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Moira Reid

THE VAMPIRE ORACLE



Sunlight

In The Cards

The Vampire Oracle: Sunlight
by Moira Reid

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Sunlight

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The Vampire Oracle: Sunlight
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Dedication

To the man who said, "In this vulnerable state, you're even more sexy."

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Chapter One

"Because you're beautiful," Johnathan said as he handed the mail to Lenora. Once again, he'd timed his evening run to coincide with her nightly trip to the mailbox.

"Thank you." She blushed as she took the stack and ran her hands over her hips. She'd just got home from work and hadn't changed clothes yet. The short, black skirt and white, silky blouse covered too much of her body to suit him. Johnathan suppressed the desire to follow her hands with his own. He could plant thoughts in her mind right now and lead her to his bed, but he wanted her to come with him fully aware of her own desires and his ability to fulfill them.

She stared down at the stack of envelopes and began flipping through them. "You are an irrepressible flirt, you know that? I'm old enough to be your mother. You shouldn't flirt with your mother."

He could smell the moisture between her legs, sensed her increased heartbeat as he imagined the taste of her on his tongue. Her body wanted his, no matter how much her voice protested. And she was wrong about his age, although he couldn't tell her that without disclosing the truth about himself. He could not have her forever, for she was human, but he selfishly imagined loving her for one night.

"I don't think of you as my mother, Lenora; I promise you that."

She glanced up from the stack of letters, and he took a long, slow look up and down her sleek, athletic frame.

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Lenora pointed an accusing finger at him. "One of these days you're going to say something like that to the wrong woman, and she's going to take you seriously."

"I know the woman." He took a strand of her hair and wrapped it around his finger. Her perfumed scent mingled with her aroused essence, and the urge to take her into his arms and carry them both to his king-sized bed pulsed through him. "You just name the day."

"Johnathan," she whispered, glancing around them. He released her hair, letting the silky strand slip through his fingers. She forced a laugh and once again studiously examined her mail. "Stop teasing an old lady. Find yourself a young woman your own age."

"Age has nothing to do with it. One of these days you're going to take me seriously. I'm looking forward to it."

"What is this?" she asked, ignoring his comment. She handed the remaining mail back to him and stared at a long, white envelope. "No return address. The postmark says El Dorado Springs, Colorado."

Johnathan sucked in a sharp breath as something like a knife stabbed him in the chest. *Oh, criminy*. Now what? He couldn't keep this woman's attention for two minutes before she attempted to change the subject. Even "to occupant" mail held her attention longer than he did.

She ripped the envelope open. "What in the world?" She squinted at the card and held it farther away from her face. "I can't read the writing—it's too small. Would you read it for me?"

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Johnathan stepped away from her extended hand, ignoring the mail and shaking his head. "Looks like junk to me; I'm trying to quit."

How many more nights was he going to come here, waiting for her to take him seriously? It was time to get off his ass. He'd had his own reasons for avoiding contact with women until now, but Lenora was the finest woman he'd ever seen before or after his transformation. This was the woman he wanted, dammit. And if he hadn't been changed at 23, it wouldn't have been a problem.

She held the card out in front of her again. "Something ... sunlight? *This is a time of ruin of the old life.* What is this?"

Johnathan glanced at the card. It looked like one of the vampire tarot cards. "Probably one of those crazy religious groups looking for donations. You know, Lenora, I'd just eighty-six the thing."

She'd read it slowly aloud, making out the small print without her reading glasses. His own eyesight had improved about ten times over after the transformation. He could read the small print from here, not that he cared to. He had other things on his mind.

"*All that was known is now lost,*" she continued. "*Painful Memories and the future must collide to find resolution.*"

She looked up, her eyebrows drawn together. "Take a look at this thing. There's a hologram image on the backside."

"No thanks," he said, waving his hand in front of her. "'Sunlight, a time of ruin?' Yeah, that's information you needed, right?"

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She tucked the card back into the envelope and took the rest of her mail.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I'll stick it on my refrigerator."

This was the moment; it happened every night the same way. He could sense the desire racing through her body as she glanced around them—four times by his count—checking to see if any of the neighbors were watching them. Then she would make some excuse to get away from him, and he'd have the remainder of the night to figure out what he could have said that would have made the difference between her leaving alone and him leaving with her.

Time to go for broke. Johnathan took another step toward her. "Why don't I come over for a while? There's a good movie on tonight. We could microwave some popcorn and watch it."

"Johnathan," she said, taking a step back. "Hang out with your friends. Meet girls your age, honey. You don't want to sit at home on a Friday night with the old neighbor lady." She turned on her heel and dashed back to her house before he could reply. Opening the door, she went inside without a backward glance.

"You're so wrong, Lenora," he said, turning toward his house. "That's exactly what I intend to do."

Lenora closed the front door and leaned against it, taking a deep breath and closing her eyes. Oh, God. He was too gorgeous. And a flirt to boot. What she wouldn't give to throw caution to the wind, rip off his clothes and suck his cock until she worked that wicked sexy grin off his face.

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She blew out the breath in a huff, kicked off her shoes and walked to the kitchen. Tossing the mail onto the counter, she opened her refrigerator, removed a Diet Coke, popped the top and took a long swallow. The cold, acidic burn down her throat brought her back to earth.

Johnathan was twenty years younger than she. *Twenty years!* It was ridiculous for him to flirt with her, and even more ridiculous to let herself get excited by it. So she told herself every day as she met him at the mailbox and looked at his luscious, perfect form of male humanity. Why hadn't she ever seen a man that looked that good when she could have done something about it?

Instead, she'd married an idiot who'd flattered her, and then almost as quickly divorced him. She'd lived alone ever since. Men, basically, were idiots, and she didn't need another one in her life.

And yet the vision of Johnathan came to her mind again. Well, imagining him was different. Imagining him naked, kissing her, licking her throat, nibbling her flesh. For some wild reason, she wanted to flash back to her youth and give him the biggest hickey in the world on that perfect, corded neck.

The blond hair, those sparkling green eyes, the long, lean physique. Oh, his body was the stuff of fantasy, and he lived right next door. One of these days, she was either going to have to move or give into her own lust. "Which will end with me moving anyway," she said aloud and laughed.

Lenora pulled the panty hose off and tossed them into the trashcan. She never liked to wear a pair more than once

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anyway, and those had been the most uncomfortable she'd ever worn. *Control-top, my ass.* Her little poochy belly could not be controlled; no matter how many sit-ups she did, no matter how many hours on the treadmill—she and her belly were not friends, even though they seemed destined to live together forever.

She pulled the blouse over her head as she moved to her bedroom and tossed it on the hope chest. Unzipping the skirt and sliding it down over her hips, she turned toward the full-length mirror and caught a glimpse of herself.

She turned away just as quickly. No point in going there. She was as fit as she could be, and whatever she looked like was what she looked like. No point in getting upset over drooping boobs and sagging backsides. Nothing was where it had been twenty years ago, and it would never be there again.

She thought once more of Johnathan's long, lusty appraisal and let herself imagine that he'd really been leering at her figure. The thought was heady and exciting, but she could only kid herself for so long before reality crashed down. He was a child, and she was an old woman. Although she'd never had children, she'd pointed out plenty of times that she could have been his mother.

This was for her own protection, she knew, and as chicken shit as it was, if she let herself enjoy the teasing for even a moment in front of him, she was quite sure he would stop. It was the chase and teasing that he loved. She feared the truth and thus avoided it; if he thought for even a moment that she

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would relish touching his naked body, the compliments, the visits to her mailbox, the leering, would stop.

She allowed herself this one guilty pleasure.

The knock on the door startled her from her reverie. She grabbed her robe from the hanger on the back of the door and pulled it on as she walked back into the living room.

"Who is it?" she shouted as she approached the door.

"Orville Redenbacher."

Strangely, Johnathan's voice sounded as if it were not on the other side of the door at all but coming from right beside her. She opened the door a crack and peered into the darkening evening.

"Johnathan. What in the world are you up to?"

His eyebrows rose as he twisted his head to look around the door. "Undressed already? Then my timing is excellent. I came to watch the movie with you."

Lenora grabbed both sides of the robe and clutched them closer together as she slid farther out of his sight. "I told you to call some friends, fella. Leave an old woman alone."

His face darkened, and his eyes flashed. "Lenora, open the door."

Lenora had never seen this look on his gorgeous face before. "I don't think so, honey. What's gotten into you today?"

He pushed the door open, stepped inside, tossed the bag of microwave popcorn on the floor and took her in his arms. His movement was so quick she gasped. He stared down at her, his eyes searching hers. "Enough of this, Lenora. You want me. Say it."

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Lenora couldn't believe what was happening. The door stood wide open, and she hoped like hell there was no one passing by right now to see her standing in her robe, her body pulled hard against the length of his. As if he'd read her mind, he kicked the door shut without taking his eyes off her.

"Say it, Lenora. Say my name. Tell me you want me inside you."

"Johnathan," she managed to squeak out. "*We cannot do this.*"

"Oh, we can," he said. "And we will. But not until you tell me. Say it."

Oh, God, say it! Say it, let him rip the robe off, strip off the panties and bra and take you right against the fucking door!

"Johnathan, please." She forced her body's betraying desires out of her mind. "This is not a good idea."

Johnathan's gaze burned into hers, and she felt herself relaxing against his hard thighs and chest. The top of her robe had opened and cool air touched the tops of her breasts as fire burned between her legs. He held her against him, so high off the floor that she stood on her tiptoes, his mouth a breath away from her own. He seemed to be supporting all her weight as her toes barely skimmed the floor. The sensation that she was so light in his arms did nothing to dissuade her mounting desire.

"I know what I want." His voice was a whisper of seduction, his fingertips caressing her back through the fabric of her robe. "I don't know how much clearer I can make it. I've been patient, Lenora. You know I have, but I'm not going

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to be anymore. Tell me you want me. I know you do, but I have to hear the words."

He slid one of his hands across her body until the hot flesh of his palm rested on her neck. His gaze slid to her throat, and he pressed her jaw until her head tilted to the side. He clenched his teeth together, and his jaw tightened. His voice lost the commanding sound, reverting to his usual sweetness. "You are so lovely. Let me have you, Lenora. Just for tonight, if that's all you'll give me. Please say yes."

