace and flickered off the entwined naked bodies. The soft feminine noises she made could break anyone's control. He was doing his best to restrain himself out of fear of harming her, but her reaction to her new found desires were driving him mad. Elsa's head was thrown back against the satin pillows; sounds of pleasure escaped her parted lips. She wrapped her legs around his hips. Lucas arched himself upwards, opening his mouth to reveal the element of his curse. His eyes changed to their luminescent shine as they shot open. She said his name and he thrust into her once more and they climaxed together. He roared and snapped his head down in mid-release effortlessly penetrating the warm

soft skin at her exposed neck. Tasting her pure warm blood just heightened the ecstasy as she shuddered with pleasure beneath him.

Jason twisted the deer's head as his teeth sunk into the creature's neck ripping it's life away. It kicked twice, then fell quiet. His kill was triumphant. He savored the nectar as it flowed into his mouth spilling onto his chin.

"Elsa, " she was definitely asleep now. It made him ache more than he thought possible to have him beside her after what they had just shared. A few hours later, he'd awoken her again unable to help himself, but she'd responded with a will of all her own and passion unequalled in his kind. The only thing he really held back on was his strength, but his experience was another matter. Hopefully, she'll never see the bite marks on her inner thigh.

He definitely could deal with this for eternity. "Elsa." He smiled as she responded by stirring and softly saying his name. She managed to pull herself up on him and lay across his bare chest. Her hair cascaded over her face, his chest, and onto the bed. He brushed the hair off her neck to examine the damage he made. The marks weren't very noticeable. He knew bruising would appear later. Maybe he was still able to keep some of his control after all. Surprisingly so. He tried not to take much from her. It was hard, because her blood was laced with pure virtue and fired his very being. It felt like liquid gold in his veins, and the more he tasted the more he wanted. He thought he may have overdone it, but she was still conscious, yet barely. He thanked God for not taking it too far. He pulled the blankets over her naked form to keep her warm and caressed her bare shoulder. She was more than he'd ever imagined in his bed. Her desires matched his and this was only a fraction of her full potential and

her first time. He honestly didn't mean to influence her by forcing her to sleep and entering her dreams, but the self-control he thought he'd had shattered while she lay next to him. Just feeling her warm body against his and smelling her was the only excuse he needed. He was slightly angry at himself over doing this to her, but she didn't need anymore encouragement when he started kissing her, the rest was her doing. That was just a fraction of the passion she contained within her. *Jesus, who knew a mere mortal, was capable of such passion?* The ecstasy they could bring each other was unimaginable. Now it was too late for her to change her mind. He had made her decision for her, and he wouldn't let her go no matter the cost. Not after he'd claimed her, took her virginity and marked her for his. A primal possessiveness emerged within him and he instinctively tightened his hold on her. She was his. She had awoken such desires in him, desires he never knew existed. One might say he actually felt human again. He couldn't help but imagine her in his form in all her glory. She would be the envy of his entire kind, male and female alike, and untouchable. Nothing could harm her except him and Valear.

Jason walked in at that moment and stopped and smiled when he saw Elsa. Lucas put a finger to his lips and reluctantly slipped out from under her. He pulled on a robe, and seeing Jason's smile stated, "It isn't done yet." She wasn't one of them yet. Far from it. She didn't know the truth. Only when she knew the truth and accepted it, could he turn her. Although when she noticed the marks he left on her she would probably press him further.

Jason mused, "She's a heavy sleeper." She didn't even stir when Lucas left her.

"No. I may have taken a little too much from her. She won't have any energy for a few hours until her blood supply returns to normal." He felt a twinge of guilt over his confession

even if he didn't take much from her. The color of the skin on her face was still fleshy and not quite pale which made him feel better.

"I see."

"Look at her Jason, have you ever seen such beauty." Lucas motioned to her.

"I can't say that I have Lucas." He admitted. She was still flushed with passion despite Lucas' feeding, and all the innocence and purity that she contained was evident as she lay peacefully in Lucas' bed. She was face down on her stomach with her lovely head framed within a mass of silky ebony curls was turned toward them. Her thick black lashes of her closed eyes brushed the tops of her cheeks, and her full lips were slightly parted as she breathed evenly, yet shallow, indicative of a sound peaceful sleep. All of Jason's protective instincts intensified around this mortal. He would keep her safe, for Lucas, even if it meant his life. Like Lucas, he found her virtuousness rare in humans because over the centuries he found them to be nothing but vein and selfish creatures. Yes, he may resemble one, but he was only half human, if that. Even with all of the preaching that Lucas did over his protectiveness of the human race, Jason always remained detached. He would kill any one of them without hesitation when he was hungry, bored, angry or just plain pissed off at anything in general if Lucas didn't insist on selecting certain characteristics of the species to condemn them with. Although, he must admit, the females of the species were fun to play with and in reality he had no choice but to mate with them, for there weren't any females of his kind. Contrary to popular belief, his kind wasn't created by a bite, they were bred. There needed to be a human female and a male of his kind, and only the males adapted his powerful characteristics when they hit puberty.

Lucas studied Jason's thoughts and expressions as he

watched Elsa. He felt a sense of pride as Jason vowed to keep her safe, for it wasn't his duty, Lucas was. Yes, he would protect his interests, but not to the death. Obviously it wasn't just Vampires the woman affected. Jason felt her purity too. As for the sweet nectar in her veins, he no longer felt the ravishing hunger that had been taunting him for days after meeting her. He was relieved that what little he had taken from her had sated him, for now. It was a great relief, even if it may be short-lived. "Now we must go and discuss this Emily Shanks."

Tanya heard footsteps approach and then recede down the hall. She waited a few moments near the door listening for any other sound to see if they were returning. Nothing. She carefully opened the door and checked down both sides of the large gloomy hall. It was empty. She slowly and bravely stepped out as if anticipating someone to jump out of nowhere and grab her. Her heart slowed down a pace when she realized that no one was watching her. It was a feeling that was hard to beat in this house. Since she came here, she always felt like she was being watched. She started to walk in the opposite direction of the stairs. She knew his room had to be down here somewhere. She knew that Elsa was in that room. There were many doors down the hall. She noticed a large arched doorway with two old heavy oak doors just like you would expect a castle to have. Just like you would expect the Lord or Lady of the castle's bedroom to be. It seemed to be the only true choice. She took another glance down the long hallway and was thankful that she wasn't spotted yet. She turned her attention back to the door and the latches. She said a small prayer before trying one of them. A small click answered her prayer and the door slid open easily. She wasn't prepared for the hinges to squeak so loudly under the weight, so she went in leaving the door open, not wanting to risk the noise bringing someone. She knew that she only had a little time

before Jason checked on her and found the room empty. She quickly looked around the massive bedroom. Her eyes lit on Elsa immediately. Her eyes were closed in a peaceful slumber, she was sleeping on her stomach with her face turned toward Tanya. She covered her mouth to hold in the gasp that followed. She could see her bare shoulders and knew she was naked under the blankets. She ran over to her, thinking the worst, “Oh Elsa! What did that monster do to you?” She shook her, “Elsa, wake up.” She tried to keep her voice in a low whisper.

No response except the scant sound of her breathing.

She shook her again, more vigorously this time, “Elsa wake up! We have to get out of here!”

Elsa moaned, and then fell silent again.

“Shit!” Tanya became frustrated, “What the hell did he do to you?” He must have drugged her. Elsa never slept so heavy. She shook her again and her hair fell back exposing the puncture marks on her neck.

“Sweet God!” Tanya jumped back. *It couldn't be possible. Things like this just don't exist.* She tried to excuse the marks in any possible way, but one reason held fast in her mind. She'd seen his face when he threatened her earlier. Jason said he wasn't a monster, that he was a powerful master. She'd seen movies of this sort of thing, but it was fiction. It couldn't possibly be real. Her mind tormented with what she had seen in the past few days with what she had been brought up to believe. Maybe Elsa had had too much to drink. That must have been what Lucas planned. To get her drunk and take advantage of her. It was her only way of making sense out of all of this, because if she believed the other possible reason, she felt she would go crazy. She knelt beside the bed in tears.

“Tanya?” Came a slow groggy reply.

Tanya's head shot up, “Elsa, are you okay? Can you walk?”

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Elsa opened her eyes as best she could. She felt so exhausted. “Why wouldn’t I?”

Tanya stood looking around for Elsa’s clothes. “We have to get you out of here.” She wiped her eyes clean with the cuff of her robe.

“What?” Came Elsa’s slurred reply. She turned her head to see Lucas’ pillow was empty, “Where’s Lucas?”

Tanya ignored her, grabbing her dress, “here put this on. We have to go.”

Elsa tried unsuccessfully to raise herself on her elbows, “What for?” she fell back with an exhausted sigh.

“there’s no time to explain. I have to get you home.”

“I should tell Lucas.” Elsa mumbled, her eyes trying to focus, “I would want him to...” her voice faded until it stopped all together.

Tanya watched Elsa fall back into her slumber. She started to panic. “Oh no! Elsa, don’t do this to me. Someone is going to find me here. You have to wake up!”

“And who might you be?”

A woman’s voice startled Tanya. She jumped and faced probably the most beautiful woman she’d ever seen. She was wearing a royal blue sequined evening gown with a blue chiffon scarf. She must’ve slipped through the open door and she was too preoccupied with Elsa to hear her. Then she noticed something in the woman’s eyes frightened her. It dawned on her, she was the same as Lucas.

Celeste stared at the young woman still awaiting her answer. She obviously wasn’t supposed to be in Lucas’ room by the frightened way she was acting. “I asked you who you were. Are you a friend of Lucas?”

Tanya knew the longer she hesitated in answering her, the more suspicious she would grow, “yes.” She blurted it out, maybe a little too quickly.

Celeste didn't seem to hear her. Suddenly her eyes focused past the redhead to the woman in Lucas' bed. Dread filled her. A woman! Lucas didn't even bring her to his bed when they shared intimacy in the past. It was always her bed or some other room in the house where he could leave soon after. What did this mean? Her eyes roved over the delicate form and she shuddered. The woman was striking, perfect, and definitely sensual. Inhaling deeply Celeste closed her eyes at the scent of her pure blood and felt the wash of saliva flood her mouth. Everything made sense. The woman was pure intoxication, but how did Lucas discover her? More importantly, why didn't he just take her treasure and kill her. Certainly any other would have. Without even realizing it, Celeste had closed the distance between her and the bed. The woman's lure was powerful and if it wasn't for the other mortal interrupting her trance, most likely she would have taken what was left in the woman's veins. She closed her eyes again in raging conflict. Lucas would rip her to shreds if she were to touch his prize. Could she risk it?

Tanya didn't miss the look of shock wash over the woman's beautiful face as she noticed Elsa. "I think my friend has had too much to drink." It was obvious that this woman was unaware of Lucas and Elsa. She wasn't sure if this was a former or present girlfriend of his. She wouldn't put it past him to have more than one. Though, by the look on her face she was really affected by Elsa laying there. It just made her dislike for him deepen.

Snapping open her eyes, Celeste stared at Elsa for a moment, all elements of surprise were erased from her features, "I certainly hope she didn't have anything to drink." She said out loud to herself. If Lucas shared his blood with the girl, she would be one of them. She couldn't tell by looking at her, so she would wait and talk to Lucas.

Tanya heard her, "What?"

"Oh. It's nothing dear. I'm just concerned for your friend.

She certainly is lovely.” A complete understatement, “I can understand why Lucas would take a fancy to her.” She brushed a tendril of her hair aside.

Tanya’s fear increased afraid of what she would find as she brushed Elsa’s hair aside. Then she realized, that she was actually looking for it. Those two spots that Tanya discovered by accident. Tanya heard her gasp as the marks came into view.

Celeste stepped back and turned to Tanya so quickly it almost startled her.

Tanya could see the waves of anger wash over the woman’s expression and it was her turn to take a step back, “I must be going.” She turned to go to the door, but gasped when the woman materialized in front of her.

“Not just yet. Dear. Who is this girl?” Celeste pointed a long finger at Elsa’s sleeping form.

Tanya was terrified. This woman wasn’t like Jason or Lucas. She wanted information and by the look in her eyes she would do anything to get it. Tanya could only shake her head.

“You are going to make me do this the hard way, dear.”

As Tanya was sneaking into Lucas’ room, Jason and Lucas were discussing what to do with Emily.

“Do you wish for me to take care of her” Jason asked.

“No. Not yet. We will try other ways.”

“I deleted the files and destroyed her computer and camera.”

“I’m sure she’ll create more.”

“I couldn’t locate the photographs. She must have them at the developers.”

Lucas went to the far window, “Stubborn woman, scaled an eight foot vine to take photos of my private life.”

Jason remained silent while Lucas thought out loud. He could tell Lucas admired this woman even though he was bothered by her. Jason too admired her determination. He was

sure Emily knew that it was risky delving into people's private lives.

Without turning around Lucas spoke, "I want the photographs and the negatives, Jason. Regardless of his admiration, there was so much at stake here. He was angry. This was just another problem he didn't need. "If she isn't cooperative, do what you wish with her."

Jason smiled. He loved it when Lucas gave him total freedom over situations such as this.

"Talk to Sadira too, Elsa is concerned that she doesn't meet my expectations. See what Sadira can do for her."

"Of course." Sadira was an old Romanian Governess and managed the household. She had been with them for forty years. If Elsa wanted to be educated in the high society ways, Sadira was the best choice. She was a bit of a mother hen too, in the strictest of sense. She knew exactly what Lucas and he were, but didn't care. Lucas had a lot of Romanian employees that have been fiercely loyal to him over the centuries. There was something about that heritage and vampires. No one really knew how it started, but they have served him well.

Suddenly, Lucas snapped his head around and stared at the ceiling as a growl escaped him. His eyes flashed.

"What is it?"

"Celeste is here." He paused, "She's in my room with Tanya." He vaporized into thin air.

Jason turned and ran for the door.

Even though Tanya was terrified of the woman before her she found courage, "I have to get her out of here."

"No. I need you to answer my question. Who is *she*?" Celeste's features changed with her anger.

Tanya shook her head, the image before her left her speechless

Celeste fumed, *How dare he take another! I am the most powerful female!*

Without warning Celeste was slammed against the far wall with a grunt. She slid to the floor.

Tanya felt the impact like she was just hit with a brick wall. She was thrown up against the wall at the head of his bed. The wind was knocked out of her. Lucas' hand was around her throat in a steely grip. Her feet were flailing several feet off the ground. She clawed frantically at his hand to no avail. It was like clawing at solid stone.

Luminescent eyes stared at her. She opened her mouth to scream, but nothing came out. She could feel her throat collapsing under the enormous pressure of his grip. The creature before her still resembled Lucas, with the exception of the glowing eyes and long canines.

Lucas' face was a breath away from hers. He tilted his head to one side as if studying her. The room was ominously silent and icy cold with the smell of death. Tanya had never been so terrified. She was in a fit of gasping and struggling as she fought for her life.

Celeste stood up and took a step toward Lucas.

He turned and growled over his shoulder, *"Don't temp me, Celeste!"*

She stopped.

Lucas swung his head back to the wide-eyed girl in front of him. Small muffled whimpers came from her. *"I told you not to interfere!"* His voice echoed from every corner of the room.

Jason entered then, and Lucas growled a warning to him also. He was dangerous in his Vampiric state. It was common instinct to defend his prey. Jason stepped aside with no intention of interfering.

Tanya's eyes searched him out pleading for him to help her. Tears of helplessness rolled from them.

He didn't move.

Tanya, in her terror, fainted.

Elsa rolled over in her sleep startling Lucas back to sanity. He stared at her for a moment, his features softening. He couldn't do this here. He dropped her.

Jason instantly bent down and retrieved her carrying her out of the room.

Celeste came forward then, "What has happened to you?"

His anger was beginning to subside, "It is not your concern."

"You concern me Lucas." she couldn't keep the panic out of her voice and her expression as her eyes darted to Elsa.

"*Not* anymore."

Celeste grew frustrated, "I must know, Lucas, it is my right."

Lucas looked past her to Elsa, "You don't have any rights--anymore."

He mouth gaped, "this can't be true! You're in love with *her*? Lucas, she's *mortal*!" Celeste said it like it was a dirty word.

Elsa moaned again. Lucas was thankful for her semi-conscious state with all the noise they made a dead man would have left his grave to find peace. "Come. We will continue this conversation elsewhere."

Celeste followed Him out the door. She was filled with overwhelming jealousy and envy.

Tanya was curled up on the bed, her knees hugging her chest. Jason stood leaning against one wall watching her. She had been crying deliriously for the ten minutes since she came to. Little did she know that he was holding her until she started to stir. He moved to the wall where he was now. It was vital that she didn't know that he cared for her. He had to stay loyal to Lucas. She wouldn't understand if he himself had to do the task that he was sure Lucas now intended for her. She was warned and she crossed the line. Her fate was sealed. It was a pity, he

enjoyed her greatly. Only if she had listened, they could have stayed together for a while longer. Then she would probably be released after Elsa had chosen to stay with Lucas. She couldn't cause any harm then.

They made as far as the bottom of the marble staircase when she began to speak, "Lucas, please. You can't put me aside." Celeste begged.

Lucas shook his head, "you chose your own path Celeste. It has nothing to do with Elsa and I."

"But if you were to take a bride, Lucas, my rank in the Association would mean nothing! Think about what this is doing to me!"

He stared at her. Leave it to Celeste to think of herself and her importance. It didn't matter to him now. "I don't care."

She screamed at him, losing all her feminine composure, "You don't care?"

"No." his handsome features remained passive.

"It's because you're obsessed with their race Lucas, nothing more!" she spat. "I had hoped this would pass, but now you have shown me that your infatuation with humans has gone too far!"

"You think I am infatuated and obsessed with humanity?" He almost laughed, "Celeste you know nothing about me. We need to co-exist to survive." He calmly continued. "I am only concerned with preserving their race, not being one of them. Yes, I do operate in their world to be close to them, to stay in contact with the species, because they fascinate me and I enjoy them, but my beliefs of preservation and understanding never made me want to be mortal again." He leaned close to her, "After all of these centuries, you still do not know me. I would kill any one of them in a heart beat to preserve my race over theirs."

"You never let me know you Lucas." she pleaded, "Let me get to know you and I will come back to you. Prove to me what

you just said. Release her, kill her, or feed her to your dogs and I will come back.”

If Jason heard that statement he'd be livid, for he wasn't a dog and it was known as an insulting slur to his race. "*She is my exception!*" he said striking his chest with his fist, "I would have that happen to you first." He said angrily and quickly. "For she means more to me than you ever did and I don't want you!"

Dreadful realization hit her as his words sunk in. He thought she was worthless compared to his mortal pet! She turned and slammed her fists against the wall. He couldn't do this to her. He told her he still cared about her. She could try and make him love her again. No, that was impossible, she saw the way he looked at that woman in his bed. She never thought she could witness that kind of emotion from him. Her features began to change in her turmoil. *He didn't mean it, he was angry*, her mind tried to reason and she would prove it, "I could kill her." Her words had the opposite affect.

His eyes flashed instant fury, "Not if you value your life Celeste!" his voice reflected the incredible power he held.

Her face registered alarm and she crouched in front of him at his threat, "Could you kill me Lucas?" she hissed through her teeth. "Is she worth it?"

He didn't hesitate, "*Yes!*"

"Over *her!* Over a *mortal!*"

"Yes!" he roared.

"You are a fool Lucas, she is mortal!"

"Not for much longer, you were once mortal too. Don't make me regret that decision."

She screeched at him in a voice that could shatter crystal, "This can't be possible, I didn't expect for this to happen!"

It was when she released her last words that her guard went down on her inner most thoughts and Lucas' mind filled with the knowledge of her scheme. He responded with ultimate fury, "It

was *you* who sent Ian!”

She backed up fearful of Lucas’ rage. He altered so swiftly that it shocked her.

“It was your selfishness that killed him, not mine! You claim to care about me, “ He started toward her, “you led me to carry the burden of his death. The death of one of our own!”

Tears entered her eyes, “I didn’t mean for it to get this far. I didn’t know that you were that involved. Ian had information to give you, I didn’t tell him anything. I figured if he got a glimpse of the girl, I could probe his mind to find out what he knew. But he died before I could see him.” She sobbed.

His hand shot out and seized Celeste as he did Tanya only moments ago, with much more force. He slammed her back against the wall with the sound of granite hitting granite, “How long have you known!”

“Lucas please!” She breathed

He lifted her away from the wall just to slam her body back against it with such force several stones cracked. She grunted in pain, “How long!”

“from the start....last week, “ she blurted, “I can sense these things. You created me. We are a part of one another.” Both her hands grappled at his wrist. She couldn’t believe the power she was up against. He was unmovable. She never thought she would witness such a display of force from him.

“How many know?” His voice was laced with fury and his eyes flooded dark crimson.

She shook her head, silently pleading.

He thrust her back against the stone wall once more.

She gasped, Her hands flailed wildly ripping pieces of flesh from his arm, “Don’t do this Lucas. You will regret it.” She managed to squeeze out the words.

“I already regret you!” He growled inhumanly. “Your selfishness has betrayed me!”

“No, I didn’t mean to!” Celeste was terrified. She had never seen Lucas in such fury.

He thrust her painfully against the wall again, crumbled pieces of stone fell to the marble floor. “I asked you a question, Celeste!”

“Lucas I...”

“How many!”

“Please!” she begged, “forgive me!”

“You *bitch!*” In one swift moment, his control broke. His free hand thrust into Celeste’s chest ripping out her still heart.

Her eyes tore wide with shock, then slowly slackened as her undead life crept out of her. He let her crumple to the floor at his feet. Although it had to be done, the agony of his actions hit him. He threw his head back and a roar of rage, pain and anguish escaped him. He had lost a part of himself in her.

Crimson orbs watched intently from the far dark corner of the room. They faded into the shadows after Celeste lay lifeless at Lucas’ feet.

Jason heard the sound. He knew what it was. It was Lucas.

Tanya suddenly sat straight up in the bed, her mouth hung open, “What the hell was that!” She looked at Jason and he was gone. She climbed out of bed and tried the door. It was locked. She should have known better, they would have learned the first time. She wiped the tears off her face with her hands to clear her vision and turned around looking for another way out. Then her eyes lit up. The window. She ran over to it and pushed it open. She leaned out and stared into the darkness. She knew she was at least three flights up. This dampened her excitement momentarily. She couldn’t possibly scale down three stories. Her hand reached out and felt the wall. Maybe the stones that she had seen on the castle stuck out enough to give her

something to grasp on to. No such luck. The stones where to smooth and she really didn't feel like killing herself trying to escape. Wait, her hand hit something soft and cool. She pulled it in through the window....vines! her sprits picked up again. She had forgotten about the decorative vines that ran up the side of the walls.

When Jason arrived at the top of the landing he saw a bloody mass below. By the looks of the clothing, it was Celeste. Lucas was nowhere to be seen. He went down to the bottom of the steps and stared at her for a moment. It would take great rage and betrayal for him to do such a thing. Lucas had good cause. Celeste was very beautiful, but her beauty didn't go any deeper than the surface. For centuries she tried to manipulate Lucas, try and use her seductive power to control him. She had a devious mind and her motives were always selfish. By the sound of that cry earlier, it pained Lucas to do such a thing. Jason knew that Lucas understood Celeste's motives, but never felt threatened enough by her to end her life. He never loved her so her influence was pointless. He was more amused by her than anything. He'd allowed her too much independence. He encouraged it and she became rebellious. So Lucas released her, not wanting her anymore. By then, she had a great many lovers. Lucas only appreciated her beauty, and after awhile she wasn't as beautiful as he thought. Celeste must've been arrogant in thinking she would take precedence over Lucas' new love. Obviously she was wrong.

Tanya looked up and saw the window ten feet above her. She had made it this far and she wasn't about to turn back now. She really wasn't that afraid of falling after seeing what Lucas was capable of. Nothing could match the horror she felt than when she saw him as that monster. Foot after foot, she

descended until became visual to her through the darkness of the night. She could see the soft turf below. However, she still had to get through the grounds and over the large stone wall that surrounded the estate.

She jumped the remaining few feet when she was confident that she was close enough. She landed on the soft grass almost silently with her bare feet. She stood up and rubbed her arms. The night air was chilly on her skin. The only clothing she had was the thin robe Jason had left for her when he took her clothes. She looked down at her feet and curled her toes in the dewy grass. She had to get out of this hellish place. She turned and ran towards the iron gates that barred the entrance.

When Jason finished the gruesome task of disposing of Celeste's body, he climbed the stairs back toward the room that he'd left Tanya in.

The soles of her feet were being ripped apart by the thick underbrush. She knew she couldn't stay on the road and risk the possibility of being seen, so she camouflaged herself in the cover of the woods beside the road so she wouldn't lose her way. Whatever those creatures were, she knew they would be able to see her in the dark. She winced in pain as she stepped on a sharp rock. She refused to let it slow her down. She was already halfway there and kept up a determined pace.

Jason pushed open the door to his room. His sharp eyes scanned the interior quickly, she was gone.

The big gates came into her view through the brush and she stopped. There was a small group of people standing there, that's if she could still call them people. She was sure they were waiting for her. Even though she wasn't gone long enough for anyone to notice, but these people weren't normal so she didn't put anything past them. Jason might have come back soon

enough to see that she was missing and discovered that she'd crawled out the window. He could have had enough time to alert them. Not only that, she couldn't approach them and ask them to let her out. They worked for Lucas and she was sure they had their orders. Even if they didn't, she wasn't dressed and their suspicions would rise. Her eyes turned and focused on the stone wall. She decided to follow the wall that encumbered the estate hoping for an easy way over.

An angry snarl escaped Jason's lips as he stood back, paused, and leapt effortlessly out of the window landing three stories below gracefully on all fours. He bent his head and sniffed the grass to pick up her scent. His features started to change him into the creature that he was. His lips pulled back to reveal sharp carnivorous teeth dripping with saliva. A deep hollow howl erupted from his throat as he gave chase.

It was an old oak tree that made her breathe a sigh of relief. Like a giant hand it reached up and stretched over the massive wall. She placed her hand on one of the ancient branches, when suddenly, something caught her attention. It was distant and by the sounds of it, large. She could hear the snapping of branches as it tore through them at a breakneck speed. She could almost hear her own heart beat as she struggled up the tree. Then she heard her name, loud and clear, and inhuman, slicing the night like a knife. *Oh no, it was one of them!* Her blood pumped like iron in her veins seeming to weight her down. Her fingers froze on the branch as she listened to the thing close in on her. *Move Tanya, move!* She screamed inwardly. Trembling hands reached upward and grabbed the branches as she inched upward. It felt like she was in a movie during a slow motion scene. Her limbs just weren't moving as fast as she wanted. Her bare feet were cut, bleeding and screaming in pain with every step. A dry branch broke that she'd stepped on and she slipped and screamed.

Thankfully, she managed to hang on with her hands while her feet thrashed around on the slippery trunk finding another foothold. Her ears were still focused on the thing moving closer with every breath and by the sound of it, it knew where she was.

It seemed like an eternity before she was actually standing on top of the stone wall looking for a way down. Her feet were throbbing and she was slipping on her own blood that seeped out of the cuts on the tender soles of her feet. Then, she heard her name again, it was below the wall, where she'd just come from. Impossible to resist she had to see who called her name. She turned and looked into the eyes of a beast. She screamed and turned and jumped off the wall without hesitation. She grunted as the wind was knocked out of her when her body hit the ground hard. Forcing herself to get up, she yelled as a sharp pain penetrated her ankle and shot up her leg. She balanced on one leg and dragged her other behind her as she hopped toward the road, constantly looking behind her. She could hear the faint scraping sound as the beast climbed the wall.

Bob Mathews had been a truck driver for twenty three years. He hadn't a wife or kids, so his job was his life. He had tried the wife thing once, but like everything else in his life, it didn't pan out. The only thing that he stayed with him through his fifty six years, had been his love for the big trucks and the lonely roads. He was definitely a shallow man, who had seen too many bar fights and women who found men that drove the big rigs appealing, but they weren't the kind of women you'd bring home to your ma. He tucked a cigarette in his mouth as his right hand searched for his lighter on the seat. He was singing, rather badly, to an old Willie Nelson tune as he watched the road ahead. A light drizzle made him turn on the wipers. His hand was still searching for his lighter, and out of frustration, he took his eyes off the road and glanced down. He quickly found it and flicked it, causing an eerie glow inside the cab. He released the little red

tab causing the flame to extinguish, leaving small spots in his vision. It was then, that the half naked woman ran out in front of him frantically waving her arms.

CHAPTER TWENTY

TANYA LIMPED ONTO the highway, dragging her bad leg. Her eyes were blinded by the lights of the big rig. She then heard the loud crunch of twigs and leaves as the creature landed on this side of the wall. Terror filled her and she rushed straight into the path of the truck waving her arms and screaming. The powerful noise of the brakes squealing rushed into her brain. The she knew she would die. She closed her eyes and waited for the impact. When she was hit, she was knocked toward the ditch on the opposite side of the road. Darkness surrounded her.

“Miss...Miss! Are you okay?” Bob barely got a look at what saved her, but it sure as hell wasn’t his driving experience. Although, he was still able to keep his rig upright and on the road, something else pushed her out of the way in time. He hit the something. He hadn’t gotten a good look at what it was, and he wasn’t sure he wanted to from what little he had seen. It was gigantic and hairy.

Tanya’s eyes opened, “Am...I still alive?” her voice was shaking. With his help she sat up.

“Yes m’am, for now. I should get you to the hospital.” He began to help her up, his eyes quickly darted around the dark surroundings. Whatever it was he hit, it was nowhere to be seen, and by the look of his bent and twisted big chrome push bar on the front of the truck, he doubt it survived. He was thankful it didn’t damage his radiator. He hit many moose in his past and never had they dented his push bar like that.

“I can’t believe I wasn’t killed. What happened?”

“I wish I could answer that m’am, one thing’s for sure,

you're damn lucky. Let's not question it. Can you walk?"

I sure as hell will, she thought. She nodded to the stranger and he led her toward his truck. She quickly looked around, remembering the beast, but there was no sign of it. She let the man help her up into the truck. She probably would have been able to do it herself if it meant getting away from here broken leg or not.

Lucas returned just before dawn and he silently summoned Jason. His night was spent on a theatre rooftop, watching people file in and out of the building. He always found that he could sort out his head when with a crowd that wasn't his own. He preferred it to being alone sometimes. The noise, believe it or not, helped him relax.

He knew that he had no choice in killing Celeste, but that didn't mean it made it easier. It was only a matter of time before she killed Elsa. He could live with Celeste's death, whereas, with Elsa's, he couldn't.

He looked around the Grand room below the stairs, Celeste's body was gone. He was thankful to Jason that he didn't have to deal with that. Speaking of which, Jason hadn't answered his summons. He summoned him again...still no response. He went to Tanya's room and found it empty. He eyed the far window and figured out what had happened. *That damn woman!* Even if she'd escaped and Jason pursued her, he would still be able to answer his call. Something happened. Concerned, he closed his eyes and stood still deeply concentrating on Jason. He envisioned him in a ditch, badly hurt. He could feel the life off him, and knew he was still alive. Lucas received a mental scent of Jason's path and instantly melted into the shadows.

"Lucas Edwards? Lady, you have to be on something." The policeman chuckled.

"Why would I lie about such a thing?" There are strange

things happening there. My friend's life could be in danger, and you sit there and laugh at me!" Tanya sat up in the hospital bed, her leg in a cast. The doctor said she'd broken it pretty bad and was surprised she was able to limp out on to the road like she said. Only if he knew her motivation.

The officer grew serious, "Look lady, if you picked someone less well known, I might have the inclination to check it out."

Tanya pounded the mattress with her fist, "Why would I lie? What could I gain from this?"

"A lawsuit for one thing if you keep talking this way." The man cleared his throat loudly.

