

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

A woman with long dark hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a black leather corset with a zipper down the front. She has a large, detailed black ink tattoo of a dragon's head and wings on her upper chest. The background is a bright, fiery orange and yellow. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

*Stop Dragon
My
Heart Around*
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Mandy M. Roth

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Stop Dragon My Heart Around

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Chapter One

Jotunheimen Mountain Range, Norway

Viktor Dracodomus shifted his weight, rolling onto his side. A rock poked him and he grunted, lifting up on all fours. He lay on the cool cave floor of his home, sweeping the ground with his long tail. The waving limb batted the stone away as he readjusted, trying to get comfortable and finding it nearly impossible. Stretching his long, black wings, he forced his body to relax.

“*Hurmph,*” the sound came from his throat in a small puff of fire and smoke. The brief flame sputtered from his nostrils, lighting the surrounding cave. Viktor closed his eyes. He didn’t need the light to see through the blackness that encased him. His eyes could pierce the dark with ease, just as his nose could detect any intruder long before they entered the part of the cave he called his home.

The dark tunnels around him led all through the mountains in a confusion of continuous mazes that eventually made their way out into the wild Norwegian countryside. He was thirty miles from the nearest town, hidden from the outside world in his cave. Because the country was so far north it was called the Land of the Midnight Sun. At one time, he’d been amazed by the constant summer daylight of the northern lands, daylight that lasted twenty-four hours. In the winter, snow covered the land and many people used skis to travel the inlands, at least they had the last time he checked. Warm winds from the sea usually melted the snow off the coastline and many of the inhabitants centered there.

Viktor’s cave home was more inland, away from the densely populated coastal towns. He never received visitors and rarely sought the company of others. The wilderness of the Jotunheimen Mountains provided him with everything he needed—food, water, caves for shelter and wide-open skies where no one could see him take to flight. Flying was one of his only pleasures.

Nowadays he preferred resting shifted into his dragon form. Actually, he seemed to prefer the body of the dragon more and more as the years passed. Maybe it was because when he shifted into his human figure his cock would be so hard he could break stones with it. The damned organ constantly seemed to be demanding attention—more attention than he’d been willing to give it. His kind was never meant to go without sex for long periods. In fact, Viktor was sure he’d hit some kind of celibacy record.

There had been a time when he liked being a man, liked walking on two legs amongst mortals—even in the Middle Ages as humans tried to track his kind and kill them for sport. One family of dragon slayers in particular had been a real thorn in their side, nearly hunting them to extinction. Though, to be fair, he and his brother Zarek had done plenty of “sporting” of their own.

How young they'd been then! It was strange to think of all the centuries they'd seen. They'd been born in the early fourteen hundreds at the same time—well, Zarek was born a minute earlier, making him the oldest. The Dracodomus brothers were raised in an era that was as wild as they were. Over the years, the world seemed to settle around them. They saw nations and monarchies change hands, lives transformed until one generation's morals became another's sins. Fashion, art, music, all of it changed and yet he stayed the same—a young man forever. It was just the way it was for all of them. They hit their twenties and their bodies peaked, aging stopped.

Viktor was homesick for his family, for his past, for his homeland—Greece. He hadn't seen his brother in a long time—perhaps too long. Though, as immortals, all they seemed to have was time. It was natural for dragon shifters to lead a solitary life, but the loneliness was beginning to wear on him. The last he heard, he had a cousin living in the Rocky Mountains, another around Mount Everest. And Zarek was...

Viktor frowned. Well, truthfully, it was hard to say where his brother was for sure, only that it was probably in some woman's bed. The man was never without some sort of female companionship and Viktor was sure no amount of time passing would change that fact.

Thinking of the old days when dragons flew freely about the open skies only made him sad. He sighed. Ah, that had been the life. Women. Fighting. Sex. Many wenches couldn't wait to lift their skirts for a Dracodomus brother. And the brothers in turn had been insatiable in their youth, full of vigor and passion and lust for adventure.

Then she had happened. Elise. Miss Elise Fenton, daughter to a wealthy lord. What a fine time it had been. What fun they had. How they had loved—in so many positions, in so many sordid ways. Theirs had been a relationship of pure, fiery hot passion. Viktor had been nearly five hundred years old at the time and still he confused what he felt for Elise as love when obviously it had been only lust.

Queen Victoria had just taken her throne when he met Elise. Society was alive with arts and music, and women wore dresses and bonnets. Not like the last time he'd gone down into the so-called civilized world. He'd been shocked to see every single woman he came across in breeches. And the men were little better—sloppily dressed and not a one of them in a suit. How a hundred years seemed to change things.

A hundred years without sex, without fulfillment, without a way to ease the ache inside me.

Viktor frowned, spouting another small puff of smoke from his long nose. He still thought of Elise. Though, truthfully, he didn't remember what he saw in her. All he remembered was that she'd hurt him badly enough to send him into his solitude. Maybe it wasn't just her betrayal that had sent him into hiding. Maybe it had been everything—the way the world had been changing at an alarming rate, the way the world always changed. Elise had said she loved him, but she married the man her father chose for her. Viktor had been close to mating to her for all eternity too. Elise knew it and still she didn't stop him. If not for Zarek's interference, he would've mated to a woman he couldn't have and who didn't love him. She would have his eternity to

do as she pleased and he would be left with nothing but the pain her indiscretions would have caused him. For a Dracodomus it would've been a fate worse than death.

The memory of it only reinforced why he didn't want to go into the world again. Feeling a tightening in his stomach, he knew he *had* to go into the world again. His time was close. He'd felt it coming for years, knew there would be the day when he'd have to chance his heart again or risk forever being alone. Somehow he'd managed to avoid the draco mating ritual for the past centuries.

But there is no more avoiding my fate, no matter how scared I am of it. The time has come and I cannot deny my needs any longer. I must find her before my six-hundredth birthday. I must go out into the world and try one last time to find happiness, to find my one true mate.

For months he'd tried to tell himself he wasn't leaving the sanctuary of his cave, that he didn't care if he ever had sex again. The man inside him laughed. Oh, he cared. He cared a great deal. Viktor knew he couldn't stay in dragon form forever, hiding from the needs of his cock or the more dire needs of his heart.

