



*Vicious
In
Love*

To Drown in Love, Is not Drowning At All

By D.D. DASS

BookRix

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Vicious In Love

Ian & Elizabeth

In dedication to all you paranormal fans! "Hello walls, Hello pillow, no one answers when I scream."

Defining the Civilization(s):

Just to clear up any confusion, this is all based on idea's that I've decided to write out! So it probably makes no sense, but I tried! :)

-Danii .xx

Ramai:*the blooded civilians of the Vampire class; Vampire aristocrates.*

Untransitioned: *Before puberty; a vampire's existence where they do not process abilities unlike human and are able to survive without the blood of the opposite sex.*

Transitioned: *the completion of development or the beginning of adulthood. Occurs usually in early twenties, may be critical for some.*

Amercement:*the treatment of which a debt is repaid, generally through torture.*

Parterra: *guardian for the younger*

Tyren: *a female's mate.*

Irryn: *a male's mate.*

Old Axvem:*fluent language of the ancient vampire class.*

Goddess of Blood Bonds: *the creator of the vampire species.*

Leader(s): *vampire descendents with bloodlines strongest connected to the Goddess. Pocesesses traits abnormal to the common*

Vamp such as mind-reading, morphing, ect.

Civilization(s): *Secret safe-houses built for the civilian vampire class*

Other(s): *Soulless beings, created by the Deserect to slay all vampires, and form a high class of an embodied race.*

Deserect: *a disembodiment of Gods conjoined through black energy caught in the fifth realm.*

First realm: *the God of all creations holds the souls of those without darkness, (heaven).*

Second Realm: *most known for the pure energy of all faded life, where vampires experience a type of 'nirvana'*

Third Realm: *the human existence, the realm of life*

Fourth Realm: *God's and Goddess' realm*

Fifth Realm: *known as the realm of death, of those where darkened souls continue*

Vampire: *Species created by Goddess of Blood Bonds superhuman to humans. Following their transitions, vampires must take the vein of the opposite sex regularly or they will become weak and agonized. Most cannot walk into the sunlight, though through age it is possible. Human's cannot be "converted" through a simple bite but must be on the verge of death before fed the blood of a vampire, though this is dangerous and more than likely will result in death. Vampires do possess abilities that differentiate them from humans, and are immortal, though death can occur through critical acts.*

Hunters/ Superhuman(s): *Class of super-human's that are neither Vampire nor Others but come from the ancestry of humans that have developed abilities to hunt both species.*

Prologue:

The only son of Krait, third *leader*, sat before the Vampire Council, staring, in a numbly calm state, at the *leaders* that stood, cloaked and hardly visible from behind the portal that separated the fourth realm.

Only two of the five Ian had heard of were present: Nicholas, blooded young of Aeluis, and Lucius, blooded son Caiside. The area where his sire once sat was empty. The sight left him...numb. Later, the reality would consume him, but for the time, he was floating in an emotionless abyss. It was sick. It was freeing.

It was Ian's first time standing beneath the males' easy glowers. In his young mind, he couldn't recall a time where he was close enough to be noticed, close enough to encounter the reactions the males inflicted in all. Awe-worth they were, standing tall, proud, and prevailing. All the things Ian was not.

"Stand all." The voice was low, but just as forceful as it'd be from a shout. All Vampires obeyed instantly, staring with the same cold, empty eyes. Ian jerked to a stance seconds to late, light-headed as he tried to breathe evenly, but it was hard, the mass of judgment was contracting around his lungs.

The voice rang on. "On this day, we stand to decide the fate of our lost. Krait Payne's blooded young, Ian Derik Payne, third *leader* in line." Ian's eyes, which had dropped to his wringing hands, rose to eye the Council doubtfully.

Surely they were not actually considering him...? He was nobody, being the spawn of a powered Blood Bonds meant nothing.

He meant naught a thing. And he never had.

Around him, transitioned classes of the *ramai* grunted their disapproval, not that Ian actually heeded. Except he inwardly winced, faced with the reality that he did care...Of course he cared if he destroyed his father's reputation. The only *good* of the male.

But that was Ian's mindset. Ian's demons. It was his bearings and like his father had taught him to do, he straightened and met the stares of the Council, but this time, blindly. Let them speak now.

To his astonishment, some looked away from his –what he hoped to be cold –gaze, though other stared with earned arrogance. But this time, he reminded himself, he was his father's son, he didn't *have* to

care about them.

“All in favor of a challenge, voice now with an ‘I’,” the voice he now recognized as *leader* Lucius gave nothing away. Ian felt a hollow grin stretch his lips, aiming to convince the he no longer cared.

He was not in favor of a challenge for the right to keep his legal position. That and he knew he’d be slaughtered easily. That was simply how it worked in his world. Survival of the fittest. And Ian, being five foot six, and deathly skinny, was not the least bit fit. Untransitioned males were always the weakest. Especially him – nearing twenty and still without a transition.

Some *leader* he’d prove.

The hall remained silent though, easing his tension, but just some. It went to the deepest pit of Fifth Realm rather quickly though.

“Since all transitioned males are unwilling, I shall challenge,” came the cool voice of *leader* Nicholas. Ian wasn’t exactly frightened to say, more so... prepared. He’d managed to keep alive within in father’s grips and nothing could defy that.

Though, his father had aimed more for torment, rather than a kill. Yet as the *leader’s* blue gaze caught Ian’s green one, something close to suspicion flared in their depths and he swallowed tightly, feeling thrown off.

“Challenge accepted.”

Chapter One:

Thirty-Six Years Later:

Beth eyed her older brother, Tallis, skeptically as she leant on the steel door of her bedroom. A six foot transitioned male, Tallis didn't act his age, or for the matter, his size.

"I left my girl back hooommeee! I don't love 'er no mooooree!" His booming voice echoed through the halls of the large manor as he attempted to sing a song she couldn't even recognize. Beth smiled despite herself, knowing he had no idea how loud he was being, the headphones in his ears preventing him from hearing anything beyond the beat.

Lucky for him, he sounded like a dying cat.

Tallis looked nothing like her. With a muscular build and a strong face, he was the opposite of Beth's shorter five foot nine, curvy frame. While his hair was cut in a skull trim, the blonde of it hidden by its short length, Beth had somehow come out with thicker, black hair that hung to the small of her back. Though there was one thing she could say that marked him as her brother, the pale blue of their eyes, a trait they'd both gotten from their father.

Completely oblivious to her, Tallis started towards the entrance hall, but Beth was bored and, well she liked to mess with him. She ran up behind him, jumping onto his back and covering his eyes with his hands. She could tell he knew it was her by the wide smile on his face as his hands locked around her ankles, and he started spinning. Round and round they went with enough speed that everything was a blur to her as she gave a laugh, light-headed already.

"Stop! Stop!" she managed to gasp, though he shook his head, obviously having too much fun. So they were playing that game huh?

Unhooking one hand from his face, she dug her nails into his neck, making him hiss and try to jerk away. But there wasn't anywhere to go and she was prepared for a full on attack as she grinned widely. Unexpectedly, he stopped, arms reaching behind to her sides, hurling her backwards with enough force that she hit the opposite wall.

Fortunately for her head, she stopped herself, pushing her hands out for support, though *unfortunately* enough, her hands would be bruised.

The room wouldn't stop spinning and she tried to glare at Tallis' moving form because he looked completely unfazed as he clutched his stomach in laughter on the carpeted floors.

"You know" he breathed between cackles. "If father saw us like this..." Beth couldn't help but laugh at the thought of their father's twitchy facial expressions every time he tried to be serious and failed so badly. It was one of the funniest things around, especially when she was locked away in a manor with nothing to do for nine hours of the day while all the "superior" teenage males were out slutting around and having some actual fun.

The thought sobered her up enough that she could finally raise her head to catch her brother's identical gaze.

Tallis was only two years older than her so they'd grown up closer than most civilian siblings. She adored his sense of humor and recklessness, which saved her from a lot of boredom as a child. They were usually in sync with each other, although they both had their fair share of secrets. Beth's admittedly more severe, but that was a risk she was willing to take.

"So, I think we should sign you up for America's Got Talent or whatever," Beth smiled slightly, sitting up and scooting closer to her brother, who was still as stone. He glared, but the amusement in his eyes told her he wasn't actually put off.

"Huh. Dad would get a kick outta that one." She snorted, rolling her eyes.

"More like a heart attack." He grinned in that lopsided way that made her heart swell with pride, but then his eyebrows furrowed and *great*.

"Shouldn't you be at the training center?"

"Should be, would be, but 'm not." She bit her lip, dropping her eyes as she tried to suppress the shiver of fear that ran up her spine at the thought of just why she didn't actually go to training much anymore. It was because of *him*. The third and coldest member of the Council, Lord Payne, or as the others liked to call him, Lord Ice.

She'd never done well around males. And the *leader* was *definitely*

male. The first day of training he'd humiliated her in front of every female in the room...After that, she couldn't be around him for too long. Especially not two whole hours, that was just cruel and unbearable.

It was worse that she couldn't even stand still around him and he didn't so much as ever glance her way. Again, she just didn't get on with males like him. The *leader* made it so much worse; because he had to look...well, exactly how he did. Totally out of her league.

Beth hadn't noticed she was fidgeting until her brother grabbed her hands, pulling her from her thoughts. The first thing she noticed were his narrow, almost glowing eyes, easily distinguished as the eyes of a Vamp. When the hell was her transition going to hit? She wondered at the sight. She was already nineteen and her mother had gone through hers around this time...Maybe she could be the freak that was later than all the others. It *would* be her.

"Elizabeth, seriously, why haven't you been going to training?" She sighed heavily, knowing "serious" Tallis was back.

Oh, joy.

"I uh, feel it...?" she admitted sheepishly, partly the truth. Heat rose to her face, because it was not the type of thing she wanted to talk to her *brother* about. Her brother, who was immature as they came.

And yup, he looked at her as if she'd grown a second head, and it took a lot for her to resist the urge to make sure she hadn't. "Uh...feel what exactly?"

She let out an uneasy laugh, running her hand through her hair. And here comes the awkward. "My transition." She watched, letting him absorb that as his mouth dropped open, then closed, then dropped again. Before she could even blink, he was off the floor and slowly backing away with his hands raised in caution.

Damned Vamp speed, it was no fair.

"What?" she demanded in exasperation. "It's not like it's contagious! Need I remind you that you went through it too?!" It didn't stop him from turning on his heels and running, his mocking laughter echoing through the hallways.

Jerk.

"Come and get me sis!" At the challenge, she grinned wickedly. The manor was beyond huge, with at least three hundred unnecessary

halls and even more rooms. It would take a long time to find her brother, even living here all her life, she didn't know every single room, in fact she tended to stick to her floor. Not to mention her brother was made of speed and energy. Again, damned Vampire.

Her body was sore still; partially from her imminent transition, the other from her time with the *hunters*. They'd gone easy on her, but the damned Super-Human's were stronger than anyone gave them credit for. Damned *hunters*.

Everyone was so much more enhanced than her, she thought as her muscles screamed in protest to her rising from the floor. Damn them all. She sniffed defiantly, ignoring the pain. At least she was considered, as the human's put it, "normal". Only for a little while longer, she hoped.

Shaking the thoughts, she pulled her jet-black hair into a messy bun and zoomed from the hall, following in the direction Tallis had gone.

How I live for a challenge.

oooooo

Ian shot his hands out in frustration, pounding at the punching bag as his speed accelerated. Two more hits, he estimated, before it broke from the iron hooks it was attached too.

"Ian!" Nick's shout was far off, and Ian ignored him, changing positions around the bag, forcefully keeping his extended fangs unclenching.

He would not let his father down this time...*Never*, he thought, rage boiling in his blood.

Breathing harsh, he flexed his bleeding knuckles, closing his eyes at the intense feel just as heavy footsteps advanced from behind him.

Anger no longer controlled his performance. He was so close now...He grinned hollowly at the relieved notion.

He felt, rather than saw, Nick's upcoming attack. Spinning on his heels, he dodged a punch, wrapping his hand around the large fist, and holding it back. Nick's glowing blue eyes flamed, his fangs were bare, and his body stiff as metal. Ian was only slightly built, not nearly as muscular as the older male, so when Nick pushed forward, Ian pushed back with his body, releasing the fist to kick him in the ribs. He

was careful to back away before that kick could be returned. After all, he liked to give the pain, *not* receive it.

“The hell’d you think you were doing?” Nick growled, catching him off guard enough that he allowed his opponent to pin him to the ground beneath his heavy muscled weight.

Not acceptable, Derik.

Lifting his fist, he punched Nick in the face, but to no satisfaction, even when his head snapped backwards, the *leader* was still over him. He glared with irritation, struggling. It was a useless cause to fight the one that taught him everything, an expert compared to Ian’s fifty-five young years.

“What,” Nick shouted, slamming his fist into Ian’s face so hard, blood exploded in his mouth. “Were,” he threw another punch. “You,” another, “Thinking!” the last one made his vision flash white as his nose cracked.

Fuck it.

Ian hissed, bloodlust fogging his vision and before he understood what he’d done, Nick was beneath him, and his fists were connecting to his mentor’s shocked face. Over and over, he slammed down; until reality caught up to him...When Nick’s face was bloodied and scrunched in pain.

Fuckin’ hell, he’d lost control. Ian Derik *never* lost control like that. Only Nick could cause it. Only this asshole, he thought petulantly.

You don’t care; he reminded himself, making sure his face was in its statically bored expression.

“You pleased with yourself now Lord Payne?” Inwardly Ian flinched at his father’s surname, though on the outside, he shrugged, hefting himself up and wiping the bloody remains of his nose bleed, and split lip, onto his leathers. The pain was easily accustomed to. His childhood consisted of it.

“Well after what you just did to my face, I fucking hope so, you prick,” Nick continued. Ian’s lips twitched, because again, only Nick could make the situation almost amusing. “You gonna throw in another, for fun?” Nick narrowed his eyes with distrust, but held up his hands in a surrendering pose. After a moment of reassurance, Nick leaned forward, but Ian just stared, a bit dumbfounded. Did he actually *need* a hand?

“Goddess, you’re not as smart as you are strong. Help me up.” Ian mentally slapped himself again for losing his composure, his *guard*.

Striding over to the male, he clasped his forearm, and pulled him up. He came up gracefully, while Ian probably would have tripped over his feet. It’d been too many years to counts since his twenty third birthday, but he still couldn’t walk with the same grace as most males, so instead he held his head high, and inwardly counted the steps until he could sit again.

Fighting was another story entirely, but walking....

Some male, his Vampire sneered, but he shut it away, pushing the brown hair from his sweaty or bloody—he couldn’t tell—forehead. Nick looked worse than him at least, his whole face was swollen, blue eyes squinted as he leaned against the door, crossing his arms.

Ian already knew it was another attempt to make him feel himself, and he appreciated the gesture, but he could never be himself again. In fact, he’d left that Ian behind, thirty six long, cold years ago.

“Ian, you’re not your fath —,” They were so not going there; his control was already shaky as hell. He needed to run it off, but first he needed to take a damned shower and get rid of all the blood. Yeah, shower, then running...then killing. *Perfect*.

“I’m leaving,” he interrupted, exiting the security door before Nick could try and stop him. Ian didn’t need his smart-ass remarks any more than Nick needed to know how fucked up he was. Still trying to please a dead man, who had wanted nothing to do with him in the first place? Damn pathetic. But so close. The idea, once again, had him smiling discreetly; nothing could get in the way of his success.

He could have traced, but he needed his mind cleared in order to prepare for the shower. It wasn’t the same as being in a pool or a tub, submerged in *water, suffocating* in your skin, lost in your *thoughts*...but he still had to force himself a little, turning the corner and listening to the loud female’s voice.

“Tallis! I know you’re around here somewhere, you big jerk!” His eyebrows furrowed. Tallis? Tallis...Tallis...He knew that name...Nick’s Tallis?

The girl continued, “Come on! I’m Untransitioned, I can’t track your scent! Hints! I need some freakin’ hints!”

His steps slowed, and he cocked his head to the side. An

Untransitioned? One of his?

“Doesn’t matter,” he muttered lowly, continuing down the hall until finally his door, the last in the hall, was in plain sight. Just a few more large steps and he would be free of conversation...

Thank Goddess. Five steps, four, three—

Right then, a female rounded the corner, moving so fast that she almost rammed into him. Would have, were it not for his reflex to stop the contact. Gripping her upper arms, he threw her tactlessly away from him, glaring at the dazed female who went tumbling to the floor.

He almost felt bad when she struggled to stand again, trying to be quick. Actually, he genuinely felt bad, so when his own hand reached out to steady her, he wasn’t shocked by the action. Maybe it was pity for the weak? He didn’t know why, but like the klutz she seemed to be, she stumbled forward, into him this time, just as he inhaled a deep breath.

Big mistake.

The sweet, citrus scent went through Ian like wild fire, his stomach tightened to the point of pain, hunger sharpening his fangs, urging him to bite the soft skin of her throat. Mouth suddenly very dry, his throat constricted and he struggled to breathe. It took all the self-control he possessed to stop breathing in *that scent*, to the avoid temptation though she was already branded into his brain.

Silently, he cursed her as his fangs pricked his bottom lip, blood flooding his mouth before the wound healed. He didn’t want his blood though, he wanted hers.

Why did she smell so very...lovely? He’d fed off more female Vampires than he could count, none ever smelled so...luscious. *Mouthwatering*. Was she was pretty as she smelled? Did he care?

He peered down at the female, slightly disappointed. It was only slightly though, her beauty called to him through her blood. Still, she wasn’t what he’d expected. Then again, he’d expected a blonde; in his experience their blood was richest. But her scent...attracted, Goddess her scent sang for him, but her face was nothing...beautiful. In fact, he wasn’t sure she was even pretty.

Inky hair set off the creamy color of her face, which was an appealing pink, defining a pointed chin. Her dark eyebrows were too

far apart, high arched above piercing, pale blue irises, familiar blue eyes. Her nose was straight, long, running down to slightly parted lips, both plumper in the middle, giving them a strange, bow-tie effect.

As he stared, those blue eyes fell to the floor and an alien knot formed in his chest. Pity again? He didn't think so. This was something more. Unable to put a word for it, he shallowly inclined his head.

Then...hatred, a different kind of hatred. It had to be. This girl, this obnoxious little girl could be his down-fall. He felt she would be and he stiffened with a hiss. Nobody would get in the way of his success.

Soon, his conscious whispered, making sure he knew it was far more imperative than a scent.

"I should've been paying more attention to where I was going, I give you my most sincere apologies," he said tightly. In actuality, she'd come out of nowhere, but he wouldn't embarrass her out loud.

Degrading females or anyone in particular was not his forte. No matter how much hatred he felt.

She opened her mouth to speak when a male came rushing into the hall, arms pulling her smaller body into him, and a growl—almost playful—escaping him.

"Gotcha!" Her cheeks positively flamed now, the heat carrying, but he did his best to ignore that, raising an eyebrow as the male looked up with a very familiar face. What was Nick's son doing with an untransitioned female? Tallis was Nick's twin in looks, but a little shorter and bulkier, blonde hair cropped, and pale blue eyes curiously protective. Of the female?

Obviously enough.

Releasing the girl, he inclined his head shortly, and Ian noted the female inched closer behind Tallis. Good, let her be afraid.

"What are you doing running around in the halls Son of Aeluis?" His voice was rough as his fists clenched. He was fuckin' *bothered*. Tallis glanced down briefly to the girl, who was almost fully hidden behind his body now.

Coward.

"My lord, I was retrieving my sister." Of course. The female was Nick's youngest daughter. A daughter that in no way resembled any of her kin besides the icy blue of her eyes.

Now he really was screwed. He couldn't hate her. He gritted his teeth. "Youngest daughter of Nicholas, second *leader*, allow me to introduce myself, I am –." She stepped forward a bit, raising her chin.

Perhaps she wasn't a coward after all.

He wasn't sure if he liked her bravery. There were no consequences to laying hands on a female in the Axvem Scrolls; most males fought hands on with their females. He couldn't understand how. A Vampire's *irryn* was supposed to be worshipped by her *tyren*, not... mishandled. It was simple. He would never treat a female the way his mother had been treated.

Yet always being a dominating male, he wanted this particular female to obey and keep her mouth shut even so. *She isn't yours*, Ian reminded his inner-Vampire. "I already know you, Lord Ic – um Derik...I-I'm one of your trainees," she mumbled, her eyes on his boots. *Lord Ice*. He rolled his eyes at that.

She didn't look up again, and that same feeling returned with a vengeance. Her not being able to meet his gaze...irked him. Though he didn't know why, not many Vampires did.

But she was his...? His trainee. It wasn't hard to miss someone so silent and cautious, but she smelled so damned lovely...A light scent, he'd have to be exceedingly close to catch it with all the heavily transitioned scents. He nodded solemnly for what he prayed was the last time, ignoring the instinct to tug at his hair.

"Yeah, I recall having seen you before," he lied smoothly. That caused her head to snap up, the look on her face told him she knew he was lying just as much as he did. A dark brow hitched provokingly and she opened her mouth to retort. Ian anticipated her reply. Her brother spoke first.

He'd always liked the male, but in that moment, he kinda wanted to hurt him.

"I believe mother's expecting you, sister-mine," he interceded, placing her hand on his arm so Ian noticed the cuts littered along her knuckles. Surely that hadn't happened at training? He rarely allowed the females to use their hands without gloves...Interest mixed with shock made his reply later than appropriate.