Before she could listen to all the reasons her logical, reasonable and adult mind would come up with, she opened her mouth. "Yes," she whispered. The word spilled forth like so much rushing water. She wanted to say it; wanted him more than anything, and her logical mind could go to hell.

His mouth captured hers, and his grip tightened on the back of her neck as he pressed her lips firmly to his. His hand slid down to her ass, clutching her against him. The stiffness of his erection pushed against her belly for only a moment before he swept her up into his arms.

She felt their movement through the house, his strong arms easily carrying her against his firm chest. His kiss deepened, his tongue searching the inside of her mouth, joining with hers in a serpentine movement that sent her senses swimming. She took his face in her hands and rubbed her fingertips along his neck, her thumbs across his cheekbones. All logic and reasonable denial fled her mind as the firm lines of his face softened under her caress.

When he lowered her to the bed, she was startled at how quickly they'd gotten here, not even recalling their

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movements up the staircase. If everything they were about to do went that fast, she would not have nearly enough memories of this moment when he was gone from her life.

And he would most certainly be gone; he was either drunk or on drugs to want to have sex with her, she knew, but she couldn't make herself care. She glanced down at his hands as they lowered the robe from her shoulders, pushing the fabric down her arms. Thank God the lights were out. The realization that he would be touching her forty-three year old body suddenly sent a chill of fear and mortification through her.

He pulled the fabric of her bra down under her breasts until the entire bra supported both of them. Kneeling in front of her, he took a nipple into his mouth, licked and suckled it, pressing it against the roof of his mouth with his tongue, sending wild strokes of fire through her limbs.

She breathed quickly; realizing this wonderful maneuvering of her bra held both of her breasts up. Perhaps he wouldn't learn that they were not the perky flesh of a twenty-something, but were in fact the gravity-worn breasts of an old woman. She could almost forget for a moment that she was too old for him, too world-worn to be in the arms of this young man. For another moment, her exotic fantasy of his body alongside hers could continue.

"Lenora." He sat up and took both of her breasts in his hands, pinching the nipples between his fingers as he looked into her eyes. "Undress me."

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Her hands rose of their own volition to the buttons of his shirt as she at first slowly, then more rapidly, began to undo the clasps, exposing his hard, muscle-rippled flesh.

When she reached the last three buttons, she found them already undone. That was strange, but the vision of his chest stopped the train of her thoughts. She pushed the shirt off over his shoulders, her gaze following her hands over his shoulder blades and down his arms.

He took her hands in his and placed them on his pants' button. With one quick flick, the button came undone, and the zipper seemed to move down without her help. He stood and let the pants fall to the floor, then stripped off his briefs.

His erection was the most beautiful thing she'd seen in years, and she leaned forward, let her mouth drop open, and closed her lips around it.

His sigh sent a warmth through her, like sunlight into shadow. She brought both of her hands to his balls, caressing them as she licked and sucked the long, thick length of his cock.

When his hands rested on her shoulders, then slid down her back, she moved even closer to him, trying to take all of him into her mouth, feeling the head of his cock at the back of her throat. When the bra's hook unfastened, though, she jerked back.

"Johnathan." She clasped both of her hands across her chest to cover her breasts. "Wait."

He blinked and knelt down on the floor beside the bed. "Wait? What's wrong?"

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She shook her head and rose from the bed. "I can't do this. I'm sorry."

Johnathan was up and in front of her in the blink of an eye. He pulled her into his arms and pressed her against him. "What are you talking about? What did I do?"

How did he move so quickly? Tears burned at the backs of her eyes. What a fool she was. "I'm sorry, Johnathan. I shouldn't have done this. I can't believe I did. Please, can we just stop?"

He did not release her, his strong arms holding her in place. Suddenly, the lights came on in the room, and she gasped.

"No, we *cannot* just stop," Johnathan said, his eyes kind. "I want to know why. I deserve a reason, Lenora. You said you wanted me; what did I do to change that?"

"What's going on with the lights?" she asked, looking into his fully-lit face.

"Answer the question, Lenora," he said, ignoring hers.

"I'm too old for you," she cried, the tears spilling from her eyes. "This is too embarrassing! You are beautiful, and I'm ... well ... I'm..."

She couldn't look at him anymore. She closed her eyes and willed all of this to have never happened. "Please leave," she said, choking on the words. "Oh, please leave."

But when she opened them, nothing had changed. She was still a forty-three year old woman in the arms of a twenty-three year old god. The mortification spread through her entire body as the desire to simply disappear flashed over her.

"I'm still here. And I'm not leaving." He smiled, his eyes twinkling.

She blinked and tears ran down her cheeks as she stared at him.

"I came here to make love to you." He rubbed his thumb over one of the tears, then brought it to his mouth. "I came here to taste you. I wasn't planning to taste your tears, but that's a start."

She shook her head. "What?"

"I've tasted your mouth, which is even sweeter than I imagined. Your breasts are soft and quite luscious. Your tears are salty. I'd like to continue from there." He loosened his grip and placed his other hand on her face, thumbing away the other tear and brushing it across her lips. "See? It's good."

She knew her eyes were wide open; her mouth might even be open for all she knew as the shock of his sweet, lusty gaze moved through her.

"Johnathan, I am..."

"Yeah, I know." He shook his head and smiled. "You're too old, blah blah blah. Whatever, Lenora. *I want you*. Do you hear me? Not some twenty year old—*you*. I want to hear *you* scream my name and *only my name* when you come. I want to taste every inch of your body with my tongue, nibble your flesh like a starving man finding food. If you're too old for that, I'll eat my hat."

And to prove it, he lowered her to the bed, dropped down to his knees, spread her legs and put his mouth on her pussy.

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She screamed his name, among other things, as the wave of shock and sweet agony smacked her headlong into ecstasy. He lapped at her like a starving animal, his hands tight on her thighs. She fell back slowly onto the mattress as if he'd lowered her. Closing her eyes and swimming in the hot bliss of his tongue, his lips, the heat of his breath, she wondered vaguely how he'd managed that when he was down on the floor.

No longer any particular age, she let herself become Lenora, object of his desire as she wrapped her legs around his back and pulled him even tighter against her flesh. The moan in his throat sent another shock of lightning pleasure as a thundering orgasm rocked through her.

She opened her eyes as he kissed the insides of her thighs, then rose from the floor. He climbed onto the bed slowly, holding his body just above hers.

The waves of pleasure began to subside, and she forced her mind to function again. She blinked to clear her thoughts.

"Shouldn't we use something?"

"Uh." He stared into her eyes for a long moment.

He didn't need a condom.

The thought passed into her mind from nowhere, and she tried to stop and examine its verisimilitude, but could not. *Of course, he didn't need a condom.*

"You're so beautiful," he said, lowering his lips to her neck. His hot mouth moved over her skin as he traced soft kisses along the base of her throat.

She spread her legs further, and as he nestled between her thighs, she lifted her hips toward him. The tip of his cock

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touched her slick opening, and the ache inside her began to build again. The orgasm he'd given her with his mouth was not nearly enough, she realized. She wanted him deep inside her body.

"That's right," he whispered into her ear. "That's where I'm going."

His thrust was smooth and sure as he shoved his pelvis into hers, filling the tight walls of her pussy so completely with his cock he pressed her back into the mattress. He remained still for a long moment, and she opened her eyes to see him staring at her.

"Wow."

"No kidding," she whispered.

He slowly began to move his cock in and out, his eyes focused on her face. The bare nakedness of his gaze tore away her ability to hide inside herself. She wanted to close her eyes, imagine once more that she was twenty-three, firm and beautiful. And yet, she'd never felt as beautiful as she did now, watching the muscles in his arms rippling as he held himself above her, the muscles in his stomach flexing against her belly with each downward plunge into her body.

Never in her life had she had an orgasm with a man on top of her. The luxury of simply watching his body brought her pleasure, and she forced herself to ignore the selfish desire to come again with him inside her. His hypnotic gaze took her to a place of power and pure sex appeal. She didn't care if she ever had another orgasm as long as she could stare into those eyes.

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"Perhaps we need an adjustment," he said. He pulled her toward him and spread his legs, sitting upright on the bed. He lifted her body easily over his and lowered her slowly onto his erection. Resting her thighs on his and facing him she watched as he moved his cock inside her from his sitting position. The upward thrust and warm length of him stroked her clit hard.

She sucked in a sharp breath as the heat began to build at an alarming rate.

"That's what we need, isn't it?" he asked. "I can see you better this way."

She felt her face flush with embarrassment but was so close to the edge she could do nothing but close her eyes and let her head fall backward as she lifted her hips to receive the firm thrust of his cock even deeper inside her.

"Johnathan," he said with another hard thrust. "Say it, Lenora."

The waves of pleasure rushed over her and around her and the world turned dark around the edges with the pleasure. She didn't say his name. She screamed it as the shuddering orgasm overtook her. The last thing she heard before everything turned black was his voice, low and seductive.

"Twenty year olds, my ass."

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Chapter Two

Johnathan held her naked, supine body in his arms and let his gaze and his hands move over her beautiful curves. Who in the hell had put the idea in her head that she was old? Her body was not that of a twenty year old; that much was true. This body was softer, less angled and uncomfortable, more curvaceous, welcoming, accepting, and lovely.

Her face, now in repose, touched something deep inside him; he'd only seen her like this when she wasn't aware of his presence. She'd never looked this happy or beautiful in all the nights he'd snuck into her bedroom to watch her sleep. Tonight, she was sated on his body, on him. She'd shouted his name. The sound of it had taken him viscerally as he came inside her.

He felt a little guilty for putting the thought into her head about the condom. He hadn't needed one, and he didn't have one. Vampires couldn't procreate, nor carry human diseases, but it was too much to explain to her in that moment. The last thing he'd wanted was to give her yet another reason to change her mind about making love with him. She had enough terrible reasons all on her own. No, he'd had to plant the thought in her mind so she could look like this right now.

Most every day, he hated what he'd become—a blood-sucking, murdering, out-of-the-light, living-in-the-dark, thing-of-nightmares vampire. He'd tried to deny it for months after his transformation, had wanted to die after he'd fed for the first time on a human being. He'd later discovered that a

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silver bullet through the heart would finish him—if he could convince someone else to do it. So not only had he lived a life of shame, it was cowardice too.