It was time to end the solitude.

It was time Viktor Dracodomus found himself a mate.

He'd finally had the vision as to where he needed to look. America. If he didn't mate, he'd never have sex again—not that he was really having sex now. Could a person actually forget how? As much as he masturbated, he was surprised his fist wasn't raw and bleeding all the time.

Viktor growled, sending fire spouting out of his dragon nose. He wanted sex. He wanted to mate. And, *bloody hell*, he was going to the New World to find it.

* * * * *

Manhattan, New York, one week later...

"Okay, now, this next thing I'm going to show you is really very simple. Anyone can do it. You're going to hold Frank by the...um...head and tilt back the...um...head. Mmm, very good, nice."

Samantha Egan smiled at her class in approval. She hoped her voice didn't sound too breathy, but she was really nervous speaking to the group. They weren't her usual type of people. She was an Upper East Side kind of chick and this class was...

Well, they were just *not*.

She was dressed in her favorite black blanket-wrap sweater and dark blue jeans. Her black leather, side-zip boots had cost nearly seven hundred dollars. She doubted any of the people in front of her had ever spent that much money on a single article of clothing in their lives. It's not that she thought she was better than them, she didn't. She just didn't know how to relate to them.

Could she help it if she'd been born into privilege?

"Now, lower your mouth onto his...um..."

“Head?” a woman with a band tattooed around her upper arm inserted, much to the amusement of the class. Samantha made a weak noise, trying to smile at the joke.

“Onto *him* and create a seal before blowing...ah...” Samantha paused in her instruction, trying to avoid eye contact with the tattooed woman. She sat in the front row and stared at Samantha like she was an idiot. The woman wore thick black eyeliner around both eyes and her hair was dyed to a stark crimson. It was clear she didn’t want to be taking the class—as seemed to be the case with most of them. Samantha cleared her throat, trying to remember where she’d left off. “Form suction and blow... ah...fo- for just one second and then...”

Samantha frowned and ran to her book on the old card table in front of the class. The room was really just part of an old office building the organization she worked for rented. Well, “worked for” was a little of an overstatement. She volunteered and didn’t get paid. It was a good thing too. She sucked at teaching cardiopulmonary resuscitation. CPR definitely wasn’t her thing. She couldn’t even spell cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

“I think Frank is choking to death. We’re a little late on the finger sweep,” a tall man in the back teased. He’d been giving her a hard time since he walked in the door. Samantha was sure he thought it was cute. She just found it annoying—and frankly a little on the scary side. He wore a leather biker vest with a skull on the back and his arms were covered in tattoos. She hated to be a girly-girl, but well, she was what she was. Afraid of pissing him off and incurring the wrath of his biker clan, she gave a small, nervous laugh.

Samantha flipped through her training manual. She was supposed to have it memorized, but it was just so boring. Was it her fault that she didn’t have a natural aptitude for this stuff? She tried five times to read the manual, but her mind kept drifting into bizarre daydreams of smoke and fire, wavy patterns that seemed to dance all around her, yet not hurting her.

The fanciful daydream struck her as odd as she tried to analyze it. Maybe it was the feeling of isolation she had being so rich. She was physically safe in her luxury from the passions of the outside world and yet she was so alone at the same time. Safe and alone.

“We still get credit if Frank kicks it, don’t we?” the man asked, causing a round of snickers at his question.

Samantha managed a weak smile and forced herself to concentrate. Now, was it five breaths? Pulse? Heart? Compress? Oxygenate the blood?

Crap, what do I say to them? They can all see I’m a phony. I don’t know what I’m doing here. What am I doing here? Why did I think to do this again? Oh, yeah, I wanted to find something fulfilling to do with my time. How do you spell cardiopulmonary resuscitation? No, that’s not important. Um... Um...

“Ms. Egan?”

Samantha stopped, her fingers pressed to a page in the manual. A sickening feeling curled inside her gut and she had to hold back the urge to vomit. It took her a moment, but she finally forced her eyes up. “Yes, Mrs. Gladhouser?”

Mrs. Gladhouser didn't look too pleased. "Could I see you in my office, please? Clarisse will take over your class."

Okay, why did that tone make her feel like she was in second grade? Samantha smiled and nodded her head. She knew what was coming. It was as clear as the look of pompous annoyance on Mrs. Gladhouser's face. She was about to get fired.

Ever since she'd lost her job at the American Museum of Natural History thanks to Dr. Fredrick, a predominate scientist, she couldn't seem to hold down a job. She was distracted and lacked focus. Well, to be fair, it really didn't help that Dr. Fredrick was also her ex-boyfriend. She'd lost both man and job in one day. Not that she cared about the man part as much as she felt like she was losing one of her true friends. Remaining friends after a break-up was always a tricky process—one she'd yet to master.

Every relationship has its problems, Samantha. Do people even realize how hard it is to find a man in New York who can see beyond my money? Especially as much money as I have?

Fredrick was one of the first guys she'd ever met that saw past her fortune. In fact, he was so distracted by work that he often saw past her. Was being ignored worse than being alone? Samantha wasn't sure she knew the answer to that. At least with Fredrick, she'd had a warm body in the next room and a sense of companionship. He'd been safe, didn't challenge her too much, didn't make her heart all achy with longing.

But you didn't love him, reason answered. And what is life without love?

"Ms. Egan," Mrs. Gladhouser said, drawing her attention back to the situation at hand. Samantha shut the office door, wanting nothing more than to run away. The woman's schoolmarm expression was more than she could bear at the moment. "Do you honestly think the patient is going to wait around long enough to administer CPR on themselves?"

"Let me save you the speech," Samantha said in dejection. "I'm fired. I know I'm fired. You know I'm fired. The people in the classroom know I'm fired."

"Ms. Egan, we are a volunteer group. We don't fire people. We simply no longer require their volunteer services."

Samantha bit her lip. She was being fired from a non-paying job. It would seem she couldn't even give her work away. "Well, I want to thank you for the opportunity, Mrs. Gladhouser."

"Mmm," was all the woman managed to answer as she shuffled papers on her desk, refusing to make eye contact as Samantha left the office.

