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Leila Brown

THE VAMPIRE ORACLE

Sacrifice

In The Cards

Sacrifice by Leila Brown

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*THE VAMPIRE ORACLE:*

*SACRIFICE*

*By*

*Leila Brown*

## Sacrifice by Leila Brown

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### **Sacrifice**

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**Dedication**

This book is dedicated to my grandmother who would be so proud. To my husband—thank you for believing in me. To my son who keeps me young by running me ragged. And to Leila and Mason, my constant inspirations.

## Chapter One

There were four of them following her tonight. She could tell by the cadence of their steps. Two in front, two in the back. Sienna James stole quick glances left, then right. There was an alley coming up. If she confronted them there, she stood a decent chance of walking away. It went up another twenty percent if she stopped them from surrounding her.

She slowed her breathing and rolled her shoulders to relax the muscles in her back and arms. *Don't tense up now.* She needed them to follow her another half block so she could duck in the alleyway. Take out the first two with a roundhouse sweeping kick. Then find something to hit the other two with.

About ten steps from the alley, Sienna broke into a full run. Their rushed footsteps pounded behind her. She ducked into the alley, spun around, planted her feet and raised her hands. The first two rounded the corner and slid to a stop in front of her. The one sporting a black goatee looked at the slick-haired man and nodded. She tried not to smile as they advanced on her. Obviously, whoever was paying them forgot to mention what happened to the last guys.

Sienna took a small step forward and shifted her center of gravity low. She kicked her left foot into a high arc and brought it down hard on the nearest man's face. He stumbled back while his partner rushed

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forward. Sweeping her leg down, she caught the new man off guard. The man's legs buckled beneath him. His head bounced against the concrete. He didn't move again.

"Bitch." Goatee guy stumbled towards her.

She wasn't worried about him. She kicked her heel into the chin of smart-ass number one, knocking him out. While smart-ass number two seemed to be out cold. Those two idiots were the least of her worries. The two men who'd been bringing up the rear seemed to have a bit more experience. They stood silently. Just watching the fight. Assessing her. *Shit*. They weren't going down easy. No, these two were going to be a problem. She bit the inside of her bottom lip and waited for them to make a move.

They circled around her, sidestepping over the two slumped bodies. One man on her left, the other on her right. They didn't converge in the middle. They followed the alley walls down until she felt the cold bite of brick behind her. If she turned to fight one, she was going to leave her back open to the other.

Sizing up both men from the corners of her eyes, the guy on the left had to be about twenty pounds less than his partner. Turning quickly, she took two steps up the wall, pivoted and kicked at the smaller man's head.

The man lifted his arm and deflected most of the blow. Sienna landed on the ground and popped up again. She kicked at his knees. He jumped back before she could connect. The second man was walking up behind her. His unhurried footsteps sent her heart into overdrive. She needed to take the smaller guy down now.

She stepped forward, kicked at his knees again and waited for him to try to sidestep her. Moving with him, she punched him squarely in the temple. He shook his head, bared his teeth and smiled down at her.

"Not smart. Not smart at all," he said. He looked past her head and gave a quick nod.

The guy behind her grabbed her. His steely grip bit into her upper arms. She struggled, hoping to lull the man in front of her into a false sense of safety. He advanced on her slowly, taking his time. As soon as he was in striking distance, she pushed her upper body back against the guy

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behind her and kicked forward hard in the smaller man's left knee.

"Bitch!" He screamed as he went down.

Sienna struggled harder, trying to get a good backwards kick into the knees of the man holding her. But he pulled her so close she couldn't get any leverage. Counting to three, she pulled her head forward and down, then slammed it back into his nose. A howl of pain blared into her ears. He tightened his grip on her arms and shook her. The metallic smell of his blood permeated the air.

"Hold her tight, Marco. We need to soften her up." The smaller man cracked all the knuckles on his left hand in one move. He rolled his neck left, then right, making more popping noises.

The man behind her grunted, twisting her arms past the point of pain. She stared at the thug in front of her and watched his fist start its downward arc. The punch hit her squarely. Stars burst behind her eyes. Pain erupted in her jaw. Her teeth cut into the fleshy tissue of her mouth. A small amount of blood pooled there. She looked up at the man and spit it into his face.

He backed up a step and wiped the liquid from his eyes. Then strode up to her and hit her again. The need to gasp burned deep inside her. She held it down by sheer will. She slumped in the confining grip and let bloody spittle drip from her lips. They weren't going to kill her. She'd given them more than enough opportunity. No, someone wanted her alive. Unfortunately for them, that wasn't in the cards. They'd drop their guard when they believed her out cold and she'd be ready.

Elias watched the fight play out in the dark alley. Four against one. And she had been holding her own, until now.

He hadn't planned on showing himself to her. Not until he'd smelled the sweet agony of her blood on the air. His insides cramped with the need to taste her. To feel the soft warm caress of her blood sliding over his tongue. Closing his eyes for a second, he savored the smell.

He launched from the roof of the building and landed on the sidewalk without a sound. He crossed the street in a blur and stopped right in front of the alleyway. Ducking into the shadows, he strode down the right side of the alley. The closer he got, the more his stomach

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cramped and clenched. Each breath he took in was laced with her blood. He drew in a large breath, taking as much of her as he could, then blocked it out.

“Two on one hardly seems fair.” Elias stepped away from the wall.

“Don’t you have somewhere else to be?” The man holding Sienna looked over his shoulder.

“Actually, I don’t.” Elias advanced on him.

“Watch out,” the man facing him yelled to his partner.

The man dropped Sienna’s arms and rounded on Elias, hands swooping around for a windmill punch. Stupid. Elias blocked the shots easily, knocking the man back.

Looking forward, he saw Sienna sweep the other guy’s feet from under him. One-on-one she would be fine. Turning back on the man getting to his feet, Elias kicked out quickly, knocking him back down. Blood rent the air.

“Do yourself a favor, stay down.” Elias said, putting his shoe on the man’s chest.

The thug threw Elias’s foot off of him and stood up. Elias gave the man room to get his balance. The man put his hands up to protect his face. Unfortunately, Elias knew the human weak spot. The sternum was not bone. It didn’t break but bruised quite easily. Elias punched him in the chest. Hit it hard enough that the man struggled to breathe. He fell to his haunches and Elias kneed him in the face. The man fell down soundlessly.

Elias stepped towards Sienna as she sat on the chest of the other attacker, and repeatedly hit him in the face. Each punch landed soundly, but the man didn’t move.

“I think he’s out cold.” Elias squatted down. The smell of her blood tickled his senses.

“I know that,” she said, hitting him again.

“Then why keep hitting him?” Elias put a hand out to stop her next punch.

She wrenched her wrist from his grasp and punched the man again. “So that when he wakes up, he’ll think twice about following me again.”



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"Okay, I think we're done here." He lifted her off the man's chest and set her on her feet.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Stopping you."

"Who asked for your help anyway?" She yanked away from him.

It took everything in him to let her out of his grasp. She looked up at him like she'd like to fight him. He backed up a couple of steps.

"Whoa.... I saved you."

"Wait a minute. You didn't save me." She stomped up to him. "I was doing fine before you came."

"Right. And if that means being hogtied by one man while another beats the shit out of you, then yeah, you were doing fine." He looked in her eyes, watching their honey depths run wild with fire. *Time for a new tactic.* "How about we discuss it over a cup of coffee?"

"Fuck you." She swept up to the front of the alley, picked up her bag and walked quickly down the street.

*Any time. Any place. Hell, with anyone looking on.* Elias raked his hand across his face. This was not the time to be thinking about that. There were bigger appetites that needed to be assuaged.

He bent down and, with one arm, lifted the man who'd hit Sienna. The man seemed to be coming around slightly. Bad time to wake up, buddy. Sienna's blood was on the side of the man's face. It called out to Elias. Giving in to the undeniable urge, he held the man's face close and licked her blood off. The cramps that constantly plagued his stomach stopped. He couldn't remember a time when the pain wasn't almost crippling. He savored the feeling as he sank his teeth into the man's taunt flesh. Blood gushed into his mouth, slid over his tongue and flowed down his throat. Power filled him. For the first time in two hundred years, he felt the draw of immortality. This is why he'd accepted the gift.

His mind filled with images of his teeth piercing her flesh. He'd like to sink something else into her, too. Maybe even indulge both appetites at once. His penis jumped at the thought. No, that could lead to disaster. This was his last chance to break the curse.

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Sienna jumped onto the last car of the BART train. She stood facing the door. There are only two ways to get on this train and she was monitoring both. The thirty-minute train ride inched by with her on full alert. When she got street side, she crossed on coming traffic and stood near the closed shop. There were no homes and barely anyone out. Usually, she would strap her bag to her back and run home. But not tonight. Tonight she caught the bus and sat directly across from the back doors. Twenty minutes later and she was home.

Sienna opened the door slowly, only breathing deep when she felt the slight sticking and tiny pop. Once inside, she locked the deadbolt then dumped her bag on the nearby key table. She reached into her bag, pulled out her Sig II and clicked off the safety, then did a quick sweep of the house. After searching the entire house, she did a quick search to make sure no one had been there. The small wax seal was secure on each window. The small piece of fishing line tied to the back door still held strong. She'd popped the one on the front door earlier. No one had been in the house.

Sienna went to the front door and got her mail before putting the Sig back into her bag. Things would be much easier if she could simply shoot the people following her. But she happened to like life as a civilian. Three hots and a cot didn't do it for her. Jail was out of the question.

She flopped onto her couch, turned on the TV and reached for the small pile of mail. 'You've been approved.' Not today. She opened the envelope and ripped the contents nine times. Never could be too careful. No dumpster diver was going to steal her identity. Two similar offers bit the dust next. The last envelope looked like another bit of junk mail. The kind with no return address.

She looked at the stamp. Okay, there was a postmark. So it had been through the postal system. El Dorado Springs, Colorado. She was going to have to do some research and make sure there was such a place. Still the envelope felt heavy. It wasn't the normal weight for mail. This had cost money. She held it up to the light. There didn't look to be

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anything mechanical in it. A credit card or something about that size. Chances it was a bomb were slim. But still...

Setting it down on the table, she went to her room and found a pair of scissors. She carefully slit one side of the paper near the center of the envelope. She slipped out the card.

It was a picture of a black 'V' on a red background. She flipped the card over. There was a picture of a dark haired man and below him was the word 'Sacrifice'. Was this a warning? A threat?

She picked up the card and headed to the kitchen. She would throw the damned thing away. She popped the lid on the trashcan and almost chucked it inside. *Throw it away. Come on, James. Just throw the damn thing in the trash.* She drummed her fingers on the counter near the bin. She slammed the card on the counter. Honestly, if sending thugs to beat her up didn't frighten her, what did they think one tiny slip of paper was going to do?

She'd keep it and hopefully make them choke on it one day. One day soon.

## Chapter Two

Someone was following her. She couldn't see anyone but she could feel eyes on her. This was different. Before it had taken them three days to put another tail on her. Someone must really want her bad if they hired new thugs already.

She slung her bag over her shoulder and trotted past the bus stop. Sucking in a deep breath, she broke into a full-out run. If someone was following her, they were going to have a hell of a time keeping up. She'd been the fastest in her first unit and the second one. It'd saved her life more times than she could count.