Now, being a vampire and living forever once again began to take on a positive perspective. Having Lenora gave him a reason to go on, and that meant really having her. Not wishing for her or waiting for her. Having her as his. That tarot card had been the slap in the face he needed. Whatever had brought that message in that moment, he was thankful for it because it had finally gotten him off his ass. His self-imposed seclusion—as his brother had told him plenty of times—was stupid. And yet, he'd never found a reason to venture out for any other reason than to fulfill his mission—until Lenora.

Bro, you're not the kind of guy who should be alone. You're a vampire, and you're killing drug dealers. I can respect that. But you gotta find you somebody, man. Killing assholes ain't a life ... fun, but no way to live.

Man, had Dillon sent the card to her? It made so much sense. He'd told Dillon to shut the hell up that night, tossing off his words like a bad jacket. He'd been younger, a wild fool who'd chosen the life of a vampire without thinking, without considering the implications. And afterward, in his misery, he'd ignored his own brother's suggestion for how to build a life for himself.

But tonight, wisdom had finally visited him, most likely at the hands of Dillon. Up until now, his only solace was the knowledge that he helped rid the streets of the vermin who

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sold death to children and brought a nightly smile to the beautiful woman next door.

Now, all that had changed. Dillon was right; he needed someone. He needed her.

He hated to leave her lying here when everything inside him begged to wake her and have her again. He'd been kidding himself if he thought making love to her once would be enough. That moment, when she'd shouted his name, had been just the beginning. They were joined now, part of each other. The next step would be to tell her who he was.

He kissed her forehead, climbed off the bed and pulled on his clothes, all the while watching the slow rise and fall of her bare breasts as she slept, a soft smile on her lips. He touched her forehead. *I have to leave you for a little while, but I will be back. If you awaken, you will know that I loved every moment I held you.*

Johnathan smiled down at her again, then left the room. He pulled his cell phone from his pocket and flipped it open as he quietly left Lenora's house.

"Dillon, it's me."

"Hey, bro. What's shaking?"

"Can you meet me in ten?"

"What's wrong? Where are you?" His brother's voice, usually so full of carefully controlled rage, spilled over with concern.

"I'm outside my neighbor's front door." Johnathan glanced up and down the dark street. None of the occupants in this middle-class neighborhood would venture out this time of night; well, none of them except him.

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"I'll meet you at the Giant Eagles grocery store parking lot on Apperson and Jones. What's this about, J?"

"I'm going to need a little help tonight," Johnathan said. "And I want to talk to you about something. Hell, I'll tell you when I see you."

"Hurry your ass up, then."

Johnathan closed his phone and shoved it back into his pocket, then jogged to his front door. Grabbing his jacket and keys, he walked into the garage.

Just over ten minutes later, he pulled into Giant Eagles' parking lot. Driving around toward a row of shadowy trees, he headed straight toward the back of the parking lot. A six-foot mountain of a man wearing black leather stood camouflaged against a black Porsche Boxster S.

Johnathan climbed out of his silver Honda Accord and shut the door behind him. "When are you going to stop looking like a thug?"

Dillon pushed himself off the car and walked toward Johnathan. "The same day you stop looking like such a pansy."

Dillon's slow smile mirrored his own. Johnathan grabbed his big brother in a crushing bear hug. "Good to see you, man."

"What the hell is going on?" Dillon did not release his vice-like hold.

"Lenora got the card."

Dillon released his hold and took a step backward. "What?"

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"Yeah, she got it." Johnathan's blood pounded at his temples. "I can't believe you remembered me talking about Lenora."

Dillon scoffed. "Uh, *yeah*. What other woman have you ever talked about? I'm not as smart as you, but I ain't that fucking stupid. What card?"

Johnathan couldn't contain his happiness. "The Sunlight card, moron."

Dillon shook his head. "Your girl got a tarot card? Sunlight, huh? Yeah, I can see it. Somebody's telling you to 'get out of the house and get laid, you fucker'."

Johnathan punched his brother in the shoulder then clenched his fist. The pain racing up his arm reminded him of the misguided punch he'd delivered to a brick wall outside the Pittsburg library a week ago. "Asshole."

"Lover Boy." Dillon tousled his hair, and Johnathan shoved off his brother's hand.

"I sure as hell hope you didn't drag me all the way down here to talk about your love life."

Johnathan shook his head. "Not entirely, no. I need your help tonight. I found out where another of Ramos' pushers is selling. He's the target tonight."

Dillon shook his head. "Since when did you need help bringing down one of those guys on your own?"

"I don't think he's going to be on his own," Johnathan said. "Been watching him for a couple of nights, and the guy is never alone. Got two or three big monkeys with him all the time. They are carrying some heavy firepower, and I can't afford to have to explain a bunch of bullet holes to Lenora."

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"What kind of firepower?" Dillon fished a key out of his pocket and walked around to his trunk.

"Automatic weapons. Two have AK-47's; one other is carrying something I don't even recognize. Looked like a friggin' Howitzer."

Dillon laughed as he opened the trunk. "It wasn't a Howitzer. Did it look like one of these?"

The shiny black and silver steel glimmered in the moonlight filtering through the blowing trees. Johnathan's eyes flicked over each of a dozen weapons. "None of these, no. Bigger. Uglier."

"Weapons aren't ugly, J." Dillon pulled one of the AK-47's out of the trunk and closed it, still chuckling. "The Avtomat Kalashnikova 1947 should do it. I'll take out the Howitzer guy first, then cover you on the others. Any chance they've got silver?"

Johnathan shook his head. "They aren't hunting vampires. They're just street scum selling drugs."

"We'll take my car. Lock that piece of shit Honda, and get into a real vehicle."

Johnathan pressed the button on his key fob, climbed into the passenger seat and closed the door. "East End, Highland Park."

* * * *

Lenora awakened and opened her eyes. Moonlight streamed through the open curtains. She glanced at the clock beside her bed then turned over.

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Johnathan had gone. An instant fear and loathing was replaced by the calm reassurance of his words. *I will be back—know that I loved every moment I held you.*

The time in his arms, his kisses, his lovemaking, she could remember everything in perfect detail. But when had he said that to her?

She rolled over onto her side and stared at the moon. Shadows from the trees outside played dark games against the windowpanes as dappled light moved along the bedspread. The sun would be up soon.

"You're awake."

Lenora turned over quickly and sat up in bed. Johnathan stood naked at the foot of the bed, placed his knee on it, then climbed slowly up the length of the mattress toward her.

"You scared me!"

He pulled her into his arms, and she settled against his lean frame then pulled the sheet over her breasts.

Johnathan pushed the sheet back down to her waist and drew circles around her nipple with his fingertips. "So lovely." He lowered his head to her nipple and nipped it between his teeth.

Lenora groaned with the exquisite ripples of pleasure his mouth brought. "I woke up and you were gone. I hope the bathroom wasn't a mess."

"No. No mess," he mumbled against her flesh. Lifting himself, he swung a leg over her hips and rested the length of his perfect body over hers. Pressing her hair back from her face, he smiled down at her.

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"What is that?" She touched the corner of his mouth. "It looks like blood."

He touched his tongue to his lip. "Oh, I must have bit my lip." He stared into her eyes, and a wave of calm washed over her. He was so beautiful, and here she was beneath him. Could anything else be so perfect?

"Do you have to work today?"

She smiled. "Yeah, I do."

"You look a little feverish to me." Johnathan ran his finger over her throat and down to her nipple. He pinched it hard between his fingers. Lenora arched her back against the pressure of his hand in response. "Maybe you should take a sick day."

"As good as that sounds, I can't." She pressed her lips to his then trailed two more kisses along his cheek. "I have to get up and get ready for work."

She pushed against his chest, and while he could have easily halted her movement, he let his body fall onto the mattress beside her then grabbed her hand.

"Lenora, you know this was not a one-night thing, don't you? I'm going to be here again tonight, and then tomorrow night, and the next night."

Lenora smiled and shook her head. She couldn't let herself think about that possibility. He would wake up from whatever high he was on soon enough and realize she was a 43-year old woman and not a suitable partner for a kid barely out of high school. "Let's just take this one day at a time. No pressure. No promises. Okay?"

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The words stuck in her throat, but she forced herself to smile sweetly to disguise the coming agony. Reality was a cruel warden, and the prison of the truth volunteered no safe escape.

The strangest sensation came over her as she moved from the bed, grabbed her robe from the floor and wrapped it around herself. She turned back to look at him. He'd already risen from the bed and pulled his pants over his hips. The pants were filthy.

"What in the world happened to your clothes?"

He ignored her question. His clenched jaw and the quick, jerky movements of his hands as he zipped his fly surprised her. Had she hurt his feelings?

Don't be ridiculous, Lenora.

"I've got to get home." Johnathan glanced out the bedroom window, then back to her. His eyes blazed. "But I'll be at the mailbox at six."

He grabbed his shirt and jacket and headed toward the front door.

"Johnathan, wait!"

He turned around instantly, his eyes expectant. "Yes?"

"Please, I'm sorry." She felt her face grow hot. "Would you mind going out the back door?"

His eyes turned to green burning coals. "Sure, Lenora." He slung the clothes under his arm and strode to the back door. He opened it, then turned back to face her. "But I'm not going to remain your dirty little secret. Tonight we're going out, and I don't give a shit if that scares the hell out of you or not."

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She stared at his beautiful, retreating back, guilt raining over her in the early morning dawn. As he turned the corner of the backyard toward the gate, something else caught her eye. A small, round hole in the corner of his back pocket revealed a flash of bare skin beneath.

* * * *

It would scare the hell out of her once she knew the truth. One, he wasn't twenty-three years old; he was 107. Two, while she'd slept he'd killed three well-armed pushers and sustained a gunshot wound to the ass. And three, unless he found a way to tell her the truth, all the nights he'd hoped they would spend together had just ended.

Dammit. There was no way to convince her to spend her life with him without telling her the truth. She would either agree to become one of the family and consign herself to the life he led—going out only at night, drinking blood from human beings, and the ultimate curse: everlasting life on earth, watching everyone you knew die. Or worse—she'd be appalled by the very idea of the bloodkiss, and he would have to erase her memory of him and leave her.

How had he let himself think that making love with her would solve the problem? He wanted her; even as pissed as he felt at being resigned to the back door exit, he wanted her. He'd convinced himself that once she was in his arms, the age difference would no longer matter, and he could tell her the truth about himself. They could move onto the bigger issues that separated them. But he was right back at the mailbox again, frigging begging her.