Samantha stopped to pick up her purse on her way out the door. Hailing a cab, she gave the driver directions to take her from the Upper West Side to the Upper East Side where she had an apartment. The car started rolling down the crowded streets. Manhattan's tall buildings passed the window as she gazed out, a little dejected by the day's events.

Her huge apartment was in one of the turn-of-the-century style buildings. It was the envy of many and she had it all to herself. The wood floors and stone fireplace, the floor-to-ceiling velvet drapes, the elegant furniture—it all sounded so cold to Samantha

at the moment. It might be a beautiful home, but to her it was so barren of life. The staff that came to clean it didn't talk to her and appeared guarded when she tried to talk to them. The best she got out of them was a "yes ma'am, no ma'am". She would've thrown a party, but her friends talked only of themselves to the point she didn't like seeing them anymore.

"I need a change," Samantha said to herself. "A big change."

"Excuse me, miss?" the cabdriver asked, looking at her through the rearview mirror. She glanced at him, not really seeing his face, before once more looking out the cab's window.

"I said I've changed my mind. Drop me off around Central Park instead, please," Samantha answered. "Anywhere along Museum Mile is fine."

"Yes, miss."

Samantha sighed, preemptively pulling money out of her purse to pay the man. She loved New York. It was her home. But maybe the time had come to find a new home – a different home.

The cabdriver pulled the car over and she handed him the money without another word. She knew she over-tipped him, but he had a picture of a young child on his dash and what looked to be a wife. Samantha was a sucker for children.

Looking around the city street, she saw the driver had listened. She was on Fifth Avenue along Museum Mile, a stretch of museums along the edge of Central Park. This area was always busy and today was no different. People ignored her as she passed, making her feel all the more isolated. Navigating her way through the crowd gathered outside, she kept to herself and avoided making eye contact.

She made her way around the side of the Metropolitan Museum, strolling aimlessly with no plans as to where she wanted to go and not caring how long she took or where she ended up. The air was chilly and she was glad she wore the sweater. Even for fall, the weather was cold.

Her legs seemed to move with a will of their own, leading her in a direction her mind didn't think to go. Before she realized it, she was by Belvedere Castle in the center of the park. Seeing the tower and turrets caused a small pain in her chest. It had been a long time since she'd visited the old castle, even though she lived so close to the park. Her father used to take her to look out over the beautiful landscape. Some of the best views of the city could be seen from its lookout.

Still feeling as if she was being pulled by an outside force, she walked up the stone steps. She hadn't visited since the day she'd found out her parents' plane had gone down over the Atlantic. Their bodies were never found and her life had forever changed that day. A rich heiress, she'd never have to want for money.

Her mother had been an heiress in her own right whose father, Samantha's grandfather, had invented a preservative used in most prepackaged foods. Her father had built a small food supply company that was now controlled by a board of directors. They were all nice men and Samantha had gladly relinquished her share of it to them.

Her father had trusted them so she had as well. She'd gotten a nice profit for it, which only added to her massive fortune.

"Daddy," she whispered. Samantha closed her eyes briefly, shaking as she touched the stone building. "Mom."

What am I doing here?

What am I doing in general? I feel so lost.

A cool breeze whipped her long hair and she turned, compelled to look around. Along one of the stone ledges a man rested on his back, his leg draped over the side. His dark-brown, chin-length hair was pushed back from his face. Samantha felt her breath catch. He had great features—strong, chiseled, rugged. She glanced around the area, almost expecting to see a camera crew. The man could easily have been a model. A partial growth of facial hair darkened his chin, framing the most incredible lips she'd ever seen on a man. A feeling of peace washed over her as she watched him, as if this was what her legs had led her to see—this man, at this moment, at this special place.

He was well dressed in black slacks and a tight crimson shirt, but not pretentiously so. She let her eyes roam over his tight form, lingering on the outline of his muscular thigh and delectably sculpted hip. Samantha took a deep breath, feeling a tingle in her stomach that soon sprouted into full-on arousal. Her nipples became hard, sensitive peaks, reminding her that it had been awhile since she'd been laid.

Who are you?

Eyeing his firm chest, she paused in her perusal. He didn't appear to be breathing. Maybe it was the fact that she'd just left the CPR class, but she stared at his chest for a moment to make sure he was all right. A knot formed in her stomach, replacing the sudden wash of desire that had come over her. His chest wasn't moving.

Samantha glanced around. There were only a few people on the platform and no one stopped to help the poor man. She looked but didn't see any police officers that she could call for help. Almost panicked, she hurried forward. Shaking, she reached for his chest, letting her fingers hover over where his heart was without touching him. The platform was quiet—suddenly too quiet. Everyone had disappeared and she was alone with him. She had little time to wonder where everyone had gone as she lightly touched his arm.

"Sir?"

He didn't move.

"Ah, sir?" She pushed harder. At her shove, his arm fell to the side, lifeless. "Oh, gawd! You're not breathing, are you?"

He's not going to answer you, Samantha.

Samantha licked her lips, whimpering as she laid her hand on his chest. Her fingers shook as warmth seeped into her hand and she felt a faint heartbeat. His temperature was high for someone out in the cold weather without a sweater. That was something. It appeared like he hadn't been unconscious long.

“Okay, sir, just relax. I can do this,” she said, knowing the man probably couldn’t hear her but feeling the need to reassure him nonetheless.

Oh gawd, Samantha, are you crazy?! Are you really going to do this? Didn’t the book say to use a protective shield between mouths?

Well, her conscience argued, he doesn’t look like the type of guy to have a weird disease.

That’s stupid! You can’t tell that by just looking at a person.

Shut up and save him already!

Fine.

Fine!

“Great, now I’m arguing with myself. I really am insane.”

Despite the stupidity of it, she couldn’t let the man die. Not when it was within her power to try and save him. Besides, things like AIDS couldn’t be passed through saliva. Then, looking at his still face, so handsome and strong, all thoughts of self-preservation fled her. A desperate need to save his life washed over her and she couldn’t resist it.

Samantha took a deep breath, pinched the stranger’s nostrils shut and delicately pressed her lips to his to blow air into his lungs. Shaking, she pulled back. She’d forgotten to pull down his chin. Opening his mouth wide, she tried again.