She ran two more blocks and dropped into the shadow of a large tree. Her hand itched to draw her Sig. The police wouldn't take it lightly that she walked around with a gun tucked into her bag. She waited.

"What the hell is she on?" came a voice from around the corner. Another step and he'd be in range.

He rounded the corner and she swung out with her left hand. The soft flesh of his throat caved around the hard cut of her slicing palm. He gurgled and stumbled back.

She spun around and landed a roundhouse kick to his head. The man fell to the ground. Bouncing on the balls of her feet, she moved out of his reach. When the man didn't immediately try to stand up, she moved in a bit closer.

"Why are you following me?" she thundered at him.

"I was just going to ask you out for a cup of coffee." He cleared his

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throat several times.

“And you thought following me would help your case?”

“I figured it was better than asking after two men beat the crap out of you.” He sat up.

“They did not beat the crap out of me,” she said through clenched teeth. “Who ended the night out cold on the concrete?”

“Just because you walked away doesn’t mean they didn’t beat the crap out of you.” He dusted off the midsection of his black shirt.

“Whatever.” She turned, picked up her bag and started walking home. “This is called stalking. If I see you again, I’m calling the police.”

She barely made it three blocks when she heard his footsteps behind her. She rounded on him. “Are you that stupid? I said no. No to coffee. No to dinner. Just no.”

“Come on, one cup of coffee. What could it hurt?” He stepped in front of her.

“What could it help?” She crossed her hands over her breasts.

“One cup and I’ll leave you alone.”

“You’ll leave me alone anyway.” She pushed past him. This was ridiculous. For all she knew this guy was just another thug hired to get her.

She didn’t wait to hear his reply. She ran the rest of the way home. But instead of going to her front door, she took a slight detour into Stern Park. She slipped through her back fence and ran into the back door before he caught up with her.

She slammed the door just as he jammed his foot inside. “Are you sure you wouldn’t like to go out with me? I’ve been told I’m a fantastic date.”

“Okay, that’s it.” Sienna reached behind her into the bag strapped to her back. Her fingers curled around the stippled butt of her gun. Pushing it aside, she kept searching until she felt the cool kiss of smooth metal.

He put his hand inside the door. Perfect. Before he could move, she snapped a pair of silver metal cuffs around his wrist and onto the handle of her door.

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"Is this really called for?" he asked, looking down at his hand. He pulled on it but the metal of the sliding door didn't budge.

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't call the police right now."

"Because I'm so handsome and charming?" He smiled down at her.

"Uhhh... No." She set her bag on the floor and yanked the phone from the cradle on the wall.

"Do we have to get the police involved?"

"Since you won't leave me alone, yes, I think we do."

"But I saved your life last night."

She cut her eyes at him and pressed a button. A dial tone tore through the air.

"Wait. Wait. Hang up that phone and I swear I'll give you two good reasons not to call the police."

"I'm not taking the cuffs off."

"Doesn't matter."

Something about the way he said it made her hang up the phone. She bent down and picked up her gun. She clicked the safety off and held it loosely in her hand, then turned to him.

"Okay, what do you want to show me?"

"Come closer," he urged her, bending his head to the point where she couldn't see his face clearly.

"Not in this lifetime, buddy. Now convince me not to call the police." She tapped her gun against her thigh.

"How's this?" He asked, flicking his head up.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. It wasn't possible. It was fake. But it couldn't be. His eyes glowed a fiery red, like a demon in some long forgotten horror movie. But this was real. His eyes were actually glowing. Maybe contacts.... Contacts didn't glow in a lighted room. This was for real.

Without stopping to second-guess herself, Sienna raised her gun and fired all thirteen shots. Six in his head and seven in his chest. Blood pooled all around him. His face was a mound of blackened flesh and red blood.

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“Now I know that wasn’t called for.”

How the hell were his lips still moving? She stared dumbfounded, as the blood seemed to run backwards up his staggering body and back to his face. The bullet holes started closing up, his flesh actually healing itself.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. Sienna dropped her gun and ran for the front door. What the hell was he? He definitely wasn’t human that was for sure.

Before she unlocked the dead bolt on the door, he was behind her. His arm snaked out and held it closed. Sienna dropped beneath his arm, delivered a quick punch to his groin and slipped away from him.

He doubled over. “Why the fuck did you do that?”

She ran to the back door, but he’d pulled it shut and snapped the handle off. Moving away from the door, she rushed up to her room. She slammed the door closed and locked it.

“Sienna, this is stupid.” The doorknob twisted left and right.

“How do you know my name?” The damn window was looking better and better.

He answered after several seconds. “You told me last night.”

“No. I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did,” he said through the wall. “Right after I rescued you.”

“You didn’t rescue me. And I don’t give out my name to strangers. Ever. So try again.” So the last few weeks were about vampires? Vampires were out to get her? Now she’d pissed off a lot of people during her time with the Seals but she was pretty sure there were no vampires.

“What the hell are you?”

“I’m a friend.”

“I have enough friends.”

The sounds of sirens got closer. Two police cruisers pulled up outside her townhouse. Sienna breathed a sigh of relief. She’d go down and tell the officers about him. What good would that do? As soon as she opened the door, he would get her and then fly off into the night. She’d proved guns didn’t hurt him. And she seriously doubted the officers were

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packing wooden stakes.

Elias raced down the steps to answer the door before the officers broke it down. The muscles around his groin still burned from her well-aimed punch. He opened the door on the second round of knocks.

"We received calls about shots being fired."

"I'm sorry, officers, my girlfriend had drops put in her ears earlier today. She turned the volume on the TV to the highest it would go. It sounded real. I could understand why the neighbors would call."

"Sir, where is your girlfriend?"

"She's upstairs. She's naked so I doubt she'll come down." Luckily for him the two officers were men. They laughed with him.

"We'll still need to talk to her."

"You're free to go up, but she just took her meds. Don't expect her to be too coherent."

One of the officers went up stairs. Elias smiled at the other man. He took up a non-threatening stance near the arm of the couch.

"She was watching *Blade* or some other scary movie so there's no telling what kind of story your partner is going to hear."

The officer laughed with Elias. A few minutes later his partner came down with a big smile on his face.

"Did she go on and on about vampires?"

"Yeah." The officer looked up, surprise clearly written on his face.

"I told you." Elias shook his head

"Just keep it down, okay? We'll write up a warning about noise but you do see how this could turn into a problem?"

"Definitely. I'll keep a better eye on her in the future." Elias walked with them to the door. He closed it with a soft click and turned the doorknob lock and the dead bolt.

"I told them about you," she screamed through the door when he got to the top of the stairs.

"I told them you were on meds and watching *Blade*." He walked up to the door. "Now open the door."

"Yeah, right."

"Look, if I wanted to kill you, I would have done it last night."



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"Not helping."

"How about this? Either you open the door or I break it down." He hit the door hard enough to jingle the hinges. "Just remember whose house this is. And who's going to have to replace the damned door."

"Shit," came the muffled reply through the door.

She was acting like a scared little bitch. Besides he was right. If he wanted to kill her, he had the perfect opportunity last night. No. He wanted something from her. And she faced her demons head on.

She opened the door. "You want to talk to me, fine. Downstairs."

She marched past him and down the stairs. Vampires. She'd faced worse. Honestly, a vampire was like a mosquito here for a bite and gone in a second. Nothing compared to some of the monsters she faced. Or at least she hoped that was the way it would be.

"The bedroom would be better." He stomped down the stairs. "I mean a nice comfy place to sit. TV. There are so many possibilities there."

"Keep dreaming."

"Oh, I will." He licked his lips.

"Look, if you're not here to kill me, then tell me what you want and get out." She walked to the door.

"We really need to work on your people skills." He walked up on her, invading her personal space. His body was almost rubbed against hers. "My name is Elias St. Clair."

His heat jumped across the small gap between them. Part of her wanted to step back and part wanted to take a step forward. In the end, she stood still. "Back up off me."

"Why, when being on you could be so much..." He leaned into her, his face almost touching hers, "...fun. Don't you like to have fun?"

"I'd like it even better if you'd tell me what you want and walk away." She took a step back and hated him for making it impossible for her to stand still. He was too damned close. If he turned to the side, he'd be kissing her. Her heart jumped, her nipples tightened.

"Agree to go out with me and I'll leave."

"You're doing this for a date? Are all vampires this desperate?"

"I'm determined. There's a difference."

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"Really? From here, they look the same. But doesn't matter. I don't date."

"Ever?"

"Ever."

"Now that must make you lonely."

How did he make lonely sound so sexual? More sex than she wanted him thinking about. They needed to get out of here. Needed more people, less atmosphere.

"You wanted a cup of coffee? Let's go get one." She grabbed her keys and headed for the front door.

"Now? It's kind of late for coffee. We could stay in." He raised his eyebrows at her.

"Coffee or get out."

"Fine. It's your beauty rest you're sacrificing."

### Chapter Three

Sienna waited for him to walk out. She then reset the line connecting the front door.

"Paranoid much?" he asked as she locked the door and skipped down the four steps to the sidewalk.

"Bit anyone lately?"

"This is supposed to be a nice friendly chat."

"Then I suggest you stop judging me. You don't know anything about me."

The little mom and pop coffee shop stayed open twenty-four hours, catering to those who worked different hours than the rest of the population.

It was crowded for a Tuesday night. Only two tables open, one near the front or one near the back. She started for the one along the small glass window. He grabbed her arm.

"What I have to say is not for everyone to hear." He steered her to the dimly lit table.

A waitress stopped at their table moments after they sat down. Sienna ordered a mocha espresso. The tiny woman tucked her order pad into the pocket of her apron and rushed away.

Sienna held her hand out to Elias. "Go."

"Just go. No foreplay. Just jump right in?"

"Basically."

"Fine. What do you want to know?" he asked.

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"How'd you become a vampire?"

"Someone bit me." He inclined his head to her. "Next question."

"Not good enough."

"Fine. Fine. Give me a minute. It's been a long time." Elias ran his hand through his hair. "August 18<sup>th</sup> 1814. A Thursday, I think. I was out late visiting a friend. When I left, the sun was just beginning to rise. The neighborhood wasn't the best, so when this guy fell into me, I just assumed he was a drunk. But when I pushed him off me, he fell and his cloak fell away. He was black."

"And that was a big deal?"

"In 1814 England? Alone at night? Yeah, it was a big deal. He was running from something. He told me if I hid him before sunrise he would give me something more precious than all the gold in England."

"And you believed him?"

He opened his mouth and shut it just as quickly. He stared at her hard. Waiting. Sienna held her hands up. Fine. She wouldn't stop him again.

"It was his manner of speech. It was too refined or maybe I was a bit too drunk. Anyway, I hid the man in my carriage and got him into my home before the sun rose. That night he thanked me and offered the gift of immortality."

"And you accepted just like that?"

"Well when you're living the life in 1814, living forever sounds pretty bloody good."

"What about your soul?"

"Turning into a vampire didn't steal my soul."

"You sound sure of that."

"I am."

"I've got one more question for you," she said, eyeing him with more than a bit of suspicion. "Why haven't you bitten me?"