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The shades on the windows lowered automatically as he walked into his house. He slammed the door and threw his jacket and shirt into the kitchen trash can as he passed by on his way to the bathroom. Dropping his pants to the floor, he flipped on the showerhead and climbed into the hot spray.

He rubbed the bar of soap over the entrance wound on his butt cheek. One of the good things about being a vampire was that this kind of wound would heal quickly. Any wound from a regular bullet was never fatal. Of course, it still hurt like hell when it happened, but the pain was momentary and easily forgotten.

Dillon had taken out the guy with the biggest weapon, then Johnathan had killed the other two bodyguards, saving the dealer for his feeding. Draining the human of blood and life had given him a righteous strength and satisfaction, although not any information he needed. Four more of Ramos' men were off the streets, but he wanted Ramos. This human, while obviously high up in the organization if he deserved three bodyguards had no information Johnathan could rip from his mind regarding Ramos' whereabouts.

His brother watched in disgust as he drank from the human until his body was emptied. Human blood was a necessity for them both, but something Dillon did only to live. Dillon killed vampires for fun; he'd originally thought killing them would save his soul, but finally resigned himself to the sheer enjoyment of it. Johnathan found he could enjoy the taste of the blood of fiends, knowing that it had one use on the planet—to keep him alive in order to destroy more of the

heartless and soulless creatures interested only in trading death for money.

Johnathan finished bathing and turned off the faucets. He stared down at his body. The scrapes on his knees and elbows had already healed. He climbed out of the tub and grabbed a towel, wrapping it around his waist. Squeezing toothpaste onto his toothbrush, he shoved the brush into his mouth and wiped the steamed mirror with the back of his arm.

How things had changed in the past eighty years. When he'd been turned into a vampire, he'd imagined he would spend the rest of his time on earth on the scientific research that would save the human race from disease and death. Once he'd accomplished that, he would fit back into the lives of those around him. If humans lived forever as he did, he would no longer be any different.

Instead, the fact that he never aged became readily apparent among the other researchers and a lot bigger problem than he'd ever imagined. He'd left the institute and for a long time wanted to end this miserable excuse for a life.

Only then had he discovered that the human race, or at least some parts of it, was causing more disease and death than all the germs and viruses he'd studied. And he'd found his one true calling.

Not satisfying in any deep way, he knew getting scum off the streets made a difference. It had been enough, until now. All the evenings flirting with Lenora, talking to Lenora, being close to her, had been building to that moment. The only good thing, now that he looked back on it, was that he'd not

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forced her. He'd practically begged her, but he hadn't forced her mind to accept him. She'd done that on her own.

And now she was ashamed. He ripped the towel off his waist and threw it at the hamper in the corner of his bedroom. Regret was not the most desirable trait to instill in the woman he'd been attempting to seduce. He grabbed a pair of briefs, pulled them on, and sat down on the edge of the bed. He punched the pillow and dropped his head onto it. Willing the lights off, he closed his eyes.

Tonight he would fix it—somehow. First, he had to convince her that they were right for each other in so many ways, but telling her he was sixty years older than she wasn't going to help—that much was certain. Hell, if he had to start dyeing his hair grey, he would. Unfortunately, he'd have to do it every damn morning for it to last, but he'd do it if it would make a difference. Maybe some plastic surgery...

"Shit." He turned over in the bed and punched the pillow again. "This sucks."

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Chapter Three

Lenora couldn't stop smiling. Even though she'd sent Johnathan out the back door to hide his visit from the prying eyes of their neighbors, she couldn't stop the overwhelming exhilaration inside her.

He *wanted* her; crazy, unbelievable, even stupid, but true. And not just in the bedroom. He wanted to take her out on a date. Tonight.

She adjusted her glasses on her nose and stared at the computer screen in front of her. The columns of figures blurred, and Johnathan filled her vision. His eyes watching her, gazing at her in sensuous appraisal. His large hands touching her everywhere. His long, lean thighs against hers. Lenora's face grew warm with the memory.

It has to end. The thought flashed into her mind, dispelling the lovely visions in its wake. She cleared her throat and tried once more to concentrate on the spreadsheet on the screen. Her body ached in places that hadn't even been touched in so long she couldn't remember, with the most glorious, pulsing ache settling between her thighs.

It has to end now before I get hurt.

She clamped her teeth together and clicked her mouse, closing the spreadsheet. She was a grown woman with no ties and no one to answer to. Why couldn't she allow herself a few days of incredible pleasure? So, yeah, they were going to end. The difference in her and Johnathan's ages would bring stares from others, but that wasn't the worst of it. Twenty

years of living ... there was no way to bridge that gap. What would they talk about, once they got around to exchanging more than a few words at the mailbox?

Lenora shook her head and glanced at her wristwatch. Two more hours until she could leave work and get her mail.

Yes, it would end, and probably sadly, but so what? All of life ended *sometime*; it was the moments that were truly lived that mattered. Being in Johnathan's arms last night she'd felt more alive than she had in her entire life. Enough of listening to the voices in her head that urged caution and discretion. To hell with them.

The phone on her desk rang. She grabbed it, imagining for a moment that it was Johnathan. The voice on the other end quickly dispelled that hope.

"Lenny, it's me. How you doing, sis?"

"Ramos." Lenora sighed and shook her head. "I thought you were somebody else. Where are you?"

"I'm in town for a couple of days. I need a favor."

Lenora quelled a heavy sigh. Any time her brother came to town, he only called if he needed a favor. "Ramos, I'd love to help, but I'm really busy today, and I've got a date tonight."

"Come on, Lenny. It's not a big deal. I just need you to take this package I've got and drop it off somewhere. I would have one of my buddies do it, but I can't reach him on his cell."

Typical Ramos. He didn't even comment on her good news, thinking only of his own concerns. He'd never grown out of the opinion that he was the center axis of the planet.

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Lenora glanced at her watch again. "I've got to be somewhere at six o'clock. It's already after four. Can I pick it up tomorrow?"

"No, Lenny." Ramos hesitated. "But it could wait until after your date. Say about eight o'clock? As long as it's delivered by nine, no problem. I can give you the information now. Got a pencil?"

Lenora didn't bother to point out that a date beginning at six would not be over by eight unless it was a catastrophe. After the way Johnathan had looked at her when he left this morning, a catastrophe wasn't completely out of the question. She picked up a pen and grabbed a legal pad. "Okay, I'm ready."

"Here's where you go."

Lenora jotted down both addresses. "When are we going to have dinner or something together, Ramos? You come to town, I see you for five minutes; you never stay."

"Next time I have a free evening, we'll have dinner, okay? See you at eight." Ramos rang off. She hung up the phone, knowing that if the day ever did come that he was ready to have dinner, he'd automatically assume she'd be free.

Lenora cleaned off her desk and turned off her computer. Well, tonight she wasn't free, and she wasn't getting anything done here anyway. If she got home now, maybe she and Johnathan could go out a little earlier. The more time she could spend with him the better, she thought selfishly. This relationship would turn into beat the clock soon, and she had to get as much fun in as she could before the timer ran out.

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By four forty-five, Lenora had parked her car in the driveway. She glanced into the rear-view mirror and checked her makeup. Girls Johnathan's age wore mascara, maybe a touch of lipstick. Although she'd learned a thing or two about makeup application, she had the distinct impression that her foundation appeared to have been applied with a trowel.

She shook her head and opened the door, then walked directly toward the mailbox before she could talk herself out of it. Glancing around casually, she noticed Johnathan's shades were drawn. She'd never been home this early in the afternoon before. His shades were always up when she drove past his house. And every evening, he was jogging up to her mailbox about the same time she drove into the driveway.

Today, however, he was not here. She reached the mailbox and opened it slowly, trying not to look like she was waiting. She removed the mail and examined each piece of correspondence, flipped over each envelope, then feigned interest in reading the addresses.

After she'd gone through each piece twice, she cleared her throat and closed the door of the mailbox. Intentionally casual, she strolled toward her front door. The sun cast long rays across her front yard and toward his, but even a more careful and not nearly so surreptitious glance at his house revealed one thing. For the first time in months, Johnathan would not be meeting her at the mailbox.

Maybe he'd changed his mind. Maybe he'd had a chance to really think about how she'd behaved this morning—making him sneak out the back door, treating him like a shameful secret—and he'd decided not to go out with her after all.

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She blinked. What if all of those evenings he really *had* been jogging, and her timely arrival at the mailbox was more *her* planning than *his*? She blinked back tears of embarrassment and humiliation as she shoved the key into her door and went inside.

* * * *

Johnathan knew she was home. The sound of her car in the driveway had wakened him from a sound sleep. He jumped up from the bed and glanced at the clock on the nightstand, then to the electronic window shades. He'd set them to rise the moment the sun set enough for him to go outside. He could tolerate very low sunlight, but the shades remained down, and the clock confirmed his fear. He couldn't safely leave the house for another hour—fifty minutes if he wanted to risk the horrible burning of his skin.

"Shit!" He strode to the windows and stood next to them with his eyes closed, his hands on the metal shutters. He heard her steps on the gravel, the mailbox opening. Dammit, why was she early? He'd told her he would meet her there. Was this her way of trying to avoid him? Well, if that was what she was thinking, she had another think coming.

The mailbox finally closed, and he heard her slow steps across the driveway up the walk to the front door. Keys rattled, then she was inside.

"Dammit to hell!"

He stormed to the telephone and picked it up. He'd searched for her number in the phone directory long ago, found it was unlisted, then memorized it after seeing it

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written on her telephone during one of his many visits inside her house. Visits she'd been completely unaware of. He'd not once used it, however. Would she wonder how he knew the number?

He didn't give two shits at the moment. He punched in the number and held the phone to his ear. When she answered, he instantly noted the slightest catch in her voice.

"Lenora?" His chest ached with the sound. Confined inside, unable to get to her, he felt like a trapped animal. "Are you all right?"

"Johnathan." Her voice brightened instantly. "It's you. Hi."

That was good news. She sounded happy to hear from him. "Yes, it's me. Is everything all right? What are you doing home so early?"

"I..." She cleared her throat and laughed nervously. "I wanted to get home and get ready."

"Oh." Johnathan felt the weight of a hundred years fall off his back—he was once again twenty-three years old, nervous and happy at the thought of what the night would bring. If Dillon saw him right now, he'd bust a gut laughing.

