



Hot Water

Book Two
Tales of the Darkworld



PPB

Lex Valentine



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TALES OF THE DARKWORLD BOOK 2: HOT WATER

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Tales of the Darkworld Book 1: Hot Water

By Lex Valentine

Black dragon Eden Antaeus is a bad girl. Or so her brother Sean would have her believe. When Sean tells Eden she's the Queen of Kink, someone who can't get off on normal sex, Eden runs straight to the vampire club Carpe Noctem to find someone to have vanilla sex with. What Eden finds is Colin Granville, her brother Declan's new brother in law. Desire burns hot between them despite the lack of surnames and after one night together, they both want more. Getting past the discovery that their siblings are married, Colin teaches Eden that she's not the Queen of Kink and Eden finds a love, and a life, she never expected to have.

She needed a drink before she contemplated the choice of partners offered by the club's patrons. As she elbowed herself a space at the end, her nose twitched. The scent of vanilla filled her senses, and her dragon suddenly itched to break free. Holy shit. Who the hell would walk into a social meat market smelling so innocent?

The smell came from her right. She wriggled in the tight quarters, trying to turn. Based on the sweet scent, she expected to see a woman. Instead, she found a tall man with midnight blue eyes smiling down at her.

"You just go right on trying to move," he quipped. "I'm enjoying it tremendously."

Eden's eyes narrowed. Every time she moved, her body rubbed up against his. Her hip dug into his groin and she could feel a slight telltale swelling there. Despite the fact that the man smelled all girly like a sugar cookie, the bulge held promise. She sniffed again. Sweet smelling. Smiling easily. No display of arrogance. A mellow and amused expression, eyes dancing with humor. Beta. He had to be. Her dragon stretched inside her, urging her to take him.

"Oh, really?" She raised one brow and wriggled against him again. The size of the ridge against her hip increased. Oh, yeah. He just might work out after all, she thought as she realized his more than adequate proportions weren't fully erect yet.

He nodded, his dark blue eyes gleaming as they raked over her from the top of her raven head to the tips of her designer boots. "Of course, we'd both enjoy it a lot more naked in my bed," he told her candidly.

Eden's pupils elongated as Blue Eyes roused her dragon. The scent of vanilla intensified.

"You don't believe in wasting time, I see." She turned, deliberately rubbing against him, breast to chest. In her boots, she almost matched his height.

He quirked a dark blond brow at her. "And you do? You can't tell me that the dragon in you isn't clawing to get at my cock."

Eden began to smile. He might not be a dragon, but he obviously knew them intimately. Good. One less thing she'd have to train him on. "You're a bold young thing, aren't you?"

He laughed. "I'm not as young as you think." His smile revealed vampire fangs.

Hot Water

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PPB

Dedication

To Karl, Gooster, and Vahid for letting me morph them into immortals.

And to Jennifer McKenzie, for always telling me that I'm frickin' brilliant.

Yes, Jen, I am... because I chose you for a friend.

Chapter One

Eden walked into Carpe Noctem wearing a short black dress and thigh high boots. The outfit, along with her long shaggy 'scene' haircut, made her seem nearly as young as the crowd that filled the trendy vampire themed nightclub. In truth, as an immortal, she looked younger than her actual years, appearing to be in her late twenties. Her tight, sexually provocative clothing had been chosen to aid the illusion of youth.

Trolling was tough business. Eden knew this from experience. With throngs of beautiful young things packing the clubs, finding someone to fuck could be a major undertaking if you didn't do something to set yourself above all the other immortals. Everyone wanted to get laid and available partners could be in short supply, especially when it came to vanilla sex. Despite what her older brother Sean thought, she figured her luck would hold better in the vampire bar than the ones she usually frequented. The cheesy vampire paraphernalia, the coffins, stakes and bats couldn't disguise the club's sophistication or fun factor. A sea of people, mostly humans dressed as vampires and true immortal Acerbian vampires, filled the club. Proving Sean wrong when he said the "Queen of Kink" would never go to Carpe Noctem, would give her immense satisfaction.

Ignoring the snarl that begged to get out whenever she thought of her elder brother, Eden turned toward the neon lit bar. She needed a drink before she contemplated the choice of partners offered by the club's patrons. As she elbowed herself a space at the end, her nose twitched. The scent of vanilla filled her senses, and her dragon suddenly itched to break free. Holy shit. Who the hell would walk into a social meat market smelling so innocent?

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He laughed. “I’m not as young as you think.” His smile revealed vampire fangs.

She pondered the fangs for a moment. People often pretended to be vampires at Carpe Noctem. He could well be one of the wannabes. After all, she’d never met a vampire who smelt of vanilla before. Usually, the real ones smelled of blood. He didn’t smell like a human either though. That vanilla scent masked his true nature and it annoyed her a little.

He shifted his hips against her and the hard ridge of his cock bumped against her belly. Her dragon poked her with its claws. Her thong grew damp as she rubbed against his erection. She finally decided he must be a real immortal, an Acerbian vampire.

“I just have a feeling I’m older than you. Indulge me,” she said. “I like being a cougar.” She reached down and boldly stroked the front of his jeans.

His engaging smile widened. “I’ll be teacher’s pet, I promise,” he joked.

Her eyes narrowed. “Not a bad game. Have you been bad today? Do you need a spanking?”

As the words fell from her lips, she could have kicked herself. Tonight was supposed to be about vanilla sex, not toys or fetishes. However, the blond man just shrugged. “I’d rather just fuck you. All that other crap isn’t necessary for me. As you can tell, I’m pretty much good to go.”

His eyes gleamed preternaturally, answering her earlier questions about his status as an immortal. One hand cupped the side of her face, the long elegant fingers sliding into her dark hair. Angling his head toward hers, he dropped a quick kiss on her lips. An electric tingle went through Eden’s body and her dragon came rushing to the surface of her skin.

When he deepened the kiss, parting her lips with his tongue, she sighed into his mouth. His free hand slid over her hip and curved over her taut buttock. She rubbed herself against him again as that sugar cookie scent grew stronger. Lifting her arms, she draped them over his broad shoulders, feeling the hard muscle and bone beneath his silk shirt. He sucked on her tongue and heat pooled deliciously between her thighs. Gods, he was hot!

“You know, at your ages, you should really get a room,” a snarky voice spoke behind Eden.

The blond man lifted his head, his expression tinged with annoyance that only lasted a moment. Recognition bloomed in the midnight blue depths of his eyes and his lips twitched into a smile.

“Hey, I know you. You’re...”

“Karl with a K... that elf with the internet gossip show... yeah, yeah,” the elf said with a sarcastic laugh. “Everyone knows me, kid. Especially here.”

Eden turned and looked at the man on the bar stool behind her. He had a half empty glass of Guinness in front of him and a bowl of bat-shaped pretzels. His grey-green eyes stared at her unblinkingly from behind wire-rimmed glasses. She frowned.

“You’re immortal. Why are you wearing glasses?”

Karl gave her a look that would have withered most people. “I’m told wearing glasses gives you character. Since I don’t have any character, I figured I’d manufacture some,” he drawled.

Her blond hunk openly grinned now. Apparently, he found Karl’s snarky sarcasm amusing. “I watch your show all the time. You have plenty of character. You’re funnier than all the shows on TV.”

“Tell that to my producer. He bitches daily that he’s gonna fire me.” Karl took a sip of his ale. “I meant what I said, you know. Get a room. All this grinding and humping is for the kids who got nowhere to go. You two are obviously old enough and wealthy enough to afford the room. So go there and grind. I don’t like having to protect my drink from elbows that are in the throes of lust,” he complained.

Mr. Sugar Cookie Scent chuckled. “Sure, Karl. Nice meeting you.” He took hold of Eden’s elbow.

Karl raised one brow at them. “We haven’t been formally introduced, but I know who you are. And more importantly, I know who *you* are,” he said, his eyes landing on Eden with a wicked gleam.

She opened her mouth to tell him to shut up when he waved a hand at her in a shooping motion. “I’m not telling. Names or lack of them is strictly between you two grinders. Now, would you mind letting me get back to my drinking here? Fucking horny immortals,” he grumbled, turning away from them.

The blond man pulled her away from the bar toward the exit. “Where to?” he asked as they stepped out onto the street.

A cab whooshed up to the curb beside them and she opened the door, getting in. The blond man followed her. She gave the cabbie the name of a posh hotel on Park Avenue. As the cab took off, the blond man smiled. “From out of town? Me too.”

Eden shrugged. “I’m here more than anywhere else. I travel almost constantly for work so I don’t have a permanent place to live unless you count a dozen boxes of crap at my brother’s house,” she said in a dismissive tone.

“I can’t imagine not having a home. I’m from the west coast myself.”

Tall, blond, and vanilla’s chatty behavior started to annoy her so she slid her hand up his jean-clad thigh and squeezed his half hard dick. It responded instantly to her touch. She smiled at him, her curved dragon fangs showing.

He sucked in a breath, his hand coming up to cup her breast. “I gather you’re not much for chitchat,” he said, his thumb teasing her nipple through the soft material of her dress.

“Nope,” she replied. Naturally reticent, when her horny dragon raged, she was even less inclined to words. Only action of a sexual nature would calm the beast inside her. “Just looking for some vanilla sex. Nothing more. Nothing less.”

“Well, just in case you feel the urge to shout my name later, it’s Colin,” he said and grabbed her by the back of the head.

Shock rippled through Eden as he held her firmly. He kissed her deeply, ravaging her mouth with the kind of kiss she’d expect from an Alpha, not a Beta like Colin. If his kiss hadn’t completely overwhelmed her and made thinking next to impossible, she would have wondered if she had pegged him wrong. Where his kiss had been leisurely before, now it burned hot and urgent, demanding a response from her rather than accepting what she doled out to him.

Abruptly, he let her go. Her chest heaved as she sucked in great gulps of air. Colin’s eyes glinted enigmatically at her in the dim light of the cab. “You gotta be more careful about judging a book by its cover,” he growled.

She blinked. He looked at her with a feral light in his eyes. Ho-ly shit. She’d never misjudged an Alpha before. Of course, her familiarity with vampires fell far below that of dragons and fae men. She’d always been rather skittish around vamps. All that biting and blood sucking...

Colin took her chin in his hand, forcing her to meet his gaze. The midnight blue irises glowed preternaturally again, and she could feel the steely strength in his long elegant fingers. “You’re lucky I’m a nice guy and all I want is to fuck your pretty pink pussy,” he whispered. “Walking into a vampire club and making snap judgments about my kind can get you drained, despite the fact that you’re a dragon.”

Her eyes widened a little. He smiled then, and the sunny, amusing persona he’d displayed at the club, the persona that had shouted Beta to her, snapped back into place. “You are going to let me fuck your pretty pink pussy, aren’t you?” he asked as his fingers turned from steel to silk, sliding warmly across her skin.

Eden nodded. Several strands of her raven hair caught in the golden stubble that covered his jaw. His vanilla, sugar cookie scent grew stronger and she realized his arousal intensified it. The more aroused he became, the stronger the scent grew. The sweet smell flooded her entire being, making her mouth water. She wondered what he tasted like...

In a split second, the dragon within her roared to life. She pushed Colin against the back of the cab’s seat and kissed him hard, her lips and tongue sucking urgently at his. The heat and depth of the kiss pushed her arousal up several notches. It had been a long time since a man had affected her so strongly, and never had one’s scent overpowered her as Colin’s did. Potent and distinctive, she would have been able to find him in a crowd of thousands at Madison Square Garden. Definitely something to remember if she ever had to hunt for him.

Colin’s hands slid up under the hem of her mini dress, his fingers digging into her ass. She rubbed herself against him and he rewarded her with another growl. Pure sex emanated from the sound, with none of the male fierceness that had colored it previously. The sound skittered along her nerve endings, reaching her inner dragon and rousing the beast’s tremendous sexual appetite.

Heat and wetness rushed to the sensitive flesh between her thighs. Colin's nostrils flared and she knew he had caught the scent of her sex. Beneath her hand, his cock had swollen to a satisfying proportion. The long thick ridge behind the zipper of his jeans promised to fill her as no one had before. Size had never mattered to her, but then, she'd never had someone as big as Colin promised to be.

The cab screeched to a stop, the centrifugal force pushing her back against the seat and away from the press of Colin's body. She sprawled awkwardly; her skirt hitched up so far her thong showed. The driver didn't even bother to look in the rear view mirror at her. Colin ran his hands over his face, then opened the door and got out. He reached in, holding out a hand for her. She put hers in it and let him pull her out of the cab. Tugging her dress down, she waited as he paid the driver.

When Colin turned toward her, she saw the feverish glitter in his eyes. He apparently didn't care that anyone who chose to look at his crotch would see the bulge of his erection. He took her arm and they walked boldly into the lobby of the expensive hotel. Exhilaration swept through Eden as they headed toward the elevator. Once in the car, she pushed the six and the car swept upward. Her dragon clawed at her insides. She was so aroused, she expected her cream to drip down her bare thighs any moment.

At her floor, they got off the elevator, and she turned down the plushly carpeted corridor, her long legs eating up the distance to her room. As she neared it, she took out her keycard. She stopped in front of 669, slipping the keycard in the slot. Colin chuckled at the room number. Moments later, he closed the door, sticking the Do Not Disturb sign on it. When he turned toward her, she reached back and unzipped her dress, letting it fall to the floor.

Standing in front of Colin in her black silk thong and leather boots, a sense of empowerment filled her. Her fingers twitched, aching for the thick handle of her whip. Colin looked at her hand and arched one blond brow in amusement, almost as if he could read her thoughts. He casually pulled off his jacket and tossed it on the chair, following it with his shirt.

Eden's eyes raked over the muscles of his arms and chest. He had a fine boned aristocratic caste to his build, with pale gold skin, a shade or two lighter than her own tan. The muscles of his arms, pecs, and shoulders were sculpted and well defined, but not bulky. His rock hard abs had classic six pack ridges. A fine dust of blond hair encircled each of his pale brown nipples... pale brown pierced nipples.

Her lips quirked in a smile. He really wasn't what he appeared to be, she thought as he bent and removed his shoes and socks. When he straightened, she briefly eyed his long narrow feet. Elegant like his hands. Her gaze shifted to those hands. They pulled down the zipper of his jeans, pushing the denim down his muscular thighs. He kicked the jeans away and hooked his thumbs in the waistband of his boxers. She stared at him thoughtfully, deciding that he had predictable taste in underwear. He seemed like a boxers kind of guy. With a practiced flick, the garment in question hit the floor and he kicked them in the same direction as the jeans.

"Will I do?" he asked, as her eyes wandered his hard body. Dark gold hair arched from his navel to his groin. She saw that he kept himself well trimmed and thought that it extended to his balls too. Even from a distance, they seemed smooth. He had a larger cock than the bulge in his jeans had given away, she noted, taking in his girth and length. Her mouth watered at the thought of licking him.

"I believe you will." Desire turned her voice husky and unconsciously, her fingers reached down to her panty line to stroke over her clan mark. The dragon inside her began to pace. Touching the swirling lines of the clan mark that covered the soft skin inside her hipbone made her even hornier.

"Your clan mark?" he asked quietly, watching her stroke it.

She nodded and he walked toward her, reaching out to brush one long finger over the mark. Her inner dragon preened at his touch. She knew the mark just looked like a tribal dragon tattoo to the uninitiated. However, Colin seemed to know about clan marks and how they reacted to touch.

"You're a black dragon. I'm not sure I recognize the clan though," he murmured, circling her and looking up and down her body.

"It doesn't matter. All you really want is to fuck my pretty pink pussy, right?" she reminded him with a lift of her brows.

Colin smiled angelically. "For now, yes, although, you have yet to show it to me..."

As his voice trailed away, Eden bent over and unzipped her boots. She could feel Colin's eyes on her breasts as if he touched her. The weight of his gaze made her rush and she kicked the expensive designer footwear off, something she never did. She lifted her head, her eyes holding his as she shimmied out of the black silk thong.

Inside her, the dragon roared, knowing that the tension they shared would soon be released. Eden walked over to the bed and ripped the covers back. Lying on the sheets, she spread her legs so that Colin could see the pussy he'd promised to fuck. She didn't need a mirror to know that her flesh glistened wetly in the low light. She could feel her swollen, sensitive lips throbbing. She stroked her hand over the clan mark and her nipples tightened painfully.

If you want it, come and get it, bite boy. Standing there staring at it, doesn't do either of us any good.

Colin's eyes jerked to hers and for a split second she had the weird sense that he had heard her thoughts, something that sent fear arcing through her. But then he flashed a seductive smile that widened as he started toward her. In a flood of lust that drowned her momentary fear, she gazed mesmerized at the thick erection that bobbed with each of his steps.

"It really is very pink and very pretty," he said softly, his tone filled with satisfaction.

When he reached the side of the bed, his long fingers trailed over her knee and up the inside of her thigh. Her heart thundered in her chest and her dragon's harsh breathing sent a trail of smoke from her nostrils.

Colin leaned over her, his hands denting the mattress on either side of her hips as he sat on the edge of the bed. "How much foreplay do you want, baby? Because as far as I'm concerned, what happened in the cab was all I need."

Eden licked her lips, watching as Colin's eyes darkened even more. "I don't need any more teasing. Just fuck me hard and fast before I explode from looking at you."

She didn't know what to expect, but what happened next still surprised her. With an economy of movement that made it all seem like a single smooth move, Colin reached out,

flipped her onto her belly, pulled her hips back against his and thrust the entire length of his cock into her throbbing wetness. She let out a startled half yelp, half moan. He filled her so tightly it bordered on pain. Taking someone as big as him without any warning had driven every ounce of air from her lungs.

Colin's fingers roughly pinched and twisted her hard nipples. Pleasure ripped through her in a great wave. She had no idea how he knew what she liked. He certainly didn't look like a rough sex sorta guy. He looked cultured and refined, the elegant and arrogant sort who liked to order women to service him.

He jerked her up off her hands, his chest cradling and supporting her torso. His hips stilled as his hands swept over her body, finding all the places she most liked to be touched. When she moaned uncontrollably, he licked her neck and she shivered. The most incredible sensations buffeted her body when his tongue stroked over her skin. She almost asked him to bite her, but he bent her over again. Her palms hit the mattress as his hips slammed into her ass. He pulled back and thrust into her forcefully.

Eden's pussy stretched to accommodate him while clinging to his thickness. He fucked her harder than she'd ever been fucked before. The head of his cock battered her G-spot with every thrust. Shivers of pleasure racked her body. Her orgasm crested and she cried out, tossing her head.

Colin chuckled but his tempo didn't lessen. He gave her exactly what she'd asked for. She shuddered and gasped for air, her heart racing thunderously. Unbelievably, as one long finger flicked over her clit, she found herself coming again.

She knew he could feel her spasms, feel her pussy clamping down on his thick cock. His strokes became shorter. The slap of his hips against her ass grew more frantic. His teeth nipped the back of her neck as his hands tightened on her thighs.

"Oh, baby. Come for me one more time. You can do it," he growled.

His tongue licked at her neck in time to the glide of his fingers against her clit. His cock filled her so full he could barely press inside her despite the fact that she was wetter than she had ever been. His thumb stroked over her mark and inside her, the dragon roared as heat flooded her veins. Her pussy clutched his cock as her whole body vibrated in a third orgasm.

With a muffled cry, Colin came. His cock jerked inside her and she could feel the gush of hot seed that filled her. Shaking uncontrollably, her arms gave out and her face landed on the sheet, her ass still in the air as Colin's cock throbbed inside her, spurts of cum still erupting from him. Finally, he pulled out of her. She moaned at the feel of his flesh separating from hers, leaving her sensitive, open and exposed.

Colin flopped onto his back beside her and her knees gave out, her lower body sprawling bonelessly on the bed. They looked at each other, both of them gasping for air. Then Colin reached out and brushed a lock of hair off her face.

"I'll give you fifteen minutes to recover. Then I'm pounding that pretty pink pussy again after I lick it into submission."

Eden's eyes popped open in astonishment. She didn't know what astonished her more, the fact that he would be ready again so soon or the way he took control. His lips curved in a grin.

“I don’t think you’ll need any of the toys I’m sure you have here. We’ll just fuck. I’m good at it and I like to do it for hours.” His midnight blue eyes twinkled at her. “Unless you’re sending me away now that you’ve come.”

Although he hadn’t framed his words as a question, she shook her head anyway. “I don’t think I can send you away. At least, not until I’m worn out and can’t walk,” she replied, her own smile growing as approval flashed across his face.

“Good.” He leaned over and kissed her hard. “Time for tongues and fingers to discover cocks and pussies.”

He grabbed her hand and placed it on his half-hard cock, still wet with her juice and his seed. She stroked him, wondering why she’d never been into biters before. Unbidden, her mind went back the phone call that had sent her storming into Carpe Noctem looking to get laid. An outcast to her family, she rarely went home, rarely participated in family events. Even so, she loved her siblings. When one of them had accused her of being the Queen of Kink, an unfeeling bitch of a slut who lived to get off, it stung. Those words from someone she had looked up to her entire life, struck deeply into emotions she struggled daily to control. To survive the pain, she’d retreated into the cold bitch persona she’d been accused of.

Now, that same self-preservation kept the lid on her emotions, when she looked at Colin. The core of her wanted to know him, but the icy bitch who’d taken control of her during that painful phone call refused to let go. The bitch coolly surveyed Colin, wondering why she hadn’t hit on vampires before. She snarkily thought that if she had known biters were this good, she would have been picking them up regularly from Carpe Noctem. And that same cold bitch decided that she had more one item she could add to her sexual buffet menu now that she knew about vampires’ stamina.