"Huh?" He stared at her as if he had been expecting another question.

"Don't play stupid. You're a vampire, right? So why haven't you bitten me? It's the only thing you could want from me." She drilled her

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fingers along the table.

"Not the only thing." He reached across the table and traced a line across her knuckles.

"Well, you're more likely to get my blood than that."

"Are you so sure? Your elevated heart rate and dilated pupils are telling me something else."

"Stop this shit and answer my question."

"The answer's easy. I'm waiting for your permission."

"You can't bite me without my permission?" she asked. In all the vampire stories, movies, and books, she'd never heard of anything like this. "Are you hoping I will suddenly get the urge to donate some blood to your sorry cause?"

"No. I'm hoping that you will want to know why."

She didn't admit it. Didn't make a move to betray the curiosity eating at her. Did all vampires need permission or was this something special about him? "So why?"

"Oh, no. If you want to know why, it's going to cost you. One date. You choose the day. You choose the place. I choose the time." He threw a thousand watt smile her way.

She was tempted to grin back but bit down on the urge. "Why is it so important for us to go out on a date?"

"I want you to get to know me before you make any snap decisions. You might find that you actually like me."

"I could also find out that I was right and you are an asshole." She hitched the right side of her mouth up.

"One date. C'mon. You know you want to." He cocked his head and reached out to her again.

Why did he keep touching her? The tingle of his skin against hers made her forget that he was one of the dead. Or was it the undead? It didn't matter. She seriously couldn't be considering this. Could she?

She held up a finger. "One date."

"One date," he echoed.

"Friday night. Club Six. I'll meet you in the basement."

"I'll be there." Elias leaned over the table and captured her face in

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his hands. His lips found hers before she could pull away.

Or that's what she told herself on the short walk home. She ran her fingers over her slightly swollen lower lip and told herself it was not the best kiss of her life. Not even close.

## Chapter Four

The blaring music of the club was almost deafening. Perfect. Elias wouldn't be able to sweet-talk her into another date. It had been a few months since the girls at the gym dragged her out to this nightclub. Things hadn't changed but she needed to be sure. Death was always in the little details.

Sienna swayed with the music as she zigzagged her way through the crowd on her way up to the bar. She ordered an amaretto sour and nursed it as she circled the small room. The bathrooms, the windows, the exits. All the same. Good. Now that she had the lay of the land, she could party in the basement.

The stairway was thick with bodies. Sweaty bodies. A hand shot out and tried to hold her in place. As she turned, her breast rubbed up against some guy.

"Hey."

Sienna grabbed the flat of his hand and twisted it until he moved back. "Look, but don't touch." She smiled up at him as she dropped his hand and walked away.

"Crazy bitch." His outburst was almost swallowed up by the music.

She continued down the steps without a backwards glance. Honestly, did that jerk really think she was going to be into some random guy grabbing her ass? What if it had been Elias? Would she have moved his hand away or leaned in so he could get a better grip? She shook her head, hoping to dislodge the image forming in her head.

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She stepped down in a crowd of gyrating bodies. Skin glistened in the roaming strobe lights. Reds, yellows and blues. Color spiraled around her. Now this is what she needed. Some mindless body-moving fun that did not include any sex. The word buzzed in her head like a key opening the door on her fantasies.

"I thought you would never get here," Elias's voice whispered across her ear.

He'd beat her here. She'd arrived over thirty minutes early to scope the place out, to get herself well and truly lost in the crowd. Now she was stuck with him.

"Not happy to see me?"

"Not expecting you this early. I figured you'd have to stop for a bite." She slanted a glance up at him.

"Oh, I had a small bite but there's still room for dessert. There's always room for dessert." He nipped at her earlobe.

The pulsing beat of the music boomed louder. Their words got lost in the throbbing mass of bodies pressing in on them. The basement was for dancing. The upper floor for talking. And although she didn't want to get all up close with him, it was probably more dangerous to talk to him.

She turned away from him and started swaying to the music. It flowed around her, through her and washed away her inhibitions. She twisted her hips and raised her arms above her head. The smell of sweat and smoke disappeared as she bit her bottom lip and snapped her head side to side in time with her hips. This was definitely what she needed.

"Be careful, little girl." His voice tickled over her ear causing goose bumps to race down her arms.

"I haven't been a little girl in a very long time," she shouted at him as she backed up and ground her ass against his thighs.

He wrapped his fingers around the top of her jeans and pulled her flush against him. His erection pressed into the top of her hips. Wandering fingers curled around the top of her jeans and rubbed the skin just below the band.

She closed her eyes as tingling little jolts rushed up to stop her lungs and then down to pool in her panties. Jeez. She tried to pull away,



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but he yanked her back.

"Did I say you could go somewhere?"

Sienna looked over her shoulder at him, then turned back around, rolling her eyes. The music changed from a throbbing, pulsing beat to a slower one. Not a slow dance, but close enough. Too close.

He used the belt loops in her jeans to turn her around to face him. His lids were half closed. His cock pressed into her lower abdomen. She looked up. What she could see of his eyes was glazed over in passion. *Back it up, buddy.* This is not what she signed on for. No matter what her body said.

"Let go. I gotta take a break."

"We just got here, and you have to take a break already?" He was hot. The heat poured out from his body, singeing her.

"I have to go to the toilet, want to hold my hand?" she asked, becoming irritated. So what if it was a lie? She did need to visit the bathroom, but it had more to do with getting some space than relieving herself. He finally let her go.

She marched up the steps. Be cold. Detached. She couldn't let his attraction affect her. She washed her hands and went over her mantra one more times. Cold. Detached. No more rubbing up against his cock. His big cock. No. No. No.

Sienna knocked open the door to the ladies room and walked out. She needed to end this date before she did something she might...no, would regret.

"Excuse me, my boss would like to see you up in the VIP room." A large man, no doubt personal security, stepped away from the wall and blocked her path.

"Not interested." She sidestepped around him.

His hand snapped down on her left forearm.

"Get your hands off me." She narrowed her eyes. There was nothing close for her to grab. Shit. She was going to have to fight this creep hand-to-hand.

"It wasn't a request." He squeezed his hand.

"No, it wasn't." She rounded on him, raised her hands, and threw

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four quick punches aimed at his face.

He blocked each one and started shaking her. She kicked out at him, connecting three or four times. He let go and stumbled back. His face pinched in anger. Shit. She couldn't even go out on a damned date.

The guy advanced on her like a bull locking onto a red cloth. She waited to the last second and dipped low and to the left. She stuck her foot out and tripped him. He went down hard. The crash cracked the plaster on the wall.

"Is there a problem?" a bouncer asked as he and another guy raced up behind her.

"Not now." She didn't turn around. Where was this guy a few minutes ago?

"Alright, you two. Time to go." One bouncer bent down and picked up the guy. The one next to her grabbed her arm and started dragging her to the door.

"You've got to be kidding. That guy attacked me."

"Doesn't matter. You're both out."

"Come on, why the hell would I pick a fight with a guy twice my size?"

"Looked like you were holding your own to me," the bouncer said.

So because she could defend herself she was being kicked out. *Come the fuck on.* "Look, at least let me tell my date I'm gone."

"Sorry. You'll either have to call or wait outside the club." He pushed her out of the door. She stumbled for a second, then straightened up. Several of the people in line turned to look at her. Bastard.

That was one way to end a date. She didn't have Elias's cell phone number so there was no calling him. He'd no doubt turn up at her door again. She turned and pulled off her shoes. There was no way she would walk all the way home with those killer heels on.

"Hope you're not trying to ditch me."

Why did it not surprise her that he was following her yet again? "Yep. I started a fight with some muscle-bound idiot so I could get kicked out of the club—all to avoid you."

"I wondered if I was going to have to step in and save you."

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She pivoted. "You were there?"

"Of course. You have this bad habit of getting in trouble."

"Then why the hell didn't you help me?"

"Last time I did, you got upset."

She gritted her teeth, turned around, and started walking again.

"What about our date?"

"I think it's over."

"This wasn't a date. I guess I'll have to make another trip to your house."

"Look. I'm not in the mood for your little games."

All the laughter fled his face. "This is no game." He grabbed her arm. He raked his loose hand through his hair. "We didn't even get in one good dance."

He likely regretted not getting his chance to grope her. She curled her fingers as she imagined running her hands along the delicious definition of his muscle-fitting shirt. *Stop thinking about him like that.* He wanted her blood, and she had no intentions of sharing any.

"How about we hit another club? I'll pick."

She looked at him suspiciously.

"You're already dressed up. Why waste it?"

He was right. She rarely...rarely went out on dates. And she hadn't applied a face full of makeup since her last job. No matter who she was out with, she'd be out. She needed to feel alive.

"Okay. But if I don't like the look of the place, I'm gone." She bent to slip her shoes back on.

"Hey, I could just carry you." He held his arms out to her.

*Not on your life.* She slipped on the other shoe and waited for him. "So where are we going? And there'd better be dancing."

He smiled down at her. They walked up the street to one of the main intersections. Elias hailed a cab. They rode a short distance and stopped in a residential area not far from Lombard Street.

"Where are we going?"

"A small club that caters to my kind." He captured her arm and strode toward what looked like a laundry mat.

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"You're kidding, right?" She looked up at the aged sign for the local Soap and Sudz.

"What do you want? A sign that says Vampire Nightclub? Don't think the locals would like that."

They walked into the laundry mat and passed three rows of washers to get to the counter. Elias walked up to the attendant. His eyes flashed red. The man let them behind the desk and opened the 'Employees Only' door.

"So I'm guessing if you can't do the eye flashy thing, you don't get back here."

"Glen is paid very well to make sure only invited guests get in." He led her down a darkened staircase.

"Just a quick reminder. I did not sign on for cobwebs, spiders, mold, or..."

She stopped talking as he opened a door to a room that looked almost like the bar they'd just left. No, that wasn't quite right, it was more inviting. More welcoming.

As they walked in, several heads popped up. Eyes blazed at her, some red, some yellow. She opened her mouth to ask, but Elias put a finger to her lips.

"You wanted to dance. Not talk."

"That's before you brought me here." She looked around, trying to take in as much of the scenery as possible. The room was bathed in slightly blue light. The lights were lowered to a point where the reflection off the furniture glowed eerily.

"There are too many ears here for me to answer your questions," he whispered to her.

"So what—we stare at each other for the next few hours?"

"No. We dance. We talk about other things. Then we leave."

And go to her place or his. She heard it in his voice. He wanted to spend the night with her. Her nipples hardened at the thought. She didn't want him. Didn't want him touching her. Stroking her.

"Do you want a drink or want to dance?"

Sienna watched the black clad bartender pour a thick red liquid

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from a wine bottle. That wasn't wine. Wine didn't cling to the glass like that. No, that was something else.

"Dance," she said, grabbing his arm. No way did she want to sit here and watch him drink that.

He closed his fingers on her hand and led her to the small deserted floor. He placed his hands on her hips and swayed with her to the soft mellow music. This was music made for loving. It wasn't the fast paced thumping from earlier. No, this was made for couples to grind their sex against each other until they were unable to think of anything except screwing each other all night long.