She quickly remembered the trucker. "The truck driver! Ask the truck driver. He picked me up near his estate."

"Do you mean the fella that brought you in?" When she nodded her head, he shook his, "Sorry, I can't do that."

"Why the hell not!" she burst angrily.

"Because he's not here. We already asked the nurse about your driver." He gave her another disbelieving expression, "She said he left over an hour ago. He told her he was late for a delivery."

She threw herself back on the bed and brought her hand to her forehead, tired of trying to convince him. "I can't believe that you guys aren't going to do anything."

"there's no physical evidence."

She sat up again, pointing an accusing finger at her cast, "What do you mean no physical evidence? Do you think I wear this because it makes me sexy?" she said sarcastically, "I was nearly killed for Christ's sake."

"Not by Lucas Edwards, you were nearly hit by a truck." He corrected, "That you ran out in front of near his estate, so you claim."

"Yes, but I was running from one of his employees. I did break my leg and Lucas Edwards did throw me against the wall!"

“Did you happen to get the license plate of the rig? Or the name of the trucker?”

She silently shook her head.

“Then there’s nothing I can do.”

“Some protector of the innocent.” She mumbled at him.

“Have a nice day.” He tipped his cap at her and walked out. His partner was waiting for him in the hall. He was flirting with the nurse at the nurse’s station. Although she did let him know that it was a trucker that brought her in, but that was it.

Doctor Evens was walking by the two men when he accidentally overheard their conversation.

“Another gold digger?”

“Yeah, she claims that there are Vampire-like beasts that live on the Edward’s estate, and that he’s one of them.”

“That’s the third woman that had some claim to him this month. Last week, I had a lady tell me she was going to have his baby even though she’d never met the man personally. I’d have to say, this one gets the prize for originality.”

The other cop laughed, “Boy, how come we always get the winners.”

Linda awoke the next day to a pounding at her door. “Linda open up! I have to talk to you!”

She glanced at her alarm clock, “Nine fifteen....what the hell....?” She groggily climbed out of bed as the pounding continued. She went to the door and opened it. It was Ted. His fist was raised to knock again. You’d better have a damn good reason for disturbing me, Ted. I don’t get out of bed before noon.” She was no longer interested in impressing him. He’d really hurt her last night.

He looked down at his feet for a moment before looking up at her, “I came by to ...Well, I...That is...”

“Oh for God’s sake, what do you want?” She yawned loudly.

“...To say I’m sorry.” He managed.

Her mouth fell open, “Could you speak a little louder. I was sure I heard you say I’m sorry.”

He began to glare at her, then he stopped himself. He did deserve this. She had a right to make him grovel. He was knocking on his Coach’s door before eight in the morning, demanding the truth and he got it, “Look Linda, I talked to Coach Winters. Everything you said was true. I am really sorry.”

Linda folded her arms across her chest and nodded to tell him ‘I told you so.’

Everything he originally thought about her was wrong. He felt horrible over his treatment of her. She was right. He was wrong. She’d always made it clear how she felt about her friends, and him. He wasn’t as honest. Like, trying to trick Elsa in going out with him even though it was clear she wasn’t the least bit interested. He’d put everyone in an uncomfortable position at the bar because of his selfishness. He felt like a heel. If the roles were reversed, he probably would’ve slammed the door in her face. Yet she stood there, in little pink baby doll pajamas, with her hair disheveled letting him apologize. Then he noticed the bruising on her upper arms in the form of hand prints when she crossed her arms. “Oh Jesus,” he grabbed her arm, “Did I do that?”

She shook her head, “It’s all right.” Although the previous night washed through to her and her eyes watered.

He didn’t miss it, “Linda, I’m really sorry. I’ve never laid a hand on a woman before. It’s not all right.” He was angry with himself for being such an ass and thought there was no way he could feel any worse for what he’d done when he’d seen how vulnerable he’d made her.

She shook her head, “Look Ted, I’ve been treated worse.” It was true. Not all the men she was involved in were saints.

Without thinking he hugged her, “I mean it. I’m really sorry

I hurt you. I promise I'll make it up to you. Please forgive me.” He had three sisters. If anyone had laid a hand on them, the way he did to Linda, he would be fit to kill. Yet in his arrogance he'd done what he abhorred about men like that.

Without speaking she nodded against his chest, for fear she might burst into tears.

From down that hall a voice interrupted them, “Hey Linda! Phone's for you.”

Elsa opened her eyes that late afternoon. The room was quite dark, so she wasn't sure what time it was. However, the embers from the fire gave her enough light to see that Lucas lay beside her in a deep slumber and his top half that was visible out of the covers was naked. Realization started to set in as she slowly lifted the covers and looked down at herself Images came rushing back through her mind of their entwined bodies. She dropped the covers. *It wasn't a dream!* It was real! She brought her hand to her mouth in alarm trying her best to sort out the memories of their night together. Everything about it was so vivid. How could she have possibly thought she was dreaming? It was just so...so...amazing. She felt a twinge of desire in her stomach at the memory. She reached over and hesitantly touched him. He didn't stir so she explored further. Her fingertips outlined his perfect profile from his forehead, down his nose, chin, and to his muscular chest. He was so beautiful.

Last night she felt for the first time what it was like to be with a man and it exceeded any thought that she'd ever had on the subject. Honestly, she thought it would be rough or painful, but it was just the opposite. Her stomach filled with that butterfly feeling again as a slow smile spread across her face at the memories of his hands on her body. She could definitely get used to this.

The velvet drapes were pulled around the bed, except on the

side where she slept. Not wanting to wake him she crawled out of bed. Suddenly, she felt dizzy and had to sit on the edge of the bed for a moment until it passed. She gave her head a small shake and stood up. Again a wave of dizziness hit her. She thought she would have to sit down again, but it passed. Her eyes settled on a table by the fireplace. There was a tray of fruit placed there and a white cotton robe slung over one of the chairs. She smiled at his consideration and walked over, put the robe and picked up a piece of orange and ate it. Suddenly she was quite hungry, so she sat down and picked at the tray until she'd had enough.

Other things from last night filled her head. Like the confrontation with Tanya. She thought it was time she find her and talk to her. Especially, while Lucas was still sleeping. It was something she could not put off. She had to find out what had gotten into her friend. She walked to the door and opened it. She knew that Jason's room had to be up here somewhere. However, after leaving the confines of Lucas' room and walking up the hallway, she noticed there were many rooms up there. What right did she have searching them? She turned and walked toward the stairway admiring the decorative art. She'd never noticed that last night. Heat enter her cheeks, her mind was on other things at that time. Not even considering that she was only wearing a bathrobe or that Lucas had servants about, she made her way down the stairs to the Grand room below. It was glorious in the light of the day. Ten foot high windows lit the interior of the room. The black and white marble checked floor was polished so clean it looked like glass. She walked up to one of the windows and looked out onto the immense garden that adorned the front of the castle. She sighed at the marvelous design of landscaping. This was so beyond her small town upbringing. Never in a million years could she have imagined that she would be standing here in all of this...beauty.

A low growl startled her and she spun around to face the yellow eyes of a wolf. Its fangs fully exposed.

She froze and held her breath.

“Nein, bruder.”

A man Elsa had not seen before was walking toward her, his eyes on the wolf. Her eyes flashed back and forth from one to the other.

The wolf sat humbly at the man’s words and started panting, no indication it was going to eat her only moments ago.

She was still afraid to move. He was almost as handsome as Lucas in the same dark way but he looked to be several decades older and he was as hulking tall and thick as Jason.

“Miss Collins?”

She was fixated on the wolf and didn’t hear him

He stared at her for a moment, then spoke slowly, “Miss Collins?” His ‘s’s sounded like ‘z’s.

His accent was thick, so he took great care in speaking. So she knew his English wasn’t that good. She guessed it was German or Austrian.

She snapped out of it, “I’m Elsa.....” Then she realized that he had known her name and she had never seen him before.

His eyebrows went up “Are you well?”. His eyes moved slowly over form slowly then he smiled as if he approved of her.

She nodded and pulled the robe instinctively closer around herself. Why would he ask such a question? Maybe it was because she paled at the sight of the wolf and didn’t answer him right away. Then he smiled, and she actually found it harmless and relaxing. He didn’t seem so menacing when he smiled.

“I am Gabriel. I managed security on Mr. Edwards’ estate.” Again, he spoke slowly while he struggled with his English.

The wolf let out a huff and plopped at his feet.

“He will not harm you, Miss Collins.” He pointed to the wolf. “Ever.”

Could have fooled me. She thought

He grinned again, “You are his new Mistress. Do not fear him.” He looked past Elsa to the setting sun, “I have work to do. Excuse me. I will send Sadira to tend you.”

“Who?” but Gabriel had already turned around and walked away without answering with the wolf happily padding at his heels leaving her gaping at his back. She doubted that Lucas ever had much of a security problem with that huge man and wolf watching the place. She watched him disappear down a long darkened hall and almost as if on cue someone else emerged. She was an older lady that could’ve probably passed for the age of Lucas’ mother. Elsa could make out grey in the woman’s hair in the tightly piled bun on the top of her head. She approached her with long strides that seemed uncharacteristic for her small frame. She wore a three-quarter length forest green dress, black tights and shoes and a black full length apron. Elsa figured that was her work uniform although it seemed outdated. The woman stopped directly in front of her, with a warm smile on her face and inclined her head slightly.

“Mistress Collins, I am Sadira, the head housemaid for Mr. Edwards. I will show you to your dressing room. Perhaps you wish a shower or a bath first.”

“Pardon me?”

Sadira paused for a moment not letting her warm smile falter, “I understand this is all so new to you. But I do have my orders, Mistress Collins. So let me help you understand.”

“What orders?” she tried returning her smile, but was still trying to understand what she was trying to tell her. “Please call me Elsa. Mistress, seems so foreign.”

“Of course, Mistress.” Sadira used her previous salutation. “Mr. Edwards would like us...” As she said the words ‘us’, two more women rushing down the same hallway that Gabriel disappeared down and Sadira appeared from interrupted her.

Sadira turned around as the other two women approached and continued, "...to introduce you to your dressing rooms and provide you with proper care." She finished.

Elsa's mouth hung open, "I don't know what to say..."

"We are at your disposal mistress." Sadira offered, "This is Natie," She put her hand on the woman's shoulder, "She is an expert stylist, and many other in fashion salon techniques."

"Natie." Elsa said in greeting, not knowing what else to say. Despite the woman being a brunette, her short cropped hair had blond and auburn streaks throughout. To Elsa, it actually looked pretty good. She was a heavy set woman and when she smiled dimples appeared at the corners of her mouth making her look undeniably cute and trustworthy.

"And this is Melody," she placed her hand on the other woman's shoulder, "She is an expert in fashion."

"Melody." Elsa greeted still gaping . Melody was a tall, lovely, thin woman, who was evidently no stranger to fashion. There wasn't a wrinkle on her tan slacks, white embroidered blouse, and multicolored scarf that she wore loosely around her neck and draped over her left shoulder and chest.

"It's nice to meet you Miss Collins." She stated genuinely.

She turned back to Elsa, "I know they seem like normal staff here on the estate, but Mr. Edwards does not hire simple staff. We all are highly educated." She reached up and tipped Elsa's mouth closed, "I am more than just a Head housemaid, I am a former governess. I attended the top finishing schools in Europe. My task is to make young ladies, act like young ladies."

"A lady?" She stared at the woman but this time kept her mouth closed.

Sadira smiled again, "You expressed your concern to Mr. Edwards at not being able to meet his expectations, did you not?"

Elsa blushed outright, "Yes, but how..."

"Alright then, it's settled. If you are willing I will teach you."

Again she reached over and placed her finger under Elsa's chin, this time to lift her head to meet her gaze. "Keep your chin up Mistress, even when you blush, it shows confidence." She smiled warmly again.

Elsa didn't understand this whole situation. How did Sadira know all of this? When did Lucas have time to tell her, she was sure he was with her the whole night? This was all so overwhelming.

She stared at the kind woman for a moment trying to gather the right words, "I want to thank you for your offer...Sadira, but I can't possibly accept this."

Sadira's smile faded a little, obviously not happy to be turned down, but her words or voice did not reflect her disappointment, "Yes Mistress, if that is your wish. Please understand that we are eager to assist you when you decide to accept it. Would you at least like Natie to do your hair before Mr. Edwards awakens this evening?"

Elsa glanced over at Natie who was still sporting the same cute smile. For some reason she couldn't say no to her so she nodded.

Sadira seemed pleased with her decision. "Good. Now let me show you to your dressing rooms." She took Elsa's arm and started leading her back toward the marble stairs that she just came down.

"Rooms?"

Elsa's *rooms* consisted of a dressing room with a large cream wingback couch and two matching chairs with various side tables and of course, a dressing screen. The walls were finished in a rich cream and white wallpaper and had several doors leading off it. One of the doors led to a bathroom larger than her dorm room with a sunk-in marble Jacuzzi tub, and huge shower with the same marble stone and at least half a dozen jets in the walls besides the shower heads. Although Sadira tried to get her

to shut her gaping mouth several times, it still managed to fall in awe. All of it was so beautiful and she'd never seen the likes of it.

The other door off the dressing room was a walk in closet with several rows of floor to ceiling drawers besides the familiar hanging gowns he'd purchased for her. She walked up to one of the drawers and pulled it open. It was full of items that she was sure she didn't approve of him buying.

Sadira tapped a panel next to one of the rows of drawers and it popped open and revealed a row of smaller drawers, "This is for your jewelry Mistress."

She stared at her, "I don't have any jewelry."

Sadira gave her a steady gaze, "You will."

She was going to protest, when Sadira took her arm again.

"You must get ready, Mr. Edwards will be waking soon and Natie still must do your hair."

Elsa allowed her to lead her into the bathroom where she proceeded to show her where all her toiletries were kept and instruct her on the buttons within the shower to turn on the jets. Then she left her alone and shut the door behind her to give her privacy.

Elsa never enjoyed a shower so much before in her life. She started the running water, then hovered her finger over the little white button that would turn on the jets, not knowing what to expect. When she pushed the button, the blast was so powerful, she squealed when they first hit her nearly knocking her over. The massage jets were ridiculously euphoric and she burst into laughter trying to stand properly. However, when she regained her footing she took full advantage of the amazing work they did on her muscles. She didn't realize how sore she was, but they seemed to find all the tender spots. She knew they were probably from last night, because despite the fact that she was in good shape, she definitely wasn't used to that kind of exercise. The familiar feeling of desire welled up in the pit of her stomach

again at the thought of what they shared. *Jesus Lucas, you have won my heart.*

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

WHEN THE LAST rays of light had descended and the night blanketed the sky, Lucas' eyes shot open. He turned his head to the right where Elsa lay the night before. She was gone. He sat up sensing that she was near. He pulled back the covers and got out of bed. As Jason's body was busy repairing itself, Julian had taken over Jason's duties and had his clothes lain out. Like Elsa he went into his bathroom and showered, dressed, and was straightening his tie when Julian walked in with some papers for him to sign.

"How mad is she about the dressing rooms?" Lucas spoke while signing and not looking at him.

Julian inclined his head in a partial bow before he answered, "Sadira thinks it went better than expected. She'll adjust."

With his expression unreadable, he handed the papers back to him, "Well, we'll see."

"Yes, my lord." Julian bent his head again.

"How is Jason's progress?"

"He's improving rapidly. Another day should have him back by your side." Julian offered.

Lucas centered his gaze on Julian, "That is good to hear."

"We agree." Julian said speaking for the pack.

Without another word, he turned and left his room with Julian on his heel.

Elsa was unprepared for his presence when he opened the door. He was captivating. It didn't help that he was sporting a devilishly gorgeous grin and a new glint of knowledge in his eyes over their intimacy. Natie had just finished with her hair and Sadira zipped up the back of her dress. When his eyes settled on

her she swore her insides just turned to molten lava.

“You’re beautiful.” He said softly as Natie and Sadira gathered their things, bowed at Lucas and rushed out the door. Julian closed it behind them leaving them alone.

She tried to meet his gaze like Sadira told her to when she got embarrassed, but she couldn’t. Her thoughts immediately flashed to the night before.

He felt her newly found feelings of desire and walked toward her while his eyes combed heatedly over her. A smile of approval lit his face, “I’ll have to give Sadira and Natie a raise. Did you sleep well?”

She whispered still not meeting his gaze. “I don’t think I’ve ever slept better.”

He took both of her hands in his, and kissed them both locking his gaze on her lovely face. “Really?”

Although she was embarrassed about their intimacy, she definitely didn’t regret it. Now it was obvious that he knew every inch of her. She couldn’t think of anything else anymore and that was beginning to worry her. She still had her degree and her friends to think about, but found that she had to force the thoughts into her mind out of guilt. Today was Tuesday, the first time she ever missed class. The scary thing was, she didn’t care. Not while she was with Lucas. Although her education was the only thing that she’d had kept her going since her mom died. Now it didn’t seem matter. She was doing exactly what her mother told her not to. His voice interrupted her thoughts.

“Elsa, about last night...”

She finally looked up at him with raw emotion registering in her eyes.

“...I thought I could control myself around you. I’m sorry.” His hand stroked the soft flesh of her cheek. He probed her thoughts and was grateful that she harbored no anger over it. Surprisingly, she blushed and images of their lovemaking flashed

in her mind, accompanied with vivid passionate emotions.

“Oh, Lucas...I didn’t realize that it could be so...” she turned away as she confessed, “...incredible.”

He chuckled at her confession then turned serious, “Did I hurt you at all?”

She stared at him, “No...of course not...why would you think that?”

“I just don’t realize my strength sometimes. I know it was your first time. Also I was a little impatient and took you again.” He embraced her lifting her off her feet, “Incredible doesn’t even touch it, love. It was mind-blowing.” He lowered his head and took her mouth with his and she responded fully. She wasn’t the least bit hesitant this time, and in fact he had to lift his head away from her. He grinned, “Well, I can see intimacy won’t be a problem in the future.”

She blushed, “Lucas....please. You are embarrassing me.”

He kissed her on the forehead, “Well you’d better get used to it because after last night, I’m lost...” He embraced her again, “Now, I know you are everything my heart desires and I’m never letting you go.”

She gave him an apprehensive smile, “I just don’t understand how you can claim to be so infatuated with me after all of the women you’ve been with. I don’t know anything about making you happy.”

He laughed, “No? Good lord Elsa, your innocence is enough to push me over the edge. I just can’t believe that you’ve remained untouched for all of these years. You have no idea that you put all of those women to shame. They would envy what you possess and you just don’t see it!”

She was so embarrassed at his words that she buried her face in his chest unable to answer such a compliment. Did he really think of her in that light? No one has ever even given her the time of day. She thought she was truly hideous all of these

years.

“If you had any idea the restraint I was using right now, not to take you back to my bed and make love to you again, you wouldn’t doubt my feelings for you ever again.” His arms gave her a reassuring squeeze and he laid his head on the top of hers. He wasn’t lying, she felt and smelled so good that it took every inch of his being not to claim her again. He knew there was no way she could handle it. Especially since he’d awakened her desires, she would be more willing for him. He didn’t think he’d be able to stop from draining what she had left in her veins or hold back his strength in a passionate frenzy. The next time he made love to her, he vowed she would have to be one of them.

She looked up at him, her eyes full of emotional vulnerability, “I don’t know what you see in me, but I pray to God that it doesn’t end.”

“*Never.*” He promised.

She gave him a dazzling smile, “You can certainly be convincing. If only I can get you to rein things in a little.” She looked around the big room that he designated for her to get her point across. “Lucas, the rooms, the shopping trip, the bodyguards, the maid, the stylist....this has got to stop. It’s too much for me to take in. You are spending too much money on me. I’m not used to this.”

He shook his head, “do you feel adored?”

“Well...yes.”

“Pampered?”

She nodded.

“Is it a crime to lavish my affection on you? You have difficulty accepting how I feel. I’m doing everything within my power to prove it to you.” His hand caressed her cheek, and his eyes probed hers. “After last night I thought I had you convinced.” Hell, he still had the taste and feel of her fresh in his mind.

She blushed again, not able to meet his eyes at that last statement, "It's true, you are showering me with attention and gifts and I'm sure anyone else would be convinced. Honestly I am beside myself over all of this, but it's just so sudden and we're moving so fast. Also I have nothing to compare this to. Lucas you know you were my first..."

"...and last." He added quickly.

She looked back at him and smiled sedulously, "I would love that to be true. " she sighed, "And every time I express my doubts you try your best to squash them. I tell you I can't compete with fashion models that you are used to dating so you hire a stylist, a fashion consultant and a governess...."

"Actually Sadira is a regular employee..."

"...Lucas, my point is, you have to stop trying to make me feel better, let me try on my own. It just makes me feel more insecure when you do these things."

He chuckled, "I guess it is a little overboard."

Her eyes widened, "A little! I don't think the first Lady has this many people fawning all over her."

"Alright, point taken. No stylist and no fashion consultant. However, the dressing room stays and so does Sadira."

"Lucas..." She began to protest.

"...Elsa you need a place for all your clothing. Not only that Sadira is a lot like Jason, she loves to be useful to you. Don't hurt her feelings."

"That is not fair. You are playing on my vulnerability towards others."

"hmm, " He leaned down and kissed her softly on the lips, "Is it working?"

"Maybe." She said tenderly after the affect of his kiss started to fade.

"Good. Now there's something else I need to ask you."

"There's more?" she stared at him in astonishment.

“Yes.” His expression became serious as he stared down at her, “Stay with me.”

“Again?” She looked astonished.

“Yes.” He said seriously.

She shook her head and smiled at him, “ I have to go to class tomorrow. I already missed today and I’ve never missed a class before. Also I have a paper to finish that is due by the end of the week.”

“I meant don’t leave. Elsa stay with me. ”

His meaning sunk in, her mouth suddenly felt dry, “You don’t want me to leave? You want me to live with you?” She was barely able to get the words out.

“You won’t need anything Elsa. I will take care of you.”

“I don’t want to be taken care of.” She defended.

“I meant, we will take care of each other.” He tried to explain

She threw her arms up in exasperation. “How can I possibly take care of you? I don’t even have a job.” She gave him a disbelieving stare, “I don’t think my meager salary could possibly compete with yours.” She turned away from him, “I mean, my God, all day I’ve been pampered and doted on...”

“...It should be that way.”

She turned back to him, “I can’t say I didn’t enjoy it...but for me it just felt so *wrong*, Lucas.”

He wanted to shake some sense into her, but restrained himself. It wasn’t her fault. She didn’t know the truth. It wasn’t about money. It was more than that he wanted to tell her. How else could she possibly understand without knowing everything about him? It was unfair to her, he shouldn’t have asked her to stay with him, but it was too late. Just seeing her there in his room and touching her, made him forget who he was. Almost.

“You have to trust me Elsa, there is more to me than you know, than anybody knows...”

“...Of course I trust you.” She softened at his words.

“You would understand what I meant if you knew what I was talking about”

She wanted to understand. To know these secrets he kept referring to. She brought her hand up to his cheek, “Then *tell* me.”

He stared at her for a moment, a long moment as he fought the decision to tell her, “I can’t, not yet.”

She saw the conflict within him but when he didn’t tell her, she removed her hand, frustrated, “How can I possibly understand if you won’t let me in?”

“I will. I promise before the week is out, you will know everything.” *That is all the time Valear has given me.*

A smile returned to her face, “You didn’t kill anyone did you? That isn’t your darks secret is it?” She teased trying her best to make light of the argument.

Not today. “No, that’s not what I need to tell you. I need you to stay here for at least the rest of the week.”

She hesitated then spoke softly, “I can’t.” She turned away from him for a moment, in thought, then turned back to face him, “I have worked all my life to get where I am now. I can’t just give it up like that Lucas, even for you. I will say though, you are making this really hard for me. I’m struggling to remember what brought me here to L.A.”

“You won’t need it. I’m asking you to trust me in this.”

“Don’t you understand what I am telling you?” She defended.

“Yes Elsa, I hear you and I do understand you. I also understand that you are going to be spending your whole life trying to prove something to your dead mother and absent father.”

She slapped him. It was such a sudden reflex to his words, she couldn’t stop it. He was right of course, but it was something

she wasn't willing to face. Still, her own aggression surprised her, she hadn't ever hit anyone in her life. She instantly regretted it, "Oh God! Lucas....I..." Tears ran down her cheeks.

He shook his head, a smile of understanding spread across his lips. He reached out and pulled her to him, kissing her.

"Sex has corroded you brain Tanya." Linda and Ted stood for almost an hour beside Tanya's hospital bed where she lay with a broken leg, listening to her outrageous story of a house full of beasts and Vampires. Linda thought Tanya had gone mad.

Tanya sat straight up in bed trying desperately to explain what had happened to her in the last few days and what had happened when she tried to rescue Elsa. "It's true Linda, I swear! I have never lied to you before, you have to believe me." She pleaded.

"But monsters, Tanya? I stopped believing in them when I was a little girl."

"I believe her."

Ted's admission startled Linda, "What? Not you too." She faced him with her mouth hanging open in shock, "Has everyone gone nuts?" she threw up her hands.

Ted ignored her and came up beside Tanya, "I've seen it too, in his eyes. When I took Elsa out last night, he showed up in the bar and took her..." He glanced at Linda, "I mean, she went with him. When a friend of mine tried to stop him, Lucas had this look in his eyes and it terrified the shit out of me."

Tanya nodded in understanding her voice raising in excitement that someone believed her, "Did his eyes glow and his teeth get really long and his face..."

Ted shook his head and spared Linda a skeptical glance, "No. I seen some sort of flash in his eyes, but after I thought about it, it might have been a trick of the light in the bar."

Linda gave him an 'I told you so' look.

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Tanya saw this and tried to rectify herself. “Well he can. You see a part of what he is capable of. I swear that he had teeth, long teeth. I thought he was going to tear me apart with them. And what about that thing that chased me through the woods?”

“A guard dog.” Linda blandly said obviously doubting her story.

Tanya glared at her, “And how do you explain how it spoke my name?”

“Maybe he heard it from one of the guests at the party the other night,” She said sarcastically.

“That’s not funny.” She fumed.

“I never meant it to be. Listen to what you are saying.”

Tanya turned back to Ted ignoring Linda. It seemed that he believed some of her story, “Did he speak to you? She was hoping that he’d heard the same deep hollow voice that instilled such terror in her that she fainted from it.

“He basically told me to control my friend. But Dirk was trying to provoke him into a fight.”

“His voice. Wasn’t it terrifying?”

“Uh...No. His eyes said plenty.”

Linda turned to leave, “I’m not listening to you anymore. You’re both crazy. Call me when you need a ride home. “ She said over her shoulder to Tanya. She heard Ted call her name but ignored it.

Ted caught up with her halfway down the hall. “Why don’t you believe at least one of us?”

She stopped and turned to him, “Because Tanya’s story is full of holes. She never wanted Elsa near Lucas in the first place. She tried her best to sabotage that date they had the other night and she treated her like crap. Now she has made up this ridiculous story to make him look like a freak. He is a respected, honest business man and no one has been able to discredit him, professionally or otherwise.” Linda shook her angrily, “She must

think we're stupid enough to believe this crazy story or she would have never told us about it."

"You should always believe your friends. Think of how frightened she was of him and how frightened I was when I saw him last night."

"Of course you were. He's quite intimidating, being so wealthy and all. And you did trick his girlfriend into going out with you. I'm sure you would be fit to kill if someone did that to you. Also, Tanya is a good actress."

"What about the bruises on her and the broken leg?"

Linda laughed, I've seen it before, minus the fracture of course. Tanya likes it rough. I don't know what it is with her. Elsa doesn't know that, so don't tell her. It was between Tanya and I. We don't discuss those things with Elsa. Don't think she's sleazy though. I don't want you to get that impression. She's very choosey."

"What?" He was having trouble trying to understand what Linda just told him. *Tanya likes it rough?*

"She probably fell of the damn bed....or fell swinging from a chandelier, and that's how she broke her leg." she giggled at the mental picture, "I'm kidding. I don't know. She probably tripped down those glorious marble stairs and hurt her leg that way," She made a motion like she was tipping an invisible glass to her mouth like Tanya had had too much to drink.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

LUCAS HAD THE car brought around so Elsa could go home. It was too soon to ask something so drastic of her and she needed time to think about what he said. She still hadn't noticed the marks on her neck and he hoped she wouldn't until he could rightfully explain himself to her. Julian would watch her tonight, and he had a certain patient to visit at the hospital.

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When the driver held the door open, Elsa made to get in the car, but then she paused, turned and looked at Lucas. The smile of understanding he held pulled at her heart. She had struck him, something she had never done before in her life to anyone. Already she had apologized a dozen times and he'd dismissed it, saying it wasn't necessary.

“Lucas...”

“Elsa, enough...I already told you, there is no need.” He pulled her into his arms and held her tightly. It was true, her slap was barely a tickle. Sometimes he forgot himself and how sensitive she was, when he had seven hundred years to become immune to those mortal feelings. Feelings that she began to awake in him again.

She kissed him before she got in the car and he watched as the car pulled away. He knew she loved him. Now he had to convince her of what he was without frightening her. It took all of his will not to influence her in staying. He regretted that he didn't. However he made a promise to her that it would be her choice. He knew he would see her again within the next day or so. She had willingly given herself to him. Allowed him to have what no other man could. As far as he was concerned, she was his and his alone. It was too late for him to call this off. Already, he loved her too much and knew she would come back to him. Unfortunately he was on a time crunch. He was just hoping that they had the time for her to realize how much she needed him too before Valear stepped in.

Tanya couldn't sleep. She lay in bed staring at the ceiling. The light mounted on the wall cast a small amount of illumination around the room. She could pull on the cord and make it lighter, but the nurse kept coming in and telling her that she needed her sleep and constantly dimmed the light. She asked Tanya if she would like something to help her sleep. Tanya

almost considered it, but was too frightened to take anything that might make her vulnerable to those creatures.

How the hell could she sleep? Even though she did feel a bit safe in the hospital with all the staff present and the nurse's station just a few paces down the hall, she still couldn't shake the images of Lucas and the eyes of the monster that chased her.

She thought about Lucas coming after her and had taken precautions. She wrote a letter and placed it under her pillow. If anything were to happen to her, someone would find the letter indicating that Lucas Edwards was responsible. Maybe then, the police would take her seriously and her friends too.

If it did happen in the hospital, at least someone would see him come and go or someone worked for him. But she figured that if it were to happen, he would deal with it himself. She knew that he would. She figured him for a man that didn't let other people handle his dirty work.

She was desperately hoping that this hospital had cameras and all the measurable security systems, so if the nurses didn't see him the cameras would. She grinned to herself, *Make sure you say cheese Mr. Edwards.*

"I abhor cameras." Lucas materialized at the end of her bed, "Funny thing is, I've never gotten around to install them in the hallways."

Tanya froze. She felt that familiar icy wave wash over her every time she was around him. She was terrified. How the hell did he get in here without her hearing him?

"It's a funny thing really. I never did get around to having those cameras installed."

"How did you get in here?" She managed to squeeze the words out despite her fear.

"Truthfully? I scaled eight floors by digging my nails into the solid wall of the building." He gave her an emotionless smile.

Her bottom lip quivered in fear, "What are you going to do

to me?”

“That depends on you.” He took a step toward her with his arms folded casually behind his back as if he was totally at ease.

“Stop or I’ll scream.” She held her hand up. Lucas was a sight to be reckoned with. He was menacing even without those monstrous features. Tall, foreboding and still disgustingly handsome despite her recent discoveries, he gave off a presence of indisputable power that emanated around the room like an electrical charge.

He chuckled while nodding his dark head toward her, “Go ahead Tanya, but when they come I won’t be here, and then they’ll think you’ve really lost your mind. They already think you’re a nut case. Would you like to know what they’re saying about you?”

“You’re lying.” She said unconvincingly.