Inside her, behind the icy bitch, the real Eden gazed at Colin’s beautiful face and wished her life was different.

Chapter Two

It had been a very long time since Colin had been with an Alpha dragon. Usually, human females or vamp women hit on him. Dragons and the fae were skittish around vampires, intimidated by the blood drinking. Despite his obvious attractiveness, dragon women didn't usually hit on him.

When the dragon had rubbed up against him at the bar, he'd been shocked to have her come on to him. He'd loved it, but at the same time, part of him was hugely surprised. Her scent had also surprised him. He'd never met a woman who smelled so richly of spicy Sangria, a mixture of cloves and oranges almost like a pomander ball. The simple but exotic scent had filled his senses. He'd never had that happen with a woman before.

Meeting Karl with a K had been interesting too. He wondered why Karl had put such particular emphasis on the fact that he knew the dragon woman's name. Colin figured Karl knew about him. Unfortunately, his face had been plastered to the Lifestyle section of the paper that day because of the high profile public relations firms that currently courted his family's business.

Well known in the Darkworld, Granville Cemetery defined old money, class and refinement. All the old vamps wanted crypts there when they retired to the Afterworld. As Vice President of Marketing and Sales for Granville Cemetery, Colin's job dealt with the sales of those crypts. High-powered positions in the cemetery industry drew the curiosity of others so the newspaper had been most insistent to interview him. Recognizing the value of such an article, Colin had agreed. He'd been recognized by a lot of people since the article came out, but apparently, not by his dragon lady.

Colin gazed down at her. Her slender fingers wrapped around his stiffening cock. Fucking her had been amazing. When he'd thrust inside her, he thought his head would implode. Her pussy had felt so damned good. And the weirdest sensation of déjà vu had happened to him earlier when he'd touched her clan mark. The swirling lines of the stylized dragon had seemed familiar, but he knew he'd never seen her individual mark before.

As he watched her stroking him, he knew without a doubt that he'd never fucked anyone hotter. She had an amazing body and her attitude suited him to a T. She pushed back the long fall of silky black hair then and bent to lick to his cock head. Colin sucked in a breath as her hot tongue touched him. Electricity crackled through him.

"Are you going to tell me your name?" he asked through gritted teeth as he tried to keep his body from spiraling out of control at her touch.

She lifted her head and gazed at him with narrowed golden eyes. "Why do you want to know my name? Isn't the sex what's important?"

"Sure, but sometimes it's nice to have a name to shout. Think of it as a sexual accolade." His smile became an openly amused grin.

She eyed him thoughtfully for a moment, her fingers still stroking his hard cock. Finally, she said, "You can call me Eden."

Colin's eyebrows shot up. "So in my orgasmic screams I will be calling you heaven? Nice."

Her sly smile gave him the distinct impression that he was the butt of some very private joke. Not that he cared. After tonight, he'd probably never see her again. Dispassionately,

Colin watched her bend to his cock again, her tongue swirling over the head. He shivered. The way she made him feel, he wanted to lock her away for a week. One night just wouldn't be enough. Mentally, he slapped himself. He rarely did one-night stands anymore because he didn't like the lack of connection.

Colin's stared at Eden as she deep throted his cock. Holy crap, she was amazing! Her hands rubbed his balls and teased his ass as she sucked him. He loved a woman who could multi-task, and gods, could she do it.

Eden pushed his thighs apart and knelt between them. "Vanilla. No toys." Her eyes held his as she spoke.

He wondered why the hell she had to make a big production out of not using toys. He shook his head. "I don't need them to get off," he reminded her.

She nodded. "Good." Then she took his cock in her mouth again, her tongue swirling in counterpoint to the stroking of her hands.

Colin tried to not to let his body gain the upper hand, but heat enveloped him. The hot, wet vacuum of Eden's mouth wrapped around his erection, driving him crazy with sensation. He couldn't remember when he'd gotten a better blowjob. He thrust his hips upward, pushing into her mouth. She didn't gag, didn't seem to care if he fucked her face. In fact, by the growing scent of her arousal, she liked it...a lot.

Trying to keep his mind occupied in order to hang onto his control didn't work. Eden teased his ass with one finger while her tongue flickered over the spot beneath the head of his cock. His downfall. The more someone teased that spot, the faster he raced toward his orgasm. Tonight was no exception.

He could feel his balls pulling up tight to his body, preparing to shoot his load. His ragged, rapid breathing seemed loud in his ears. His fingers convulsively clenched fistfuls of her silky hair. The hot burning sensation that prefaced his orgasm had already started at the base of his spine and radiated out to his ass, balls, and cock. His entire body tensed.

"Fuck. Eden, I'm gonna come," he warned her.

She blinked up at him for a moment and he wished he could take a picture of her in that instant. Her golden eyes glowed with desire, her luscious lips wrapped around his thick erection. The intense, lust-ridden expression on her face pushed all of his buttons, and he couldn't hold back another second. The image of her with his dick in her mouth was so erotic that his orgasm exploded like a fire hitting the flashover point. With a hoarse shout, his cock jerked and he shot his cum into her throat.

Eden's eyes held his as she swallowed, her tongue still swirling around his throbbing flesh. Colin shuddered. Wave after wave of pleasure racked his body, making him tremble. He gasped for air, his lungs burning.

Finally, his fingers loosened their hold on her long black hair. He went limp, his hands falling to the mattress. Eden licked delicately at him, cleaning away all traces of his semen. When she lifted her head, his softening cock popped free of her swollen lips, and she smiled at him. By the gods, she had loved sucking him off! Colin couldn't remember the last time a woman had delighted in sucking him and swallowing his cum.

He reached for her, his hands still shaking with the force of his orgasm. He pulled her toward him and she crawled up his body, lying on him so that she could press her lips to his. He opened his mouth, his tongue meeting hers in a tangled dance of lust. The taste of his cum on her tongue made him shiver. His orgasm seemed to have made no impact on the desire that had taken hold of his body.

Eden broke the kiss, rising up on her knees and straddling his face, her hands gripping the headboard of the bed. Colin looked up at the swollen pink flesh that glistened with wetness. He rubbed a finger over her labia and her hips jerked, a moan escaping her. Reaching up, he grabbed her hips and lowered her into position over his face. Taking a deep breath, he inhaled her scent. Sweet and spicy, the tangy mix of her arousal and that exotic orange-clove scent drove his senses nuts.

Colin parted her lips, noting her deep pink center. He wondered if his girth and length had caused some of that pinkness. He had no illusions about sex. Most women had difficulty taking him and he'd unwittingly hurt some in the past. Eden hadn't seemed to have any trouble with his size, but she'd been damned tight. He figured at the very least she'd be feeling the after affects for a day or two because he wasn't leaving before he fucked her at least once more.

Tilting his head back, he sucked her labia into his mouth, and she rewarded him with little mewling sounds from her throat. When he flicked his tongue over her clit, her hips jerked. He slid a finger deep inside her, angling it so that he could hit her most sensitive spot. She shuddered and he knew he'd found it. He slipped another finger into her, using both fingers to press the spot. Meanwhile, his tongue flicked over her clit.

When Eden's hips began to undulate, pressing her pussy into his face, he knew her control had shattered. He licked faster as her juices flowed. The feel of her slick flesh gripping his fingers and teasing his tongue had his own arousal spiking upward again. His cock started to thicken. Gods, he loved how she tasted! Licking and sucking her flesh as his fingers thrust into her, he pushed his face up against her.

Eden's little moans grew louder and he stepped up the pace. His tongue kept going back to tease her clit, making her body shiver. He saw little goosebumps prickling across her satiny skin. She ground her pussy against his face now, and Colin could sense her imminent orgasm. He rubbed his stubbly chin against her and she squeaked. Determined to push her over the edge, he sucked on her clit while pressing on her G-spot with one hand. The other hand rubbed her clan mark.

Shudders rippled through her. "Colin!" she cried out, as she pressed herself against his mouth.

Colin's hands tightened on her, absorbing the orgasmic ripples that tore through her. Her whole body shook with its force and her breath caught audibly in her throat. He just kept on licking, pressing the flat of his tongue against her clit over and over. On the heels of the first orgasm came a second one, forced out by the pressure of his tongue on her engorged flesh.

She gripped the headboard with her head flung back, her long hair cascading down her slender back. As Colin slipped out from under her, he marveled at how incredibly beautiful she looked with little tremors still rocking her. He took her in his arms and kissed her. She melted against him and he took them both down to the mattress, his hips pressing against hers.

Eden cradled him between her thighs, her hands stroking up over his back. She closed her eyes, struggling to catch her breath. Colin stared down at her. She had an exotic beauty that captured him and wouldn't let go. He could look at her for hours, he thought. Then he realized that he didn't have that option.

He kissed the tip of her nose and grinned. "This place got a Jacuzzi tub?" he asked.

She nodded without opening her eyes. Colin got up and went into bathroom. He turned on the water, filling the huge tub. Hearing a sound behind him, he turned to find Eden standing there smiling at him.

"I love fucking in water," she said as she got in.

Her golden eyes glittered with erotic invitation. Colin turned off the water and turned on the jets. When he slid into the tub, Eden straddled his thighs, settling herself on her knees, her ass on his legs. He cupped her taut buttocks and leaned in to nuzzle her throat.

"I wanna fuck your ass," he growled, licking her neck.

She pulled back and looked at him. "That's not vanilla."

His brows shot together. "Yes, it is. Anal sex is not kinky."

"I disagree." She leaned back a little and Colin's eyes locked onto her luscious breasts, drawn there by the way the hot water swirled around them. He reached up and cupped them, noting how his fingers looked pale on her tanned flesh.

"What is this thing you have about not doing anything kinky?" he asked, sensing that something was going with the whole vanilla issue. She seemed to have a no holds barred kind of personality, yet tonight she'd been adamant about sticking to really basic sex.

For a moment she tensed, her eyes searching his. Finally, she sighed and relaxed against him, her breasts rubbing his chest. "Someone told me I couldn't get off unless I had kinky sex," she said in a voice devoid of emotion.

That carefully flat tone told Colin that this issue had stirred up a hornet's nest inside her. Tilting his head to one side, he caressed her nipples absently as he chose his words carefully. "So you feared they were right? That you had lost the ability to be turned on by a person rather than an act?"

She nodded stiffly. "You didn't seem like the kind of guy who does kinky," she muttered, her eyes falling from his.

Colin stared at her, unsure how he should feel about this new development. First, she had pegged him as a Beta, now she thought he didn't do kinky. He wondered if he should be insulted. He decided to just be honest with her.

"Baby, I've done kinky. I still do kinky. It just depends on your definition," he said cautiously. "Am I gonna get off on you striping my ass? No. I'm a tad too much the Alpha to enjoy that. Will I let you spank me a little when you're all worked up? As a prelude to other things and if it excites you to do it, sure. I've cuffed and been cuffed. I like anal sex. Yes, you can stimulate my ass too. Nipple clamps? I don't think so. My nipples are already pierced."

A reluctant smile curved her lips and Colin grinned back at her. "You wanna blindfold me and feed me different foods? Go for it. You wanna order me around? I can play that a little too. It's not the games, darlin'. It's all about the person I'm with. The bottom line is always

gonna be fucking your pretty pink pussy in some way, shape or form. There might be all kinds of stuff we do to get to that point, but in the end it's my cock in your pussy that will get me off."

"Not a blowjob?" Her fingers trailed over his chest and pulled at his nipple rings.

He leaned in and kissed her hard. "Baby, that was the best blowjob of my life, but I still wouldn't trade it for fucking you."

Seeing the uncertainty in her eyes, Colin wondered who the hell had made her question her sexuality, because it seemed such a cruel thing to do to such a passionate woman.

"Eden." She looked up, and he cupped her head in his hands. "You don't need the kink to get turned on or enjoy sex. Have we done anything kinky tonight?"

She was silent a long moment, her golden eyes clouded with emotion. "I don't know you. Stranger sex is exciting," she whispered.

So someone had told her she got off on sex with nameless, faceless people. *What an asshat!* Anger speared through him.

"I don't think that's something you need to worry about, Eden. If you want to get to know me, just ask. If you want to see me again, I'm here for a few more days. If you want to see me when I go home, I'll give you my cell number and address," he told her with a little shrug. "I'm open to taking this to another level if you want to. I don't have a problem exploring the possibilities of relationships."

Eden looked at him thoughtfully. Her hands came up and framed his face, stroking his damp skin. "You're a really nice guy, Colin. Dangerous, but nice."

She leaned forward and her breasts pressed against his chest. She kissed him leisurely, without heat or passion. When she pulled away, he quirked a brow at her.

"Dangerous, but nice," he repeated. "What does that mean?"

She began to caress him, her fingers stroking over his shoulders and neck, a particularly sensitive area. He shivered a little and she smiled.

"You're Alpha, but you don't really act it. It fooled me. It probably fools a lot of people. That makes you dangerous."

She circled one of his nipples with her fingertip as she trailed her tongue over the side of his neck. Colin couldn't suppress the shiver that time. Her smile widened.

"You're smart, and you don't intimidate easily. That makes you dangerous." Eden reached down and wrapped her fingers around his thick cock. "You're a lot bigger than I would expect a man of your stature to be. That can be considered dangerous."

He stilled her fingers with his own. She looked up at him. "But not to you?" he asked, holding her gaze intently.

Eden smiled at him in a way that made his stomach flutter. "I like a challenge, and I don't scare easily," she said.

Colin let go of her hand and she resumed stroking his cock. He leaned back against the side of the tub and watched her explore his body. "Would you spend this much time on a

stranger's pleasure just to get off on fucking someone whose name you didn't know?" he asked.

Her head shot up and she blinked at him in surprise. "You have a way of putting things that brings the logic right to the fore. Did anyone ever tell you that before?"

He shook his head. "Nah. Usually, it's my brother who is considered the cool logical one in the family. I'm just a playboy looking for fun," he replied, his gaze dropping to her breasts.

She caught his chin in her hand and twisted his face so he had to look at her. "I don't believe that," she whispered and kissed him again.

This time, Colin took control of the kiss. His tongue parted her lips, stroking over them before entering her mouth. As his tongue slid against hers, she pressed up against him, winding her arms around his shoulders, her hips rubbing against his thighs in the steamy water. He didn't know why, but being in the water with her kicked up his desire a few notches. His senses seemed on overdrive. Sight, sound, taste, and touch, all intensified. The silky hot water felt erotic against his skin. When she stroked her hands over his wet flesh, his eyes wanted to roll back into his head with unadulterated bliss.

Colin sucked on her tongue and she moaned a little. He cupped her ass with one hand, his fingertips teasing the flesh between the taut globes. His other hand slipped between her thighs to tease her slippery pussy. He stroked his fingers over her swollen lips and she shuddered.

Gasping for air, she broke the kiss. He nipped at the side of her neck and she arched it, tilting her head back to give him a view of her honey colored throat. The scent of her blood filled his nostrils. He could hear the pounding of her heart. When he bent to kiss her throat, he could feel the rush of blood in her veins beneath his lips. Until this moment, he'd had no urge to bite her, but now it rose within him. He'd fed earlier, a baggie from the blood bank. Without hunger, there was no reason for his uncontrollable urge to bite her.

Unable to stop himself, his fangs unsheathed. As he licked her throat, they scraped against her flesh. He tensed a little, waiting for her to jerk away from him in fright. It didn't happen. Instead, she pressed herself against him tightly, her hips rotating to accommodate his stroking fingers.

"Do you want to bite me?" she asked breathlessly.

Fuck! How the hell did he answer that? She would toss him out of her suite on his ear, if he said the wrong thing.

"Yes," he admitted honestly. "But I won't."

Her head tilted forward so that their eyes met. "Why not?"

For a brief moment he wondered if she could be one of those thrill seekers who sought out vampires just to get bit. Then he realized that genuine curiosity shone in her eyes. His fingers stilled.

"Biting someone during the sex act is something reserved for bloodmates," he explained slowly. "Some vampires do it with everyone they fuck, as a sort of thrill seeking act. If the person they happen to bite really is their bloodmate, they become bonded to the person."

“Bonded? What does that mean for a vampire?” Eden eyed him coolly, but her fingers did dangerously hot things to his hard cock, rubbing the head and stroking ever closer to the spot beneath the crown that drove him insane with pleasure.

“It means they can never drink from another person again. Bonded bloodmates can only drink from their mate. If the mate dies, the vampire dies of starvation.”

Profound silence followed Colin’s words. He tamped down a little rush of anger with himself. He’d let the conversation turn far too serious.

“Look, it’s a complicated mating thing. It doesn’t have anything to do with you and me and this moment,” he said, trying to backpedal his way out of the situation.

Eden frowned at him a little. “I asked. I didn’t expect the answer to be some sugar coated platitude,” she told him. “I just wanted to understand.”

“Well, now you do,” he said gruffly, feeling really uncomfortable.

Eden kissed him again. “It’s okay, Colin. I still want to fuck you.”

His good humor returned with a rush. “Good,” he murmured. “Cause I think it’s time.”

Colin slid both hands under her ass, lifting her and guiding her over his erection. Her golden eyes held his steadily as she slid down, her pussy stretching to accommodate his girth. She whimpered a little as she rocked her hips, taking the last of his length inside her. He flexed his cock and her eyes went wide with shock.

“Oh gods. That feels so...”

Colin did it again and she shuddered. He grinned.

“It’s j-just that it’s h-hitting...”

He did it a third time and she jerked in his arms, her skin rippling as she came. She moaned, her fingers digging into his shoulders. He held her as her orgasm subsided to little shivers. Remaining still while her slick pussy clutched his cock was torture, but he enjoyed it nonetheless. Watching her fly apart in his arms made him even hotter.

She drew a shuddering breath and opened her eyes. Desire flared in their amber irises. Her hips rotated, grinding against him. Heat flooded Colin’s groin and he groaned out loud. Eden smiled and did it again. This time, she squeezed him with her inner muscles.

“Shit!” he hissed between clenched teeth.

She braced her hands on his shoulders and began to ride him with a twisting movement that made every thrust feel like wet velvet wound tighter and tighter around his cock.

Eden leaned close to him and nipped the side of his neck. Colin went rigid as intense pleasure washed over him. He barely hung onto his control by a thread. Any of her thrusts could push him over now. His balls tightened painfully. His entire body burned. Every nerve ending he had seemed to be centered in his groin.

Her stiff nipples poked his chest and he twisted one, rolling it between his thumb and forefinger. She tossed her head, moaning a little. He noticed a slight flush on her honey colored skin and gooseflesh along her arms. Her breath came in swift pants.

Eden’s hips undulated against his and Colin passed the point of no return. She ground against him and her swollen clit pressed against his pubic bone. She shivered and her pussy

clamped down on him. With a cry, Colin lost control. His cock throbbed, expanding in the tight space of her channel. His ejaculation burst from the head of his cock to bathe her insides as she cried out and came once more.

One oddly lucid thought speared his lust soaked brain. Dragons could only get pregnant after mating. He'd sure as hell shot his seed deep inside her, enough to knock her up if he had been her mate. A quick vision of Eden, her belly round with his child made Colin's eyes snap open in shock. He had to get a grip on himself. His wild ideas had no place in a purely sexual encounter.

Eden lay sated on his chest, her breathing rapid. He wrapped his arms around her, stroking her long naked back.

"I don't think you have anything to worry about," he said softly. "You don't need the kink to get off. Whoever told you that obviously doesn't know you very well."

She stirred slightly, but remained draped over his chest, her head nestled in the crook of his neck. "It was my brother," she replied, her voice muffled.

Chapter Three

Lying boneless on Colin's chest in the aftermath of her orgasms, the two of them still sunk deep into the hot water of the tub, Eden's icy bitch resurfaced. His thighs bore her full weight yet he hadn't protested at all. He was far too nice a man for her, the bitch thought. As the black sheep of the family, the decades old ideas of honor, home, and hearth were pure bullshit to a dragon like her. And her oldest brother used that bullshit against her every chance he got. She knew Sean's tactics well. He used words to push her buttons and hopefully sour her on her lifestyle. Calling her the Queen of Kink and telling her that she didn't know how to have meaningful sex, definitely set her off. Her younger brother told her that Sean would never give up trying to get her to come home and work in the family business.

Antaeus International was a huge company with offices around the world. Her brothers bought up funeral homes and cemeteries and repackaged them for the masses, turning out cookie cutter products at low cost. The Antaeus men were the darlings of the death care industry because of their success. Her whole family worked for AI and once upon a time Eden had too. But working for her family didn't interest her any longer. She liked being a photographer and traveling the world. Sure, it got lonely sometimes and hotel suites got old after awhile, but she could never give up her camera for a desk job. It just wasn't in her to lock away her creative side. She needed it like she needed air to breathe.

"Your brother doesn't know jack."

Colin's voice rumbled in his chest, vibrating against her naked breasts and rousing her from her unpleasant thoughts. Despite the fact that the cold bitch had been the only face she'd shown Colin, he seemed to instinctively know that there was more to her than that. His words about Sean not knowing jack proved it. The pain of recalling Sean's words had the bitch coming out to protect Eden's emotions. But as soon as Colin made his crack about her brother, the bitch slinked off, leaving Eden lying vulnerable on her lover's hard body.

Dear gods, she had never been as comfortable in a man's arms as she was in Colin's. He managed to be amusing, sweet, and Alpha without being an asshole. In her eyes, he was an unbeatable combination. Her curiosity about vampire biting habits had seemed to make him a little uncomfortable, but she chalked it up to biting being an intensely personal thing for him.