Don’t die on me, sir. This day has already been bad enough.

His lips were warm, almost too warm as she breathed air into his lungs. She felt his chest rise beneath her hand. A soft, low moan sounded as she blew a second time. Samantha froze. She didn’t make that noise.

The man’s eyes popped open. They were a magnificent, soulful dark brown tinged with threads of gold. The color matched his gorgeous hair. Her mouth was pressed tightly against him, open and poised to give him a breath, and her hand was still on his whisker-stubbed jaw.

Samantha gasped, feeling as if she breathed in his warmth and life. He moaned a second time. The strange sensation of it curled within her and she tried to pull back, but the feel of a hand sliding over her hip just as his tongue reached forward to swipe between her lips stopped her. His palm flexed against her as he curled his fingers along her waist beneath her sweater. Heat shot through her from his light touch and she was too stunned to move.

He moaned again, a low, throaty sound, and his eyes closed. This time when his tongue thrust, it went deeper into her mouth. His kiss tasted sweet, like warm chocolate. It was Samantha’s turn to moan and she did, running her hand from his jaw into his hair.

With each stroke of his tongue, the kiss became deeper and more passionate. Pleasure rippled when he touched her, fanning out over her senses until she was mindless to everything but the stranger before her. Fire. Lust. Passion. It all swam in her blood until she was lightheaded and mindless to anything else. Samantha growled as

need built inside her and became more aggressive. She gripped his hair tightly in her fingers and sawed her mouth hard against his.

Destiny, she heard the word whispered in her head, as if put there by an outside force. *Fate*.

I don't care what it is. I just know it's been way too long since I've felt like this. The tip of his tongue flicked really fast, working back and forth along the seam of her mouth. *Scratch that. I've never felt like this.*

Her pussy spasmed, so wet she could barely keep her hips from grinding in mid-air. Samantha didn't care that she was in a public place – one of the more famous places in New York – and was about to climb up on top of the ledge and dry hump a complete stranger. The ache in her thighs needed to be assuaged. If he could make her feel like that with just his mouth, she could just imagine the pleasure he'd give her between her legs.

Would it be terribly wrong for her to take off her pants, straddle his face and demand he pleasure her with his incredible kisses?

Okay, maybe just a little wrong...

"Whoa, you two, break it up! This isn't a peepshow."

Samantha barely heard the voice as she continued kissing the stranger. Each brush of his tongue was pure ecstasy. The more she kissed him, the more she wanted to keep kissing him. The chocolate taste she found upon first contact only seemed to get sweeter and stronger, as if he secreted a special aphrodisiac with the sole purpose of driving her wild.

This is crazy.

"Uh-hem!" the voice said again. The sound was followed by a throat being cleared.

Samantha blinked, just then realizing that the man had his hand thrust all the way up her sweater and her naked back was exposed to anyone who would happen by. He was massaging her breast through her lacy bra with such fervor that she wondered why she hadn't noticed before this moment. Her whole body had been centered on his perfect kiss.

"I hate to break up your little party, but you two can't do this here," the man's voice continued, breaking further into the fog of her senses.

With a jolt of surprise, Samantha pulled back. Her pussy clamped down on itself, her clit actually throbbing with the need for stimulation. Stinging with protest, her body missed the feel of the man's heat as she stood and turned to see who was speaking to her. From the corner of her eye, she saw her would-be lover roll to sitting on the ledge, his perfect form moving with grace and ease.

It took a moment, but Samantha focused on the uniformed police officer. He waited, hands on hips, his eyes narrowed in what could have been annoyance or just plain boredom. She wasn't sure. His gaze traveled over her attire and she watched him subtly shift his weight back and forth.

Oh, gawd, I'm going to get arrested! What was I thinking? This will be all over the papers. The city loves it when there's a scandal involving the rich!

"I was just giving him CPR." As soon as her words were out, Samantha knew that she sounded like an idiot. Their embrace might have started that way, but it sure as heck didn't end like that. Still tasting his kiss on her mouth, she knew she'd gone from saving him to attacking him. Though he hadn't really been protesting it.

"Well, I think he's breathing just fine now, ma'am." The police officer chuckled, his voice softening some as he continued, "Hey, why don't you run along, miss? You two go find yourself a nice, private, *legal* place to continue with your...ah...CPR. All right?"

"Yes, sir, will do," Samantha whispered, horrified. What in the world had come over her? She glanced at the stranger she'd been kissing. He smiled, his lip curling up at the side in a way that would melt any woman's resolve. Still talking to the cop, she said, "Thank you, sir. I will, sir."

The cop grinned, chuckling louder.

Samantha pulled her eyes away from the handsome stranger she'd just assaulted with her mouth. Unable to face him, she nodded at the officer and quickly turned to run home. What in the world had she done? Sane people didn't grab complete strangers in the middle of the park and start going at it. Samantha ran faster. After this, she might never leave her apartment again.

Chapter Two

Viktor didn't speak as he watched the lush redhead run away from him. Her long, wavy hair blew in the breeze. The locks nearly reached her round, tight ass. He suppressed a groan, eyeing the way her hips swayed under her tight pants. His cock was so hard and full he thought it might explode if he did so much as try to walk.

He could barely move due to the heightened state of arousal she'd left him in, plus the fact that he hadn't had sex for nearly a hundred years. The urge to capture her and fly away with her was strong—almost too strong. Already he wanted her and if he got her, there would be no one to stop him from ramming her cunt so full that she would have no choice but to submit to him completely. When he kissed her, he hadn't meant to release *risbrosius*. It was the natural aphrodisiac his species carried, but her kiss had taken him by surprise and his body had just reacted on instinct to the intimate contact.

The aphrodisiac was just that, a potent aphrodisiac. One drop of it on the skin or lips could turn the most refined lady into a whore. Thankfully, all Dracodomus lived by a code of honor and they never took an unwilling woman by drugging them. It was merely to enhance the pleasure and to ease any pain they might feel at taking in his kind's large erection—especially when they'd gone as long as he had without sex.