She turned away from him, trying to resume the pose they'd adopted at Club Six, but he wasn't having it. He spun in a circle. She stared at his chest, determined not to meet his gaze.

His hands dropped from her waist to cup her ass. She should step back and make him move his hands, but the warmth seeping in from his touch made her moan.

"Does that feel good to you, Sienna?" His lips hovered just inches above her ear. The warm breath tickled the soft hair on her neck. The sensations didn't make her want to laugh. Instead, it made her panties wet. She wasn't going to let him seduce her like this. No.

"Let go."

"No."

She looked up at him and cocked her head to the side. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

He nodded his head up and down.

"Okay, but don't say I didn't warn you."

She barely got the last word out of her mouth before his lips pressed down on hers. He tasted forbidden. So hot. So damned sexy. He tasted like what her body was craving. Pure decadence.

She wrapped her arms over his head and pulled him down closer. She wanted to explore every inch of his mouth. Memorize the taste of him.

"What did you do to me?" She pulled away from him.

"The same thing you're doing to me." He captured her lips again and bit down on the bottom one.

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She gasped as his fangs pierced through the soft sensitive flesh of her mouth. She pulled away quickly. "I thought you needed my permission."

"Not for a kiss." He licked the red liquid from her lips.

"You bit me." She turned her head away from him.

"No. I nicked you. When I bite you, you'll know it." He pulled her to him.

## Chapter Five

His penis pressed into her stomach. The soft music pushed through her. She swayed back and forth, rubbing her body against him. She could not be considering this. She didn't know him from Adam. Her nipples hardened. They had just met a couple of days ago. Tell-tale wetness rubbed against the top of her thighs.

She hadn't been this close to having sex since her last assignment. And worse yet, she hadn't liked the guy as much as she liked Elias. So why not? Why not have a bit of fun just for her? One time. What could it hurt?

Sienna wrapped her hands around his neck and leaned into him. His breath came out in a huff. His hands tightened, then loosened on her ass.

"So does this mean I can take a little bite?"

"No." She rubbed her fingers up and down the back of his neck. Under her fingers, a shiver raced down his spine.

"Then what are you saying?"

"I'm dancing. If you don't like it, I'm sure someone here would dance with me." She pulled back from him, putting a bit of space between them.

He grunted and yanked her back to him. Sienna let out a giggle as the momentum brought her body flush against him. He felt so good. Intoxicating.

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"What are you playing at, Sienna?"

"I'm not playing, Elias. Are you?"

His gaze bore down on her, then he brought his lips down hard on hers. His taste washed over her, into her. His tongue pushed into her willing mouth as his hand pressed her hips into his. There was no mistaking what he was saying.

Sienna dropped her hands from around his neck and wrapped them around his waist. She trapped him against her as she moved her hips in a figure eight. His penis jumped every time she brushed hard against him.

He pulled his mouth away from hers. "Sienna."

A warning rumbled in his voice. How long had it been for him? How far would he let her push him before his control slipped? Sienna looked over to the bar. Several eyes were on them. It should have made her self-conscious, but instead she felt sexier. Hotter. She raised her hands and encircled his neck. She raked her hands along the skin beneath her fingers.

"Let's go." He grasped her hands and pulled them from around him.

"I didn't get to finish my dance."

"You'll get your dance." He led her out the side door of the club.

"Where are we going?" she asked, trying to keep a straight face. He was acting like a randy teenager about to have sex for the first time.

"Your place."

"Why my place?"

"It's closer," he said looking up and down the street.

"What are you looking for?"

"A damned cable car, a taxi, a bus. I don't care."

"Well, can't you like fly or something?"

He turned to stare at her. His eyes moved to look up over her shoulder. She turned around to see what he was looking at. There was a dark alley that ran alongside of the Soap and Sudz.

Elias looked up and down the street again. He pulled her into an embrace. His lips sought hers and his tongue skimmed along the line of



her bottom lip. Sienna opened her mouth, more than willing to let him in. He walked her backwards. He didn't stop kissing her until her back bumped up against the wall. They were at the front of the alley.

He couldn't mean to... Elias pushed her back towards the shadows. A chill went through her as the darkness surrounded them. Someone driving a car down the narrow lane wouldn't see them.

Sienna slipped her hands up and ran her fingers through his hair. She grabbed two fistfuls and yanked his lips down to hers. Her tongue pushed into his mouth. His tongue snaked out and brushed alongside hers. It curled around the tip of hers as he sucked on it. Jeez, this guy could kiss.

His fingers reached down and lifted her tight denim skirt the short distance up to her waist.

"No panties?" he said, breaking the kiss.

"A thong." She smiled up at him.

"You mean this tiny piece of string?" He slipped his fingers into the side of her new g-string and pulled hard. The fabric ripped without a sound. The black fabric barely skimmed her legs as it fell to the concrete.

"You owe me. Those were brand new." Sienna snapped her mouth shut, but the words were already out.

"New. For me?" He smiled arrogantly down at her. "And here I thought you didn't like me."

"I don't." She caught his arm and spun him against the wall. This time she didn't even attempt to be gentle as she yanked his mouth down to hers, hopefully cutting off any smart-assed comment he'd been about to make.

Elias pushed her top and bra up in one quick movement. Her breasts bobbed with freedom. He cupped them in his hands. Warmth flooded her as he flicked his fingers across the sensitive pad of her already hard nipples.

"Mmm..." she moaned into his mouth.

Elias broke the kiss and bent his head lower. He captured one nipple and grazed the raised flesh with his teeth. The slight scratch sent adrenaline rushing through her and heat pooled between her legs.

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The mind-numbing pull of his hot mouth against her skin blurred her vision. She closed her eyes and bit down on her bottom lip. The fire he ignited burned hotter with every touch. He slipped a hand between their heated bodies. His fingers slid along the soft shaven skin framing the outside of her sex. With deliberate slowness, he slipped a finger through the lips of her pussy. The rough pad of his fingers rubbed down one side and up the other. He flicked the engorged flesh around her clit. After a couple more stokes, the sound of her wetness permeated the quiet alley.

"Do you like that?" he asked her. He sounded as out of breath as she felt. When his head lifted to switch nipples, he sped up the motion of his fingers.

Her knees went weak and she would have crumbled to the ground if he hadn't caught her. She willed her legs to work as her hands shot forward to pull on the top of his pants. One hard tug and his zipper zoomed down. She pushed his boxers and jeans below his hips in one movement.

His cock sprang free. She wrapped a hand around his thickness and rubbed the smooth length of him. Damn, he was big. Elias hooked one of her legs over his elbow and turned her to press her against the cold hard bricks of the laundry mat.

The head of his cock slipped through her nether lips, rubbing against her already engorged clit. She bit down on the moan before it slipped through her lips. Elias rocked his hips back and forward. He pressed into her, his girth stretching her wide. She clawed at his back, her fingernails biting into his flesh.

He pulled out and pushed in deeper. A moment later he stopped for a second, not moving. It seemed as if he'd even stopped breathing. Sienna clenched the inner muscles of her pussy, hoping to spur him into some type of movement.

Elias reached down and pulled up her other leg. He spread her wide open. When his hips pressed down into her, she felt the entire length of him. He moaned into the sweat-soaked skin of her throat as he pumped into her wetness.

The bricks at her back ate into her flesh as his hips pressed down

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on her. The curve of her ass hit the wall and bounced forward into his next thrust. He was so deep inside her. So deep. His hips pounded against her, building up the pressure. He felt so good. He reached between their pulsing bodies and lightly pinched her bud as he slammed into her. A few short strokes and she exploded.

"One taste. One taste, Sienna," he said, rubbing her clit, prolonging her pleasure. "Just say yes."

She closed her eyes and rode wave upon wave of ecstasy.

"Just say yes," he repeated, rocking into her.

Sienna gasped as she exploded for a second time.

"Yes." The word slipped out so soft she didn't even hear it.

Need burned Elias as he let go of the hunger that was his constant companion. His fangs elongated and sharpened into razor points. He lifted his head and pulled in the scent of her. Her body pulsed with the rhythmic sound of her blood pumping through her veins. He zeroed into the vein in her neck. He opened his mouth and bit down hard on her. Once past the initial resistance of her skin, his teeth slid into her and blood rushed into his mouth.

The deliriously sweet coppery taste of her blood flowed over his tongue and into him. Colors popped around him. He saw the heat pouring off the mice in the alley. His every sense heightened to a level he was unaccustomed too. Even the rub of her skin was ten times more satisfying. He thrust into her several times while taking more of her blood. The pull of her wet sex against his hard cock ate away at his control. He swirled his tongue over her neck, his saliva making a temporary seal on the holes in her neck. He shouted into the night as he spurted inside her.

"I hope you know this means nothing," Sienna slurred into his ear.

Elias's head popped up. Her heavy lidded eyes and extremely pale pallor had less to do with ecstasy and more to do with the amount of blood he'd just taken. Shit. He hadn't realized it'd been so much. She tasted so good, he'd over imbibed.

He let go of her legs. They fell down like dead weight. He stepped back but had to rush forward as she almost tipped over. She was so out of it, there was no way she was going to be able to walk. How the fuck was

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he going to get her home?

## Chapter Six

Sienna woke up to the shrill sound of the phone beside the bed. It took four rings before she slumped her way over to the nightstand by the edge.

"Sienna?"

"Yep?" she croaked out.

"This is Mario. I have a Mrs. Baglow here at the gym. She says she was supposed to have a nine o'clock session with you this morning."

Sienna shot up in bed. What the fuck time was it? She looked over to the alarm clock on the nightstand. 9:45. Holy hell. Where had her weekend gone?

"Tell her I'm sorry and the next three sessions will be free." Free always worked to calm an overworked client. Sure it would eat into her bottom line for the month but at least she would be able to keep her client.

"She says that's fine. But you also have a nooner. Don't forget her." The line went dead.

Sienna raked a hand through her hair. She would be kissing ass for at least a month. Shit. Sienna shot out of bed and her knees buckled. The carpet provided almost no protection. Jarring pain raced up her thighs and erased all measure of lingering sleep.

*What the hell?* Taking it slowly, Sienna stood again and took a few hesitant steps. She had to lean on the doorframe as she stepped into the bathroom. Leaning over to the sink, she stared in the mirror. She was pale. Too pale. Dark marks blazed semi-circles beneath her eyes.

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Sienna turned on the cold water and used the soap at the corner of the sink to wash her face. Most of the black marks washed away. Smearred make-up no doubt but a couple of shadows still darkened her skin. *And what the fuck is that?* Leaning towards the mirror, she peered at two distinct marks on her neck. Those wouldn't be washed away by a little soap and water. She lifted a finger and touched at the small red scabs. The skin beneath it was a bit sore.

*Think. Think. The date. The club. The alley. That son of a bitch bit me!* He actually bit her. She didn't give him permission. Her eyes narrowed. He'd wanted to bite her and fuck her and it looked like she fell right into his little trap. She needed a shower. She needed to wash away the smell of him.

Sienna took a long hot shower, soaping up and rinsing several times. But no matter how many times she washed, the touch of his hands, the salty spice smell of his skin, the sweetness of his kiss was still there. Her body tingled from the memories.