She sighed, snuggling her face into his neck more. "My brother doesn't know me. He only thinks he does."

"Siblings, especially older ones, can be like that," Colin agreed.

"Spoken like a man with an older sibling," she chuckled.

"Two."

"Holy shit. How do you survive when all of you are Alpha?"

Colin laughed. "I only have one brother."

"Does that mean your sister isn't Alpha?" she asked.

"No, she is, but for vampires, being Alpha comes into play more with mates than siblings. The Alpha always has to be the one in power, the leader, the one who has the urge within him to force submission from others. For Acerbians – vampires – that instinctive drive is strongest with regard to our mates. We do show our Alpha in other venues, in business particularly. My brother is quite ruthless. My sister is cutthroat. I don't take any shit from people. All three of

us are natural leaders. We don't fight each other in the office because each of us has our own area of expertise. Besides, vampires can be just as clannish as dragons. Family ties are important so we just don't posture and play the Alpha card on that level. However, we are very aggressive and possessive when it comes to mates. " He stroked his hand over her back and her inner dragon preened, loving his touch. "If my brother hit on you, then he would see my Alpha."

The harsh tone in Colin's voice should have sent up red flags. She should be pushing him away at this point. After all, she couldn't afford to get involved with someone. Instead, she closed her eyes and let him hold her. Lying in the luxurious warmth of the water with the hard muscles of his body beneath hers, his cock still partially within her, all combined to make her feel incredibly comfortable. It wasn't very often that she got the opportunity to just be a woman...

"Hey! You're not falling asleep on me, are you?"

Eden blinked, her eyes opening sleepily. Shit! She hadn't fallen asleep but she was so comfortable that it had been a near thing. She flexed her inner muscles and felt the head of his cock still lodged inside her. Yeah, he was still slightly hard so only seconds had gone by. She'd never had a man's voice soothe her as Colin's did.

He sucked in a breath when she squeezed him. "You know, I could totally fuck you again, but I'm feeling a little like a prune. Can we get out now?"

She raised her head and found him smiling at her. "Sure." She lifted herself off of him, his cock slipping free. As she stood up, she grabbed a hotel robe from the stack lying on the edge of the tub. She stepped out and wrapped it around herself, reaching for a towel to dry her hair. Colin came up behind her and pushed her hair aside so he could kiss the side of her neck.

"Are you gonna kick me out now?" he asked.

"Don't you biters have to be home before the sun?"

He shrugged. "Not really. It just gives me a sunburn. And that's the midday sun not the morning sun."

She turned in his arms, her eyes searching his midnight blue ones. "If I send you away now, will you come back tomorrow?"

"If you tell me why you're suddenly sending me away," he replied cautiously.

Eden bit her lip. She wanted him to stay. She didn't want him to go. However, she needed time to think. Her whole perspective on sex and men and relationships had shifted on its axis and her emotions seemed off balance from it.

"I need to think," she said honestly. "When I picked you up tonight, I was angry and determined to prove my brother wrong." She paused, biting her lip for a moment. "I let his words make me question myself, my motivations, my sexuality. You've made me realize that I never should have questioned that. Instead, I should have questioned other things."

"What other things?"

She shook her head. "Nothing to do with you. Things about my family. About why my brother would feel the need to say such a thing to me."

Colin's expression became sympathetic. "That's certainly what I would be questioning." He paused then went on in a carefully neutral voice. "You know, you don't have to invite me back tomorrow. It's okay if you want this to end here."

Her eyes widened. "You don't have to say that, Colin. You can be the Alpha with me. I rather like him, you know."

His eyes flashed and he pulled her into his arms, kissing her. The embrace was hard and rough, but she enjoyed it. When he lifted his head, she grinned at him and he growled. "If you don't call me, I'll be back here at five pounding on your door."

She opened her robe, swiped the first two fingers of her hand across her clan mark then pressed them to his lips. "I promise. Dragon swear."

Colin's lips quirked up at the corners. "Dragon swear? Just what exactly does that mean?"

She wrinkled her nose at him. "It's like pinky swear or cross my heart... only it's a promise on my clan mark. You already know that clan marks are different for every dragon, the mark intrinsic to each. Dragon swear is a child's phrase, but its roots are deep in each dragon's personal honor."

He nodded. "I understand."

In the bedroom, she watched him dress. Then he took out his Blackberry. "Where's your cell phone?" he asked.

She got it out and he grunted when he saw they had the same phone. "Put my number in it," he told her and rattled it off.

Eden recognized the area code as the same one where her family lived. How odd that Colin lived in the same area, she thought. She gave him her number, watching his brows shoot up when he heard the area code. He punched in the number and pocketed his phone. "You have the same area code as I do," he remarked.

She nodded. "I get my mail at my family's house. I don't have a permanent place to live. I travel too much."

Colin's eyes glinted, but he didn't say anything. She walked him to the door of the suite. He bent and kissed her hard, his tongue sweeping into her mouth to tease hers. She moaned. He groaned. Their mouths parted.

"Call me any time tomorrow," he told her.

"I will," she agreed, and then he left. She closed the door and flopped down on the edge of the bed. It reeked of sex and vanilla.

Eden breathed deeply of Colin's scent and her stomach clenched. Definitely something inside her felt drawn to him. Something primal and uncontrollable. The moment she'd smelled him, her whole body had gone into some weird mode. She hadn't really wanted to talk to him at first. She just wanted to fuck him... to have him fuck her. In the tub, her dragon had fought her, turning the water hotter. The urge to bathe Colin in her dragonfire rose within her, making her ask him about vampire matings.

She sucked in a shaky breath. Gods. If her brother Sean could see her now, he would be all about the I-told-you-sos. He wanted her mated and settled. He didn't like the fact that she

roamed the world, far from the family, far from his influence and control. He made no bones about the fact that he wanted Eden to be more like her sister.

Diandra, the eldest of the Antaeus clan, had married a werewolf. Together, they held dominion over a large pack in Scotland. Diandra was everything their parents had ever expected of their daughter. Smart and successful, owning a number of ISPs in the UK, she helped her mate run their corporation as well as the pack.

Ruan McCallen's bloodlines could be traced back to the time of the Roman occupation of Britain. His people were proud and fierce. At first, they had been resistant to their Alpha mating a dragon, but when Diandra had easily won a bloodmatch challenge for Ruan, they grew respectful. By the time she'd spit out twin cubs a couple of years after mating, every wolf in the pack loved her.

Her sister had always been perfect, Eden admitted ruefully. She'd mated and had children. She had a normal job. She was Eden's opposite in every way.

Shoulders slumped, Eden wondered why she continually beat herself up over this. She wouldn't ever fit in, would never be a productive member of the family like Diandra, or any of her siblings for that matter. Declan and Holden were just as mired in the family business as Sean. Only she had ever felt stifled working there.

She'd tried for years, working in marketing where her artistic and creative forces fit best, but in the end, the corporate world had sucked the life out of her until she became an automaton, going through the motions of living. That's when she'd quit the business and thrown off the mantle of her family ties. She'd headed to New York City with little more than a suitcase full of clothes, her cameras and laptop, and a portfolio. The fact that it had taken her less than a year to rise to the top of her profession was a testament to the business acumen she'd learned from her family. She ruthlessly used those business skills when she had to, but always felt a little dirty doing so.

Stretching out on the bed, Eden hugged a pillow to her chest, her nose filled with Colin's scent. The man was obviously successful at his job. She knew the brand of his watch, the cut of his jeans and silk shirt. Top names. Expensive names. Usually, she avoided men like him. Men who reminded her of her brothers, unless they were submissive she could flog. Taking a cat o' nine tails to the muscular back of a man who had untold power in the corporate world held endless satisfaction for her.

Once upon a time, at an invitation only club above the popular Paris nightclub Wicked Pleasures, the master had told her that she didn't have the nature of a true dom. He hadn't turned her away from the club, because she followed the rules and paid well. However, he had held her hand, stroking her palm, and told her that she used the lifestyle to hide from her past and work out the pain and aggression that filled her because the two halves of her life did not sync – her past and her present-future.

At the time, she'd scoffed at the zen in his words. Tonight, she sighed over how prophetic they had been. Being with Colin had not only showed her how wrong Sean was, but that she had been too. The master had been right. She wasn't a true dom. The lifestyle wasn't for her. What she had shared with Colin had been fantastic. Sex at its purist. Gods, her pussy still ached from the pounding his huge cock had given her. She knew she would call him. Every atom in her body wanted her to.

Briefly, she wondered what it would be like to have a relationship, to have someone to come home to. An ache bloomed behind her breastbone. Maybe she should look into alternatives to her lifestyle. A long time ago, when she'd worked for Antaeus International, she'd lived with someone, a dragon who worked for the company too. When Eden left the company to go to New York and become a fashion photographer, she'd left Vahid behind as well. He was a great guy, just not for her in the long term. She hoped he'd found someone else to be with.

The scent of vanilla permeated the air. She wondered why Colin affected her so strongly. His scent, his touch, everything about him fired her senses intensely. He roused her dragon as no one ever had before. In fact, her dragon waited calmly at the moment, serene in the notion that she would be seeing Colin again very soon.

With a sigh, Eden curled up on her side and closed her eyes. Her dragon was right. She would call him tomorrow. What had happened between them was so fantastic she would be an idiot not to see if it could be duplicated. As she began to drift to sleep, she wondered fleetingly what it would be like if what she and Colin had shared could be duplicated every night of their lives from this point forward. As soon as she thought it, sadness filled her. Trying to make something like that work would be next to impossible and she didn't know if she even had it in her to try...

Chapter Four

Blah, blah, blah.

Colin slapped a politely interested expression on his face, while giving his thoughts free rein. Three days of listening to PR bullshit by every top company in New York City had left him irritated and bored. To give them their due, they had been invited to pitch their best at him. It wasn't their fault that their ideas had fallen on deaf ears because he hadn't liked the way Marius had strong-armed him into this trip. His brother thought their company image needed sprucing up. Colin thought that paying Madison Avenue to spruce up the image of a cemetery as old and reputable as theirs was a waste of money.

Still, here he sat listening to the patter that sounded almost identical to every pitch he'd heard since he arrived. People had such ridiculous ideas about cemeteries. No one had come up with anything creative, which didn't surprise him.

When he realized that the young marketing whiz with the presentation materials wasn't going to hit him with something amazing, Colin let his mind drift to the one thing that did hold his attention... Eden. Just thinking her name meant he had to fight his body in order to keep his cock from embarrassing him in a room full of men. His sleep had been restless and his dreams filled with her presence. He couldn't remember ever having a woman affect him so strongly.

He'd been with dragon women before. They were lusty creatures and Colin liked to fuck. Consequently, he'd been with a lot of dragon women. But Eden differed from all the rest. Beneath that air of confidence she wore like a second skin lay a vulnerability that roused his protective instincts. Something to do with her family...

Colin knew that not every family worked like a well-oiled machine as his family did. He'd seen some evidence of squeaky wheels in his sister's new family. His brother-in-law's youngest sister apparently hung out with celebrity do nothing, party-going jetsetters. Colin didn't have time for non-productive members of society. He'd heard that Declan's spoiled sister wouldn't forgo a weekend of parties even for his wedding. Colin never understood that lack of familial caring and support.

On the other hand – his eyes followed the PR guy as he pointed to a pie chart – sometimes family could be a bit overbearing. The gods knew that Colin's older brother Marius ruled the Granville clan, small as it was, with an iron fist in a velvet glove. Marius liked playing Machiavelli. Over the last century, he'd tried controlling Colin with little things, devious things, but Colin always detected Marius' machinations. On the rare occasion that they had differing opinions, Colin would put his foot down. He disliked the unpleasantness of arguing with Marius, but he did it when he had to. He hadn't had strong enough reasons to get out of this PR thing and besides, the trip to the Big Apple had turned into a lot of fun... a lot of sexual fun...

With his mind right back on Eden, Colin checked his watch. Only a couple more hours and he could call her. He'd really hoped she'd take the initiative and call him, but so far, that hadn't happened. In his head, he had a sudden vision of himself doing exactly what he'd told her he would do... kick down her door at 5 pm. She drew him like a magnet and he couldn't just walk away and forget about her.

Another glimpse of his watch told him that PR boy was due to wind up. He tuned back in to the young man's words. Sure enough, the pitch ended and the PR guys looked at Colin

expectantly. Clearing his throat and straightening his tie, Colin smiled at them coolly. He stood up and picked up the packet of presentation materials they'd provided him.

"Thank you for your time, gentlemen," he said smoothly. "I will share this information with my brother Marius, the CEO. Once we've made a decision, we'll let you know. I appreciate the work you've put into this proposal."

They gave him more blah blah blah business chitchat as they walked him to the elevator. As soon as the doors closed, Colin growled and yanked his tie loose. He was done with this crap. Every meeting Marius set up had been the same. He took out his phone and hit the speed dial for his assistant Corey.

"Bossman! How's the Big Apple?" An engaging young man, Corey was beyond efficient if a little irreverent in his demeanor.

"These meetings suck, Corey. They're all the same. Get me out of the rest of them," Colin growled.

Corey chortled with amusement. "You met someone. You just wanna spend the next three days fucking!"

Colin rolled his eyes. "Corey, what man doesn't wanna spend his days and nights fucking?"

"I don't," Corey said loftily.

"That's because you don't have a boyfriend right now," Colin laughed.

"Just because I'm unattached doesn't mean I couldn't fuck for three days and nights if I wanted to. I'm just not a slutty boy," his assistant sniffed.

Colin grinned. Corey might be gay, but his masculinity never came into question. He liked to amuse others by putting on an over the top, gay man act, and he did it really well. "Fine. Your moral self needs to pick up the phone and cancel the rest of the appointments Marius made for me. I'm off to be a slutty boy," he said cheerfully.

"Who did you meet?" Corey's voice lowered to a conspiratorial tone. "I won't tell the Big Fang that you're spending the rest of your time in New York fucking some woman. It is a woman, isn't it?"

Colin shook his head, stifling his laughter as the elevator door opened and he stepped out. "Corey, when have you ever known me to fuck a man?"

His assistant's laugh was rich with amusement. "Never. But there's always a first time!"

"No first times for me. It's a woman. A beautiful strong willed black dragon woman," he confided as he headed for the taxi stand.

"Ooooh!" Colin could just see Corey's eyes opening wide. "What is it with you Granvilles lately? First your sister goes all googly eyed for a dragon and now you."

Colin got in a waiting cab and gave the driver the name of his hotel. "I'm not googly eyed, Corey. I'm just horny."

"You say to-may-toe and I say to-mah-toe."

Colin grinned at his assistant's cheekiness. "We'll see. So far, she hasn't called me back and that is not a good sign."

“She’ll call,” Corey said confidently.

“You sound like you’re ready to take bets on this.”

Corey made a rude sound that Colin took for a raspberry. “Bossman, you have a big dick. All the girlies want to call you back. And all the slutty boys *wish* you’d call.”

As Colin burst out laughing, Corey told him, “You just have a good time burning your candle at both ends. Corey will relieve you of the boring meetings. See you in three days, Bossman!”

The call ended and Colin stared at his phone. *Ring, damn you!* As if prompted by his thoughts, the phone dinged. His eyebrows flicked up at the text message notice. He clicked on it.

I’m wet. How fast can you get here?

Colin sucked in his breath sharply. He tapped on the divider between him and the driver and gave him the name of Eden’s hotel. As the cab sped him toward Park Avenue, Colin’s groin tightened. Already he could mentally smell the scent of her blood. His muscles twitched. His cock protested being confined within his boxer briefs, behind the zipper of his suit pants. He had the primal urge to rip his clothes off and take his woman and he hadn’t even arrived yet!

Biting the inside of his cheek, he tried to calm himself. Damn. He was more excited than a virgin on prom night. He couldn’t remember ever being this turned on by a woman. When the cab pulled up at Eden’s hotel, Colin tossed some money at the driver. He knew it was probably way too much, but he didn’t care. He just wanted to get to Eden. He fidgeted in the elevator and when the doors opened, he bolted for her room. He lifted a hand to knock, but his fist met the air as she jerked the door open.

Their eyes met. Colin leaned forward. Eden tilted her head up. Their mouths met in a hard mash of lips and tongue. They kissed each other urgently. Colin maneuvered his way inside and kicked the door shut, fumbling behind him for the security lock. Eden’s hands pulled his suit jacket off, tugging at his already loosened tie, and unbuttoning his expensive designer shirt. She tossed all three items toward a chair and ran her hands over his bare chest.

“Ohmygods, Colin,” she groaned against his mouth. “I thought I could hold out until five...”

Colin ripped open the hotel robe she wore and pushed it off. His hands spanned her waist, his fingers finding her clan mark. She shivered when he touched it, her skin rippling. For a moment, he thought he could see the outline of dark glittery scales beneath her skin, but then the illusion disappeared. He took her mouth in another deep kiss, his tongue parting the seam of her lips. A groan escaped her.

Eden’s hands went to his belt, unbuckling it with the swift skill of a woman who handled straps on a regular basis. Vaguely he recalled that she’d mentioned being into all kinds of kinky stuff. He didn’t care. Right now, he just wanted to be inside her. He could smell her arousal and it fueled his.

She freed his cock and pushed his pants and briefs down. She knelt, tugging off his shoes and socks. As she stood, her fingers trailed along the length of his erection. His cock ached and Colin thought his head would explode.

Fuck it, he thought as he caught her fingers in his. He spun her around, pressing her front against the wall. His hips rubbed against her ass, his cock gliding along the crease between her buttocks. She moaned and he leaned over her shoulder catching her mouth with his.

They both panted roughly, the sound loud in the big room. Eden placed her palms flat on the wall, arching her back and pushing her ass against him. Colin's hands slipped between her thighs, pressing them apart. His long fingers dipped into her pussy, rubbing the wetness all over her swollen lips. She jerked a little then leaned back against him, her long black hair spilling over his shoulder. Colin lifted one hand to cup her breasts, twisting and pulling her tight nipples.

For long minutes, they stood in that position, Colin's cock cradled between Eden's buttocks, one of his hands teasing her breasts while the other played with her pussy. Her head leaned on his shoulder, her amber eyes glazed with desire, the pupils elongated. Little puffs of smoke came from her nostrils and a pale pink flush began to creep over her torso.

Seeing the sexual flush, Colin pressed her forward again, his hands bending her at the waist a little. Eden rested her cheek on the wallpaper as his thighs pushed hers apart. He nudged her wet flesh with the thick head of his cock, and once again, he saw her skin ripple in that odd way, showing the vague tracing of her scales. Then he thrust into her, his cock filling her from behind.

He couldn't tell if the loud moan belonged to him or her. He'd become mindless. His dick throbbed so hard he thought it would burst and it was encased in the hottest, wettest, tightest female flesh he had ever fucked. He thrust without thinking, his instincts in the driver's seat of his body. He licked the side of her neck, making little growling noises as he thrust heavily into her. Vaguely, in the back of his mind, he wondered if he hurt her. After all, she was tight and he was big. And he'd shown her no consideration whatsoever.

Colin held her tightly around the waist as his hips slapped noisily against her ass. His fangs unsheathed, scraping their way along her neck. She seemed to like the feel of them on her skin because she shivered every time the sharp points poked her. The smell of her blood filled him, a red haze of blood thirst coming over him...

His arm held her firmly, like an iron bar around her waist. His other hand slipped between her thighs, rubbing her clit. If he wanted to bite her, she would be unable to resist. She was helpless in this position.

The bloodlust rose to an unbearable level within him. He knew that if he didn't come soon, he would commit a grave sin against her by biting her. He'd never had such a strong urge to drink from a woman before. The sensation was seductive and dangerous at the same time.

Fighting back the urge to sink his fangs into her throat, Colin flicked his fingers over her clit as he thrust inside her. With a keening cry, she came, her fingernails leaving half moon bruises on his arms. He pumped into her with short strokes, feeling his balls pull tight to his body. Her wet depths clung to him and every stroke made a loud squishy sound that sent shivers through him. The erotic sound of her ragged breathing, the wet sound of her swollen flesh pulling at him, the sigh that caught in her throat as he flicked his fingers over her clit again... everything led him to the brink...

He sucked at her neck a little and she jerked, a second orgasm hitting her. Unable to withstand any more, Colin crashed over the edge of sensation into the heated bliss of a

powerful orgasm. His cock throbbed, swelling within her tight passage as his cum filled her. Instinctively, Colin opened his mouth and the points of his fangs started to pierce her skin. With a jerk, he pulled his mouth away, just shy of breaking her skin. He shuddered, from the force of his orgasm and from a sliver of fear at what he had almost done.

Eden hung limply from the arm he had around her waist. She shivered a little, her pussy still clutching his now deflating cock. Colin pulled out of her and she moaned. Bending, he slipped an arm beneath her knees and carried her to the bed. He laid her on the fresh sheets, her raven hair spread across the white pillows. Her golden eyes gleamed up at him as he pressed one knee into the mattress, leaning over to kiss her.

Her arms came up and wound around his neck, pulling him down to her. "I don't know why. I don't know how. I just... don't know... but... I missed you today," she said softly, her eyes holding his.

Colin could see the serious, puzzled expression in her eyes. She had been on his mind all day too. When he'd gotten her text message, he hadn't even thought about what to do. He'd acted on pure gut instinct... to be with her. The enormity of what that might mean hit him, and he collapsed at her side, pulling her into his arms. She curled into his chest, her palms rubbing over his pierced nipples.