The need inside him was so strong, he was almost violent with it. He wanted to be a gentle lover, but when she responded the way she had—so willing and eager—how could he think of anything but claiming her pussy for his own?

"If I had a girlfriend who looked like that, buddy, I wouldn't just let her walk away," the lawman said. Viktor nodded at him before turning to watch the redhead once more.

"*Audentis Fortuna iuvat*," Viktor said under his breath, his gut tight. Did he go after her to slake the desires of his body and pray that she could also slake the desires of his heart? Or did fear win? Did he stay where he was and fight the passion between them? Did he play it safe and wait for another sign to hit him across the forehead like a brick?

"Excuse me?" the man asked.

His voice thick with his need to swoop in and capture the woman, Viktor absently translated his words, "Fortune favors the brave."

"Ah, she's one of those," the man said knowingly. Viktor had no idea what the lawman was going on about.

Was this the woman the fates had sent him for? Was she his mate? Did she know it as well? If she did, it was clear she accepted him and what he was to her. Why else would she kiss him like that? By the nearly pure smell of her, he wouldn't guess she was promiscuous by nature. Had she dreamed of him as well?

And if she accepts me, why in the world am I still sitting here? I should be claiming my mate. I should be following her.

I should be easing the flames of my desire in her ripe little body.

What bigger sign did he need than a woman grabbing him and kissing him as if she was meant to do just that? If that wasn't an omen of good fortune, he wasn't sure he'd ever see one.

Viktor jumped up from the ledge, ignoring the pleasure-pain feel of his slacks rubbing against his erection. If he wasn't careful, he'd explode prematurely and not make a very favorable impression on his future wife.

"Bless the fates," he whispered, entranced by the movements of her ass as he hurried to catch up to her. Biting his lip, he moaned, "*Mm-hmm.*"

A passing blonde woman glanced up at him as he made the sound. A small smile of amusement crossed her features, only to turn into a look of invitation as her eyes darted over him, stopping at the obvious mass between his thighs. Viktor nodded politely, but the pretty woman didn't interest him. He was on the hunt for something much finer.

He'd been in New York for a week, spending all his time at Belvedere Castle in Central Park. At first, when he had the vision of a castle, he'd been confused about being drawn to America. The New World wasn't exactly known for its castles, at least not like Europe was.

United States, Viktor reminded himself. No one seemed to call it the "New World" anymore.

He'd really been working on assimilating his speech to blend in with the modern-day language. But there were some things he couldn't decipher no matter how hard he tried. Like, what exactly did *f'shizzle my n'izzle* mean? For the life of him, Viktor couldn't figure that one out and it was driving him mad.

Crazy, not mad. They say crazy now. Mad means anger. No, wait, it sometimes means anger. Ugh, curse this time.

In his opinion, language had taken about as bad a turn as fashion had. The only time one would expect to see undergarments hanging out of someone's pants was in a brothel. Now every third person he came across seemed to have more than what could be deemed appropriated pulled out for the world to see.

You're showing your age, old man. Six hundred is hitting you hard, isn't it?

Even as he thought it, Viktor wasn't feeling very old. In fact, he was downright frisky. The redhead's scent was drifting to him. She wore perfume, not a lot but just a light floral scent that smelled so nice compared to the suffocating city air. His nostrils flared and he felt a jolt of desire go to his already sensitive loins.

Gods help me, I hope she likes it rough. After a century, I don't know that I can take it easy on her.

Viktor picked up his pace. As if she sensed him, she glanced over her shoulder. Her round green eyes met his. The closer he got to her, the more he detected how hot and

ready her body was for him. Part of it was his natural aphrodisiac at work and part of it was just the natural chemistry that was between them. When she kissed him, he could practically feel the sparks landing on every inch of his flesh. This woman had passion.

His woman.

His.

Primitive feelings of possessiveness curled inside of him. His body wanted to take flight, sweep her up and cart her away to a private cave where he could spend hours slaking his need in her soft body. The animal in him reared its antiquated head, trying to surge forth. He had to fight to hold it down, knowing that already his eyes would be glowing eerily. The animal in him would try to take a woman in dragon form, but to do so would be disastrous. If his size now would be a great stretch for any woman in human form, the dragon's scaly dick would split her in two. However, the fact didn't keep the primal beast from trying to have its fun.

Viktor wasn't sure how to feel about that. He might desire her with the driving force of a hundred thoroughbreds, but he didn't know her, *really* know her. Was she vain? Petty? Heartless? Conniving? Or was she kind? Did she have a heart of gold, a heart aching to be loved as his was? His hand trembled.

Does it honestly matter? With a smell like that how can I deny her?

It was torture not to touch her. He gave her an impassioned look, knowing full well the reaction it used to have on women. With the glowing in his eyes, how could she resist his fervent pull? Whatever worries he had about forgetting how to seduce a woman fluttered away when he saw a shiver work over her spine. He grinned.

The mighty Dracodomus brothers never lose their touch when it comes to women. A hundred years and I still got it.

As if feeling his urgency, the sexy redhead picked up her pace. Viktor's heartbeat sped in his chest, almost feeling like he used to as a young dragon on the hunt. Only his prey was much more delectable than anything he'd find in the Jotunheimen Mountains and she definitely had a much sweeter hindquarters. Viktor licked his lips, tilting his head slightly as he stared at the redhead's delicious backside. There were so many things he'd like to do to her and he'd always been partial to a great ass.

"Soon, my sweet," he whispered, his gut so tight he wanted to roar fire with the need inside his loins. "Soon I will put an end to this torment inside us. Soon I will lay claim to every inch of you. You're cunt, ass and lips will be marked as mine."

Soon she would be his. Very soon.

* * * * *

Samantha picked up her pace before daring to glance over her shoulder. The handsome stranger was still there. She'd been a New Yorker all her life and knew better than to mess with strange men she found lying around in Central Park. Then why in the

world was every fiber of her being telling her to slow down so he didn't lose sight of her? To make sure he followed her to finish what was started between them?

Conflicting thoughts warred within her. *Unsafe sex, bad. Mmm, but pleasure, so very good. He's so hot. This is wrong – run! Are you kidding? Slow down, let him catch you and have his wicked way with you. Or, shoot, have your wicked way with him. He looks like the type of man that can be ridden until sunup.*

Run, this is crazy.