She threw on a pair of gray sweat pants and a white work-out tank then jogged almost all the way to the bus stop. By the time she walked in the doors of the gym, she was close to passing out. It would have been smart to eat something before she left the house. But lately, smart was not something she could claim to be.

As soon as her last client hit the showers, Sienna hit the door. She needed go home and sleep for another day or two. Not to mention find Elias and kick his ass. Yeah, right. He got what he wanted and was probably long gone. She fell asleep three times on the bus ride home. Each time she closed her eyes, she was in that alley again, back pushed against the bricks, legs spread wide.

She stepped off the bus and walked to her house. She opened the door, felt the pop of the fishing wire. She made a quick sweep of her other 'precautions' before dropping in a heap on her couch. Her muscles felt like jelly. She tucked her feet beneath her, turned on the TV and leaned her head against the soft cushioned arm of the couch.

Just as her eyelids began to droop, the doorbell sounded. It was either a very desperate door-to-door salesman or Elias. Adrenaline surged

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through her at the thought of telling him just where he could go.

Sienna grabbed her Sig just in case. She looked through the small peephole. It wasn't Elias. And from the look of his suit, this guy wasn't a door-to-door salesman either. She locked the chain at the top of her door and opened it as far as the chain would allow.

"Can I help you?" She held the door with one hand as she held the Sig behind her back in the other.

"Ms. James?"

"Depends on who wants to know." She undid the safety on the gun. Her fingers tightened against the handle.

"I have a package for you," he said, pulling a box up between them. The dark red ribbon wrapped around it caught her eyes.

"Open it," she said.

"Here." He shoved the package at her.

"Who did you say you worked for?" Men just didn't show up at people's doorstep bearing gifts.

"I didn't. My employer wants to apologize for what happened. He would like to invite you to dinner tonight."

"Tell your employer he can go to hell." Elias, the coward, sent someone to do his dirty work. He knew she wouldn't accept this dinner invitation.

The man opened the box and pull out a stunning black dress. Light bounced off the fabric in glittering waves. The dress spoke to Sienna's sense of beauty. It called to her. She curled her fingers around the door to keep from reaching out to touch the material.

"Look, lady, either you take this dress. Or I can just leave it on the porch."

"Where is dinner?" Sienna asked, making a snap decision to go to dinner and tell Elias exactly where he could shove his nice little date.

"The limo is set to take you and bring you back," the guy said.

"I prefer to take a cab." And she was keeping the damned dress to.

"Look, I don't know where it is. The driver does. He is the only one with directions. This guy said you were a 'little' paranoid." By the way he said the word little, she could tell that he thought she was major league

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paranoid.

She grabbed the dress through the door opening and slammed the door in his face. Who was he to question her? He didn't know the shit she'd been through. How cautious would he be if he'd killed men in their sleep? She stomped upstairs. It didn't matter it was in the name of the government, or that the men were killers and drug dealers. She shrugged out of her clothes and stepped into the steaming water. No, none of that mattered. Only the look of death as it visited her targets and team members alike were burned into her memory. The water washed away a bit of the anger but the faces that haunted her remained. Nothing as simple as a bit of water would get rid of them.

She stepped out of the shower, dried off and slipped into the dress. The cowl-neckline drooped down to almost her belly button in the front and the very top of her ass in the back. The soft fabric was so light she could barely feel it. It swooshed around her legs as she walked, falling slightly lower than mid calf. Standing still, it looked like a pencil skirt but there was a lot of fabric hidden in folds. She didn't even want to imagine how much the dress cost. She'd worn dresses like this during her assignments. The quality was undeniable. Designer.

Sienna touched up her make-up. She wanted Elias to see what he would be missing out on. What he would never have again. She pinned her hair up into an untidy bun. Once that was done, she went in search of shoes. No three-inch heels today. No, today she would choose more sensible shoes. She picked out a pair of black wedges. Not the most glamorous but a bit more sensible if she needed to walk home. Which might be the case once she spoke her piece.

After rushing downstairs and resetting the string at her front door, Sienna swept outside. The limo was waiting with goon number one in the front passenger side and goon number two getting out to open her door.

This felt wrong. Sienna's internal warning went off when the man opened the door. Nothing about this went with the man she'd fucked last night. It was too classy, too refined, too much like a trap. She shook her head and called herself all types of fools for not seeing it earlier.

Shit. Her door was locked. There was no way she would be able to



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get back inside before they reached her. And fighting in these shoes was a pure death wish. Her best bet would be to go with them and make a run for it at the first opening.

The dark windows of the limo, combined with the quickly setting sun, made it almost impossible to keep track of their route. Highway 80 North was the last sign she saw. They turned onto a side street and down a lane.

Civilization seemed to melt away. Sienna reached down and untied the laces on her wedge shoes. She used slight movements so as not to tip off the men sitting in the front seat. Slowly she wrapped the laces around her forearms. The wedge heels would be a lot harder than her hands. The deeper they drove up into the mountains, the more fear pooled in her stomach.

## Chapter Seven

Elias woke to hunger clawing at his mind and his cock. He'd just fed from Sienna. The gnawing pain should've diminished some. But the burning need was stronger than he'd ever felt. How the fuck could it be stronger? Her blood was freely given. It should have strengthened him. Refreshed him. Not crippled him.

Her ancestor must be having a good laugh now. Even on her deathbed, she'd lied. Her curse had been complete. There was no cure for it. No freedom for him. He'd restrained himself last night for nothing. He'd begged her for her consent. His restraint. Her consent. It all meant nothing.

Elias erupted from the cool sheets of the bed he'd installed in the new sub-basement of his house. He was done being Mr. Nice Guy. Especially since it didn't seem to matter. No. Now she was going to help him whether she wanted to or not. There had to be a way to end this.

He wasted no time showering and dressing, then opted to run the short two miles to Sienna's place. His legs burned from the exertion by the time he walked up the three steps to knock on her door. The sharp edge of his anger was gone. He continued to knock until the door hinges shook with the force.

He'd calmed down enough to listen. There was no movement in her house. Not even the small hitches from her normal breathing. He inhaled deep and pulled into her scent. Sexuality laced with fear. A lot of fear. The fear intensified his hunger. Something was wrong. She hadn't

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been this scared when he showed her his fangs. Not even when those guys had jumped her in the alley. He needed to find her.

He pulled in another deep breath. She'd been gone at least forty-five minutes. Looking around her small neighborhood, he zeroed in on a motorcycle. It was a little banged up on the sides but hopefully it still ran. He sauntered across the street and down the sidewalk. As he approached the bike, he looked for the tell-tale light of a curtain or door opening. He ducked down to hotwire the damn thing. The wires were already pulled out. No doubt the bike was already stolen. He was down the street before anyone came out the house.

He hit the highway and pushed the bike as fast as it would go. It topped out at eighty. The wheels ate up the distance. He followed Sienna's scent on the air, hoping for both their sakes she was still alive.

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Sienna moved from her hiding space in the shadows of a large oak tree. She leveled her breathing, not wanting her rising panic to give her away. She was a survivor, damn it. She'd find her way off the mountain. *Just keep cool and don't get caught.*

The sound of a nearby stick breaking shattered the silence. They were getting closer. She couldn't afford to stay here any longer. She pushed off from the tree and ran from shadow to shadow away from the direction the men would be coming from. She didn't dare glance over her shoulder. They were there and she couldn't afford any stumbles. No. This was life and death, no chance for any do-overs.

A sharp whistle sliced through the air. Two dark shadows stepped from around the trees in front of her. She whipped her head around and saw another approaching from behind. Three on one, in such an open environment, severely cut her chances of survival. The important thing was that she had a chance.

Bending quickly, she grabbed the sides of the fabric along the calf-high split on the left side of her dress. The sound of ripping fabric echoed through the trees. She did the same thing to the split on the right.

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The dress was flowy but it still would have inhibited her from doing any roundhouse kicks.

The guy behind her slowed down. They all started advancing at an unhurried pace. This seemed too controlled, too practiced. Like they had this planned even before she bolted from the limo.

There was no way she would be able to handle all three at once. Time to pick and choose. The two in front sported large upper bodies. She peered over her shoulder. That guy was a bit more even-keeled. Fine. She needed to take out one of the big fellows. She tightened her grip on the toe end of her shoes. One. Two. Three. Sienna launched herself at the goon on her right.

All three men stopped moving. The one she ran for backed up a step. With momentum carrying her, she leapt and aimed for the man's knees. The sickening crack told her she'd connected. When he fell, Sienna swung a wedge and connected with his temple. *One down, two to go.* The sound of crushing leaves and twigs broke through her fury. She delivered one more kick to the fallen man's midsection before turning to the coming threat.

She turned just in time to miss the other mammoth man's punch. It came in a downward arch, slicing the air beside her ear. The smaller guy swept his foot down along the ground. She jumped up, barely evading his attempt to take her off her feet. A massive fist punched her chest. He connected but not at full strength. The blow pushed her backwards, but didn't knock her down. She willed herself not to rub her stinging flesh.

This wasn't working. One good hit and she would be down. She ran to the nearest tree and turned to meet her attackers. The big man came first, barreling at her. She stepped around the tree and waited, putting a blocker in his path. He wouldn't be able to hit her head on. Sienna stepped a bit away from the tree, just in case he decided to grow a brain. She loosed the shoes ribbons tied around her arms and grabbed the ends.

The man came from the opposite side of where he'd been heading. She swung her shoes out into wide arcs. She hit him with two good hits to the side of his head, the last leaving him a bit dazed. She ran up to him, pivoted and roundhouse kicked at his head. He moved back and batted

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her leg away.

He wasn't dazed. The smaller guy stepped from around the tree behind her. She didn't turn around to see him, didn't have to. She was caught. She let go of her shoes and caught the ribbons as they fell. She started twirling the shoes in circles at her sides. She turned, now the men were on her left and right.

She took a couple of steps backward. They followed her. The smaller man on her left reached out. She used a shoe to knock his hand down. The man on her right lunged at her and she used both shoes to knock him down. She turned just as a hand closed around her arm. Shit. She kicked out, connecting hard with a shin. But he didn't let go.

"Get up," he yelled to his downed friend. "Grab her feet."

The bent man grabbed her legs. She wiggled out of his grasp, kicking at his hands, his legs, his head. She refused to go do without a fight.

"Are you always this much trouble?" Elias's voice broke through the forest.

The man below her dropped her feet and jumped up. He ran to Elias. The man punched him several times but it didn't seem to have any effect. Sienna jerked and moved until she and the man behind her could no longer see the fight. She waited for the man behind her to turn his head to check on his buddy. It took several seconds. She jumped up and slammed her head back. The man's grip loosened against her arms. She pulled away from him and quickly kned him in the groin before he could protect himself. A low blow, but at this point she was beyond fighting fair.

Her quick left hook connected. It landed squarely but the man didn't fall. He took a few steps back and shook his head a couple of times, but he didn't fall. She started advancing on him again.

"Sienna."

Elias's voice made her snap her head back. He was running towards her. How had he gotten that far away from her?

"What—"

Elias grabbed her, lifting her up into his arms as he ran through the forest. She looked over her shoulder. The men must have decided to screw

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orders. Several new guys had appeared...with guns. There was no fighting a gun.