"I didn't know you were home. I saw your shades are still drawn. You know, it's smart to close them during the day. I'm sure you're electric bill is much lower than mine. Did you just get home?"

Johnathan realized she had no idea he spent all of his daylight hours inside. He carried the wireless phone into his closet and pulled a pair of jeans down from the hanger. "Not long ago. So, will you be ready at six?"

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"I can be ready in about fifteen minutes. Do you want to come over now?"

Johnathan slid his legs into the jeans and pulled them up his hips, then glanced at the clock again. The excitement in her voice stirred his cock, but the hands on the clock drove his blood pressure up a notch higher. *I can't go. Dammit, I can't go.*

"Or, I could come there."

He smiled and pressed his hard-on into the jeans. Hopefully, he wouldn't have to wear them long like this. "I'll leave the front door open for you."

She hesitated only a moment then spoke, her voice strong and firm. "Okay."

"Unless you prefer the back door?" He tried to keep the sound of irritation from his voice, but wasn't quite sure he'd accomplished that.

"Johnathan, I'm sorry about this morning..."

"You've got fourteen minutes now. Don't waste it. You can apologize to me properly when you get here. Preferably naked."

By the time he zipped the jeans, ran a comb through his hair and got to the front door to unlock it, he could hear her steps on the sidewalk outside. He stepped far enough from the door to avoid the sunlight, but still close enough to see her as she entered.

As soon as she came across the threshold and closed the door behind her, he was on her like an animal.

He pulled her body against his bare chest and wound his hands into her hair. "I hope you didn't take long choosing this

dress." He quickly undid the buttons along the back, the top two with his fingers, the remaining with his mind. "It is quite beautiful, but I'd rather have the present and not the wrapping."

"Johnathan!"

He covered her mouth with his, tasting the sweet flavor of her mouth so reminiscent of the sweet taste of the rest of her flesh as the dress fell into a pile around her feet. Her hands moved to his chest, gently caressing his neck and clavicle. Trailing his mouth down her jaw to her neck, he felt his fangs begin to elongate. The urge to bite her now, drain her blood to the point of death and then let her drink from his vein threatened to overwhelm him. The process would take hours, and he didn't want to wait another minute. He wanted her now; he wanted her forever.

Johnathan took a deep breath and clamped his lips together. *Choice*. He'd been given the choice to change; the woman he loved could be given no less.

He pressed her away from his body and forced his breathing to slow. Her eyes, wide with desire, gazed up into his, clenching something deep inside his gut.

"What is it?" Lenora lifted her hands, wrapping her arms around her midsection.

"You." He couldn't form the words to tell her everything he needed to say. "You are unbelievably beautiful."

A sad smile moved over her lips as she tightened her grip around her waist. "You are one blind kid."

He shook his head and squeezed her arms. "I am *not* a kid."

She blinked. "I'm sorry, I—"

"Lenora, there are things you don't know, things I want to tell you. I'm not sure exactly how to tell you, but know this: I am a grown man who knows exactly what he wants. I want you. Only you. Forever."

Lenora stared at him for a long moment. "What are you saying? Is this ... are you...?"

Marriage. Oh, shit; she thought he wanted to propose. Well, in a way he did. Only instead of till death do us part she would have to promise to be with him for a considerably longer time.

He took her hands and wrapped them around his waist, holding them together behind his back. "Yes, that's part of it. Marry me, Lenora. Stay with me forever. Love me as much as I love you."

She stared at him, her eyes wide. "But Johnathan, this is crazy. You—"

"If this is about my age, I don't want to hear it," he said. "Imagine I'm a hundred years old, and answer me. Will you spend eternity with me or not?"

Her face reddened and tears sprang into her eyes. "Would you make love to me first?"

His cock hardened with the sound of her voice. He slid his hands along her forearms and unfastened the clasps of the lacy pink bra with his mind. Taking the slender, silk straps into his hands, he lowered them slowly down her arms. "First, last and always."

She closed her eyes and drew in a sharp breath, and the craving to take her viciously, press her body against the door

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and enter her swift and hard from behind, almost overwhelmed him. Her body was a feast, and he was starving. Last night had been but a taste, and he'd been hungry for a long time. Reminding himself that she was human, he focused his mind on her sweet voice, her tender skin, and her gentle breathing in an effort to control his base desires.

He turned her around and pressed her back against his chest, his hard cock slipping between her thighs. Pressing his lips to her ear, he whispered, "Can you stay with me, all night?"

She nodded, then shook her head. "I want to, but I promised Ramos..."

The sound of that name intoned in her sweet voice took him aback. "Who's Ramos?"

She turned around in his arms and touched his lips with her fingertips. Her sweet smile did nothing to still the pounding of his heart. "Oh, honey, no. He's my brother. I told him I'd do a favor for him tonight. I thought we'd have time. I mean, I didn't think..."

He forced a smile through the pulsing blood beating into his temples. Her brother's name was Ramos; it had to be a coincidence. "What's his last name?"

"Garcia."

"Ramos Garcia is your brother?"

Her widening eyes drove the stake through his heart. "You know him?"

"Your last name is Greenway."

"Ramos is my step-brother. My mother married his father when I was in my mid-twenties." He waited for her to add "about your age" but thankfully she didn't. Perhaps they'd finally made it past that hurdle. "How do you know him?"

"I don't, really." He took a deep breath and stared down at the woman he loved. Not even having a step-brother who was the largest drug trafficker in the city could stop the emotions burning inside him.

He shook his head. *She could lead me straight to Ramos.* But how would she like finding out that Ramos had been killed? Would he tell her that he had been the one to kill him?

There would be time later to deal with this new information. Very little mattered if he didn't make Lenora his own. "I've heard of him. How long do we have before we have to go?"

"Almost two hours." Her smile returned.

He pressed his thumbs over her cheekbones, letting them make lazy circles under her eyes. "Not long enough, but it will have to do."

Johnathan released his hold on her body and glanced down at the strip of pink panties she wore. "I love those. Take them off."

She kept her eyes on his then slipped her fingers beneath the fabric and slid them over her hips, letting them fall to the floor around a pair of high-heeled red shoes.

"Keep the shoes. You might need the extra height." He took her hand. "Come with me."

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He walked backward toward the sofa, watching the sway of her hips as she followed him. He mentally turned on all the lamps in the living room. "That's better."

Lenora blinked and looked around the room. "How did you do that?"

"Walk to the window then back to me. Slowly, Lenora."

She hesitated only a moment before taking a deep breath and turning around. She straightened her shoulders and took a step in the heels, her long back ending in the most luscious, ample ass he'd ever imagined. Lenora moved as he'd commanded, one slow, swaying step at a time toward the closed blinds of the window. When she reached them, she placed her hands on the closed metal slats, then turned and started back toward him. Staring at the small triangle of hair at the tops of her thighs, he knew that if he didn't get his cock inside her soon, he was going to lose the tenuous grip on his control.

His eyes moved over her, taking in every supple inch of her body, almost able to hear the heartbeat he saw pulsing at her throat. Her blood called to him, and once more his fangs pressed against his lower lip.

When she reached him, he turned her back to the arm of the sofa. "Sit down."

She lowered herself to the armrest, and he placed his hands on her thighs then knelt between them, caressing her calves with the palms of his hands. The scent of her pussy filled his senses, and the sight of her slick entrance teased the force within him. In that moment, he knew the power was

no longer his; she had it, and here it was, a breath away from his lips.

"Oh, Lenora." The words came out in a breath of relief, desire, and pain.

She spread her thighs wider. "Kiss my pussy."

Slow. The command burned inside his head as he moved closer. *Go slow, dammit.*

As soon as his tongue touched the sweet juice of her flesh, slow became swift and tender turned to fervent in spite of his own directive. The force of his lips on her pussy pushed her back on the sofa until she slid over the armrest and fell back among the pillows. The taste of her body, the warmth of her juices on his tongue, and the sweet fragrance of her skin combined and drove him to clench his cock through the fabric of his jeans to ease the ache in his groin as he lapped at her flesh, drinking in every sweet flavor and sensation with his tongue.

With each taste of her, each stroke of his tongue over her pussy, she began to moan louder and clench her legs around him. He gripped her thighs, then stroked the tender flesh with his fingers. Another taste, and another. He could not get enough of her, could not satiate the urge to consume her feminine power. Moving his hand up her thigh, he shoved two fingers inside her opening as he flicked his tongue over her clit once more.

Her scream startled him until he realized she writhed against his lips not with pain, but with the exquisite bliss of her orgasm. He kept his fingers inside her, moved them

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gently in and out as he watched her clench the sofa into her fists, riding out the waves of pleasure coursing through her.

The whirl of the rising shades mingled with her low moan.

She opened her eyes and blinked as if struggling for conscious thought. "The lights?"

He extinguished them instantly and glanced out the living room picture window. Only the glow from the late dusk and rising moon illuminated the room now, long low rays of golden hues cast across the contours of her body. He rose slowly from the floor, watching a dazed and satisfied look cross her face. He held out his hand. "Are you all right?"

"Yes." The slow, lazy smile on her lips confirmed the words. "More than all right."

"Come with me. I want to show you something."

She lifted her hand to his with effort. He eased her up from the sofa and led her to the front window, both of their bodies now clearly visible to the street.

She turned toward him. "Johnathan, people will see us."

"Turn around." He rotated her body toward the window and pressed her hands high above her head against the glass. As he did, he willed his pants undone and down his thighs.

"Johnathan."

He could hold back no longer. The throbbing in his cock had reached a steady ache. He needed to be inside her. *Now.*

Johnathan spread her legs and entered her in one swift motion, fully encasing himself in her hot, sweet sheath.

Her sharp intake of breath and groan of pleasure drove him on. Grasping her waist, he pulled away from her body then pounded into her again and again, each time feeling the

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engorgement of his cock increase. Her channel was slick and so hot. She was everything he'd wanted for so long. How had he delayed when he could have been inside her like this a long time ago? *So many lost nights*. He drove into her again and again, each hard connection of his hips against her buttocks a burning reminder of lost time. *So much to make up for*. She turned her head over her shoulder toward him, and he had to blink to focus his vision on her face and away from his unbearable longing.