Eden was a strong woman. Colin knew this with every fiber of his being. Her confession about missing him was no small thing. For people like them, Alphas, letting people in, letting them get close to you, could be problematic. It had taken a lot for her to admit he'd been on her mind all day. Not wanting her to think that her trust in him was misplaced, Colin rubbed his cheek on her hair.

"I couldn't stop thinking about you. All day I watched the clock and kept checking my phone, thinking I'd missed your call," he admitted.

She tilted her head back and their eyes met. "What does it mean?"

Colin let his breath out on a sigh. "Do you really want to hear the answer to that?"

"Well, I think we both know what the only answer could be," Eden said wryly.

He quirked a brow at her. "You're sure there's only one reason we're this drawn to each other?"

For a long moment she remained silent, then she said, "Look. Can we just spend a couple of days together and then ask the questions?"

He cupped the side of her face and kissed her hard, his emotions in turmoil. "Absolutely. So what are we gonna do for two days?"

A wicked grin curved her lips and her hand snaked down to curl around his semi-erect penis. "You have to ask? Maybe this isn't what I thought it was between us after all. I mean, I could never mate with a man less intelligent than me."

Colin blinked. Shit. She'd said the word out loud. *Mate*. He'd tried to hedge around it, partly because he didn't want to scare her. Also, saying the actual word made the possibility of it being true seem much higher.

Eden went very still and her eyes widened. She looked like she would bolt at any second. He reached up and brushed his thumb over her bottom lip, his chest aching with the need to comfort her and make that expression in her eyes go away.

“You’re a lot braver than I am, Eden,” he said quietly, hoping she saw the sincerity in his eyes. “I avoided the words because I didn’t want to spoil the moment.”

“Words don’t spoil the moment, Colin. People do.” Her cool eyes held his in the most direct gaze he’d ever received from a woman. At least, the most direct gaze that wasn’t a blatant come on.

“I don’t want to do anything you don’t want me to do, Eden. I don’t want to make any mistakes. Yeah, I walked out of Carpe Noctem with you because you’re hot and I was horny, but somewhere last night being horny became the least of what went on inside me,” he admitted. “If this is what it seems it might be... I can’t ignore it. I’ve always been taught that as immortals we get one shot at love and a mate in this life. If you’re it for me, I’m not going to let you go without a fight.”

He watched her face carefully, waiting to see if he had said too much. He’d only spoken the truth, what he felt right now about her and the situation, but he didn’t know enough about her to know how she would react to his words.

Eden looked at him thoughtfully, her fingers still playing with his nipple rings. “I’m an aberration,” she said finally. “Dragons are usually all about home and family. I’ve been a wanderer for a long time. I don’t fit in at home with my family. I’ve never fit in anywhere.”

Colin hung on her words, needing to know everything about her. The wistfulness in her voice when she said she never fit in brought out his protectiveness. His chest ached as he fought back the urge to tell her she fit in his arms, and in his heart... All the emotions rising inside him were new and startling. His intense reaction to her seemed to grow by leaps and bounds the more time he spent with her.

“Just because you don’t fit with *them* doesn’t mean you won’t fit with *me*.”

Her golden gaze flickered. “That’s true.” She reached up and touched his cheek, her fingertips lightly brushing his cheekbone. “If you are my mate, I would not let you go without a fight either.”

He felt as if he’d been on death row and been granted a reprieve. His emotions were in triumphant chaos. They were on the same page. For now, he would take that and run with it. “So tell me how you want to play this, Eden, because at the moment, all I want to do is bite you. The urge is getting stronger and stronger and my ability to control myself is getting weaker and weaker.”

She kissed him sweetly, her fingers cupping the side of his face. He rubbed against her hand, loving her touch. “Just awhile longer, Colin. Until we know more about this thing between us...and about each other.”

“You’ve got it,” he said, his voice low and growly. “What next then?”

Eden smiled and her hand cupped his balls. His cock rose instantly. “Make love to me. Dinner and dancing. Show me the romantic Colin.”

“I didn’t know I had a romantic side, but I’ll give you whatever you want... whatever you need...”

Her hands stroked him to full erection and he pressed her back against the pillow, settling between her thighs as he kissed her. Having taken the edge off their hunger with their earlier fast and furious coupling, now they spent long minutes stroking and teasing each

other. Colin knew in his heart that until this hot, sweet moment, he hadn't ever made love to a woman before. Every sexual moment that had come before this had been fucking. The sweetness of their union seared itself into his heart. By the time her legs wrapped around his hips and he slid his cock deep inside her, they were both nearly mindless with need.

Colin thrust into her slowly, letting things build between them deliberately. He rotated his hips making his cock press up into her in a way that made her moan and squirm beneath him. Her hands roamed his body, stroking and teasing every inch of his flesh that she could reach. Her touch turned him to flame and he wondered briefly if her dragonfire gave her as much trouble as his bite urge gave him. And oh, how he wanted to bite her! The scent of her blood was spicy, redolent with oranges and cloves, like a true hot Sangria.

When his fangs dragged along the skin of her throat she jerked, her body convulsing in orgasm. Her pussy clamped down on his pistoning cock and heat flared in his groin. As he came, he had but a single thought, *I want to feel like this forever...*

Eden's arms tightened around him, her fingers digging into his triceps.

I do too...

His body consumed with the pleasure of his orgasm, her thought entered his mind easily, so that at first he didn't even realize what had happened. As he collapsed onto her, his face pressed to her neck and shoulder, his conscious mind came roaring to life.

Fuck. Me. I heard her.

I hear you too.

His eyes popped open and he rose up on his elbows. She stared back at him, her golden eyes glowing a little still from her orgasm. The elongated pupils blinked and he shuddered.

I thought this only happened after bonding.

Apparently, that's not necessarily true. Maybe we just have a more metaphysical connection.

He shook his head trying to clear away his sexual haze. *I just came. I can't think,* he protested.

Eden smiled at him and brushed her fingertips over his cheeks. *You don't have to. This just is.*

Is this too fast for you, sweetheart? Cause it feels really fast to me.

She bent her head and licked one of his nipples, keeping her face averted from his. *It's fast, but I know what I'm feeling strangely enough. I don't feel like I have any questions inside me. I just feel... content, I think.*

Out loud she said, "I don't have much experience with contentment so I'm not sure that's truly what I feel, but I have no urge to question this. It feels too fucking right to question."

She had nailed it, of course, Colin realized. It *did* feel right. It felt better than anything he'd ever done before. He kissed her, tasting the sweetness of her lips and how she gave the kiss back to him without hesitation.

He broke the kiss, his eyes holding hers. "Eden, I know we just agreed not to talk about it for a couple of days, but I don't think there's any question about this any longer," he said in a

low voice. A shiver went through him, his emotions pushing their way right from his heart to edge of his lips. "You're my bloodmate."

Chapter Five

Eden hadn't expected to sleep after Colin had left the night before. Yet, she had and it had been a deep soothing sleep. Before she awakened, she'd been dreaming of Colin. The simple dream had rocked her to her core.

She'd been lying in his arms on a chaise, her back cradled against his chest, his breath warm in her ear. A beautiful sunset spread before them, gilding the ocean and beach that stretched beyond the railing of the porch where they sat. Colin's sugary vanilla scent filled the air and made her feel warm and content.

He kissed her ear.

You're mine. I am your family now...

His words echoed in her head as he kissed her.

Her eyes opened then and she realized it had been a dream. A short, sweet, awesome dream. Unsure how or when it had happened, she realized that at some point over the past few years, she had become disillusioned and hardened to life. She had given up hope that happiness would ever be hers. She seemed so different from the rest of her family that she'd begun to feel that she had no mate, and no real future. She'd lived for the moment, for the day, forgetting to dream, and giving up on the idea of finding a man who could accept her and be her mate.

By not living up to the standards of her family, Eden carried around a huge – and usually well-hidden – black mark on her self esteem. She didn't fit in. She wasn't good enough. She didn't know why she was different, and she wanted to be like them, but their lifestyle made her unhappy. Vaguely, she understood that the lifestyle she had chosen made her unhappy too, just not as much.

Her dissatisfaction with life had drawn her into the BDSM lifestyle. The master in Paris had been correct. She wasn't really a dom, but she had needed that life at the time. With Colin, she had no urge to whip or control him. The handcuffs or the rope might come in handy later, but her collection of crops and whips were out of the question. And she knew in her heart that she wouldn't miss the life. Sex with Colin hadn't been kinky, but it had been the best sex of her life.

She got up and had lunch, resisting the strong urge to call Colin. She let the maid in, thinking that clean sheets might be a good thing in case Colin came by at five. All afternoon she paced her suite, thinking about him and refusing to look at her cell phone. Finally, she realized her actions were driven by nerves and she sat down on the sofa to take a long hard look at her emotions.

Her dragon wanted Colin. It had been clawing at her from the moment he left. She couldn't ignore the urge to bathe him in her dragonfire. She'd never felt that way about a man before. Never in her life had it been difficult to control her dragon urges, but one glance from Colin's midnight blue eyes and she wanted to jump on him, pin him down, impale herself on his big dick, and unleash her dragon on him, fire and all. She had to be feeling this way for a reason and logic decreed that it was because he was her mate.

Despite the fact that she'd given up on having a mate, she couldn't find it in herself to be shocked at her conclusions. Something in her subconscious must have recognized him right away. The strength and distinctiveness of his scent had been a clue. Dragons responded to the

scent of their mate. Usually, other immortals couldn't smell the scent. Also, the fact that Colin smelled like vanilla and sugar cookies held an important clue.

That scent represented innocence to her. Simplicity. Warmth. Comfort. While Colin couldn't be called a sexual innocent, he had an innocence of spirit and an open nature. She'd always assumed vampires were dark and secretive, yet Colin was neither. He wouldn't play games with her or lie to her. He didn't have an agenda. His openness drew her like the proverbial moth to flame. He was Sean's diametric opposite. No one did devious and secretive better than Sean. Eden needed a man far removed from that kind of behavior.

In the end, as she reached for her phone, she decided that Colin must be her mate. He was perfect for her, Alpha without being an arrogant asshole. She needed a mate who equaled her strength of will, yet at the same time, she couldn't live with a man who rode roughshod over her feelings and wishes. She wanted a partner, someone who would share everything with her, and who would be her equal. Most Alphas took control and never released it. Eden couldn't live like that, but with Colin, she didn't think she'd have to.

By the time she decided to text him, she was convinced he was special. She thought he might be her mate, but she wanted a bit more proof. The only way to get it would be to spend time with him. She already wanted him with every breath she drew. Her pulse pounded just thinking about him and her panties grew wet. Gods! She needed to touch him soon...

The text message had gone out without her giving it much thought. When he didn't respond right away, she grew worried. But, as a businessman, he likely had things to do, so she knew she should give him time to respond. She stripped off her clothes and showered, putting on a hotel robe. When she walked out of the bathroom, her senses suddenly went wild with the feeling that Colin was near. Heart racing, she pulled open the suite's door to find him standing there about to knock.

Their quick, hard fucking had exhilarated her. When he turned her around, she trembled, wondering if he would fuck her ass. He hadn't, but she knew one day soon he would. The submissive position he'd put her in, bending her over to take her from behind, reminded her of an Alpha dragon determined to mate his woman. Because of that, she'd never been a fan of that position, but with Colin, it had been beyond exciting.

Now, they spoke about the thing that, incredibly, seemed to be on both their minds. Colin seemed hesitant with her, as if he thought she would bolt on him when he revealed that they might be mates. She had to admit that if she hadn't already been thinking of this all day, the shock might have sent her running from him in fear. However, she'd already come to the same conclusion. They had something special. They just needed to figure out if that meant they were mates.

When his thoughts entered her head so easily during their discussion, she had the wry thought that some deity had worked overtime today. They decided to figure the mate thing out and then, BAM! The truth popped directly into their heads. It was startling and disconcerting to have Colin's thoughts in her head, but she instinctively knew it was right.

Colin's statement that he thought she was his bloodmate gave her a sense of freedom, something she hadn't felt in a long time. Not since she'd left her job, her family, and her home, and took off for New York to work as a photographer. As the years passed, the impersonality of her life leached away that feeling of freedom. She had nothing to show for

her life. No home. No friends. No lover. Well, lots of lovers, but no boyfriend. No one close to her. She'd become disconnected from people.

That contentment that filled her upon discovering that Colin was her mate was simply due to the fact that she knew she would never be alone again. Never feel lonely. She finally belonged somewhere...in his arms.

He shifted uncomfortably, and she could sense his rising anxiety, even though he didn't let his thoughts drift into her head. "Aren't you going to say something?" he asked.

Dear gods. She had been so far into her own head over this incredible discovery that she'd forgotten to answer him. She threaded her fingers into his short hair and kissed him, quick and hard. "Yes. I have a lot to say actually, but the most important thing is that I think you're right."

His midnight blue eyes widened in shock. A tiny rumble of annoyance flickered through her as she wondered why he persisted in thinking she couldn't get with the program. Sure, she'd walked into *Carpe Noctem* like the Queen of Kink, but since then she'd shown him another side to her. Just because she'd been a sexual free spirit didn't mean she couldn't accept the truth. Accept it and want it. She was tired of her life. She didn't want to be alone anymore...

"Colin, I like you. I love how you make me feel. Why would I fight something that is obviously good and obviously meant to be?" She kissed him again, feeling his body relax against hers. "I'm not going to tell you everything is gonna be okay because there's a lot of stuff to work out between us. However, the logistics should come last. So can we not talk about them yet? Just concentrate on you and me?"

He nodded, a smile breaking out across his handsome face. "Now, that is something I can endorse," he chuckled, his hands stroking over her naked back.

Eden shivered. His touch felt amazing. Sex with Colin had a whole other dimension to it, as if all her previous lovers were black and white and he was Technicolor.

"Actually, I was thinking about that dinner and dancing you mentioned. We can make love in color later." He grinned, letting her know he'd been listening to her thoughts.

Although it felt weird to have someone know her thoughts, Eden was suddenly struck by the sense that before she met Colin, she could have – and had – screamed bloody murder in her head, and no one had ever known of her despair. Now, Colin would always be there. An emotion she couldn't name squeezed her heart and closed her throat.

She nodded, smiling at him. "Dinner and dancing," she agreed.

They sat up and Colin frowned at his suit, lying wrinkled on the floor. "I should just..."

"... go get your stuff," she finished for him.

They looked at each other and grinned. He leaned over and kissed her. "You put on something sexy. I'm going back to my room to shower and pack. I'll be back after I check out," he told her.

Eden nodded. Why pay for two suites? Despite the fact that Colin wouldn't spend much time in his clothes, it would be nice to go out for brunch, she thought wickedly, knowing he could hear her. She watched him dress, her eyes loving the way his long, lean body rippled

with muscle. Her brothers were bigger, but she figured Colin would be able to hold his own with them. He was obviously no slouch in the strength department.

“I’m strong enough to carry you in to that Jacuzzi tub and fuck you until we make the water boil,” he joked.

He bent and pressed a kiss to her mouth. Eden’s heart began to thump heavily. “Promise?” she laughed as he straightened.

Colin rubbed his fingers over her clan mark and pressed them to her lips. “Dragon swear.”

After he left, she showered and dried her hair. Once it hung like sleek black silk around her shoulders, she slapped on a little makeup and got dressed. The dark bronze halter dress complimented her eyes and the matching glittery spike heeled sandals would bring her almost eye-to-eye with Colin. She loved that her height didn’t intimidate him. He seemed perfect for her. Still, she knew it would be wise to recognize that not everything would be perfect. She knew they had obstacles to overcome. Her family wouldn’t be happy that she mated a vampire for one, despite the fact that her brother Declan had. She had no idea what to do about her job. She didn’t even know what Colin did for a living. She knew he lived on the west coast, somewhere near her family, but she didn’t know exactly where. There were a hundred things to work out, but she had every confidence that it could be done.

While she waited for Colin to arrive, she turned on her laptop and checked her messages. She had four offers to shoot ads for designers and she turned them all down. This was her time to get to know Colin and figure out their lives. She didn’t want work intruding and she didn’t need the jobs. She had been able to pick and choose her assignments for years, and that ability would come in very handy now.

She had email from her siblings too, but Eden ignored them. She’d read them later. She didn’t need the headache at the moment. Her life had changed and she felt really good about it. Excited. Happy. She had a sense of being renewed, like a snake that had shed its skin. She’d left behind her old life and the future lay before her, shining and brilliant.

When Colin arrived, carrying his suitcase and laptop, she had to restrain herself from throwing her arms around him. He gave her an odd look, the corner of his mouth lifting in a wry smile.

“I can hear your excitement, you know,” he told her as he set his suitcase down and placed his laptop case on the desk next to hers.

Eden laughed. “Ask me if I care. You have set me free and I am reveling in the sensation.”

He wrapped his arms around her, nuzzling her neck. “Finding your mate does leave you feeling rather relieved and free, doesn’t it? It’s like finding a buried treasure.”

She leaned against his silk clad chest. “Better than treasure. It’s finding your future when you had none.”

Colin’s fingers speared through her hair and he tilted her head back so that their eyes met. “You were really that bad, Eden?”

A deep sigh escaped her. “I’m the black sheep. I never do anything right in the eyes of my family. I’m always in hot water. It’s oppressive to feel like the bad girl with no future. It’s worse when you’ve been that way for years.”

Colin frowned. "It's done now, love. No more black sheep. No more bad girl, except with me. You can be as bad as you want and do everything wrong with me and I will still want you."

The total acceptance in his voice and demeanor brought tears to her eyes. She blinked them back. It wouldn't do to cry all over the man. Finding your mate was supposed to be happy. Maybe she'd been so restless for so many years because she needed to find the man that she fit with, the one who would accept her unconditionally and not try to force her into a mold the way her brother did.

"No more introspection," Colin said, his hand capturing her chin. "Time for some fun."

Eden drew a breath and every bad emotion that she'd carried within her for years fell away. Happiness flooded her. She was falling in love with Colin. He fit her so well, how could she not fall for him? "I am so ready for fun," she told him, standing on tip toes to kiss him.

She pulled away and got her purse, glancing over her shoulder at him. Dressed casually in an expensive silk shirt the exact color of his eyes, with black designer slacks and a black suede jacket, he appeared just as sexy as he had the night before. His blond hair gleamed gold in the low lights of the suite, but she knew that in actuality it was several shades of blond from flaxen to deepest honey. His well-trimmed pubic hair didn't match the hair on his head exactly, being darker, a cross between pale brown and darkest blond.

Her eyes flickered over his hips noting the substantial bulge behind his zipper and the pull of his slacks over his muscular thighs. The man was so damned good looking and so well built. Her mouth watered just looking at him.

"Stop, or you'll give me a fat head, Eden. And I don't mean the one on my shoulders." Colin said with wry amusement.

Coming out of her reverie, which she realized he'd heard, she looked up and found him grinning. Holding out her hand to him, she said, "Later, mister. Right now, I feel like dancing."

Dinner went by in a haze of sensation. Colin fed her bites from his plate. The heady, slightly sweet wine he chose went straight to her head. They shared some fluffy chocolate confection for dessert. And through it all, Eden felt bathed in a golden haze of happiness. After they ate, they headed to Carpe Noctem. The vampire club barely had standing room, but they didn't care. They waved to Karl with a K who sat at the bar, just like the night before. He looked shocked, but waved back, a speculative gleam in his eyes. Eden figured his shock came from knowing that she had a habit of not being seen with the same guy more than once.

Her days of a different man every night were over now, she thought as she wrapped her arms around Colin's neck on the dance floor. His warm hands glided over the naked skin of her back as they moved in time to the slow, sultry music. Dancing with Colin felt easy and natural. He was a good dancer who anticipated her moves regardless of the type of song. By the time midnight rolled around, sweat dampened them both and all the seductive rubbing up against each other had them on the verge of ripping their clothes off.

In the cab on the way to the hotel, they made out like teenagers. Eden could barely keep her hands out of Colin's pants, she was so hot for him. She wasn't so restrained in the elevator and the moment her fingers wrapped around his erection, he groaned loudly. His blue eyes gleamed at her.

"Can't even wait another couple of minutes? What if the door opens?"

“Then someone sees me with my hand in your pants,” she growled, smoke coming from her nostrils.

The elevator door opened and they bolted for their suite. Eden fumbled with the keycard, and then popped the door open. They stumbled inside, pulling at each other’s clothes. Colin hopped on one foot, trying to get out of his slacks and shoes at the same time, his shirt hanging because she’d ripped off all the buttons opening it. The top of Eden’s dress hung around her waist and she twisted, trying to reach her zipper, while kicking out of the thong that Colin had already pulled down to her knees. A loud thump reverberated through the room before Colin grunted, “Ow!”

Eden turned around and found him standing in his boxer briefs and shirt, rubbing his thigh, his eyes on the open laptop on the desk. “Are you okay? What happened?” she asked, as she got her shoes off and the thong fell to the floor.

Colin turned to her, frowning. His eyes had turned dark and stormy and Eden’s stomach dropped. The email on her computer was from her brother. Her full name showed clearly in the TO line. For some reason, that email had turned Colin from her eager lover into a man who looked like he wanted answers.

“Your last name is Antaeus?” he bit out, gesturing toward the laptop.

Eden didn’t know why, but icy fear squelched her libido. “Yes,” she whispered.

“You’re Declan Antaeus’ younger sister? The one who couldn’t be bothered to show up for his wedding? The spoiled rich girl who hangs out with celebrities like Paris Hilton?” he snarled.