"You can't run all the way down the mountain. No doubt a few will be going to get some cars now. They'll be waiting at the bottom."

"We aren't going to run down the mountain."

He wasn't even breathing hard. Sienna knew she wasn't fat, but she wasn't a toothpick either. And at the pace they were running, he should've been at least a bit winded from the difficulty running with her in his arms and talking.

"What? Are you going to do fly?" Could he?

"No." He raced around a tree and came to a sudden halt right beside an electric blue motorbike.

"You've got to be kidding. This little thing isn't going to outrun anything." She watched him throw his legs over the side of the bike. She didn't miss how well his pants encased those muscular thighs, and that ass. Those pants made him look so good. If they weren't about to be killed she would...No. No. No. Safety first.

"If you hurry up and get on, we won't have to worry about that." He bent down pulled out wires. Sparks shot out as the bike's motor grumbled to life..

"How do you figure that?" She crossed her arms.

"I run a lot faster than a human. I think we've got a least five minutes before they get here."

Sienna stopped arguing and climbed on the back of the bike and wrapped her arms around Elias. The bike shot forward. Elias navigated the curving path down the mountain at a breakneck pace. She fought against the wetness pooling between her legs as her thighs squeezed against him. Not now. It was beyond stupid to be turned on while they were running for their lives, but she couldn't help it. The vibrations of the bike coupled with the heat pouring off him felt like a vibrator stuck deep inside her. Damn. She should want to hit him, not throw him down and have hot and sweaty sex with him.

"Stop it," he yelled at her without turning around.

"Stop what?"

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"Rubbing your pussy against me."

"I'm not," she screamed into the wind.

"Please. You soaked the back of my jeans."

Now he was just being an ass. There was no way she was wet enough to soak the back of his pants. "Just take me home."

"Not tonight."

"Why the hell not?"

When he didn't answer her question right away, she thumped him hard on the back. Which promptly earned her a grunt. It took them another twenty-five minutes to get back to the city. But he missed her exit. He couldn't be serious.

"What are you doing?" She dug her fingers into his side. He was going to answer her.

"Taking you to my place."

## Chapter Eight

She loosened her fingers a bit. She'd be lying if she didn't admit she was curious. How did a vampire live? Then again, he could be taking her back to his place because he thought she was easy.

He parked the bike outside a small two-story home. The yard was small but not non-existent. It looked well kept. Did he mow it at night?

"Are you going to get off the bike?"

Sienna didn't say anything. She leaned to the side and threw her leg off the bike. She took a few steps away from him.

"Don't act shy now. Where is the lady who was just getting herself off rubbing against my back?"

"I told you I was not—"

Elias held up a hand to stop her. She should have known by the grin on his face that he was only joking. But it was close enough to the truth to irritate her. He unlocked the door and ushered her inside.

"I hope you didn't bring me here hoping for a repeat of last night."

"And why would I do that?" He ran a finger up and down the skin of her left arm.

"I don't know. But I just want to set the record straight. I am not easy." She unfurled her arms and planted them on her hips.

"Sienna, the one thing you're not is easy." He closed the small distance between them and brought his lips down to hover above hers. "Not by a long shot."

Suddenly his lips were on hers. Caressing her. Tasting her.



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Devouring her. She couldn't lie to herself. He hadn't kissed her. She closed that last little bit of space between their lips to initiate the kiss. It was her choice.

He grabbed her under the arms and picked her up. He helped wrap her legs around him. He grabbed the rounded flesh of her ass and held her as he walked the short distance to the door. She bet it led to the basement.

"Hold on." There were a ton of steps. And from the way he turned his body they must be extremely steep.

At the bottom of the stairs, he hit a switch on the wall and a small lamp flicked on. It was dim, barely casting a shadow. But it lighted the room enough for her to make out the bed. Without letting her go, he crawled to the middle of the bed on his knees. More than once the hard ridge of his erection pressed against the material of her dress.

"I thought vampires slept in coffins." She raised her eyebrow at him as he lowered her to the soft black comforter.

"What I'm about to do to you wouldn't be comfortable in a coffin."

"Really, and what's that?"

"Lie back and find out." He reached back and unhooked one of her legs. He sat on his knees beside her and rubbed his hands up and down her dress. He stopped at her breast and squeezed.

"What happened tonight?"

"I don't know." Her eyes popped open. He was not trying to use sex to get answers. Passion slowly cooled to outrage. She knew this game. Hell, she was the queen of this game. Who the hell did he think he was fucking with?

"Let me up."

"I don't think so."

"If you don't let me up right now, I will scream until the police break your doors down." What in hell made her think she could trust him?

"What's wrong?" His voice was silky smooth. But his eyes didn't hold the same innocence. He knew why she was pissed.

"Don't give me that crap. You were about to try to make me spill my guts in exchange for sex."

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"Not entirely right."

"Oh, really? And what part did I miss?"

"We're going to have sex regardless."

"You think so?"

"I know so. I just thought I would make the questions more enjoyable. But since you want to do it the hard way." He got off the bed and looked down at her. His eyes were rimmed in red. More beast than human.

"What are you doing?" She sat up quickly, and looked around. There was nowhere to run. He'd be on her before she got off the bed.

"Don't change the subject. Why were those men after you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." She scooted back until she bumped against the headboard.

"Yes, you do. And you're going to tell me." Elias climbed onto the bed. His eyes were redder now. What would happen when they were all red?

"Look. I don't care what you are. Sex doesn't mean you get to pry into my private life." Sienna sat up on her legs. That was better. She didn't feel so open, so vulnerable.

"What does that mean?" There was only a bit of brown left.

"A minute ago, it meant we could have had a repeat of last night. Now it means I'm ready to go home." Sienna straightened her clothes and sat on the edge of the bed. Could she make it to the door before he caught her?

"I risked my life to save you. And then you refuse to tell me why?" His voice elevated to one that boomed across the room. It bounced off the walls and seemed to echo in on itself.

"Did I ask you for your help?"

"What if the situations were reversed? What if I needed your help but refused to tell you why? Would you be okay with that?"

"If I wanted to help you, then yes, it would be okay."

"So if I were in trouble, would you help me?"

Sienna stared at him. Was this another 'hypothetical' situation or did he really need her help?

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"I saved your life twice and you can't even say you would help me in the same situation?"

"You did not save my life twice. You helped me...unasked for help by the way." He didn't have to make her sound so selfish. What if he really was in trouble? "Fine. If you were in trouble, I'd help you."

"Good, because I am in trouble and you're the only one who can help me."

"What?"

"No questions. Remember?"

"You expect me to follow you blindly with no idea of what's going on?"

"That's what you want me to do."

"I have a good reason for not telling you." If he knew all the things she'd done, he wouldn't look at her the same way. At least not the way he was looking at her right now.

"Okay, so if I accept without question your situation, you'll do the same for me. No more trying to pry info from me during sex."

"Technically, that wasn't during sex. That was just a bit of foreplay."

The passion was back in his eyes. She was a fool to think he would give up that quickly, but the boundaries were set. If he overstepped them, she would do the same.

"So you call that foreplay?"

He raised his eyebrow at her. "What would you call it?"

"Being a tease." Was he going to touch her or was he waiting for her to make the first move?

"No. That's not what I call teasing." He eased one knee onto the bed and then another. He circled her on the bed. His hand shot out and grabbed her ankle. He pulled hard.

She went from a sitting position to flat on her back before she could catch herself. He pulled her leg up to his mouth and traced a line from her left ankle up her calf to her knee. The heat of his mouth left pleasurable shock waves in its wake.

He pulled up her other leg and mirrored the same kisses. She raised her hips off the mattress to give him better access. He put his hands on the

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soft skin just above her knees and traced along her thighs, only to stop at the juncture of her legs. Moisture pooled in anticipation of his fingers seeking out her sensitive core. But the fingers moved back down to her knees. She leaned up on her elbows to give him a cutting look but stopped short when his lips connected with her thigh. *Oh damn.*

He licked a light path down her thigh, only stopping to bypass her now soaked pussy. He had to smell her juices. There was no denying she was more than ready for his touch. Any touch. Hands. Lips. Cock. It didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was how open and hungry her sex was.

"Touch me," she ground out through pursed lips.

"I am touching you." He traced a backwards path down her right leg, a short hop, and back up the left.

"You know what I mean."

"No. I don't. Spell it out for me." His fingers massaged small circles in the tender flesh behind her knees.

She grabbed his hand and tried to put it onto her sex, but once he started resisting, she couldn't do anything to make him touch her.

"Tell. Me. What. You. Want." His words were spaced evenly. Each one a command. If she wanted him to touch her, she would have to tell him how to do it.

"Rub your fingers up and down my pussy." She was so hot she would ride his hard digits right into an orgasm.

He pressed three fingers against the soft skin of her opening. "Like this?"

At first, the pressure was another tick in her countdown to orgasm but when he didn't move his fingers, she started trying to grind against him. He pulled his fingers back.

"Stop playing with me."

"I'm not playing with you. This," he said smacking her mound, "is what I call teasing."

His fingers delved through her outer lips and spread them, exposing her hard nub. Using his middle finger, he flicked back and forth across the sensitive flesh.

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“This. Is. Playing. With. You.” Each word was punctuated with another jarring jerk of his finger. Heat engulfed her. Tiny beads of sweat rolled along the rim of her top lip.

“Please, Elias.” She wasn’t begging him to stop. No, she wanted more. More of his hands. More of his lips. More of him. All of him.

Elias pulled away from her. He ripped his shirt over his head and kicked off his pants. He climbed back on the bed, grabbed her legs and spread them. Evidence of her readiness coated the smooth flesh of her mound.

He reached under the cupped, rounded globes of her ass and pulled her to him. He towered over her. For a moment, he didn’t move. Didn’t speak. He just stared. Stared at her.

But just as soon as that moment came, it was gone. He molded his hands to her breasts. He moved them up and down, causing her body to shift with them. Up and down. The head of his erection pushed against the wetness of her opening. Up and down. His member poked through her outer lips. Up and down. The head pushed into the rim of her opening.

“Shit.” He reached down again and tilted her hips upward, then plunged into her. He buried his full length in one stroke. He reached back and grabbed her hands from around him. She hadn’t realized she’d latched onto the flesh of his back until that moment.

He intertwined his fingers with hers and he lifted himself up. The movement pulled his shaft out, but before she could whimper, he surged back in.

The pressure of him leaning on her arms caused her entire body to tense. The tightening of the inner muscles made every ridge, every vein of his cock feel ten times bigger. She moaned as he pulled out again.

*Damn.* She licked her lips. She was no virgin but he made her feel like one. Sex with Elias was like discovering the intimate mating between man and woman—strike that—vampire and woman for the first time.

He plunged in again, wiping all thoughts from her mind. Then, he bent down and captured one of her nipples in his mouth. Fire ignited against her skin for a second time with the first stroke of his tongue.

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“How about another bite? I promise to behave this time.” He looked up at her with those mesmerizing eyes.

Her automatic reaction was to say yes, but she clamped her mouth closed before any words could eek out. Something. Something about the last time. What was it? She’d said yes and...and...and what?