"*Goodbye.*" He hadn't realized he'd spoke the Old Axvem Idiom until they remained mute.

Not bothering to explain, he brushed passed them, unlocking his door and entering the darkness' chill. Inside, he mused over the girl, grasping belatedly that he hadn't even gotten her name. He could always ask Nick, but that would be an unwise idea, the male was already overly protective of his irryn, and Ian could only imagine how much more of the girl. Besides, why should he care to know? He had no business with the young untransitioned.

Except that scent...

Forcefully removing her from his thoughts, he went numb as he showered, trying to quickly scrub the soap over his scared and salt-inked tattooed body. The most important one was his swear to the council, along his collar it read: *"Protection of the race depends on myself, so therefore, I give all myself to three, I supply my mind, body, heart, and soul to the lives of the vampire species."*

It was what he believed with all of himself, a promise he abided by. No matter what, he gave himself over to protecting his species. Every Vampire had a choice but the *leaders*. They possessed the excess abilities, whereas *leaders* carried the stronger genes of the founding Goddess of Blood Bonds. The *leaders* were forced to use her given name, Aetheria, whenever they were in the Fourth realm. Alocer and Xaphan the two last *leaders*, remained on that side to keep order in line, and that was all Ian cared to know.

Shutting his eyes, he cut off the leeway to his thoughts, leaving him to his surroundings. His given gift was the control of morphing, and although he bore others such as being an illusionist, his given gift was what he'd been able to do since birth, something that would always be there to continue to excel without further practice. When his skin was crawling, he exited the shower and dressed. Drying his messy hair roughly, he grabbed on leathers, placing his holster over his chest and shirt before loading it with daggers, each engraved symbolically with his name in the Axvem Idiom.

Going into the long closet, he grabbed the duffle bag stuffed with loaded rifles, silver, and other steels. Nick preferred using metal baseball bats for a reason unimaginable to Ian, while Lucius was fond of dagger, quick and quiet. Ian had to agree with Lucius. Enjoying a kill was one thing, but Nick lived off it. Nobody could blame the male though; they'd murdered his eldest daughter. Revenge was expected, deserved.

His door was pounded on and he knew who it was before Nick

opened it. He looked better already, the bruises disappearing as he smiled, amusement deep in his blue eyes.

If only he knew how much you wanna sink your teeth into his daughter's neck, his conscious hissed in disgust.

"You should wait for me to answer next time," Ian muttered, keeping away from those thoughts. Nick's eyes reminded him of the chit again. Damn him.

"I thought you'd gotten all that anger out when you pounded my face in. Verona is furious by the way." Nick eyed him suspiciously, and Ian rolled his eyes.

"Obviously not, your face is still too pretty," he mumbled dryly. "By any miracle is Lucius ready?" Nick plopped on a loveseat, getting much too comfortable. The door behind Ian slammed shut and he knew Nick used his given gift, telekinesis. Still, he warily eyed the door from the corner of his eye, expecting an attack. "Keep wishing. Aye, where are my bats?" Ian pointed to the closet, and Nick grinned, looking like a young boy rather than his two-hundred years, before disappearing in the closet.

A bit annoyed, he called, "Is Lucius aware that sunrise is only hours away?" Then he lifted a dagger, and tossed it from one hand to the other subconsciously.

"Yeah, but he's...preoccupied with a female at the present," he shouted from the closer. As if Ian couldn't hear him if he whispered it.

"Sex or blood?" he yelled back anyway. Nick chuckled lowly.

"Both."

"Shall we leave him the keys to the Range Rover?" Nick exited the closet, pounding the metal bat into his hand ponderingly.

"Cool, let's take the Escalade then?" Ian stifled a smirk, feeling like Nick had entered that closet. He loved that car, though he never had an excuse to really drive it. Not 'till now. And he was going to take full advantage of it.

"I'm driving," he declared, hefting the duffle bag over his shoulder and tracing to the garage. This was his only outlet. He needed to brush off all these emotions before he lost it.

Tonight, he decided as he picked out to whipping chains, he was killing dirty.

Chapter Two:

Beth slammed awake, the pain in her body shoving her into consciousness. With a groan, she pushed the heavy covers from her sensitive skin, wishing she could just skip the post-transitional pains. Everything *hurt*. Her body ached, as if her skin was stretched to fit her, going as far as to ache down...below, and to make it worse, she was *starving*. But it was a miracle if she could force down two meals a day, the idea of food made her stomach turn.

Frustrated tears threatened to spill from her stinging eyes as her body calmed enough for her mind to recharge from the attack. Goddess, she thought, what hurt more, the physical or emotional pain? Her mind immediately casted emotional pain, but her body wouldn't give so easily.

After a shower, she decided to work it off, to feel the light, but tantalizing ache in her muscles. As she tiptoed through her room, she pulled out typical workout clothes; dressing into the sports-bra, tights and old, white All-Stars before hastily pulling her hair back and walking from the room with Tallis' security care, and her iPhone, in hand.

It was prohibited for females to be in the training center without their trainer, but Beth had never been one to follow the rules of the *ramai*. As she strode the familiar halls, she dwelled on her encounter with Derik. It wasn't hard to notice how badly she'd humiliated herself, unable to even meet the male's eyes.

He probably thought she was some sort of Neanderthal. Though, in her defense, it was his fault. Nobody should be allowed to be *that* handsome. Six foot six, he wasn't bulkier than most Vamps, but the slightness of him did nothing to mispronounce his muscles. His brown hair was on the shorter side, but long enough that she could run her fingers through it still. Not that she imagined the textures at all, definitely not. And while his eyebrows were straighter than most, they set off the icy green of his eyes, lighter despite his age. For all the *leaders*, their eyes would eventually loss its original color and become crimson, a sign of power. His straight, aristocratic nose gave way to the sharp cheekbones and a chiseled jaw, lips above full and forever in a tight line.

Did he get his looks from his father? She tried to remember Lord

Payne, but she hadn't been alive when he'd reined *leader*, and admittedly, she hadn't paid much attention to the stories. She thought she'd heard the others say something about...drowning, but couldn't be sure. It was pointless to try; she obviously wouldn't be getting anywhere.

Instead, she tried to picture the *leader* with a smile, fangs sharp and white. She shivered. He was so completely male that it stung to realize he wouldn't notice her again, she was just another girl.

And how could she expect him to even glance her way when he had every single female, even their freakin' Goddess, throwing themselves at him. There were so many beauties and she was certainly no beauty. Her eyebrows were set too far apart, her cheeks too puffy, breasts too small; the list could go on forever.

"Oh, get over it," she admonished to herself as she reached the metal entryway to the training center. Swiping the card, she grinned when the green light flashed, indicating her access. She wasted no time pushing the heavy door, wincing a bit when it closed too quickly, hurling her forward. *Ouch*.

Whatever.

With the lights turned low, she plugged her headphones into her phone, blasting '*The Script*'. She'd always liked their music. And music was her outlet, very dreary music ever since Vince. Even now, after a month, betrayal had her heart constricting in her chest.

Shutting her eyes, she pulled on a pair of leather gloves, and sinking in memories of the *hunter*, planning her next escape route. The creepy, muggy caves being her only, unnerving option since the last *other* outbreak had security overflowing the Civilizations.

Beth approached the punching bag, placing her hands on either side of its leathery texture, concentrating hard. Everything she'd been taught rushed back as she threw the first blow, feeling her hands sting underneath the gloves.

Sucking it up, she circled the thing, wishing it were an actual *other*. At least their skin wasn't as unwelcoming.

As the songs played on, they sunk in, she fought harder, heart thudding in her ears as the familiar high settled in. She felt so alive this way.

Let bygones be bygones could never work for her. The emotional

weaknesses needed to heal over.

The room was chilling slightly, as she whirled in a kick, wincing at the pain that ran up her leg. Immediately, another presence overrode her focus, powerful and dangerous enough that she froze, ripping her headphones from her ringing ears and risking a glance over.

She choked on her breath. Hair in her face, body sticky with precipitation, she caught sight of Derik, looking composed and handsome as ever from where he leaned on the wall, arms flexing as he crossed them. Goddess, why, oh why, did he look so...good? Better yet, why couldn't she have had blonde hair, and a pixie body?

Though his pale eyes were unreadable, his eyebrow was arched in question. For a moment, she caught her breath, staring wide eyed at him as he stared at her. A delicious desire pooled at the junction of her thighs under that stare, some invisible force trying to pull her closer, making her wonder if he felt it too? Probably not.

As if on cue, shocks of pain shot up her body, and she dropped her hands to her knees, gasping for breaths before she managed—with a lot of effort—to straighten, still swaying a bit, but catching herself against the punching bag, highly aware of Derik's impassive gaze.

Pain wasn't her friend, though neither was the *leader*, and she was attracted to him. *Idiot*.

She hemmed twice before she found her voice. "Have you been here...long?" Being as self-conscious as she, Beth kept her eyes on the ground, worried he was laughing at her for being so weak, nearly *human*.

"Have you?" She shook her head no, too out of breath to say anything. His next query caused her head to snap up.

"What were you thinking of before?" Why did he care?

"Nothing," she mumbled nonchalantly, making sure she kept thoughts of Vince and Magda away in case he could read minds. But, she missed them, and it was hard to since it was more than wrong.

"Anger makes you sloppy," he drawled, voice closed off. Her mouth dropped open, as she blinked. Was he called her sloppy now?

"What are you implying?" she asked, slightly annoyed.

"You were sloppy." Blunt much?

"Sloppy," she echoed, trying to squish her anger. He pushed from

the wall, taking a step closer, and she automatically took one back. His smirk fueled her anger as he practically spoke his thought: coward.

Around him anyone would be, but she was stubborn, and inwardly took a deep breath, lifting her chin and taking a sure step forward, smiling sourly when his eyebrows furrowed and his hands twitched.

Did he want to hit her then? Was he that type? she wondered, trying not to gawk at the amount of tattoos that littered his skin. They were banded around his muscular arms, symbols of the Axvem she'd never learnt thoroughly. She tried to make them out, but was only able to catch one, *'drown in the light of those you seek out'*. She blinked at the unexpected message.

His voice pulled her from her thoughts. "Your anger directed your actions, and you attacked at all the wrong angles," he paused, taking another step forward. "If that'd been an actual battle, you'd have been dead before you blinked." Beth glowered, wondering why the hell she appreciated his candor.

Maybe 'cause the man you loved never gave it to you, her conscious supplied, causing her to flinch away from nobody. Lovely.

"Betrayal," she muttered, the word leaving a bitter taste in her mouth. Her gloved hands tangled together uneasily, unsure of his reaction because well, he was unpredictable as they come.

Although he was more than several feet away, she felt him stiffen. Not exactly a good reaction.

"Begging your pardon?" From under her lashes, she could see the confusion on his expression. Could it possibly be real? Was the most heartless Vampire alive confused? A smile blossomed her lips.

"I was thinking of betrayal," she blurted a bit more confident. His green eyes blazed then, with so much...fury that she cringed away from him. Oh yeah, she reminded herself, never get to comfortable around men, they were weird creatures.

"What do you know of betrayal?" She went frigid because who the hell did he think he was? He hadn't even known she existed until yesterday. She knew everything about betrayal, she was its victim.

All he knew about was being a careless asshole! Anger clouding her brain, she stomped up to him until they were close enough that their noses would have been touching were it not for the height difference. Behind her anger was embarrassment, because he was so

much more intimidating than her, but she brushed the pesky emotion off. Arrogant green eyes bored into her blue blazing ones as they challenged each other.

Try me, she wanted to shoot, but she had enough mind not to, instead pressing closer. “You don’t know anything about me,” she hissed, her finger lifting to poke him in the muscular plains of his chest. Such a damn male. Arrogant bastards they all were, especially this one.

In response, he growled low in his chest, making her grit her teeth to keep from backing off. She wouldn’t back down to him.

“I know that you haven’t the slightest notion as to how betrayal feels, you insolent child,” he gritted, fangs flashing threateningly.

“Insolent child? How old *are* you, grandpa!” Without any indication, his hands shot out, shoving her away just as his lip curled, fangs revealed, eyes gleaming with bloodlust.

Fear had her stumbling further away, tripping so that she fell, her belly twisting in pain, and her hand landed on her throat, to make sure he actually hadn’t bitten her. With sheer will, she stood, unable to meet his gaze this time as multiple insults sped through her mind.

The will to fight lost, she settled on plain ‘ole, “Males.” Her eyes closed away from his burning ones. That moment someone traced into the room, a freesia scent overwhelming her as she looked in the direction; both human and vampire glared at the intruder, though Beth had no idea why. She should be grateful someone interrupted before she killed the arrogant jerk, or worse, he killed her.

The female was tall and curvy in a grey muscle shirt and tights that left her legs partially bare. Beautiful, transitioned, and worse, blonde Beth noted with a sigh. What the hell was she still doing arguing anyway? He was obviously beyond her ‘insolent child’ views.

The woman’s face was pert and beaming as she looked between Beth and Derik, her smile slowly fading as she tamped into the tension that surrounded them. Tension that animated from the *leader*.

She snorted, so much for unfeeling then, since his face was fixed in annoyance.

“Am I interrupt—,” *everything*. Beth cut her off quickly.

“No, no,” she glanced at Derik with a false, eager smile. “Lord Derik was just helping me with my er, balance, but I have to go now.” With

that she started for the door, happy to escape as she kept her gaze forward, the heated daggers in her back making her want to turn around and stick her tongue out, but she didn't, feeling the air smooth over with a chill.

He wasn't going to let her go, was he? What had she gotten herself into now?

ooooo

Ian's blood roared in his ears as he watched the girls retreating back. Inside he had an internal battle, his arrogant half told him to let her leave, but as he kept watching her edge closer to the door it hit him that she was really leaving, and he still hadn't gotten her name.

The female was as irritating as they came, yet he was worried about the damned name. What the hell was wrong with him?

Right, everything.

Though being honest, he'd already argued with her, and didn't even know her name, a pathetic slam on his part.

Something stirred within him, something forbidden and unwelcome, but it made up his mind. Swallowing his pride, he traced before the door, his demon smiling with glee when she walked into him, her creamy throat far too close. He quickly pushed her away, again using a bit too much strength since she went stumbling, glaring when she caught her footing and advanced him. The *ramai* raised male in him wanted to apologize, but he wouldn't give her the satisfaction.

"You aren't going anywhere," he stated lowly, trying to keep his voice curt as possible though he was seething with irritation caused by bloodlust. She froze mid-step, falling forward and making the female in the sidelines giggle. The girl's face flushed, looking mortified. Huh, not so tough around other females then? He grasped instantly, though defensive, he shot the blonde a glare.

He expected the girl's answer, 'you can't stop me!', though instead, she surprised him, smiling a very fake smile. So, she was an actress too? Wonderful. Though how could she know anything? Despite the pale color of her eyes, she had to be around eighteen, her innocence radiated from her.

"My lord, you flatter me," she began almost sweetly.

"Please," he scoffed in disbelief, but she simply smiled wider,

continuing as if he hadn't spoken. "But I really gotta go." Not a chance.

He composedly answered, "You mean to skip training then? I'm sure your father would be thrilled to hear this." He inwardly smiled with satisfaction at her gape.

"You wouldn't," she whispered fiercely, probably unaware that the blonde could still hear her. Loud and clear actually.

Glancing at the other female whose name he didn't bother to learn, he leaned forward, closer to her ear to whisper as lowly as possible. She was so stiff that he wanted to laugh, because surely he wasn't so scary? Like the big bad Vamp. "Try me."

He inhaled purposefully, forcing himself to move away, risking another glance at the blond. She wasn't looking their way, too preoccupied with a message, most likely the newest gossip. He gritted his teeth, trying to convince himself not to hurt her. Blondes were not his type of the late; they were becoming much too dense.

The girl that held his attention narrowed her eyes, boldly holding his gaze before looking away, biting her bottom lips, seemingly torn. His demon smiled in triumph. She didn't reply, but stalked passed him, close enough that he caught her scent, citrus seduction, making his throat burn, and his fangs elongate. Unconsciously, he ran his tongue along the sharp points, watching the sway of her curvy hips in those tights, making his groin tighten uncomfortably. Goddess, she was trouble. Her personality was a fire waiting to be lit and his, the flames. The explosion of emotions was alien, annoying and fascinating all at once, a terrible combination. Why, he speculated angrily, was this female, his *best friend's* daughter, so...enthralling. It was enough to drive him mad; with curiosity, bloodlust, anger, and worst of all, lust in general. Feeling so much at one time was new, and he sure as hell didn't like it. How could he lust after someone he didn't even consider pretty?

How couldn't he find her pretty?

Hell, the female was particularly lovely. How hadn't he noticed that before? Was he that caught up in her scent? He glanced at her again, feeling his breathing hitch as she glared. Yeah, that was definitely it. His vision didn't deceive him now though, stubborn became her.

Hair thick and dark was unfortunately pulled away from her face, making him want to know how long it would fall. The heart shaped face was flushed with anger, her pointed chin jutting attractively, and her

bow-tie lips in a pout, the wide blue of her eyes molten fire, glaring holes into him.

He didn't dare glance at her body, sure that the bulge in his leathers was already noticeable enough. Growling under his breath, he grabbed his duffle bag, pulling out the highly unnecessary leather gloves and pulling them over his hands. The damned things were restricting, but in his fucked up sense, double standards were idiotic, and he wouldn't make the females wear them if he didn't.

Peering at his iPhone, he realized the sun had fallen only ten minutes ago, which meant they were all early. He often came here early; working off his agitation until training began, though today he'd woken earlier, as if knowing the girl would be here. Of course she should not have been, such was the rules, but the girl didn't come off as one to follow those anyway.

No, from the little Nick spoke of her, she wouldn't follow rules. Which was another problem. Yet he had to admit, grudgingly enough, that she was speedy in her actions. Speedy but sloppy all the same.

Flushed and lovely, he'd watched her pound at the punching bag, inexpertly. It was expected though, she'd been bitter, angry, the only excuse for such sloppy blows. That made him even more curious. Betrayal? She was young, a little girl basically, but on another stance, she was right. Who was he? Despite his self-disgust, he smiled because he basically was old enough to be a human's father.

Ian knew it didn't matter, so he threw the nagging thoughts away, placing his daggers neatly across the steel counterpane. Using his personal daggers was a risk he was—or he convinced himself he was willing to take, though it'd bother him if one was lost. Each dagger was made by the Goddess, symbolized and named...They were *his*.

The male in him didn't want to admit his race was more important than his daggers. They didn't purposely irritate him. Like the *ramai* or the girl.

In a matter of minutes the room was swarming with females of all sizes, sneaking nervous glances at him before keeping up quiet conversation. He didn't know how much there was to actually talk about, but he'd always been withdrawn from the *ramai's* world. All he'd ever known was his father and Nick. And with the one, talking hadn't been exactly tolerated.

For the hundredth time this year he wondered why he was even

doing this. Oh, right, his supposed best friend had trapped him into it. “*The good of the civilization...It’ll be easy Ian.*” His idea of “easy” was completely screwed.

He hadn’t minded training females until he realized just how... lacking in fighting knowledge some were. And he had a hunch that most of these girls only wanted to ogle him. It was frustrating. They were, so why didn’t they fascinate him?

Sighing heavily, he lifted a dagger and twirled it in his hand with enough speed that if the blade even grazed one of his fingers, it’d be cut straight through. Not that it wouldn’t grow back, but it’d probably hurt like hell.

“Let’s get this over with,” he muttered to himself, turning to face the scary creatures called women.

“Please.” It was the girl’s mutter, low enough that only some caught it and gaped. He decided to ignore that and directed his attention to the blade.

“Anyone know how to use a dagger?” His voice was intentionally low. The room was silent now.

“Simple.” He shot her a wry look, but otherwise, ignore that as well.

“Anyone else?” This was getting damn old. Nobody answered and okay, topic change.

“What is the only possibly way to destroy an *other*?” Everyone began to look around, searching to see if anyone knew the answer and he sighed again, about to tell with Nick’s female chirped, “A stab to the heart.” Goddess she was confident.

“Anything else?” he challenged.

“The blood of a Vampire, though I doubt they’re stupid enough to try that.”

“Give someone else a chance,” he shot back, dragging his eyes to her smiling face, blue eyes testing.

“Alright then female, why does it take a stab to the heart to execute them?”

Trying to best her now? As if.

This time around, he was slightly shocked when she was correct. “Being forever frozen, their only living organ able to keep the dark energy festering is the heart cavity, most protected from attack.” His

eyes snapped back to her, eyebrows furrowing at the proud look on her face, as if that answer had been...out there.

She was well-educated and it showed.

He resisted the urge to clear his throat. "Exactly. Grab a dagger, females." The women hurried forward, grabbing at them. Nick's girl took hers, aware of his gaze apparently since she twirled her finger at the point. If she wanted to hurt herself, he'd be damned to stop her...

Distracting him one female actually went for the blade. Tracing before she could, he snatched the hilt and glared. "Never grab the blade," he almost groaned, unable to comprehend how brainless someone could be.

It was common bloody sense.

Two hours felt like an eternity. All but one female failed miserably at their attempts to stab the thick interior of the dummy-*other's* chest cavities. He watched, slightly impressed at the amount of grace she had as she plunged the dagger through, shoving upwards, past the ribs, and into where the heart would stay. Where had she learnt to do that? The accuracy was too perfected.

Vaguely, he thought the dagger in her left hand would be welcomed into his own black heart. Anything to stop this torturous training.