A huge invisible hand squeezed Eden’s chest. She looked up at Colin, wide eyed and panic stricken at how suddenly her whole world had taken a nosedive. “I’m Declan’s sister, yes. But I don’t hang out with celebrities and I was stuck at Heathrow airport fogged in with a cancelled flight when my brother got m-married. I called. I spoke to Declan and Sean. I tried to get home, but I c-couldn’t,” she whispered, shaken by the stark terror that took hold inside her. “Who *are* you?”

“Colin Granville.”

His terse words crashed through her mind and her happiness drained away. Her brother-in-law. Her brother Declan’s new wife, Elysia’s, brother. A Granville who believed her so spoiled she couldn’t even bother to show up for her brother’s wedding. She swallowed hard, her throat suddenly dry and aching. The gods really had been working overtime to have set her up with such a monumental mind fuck.

She stumbled into the bathroom, away from Colin. Collapsing on her knees in front of the toilet, she pushed at the lid, getting it up just in time to lose her dinner. Once more her life had become unbelievably fucked up, her fragile new hope for a future torn from her. Her mate was her new sister-in-law’s brother, and by the tone of his voice and the expression on his face, he didn’t want to be related to her, let alone know her. Pain clawed at her and, inside, her dragon roared, unnerved by her despair.

Chapter Six

Colin couldn't believe his eyes and ears. The woman destined to be his bloodmate was his brother-in-law's younger sister. As she disappeared into the bathroom, he shook his head, thinking, *What the fuck?* He glared at the laptop, seeing Eden's name in the *To* field and Sean's name in the *From* field. He didn't understand why Sean would make Eden out to be an irresponsible party girl who hung out with the worst celebrity nobodies on the planet. Sean had made a point of telling Colin that Eden couldn't be bothered to come to Declan's wedding. The picture he painted of his sister had been guaranteed to make Colin dislike her.

Anger lashed at him, making him want to hurl the laptop into the wall. The urge to break something rose almost uncontrollably within him. His fists clenched at his sides. Either Eden had lied to him about why she hadn't been at his sister's wedding or Sean had lied to him about Eden. His heart wanted to believe Eden. She had no reason to lie to him. He didn't really know Sean, but he would have thought that the man had no reason to lie to him either. Still, after what he knew of Eden, what he'd learned of her in the past twenty-four hours, he couldn't believe what Sean had told him about her. His brain joined his heart. Sean had lied to him, not Eden. He was sure of it.

The violent sound of her retching wrenched at him. He slammed the laptop closed and rushed to the bathroom. She was his bloodmate, and his sudden fury had hurt her so badly she'd lost her dinner. His anger turned on himself for having done this to her. As her mate, he should have believed in her unquestioningly. He should have believed in them...

He skidded to a halt in the doorway, arrested by the sight of her sprawled on the tile floor, her dress around her waist, her slender body wracked with dry heaves. Weakly, she pushed her hair back, shivering. To Colin's horrified eyes, it seemed as if she had folded in on herself, her tall, lush frame appearing shrunken and fragile. A sob came from her crumpled form and his heart jerked in his chest.

Colin strode over to the sink and wet a washcloth with warm water. Then he filled a glass with cold water. When he turned back to Eden, she sat motionless, her arms wrapped around herself, her face hidden by the long fall of her silky hair. He walked over to her, but when she saw his feet, she said in a hoarse voice,

"Can you just go, please? I'm sure you want to berate me for the disrespect I've shown your sister, but I think my broken heart is payment enough for any hurt feelings she might have."

The pain in her voice ripped him to shreds. Her words lacerated his heart. He knelt beside her, setting the glass down so he could slide an arm around her and press the warm washcloth into her hands. She sat stiff and motionless for a long moment. Then she lifted her head and what he saw on her face made him feel like the world's biggest asshole.

Tears fell from her beautiful amber eyes, now sunken and red-rimmed in grief. Her lush mouth appeared pinched and pale on her ashen features. Her eyes dropped to the washcloth.

"I don't understand."

Her rough voice, like sandpaper lined her throat, sliced into him even more. He plucked the washcloth from her hands and gently wiped her face. Then he handed her the glass of water. "Rinse," he said softly.

She obeyed him instantly, as if she had no will of her own. His heart broke with her pain. Rising to his feet, he set the glass on the counter, returning to lift her limp body into his arms. When she struggled weakly against his arms, he pressed a kiss to her forehead and tightened his arms around her.

“I’m sorry, Eden,” he whispered. “I believe you.”

He set her on her feet beside the bed. She stood limply, like a doll held within the circle of his arms. Anger at himself for not believing in her made his hands more gentle than usual as he carefully unzipped her dress. The silk fell to the floor and he lifted her, settling her naked body on the sheets. She shivered and he knew it wasn’t just with cold. Her pain tore at his heart.

Quickly, he yanked off his shirt, leaving his briefs on despite the fact that it had been years since he’d gotten into a bed in his underwear. Crawling in beside her, he pulled the covers around them and cuddled her close to his chest, wracking his brain for ways to comfort her and apologize for his massive stupidity. Her unnatural stillness petrified him. The beautiful amber eyes that lit his soul on fire were empty, with only the echo of a mind numbing pain visible in their formerly expressive depths. The Eden he knew...was gone. And he had never been so frightened in his life.

Something warm and wet— her tears— touched his chest. Silent droplets slid down her face, her eyes closed tightly, her mouth held stiffly. She’d closed her mind to him. He cradled her to his chest, dropping kisses all over her face and hair, whatever part of her he could reach. Tipping her head back, he kissed her lips, the taste of her tears sending pain shooting through his body.

A sob escaped her and she moved, her arms closing around him convulsively. “I d-don’t u-unders-stand how I c-could h-have fallen f-for y-you s-so f-fast,” she stuttered.

“It doesn’t matter that it happened quickly, Eden. It only matters that it did. And it matters that I feel the same.” Colin knew in his heart the quiet words he’d spoken were the truth.

She blinked at him, her tears easing. “Y-you d-do?”

He kissed her again, wiping at her tears with his thumbs. “I do.” He smiled gently. “Look in my head. You’re my mate. My thoughts are yours, love.”

Now that he concentrated, he felt the warm, tentative touch of her thoughts to his. Earlier he hadn’t been able to detect her presence in his head.

I don’t know why your brother lied to me, Eden, but I don’t believe him. I only needed a minute to organize my thoughts and shake off my shock. Then I realized that I trust you. You’re my bloodmate. I don’t know Sean and I don’t know why he would lie to me, but he did. He’s nothing to me... you, I’m falling in love with.

A long shuddering sigh shook her. He thinks what I do is worthless, that it’s some jet setter nothing job. To him, I’m always getting in trouble, doing something wrong. It all comes down to me not wanting to be part of the company. What he told you about me is what he believes. I’m a bad girl, the black sheep of the family.

I don’t care what you do for a living, Eden. I don’t care if you don’t get along with Sean. I barely know the man anyway. I don’t care if you don’t get along with Declan, although that will

be stickier since he's married to my sister. But really, he doesn't matter to you and me, to what's between us.

Eden's body grew warm again. "Declan follows Sean's lead. They all do. Whatever Diandra and Sean decree is law in the Antaeus family," she said quietly, her voice bleak.

Colin could tell that she had given up trying to change her siblings' minds about her. Still, he knew a little more about Declan Antaeus than he did the other members of the family. Eden's words rang true in the sense that it was what she believed. However, it didn't ring true when it came to what he knew about his sister's husband. Declan made his own decisions about people. He might defer to Sean when it came to the family business, but Declan was his own man. He wouldn't follow Sean's lead if he didn't believe it too. Which made him wonder just what exactly Declan believed about Eden.

Shoving aside his thoughts about the Antaeus family, Colin turned his attention to his bloodmate. "I'm sorry I flew off the handle, Eden," he apologized. "I'll deal with Sean and his lies later. Right now, you are my only concern."

She tightened her arms around him. "I was delirious with happiness, and then suddenly it was ripped from me. Nothing has ever hurt this bad before." Her voice sounded puzzled and Colin mentally kicked himself. He knew what he'd done had sucked the soul right out of her.

In general, he considered himself a nice guy, an upbeat, happy guy. Not angsty or arrogant like many men. He didn't like to hurt people or bad mouth them. He didn't like lying or bending the truth. He didn't have a manipulative bone in his body. He rarely believed the worst of people, but he had tonight for a few short minutes. In the process, he had hurt the last person he would ever want to hurt.

"Eden, what happened tonight will never happen again, I promise you. You are my bloodmate. I am falling in love with you. You come before everyone else in my life now."

A ghost of a smile touched her lips. "I believe you, Colin." She burrowed her face into the hollow of his shoulder.

"Good." Now, that she seemed more at ease, he wriggled his hips, working his way out of his uncomfortable briefs. He tossed them out of the bed and a little smile curled her lips. With a sigh, he settled her gently against his naked body, his hands stroking her comfortingly. "Sleep now. You've had little sleep and far too much excitement and emotion. I can feel how tired you are."

She murmured something unintelligible and he watched her eyelids droop, her beautiful face growing slack as she fell asleep. While she slept, Colin mentally made a checklist. He needed to call his sister and Declan. He needed to call the airline and he needed to call Corey. He had decided to take Eden home with him.

Despite the fact that Colin hated confrontations and fighting, and he didn't like hitting people, he would do whatever was necessary to protect his mate both physically, mentally, and emotionally. That thought fueled his determination to ensure that one thing above all others became the truth. Sean Antaeus had told his last lie about his sister.

Chapter Seven

Eden's body burned. Usually, her dragon blood kept her pretty warm so she rarely slept with more than a sheet covering her even in the coolest weather. The heavy weight of a sheet and blanket pressed onto her, and she wondered how that had happened. Something itched her nose too. Without opening her eyes, she wriggled her nose. Something still tickled it. She took a deep breath. Sugar cookies. Who the hell was baking? Was that why it was so hot?

She drew another breath. Damn. Sugar cookies?

Her eyes popped open. The sheet and coverlet on the hotel bed covered her. However, the heat she felt didn't come from her coverings but from the big male body that curled around hers. Colin's head rested half on her shoulder, half on her pillow, and his blond spikes brushed against her nose. He had one long arm draped across her body, and his hand curved possessively over her naked hip. One of his thighs nestled intimately between hers.

For a moment, Eden savored the feeling of him lying half on her. He radiated heat like an oven. She wondered if all vampires were warm like Colin. With a rush, the events of the previous night came flooding back. Now, that the thought of losing her mate on the day she had found him no longer crushed her, anger took hold.

Fucking Sean would pay for what he had said to Colin about her. Paris Hilton? She'd show him Paris Fucking Hilton! Her dragon uncurled within her, anger and adrenaline fueling the beast's instincts. Unfortunately, the dragon then noticed Colin draped across her body. Instantly, the urge to mate became her dragon's priority. Kicking Sean where the sun didn't shine took a backseat to her dragon's primal instincts.

The scent of sugar cookies overwhelmed her. Eden wondered why Colin's body gave off the scent so strongly. He moved a little and something hard and hot dug into her hip. A wry smile tilted up the corner of her mouth. That would be why. Morning wood. Apparently, Colin dreamt of her.

Her mouth turned down. At least, she hoped he dreamed of her. With a frown, she tried to wriggle out from beneath him.

I am dreaming of you. Stop moving and let me finish.

His amused thought slid into her head and she felt a strange warm tingle there. She hadn't noticed that little tingle the day before. Now, she was fully aware of his presence in her head.

You're not having a wet dream, are you?

He flexed his hips and his cock pressed into her flesh. *Does that feel wet to you?*

Not yet, she admitted, trying to wriggle free of his grasp.

Keep moving like that and it will feel wet much sooner than expected.

Eden froze. Colin's chuckle sounded in her head. *Don't worry, love. We have far too much to do today. There's no time for sexual escapades. Get your ass in the shower.* He reached out and lightly smacked her right buttock.

Her eyes widened. *Did you just spank me?*

Yes. Now get outta here or you'll have to watch me spank the monkey.

She scooted away from him, and he laughed out loud. "I'm joking. I have phone calls to make and you probably want a shower."

Eden grimaced. Oh, yeah. Hot water ruled when you'd been tucked up against a living furnace all night.

He flopped onto his back as she slid out of bed. "I thought that might be the case."

"You're not always gonna be right in this relationship, Colin, so you'd better not get used to it," she warned.

I wouldn't dare.

She showered quickly. When she got out, she could hear the murmur of Colin's voice as he spoke on the phone. She brushed her teeth three times, grimacing over the fact that she'd practically spewed in front of him. Walking into the bedroom, she found him on his laptop. He looked busy except for the fact that he was naked.

"How many other naked asses have been on that chair? Don't sit on it! Sit on a towel!" she exclaimed.

"Don't have one," he quipped.

She whipped off her damp towel and tossed it to him. He put it on the chair and sat back down. He looked at her with a wide grin.

"Now you're naked. Perfect. I love it when a ploy works as it's supposed to," he laughed.

"You're a crazy man." Eden kept her voice stern, but let him see her grin.

"Crazy like a fox." He turned off his computer. "I need to shower. You need to pack."

"Come again?" Her eyebrows shot upward.

"You and I are booked on a flight back to the west coast this morning. I got the last two first class seats," he told her.

"What if I don't want to go?" She crossed her arms over her chest.

"You'll go. We're going to my house, not your family's."

Eden walked over to the closet and pulled out her suitcase. Despite her words, she wasn't going to argue with him. Both of them knew that it was time to go home.

~ * * * ~

The flight was uneventful. Both of them slept a little. During the movie, they cuddled under a blanket and masturbated each other to orgasm. Luckily, Eden had thought to grab a napkin before they started or Colin would have been a mess. Well, as much as he came, they both would have.

The dinner hour had passed and night had fallen by the time they landed. An eerie sense of entitlement welled from within Eden as they walked through the airport. Usually, she walked this concourse alone. Now, she strode along, hip to hip with Colin, one hand clasped in his, each of them with a laptop case slung over their shoulder and their free hands pulling their suitcases along behind them. She knew they looked like any other young affluent couple arriving home from a trip. And her sense that this was the life she deserved grew stronger with every brush of Colin's hip against hers.

Instead of heading toward the line of cabs at the curb, Colin turned her toward the long term parking structure. Eden played a little game in her head trying to guess which car was his as they walked along. She'd progressed from SUVs to sports cars when suddenly he stopped. She cocked an eyebrow up at the sporty Lexus sedan in dark candy apple red.

Her mate pulled a key fob from his jacket pocket and with a blip and a flash of lights, disarmed the alarm. The trunk opened remotely. Colin stowed their suitcases there and their laptops in the backseat. When they got inside the car, he turned down the volume on the stereo. Eden's brows rose curiously, but then he started the engine. Music blared from the speakers and she winced a little. Apparently, he liked his music played at concert level. With an apologetic smile, Colin turned the volume down further. Minutes later, they rolled out of the parking structure.

Eden watched her lover drive. He was relaxed, his fingers drumming on the leather and burlwood wrapped steering wheel in time to the music. Although she should have been angsty about coming home but not *going* home, excitement bubbled within her, warring with her eagerness to see where he lived. Colin had told her about his house, that it was less than a year old, in a new private community on the beach. He'd moved in just after his sister had hooked up with her brother. She wondered what it looked like.

She knew this stretch of coast highway, and his turn onto a private road marked Crimson Beach didn't surprise her. When they reached a guardhouse, the guard obviously recognized Colin and opened the gate. Instead of driving through, Colin pulled up to the guardhouse, rolling down his window.

The guard leaned in with a smile. "Good evening, Mr. Granville. How was your business trip?" Eden noticed the man's friendly smile and that the name tag above his badge read 'Edward'.

"Heya, Ed. Yeah, it was a great trip." He leaned back, gesturing toward Eden. "This is Eden Antaeus. She's moving into my house so I'll need a security packet for her."

Ed tipped his cap at her. "You'll have the packet first thing in the morning, sir. Evening, ma'am. Are you related to Mr. Granville's new brother-in-law?"

"She's his sister. She'll be picking up her car tomorrow so make sure you let her in," Colin told him.

Ed nodded solemnly. "No problem, Mr. Granville. I've got you on the video and I'll make sure my day staff familiarizes themselves with her." Ed stepped back from the car. "Have a good evening, sir, ma'am."

Colin put the car in gear and they rolled through the gate. As he drove through the small community, Eden saw that the homes were all different sizes from cottages to mansions, some right on the beach and others not. Colin drove until they reached a row of houses that seemed like an odd mix of California modern and New England Cape Cod. Each of the medium sizes homes sat on a large lot and backed onto the beach itself.

Colin's house stood out because the houses on either side were sprawling single level houses while his stood two stories high. Because the lots ran right out to the sand, no one had fences, but on one side of Colin's house, she spied a six foot privacy fence that enclosed a huge patio. Because the lots were so big, the house next door wasn't close nor did it have an upper

story that would allow someone to look down into Colin's yard. The fence roused her curiosity.

The car pulled into the center of the huge double sized garage. Actually, the garage had a double sized bay and a single sized bay with enough room for two cars and water toys like a boat or jet skis. Apparently, Colin didn't have any toys though. The garage sported a large pile of flattened packing boxes and nothing else.

Eden got out as the garage door closed. She stared at the huge empty space. Absolutely nothing about it said that this was Colin Granville's garage. It seemed odd to her because her brothers had tools and ... man stuff in their garages.

Colin opened the trunk and took out their suitcases. "Can you get the laptops? I'll take care of these," he said, hauling the two cases to the door.

Eden grabbed the computers out of the backseat and hurried after him. She followed him into a huge kitchen that looked out over a wrap around porch that faced the ocean. She sucked in a breath. The view was fantastic, but the room appeared just as sterile as the garage. Colin hadn't put his stamp on it at all. She followed him through the house and up the stairs, all the while marveling at how un-lived in it looked.

Colin threw open the double doors to the master suite and Eden stifled a gasp. A huge California King four-poster bed draped in blue faced a wall of windows that gave an incredible view of the Pacific Ocean. A messy trail of clothes led from the bed to the huge walk-in closet cum dressing room. Eden set the computers on a desk near the windows and looked around. The suite consisted of the huge bedroom that had an alcove on one side near the windows. The alcove held a desk, a futon, and a recliner.

Two closets opened from either side of the bathroom door. Although identical in size, one held clothes and the other had work out equipment. The bathroom had a huge shower stall with six showerheads and an enormous Jacuzzi tub. Two other doors turned out to be a small sauna and a linen closet. The long counter with double sinks was flanked by a toilet on one side and a bidet that looked like no one had ever touched it on the other.

"Do I look like the kind of guy who would use one of those?" Colin said when he caught her staring at the bidet.

She turned to find him standing in the doorway, an amused expression on his face. She arched a brow at him. "It wouldn't hurt you to use it. You know, cleanliness is supposed to be next to godliness."

"The only goddess I get next to is you."

"Like I said, it wouldn't hurt you to use it," she teased.

Colin reached out and grabbed her around the waist, pulling her against him. "Do you like the house?" He nuzzled her neck.

Eden sighed. "It's very white. And it looks like no one lives here, but yes, I like the house."

He made a face. "It came white. I didn't know what to do with it."

"I suppose that means you're giving me carte blanche to do something with it."

The instant the words left her mouth their eyes locked. “Yes,” Colin said softly. “You’re my bloodmate. Maybe it’s wrong of me to assume that you will want to live here with me permanently, but...”

She put her fingers over his lips, stilling his words. “It’s not wrong. It just takes some getting used to. It felt strange to come home and not go to Sean’s. But this feels ... right.”

His sigh conveyed his relief. “Pizza and a swim?” he asked with a bright, hopeful smile. “I have a great place that will deliver. What do you like on a pizza?”

“Everything except bell peppers and anchovies. Any combination of items is fine with me.” Eden pulled away and walked over to the windows. They stretched from floor to ceiling, the width of the wall, and the expanse of the Pacific Ocean stretched before her on the other side of the glass. The night sky twinkled with lights that reflected off the water. The view tugged at her senses and she knew if the windows and patio door were open, she would feel as if she was outdoors.

“This view... it’s unbelievable.”

“Yeah, I thought so too. I bought this house solely for that view. The house is way too big for me, but I couldn’t resist the feeling of being at sea.”

Eden knew what he meant. Standing before the wall of windows, the ocean seemed so close it felt as if she could reach out her hand and touch it, as if she stood on the deck of a yacht with the ocean all around her. A long sigh escaped her. The mating thing had gone more smoothly than she’d thought it would. Colin’s house was perfect. No one had made any imprint on it, not even Colin. It was a blank canvas, waiting for her. For the first time in her life, Eden had the sense that she had really come home. The place felt comfortable and welcoming despite its lack of furniture.

They sat on the deck outside the bedroom and ate their pizza. Colin kept flinging his crust out onto the sand for the seagulls despite Eden’s warning that the gulls would keep coming back every day if he did that. After they ate, they got into swimsuits and Colin pulled out towels. He led the way down an outside staircase to the huge patio behind the privacy fence. Gray flagstones stretched from one side of the house all the way around to the other side. The side with the privacy fence had a huge hot tub and an infinity pool set into the stones.

The pool was landscaped all around with big gray rocks and a waterfall near the hot tub. When she stood at the waterfall end of the pool and looked toward the open end of the patio, the pool looked like it merged with the ocean. The effect was spectacular and Eden knew Colin must have paid a small fortune for it.