She rolled her head from side to side as if the movement would dislodge the information she was looking for. That same seductive voice, one bite, and she woke up two days later and—

Screw ‘and’. She lost two days. “I don’t think so,” she said, staring up at him. Two days. Two days. She reminded herself. His hands didn’t stop moving and he didn’t stop pumping into her. Only his eyes begged for another chance.

“I swear I won’t lose my head this time,” he growled as he lowered his head to her neck. Sharp teeth scraped along her smooth skin and fire raced along the path they carved. He moved along her jaw line. Down one side and up the other.

“Just one quick taste. Please.” The sweet purr of his voice pushed all reason straight out of her head. She turned her face and bared her neck for him.

She hadn’t said the word but her movement was more than enough agreement for him. He plunged his teeth deep into her neck. Excruciating pain exploded with the rip of her skin but was quickly overridden by the seductive pull of his mouth as he sucked her blood. Pleasure flooded her body. Every breath, every movement pushed her closer to a body engulfing orgasm. So close. So close.

“Please.” She mouthed the word but her voice was so low and soft she doubt he’d heard her.

His head snapped up. Her blood coated his lips, turning them a deep crimson. He licked the liquid away. “Delicious.” He seemed more alive, more focused, more centered on her.

“Elias.”

He dipped his head and captured her mouth. His teeth were long and sharp. She ran her tongue down one and touched the point to see if it was as sharp as it looked. Just the one tap and taste of blood exploded on

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her taste buds. His tongue snaked into her mouth and lapped at her wounded tongue.

He growled into her mouth and his control seemed to snap. She dug her fingers into his hands as he pounded into her. So fast. So frenzied. She could barely catch her breath between each of his thrusts. She went from standing on the edge of an orgasm to diving over the chasm.

Her muscles pulsed, gripped, and milked him until he growled out his satisfaction and poured into her. Stream after stream until she swore she had to be full of him. He lowered his face to hers and captured her lips in a small kiss. His teeth scraped along her bottom lip before he broke the connection. He rolled to the right side of her and pulled her to him. His warmth engulfed her. She felt warm and safe. She snuggled into him and fell asleep feeling more content than she could ever remember. And she'd known him for less than two weeks. How sad was that?

## Chapter Nine

Elias erupted from the bed. The need for blood ate at him. But the hunger for her blood was nothing compared to the hunger for Sienna herself. His arms searched the sheets before his eyes opened. But he already knew she was gone. Why did he expect anything different?

Less than ten minutes and he was at her door. He raised his hand to knock but stopped as he felt her fear on the air. Something was wrong. Very wrong. He jumped off the small porch and raced around her house. He scaled her fence in the back, scouted out the backyard, then ran back around to the front.

He knocked on the door hard enough to jar the hinges. Ten. Nine. Eight. When he got to one, he was going through the door. Seven. Six. Five. Four. The door swung in and he found himself staring down the butt of a gun.

"Sienna." Her face was a mass of bruises.

"I can't do this right now." Her words were jumbled, like she didn't want to move her mouth or couldn't move it. She swung the door closed but he stuck his foot inside and stopped it.

"Let me in."

Sienna eyed him up and down. "I'm tired, Elias."

"Then tell me what the hell is going on." He wasn't about to leave. "I'm not going away, Sienna."

She let out a deep breath and stepped away from the door. Elias stomped in. Bloody towels and ice packs littered her couch. This wasn't



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good.

"What happened?"

"The same damned thing that's been happening for weeks. Only this time I was distracted and didn't notice it until it was almost too late." She sounded resentful. As if it was somehow his fault.

"Did you call the police?" he asked, watching her lower herself slowly to the couch.

She raised her eyebrows at him as she eased her way onto the couch. Yeah, stupid question. She hadn't called the police the first, second, or third time. Why the hell would she call them tonight?

"If this keeps up, they'll end up killing you." Elias paced in front of her prone body.

"I think that's what they're hoping for."

"Don't be a smartass." He stooped down in front of her. The same body he'd caressed and held last night was a canvas of bruises. Some darker than others, but each one of them appeared painful. "I can't help you unless you tell me what is going on. Let me help you, Sienna."

She stared at the wall behind him.

"Don't tune me out, damn it. Everyone needs help sometimes." He raised his hands to her face and angled it down so that she was looking at him. "Everyone."

"Even you?"

Damn it. If he wanted to find out what was going on with her, he was going to have to tell her everything. She wouldn't want his help after that. Didn't matter, he was going to help her.

"You tell me who is after you and I'll tell you why you." He sat next to her and pulled her to his side. He would cherish this feeling of closeness. Her warmth. Her acceptance.

"Why me?" There was slight tilt in her voice.

"Why I need you." Even as he said the words, he knew he wouldn't tell her everything. No, he would tell her about the past. To include his feeling for her, whatever they were, would be too cruel. To her and to him.

"Fine," she said, harshly. Tears slipped out the corners of her eyes.

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"I used to be military. Hell, it's still a part of me. I was the first woman to do the impossible. I was a Navy Seal." Quiet mockery laced through her voice. "I was a good little soldier. I did everything I was told. I never questioned my orders. Not even when the things I did went against everything, everything in me. My unit, my team, my country came first." She sucked in a breath as the tears streamed down her face in earnest. She swallowed hard.

"But that last op. It was too much. I had to go undercover. Get close to the target. There was no other way to get what we needed."

"I don't see—"

"No, you don't see," she said, twisting away from his touch. "I wasn't some undercover maid or cook. I was his girlfriend. I had to let that bastard touch me. Kiss me. We were almost ready to strike when he wanted to take the relationship one step further. I didn't. Something in the way I fought back had to tip him off. Because he knew. Suddenly that fucker knew." She inhaled and her nostrils flared. "I got out. But by the time I reached my team, they were all dead. Every single one of them. Shot in the head, hands tied behind their backs. So much blood." She sucked in another breath and stood in front of the couch.

"It took me two months to get to a safe house. I was debriefed and assigned to a new team. We were assigned a simple op. A total newbie time waster. Nothing too hard. But Nicolaus's men found me. They killed my new team. Most of those kids were so young. So damn young."

"It's not your fault—"

"Yes, it is. If I had just slept with him, none of it would've happened. We'd have completed the op and those men would still be alive."

"You don't know that. If you had slept with him, you would not be able to live with yourself. I know you."

"You don't know me."

"Yes, I do. You would've hated yourself for letting him touch you like that. You will do a lot to help others, but you would never let someone you hated touch you like that." Elias put his hands out and grabbed her. He pulled her down on his lap and held her as tears

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streamed down her face.

"Why didn't you contact your supervisors and tell them what's going on?"

"And put more people in danger? They'd put a detail around me and more men would die. More men with families and obligations." She shook her head, refusing to go on.

"Well, I'm immortal. So you don't have to worry about anyone killing me." He hugged her tighter, knowing what was coming next.

Her tears flowed for a few more minutes before turning to quiet sniffles. She wiped her eyes on her sleeve before turning to him. "Why do you need me?"

He took in a deep breath. He couldn't hide from the truth any longer. "You know when I told you about how I was turned into a vampire? Well, that wasn't the end. About ten years after I was turned, I ran into a woman who'd refused me before." He squeezed her tighter.

"She had gotten married. But I didn't let that stop me. I pursued her. She refused me again and again. I think it angered me that, even with my new powers, I couldn't make her want me."

"What did you do?" Sienna asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

"I stalked her one night. Before she could get into her home, I grabbed her. I pulled her into a nearby alley and fed from her."

"Okay, I could have guessed that." He stared at her but didn't say anything.

"Her blood was so potent I lost my head and took too much. By the time I realized what happened, it was too late. I felt the ending of life. That small blink of extinguishment that means there is no more hope."

"You killed her?"

"No. I killed one of the babies she carried deep in her womb." Sienna stiffened in his arms. He knew this was coming. The initial shock, disgust and disappointment would soon follow. He needed to tell her everything. Everything. "I stopped, but it was too late. She must have known. Felt the life leaving somehow because she grabbed her rounded belly and starting crying. She cursed me then. Cursed me to always crave

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the blood of her line. I starve for what I took without asking. To one day be overtaken by the hunger and become the beast which had killed one of the children she carried unless blood was freely given."

Sienna didn't say anything. She wrung her hands together. He turned her head towards him. Her eyes begged him not to say the words.

"That woman was your ancestor. You are the last of your line. And my last chance at salvation."

"No." The word burst from her lips as she tore away from his grasp. "You're lying. You're lying. Tell me you're lying."

"I'm sorry."

"No," she said, stumbling around the room. "So this whole thing has been about freeing you from a curse you deserved? Something you brought on yourself?"

"No. It might have started that way but what we have, what we shared was real—"

"Stop. It all makes sense now. Why you were there that first night. Why you always seemed to be there to save me. You had to, because you needed me. You need me." She punctuated the word need like it was a curse.

"I was young and stupid. I had too much power. But I am not the same man. I—"

"How many others?"

"What?"

"How many other members of my family have you found through the years? Surely, I am not the first?" Her voice mocked him. It no longer held any semblance of warmth.

He could lie to her and say none. There was no one to contradict him. "One."

"And did you kill them?"

"Yes, but purely by accident."

"Sure. And I'm supposed to believe that?"

"It was the first moment of relief that I'd had in almost one hundred years. I lost my head and took too much blood."

"But you think you can control it with me? Look what you did the

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first time."

"But I stopped before it was too late."

"That time."

"Please, Sienna. I can control the hunger and we can beat this."

"Blood freely given," she said, thumping her index finger against her lip. "How much blood do you think it'll take, Elias? I mean that first time knocked me out for days and did it help?"

He stared at her, refusing to answer. The fact that they were having this conversation was answer enough. "I can control it."

"And what happens when you don't? I die. And frankly I don't think you're worth it." Sienna marched to the door. She grimaced with each step but determination painted her face. "Leave."

"Sienna."

"If you don't leave right now, I'm going to go to the kitchen, get a mixing spoon and plunge it where your heart should be."

As he approached her, he saw the sheen coating her eyes. Tears. If she cared enough to cry, maybe there was still a chance. Elias stepped in front of her, grabbed her quickly and held her close to him. He could feel her stiffen, but didn't release her.

"This is real, Sienna. More real than anything else in your life." He planted a quick kiss on the nape of her neck before releasing her. He strode out the door.

## Chapter Ten

How could she be so stupid? So blind? Of course, he needed her. He had no choice. Sex was just icing on the cake. It wasn't as if she put up a major fight either. No. Pain ripped through her shoulder as she slid down the door into a mass of tears.

Her chest heaved as her heart shattered. Blinding, stabbing pain erupted from the organ each time she replayed his words. She tried to suck in a breath but could only inhale short staccato breaths. It hurt too much. He'd made her feel more in their short time together than she could ever remember experiencing. But flying that high was devastating when you fell back to reality. And the reality was that she'd given him her heart and he'd just driven a stake straight through it.

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Sienna woke from a dreamless pain killer induced sleep. Her body yearned for Elias's warmth. How long would she torture herself? She walked to the phone and punched in a number she swore she would never call again.

"Donovan," a familiar voice said.