“I assure you, I am not.” He tilted his head toward the closed door. “They are talking about how the friends you had here earlier...Mmm, I didn’t know you had visitors. They are saying that they thought you were crazy too.” He stared proudly at her over his accomplishment. “Would you like to hear more...Oh...Change of subject, you must be growing stale in their gossip.”

“Shutup.” She seethed. “You can kill me, but I have taken measures to ensure everyone knows who you are.”

“If you are referring to the note under your pillow, I can remove that after I decapitate you.”

Tanya gasped.

“I can also read your inner most thoughts. Did I neglect to tell you that?”

Tears began to fall from her eyes, “Then no one will know.”

“Exactly.” He came over and stood beside her, “Now that I’ve established all of that, you know what you are dealing with and we can settle this matter.”

“you’re not going to kill me.” She stared at him through a tear stained face.

“It amazes me that Elsa could have such friends so opposite of her intelligence. If I wanted you dead Tanya, I wouldn’t have wasted my breath on you or had my most favorite guardian occupy your time. I would have just taken your life and been done with it. It would displease Elsa, if she heard that you were missing. I wouldn’t want to do that to her, despite the way you have treated her.”

Some of Tanya’s courage returned, “Then what are you doing here, scaring me to death?”

“I came to discuss our problem.” He said evenly.

“I don’t have a problem. You’re the one with the glowing eyes and fangs.” She retorted.

Lifting his head he settled his eyes on hers, “You’re wrong, you have seen me in my true form, now you have a problem. Do not underestimate me.” He warned.

She clamped her jaw shut at her next remark. He was right. She had underestimated him once before and he could have easily taken her life, but he didn’t. “Why didn’t you just kill me? I—isn’t that what you do? Some Godless race that murders to survive.” She actually saw him wince as if insulted.

“Movies and myth.” He gave a grim smile of distaste, “Mortals are so gullible. We are a highly intelligent organized species that chooses to survive and in some cases that means to take live prey. Just as you do. Humanity is not known as a herbivore diet either Tanya. As for God, I have total faith there is one. I have just forsaken him to be what I am. At least we don’t wage wars that last a millennia in his name slaughtering each other in the process. Judge not, lest ye be judged.”

Lucas couldn’t erase what she’d known because she had already told too many people. They would grow suspicious if she suddenly couldn’t remember anything. So he had another way,

“It’s simple. I let you live and you return the favor.”

“Gee thanks.”

Lucas was amused at her guff and continued, “We both have a mutual interest. I do not wish for her to hear any of what has happened. Be warned Tanya, I will not hesitate to kill you if she finds out even the slightest of what had happened last night.”

“That isn’t fair! She deserves to know. You put me through hell.” Her tears began to fall again.

Lucas remained unmoved, “I was sparing her grief of you trying to come between us.”

“I was trying to save her from you.”

“What you were trying to do was disrupt our fate. You cannot prevent what is meant to be.”

“You’re confidence in yourself is disgusting.” She stated.

He chuckled not letting the insult bother him, “I would expect nothing less than mortal skepticism from you. If you doubt her feelings for me, ask her...she will tell you how she feels about me.”

“Impossible.” She denied, “You’ve only known each other for a few days.”

“You think you know your friend so well, you are wrong. She is more than capable of rational decisions than you give her credit for.”

“You took her innocence from her. I know you have the power to manipulate people’s thoughts, you did it to me.” Tanya recalled the memory lapse at the party and the horrible image of him in his room and was able to piece together some of his capabilities.

“She gave it to me...willingly.” He stated arrogantly, “again and again.”

Tanya stared at him incredulous for a moment and realized he told the truth. She grew angry at him, he won. He was able to claim Elsa and there was nothing she could do to stop him.

“She still possesses her innocent soul. That will always remain unchanged.”

“Please Lucas, don’t take her from us. I know you are going to make her one of you. Please consider what it will do to her.”

He understood her sisterly urge to protect Elsa, but it wasn’t her responsibility anymore. It was his.

“Why her? Just answer that question.” Tanya stared at him with watery eyes.

Because of her innocence, her beauty, her strengths, her desire to be free and loved and his undeniable love and desires for her. “That is not your concern.”

She turned her head away from him in defeat, “What do I tell the people that I’ve spoken to about you?”

“You are a good actress Tanya, you will think of something. Tell them you were jealous of her.”

At her disgusted expression Lucas laughed, “Then make something else up. I don’t care, but you will do it.”

Tanya nodded reluctantly in agreement. She would do this, in exchange for her life.

“I must go. Do not forget my words.” He turned and headed toward the darkness of the room.

“Wait.” Tanya said suddenly, and he stopped, “There is something I have to ask you. That night, when I was running away, there was a beast. I think it saved my life. Was that you?”

He turned and looked at her, emotion briefly passing over his expression. “No.”

“Then who...?” She was confused. She knew it was a beast and he was the only one she could suspect. Then images of her recent lovemaking flashed in her mind, “Oh no!” She covered her mouth with her hand in horror as realization dawned on her.

“Regardless of his role, Tanya, he did save your life and it nearly cost him his.” With that, Lucas melted into darkness.

Tanya was grief-stricken. Now she knew how big this was.

She understood that they had gone out of their way to spare her and spare Elsa the grief of losing her friend. Jason risked his life to save her. She was horrible to all of them. Especially Elsa. She felt like the monster now. She hated Lucas for what he did to her, but it was to protect Elsa. She would do what he'd asked, in exchange for her life and it would give her a chance to make things right.

Regardless of Lucas' reassurance that Elsa wanted to be with him, she was still worried. What would become of her? Could Tanya live with herself after losing Elsa and subjecting her to that monster? Was it possible for her to ignore everything she'd discovered this past few days?

She reached under her pillow and pulled out the note she'd written and read it one last time.. She let out a defeated sigh and crumpled it up and tossed it in the waste basket. No one will ever find out about Lucas Edwards now.

"*Tanya.*" Came a soft masculine voice from the corner that Lucas had faded into only minutes ago.

Startled her head came up. She squinted her eyes trying to focus on the corner, "Lucas?" Although she asked the question, she knew it wasn't. A chilling air surrounded her. "I thought we had a deal." Her mind couldn't accept the obvious. She was terrified.

"Tanya." The voice came again, stronger this time.

She sat up straight, her skin prickled, "Lucas. Quit it, you're scaring me." Even though she said it, she knew it wasn't Lucas.

A man she didn't recognize, stepped into the dim light. "An agreement you say?"

Tanya opened her mouth to scream but it lodged in her throat. His face was frightening. It was then that she knew he was one of them. He was young, no more than twenty. She flinched as he suddenly appeared a few feet from her in the blink of an eye. A surge of terror coursed through her, "Who.....?"

“I think you know who, or what I am.”

She took her eyes off him long enough to search for a weapon, something to defend herself with.

“I don’t think that’s necessary, my dear.” His long fingers reached up and caressed her cheek, “Nothing can protect you from me.”

This time she did scream. She moved so fast, it surprised her. She jumped out of bed on the opposite side while favoring her cast leg. This put the bed between them. She winced as a jolt of pain shot up her leg. Her eyes never left him.

He placed both hands palms down on the mattress of the bed while his luminescent eyes filled her with terror, “Now what kind of agreement could you possibly have made with my over controlling, mortal envying, brother Lucas?”

“B...Brothers” She gasped.

He smiled showing his elongated teeth, “Yes Tanya, we are all brothers.” He curled his fingers on the mattress causing the sheets to tear as easily if they were made of paper.

“Oh God!” her eyes darted back and forth from his horrifying face to the torn sheets. She screamed again and limped toward the door.

He appeared in front of her as she reached for the handle, “Escape was never an option.”

She jumped back screaming again.

He walked slowly toward her matching her steps as if in no hurry to do what he came here for. “That scream won’t help you. You see, the only two nurses on the floor was most obliging in helping me locate you. I’ve afraid they won’t be working anymore.” He brought his pinky finger up as if he was digging out food that was caught between his teeth, “That just leaves you and me. Of course I really don’t mind if you scream. I love to hear my victims scream.”

She bumped into something, stopping her progress. It was a

chair. She grabbed it and held it in front of her like she was taming a lion, "Stay away from me!" She stood unsteady on her good leg while trying to balance the chair in front of her.

He laughed, "Or you'll hit me with a chair? He then grew serious and made a grab for her. "I've had enough of your games bitch...I'm quite hungry."

Tanya screamed again, just dodging his arm. She raised the chair over her head and brought it down on his.

He surprised her by catching it without even looking at it and tossed it effortlessly against the far wall with a clamor. He was now close enough to reach out and grab her hair as she turned to run. He pulled her close, until their faces were inches apart. She sobbed at the pain of her stinging scalp as he twisted his fist in her hair. "It's a shame really, Tanya. You are a credit to your race lasting so long.

Tears rolled down her face in helplessness.

He effortlessly turned her head sideways, exposing the skin at the nape of her neck. His mouth opened, freeing his Vampiric teeth. He could smell the sweetness of terror off her, and hear her blood pumping rapidly through her veins, just begging for release. His whole sanity was lost in the moment over the need to feed.

She felt his face inches from her neck and something within her snapped, she kned him in the groin.

He released her instantly and with a painful roar slumped to the floor.

She slipped past him and ran out the door. She ran down the hall to the nurse's station, looking over her shoulder to see if he was following her. She called loudly for help, there was no response. *Wasn't there anyone else on this floor?* She ran behind the nurse's station to the phone, when she tripped and fell landing hard on her arm. Another jolt of pain surged up her leg and she bit her lip against the pain, now wanting to scream

incase her had heard her. She turned to see what had tripped her. The nurses lay on the floor, their bodies kinked and twisted at obscene angles. She couldn't contain another scream and tried to scramble backwards away from the bloody horror in front of her.

Suddenly she was lifted upward and turned swiftly, coming face to face with the same horror that she tried to escape, and he was furious.

He was in a fury as he dragged her away from the nurse's station to a nearby supply closet. With one hand cupped over her mouth, he reached down and broke the lock. He pulled her inside and closed the door behind them. With his hand still cupped over her mouth, he pinned her against the wall. Her hands flailed wildly at him and her screams muffled against his palm.

"You shouldn't have done that Tanya." He waved a finger slowly in front of her face, "I was prepared to make this as least painful as possible, but now you've gone and changed that."

Her stifled screams increased as she frantically tried to kick at him again. Her eyes were wild with fear. Somehow she managed to bite his hand drawing blood.

He grinned at her, "Excellent Tanya, now you've making this easy for me. There is only one part of the ritual left."

Her eyes flew wide as she watched his mouth open slowly. Ultimate terror flooded through her as she took in the sight. A sudden burst of strength had her arms and legs swinging wildly. Her screams muffled against his hand. Her attempts were in vein. He forced her head to the side effortlessly, bringing his mouth to her neck. He broke her soft flesh quickly and hard. She could feel the intense pressure as the bones in her neck snapped like weathered twigs. Her last muffled scream couldn't be heard beyond the confines of the supply closet.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

ELSA DIDN'T SLEEP that night. Her thoughts lay with Lucas and what he had proposed to her. His touch haunted her flesh and her body charged with desire every time images of his naked body flashed in her mind. She couldn't deny that she wanted to be with him, but what about her life? She worked very hard to escape her past, and that was all that seemed to matter, until now. He made her feel so whole, so loved. Her mother would have ridiculed her for being weak towards a man. She could almost hear her lectures echoing in her head. She was so confused. Lucas gave her something that no one else had been able to, herself. She realized now that she did have the freedom of choice. The only reason she felt she needed to have a career and make something of her life was to prove something to her mother...he was right. However, was she supposed to drop all of this and become dependent on someone else? It terrified the hell out of her. What if Lucas decided that they weren't right together? She would have dropped out of school for nothing. Even if he promised to take care of her needs, she couldn't accept that because she would feel as though she accomplished nothing. She really doubted that he would wait until she received her degree. It would take three more years. Then three years of internship. She doubted he would wait six years for her. Suddenly, she was brought out of her thoughts by a strange feeling. Although, she wasn't feeling it, it was coming from somewhere else. She was just aware of it. It took her a moment to understand which feeling it was...terror. She got out of bed and stood clutching her chest. She had never felt this way before, such horror, such helplessness. She fell to her knees and sobbed. Whatever it was, it was horrific. Her left leg suddenly became numb. Her hands went to her mouth as a strange pressure exerted itself there. There was no pain, just the sensation of

awareness, but it was so real, she could almost feel it. The strangest thing about all of this, was that she was aware that it was happening to someone else. She didn't know who or how she was able to conclude this. Her hands quickly covered her ears as a silent scream ripped through her, affecting her very core. Dread washed over her. She felt as if she'd just lost someone dear to her.

Doctor Evens was disturbed from his sleep in the middle of the night, to assist the police. He was thankful that he was the Doctor on call that night after seeing the nurse's pale and lifeless forms. He crouched down by the body, turning her head. He saw the marks on their necks

He told the police he knew nothing of what happened to her. They asked him if he could take a guess about the cause of death and he shook his head, "I'm not a coroner, I'll need an autopsy." It would buy him some time to talk to Lucas. He suspected that it wasn't the nurse but Mrs. Collin's friend he was after, and the nurses just got in the way. As much as he didn't see Lucas as a murderer, he saw the look in his eyes when they discussed Elsa. Lucas made it clear that he would have her regardless of the cost. He asked if there was anything else he could do for them. They told him they would contact him later. He told them he would be available then quickly went to look in Tanya's room. It was empty, no dead body. He breathed a sigh of relief even though she could still turn up dead. He'll deal with that when the time comes. He briefly scanned the room. A chair lay on its side against the wall. Someone had thrown the chair with enough force to put sufficient dents in the wall. He picked up the chair and set it next to the bed. His worry returned when he glanced at the bed. The sheets looked shredded.

He knew this girl was terrified of Lucas. Claiming that he tried to kill her. He wasn't worried about an investigation before,

because the police had dismissed her as an obsessed stalker. Now things have changed. Tanya had disappeared. When her friends found out they would report her missing, then there would be a problem for him and Lucas. The police would follow up on her last complaint. *Damn you Lucas.*

Fred turned to leave. His foot accidentally kicked the wastebasket beside the bed. He looked down and noticed a crumpled up piece of paper. He picked it up, opened it, and read it. His face registered shock. This could have been serious if it was discovered. He quickly stuffed it in his coat pocket. He had to talk to Lucas first before making a decision about the missing girl.

Jason lay in bed. Hot and cold shivers racked his body as it painfully repaired itself. Lucas stopped in several times to check on him. He knew now that Jason would survive. A crushed chest and half a dozen broken bones couldn't kill him. It would just place him in a lot of pain for the next few days. Lucas was angry with himself over the risk Jason took to save Tanya. He should have taken care of her from the beginning. Valear was right, he was being careless and because of it, he nearly lost someone he dearly loved. The next time he wouldn't hesitate when it came to those he cared about. No more loose ends.

Jack laid Tanya's lifeless body on the floor at his feet. The next sunset would awaken her and she would be his. He stared at the half dozen night creatures before him. He had promised them power for their loyalty. He promised them blood and death at will instead of Lucas controlling their sanctions. "Now we will discover Lucas' weakness."

Issac, who was one of Jacks most trusted spoke, "How can she help us?"

"She is a friend of the one Lucas covets. She will lead us to

her.” Jack thought it would be sheer poetry to send Tanya to retrieve Lucas’ love. He stared down at Tanya’s limp form. As it was now, the mortal female was so well guarded by Lucas’ dogs that none of them could get close without being discovered. If they were found out, he would pull her into his full protection at his estate and Jack wouldn’t stand a chance. Now he had Tanya. She may be able to get past the bodyguards before she was detected, “She will be Lucas’ undoing.” He grinned, “I will defeat Lucas with his own mistake. He should have killed this girl.” He looked at his small band of followers, “Don’t you just love the irony?”

Jack knew the others still feared Lucas, but after Jack is able to destroy him and he was confident he would. There would be no more iron fisted rule, and no more Association. He looked down at Tanya, “Valear will not be able to help his son this time. I will become the rightful ruler of our kind.”

Fred didn’t recognize the man who opened the door for him. He hadn’t seen him with Lucas before. But he supposed Lucas had a lot of others around him. The man was quite tall, taller than Lucas, and much more frightening. A large wolf stood at this side. Fred wasn’t impressed about coming her in the first place. He was frightened. He had to, because of the deaths at his hospital and the missing girl. He reached into his coat pocket and reassuringly gripped the cross he had brought as a precaution, reminding himself why he was here in the first place. “Lucas is expecting me.”

The man nodded and moved aside allowing him to enter. He then motioned for Fred to follow him to another door across the large entrance room.

Doesn’t this man speak? This place gave him the creeps and he didn’t want to be here any longer than he had to. It wasn’t the house itself, for it was as gallant and beautiful as he thought it

would be. It was the knowledge he held about the creatures that lived here, and it made him uneasy.

Gabriel opened the door to Lucas' study. Fred slowly stepped past him, looking at him as he went by. His nervousness quite noticeable. The man gave him an eerie grin. He obviously knew how he made him feel. He breathed a sigh of relief when the door clicked shut behind him.

"Is there a problem Fred?" Lucas' voice rang from across the room.

Startled, Fred turned around and saw Lucas sitting behind his desk in an expensive high back leather chair. "I'm afraid so Lucas. I had to come to you first."

Lucas stared at him, his expression unreadable as always. "Well, what is it?"

Fred told him everything while Lucas stared at him dispassionately.

Fred paced, "I'm afraid the police might find out what happened and connect with us."

Lucas leaned to one side of the chair resting his chin on his hand as if nothing had interested him, "And what exactly did happen."

Fred stopped, "Don't lie to me Lucas. The nurses, the young lady.."

".....You seem to think this was my doing."

"Did you visit the young lady tonight?"

Lucas nodded.

"Well, where is she? What have you done with her?"

Lucas stood up, staring at Fred, "I haven't done anything with her. I left her where I found her."

"What?" Fred wasn't sure if he could believe him or not. His hand thrust into his pocket and tightened around the cross for security.

Lucas' eyes followed Fred's movement into the coat before

meeting his eyes, "I consider you a good friend, there is no need for any sort of defense from me or my kind while you are under my protection. As for the cross you so desperately clutch, it won't help you. They are ineffective against us. That is a myth."

Fred stared at him for a moment before allowing Lucas' words sink in. "I should know better than to try and hide something from you." Fred relaxed a little at Lucas' reassurance and sat in a nearby chair, wiping his sweaty brow with the back of his hand, "I can't help but be nervous Lucas." He said apologetically, "if you could have seen those women."

Lucas understood his friend's obvious grief and guilt in supporting Lucas' need for blood and thinking that he was a murderer. "I'm not a ruthless killer, Fred, just a survivor."

Fred shook his head, "You do kill to survive."

"Yes, but they are few and far between. Those I kill do the world injustice and kill more in their lifetime than I have in mine."

Knowing this was an argument he would lose, Fred brought the subject back to the matter at hand. He also gave Lucas the crumpled paper with the message on it. He said he would keep the missing girl under wraps as long as he could until her friends came looking for her. It was the best he could do.

Although Lucas listened intently to the Doctor, his main concern was Elsa. They would be going after her next, now that they've taken Tanya. Elsa was no longer safe. Tanya would awaken on the next sunset if she was turned, which was most likely. It was the only way, he half mused that they could get anything out of that stubborn woman. She would lead them to Elsa.

Although Lucas hadn't much use for Tanya, because she proved to be a nuisance. The fact that she was no longer mortal, bothered him. He would have spared her a life of damnation by letting her die, not spend her life as a nocturnal concubine to

Jack. He was too passionate towards human life for that. Except with Elsa, it would be different for her. He could teach her, help her understand his world so they could be content together. She had the power within herself to withstand and adjust to his world without the need for uncontrollable hunger. Tanya would most likely have to deal with the thirst of blood and death on her own and she would have to be destroyed if she was uncontrollable. Lucas knew that is what Jack had counted on.

Jack hadn't violated any of their laws by taking Tanya and he knew this. Jack also knew Lucas couldn't help her. It would be a violation towards Jack. Jack had a right to take as many brides as he wished. Jack wasn't near as powerful as Lucas was, but in his thirst for power, he'd been able to defeat others that were in his way.

Lucas sat back in his chair and silently summoned Gabriel.

Fred jumped when the big man and the wolf suddenly entered without warning. Gabriel didn't spare Fred a glance as he approached Lucas. The wolf padded ahead of him reaching Lucas first, hoping for a pet.

"Yes, my Lord?" Gabriel spoke in his native Austrian.

Lucas spoke the same, "*Send the car for Elsa.*"

Gabriel acknowledged Lucas' orders and spared a look at the nervous Doctor before leaving. As if the wolf somehow knew he wasn't needed, he curled up at Lucas' feet.

"I suggest you go home and get some rest Fred,"

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

He shook his head, "You've done more than enough." He gave his friend and appreciative glance, "thank you."

After Fred left, Lucas stood and walked to one of the windows. If he had enough time before sunrise, he would go and retrieve Elsa on his own. He wasn't even sure if she would come. She had told him that she needed time to think. He would give it to her even though time was something he didn't have. Now

things have changed, if she didn't come tonight he would have to tell her everything and try and convince her right then why she must be with him, otherwise she would be killed, or worse. He still intended to keep his promise to her. She had to want this as much as he did.

The wolf sensed Lucas' unrest and let out a soft whine in question.

Lucas turned and looked at the yellow-eyed beast, "Don't worry friend, I don't intend to lose."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

LINDA RETURNED HOME early that morning as Lucas was closing his eyes for the day. She and Ted had gone to a movie to get their minds off of how disturbed Tanya had been and then sat in a coffee shop for the rest of the night talking. They discovered that they had a few things in common, more than they thought they would. They talked about their lives, upbringing, and friends. In fact, they began to really like each other. Linda didn't think she laughed so much in a long time. The horrible fight they had the night before was forgotten. Ted actually kissed her after he'd walked her to her dorm room. They said goodnight and he left. She smiled to herself. Thinking of him just as a trophy boyfriend was very appealing to her. Now she knew him as a person and he was amazing. Damn! He knew how to kiss too.

She crawled into bed just after the sun rose. She had classes in an hour and a half, and so did Ted for that matter. Oh well, it's not like she hadn't missed classes before. She'll start going to classes again the next day. Maybe she'll put in an effort this semester. She stared across the room to Elsa's sleeping form wondering how her night had been. Tanya had a lot of explaining and sucking up to do to Elsa when she got out of the hospital.

She also wondered if Lucas had told her about the little incident she started. She doubted it. Elsa would have said something by now. Also maybe he didn't want to hurt her. She decided to keep Tanya's hospital experience to herself also, or Tanya would have succeeded in upsetting Elsa about Lucas. If Elsa asked her about Tanya she decided she would lie and tell her she didn't know anything and hasn't heard from her. She hated to lie to her, so she hoped she wouldn't ask.

She started to drift off to sleep when a loud knock came at the door. Linda started to get up when she noticed that Elsa was already getting out of bed.

When Elsa opened the door, Gabriel stood there minus the wolf.

Elsa squinted at the bright lights of the hallway, "Yes?"

"Good morning Miss Collins, Mr. Edwards asked me to come for you." The deeply accented voice echoed in the empty hallway.

She grew scared, "Is he all right? Has he been hurt?"

He shook his head, "No. He must speak with you."

It took her a moment to get her heart to beat normal. She relaxed at Gabriel's reassurance, "He wants to talk now?" she asked thinking it rather odd. She glanced at her clock's red illuminated numbers, "At seven o'clock in the morning?"

He nodded.

"What could be so important?"

Gabriel said nothing as he waited for her decision.

Elsa stared at him questioningly.

He spoke in his thick accent, "I do what I am told."

"If this is about what we discussed last night, I still haven't made up my mind."

The man repeated himself and seemed a little annoyed that he had to, "Mr. Edwards asked me to pick you up. I know nothing of the reason."

Elsa studied him for a moment before answering, "I'm sorry. I can't go. I have a class in an hour."

Gabriel looked surprised for a moment then he quickly regained his cool composure, "As you wish Miss. I will give your message to Mr. Edwards."

Elsa reluctantly nodded before closing the door. It took a lot for her to do so.

Linda, who was listening to the conversation spoke, "What was that all about?"

Elsa sat on the edge of her bed feeling sick to her stomach. She wanted to go to him more than anything. But she still needed time to think. A few hours wasn't enough to give herself an objective view. She glanced up at Linda. "He asked me to come live with him."

Linda bolted upright, "What! Tell me you're joking! Lucas Edwards? Really?"

Elsa almost laughed at Linda's disbelief, "Yes. He said he wanted to be with me. He said he needed me."

"Needed you...? Him? And what did you say?" Linda was surprised that a man such as Lucas would need anything.

"I told him I needed my degree first." She shook her head, "But he refused to understand, claiming that it wasn't as important as us being together. He just didn't understand."

Linda was surprised, "Are you out of your mind! I don't blame him for not understanding. What are you doing Elsa?"

"I don't know anymore." She felt her eyes begin to water and immediately forced the tears back, "I'm so confused about what's important. It used to be my education. Now it's only him. I can't live my life for a man I've only known a few days."

"And why the hell not!" Linda added, "He's rich, he can take care of you."

"I don't want to be taken care of." She defended, "I want my education....I think....Oh God! I just don't know."

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Linda grew a little impatient with Elsa's stubbornness. "How can you be so bullheaded? I would love to have someone like Lucas Edwards look at me the way he looks at you."

"My whole life has come to this moment, Linda. I've had nothing else in my life, but what I hoped to achieve. It measures my self-worth. I can't just drop it because he says he cares deeply for me." She explained, "I know you wouldn't hesitate, but that is you, I'm not like that. And what do you mean...looks at me?" She answered if she suddenly realized what Linda said.

Linda knew she had to confess what she did. She cared about Elsa and she deserved to know the truth. "I made a play for him at his house." The look on Elsa's face was enough to make Linda regret what she did for years to come. "I'm so sorry. I honestly was jealous. That man is everything I thought I wanted...no, deserved, but now there's Ted and I finally understand how damn selfish I was. Please don't hate me Elsa, let me finish." Elsa never said anything, but her look of betrayal was still etched on her face. "I followed him to his room and he basically told me I didn't come close to what you were. I had so much to drink...I know that's not an excuse, but I tried to seduce him, and he refused. Now, any other man would have taken complete advantage of me, but not him. He mentioned that you were a dream come true and he wouldn't betray that."

Elsa's gut was in a dreadful knot. Linda, her best friend tried to sleep with Lucas. How *could* she? And why didn't he say anything? Did he want her? No, it couldn't be, Linda said he refused her....but....what if he did? Since she had made love to him, all the feelings she was experiencing toward him seemed to have increased a thousand times. Was that normal? She had shared something with him that no other man had been able to even come close to. Is that why she felt such anger and betrayal toward the both of them....or was it anger....no, it was hurt...gut wrenching hurt. Tears started to flow down her cheeks and she

released a sob. Linda was beside her in an instant.

“Oh God Elsa, please forgive me! I swear as long as I live, I’ll make this up to you. Please don’t cry.” She grabbed her hand and felt her own tears begin to fall.

“How do you know he didn’t want you?” She managed to say through her hiccupping.

“He practically threw me out of his way Elsa....that man only wants you.”

“He threw you?”

“Well, not enough to hurt me, but to get me off him....yes.” She choked out, not wanting her to think any more worse than she already was. “I wouldn’t leave him be and he was angry with me...he really was. Elsa I was so stupid. Jealous, and stupid.”

Elsa finally looked at her. Linda was sorry. Her tears weren’t fake, and neither was the regret in her eyes. She slowly nodded, “I believe you Linda.” Linda crushed her in a hug.

“It’ll never happen again...I swear. I was being eaten alive with guilt over the whole thing. At least one thing is for sure....that man is crazy for you. Especially since that night was your first date, and he only had eyes for you. Now do you see? You need to go to him.”

“My mother would be very ashamed of me.” Elsa confessed weakly, “If I did that.”

Linda may not have known much about Elsa’s past, but she figured out that the words that came out of her mouth were not her own, “What do you want to do?”

Elsa was silent.

Linda spoke softly, “Elsa, I think you should live your future the way you want to, not the way someone else has told you, or you still haven’t found your self-worth. You’ve found what that someone told you to be. I think you should figure out what feels right, not what should be, because it was told to you. What is achievement Elsa, if you have no one to share it with? If you love

Lucas, then go be with him.”

Elsa shook her head, “I can’t. Not yet.” She looked down at her hands, “But thank you for those words of wisdom.”

“Why can’t you?”

“I’m afraid my fairytale will end up like my mothers.”

Linda didn’t know what had happened with Elsa’s mother and it was the first time she had ever mentioned anything about her, so she knew it was hard for her to say something, and she could understand the insecurities parents could hand down to their children through their mistakes, “You won’t know unless you risk it.”

“What if it doesn’t last?” Elsa could feel another tear run down her cheek. The truth was, she was terrified of the happiness he brought her. It was totally alien to her. It was Lucas, something about him that made her feel like nothing could separate them. I felt so perfect to be with him. It wasn’t just because he was her first love. It seemed to run deeper for reasons unknown to her. She connected so well with him. He knew everything about her, and she didn’t mind it. In fact, she needed his understanding about her. When she was apart from him, she had an undeniable aching deep within her gut, as if she craved his presence, yearning to be with him. It was getting more and more difficult to resist. When she was away from him, reality would hit her, and her insecurities would return. She needed to figure out if this would last too if she stayed with him.

“It sounds like you’re in love with this guy. It totally explains the agony you’re going through.”

“I’ve only known him such a short time Linda.”

She shrugged, “Stranger things have happened.” Linda knew Elsa was crying again and she wanted to give her another hug to make her feel better, but a part of her sensed that she wanted to be left alone. Instead she tried to comfort her with her words, “Look at it this way, you have been able to achieve in a very short

time what most people dream about in a lifetime. I think it's worth the risk."

Elsa wiped the tears away, "Would you do this?"

"Hell yes!" Linda said, trying to add some humor, "But knowing me, I'd just use him for that sexy body of his."

Elsa managed a small laugh, "Well...maybe I'll go see him later on this evening. Besides, if I stay away from him any longer I think I'm going to go mad. I can't stop thinking about him."

Linda sighed, "It's amore."

As the sun crested high in the sky Jason awoke. His body had sufficiently repaired itself. He got out of bed and groaned as the evidence of repaired broken bones ached with movement. One by one, he rotated his shoulders and his head before dropping on all fours doing two hundred pushups off his knuckles and toes to work out any of the aches he felt. Satisfied that things seemed to be working right, he got dressed and made his way downstairs to consult with the others. He had been injured before, many times so this wasn't new to him. What was new to him is compromising Lucas' best interests by saving Tanya's life. By rights, he should have let her die instead of injuring himself. He had to find out what he missed and to find out about Tanya. His mind flashed to that night.

When she ran out in front of the Semi, something in him snapped. He couldn't just let her die. He knew Lucas would probably throttle him for nearly losing his life. That was something he didn't look forward to.

Gabriel was out inspecting the grounds when Jason found him. The wolf, Gabriel's constant companion whined and leapt up on Jason in a greeting, placing his paws on Jason's chest just to come eye to eye with him. Jason stroked his thick soft coat, "Hello my friend."

Gabriel relayed what Lucas had told him earlier, which

wasn't everything, for Gabriel didn't need specifics. He told Jason of Tanya, not knowing of Jason's attachment to her. Lucas couldn't locate her, although they suspected that Jack had her.

Jason listened while Gabriel told him the events in his absence. He heard his words while his insides were in a fury. It was his weakness that caused Tanya's capture, and now Lucas and Elsa's endangerment. If He'd let Tanya die, this wouldn't be possible. Lucas trusted him and he failed.