She sat on the edge as Colin turned the pool lights on. When he came toward her, she slipped into the water, backstroking away from him. He smiled and dove in, coming up next to her. The seductive warmth of the water made her limbs feel light and languorous as Colin wrapped his arms around her. Their bodies slid together sensuously as he kissed her. His mouth rubbed against hers, hot and urgent. Eden’s heart took on a thunderous rhythm.

His tongue danced with hers as his hands untied her bikini top. Moments later, their swimsuits landed on the flagstones with a wet slap. Eden scissored her legs around Colin, rubbing her pussy against his thick erection. His hands cupped her breasts and they went under. Without breaking the kiss, Colin kicked out, pushing them back to the surface. He

maneuvered them toward the shallow end, close to the rocks and waterfall where their feet could touch the bottom.

Eden moaned as his thumbs teased her hard nipples. "Now. Just fuck me now," she panted, rubbing against him.

With a growl, Colin grabbed her ass and lifted. She wrapped her legs around his waist as he fitted himself to her and thrust home. The delicious feel of being impaled by his thick cock had Eden shuddering in orgasm. Colin held her close, his fingers digging into her buttocks. She gazed into his dark eyes, seeing the flame of his arousal burning there.

"More," she rasped breathlessly.

Colin pressed her back against a smooth stone and pulled almost all the way out of her. He thrust within her again, beginning a rhythm that had the water sloshing around them. Heat rose in her as her dragon stretched and clawed to be free. Her skin rippled with the effort of holding her human shape. She wanted more... wanted something... her hips moved urgently against Colin's as her body sought relief from the incredibly pleasurable tension.

Eden's fingernails dug into his shoulders and their gazes locked. Colin's breathing was rapid and rough. Her own matched it. She could tell that they were both about to come. She tossed her wet hair back, exposing her neck. A low growl came from Colin.

"Bite me," she demanded, her wet naked breasts rubbing against his chest, against his pierced nipples.

His eyes glowed with a preternatural light and within her, her dragon roared its approval. He kissed her and she could feel the sharp edge of his fangs. She arched her neck as his lips left hers, feeling the fangs dance along her sensitive skin. Then heat scored her as a sharp sting told her his fangs had pierced her vein. Instantly, Colin's thoughts flooded her mind.

Oh gods, her blood tastes so good.

From his thoughts, she could feel his ecstasy at tasting her blood on his tongue, how the joy filled his senses and his soul. His love wrapped itself around her as surely as his physical body did. He continued thrusting into her as he drank from her and the sensation made her mindless with lust. She bucked against him, pressing closer. The need to be one with him overwhelmed her. The pounding of his heart became the thundering of her own heart. They were a seamless unit, melded together until she couldn't tell where she ended and Colin began.

His fangs began to retract and pleasure burst within her. She screamed his name as he licked her throat, moaning her name over and over again. She convulsed, her body going rigid with the most intense orgasm she'd ever had. Colin's cock swelled inside her and she cried out again as his hot semen bathed her hot channel.

Somehow they ended up on the shallow steps, lying limp and dazed. Groggy, Eden's body still shook with little tremors. Colin's mouth had a bit of blood smeared on it and his eyes were unfocused. Suddenly, it dawned on her what had happened.

"Colin?" she asked shakily. "Did you just bond with me?"

He blinked a few times before his eyes finally focused. "Yes."

She looked at the still water and realized she hadn't loosed her dragonfire yet. The water would have been boiling if she had. "I didn't bond with you."

He shook his head. "S'ok. You'll get to it." His words were slurred like a drunk's.

Colin pulled her close as they lay on the steps, letting the warm water lap at their tired bodies. As immortals, it wouldn't take long for them to regain their equilibrium. Eden loved how the more she regained her presence of mind, the stronger her mental and emotional connection to Colin became. His disjointed thoughts recalling the bonding echoed in her mind. Experiencing the event through his mind gave her an even greater sense of belonging to him. It strengthened her own conviction that this man was her mate.

Once their energy returned, they got out of the pool and wrapped themselves in towels. Back in the master bedroom, they showered together, still slightly dazed from bonding, and fell into bed. Colin pulled her into his arms and she rubbed her face against his chest in a loving caress.

Mine now. Only mine.

His thought made her smile as she drifted to sleep. Coming home had never been this good.

Chapter Eight

Colin didn't feel all that different. Being bonded was all about love anyway and he knew he was in love with Eden. They'd gotten up early and made love again. Colin bit her again, just because he could, not because he needed her blood. It just felt good.

Afterward, they'd dressed and eaten cold pizza for breakfast, washing it down with coffee that Eden made after finding a state of the art coffee machine and French roast beans in the kitchen cupboard. She cleaned up afterward even though Colin protested that he had a cleaning lady.

He drove her to the Antaeus family home where her brother Sean lived. She had clothes, a car and other belongings there that she wanted to collect. Colin worried that going there would upset her, but she seemed cheerful and if it bothered her to be there, he sure as hell couldn't tell. As soon as he dropped her off, waving to Sean's astonished wife, he drove straight to Sean's office.

He'd been to Antaeus International a few times since Elysia had hooked up with Declan, but he'd never been to Sean's office. He knew it was on the same floor as Declan's though – the top floor. He got off the elevator and headed to Declan's office first. His brother-in-law looked up, amber eyes narrowed, as Colin walked in and shut the door.

"I know you told me on the phone that you didn't have the same opinion about Eden as Sean, but I want to hear it from your mouth while I'm looking you in the eye," he growled.

"I don't know why Sean said that to you, Colin. I love my sister. I always have. I don't care where she works or lives as long as she's safe." Declan's deep voice sounded serious. "If she wants to be with you, I have no objection. She's her own keeper and has been since long before she left this company and moved to New York. In fact, I can't think of very many people I would trust to control her and keep her from doing something cockeyed, but I think you can handle her."

"We don't need your approval, but I'm glad to have it for her sake." Colin drew a deep breath. "I bonded with her last night."

Declan's eyebrows shot up. "So soon?" He shook his dark head, his expression a little wry. "Well, that's very Eden. She's quick to make up her mind."

Colin watched his brother-in-law carefully. "I bonded with her. She has not yet mated me. I have yet to see her dragonfire. In fact, I've never even seen her shift."

A smile curved Declan's mouth. "You will soon. A dragon cannot keep himself from showing off his dragon form to his mate. It's like trying to keep a little kid out of a candy jar."

"So you and Elysia are okay with this? I'm not gonna have to come back up here and bloody your nose?" Colin asked pointedly.

Declan shook his head. "Your sister and I are happy for you both. Holden is too. I called him after you called me. Frankly, since I knew you would be coming here to talk to Sean, I didn't call either him or Diandra. If I had called Di, she would have called Sean, and I knew you wouldn't want that. In your shoes, I would do the same thing. As my sister's mate, you have every right to call Sean on the things he told you about Eden."

"Where's his office?"

Declan pointed to his door. "Three doors down from mine in the corner." His amber eyes, so like his sister's, glinted with approval. "Good luck."

Colin left Declan's office and walked purposefully toward Sean Antaeus' office. He brushed past Sean's assistant and pushed the door open.

Sean sat at his desk, his back to Colin, his eyes on the huge window that looked out toward the ocean. "Good morning, Colin. What can I do for you?" he said without turning around.

Colin's mouth tightened. "You can turn around and face me, Sean," he gritted out, his anger rising.

Slowly, Sean spun around in his leather chair. He looked a lot like Declan, but harsher, not as handsome, with black hair brushed back neatly from his face. His golden Antaeus eyes held a cold, hard expression.

"What can I do for you?" he repeated.

Resisting the urge to clench his hands into fists, Colin said, "Why did you lie to me about Eden?"

Sean shrugged. "What does it matter? You know the truth now, don't you? And you love her despite anything I might have said to you. Am I right?"

Colin saw red. The man deliberately pushed his buttons! "You're her brother. You should be supporting her and protecting her, not turning your back on her and telling people she's a fucking worthless dilettante!"

Sean's dark brows flicked up a little. "Why do you say I don't support her? She wanted to leave and I let her go. That's supporting her decision in my book."

"That's turning your back on her, you fucking asshole!" Colin roared. "Do you have any idea how bad you've made her feel over the years? The lack of self-esteem she has because you think she's a goddamned black sheep? She's spent all these years thinking she doesn't fit in anywhere, that she's been nothing but trouble to your family. She thinks it because that's what you fucking drummed into her head for having the temerity to want a career that has nothing to do with this fucking company!"

An impassive expression settled on Sean's hawkish features. "Think what you want," he said coolly turning his chair away from Colin.

With a growl, Colin leapt across Sean's desk, the preternatural speed and dexterity of a vampire coming to his aid. In a blur of movement, he had Sean by the shirtfront, dragging him from the chair and slamming him against the wall. Sean's golden eyes lit with fire and he pushed away from the wall, but Colin was waiting. His fist shot out and connected with Sean's face. The force of the blow knocked the dragon back into the wall. The drywall cracked from the floor to the ceiling, raising a cloud of dust.

Sean put a hand to the corner of his mouth where a trickle of blood oozed. Colin's eyes glowed red with bloodlust. "If you ever tell another lie about Eden, I will break every bone in your body, you son of a bitch."

He took two steps back and when he was sure that Sean wouldn't attack him, he spun on his heel and left the office. Outside, in the corridor a small crowd had gathered. His bloodlust

dissipating, Colin saw Declan and Holden Antaeus standing a few feet away. Holden grinned, holding up his hands in a gesture of surrender.

“Don’t look at me like that, brother,” he chuckled. “I’m on your side. Someone needed to take Sean down a peg where Eden’s concerned.”

Declan’s mouth twitched. “Welcome to the family, Colin,” he said.

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Eden stared at her sister-in-law mutinously. Despite being Sean’s wife, Careen usually had her own opinions on things. This time, however, she spouted Sean’s party line and it pissed Eden off.

“Why do you have to do this so quickly, Eden? Why couldn’t you have come home and just dated Colin like a normal person?” Careen pressed.

Eden closed the last suitcase and heaved it to the floor, ignoring Careen’s comment about ‘normal’. She looked around her bedroom. Nothing personal remained in the room. There was a stack of boxes by the door and three suitcases. She had another dozen boxes in the garage. She made a mental note to hire someone to pick them all up.

Ignoring Careen, she tucked the smallest suitcase under her arm and grabbed the other two suitcases, hauling them out of her room and down the hall to the landing. She struggled down the stairs with the bulky suitcases, annoyed with her sister-in-law for not offering to help. Not that she would have accepted Careen’s help after the lecture she’d had to endure from the woman.

Dragging the cases to the garage, she opened it and dug in her purse for her keys. With a loud beep, she turned off the alarm on the Land Rover. Pulling open the back, she flipped the seats down and tossed her suitcases in. She went back in the house and began carrying down boxes until she’d filled the SUV.

Sweating and angry, she stood on the driveway and wiped her face on the sleeve of her sweater. Everything from her room was either in her car or here in the garage waiting to be picked up by the moving company. Careen still hovered, her next lecture only a breath away. Eden took out her phone, checking it for text messages or missed calls. She blinked then. Careen held a huge jewelry box in her arms. The box looked like a Swiss chalet. Eden’s father had given it to her as a little girl. Seeing it in Careen’s arms when the woman had been nothing but a pain in her ass all morning made Eden see red.

Lurching forward, she tried to snatch it from Careen. “Where the fuck did you get that?”

Careen stepped back, out of Eden’s reach. “Sean had it put away because his mother’s jewelry is in there. He says it’s worth a lot of money,” Careen said, tilting her head defiantly.

“Arggh! He had no right! That’s my jewelry box!” Eden growled and snatched at it again.

Careen tried to hang on to it and they struggled for a moment. Then, as Eden wrested the box from Careen’s hands, her sister-in-law hit her. Startled, not knowing whether Careen meant to hit her or whether it was an accident, Eden almost dropped the jewelry box. They both grabbed for it and Eden’s cell phone went flying, shattering into several pieces on the concrete driveway.

“Shit!” she growled, her eyes flashing at her sister-in-law. She put the jewelry box in the front seat of the SUV and locked it, coming back to pick up the pieces of her phone. “Damn it! Why are you suddenly such a bitch, Careen?”

Careen looked down her nose at Eden. “Sean doesn’t think you’re being rational.”

Eden let out a sigh. Her fucking brother had a lot to answer for. “Yeah, well you’ve never spouted Sean’s party line before now, Careen,” Eden said waspishly. “I used to think you had your own mind. I can see I must have been mistaken.”

She turned away, calling over her shoulder, “The movers will come to get my boxes tomorrow. I’ll see you, Careen.”

Eden got in the Land Rover and backed out of the garage, tearing down the drive away from the house where she’d grown up. Careen had pissed her off, but she really wanted Sean’s blood, so she headed to Antaeus International next.

~ * * * ~

Careen went in the house and called her husband. “It’s done,” she sighed. “Her phone is broken.”

“Good,” Sean replied. “Everything is in place. Are you sure she’s coming here?”

“She’s really pissed off, Sean. And she’s just like you. Why wouldn’t she be on her way there to tear a strip off you? It’s what you would do in her shoes,” Careen said. “You know, I didn’t like doing this. I’m happy for her. Why do you always have to be in charge, Sean?”

“It’s what I do, Careen. You knew what I was like when you married me.”

She sighed again. “Yeah. I knew. I still don’t like it.”

“But you love me,” Sean’s voice deepened with emotion.

“I can’t seem to help myself,” she said wryly. “I’ll see you later.”

“I love you, Careen.”

She smiled indulgently. “I love you too, Sean, but I’m so glad this is the last of your siblings to fall in love.”

Sean laughed softly and Careen hung up the phone.

~ * * * ~

Telling Marius that he’d bonded with Sean Antaeus’ sister hadn’t gone as well as Colin had thought it would go. In fact, he couldn’t remember the last time he’d seen that much emotion on his brother’s face.

“You didn’t care that Elysia bonded with Declan Antaeus,” Colin pointed out when Marius told him he should have thought things through.

“They didn’t bond after knowing each other two nights,” Marius replied.

Colin’s rage, banked after hitting Sean, returned with a vengeance. “What the fuck do you know, Marius? You’ve never been in my position! You haven’t met your mate yet, so don’t tell me what’s right and what’s wrong.”

“I just think you should have waited. I’m not telling you that she’s wrong for you, just that I wish you had spent more time with her before you bit her!” Marius ran a hand through his dark blond hair, the gesture filled with frustration.

Colin understood his brother’s point, and he could see Marius’ frustration. Still, it was none of his business. “Yeah, well you and your golf buddy can go fuck yourselves. This is none of your business anyway. I only told you about it because I’m sure Sean will be calling to tell you I decked his ass.”

Storming out of his brother’s office, Colin completely bypassed his own and headed to his sister’s. He threw open the door, not bothering to knock. Luckily, Elysia was alone. She waved at him to shut the door.

Flopping into the big leather chair in front of her desk, Colin frowned at her. “Are you gonna lecture me too?”

Elysia shook her head, but Colin noticed her twisting the big yellow diamond on her ring finger. He wondered at her obvious nervousness.

“No. But you’re my baby brother. I worry about you,” she replied.

Colin continued to frown at her. Why did they all think he couldn’t manage his own life? “No need. I’m a big boy, Elysia, and I have been for a lot of years. I know what I’m doing. Eden is my bloodmate. I’m supposed to bond with her,” he said.

Elysia sighed. “I don’t understand why she didn’t bond with you though, Colin. It worries me.”

He leaned forward in his chair, holding her gaze. “You think that because Eden didn’t mate with me, that she could take off and leave me to die?”

Elysia looked uncomfortable. “I don’t think Declan’s sister would be so irresponsible, Colin, but she’s a dragon. She doesn’t understand vampires. Does she know you can never feed from anyone else now?” Her voice sounded troubled and Colin knew her uncertainty had been put there by Marius.

“She understands, Lys. Look, she loves me. She’s not going anywhere.”

“She told you she loves you?” Elysia asked him point blank.

Now, Colin felt uncomfortable. Eden hadn’t said the words yet. Only that she was falling in love with him. Not that she loved him. The distinction was very small to him, but apparently not to his family.

“Both of us are positive we’re falling in love,” he said with a confidence he suddenly didn’t quite feel. If Marius had said this to him, he would have just gotten pissed. But because Elysia said them, he started to feel a little panicked. Usually, his sister didn’t listen to his brother unless what Marius said made perfect sense. Colin resisted the sudden urge to take out his phone and look for a text message.

“I hope this works out for you, Colin,” his sister said. “Declan and I are happy for you both. When you’re settled, will you bring her over for dinner? I want to get to know her.”

Colin rose to his feet, feeling distracted. “Yeah, sure, Lys. Soon.”

He left his sister’s office, again avoided his own, and headed out of the cemetery’s administration building to his car. By the time he got in the driver’s seat, he had his phone

out. No messages. No missed calls. He hit the speed dial for Eden's phone. It went straight to voice mail.

Where are you, love? he called out to her. When she didn't answer, he started his car. Something was up and he just bet it involved that rat bastard Sean Antaeus.

~ * * * ~

The last time Eden had walked down this corridor, she'd left Antaeus International's payroll. The last person she'd seen that day was Vahid Delrey. Ironically, the first person she saw today was Vahid.

"Eden!" The smooth, smoky tones of the black dragon's voice still gave her the sensation of a fine whiskey burning its way through her veins. "I never thought I'd see you in this building again. How are you?"

Slapping a polite smile on her face, Eden turned to greet her former lover. "I'm good, Vahid. How are you? Still keeping things together for Sean?"

Vahid nodded his dark head. The same height as Eden, with impossibly wide shoulders and thickly muscled arms, he had ink dark, mesmerizing eyes. He had the most disconcerting habit of focusing intently on a person when he spoke to them. Women adored it. Men found it intimidating. Eden didn't have either problem. However, Vahid was her brother's right hand. His favored Vice President. If he asked questions, he had some kind of ulterior motive, which usually involved telling Sean everything.

"I'm glad Sean is keeping you busy. Do you happen to know if he's in today?" she asked, her polite smile becoming an inquiring one.

Vahid grinned. "Oh, he's here. It's been a busy morning," he said, his expression amused.

"Really?" Eden eyed him thoughtfully for a moment, thinking he was still the nicest man ever. When she'd broken up with him, he'd taken it with equanimity, as he did most things. She'd wondered then, as she did now, where all his extreme emotions hid.

"It's good to see you again, Vahid. Take care of yourself," she murmured, her attention shifting back to her mission as she headed down the corridor to Sean's office.

"It's great to see you too, Eden."

She could have sworn she heard laughter in Vahid's reply, but she couldn't imagine what amused him so she dismissed it, reaching for the handle of Sean's door. She opened it and stepped in.

"I said I didn't want to see anyone!" Sean growled angrily.

Eden blinked. Sean's usually immaculate office looked like a tornado had hit it. Papers littered the floor and one wall had a huge crack in it from the floor to the ceiling. Plaster dust lay thick on the burgundy carpet. Her eyes flicked to her brother and narrowed speculatively. He stood at the closet door in front of the full-length mirror, dabbing at his mouth... his bloody mouth.

"What the fuck happened to you?" she asked brusquely. "Not that you didn't deserve it."

"Your mate happened to me," Sean bit out. "You're going to need to put him on a leash, Eden. He acted like a rabid dog!"

The anger that had banked a little when she'd run into Vahid returned full force and then some. How dare Sean call Colin a rabid dog?

"You know, Sean, I can see why you have Vahid around. You're not very tactful and he is nothing but tact," she said in a falsely cheerful voice.

Sean looked at her warily in the mirror. "Why are you here, Eden? I thought nothing could ever make you step foot in this hell hole again."

"Well, what you said about me to Colin isn't nothing. Why the hell did you lie to him about me? I mean, c'mon, Sean. Paris Hilton?" she spat, her anger taking hold. "The man didn't know me from Jack and yet you filled his head with a pack of farfetched lies! Why would you say those things about me?"

She met her brother's gaze in the mirror. His eyes were so cold she blinked in surprise. "Because you became someone as worthless as those spoiled celebrity girls when you left this family, Eden. What we do here isn't good enough for you. It's not exciting. It's not creative. It's not fun. If we weren't good enough for you, then by the gods you weren't good enough for us any longer," he raged.

"Tit for tat? Is that what your lies were all about? Because that's a fucking childish thing to do. You're the head of this family, the oldest male. You're supposed to lead by example, not act like a whiny little boy who didn't get his way." Eden stormed over to him, glaring scornfully at his bloody lip. "I'm glad Colin hit you. He's not afraid of who or what I am. He loves me whether I take photos for a living or work for you. In fact, after everything that's happened, I think Colin would respect me less if I asked to come back here to work!"

"I wouldn't take you back! You have no loyalty!" Sean roared, his dark eyes glittering.

Eden's spine stiffened as outrage filled her. "You're a fine one to talk! Lying about your own sister in a fit of pique? What the fuck kind of loyalty is that? Colin has more loyalty in his little finger than you have in your whole body!" she yelled. "All these years, I let you make me think I was worthless, nothing but trouble, that I didn't fit into this family. Well, let me tell you, Sean Taylor Antaeus, you're the one who doesn't fit! Trying to mold Declan and Holden in your own image so that you can justify who you are. You're nothing but a mean, petty, manipulative bastard and I'm so sorry I ever believed anything you ever said to me!"

As the last word left her mouth, she let fly with her fist, catching Sean squarely in the left eye. He staggered, and she spun on her heel, storming out of his office. She paused in the door and looked over her shoulder at him. He leaned against the closet door, his eye swelling.