"Enough." Instant obedience, *thank Goddess*. "Just place the daggers where you found them."

They were quick to leave. The raven haired girl placed hers down with care and turned on her heels. His hand mechanically shot out and gripped her arm, electric shocks ran up his arm. She flinched, trying unsuccessfully to rip from his hold.

Really, she should've known better.

"Will you lay off?!" His lips threatened to tilt up, but he shook his head. The girl had something in common with her father, they both fucked with his feelings. Still, he didn't want to let go just yet, he wanted to take in the burning sensation, so different than he'd ever before felt.

"Why not?" She sounded distressed and he had to smile, just a bit, though when her head snapped up, it was already gone. No way he'd let her read his emotions that easily.

She couldn't have that power over him. Nobody could.

“Well,” he drawled. “I’m not one to be told what to do, *little girl*.” She was no more special than the others and he intended to make that known.

But she is. He worked his jaw, unaware that his hold had tightened until the girl winced, fidgeting. He loosened up, but kept a good hold.

“Again, my lord, you underestimate me.” And she kicked him where it counted.

Pain traveled up his body, and he managed to keep horizontal, though not by much. He hissed, catching his breath as she headed towards the door. She thought she was going somewhere, funny.

He traced directly behind her, seizing her wrist in one hand and waist in the other before knocking her feet so that she tripped with a startled gasp. Smirking, he knelt, brushing stray hairs away from her face in a mocking manner. The pain in his abdomen made his balanced slightly off.

She knew how to kick. Hard at that.

“What the hell do you want from me?” she demanded.

“Your name, female.” She scowled, but rose to her feet in a fluid movement, crossing her arms over her chest, bringing his attention to her breasts, trailing down to the bare, flat skin of her belly. His hands began to burn to cup those breasts, to hear her beg.

Her reply snapped those thoughts away. “Does it really matter much?” Ian cocked his head to the side. He didn’t like the way she was talking to him.

“Does your father know ‘bout that smart mouth of yours?” he muttered. *Pretty, smart mouth.*

She rolled her eyes condescendingly. “Smart mouth? My lord, I assure you I was under the impression you did not care to know my name”

“Your name,” he simply repeated. He didn’t *expect* her answered grin, and he sure as hell didn’t expect his reaction either. One second he was frustrated, the next his muscles tightened in want as his gaze fell to those lips, tipped in amusement, looking rosier and so kissable.

One little taste, his Vampire urged and her lips beckoned.

“Beth.” *Beth?* Elizabeth? Bethany? Or just Beth? He wagered it was Elizabeth, it was a name from the Axvem Scrolls and he knew

Nick. He knew how much he honored those Scrolls. Besides, the young female was anything but plain which meant, ultimately, he needed to leave her be.

Going on that thought, he commanded himself to step back, but his legs wouldn't listen. He growled under his breath, staring down into the blueness of her inquisitive eyes.

And almost drowned there. Would have, were it not for his instinct to get as far away as possible. He traced back to his daggers, leaning on the table, acting as easy as he could manage.

"Ian," he supplied, shocked he'd given her his name at all. Her eyebrows creased in confusion, and he almost smiled. Two times in a day? What the *fuck* was he on? It was unnerving that this one brat could make him smile. What was it with her that made him want to—?

"My name is Ian," he clarified slowly as her eyes widened.

"Um, my lord" she just about squeaked, backing up until she exited through the doors abruptly. Alone, he shrugged, wondering half-heartedly, what he'd done to make her run.

You should have known better than talking to her. He growled. Fuck her then.

His mind cleared from anger, he decided he was relieved she'd left before he'd gone and made himself look more of an idiot. He was emotionless, he depended on being that way, but around the girl – Beth, he lost control of his natural defenses and that was unsafe.

He had to stay away from her, and his curiosity, because neither was good for him. Then again, when did he ever do anything good for himself?

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Beth practically ran to her bedroom, trying to steady her breathing as she leaned on her door.

Ian. His name was Ian Derik Payne, *leader* of Vampire Civilizations five covens. It sounded strong to her ears, masculine and blunt, just like him.

Don't think of him as Ian, it's Lord Derik, she chastised herself. Yet every time she pictured him in her head, it was Ian.

This was going way too far. She needed to forget him, like he

would do her. Without another thought, she stripped down, showering in steamy water before snuggling into her fluffy bed.

She couldn't wait until the transitional waiting for over, until she wasn't so hot and hungry all the time. She smiled to herself in the darkness, hot and hungry?, more like hot and horny.

Her iPhone began to ring, the song 'We Found Love' shrilling until she couldn't take it anymore. She grabbed it from the nightstand, only to find twenty messages unread and even more missed calls.

All from Vince and Maggie.

Beth skimmed through them, tears pricking her eyes and hurt slamming into her lungs with every apology. She loathed him...but she loved him. What was *wrong* with her?

She thought she was over the pain of betrayal, but the more he continued to attempt to talk to her, the more she hated him. The more she wanted his friendship more than anything.

Shutting her eyes, she hurled the phone away from her, smashing it against the wall as angry sobs shook her frame. If life was unfair, love was that way to.

Oddly enough though, when she calmed enough that sleep stole her, it wasn't Vincent's voice that lulled her to sleep, but Ian's. Deep and arrogant, the perfect lullaby.

Thump, thump, thump! Footsteps sounded outside her door, loud and heavy as Beth groggily awoke, stumbling to the door to crack it open. Through bleary eyes, she found hers brothers retreating back as he danced—rather awkwardly—toward his room. Too sleepy to greet him, not to mention she was half-naked, she closed the door, wishing she could cool herself down some.

Her skin should have been on fire. How the others had gone through this so quietly when she felt like begging for a male, one in particular, was beyond her.

Peering at her clock, she realized it was almost sunrise, time for dinner, so she quickly brushed her teeth, dressing into a pretty blood-red cocktail dress, and black flats, pinning her thick hair at the crown of her head. She was used to dressing for dinner, it was commanded by the *ramai*, that a female of worth should always act and look as such. She'd grown up with it, so she applied the bright red lipstick, hating the sticky feel.

Figuring she looked decent enough, she exited her room, smacking into a hard wall. *What....?*

Confused, she looked up, and sighed, not a wall, a man. Ian stood, glaring down at her, his eyes looking more crimson...scarier as they glinted. His face was pale, circles underlining those eyes, and blood coming from a gash in hollow of his cheekbone. Her eyes widened, had they been hunting tonight?

“Do you ever watch where you’re going?” His pale eyes traveled the length of her body and she woke a little, her body heating under his gaze. Even injured, he was composed.

“Like what you see then?” It was a tease, but when the question escaped her lips it was laced seduction. Goddess, help her.

Drowsiness was obviously making her daring, but when his lips tipped up in a crooked half-smile, she felt like she’d won something. Her breath caught in her throat, because it was just what she’d *expected*. He was so much sexier when he smiled, his eyes sparkling in ways that made her tingle all over.

“Again I ask, does your father know about that saucy mouth of yours?” She grinned.

“I believe you asked about my ‘smart’ mouth, but saucy sounds more me so we’ll go with it. For now at least,” she teased again, moving around his larger frame and beginning to walk away. His hand wrapped around her wrist like before in a vice-like grasp and she gasped, barely registering the fact that she was suddenly pressed to the hard plains of his body, close enough that she smelt his cologne mixed with his own masculine scent. Her body responded instantly, making her breath come faster as she bit into her bottom lip.

“Very pretty mouth,” he breathed, looming over her, cool breath on her lips. She licked them, so very eager for whatever he would give her.

Until he stiffened, pushing her away, not with so much force but enough that she backed up a few feet. And how bipolar did a guy get? Looking up, she didn’t get any emotion off his face as he stared, eyes cold.

“Stay away from me,” he was all he said before stalking away. She stared at his back, feeling anger, confusion, and a wounded pride jumble as tears pricked her eyes. Beth gritted her teeth; she would *not* let him be the reason for her tears. He was just an old

grump...an old, very sexy grump.

Dear Goddess, what the hell was going on? Did she want him? Did he want her? He wasn't oblivious to her...that much she was sure, but he wasn't acting on anything...Did it matter anymore? She was going to do exactly what he said; she was going to stay away from him.

Dazed at the whole series of events, she stumbled down the spiral staircase, contemplating the whole way down if all males were so... puzzling. Vince hadn't been that way. In fact, he was as predictable as they came. Safe, and completely Beth's type.

It was just Ian then.

Fine, she would leave him alone. From then on, she told herself she wouldn't even glance his way...He was as good as dead to her.

Told you so, her conscious sneered as she realized; them *together* had never even been a possibility. He was her father's best friend! For the first time since Vincent, she felt really, really stupid.

Chapter Three:

Beth's breathing hitched uneasily as she skidded through the heavy-set security gates, taking special care to make sure the cameras, set up around the perimeter, didn't catch her by illuminated her shadow to match the one similar to the metal entrance

Tonight was the best of nights to escape the *leaders* premises. They were hunting *others* through the streets of New York since the abduction rates of civilians were becoming an increasingly large threat. Beth frowned over the information her brother –after hours of badgering him –had disclosed. Why were so many civilians being allowed out of the civilizations suddenly?

Beth knew it was against the law. Civilians, such as herself, were supposed to be guarded at all times. The laws were still set...right?

Shaking the thoughts, she slipped passed the iron-bars, pulling her brother's hood over her head and taking the jump. The three feet fall pinned her legs with tingles, but she ignored it, biting her lip and allowing her vision to adjust to the sudden obscurity. Beth started forward in the tunnel, running her fingers over the jagged stone walls, engraved with symbolic warning. Her only console.

As she continued forward male voices floated from another route. They were back already? She screwed her eyes shut, realizing she was directly in their path, leading towards the infamous jarred rooms, the next route over.

Except that little fact didn't bother her at the moment. Instead, she was listening intently for his voice.

In the two weeks she'd been avoiding him, it seemed almost impossible. The male was everywhere. Even though he didn't so much as glance her way, she couldn't help but fixate her attention on him. And through that she'd learnt there was something wrong, particularly with her, because he easily conversed with the civilians of the *ramai*. Especially the females whose eyes gleamed with hunger so fierce you'd have to be blind not to see it.

He never smiled at them though, she noticed with relief. And, he asked about her. Otherwise, her father wouldn't know she didn't show up to training more than once a week, sometimes not at all. It cooled

her jealousy to the point where it was almost easy to pretend he didn't exist. Almost.

More mutters. She recognized her father's voice pitch higher than the others in defense. "Derik don't even fucking *try* it. I will finish the prick."

Beth inwardly winced as the heavy footsteps advanced. Acting on instinct, she dropped to her knees, flattening her back to the wall so she wasn't as visible. The *hunters* messed with her about the fact that Vamps hardly ever looked down for their enemies.

A low growl reverberated off the walls and Beth's breath caught in her throat, eyes fluttered shut. A shiver ran over her skin just at the sound. It was his and she wanted it, his lips along her skin, *everywhere*, on her —. Ian spoke up.

"Fuck off," his tone wasn't even mildly irritated, just dry. A small smile pulled at her lips. She would have loved to get underneath that stony front, because Beth knew he wasn't as cruel as he put up. He was just another challenge. A very, very complicated challenge.

"Christ, just lay off. Both of you," another voice muttered. "Derik, tighten up with that arms of yours. It needs to be stitched before next call. Nick you... you're outta the game tonight. That means no vengeance."

"My brother, I am *fine*," her father said.

"Not your call," Derik muttered.

Lucius grunted. "Enough! I've already spoken. It's too damned early and the testosterone levels are high enough. *Goddess*, someone get me a blunt, pronto."

Well then... Beth grinned despite the shot of sadness that stirred in her chest whenever he father was unable to avenge their lost. Malia had been years older than both Beth and Tallis, and the opportunity to really *know* her sister had been taken from her. It was a sharper hurt than she'd ever let on.

Cool water soaked her right side and Beth froze as the hard footsteps pounded passed her. Please, she prayed, please don't look down. But of course that's exactly when one of them — Ian froze, height giving the male away, being the tallest by an inch or so. Dear sweet Goddess, help me, she tried again, cutting the flow of her breathing.

She could feel his sharp eyes wandering over the caves,

searching.

“Derik, my man, we haven’t all damned night! What’re you stoppin’ for?” Inwardly, she agreed. *Just keep movin’ Frostbite.*

His footsteps were all she heard as he stalked closer, inhaling deeply. Her heart stalled, chest aching for air. He couldn’t smell her, her scent was too light. For Goddess’ Sakes, she was an *untransitioned!*

Just when she thought her life was over, another presence, only feet ahead of her –the frame of a bulky male –blocked her already strained view. She could see nothing now, not even a shadow. It was both unnerving and sheltering.

At least he hasn’t seen you...yet, her conscious sneered, glaring daggers at her. Beth swallowed, inhaling a little through her nose, prepared for the worst. In that moment, she loathed him as much as he did her.

“What’s doing, Ian?” Her father’s voice was yielding, as if he were speaking to a rabid-animal which –that was exactly how Frosty acted sometimes.

Minute passed in silence, until at least, Ian muttered a muffled, “Nothing.” Then, in seconds, his footsteps vanished. *Man,* she thought, he was fast...scary fast.

Her father exhaled heavily before tracing altogether. Still, she kept motionless, gasping shallow strangled breaths, waiting until she heard the agonized screams.

Frantically, she clapped her hands over her ears, blocking out the sound as her body trembled, the events causing an emotional overload. Being out of tune with her emotions was hell.

Her father was constantly getting out her about missing training, but he didn’t understand. Every time she showed fact, she was welcomed or rather *unwelcomed* by glaring, detached emerald eyes. And every day she spoke to Vince she found herself comparing him to Ice, and to top it all off, her transition still hadn’t come.

Her *mathine* was so overwrought with concern she’d booked continuous appointments with Doctor Fang. A skeptical giggle bubbled over her lips. *Doctor Fang, how ironic.* Jeez, she was crazy she decided, leaning on the wall for support as the blood rushed to her legs.

Slowly, she stumbled out of the caves, slipped through the rusted iron bars until she broke away from the musty, suffocating air. And then, she ran. Desperately, she ran through the forests, brushing trees and dodging rocks until the screams faded into nothing but a bad memory.

Beth collapsed into the dried leaves, pulling her iPhone from her pocket and dialing the familiar number.

He answered on the first ring. "Beth," voice gruff with an emotion close to worry. She smiled softly.

"I'll be at the road in five. Come get me?" He sighed over the line

"You've gatta stop doing this..." she swallowed. "You good?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," she dismissed teasingly. "I'm hanging up so come get me!" Sitting up, she tugged off the ugly dark green beanie, unhooking her hair from its tight bun, and standing. It felt better to have her hair loose; it made her headache bearable.

Jacking her brothers jeans up, she started forward on the trail, wondering unconsciously, why *others* mainly hunted females.

She huffed, making her way into the street that overlooked the city, just beyond the forests. Vince's Lincoln was already there, his pale figure pacing until he spotted her. In a second, he was by her side, his speed too quick for her eyes to follow until her body was crushed against his, the sweet scent smothering her...But in a good way. Nothing like Frostbites.

Forcing a smile, she hugged his lean body closer because she'd missed him. Even if it was only a friendly way, he was still her best-friend.

"Fuck, Beth, I missed you. Why the hell haven't you been answering my calls?" *Sorry, been busy obsessing over a male that hates me!*

She blinked harshly, her smile turning watery.

If only anyone understood.

oooooo

There is was again. As Ian exited the *jarred* cells his skin crawled. Impatiently, he traced to the spot where the scent swirled, still fresh. Involuntarily, he stepped closer to the wall, breathing coming deeper – the fragrance, so embedded into his mind, was stronger with time,

striking his ribs like a wrecking ball.

And like an idiot, he found himself sliding to the ground, the cords of his sanity lost in his jumbled thoughts and images flashed over his vision. His demons hissed in his ears, but with another inhale, they were silenced by the –her scent.

Had she been sitting right here? Probably, he thought angry at himself for not bothering to look down.

Typical freakin' Vamp.

But how in the hell had she even managed to stay so quiet? She was only human, for fuck's sake. She shouldn't have even known about this hellhole in the first place.

He saw red at the idea of her being anywhere near the pernicious *jarred* chambers. She could have been harmed. The cavers were packed with *others*, either chained or drugged until proven useless, and then they were *jarred*. But they were still dangerous.

Ian snarled under his breath, shutting his eyes. When he opened them again he was standing outside her door. The sight made him sigh, running a hand through his hair in agitation. He didn't even have to think about it anymore, the female intoxicated his mind.

He'd been in her bedroom before. And as bad as it –his fixation was becoming, he still managed to go through every bloody day giving her the cold shoulder. But just that. He still paid her more attention than any other being. He still watched her wantonly, watched her bow-tie lips curve into a smile that lit her face and had *that* feeling settle in his bones. He still listened to her airy laugh whenever some idiot made a stupid remark but she was kind enough to make sure they didn't feel bad. He still noticed her care for young of the *ramai*...And worse, he still wondered where she was whenever she missed training or why she didn't associate with other males and females. Point blank: he was engrossed with her.

And as they days kept going, the frustrating attraction only added to the plethora of attributes that made him want her. But as he ignored her, she ignored him. That alone lit the flames of his fury easier than any words. Ian knew he would've lost his resolve if she was a silent sleeper. The very first night he'd visited (he used that term lightly) her, she spoke his name five times and five times the sound toyed with his emotions...Albeit now, hearing it on her lips was becoming rare.

The night before last, the name Vince had been reoccurring and it

made another awful feeling pack onto his shoulders. He'd never been jealous of anything, but hell, he was going to find out exactly who this Vince was.

The only excuse for this possessiveness: her blood. The only comfort that another, that *Vince*, wasn't feeding from her was that he'd checked her throat. It wasn't as if he could have stopped himself if he even tried. He didn't have that much willpower when it came to Beth, because each night he ended up knelt at her bedside running his fingertips over the soft flesh of her neck...Fortunately for them both, it remained untouched.

Ian's head fell forward to the metal doorframe; hand tight around the handle as he fought the dominated need to enter the citrus-scented hell.

The hell was with him? He thought despite already knowing. He couldn't be pinning after some brat, especially not his best-friends daughter. Never her. She was forbidden delights.

"Yeah," he muttered bitterly. "Right." Then he tried the door once, careful not to twist the knob too hard and break it. It was locked and – patience damned, he traced into the darkened room. It was empty.

Straight up she'd been in that cave. It didn't particularly come as a shock. No, he was extremely pissed, confused, and *damn him*, concerned. The *others* were out in high numbers, scattered about New York, *hunting*. And she was out there with them, out of his reach or security of any kind.

Why!? Why the hell did he care? He was mental, fucked up, still trying to get *papa's* approval, yet he was worried about one little girl?

He was more screwed than he'd initially thought. Funny that.

From his pocket, his phones vibrated. He whipped it out, answering curtly, "Derik."

A low, evil chuckle echoed through the line and he stopped dead, spine stiffening. Well, whattyaknow?

"Tired of hiding yet?" he questioned, voice empty despite the different tactics he was going through in order to torment the peice of shit. How many females' lives had he taken in the past two weeks? It was time their lost were avenged.

"Have you missed me so much? I hadn't thought so with your little obsession wandering about..." *New obsession? Ah, hell, it was her.*

The heel of his palm pressed over his eyes. He was growing tired of this game. There was no possible way for the *other* to know about Beth...Ian didn't so much as risk glancing at her.

This *other* was toying with his head. How the bastard succeeded.

"Obsession?" There was another laugh and he tensed further, fist tightening as the feeling to go to her got stronger. But he was helpless. And it was *wrong*, all *darned wrong*.

"I'd thought she was quite plain, Payne. Expected somethin' more..." a brief pause and Ian lifted his fist to strike something in substitute for the *other*. "Bein' quite honest, I expected a blonde. All the others have been, and so beautiful too."

Ian yearned for the *others* disgusting black blood.

"Don't touch her," he maintained the empty tone, concealing just how much he was feeling, though just barely.

"Now I realize," the *other* continued as if he hadn't spoken. "She is actually a tempting prize...The way her hips sway or that hair, so very dark and thick...It would please me greatly to hear her scream in terror, to have her fight me." *Fucking try it*.

"No kiddin'?" he traced into his own bedroom, snatching weapons from his closet. "She will be avenged," he lied easily. He would not have to avenge her because there was no way in hell she'd be taken.

"Come now Payne. Second daughter to Aeluis. I know you're aware of who I speak of. You, of all demons would notice the splendor in her." Indeed, he would.

"Why the hell would I care?" He willed himself to answer himself, but there it was again, the denial. She was his best-friend –fathers, or the closest he'd had to a father, daughter. How could he *not* care?

"Don't you? I'd love to continue this...*but*, the raven-haired beauty is on the move, and I wouldn't wanna miss her. Keep in touch, Payne."

The line went dead.

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Beth shivered from under her brother's heavy sweater, inhaling Vincent's sweet scent from where it caught in the cotton as she made her way through the city-streets beside her only female friend, Magda.

The awkward silence lingered as a reminder that it wouldn't be the same anymore. Their friendship was completely altered.

Tears blurred her vision, as she watched a human male with his woman laugh at something she'd said. It was so very normal. Beth wished life could be that easy.

"Beth?" Ripping her gaze from the couples departing backs, she looked up into a pair of wide, shimmering green eyes. Magda was a tall woman, even at eighteen, she was six foot, but she was slim, a body made for models, with a sharp face, tan skin set off by black hair the same shade as Beth's.