"Lieutenant Donovan, this is Sienna. I think that Diablo is in town." She knew the name Diablo would set Donovan into action. He had been the commander during the op that went wrong.

"Don't say anything else, James. I need you in for a debriefing." The

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sound of him typing away at a keyboard echoed over the phone. "I'm sending a car for you now."

"Give me a few hours. I have some things I need to take care of."

"James, this is not something that's going to wait. You need to come in now."

"This is my life, Donovan. I know what happens when I come in. I prefer not to leave people I care for worrying about me." She'd seen what happened to people who went in for a debriefing. She'd be relocated.

"A car will be at your house in two hours, James. If it takes longer than that to wrap things up, too bad. I don't want your body attached to this." Frustration and anger rang in his voice.

Sienna hung up the phone with a shaking hand. It was over now. Donovan would stop at nothing to get her into the office. Even if she broke down and went back to Elias, it wouldn't matter. Nothing mattered. Sienna grabbed her keys and rushed out the door. Two hours.

It took a fifteen-minute run and a fifteen-minute bus ride to make it to the gym. The second she walked into the door, she was hit with a real sense of loss. Her job. Her life. Everything she had been fighting for months to keep was gone. Or it would be in an hour and twenty-five minutes.

"Hey, Sienna, you don't have clients today. What's up?" Joel, the weekend receptionist, asked.

"I need you to do some rearranging in the system for me." She felt tears building, but bit down on her bottom lip to keep them at bay. "I'm going away for a while."

"Sure, Sienna." Joel sat down at the computer and pulled up her schedule. His fingers flew across the keyboard. Almost too quickly, he printed out a two-month schedule without her on it.

"Have fun, Sienna," Joel said, tilting his head up to her. "When are you leaving?"

"Today," she said, lifting her corners of her mouth in what she hoped was a convincing smile. She ran outside before the tears spilled. The cool air cleared her head. She needed to do this before Diablo stepped things up and hurt someone besides her.

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Sienna jogged the few blocks to her bank. The first thing she did when she got out of the Seals was to set up a safety net. A back door. She always hoped it would rot away in that tiny metal box. It took her twenty minutes to gather her emergency money and new identification.

By the time she put the key in the lock of her door, she had just under twenty minutes to hop in the shower and gather anything that meant something to her. She opened the door and stepped inside to a ringing phone. Let the machine get it.

“James, I’m sending a car now.”

Which probably meant he sent it ten minutes ago. *Get moving.* She pulled off her shirt as she walked up to the stairs. She was at the top floor before it registered. She whipped around to stare at her front door.

*The line didn’t snap. It didn’t snap. Oh shit.* Sienna raced to the key stand next to her door. She pulled out the drawer and reached for her secondary gun. It slid free of the secret holster easily.

She turned around and stared at the television and coffee table in her living room. Everything looked as it had when she left this morning. She searched the kitchen. The back door. The windows. Everything looked fine. No other seals were broken.

She headed upstairs. Her common sense begged her to wait for the team to show up. No. She refused to put any more innocent men in danger. Sienna grabbed the small oval mirror off the wall and used it to look into her bedroom. The room looked empty.

The bathroom and closet door were open. Her training demanded she clear this room before she checked the bathroom. Keeping out of a direct line of fire from the opening, she edged around to the closet door. Taking a deep breath, she slammed one side open.

She rounded the corner and looked down. A red number countdown stared up at her. Ten. Nine. Fuck. She would never make it downstairs and outside in time. Eight. Seven. The bathroom window was the only way out. She raced to the bathroom. Six. Five. Four. She raised the window and punched out the screen. Three. Two. She dove head first out the window. One.

The blast caught her mid-air. Glass and brick ripped flesh from her



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body as she was propelled over her fence and into the park. She was heading directly for a tree. If she hit it headfirst, she was done. She twisted sore muscles hard left. Her back slammed into the tree just as the blackness engulfed her.

## Chapter Eleven

Elias woke with a start. It was early. Hours early. Too early. The sun was still high. Something was wrong with Sienna. He didn't question how he knew it. But he knew she was dying.

One of the most important rules of being a vampire was to be very careful in direct sunlight. He preferred to stay out of it altogether. But if he didn't go out, he would lose her. Elias ransacked his clothes. A black hooded shirt, black jeans, black socks, black shoes. Please don't let him be too late.

He stepped up from the sub-basement. The test. He walked over to the nearest window and stretched his hand out to the sunlight. The sun felt warm. He expected that warmth to turn into a blinding fire but it didn't. His skin tightened. Little pricks poked his skin from the inside out. Painful, but not a burning hand of fire. Good enough.

He snapped the hood over his head and raced out the door. He kept his hands in the pouch in the front of the sweatshirt as he ran. His eyes burned with the sunlight. He needed a pair of shades. No time. He bent his head down to block the direct sunlight.

As he closed in on Sienna's street, he could hear sirens. A lot of sirens. He never should've left last night. He could've slept on the couch. He rounded her corner and saw ten police cars and two fire trucks. Where Sienna's two-story house had been, there was only a bit of the bottom floor left.

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No. Please, no. It took a few mind-bending moments for him to realize she was still alive. He could smell her on the wind. He licked his lips and tasted her blood floating on the air coming from the park. He ran to the entrance and followed her scent to a small hidden drop off near her back fence.

He could hear her now. The uneven breathing. The almost soundless moans. Elias jumped off the path and raced through the brush of the small drop off. Her skin was like a white mark on a canvas of green.

Before he put his hands on her, he knew time was running out. There was no way he would be able to get her to a hospital in time.

"Elias?" Sienna's eyes opened, then fluttered closed.

"I'm here," he whispered as he dropped down to ground beside her. "Come on, baby. We need to get you out of here." As he said the words, he lifted a hand to stroke her cheek. His fingers hovered right above her discolored skin; if he touched her he would cause more pain than comfort.

"Freely given," she whispered, without opening her eyes. "My blood freely given."

Even as she said the words, his mind balked. She was saving him. Releasing him from the curse. Even dying, she was putting another's needs above her own. Too bad he wasn't ready to give her up.

"No, Sienna."

She closed her eyes. "Free. Freely..."

"Did you hear me, Sienna?" he said, lifting her head into his lap. "I refuse your gift. I won't let you die to save me."

"Die anyway." She coughed several times, expelling more of her precious blood into the air.

Time was running out. "I can save you, Sienna. I can make you like me. I swear I will spend every waking moment trying to find out who did this. I want to spend a lifetime—" He choked as his chest burned. Blood roared in his ears and tears filled his eyes. "Several lifetimes with you. And when you're ready to end it, I will be there with you then, too. Please let me save you."

Sienna didn't say anything. He would have assumed she was dead

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if he couldn't hear that erratic beat of her heart. A tear dropped down from his eyes to her cheek.

"Please, Sienna," he said, hugging her to him. "Please."

She didn't say anything but moved her head to the side, exposing the pulsing vein of her neck. Elias didn't let relief flood him. They were cutting it close. Maybe too close. He bent down and quickly bit into the soft skin of her neck. Blood rushed in. Powerful, intoxicating. But he was too intent on saving her life to let those feelings distract him. As soon as he felt strong enough, he healed her wounds and lifted his left wrist to his mouth.

He bit into his own flesh, making sure to hit a major artery. He quickly pressed it to her colorless lips. He pumped his hand into a tight fist several times to make the blood fill her slightly open mouth.

"Drink. You have to drink," he pleaded with her.

Her mouth didn't move. She either didn't hear him or she was unconscious. He kept his wrist pressed against her mouth as he used his other hand to caress her neck. She coughed into the liquid several times but he just moved with her body. She would take it down. Elias had no clue how long he kept at it. He only stopped when he felt weakness creeping in on him.

He still needed to find them a safe haven from the daylight. Elias set her down gently and stood. This spot provided a measure of protection from human eyes, but it wouldn't help hide them from the sunlight. There was nowhere close to hide and he was too weak to search for a place. Only one thing to do.

Elias bent down to the ground and started digging at the dirt with his hands. He pulled off his sweatshirt and split the fabric along one seam. He piled the dirt and leaves high on the shirt. The hole was a good three feet deep before he sensed her end was coming. Please let there have been enough time for his blood to complete the conversion.

He crawled out of the hole and staggered to her. His knees threatened to buckle under her weight as he picked her up and shuffled the short distance to drop her into the opening. He jumped in after her. He straightened her body out as she took her last staggering breath. He

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prayed they would both wake the next night as he pulled the fabric with a hard tug. Dirt and leaves rained down, burying them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sienna woke with a sense of panic. Something was pressing down on her. She could barely move. She wiggled her fingers and bucked under the weight. The pressure shifted and moved until finally her head was free. She fought her way into a sitting position.

She looked up and blinked. It was dark. Too dark to be seeing this well. She snapped her neck from side to side, the cracking sound echoed in the silence. She was in a pit. What the hell?

She looked down again at the dirt that was slowly rolling into the hole she'd just vacated. A grave. She'd been buried alive. It took only a few seconds for the past morning to come back to her. The explosion. Elias. The curse. She'd been so delirious who knows what she'd said to him.

She'd told him to break the curse. He refused. Amazing how clear things become when you are staring death in the face. Elias was a good man. He deserved a second chance. Everyone did.

Arms snaked over her shoulder. Sienna grabbed the arm just below the elbow, twisted and pushed down, driving him down into the dirt covering her lap.

"I give. I give. Uncle." Mocking laughter floated up to her.

"Damn it, Elias. I told you to break the curse." She let go of his arm and scooted away from him.

"I wasn't ready to let you go. Curse or no curse. Besides it's gone," he said, turning to her.

"It's gone?" She snapped her fingers. "Poof. Just like that?"

"Yeah. I woke and waited for the pressure and pain of needing but it wasn't there. Don't get me wrong, I'm still hungry. I feel the need to feed. But it seems a mild annoyance compared to what I have endured for centuries."

"How is that possible? I know you didn't take any more blood than

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you did that first time. I doubt I had it to give." She looked over to a tree trunk still stained with her blood.

"I don't think it was your blood that needed to be freely given."

It took a second for her to grasp his meaning. "Turning me freed you?"

"I'm not free." He laid over her, trapping her with his body. "I just traded one obsession for another. I don't just want your blood, Sienna. I want all of you. Forever." He leaned down until his mouth hovered directly above hers. His eyes burned a bright red.

"Forever is a long time. I don't know if you can handle me." She strained up to meet his lips, but he moved back.

"We're immortal. We have plenty of time to test it." He dipped down and captured her lips in an all-consuming kiss.

Her body called for blood but there were more important urges that needed to be satisfied first.

### **Author Bio**

Leila has been an avid reader since the fifth grade. As she got older she read everything she could get her hands on from horror, to mystery and finally stopping in romance.

While in college studying computer programming and electrical engineering, she realized what she wanted to do when she grew up. She wanted to write those stories that entertained her through more nights than she could remember. Of course her first attempts were less than remarkable and have been destroyed to protect the innocent. :)

Currently, she works a normal 9 to 5 in the IT world. She writes during her lunch hour and at home after 9 p.m. when everyone in her house is asleep.

Is it easy?...Yes and No. Coming up with the stories is easy. Getting the words out of her head and onto paper is HARD! But she couldn't live without it!