Elsa sat in the library that evening after class. She was trying to concentrate on her studies without success. She chewed on the end of her pen while glancing around the library. She wasn't sure when she admitted to herself that she had to resolve this thing with Lucas soon or she wouldn't be able to get anything done. One thing was certain; she didn't feel as confident when she was away from him. In fact, she felt empty. She couldn't shake the feeling like she had lost something very significant and it actually began to unnerve her. Again, she had spent all evening in the library after class and got absolutely nothing done. The haunting images of their night together were causing her havoc. They would flash into her mind at random causing such a gut wrenching ache that she near dropped everything and ran back to him at least a dozen times every hour. She couldn't concentrate on anything but him. The memories evoked feelings that caused her stomach to flip-flop and alternated with the hunger-like cramping. No one in their right mind could concentrate with all of that going on inside of them. She would go insane if she stayed away from him. She reached up and scratched the small marks on her neck. Damn bug bites. Too many bugs in the dorm and she was finally bitten. Linda and Tanya had complained bitterly about them several times, but nothing was done about it. She wasn't too concerned, they were healing. So she never thought to have them checked out. She

caught herself reading and rereading paragraphs for the last two hours and in frustration slammed her books shut causing other students to shush her again. She sheepishly mouthed the word 'sorry' and packed up and left.

Fred Evens was waiting for Linda at the hospital when she came in looking for her friend. He calmly told her that she had left.

“What! Where? Back to the dorm?” She couldn’t understand Tanya’s recent behavior at all.

“Um...I think she said something about Montana.” He lied. That wasn’t easy for him. He’d never lied so much in his life. Several times to family members when his patients didn’t want them to know the true diagnosis, like Cancer or AIDS that would eventually be fatal, but never to this extent. He was lying to protect a Vampire and this hospital from ruin. He desperately reasoned with himself. Lucas does such good for the area, and the people that work here. He had to weight the consequences. Lucas saved more lives than he took. It was worth the deceit.

“When?” Linda’s mouth fell open. She knew Tanya was upset, but not to the point where she’d quit school and go home. She’d been mad at Linda before, but never resorted to even threats remotely close to this.

“Yesterday afternoon, shortly after you left.” He desperately tried to keep his expression truthful.

Linda was too upset to notice. She had to sit down.

Fred followed her into the lounge where she sat down. “She was quite upset yesterday. She never said why. Can I get you something? A coffee? A glass of water?”

Linda shook her head, “She was upset with me.” It was her fault. She should have tried to humor Tanya more. She only came back to visit her to see if she was calm enough to tell her the truth. Linda looked up at the doctor, “I thought she was

suppose to stay overnight for observation.”

“I can’t hold someone against their will, Miss Stanten. She wanted to go.” Fred had never lied to anyone before in his life, and none of this sat well with him. Although he didn’t know the whole story, he believed Lucas. He didn’t need to lie to him because it didn’t serve any purpose.

“I understand.” She didn’t blame him. She blamed herself.

“Did she at least leave a note? Maybe some sort of message for me?” She stared at him. It just didn’t make any sense. Tanya couldn’t have left over such a small spat. Tanya loved challenges. She always had to stick around until she proved she was right.

Fred remembered the note he found in the wastebasket, “No.”

Linda shook her head and stood up, “Thank you Doctor, I appreciate your time. If you hear from her will you let me know?” She began to walk away after the Doctor took her name and phone number. This will definitely upset Elsa. Linda didn’t tell her about Tanya being in the hospital. She knew that Elsa would be angry at her over this, because now Tanya was missing. Linda blamed herself for this whole episode. Why would she run off like that? Maybe something was really wrong. Maybe she was as scared as she said she was. Things didn’t seem right anymore, and it was up to her to find out why.

Fred watched her leave. *This is getting worse by the day.* He thought to himself. She didn’t look satisfied with his answers. He would call Lucas and let him know.

When Lucas, as always, awoke as the sunset, Jason was down on his knees beside the bed, his head bowed.

Lucas sat up and stared down at him silently.

When Jason spoke his voice was laced with remorse, “Forgive me, I’ve failed you My Lord.”

Lucas reached out and placed a hand on his large shoulder.

Jason brought his head up to meet Lucas' gaze.

"You are more to me than just my Guardian, Jason. You are my friend. This wouldn't have happened if I let her live in the first place. Do not blame yourself for my mistakes."

Jason stared at him in disbelief.

"You have been loyal to me for centuries." He stood and began to dress, "Don't expect me to punish you for this. It's more my fault than yours my friend." He turned to Jason, "Now get up. We have work to do." He was actually surprised at Jason's chivalry because he never cared much for the human race, but he had just risked his life to save one. No, he shouldn't have done it, but if Lucas was in that situation and knowing how much the twit meant to Elsa, he would have done the same thing. Although, the semi wouldn't have hurt him as much as it did Jason.

Jason was relieved at Lucas' forgiveness, "Yes, my Lord." He stood. However, it still didn't wash his guilt. It was his responsibility to protect Lucas and his interests at the risk of his own life. That is what he was bred, born, raised and trained for. He was handpicked by Valear himself for Lucas. It was a great honor to receive such a position. He did come from a highly respected lineage that were known for their strength, intelligence and loyalty. He was thinking of himself when he saved Tanya. Not his life's duty. He promised Lucas silently that he would never do that again that is if Valear doesn't kill him over this.

It was dark when Elsa returned home to her dorm. Linda wasn't around. Elsa thought that she was probably with Ted. She laid her books on her desk and went back out the door to the payphone down the hall. She had finally come to terms with her conflicted feelings on her walk home, now she had to see Lucas.

An unfamiliar male voice answered the phone. "Mr. Edwards' residence."

She knew it wasn't Gabriel or Jason. *How many people live*

there? “Um...yes. I’d like to speak with Mr. Edwards Please.”

“What would this be referring too?” said the masculine voice on the other end.

“Oh...Well...I, that is...I mean...” How could she explain this.

“...Just one moment.” The voice cut her off.

She nervously waited as the phone went silent.

“Yes, Hello.” Another male voice.

Elsa recognized this one by the familiar accent, “Oh Gabriel, yes, could you tell Lucas that I would like to see him tonight. It’s important.”

“Of course, Miss Collins. He’s gone out for the evening; I will inform him when he returns.”

“Thank you.” She hung up the phone and didn’t realize until she hung up that she was very crestfallen. Maybe he got tired of waiting and found someone else. She shouldn’t feel that way about him, but she couldn’t help it. Her insecurities were getting the better of her.

Sickened at the thought, she walked back to her room. She couldn’t blame him. She was hot, then cold with her emotions toward him. At least she thought she was. She even slapped him for Christ’s sake! What if she never saw him again? She felt a cold spike driving itself through her heart as her mind ran wild. Images from the night before entered her mind, but they were altered, he was making love to someone else. She felt the urge to throw up.

She opened the door to her room. One hand was on her stomach as her dread worsened with every passing moment. Her other hand reached up to turn the light on.

“Elsa.”

She stopped, her eyes set on Lucas who sat on the corner of her desk fingering through one of her text books. “Oh thank God.”

She ran across the room towards him and was gathered in

strong arms.

He smiled to himself. He knew the turmoil she was going through. He knew it would bring her back to him, so he let her deal with it on her own. She had to understand what was between them. To know the strong bond they shared. Now she knew.

“I was so frightened.” She confessed as she hugged him tightly.

He tilted her head up towards him. “Do what I ask. Come home. Then you will never have to deal with it again.”

She nodded, “I know that there is no way on earth that I’m going to be able to do anything here until I get you out of my head, if that’s possible.”

He chuckled, held her tightly and kissed the top of her head. Her decision was made. She chose him without any influence.

She was so elated to see him that she didn’t even consider the fact that she didn’t see him walk down the hall towards her room when she was on the phone. He would have to walk directly by her. Now that he was here with her she didn’t care. She felt complete again.

It was her that initiated the passionate kiss. She turned her head up to him and slipped his arms around his neck, inviting him to bend his head and kiss her.

“Elsa, “ He whispered, “I can’t. I’m afraid I might hurt you. It’s too soon after your first time.” *And way too soon for me.* He wasn’t sure if he could hold back enough not to harm her physically. She was so bloody tempting.

“I don’t care.” She answered while shoving his jacket off his shoulders and pulling at his shirt. She didn’t even think twice about his words of warning. She wanted him so bad at that moment that all her conscious thought was gone.

He groaned and kissed her back. It certainly didn’t take much for his will to crumble. He could barely restrain himself

when she initiated such affection. It was getting more difficult contain his true self around her. Now that he knew her intimately, his need for her grew.

She continued to pull at his clothing, and Lucas helped her remove it, then he undressed her slowly so he could savor every curve. He gradually slid her t-shirt up over her head by placing a hand on either side of her body and caressing her soft flesh as he slid his hands up her body and over her raised arms. Then he knelt in front of her and trailed kisses over her stomach as he undid the snap on her jeans and mimicked his movement with the shirt. His tongue explored the recess of her belly button and she gasped digging her fingers in his hair pulling him close. He slid his fingers into the lace top of her panties and made a circle around her following the fine material before pulling them down her perfectly shaped derriere and shapely legs all the while his mouth moved sensuously over her abdomen.

Lucas gently laid her down on her bed covering her body with his. He kissed her deeply. Thrusting his tongue into her sweet warm mouth, it tangled with hers in wild passion. He started making love carefully and slowly to her this time, caressing every precious part of her, taking care to memorize her every pleasure. She dug her nails into the flesh at his back as his mouth coaxed and teased hers. Then she said the words that made his insides melt. Her lips whispered against his, “God help me, but I *love* you.” She wrapped her legs around his hips and he plunged deep into her.

It was the words he was waiting to hear and he basked in them. With that and her warm flesh, he near lost it, “Jesus Elsa, you’re driving me wild.” His voice was harsh with lustful hunger as the delicious sensation of her body against his. He had to pause a moment to avoid ending this moment by losing all of his guarded control. Her soft moans were driving him to his limits. He wanted to give her everything he could, but he couldn’t, yet.

With his strength, he was terrified that he would end up hurting her or worse, draining all of her life-force before he could stop.

Elsa never felt more alive. The feel of his flesh on hers was an indescribable ecstasy. The searing heat returned burning through to her very soul. It ebbed and pulsed through her reaching every limb. Every time he plunged into her, she felt the sensation flood from her loins through her to invade every cell of her being. She reached up above her head and gripped the headboard to add resistance to his movements and giving herself leverage to lift her hips to meet him. His answer was a deep throaty groan and he increased the force and speed of his thrusts causing her to begin crying out every time he buried himself deep in her.

Through her haze of ecstasy she knew something was missing. She didn't know what, but she knew he could give it to her. She opened her eyes and stared at him, "Lucas....I need...." Her eyes refocused on him, clear desperation mixed with lust in their depths, begging for him to take her beyond the limit.

He returned her stare, passion flared within him; he knew what she didn't, "As you wish, my love." He growled and kissed her possessively before pulling his head back all the time his hips rocked against hers.

She subconsciously turned her head exposing the soft pale flesh of her neck. He focused his crimson eyes on the rapid pulse beneath and ached for her innocent blood to spark and ignite his soul again. His masculine lips pulled back. He broke the soft flesh at her neck as easily as tearing paper without slowing his rhythm. He groaned. Her blood was rapturous. She didn't even realize that she offered herself to him and with her willingness he finally lost control. He gorged himself on her rich nectar. Her hands threaded in his dark locks and gripped hair fiercely as she groaned at the euphoric feeling his feeding gave her. She began to shudder with her orgasm and he grabbed her hips and finished

his with a final powerful thrust.

“Don’t stop!” She gasped tightening her fingers in his hair as he drank deeply.

He probably wouldn’t have stopped but he was interrupted.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

WHEN LINDA OPENED the door she heard Elsa gasping. She turned on the light and was stunned to see Elsa lying in bed, naked from the waist up. The sheets covered her lower half. She had her hands up if she was bracing herself against something. Her eyes were open and she was staring at the ceiling.

Linda dropped her purse on the floor and ran over to her. She shook her hard, “Elsa! Wake up, you’re having a nightmare!”

Lucas crouched on the roof of the dormitory in an animal-like pose. His tongue slid out and licked a drop of blood at the corner of his mouth. He chastised himself over his actions. He could have killed her if he wasn’t interrupted. *His precious Elsa.* He growled as his veins seared with her innocent blood. Now he knew what a junkie felt like when the drug hit their bloodstream. It was undeniable how addicted he was to her. He snarled again, angry at himself for what he almost did. He couldn’t touch her again at all, until she was willing to be his...for eternity. He couldn’t trust himself. It didn’t help that she was so wanton for him. It just multiplied his hunger and desire off the scale. He dropped his face in his hand. What the hell was he doing?

Linda pulled the sheet up and covered Elsa who now sat on her bed looking quickly around the room. She was shaking almost uncontrollable

“Are you okay Elsa? That seemed like a really bad dream.”

Where the hell did he go? She thought as she glanced around the room and Lucas was nowhere to be seen. Was she dreaming? No dream could be that good, could it? She looked at

Linda, "It must've been." Is she going crazy?

"About what? I thought you were dying."

"I don't remember." She lied.

On the roof, Lucas crouched above her window. *Good girl Elsa*. He was thankful to Linda at that moment. God only knows if he would've stopped that time. He berated himself again and cursed his loss of control. He pushed the horrible thought out of his mind. He can't think like that. It was agonizing. He stood up and jumped three stories down to the soft grass. Jason met him by the familiar tree that he had spent several hours in when he first followed her home. He must have noticed him on the roof. Jason had keen senses. He was patrolling outside the dorm while Lucas was inside with Elsa.

He noticed the strain on Lucas' face and gave him an amused smile, "Problem?"

Lucas shook his head, "You have no idea." He continued toward the front entrance and he could hear Jason's laughter follow him through the doors.

"I guess I haven't been sleeping well lately." She continued while her thoughts still whirled in confusion with the vivid images in her mind. She was having difficulty separating dream from reality. There was no way he could leave without Linda seeing him. So could it be that she imagined the whole thing? There was no way she could have. It seemed too real to be a dream. Last time she had thought that it was, it had turned out to be real. But where was *he*?

"No, I guess not" Linda was worried. She stood up, "Let me get you some hot tea."

Elsa looked up at her and smiled, feeling a little more relaxed, "That would be nice."

"Will you be okay? I'll just be down the hall in the kitchen." Every floor, all three of them, had a kitchen. It was just a small

room with a fridge, stove, a sink and a few cupboards for the students that couldn't afford to pay for meals all the time and preferred to cook their own. No one would risk putting their food in the fridge at risk of other students taking it. Yet, a few students would pitch in a buy coffee and tea when it was needed for those late night study sessions, "I'll be right back."

Elsa nodded and Linda left.

Elsa stood up and brought the sheet tighter around her to try and stop the shivers that still raced through her. She walked over to the bathroom and looked in it.

Empty.

"Lucas?" She stated softly. She stared at the empty confines of their small room, "Am I crazy?" She stated to the emptiness. She sighed deeply and lifted the sheet off the bed, there was her t-shirt. She put it on and continued to discover more clothing entangled in the sheets, but none of his. She pulled her white panties on sat back down on the bed. Her head swam in enormous confusion. Did she care and crave for him that deeply that she totally imagined all of that? She looked at her trembling hands. It seemed so real that they still tingled as did the rest of her from the memory of his touch. Honestly she didn't remember lying down for a nap prior to being overpowered by such a vivid dream. Then there was a knock at the door.

She jumped at the sound

"Elsa?"

It was Lucas. Her blood started to pound in her ears in fear and excitement over this experience. It *was* him. The voice was unmistakable. She pulled open the door to find him standing there not even taking into account that she was half naked. "Lucas...Is it really you?"

He chuckled, "Of course." He looked down her half-naked form and his eyes narrowed, "You really shouldn't answer the door like that."

“I think I’m going crazy.” She grabbed the lapel of his suit and pulled him in the room. She told him what had just happened and watched an expression of concern and something akin to guilt cross his features.

He bent down and kissed her before answering her, “And I thought you hypnotized *me*.” He said sincerely.

His head suddenly lifted from her and turned toward the door. Linda was returning. He turned back to Elsa, “come with me.”

“Now?” She looked down at her state of undress.

“Yes.” His violet stare coaxed her.

She started silent at him for a moment before answering, “Okay,” She whipped the t-shirt off over her head, “I have to get dressed.”

He watched her pull open her dresser drawers while naked except for those little white lace panties, and none of the previous shyness she displayed when they first met.

“Things change so quickly.” He smiled at her while his eyes raked up her shapely athletic legs.

She looked down at her state and blushed. “Oh!” She didn’t even consider that she was being so free with him. She quickly grabbed a sweatshirt and pulled it over her head.

He chuckled, it was good that she felt so confident and relaxed around him. It was what he wanted. She had definitely come to terms with who she belonged to.

Linda entered with a cup of hot tea in her hand just to see Elsa do up the button on her jeans and grab her bag. Linda looked at Lucas, then back at Elsa. “Where are you going?”

“To Lucas’.” She mildly explained, her eyes going to the object of affection and she smiled.

Linda was a little stunned, “But a minute ago, you looked as if you were having some sort of a seizure.” She indicated to the bed with a motion of her hand that carried the tea.

“...And I’m fine now Linda, you don’t have to worry.” She smiled reassuringly at her friend.

Linda turned to Lucas, “When did you get here?”

He could feel Linda’s apprehension. He no longer cared about being careful. Elsa was coming home with him. Linda could no longer influence Elsa in any way, “A few minutes ago.”

“Oh?” She smiled, “I didn’t see you come in.” The kitchen was the first door past the stairs. He would have had to walk right by the door and she didn’t see or hear him. The empty hallways echo terribly at this time of night. Maybe he’d walked by when the kettle was whistling. She quickly squashed any suspicious thoughts. She didn’t want to be wrong in her original judgment of him, thinking he was rich, handsome and just plain perfect.

Lucas took Elsa’s hand leading her out the door, “Goodnight Linda.”

She smiled, “Have fun.”

She beamed, “Thanks...I’ll call you tomorrow.”

Linda pushed aside her worries again and shut the door behind them. She reminded herself that she still wanted to speak to Lucas about Tanya, but not in front of Elsa. She would have to get him alone. She turned and picked the blanket up off the floor. *What is this?* She saw several speckles of crimson dots on the fabric. *Blood?* Her concerns about Lucas rose again. First, Tanya’s ravings about him, followed by her disappearance. Then, Ted’s obvious fear towards him over the incident at Deter’s. Not to mention the odd way she found Elsa earlier, in bed half naked.

Linda had trouble imagining a man such as Lucas being the least bit threatening, except maybe where business was concerned. Elsa wasn’t business to him but she was something that he would protect because he obviously cared about her. Linda didn’t miss the gentle and affectionate way he handled Elsa and knew that he was genuine in his feelings toward her.

She could understand why Lucas would be threatening to Ted over Elsa, especially in the way Ted had got her to go with him. Tricking her like that. Somehow the Tanya thing just didn't fit in all of this. She was adamant in stopping Elsa from seeing Lucas, but she wasn't a real threat, because nobody believed her ludicrous ranting. But what if Lucas thought that someone took her seriously? Would he actually go that far? Who would believe such a story? Unless some of it was really true. Linda silently shuddered. What if Lucas saw Tanya as a greater threat than Ted and had something done to her. She shook her head, impossible. People like Lucas Edwards never would bother with such ridiculous events. He was in the tabloids often and the stories there were much worse and those journalists are still around. Also, there were a lot of people at Lucas' that night and that meant a lot of witnesses. It would be too risky, even for him. She glanced down at the crimson stains on the blanket once more. One thing was for sure, whatever was going on, she was sure Lucas Edwards was a part of it and she was going to find out exactly what.

Jason's humor hadn't faded in the few minutes that Lucas had went and retrieved Elsa. His smile said as much. He greeted them both as he opened the door for them.

Lucas gave him a sheepish grin before he got in the car causing him to roar with laughter after he shut the door.

Elsa's head lay on Lucas' chest as he silently caressed her silken tresses. She smiled to herself, something wonderful was happening to her. She could feel her body changing. She didn't know why, she only knew that it was because of Lucas. She wasn't sure if this was normal when you give yourself to someone or not. If it was, she could definitely get used to it. She felt so drawn and powerfully connected to him as if nothing else mattered.

Lucas could feel her contentment. For the first time in his

immortal life he was finding himself in love.

He looked down at the top of her head, watching his hand brush through her glorious ebony hair, deep in thought. He knew what he was risking. Both of their lives were at stake. He soon expected a visit from Valear to deal with his loose ends. He would have to tell her tonight. She already knew there was something different about him. She just wasn't able to accept it yet. Also, she did love him. He knew that. So she was blinded from the obvious. She was making excuses for his differences. Just because she wasn't with another man before him, she was using that to blind her to his unusual talents. He knew that if he didn't tell her tonight, Valear would be back soon to deal with the both of them.

Every Vampire was afraid of death because they had forsaken God to be immortal; they only have the dark knowledge that when they are destroyed there is no place left to go but obliqueness...blackness, or nothingness as some say. There was no doubt that he actually feared telling her what he was, more than he feared death. He would be lost in eternity without her if she were to refuse him.

When the car pulled up to the front doors, he helped Elsa out of the car and took her by the hand into the house. Without a word he led her up to his room. When she followed him through the door, he turned around and locked it.

She stared at his hand as he turned a key in the lock and put it in his pocket, "Lucas?"

He regretted the look of confusion and suspiciousness that crossed her beautiful face. "I'm sorry Elsa, but I can't have you leave, until you hear me out."

She slowly nodded a twinge of fear went through her. He was so grave in his expression that it began to alarm her.

"Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you." Although she was fearful of his sudden seriousness, her eyes were still full of trust.

She gave him an unsure smile, “okay.”

“I know you suspect something different with me, but you’re not quite sure what it is.” He sighed forcing himself to continue, “The difficulty you have distinguishing dream from reality are my doing. They aren’t dreams, they are actually real.”

“What?” She tilted her head at him in confusion, “Lucas...I..”

“I *was* in your dorm room earlier before I knocked on the door. We were making love, then Linda interrupted us.”

She suddenly felt cold, “What? How?”

“It was a good thing that she did.” He paused again, but this time she just stared at him, confused. “I find everything that defines what I am literally shatters when I’m near you. I have no idea how you do it. I don’t think you do either, but regardless, it happens.”

He reached up and undid his tie and as he talked he continued to remove his jacket and shirt until he stood in front of her with the bare upper half of his muscular form showing. “You never really believed me when I told you how I felt because of my reputation in the media, but tonight I’m going to give you undisputed reasons why I’m devoted to you.” He reached behind her and took something out of his beside table.

“Lucas, what are you talking about?” An odd apprehension started to creep through her. Something was wrong.

“I want you to know that I’m not trying to purposely frighten you. So, it’s very important that you pay attention.” The look on her face was so vulnerable at that moment that he nearly considered not going through with his plan. Regardless, tonight it had to be done. She had to know.

Her eyes widened, and her voice was barely a whisper. “Lucas you *are* frightening me”

“Listen, I lied to you about being twenty-four. I’m actually older than that...much older.” He showed her what he’d taken from the drawer. It was a dagger with at least an eight inch shaft,

“I’m sorry, but I can’t explain it any other way but this.” Suddenly without any warning to her he flipped it around and thrust it into his abdomen.

Elsa screamed and grabbed at his hands. He released the hilt. It protruded out of his gut. She continued to scream in horror “*Oh my God! Lucas!*”

“Elsa.”

She stopped and looked up at him. A wave of icy reality washed over her as she saw that his face remained sympathetic as he gazed at her. There was no sign of pain. Then he pulled the knife out and stood back a few feet from her with his hands at his sides and closed his eyes. She felt her legs turn to complete jelly as the wound in his abdomen healed before her eyes, “Lucas....wha....? Then everything faded to black.

Lucas swore, dropped the dagger and caught her before she hit the floor. It was the only way to prove to her what he was. There weren’t any words that could convince her. He gently laid her on his bed and sat down beside her. She was beautiful, and watching the slow rise and fall of her chest as she lay unconscious on his bed pulled his emotions. She belonged here, with him. His hand stroked her cheek, “Elsa.”

She opened her eyes after a few minutes with his coaxing. Suddenly remembering where she was and what she saw, her eyes shot wide and she scrambled to the opposite edge of the bed all the while staring at him in disbelief and shaking her head silently.

“There’s no reason to be afraid of me.” His expression was pained and his voice was as gentle as he could make it.

“Sweet God, Lucas...!” Her eyes watered up as they darted from the area in his abdomen that was now free of any evidence that he stabbed himself, then back to his face. “This just can’t be real!”

“Elsa, I have told you that there is more to me than I could

possibly tell you.”

She paled and he was worried she might faint again.

He kept talking to try and keep her focused, “I was injured in a war in the fourteenth century. It was a war that wasn’t even worth documenting.” He nodded toward his sword that was mounted on the wall. “That sword you caressed with your fingers the first night we were together was one I shed blood with so many times in my century.”

Elsa put her hands over her ears to block out his voice. She didn’t want to hear this. The man she was in love with was a fraud, he was crazy. However, his voice was able to reach her despite her efforts.

“I’m not crazy Elsa, “ He read her thoughts, “I was lying in a pool of my own blood. I couldn’t move. Paralyzed by another man’s sword thrust in my chest. I didn’t die right away. I lay dying slowly as night fell. I remember that the moon was full that night, as I prayed to God to end my life. All around me I could hear the horror of voices of the dying men, some of them just boys wanting to prove their manhood. There were so many of us, Elsa, just dying....”

“Stop it Lucas! Please!” She pleaded as tears continued to stream down her cheeks.

As painful as it was for him to see her this way, he still had to continue, “A shadow blocked my view of the moon that night. I thought it was the face of death coming to claim me. I thought my prayers were answered, but I was wrong. ”

Elsa stopped trying to block out his words, now she was listening, tears still falling from her eyes.

“I told him I would go with him. I’d lost a lot of blood and was quite delirious by then. Only it wasn’t death. “

“What are you trying to tell me?” She spoke through her tear stained face.

He paused for a moment taking in the sight of her. He knew

he was the cause of her hurt, but he had to finish it. She had to know everything, "I am immortal."

Elsa shook her head in disbelief. Ripples of fear washed through her, "That's *impossible*." She whispered. Her hands covered her mouth in shock.

He grabbed her trembling hand placing it on his chest, "There is no mortal life in this body, Elsa. I have been this way for seven hundred years."

"*Seven hundred years*...How could I have not noticed?" She stared at him

"Because you chose not to. Part of you knew what I was, just not the extent of it."

"This can't be happening!"

"You are in love with me." He reminded her calmly although his insides were in turmoil.

"No." she said quietly, her voice trembling.

"You loved me then, and you still love me now! Don't deny it Elsa; I can feel your inner torment. I know that hasn't changed."

She stared at him, "What are you?"

"I am what you mortals refer to as a Vampire."

She shook her head in denial. A small sound of terror escaped her parted lips. Her hand came up to the small marks on her neck, "*You?*" she accused. The shocking reality hit and her insides turned icy cold. There was no doubt he was telling the truth. All the evidence was there, in front of her. This man who managed to make her love him in less than a week, wasn't a man at all.

"I cannot help what I am Elsa, but I can promise you that no harm will come to you. Do not fear me. You have given me something, I didn't realize was missing. I can show you so much, if you give me the chance."

"Are you going to kill me?" She was still touching the marks

on her neck.

He felt a stab of pain at her words, “No.” He could see that she was visibly trembling. “That is the last thing I want and I would die first.”

“Then, what do you want from me?” her voice was barely a whisper.

He reached over and cupped her chin, and to his surprise, she didn’t flinch, “I’ve never felt as complete as I have with you. I need you to be with me. I want you Elsa, by my side.”

“How can that be?” he was undead, she wasn’t.

“For eternity.” He added sincerely while locking his gaze with hers.

“But, how....when you’re...” She gasped, “But that would mean...!”

“...think of the power Elsa!” he interrupted. “The freedom! I can preserve your beauty forever. You will never age.”

She started to protest again and he interrupted her, “You must remember, you have nothing in this world now. Except me! Think of it! Everyone you love is gone.” He watched the tears flow again and felt the fight within her and he continued, “All you have to do is ask and I would lay down my life for you. I’ve existed for seven hundred years in this state and I have never felt this way. There is something beyond our control here Elsa. We belong together.”

“Lucas....I...”

“Tell me you love me.”

More tears fell.

“Tell me!” he demanded.

She looked up at him with her emerald gaze full of anguish, and then she turned her head away, slowly nodding.

He gathered her into his arms and held her tight as she wept, “I will protect you Elsa. Nothing will hurt you anymore. I will give you anything you want or desire. Anything you want to

make you mine!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

JACK SAT ON the side of his bed. The red-head lay beside him. The sun set some time ago, yet she still hadn't awoken. It was because of the fight in her, she was fighting what she had become. She would lose of course. This was a dark force that could not be reckoned with. It always won.

Just as the thoughts crossed his mind, her eyes shot open. She could not comprehend where she was or what had happened to her. All she knew was the powerful urge to feed. The raw cramping hunger was unmistakable as it possessed her dark soul.

“Hello darling.” Jack watched her as she quickly leapt out of the bed and glanced around the unfamiliar surroundings. He mind racing with confusion. She didn't quite know what she was looking for.

Jack got up from the bed and walked toward her, “I have given you a gift.”

Another cramping pain took her and she snarled, clutching her midsection.

“I see that you are hungry, my dear.” He began to roll up his sleeve.

“You!” She hissed in response.

“It will take some time getting use to your new life Tanya, but you will be fine.” He swiped his long fingernail across the bared flesh of his wrist. The crimson liquid began to flow freely from the wound, “You now know who your new master is Tanya.”

Her bright blue eyes darted to his arm with an unmistakable look of hunger.

Drink

He only needed to give her the permission and she was there. Down on her knees before him, savoring the life giving

nectar.

He stopped her before she was completely finished.

She whined and hissed at him in response.

“Don’t worry, Darling, there will be more. I can’t give you all I have, it would weaken me.” He knelt down in front of her. “I think I’m going to enjoy having you on my side.” His hand ran a path down her throat. “You are beautiful in this form.” Jack had several brides already. He kept them all in line and enjoyed them greatly. Only Lucas was fool enough to let Celeste get independent, even though she served him well before she disappeared. It didn’t take Jack long to figure out that it had to have something to do with Lucas. Only he would have the power to destroy her, and considering Lucas’ affection for Celeste, there had to be a damn good reason. Really, there was only one. He had a new bride. Jack had always been able to manipulate Celeste. That is how he always knew Lucas’ next move. Only when Lucas had set Celeste aside, could he no longer figure out what he was up to. He grinned, now he had Tanya, the key to Lucas’ love. Jack stared at the flaming beauty in front of him. He reached his hand behind her back and pulled the strings of her hospital gown, letting it fall gently to the floor. “Do you know who I am?”

Tanya nodded.

“You do as I say, Tanya, and you will be rewarded.” He reached for her.

“I have to go Lucas, this is too much.....”

“Stay.” He said softly

She sobbed, “I can’t.”

He took her head in his hands and kissed her tears tenderly, “Stay with me.” He repeated.

Her emerald eyes were full of sorrow when she settled them on his, “I...”

“I *love* you Elsa...” He confessed and kissed another tear, “Don’t leave me, I *need* you.”

She stared at him as the last remnants of her resistance faded at his tender words. His expression was full of raw emotion for her, and she knew he told the truth. She found her arms suddenly around his neck and he embraced her as she melted against him.

Lucas held Elsa while she wept. He managed to guide her back lying down on the bed and was glad that she didn’t hesitate when he urged her back in next to him. It was done. She knew. There were no secrets between them, save one. Tanya. She rested her head on his shoulder as he spoke to her of his devotion to her. She stopped crying and he knew she was listening.

“Lucas?” She said softly.

“Yes love?”

She raised herself up and looked at him, “Why me?” She was a nobody. Not popular in school, not famous and out of all the women, why her?

“You are not a *nobody*.”