She smiled a little, stuffing her numb hands into her pockets to keep the cold from nipping at her fingertips next. It was cold this time of November in New York, light flakes of snow already have begun falling.

"Yeah?" she mumbled; her voice cracking vulnerably as she swallowed the lump in her throat.

"I'm so sorry..." Pain assaulted her, and she gritted her teeth, listening to her conscious, and letting go. She wanted to let go of the anger, the pain, and betrayal to just let it all melt in the snow. She couldn't lose Magda, no matter how many stabs in the back it cost her.

"Why?" She needed to know.

"I don't know, Elizabeth. I was so...*angry* at you because you wouldn't stop talking about how much was going to change when you became a –a Vampire...And Vince was so hurt...It just...happened."

I loved him, he was mine. She wanted to scream it, to just...snap, but instead she breathed in a sharp breath, allowing the last of her tears to fall before she gave a wide smile. It took all her strength to forgive...but she couldn't forget.

Just then, a thought came from nowhere: just don't feel. She wondered how Ian managed to do it...Beth had always been (overly) emotional and couldn't comprehend how anyone just shut out feelings. How had this childhood gone? Had he even had one?

She shook herself, "But that's the thing Magda! It *will* be different. We'll be enemies." That was just the way it was.

"We won't! Beth, believe it or not, we all love you. Specially Vince," she thought she heard jealously in her friends tone, but Magda just continued. "Leech or not." She loved her second family, too. No matter what the Law said, they would never be considered her enemy.

Trying to lighten the mood, she teased, "Hey! I won't be sucking

anybody but my males' blood." Magda smile flirtatiously.

"Oh, so you've already moved on huh? Who's the lucky bloodsucker?" Beth snorted, trying to block the name that popped into mind. Ian was not hers. And would never be. It couldn't work, they were so different. But when had she ever been a sore loser? There was tons of fish in the sea.

But you only want this one, her conscious reminded.

"Nobody," Beth paused, shooting a glance at the human, partially hidden by the nightclub's shadows. But she could feel him eyeing her. "Yet."

"Gross, please tell me you're not looking at him?" Magda gestured discreetly at the human. "He's *human*." Beth rolled her eyes.

"So 'm I! Besides, humans aren't my type...You know, with the need for *royal* blood, Blood Bonds and all."

All was silent for a while, but at least it wasn't awkward anymore, just testing. "I missed you, Beth...Don't –Please don't drop us like that again. Are we –," she hemmed. "Are we good?" Beth threw her arms around her friend's thin waist, smiling when she immediately hugged back.

"We're great Magdalene, and we always will be." It was the truth.

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Three hours later, Beth finally left Magda at the *hunters* hidden entrance, insisting she could walk back alone since it wasn't a far way...But really, she just needed to clear her cluttered thoughts.

The snow fell in clumps now, soaking her beanie as she trudged through the deserted streets. She probably should have let Vince drive her back, she admitted ten minutes into the walk. It was freezing and she was being watched, the deathly intensity of that stare burning into her back, making her shiver in unease.

Her steps were stealthily quiet and large as she breathed a relieved sigh, entering the forest's edge. But, as she kept going, she realized it didn't matter that she'd entered Vampire territory, her stalker followed.

Breathing heavy, she caught sight of the forest camera's, lights blinking green. *So close*. Abruptly, Beth froze, muscles locked in place. She willed herself to move, to *go*, but her legs refused to cooperate.

Slowly, her head twisted to look over her shoulder and...she saw him

The *other* was tall, taller than her father, shoulders bulky, arms pale bands of muscle flexing at his sides. There was a ghost of a smile on his pale features, eyes swirling silver. *Silver?* She thought in disbelief. There was no way he was an *other*, their eyes remained a soulless black.

But he radiated a deep, darkness that she knew. Her thoughts blared *runrunrun!* Goddess, she thought suddenly, he was back for her...This time there was no escape.

Even so, her legs finally shuffled backwards, her shaky hands over her mouth. What a way to end her life. The *other* took a step forward in response.

It was there, in the dead of night, scared like never before, that her missing survival instincts shifted into gear and she broke into a dead run. She ran as fast as she possibly could without tripping, not risking a glance over her shoulder because his thudded footsteps were already closing in on her.

Please kill me quickly, she prayed to the Goddess.

When she reached the caves, she kept going blindly, already having memorized the route back. Splashing through the dark, murky waters, adrenaline made her quicker than ever.

She pushed her tiring muscles harder still, flinching at the low, evil chuckle close behind her. Just like that, she lost her footing and plummeted into the cool water. Trembling, she held her breath, listening to the deathly silence until she couldn't take it any longer. She knew he was watching her, so why couldn't he just get it over with already?

Blinking back tears, she tried to get back up, but a slice of pain went through her knee, which had taken most of her fall. She waited.

Beth never expected to get away, so when a heavy hand snagged her left ankle, she shut her eyes tight, resisting the urge to scream as the male began to drag her backwards. The material of her shirt bunched though and her skin caught the ruble, the further he went, the more it hurt, and she couldn't stop her struggle.

An animal-esque growl ripped from the male before he released her, pouncing. Panicked, she rolled onto her raw skin, barely avoiding his body but still taking the impact of a slap to the face. Her head span,

a new flash of pain going through her as the metallic taste of blood flooded her mouth.

“Do not make this harder than it has to be,” the voice was a harsh, dirty whisper in her ear. She cried out a little when he moved to straddle her, and with the last of her energy, she flung her legs forward.

She hit home. Everything went still, a hiss of pain being the only sound as she dug her shoes into the same spot, sprawling away as the *other* slumped. Then, she desperately kicked the figure, breaking into another run.

At the security doors, she fumbled for the security car, shaking badly as she ripped in from her pant pocket. The green light flashed, the sweetest sight of her life, and instantly she skidded through the metal door. There was a loud swear when the dead-bolts locked in place.

Needed distance between her and that door, she numbly trudged up the long staircase and into her bedroom, limping slightly, soaking wet, she didn't care who saw her. Far off, in the part of her brain that was properly functioning, she thanked the Goddess nobody did see; it would be her ruination.

The *ramai* would be absolutely scandalized.

Upstairs, in her bedroom, she locked the door behind her, willing herself to feel something –anything, but nothing came. Just the blank, stretching numbness as she trembled, going to the opposite side of her room so she could slide to the carpeted floor and gaze vacantly at the door.

Time passed by sluggishly. She sat there, no tears, no pain, just... alone. So finally when she stood it was because she didn't really need a cold before her transition. Unzipping her brother's sweater she let it fall off her shoulders and onto the ground, next she undid the tight bondage that held her small breasts (couldn't take the risk of having *any* breasts, obviously), until that too fell to that carpet. Unbuckling her belt, she sighed as the large, baggy jeans dropped, letting her boy-shorts land on the pile so that she was completely bare.

A fresh towel in hand, she entered her bathroom, avoiding the mirror as she mechanically turned the faucet, not realizing how hot she was until the water smothered her. Too exhausted to do anything about it, Beth leaned on the shower wall, closing her eyes as the hot –turned

to cold –waters spray soothed her slightly. With an easier sigh, she scrubbed her hair twice with her favorite citrus-scented shampoo, then scoured her skin with soap and body wash until her skin stung worse than before.

Outside, she slid into the warmest clothing she could find, which ended up being Hollister (when had she even shopped there?) sweats, a hideous dark green sweater, and thick, black knee-high socks. She made a point to cover her swollen knee and the red welts on her side, but she couldn't hide whatever was going on with her face –because it hurt, a lot. Mustering the courage to look in the mirror, she cringed at the girl in the reflection.

Her skin was sickly pale, hollow circles underlining her puffy, blood-shot eyes. Her features were exactly the same, but her right cheek was bruising and her bottom lip was split. Her hands began to shake again and she looked down to find them clenched, knuckles bitten raw.

“Where've you been?” His voice was cool –calculating. She choked on her breath, shutting her eyes to be confronted by *silver*. She couldn't help the frantic whimper that fell from her mouth as she clutched the counterpane.

Goddess, she couldn't stop. It all came rushing back, leaving her dizzy. She was scared—terrified and everything *hurt*. The sound of a shrill pierced her ears, but she was too lost in her own horror. A large hand suddenly cupped her mouth, the distinct cologne enveloping her atmosphere and she let herself be weak for the time, leaning into the hard wall of his chest.

Biting into her top lip she forced herself to turn, her fear morphing into denial as she shoved him away, but her hands tangled in the collar of his shirt, unsure of whether to push him away or pull him closer. *Goddess, she did not need him. She was fine.* And now, apparently a liar.

“Elizabeth...” Her eyes fluttered open, meeting a glorious green, but she couldn't handle the force of that gaze, instead she faced the mirror once more, gazing at herself.

She frowned, noticing how horrible she really looked. Right there, beside her, Ian looked like a God, brown hair in messy spikes, green eyes blazing with the lightest tinge of red she'd seen them, the white, sharp tips of his fangs revealed.

Gorgeous as ever while she looked like she'd been hit by a car. Or

rather, an *other*.

“Christ,” he breathed. “What happened, Beth?” She didn’t see him move again, but suddenly, he was crowding her, long fingers tracing lightly at her cheek. She shied away from the panging sensation.

Don’t be so weak, her conscious castigated with an anger Beth didn’t feel. His fingers fell away, and when her eyes rose again, he’d traced to the doorway. There, he loomed, looking furious as he grimaced. She looked down immediately to keep his hatred from burning her with unwanted feelings.

She just wanted to be furious as he looked.

“I’ll ask you once more,” he paused, eyes finding hers. “Where have you been?”

“Nowhere,” she breathed, leaning into the counter for support. A shiver ran down her spine, pain igniting over her entire body though it was the all-too-familiar transitional pain.

Purposefully, he pursued, arm snaking around her belly to pull her wobbly legs backwards until she was molded to him. Her shoulders at his chest, her butt just below his pelvis. She kept her gaze on the mirror, taking him in there, noticing for the first time that he was dressed for protocol slaying. His holster was packed with daggers, a handgun at his hip, leathers tight along the muscles of his thighs.

He bent, nose skimming a path down her neck as she shivered, her belly swooping with desire that sparked her blood. He stopped at the slope of her shoulder, and inhaled deeply through his nose before drawing back up until his lips brushed her ear.

“You smell of a male,” his voice was deeper, accusing. Beth cursed herself for forgetting he was a *leader* with heightened senses.

“Suppose I would,” she snapped breathily. “Since you’re accosting me.” His hand dragged from her stomach to her waist, fingers burrowing tighter than necessary. The feeling still had her stifling a moan, working to breathe evenly and slow her racing heart.

This was so...*wrong*.

“I’m not playing games tonight, female. Tell me where you went, otherwise, I will speak to Nick.” The threat in his voice was true and finally, anger coursed through her. For all the wrong reasons, she spun to face him. The proximity made her freeze as she stared up into the burning green sea, and for a second, she thought she saw something

other than irritation, but it was gone before she could tell.

“My lord, perhaps I should be the one speaking with my father,” she tested, copying his cold tone. His eyes hardened with a challenge.

“What about?” She was livid. She couldn’t remember being so angry. Only this infuriating man would threaten her this way.

She wanted him to react to her. Tonight she held the strings, not him.

Beth leaned forward so that her breasts just barely hit the hard plains of his chest, fingertips curling lightly over his thick neck. His shoulders tensed almost immediately and she could *feel* how aware he was of her. His attention was focused solely on her fingertips, her breasts straining under her sweater. On her tiptoes she breathed, “Perhaps I should tell him how pretty you think my mouth it...” he inhaled sharply, but she didn’t give him the satisfaction of stopping her, instead she continued. “Or that you’ve been in my room...” her voice dropped an octave at the realization. He couldn’t have traced into her room without having been there before. “How many times have you been here Ian?”

His name was warm on her tongue as the air crackled, her heartbeat became erratic. She was pushing too far. And she didn’t care either. She wanted him to feel something for her other than that deep hatred.

“You go too far tonight,” he acquiesced her thoughts in a tight bark. In victory her eyes shut and she blew out a shaky breath because it felt wrong. Ian did not allow victories...and yet tonight he’d let her have the last word. She willed herself to step away, but his scent drifted over her, all male with a slight tinge of cologne that she wanted to roll around in until it settled over her very essence.

His thumbs began to draw slow circles at her waist and a gasp escaped her parted lips. She hadn’t known that could feel good, but at the feel everything below her sweats tingled, wetness seeping at the junction of her thighs. *Oh*. Her cheeks flamed as he leaned closer, skimming her throat, starting at the sensitive spot where her neck became her shoulder and following a path only he knew. On impulse, her hands gripped the muscles of his shoulders, needing the support as she tilted her head, giving better access.

His lips pressed tenderly at her frantic pulse, the warmth of his tongue following and she bit her lip to keep from begging him to kiss

–*bite* her. Instead, she took a small step closer, holding her breath as his lips met her ear, breath warm as he breathed a low hiss there, the sharp point of a fang grazing just below her ear. She couldn't help the soft whimper that fell passed her lips.

Every instinct in her short-wired –*Goddess, she wanted him to bite her!*

And she was going to bed, and beg and –a loud slam at her door jolted her back to reality and she jerked away from the male at her throat. In that moment, she was motionless, watching him run a hand through his hair, eyes shut as his fangs disappeared from sight.

Another harsh slam to her door and she winced, trudging out of the bathroom and hoping desperately that Ian would be gone by the time she opened that door. With a deep, reassuring breath Beth undid the bolt-locks and cracked the door open –only the metal thing broke off its hinges with enough force that she went tumbling backwards into her dresser.

She thought her head caught the edge of a hard surface as a spurt of pain shocked through her body, hot, thick liquid trickling down her temple. In confusion, she clutched the spot, vision fading in...and out.

There was a figure in her doorway. *Daddy? Daddy?* She thought blearily, blinking crazily until her vision cleared and yeah...*Father*. Terror, cold and sharp punctured his lungs as she tried to look through the threat he was posing...tried to see her father. But he didn't seem to be conscious any longer, his massive body shaking with vehemence.

Daddy. Her mouth fell open, but no sound came. *Nothing, nothing, nothing...* Unconsciously, she felt the bizarre, deep sense that Ian was still there, *watching* as she struggled to grip some sort of reality.

“Where the *fuck have you been Elizabeth?!*” was the last, terrifying roar she heard before the opaque obscurity swallowed her whole.

Chapter Four:

Ian stood stiffly in her bathroom, alone as the cold crawled along his skin. *Warmth*. It was what the female brought with her everywhere, it flowed out of her and into him, when she wasn't close, it was missing and he didn't know how to fucking feel about that. At all.

She had that control over him and it wasn't...constricting. No, it had quite the opposite effect. While she was able to move gracefully, seemingly unfazed, he was completely *stuck*. His groin throbbed painfully, begging for release, his throat was tight with the need for her blood and damn him, his hands were burning to have her soft skin under them.

It was the most intense lust he'd ever encountered; the yearning deep in his chest was for more than her body or her blood, it was for every cell that *made* her. He wanted to have her stripped of everything for him. He wanted her a needy wrecked beneath him. He wanted her to know him more than any other being. And he'd never wanted so much at one time before. His heart stalled, because this little girl was *dangerous* to him.

Without permission his legs carried him to the bathroom doorway, where he drank in the sight of her. Dark hair flowing down to her lower back, where the sweater rose to show the tantalizing skin of her side and her hips flared from beneath those joggers. He tried to pry his eyes away, to recall his senses, but he found he couldn't. Not even as she unlocked the door.

And it was like a bucket of ice-water had been dumped over his head as everything went straight to the Fifth Realm.

The metal doorframe flung off its hinges, shoving Beth backwards, into the dresser. A sickening, familiar crack sounded and she looked up, pale eyes foggy with confusion, horror stark on her features. His heart gave a feeble leap in his chest and –fuckin' hell.

His body registered her blood had been spilt before the dark liquid oozed from her temple. His airways cut off mid-breath, and his inner-demon rejoiced at the red that filled his vision.

"Where the *fuck* have you been Elizabeth?" Nick's voice was volatile as he stalked forward, not even noticing Ian.

His willpower lay in shreds already.

A threatening growl ripped from Ian's chest, bloodlust coursed through him but it wasn't for feeding, not at all. He wanted to tear his best-friends throat out with his teeth.

With a speed only a *leader* could possess, he lurched forward, crouching in front of the female's limp body. Everything in Ian chilled when her breathing faltered and he found himself torn between making sure she wasn't seriously injured and protecting her from the direct threat. Intently, he listened, all the while keeping his eyes attached to Nick's tense form. Relief swelled over him as her heartbeat became a steady thump in his ears, allowing him to really focus.

Nick's eyes were hard, a light red glazed over them, a red Ian had never noticed there before. But the raise in the males power did not matter when he took another step forward, testing his sincerity. Ian was already weighing the best possible angles to take the bulkier Vamp down. One more step and he would pounce.

Baring his fangs in warning, he hissed, geared up to lunge the enemy, even his best friend.

"Back the fuck away from *mine*, Derik," Nick sneered, eyes locked on Beth with a predatory glint. Mine his Vamp sneered right back, the glint fueling his blood-hunger, urging him to cover her from the onlooker's eyes.

But he couldn't risk moving, there was too much agitation –*competition*. His morphing pinpointed Nick's mind before he could stop it and the suffocating clutches forced him under.

It was drowning, the ache to tear at his own skin, to *stop* the painful, crawling sensation, to lose train of conscious thought, but *no*, that wouldn't do, he had to guard the female. Fighting it, he bit into the flesh of his lip, bearing his own blood, and then the draining began. The energy from the other fizzled underneath his skin.

At the loss, Nick stumbled backwards. "*Are you* – You're using that purgatory gift..." Ian's lips twitched despite his fury. It pulled his meditation and Nick shoved him out, harboring the remains of his energy, taking another step.

Ian knew he was too weak to fight anymore, even all hyped up. It helped him gain control of himself and straighten, stepping towards the male until they were dangerously close. Even so, Nick's focus was mainly on Beth –that had to change –the older radiated sadistic concern and spite, never a good blend for a killing machine such as

Nicholas. Devil take it, where was Verona?

“Don’t do this, my brother,” Ian said slowly, his own rage clawing at him. “Think ‘bout what you’re going to do Nicholas.” Nick’s brows creased, an indication that he was listening. Ian took the chance to continue. “I swear upon mine honor, you will regret this as much as I once I go for your throat... You –I refuse to let you put yourself through pain by harming her.” *Liar. You won’t let him hurt her because you are obsessed! Completely fucking sick.*

Minutes turned to years...decades...centuries, a damned millennium before Nick staggered backwards, breathing coming in uneven huffs as he registered what was going on around him.

“Shit...*Oh fucking shit!*” Ian didn’t dare move. “Did –Oh dear Goddess, did I –hurt her?” his voice was barely a breath. Ian grunted, running a hand through his disheveled hair.

“Just fuckin’ stay,” he muttered, waiting until Nick nodded jerkily. It went against all his better instincts to turn his back to the enemy, principally with his female –a female at stake, but he did anyway, tuning into the other’s feelings.

Silently, he knelt at Beth’s side, brushing the silky strands of hair from her face and taking a shallow, testing breath, swallowing around the burn in his throat and fighting down the nagging demon within. He tried not to think about how long it’d been since he’d fed but *hell*, it’d been too long.

Cursing under his breath, he easily lifted her, careful not to jostle her too much. Nick watched with hard, protective eyes and Ian wanted too –well, he wasn’t sure exactly what he wanted, but he knew the bastard had no right to be protective over the female he cradled. He was the reason she was hurting.

Beth whimpered, struggled against him and he paused, unsure of what to do but tighten his hold.

It wrecked over him then, the blooming scent of transition and naturally, he inhaled deeper. His entire body constricted and his erection swelled in his leathers with a scary speed. The second wave crashed over him and *fuck, fuck, fuck*, he couldn’t think of anything but –Nick cursed loudly, distracting him enough that he could think passed whatever was going on in his head.

The male sped out of the room and Ian instantly followed. *Goddess*, he thought, why now? His heart hammered painfully, and his

body was already well passed ready for her –to serve her.

But he couldn't let himself think of that. No, but how many other males were in the facilities right now? How many males were feeling that aching need in their very beings right now?

Ah, hell.

In Nick's weapon centre, Ian walked in on the male searching frantically. Another invisible wave of pheromones and he was blinded, swaying a bit and groaning. Talk about a freakin' mess.

Beth moaned into his collar and Ian winced because she would be in so much more pain than any male soon. A foreign feeling crawled over his chest...*sadness*? His vision returned as he looked down at her: mouth parted, skin flushed prettily as she squirmed closer. *Oh sweet Goddess...*

He didn't see Nick find the phone but then it was on speaker, ringing. An accented voice answered on the second ring, "Sire."

"Keep talkin'," Nick commanded, voice shaky though in an entirely unaffected way.

"Well sire," the voice began. "There's quite a bit of activity here. Not in this room, of course, I am alone with the expectance of this..." the voice faded as Ian traced it, ending up in a dimly lit observatory.

What the hell?

Beth's whines grew higher as her hands tangled in his shirt and Ian sighed, looking around frantically to find a young civilian rising from a chair in the corner of the room. The civilian stiffened as he sniffed the air, beady eyes latching onto Beth.

He didn't have to look down for the evidence of the male's arousal, the stench blasted at him as he growled, baring his fangs at the male who scrambled backwards.

Fortunately for him, Nick appeared, glancing at the male. "Uh, Doc...?"