No, stop!

Shit! What do I do?

A light sheen of sweat formed over her flesh and she couldn't tell if it was from the brisk walk or the incredible kiss she'd shared with the delicious stranger. Either way, if she didn't find release soon she'd surely die from need. Selfish desire and the promise of mindless passion were fast winning over sanity and logic. Before that moment, she would've laughed had anyone said they were horny to the point of death. Now she knew it was entirely possible to perish from arousal.

Each step sent a small jolt of pleasure from her clit over the rest of her body. It was enough to tease her but not a sufficient enough amount to bring any real satisfaction. Samantha bit her lip, trying not to moan as she passed a sidewalk performer with a grinder monkey. The creature jumped off the man's shoulder and started squealing at the top of his lungs, running in circles like demons were after him. The performer yelled at the animal to stop, but it didn't listen.

Glancing back to make sure Mr. Tall, Sexy and so very Handsome was still following her, Samantha ignored the monkey and his trainer. Birds squawked overhead, seeming louder than normal. The creatures took to flight, their wings beating audibly as they sped away. Samantha barely paid attention to any of it. She couldn't, not when the heat in her body was about to erupt into molten lava.

All she could seem to think about was getting the stranger naked and beneath her – his thick cock hammering into her until her pussy was raw. She shivered to see his narrowed eyes planted firmly on her ass. The orbs seemed to glow with an inner light. He licked his lips, as if picturing something truly wicked and naughty that he'd like to do to her. It would seem her stranger had the exact same thoughts on his mind that she had. Never had she reacted in such a lustful way to a man. Her body sizzled with need – the need to fuck, to be fucked.

Samantha's heart pounded in excitement and just a trace of fear. With each step she took, the organ beat faster until it thundered so loudly in her chest she couldn't hear anything else. Her body had never reacted like this to a man. All she could think about was the primitive urges centering in her pussy. The sweet taste of his kiss was on her lips, the pleasure of it like a euphoric drug that shot ecstasy and need throughout every one of her senses. She smelled only him, the natural scent of his body. Picturing him in her mind, the images like an underground porno flick, she barely noticed the park. Her ears strained to hear him and her flesh tingled to touch him.

At that moment, he was her everything.

Anticipation made her giddy. Her breathing deepened. Suddenly, she realized she'd stopped walking. She was near the street, just on the edge of Central Park. How long had she been standing still in the rolling sea of the crowd around her? Fear gripped her as she thought that she might have lost her chance with the stranger.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was close to her, its tall columns towering high over the sidewalk. She glanced over it, not really caring about the building as she was instantly drawn to where the stranger waited for her. He was close, standing on the top of the museum steps. His eyes bored forward, piercing her to her soul, beckoning her to come to him.

Without question, she slowly obeyed, approaching him. He kept his attention trained on her, as if calling her forward. His body was rigid and it was like she could feel the need and desire radiating off him. His lips parted, so firm she ached to have him talk dirty to her before latching onto her clit so she could ride his face.

"Samantha Egan," she said. Her voice sounded strange, as if it came from outside herself. She wasn't sure if it was passion or fear that made her tremble.

"Viktor Dracodomus," he answered just as simply. His low tone was accented, but she couldn't quite make out where he was from.

Viktor, such a perfect name for such a perfect man. Kiss me, Viktor. Take me. Fuck me. Take your big cock and pound me until I scream!

What had gotten into her? One word and suddenly she was a sex-crazed maniac on the verge of tearing off her clothes in public and demanding he service her cunt like she was a whore?

Viktor's firm lips parted and she needed more of his sweet taste, needed it like her body needed blood. Her clit ached and she longed to feel his delicious mouth between her thighs, eating out her pussy. Unable to control the urgings in her body, Samantha flung her arms around his neck and pulled him into her kiss. She struggled with him for control of their passionate embrace as she thrust her tongue into his mouth. With each brush of their lips, the more turned on she got until she was sure her thighs would explode from the pressure.

Viktor groaned, pressing his tight erection against her stomach. She felt the impossibly long, thick length of his shaft but was too far gone to be scared of the amazing size. New York faded until there was nothing else—only Viktor and what he was doing to her.

Suddenly, he pulled back. He was breathing as hard as she was. Samantha had the presence of mind to blush at the way he was looking at her, desperate and pleading. His dark eyes held a sultry fire in their depths, so real that it looked like flames actually wrapped around his pupils for a brief moment.

His eyes narrowed as he glanced around. "I'm not sure of your laws, *agapao*, but I cannot stand to be interrupted by one of your lawmen again. Is there somewhere else

we can go to be alone? I wish to make love to you, my body is burning to do so. You're smell, it's in my head."

Viktor's dark eyes glanced down. She followed the movement. His giant cock bulged against his pants, straining to be free. And, oh, how she wanted to free it for him.

Samantha looked up at the museum, feeling a little shy as she suggested, "There's a private room close to the American Art collection that we can use. We're almost guaranteed not to be interrupted there."

"You are sure of this?"

Samantha nodded. "I was...ah...let go from here last week. I gave the tour of that section. No one ever goes into the room."

Without further question, Viktor grabbed her hand and hurried up the stairs, practically running to get through the door. Luckily, the line wasn't long and they were able to get in relatively fast. Samantha glanced over her shoulder as she held tightly onto Viktor's hand, taking the lead as she pulled him toward the American Art collection. The room was empty as they went in. Turning, she gazed into his dark eyes, feeling as if she really knew him, which was impossible because he was a stranger.

Maybe that was part of his appeal. She didn't know anything about him. There was nothing to think about, nothing to be discouraged over. So many times she'd meet a man only be put off by his ideals or his manners. With Viktor, there was no time for her to change her mind or find a reason not to like him.

Viktor surged forward, capturing her lips eagerly with his as he walked her further into the room, kissing her deeply until he touched every inch of her mouth.

"I love this museum and this really is a great collection," she said, breaking the kiss long enough to speak. Gesturing to the side, she didn't bother to look where she pointed and neither did he. "Over there is John Singer Sargent's painting, *Madame X*."