"All these years, I thought I disappointed you because you loved me when in reality, you *didn't* love me. I'm so glad I have Colin, because now I know what real love is. My mate is my family now, Sean. Not you. Not you ever again."

She stalked down the corridor, brushing past the crowds of gawking AI employees. Just before she reached the elevator, a hard hand grabbed her arm. She twisted, trying to get away, but stopped when she saw her other brothers standing there.

"We aren't Sean or Diandra," Holden said, his expression grim. "We weren't ever disappointed in you, Eden."

"I'm so sorry you ever thought we were," Declan told her.

Blinking back the sudden onslaught of tears, she hugged each of her brothers. “Thank you, but Colin is my family now. I belong to him.”

“We’ve always been here for you, Eden, even if you never realized that,” Declan said. “Holden and I should have tried harder to let you know that we love you. Unfortunately, like so many other things, we just let Sean deal with it. We’re so sorry, Ede.”

She sighed and shook her head. “It’s done now.” She smiled brightly then. “You’ll have to come to dinner once the house looks like someone lives there,” she joked.

“You’ve got a deal,” Holden said with a grin.

Eden stepped into the elevator and let it take her down to the garage level. Her happiness had her practically skipping to the Land Rover. As she drove away from the high rise, she realized that she hadn’t spoken to Colin in hours and now she had a broken phone. She’d get a new one tomorrow, she decided. Tonight she didn’t need the distraction because she was going to mate Colin. If she got a replacement phone and it went off as she released her dragonfire, she would really be pissed. Tomorrow was soon enough for a new phone. Tonight, she’d be busy.

~ * * * ~

“Tell me again why I did this,” Sean barked into the phone.

He frowned as he listened to the voice on the other end. Wincing, he held a small ice pack to his eye. “You know I’ve been punched twice today. The last time anyone laid a hand on me, he ended up unconscious. If you’ve fucked this up, I’m taking these two punches out on *you*, just as if you had hit me.”

Sean set the ice pack down and fingered his fat lip as the person on the other end spoke. Finally, he said, “I’m telling you, Alfred, all of this had better work. The last time we played matchmaker, Marius’ miscalculations about his sister nearly fucked everything up. We can’t make those kinds of mistakes with Eden. It’s promising that they were compelled to come here and hit me, but this last thing had better work too, otherwise I’m confessing everything.”

A heavy sigh escaped Sean. “Yeah sure, Alfred. I’ll see you and Marius tomorrow. Same tee time? Okay, good. Oh, and if either of you laughs at my black eye and fat lip, I will give you both matching ones.”

~ * * * ~

Colin went home to find that Eden hadn’t been there. Frowning, he wondered if she could still be at Sean’s house. Every time he called her, it went straight to voice mail. With no way to reach her, he figured the best thing to do would be to go to Sean’s house. Eden might still be packing. Maybe she could use another pair of hands to get it done more quickly, he thought.

He drove swiftly to Sean’s house, only a few miles down the highway. He walked up to the front door and rang the bell. Sean’s wife Careen answered, her expression wary.

“Hello, Colin. What can I do for you?” she asked.

Her expression made the doubt inside Colin leap. “Is Eden here?”

She shook her head, the fiery tresses spilling over her shoulders. “She left hours ago.”

“Do you know where she went? I haven’t been able to reach her,” he said in a calm voice that hid his inner turmoil.

“To see Sean,” Careen admitted. “She was angry with him.”

“I see.” Colin started to turn away. “Thank you, Careen.”

As he started down the sidewalk, Careen called out to him. “Colin!”

He looked back at her. She looked uncomfortable and not very happy. “Just remember that sometimes things aren’t what they seem.”

Colin nodded and turned toward his car. He had no clue what the hell her cryptic message meant, and he didn’t have time to stay and grill her. Right now, he needed to find Eden.

~ * * * ~

The tire didn’t mind being kicked, but Eden’s toe complained. She stood on the side of the coast highway and frowned at the stupid Land Rover. Less than a year old, and barely driven by her because she’d been away. Almost all the miles on it had been logged by one of her brothers in an effort to keep the SUV in working order by driving it once a week. And if it worked properly, why the hell did the gas gauge register half a tank when it was obviously empty?

Having run out of gas before, Eden had recognized the tell tale sputter and loss of power. Luckily, this stretch of the highway had a wide verge and she’d easily steered the big SUV off the road and into the dirt. Now, she stood beside the vehicle, cursing up a storm, and kicking the big tire to the detriment of her big toe. She couldn’t call roadside assistance with the pieces of her broken phone. This stretch of highway had no developments on it and the snooty Southern Californians who drove by wouldn’t dream of stopping to ask if she needed help. They assumed that people had cell phones.

She could walk the few miles to the next call box, pay phone, or place of business or she could let Colin into her thoughts. She kicked the tire again. She’d started a new life! She shouldn’t need to be bailed out the very first day! Asking for his help was out of the question. Looking at her delicate designer footwear, she realized she couldn’t walk for any distance along the side of the road in the expensive slides so the call box was out too.

Her gaze took in the puffy clouds drifting in the pale blue sky. Another solution presented itself and she grinned. In fact, it had been ages since she’d had an idea this good. Crouching behind the Land Rover, she opened the passenger door and began to take her clothes off. She locked everything in the car and turned her face to the sky, unworried that anyone would see her naked...

~ * * * ~

Colin drove through the gates of Granville Cemetery as if chased by the demons of Hell. He strode into the administration building and breezed into his office, barking at Corey, “Get Declan on the phone for me!”

He’d barely sat down when Corey came in and picked up the handset of his phone, holding it out to him. “It’s ringing,” he said with a cheeky smile.

Colin snatched the phone from him. He glared at Corey, but the assistant continued to stand there smiling.

“Colin? What’s going on?” Declan barked into the phone.

“Where the hell is your sister?” Colin snapped back.

“What?” Declan drew a long audible breath. “Is Elysia okay?” he asked more calmly.

Colin gritted his teeth. The gods preserve him from newlyweds. “She’s fine. Where the hell is Eden?”

“I don’t know. She left here a couple of hours ago.” Declan sounded puzzled. “What’s going on?” he asked again.

“Eden is missing.” The starkness of his words perhaps conveyed something more sinister than he meant, but Colin was worried. “Who saw her last?”

“Me and Holden. We saw her get on the elevator. Hang on a sec. Lemme make sure she left.”

Declan put him on hold and Colin drummed his fingers on the desk. Where the fuck was she? And why wasn’t she letting his thoughts in?

Declan came back on the line. “The parking attendant said she left. Where have you looked for her?”

“My house, Sean’s. She’s not answering her phone or her head,” Colin said roughly.

Corey snickered at his words and Colin shot him a dirty look.

Declan sighed. “Look, Colin. Women do this shit. They go shopping. They forget about their phones. They tune us out. Eden’s not stupid. I doubt she did anything dangerous, despite Sean’s idea that she’s a bad girl always falling into trouble. He says that shit because she’s like him and he can’t control her. If you haven’t heard from her in a couple more hours call me back and we’ll all go looking for her.”

Colin bit the inside of his cheek to stop himself from yelling at his brother in law. “Was she okay after she saw Sean? Her mood?” he asked stiffly.

“Why?” Declan’s smooth voice turned suspicious.

“Because... because...” he broke off and ran a hand around the back of his neck. This was crazy, he thought. He shouldn’t be freaking out thinking that she left him. He loved her. He should have faith in her... the way her brother Sean never had.

“You know, Colin, I’m not sure I like the hesitancy in your voice.” Declan’s tone and words came out harshly, and Colin didn’t blame him one bit. He didn’t like himself much at the moment. “I have never seen Eden so happy as when she left this office, babbling about your house and having us over for dinner. Does that sound like a woman who’s about to run out on you?”

Colin rubbed his free hand over his face. God damn his brother-in-law for being so fucking smart. “No. And I’m clearly an asshole for letting my brother get to me and making me question my own gut instinct. I’m sorry, Declan.”

His brother in law chuckled. “Don’t apologize to me. This is between you and my sister. I’m not even gonna mention it to her. Relax, Colin. She probably went to buy you a present.

She's like that, you know. Little spur of the moment gifts and goodies. At least, she used to be before she and Sean had their falling out over the company."

Declan said goodbye and hung up. Colin looked up at Corey who stared at him thoughtfully. "What?" he burst out after a minute went by.

"Me thinks you shouldn't listen to older brothers, yours or hers," he pronounced. "Your love affair is between you and her. Leave it that way and things will be just fine."

"How old *are* you?" Colin asked the fae man.

Corey looked down his nose at his boss. "Older than you, although I look much younger thanks to my wildling genes," he said. "Well, that and my happy lifestyle."

Colin's lips twitched. "Don't you mean gay lifestyle?"

Corey walked to the door. "If I meant gay I would have said gay. I mean happy. I prefer to be happy. You should prefer to be that way too."

After Corey left, Colin looked at the closed door thoughtfully. Happiness was a choice. It didn't just happen to you. Despite the people around you who might try to keep you from it. Ultimately, everyone had to choose whether or not to be happy. Giving his brother and Sean a mental fuck you, Colin decided the time had come for him to live his life on his own terms. His... and Eden's.

Turning his thoughts back to the question of where she could be, he jumped when his cell phone rang. He snatched it up, thinking it might be Eden, and looked at the caller ID. His excitement ebbed when he saw his neighbor's number.

"Hey, Jon. What's up?"

"Colin, I think you better come home," his next-door neighbor said in a voice that shook slightly.

Colin's stomach clenched. "Why? What's wrong?"

"Uhhh... there's a dragon in your yard."

Chapter Nine

Of course, her brilliant idea had turned to shit the moment she had gotten to Colin's house. She didn't have a key. She didn't have clothes. If she shifted back to human form, she'd be sitting outside naked, waiting for Colin. Unless she let him in her head. With a stubborn grunt, she stretched out on the flagstone patio and put her huge fanged head down. She was not about to admit that on the first day of her new life, she'd screwed everything up royally. Well... except for the part where she'd slugged Sean. Hitting her brother had filled her with a sense of triumph. Her hand had stung like crazy, but the moment she shifted to dragon form the pain left.

A quarter hour passed, and waiting for Colin began to make her antsy. Then she heard hushed voices. Her head swiveled a little. On the other side of the privacy fence, Colin's neighbor stood talking on a cell phone. Every few minutes he'd peek around the edge of the fence at her. She put her head down with a sigh that sent steam rolling toward the sky.

Rubberneckers.

Another twenty minutes went by and Eden became sleepy lying in the sun in her dragon form. She loved the freedom of her fangs, claws, scales, and wings, but she preferred being in human form. She figured the whole opposable thumbs thing made the choice easy for most shifters. In a technology-based world, giving up manual dexterity for sheer brute force seemed like sheer lunacy.

The garage door squealed. Eden's big black head turned toward the sound. She couldn't see the garage from where she lay on the patio, her tail trailing down toward the beach, but her acute hearing told her it was Colin's garage door, and Colin's car racing up the drive. She lifted her head, her lips curling in a smile that looked like a snarl to someone unfamiliar with dragons.

The car door slammed and the garage door squeaked as it closed. Eden watched the side of the house, waiting eagerly for Colin. He came running from the front of the house as if in a panic. He skidded to a stop when he saw her. Unable to speak in this form, Eden finally let him in her head.

I'm sorry. Do I scare you?

Colin walked up to her, his expression enigmatic. *I was scared shitless when I couldn't find you, Eden.*

Vampirelike, he kept to the shadows cast by the house, his face turned up to her. *Your dragon form does not scare me. It's pretty cool actually. But it's not every day my neighbor calls to tell me I have a dragon in my yard.*

Eden sighed and another big cloud of smoke emerged from her nostrils. *Yeah, well, my planning apparently sucks. I forgot that I didn't have a key.*

Which left you out here either in dragon form or naked, right?

She bobbed her head. Colin grinned.

You realize that all the neighbors are either scared or excited. Jon next door wants to have a barbeque to welcome you to the neighborhood. He wanted to know if you gave dragon rides.

Eden stood up, her black scales glittering with a faint gold sheen in the setting sun. *I'm too old for dragon rides, but there is something really dragonish I want to do.*

Colin's mouth quirked into that wry amused smile he'd turned on her the night she'd met him at Carpe Noctem.

"Does it involve sex and fire?" he asked out loud.

I can't surprise you at all, can I? Do you think mating is vanilla? Cause I'm all about the vanilla sex now.

I think mating is the most exotic and erotic thing any couple could ever do sexually.

Well, in that case... can you unlock the door so I can make a mad naked dash for it?

Colin unlocked the door and Eden concentrated on the shift. She knew that he could see her dragon form shimmering like golden confetti in the air. The instant her human form completed the shift, she darted past Colin into the kitchen. She heard his amused thoughts as he focused with lewd interest on how her naked ass filled his field of vision.

Ignoring the sexual innuendo of his thoughts, she headed straight for her suitcase. She had things to do before they mated tonight.

"You're not going to get dressed, are you?" he complained, as she dug in her suitcase.

"I gotta get my car," she muttered as the top of the suitcase came down on her head. "Ow!"

"No worries, love. I saw the car on my way here. I had my assistant Corey call a tow truck. They'll pick it up and drop it on the drive."

Eden turned to find a naked Colin, his cock fully erect. She blinked at him. "You do that really fast, you know."

"What? Get hard?" he laughed. "All I gotta do is look at you. It only takes a few seconds. You turn me on more than any woman ever has."

"You hit my brother."

Her abrupt change of subject had him shaking his head dazedly at her. "Uh, yeah."

Eden walked over to him and took his cock in her hand. "You did it for me."

He nodded, his face turning into a mask of lust as she stroked him. "I told him that if he ever lies about you again, I'd break every bone in his body."

She grinned. No man had ever stood up to Sean for her. "I punched him in the eye. I told him you were my family now, not him."

Colin's eyes went wide with shock. "You didn't."

She nodded, still grinning. "I did. And I meant it. The words more than the punch." She slid her arms around his waist, pressing her naked body to his. "I want to mate you in the pool tonight. I want to make the water boil when I tie myself to you forever."

"Cooked vampire?" Colin said, cocking up one eyebrow.

She shook her head. "The heat will never bother you again once you've been bathed in my dragonfire. And my clan mark..." She slipped her hand between their bodies to touch it. "It

will become two entwined dragons instead of one. You will bear the same mark in the same place on your body.”

He nodded. “Like my sister does for Declan. It’s a physical sign that I am mated to a dragon.”

“Yes.” She leaned forward and kissed him. “We need to eat. Mating is serious business and I want you in the pool the instant the sun goes down.”

He smiled slyly. “Not gonna let me get away are you?”

“No, never. You will be a part of me. If I get in hot water, you will too.”

“Promise?” he murmured, his head lowering to hers.

She rubbed the clan mark, her hand pressing against his skin as he licked at her lips. “Dragon swear.”

~ * * * ~

The instant the sun dipped below the horizon, Eden dragged him out to the pool. They swam naked, pushing and pulling at each other, snatching kisses and stroking flesh made silky by the water. Colin was beyond eager to be inside her. The day had been a rollercoaster of emotion and he knew in his gut that he needed to belong to her.

When Eden dragged him to the side of the pool and wrapped her legs around his hips, Colin rocked against her, letting his cock glide along her swollen female flesh. The Alpha in him screamed to take her, but he wanted this time to be special. He licked her neck and when she shivered, he let his fangs tease her sensitive skin. The hot spicy Sangria scent of her made him mindless with lust, but he hung on to his sanity by his fangs, letting his mouth and his hands tease her.

He held her in the water, her long dark hair floating free as he kissed and licked his way along her throat. Her golden skin prickled with goosebumps, but he knew she wasn’t cold. He heard the rushing of her blood in her veins and as his bloodmate, he knew every beat of her heart even if she wasn’t nearby.

When Eden rubbed her pussy against his cock again, he bent to her throat, his fangs dragging along her wet skin to the vein that throbbed near her collarbone. With a swiftness known only to vampires, he bit her, his fangs sinking deep. As he pulled, her warm blood splashed on his tongue, tasting of Sangria and heady spices. He grew lightheaded and pulled away, licking the wounds so that they healed instantly, fading from sight in a matter of seconds.

Eden moaned, her fingers digging into his flesh. He pressed her toward the shallow end of the pool, onto the low steps. She kissed him, but he broke the kiss right away so that he could turn her and position her on her knees. Colin kissed his way up her spine and her body undulated like a serpent’s, reminding him briefly of the ancient link between dragons and serpents. Rubbing his cock along the crease between her firm buttocks, she pushed back against it, lowering her head and raising her ass in the air, begging him to take it.

Colin could have fucked her in the ass, except that he wanted something else from her this night. He wanted to belong to her, and that meant sinking himself balls deep into her pussy and fucking her until she turned her dragonfire loose. He pressed his cock down, the

thick head rubbing her swollen labia. She panted loudly, her body rocking back against his. His hips flexed, sending his cock deep into her.

She cried out, tossing her head. "Oh, gods, Colin! More, more!"

He fucked her hard, the water around them churning and slapping the sides of the pool. Focused solely on making her come again and again, his long fingers teased her clit. Nibbling at her shoulders, he pounded into her from behind. She shook and writhed beneath him in a way that told him her orgasm was close. He tweaked her stiff nipples, pinching and pulling them. She moaned and thrust back against him.

And then it happened. She jerked and Colin trailed his fingers over her clan mark. Oddly, the tribal mark had the texture of hot metal despite being in water. She screamed his name over and over and Colin just fucked her harder and harder, feeling his balls tighten to the point of pain. He rubbed her clan mark again, twisting her head to one side so he could lock his mouth onto hers as he came, his hot seed bathing her tight passage. As her tongue twined around his, his body began to heat until he thought he would burst into flame. His eyes popped open to find the water of the infinity pool boiling, steam rising in a huge cloud and little flames dancing along the rocks. His skin was stretched so tight with pleasure and heat, he imagined himself splitting open like melon, literally exploding.

The next conscious moment Colin had, his eyes opened and he found himself lying half on Eden, half on the steps of the pool, sucking in great gulps of air, while steam and the smell of sulfur tickled his nose. The skin of his lower abdomen itched and he rolled off Eden, his cock sliding free of her pussy. He looked down and found the beginnings of a mate mark on the skin of his lower belly just inside his hipbone.

Eden slid over to him and curled into his arms, nuzzling him. "I love you, Colin. I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

Colin looked at the still simmering water of the pool. "In hot water, you mean?" he teased, lifting her chin with his fingers so he could kiss her swollen lips. "I love you too, Eden. You're my whole world."

She grinned at him. "Good, because I have a few assignments coming that I can't get out of. You'll see more of the world than you ever wanted to see."

He hugged her tightly. "It doesn't matter to me if I do or I don't see the world. All I care to see is right here in my arms. My Queen of Kink."

"My Sugar Cookie man," she purred, her amber eyes glowing with happiness.

Colin smiled at her. "I have a couple of ground rules to ensure we stay this happy."

"Oh, yeah?" She raised her dark brows at him.

He nodded. "Rule number one, no listening to older brothers."

"Oh, that's a given!" she agreed snarkily.

"Number two, when in doubt, remember rule number one."

Eden started to laugh, but he kissed her hard. "Rule number three..." His fingers slipped between her thighs. "Everything else that's questionable can be easily answered by me putting my cock in your pretty pink pussy."

Her fingers wrapped around his thickening penis. “Remember you once said I could handcuff you?”

Suddenly wary, he nodded. She grinned. “Let’s go upstairs. I’ll cuff you to the bed, then *I’ll* put *your* cock in *my* pretty pink pussy.”

Colin eyed her thoughtfully. “Okay. I can live with those rules.”

Eden laughed out loud, kissing him soundly on the mouth, her expression filled with love and lust. “I never thought I’d be able to follow the rules and fit in, but with you, it’s easy.”

“Shut up and cuff me,” Colin growled.

And she did.

Epilogue

The party was a huge success. The entire Antaeus and Granville families attended, including Eden's sister Diandra and her husband. Other guests included their neighbors, who still angled for dragon rides, and Alfred Stone who looked really pleased with himself for some reason.

Everyone oohed and ahhed over the house and over Eden's engagement ring. During the buffet dinner, Eden slipped away, needing to catch her breath and not play hostess for a few minutes. The last six weeks had been a lot of work, with the result worth every drop of sweat. Everything she and Colin had envisioned that first week had come to fruition, for themselves and their home. She started up the stairs, but a heavy hand fell on her arm. She looked up into the serious eyes of her brother Sean.

"Can we talk?" he asked.

She almost told him that there was nothing to say, but an indefinable emotion lurked in the back of his eyes and she couldn't ignore it... a pain that she could only just make out. She shrugged. "Sure."

They climbed the stairs and she opened the door to the master bedroom. Sean stepped in behind her, looking around the room at the deep blue walls, the pale champagne trim, the huge bed in blues and golds and darkest reds. Eden sat down in the alcove on a champagne colored chaise. Sean sat down on a matching chair.

"You've done a great job here, Eden. It's a beautiful house," he said coolly.

She gave him a half smile. "Thanks, but I know that's not why you asked to speak with me, Sean. Decorating is so not your thing."

"I know enough to know that you did a better than excellent job here. Must be those creative forces in you," he grunted.

Eden stared at him, wondering just what the hell he'd worked himself up to say.

"I'm so sorry."

Her mouth fell open in shock. She sat there in stunned silence. No way had her brother just apologized. Sean Antaeus? The ruthless head of Antaeus International? Fiendish businessman and cold hearted sibling? Apologizing? The concept seemed too much to grasp.