Her eyes were closed, her mouth slightly open. The total collapse of her will to resist embarrassment; her acquiescence in ignoring anyone outside who might see her receive his cock with such intense desire brought him to the razor's edge of lust. The vision of her hands still high above her head, her breasts pressed against the glass as her pussy clutched his cock was his undoing. With one final thrust, he came, a long, pulsing release inside her. She shuddered against him, and he held her firmly against his body, wanting every ounce of himself inside her as her orgasm mixed with his own.

Control returning only by supreme effort on his part, he took a deep breath and disengaged. Turning her in his arms, he pressed his mouth to hers, tasting once again the now well-known flavor of her. Like ripe fruit juice, her mouth was sweet and fragrant, her tongue soft and tender in his mouth.

Before she could say a word, before she noticed the time and suggested they leave, he knew he must be inside her once more. He'd procrastinated too damn long already. Ramos could wait. She was with him, and he would have her again.

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Lifting her into his arms, he kicked off the jeans and carried her toward his bathroom as she pressed kiss after kiss on his chest. He kicked the door open and sat on the edge of the tub. Pulling her onto his lap, he leaned back and turned on both shower jets.

Her fingers opened and closed on his chest as she rested her head against his shoulder. He'd almost forgotten that she'd worked all day, and he'd used her body more than she was probably accustomed to last night. He looked down at her face as he checked the temperature of the water with his hand. Her thick lashes lay on her cheeks, a soft smile on her lips.

"Lenora, are you asleep?"

She shook her head slowly, rubbing her hair against his skin. "I'm dreaming."

He ran his wet hand through her hair. "About what, darling?"

"I like the way that sounded." Her smile widened. "I was thinking how sweet you are."

He stood, lifting her easily from the side of the tub as he moved, then stepped into the warm sprays of water. For a long moment, he held her up in his arms, cradling her against him as water spilled over her breasts, her belly, and her thighs.

"You're a vampire, aren't you?"

Johnathan almost dropped her. "What?"

He stared into her face, waiting for her to open her eyes. She lay still in his arms, her voice soft and almost dreamy.

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"The lights, the strength. The shades. You put that thought in my mind, too, about not needing a condom, didn't you?" She curled her fingers around his neck.

Oh, shit! He did not know how to respond. What in the hell did she know about vampires anyway? Was this some flight of fancy, some fantasy she spun to tease him, or something else?

"That dress has thirty buttons along the back. You didn't rip it, and you couldn't have unbuttoned it that easily without the telekinesis. And you didn't meet me at the mailbox ... that's what gave you away."

He released his hold on her legs, allowing her to stand. "Lenora, open your eyes."

"You wanted me; you would have come if the sun had already set."

"Lenora."

"I can't open them, Johnathan." She pressed her hips against his and leaned back into the falling spray, the water bouncing off her hair. "If I open them, I'll see the truth in your eyes."

His body went rigid, and he fought to slow his breathing. "The truth that I'm a *vampire*?"

Tears sprang to the corners of her eyes and mixed into the falling spray. "Please don't lie to me anymore. You made me believe that you loved me, didn't you?" She choked on a sob. Her body had gone almost limp in his arms, but he held her upright.

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He opened his mouth to speak, but she opened her eyes. He didn't know what she saw in his, but hers were not fearful or angry. Lenora's blue eyes blinked back tears.

"Why did you stop?"

"I didn't make you believe anything." Johnathan shook his head. "Well, the condom thing, yes, but nothing else. I swear."

She watched him, considering the words as if to decide if he spoke the truth. She straightened and her lips formed a thin line, although her eyes pleaded with him. "You didn't make me believe that you love me?"

"I want you to believe it," he said. "That's not the same thing. I didn't *make* you believe it. I do love you, Lenora."

She licked her lips. "Really?"

Her voice was like a child's. How desperate she was for confirmation that her thoughts and feelings were genuine and not her imagination or worse, his interference. Johnathan felt his heart shift in his chest as it pounded against his ribcage.

"Yes, darling, really."

Another tear fell down her cheek, and she leaned against his chest. Her mouth found his in the sweetest of tender kisses. Desire surged through his limbs, and he wanted to take her then, make love to her over and over, forever in this falling water. But one problem remained.

He placed his hands on her face and ended the kiss. She smiled up at him and slid her hand down to his cock. He groaned and grabbed her hand to still it before he lost control altogether. "Lenora, how did you know?"

She shrugged. "I already told you. I'm an intelligent woman."

He shook his head. "Even an intelligent woman doesn't take that set of facts and assume 'vampire'."

"I'm right, though." She tightened her grip on his penis, sliding the tip of her finger over his balls.

He took a sharp breath and clutched her hand tighter to still the movement. He had to get the questions out before he lost the power to think clearly. Logic was difficult enough with her naked in his arms. His erection in her hands was too much to overcome.

"What do you know about them? You're not a vampire."

Sudden panic rose in his throat. He released her hand on his cock and grabbed her throat, tipping her chin from one side to the other to inspect the skin. He could have seen if she bore any recent feeding marks; there were none. "Were you attacked? Did you witness an attack?"

She tilted her head as she watched his face. "I thought maybe you'd chosen me because of Ramos. I didn't know you knew him, but it makes sense."

The muscles in Johnathan's jaw tightened and he tried not to grit his teeth. "Chosen you because of Ramos? What does Ramos have to do with us?"

"He's a vampire, too," she said simply, then blinked. "You didn't know?"

Johnathan ran his hand through his hair and stared at her. "Holy fucking shit."

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Chapter Four

Johnathan climbed out of the tub, leaving Lenora standing in the pounding fountains of water. He grabbed a towel and walked into the living room in search of his pants. This could not be happening. The woman he loved had a vampire brother whom he'd intended for months to find and destroy.

That would not go over well at the family reunions.

As much as he loved her, he would not let the bastard live. Now everything made perfect sense, just as she'd said. Normal bullets wouldn't kill Ramos. Johnathan had never had a shot at him, but even if he had, he didn't carry silver bullets so they would have done nothing. He wasn't out to kill vampires—that was Dillon's specialty.

Johnathan had blamed the cops all this time; he was one vampire and even with Dillon along, they could only work at night. The police had units and backup and precincts not to mention years to bring Ramos down, but had never had him in their grasp.

Or had they gotten to Ramos and he'd simply overpowered them, erased their memories and gotten away?

No wonder the cops couldn't stop this asshole from spreading his poison everywhere. He was the only one who could stop Ramos.

He threw the towel on the floor and quickly pulled the wadded briefs and jeans over his hips. Zipping his fly, Johnathan strode back to the bedroom closet.

"Johnathan, where are you going?"

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"With you. We're going to be late." His heart clenched in fury and agony. *Dammit all to hell.* Could his future collide any worse with his past? He'd chosen this life of destroying corruption on the street; how could he let the worst offender go just because he was in love with the scum's sister?

"Johnathan, wait!"

Lenora knew Ramos was a vampire; did she also know he was one of the city's biggest drug dealers? He yanked a T-shirt off the hanger and pulled it over his head. As he turned to leave the closet, he almost knocked Lenora over.

"Oh, shit, I'm sorry." Johnathan steadied her then moved past her.

Lenora followed him to the dresser and grabbed his forearm. She'd wrapped a towel around her body and stood dripping on the wood floor. "Johnathan, wait a minute. Will you please tell me what's wrong? Does this have something to do with Ramos?"

He ran his hands through his wet hair as he looked at her. What could he tell her? *Dammit*, what did she know already? How was he going to kill her brother tonight and face her tomorrow?

He shook his head, attempting to clear his thoughts. He couldn't tell her anything yet. He didn't know what to tell her for one thing; and he didn't have the first clue how to tell her in the second. Johnathan forced a smile, putting his hand on her face. "You said you needed to meet your brother at eight. It's almost eight now."

"That's why you're in a hurry all of a sudden?" Lenora shook her head and crossed her arms over her breasts.

"Lenora." Johnathan thought carefully about what to say. He didn't want to lie to her, but the truth was impossible at the moment. Would he ever be able to tell her the truth? "I want to come with you. I'd like to meet your brother. Do you know much about what he does for a living?"

Lenora's eyebrows rose. "What? No, not really. He's an importer and distributor of foreign-manufactured goods is all I know. I don't see him that much. Why?"

Obviously Ramos preferred to stick to as much of the truth as possible, too. Realizing he was doing exactly the same thing as a piece of drug-dealing scum to the woman he loved did nothing to ease his conscience. "I guess you could say your brother's business and mine have something in common. I've wanted to meet him for a long time. So, I'm going with you tonight."

He left her standing in the bedroom and walked to the living room to retrieve her clothes.

"Okay." She followed behind him, grabbing her panties and bra along the way. Her sweet voice rang out with a trusting acknowledgement that drove another stake into his heart.

He picked her dress up from the floor. "Let's get this back on you."

She dropped the towel, slipped into the under garments then held her hands over her head as he slid the silky periwinkle fabric over her body. A twinge of desire hit him followed quickly by guilt and anger. Depending on what this night wrought, he may or may not ever see her undressed again. When he did what he had to do tonight, she might never forgive him.

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His heart squeezed in his chest and he pulled air into his lungs with effort. "Get your shoes. I'll drive."

Once inside his Honda, Lenora lowered the visor and looked into the mirror. "My hair is a little wild."

He glanced at her as she stared into the mirror. She'd pulled the wet hair back tightly over her head and knotted it at the nape of her neck. If he hadn't had a hundred other thoughts racing through his mind, he'd pull the car over right now and show her just how wild she looked to him. He shook his head and forced his eyes back to the road. "You look beautiful, as always."

She pulled a slip of paper from her purse. "Here's where we're going."

Johnathan nodded as she read the address to him. "That's a pretty shitty neighborhood, Lenora. Have you ever picked things up for Ramos before out there?"

"Once or twice. About every time I've seen him over the past three years, actually." The low, bitter laugh did not become her.

For a moment, Johnathan relaxed. Maybe there was no love lost between them; perhaps they didn't get on that well at all. Of course, that didn't mean she'd like him *killing* Ramos. *Shit, shit, shit.*

"What are these packages like?" Johnathan asked, then hearing how the question sounded, quickly added, "Think that whatever it is will fit in my trunk?"

"Oh, yes," Lenora said, flipping the visor back in the place. "They've never been any bigger than a bread box."