"Mm, interesting," he agreed, not bothering to turn from her. His eyes dipped to her breasts. "I love fine pieces of art."

"And over there is..." she moaned slightly as he interrupted with a swift kiss, "...*Washington Crossing the...* a river. I can't think what it's called right now, but it's really famous."

"Fascinating."

Samantha shivered, feeling the vibration of that one word along her lips. Viktor captured her mouth again. She continued to lead the way, barely able to focus on where she was taking him. Finally, she stopped. His actions became more aggressive as he pressed her up against a wall. Samantha reached for a door knob, not paying attention as she pulled him inside the small, unlocked storage room. The area was hidden from the public and wasn't used for much more than storing a few tables and chairs. It didn't matter. It had a wall and it was private.

Viktor pressed her into the hard wall. The length of his chiseled body fitted to hers, firm and tight, until every flex of his strong hips seemed to grind his erection into her softer stomach. Her pussy was wet with cream as she parted her thighs to let him rock more intimately against her. Dry humping had never felt so good and she enthusiastically thrust her hips so that her pussy rubbed against his thick shaft, sliding along his clothed erection and wishing their pants would just melt away.

Her mind wandered and she found herself thinking wicked thoughts. The room spun until she wasn't sure if she spoke them aloud. "My cunt is so wet for you. Ah, yes, Viktor. Fuck me."

"You like that," he answered, confirming that she was speaking aloud. "You want me to conquer every inch of you? You want to feel me prying open your cunt like never before?"

He ground his cock along her slit, stimulating her sensitive bud through her clothing. By the feel, he would indeed pry her open. Her lace panties added friction to his movements, tweaking her heated pussy just right. Samantha moaned into his mouth, lightheaded from his deep kiss and unwilling to break it to get air. There was something about his taste, like he was pouring his emotions into her, making her so randy she was about to come with just the taste of it.

Feeling an orgasm close, Samantha finally tore her mouth away from his. She lifted a thigh along his hip and he grabbed it eagerly, holding her open. There was so much heat and friction, she suddenly didn't care that they weren't naked. She arched her back against the wall, rocking uncontrollably against his thick, hard cock. The impossible size of it only turned her on more. The man was positively huge, like a battering ram waiting to crash its way inside.

A growl sounded in the back of his throat. He found hold on her breast, squeezing the mound as he pinched her nipple hard. It was too much stimulation. Her body exploded and she gasped, unable to scream as her mouth fell open. Cream poured out of her, soaking her panties. Viktor rode her orgasm, keeping it going as he pumped his hips along hers. How she wished he was embedded inside her, coming along with her!

Suddenly, he grunted and jerked and she felt liquid heat soaking the outside of her pants. Amazed, Samantha realized he'd come too, releasing enough seed to soak them both. Even in the light of her intense climax, she didn't want to stop. He kissed her again and the pleasure only intensified.

His hard cock pressed into her and she was surprised that it hadn't appeared to lessen in size. By the look on his face, he was ready to keep going. The idea that he could fuck all night excited her.

"Maybe we really shouldn't... Ah," Samantha tried to protest in a moment of sanity, "do this here."

She pulled at his shirt, trying to free him of it. In the back of her mind she knew that they were in a public place, but was it wrong of her not to care? In fact, the danger of being caught only added to her urgency.

Viktor chuckled, pulling back as he cupped the sides of her face. He breathed as hard as she did. “*Agapao*, you are right. I dishonor you by taking you like this. Forgive me.”

Samantha felt as if she’d been kicked in the gut. What man in his right mind turned back now? Wasn’t she—the woman—supposed to show the control? Her blood ran rampant in her veins, until every inch was flooded with desire. Could it be the one release had been enough for him? She only wanted more.

“I should not have given so much of myself to you,” he continued, his eyes dipping to look at her mouth. His accent was thick, but she made out his words through the sound of blood rushing in her ears. He breathed heavily, only to let out a small moan as he controlled himself. “You must forgive me. Your kiss took me by surprise and I gave you a great deal of myself.”

Huh? But, we’re just getting started. There is no way we’re stopping now.

“I will leave you,” Viktor said, drawing back with what looked like a lot of effort.

“Forget what I said. You can’t leave me like this. We’ve gone too far.”

“No, you were right to tell me to stop.”

“But...?”

He touched her cheek and reached for the door. “I will come for you later.”

She watched him leave before rushing after him. A woman and two children walked into the exhibit room. Samantha blinked, turning her back on them as she righted her clothing and pulled her sweater low over her pants to hide what they had done. Now that he’d pulled away, she noticed just how hot she was in the sweater.

Viktor was right, of course. They shouldn’t be doing what they were about to be doing in public. The woman glanced at her but said nothing as she ushered her children along a wall filled with paintings.

“Viktor, we can go to my—” Samantha began, turning around. Viktor was gone. “Viktor?”

Hurrying to the door, she looked for him. He was nowhere to be found. It was like he just disappeared.

“Viktor?”

* * * * *

The tightness in his gut was going to kill him if it wasn’t released soon. The one time wasn’t nearly enough, let alone satisfying. He wanted to feel his mate’s body tightly clenching his, her pussy wrapping him like silk.

If he didn’t know better, he’d think she secreted an aphrodisiac with her kisses as well. It might have been a while, but he was pretty sure he’d never felt desire like he did for Miss Samantha Egan. It took everything in him to walk away, but Viktor knew he had to show consideration for his mate from the very beginning. He couldn’t

disrespect her and have their first coupling, the moment that would join them forever, be in public against a museum storage room wall. It was bad enough he'd let things go as far as they had. What had come over him? Had all those years in the cave made him forget his manners?

Keeping back so she couldn't see him, he watched her as she made her way down Fifth Avenue. It was now his duty to make sure she was always safe. Even now, he felt the beginning of a connection. Her body was stiff and he could easily detect the heightened state of arousal he'd left her in. He felt bad about it, but he had to do things right—if he could only remember what was the “right” way to court a woman.

I need to be careful. I thought I was connected to Elise and I was wrong.

Thinking of his long-dead lover, he frowned. There was something to Samantha that reminded him of Elise. Not her personality, per se, but the color of her green eyes. They were an exact match. Even the shape of their face was close. The big difference was their hair. Samantha's hair was red where Elise's had been black.