The doctor went into action, pulling vials from the cabinetry and glancing unsurely at him again. "M-Master, if you would please set her on the...m-mattress?" *Mattress?*

Hell no, he wouldn't set her anywhere near him. He did not move until Nick spoke up, "Derik. She's bleeding..." at the reminder he made move from the spot he was rooted. And Beth was now shaking,

sobbing.

Gently, he placed her down; stepping back cautiously when her energy curled over him again, citrus and sexuality had the thick erection in his pants jerking. Nick growled, causing the doctor to continue collecting supplies but Ian didn't bother to look at him, unable to even tear his eyes from Beth's pained expression.

"Well, my lords, as I was er saying," he tugged at his cravat, visibly uncomfortable. "I, well I am unsurprised that 'tis finally upon us, albeit she is bleeding profusely and I've not yet collected a male from the Fourth realm..." Nick opened his mouth to reply but Ian was quicker, possessiveness and arousal raw in his voice.

"She fell," he snarled, taking a step closer, glaring. "Without another remark you will mend her and give us the damned morphine or else I will rip your eyes from their sockets!" The other *leader* sighed, towing Ian by the shoulders away from the cringing doctor.

He knew he had to leave, to get away from her and that scent. It was driving him passed the brinks of insanity.

As he reached the door handle, he spoke quietly. "Heed my words well or you shall face the consequences. And what consequences they will be."

He forced himself from the room with as much of himself as he could leave.

ooooo

Nick glanced at his daughters thrashing form. He couldn't breathe. His lungs were heavy and his throat unbearably tight. Nothing made a lick of sense to his muddled thoughts as they were pulled in a million separate directions. The impulse to defend Elizabeth from looming males was indomitable. She was hurt, and he was the only one at fault.

The leather chair he'd forced his hefty form into somehow became tighter, squeezing until he fidgeted, face shamefully hidden in his hands, nails digging into his forehead as he tried to replace the image of his daughter, his precious little girl, harmed by her own sire.

The thing was, Nick knew abuse, was a victim of it by his own father and those ways were a show of strength through the century of his adolescence. It left him with his own sins, but he'd found Verona

soon after. His *irryn* was all things lovely and he would forever love her for releasing him of those sinful chains.

His *irryn* who loved him unconditionally, who guided him, who'd given him three young despite the risk, she was his strength. The loss of Malia would never fade, but he took it proudly, a keepsake of his daughter, to focus on Ian.

He considered the younger his son, though it was too far from truth.

By the time Nick met the scrawny, scarred boy with dull green eyes, he'd already lost too much. He sometimes blamed himself for what Ian had gone through, because if he'd bothered to ask Krait about his son a bit more...If he'd given the effort to demand an *introduction*...Those dull, helpless emerald eyes took him back to nineteen seventy three.

Months had long passed since Nicholas becoming the young's parterra. Yet no more than two words had been spoken between them and those two words were simple acknowledgements, "my lord" or trainees instructions. Even so, Nicholas could find no fault in the young Lord fore he exceeded the expectations of the ramai, kept his head held higher than male's two sizes of him.

The son of Payne was presenting his heritage; his blood was thickening and amounting to that of the warrior whom had sired him.

There was far more of it however. The boy was perfunctory, verily. There was a thing about the sights of pools, tubs, any large quantity of water that left him distant from even himself. He would never linger in a bedchamber for long without becoming almost mad within himself. He did not speak unless spoken too, and that was hardly a time.

He was scarred.

Sunrise was approaching by the time Nicholas returned to the Civilization. His instincts blared. In the two years the male had been preparing the untransitioned, he'd grown oddly attached. Throughout their time together, he was mostly silent, ignoring those around him even when they found pleasure in tormenting him.

It was natural for Nicholas to want to teach those morons a lesson, but he knew Ian would not appreciate his interceding. So, he watched. He watched the boy, who knew best how to fight, take what was thrown at him. Words, fists, dirt...He did nothing but fester in the pain.

But Nicholas didn't dwell there in that moment; instead, he shook

himself and slipped through the already ajar door, below the grounds sector. A feeling close to panic washed over him at the sounds of laughter in that direction, where it was forbidden for anyone but leaders to enter... These males were not leaders.

The atmosphere was heavy with the smell of blood. He was red.

At the landing, Nicholas held himself perfectly still, catching sight of three transitioned males hovering over Ian, whose back was to the wall, legs held to his chest, eyes trained on the...pool. His emotions were veiled well, but not enough. The slight shake of his hands and the wideness of his eyes gave him away.

As Nicholas continued to stare, one of the three spoke. "Bet you begged for Daddy to touch you...Didn't you, Derik? Ian remained silent but Nick had to bite back a snarl, feeling revulsion merge with his anger, his inner Vampire encouraging him to spill the blood, to have them beg for him to spare them.

The others broke into more laughter and the one made his way to the pool's edge, splashing Ian, who blinked in confusion, raising his emerald gaze to the male's twisted features.

"Say somethin' you little bastard. C'mon, do it." As he taunted, his meaty hand wrapped itself around the boy's neck, lifting him off the ground to snap back into the stone wall. Ian's eyes focused on the pool again, but Nick knew he could feel the pain at his skull, which had cracked under the force. His blood was strong, and rich in the air.

"Des, we've had our fun...If the Lords return to find the little prick in two pieces, we shall have our balls fed to us," the one that remained on the sidelines uttered, voice shaky and nervous as he took a step back.

Closer to Nick, who could smell the fear consuming him. It stuck. The other male, Des, ignored him, pressing closer to Ian.

"I would see it fit for you to release me now," the boy finally voiced. Des snarled in response.

"Would you? It would be a pleasure, my lord," he spat it at him. The male released his hold on Ian's neck only to grab a fistful of the boy's uncut hair. The boy's eyes widened further, a look of complete horror fixing his features. His mouth fell open, as if to scream, but no sound came fourth. Nick growled, taking a step forward, the last string of his self-control cut but –

The male, Des, took the moment to lift Ian's smaller frame, and fling him at the water. Nick pounced for him, terror twisting his gut for the male who was so frightened of pools. The water...the water that had the power to destroy anything left of Ian.

But he was too late; the boy went under....Everything fell silent for a second before the agonized wails and screams tore through the air.

A different, female shrill brought the memory to an end as he blinked it away, ignoring his vibrating phone to rise from his chair and stride over to the Doctor, who was bandaging his daughter's temple.

His heart shattered all over again, taking in the damage he'd done. Goddess, how could she forgive him for that? She was trembling and Nick wondered how long they had until she had to be given blood... Until she completed the tran –His phone started up again and he growled, ripping the damned thing from his pocket and answering without bothering to look at the caller I.D.

“The hell is it now?” It wasn't meant to come out so threatening but...

“Father,” his son's voice was tight. “Um, Mother...she's...Goddess, she's gone into her need?” Nick stopped breathing.

“Tallis,” there was a stifled groan and Nick was back in motion at once. “Aye, listen to me, Tallis. Get your ass out of the room, now. I'll be there in three.” He didn't wait for a reply, storming out into the hallway where he knew Ian would be.

The male's head was in his hands, broad shoulders caved in before he straightened defensively to glare at Nick with growing resentment. He didn't know when something had formed between his daughter and his best-friend, and fuck, it pissed him off, but all he could see was the boy he'd raised, with the green eyes that suddenly didn't look so distant anymore.

“Derik,” he breathed, feeling a crumpling anguish at having to choose between his *irryn* and daughter. “I need you.”

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Ian's entire body seemed to constrict as he groaned, his hips unconsciously bucking as the potent pheromones followed him from the room. For fuck's sakes, he needed *out*. Yet he couldn't bring himself to even think about walking away from her, not when she was *needing*.

Not for you, his demon hissed, she's needing for a male of worth.

His teeth gnashed as he covered his face with his hands.

This could not possibly get any worse. And as if fate was screwed with him personally, Nick pushed his way into the hallway. Anxiety poured out of the male and straight into Ian, who tried not to glare, but the self-loathing crawled up his throat. Removing his hands, he stared impassively at his best-friend –a male of worth.

“Derik,” Nick muttered. “I need you.” Ian jaw worked.

“Whatever for?” it was a hiss, livid with the reason that every time he *blinked*, the image of Beth, face scrunched in pain, was all he could see.

Nick’s hands curled into fists at his sides. Ian wanted his own hands around the male’s throat much the same. The tension was tangible in the air and he had to shut his eyes against the emotional-overload. She was not *his* to care for.

“Take care of her, Ian. Please.” His eyes snapped open in disbelief. *What the hell is he goin’ on about now? Take care of her...? Beth?*

“Begging pardon?” His tongue was heavy in his mouth. His mind had never been so well...*fucked over*.

He was so caught up in the voices in his head that he didn’t detect the upcoming attack until it was too late and hands wrapped around his throat, cutting his airways as his back made contact with the wall, which gave a weak tremor in response. Ian glowered, grudgingly denying the Vamp instinctive reprisal. With effort, he commanded his arms to relax at his sides in surrender. He didn’t want to fight Nick this way, not over this.

“I can’t stay,” the pain –much like what Ian was feeling –shocked him, but before he could ask, Nick continued. “It’s Verona. She’s gone into her *need* and...and I have to go to her. I would offer the *amercement*, if you will it. Just take *care of her*.” Instantly Ian’s hand clasped over the other’s shoulder in reassurance.

Nick could be an utter ass at times, but from the very beginning the male had saved Ian from himself and for that, he was beholden.

“See to her then,” he said.

The other hesitated. “Don’t make me regret this.” Ian squeezed his eyes shut in guilt.

“Don’t trust me...” It was only after Nick traced, the words came out. *Damn it all*, he was a complete...There wasn’t a proper word for the self-loathing.

“Monster, monster, *monster*,” he growled, never hesitating to hurl the door open. The doctor was brushing the dark hair from Beth’s flushed face and Ian just barely held back a growl, possessiveness threatening to overtake his sense.

“Are you *quite* finished?” His voice remained disciplined.

The doctor’s mouth opened to reply but a scream ripped through the room, demanding his attention, which was already focusing on Beth. Ian stared, unable to move until the screaming ceased and the doctor glanced back up at him, never meeting his eyes.

“Left breakfront, the morphine is located, if you will my lord. It shall ease her for some hours until I can contact the Chosen.” Ian forced his legs over to the open cabinet, grabbing the packages of pain-killers.

“Hours?” The doctor stood, removing the blue surgical gloves as Ian crossed his arms.

“Precisely. I’ve packaged blood to hold her by. If you continue to have her drink from them she shall be alright until the Chosen arrives. I advise you take her where other males are not present.” At the words Ian pinched the bridge of his nose, but went for the duffle across the room nonetheless.

“And how long’s this transition last for...females?” His voice, he noted absently, was too raw for comfort.

The doctor –*Fang* –Ian caught the nametag, watched Beth as she moaned, more searing heat radiating from the core of her. *Sweet Goddess*. Ian sucked in a deep, calming breath which was the same error he always made around her.

His throat flamed, fangs elongating with purpose and his stomach churning with famine. He needed to feed, but only when he got her situated.

Fang cleared his throat, fidgeting. “Since she is the daughter of a *leader*, it’s to be worse. Generally, it would last five hours or so, but, in her case, more or less ten. The blood needing is worse than the sexual, but the morphine should help, especially when her fangs come in. Just be prepare for that hunger...seeing as you are a male of finer heritage, my lord.” *Right*.

“Hunger?” Fang gave a grin, as if the question was somehow funny.

“You shall see. Keep in mind, she’ll be much stronger. She’ll use that against you...to act out, a bit more viciously.” He stifled a snort. Beth generally was vicious. He could handle that.

He didn’t have to think hard about relocation. The townhouse he owned in Manhattan would do, though he despised having to remain there, it was much too close to those damned *hunters*. And where the *hunters* lingered, humans and *others* did in turn.”

Curtly, he nodded in thanks, going over to Beth. Not trusting himself to breathe, he took one last breath before stopping completely. It was slightly uncomfortable, but durable. With the duffle bag at his shoulder, he took care in lifting her. At the proximity her hands clutched his shirt and he swallowed a groan, making his destination his focus.

And then their forms wavered, and darkness greeted him openly before he made solid contact. An alarm, designed for only supernatural ears sounded, but he ignored it to pull back a canopy from an untouched bed. His eyes remained strictly on the door, awaiting the entrance of his security as he placed her down, draping the coverlet over her.

As expected, a nameless guard burst through the door. Ian hissed, exposing his fangs as the male staggered backwards. “*Out.*” Immediate obedience. The dead-bolts twisted into place seconds later.

And without warning, the energy flashed white over his vision and reeled backwards, on his feet, to where the duffle lay on the floor. *Don’t think ‘bout her, don’t think ‘bout her*, he repeated inwardly as he flicked the syringe, a numb smile on his lips as the morphine leaked from the tip.

He hated having to be the one to do it, but she was hurting and there wasn’t another option unless...Hell fuckin’ no. He refused to go there. Even as he thought that, his erection pulsed at the opportunity, twisting painfully at his zipper. *Good for the damned thing.*

For a moment, bloodlust chewed at his sanity, and he thought about crushing that guard’s skull in his hand, but realized that was impossible for so many reasons. There was nothing to relieve the building tension, nothing at all, just a still-growing hard-on, an agonized transitioned, and *blood*.

“Let’s all have a fuckin’ tea party,” he muttered bitterly. Shaking himself, he approached the bed in careful footsteps, going through the correct ways of injection.

Wrist, elbow...? Wrist, he thought. He’d go with the wrist.

Not wanting to soil the sheets near her, he kicked off his boots before he knelt on the mattress, debating on retrieving Fang to just do it or –

She cried out, a sound that made his eyes go wide. *Alright*, so it had to be now. Goddess, why the hell was he so nervous about this? So damned unsure of himself.

He circled her wrist in his fingers, trying to ignore how badly his hands shook. But that couldn’t do, he’d screw up and he couldn’t afford to.

Closing his eyes, he focused on her racing heartbeat. It calmed him until he was composed enough that he could inject the needle into her vein. She mumbled something that sounded close to thank you.

That thank you confirmed it, confirmed that he’d done right by someone.

And he tried not to notice that it mattered more that he’d done right by *her*.

Chapter Five:

Pain. Raw pain severed the obscurity. It was cold, and she was left to the pain, alone with the darkness. *Alone, alone, alone.*

A scream pierced the air as her lungs grasped oxygen, alleviating some muted ache in his chest. Something frighteningly carnal slithered through her insides. Her gums tore, and blood filled her mouth, a saccharine taste that caused an unbearable hunger to join in on the torment. With each breath, a scent wisped and *nothing* seemed to matter.

A heartbeat pounded in her ears as she hummed around it, leaving her heavy eyes shut. She was very starving; a famine she'd never experienced garroted through her belly.

Absently, she noted that she could hear far more than that heartbeat. Inside, someone was approaching her, outside cars and people and—. A sweat broke over her skin, breathing coming in shallow pants. Her throat was so tight, and *dry*. She needed a drink.

Without permission, her eyes flickered, and she saw...really saw. It was dark, yet unbelievably clear.

What...?

Where...?

The room was spacious, but empty and bare of...personality. It wasn't *hers*. Colored in all black: black dressers, bed sheets, nightstands, except the walls, which were a deep, oddly deep blue, designed specifically to make someone feel that they were *suffocating*. It only left her disoriented.

She tried to remember how she'd ended up here, in a stranger's bed, but it all came back in blurry, dreamlike flashes. *Ian*. She'd been talking –arguing with him...Somehow they'd found out she'd left the premises and oh *Goddess her father* –

Terror grasped her lungs and unconsciously, she bounded backwards, knocking into the opposite wall to her with a hard thump that should have hurt... but *didn't*. Not at all. In fact, she felt better than ever, everything felt easy, except the throbbing of her throat...

Shying away from it, she realized that her lip, her cheek, her *head*, didn't hurt, though she knew the damage had been done. Instead, all she felt was an exhilarating high.

Drugs, maybe?

Her eyes lifted and *oh*. His face was impassive, much the same, but now...he looked...*Goddess*, he was the sexiest male she'd ever laid eyes on. Had she ever actually seen him before now?

The brown of his hair seemed lighter now, as if fell loosely over those sharp, calculating green eyes, extremely daunting with their tinges of red. His skin seemed natural now, smooth and pale to his sharp features, less warrior-like in comparison to her father. And that made him so much more attractive. His bottom lip was caught between his whites, fangs exposed.

Across the room, he was stiff, broad shoulders heavy, giving a show of the slightness of him. That was how she caught sight of the bag he held. Eyes locked on her in that weird, wary way.

Under that gaze she somehow managed to unwind a bit. Probably because he wasn't her father which left little to no possibility of him harming her. She tried to swallow, but found she couldn't, it was raw, merciless pain. Her hands reached up to clutch her throat, bewildered and cowardly afraid.

"What's wrong with me?" she breathed shakily, reaching for bedside table to steady herself. Beneath her fingers, the wood splinted and she yelped *—it even hurt to do that* —and lurched away, horrified at what she'd done. She looked down to her hand which remained unscratched. *What?*

Her eyes made their way back to Ian as he cautiously moved forward to place the bag in the middle of the bed. Then he threw his hands up and took three steps back, to his original spot. As if worried...for *her*? No, she thought, for himself. Huh, well, this *had* to be a dream then.

Ignoring him, she eyed the baggie, which was uncovered to reveal midnight red...*blood*? He was giving her blood? She looked back to him, trying not to look hopelessly confused as she was.

His eyes held something different now. *Pity?*

A small, tenuous growl echoed in the room and she inhaled sharply, realizing that it'd come from her. She was *growling*...? At *him*?! He deserved it. She did not need his empty pity.

"Don't look at me like that," Beth snapped. He arched an elegant brow and the temperature dropped a degree.

Really? she thought angrily. How the hell did he manage to influence even the *atmosphere*?

“How was I looking at you?” His voice came harsher than hers, of course. *Why does he hate me so much? God, that hurt.*

She raised in chin defiantly. “Like I *need* you.”

His lips tipped into a small smile, but she did not let herself get distracted by that. She would not be affected by him. “Don’t you?” *She might need him.*

“You wish.” She didn’t mean for it to come out so childish but...

“Hardly. C’mon Elizabeth, you’re acting infantile.”

“I need to leave...” And fast because with the way she was feeling, it would be a miracle if she didn’t become homicidal. But where exactly was she? She needed to talk to her mother, about the roller-coaster of emotions. Was this part of the transitional waiting? Did it mean it was closer? Was she already beginning?

She didn’t think so; it didn’t hurt something horrible yet...Not like she’d been taught.

Then again, it really *had* hurt that bad earlier. It had hurt something indescribable. Her blood a thick, searing lava running through her veins, her skin slowly, but indubitably being peeled away and her head an atomic bomb. Above that, she’d been so turned on it’d actually hurt.

She flinched away from the memory, her face heating as warm liquid seeped from the junction at her thighs. *Not freaking now.*

What is happening to me? she thought furiously.

“You need to feed Beth.” *Feed?* All the pieces suddenly fell into place. The pain, the thirst and need, the heightened senses, feeling as if she could take on the world...*Vampire.* She was a Vampire. Or nearly there at least.

Reaching up to reassure herself that she wasn’t going crazy, she opened her mouth, running a finger along the sharp points of her...fangs, probing them until she could feel the slight ache in her gums as they contracted. *Hmm*, well, it certainly had been a surprise.

She shook herself, rubbing her eyes next as she stifled an exhausted yawn. Wait –he wanted her to feed from a *rubber package*? No freakin’ way.

“Where is...erm, where’s my male?” He’d made it perfectly clear

she wasn't taking his vein.

There was a gravelly growl that froze the air and she toyed with her fingers, nervously avoiding his gaze when she spoke again. "I mean," she stumbled over her words awkwardly. "I know I'm not taking...*we're not going to –,*"

"Don't flatter yourself, female," he interrupted. "You will have to drink packaged blood while Fang locates Xaphan from the Fourth Realm." *Ouch, okay, yeah. Leader Xaphan.* He'd fed a few of the girls at training, Beth remembered having overheard them bragging about that. Each time, she'd felt bad for the guy.

Unsure of what to do, she peeked up from beneath her lashes, but found he was no longer looking at her. Instead, his brows were furrowed, eyes shut as if concentrating hard. His head was tilted so that his hand could knead at his throat. She could not look away.

He had a very appealing throat, thick and kissable and she marveled at how it would feel to sink her teeth there.

Bloodlust rammed into her. Her mouth went chalk dry, fangs cutting at her bottom lip though she didn't notice with the flames in her own throat.

"H-How long do I have to wait...for him?" Her voice was a higher pitch than normal, on edge as she tried to breathe properly. He didn't stop his tormenting rhythm though; up, down and around, up down... around...*Oh, no.*

"How long, *Derik?*" It was becoming impossible to breathe.

"I don't *know,*" he finally replied in a frustrated voice. Beth's breathing stopped altogether, her heartbeat going erratic as her pain skyrocketed –she *needed* a male. *It hurts, it hurts,* was all her mind acknowledged. It was all she knew.

"You're joking?" *Please, please be joking.* He finally looked at her, eyes ablaze.

"I do not joke. Take the damned bag, Beth. You're practically on fire; I can feel it from here." The knowing way he said that made her glare boldly.

"You don't know *anything!*" At his warning growl, she tensed, pulling some air in at the same time, pulling that *scent* in. It animated from him, teasing her.

Hastily, she licked her lips, taking a step forward before she could

think to stop herself. His eyes narrowed guardedly.