Johnathan hadn't heard that particular phrase in years. He remembered her declaration in the shower—*you're a vampire, aren't you?*

"You know, Lenora," he began, choosing his words carefully. If this were ever going to work between them, and the odds were long at the moment, perhaps they could get through her main concern right now. "I was born at the turn of the century."

She laughed out loud, the bitter sound completely gone from her voice. "Oh, really? Well, then you are way too old for me, mister."

He turned to look at her and found her staring at him. She placed a hand on his thigh, leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. "You look pretty damn good for your age, too, I might add."

How could he lie to her? How could he come with her and kill her brother? *Oh, shit.* Worse yet, how did he avoid being killed once Ramos realized who he was? Unless Ramos was an idiot, he had to know his minions had been hunted and destroyed by vampires.

Dillon.

"I need to make a quick call." Johnathan pulled out his phone and flipped it open, hitting the speed dial for his brother's cell.

"What up, bro?"

"Hey, can you meet us? It's important." Johnathan gave Dillon the address. "I'm ten or fifteen minutes from there now."

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"Us? I hope this isn't some kind of social call. That's a shitty neighborhood."

Johnathan kept his voice level. "Not in the slightest."

"What the hell?" Dillon yelled. "You brought her with you on a job?"

"Yeah, remember how I was telling you I'd like to meet Ramos. Well Ramos is Lenora's brother. Oh, and hey, turns out he's one of us. I wanted you to meet him, too." Johnathan smiled at Lenora, forcing a gaiety into his voice he was far from feeling.

The silence on the other end of the line was finally broken by his brother's loud grunt. "Oh, holy fuck, man."

Johnathan did not respond. Dillon knew him better than Johnathan knew himself; he would have picked up on every angle of the problem immediately. Johnathan just hoped his brother could come up with some kind of plan since he'd brainstormed exactly nothing.

"I'll bring silver. You want me to take him out; you don't want her to know."

None of it was a question. Dillon could access a problem and come up with a solution quicker than any other person he'd ever known. His solution, as usual though, involved protecting Johnathan and taking all the danger on himself.

"I think I'll talk to him a while. Maybe you'd like to talk to him, too."

"Man, I can erase every memory of it from her mind. She'll never even know any of us was there."

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Lenora pointed for the next turn, and Johnathan flipped on his blinker. "I believe in relationships based on honesty, too. Perhaps a mutual understanding is a possibility."

"Mutual understanding?" Dillon's ugly laugh echoed through the receiver, and Johnathan pressed the cell phone closer to his ear to muffle the sound. Talking in code was hard enough without having to listen to his brother's angry laughter.

"You're going to get yourself mutually *shot* by that asshole if you're not careful."

"That's why I have you," Johnathan said. "To be sure I negotiate properly."

"Hell." Dillon was quiet for a long moment. Johnathan heard the sound of his Porsche engine turning over in the background. "All right. Do *not* approach him until I get there, you got me? Wait for me at the corner of McKinsey and Main. You both get in my car, and we drive up together."

"We're not all going to fit in that expensive sardine can of yours, Dillon. We can take my car."

"The hell we will!" Dillon said. "When this is over, we are getting the fuck out of there as fast as 295 horses can carry us. She can sit on your damn lap."

The line went dead in Johnathan's ear. "Okay, see you there then." He closed the phone. His Honda was still a good five to seven minutes from the intersection where Dillon would meet them.

Ramos had chosen the back of a used car lot for the meeting; he must not think too much of his sister to drag her to this slum alone at night. Of course, tonight, she would be

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far from alone. Ramos had no way of knowing that tonight he would meet two vampires out for blood, and hell was coming to breakfast.

Johnathan had driven through this area before, and parking was a gang fuck. Dillon was probably right; one car, one exit from the parking lot. Lenora crossed her legs, the movement catching his eye. He couldn't think about those legs right now. He needed to focus if they were all three going to come out of this alive and finally be rid of Ramos.

"What kind of car does your brother drive?" Johnathan asked.

"Every time I've met up with him, he drove a rental. What is your brother's name?"

Johnathan reminded himself that as far as she was concerned, this was a social call—just meeting the relatives. "Dillon."

"Is he a vampire, too?"

"Yeah," Johnathan said. "The same guy turned us both. I asked him to change Dillon; sometimes I think Dillon regrets that, but I couldn't make it without him. He's my best friend."

"What's he like?"

Johnathan smiled. "Don't be scared when you see him. He's older, bigger and meaner looking, but he's really a good guy. Think Terminator meets Dracula meets Godzilla."

"Sounds like a charmer." Lenora placed her hand on his shoulder and combed her fingers through the hair at the nape of his neck. "Why does he want to meet Ramos? Are you and Dillon in business together?"

"Sort of. Listen, Lenora. Can we get one thing straight between us now? I love you; I want you to be with me forever. No matter what Ramos thinks of me; I'm not here to get his approval to marry you."

"That's not what you meant though earlier, was it?" she said, her voice sweet and lyrical. "I thought you were talking about marriage, but when you said forever, that's what you really meant—forever."

Her words startled him. She *was* a smart woman. "Yes, but, not if you don't want to. That's a big step and a decision you shouldn't make quickly. I just want to be with you—marriage, dating, living together—whatever I can have of you. But that means no one else, and you and I are together. That's what I want."

She didn't speak, her fingers still twining in and out of his hair. He held his breath waiting for her response. None came.

As he approached Main, he saw Dillon's Porsche parked outside the quickie convenience mart. Johnathan wanted to turn the car around and take her back home with him right now. He couldn't leave Dillon waiting here alone, though, and he could not escape his destiny. He turned and smiled at her then took her hand from his shoulder, put it on his thigh and squeezed it. The sooner they got this over with, the sooner his new life could begin.

"That's Dillon."

Lenora looked out the passenger side window as Johnathan parked his Honda beside the Porsche.

Lenora stared at the mountain of a man in black leather pants, black jacket and black shitkickers standing next to the

driver's side door. His hair was black, too, and he wore dark shades. If he wasn't the Terminator, he certainly had him on speed dial. Built like Johnathan, but on a much bigger scale, this man had none of the friendly, casual air about him that Johnathan exuded; this guy was trouble. She searched for something nice to say. "Well. You didn't mention how handsome he is."

"Watch yourself, woman," Johnathan said, squeezing her hand. "I'm the jealous type, and he sort of goes the other way, if you know what I mean. Come on. We're going to ride with him."

Lenora paused before she got out of the car. "I guess it's true then; all the good-looking ones are gay."

Johnathan pulled her toward him and kissed her, then stared into her eyes. His were full of mischief and something else—something like fear. "I thought you said I was good-looking."

"All but one, I meant," she said and placed another quick kiss on his lips.

"If you two are done acting like teenagers at the drive-in, think we could get going?" Dillon's voice carried through the Honda as if the windows were wide open.

"What if he doesn't like me?" Lenora whispered.

"He'll like you." Johnathan pulled his keys from the ignition. "Although you might be better off if he doesn't."

A few moments later, they'd all piled into the small sports car after the most cursory of introductions and were back on the road headed toward the used car lot. Neither of the men had spoken since they'd gotten into the car.

"Is everything okay, you guys?"

"Not especially," Dillon said.

"Pay no attention to him," Johnathan said. "He's antisocial. Doesn't like meeting new people."

"Bite me," Dillon muttered.

Lenora saw a look pass between the two men, but neither said anything further.

Dillon turned into the entrance of the used car lot Ramos had told her about. He wound the front end of the Porsche between the rusted wrecks toward the back of the parking lot.

Lenora pointed to the back right corner of the lot. "There he is, over there."

"He's alone," Dillon said.

"Not expecting company, I guess," Johnathan said.

"She should stay in the car."

"What?" Lenora turned to look at Dillon and noticed for the first time how nervous he seemed. His jaw was clenched, his hands tightly clutching the leather steering wheel.

"Ramos is her brother," Johnathan said, his voice low and even. "This is a dangerous neighborhood, but he's not going to hurt her. Besides, she's got us as bodyguards, right, Lenora? Nothing to worry about."

Lenora noticed a strange sound in his voice—he didn't believe a word he was saying. The tension between the two men mounted inside the car as Dillon parked nearly fifty yards away from Ramos and immediately climbed out.

"Where's he going?"

"Out, like we are." Johnathan opened his door.

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Lenora climbed out of the low-riding sports car, Johnathan quick on her heels. He took her hand and followed Dillon, who had already started walking toward Ramos.

Ramos watched as the three of them approached in the darkness. Lenora held up her hand and waved. "Hey Ramos! I brought some friends."

"Hey, Ramos! How's it going?" Johnathan called as he jogged to catch up with Dillon and pulled her along with him. "Lenora needed a ride."

As the three of them reached Ramos, Lenora walked up to him and wrapped her arms around his neck, planting a kiss on his cheek. Ramos put one arm around her watching the two men skeptically. "What's going on, Lennie? Who the hell are these guys?"

Lenora released Ramos and turned. The two men stood side-by-side each holding their hands behind them. They looked like two bodyguards or two ushers at a very odd wedding.

"Ramos, meet Johnathan and Dillon."

Ramos turned to her and shook his head. "They're vampires. You do know that, don't you?"

"Yeah, Ramos, she knows that," Dillon said. "We didn't know that you were, though, until tonight. Why don't you give her the package so she can get out of here?"

"So we can get out of here," Johnathan corrected. "Big plans tonight. My brother is always in a big hurry. Doesn't take enough time for the pleasantries."

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Lenora heard a sound like metal shifting against metal and looked down to her brother's hand. He held a large, black gun. "Ramos! What are you doing?"

Ramos grabbed her and held her body against his. "You're those brothers." Ramos pointed his gun at Johnathan and Dillon and backed up a step, pulling her along with him.

"Ramos! Stop this! They aren't going to hurt me!"

Then she realized he wasn't trying to protect her; he held her body in front of his, using her as a shield against them. Lenora glanced back to her friends, feeling a sick, horrible fear course through her as she saw the weapons in their hands. She knew nothing about guns, but the ones the brothers held were enormous and looked deadly.

"Ramos, what is going on?"

"Shut up!" Ramos hissed into her ear. "How could you bring these two with you?" He continued moving backward, dragging her along with him.

"What's the chance that he's got silver in that gun?" Dillon asked.

"Not that good, but I'm not crazy about testing it. You?"

"Not crazy about it, no."