"I must need to clean out my ears," she muttered, shaking her head.

Sean shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "Ede, I said I'm sorry," he repeated. "Did I not say it loud enough for you? Or should I grovel at your feet to make you understand?"

She blinked. "I heard you the first time, Sean. Groveling doesn't help my hearing," she said. "I just don't understand why you're apologizing."

He sighed faintly, fiddling with his shirt cuffs. "Marius and I set you and Colin up. We played matchmaker. Marius sent Colin to New York City and told him he should check out the vamp club." Sean shrugged slightly. "I played you with the whole Queen of Kink thing and saying Carpe Noctem was too tame for you..."

Eden's mouth fell open again. "How did you know we would even run into each other? It's a big club, a big city..."

“I... we... uhh...” Sean stumbled, seemingly unable to find the right words. His expression turned dark and a little exasperated. “We just figured you would... we had a feeling... you know.”

Eden shook her head in astonishment at her big bad brother stuttering, mumbling, and unable to express himself. Besides his need to apologize, something else bothered him, but knowing Sean, she'd only get it out of him when he was ready to tell. “Are you telling me that you and Marius had a ‘feeling’ that Colin was my mate?”

“Well, yeah... sorta,” Sean nodded, clearing his throat uncomfortably. “Losing you was difficult for me, Eden. I struggled with your need for independence. I don't bend easily. I try and sometimes I don't make it,” he said, his voice bitter. “But because I'm the head of this family, and everyone looks to me to lead them and guide them, when I don't bend enough, that mistake is much more glaring and much harder for me to rectify.”

It dawned on Eden that Sean had never asked to be the head of the family. Diandra was the eldest, but she had thrown off the mantle of matriarch and moved to Scotland. Her leaving had probably caused the overwhelming responsibility Sean felt for his family.

“Sean. You don't have to be the head of the family anymore,” she told him with a soft smile. “We all have mates. Your matchmaking job is done.”

Sean stood up and pulled her up into his arms, hugging her hard. “I'm sorry for my harshness with you, Eden. All these years, I've been so wrong in my treatment of you. You're so much like me that I guess I just thought you should be me. When you didn't want to, it hurt and angered me. I shouldn't have treated you as I did, and I'm sorry. Making sure that you and Colin got together helped me make amends.”

Eden hugged him back. “So all that grim displeasure you showed me the day I hit you was just an act?”

Sean's arms fell to his sides, and she saw that he looked a little sheepish. “We contrived a lot of things that happened that day,” he admitted. “Your busted cell phone and your car breaking down. Marius telling Colin he didn't approve of him bonding with you. We had to make sure you had a commitment to each other and weren't just hell bent to fuck each other.”

Eden started to laugh. “We *were* hell bent to fuck each other.”

Sean made a face. “I didn't really need to hear that from you.” He shot her an amused look. “You disappearing for a few hours that day gave Marius the chance to try to shake Colin's commitment to you. It didn't work obviously. We thought you'd call Colin for help, but going to his house and showing your dragon form to him clinched things for us. We knew you didn't need any more help.”

Eden rolled her eyes at him. “We never did need your help. Maybe initially, to meet, but after that... it was all over for me. I got one whiff of him and lost my heart. I couldn't ever leave him, no matter what I had to give up to have him.”

His eyes on a large photograph on the wall, Sean said, “He's a smart man not to ask you to give up anything. You have amazing talent, Eden. I'm sorry I never realized that.”

“That's okay, Sean. *I* get it,” Colin's voice spoke from the doorway. His eyes met Eden's and he smiled. “I'd follow her to the ends of the earth to have her.”

“You may have to,” she chuckled. “I have a shoot in Africa next month.”

Colin shrugged carelessly, coming into the room to slip his arm around her waist and nuzzle her cheek. "It's okay. We'll work it out." He looked at Sean. "Thank you for the apology. She deserved it."

The head of the Antaeus family nodded his dark head. "You're right. She did."

He left the room, closing the door behind him. Eden turned into Colin's arms. "You heard it all, didn't you?"

He nodded. "Who would have thought Sean Antaeus had it in him to apologize?" he said, his expression showing his surprise.

Eden wound her arms around his neck. "Even an Antaeus can admit to being wrong."

He bent his head to kiss her. "If we didn't have a houseful of guests..." he growled.

"Oh, yeah? What would you do?" she teased him, rubbing her body against his.

"Show you the real difference between kink and vanilla." He nibbled the side of her neck and she shivered as desire swept through her.

"Uh, oh. Why do I get the feeling that I'm in hot water again?"

"Maybe because that's where I like you... bathing me in your fire, turning the pool into a hot tub while I'm deep inside your hot... wet... pretty... pink... pussy..."

A deep, quick kiss punctuated each of his words, and Eden melted in his arms. "Will they miss us?" she panted, pulling at his clothes.

"Who cares?" Colin kissed her, his tongue dancing with hers. "I love you."

"I love you too," she managed to whisper before his mouth took hers again. They sank down on the bed, forgetting about everything but each other.

Downstairs, Sean and Marius kept the guests entertained. No one else noticed how long Colin and Eden went missing from the party. However, the guests did notice one odd thing... Sean and Marius silently toasting each other and grinning wickedly with Alfred Stone.

About the Author

Lex has been writing stories and poems ever since she could hold a pencil. A few years ago, she got caught up writing in an online paranormal serial story. The story was very intense and a challenge to her writing skills. As she began to write more and more, fans of the story and her blog readers began to encourage her to submit her writing. Lex lives in Orange County, California with her long haired musician husband and her teen aged daughter. Lex loves loud music, reading hot stories, reading her friends' blogs and hanging out with them, enjoys building her own computers, and has a propensity for having very weird vivid dreams about Nikki Sixx.

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Her lips curved into a seductive smile. Maybe she would just have to discover the truth of that old adage about big men. Declan was certainly handsome enough. Black hair that shone like a raven's wing. Golden eyes that glowed as if lit by a fire within. Sun bronzed, supple skin. Beneath the baggy robe, she knew he had a tall and muscular body, the kind that looked best in a faded pair of jeans and a tank top that showed off his biceps.

"Buy me a drink?" she purred, deciding to start as she meant to go on. She was horny. He was hot. Seemed like a match made in heaven to her.

One dark brow winged up. "It's an open bar. I'll get you whatever your heart desires," he told her in a voice filled with innuendo.

Deciding the drink wasn't necessary; Elysia stopped him from turning away by putting one hand on his arm. He looked back at her with a question in his eyes.

"What if my heart desires something other than a drink? Will you get me that?" Her eyes held his boldly.

Declan's face became a mask of pure masculine desire. He cupped her elbow, just as he had three years ago at the convention, steering her toward the lobby. Once they were away from the crowd, he pushed back his hood and bent toward her. "Do you know what you're doing, Elysia? What you're inviting?" he growled softly.

Elysia smiled at him, reaching up to stroke her fingers over his hard jaw line. His skin felt hot to the touch. Her whole body tingled and she could hear his heart beating, feel the rush of his blood in his veins. She drew in a breath, the scent of his blood tart and crisp in her nostrils, like biting into a Granny Smith apple... Her fangs slid from their sheath as her panties grew damp. Yes, Declan Antaeus was definitely the right choice. Her body already wanted him fiercely. None of the men at the ball would satisfy her now. Besides, backing down after coming on to a man like Declan wasn't wise because he was easily the most powerful man at the party, both professionally and physically.

"I'm not a child, Declan. I know exactly what I'm doing. Do you need me to spell it out for you?" She tilted her head to one side inquiringly, wondering if he would take her up on her offer or if this was just a game to him.

His lips quirked. "Yeah. Maybe I do. After all, I've wanted you for a long time."

Ghost Redeemed

By Mary Winter

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Shay's stomach flip-flopped. Looking at Kyle standing just outside her bathroom door, a boyish grin on his face, made her wonder what would happen if she invited him to join her. She'd planned on taking a shower, figuring that would be the easiest way to wash the wound on her back. But with Kyle there, she wouldn't need to go to such lengths. Then again, maybe she would anyway.

She stepped back and opened the door, suddenly nervous about her plan. "I guess you're right," she said, trying not to sound too eager. "I will need some help." Turning from him, she pulled her shirt over her head. She swore she heard Kyle's swiftly indrawn breath. She glanced into the mirror and saw the angry red gash start just below her shoulder blade to disappear beneath her bra clasp. She reached around her and unfastened the hooks. Her peach lace bra hung loosely on her shoulders, and she noticed Kyle trying hard not to look at her breasts in the mirror.

She slipped the lingerie from her shoulders. "The peroxide and some antibiotic ointment are in the medicine cabinet."

Kyle opened the mirrored panel. She watched, noticing the light glow surrounding his skin. If it weren't for that, he'd look completely normal standing in her bathroom, reaching for the brown plastic bottle of peroxide. He grabbed several cotton balls and turned his attention to her back. His movements seemed slow, as if he had to think about each action.

"This is going to sting a little. There's not much I can do about that." He unscrewed the lid of the peroxide bottle and doused a cotton ball. "Are you ready?"

"I'll be fine," she said. His fingers brushed her skin, and tiny shivers darted from the touch. Her nipples pebbled, and she resisted the urge to cover her breasts with her hands. A soft fizzing sound filled the bathroom, and then the wound stung. Shay sucked in a quick breath and gritted her teeth.

"I'm sorry." Kyle continued to dab the cotton ball on the wound.

"It's okay," Shay ground out. She reached in front of her and wrapped her fingers around the towel rod on her shower door. Clenching her fingers around it, she focused on breathing in and out to distance herself from the sting of disinfectant on her wound.

His motions slowed, and she heard the soft clunk of the bottle on the counter. The trash bag rustled as he tossed the cotton ball into it. The room closed in. She became aware of Kyle standing behind her, his body just inches from her. The thudding of her heart sounded loud in her ears. She longed to turn around and see him, but didn't, afraid of the desire she would see in his gaze. Keeping her eyes down, she waited.

He touched her. His fingers slid across her shoulder, a feather light touch against her skin. Tiny sparks danced at the contact. Telling herself he was a ghost did little good, as heavy warmth filled her limbs. His hand skimmed her side, barely touching the side of her breast. She wanted more. Him. His cock. Her lips parted.

“Kyle,” she breathed.

“Shay.” His other hand reached around to palm her breast, a light touch that soon had him standing against her. The ridge of his cock pressed against her buttocks.

Her knees went weak. She leaned against his strength, not wanting to get used to his warmth surrounding her. The fact he was a ghost mattered little. Some part of her mind rebelled, but she refused to listen. Right now, still aching from the fight and heart-sore from her best friend’s death, she wanted his warmth, his strength surrounding her.

She shifted her weight. Her ankle protested, and she quickly moved her weight to her good foot.

“Let me help you.” His hand slid down her back, to her hip. “Turn around and wrap your legs around me.”

Shay started to turn. “But you’re a gh—” Words died when she saw the naked hunger in his eyes. He wanted her, his gaze sweeping over her bared breasts.

“Perfect,” he whispered, covering one with his hand. He brushed a thumb across a distended nipple, and Shay closed her eyes. His free hand slid over her back, down to her ass. Pulling her against him, he urged her to wrap her leg around his waist.

She complied. The first touch of his hard cock against her coaxed a low moan from her throat. She wrapped her arms around him and brought her other leg around his waist. He easily lifted her, carrying her out of the bathroom.

“Where’s your bedroom?” He glanced down the hall, before looking back into the living room.

The Purrfect Man

By Mary Winter

Available Now from Pink Petal Books

<http://www.pinkpetalbooks.com/index.php/Bookstore/Mary-Winter/Paranormal-Romance/The-Purrfect-Man.html>

“I’m sorry.”

The masculine words sounded truly remorseful, and it took Althea a moment to realize she was dreaming. “It’s okay,” she automatically replied, though she knew not who this man was or why he apologized to her. In fact, she couldn’t really see him. Instead, it seemed as if she still lay in bed, though the edges of the room seemed fuzzy. An effect of the sinus medication, she wondered, but she’d never had dreams like this before.

Gradually, her surroundings became visible. A man sat on the foot of her bed. Though he didn’t move, she sensed an inherent lithe grace in his form.

“Wha--?” she asked, coming out of a medicine-induced fog. “Who are you?”

Tawny hair crowned his head and feathered over his shoulders. His brilliant blue eyes held warmth. A straight nose divided his face, leading to the fullest, most sensuous pair of lips she’d ever seen on a man. He wore no shirt, and the view of his chest nearly took Althea’s breath away. Matching tawny hair dusted his pectorals, and then arched over a work-hardened set of abs and disappeared beneath the waistband of a gray pair of sweat pants. His feet were bare.

She blinked at the sweat pants. Until that modern piece of clothing, she expected him to be dressed in historical clothing. She didn’t know why. She saw only his body; he hadn’t even spoken yet. Still, something about his manner, the way he sat with his hands resting on his muscled thighs brought back images from a bygone era. She chalked it up to the timelessness of the dream state.

He moved closer, the efficiency in the way he inched toward her pillow reaffirming her belief that this was a man unlike any she’d met. After settling himself next to her hip, he trailed his fingers over her arm. The caress, so light, reminded her of the way she’d petted the cat on her porch.

“I’m Dante,” he said. Reaching out, he brushed his thumb against her lips. “So beautiful. So warm.” He bent over, replacing his thumb with his lips. Gently he kissed her, drawing her deeper into the dream, into him. His lips coaxed, nibbled, ate as daintily as a cat enjoying a tasty morsel. With his tongue, he traced her lower lip.

Althea parted her lips to allow him entrance. Dante’s answering moan sent warm shivers darting through her body. She wrapped her arm around him, tangling her fingers in his silky soft hair. His hard body pressed against hers, and arousal drew her nipples into tight beads. She wanted to be devoured by him, to feel his lips on every inch of her flesh. Allergies forgotten, she clung to him and slid her other hand down over his muscled back to his buttocks. This was a dream, after all.

And thank goodness it *was* a dream. Her body hungered for the touch of flesh against flesh. Reaching for him, curling her fingers around his biceps, something awakened deep

inside. She'd ignored the months of celibacy, hadn't really thought about them, but now, the need to make up for lost time drove her. She moaned as he deepened the kiss. Passion flared in her blood. She wanted him—her dream man. *Now.*

A quick tug pulled her shirt free of her jeans. His hand splayed across her abdomen. His touch branded her. He laid her back on the bed, tugging at her T-shirt. She released him long enough for him to pull it over her head. He unfastened her bra and slid it off her shoulders.

Althea reached for him once more. She wrapped her fingers around his hard biceps and pulled him to her.

Dante lowered his head and nibbled along her collarbone. He laved each kiss, each love bite, with a long sweep of his tongue that had her shuddering to her toes. The crisp whorls of his chest hair tickled her nipples and stomach.

She arched beneath him, her breasts begging for his touch. "Please," she whispered, unaware she voiced her plea.

Keeper

By Shaunta Grimes

Available Now

<http://www.pinkpetalbooks.com/index.php/Bookstore/Shunta-Grimes/Paranormal-Romance/Keeper.html>

Jude Felini carefully removed all the thorns from a single, perfect yellow rose before biting the long stem. He surveyed the tree-lined street, the rows of neat four-plex apartments, making sure he was alone before his body shimmered and contracted into that of a large orange tomcat.

Clutching the rose between his teeth, he hopped from the ground onto an iron balcony railing, walked across it, jumped to a tree limb, and then up to a second story balcony. Potted plants and flowers turned the small space into a tiny rain forest. Jude loved being here and he often snuck up without the balcony's avian owner knowing.

The sexy little bird in question had once again jumped headlong into a boatload of trouble. From his position under her window, Jude watched Avery Dove wrap her arms around her slender waist and gaze at the sky. Her up-tilted heart-shaped face was unguarded, and breathtaking in its beauty. She opened the window and Jude leapt onto the sill.

Avery stumbled backward several steps away from the window, upsetting framed pictures off the table behind her, and then let loose with a string of swear words all the more colorful for coming from such a delicate woman.

Laughter rang in his head. He drew altogether too much enjoyment from yanking her chain. If he could get that personality quirk under control, maybe he'd be in Avery's bed instead of standing outside her window. He took on his human form again as he jumped from the sill to the floor. As he transformed, the rose was tossed in the air. It spun in a slow arc before it landed in his hand. He presented it to her with a formal bow.

She stood with her hands fisted on her hips, her cheeks flushed. Though she struggled to keep her gaze resolutely on his face, he caught the sweep she made of his nude body. "I swear to God, one of these days I'm going to put a collar around your neck and take you in to be neutered, Jude Felini."

Jude laughed out loud. "You don't want me neutered, Sweetheart. Trust me."

"Maybe neutered you wouldn't be such a pain in my ass." She took the flower. "Where the hell are your clothes?"

Jude raised an eyebrow and tilted his head toward the window with the tree outside, under which rested his jeans and t-shirt. "Being a pain in your ass sounds fun. Maybe we should give it a try."

"I hope you aren't here just to gloat, because I'm really not in the mood." Avery stuck her nose in the flower, but Jude saw the blush rising up from her elegant neck. No woman had ever done angry as beautifully as she did. "Go get dressed."

He leaned against her clean, white wall. Everything in her apartment was airy and light, perfectly suited for a bird. "Don't you think it'll cause a sensation if I walk down the front stairs nude?"

“So go back down the balcony. You need clothes.”

“Or you could take some of yours off.” He let his eyes slide down her body. Her hands were fisted on her hips and she was teetering on the edge of more angry than sexy. “And I’m not here to gloat. I’m here to lend support.”

Avery looked down her nose at him over the rose. “Sure you are. Stay there.”

She put the flower in water and then stalked off. Maybe needing some air, because it wasn’t like her to give into this particular argument so easily. She’d spent an entire evening pretending that he wasn’t naked before, just to keep from going down and collecting the clothing that he shed during his transformation.

Once he was dressed, Jude sat on Avery’s couch and closed his mouth before sexy-angry turned to really-angry. Avery sat next to him. He couldn’t take his eyes off of her. She was beautiful, fine boned and delicate in a way that made him want to take her in his arms to hold and protect her. But also fiery, she was a small package of dynamite with no fear, no hesitation when she went after something she wanted.

That rebellious streak was how she got into trouble this time.

King of Cats

By Jessica Quinn

Available Now

<http://www.pinkpetalbooks.com/index.php/Bookstore/Jessica-Quinn/Paranormal-Romance/King-of-Cats.html>

Rita was still on the phone when she marched out to the front desk and deposited the vase onto her desk with a thud. “Get rid of these ASAP, will you?” Mel asked. “I don’t care if you take them to the nearest cemetery or throw them in the dumpster, but I don’t want to see them when I come back out here.” Rita nodded and Mel turned and marched back into her office to retrieve their latest guest for his bath.

The bronze-furred cat was nowhere to be seen when she stepped back into her office, and she frowned. *Hiding under the couch, maybe? Most folks would be surprised at how many cats learn to recognize the word ‘bath’.* She took a few steps forward, shutting the office door behind her without a glance back so he couldn’t get out that way, and knelt down on the floor to peer under the sofa.

“You don’t really want to let the old man neuter me, do you, sweetheart?” came the purring voice from behind her. A tan, lithely-muscled arm wrapped itself around her waist even as she half-turned, ready to scream.

The eyes she found herself staring up into were copper-gold, brighter than any she’d seen outside of contact lenses. Long, straight, golden-bronze hair spilled over impossibly wide shoulders, gone the color of butterscotch from the summer sun. The broad, hairless chest was equally muscular and tapered downward to a trim, narrow waist, lean hips and a very nice—*Oh. My. God. He’s completely naked.*

Before she could force a scream past her parted lips, he grinned roguishly, eyes twinkling, and swooped in, mouth closing over hers. His tongue speared straight into her mouth to tangle with hers, his lips roaming possessively over her own. A flush of heat shot from her lips all the way down to her groin, igniting an ember of liquid flame there that slicked her panties. Eyes wide, she watched the stranger’s nostrils twitch, almost as if he could smell her arousal, and even as she turned the rest of the way to face him, he lowered her to the floor.

Her nipples had gone hard enough to cut diamonds, pressing achingly against the white lace bra she wore. He undid the buttons on her blouse with eye-watering speed, fanning the lapels of the shirt open.

“Wait, no!” she gasped, pulling free for a second. Her knees went weak, and she swallowed hard at the rush of heat through her body, consumed by a white-hot lust she hadn’t felt since...well, ever. *Jason never made me feel like this!* Something hot and hard nudged her thigh and she glanced down, stifling a gasp at the sight. His erection was huge, large enough to nudge the soft flesh of her belly.

He leaned in close before she could get a better look, arrowing in to nip her shoulder and the side of her throat. She could feel his hands slip below her waist, working to undo the button and zipper of the slacks she wore, and she grabbed his hands, temporarily stilling them.

“Who...who the hell are you?” she gasped, desperately trying to maintain even a thin façade of sanity against the sensations that swirled turbulently through her hungry flesh.

He grinned again, wide, licking his lips, those emerald eyes hot with desire. “Don’t you know, sweetheart?” he teased, sliding one finger under the waistband of her panties and drawing a fiery line from her left hip to the right. “After all, *you* were the one who saved me when that car hit me.”

It made no sense whatsoever. She spent half a second trying to puzzle out the mystery behind his words; then his mouth sought hers again. With waning determination, she grabbed his hands—again— pulling them away from her pants. She could hear the stranger making a deep rumbling sound in his throat and chest. It took her a second to realize what it meant.

Purring. He’s purring.