Her eyes widened, “Stop that.” She stared at him for a moment, “You can read my mind?”

“Only certain thoughts.” He studied her beautiful face with unveiled affection, “Thoughts that aren’t hidden too deeply and the more intelligent the person, the more hindered they are. You are very intelligent, so I can only read what I call ‘surface thoughts’. They appear in the moment that you ponder them. The deepest memories you have remain hidden unless I am there when you recall them.”

“So you know everything about how I feel about you, my doubts and...other things I’ve thought...” She blushed unable to continue.

“Yes.”

Her mouth fell open in a silent gasp at his confession. The

hospital, the art auction, and all the times she was alone with him, he knew what she was thinking at that time. The women that she seethed over when they went shopping, he knew what she was thinking. “That’s terrible, and unfair.”

He shook his head, “I know you think that, but your thoughts are not the least bit as horrible as you think they are, especially if you knew what I’ve heard and seen in my time. Your mind is intelligent, honest, selfless, and like the rest of you, beautiful.”

“Enough Lucas.”

He managed to smile tenderly at her, “I can’t help it.” His hand reached up and brushed the long curls off her beautiful face, “I must admit, I have nothing on you despite what you think. You are very gifted. You have no idea what your potential is in my form, as you are now, you can captivate me with just a nod of your head, and I would do your every bidding. You alone could either make or destroy my kind as you are.”

“That’s not true.” She looked shocked.

“Yes, it is.”

“How?”

“Because of how I feel. I can’t begin to imagine my life without you, Elsa. I have been alone these past seven hundred years and was quite content. You made me realize how alone I really was. How could I walk this earth another seven hundred without you when I’ve been introduced to such a beautiful, pure creature, such as yourself?”

Her cheeks pinked up again, “You’re telling me you haven’t had anyone for that long?”

“No, there have been plenty of companions, just not what you have to offer. You have awakened something in me that I refuse to let sleep. I feel alive; I can’t deny myself that again.”

“How many is plenty?” Her eyes narrowed in jealousy.

He’d forgotten how old she was sometimes because she

radiated such maturity beyond her years. He laughed, “obviously too many for your liking.”

“Obviously.” She droned. Then she thought to bring up Linda’s confession. “Linda told me what she did that night of your party.”

“I thought she might.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“She’s your friend. If I confessed something like that, you would have been more upset with me, and that would have dampened my chances of winning you. To you, friendship was more important than me at that time. Now, it isn’t.”

“You know this from reading my thoughts?”

“No, I know this from knowing your loyalty to your friends.”

She bit her bottom lip for a moment absorbing his words. He was probably right. She might have even stepped aside and let Linda have him if she wanted him, “She said you didn’t want her.”

“I didn’t.” He made a face of distaste, but didn’t let her see it.

“She’s beautiful Lucas.”

“No, you are beautiful, she is just a woman who has a shapely figure, knows which fashions to wear, how to put on makeup and what mortal men desire in personality. You on the other hand, are natural, trustworthy, kind and utterly, irrevocably desirable without even lifting one single eyebrow in a man’s direction. There are thousands of Linda’s in the world, but only one of you.”

“Do you really think that?”

“Elsa, I’m already hard with wanting you again, and you have done nothing to provoke it.” He saw her blush. “It’s true, yes.”

“I was so hurt when she told me what she did.” She laid her head back down on his chest. “I wasn’t sure if she told me the

truth about you not wanting her, just to save my feelings that you did. Then she begged me to forgive her and told me you threw her away from you.”

“She was drunk, and it influenced her confidence of thinking she was desirable enough for me to want her. She was wrong. I asked her to stop, she wouldn’t, I pushed her out of my way, and she landed on my bed, unhurt....actually not even upset at the rejection come to think of it.”

“Why did you push her?”

He smirked, “She was trying to remove my clothes. I wouldn’t let her.”

Elsa’s head shot up, “She what!”

He chuckled at her blast of anger towards Linda, and reached out to caress her jaw with the back of his hand, “She was drunk...really drunk. Don’t be angry at her baby, there was no harm done.”

“No wonder she was begging for my forgiveness.” She seethed. “She had no right! You are mine.”

“Now that’s what I want to hear!” He grabbed her and crushed his mouth against hers in an unforgiving passionate all-telling kiss. Her sudden possessiveness elated him. She constantly balanced back and forth between him, her friends, and her career. She just released Linda from her loyalties, over the betrayal. When he pulled her back she looked thoroughly dazed, but he still held her face in his hands. His eyes searched hers, “You shouldn’t ever worry about other women. When you chose to be with me...” He felt her tremble, “...and I pray you chose to. I will show you such amazing things, desires, and ecstasy that you will not regret it.”

“Is it all really different?”

“You have no idea.” He met her gaze, “What awaits us.”

She stiffened towards him at her knew found realizations. Why should it matter? He’d never harmed her. He told her it

was her choice. If anything he'd shown her so much about herself. More than she'd ever known in all her nineteen years she'd learned in the past few days. Imagine what an eternity would be like with this man. He was so tender, patient and constantly urged her to discover her own desires. The horrible truth was, what would her life be without him? She couldn't go back. Not to that drabness, not to that life where she was always invisible. She allowed herself to be consumed by others' ambitions of her. It wasn't what she wanted. She wanted Lucas. "I'm scared."

"Elsa," his hand stroked through her hair in complete adoration, "Never, would I intentionally frighten you again."

She stared at him a moment, "You really mean that."

"Yes, I do."

Her hand came up and touched the puncture marks on her neck while they continued to stare at each other. "Will it hurt?"

"It might."

She winced a little at the thought, "How does it happen?"

"I don't want to frighten you because it sounds quite gory, but it's not really. I'll explain it to you later, when you've had more time to think about this."

She nodded, "Okay." She swallowed, "You mentioned you had a father. Is he...I mean..."

He smiled and answered her awkward question, "Yes, he is."

"And you'll sure he'll like me?"

"He's already seen you. He likes you."

Her eyes widened, "When?"

"He insisted on seeing you when he sensed an emotion in me. It was that night in the hospital. He approves, trust me."

"What do you mean *sensed*?"

"The best way I can explain this is that we are all linked like a spider web. The strings form rings around the center with long strings originating at the center and touching every ring as they

spread outwards.” He explained, “Valear sits at the center of the web that links all the strings. I sit on the next ring down, and the rest of my kind sits on the outside of mine. When one of us has a change in our emotional state or has something traumatic happen, like die...Valear senses it immediately. It may take me a little longer depending on where my proximity is to the source of the event, but eventually I feel it. Valear felt the emotion that you evoked in me. He insisted on meeting the object of my infatuation.”

“I don’t remember.”

“He made you forget, we have that power.”

“Oh. Like hypnotizing?”

“It’s more powerful than that. We can change memories, insert them. Make people bend to our will with barely a thought.”

As she absorbed his words and expression of dread dawned her expression. “Do you mean that dream...my first night with you and I together was...”

“I told you I was sorry.”

“Lucas, you made me think that...” She instantly felt betrayed. Was any of that real? Did he influence her whole emotional state, and make it seem like it was so amazing?

“Wait a minute,” He interrupted as he read her thoughts, “I only started it...the rest was you and all of it was real!” he defended immediately, “It was the only time I ever did that to you.” He confessed, “I couldn’t help it. You’re body was so warm and you are so beautiful. Having you lay next to me was too much to bear. My resistance splintered.”

“Really?” She smiled slowly.

“I wouldn’t lie about that. I had enough trouble keeping my hands off you as it was. To admit that a vampire such as myself lost control is not an easy thing to own up to.”

She swallowed again, but this time there was interest in her

voice, "Tell me more Lucas please."

"This may take awhile." He confessed. Hearing the fascination in her voice made him happy. The fact that she was interested made him know that her fear was fading.

"I don't care. I have nothing but time with you tonight." She said sincerely.

He kissed her forehead, "Alright, love, anything you wish."

Her hand traced the area on his abdomen where he stabbed himself, "Does that hurt when it happens?"

"No. It's more of a discomfort, like stubbing your toe."

"Does anything cause you pain?"

He looked at her, "Losing you would cause me an enormous amount."

"Lucas...I meant..."

He smiled, "I know what you meant, but it's true. Emotional pain is more severe for us. We aren't an emotional race. You could've twisted that knife in my gut and it wouldn't have touched what I feel when you're away from me."

She was stunned at his confession, "I feel something too." She admitted.

His brows rose, "Really?"

She nodded, "It's like terrible hunger pains, like you haven't eaten all day. Then..." she closed her eyes recalling the memories, "...when we're together, there's this pulsing...electrical feeling that is so consuming, it's hard for me to think about anything else but you."

"Now *I'm* intrigued."

"Why?"

"Because, Elsa, that is not a human characteristic, it's an *inhuman* one." Suddenly it dawned on him, something made sense. He sat up, and spoke his thoughts out loud, "Now I know what Valear was referring to."

She sat up beside him, "What do you mean?"

He turned to her, his eyes flared with a new knowledge, “He *knows* you. That was what I sensed off him that night.”

“but I don’t know anyone named Valear.”

“Regardless, Elsa, he does know you.”

“What does he look like?” Maybe she’s seen him before.

Lucas shook his head, “Oh no, I can’t explain that to you. He’s quite....horrifying to look at. It’s something you wouldn’t forget if you’d ever seen him and been aware of it.”

“Oh.” She involuntarily shivered.

He smiled at her, “you don’t need to fear him. Remember that.”

She looked away for a moment thinking before turning back, “You said he sits in the middle of the web.”

“Yes.”

“Why do you sit on the next level, and every other of your kind sits on the lower levels?”

“None of us knows how it works, but Valear is the most powerful of us. Not only can he control minds, he can control weather, sinking ships and toppling buildings if he wants. This is just a couple of things that he is capable of. I’ve seen him crush another like me without touching him.”

Her mouth fell open, “Lucas that’s terrifying.”

“There was good reason for it, trust me.”

“But...”

“Elsa, there is no excuse for senseless slaughter of your kind. He was in a sense, protecting your race and that’s all I will tell you. It wouldn’t do you any good to know everything at this point.” In fact this particular Vampire, enjoyed the blood of children. It became so rampant that several dozen were disappearing a week and Valear had warned him, but the Vampire craved the taste of children more than he feared Valear. He didn’t want her to know that Vampires kill children. He didn’t need anymore strikes against him for her to refuse being

with him.

“Okay.” She nodded, “I guess it’s probably really bad.”

“worse than you could possibly imagine.” Lucas continued telling her about Valear, “He is very ancient. No one knows how old and I’ve never asked. When Valear changes someone...like me, I also become powerful, but less powerful than Valear.”

“Why is that?”

“No one knows. It’s just the way things are. Now, if I were to transform someone...”

“...Like me.” She offered, trying not to tremble.

“If you wish Elsa, like you. You would have less abilities than what I have and so on.”

“But you said you were on the next level...”

“...I’m getting to that, love, be patient.” To her surprise she actually gave him a partial smile.

“Sorry.”

“Valear changed me. I’m the last of the ones he’s taken. The others are changed from other vampires less powerful.”

“How could you be the last?”

“Valear killed them all, but me.”

Her face registered shock, “Why?”

“Valear is the true King of us all, and the others vied for the power that he possessed. I never did. He has always been true to me and I him. I would never betray him. He knows this.”

She looked away from him for a moment while thinking before she brought her gaze back to him, “You make it sound like he needs you for some purpose. Why would he?”

“He does need me to take over his reign some day. It’s no secret among us...the Association, is what we call our race. Therefore, I’ve enemies. Others that wish to remove me from that throne.”

“But you said you were more powerful than them.”

“I am, but with the right numbers and the right strategy,

they may win. Now you know why I have tried to protect you from all of this. If they find out about you, they won't hesitate." He paused for a moment, knowing the next part may send her running from him, "Elsa I need you to listen carefully, Valear has given me a week to make you mine, after that he will be dealing with you and me." He added gravely.

"Oh my God Lucas! How long do I have left?"

"Two days."

"That's not long enough." She stood up and looked at him in protest.

"I know." He agreed.

"I haven't made up my mind."

He stood to face her, "No?" His hands came up and cupped her face while his violet eyes saw into her mind, "You have so."

She stared at him, "That's not fair when you do that."

"I can't help it. It's as if you speak your thoughts out loud." He paused before he spoke again knowing that this would be especially difficult for her, "Elsa, you must leave this life behind."

"Linda and Tanya?"

"You have to let them go. How can you explain it when they grow old, and you haven't?" Tanya was gone, but he wasn't ready to tell her that and she was too vulnerable to hear it.

"I have to say goodbye to my friends?" she sat down on the bed again, "I don't think I can do that."

"You have less than forty-eight hours Elsa." He knelt down before her and took her hands, "There is no turning back for me. I need to make that clear." Tanya was gone. The rebels were already plotting against them and Valear would not change his mind.

Her expression held complete raw emotion for him. He'd been honest despite the risk of her leaving him forever. She knew she could only see a fraction of the anguish he'd had to deal with by struggling with his affection for her. Would another

mortal male be able to love her as much as he professed to her? She already knew the answer to that question. Here was this indestructible, immortal being kneeling before her with his heart in his hands and telling her his existence was over without her. Her eyes welled up again. Whatever apprehension, fear or disbelief she had dissolved in that moment. She leaned forward and pressed her face into his neck and kneeled down in front of him, "I understand Lucas. To be with you, I will do as you ask." She sniffed fighting the tears that threatened to fall.

He embraced her as tight as he could without crushing her.

Ted was half asleep when the loud rapping woke him up. He crawled out of bed and opened the door.

"Mornin' gorgeous!"

He rolled his eyes teasingly, "It figures." Ted gave Linda a quick kiss.

She walked in his dorm and looked down at his half naked form, "If I knew you looked like that in your boxer shorts, I would have been knocking more often."

He gave her a wry smile and pulled on a pair of Levis. He didn't bother putting a shirt on, "I thought you didn't get up before noon?"

"I don't." She reminded herself why she was there. Seeing him standing half naked before her made her forget herself, "Ted, there's a problem."

"I have been trying to tell you that since I met you." He jested.

"I'm serious. I went to the hospital to see if Tanya had come to her senses and was willing to tell me the truth. Well...She wasn't there. The Doctor told me she left, upset because no one would believe her story."

"That's understandable, we all acted like she was crazy." He

justified.

“Yes, for anyone else, but Tanya is not like that. She would still try and convince us. You don’t know her, she doesn’t give up. I think someone took her.”

“Who?”

“I don’t know. I do know that the last place she was seen was at the hospital. The one Lucas Edwards owns.”

Ted stared at her for a moment, “I see, so now you are going to listen to us about that man.”

Linda looked away a little ashamed, “I just found it hard to believe at that time that he could be involved. I mean, look at him, he is virtually untouchable. He’s rich, he’s popular and handsome....”

“...I get it.” He interrupted.

She laughed. She would have never considered that he would display jealousy, “I mean,” she continued despite his look of chagrin, “I just can’t believe he would do that. Look at all the charities that he’s involved in.”

“I saw something different.” He sat down on his bed, remembering the frightening confrontation he had with him in the bar. “I can’t get that look out of my mind. It haunts my dreams at night Linda. I swear it wasn’t my imagination. What I saw couldn’t have been human. That, and Tanya’s story, as farfetched as it was, made me think again about what I saw.”

Linda shook her head in disbelief. “But this is the Lucas Edwards. He’s always on T.V., in the tabloids....it just can’t be possible.”

“You heard Tanya. Where would she get such lies? She couldn’t possibly think that you would believe her if she made that up. She was desperate for you to believe her. You know her better than I do. Would she be able to think she could get away with this story if it was false?”

“but all this talk about a monster from her....it’s just so

farfetched.”

“I don’t know about monsters, but there is something very odd about that man.”

Linda began to pace in front of him, “Well, that’s it then.”

“What is?”

She stopped and looked at him. “I can’t leave Elsa to him. I encouraged her to be with him. She left with him early this morning and I don’t think she has any plans on returning. I might have just done something terribly wrong. I can’t let it go until I find out some truth in all of this.” Linda told him about the events in the early hours of the morning. How she’d found Elsa after Ted had walked her home. How Lucas suddenly showed up and about the blood stains, “She’s just been acting so strange lately, it’s not like her. Maybe the blood was nothing. I mean, she could have cut herself, or something.”

“...Or something.” Ted added.

Linda walked over to the window staring out into the daylight, “What if he hurts her?”

“wouldn’t he have done that already?” Ted stood and went to her, putting his arms around her waist from behind, looking out the window also.

She laid her head back against him, “What if he was saving her for something?”

“Saving her for what?”

“I don’t know, but I need to find out.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

JASON THUMBED THROUGH the daily edition of the L.A. Times looking for the one particular article. He knew it was in there somewhere and was thankful when he found it on the second to last page on a gossip column of sorts. *It’s a pity*. He knew Emily had more talent than that regardless of her first

newscast being pitiful. He chuckled. Her pictures apparently didn't turn out, because the one she did have of him, was an old one of him leaving a hotel in New York. It was six months old. *Lucas will be content.*

Emily sat on her couch thumbing through the photographs. She should have known better, the room was too dark and despite the cost of her camera it wasn't made for such darkened areas. Now she didn't have any camera. Hers still lay in a crumpled pile on her coffee table. She didn't report it to the police. What was the use? She knew who was responsible. She left it there to make her angry. She placed her feet on the table and punted the crumpled ball onto the floor with a *thunk*. She wasn't going to stop pursuing her story. She wanted to be a columnist, not a reporter and Lucas Edwards was the key. She was offered the story because she had been able to get invited to one of his rare shindigs only she'd blown it. On top of everything she still didn't know where this woman was that he was so infatuated with, except her name. He shouldn't have made this personal, but he did. The bastard went through her apartment and nosed through her personal things. She knew it wasn't Lucas Edwards, but his personal bodyguard. It had to be. He had that look and arrogance about him. It did cause her major curiosity on what he used to crumple up her laptop and camera. It had to have been some sort of portable metal crusher, but she had never heard of such a thing. Also, he had managed to shatter her door lock. The locksmith charged her two hundred bucks to fix it. She fumed again. She was definitely going to make Jason pay for this.

Now she wasn't going to give up. What could he possibly be hiding that he would have someone break into her home and destroy her laptop and camera? What did she discover that caused him to do that? Then it dawned on her. *The girl.*

It was raining late that afternoon when Ted and Linda arrived at Lucas' estate. The guard that stood in a small shelter at the gate, phoned ahead to the house while Linda and Ted sat patiently in her care.

"Do you think they'll let us in?" Ted was nervous about seeing Lucas again, and how he would receive him after what he did. Linda was reassuring in that when he sees that they are together now, he'll be fine.

"We should be allowed to see our friend." She smiled at him.

Before they knew it the big iron gates started to open and the guard was waving them through.

Linda was openly relieved, "well, at least we know she's not a prisoner." Her attempt at humor didn't work. She was still nervous about being there unannounced.

It was Jason that answered the door, "Good afternoon, Miss Stanten, Mr. Williams." He gave them a pleasant greeting.

Ted was still staring at the beautiful estate in awe. He'd never seen anything so magnificent. He spun his head around, "Uh, Yes...Hello."

Linda looked around the large foyer, it looked totally different without the guests from last week's extensive gathering. It looked so empty and almost eerie.

"Where's Elsa?" Ted asked.

"She will meet you in the library, " He swept his arm toward the direction they were to go."This way please."

They walked across the large room and down a wide hall. Their footsteps echoed ominously. Linda hadn't explore this part of the building , or if she did, she didn't remember. She had consumed a lot of liquor that night. The only real thing she remembered was making a play for Lucas and making a fool out of herself in the process.

Jason opened one of the two double doors and invited them

to enter, "I'll inform Miss Collins that you are here." He indicated to a glass decanter set on the table in the corner, "Help yourself to a drink, if you wish." He spared an amused glance at Linda before leaving.

Linda rolled her eyes, "Obviously Lucas confides in his bodyguard." She meant to say it to herself but Ted heard her.

"What would make you say that?"

She brushed it off, "It's nothing. Would you like a drink? I sure could use one."

Ted shook his head as Linda poured herself one. She took a sip as she stared about the room. *Talk about being tastefully decorated.* This particular library had books on shelves that reached up into a second story. There were spiral steps that led up to a wrap around balcony for the second floor. Each floor also had a wooden ladder that could swing on rails all the way around the three walls that the books were housed on. The fourth wall, where the entrance to the room was, consisted of authentic paintings of people that Linda assumed were Lucas' ancestors. One painting in particular caught her attention, "Ted come look at this."

Ted came up beside her, "What is it?"

"Look at that man in the kilt. Shave the beard and the mustache, and he could look like Lucas."

Ted tilted his head to study the painting, then slowly shook his head, "I don't see it."

"Maybe I was wrong." She turned away from it and took a long gulp from her glass.

Elsa sat in the chair that she had occupied the first night she had stayed with Lucas. The curtain on the bed was pulled back so she could see him sleeping. The room had an orange glow to it as a fire burned brightly. Lucas had lit it before he slept and Elsa just kept it up by feeding it wood. She had waited for him all day,

because she was unable to sleep, regardless of getting no sleep the night before. She stared at his peaceful sleeping form on the bed as the light from the fire reflected off his skin. He was so heart stopping even while sleeping. She felt the feelings of desire surge within her and tried to squelch it. He wasn't human. Her mind may be struggling with his confession, but her body didn't care who he was. She had so many more questions to ask him, but he'd succumbed to some strange trance-like sleep before she had a chance to and for the life of her she couldn't wake him. She stood and walked over to him staring down at his handsome face. How is it that someone who is so gentle, kill? She couldn't harm another for anything, but how could she go on without him? She turned and paced in frustration. How could this happen to her? *The first man I ever fall in love with is a Vampire.* She thought to herself. What about the things she had been going through, the surge of feelings and desire, her dream that wasn't a dream back in her dorm. He admitted he was capable of it. Also, she was changing. It was like she was just hazily moving through life for nineteen years and now the mist cleared. It was a strange and alluring sensation, that she couldn't describe. It made her feel different from other people. This wasn't because of the things Lucas had done to her, she was sure of it. It was from something else. Something deep inside her. She had already went through the terror and confusion over the decision she had to make. First she had to come to terms with what he had told her, that was the most difficult part and it took her the longest part of the day as Lucas slept. Now she must come to terms with what she wanted and needed. Lucas already knew her decision and for some reason, it brought her an amazing amount of relief.

A knock on the door interrupted her thoughts. She opened it to find Jason standing on the other side.

"May I come in?"

She didn't know what to expect from this man. Now that

she knew what Lucas was. What could Jason be? Was he a Vampire too? She found herself stepping back out of the way and letting him in.

Jason could see that she was apprehensive and from the whiff of adrenaline, a little frightened. Lucas must've told her. He walked by her and removed a light green cotton summer dress off his arm and laid it over a chair. He turned to her. She'd kept her distance and stayed by the door. "Miss Collins, there are visitors here to see you."

Elsa was surprised, "Who?"

"Linda Stanten and Ted..."

"Williams!" She interrupted with a smile. She never realized how tense she was.

He gave her a charming smile, pleased to see her spirits pick up. "I brought you something clean to wear, If you like. If you don't wish to wear this dress, I can call Sadira and..."

"...No..." She held her hands up "...Thank you."

Jason grinned, "I understand, she can be quite thorough, can't she?"

"Maybe just a little," she returned his smile although it was still uncertain. At least she was excited about seeing her friends after all what had happened the night before. It would take her mind off things. "Please don't go through any trouble. I don't want to bother you."

Jason chuckled, "Not at all, I do have spare time on my hands." He walked toward the door that she stood beside.

She took a step back without meaning to. She knew she looked frightened but couldn't help it.

Jason acted as if he didn't notice it, "If there is anything else you need, just ask."

"Well..." she paused as she turned and looked at Lucas, "I can't wake him."

"He will wake when the sun sets. Don't worry." He closed his

eyes and inhaled deeply, “Another four hours...give or take.” He opened his eyes and stared at her with the smile still on his face.

Elsa’s couldn’t hide her surprise.

Jason smiled reassuringly at her, “Sorry...habit. My senses allow me to know when the sun goes down. I’ve grown accustomed to it.”

Elsa’s surprise turned to awe, “You can tell when the sun sets?”

His voice was laced with respect when he answered her and his smile never faltered, “I apologize if I frightened you. My intention is the opposite.”

Elsa almost blushed. Jason was incredibly handsome, and when he smiled showing his perfectly straight white teeth, she was sure women would feel the same way she felt about Lucas when he smiled at her. Not only that he was utterly charming and for some odd reason she always felt from the first day that she met him that she could trust him, “You don’t frighten me Jason.”

He gave her another charming smile, “Let me rephrase that then, *we* don’t intend to frighten you.”

She managed another smile, “Thank you...for the reassurance...and the dress.”

Jason nodded, “I will wait outside the door to take you to your friends after you’ve changed.” He shut the door.

She walked over to the dress and picked it up, Jason’s words swimming in her mind. “It’s hard not to be frightened.” She said to herself.

Linda was on her third glass of brandy by the time Elsa walked through the door. So she had plenty of time to build up an attitude towards Lucas over Tanya’s disappearance.

Ted had asked her to slow down, but she wasn’t listening. So he made himself comfortable in a chair waiting while Linda began to rave about what a fool she was to believe that Lucas was such a gentleman.

When Elsa walked in Linda hardly recognized her. She was beautiful. It wasn't because of the way she wore her hair, or the lovely dress she was wearing. There was just something else that was different, she was radiant. She looked older than her nineteen years and held an air of belonging. Regardless of Linda's worry for her, she felt a stab of jealousy over Elsa's new found luxury and the fact that she fit in so well. She never considered that Elsa would fit in with Linda's crowd even better than she did.

Ted thought she was incredible. He didn't know why, but he couldn't take his eyes off her or find the words to speak.

Elsa smiled clearly relieved to see them. "I'm so glad you guys came. I could use the company of close friends."

Linda stepped forward, "Well you left so quickly the other night that I didn't really have a chance to say anything."

Elsa looked taken aback, "What would you say?" She didn't miss the accusation in her tone and didn't have the slightest idea where it came from.

"Well for one, I was going to ask you if you had any intention of returning." She swirled her glass of Brandy in her glass pretending to be interested in it.

Elsa shook her head, "I haven't decided yet. I'm not sure if I will return. Why?" she did her best to ignore Linda's accusing tone.

Before she could stop herself she said, "Well, I need to know what do with your stuff and I would like to know if I need to find a new roommate."

"Linda!" Ted stood up seeing the words sting Elsa and register on her expression, "I've think you've said enough." He had no idea what got into her. He honestly didn't think she could be so hateful.

Linda turned her venom on him, "Oh, you think so don't you. You always did want her didn't you?"

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Ted turned his eyes toward Elsa then looked away, embarrassed. He saw the look of awareness dawn on her face and then she blushed. He wished there was a hole he could crawl into.

“That’s what I thought,” She accused. It was almost as if someone else were saying the words. She didn’t know where her anger was coming from and couldn’t stop herself, “Only you settled for second best.”

Ted was able to collect himself, “I don’t know what has gotten into you Linda.” He walked toward her, ”but things are different now. “

When Linda turned toward him, her anger suddenly vanished. She felt like weeping as she stared in to his brown eyes. “Oh...God...I don’t know.” It was like she was under a strange spell.

“What has gotten into you?” Elsa’s voice interrupted them.

Linda returned her attention to her and with it the anger and jealousy resurfaced, “Why don’t you go ask your boyfriend.”

“What?” Elsa felt a cold chill seep through her. *What does she know?*

Linda didn’t miss Elsa’s expression, “Did you see her face Ted? She knows something about him.”

Elsa masked her surprise quickly and became defensive. Her eyes narrowed, “How much have you had to drink?”

“You’re going to blame this on my drinking Elsa? I thought you had better morals than that.”

Elsa took a deep breath to try and calm the rising anger, “You came all the way out here to lecture me on my education and my relationship?”

“No.” Ted spoke before Linda answered, ”Regardless of Linda’s accusations, she did want to see if you were okay. This wasn’t the way it was supposed to be. She really is worried about you Elsa.”

Elsa's face softened, "Linda, you shouldn't worry. I'm a big girl," she tried to manage a smile, "I can take care of myself. I have all my life, this isn't going to change."

"Where's Lucas?" Linda still couldn't keep the accusatory tone out of her voice.

Elsa's eyes narrowed, "Why are you so interested in my life all of a sudden. It was you who told me to throw it all away for him."

"Because of the strange way you have been acting."

Linda's accusations hadn't diminished regardless of Ted's reassurances

Elsa snapped, "why are you being such a witch!"

"It's better than acting like a tramp!" Linda spat back.

"Linda!" Ted stepped forward and grabbed her arm, "I think you have said just about enough."

It was then that Elsa growled.

"What the hell was *that*?" Ted directed his attention towards Elsa.

"It was *her*!" Linda pointed an accusing finger at her.

Ted stared at her, "Jesus Elsa, you did that?"

Elsa's mouth fell open in shock. That couldn't possibly come from her. It was inhuman. She slapped her hands over her mouth. Elsa shook her head in response to Ted's question, not wanting to uncover her mouth.

Linda's expression changed to concern, "Elsa you have to get out of here. He's turning you into a monster just like him."

Elsa's eyes watered as she spoke softly, "Lucas is no monster Linda."

It was Ted's turn, "You've changed Elsa, " He couldn't say what he really felt around her. If she said that she wanted him, he would have taken her right there and then regardless of Linda standing beside him. The sexuality she emitted was devastating. "You're going to end up like him. If you're afraid, we can help

you.”

Elsa grew angry, “All my life, I had to listen to people like you tell me what to do. Now I’m making my own decisions. I’m not leaving. And another thing...this *change* isn’t Lucas’ doing. Don’t blame him for it”

“...but Elsa...” Linda pleaded.

“Linda, you don’t know anything and what you think you know is completely wrong! I think you two had better leave.” She forced the tears back hoping neither one of them noticed. Lucas was right she had made her choice and she had to say goodbye to her friends.

“You don’t understand...” Ted tried again only to be interrupted.

“...What makes you think I don’t understand?” She focused her angry gaze on him.

It was Linda’s turn to look taken aback. How could she possibly stay with him if she knew what he was? It couldn’t be possible. Elsa wasn’t that type of person. Although she has changed considerably since she met Lucas. Linda was about to confront her on the last question when the door suddenly swung open and a man entered with a huge dog at his heels. Linda gaped when she saw the beast.

Gabriel spoke in his language, “*Is there a problem?*” He stared at Elsa.

Even though she didn’t know what he said, she understood him perfectly, “No, Gabriel. My friends were just leaving.”

Linda tried once more, “Elsa, you have to listen to us.”

The wolf left Gabriel’s side and padded over to Elsa, putting himself in between her and Linda. It’s yellow eyes focused unmistakably on Linda.

Elsa stepped back in surprise.

Linda felt as if the thing was warning her not come any closer. *Jesus! That thing is protecting her.* She looked up at Elsa,

who looked as surprised as she was.

Ted took her by the arm, "Linda we have to go."

"We can't just leave her," Linda protested.

"I don't think you understand, Linda, she doesn't *want* to come." He stared at her, his expression serious.

Regardless of what Lucas was, Linda had to come with the terms that Elsa was choosing to stay there for now. She still wasn't going to leave until she had a chance to convince her. She tried one last time, "Why don't you ask your boyfriend about Tanya."

"We weren't going to tell her." Ted and Linda agreed ahead of time not to trouble her until they found out more. Now Ted watched Elsa's expression change to surprise. If this was the effect Linda wanted, she succeeded.

"What do you mean?"

Ted still managed to pull Linda past Gabriel and out the door.

Elsa followed them long enough to hear Linda say, "Ask him where she is, because no one else knows." Linda turned and followed Ted down the hall.

Elsa stood and watched them leave she then turned to Gabriel, "Where is Jason?"

Gabriel gestured his arm in the direction that Ted and Linda had gone.