Beth tried to fight it, but whatever *it* was burst open and instinctively, she went for him, crashing into his body, hard. It might've made her head spin, it might've even hurt, but she didn't feel anything but that *need*.

And he lost his footing, taking her with him. One second she was straddling him, leaning forward with parted lips to sink her teeth into his exposed throat, but the next she was on her knees, body forced into the mattress. His large frame held her in that position, chest inclined over his back, one hand pinning her arms over her head. She knew she couldn't move, but that didn't matter, she let loose the fight in her, thrashing until his breathing was slightly labored with the effort it took to keep her contained.

"*Let me go!*" She screamed it at the top of her lungs. He grunted a bit, reaching between them to still her wriggling hips. *Oh*. His hand being there lit another desire and her sex throbbed wantonly. She sighed deep in her throat, in defeat as she inhaled his scent, all male richness with a lighter fragrance—*cologne, shampoo?* It made her head spin with want.

"Why must you always be so difficult, female?" She shook her head, hair a mess in her face. She blew the strands away, but they simply fell right back over her face. She never got her way.

"Why must you always be so difficult, *male?*" Beth poorly imitated his deep accent. It was pathetic, really, but he chuckled anyway, a throaty, stressed sound that made everything below her sweats clench. She ignored that, letting out her own huff of humored indignation.

Nothing should have been funny about their current impasse, but it was, because in the darkness everything seemed completely wrong and she needed something to feel alright. And she did feel a little better.

But then her belly twisted weirdly and she gasped. "Sweet Goddess that hurts."

His voice was low. "It'll only get worse if you don't drink." *No*.

"I don't want my first time to be with some plastic trash. I *refuse*; I'd rather you drugged me." Beth despised needles, but she could take one for this.

It was easier than telling him—a *male that hated her*—she had this silly fantasy that the first male she drank from would fall in love with her. Nope, she was so not going there with him.

“You have no choice in the matter.” The hell she didn’t. She opened her mouth to tell him just that but he kept going. “If you don’t drink willingly in the next two minutes I will force it down your pretty little neck.” She blinked at the confidence in his voice.

Males. They were always with the I-Rule-You-Females bullcrap.

“I won’t let you.”

She could practically hear him roll his eyes. “And how do you plan to stop me?” He came closer so his body flattened against hers, pulling her up so that his hand could wrap around her neck, thumbing the frantic pulse-point. She wasn’t about to tell him her blood was racing from desire and not fear. Some things a girl just had to keep secret. “I’ve got you detained now and I can easily do it again.” Her blood froze.

When his hand left her neck to drag to her waist once again, she shoved her face into the mattress, trying not to scream in frustration.

“You’d force me then?” Suddenly, her eyes blurred until all she saw was red. Literally.

She blinked crazily, realizing she was crying blood-tears. She quickly shoved her face deeper into the covers, so that he wouldn’t have that power over her. She didn’t let herself think he could smell the blood.

His voice was softer when he spoke. “You speak as though that is my intention. Do you realize that if you don’t feed you’ll die? And...I promised your father I would care for you.” Well, it wasn’t a surprise, but it still hurt the same. She mentally pushed away any denial and nodded.

“Is it at least any *good*?” There was a gapping silence.

“That’s my girl.” As soon as the words were out, she felt him tense, but knew he hadn’t meant it literally.

“I’ll behave, I promise. Just, lemme go.” But he didn’t. He shuffled closer, every hard muscle over every curve of her body and the pleasure was electrifying. His scent, hot and secure, enfolded her body and she thought he could feel it too, feel how he affected her because his breathing deepened.

There it was again, the buzz along her skin, the ache in her belly as she became aware of his every breath. The air was blazing and she shuddered a little, lips parting invitingly and –a phone rang.

Fabulous.

Ian cursed, but released her to go for the mobile on the dresser.

For a minute, she remained in that spot, but her eyes found the baggie again. It looked to unappetizing compared to the male across from her, but there was no way she was getting to him. The sting of rejection was just a pinprick compared to the excruciating burn so the counterfeit was her last resort until Xaphan showed.

With a breathy sigh Beth sat on the bed and grabbed the plastic in shaky hands.

Here goes nothing, she thought, pressed her lips over the side and squeezing her eyes shut just as she bit down lightly.

Pop! Just like that, the blood was flooding her mouth, cold and slightly off, but she swallowed anyway and *Goddess almighty*. Her breathing hiked as she moaned. Her head swam with the taste and she arched, sucking intensely. Her throat began to cool as she got more of that sweet salvation to it, but too soon, it was gone, leaving her anxious and angry and *oh so thirsty...*

“More.”

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Ian hadn't expected Beth to surrender so easily, not with the way she was acting. But, he concluded she was in more pain than she let on. Stubborn as she was.

“What is it?” he barked into his phone, only partially listening for a response. His eyes could see nothing but her from where she leaned over the bed, frozen.

Ah, hell. Immortality became her. The little changes had no affect on how he viewed her though; she was *still* lovely as before. Her face hadn't lost its pale touch, but as of now, it was flushed, accenting her bowtie lips, which were—a bit sadly—fuller. And Goddess, he'd never seen anything more erotic than the small, pointed tips of her fangs, bright and beautiful. The pale blue of her eyes had become sharper; flaring with each emotion she felt, the more primitive: need, for his blood.

He wasn't ignorant to the affect *leaders'* blood had on Vampires during their transitions but involuntarily, his throat tightened. Something close to panic had him glaring, though a part of him was far too excited. Nobody drank from him. He would kill them if they ever tried to get so close. It wasn't a novelty for him, the hatred of being held down, unable to defend him...so much like drowning.

Yet he thought he could stand having her canines locked around his throat. Wishful thinkin' Derik, his Vampire snarled, and yeah –he got that.

When he focused again, he found that she still hadn't moved. And he could imagine what he could do to her in that position. Her arching helplessly into him, begging as his hand spread those creamy thighs, the other caressing the swells of her breasts so that she ground her hips back into him...

"Hello? Sire, are you there?" He blinked, clutching his phone. The images were too clear for comfort.

"Yeah...?" And if he sounded lost, nobody said so. Good on them too.

"As I was saying, there's been a bit of a...issue on the other side at the moment. Lord Lucius is seeing to but by the time *leader*...Alocer is...erm recovered, it may be too late." *Alocer?* They were bringing that demented bastard back to the Third Realm?

He was *not* laying a bloody paw on Beth. No, he wasn't because she was Nick's daughter.

"Where's Xaphan?" He was having trouble thinking straight. In fact, his brain went overkill the second he'd called Beth *his*. She wasn't his...She wasn't *for him*.

He would never acknowledge how much it bothered him. He could lie to her, to Nick, to any other son of a bitch in any Realm, but he could never lie to himself.

Over the line the doctor cleared his throat. "Well, Lord Nicholas isn't answering his phone..." *No shit*. "Therefore, we've taken it upon ourselves to request that you..." The words faded. Ian watched. He watched as Beth crawled—a sexy huntress—onto the bed, dark hair a curtain concealing her face. She snatched the bag and set cross-legged.

His Vampire roared. *Take it away. Have her take from you. Prove*

yourself worthy enough.

It was pure instinct he fought down, listening to his Vampire and conscious mind snap at each other until *–too late.*

There was a muffled pop as her fangs got through the plastic and he went straight at steel, throat burning with need. This was *bad.* He felt as though he was about to...snap. Then she went and whimpered *–there goes all self-control.* He wanted her. And he wanted her *now.*

The phone cracked when it hit the ground, but he didn't notice, licking his sharpening fangs suggestively, smirking with sadistic delight. Ian couldn't hold it back any longer, the fire was lit and there was nothing to stop it from blazing.

Hunger coiled deep, but he reminded himself that he was to give her what she needed first. His female would always come first –in more than one way.

He shadowed the room, eyes never leaving her as she sucked the packet dry, a trickle of blood trailing down her unpracticed mouth as she made a sound of complete displeasure. He could taste the blood on her tongue. He would taste her everywhere.

“More.” He would give her everything.

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We were disconnected...” Lucius's head snapped up at Fang's words, his upper lip curling as he grimaced. He was not in the mood for this *bullshit.*

Hues of black and gray edged his vision but he reminded himself that it wasn't the doctor's fault. Not at all. It was Alocer's and he could fuck with the fourth *leader.*

A satisfied smile tilted his lips as he stretched. “Alrightly, Doc. I'll be back, just...stay where you're at.” Fang looked ready to crap his expensive trousers, but nonetheless nodded. *Good for him.*

As many centuries as he'd done this, it wasn't hard to reach the Fourth Realms boundaries, though he couldn't help but flinch at the blinding flash of light that was no doubt doing his retinas in. He staggered on nothingness, stretching and depressing.

The Fourth Realm was freaky shit. A black void that swirled on and on until those sought out were summoned. It would all disappear into

what the one sought considered *home*. Technically though, it was a rather imaginative Realm for God's and Goddesses alike to chill out, though the *leaders* could just as easily reside there, if they pleased. Unlike Alocer who was cursed to remain.

Only Nick and the Goddess were aware of the whys and Lucius frankly didn't give two fucks. It was none of his business.

"Alocer!" he called, listening to it echo on and on. When he received no response, he took a step in no general direction, roaring, "Aloceeria, my devoted lover, come to me!" The dub worked like a charm.

The familiar vertigo crashed into him, but then he was welcomed – or rather *unwelcomed*—by the, as Ian often called it, "red room of Payne". Fit quite nicely too.

The room smelt heavily of leather, the walls colored a deep, blood-red, chain rattled from where they hung on those walls. Toys, elastic suits, and more unidentifiable objects scattered about. And Lucius thought there was a splatter of blood on the white, tile floors, but quickly overlooked it to take in the black candles that lit the room, white rose petals lined the windowpane where outside, white writings littered the darkness.

Alocer—the bastard—was a real mind-fuck.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" Lucius rolled his eyes, bearing in mind that the *leader* hadn't had much interaction in over a century, which couldn't be good for his rejuvenation. He almost felt bad for the ignorant bastard, almost wondered what he'd done to deserve such a punishment or why Lucius hadn't *seen* it.

Pivoting slowly, his lips involuntarily twisted into a disgusted smile. Alocer was beautiful, even scarred. Lucius didn't swing that way, but you'd have to be blind not to see it.

The half-brother's resembled nothing of each other.

Alocer's inky hair hung in an archaic braid at his shoulder, straight and flat against his God-like features. The warrior was in the chiseled shape of his jaw and the hideous scar that mangled the right side of his face, starting at his eyebrow, narrowly missing his eye to run straight down his sharp cheekbones and end at his contorted top lip. Otherwise, his eyebrows were wings above those detached silver eyes and a strong, straight nose. The male was *malice* to the very core of him.

“Gawking is rude, Luc,” he said, devoid of emotion. Lucius knew how that scar ruined Alocer, who’d always been narcissistic. His face had been an emotional-buffer of sorts, because no matter how much people loathed him as a whole, they were beguiled by his face. Or rather, had been.

Lucius didn’t know the entire story; all he knew was the once tightly-bound relationship between the blood-brothers was shattered into an ever-going animosity. Alocer did not so much as speak Nick’s name.

Nobody really knew how Alocer had gotten the scar, where or – whom it’d been given by. Every *leader* tended to keep their fucked up side-stories to themselves. As brothers they owed it to each other. But Lucius still saw *everything*. Ian though, the third to their fucked up Council was Nick’s best friend. The two behaved as if they detested the other’s very presence, but in actuality, they just understood one another far too profoundly.

From the moment Nick had laid eyes on the shaken eighteen years young untransitioned he’d known him. On levels not even Lucius, who saw all, or even Ian himself, could recognize. Naturally, Ian despised it, despised that someone other than himself was aware of his weaknesses, his faults, his *fears*.

Warriors would never admit such things. Not even to one another.

“I was simply admiring...As I’m sure you know all about, or you used to at least.” Lucius was dead serious.

“Why is it you’ve sought me out?” He ambled over to a weirdly shaped gag, rolling it in his hand with anticipation sparkling in his usually cold eyes.

Straight to the chase it was. “Blood, whatever else?” Nobody ever summoned this male, *partners* excluded and the *leaders*.

“Surely you are not requesting I feed *his* offspring?” He didn’t beat around the bush.

Silver eyes were ablaze with fire, his hand curling around the gag as he hissed, baring his teeth in a sneer. Lucius was not intentionally spurring the male.

“Your brother, you mean. Say his name, Alocer, say Nicholas, it isn’t quite that hard.”

“That is *not* my brother,” he spat in response, abruptly blinking his

fury away, leaving his eyes lifeless. “Now that I’ve come to my wits, I’m leaving. Or rather, you are.” Just like that, the male began to fade away, image rippling.

Fuckin’ A. “Alocer, I would not have asked if Xaphan wasn’t otherwise concerned...” Instantly, things solidified, becoming real once more.

“With that *bitch*? With Aetheria?” Alocer would never learn. Calling their Goddess a bitch wasn’t helping him out of exile...But, his brother was ruled by his own obscurity and according to Lucius’s vision, would never end up escaping his own suffering.

“Alocer, she needs to feed...” He would *not* beg.

“Why can’t you or Derik feed her? Oh aye, you’re a selfish bastard and never allow any other to take from your vein but what’s Derik’s excuse...?”

He winced, that soft voice poison in his ears. “...*been a selfish little boy...hiding away all this...such soft skin...tsk-tsk-tsk*”. The words crawled up his throat, panic weighing in on him.

“That’s...complicated.” Goddess, weak frickin’ point there Luc.

Realization lit the male’s eyes and Lucius felt like he’d somehow betrayed Ian.

“He still cannot stand to be held down? Boo fuckin’ hoo.” Lucius growled in warning.

“Do not speak of him as such. You know as well as I that he is justified to it, so you of all males should back off. He’s your brother Alocer, and you should take pride in him.” Alocer blew on his nails and looked up with a chalk-dry expression. And that was why Alocer remained unmissed. He cared for none but himself, he was *selfish*.

“Were you speaking to me? I was busy not giving a fuck. You’re boring me Lucius, feed the chit yourself or have *your brother* do it.”

“Wait!” It was too late; he ended up in Fang’s observatory once again. What the hell had he just done? *Ruined*. He could see the word flashing around in his head, warning him of—his entire body jerked, eyes rolling into the back of his head but he still *saw*. He always *saw*.

The male’s entire future... “Disaster,” the words left his lips with all intentions of being true.

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The room's temperature changed abruptly, from cool to a mellow fire. Beth's eyes strayed from the dried out baggie to find the spot where Ian had stood, empty.

"You do that a lot..." Her head snapped in the direction of his voice. And there he was. Like a drug addict taking their first hit in months, she drank in the sight of him, her thighs working to keep together as she became wet.

She still wanted him and for that, there had to be something completely and undeniably wrong with her.

With a harsh blink, she focused on answering. "Um, do what exactly?" Her throat gave a throb at the words.

"Bite your lip..." his voice was nearly inaudible, but she caught the words anyway, immediately finding that her lip was indeed caught between one of her fangs. Quickly, she released it, licking over the small puncture wound, which to her amazement, healed instantly. Huh, maybe the whole Vamp jig wouldn't be so bad after all.

"Bad habit....Guess I'll have to stop now." *You don't say.*

As she fumbled, she continued to stare, noticing his eyes were scorching, not from anger but something different –*hotter*. Something that also screamed *run*. It was compelling, instinctive, as he took a tentative step closer. Yet Beth's muscles refused to oblige, leaving her stuck in the middle of the plush bed. She couldn't even tear her eyes away from him. He completely hypnotized her with the crimson promises there.

He could make her feel so much better. The pull had always been there, her body began to buzz with one thing and ache with another – so much *need*.

Have you lost it vampire-girl? He's –Just move. Leave! Run! Stay! Do something.

Every step closer was another sharp, electric force and within seconds, she found herself at the edge of the mattress, staring up at him as he made the last, undecided step. His eyes searched hers and she wasn't sure what he found, but it didn't matter when his large hands fell to her waist, hoisting her up so that she stood on the mattress, an inch separating them.

He was still a bit taller, but that turned her on unbelievably. "What if

I told you,” he spoke languidly, twining a lock of her hair in a long index finger, almost suggestively. “That I want you...everywhere?” Beth couldn’t remember how to breathe, let alone form words, especially not with his hand splayed at her neck, gently stroking her leaping pulse.

“Would you let me have you? Would you allow a monster into your lovely body? Would you take from me?” His voice was raspy, daring her to deny him as he leaned closer, hot breath fanning her jaw. “Answer me, Elizabeth.”

Oh Goddess, yes. Had she ever had a choice? The thought flittered through her mind as the words fell passed her lips. From the beginning she’d known she wouldn’t deny him. He was dominating, he had control: he *had* her. It was far too late for second thoughts.

His lips claimed hers and the fight—the resistance—lay in shreds. It waselating. His lips were firm, but soft as he guided her, tongue caressing the seam of her bottom lip in a way that her sighing in surrender. That was all he needed to invade her mouth, tasting the blood there as she remained immobile, unable to think anything beyond Ian Payne was kissing her —*desired* her.

“Like you mean it, Beth...” it was command, but too soon, he tore away and *no*. She wanted to cry because she needed *more more more*.

With no control over her body, she placed her trembling hands on either side of his throat, an eccentric viciousness causing her to bite her nails into the hot flesh. His entire body shuddered and she whined, breasts straining at his chest.

“Good girl,” he hummed, and she closed her eyes, relishing in the strange and dangerous high that accompanied him. A high that had her kissing a male she practically *loathed* all because he made her feel things that shouldn’t be possible.

And she found herself stretching to kiss him hard, falling into it, her fangs scrapping carelessly at his lip so that he opened with a sharp inhale. As her tongue tangled with his, she felt as if she was fading away from everything but the syrupy taste of him —blood and Ian. His arm circled around her waist, the other tugged her hair so that he was given a better angle.

Beth didn’t care what he did to her as long as they were touching, as long as his mouth stayed on her skin. Involuntarily, her legs wrapped around his waist so that he was supporting her weight and

she was impossibly closer to him. Yes was all she thought when his hand slipped underneath her sweater, large and rough as it splayed along the entire span of her belly.

She squirmed. “More.” His lips dragged to her neck, sucking harshly as he chuckled, the hand at her belly leaving to grip one of her ankles, removing it from his back so that she was flat on the bed. She blew out a heavy breath, trying to think clearly, but he didn’t give her the chance, instead he grinned wickedly, long, white fangs on display.

“Do you trust me, Beth?” She blinked, but answered immediately.

“If I said no?” His lips were moving against hers again, dominantly. *Goddess*. She sighed, stretching to get closer. But he wouldn’t allow it, backing up before her breasts hit the wall of his chest.

With an irritated growl, she ripped away, scowling. He finally answered. “It’s a bit late for second thoughts...You’ve no choice anymore.” A shiver ran up her spine, anticipation heady.

“Gimme your worst,” she dared without another thought.

His eyes seemed to glow, a gorgeous emerald. “You don’t even know what you’re asking for, female.” She closed her eyes in frustration, falling back into the covers and waiting.

He wasn’t going to say no to her now, cocky or not. He’d give her what she wanted. And he did not disappoint. His weight was sudden and heavy over her smaller frame but she loved the pressure on her ribs, back bowing when his hands cupped her face in another, filthy kiss.

It was fuzzy all over again. On instinct, her hands found the silk strands of his hair, about to tug when he froze above her. She tensed too, wondering if that was some sort of hard limit for him or – “Did I...?”

“Just...don’t pull my hair. Yeah, don’t,” he muttered, voice laced with something suspiciously close to panic. Instantly, she retracted her hands, a sick shame washing through her.

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**D**amn it. Ian despised himself the moment Beth’s horror fell over his crawling skin. Damn *me*, he thought, despising his weakness. She couldn’t even touch him without that disgusting feeling. He was an absolute *idiot*.

“This was a mistake,” her voice was a breath. *No*. “I pushed you

into this. *Goddess.*” *What?*

Beyond confused, he pushed himself away from her and onto his forearms, where he stared. That same, unwelcome emotion from their first meet warred inside him. Her eyes were wide, and so, so sincere before she looked away.

She really thought she'd pushed him into bedding her? *Well, damn it all.* It would've been amusing if she obviously hadn't had her feelings hurt. Obnoxious, oblivious female.

Ian shuffled onto his side, gripping her chin in his hand and forcing her gaze, hard with secreted emotions, to meet his own. “Why would you think that?” She bit her lip, hesitating. “Answer me, Beth.”

“Why *wouldn't* I think that? You've been ignoring me for weeks... ‘*Stay away from me.*’ Remember that?”

He winced. “Here's the thing...I want you. I've coveted you for...*a while.* And I will have you. Believe me, no female has – or ever will be able to guilt me into bed. Understood?” She nodded quickly. It told him nothing, but he was done evaluating everything that had to do with her.

“My sweet Elizabeth,” he purred, leaning in to nip at her bottom lip. “Have you ever been taken?” She didn't hesitate to shake her head and he smirked, pleased though he had no reason to be. It only meant he was poaching her of one more thing tonight.

Ian nuzzled her throat, savoring the burn in his own throat at the enticing citrus scent, stronger with her transition. A scent he couldn't seem to get enough or away from.

Teasing himself, he scraped his fangs along her revealed collarbone, but before he made a mistake, he returned to her soft, parted lips. A sigh escaped her, traveling directly to his erection, which strained harder against his leathers.