Johnathan glanced at Dillon then back to her.

"Shit, man, a Colt?" Johnathan mumbled.

"God created men," Dillon muttered as he inched closer to Ramos, his weapon still trained on Ramos. "But Colt made them equal."

"These two assholes killed three of my employees, Lenora. What in the hell are you doing with them anyway?"

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"Killed? Ramos, that's impossible!" She watched as Johnathan and Dillon followed them step for step, their guns not really pointed at her or Ramos, but still held at the ready.

"Employees? Oh that's rich! Got a good retirement plan there, Ramos?"

"It's the benefits his employees like, Dill. All the coke they can steal." Johnathan said.

"Cocaine?" She tried to turn in Ramos' arms, but he held her tight and suddenly the gun touched her neck.

"Yeah, little sister, cocaine." Ramos pressed the cold steel into her neck until she flinched. "And things were going fine until these two showed up and started taking out my distributors. I ask you again, what in the hell are you doing with them?"

"Johnathan is my fiancé."

Ramos stopped walking backward and started laughing. "Oh, man. My forty-year old spinster sister finally found a guy—and he looks what, 20? What is he really, about fifty, a hundred? Two hundred? Still isn't going to keep you two from looking ridiculous."

Lenora felt the hot tears burn the backs of her eyes. Johnathan moved toward them, but Dillon grabbed hold of Johnathan's jacket and held him back.

"Don't come any closer, you assholes."

"You're going to shoot your own sister?" Dillon said.

"Damn, J, this guy is a piece of shit. I'm taking him out."

Lenora's tears swirled her vision, but she saw Dillon raise his weapon and point it directly toward them.

"You do it, and she dies," Ramos said.

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Everyone stopped moving, and Lenora's thoughts flashed through her head like pieces of old movie film. She considered falling to the ground. If she did, Ramos might still kill her, and one or both of the two men would definitely shoot him. Johnathan stood perfectly still in Dillon's clutches, his weapon pointed at the ground. In the semi-darkness, Lenora saw for the first time Johnathan's fangs glinting in the moonlight.

Perhaps she should say something, try to calm everyone down.

Cocaine? The word sent a shiver of fear through her. Johnathan had been hunting him; that's why he came with her tonight. Her brother was a cocaine dealer, and now he wanted to get away without being killed.

Maybe a lie? What had Dillon said about silver? What did that mean?

She wished Johnathan would put another thought into her mind, tell her what she should do. But if he sent a thought to her, would Ramos hear it, too?

She had to do something. Lenora took a slow breath and opened her mouth, hoping against hope that they could all get out of this alive.

"Ramos, stop this. Dillon. Johnathan. Put your guns down. Nobody is going to shoot anyone. Go back to your car and wait for me there."

Johnathan blinked. Dillon, his weapon trained on them both, didn't move. Ramos pressed the barrel of the gun harder into her throat.

"I said stop this!" Her voice rang through the quiet night, steady and firm. "Ramos!"

"Shut up!" Ramos shouted and began pulling her backward again.

Johnathan's heart pounded in his chest as Lenora struggled against Ramos' hold. She'd almost broken away when the sound of a gun blast rang into the night. The force of the bullet punched Ramos back a step, and his weapon slid away from her neck. Johnathan glanced at Dillon and saw the smoke float up from the end of his Colt 1903 Pocket Hammerless.

Johnathan raced toward Lenora, her face now gray and as wide open as the moon glowing overhead. Ramos raised his weapon in a shaking hand and gritted his teeth as he sneered at Johnathan.

Johnathan grabbed Lenora and pulled her into his arms as Ramos' Jericho Uzi Eagle fired twice. Her body fell into his and a searing pain hit his left elbow. The third resounding blast came from the Colt, and as Lenora's body fell against him, Johnathan saw the round hit Ramos' square in the chest. Ramos fell onto the concrete then disintegrated in a flash of light and falling dust.

"Lenora!"

Johnathan dropped the Sig Sauer on the pavement. He lifted her body upright and examined her face with his right hand. His left elbow hurt like a son of a bitch, but that would heal. His hands were wet and warm, leaving a trail of dark red blood along her cheeks.

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"She's hit." Dillon grabbed her and set her down on the pavement, pulling her shirt over her head. "Might have caught her lung."

Johnathan stared into her face as Dillon examined the wound. "Lenora, speak to me. Say something."

She opened her mouth, but no sound emerged. A tear ran down her cheek.

"We've got to get her out of here." Dillon stood and picked her up. "Get the weapon, and get in the car."

Johnathan grabbed the Sig and ran toward the Porsche. He climbed in and Dillon dropped her onto his lap, ran around the front of the car and got in.

"You're going to have to bite her."

"We've got to get her to a hospital." Johnathan's heart hammered in his chest.

"Mercy is too far; she'll never make it."

Johnathan couldn't breathe. He pressed his hand against the wound in her back to stem the blood flow. "Lenora, honey, stay with me."

"Do it now, Johnathan, or she's going to die."

"We were going to talk about this; she doesn't know what she's getting into."

"Neither did I."

Johnathan felt the pain of the words wrench his heart. He pressed his fingers to her carotid. Her pulse was weak. If he didn't drink from her soon, she wouldn't have the strength to drink from him and complete the conversion.

"I don't want you to die," Johnathan whispered. What if she didn't want this, didn't want to stay with him?

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"If you don't do it now, it'll be too late, Johnathan. Just do it already! You didn't fuck around this much to get me vamped."

Dillon was right; he hadn't, which was why he hesitated now. If he did this and she didn't want it, he'd be sentencing her to an existence she could never escape as he'd sentenced his brother years ago for his own selfish purposes.

Johnathan shook his head as he pressed his hand harder against the bleeding wound. He couldn't bring himself to look at Dillon, but felt his eyes glancing back and forth between him and the road. "You never forgave me for that. What makes you think she will?"

Dillon turned the car hard, and it skidded around the corner toward Johnathan's house. "Shit, J, that was a long time ago. As big of a pain in the ass as you are, I'd rather be with you than dead."

Johnathan turned to look at his brother and caught the smile cutting the edges of his lips before he turned back toward the windshield. Johnathan opened his mouth, his fangs elongating, and sank them into the weak pulse at Lenora's throat.

By the time they'd reached Johnathan's house, he'd almost drained her body of the sweet life force coursing through her veins. He lifted his head as Dillon turned off the engine and ran around to his side of the car. Dillon opened the door, and Johnathan climbed out, carrying her light body with his right arm, his left arm hanging useless at his side.

"Let me carry her," Dillon said, reaching toward him.

"No, get the door. Keys are in my back pocket."

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Dillon yanked the keys out of his pocket and shoved one in the deadbolt.

"Lenora." Her body lay limp in his arms.

When Dillon shoved the door open, Johnathan ran into the living room and laid her on the sofa. "Get a knife!"

Dillon pulled a pocketknife from his pocket and handed it to Johnathan.

Johnathan held his right wrist up to Dillon. "I can't do it—my left elbow's shit. Cut it, Dill."

Dillon grabbed his hand and cut a long hard slice across the underside of his wrist. Johnathan winced then pressed the bleeding wound to Lenora's lips. Her chest rose and fell slowly, but she did not drink.

"You've got to take it." Johnathan's voice sounded ragged in his ears. "Don't die, honey. Stay with me. I love you."

Dillon yanked the St. Christopher medal off his neck and laid it in Johnathan's hand. Johnathan looked up at his brother as he stood, his own fangs bared, his eyes closed, his lips moving rapidly.

"What's this for?" Johnathan whispered.

Dillon opened his eyes then closed them again. "Can't hurt."

Johnathan nodded and pressed his wrist harder against her lips, whispering the prayer of St. Christopher along with his brother as he clutched the medal in his hand. "St. Christopher, holy patron of travelers, protect her and lead her safely to her destiny..."

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Long moments passed, and Johnathan tried to breathe. His chest tight and aching, he closed his eyes and prayed more fervently.

Days, months, even years seemed to pass before her lips finally closed tenderly around his wrist, and Johnathan felt blood being sucked from his vein. He released the breath he'd been holding like a man clutching a precipice over an endless, dark cavern and glanced up at his brother. "She'll need dressings for the gunshot wound."

Dillon left the room returning moments later with a pile of his white bath towels. He rolled the terry cloth into a tight wad and pressed it hard against Lenora's back.

"What about your elbow?"

"It'll be fine in a couple of hours." Johnathan couldn't take his eyes off Lenora as she suckled from the slice across his wrist. She was more beautiful than ever as color returned to her smooth skin. Her eyes fluttered open, dazzling in their glittery depths.

She stopped drinking, gently licking his wound until it closed and then disappeared. She smiled and pressed a kiss to his lips. Her lips parted and deepened, the kiss sending a surge of desire through his body.

He took her hair into his hand, then ended the kiss.

"Lenora, I'm sorry. Ramos..."

She gazed at his face, her eyes searching his. "Ramos shot me; he would have killed me if you hadn't stopped him." She looked up at Dillon, then back to him. "You two saved my life."

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Dillon placed his hand on his brother's shoulder for a moment, then turned to go.

Johnathan called to his retreating back. "You don't have to leave."

"I've got better things to do than watch you two make eyes at each other. Jason is home waiting for me. Night."

Johnathan smiled then turned back to Lenora. Her smile stunned him.

"Now, I'll always look too old for you."

The words were spoken without fear or embarrassment as she moved her hand up his leg. Johnathan returned the smile with one of his own.

"And I'll always want you as much as I did the first day I saw you."

"You're probably too tired to prove it now, aren't you?"

He shook his head. "No, but my arm isn't working all that well at the moment."

"You won't be needing that arm for what I had in mind."

Her kiss began at his lips and as she moved downward he leaned back on the sofa and closed his eyes. They would speak more about what had happened. Later. They had the rest of eternity to talk. The time of their old lives was past.

For now, having her in his arms was enough. It was more than enough.

The End

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Author Bio

Moira Reid is a graduate of the University of Nebraska, majoring in Actuarial Science with a minor in English. She traveled the world with her military family and has lived in Houston and San Antonio Texas; South and North Carolina; Virginia; Omaha and Lincoln Nebraska; Seattle, Washington; Panama City, Florida; and Tokyo, Japan. Moira's favorite things are writing, reading and drinking coffee.

Visit her website at: www.readmoore.com

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