Jason had heard them coming before Gabriel opened the door and let her in and closed it softly behind her. He stood up when she entered, "Elsa?" He knew by the look on her face that this wasn't a friendly visit. She was very upset.

"Where is Tanya?"

"She's not here." Jason replied honestly. "She left the night before last."

"Then where is she?" She lifted her chin defiantly.

“I’m sorry. I can’t tell you that.” He stated truthfully.

Elsa’s eyes widened, “So, it’s true.”

“No, it’s not true. Lucas had nothing to do with what had happened to your friend.”

“No?”

“I am telling the truth. He wouldn’t risk hurting you by hurting those you love.” Jason walked toward her and she responded by taking a step back. He stopped, “Please do not fear me.” He reminded her. He walked up to her and she didn’t move this time.

“What happened to her? Is she okay?”

Jason shook his head, “I don’t know. I just know she was taken. That’s all I can tell you.” He knew it was his fault, and to tell her about it without admitting it was difficult. Also, he knew Lucas had to tell her, not him.

“Who took her?” Her green eyes implored him.

“I can’t tell you.”

“Then what the hell can you tell me?” She stomped her foot in frustration.

Jason bowed his head respectfully with his eyes focused on her, “Trust Lucas, Elsa.”

Elsa couldn’t take it anymore; her hands covered her eyes as she wept, “How can I possibly trust anyone! I can’t even trust myself to make the right decision, and now my best friend is missing, and could be dead....all because of me! Am I so selfish that I would sacrifice my friends for my happiness...with...with a vampire!”

Guilt built up in him. Her reached for her and held her as she wept. It was his fault. He was ashamed of how he had dealt with his responsibility. This was worse than a reprimand from Lucas, having her weep in front of him. He should have taken Tanya’s life after he had pulled her out of Lucas’ room that night. Ted and Linda wouldn’t have been suspicious then and Elsa

wouldn't know. He could imagine how Lucas would deal with Elsa's pain, when he himself had difficulty dealing with it.

She pushed back from him, "I have to go home. I can't possibly stay here." She involuntarily sniffed and wiped the tears off her cheeks with the backs of her hands.

"Elsa please just wait for Lucas to awake, he'll explain things to you." Jason pleaded.

She shook her head staring at him with red rimmed swollen eyelids, "I can't because when he's around I can't think straight. He'll ask me to stay, and I'll do it because I love him."

"Would you at least let me send Gabriel with you?" Jason couldn't leave Lucas' side because of the danger that now emerged with the abduction of Tanya.

"Jason, I need to get away from here and everything that reminds me of him so I can sort out my thoughts and that includes his numerous bodyguards."

"Elsa..."

"...would you please call me a taxi?" She lifted her chin stubbornly trying to get her point across.

Jason couldn't keep her against her will. It would just make her more wary of them and he new Lucas would like it, "As you wish." He conceded.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

WHEN LUCAS AWOKE that evening as the last rays of the sun disappeared in the west, Jason was standing beside the bed a look of distress on his face.

"What is it?"

"She's gone, Lucas."

"Damn!" Lucas quickly dressed while Jason told him about Ted and Linda's visit, and Elsa's departure.

"We have to get her back. She's sitting prey for Jack." Luca's

internal anguish was evident through his altering facial features. His eyes flashed violet then crimson. This was it. He had to use his influence with her. Valear would be here tonight and he failed. Worse, the thought of Jack touching her enraged him. He swore and drove his fist into the stone wall with a crunch cracking several stones. "Get the car and meet me at her dorm." He vanished.

Linda's words cut Elsa to the quick. She had let her love for Lucas make her forget her friends and now one of them was missing. She had to get away from him so she could think. She was already wrought with guilt over Tanya's disappearance.

Rain pelted against the window of the cab as she peered through it. Her eyes were not focusing on anything specific as she was trying to justify the conflict within her. It would be dark soon and it pained her to not be there when he woke. The separation from him was already causing her grief. She wanted to turn the car around at least a hundred times on the way home. But she couldn't until she found out exactly what had happened to Tanya, and if she was the reason why she was missing. She needed to talk to Ted and Linda to find out what they knew. She had to know the truth. She remembered the way Tanya was behaving and what Lucas had told her. She should have stayed there and listened to what else he told her instead of cowering in his study. *Maybe he threatened her*, she thought reluctantly. Shaking her head, she refused the thought. He probably influenced her into listening to him. Either way, if she was with him at that time, she would be able to eliminate the doubts she had. Not only that, she might have figured him out then. All the signs were there so many times, yet she chose not to see them. She did love him, there wasn't any doubt. However, Tanya was gone because of it and she didn't know if she was dead or alive. She also couldn't handle the thought that Lucas might be involved regardless of what Jason said.

She could not risk any more of her friend's lives for her happiness. Moreover, if Ted and Linda knew something, their lives may be at risk too. Unfortunately, they didn't know what they were up against. She wasn't able to ask Lucas anything before he fell asleep this morning. Tears spilled down her cheeks. What if Tanya was dead and Lucas killed her? No, that couldn't be possible she argued with herself, he was so gentle and loving. She couldn't fathom that he could be capable of it.

The taxi pulled up in front of the dorm. Elsa paid the man and got out. She stood staring at the building, knowing that she must go and explain things. She wasn't sure how they would take this, or accept her after the things she said to them, but it was her last hope. She took a deep breath and went up through the door. When she was climbing the stairs to the third floor, that's when it hit her. An undeniable feeling of desolation and abandonment, much like the sensation she received when she was away from him, but this time it was overwhelming. She knew it was because of the separation from Lucas. When she was around him the feelings would diminish. It was hard for her to concentrate through it. Because of it, her gut began to ache. It took every cell of her being not to go back to him. He was right, they had forged a connection and now she had to fight it. It was calling to her, beckoning her to return to him. She wanted to, but she had to know about Tanya. She made her way down the hall to her dorm as the last strangled light of the day begin to fade. She opened the door to her dorm and looked out the window at the dim light in the sky. Linda wasn't there she must still be with Ted.

Linda made her way to the top of the stairs. She had made a fool out of herself in front of Ted and Elsa. She didn't know what had come over her, but she had drunk too much again. She never could handle liquor properly. Now she probably wouldn't see her again after being so childish. Especially blaming someone Elsa

loved for the disappearance of Tanya. Linda felt really shitty after treating her in such a way.

She was surprised, when she opened the door, to find Elsa on the dorm floor curled up in a ball, hugging her knees to her chest and shivering. Her flesh was pale and she was perspiring. She dropped to her knees beside her, bent down and started to shake her, “Elsa wake up. What’s wrong?”

Elsa opened her eyes slightly, her voice came in small breaths, “It feels like a stomach flu. Horrible cramping.” Tears rolled off her cheeks. “I’m sorry for the way I treated you.”

“Oh, no! Elsa I’m sorry about the way I behaved. I don’t know why I get so stupid sometimes. Can you forgive me?”

She smiled and nodded, wincing slightly. “I can’t stand the cramping....”

Linda ran to her bedside table and grabbed a couple of her sleeping pills and a glass of water. She ran back to Elsa and bent down, “Here take these.” She lifted Elsa’s head and helped her swallow the pills followed by a drink of water. She wasn’t sure how they would affect her, but they always worked for her when she was upset over some man. She didn’t know the whole story on why Elsa was here, “What’s happening Elsa?”

“My stomach hurts....such horrible emptiness Linda. I need to go back to him. It’s the only way. Now I know where I belong.” She managed to say before another cramp took her.

“What?” Linda was clearly upset at seeing her friend on the floor. “He’s got some kind of a hold on you.”

“No Linda, it’s both of us, we need each other, I can’t deny it anymore....” Elsa’s voice trailed off as the pills began to take effect. Her eyes drifted shut.

Linda shook her, “Elsa, tell me what I’m dealing with.”

Elsa opened her eyes again, and mouthed something that made Linda’s eyes fling wide.

Linda released her suddenly as if she was just bitten, “Oh

god...Elsa we have to get you out of here.”

“No, Lucas will be coming. I need to be here.”

“Not if I can help it.”

“Don’t hurt him, Linda...” That was the last thing she was able to say as the pills took their full effect.

Linda stood and ran out the door to the phone. She needed Ted’s help. He was the only one that knew what Lucas was capable of.

She hung up the phone after Ted reassured her that he would be there inside of ten minutes. She was grateful he wasn’t upset with her. He didn’t say much on the car ride back from Lucas’ and she just dropped him off at his dormitory. He kissed her politely on the cheek, told her he’d see her later and got out. He didn’t even look back when he left. She figured he didn’t want anything to do with her after she misbehaved and embarrassed him in front of Elsa. She rushed back to the room and tried to lift Elsa by herself no luck. She saw Elsa’s head fall back exposing the marks on her neck.

It was true. Elsa had managed to whisper to her only moments ago. *Vampire*. She quickly rummaged through Elsa’s dresser Linda may not have been religious, but Elsa was and she knew that Elsa had a silver cross her mother left her. She didn’t know much about Vampires, except for the fact that you could ward them off with a cross. At least it worked in the movies. Ted arrived when she was still searching.

He saw Elsa on the floor sleeping, “What’s going on?”

“Oh Ted, thank God!” She ran and threw her arms around him. “Lucas is coming for her.”

“What?” Ted stared at her in confusion, “What are you talking about?”

Linda showed him the marks on her neck and told him what Elsa had said. “Now she’s got it in her mind that she wants to be with him. He’s going to kill her. I know it!” She went back to

rummaging around in Elsa's dresser.

Ted took a moment to absorb what she told him, "But that's impossible. They don't exist."

Linda spoke without turning around, "Well, Elsa and Tanya think they do and it explains the frightening look he gave you. I'm going to be prepared either way."

"What are you going to do? What do you need me to do?" He was going to help her. Regardless of her outburst at Lucas', Ted couldn't deny that he really liked her. Especially after the fight and then the night in the coffee shop. He knew she was not as selfish as she thought she was. He didn't know what came over him when he saw Elsa that day, because when he was away from her, and now that she lay unconscious, he could control himself and it was Linda that entered his thoughts. Somehow Elsa could bewitch him and he wasn't sure why or how.

"We have to hide her. I suspect that the pills I've given her will knock her out for a few hours. So she won't know what's happening."

Emily sat in her little Chevette on the side of the road outside Lucas' estate. She knew he did most of his business at night. Hopefully he had somewhere to go tonight. Her prayers were answered when she saw the big gates open and Lucas' hummer leave. She started her car and followed it.

Linda and Ted managed to get Elsa settled in his bed. They hadn't much time to find a place for her, so this was the closest thing they could think of. They used her car to transport Elsa between the dorms. Thankfully campus security didn't see them loading an unconscious person in and out of the back seat of her car, because she really didn't have time to think of excuses. Linda had found Elsa's cross in the bottom drawer of her dresser. When Ted asked her what she was doing, she told him she was

looking for insurance. She didn't have anything of her own that represented God, but she made a mental note that she would in the future. If she had one.

Lucas stood outside of the dorm that Elsa lived in. She wasn't there. He'd already checked. Although she was earlier. He could smell her glorious scent. He could also smell Ted and Linda. They had her...he hoped. Then he still had a chance before Jack found her. Lucas had not experienced such anguish in all his immortal life. He clenched his fists in frustration cutting his nails into his palms. He could not sense her for some reason. He'd been calling her for the last hour, and could not locate her. He couldn't even get a mental image. Even if Jack had her, he'd be able to sense her or so he thought. Somehow his connection with her was shattered. The only way that would happen is if she was drugged, or worse, dead. Maybe it was the emotional distress he was dealing with. Maybe it somehow blocked his senses, that is, until Valear summoned him.

He swore, "Shit!" *not now!*

The summon came again. Stronger this time. He growled and bent over placing his hands on his knees for support. Lucas knew he couldn't ignore it. Valear would be very displeased and the next one would be painful. He did wonder why Valear hadn't just come to him instead of summoning back to his home. Again the summon came, and it was almost painful. *Damn!* He had to go. His only salvation was Jason would soon arrive and hunt for Elsa in his place. Jason could track her with that sensitive sense of smell he had. He could have Valear find her for him also. He just dreaded the outcome of it.

Lucas appeared in his bedroom which is where the summon was radiating from. Here of all places?

Valear was standing beside the chair that Elsa had laid her robe over. Lucas watched him lift it, bring it to his nose and take

a deep breath.

“She smells like wildflowers, doesn’t she?” Valears’ eyes fell on Lucas.

“Rain...summer rain in Italy.” Lucas corrected in a soft strained voice. Lucas anxiety was evident and Valear noticed.

“Remember who you are.” Valear droned as he set the robe down.

It was only a small phrase, but it was enough to calm Lucas down almost completely. He was falling apart at the thought of losing her. His control was absent in the most important part of his life when he needed it the most. He was ashamed of this.

Valear glided toward him, “Tell me what has happened?”

Lucas told him.

Valear tsked, “I told you the girl would cause this. If she was taken by another, you have to let her go.”

“I can’t.”

Valear raised his brow at him, “You have to.”

Lucas turned away from Valear for a moment to control his anger. He turned back to him, “I will not.”

“You defy me Lucas!” Valear thundered, his eyes glowed crimson.

“No..I don’t father, I must protect her. She is mine!” His features started altering as he challenged the undefeated sovereign of Vampires, “She will be mine at all costs!”

Valear hissed as Lucas stood defiant before him in direct challenge, “I could destroy you Lucas!”

“So be it!” Lucas stood his ground, unwavering . His features altered in his rage. He now looked like a true Vampire. His eyes turned crimson as Valear’s. His long canines found their way down from the recesses of his skull and pushed their way past the normal length of his other teeth to show the most naïve of mortals who he really was. Waiting for the impact he assumed a defensive stance.

Valear watched Lucas regain complete control of himself in his vampiric state. He almost smiled as he took a step back conceding to the confrontation.

Lucas couldn't believe what he was seeing and he himself backed down.

"It is different to see you use your power without urging you to do so. You have never challenged me before."

"I have never had a reason." Lucas features began to return to that of a normal man. He still couldn't get past the fact that Valear backed down. Valear never backed down.

"I see. This mortal brings out the best in you."

Lucas bowed and kneeled in respect, "Forgive me, father."

Valear motioned with his boney hand, "Get up Lucas. There is no need of such paltry gestures from you."

Lucas obeyed and stood

"You have indeed come into your power well. I find myself at awe in your control over this situation, regardless of how I found you moments ago. You challenged your life and the life of your beloved towards me. There is no need to seek forgiveness you were within your rights."

Lucas stared at him in fascination, "It's what you wanted from the beginning."

Valear nodded, "From that first moment I saw you laying in that blood stained field with that sword embedded deep in your chest. I was drawn to you, just as you were drawn to that young woman. There is more to her than you know, but you will find out in time."

It seemed to Lucas that Valear had a few secrets of his own that he wasn't sharing.

"I knew," Valear continued, "What you needed. You had so much Lucas, your fight to survive, your zest for life, but most important, your purity." Valear released a long sigh through his thin lips, "You were calling to me, like the brightest flower in a

field aching to be picked. I sensed you as I walked through that field of death to get my fill of the dying young boys. You must have lain there for hours with that dull blade sticking out of your chest, yet you still didn't die."

"I prayed for it," Vivid images of that day flooded Lucas' mind.

"Yesss, I know." Valear half-hissed, "That was the best part. Even though you begged for death, you still didn't want it. So I, though full, obliged you with pleasure." The corner of Valear's mouth pulled as he half smiled with remembrance. "You had the sweetest tasting blood in that whole field. It wasn't tainted with hate, ignorance and selfishness. You were pure Lucas. You may not think so, but you were. I knew someday you would be the one to take what I had to offer. Now you will be the new ultimate ruler of the Association and the power to control all. You will have the knowledge of everyone of them with it.

"You wanted me to challenge you."

"It was the only way for you to keep your rightful place."

"Others have challenged you for less and died."

"They were trying to take what wasn't offered to them. You were protecting your own. You have interests of the Association ahead of your own, and most important, the welfare of your beloved. You would kill for her. You have done something I never thought possible and destroyed that bitch Celeste for her. Regardless of what the legendary Vampire portrays, you are the true Prince of the night and you must protect your own. Our race must survive. I challenged you and you were willing to give your life for her. This was something you would have never done before."

This is a side of Valear he would have never suspected. He was almost caring. Yet, he spoke in the same ancient stern monotone that he would use in planning a massacre. It was no secret that Valear was more willing to take mortal lives than

Lucas was.

Valear read his thoughts, “Mortal lives are expendable in view of ours. I kill to support our race.”

“You destroy another in the process.”

Valear shocked Lucas by laughing. It was hideous, but nonetheless, he laughed, “Lucas...mortals have the privilege of God and the ability to reproduce. We do not. They also have the gift of choice when it comes to their menu. We only have one item; the thirst for human blood. They also slaughter animals and each other. Who are we, but to take their lives a fraction before their short time here has ended. They should thank us for sending them back to their maker instead of spending a hellish mortal life here on earth living in an aging body.”

“We are not in a position to pass judgment.”

Valear stared unblinkingly at him, “They do.”

Lucas had always admired and respected Valear and loved him as if he was his real father. This was a side of him he'd never thought he'd see. Valear was explaining himself. Valear never explained anything. He commanded, Lucas would obey, he demanded, no one refused him. Then it dawned on him, *protecting our race, willingness to defend, Prince*, “No!....not now!” *Elsa!*

“Yes Lucas.” Valear was adamant when he told Lucas that he was the true Prince of the immortals. Now it was time for him to claim what was being offered.

Before Lucas knew what was happening, several others had materialized around him. These others, five in all, looked as ancient as Valear, with the pasty faces and horror filled eyes. They surrounded him in a half circle.

The power in the room was phenomenal. Lucas' body had trouble adjusting, “not now, Valear, I have to find Elsa.”

“No, first you must accept who you are.” Valear took a step toward him.

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Lucas collapsed on the floor as his head was overcome with many voices speaking all at once, filling him full of information, teaching him and coaching him. The, Valear's voice emerged clearly out of all of them.

I have searched a lifetime for someone to take our place. My brothers and I can now have an eternal rest as you can now understand my judgments. We will give you the power to feel every member of the association just by thought as the wind feels every contour of the earth. You will hear their thoughts, their actions, and their motives. You will have the power to seek out whomever you desire, just by feeling out their existence. Elsa will no longer be invisible to you.

Lucas lay on the floor, his hands over his ears trying to block out the pain as the voices kept rising in his mind.

One of them retrieved the glass from Lucas bedside table. The five and Valear stood above Lucas and one by one, they used their long nails to cut open their wrists as the glass was handed around. Their blood pour from the wounds, turning pitch black and sizzling as it collected in the bottom of the glass.

Valear took the glass and knelt at Lucas' side, *Drink!*

Lucas shook his head trying to block out the voices.

Valear slapped him with his long boney hand, "Now."

Lucas didn't remember opening his mouth and letting the opaque liquid flow down his throat, he only remembered the searing pain that followed. Liquid fire filled every limb. His body convulsed as it tried to adjust to the new toxic invasion of power. He could hear himself screaming.

"They'll be sure to look here." Ted watched Linda make Elsa comfortable. She was still unconscious, "What did you give her."

"Some anti-anxiety pills I have. They help you sleep. I don't think Elsa's ever taken any kind of pills before, because these hit her hard. As for them, "well be ready." For reassurance she

grabbed her handbag and rummaged through it for the cross. It was gone. "Oh no." She dumped her bag out on the bed next to Elsa and spread everything around. It definitely was gone.

"What is it?"

Linda looked at him, alarm on her face, "I lost the cross."

Ted started to pull his coat on, "I'll go look for it."

"No! I have to. You are stronger than me. If one of them comes, you can protect her better than I can." She kissed him for a long moment. Maybe too long. She then left.

"I doubt it." Ted said to the closed door. He turned and looked at the peacefully sleeping form of Elsa.

Linda made her way out of the dorm. It was dark now, and she pulled her sweater around herself over the slight chill in the air. She scanned the walk. The cross either fell here when they were unloading Elsa, or over at her dorm where they were putting her in the car. The concrete walk to the road remained bare. She knew it had to be back at her dorm. She stared at her car in the parking lot and then turned and looked over her shoulder. It would be quicker to walk back between the buildings than to go and get her car and drive all the way around. Without another thought she turned and headed to her dorm. Her heels clicked on the walk and echoed off of the buildings. She turned and cut through the small park that lay between the two dormitories. She felt very isolated. She knew that Elsa and Ted were sitting ducks until she came back with protection. She cursed at herself and her carelessness. Maybe someone had picked it up. It was silver and worth a lot of money.

Oh this was too good. He watched her pause and look over her shoulder as if she was looking for someone. He smiled she seemed preoccupied and hopefully wouldn't hear him coming.

She didn't know what was wrong with her. Linda thought

she was just being paranoid. It was so dark out, except with the lamp glow of the few light posts that lined the sidewalk, and after all the things she'd seen in the past few hours, she was getting creeped out. It was a short walk to the women's dorm, but she kept thinking she was being followed. Although, there was no noise to indicate anything to the fact, except for the wind rustling the leaves of the trees. She took a deep breath and chastised herself for being silly, reminded her of the reason she was out here, and kept on walking. She was so focused on the reason, to find the cross, that she didn't know what had hit her. A hand suddenly covered her mouth, and a strong arm went around her waist. She was being roughly dragged back into the thicket. She kicked and screamed against her attacker, but he was stronger than she was, easily dragging her into the brush.

"Shut up or I'll cut ya!" A harsh voice spoke into her ear and to make his point he pressed the sharp edge of his knife against her throat none too gently.

He waited until she quit looking over her shoulder so he could approach her from behind and surprise her. He felt her cease her struggle at his words. Once he was a safe distance away from the walk and into the bush, he shoved her face down onto the ground. She opened her mouth with a grunt of pain filling it with grass and dirt. Her arm was twisted painfully up her back. She tried to move and he twisted it more.

"I swear I'll break your damn arm, if you try that again."

She stopped struggling, petrified of what he was going to do to her. The she had heard the familiar sound of rustling metal and leather as her attacker undid his belt. Realization struck her as his intent sunk in. She started to scream and he retaliated by striking her on the back of the head with something hard.

"I told you to shut up!"

Tears spilled into the dirt from her eyes. She knew she was going to be raped. No one would be around to hear her screams

and help her. She had never felt such helpless terror.

He used his belt to tie her wrists behind her back. Then he flipped her over.

Linda let out another gasp of pain as her bound wrists dug into her back. She opened her eyes to look at him, he wore a black balaclava with a mouth and two eye holes.

The man looked her up and down, “Well, well, if it isn’t the Senator’s disreputable daughter.” He made his way on top of her, until his body hovered just inches above hers. His eyes focused on her breasts as they rose and fell with every quick and shallow breath she took. She knew he was smiling at her.

“That’s a good girl. Now this won’t take long, if you relax and enjoy it like I will.”

Her eyes widened at his horrible words and without thinking she brought her knee up suddenly between legs and nailed him in the groin. “Screw you!”

He howled and fell on her.

She struggled to get him off her, but her hands were still useless. She tried to get her knees up and shove him off her.

She had had him just past her waist, when he sprang up and put his hand at her throat, cutting off her wind. He then removed a cloth from his pocket with his free hand and stuffed it in her mouth.

“You are going to pay for that. Now I’m not going to be gentle.” His mouth was inches from her and drops of spittle came out and hit her face.

She gagged against the cloth, trying not to throw up. Her heart hammered in her ears.

He clumsily grabbed at her clothes.

She let out another muffled scream against the cloth, trying to kick and wiggle away from him.

He brought his knees painfully down on her legs to stop her.

She snapped, jerking herself into a frenzy, her muffled

screams vibrated in her throat. She struggled to close her legs

He slapped her. "Shut up!"

Her muffled screams increased. He was going to enjoy this. She deserved it. He loved to see the terror on their faces as he showed them how powerful he was. Suddenly he felt weightless. He was being lifted upwards and was swung around in the air to face an unholy sight.

"Didn't your mother tell you to respect women?" Lucas voice was deep, hollow and inhuman. He brought his face inches from the attacker and snarled.

The man responded by letting a terrified scream rip from him. A hand of solid strength seized him by the throat cutting his scream short.

Lucas turned the rapists head to the side.

"They didn't hear her. They won't hear you, isn't that ironic?" Lucas violently ripped through flesh and bone to get at the rapists carotid artery. He drained him to the last drop of blood in his body. *Bastard!* He thought to himself as he tossed the dead man aside like garbage. The lifeless body hit a nearby tree with a hollow thump.

Linda watched the whole thing through a muddy tear stained face. Even in the darkness of the night, the small amount of light that radiated from the walk beyond gave her partial view of what had happened. She heard the unmistakable tearing of flesh and snapping of bone. She saw the man tossed aside like he weighed nothing. Whoever it was that had rescued her, just killed her attacker. She wasn't able to see who it was in the dim light, blurred teary eyes and the angle in which she was laying. She tried tilting her head up to see how the other person was but her strength was drained. Whoever it was, breathed deeply several times before he turned and walked toward her.

Lucas leaned over her and helped her sit up. He gently removed the cloth.

She stared at him in surprise. “You.”

Lucas managed to return to his normal state before he went to her. She was frightened enough. He easily split the belt at her back and began to help her up, “Can you walk?”

At that moment she didn’t care about who Lucas was, she gripped him desperately and cried.

“Shhh....Linda, you’re safe now.” He reassured. With his new power he could easily focus on Elsa’s location. He was on his way to get her at the other dormitory when he felt Linda’s terror. He also recognized her voice in the muffled screams. Events such as this one made Lucas feel that Valear was right about mortals not respecting anything. He’d killed that bastard and enjoyed it immensely. Not even the slightest twinge of guilt pulled at him. Whereas, before when he’d done such a thing, he’d always felt guilty about judging a mortal’s life. After Valear had given him the Vampire cocktail, he didn’t remember anything. He woke up on the floor of his bedroom not knowing how long he’d been out. It was an awesome feeling of rebirth. He felt as though a cloud had been lifted and he could see clearly for the first time in his immortal life. The overwhelming power surged through every cell of his being like hot-fired coals and he was able to sense the unrest in the Association, hear insects scuttle in the nearby grass and most importantly, sense Elsa . His veins still burned from the drink but he felt absolutely omnipotent.

Ted was pacing his room. *She should have been back by now. Something’s wrong.* He could feel it in his gut. He stopped and looked out into the darkness of the night and froze. A wafting mist filled the space outside the window. *Fog? Here?* What he saw next made his skin crawl. Tanya appeared through the fog.

Emily followed the car onto UCLA campus. *What the hell was this about?* Lucas Edwards couldn’t possibly have business

here in the middle of the night. Then it dawned on her, the girl. She couldn't possibly be a student here, although she did look young enough to attend the University. Emily just never thought that after all the women that Lucas had to choose from, he picked a young student. Emily's spirits picked up. She could actually redeem herself with this juicy bit of gossip.

In Ted's terror, he backed up into one of his shelves housing his football trophies. They fell to the ground noisily. He saw Tanya's face press up against the glass and stare around the inside of his room before settling on him. An icy grin spread across her face revealing her sharp, altered teeth.

"Oh *God!*" he could feel the blood drain from his head in horror.

Her palms pressed against the window pane, she then curled her fingers on the glass creating an eerie scraping sound which actually left grooves in the pane.

Ted wanted to turn and run. Seeing her horrifying face pressed against the glass several stories of the ground made him forget that he was guarding Elsa.

Ted.

His hand was feeling the wall for the crease of the door and the door knob when he'd heard his name. It stopped him in mid grab. He forced his eyes back to the window where her ghastly face was now pressed against.

Let me in, Ted.

He trembled and shook his head erratically while his eyes never left her.

I know you want me Ted.

"No..." Despite his denial, he felt as though he really did want her.

Come, Ted. Let me in. I'll let you have me.

Ted involuntarily pushed away from the shelf and started to

walk toward her slowly. He hesitated during every step as he fought to resist her.

Tanya began to caress her body seductively

Ted felt himself lose all thought as it was replaced by desire. He was aching to have her.

“Yes, Ted. Let me in and you can have me. Just open the window.”

Her voice filled her head consuming his thoughts as if she were standing next to him, whispering in his ear. Ted approached the window and without taking his eyes off the beautiful red-head his hand went to the window latch.

Tanya continued to coax and tease him through the glass.

“I always wanted you Ted.” She cooed, “let me have you.”

He flipped up the latch.

Emily saw Jason get out of the car. She turned off her lights and parked down the block from him. She watched him as he walked around the front of the car, step up onto the curb and walk quickly toward one of the brick dormitories. She got out of her car and followed him. He disappeared through the set of double doors to the building. She stepped behind a tree, not wanting to follow him into the building. She would wait for him to return.

She lit up a cigarette and waited. Maybe she was fishing for straws. She glanced back over to the car. It was surprising that Lucas himself didn't get out and go and get her, if he was even in there. Also, the young lady may not even be here.

She took a long drag off her cigarette and glanced at her watch. He'd been in there for a good fifteen minutes. What the hell was he doing?

A twig cracked behind her, startling her into dropping her cigarette. She spun towards the noise just to face darkness, “Who's there?”

Silence.

She still stared in the direction of the sound. Dread started to work its way through her. She knew someone was watching her. She could feel it. She thought maybe she could intimidate whoever it was, "I hope you realize, I have a gun." She tried to keep the trembling out of her voice. *Screw this*, She fumbled in her purse for the small twenty-two caliber she kept for protection.

"Hello Emily." The voice came from behind her, toward the dormitory.

She turned back to it with her gun in her hand. Strong hands caught her wrists, putting enough pressure on them to make her drop it. She gasped in pain.

"You could hurt yourself with something like that."

She looked up to see Jason Markham. His brow was furrowed, showing his displeasure. Her fear instantly dissolved to anger, "What the hell do you think you were doing scaring the crap out of me like that?" She rubbed her wrist, "That hurt."

Jason's expression changed to surprise, then amusement, "I should ask you the same and sorry, it was that or getting shot."

"It's a free country, and you should be sorry." She bent down and picked up her gun and shoved it back in her bag, "I could have shot you. Jesus Jason, you shouldn't sneak up on people. I should shoot you for wrecking my laptop and camera anyway."

He chuckled, "Serves you right for sticking your nose where it doesn't belong. Don't you have other people to spy on?"

"Not particularly, no."

He turned to walk away from her, "Go home Emily," He shot over his shoulder.

She grabbed his arm, "All I want is a story from Lucas."

"Impossible."

"At least it would be the truth. I would make anything up. I promise." She pleaded.

Jason turned back to her, “You honestly don’t want to write anything about Lucas, Emily. It could be costly.” To show her his meaning, he pulled back his lips showing her a mouth full of canine sharp teeth.

She gasped and released his arm.

“I’m getting tired of your interruptions, and I think it’s about time you minded your own business. Don’t you agree?”

She slowly nodded then couldn’t help but add, “You will be getting a bill for my things.”

“Fine. Now go home.” His eyes locked on hers.

Without saying another word she turned and ran back toward her car as she blindly searched her purse for her keys. Finding her keys, she hopped in and started the car and sped away without a backward glance.

He almost laughed. Even terrifying the woman, didn’t stop her from making demands. It was admirable.

Lucas left Linda on the second floor stairs as he could feel another of his own present. It was Tanya.

“You have to wait here,” He glanced up the stair well.

“What is it?” She looked concerned.

He helped her sit on the stairs, He stared down at her, “It’s not safe.”

“What?” She left Ted up there, “Oh no, Lucas....Ted’s in there!”

“You can’t help him. I can. Stay here and trust me.” With that he vaporized.

Linda fell back against the stairs shocked at what she’d just seen.

Lucas willed the door to Ted’s room open. It flung open with a crunch and the doorknob buried itself in the plaster, “Tanya!” Lucas boomed.