Deepening the kiss, he shoved a hand underneath her sweater once more, moving to cup her breast, clamping one nipple between his thumb and forefinger, over the lace-fabric of her bra, until her back was bowed beautifully, her arousal a sharp, intoxicating fragrance. *Fuck.*

With a grunt, he broke away from her tempting mouth long enough to yank the top over her and fling the damned thing away. It surprised him to find his lips moving with hers again. He wasn't into kissing or even touching, but with *her*, he found himself *craving* it. He craved like nothing before, to have her a needy wreck beneath him, to have her

feel that same passion he had only for her.

*Can't resist this...*

He thought he couldn't get anymore turned on, but when her dainty hand dug into his shoulder blade, his entire body jolted on high voltage, muscles rippling expectantly.

"*Ian...*" it was a pant as he unclasped her bra, all but tearing it away. The breath left him in a rush at the sight of her, so ethereal, bared to him. Her face flushed deeply, lips swollen as she arched, perky cream swells straining for his touch, nipples tight and rosy.

*Mine.* The Vampire in him snarled to life. *Claim her.* But hell, she was untouched and he would not fuck her like an animal. Not Elizabeth.

*Goddess, she makes me crazy.* Growling low in his chest, he sat up, tugging his shirt off before lurching forward to cover her nipple with his mouth, suckling her as his hands brushed over her thighs, trailing lower though his body insisted he move south until he was touching her where he knew she was hot and wet for him.

Beth's hand began to roam over his back even as he kept on, trailing light kisses down her belly, running his tongue around her naval. A plea left her, "*Lower.*" And it was all he needed to continue until he reached the waistband of her joggers.

Thirst called to him, but he disregarded it to slide the fabric down her slender legs. *So damned beautiful...* He gazed at the boy-shorts, covering her from his gaze. Just the idea of being so close had his erection twist at his zipper. The pain was exhilarant.

*Her first.*

He gripped her sides, yanking her towards him while removing the shorts in the same motion. The scent of her arousal hit him like a wrecking ball, like a battering ram. His eyes fell to the pretty slit between her legs, hairless, as all females of their species were, but so much *better*, swollen and glistening, *begging* for him to taste her sweetest spot.

*Too much,* a small, nearly inaudible voice warned. He ignored it, carefully placing her legs at his shoulders, risking a brief glance at her to lock on blue, blue, *so disturbingly blue* eyes.

It was easy to hold her gaze as he licked over his mouth. Something flickered inside her as she tensed. "You're not...going to –,"

she gave this delicious, throaty sound as he blew on her sex, biting back a groan when her hips inched higher. *So responsive.* Any notion of patience was now out of grasp.

He planted his mouth over her core, starting gently as she jerked, and *that sound* fell passed her lips once more. *Goddess*, he'd never tasted anything more exquisite. He growled low in his throat, flicking his tongue at her opening, where her honey seeped.

As he devoured her, she rocked to his tongue and Ian's discipline begin to lapse. Slowly, he eased his forefinger into her wetness, stirring her. Her sex clasped under the invasion, but it wasn't nearly *enough*. He darted his tongue over her clitoris. She hissed, twisting wildly. "*Goddess...Don't stop.*" A second finger joined and he curled them upward to her subtle flesh, in sync with his tongue.

Her back curved, bringing her closer. A fang grazed over her engorged flesh as he advanced those fingers and she sobbed, clenching the sheets. Her orgasm drenched his tongue. *Ecstasy. More.*

His fingers thrust against her maidenhead repeatedly, mouth firm on her flesh. Spasms shook her body. And she screamed, thighs closing around his head in another orgasm.

As a newly transitioned, she was strong, resistant to his prying. "Beth," he tried, licking over her once more. "Open for me." On command her knees spread.

*Mine.* His hands fell to his zipper, which he managed –just barely— to undo without hurting himself further, shrugging out of the pants. In a trance at the sight of her, he froze, watching as she slowly sat up, eyes glowing with need as they found his throat. He worked to swallow, worked to *think*.

"Ian...?" At the sound, his erection jerked, heavy, proud and demanding. She needed to feed; he could see she was holding back, so he forced himself to catch her around the waist. Tugging her into his lap, he nuzzled her throat, hissing at the feel of her breasts against his chest, his erection at her belly.

"You're thirsty," she breathed. A shock ran through him and he pulled back to find her eyes still at his throat, long lashes casting shadows across her cheeks, fangs revealed.

*Goddess, yes.* "Need to be inside you," it was blunt as he cupped her sex. Her head tilted as he stroked the soaking folds. He gently led her onto his back and finally beneath him where her heat burned his

erection.

“Sweet, stunning Elizabeth,” he ground in the Axvem, torn between his own need and the need to pleasure her.

*Mine. Keep Elizabeth pleased.* His hips flexed forward only an inch, but it was still too much as his thoughts scattered into a million zones, all revolving around the female beneath him. *Too much*, she was *too much*.

Pleasure raked through him as he took her inch for inch, everything but her touch fading into oblivion. She was so hot and *tight* around him. When he hit that barrier, her *innocence*, he cursed. This was the one claim to her, she would be his. At least for a little while. And for now, that was enough.

It was inevitable. He stroked forward, burying himself inside her. She inhaled sharply, nails biting into his hips, a single blood-tear skating down her cheek. He licked the tear away, the taste exploding on his tongue. *Ah, fuck.*

“Ian, it hurts...so good...” she mumbled, wriggling around him. Ian grunted, head falling to inhale her scent before he pulled back with his hips, only to drive forward again. *Perfection.*

The breath left him in a rush at the feel of her around him, *beneath* him, lips gliding feather-light over his collar, tongue over the column of his throat. But –

“Goddess, Beth, don’t –,” Far too late for the panic, he thought as her fangs scraped, then, sharp points pierced deep into his skin. *Oh fuck.*

It wasn’t a clean bite, but the pain...A fierce groan passed his lips, her pulls becoming stronger as her moan vibrated between them. He was powerless to the Vampire in him. His was drilling into her, loud sounds shooting through the room, until he realized growls were coming from him.

Her sensual draws at his throat had his muscles churning and his hips thrashed against her. Heat coiled low in his abdomen, but before he could come, he forced himself to still...And she pulled away.

*No, damn it, don’t stop.* He yearned for it, to have her take more from him, to take all from him. He didn’t understand it, fuck, he hardly understood anything with her, but for the first time, it wasn’t as if he was being drown...Instead, it was being *lifted*. All that mattered was

her.

“*No! Hurry! Hurry, hurry, more, please,*” she gasped and he couldn’t stop himself if he tried. He took her with all the strength he possessed, until she was clinging to his arms, the headboard cracked and –She screamed weakly, clenching around him with a force that took him with her.

Ian came violently, pumping into her as a deep sound ripped from his throat and his vision flashed a dangerous white. His entire body vibrated with it, on and on until his mind went into overload, arms pulling her flush against him, practically begging for the feel of her softer, smaller frame depending on his.

Depending on that to bring him back, another painstaking mistake.

Her scent sliced through his haze, becoming so much more potent with her orgasms. He bit his tongue, groaning at the hunger, so fierce, wearing on what was left of his sanity as he rolled away, and shoving his face into a pillow that smelled so much like her. *Of course.* He had to leave, to get away from her.

“Ian...?” she shot up, scrambling closer so that he automatically recoiled. Goddess, the female really hadn’t any self-preservation.

“Get away! Get away from me.” He instantly regretted the words, because she flinched, eyes dimming. It took all he had to shove his leathers back on and go for his boots, recognizing his shirt hanging from the lopsided, headboard. *Way to close.*

Screw the shirt, he thought as the pain rolled through him, almost taking him under.

“I’m...*fuck* –leaving. I can’t –,” rolling his shoulders, he snatched a vial of morphine from the dresser, managing to maintain control –which sadly wasn’t much control at all since he was already becoming extremely lightheaded. He filled the syringe once more, quickly stepping closer to her for, with any bloody luck, was the last time that night, stopping the flow of air.

“Where are...? Please, just take me with you...I-I am *not* taking any more drugs!” The mutiny in her tone was practically tangible. Guess we’re doing this the hard way, he thought, far too disconnected with his feelings to care as his hand enclosed her upper arm.

And Beth being Beth thrashed, fighting him and in the process, nearly kicking the syringe away. Goddess, *didn’t she get it?* He was



trying to *save* her. Alarm nearly burst in his chest when she slumped – unconscious, until he realized, he was morphing. *But –she didn't have a gift too....?*

Storing the thought away for later inspection, he made his main focal feeding her vein the drug so that she stayed asleep, good and long because he knew there'd be hell to pay when she awoke.

After, he gazed at her, hard and wanting her again. He'd never yearned for another like he did her in his life. It was eating away at him, being so *weak*, opening his mind to the idea of letting something other, possibly better, into his...Before he could finish the thought, he shredded it mentally, then threw it down a lava-pit.

It was *just* sex. Hot, mindboggling sex that hadn't meant...He inhaled sharply. It had meant something. He would never deny that. But it didn't *matter*, he wasn't bonded to her...She was just as any female he'd lain with, except it'd be much less meaningful with any female.

Yeah, it would be, and that was all he envisioned leaving the room. Blood and sex. From someone that wasn't Elizabeth Aeluis.

Someone he did not have to watch himself around because he actually felt *something* other than boredom and exasperation.

*Someone I don't fear...*

## Chapter Six:

Beth was floating. Except when she awoke, her body was cold and numb. She was *buzzed*, completely sated as she stretched her achy limbs, not even a bit groggy. Then she remembered what had occurred hours before.

Something bitter and unwelcome washed over her, settling in her chest.

She really should have seen this coming. Out of everyone, she knew how Ian Derik *was*. He wasn't looking for feelings or love, he was looking for sex. Plain and heartless, a sick combination they made. And the worst part, she couldn't even call herself heartless, only plain, whereas he could call himself a God with a black heart.

Shame flamed bright inside her and she staggered out of that awful, plush bed. She would *not* be waiting for him when he came back. *Hell no*. No way could she face him now.

For a second, she searched the bare room, finding his iPhone left on the floor. Thank the Goddess the screen stilled worked despite being partially shattered. Holding onto it, she tried the knob to the nearest door, sighing when she found it dead-bolted. From the outside. Even with her strength, it didn't budge.

Wishful thinking killed the hostage, she thought bitterly, trudging to the next door.

To her surprise, it opened easily, but as quickly as the hope spurred, it vanished at the sight of a bathroom, without any possibly mode of escape. *No windows, no air-vents*.

With a heartfelt groan, Beth turned to his mobile, flickering through the contacts which didn't hold any *useful* numbers. Her father's number was there, but she didn't have the guts to contact him, besides, he must've been pissed beyond belief to leave her with Derik anyway.

Placing the phone beside the duffle-bag, she collected her strewn clothing, brows furrowing when she couldn't locate her underwear...*Fine*, she could do without.

Might as well, she thought, locking the bolts to the bathroom before entering the glass shower. She took her time in the water, reluctantly making use of his shampoos and expensive variety of soaps –*jeez*,

*couldn't he just use Dove or something?* Still, she didn't deny that the soaps smelled lovely, but she shut the traitor thoughts away because *no, just no.*

Apparently, her mind hated her because flashes from the night before had her leaning into the glass for support, the ache between her legs evoking the sparks she'd felt, the hot-white *pleasure.*

*Why?* she wondered unsteadily. Why was she the only one who'd felt it? She'd given her virtue to a male that was much too complicated and she refused to think it'd just been sex. At least for her it hadn't been...

*"Seriously."* She muttered, stepping out to dry her skin with a fluffy towel in the cabinet. *"Something is wrong with me."* Not bothering with her hair, she dressed into the same clothes, risking a look at her reflection.

*Oh.* Beth blinked at the female in the mirror. She was strangely... beautiful. A Vampire. Her damn hair was darker, hanging just below her breasts to set off the pale, but now radiant, complexion. Her dark eyebrows were still widely set apart, but now looked proportional with her nose, and fuller lips.

She shied away from any of those thoughts, returning to the room and sliding down to the carpets, avoiding the busted bed, which was now asymmetrical, the canopy bent ineptly on one side.

Numbness cloaked her, isolation in the darkness. Seconds, minutes, maybe hours went by as she stared vaguely without thinking or feeling...*Apathy.*

Unexpectedly, the door crept open and Ian stepped inside. Beth's heart lurched in her chest at the sight of him. For a split second, he didn't look so cold. Instead, he looked...dazed, features ashen, eyes wide and unseeing as he turned to shut the door. He didn't dare glance at the bed as he placed two more bags onto the dresser. He stared into those bags—as if there was something of interest there—and she noticed the muscles of his back rise under his black sweater, a heavy exhale leaving him.

It was then the thick smell of females hacked through the air. And she realized it. Realized he had the power to hurt her, the same power she'd given Vincent. *No,* she thought, she refused to give him her heart, because in the end, she would be bleed for it.

Blood-tears flooded her vision and she pressed her trembling lips

to her knees, hoping if she kept silent, he would just disappear. That way she would never have to face him –immature as it was.

His footsteps were heavy thumps as he gave a fleeting look at the bed, but just as quickly, averted his eyes. She shut her own tightly, feeling the exact moment his gaze landed on her.

“Have *fun*?” The tart question escaped her before she could stop it.

Silence was her only answer. She shook her head with a scoff, nails biting into her ankles, keeping her legs to her chest in case her lungs collapsed.

“I need a shower. Just...knock if you need me –anything.” His voice was different now, not cruel, just...lifeless. His footsteps sounded faraway to her ringing ears and it wasn't until the door clicked shut that Beth rose on wobbly legs, inclined on the wall as she tried not to think about the women he had been with.

Try as she might, she could still see the infamous blondes the *ramai* spoke that he favored.

*Distraction.* That's what she needed. Trudging toward the bags he'd brought in, she found clothing from her room, along with her phone, laptop, even toiletries.

*Thank the sweet Goddess,* she thought, immediately grabbing her phone. Before she did anything with it though, she swapped clothing, pulling her hair into an untidy ponytail before tugging on loose skinnies, a white turtleneck and black snow-boots.

After, she dialed the only number she could think too. One ring later, his safe voice flooded her ears. “Beth, you never called. Everything cool?”

Her throat went tight. “There's something...wrong, Vince.” An engine purred to life before he spoke again, this time agitation tinged his tone.

“What happened?” *Everything. Nothing.*

“I just...have to get away...” it was barely a whisper.

“Calm down, love. You're fine. I'll come for you. Just tell me where you're at?” *Good freakin' question.*

“I don't know,” she muttered incredulously. “I don't know...”

“Beth, tell me what's wrong before I get the trackers. Was it your

father? I swear to God, if he hurt you..." The threat was real. Beth shivered at the thought of her father and Vincent going at it.

Just as she opened her mouth to tell him otherwise, the phone was taken from her hands and she froze, wide-eyed.

His voice was deathly calm. "Goodbye, Vince." The call was ended and he began to pad around the room.

"I can't stay here," she told him matter-of-factly. That stopped him. She finally whirled around, to find him pulling another shirt over his sculpted torso, jeans hung low at his hips, and boots replaced by sneakers...Converses. Like this, he looked so much younger.

Her mouth dried, belly clenching and in that moment, she truly hated herself. How she could still want him knowing...His voice cut the direction of her thoughts.

"Beth..." the same low tone. For the first time she noticed how distant he looked. *Pity, again?*

"Don't you dare," she started, horror coloring her tone. "Don't you fucking dare feel sorry for me!" Her hands fisted, wanting excessively to throw something heavy at him. To make him feel the hurt.

He hung his head, hand rubbing his neck as he took a deep breath. She didn't care to hear his next words.

"I'm *leaving!*" With that she practically lunged for the door, latching onto the doorknob to wrestle free the locks. Using all her strength, she twisted, turned, jerked, but it wasn't *enough!*

"Elizabeth, stop. You're not leaving." His voice was close –too close. It made her want to attack him. Something deep, frightening threatened to snap inside her.

"Why? Why won't you just *let me go?* Haven't you had enough fun? I can't stand it here. I can't stand to be anywhere *near you!*" The words were venomous, aimed to hurt.

And when he didn't answer, her frustration built. Turning on her heels, she saw that he'd decided to get comfy on the love-seat across the room, legs spread, shoulders slouched, head bowed as he rubbed roughly at his eyes.

She could see those same, long fingers pleasuring other females, as he'd done to her. His mouth on their skin. It made her skin crawl.

"Did you bother to get her name? Or was there more than one?"

How many, Ian?" No answer. "*Goddess, how fucking many?!*" Abruptly, the fury drained, leaving her cold, arms hugging her chest in attempt to not feel so trapped.

"You do not wish to know the answer." Hot, red tears rushed to her eyes, deceiving her as they oozed down her flushed cheeks.

"Did they mean anything? *Did I?*"

There was a shift and then he was directly in front of her, on his knees with his left hand over his heart. "Stop...Stop it. They meant nothing. *Nothing*. Just stop –don't cry..." Hastily, she wiped at them, knowing he was just telling her that so she'd quit being such a baby.

Still, a few more came, but he brushed them away with gentle hands, ignoring how she flinched under the touch. *Suck it up Beth, he was never yours and you've known it.*

She listened to her conscious, stepping away to survey the room but avoiding the bed. "Where are we?"

He rose stiffly, creating more distance. "Townhouse," he responded flatly.

*Ah, so he returns.* Fortunately, so did her emotional-filter, which was up and running, hiding the pain for later, when she was alone.

"Why?"

He shrugged. "Your mother went into her *need* and your father is seeing to her. I would have taken you back to the manor, but two females in the same household under such conditions..." his mouth became a thin line of horror as he tucked his hands into his pockets.

"Oh..." There was an awkward pause before, "How long am I hostage here then? I've got a life too you know..."

"Two days."

She crossed her arms again, grimacing. "And what are we supposed to do here for two days?"

Ian shot her a wary glance. "I don't suppose you'll stay put?" *Yeah right.*

She snorted.

His jaw ticked as he ground out an answer. "*Fine*. For now, I'm going to catch up on my rest. The door is open and there are about five stories, so you can look about the rooms. I don't care, just don't

talk to anybody or leave the premises. Try it and you will be punished.” The double meaning in that threat ran up her spine hotly, but she simply rolled her eyes.

“Anything else, father?” His eyes glinted, mouth seeming to soften into a half-smile.

“Keep out of here until I come for you. And don’t bother my guards either.”

Beth nodded, grabbing her phone back from the nightstand and starting for the door. It opened easily now *–of course* –greeting her with a brightly lit, wide foyer.

It was elegant, so much that it reminded her of her mother’s own décor. She sucked in a sharp breath, poking her head to the left.

*Whoa.* Yeah, she’d be preoccupied for a while.

## Chapter Seven:

*Ian struggled to breathe, vision fading around the edges, the length of his small body trembling uncontrollably. It was pitch black around him. He could see nothing, but knew everything. He knew that the diminutive expanse of his childhood holding were to close in on him. The heady smell of damp mould and rusted chains invading his nostrils. The heavy footsteps and weight-like mechanicals ricocheted along the strings of his sanity.*

*It was inevitable, he was going to drown. Alone, weak and worthless.*

*“N-nay,” he muttered forcefully, hands clamping over his ringing ears. “Nay!”*

*Nobody would listen. They never did.*

*And the footsteps did not cease, they continued onward, nearer and nearer until he was curled in on himself, praying silently to any God or Goddess that would listen, to have him stronger. To have him a worthy enough male. But they had always seemingly detested him, because he grew no stronger, he grew no more worthy, and a large hand coiled around his protruding shoulder bone, the other in his matted hair.*

*He was trained better than to make a sound but Goddess, his entire body was crawling with pain. He was so very hungry...He was tired...He was filthy...Worse, he was ashamed. “Please,” the words disgusted him, but he could not keep silent. “I b-beg of you, father, p –,” the hand in his hair tightened, dragging him to a stance where everything spun around him. There was two of his father, and that terrified him more than the thought of death.*

*...Something warm wisped its way down the skin of his throat, so warm and inviting that his eyes fell shut and he leant into it. In that instant the warmth turned blazing, the sharp point of some sort of needle dragging over his collarbone and a scream, unlike any other he'd given, pierced the black air. It was as if acid was fusing itself into his bloodstream. It was –It was...*

*“Ian!” With a jolt, Ian hissed out of the memory, scrambling to escape the harsh voice. His vision would not focus, but he could make out Nick's figure, crouching beside him. He became aware of his surroundings then, finding that he was on his knees, leaning forward,*



toward the pools depthless waters. Immediately, he cringed backwards, squeezing his eyes shut in his terror.

“Is there anything I can do, son?” His tone was its natural soft, patient tenor. If he’d been more in tuned with himself he would have simply shrugged, but this was Nick, the only comfort he’d had thus far...Nick who loved him in some sick, twisted way.

“End this, please,” he whispered, eyes stinging weirdly. “Do not make me continue like this, my lord. Take my life, I ask of you this.” The other male was silent for a stretched time.

“You ask that of me why?” Ian forced his eyes open and met the intense blues of Nick’s.

“Nicholas, look unto me. I am one and twenty years of age and have yet to meet my worth.” He held his arms out for inspection, avoiding the look of him: deathly skinny from the lack of food and pale as sin. “It’s as if I am a female. How am I to find my irryn with the looks of me?” He gave a bitter laugh. “I am nothing.”

The other smiled, as if it was funny. And perhaps, to him, it was. “I say otherwise, Ian. You’ve yet to meet your strength, not your worth, son. Hell, a century past I was much the same. Am I worthless? I think not. Verily, you shall get there.”

Ian shook his head faintly. “I do not wish to live any longer...” It was out then, the dark secret which he’d harbored inside as long as he could remember.

Nick sighed heavily, mouth opening to most likely deny what was painfully true when a female descended the stairs. In the dim light, Ian’s eyes widened at the very sight of her.

She was awe-worthy. It wasn’t as if Ian wanted her, not at all, but there was something from which animated from the very core of her, the form of soul –pure and giving, that which a male searched for ‘til death. He could not stop staring, even as she approached in easy steps, beaming incredibly at Nick, who was suddenly in a stance.

“Verona,” the male spoke softly, softer than he did even with Ian.

The female, Verona, stopped at Nick’s side, taking her dark hair into one hand, seemingly ill at ease of sudden. Ian swallowed, but managed to rise to his feet, just barely keeping from swaying once he bowed respectfully.

“Tis a pleasure my lady.” It was the sincerest of greetings he’d ever

given.

*The female glanced at Nick, questions in her dark eyes. "Likewise, my lord." Ian did not know how to respond to the same sincere words...*

*She continued easily. "It was no intention of mine to be a bother, my lords, but I would request your presences amid supper." Ian flinched, prepared to decline because there was no hope in him even swallowing down another meal when Nick added heedlessly, "There will be pudding for dessert, if you are not hungry Ian..."*

*His throat tightened and he had the distinct sense that he might cry if he did not know how to act by now. Of course Nicholas would know exactly what to say when he could not, of course Nicholas would not make him seem as less of a male because Nicholas was, from the very beginning, in sync with him always.*

*He nodded and Verona flashed a brilliant smile before excusing herself. When she was out of sight, Ian inclined his head; the words fell from his lips in a breath, "Thank you..."*

*The larger male stepped forward, but Ian made no move, even as he firmly pressed his lips to Ian's lengthy hair, a silent avow to loyalty. "See you at dinner, son."*

The memory began to crumble under the force of consciousness as Ian's eyes flew open. Slowly, he looked down at himself, almost afraid that he would find himself in that same figure, but no, his body was as lean as it'd been the last thirty or so years.

The little boy was long gone, but the remembrance was forever there. He cursed himself for that, for keeping with him the pointless issues. It wasn't as if he could change them.

Guilt settled in his chest because there was no explanation for his actions...or whatever the hell was making it harder to breathe whenever he thought about Beth. As his body relaxed, he groaned, it was clear how this might have happened. How he might have easily been captivated by someone as pure as Beth, especially when her Mother was that of all he'd hoped to find as an adolescent.

Except the two were nothing alike in another sense. Verona was what was expected from the *ramai*. She did not speak out of turn, she did not have the fighting spark as Beth did...And somehow, Ian found that was why Beth was so much more special.

“Stop it,” he grunted through gritted teeth.

But she was everywhere, all over his skin, the room, and yeah, he was thinking into it again. Time to go find –do something, because hell, he was *not* going to search for her. If he so happened to come across her then fine, but he wasn’t going to track her scent. Even as he told himself this, he breathed that scent into his lungs, rising in one fluid movement.

The comfort of being alone suddenly didn’t seem entirely comfortable as he put back on the Converse, grimacing at their loose feel, but ignoring it too slip out of the room. Outside, he started to the left, completely lost to the scent that was compelling him in its direction.

He tried holding a languid pace, all too content with lingering in the shadows, but as he neared the library entrance dread smothered the air. A bloodcurdling shriek sliced the eerie silence.

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**B**eth smiled softly, running her fingers along the leather spines of the seemingly ancient writings. Much to her mother’s frustration, for as long as she could remember she had always been eased with the whirlwinds of life, favoring to face its dangers rather than sit back and watch as they passed her by. And after many years of her childhood, she’d come to accept she would never fit in with other females. She had no wish to quietly fawn over males, to gossip about other girls, or any other pointless doings. Most importantly, she did not wish to allow males to fight for her when she was capable of fighting for herself.

Beth belonged to the outside world, she just needed to leave the confines of her races society. She’d promised herself after her transition she would. She just needed time to get there, to let go.

With a deep breath, she started down the very last shelves of books, eyes roaming over their titles. That’s when she saw it. The very last column: easily distinguished by gemmed spines were the Council-Scripts, where the lives of the *leaders* were spiritually documented from the other-side.

Beth began to chew nervously at her lips, barely feeling the light

sting when her fangs pierced the flesh. *No*, she thought forcefully, she was *not* going to even think about touching those books. It was wrong, a complete invasion of privacy that would do nothing but –

She could not look away. It was like being compelled, driven by something beyond her. The books were...calling to her. The words began to heighten, *"naught but a breath..."*, *"terrorized by..."*, *"of no worth..."*.

There were no thoughts of her own as her frame began to shake with it, lungs constricting with panic and so much...agony. She faded in and out of darkness, dazed by the murky, blurred images around her. It was all messy pains of different colors swirling around her vision.

She felt hot, it burned her entire body. Then it got cold...*too* cold, freezing cold. Dimly, she could feel her body curl up on the carpet, but her head lolled and it felt so strange, burning cold. It ran up and down her body, pulling her in and out of a...past that wasn't her own.

*"See, Ian?"* a voice hissed in her ear...or her head...she couldn't tell but she could make out a male, crouching beside her body. It was *him* again. Somehow she knew this male, this male who she feared with everything in her. His eyes glowed something evil and she *knew*, she knew with everything in her that this male had been the one to hurt her. This male still yearned to. *"You are incapable of surviving even a bit of pain. How are you to even fight, boy? How are you to survive at all?"*

A horrific cry rang in her head, but she managed to think above it until all was silent once more. *"I-I can do better father, verily, I swear to it."* The voice was not her own. It was small, a young boy's voice.

Beth tried to get pull herself out, but the book had already seized her completely. There was nothing to save her from this.

*"I am unsure if I am to believe you as of now, Ian,"* he pondered coolly. *"You're a disaster in yourself."*

Denial. Denial. Denial. *"Nay master, I-I am simply...I am..."*

*"You are weak,"* he spat at her.

*"Nay,"* she was frantic and feeble all at once. *"I swear to –,"* the words were cut off because Beth's head exploded with pain so profound, she didn't even notice the hit had hurled her across the small room (basement?). Her head pounded and throbbed as choked

shrieks clouded whatever reality she had left.

Through the torment, all she could think was *lan...lan, lan, lan*. It was a mantra of her pain. She never stopped. Not until warmth, unlike the cold burning anguish, cloaked her in a strong grip. The smell of cologne and male settled over the stench of grime.

*lan, lan, lan...* “Christ...*Beth...*didn’t...” The voice was rough, laced with panic. Beth didn’t like that at all, no, the voice she knew too well wasn’t ever supposed to be –Her thoughts shifted with the petulant knowledge that she could do nothing about it. She couldn’t even help herself. *lan, lan, lan*.

Abruptly, the warmth began to fade and need, so strong, shredded past the pain for the second. Her body weighed so much that it took all she had to burrow closer to the solid warmth, so concrete along the curves and hollows of her.

Like this, she could deal, as long as he didn’t leave her. “It’s...okay, baby...” arms encased her in the warmth and she thought she made a happy little noise because, despite the pain, she *was* completely happy there. She belonged in those arms, and that was all she was sure of to a point. “Just...don’t...” static blocked the rest out. “Just...be okay...”

She blindly promised, hoping to reassure him. *lan, lan, lan*. The black, obscurity continued to stretch, on and on. Beth could feel it all over her, for such a long time she faded in and out of consciousness.

But the rasping voice helped. It spoke to her all the while in a tongue that she could only recognize as the Axvem. She didn’t listen for the words, only the so soft, so male pitch that drove the pain away until she could feel herself again. Her fingers were first and she lightly tapped with each word, creating a rhythm that she made no effort to keep up, to exhausted.

Beth didn’t realize she was crying until she could feel the liquid, thicker than actual tears, slip soundlessly down her face. The pain unexpectedly made its exit, quickly enough that she couldn’t comprehend it, instead she cried harder, practically plastering herself to the warmth, afraid that her trembling would make it disappear as well. She couldn’t handle that. Involuntarily, her arms flung around broad shoulders; face burying in the slope of his throat, welcoming the blaze in her throat at the rich scent, nothing like the other burn. So much better.

His arms felt like iron clasps secured to her waist, holding her impossibly closer and all the while, she kept her eyes tightly shut, terrified that the pain would also come back. Closer. She needed to be closer, she thought, draping her legs around him and deeply inhaling that scent. *Ian, Ian, Ian.*

“I’m right here, baby. And I’m sorry...So, so sorry.” She gave a useless whimper, too out of tune with herself to bother asking what he was apologizing for...Goddess, the pain...His pain. He’d had to live through that...*No, Goddess, no.*

“I-Ian...” she breathed raggedly, jerking backwards a bit to brush her lips softly to his clenched jaw.

*So much pain...* “Go ahead...drink,” he urged gently, but that wasn’t what she was after. She shook her head, trailing light kisses down his throat, but never breaking the skin, simply breathing him in, trying to bleed all of her into her scarred *leader*, to make him understand.

Understand what? She had no idea herself, but for now, Beth just needed the easy support of his presence, sensing that he needed the same. She gave it freely, grazing over his flawless features with her lips and her fingers until his eyes were shut and he was completely relaxed around her. Then, she let exhaustion overrule her misery, nuzzling his throat and going lax.

Beth did not understand her life at all, but for the time, with the most impossible, strong male cradling her close, she didn’t really care to either.

## Chapter Eight:

In a rush, Beth's senses returned to her. The atmosphere was warm. *Very warm. Uncomfortably warm.* Her throat was in flames, *ablaze*, craving the constant fragrance that seemed embedded into her memory. She could tell, by the material twisted in her legs and the snug mattress beneath her, she was in a bed, *his* bed.

With at start, her eyes snapped open, fixating on the high-ceiling stretched on and on above her. The darkness was not darkness at all, but amass of *clarity*, lacking any threats to her now. *This is where I belong now.* The realization, oddly enough, left her feeling at peace, hidden away.

Except the memories from the previous night—or *sometime* earlier—washed over her, a bucket of ice water, derisively malicious. *The pain, oh that pain, the loss—lan, lan, lan—*whose presence she felt was needed to function without driving herself insane in fear. And he was there. She was bizarrely tuned into the way the fear lurked rather than attacked, tamed by him. *Only for him.*

Her heartbeat was an insistent *thump thump thump* giving her away, but she easily ignored it, peeking up through her lashes. Vision sharp she made him out instantaneously —long, lean muscle stretched out beside her, shoulders set tensely, fingers tapping at his hard thighs as he stared up at the ceiling much like she had, face impassive.

She let out a breath she hadn't known she was holding, feeling her heart sink into a slow, sympathetic hibernation.

"How are you feeling?" His tone was achingly flat.

"Are you...*Aren't* you mad at me?" she breathed, dismayed by how miserable she sounded, even to her own ears.

*Silence.* The minutes dragged on, him staring so intently at the ceiling, as if searching for the answer there. Beth swallowed around the burn, tightening the covers around her body self-consciously—having only just noticed how unclothed she was, in just a tank-top and panties. Seemingly startled by the movement, his head whipped in her direction and her heart might've plummeted passed her ribs and into her belly. Her eyes stung with the threat of tears.

*I've really done it this time, haven't I?*

The male she'd come to know was...lost, with emerald eyes

almost childlike in their uncertainty, their unease. Instantly, she *loathed* that look. It didn't belong to a warrior like Ian. It was too...open. "Should I be?" Yes. "I want to be. *Alas*, I don't *know what* to feel..." His lips tipped in an empty half-smile. "Tell me, Elizabeth, *how* I am *supposed* to feel? I've stopped trying."

*What...? Given up on...trying? To feel? But –No.*

Beth's vision flashed a forbidding crimson. It wasn't from tears this time though. Rage turned her blood into molten-fire, spreading a vicious flare throughout her entire body. Her mind began a thousand miles a second.

An unknown impulse flared deep within her body, which responded instantly in defense, straddling his chest. She stooped forward in the same motion, so that her hair was a thick mask around them. With only an inch separating them, she held his gaze unwaveringly, mesmerized by the sheer *masculinity* of him, flared by the specks of red in the green of his irises.

He was affected by her. A part of her was engrossed by his subtle reactions. The way his muscles flexed and strained beneath her, the way his pupils dilated, or his breathing grew shallow...His body wanted her, now why couldn't *he*? It wasn't *fair*.

*Tonight*, some nameless piece of her thought fiercely, *he is going to feel me, to realize I am for him*. Precipitately her hands fisted themselves in his hair, tugging at the silky stands, not caring that his answering groan was one of pain, not caring that his breathing was now faster in panic –not giving one damn. "Don't you dare," she growled, lost to the ferment. "Don't you dare leave me to face this *alone*. You are my *male*, Derik. You are not *allowed* to give up on me. You are not *allowed* to abandon your female!"

And it didn't matter he wasn't hers, because she was *his*. In the course of a few weeks he had completely wrecked every wall she'd ever built without even *realizing* and she was so...betrayed by that. It practically poured from her very soul, the all-too familiar fear of being hurt –damaged–so severely.

His eyes reflected that hurt, as if he could somehow feel it himself. Her hold loosened as her eyes slid shut. "I'm scared...So, so scared. Don't...Be angry with me, vicious even." Then, she breathed raggedly, "*Protect me Ian...I need you.*"

There was a carnal growl before his lips claimed hers, relentless



until with a gasp, she opened for him. “Yes,” she whispered against his mouth, fingers curled in his hair. “Be angry, *hate me*. Just don’t leave... me.”

He jerked a fraction away from her, bared his fangs and let out a hiss, eyes gleaming dangerously. *Possession* –the emotion surged through the male, affecting her completely. Spellbound, a shudder ran down her spine and her skin began to ache, instinctively aware of where those sharp points belonged.

At an inhumane velocity, he sat up, yanking her with him so that she was firmly seated in his lap. One of his hands clamped onto the base of her neck, the other pulling her hips tight against him where his erection strained, a thick rope on her belly. Her head fell back and she let out a pitifully needy moan.

“I love that sound,” he said, nuzzled her neck so that she felt a soft scratch. His fangs, she thought before rubbing herself against his thighs and thrusting her breasts up to his chest. “Make it for me again, Elizabeth.”

*No way!*

She shook her head wildly, but then his mouth, *Goddess almighty what he did with his mouth*. He sucked harshly, teasing her with his clever tongue and – a helpless whine fell passed her parted lips.

He chuckled darkly. “You’ll always obey, won’t you?”

For him, *maybe* – another deliberate, open-mouthed kiss –*most definitely*. “Never...’gain...”

“*Mmm*. Right.” She had every intention of smart-mouthing him, but then his hands began to travel up her sides, sure fingers so very close to her aching breasts.

“Touch me.”

“Needy, are we?” he hummed, mouth attaching hungrily to her jaw. *Goddess yes!* But instead of touching her neglected breasts, he started southward, over her ribcage.

“For you, *always*,” she retorted sweetly, retracting one hand from his hair. She placed it over his larger one, to drag it in the *right* direction. He allowed it, only drawing apart to watch her, eyes glowing with pure, feral *need*.

At the look, fierce mind-blowing sparks ignited over her deprived body, something melted between her legs and her fangs retracted. At

last, fingers brushed the sides of her breasts, before two clamped onto the jutting tips and – a phone rang.

For a hazy millisecond Beth ground herself down on his hard thighs, crazed by the – another, horrible shrill stilled her completely.

Ian's entire body shuddered beneath her. "*Beth.*" It was raw, desperate even.

She clutched him impossibly closer, mirroring his desperation. "Ignore it," she pleaded, wriggling in his lap –tempting them both though she already knew it was hopeless, this was *Ian*, her ever-so-obligated male.

"Can't," he bit out. "Could be critical." And as a warrior, he could not risk that chance.

Exhaling unsteadily, she rolled away, onto her side, the heels of her palms over her eyes in attempt to calm herself. After a few seconds, the room became still, even *Ian* remained still beside her.

Slightly annoyed, but more curious, she lifted her hands to find him watching her, all coiled muscle and intensity. The delicious heat of him continued to spiral through her.

The –*stupid, evil piece of junk* –phone gave another, impatient shriek. Before she could even blink, he was across the room. The distance roiled inside her, the fear creeping closer to the surface.

*He might leave me...*

Beth's teeth locked at the thought.

*No. He wouldn't. Not like this.*

"Derik," he answered. But any diminutive hope of Ian staying vanished at his contained tone.

oooooo

Ian stalked around the bedroom, prisoner to more than the four-walls as he tried to work off the building edge. The burn had spread over his every muscle, his skin pricked in that stretched-to-fit- way that itched so badly he was tempted to scrub it away with his bare nails and his hand shook uncontrollably as he ran it through his wayward

hair.

He *had* to get away from the scent of her arousal, *such an agonizing little tease*. The knowledge that he could take her right now, because she'd let him, festered in each section of his brain, like parasites to a human. And weak as he suddenly was for this little girl, he *refused* to abandon her to the pain that could ruin her soul, much like it had his own so many bitter ages ago. A soul he was still working to reconstruct.

*Damn it all*, she was his to protect, because the terror –*caused by yours truly* –lingered in the pale of her eyes, because she was curled into a tight ball in the middle of the bed, glaringly small, because, above it all, he was more than just witness to the same horrific depth of the trauma.

*This was entirely his fault. He'd done this to her with his sick, demented past.*

He could not leave her, but he could not remain in the townhouse. To accommodate the lack of defenses, his shift was doubled, which meant in thirty to sunset, he had to hit the streets. Which left only two options, neither particularly –

“Ian...?” Without his noticing, she'd drifted over to the edge of the bed, dark hair a waterfall below her breasts. *Ah hell...*

He rubbed his eyes roughly. “What.”

“Are you okay...?”

*Fuck if I know.* “I'm fine,” he lied absently.

“Then why are you stalking around like an angry bull...?” The question was soft, colored with alarm. The question–hell just her tone–seized direct control over his legs –*traitors, they forever were* –which halted. Then gradually–once again without permission–he turned to face her.

*Ethereal, stunning, awe-worthy* –*shatteringly* terrified. The sight hit him like a wrecking ball, a battering ram to his ribs, which retaliated cruelly, contracting so forcefully around his lungs that he struggled to breathe, a cold sweat breaking over his skin.

*No, not Elizabeth, never mine.* Unable to even consider a rational, conscious decision, he blurted, “Get dressed.” Emotion, those he did not believe he had the capacity to even feel, flickered to life in her eyes. She didn't give him the opportunity to even question it –his

*mindless decision*, if it could even be called that—, stumbling towards the dresser where she retrieved her bag to disappear into the bathroom, door shut firmly behind her.

Cursing himself, Ian went for his duffels, slinging both over one shoulder and tracing to the room over, where he began to gear up. Minutes later, he was dressed to hunt, weapons heavy beneath the clothing, but even so, emptiness chilled him.

Frantic to get rid of it, he returned to the *–her* room on foot, where he found her seated cross-legged on the leather sofa. The initial, most troubling change, her lovely hair was clipped back into some contraption he thought could not possibly be comfortable. Covered in all black, she seemed incredibly frailer which only had him questioning the reliability of such thin material. *But Goddess, it couldn't even protect her against the weather!*

Annoyed at himself, he barked, “Get on a thicker sweater.” And uncharacteristically quiet, she did so.

*Not enough.* And he had the damndest hunch no article of clothing ever would be. Still, he was not about to risk her life on a hunch, but unexpectedly the steel shutters over the windows began to rise. Time was up.

“Come ‘ere.”

Slowly, she shuffled closer, until they were toe to toe. Nervously, she chewed her bottom lip, wringing her hands together. The differences between this timid female and the one from only hours ago stunned him in a manner only Beth had the potential too.

How she could be so remarkably capable but achingly vulnerable all the same was beyond him.

“Where’re we going?” Her voice, a small whisper, solidated that vulnerability.

*More.* The one, simple word erupted in his mind, slamming into his skull. And suddenly, he was starving for the proximity, starving for *her* all over.

Crazed by it, he closed the small space between them, shivered as the empty cold began to thaw. He tilted her face in two fingers, probing her eyes, reassured by the sparks of warm *–who’d of thought?–* tenacity beyond all the other emotions swimming there.

*She has blue eyes,* he thought idiotically. *Bluer than the ocean,*

*bluer like the sky, bluer than – So damned blue.*

“You will be safe with me,” he vowed, determined to think past the very clear color of her eyes. Unconsciously, his fingers trailed her cheekbone, where they traced her swollen lips instead.

“I know...” And those same blue eyes glowed with passion so vivid he almost wanted to drown in the deep pools. Shocking him, she flung her slim arms around his shoulders, hiding her face in his chest, breathing in short pants. Already accustomed to the soft, complaint feel of her body against his, his arms came around her with affection that dazed him further.

It was...*right*. Utterly and irrevocably. The borne Vampire in him knew this, declined to let him believe otherwise.

He grasped it abruptly. The female, the link to her borne Vampire, was reacting to him on profound levels. An embedded fragment, one he had no reason to believe existed, shattered, imploding deep within his very core. His muscles shook with it, his insides flamed.

A distinct scent came off his skin. As a *ramai* raised male, he was aware of its meaning.

“Ian?” Alarmed, she tried to pull back, but he shook his head, unable to let her go yet.

“Don’t,” he croaked, strained. “Don’t.” And she didn’t.

*What. Have. I. Done?*