Immortal Promise: A Vampire Love Story

Tanya was standing behind Ted who had his neck twisted to the side as she was feeding off him. She lifted her head and hissed in fear when she saw Lucas and dropped Ted on the floor.

He made a motion with his hand which in turn shoved her back through the glass window, shattering it.

A blood curdling scream lit from her throat as and unseen force shoved her from the room to the ground below.

Linda came in at that moment and saw Ted on the floor, “Oh no! Not you!” She made her way to his unconscious body.

Lucas then noticed Elsa on Ted’s bed. He knelt down beside her, “What have you done to her?” He caressed her cheek, “Elsa, baby, wake up.”

There was no response.

Linda looked at him, “I gave her two of my sleeping pills.”

“That as a stupid thing to do, you left her vulnerable to our enemies!” he stated angrily.

Linda shrank back at Lucas harsh words, “I....didn’t know.”

Lucas had trouble controlling this new surge of power. He didn’t mean to frighten her, but he would change so quickly, just in frustration. He quickly forced it back or he would have the need to feed and Linda was so readily available. He closed his eyes and concentrated on controlling it. Thoughts of mortal well-being were furthest from his mind when it came to protecting Elsa.

Ted moaned and Linda startled, “Lucas,” Linda interrupted, although she didn’t want to. He was frightening, but her concern for Ted was more important, “Is Ted....?” She sobbed. She couldn’t finish.

Lucas’ crimson eyes opened. Hunger and revenge altered his appearance. He stood and stared down at Ted. Lucas could hear his human heart still beating, “He will be fine.”

“But ...is he like you?” Linda couldn’t help stutter over the chilling image that stood before her.

“I told you, no. He is still alive.” He snarled, “How could you taint her with drugs?” He sounded fierce even though he tried his best to keep the stress out of his voice.

“She was shivering, complaining of terrible cramping....God Lucas, I didn’t know I could hurt her.” She sobbed.

He summoned Jason and Gabriel. He would need them to take her home, while he went after Tanya. Linda’s confession struck him odd. It sounded like Elsa was displaying the signs of a Vampire’s hunger. “Cramping...did you say?”

“She was curled up in a ball on floor in our dorm....It frightened me. She told me we had to break the connection...”

“It wasn’t just a connection Linda.” Lucas confessed, “She’s hungry.” He remembered what Elsa had told him before of the hunger like feelings that were present when she was away from him. Granted the electricity between them was real, but this was different. He originally thought that she just misinterpreted the feelings. Maybe she didn’t. She didn’t understand what the hunger feels like. He had to calculate when it started.

Linda’s mouth fell open. “but...that means that she’s.....”

“No she’s not.” He brought his face to her neck and inhaled deeply. Her radiant innocence filled his nostrils. He clenched his jaw as saliva ran in his mouth, “This is all her.”

“But how...?” She watched Lucas lift her to him gently and cradle her for a moment.

“I don’t know.” Lucas laid Elsa back down on the bed like she was a precious jewel being returned to a velveteen casing, and walked to the window that he shoved Tanya through only moments ago and looked out it to the ground below. It was empty. He then turned back to Linda, “Watch over her until Jason arrives. He will be here soon. He isn’t far.”

Linda stood and walked over to him, trying to rein in her terror at the sight inhuman features, “You’re going after her aren’t you?” when Lucas didn’t say anything she continued,

“You’re going to kill her.”

“She is already dead.”

Linda knew who it was that Lucas was after. She had heard him call Tanya’s name. Despite the fact that she knew he was going after her, she owed Lucas, he’d saved her earlier from the rapist, and he saved Ted, “Lucas..I want to say...”

“...Save it Linda. You can thank me by staying away from Elsa in the future and keeping your mouth closed about what you have seen tonight.” He stared at her longer than he should have to make his point before his features transformed fully as he prepared himself for the hunt.

Linda’s bottom lip quivered at the terrifying sight and she understood his meaning.

With that Lucas leapt out of the window and into the night air and landed softly on the grass below. He stood erect and straightened his overcoat and began to follow the path the Vampiress took minutes ago. He would end this tonight.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

GABRIEL DROVE THE limo as Jason sat in the back opposite of Elsa’s sleeping form. She was still out cold. She didn’t even stir when he retrieved her from the room that Lucas had summoned him to. Gabriel had shown up shortly after. Jason had suspected that Lucas had summoned him also for extra protection. They didn’t exchange any words in front of Linda and Ted as she was still trying to revive him on the floor. She watched them and didn’t interfere as Jason lifted Elsa off the bed and Gabriel stood guard over them.

Jason knew he was to protect Elsa with his life. Lucas needn’t say anything. She was his responsibility until Lucas returned to protect her himself. She was safest at the house

where Lucas' loyal servants were.

He carried her up the stairs and into Lucas' room. He laid her gently on the bed and she stirred slightly but it was short lived. He wasn't sure on how long Lucas would be, so as an extra precaution he had Gabriel join him in the bedroom.

"She is beautiful." Gabriel spoke in his foreign tongue as he watched Jason pull the covers up over her.

"Yes." Jason answered in like.

"The master chose wise. She is a good choice for him."

"I think she will handle herself very well as one of them." Jason added.

"Does she know?"

"Yes, he told her. She hasn't a choice now. Lucas will have her. He has made that clear. Even if she does not agree, it is too late to turn back. Jack knows who she is now." He walked over to one of the chairs next to the fire and sat down.

Gabriel joined him, *"I see."*

Lucas knew she was near, he could sense her. She obviously thought that he couldn't. He found himself walking the deserted cement paths that wound through the Los Angeles Zoo. Tanya must have thought she could deter him with so much life blood. *Smart thinking Tanya. It might have worked up until a few hours ago.* Now, among all the beasts, he could still find her scent, her fear, and her evil aura.

He walked casually down a path that had tall palms and bushes on both sides, "You set your loyalty foolishly Tanya. I am the most powerful. I am your true master." He stopped below one of the palm trees and stared up it. His skillful eyes picking up her form hiding in the among the huge flat leaves, "You have no idea of what your betraying. I can give you more than Jack ever could. I reward those who are loyal." Because of her mortal personality and the darkness he sensed within her, he knew that

she only understood the thirst for blood, but his powerful words were making an impact on her. He now had ways of reaching the unreachable. The sad thing was, he still had to destroy her. She was too much of a threat to his Elsa. *No more loose ends*, he reminded himself. “I think it’s time you came down.” His voice held the familiar commanding echo she had heard before, only it was much more powerfully irresistible this time.

The rustle of leaves let him know she was obeying. She stood in front of him within a minute, fear was evident on her face.

He stared at her for a moment, his crimson eyes penetrating her very being, “It’s a shame Tanya, you never had a choice. Your life was taken too quickly for you to understand. Maybe your God will forgive you.”

She whined in response as Lucas walked up to her.

And may Elsa forgive me.

Elsa slowly opened her eyes. It felt as though she had a major hangover. Her eyelids felt so heavy. Now she knew how Linda felt after a night out. It must have been the pills. She should have never taken them. She focused on a figure, it was Jason. She spoke his name.

Jason got up from the chair and kneeled beside the bed, “Yes Elsa?”

She struggled herself up onto her elbows, “How did I get here? Where’s Lucas.” She spied Gabriel over by one of the windows, “what’s going on?”

Jason gave her a gentle smile, “He’ll be back soon. “ He handed her a glass of liquid, “Drink this, it’ll help flush the drugs from your system. “

She took a drink, and made a face. It was bitter, “What is this? It’s horrible!”

Jason chuckled, “An old family recipe.”

“Where is Lucas? Is he alright?” she struggled to sit up.

Jason helped her, “Yes, I assure you he’s fine.” *Nothing can harm him now, except losing you.*

“What are you two doing?” She glanced back and forth at the two.

“We are here to protect you Elsa. It is our duty.”

“Duty? What do you mean, duty?” She questioned.

“It’s what we were born and bred for Elsa. It is our duty to protect our master and now his mistress.”

“You’re not human either?” a look of awe and fear crossed her features.

He shook his head smiling, “No. I am a lycanthrope....a werewolf as you mortals have called us. My duty is to protect Vampires such as Lucas. We are hand chosen from birth. It is a great honor to serve Lucas. Valear chose me himself for the task.”

“Valear? Lucas’ father?”

Jason’s eyebrows rose, “Yes. I see that Lucas has told you of him.”

“He told me that Valear is the father of all Vampires. “

“It’s true.” Jason admitted, “But he only covets Lucas as his true heir. There are many that would vie for such prestige and power, but it’s Lucas that was chosen.”

“How many are there?”

“Thousands, and now Lucas rules them all.” He stared at her seriously, “And you Elsa, are his chosen mate.”

Elsa gasped

“Now you know the truth. Now you know why Lucas was secretive and so cautious about protecting you. You have no idea of what he has risked in these past few days for you.” Jason continued to tell her of the past few day’s events, the conflict with Lucas and his father over Lucas’ choice and his legacy, and the unrest within Association.

“I..I didn’t know.” She felt so selfish. She had taken off on him, argued with him, and she had no idea what he was trying to tell her all this time. He risked everything for her.

“It’s not your fault, you didn’t know. We tried to protect you from all of this until the right time.” He stood up.

“Jason.....I’m....”She was about to apologize for all the trouble she put him through, when she was interrupted by the sound of splintering metal and glass as one of the windows and metallic blinds exploded into the room.

Jason’s warning senses went off just before the sound split his ears. He shoved Elsa behind him quickly, almost knocking her over.

Gabriel jumped at the intruder just to get tossed across the room against a wall.

“Fool!” Jack growled.

Jason positioned himself between Elsa and Jack as Elsa cowered behind him.

Her hands pressed against his back, frozen in place. She knew he was like Lucas, only his face was swollen with evil. She watched him open his mouth to speak and saw the long sharp teeth within. His voice was deep and hypnotizing, it was all she could do not to listen.

“Do you think you could stop me?” Jack laughed at Jason, “I should have known that Lucas would send his *dog* to do his bidding! You are no match for me guardian! I will take her!”

Elsa heard a deep, menacing growl and felt it vibrate through Jason under the palms of her hands. She felt movement there and noticed strange ripples move under his shirt. She backed off a little and watched in shock the change that was happening.

Jason’s clothes started tearing unable to contain the expanding body underneath. Hair started sprouting out of every part of his exposed flesh through the tattered clothing until he

was covered in it and his clothes lay in shreds. The shape of his head was altering, shifting from its normal appearance. His blond hair darkened to a grayish-black as it mixed with the other hair on his body. His ears stretched and shifted to the top of his head like a dog. Only it wasn't a dog. He was massive, bigger than a normal man and heavily muscled. He stood on two feet, although she knew he could be on all four.

He turned and looked over his shoulder at Elsa who screamed when she saw how drastic the change was. His multitude of deadly sharp teeth were showing and as he snarled and made his way towards the invader. Her mouth fell open and quivered. In all its massive fierceness stood the biggest predator she'd ever seen with none of the features that would recognize it as Jason. A werewolf who stood on its hind legs bringing its immense height to at least eight feet. She backed up against the wall at the head of the bed; her eyes wide with terror. A scream tore from her again as Jason sprang at Jack. At the same time, Jack sprang at Jason.

Inhuman howls tore from both of them as she heard the grotesque sound of tearing flesh. She gathered all her courage and pushed away from the wall and edged herself toward the door. Her wide eyes never left the loud and graphic display of fighting horror before her. She reached the door, opened it slowly and then turned and ran down the hall. She had to get out of there. She had seen that thing that Jason was up against. *Did Lucas look like that? Would she? Could she live with herself like that?* She ran down the stairs, out the front door and down the road toward the gate. She remembered the guard there. He must have a gun. That is, if it would work on something like that. She didn't know much about the legend of Vampires, but she was sure that guns weren't a cure. She was thankful that she could run fast, and hopefully that thing wouldn't know where she was. Her breathing quickened as she began to tire. She had a rush of

adrenaline that was fading on her. She knew the gates were around the bend in the road and she was almost within view. She raced around it and began to feel a little relieved as that thing hadn't caught her yet. Her thoughts raced back to Jason. *Was he still alive?* Could she live with herself if he died for her?

Jack appeared directly in front of her and She screamed as she almost ran right into him.

He was still able to reach out and grab her as she stopped, "Hello gorgeous."

She screamed again.

He turned her to face him and they glided backwards together, her feet not even touching the ground, until she slammed hard against a thick tree trunk. She grunted as the wind was knocked out of her.

He placed his hand at the base of her throat and effortlessly turned her head from side to side while he studied her. Her hands tried to pry his off to no avail. It would have been easier to claw at stone.

He leaned down and inhaled deeply "Well, well, Lucas has truly outdone himself. You...are...perhaps the sweetest piece of meat I've ever smelled." He spoke slowly as if he was savoring a taste on his palate . "And you are so *beautiful*. Now I am truly jealous!"

His crimson eyes seemed to pierce her soul as he studied her. Her mouth opened, but nothing came out, but a terrified breath of noise. She felt sheer terror at the creature in front of her and anguish over Jason. She knew there was no way he would have let this creature by him unless....

He brought a finger to his gruesome lips that were caked with blood, Jason's blood, "Shh, you obey me, sweet, and I'll let you live, for now. I need your mate my dear and you're the bait." He ran his tongue up her cheek and she made a disgusted noise. He laughed, "Oh, but you taste so sweet, so don't tempt me. The

things I could do to you.”

“Please!” she begged despite his hand squeezing her throat.

His eyebrows rose in surprise at her voice, “Oh hell! You even *sound* beautiful when you beg. How yummy is that?”

She panicked and raked her nails down his face leaving deep scratches and watched in awe as the grooves repaired themselves immediately.

Jack’s eyebrows raised again, “Well, well. I think someone needs some discipline. I warned you not to tempt me.”

“No....” she gasped as he forced her head to one side.

He brought his mouth to the skin at her neck and slowly inhaled her scent deeply once more, then in a flash, sunk his teeth deep and painfully into it.

She let a blood curdling scream rip from her.

Lucas had drained the last bit of Tanya’s life force when he felt Elsa’s terror. *Elsa!* With a surge of rage he ripped out Tanya’s heart. She would no longer be able to harm anyone. He then turned and concentrated on his home and melted into the darkness.

When he arrived in his bedroom he found Jason trying to drag himself up onto a chair. He was back in human form and his skin hung off him in shreds and a good portion of the right side of his face was torn away revealing bone. He couldn’t retain his animal form because of the damage he’d suffered and he’d lost a good deal of blood. Lucas knelt beside him to help him sit up. Jason’s breathing was gurgled and Lucas knew that his lungs were punctured. He knew that if he didn’t stay and help heal him, he would die. He closed his eyes and concentrated on Elsa for a moment. He felt her life, yet faint. She was still alive. If Jack hadn’t killed her when he had the chance, he was waiting for him. He still had time. Jason struggled to talk, but Lucas silenced him, “Don’t worry friend, she’s still alive.”

Jason let out a sigh of relief causing blood to stream from

his mouth.

What Lucas couldn't understand was how Jack was able to defeat Jason. When a werewolf is chosen they are given a few drops of the Vampire's blood to imprint the master and aid in creating the strength of the protector. The blood of the Vampire merges with werewolf blood for the rest of their lives. It gives them immortality and excess strength, besides a few other vampiric gifts from their master, like the ability to force thoughts and read minds. It is in a diminished capacity but still effective with mortals. Other werewolves wouldn't have Jason's ability unless they were gifted with Lucas' or Valear's blood. Unlike humans who can be converted into a full Vampire, werewolves are born and raised, chosen and given immortality to where they age as Vampires do. They are born and raised from a mortal woman and do not inherit the qualities until they hit puberty. Also, werewolves do not father daughters. There are no female werewolves that history has known of. It is something to do with the hormones of a female that is resistant to the strain. The werewolf does not need the sanctity of sleep, so he is always awake and aware, ready to protect. It is the animal in them that needs to covet and guard its master. It is their lifelong duty. Vampire and werewolf are somehow linked to the same darkness that controls their power. Therefore they are almost as brothers, but different races. Jason was given Lucas' blood at the same age as Lucas when Valear claimed him. They would age slowly together. Therefore, Jason should have been able to practically kill anyone in the Association save Lucas and Valear. This just didn't make any sense. How did Jack defeat him? Now that Lucas had inherited Valear's power he would share that with his protector, it would also aid in healing him. Lucas bit his own wrist and held it over Jason's gurgling mouth as he struggled to breathe. *No one will ever defeat you again, my friend.*

Valear could see as clear as day in the dark room. He saw jack standing near the doorway.

“You have come for me Father, because I hurt your precious Lucas?”

Valear didn’t have to say a word, it was exactly what he’d come for.

Jack chuckled, “You wish to slay me, like you did Ian.”

Valear gave him a gruesome smile. He could feel the fear off him.

It was jack’s turn to return the emotionless grin, “You must think I’m stupid, father, for thinking that you wouldn’t come after me.” Jack reached over and flicked on a switch he was standing by. Ultra violet lights flickered and came on surrounding the entire room where Valear was standing. Trapping him.

“You must be losing your touch. You didn’t even know I had planned this. You think Lucas was powerful, I am too!” he spat.

Valear crouched under his robes. The lights were strategically placed so he could not escape.

Jack gloated, “I knew you would try to protect him. I also knew that there was no way I could get to Lucas without going through you first. I think you let your love for Lucas corrupt your senses, or you would know what I had planned. I also hope that his love for you will do the same.”

Valear couldn’t vaporize out of the room, because vapor needed an escape route and the only way out was through the light, he was trapped. He hissed.

“It’s a shame you never put any confidence in me or you would have read my true intentions. Now Lucas will know who I really am, won’t he? You never did tell him that he has a full brother. Does he know that you created me too? It’s too bad that you can’t look out from behind those long grotesque hands of yours to see that beautiful bay window over there. The one the

sun will shine through in a short time. You see, when the sun rises, you will no longer exist, and when Lucas arrives to save you, he will die also. Then I will take my true place in the association.”

Elsa’s hands were firmly tied behind her back. She came to only moments ago and the room she was in was damp, musty smelling and so dark she couldn’t see anything. Her neck hurt like hell where he’d bitten her. Every time she swallowed, the movement caused throbbing there. She was still feeling quite dizzy, but the pain seemed to bring her around. It was obvious from the cool hardness of the floor that it was cement. She must be in a basement. She struggled with the ropes on her wrists when she heard it. A small sound, like scraping, and she stilled herself, “Hello?”

The scraping came again. Like fingernails on cement.

“anyone there?”

No answer, just more breathing.

Oh God. Where the hell was she? Again she stated, “Hello?”

Still no answer.

A spine tingling chill crept through her. She wasn’t alone. Every time she stilled her breath the breathing would stop, purposely terrorizing her. Tears rolled down her cheeks. She felt she would go insane with horror. *Sweet God Lucas! Where are you?*

Gabriel had come around by the time Lucas had finished with Jason. He’d rendered him unconscious until his body had recovered sufficiently. It would help mask the pain. He picked him up and carried him to his bed, laying him down gently on the mattress. He knew this was from Jack, only he still couldn’t figure out how he was able to defeat him. Better yet, what made Jack think he could challenge his protector? Something wasn’t quite right about this.

Gabriel had left on Lucas’ orders to go and check the rest of

the house for any other casualties. He returned a moment later. Too soon to have checked thoroughly.

“What is it?”

“*We have a visitor, My Lord. A woman, she says it’s important.*”

Lucas focused his thoughts on the front door, “Ah, Emily.” Lucas didn’t have time for this. But she was another loose end, “Show her to my study.”

“Yes, *My Lord.*” Gabriel left.

CHAPTER THIRTY

EMILY HAD NEVER seen the big man before. He led her through the grand room into the doors that she’d seen Lucas and his girlfriend disappear into a short week ago. She was led inside and the door was closed behind her. She nervously clutched the envelope in her left hand. She wasn’t sure what she had seen earlier on the campus with Lucas’ bodyguard, and she wasn’t she wanted to know what the hell she did see. However, she had to pursue it when a note was slipped under her door for a story of a lifetime. All she had to do was deliver this note to Lucas.

“You wish to see me?”

She jumped, startled because she hadn’t heard him enter. The light was dim in the room, just as when she saw the two lovers dancing together. She was still taken back by his handsome looks. She though she must have looked like a fool with her mouth hanging open. Then again, he should be used to it by now. She also thought his assistant was handsome until he showed her that freaky part of him by displaying his dental work.

Lucas closed the door behind him. Emily handed him the envelope she received.

“This came for you to my apartment.”

“did you read it?”

“No.”

He scanned her eyes for a moment, she lied, but for some reason she didn't understand what was in it, “Did you come here hoping for an update on your story?”

Emily smiled at him, “Not really. Actually I was wondering when and if you were going to pay for the damages that Jason caused.” Jason really did discourage her until she received this note.

“Oh yes. Well, that is something you will have to take up with Jason, when he is feeling better.” He didn't even bother denying it as his eyes scanned the note.

“Well, Lucas....are you going to share?”

He almost laughed, “No wonder you couldn't read it. It's in Gaelic.”

“Is that what that was?” She sighed. “Is it important?”

“Yes. Someone must've thought we knew each other after they read your article.” He said as he glanced at her, before returning to the note.

Hello dear brother and I do mean that in the most relative of sense. My, my, your Elsa has the sweetest tasting blood. So pure. So irresistible. I wonder if you have the slightest idea what I'm going to do with her. If you want her, come get her. Or what's left of her

Jack

Emily's mouth fell open a second time as she watched Lucas shake in rage. His appearance began to alter. She stepped backwards slowly, her eyes fixated on the alarming sight.

A cry of rage escaped him, “Your dead, Jack!” His inhuman voice rang in Emily's ears.

She backed herself up against a wall. Her eyes were wide

with horror. She then watched his crimson eyes focus on her.

He started toward her.

“Oh God! Lucas, I promise....no story!”

“It’s too late for that Emily!” He reached for her. Suddenly a burning pain ripped through him, searing his very soul. *Father!*

Lucas turned his head away from Emily, trying to control his emotions.

Gabriel rushed in at that moment.

“Lock her up!” He growled, “I’ll deal with her when I come back!” Lucas vanished instantly, focusing on the pain to lead him.

“You know father, I wouldn’t be doing this if you let me rule the association instead of Lucas.” Jack sat cross-legged on the floor outside of the room watching Valear suffer, “I was sure it was going to be me, up until Celeste’s and Ian’s removal. I figured that is why you never told Lucas who I really was.”

Valear looked up at him through crimson eyes, “You have no idea what power is Jack,” he hissed, “You have no idea what you’re dealing with.” Valear was able to manage a grisly smile.

“Oh, you are so wrong father, I know exactly what I’m dealing with. Lucas will be here soon. I’m sure he would have received my note by now. It would anger him so much that his sanity would be lost to his emotions. Lucas’ emotions have always been his undoing. Then he will be vulnerable to me.”

“Aren’t you confident,” Lucas vaporized behind him.

Jack turned suddenly to Lucas’ voice, surprised. He quickly masked it and stood, placing his fingers on another light switch, “This one controls the light just above Valear Lucas. Come a little closer if you wish to see him turn into a French fry. I know it has been a life long dream of mine to see it happen.”

“I don’t think you were really listening to what Valear had to say, Jack.” It would have made a difference before, but not

know.

Jack narrowed his eyes toward Lucas, “Something is different...” He turned to Valear as the horrible realization hit him, “You bastard!”

Valear responded with an evil grin and straightened himself to his full height.

“You *knew* all along?” Jack accused.

“I know what all my children think, Jack.”

Jack’s anger began to bring out the beast in him and his features began to alter, “At least I will take you with me.” His hand thrust up on the light switch.

The light flickered above Valear. Yet, the ancient Vampire just stood and allowed an evil grin to grace his pale sunken face. Jack stood in shock as the light flickered and lit, yet there was no reaction from him.

“What the hell!” Jack was stunned. The light didn’t affect him at all!

“You are a fool Jack.” Hissed Valear, “Light doesn’t bother me!” he emitted what Lucas thought might be a laugh, but it was a series of broken hisses.

“How--!”

“I am omnipotent!” he burst raising his arms in the air, “Nothing can harm me and now my true prodigy!” With that he vanished and Jack wheeled his attention on Lucas.

“That’s impossible! Every Vampire reacts to light! Valear hates light!” he screeched.

“He hates it, but it doesn’t harm him.” Lucas grinned and took advantage of Jack’s delayed shock. It was all the time Lucas needed. He was beside Jack in a flicker of an eyelid and thrust him hard enough to send him across the room slamming into the wall.

Lucas then focused his attention on Elsa’s fear.

Another tear choked its way out and rolled down her cheek. She was going to die here. She was sure there were others down there with her that weren't human. She could easily feel the heated sensation of being watched. Then it suddenly happened, the same familiar sound of ripping and tearing of flesh. Inhuman screams tore from the many surrounding her. She joined them, screaming at the top of her lungs, not being able to bear the terror anymore. When she finished the noises had stopped.

"Elsa." It was Lucas.

Relief flooded through her and she sobbed. It didn't sound like him, but she knew it was, "Oh thank God!" She choked out.

She felt herself being lifted off the floor into strong arms. The bonds that tied her hands were suddenly gone. Then she was kissed. It was a desperate possessive kiss.

"I'm sorry, my love." Lucas said after he kissed her, "You shouldn't have had to deal with this." He set her down on her feet, "Are you okay to walk? I will carry you."

She felt silly for nodding in the dark room, but he answered her as if he knew she nodded.

He brushed the tears from her cheeks, "Let's get out of here then." He held her hand and led her through the corpses that he'd left on the floor. She may not have been able to see, but he could, with no problem. It was how he was able to find those that lay in the darkness around her. Waiting for Jack's orders to have a piece of her. He was enraged and gladly killed them all. Dozens of Jack's followers were now dead. It serves them right, for choosing the wrong side. Jack now had no one left to aid him in his thirst for power. Lucas would have never attempted to destroy so many until this night, when he had the power to do so. He led Elsa up to the heavily bolted door and willed it to open. The metal hinges gave an eerie metallic snap as they twisted and broke. The door flew off the hinges, across the hall into the wall where it embedded itself.

Lucas couldn't deny he loved this new surge of power. Anything seemed possible. They stepped out into the dimly lit hall.

Elsa stared at the awesome image of the door embedded in the wall as he guided her by it.

Lucas began to lead her down the hall. She pulled on his arm making him pause to look at her, "What is it?"

"I'm scared," she stared up at him, "what if that ...other one, the one like you is still out there?"

Lucas concentrated for a moment, "He's gone."

"Where?"

"Far from here. He will be back. I have to find him and end this." He said seriously. It was then that he noticed the deep gouges on her neck and the fresh bruising there, "Jesus Elsa!" His fingers brushed over it and she flinched. Lucas growled, "That son of a bitch!" Jack had put his dirty hands on her. He was furious. His violet eyes flooded red.

As scared as she was seeing him this way, Elsa reached up and placed a hand on his jaw, "Lucas...I'm all right. It's okay. I'm still alive."

Lucas stared down at her tear stained face, and her words calmed him immediately. His eyes returned to their normal color.

She managed a weak smile, "Why do you need to go after him? Can't we just leave? No more killing Lucas, please."

"Elsa, there has already been a lot of killing."

She stared at him in surprise.

"There is something I need to confess to you, but after I get you home."

She sobbed, "Lucas I can't do this. There are too many secrets."

"I will explain it all, Elsa. I promise you that." He felt her hand tremble in his, "Right now I have to get you where you will

be the safest.” It would be dawn soon. She wasn’t safe in Jack’s house. Unknown to Elsa he had plans for her before the night was out, only he couldn’t tell her this now. She was still traumatized.

Jason woke several hours later and felt exhilarated. He didn’t know what Lucas had done to him, but he felt better than before. It was a fraction of the time needed for him to normally heal from such wounds. He could feel Lucas summon him to ready for his arrival. He felt an ease of relief as he was told that Elsa was with him.

He had several others quickly clear away the broken debris in Lucas’ room and wash the blood from the walls and furniture. The sheets were changed and Jason started a fire in the fireplace to warm the room. It looked as good as new with exception to a few missing pieces of furniture. Jason closed the door and walked down the hall. Emily’s screams pummeled his super sensitive hearing. She was screaming obscenities at them. It figures.

Elsa wasn’t sure how Lucas was able to get Gabriel to bring the car to pick them up at the remote area, but he was able to do it. She didn’t even know where this was. In the darkness she could barely make out the house they were leaving. She just knew it was dismal inside, nothing like the elegance that Lucas possessed.

In the darkness of the car, Lucas could feel her fear of him. It pained him to have her frightened of him even though he knew her love for him was greater.

Elsa chose to sit across from him in the car. She was so conflicted with what she’d seen. The horror and the terror she felt were so undeniably real. Would she be like those creatures that lay in wait for their master’s bidding? Would Lucas be able to control her like that?

Lucas interrupted her thoughts, "I would never hurt you."

She looked up at him and almost whispered, "I wish you would stop telling me what I'm thinking."

"We are connected."

"I know Lucas, I can't deny that." She tried not to start crying again and turned her head to look out the window.

"Elsa. Come here." Although, he understood her frustration, fear and anger, he couldn't possibly imagine the image that he projected to her now after she'd seen Jack.

She turned her head towards him.

"Please."

This time she did cry. She couldn't deny the fact that Lucas was all she wanted. He'd tried his best to protect her from the horror that his race was capable of. She found herself sliding off the seat towards him.

Lucas gathered her onto his lap and held her close, "I promised you the truth." He told her of Tanya and how he'd dealt with her.

Elsa openly sobbed against him.

"She was already dead, Elsa."

"she's dead because of me."

"No she's dead because of *us*. Her soul was not innocent or she wouldn't have gone after Ted to get to you."

"What?"

"She was after you for Jack, Elsa."

Lucas explained that when a mortal becomes immortal the strongest traits survive. With Tanya it was selfishness, and greed, which is quite common in the human race. "Rarely is there someone like you and I that put others first."

"she wasn't like that Lucas."

"Yes, she was. What you saw at my house was the real Tanya. Jason and I had nothing to do with her behavior."

"What?...but I thought..." She stared up at him.

“She would have turned you over to Jack, Elsa, without hesitation to get what she wanted.”

“Oh my God.” She mouthed. *Could that be true?*

“You will know soon enough.” He answered her unspoken question. Lucas would make her his tonight.

“It scares me, Lucas. You scare me.” Her thoughts of sorrow lingered on her dead friend.

“You love me.” He reminded her.

She said nothing. It was obvious that she did. She didn’t resist when his arms came around her. Instead she found herself savoring the feel of him instead.

They didn’t speak after that. She rested her head against his chest as he held her. She never felt so safe than she did in that moment regardless of everything that had just happened, who he was and Tanya’s death. Every now and then Lucas would bend his head and nuzzle her hair and she would forget what he was. He came for her. He saved her.

She was openly relieved when the car glided down the familiar paved driveway, through the iron gates and came to a stop in front of Lucas’ home. She actually felt protected there despite what had happened a few hours ago.

Lucas helped her out of the car and held onto her hand possessively even after the car drove away.

Jason was waiting for them when they came through the door.

Elsa was surprised to see him in one piece. She threw her arms around him, “Thank God you’re alive!” She looked up at him, “I thought you were dead.” She cried. She thought he lost his life trying to protect her. The skin on the right side of his face was more pink than the surrounding flesh indicating a flesh wound that had since healed.

Jason looked sheepishly at Lucas, who just shrugged his shoulders.

She released him and backed up, “I thought he killed you.”

“He just about did.” Jason nodded toward Lucas.

She turned and looked at him, her jaw dropped, “You saved him?”

“I’m not all bad Elsa.” He smiled at her.

Elsa blushed, “Lucas, that’s not what I meant.” She didn’t realize that they had the power to heal also. Memories of her in the hospital with her broken ankle surfaced.

“I know.” He smiled. He slid his arm around her waist, “Come.”

She stared at him as he led her up the stairs, “At the hospital...my ankle....that was you, not the doctor’s misdiagnosis?”

“Yes.”

“You did that for me?” She asked

“I would do anything for you Elsa. I thought I made that clear.”

“But you didn’t know me then.”

“I knew enough.” He could see her eyes tear up when realization hit her.

He’d proved to her time and time again that he was genuine in his adoration for her and she knew how she felt about him. It was never a reality to her on how he felt. He was rich, handsome and could have his pick of anyone, but he chose her, “I never thought....”

He stared at her, “Now you won’t doubt how I feel anymore.” He leaned down and kissed her on the cheek, allowing his lips to linger there, “I love you.” He said quietly for her to hear.

She stepped up to him and hugged him. She felt like a fool. He’d been reassuring her constantly on how he felt, trying to quell her doubts, but she never did fully believe him. She had seen such horrible things in the past few hours, and didn’t realize

it could have been a lot worse if Lucas hadn't been there to protect her. In fact, none of this would have occurred if he wasn't so enamored with her. He wouldn't have had to risk so much. She'd been able to piece things together with what Jason had told her and the night's events.

He held her in turn, and then the screaming started again.

"Oh shit." Jason turned to look at them.

"Who is *that*?" Elsa asked as she looked from one to the other.

Lucas knew there could be no more secrets between them if she was to trust him, "I'll show you." He opened the door where Emily's voice was coming from, and all three stepped inside. He knew she might be angry with him over this, but he'd promised her, no more secrets.

Emily stood silent staring at them, her fists clenched in anger.

Lucas introduced them just as if he was casually doing it at a social gathering, "Elsa, I'd like you to meet Journalist, Emily shanks."

"Are you crazy!" Emily was struck out of her silence over the casual greeting, "let me out of here!"

"What is she doing here, and why is she screaming?" Elsa asked innocently, not missing the amused smiles on Lucas and Jason faces, "This isn't funny Lucas."

Their amused smiles faded at Elsa's scolding

"Elsa, Emily pleaded, "You've got to get him to let me go. These two are monsters."

Elsa grew angry, "Don't you ever call them monsters. You don't know the half of it."

Lucas laughed this time, "It all right, love. She's a little eccentric."

"Who? Me? You can't hold me against my will Mr. Edwards. I have rights and people will be looking for me. Besides, I'm not

the one with glowing eyes.” She accused.

“Yes you do have rights.” Lucas took Elsa’s hand and turned to leave giving Jason a private look as he left.

Jason read his meaning, the girl was his.

“where are you going? Lucas, Elsa....I’m talking to you!” she yelled as Lucas shut the door.

“Are you going to hurt her?”

“No, Elsa, there are other ways.” He nearly took her life when she had brought information of Elsa, but he’d since changed his mind, “She is no threat to us.” He led her to his door, opened it, and allowed her to enter first.

Elsa noticed that the room looked as though nothing had happened only a few hours ago. The table and chairs by the fire were gone, obviously broken. She shuddered at the images of the fight. She turned and faced Lucas, “Will that...that is...” She didn’t know exactly what to call him.

“Jack.”

“Yes.” She involuntary touched her neck where he’d bitten her, “will he be back?”

“Not tonight. He’s regrouping his allies. What little he has left. Once word gets out about me, no one will challenge me.”

Elsa looked confused, “What has happened?”

“You will know soon enough.”

Her eyes widened as she found his meaning, “No, Lucas. I haven’t decided.”

“I have.” He stepped toward her.

She started backwards, “You told me I could have time.” She backed up against the wall next to the fire.

He stood directly in front of her, “There is no other way. If I don’t claim you Elsa, Jack will come. If he gets a hold of you again knowing what Valear has given me, he could destroy me through you. Even worse, he could take you as his own.”

Elsa brought her hands to her mouth at the grisly picture

Lucas was giving her. Her memories of Jack biting her were too real and vivid in her mind. The terror he'd put her through was unforgettable. His viciousness was a far cry from the gentleness that Lucas had displayed towards her.

"Yes Elsa, he will make it painful. He will make you suffer just to spite me." He cupped her head in his hands forcing her to look at him, "I need you with me, Elsa. You now understand that we cannot go on like this as one mortal, and one immortal."

"There must be another way." She pleaded. She really didn't want to die. She wanted to stay normal and love Lucas like this. However, she didn't want another man either. She didn't want to start over with someone else. She couldn't deny that she loved him more than anything. He provided her with the strength to feel confident in herself. He allowed her to be herself without any restrictions.

"No. there isn't." his eyes focused on hers, he brushed a tear away that fell down her cheek. "I promise it won't be painful. I will be gentle and you will welcome it. There is unimaginable power that will come with this and you will be a part of it." He grabbed her hand, "Come with me Elsa." His violet eyes beckoned her.

She responded slowly, reluctantly and pushed herself away from the wall toward him.

They stood beside his bed. He reached behind her and unzipped her dress, his eyes never leaving hers. His hands caressed her back up behind her head and he pulled her to him and kissed her gently.

She loved the feel of his mouth on hers. He was always in such control, yet patient, waiting for her reaction, until he ventured further, enticing her, teaching her. She was almost lost in her desires when foreboding thoughts entered her head of his true intentions and she pulled back from him.

"Don't be afraid, Elsa. I won't take you by surprise. I want

to take my time and make love to you first.” He knew she wouldn’t relax until he had reassured her.

“I’m so scared Lucas,” she hugged herself and her dress fell loosely past her shoulders resting on her upper arms.

He smiled at her, she still radiated in innocence, even after all that she’d been through. However, he wasn’t changing his mind. He would have her before the sun rose. There wasn’t any other choice. She would have to accept it as she accepted him. “I will be gentle Elsa. Trust me.”

She gave him a smile, the first one in what seemed like an eternity, “I do trust you Lucas. I always did.” She stepped up to him and laid her head against his chest and hugged him, “You have tried to prevent me from being hurt so many times tonight. How could I not trust you now? I’m just frightened. I’m scared of the unknown.” She felt so small next to him, yet she now knew she no longer feared him. She knew he was right, she had to accept this if she wanted to be with him, and she did. She didn’t want to turn out like Tanya or have Jack touch her again. He was pure evil, a demon. She new Lucas was being reserved in the things that Jack could really do to her if she was somehow caught by him again. She couldn’t turn back now, it was too late. Also, did she really want to?

Lucas closed his eyes against her forward show of affection and circled his arms around her. It was the first time she had been affectionate without him coaxing her to do so tonight.

She suddenly let go and stood back, “Then do it now Lucas, I may be terrified, but I can’t be with you now and have it in the back of my mind.” She looked away from him for a moment, in thought before turning back to him, “I understand that it has to be this way, but my fear of the unknown is not going to change. It will not be easier for me later than it is now. It could be worse because I would have time to think about it. So do it now, before I try and run from here screaming and cause us both a lot of

pain.” She let her arms drop, which in turn caused her dress to fall to the floor. She stood naked in front of him. “Now, Lucas, please.”

He knew she was frightened. He’d felt her trembling. He admired how hard she was trying to be brave. She was giving up so much for him. She stood in front of him willing to sacrifice her mortality for him, for them. Her nakedness just added to her vulnerability. Regardless of her fears, he couldn’t deny how intoxicating this whole scene was for him. Her beauty, the innocence that radiated off of her and her helplessness was actually firing his hunger for her. He wanted her to feel safe and protected.

“What do I need to do?”

He chuckled, “First you have to relax.” He started unbuttoning his shirt, “I know just the solution.”

She watched his fingers travel down the front of his shirt, “but I thought...”

“Shhh.” He stripped off his shirt. His eyes never leaving hers, “there is a right way and a wrong way. I want the right way. Come here.”

She stepped up to him, “but Lucas...”

Lucas shook his head, “Be patient Elsa, you have to want this. I’m going to make sure that there is no doubt in your mind when it happens.” His hands reached up and threaded through the hair at the back of her head.

When he lowered his head to kiss her, she felt a familiar surge of sexual power. It was bewitching. Her fear slowly ebbed out of her and was replaced by an erotic passion. She moaned against his mouth.

He inwardly smiled at her new found desire. Her fear mixed with her desires creating a new ecstasy for her.

In moments she was on his bed with him on top of her, flesh on flesh. His lips moved expertly against hers as his hands

caressed the recesses of her body. Then he stopped and rose to his knees pulling her with him. He held her in an embrace.

“Will it always be like this?” she whispered, with his head against his chest.

“Yes.” He said softly, his hands sliding down the gentle arch of her back, “It can be better.” He brought his finger across the base of his chest in front of her and easily sliced open the flesh allowing the crimson liquid freedom to drip down his flesh and across his abdomen. His voice was laced with passion, “Drink Elsa, take what I have to offer you and no other.”

Her eyes focused on him, then she turned her attention to his chest. She wasn't sure what had done it for her, but when she saw the blood, she could not resist the urge to taste it. Her lips brushed against his chest and she drank.

He tilted his head back and groaned at the orgasmic feeling it gave him. He then found himself being shoved backward on the bed as she came down on top of him, hungrily drinking his life force. He threaded his fingers in her mass of black curls as she fed on him causing intense sexual desires. He finally had to reach up and take her head between his hands to stop her. She tried to resist and bring her mouth back to his chest. He suddenly whipped her over on her back and entered her swiftly. She cried out in pleasure.

“Let me taste my blood on your lips, my love.”

She complied and their lips melded in liquid fire. His fingers threaded through hers and forced her arms over her head.

Every inch of her was on fire with need as his blood flowed through her veins flooding her with such intense sexual desire. She writhed beneath him craving more of his passion.

He gave in to her by thrusting deep and hard. She let small noises of wanton ecstasy escape her parted lips. He moved inside of her in the same rhythmic pattern that he'd mastered so well over the centuries, knowing what she needed by the slightest

reaction of her body.

She threw back her head against the blankets as she neared her climax.

Lucas' eyes focused on the soft spot of her neck that drummed a rapid pulse. He thrust into her with more strength than he knew he should have, but she didn't complain and cried his name.

They reached their peak together. Lucas' back arched up as he allowed his Vampiric teeth to release themselves, before snapping his head down and biting through flesh and bone, none so gently to reach that rich vein. *She was his.*

She held him tight as he fed. Waves of her climax still coursed through her, and although she felt the pressure, there was no pain.

He devoured the sweet, warm liquid. It was rich with innocence. He drank until he felt the life ebb from her. Only until she lay still and her arms slackened and fell off him did he stop.

He lifted his head from her and growled. It was the wild frenzy of feeding that had altered his features. That and the passion they had just shared. He sat back and lifted her lifeless body to him. Her arms fell limp at her sides. Her head lolled back. He lifted it to his shoulder and rolled back onto the bed taking her with him. He grieved for the loss of her mortality, but he anticipated her rebirth. He would be waiting for her when she awoke.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

“DON'T YOU HAVE some sort of cave or something that you came out of that might be missing you.” Emily shot sarcastically at Jason, who had remained behind when Lucas and Elsa had left.

Jason chuckled, *I thought Tanya was stubborn.*

“Why are you here? Are you supposed to kill me?” She paced in front of him, “Christ, I wish I had a cigarette!”

“I’m not going to kill you Emily. You don’t have to worry about that.”

She stopped and stared at him, “Do you mean I did all that bloody screaming for nothing!”

Jason removed his gray blazer and tossed it on the bed as he walked toward her with a smoldering look in his eyes. “Oh, it wasn’t for nothing.”

She stared at him until she realized his intent, “What? Oh no way Mr. Markam...or whatever you are. I know the impression I gave you when I first met you, but I was after a story. It was business.”

“Uh huh,” he nodded, starting to undo his tie. Regardless of his feelings for Tanya, she was gone. He needed to fulfill the heavy sexual yearnings that he had. She was it. He did find her amusing, but she was also beautiful and quite a handful. Just the way he liked them.

“Put your clothes back on Jason!” She demanded as he started to unbutton his shirt. She waved a finger at him, “That is no way to get what you want. Maybe dinner or a movie.”

“Scared Emily?” he tilted his head at her.

She shook her head, “You wish.” She turned and grabbed a vase off a nearby table. “This could cause considerable damage.” She held it as she would a baseball bat.

Jason stopped unbuttoning his shirt and looked at her amused, “Are you finished?”

“You think this is funny? Scaring me? You are sick.”

“I think you’re just delaying, or is this your form of foreplay?”

“go to hell.”

His eyes flashed yellow like a wolves for an instant before

returning to their normal Mocha color, “Tell me what you desire Emily.”

His eyes burned her soul, “Holy shit!” she backed up against the table she took the vase off of. It startled her and she dropped the vase just to have it shatter on the tile floor.

He walked up to her, “I could make all your fantasies come true.”

“You don’t look like to big African Americans to me.” She had a terrible time trying to resist him. He seemed twice as handsome as he did a moment ago, and his eyes seemed to promise her all her sexual desires.

“Having a problem?” he mused.

“What are you doing to me?” She made the same mistake that Tanya had made by closing her eyes against his closeness. She felt herself naked, on top of him, her fingers raking down his chest in the heat of passion as he entered her, filling her whole being. The vision left her as suddenly as it came, when she opened her eyes. Her breathing was erratic and she tried to calm herself down, “What was that?” She couldn’t keep the excitement out of her voice.

“Us.” Came his heated reply as he removed his shirt, showing her a thick chest lightly dusted with hair.

Her eyes darted to it, remembering the feeling of her nails raking across his flesh.

“Your turn.” He stepped up to her, his body mere inches from hers.

“You play dirty.” She quickly pulled off her shirt.

A smile of triumph pulled at his mouth.

Linda watched out the window until dawn had crested the sky. She let out a sigh, She was finally able to relax. She had been up for the rest of the night watching over Ted while clutching the cross like it was a part of her. She had a wet, cold

cloth on his head. She walked over and took it off to rinse it. She had stayed up just to make sure the Vampires wouldn't return, not knowing what she'd do if they did. Ted moaned and she sat down on the floor beside him. He was too heavy to move off the floor by herself so she just took the quilt off the bed and covered him in it. He had been stirring for about an hour and she now believed Lucas that he would be okay. Much to her chagrin, the cross she'd been searching for was wrapped up in the blankets. She stuck it in her purse just in case she needed it later. God, she needed a shower! She would wait until Ted would wake up before she did. Then she would drag him to Lucas' estate to check on Elsa. She was taken out of there so fast that she didn't have a chance to stop them. She knew what she pledged to Lucas last night, but she just wanted to make sure that Elsa was okay. She stared down at Ted. She wouldn't tell him what had almost happened to her last night, because she just wanted to erase it from her memory. However, she did find a sinister satisfaction in the fact that Lucas had killed him.

Jason had left Emily asleep in his room. He knew that Lucas would pay a visit to her later to purge her memory. It was unfortunate because she was incredible in bed. It was too bad that werewolves couldn't reproduce the way Vampires could, because he would sincerely consider her. Maybe Lucas would be in a generous mood and let him keep her for a while longer.

Linda and Ted arrived at Lucas house just before sunset. Ted was still drowsy, but he refused to let Linda go alone. They got out of the car and walked up to the door. Linda was surprised that the guards at the front gate waved them through. It was like they were expected.

"Are we supposed to knock?" Ted stared at her.

She didn't know, "I guess." She lifted the heavy knocker and banged it a few times. They probably knew that they were there

already.

Gabriel opened the door and stared at the two for a moment. He shrugged his shoulders and stepped aside just as Linda opened her mouth to say something.

She clamped it shut when she saw him step aside and let them walk by him.

Gabriel shut the door behind them.

“We would like to see Elsa.”

“Of course.” He looked out one of the far windows at the receding daylight, then turned back to them, “It will be a few moments, please wait here.” He turned and left.

Linda reached for her purse and brought it around to hold it in front of her stomach. Her nervousness was reduced knowing that the cross was within.

Elsa was nestled on Lucas’ shoulder when she woke. She lifted her head to look at him, he was already awake.

He could feel her stirring but he didn’t want to rush it, she would be out of sorts for a moment or two. He had summoned Jason to bring her a drink before she’d woken. He reached for the elegant crystal glass on his bedside table. *Here, Elsa, drink this.*

She’d felt a horrible cramping hunger in her stomach and winced, “What is it?” She didn’t notice that his lips didn’t move when he’d spoke to her, his words were that clear.

“Blood. It will ease the pain.”

She sat up and took the glass from him. She stared at it for a moment before she downed it’s contents. A rush of undeniable pleasure washed through her, “Oh God!” she put her free hand to her chest in awe and soon the cramping ceased.

Lucas grinned taking the glass from her.

“Is it always this incredible?”

“Yes.” He rose up and kissed her neck, “I will show you so

much, my love. This is just the beginning.” He murmured against her skin as he moved his kisses up to her mouth and captured it fully.

This time she was the aggressor and Lucas gave her the freedom she needed. She was exquisite in his form, powerfully sensuous and his. She was his. They made love without inhibition and he showed her how phenomenal it could be. Again and again she moaned sweetly while he possessed her fully. He loved her.

Afterwards, Lucas pulled her back on the bed with him smiling, “Well?”

“Wow.” She managed in a whisper.

He raised himself up on his elbows, “I have something for you.” He reached into his bedside table drawer and pulled out a black velvet box.

Her interest peaked and she sat up, “What is it?”

He opened the case. His eyes watched hers intently.

Her eyes widened in awe. She had never seen such beautiful diamonds, “Oh Lucas....” She reached for the necklace, “It’s beautiful!” She fingered the gems, “Why?” She looked at him.

“You know why.” He smiled, and took the necklace from her placing it around her neck doing up the clasp in the back.

“You shouldn’t have. I know they were expensive.” Her hand caressed the necklace.

He shook his head, “Not expensive enough. It looks beautiful on you.” He moved her hair off her shoulders admiring the gems on her skin. He kissed her bare shoulder, “Anything you want Elsa, if it is within my reach, it’s yours.”

Elsa couldn’t hold back the tears that welled up in her eyes, “No one has treated me the way you do, Lucas. I wish I could do something for you.”

His eyebrows went up, “I think you just did, don’t you.”

She blushed, “Not that....”

Lucas' head turned toward the door interrupting her.

"What is it?"

He looked back at her, "Close your eyes Elsa."

"Why?"

"Just do it, and you'll see."

She did.

"Now, listen to everything around you...the crackling embers in the fire, the breeze in the trees, and..."

"...Linda." She said as her eyes shot open.

"Good. I think this will be easier than I thought."

"Is she here?"

"Yes, with Ted downstairs. We'd better get dressed."

"maybe it would have been easier if we called first..." Ted's voice trailed off.

Linda looked at him and noticed that he stared past her to the stairs with a look of awe on his face. She followed his gaze to the top of the stairs.

Lucas zipped up the back of Elsa's dress, "Exquisite." He admired how beautiful she was. "Only one thing missing." He held another box for her.

"Another one?" She stared at him.

"You need the earrings to go with that necklace."

Lucas stood at the top, clothed in an elegant black double breasted dress coat, a burgundy shirt and black tie. His shoulder length locks curled roguishly under his strong, square jaw. His face had an indisputable look of pride on his face as he had his head turned to the side. Linda could see that he had reason, for Elsa had descended the stairs with him. Her arm looped through his. She was a perfect picture of virtuous grace, clad in a slimming black evening gown that showed her voluptuous

unforgivable figure. One of her long legs would appear almost up to the hip through a stylish slit when she stepped down a stair. Linda thought that Lucas must love that style. The strapless, low cut bodice was decorated with a priceless necklace of teardrop diamonds that crested just above her firm breasts. Her thick black hair was pinned up showing her elegant neck and her ears were donned with large matching diamond earrings. She saw that Elsa, in turn, was staring back at Lucas with adoration.

Linda watched them together and realized that her coming here was a waste of time. They were infatuated with one another, and that was an extreme understatement. They were a portrait of powerful desire and flaming passion. She felt almost ashamed for intruding on them, "I see you have made your decision Elsa." She knew she just lost a dear, and the only true friend she ever had.

"She has." Lucas said as he looked at the two.

Ted was unable to look him in the eye, especially after the way he ogled Elsa...again.

"Elsa is there some place we can talk?" She spared an unsure glance at Lucas.

"My study is free." Lucas volunteered.

Elsa nodded and Lucas gave her an affectionate kiss on the cheek before she left with her friends in tow.

Once they were in the room and the door was closed Linda felt safe to speak, "Are you okay?"

Elsa gave her a confused look, "Why wouldn't I be?"

"I was just concerned. When I saw you last night, you were so upset."

Elsa shook her head, "Things have changed. I don't belong there anymore."

Linda was taken back, "What about your education, you're degree? You wanted to be a Doctor."

"Not anymore."

“Be careful Elsa. Men like to shower women with gifts to get what they want,” She indicated to the necklace.

Elsa laughed, “You don’t understand Linda, I can’t ever go back there.”

“Do you mean because he is a Vampire? I saw him change Elsa, right before he went after Tanya. Did you know that she attacked Ted and tried to kill him?”

She surprised Linda, “Yes, I knew that.”

“What? And you’re still here?”

“Lucas doesn’t keep secrets from me, Linda, he had no choice in eliminating her....I know that now.”

“Don’t you mean murdering?” Her mouth hung open.

“She was already dead Linda. She would have gone on to suck the life out of all that she knew, and more. Lucas did her a favor by destroying her.”

“How can you say that? She wouldn’t have had that happen to her, if you weren’t infatuated with Lucas.” Linda accused.

“She would have killed Ted, Linda. Does that sit well with you?” Elsa could feel her anger rising and quickly turned away from her. She could feel something building in her, and she didn’t want her friends to see it, “Tanya made her own choice to involve herself in this, no one made it for her.” Elsa walked over and leaned on Lucas’ desk as she fought the surge of power that had invaded her. Her protective instincts fought for release and she had difficulty holding them back.

Ted walked up to her and put a hand on her shoulder, “Are you okay?”

“Please don’t touch me.” She whispered.

Her removed his hand, “What is it? Are you sick?”

Linda came up and stood behind Ted thinking that she’d really upset her, “I’m sorry Elsa, I know Tanya was your friend too.”

“You two don’t understand,” she stated in a harsh whisper,

“Things can never be the way they were...”

“...they can, Elsa, we just have to...” Linda’s voice was cut off when Elsa turned to face them.

Her beautiful features remained unchanged with the exception of the long canine teeth that clearly showed themselves when she talked causing her to lisp a little, “I can’t Linda.”

“Oh no! Not you!” she sobbed.

“Please, I would never hurt you.” She pleaded as Ted and Linda backed away from her in fear. Ted’s face whitened as recent events with Tanya surfaced, “You are my friends.”

“Tanya was our friend also,” Linda argued, “and she had no problem chewing on Ted!”

“That is different. She was made by another’s evil, used only as a pawn...”

“...Another?” Linda and Ted said in unison.

Just then Lucas burst through the door yelling Elsa’s name followed by shattering glass. The force threw all three to the ground backwards to the floor knocking Linda and Ted out cold.

Elsa felt someone land on her and then her hair was pulled on painfully guiding her to her feet.

“Hello again gorgeous!” Jack slipped his other arm around her waist.

She twisted fiercely in his grip and raked her nails down his face.

He howled and released her.

She flew across the room behind Lucas, “You’re too late Jack, and I’ve already claimed my bride! You’re stupid to think I wouldn’t.”

Jack seethed with rage, “You have taken what I rightly deserve!” The grooves Elsa left in his flesh repaired themselves.

Linda came around then and moaned. She saw Ted beside her and then noticed Lucas facing down another man. It only took a moment for her to realize who had shattered the windows.

She grabbed for her purse and removed the cross. She slowly got to her feet and approached the intruder from behind.

“The only thing you deserve is a quick end to your pathetic existence.” Lucas growled as his features started to alter.

Linda raised her hand with the intention of bringing the sharp point down into his back when he suddenly turned and grabbed her wrist, “Stupid bitch! You don’t think I didn’t hear you coming?” He thrust her against the front of him and twisted her wrist painfully enough for her to scream and drop the cross.

“Oh God Lucas, don’t let him hurt her!” Elsa cried.

“Do you always get mortals to fight your battles for you brother?” In one swift movement he sunk his teeth into Linda’s neck.

Elsa screamed.

“You afraid of me jack?” Lucas could feel Elsa’s pain and Linda’s helpless terror. He knew she couldn’t handle it if she lost another friend.

Jack lifted his head, “You challenging me Lucas?” He dropped his victim and she fell to the floor.

Elsa sobbed at the scene.

Lucas leapt at him and Jack responded in same. They met in mid air. Lucas thrust Jack up high enough that he was slammed against the ceiling. He then let him fall to the floor just missing Linda’s still body. Lucas landed upright beside him. He was about to reach for him again when Valear, in all his gruesome glory appeared between them staring down at Jack.

“You have a death wish.”

Lucas stopped his attack and backed off. Valear had his reasons for being here and Lucas wouldn’t interfere.

“Lucas?” Elsa’s voice shook with fear upon seeing Valear. He was so terrifying to look at that she’d forgotten about her friend’s still body on the floor several feet away.

Valear, sensing her unrest focused on her for a moment,

“You do well as one of us, my dear.” He returned his attention back to Jack who was struggling to stand, “You are a bigger fool than I thought, if you think you can defeat Lucas, in all his power.”

“It was supposed to be mine!” He spat through his clenched teeth.

“I never promised you anything Jack.” Valear mused, “Lucas was always my true choice. It was no secret.”

“Why did you allow me my existence then?” he raged

Valear almost laughed, “You were no threat to me. Lucas needed a challenge...a toy of sorts to threaten him, train him. He needed to learn his risks and be able to defend those he loved.” He spared a glance at Elsa.

A look of horrible realization hit him, “I was a training prop! After all these centuries, my existence meant nothing! Just a pawn for your precious Lucas?” Jack’s rage became uncontrollable.

“Your heart was dark before I ever changed you. I cannot entrust you with such power. Your murderous soul would have destroyed all that has been formed over eons. You would murder uncontrollably and irresponsibly. Our race would be discovered and destroyed because of you.” Valear waved a dismissing hand in front of him, “Do you think I would be so foolish to entrust this to you?” He gave Jack a sardonic smile, “You are a Fool.”

A hideous anguished roar tore from Jack as he leapt at Valear. Shear rage registered on his Vampiric face.

In an instant Lucas was in front of Valear and seized Jack before he reached him, throwing him over their heads to the floor. Valear turned and watched, remaining unmoved with his hands calmly clasped in front of him as if he expected Lucas to interfere. Lucas leapt on top of him, his powerful protective instinct changing him into his true self, “I want you to suffer, “ Lucas’ voice boomed in the room, “for all you’ve done to me and

mine!”

Jack’s eyes widened in fear.

Lucas’ own unexplored power overwhelmed him. He could feel the fear off of Jack as he twisted his head effortlessly and tore the flesh away at the neck while he fed.

Jack’s scream of pain was so piercing that Elsa had to cover her ears.

Lucas drove his fist into his chest and removed his heart. He then stood, looking down at the body as it suddenly took on a pale look. Within seconds, the flesh began to turn gray then crumble into ash. Nothing was left but the clothes Jack wore and a pile of ashes.

When Lucas turned to face Elsa, his face was normal. She had forgotten about Valear and ran over to him. She wrapped her arms around him, “Are you okay?”

He smiled down at her, “I’m fine....”

Valear glided toward Elsa and Lucas. He watched Elsa shrink partially behind Lucas.

Lucas pulled her to him and held her tightly with his arm around her waist, *Don’t frightened Elsa, he is on our side.*

“Yes.” Valear hissed as he neared them, “I am.” He stopped in front of Elsa and his words came through as clear as he was speaking them out loud.

Do you not know me little girl?

She shook her head unable to take her eyes off his ghastly face.

I knew your mother.

“W-what did you say?”

I loved her...as best as I could, in my way. I followed her one evening home from a grocery store. She was suicidal you know?

“I didn’t.”

She was pregnant by a man who did not stay around after

she found out.

Elsa began to weep “She never talked about my father”

“do not cry little one. I watched her. You were a lot like her you know. She was beautiful and radiant. “ He spoke out loud

“She still managed to kill herself.”

“I shouldn’t have left, but I did. It was for her safety not mine. I watched you grow for several years.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” It was Lucas’ voice that interrupted.

His answer to Lucas was a mere smile, before he turned back to Elsa, “Something happened, when I was with your mother. I used to visit her in her dreams.”

Elsa blushed knowing what that was like.

Valear managed a smile as her thoughts came through, “I see. I don’t have to explain further.” He settled his ghoulish eyes on her causing her to avert her gaze and blush more.

“Not in this form, but in another. She was quite willing because she was lonely and one of those nights there was an exchange of blood, but I never took her life making her one of us because of you. I am not a baby killer regardless of incidents that have happened in the past. The unborn child would have died. When I returned years later she was dead, and the child was gone.”

“Father are you saying that Elsa received some of your blood while she was yet to be born?”

“Yes.”

Lucas was taken back. Everything made sense! Her ability to summon him without knowing it, the powerful desires she held and the bewitching power she had over him. No mortal could have affected him in such a way.

She looked at Lucas, “What does that mean?”

He smiled down at her, “It means that you were meant to be mine.”

Valear chuckled, “In a sense my dear, he is right. This is your destiny.” He looked at Lucas, “You keep her close Lucas. I will be watching over my children. I trust you to be as powerful and fair as I know you can.”

Lucas bowed, and Valear placed an affectionate hand on his shoulder, then he faded into mist which dispersed so quickly it was as if he was never there.

Elsa heard Linda starting to stir, “Lucas...my friends.”

Grasping both of her hands, he turned to her, “I need you to leave.” Jason opened the door at that moment as Lucas summoned him, “Go with Jason. Trust me to care for your friends.”

Elsa glanced at the two on the floor, then back at Lucas. A small smile splayed across her lips, as she stepped up on her toes and kissed him, “I do trust you my love.” Without sparing another glance at her friends, she left the room. Jason closed the door behind her.

Linda saw her leave and watched Lucas come over to her and crouch down in front of her, taking her chin in his hand. “I can’t let you interfere anymore Linda.” She began to tremble in fear. “I love Elsa too much to watch her suffer over her friend’s constant meddling. She will forgive me in time over what I need to do.”

EPILOGUE

Linda smiled at her husband. Ted had one arm around her waist and his other holding her hand as he helped her off the dance floor. She needed help. She was just thankful her water didn’t break when he insisted on twirling her around. It had been five years since he finished his degree and opened a very

successful practice with a loan from her father. He had been able to pay him back within two years, then he finally proposed. Now they were expecting their first child.

She never thought she could be so happy. Of course she never did finish school, but her father seemed proud of her regardless and he genuinely was fond of his son-in-law. He was just happy a man was able to tame her.

As they made their way back to their table where her father sat waiting they nearly bumped into another couple. "Oh, excuse us." Said Ted. "As you can see, we need more than room for two."

Linda looked at the couple and had to stifle a gasp. The only word she could come up with at that moment was beautiful. He was unbelievably handsome, but she was undeniably radiant. She saw the handsome couple share a look as if unspoken words were exchanged between them before the man spoke, "I assure you, it's our fault."

"When are you due?" Came the woman's beautiful voice.

Linda beamed, "four weeks. It's our first." She saw the woman look at Ted who was momentarily speechless, "Congratulations."

"Come love," Said the man, "This is your favorite."

Linda saw her smile at him as he winked at her, taking her hands. "Wow." She said to Ted as he led the woman onto the dance floor. "have you ever seen two people more in love?"

He placed his arm around her shoulder and gave her a squeeze, "Yes."

"You know it's really odd. Although I know I have never seen them before, I feel as though I know them."

"You have seen them before."

"I have?"

"That's the multibillionaire Lucas Edwards and his wife Elsa. They're always plastered all over the tabloids."

Linda laughed, “I remember now.” She recalled the headlines.

“The latest one said they had blood sucking vampires living on their estate.”

Linda laughed again. “How ridiculous.”



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