Knowing it wasn't fair to judge Samantha for Elise's sins, he focused his attention on her and tried to keep an open mind. The truth was, aside from the feeling of being pushed toward her, he didn't know much about her. Sex was sex, but love...

Could he even think of loving her? He just saw her. Sexual impulses were something every man could feel for a number of beautiful women.

The dawn of his six hundredth birthday was pressing in on him. Why did he wait so long to leave his sanctuary? Even as he asked it, he knew the answer. Fear. He was afraid of losing his heart to the wrong woman. He'd made that mistake once.

A doorman came out of a building and held open a large glass door, holding it open for Samantha. The man's hand brushed her lower back as he guided her into the apartment building's front lobby. Samantha smiled, her face brightening as she said something to the doorman. Viktor stiffened, suddenly feeling incredibly jealous.

This isn't good. Already I'm too protective of her.

He fought every urge in his body that told him to go to her. Turning his back on her building, he forced himself to slowly walk away.

Chapter Three

"I don't believe it. The reclusive dragon has finally arisen from his solitude. The family had almost given up hope."

Viktor glanced up from his hot tea in surprise. It was the middle of the afternoon and the sidewalks were crowded. He'd been waiting to detect Samantha's scent on the air. Two days had passed since he'd seen her, but he knew he had to get his desires under control first. Just thinking of her made his body respond and he was beginning to doubt that time apart was the answer to his problems. Catching a pair of familiar old eyes, he grimaced. It was one of his cousins who spoke.

"Good to see you too, old man," Laurence said when Viktor didn't answer. He grinned. His shaggy brown hair ruffled slightly in the wind and his dark green eyes sparkled with mischief. It was a look Viktor remembered well. His cousin had gotten him into plenty of trouble over the centuries.

"Laurie," Viktor acknowledged, standing to look the man over. "The years have been kind to you. Though truthfully, I thought you'd be shot by now. Last time I saw you we were running from the law in a carriage. Tell me, did you ever return whatever it was you stole from the Duchess?"

It was his cousin's turn to grimace. "Ugh, I still maintain that I didn't take a thing that didn't already belong to me. And don't call me Laurie. It's a girl's name nowadays."

Viktor smirked even as he stood up. "It was a girl's name then too."

"Very funny, old chap," Laurence said, chuckling as he grabbed Viktor in a firm hug. "Why the heck didn't you look me up?"

"I didn't know you were in town." Viktor returned his cousin's brief affection. "Last I heard you were hiding out on Mount Everest."

"Actually, I was climbing it in human form," Laurence laughed. "I just wanted to see if I could."

"And did you?"

"For the most part. Friend of mine got into a little accident and I had to fly him down. The look on his face was priceless. Though he was grateful enough to help me get my current job."

Viktor glanced around to see if anyone had heard the comment about flying.

"Don't worry about it," Laurence said. "This is New York. There are stranger things than us residing here. Besides, no one cares about anyone else. They all mind their own business not wanting to be involved."

"Sounds lonely."

"Yeah, well, it is what it is." Laurence shrugged, taking a seat at the small sidewalk café table. Waving to a waiter, he said, "Coffee." The young man nodded and went inside the restaurant.

"If not for me, what are you doing here?" Laurence asked as Viktor took a seat next to him.

Viktor shrugged, also taking a seat. "No reason. Just traveling and thought I'd see the New World."

"Oh," Laurence paused as the waiter set a cup of coffee in front of him. Absently, he thanked the young man before continuing, "I thought it might have something to do with a certain big six zero zero birthday coming up."

Viktor couldn't answer.

"So it is!" Laurence clapped, laughing. "Brilliant! Have you seen her? Do you know who your *gyni i* is? Is she—?"

"I don't know," Viktor interrupted, not wishing to discuss his possible mate's attractiveness with his long-lost cousin. It might have been years, but that didn't matter to their kind. Whenever a Dracodomus met with one of his kind, it was like no time had gone by. The bond was always there. "I'm thinking of going back home. It's much less complicated in the mountains."

"And a lot lonelier. Besides, you know what happens to our kind when we don't find a mate. Sure, you'll still live, but you'll become one of those crotchety old dragons no one wants to sit next to during parties."

"We have parties?" Viktor chuckled, trying to dismiss his cousin's words.

"You know what I mean."

"Actually, I hardly know what anyone means anymore." Viktor glanced around. Seeing a group of kids walking by, their pants hanging down low on their hips to show their underwear, he gestured to them. Leaning forward, he whispered, "Has there been some sort of plague I don't know about?"

Laurence laughed. "Oh, you have been away too long."

"What do you know about it?"

"More than you think."

"My brother always did have a big mouth," Viktor shook his head.

"It wasn't Zarek who told me about Elise. Everyone knew what she was, you just didn't want to listen. The whole family tried to warn you about her."

"That's comforting." Viktor shifted awkwardly in his seat. He'd never talked about Elise to anyone. Even as he didn't wish to discuss her now, he found that the pain of her betrayal had lessened with time. "So, what are you doing here?"

"I have a job dating items of antiquity. I figured since I had seen most of them firsthand that dating them for the modern world shouldn't be a problem. Truth is, I've got them all fooled. They think I'm some kind of genius with a photographic memory."

Anyway, it gives me something to do and the ladies seem to like rich, handsome, charming, smart guys."

"Still modest, I see," Viktor drawled sardonically.

"Did I mention confident?" Laurence added with a short, teasing laugh.

"Enough," Viktor waved his hand to stop his cousin from continuing along the same path of conversation. "Pretty soon you'll be trying to lay out your long list of conquests for me to look at."

"Hey, just because you're turning six hundred, don't take your ill humor out on me. I wasn't the one who made you spend all that time alone in a cave. If you'd have come down sooner, you'd have had more time."

"Keep talking, Laurie. Your time is coming soon. I'll remember everything you say to me and turn it back on you. See how you like it then."

Laurence frowned, toying with the coffee cup handle. "Ugh, I know. I broke up with my girlfriend so I could go tomcatting with a clear conscience. She's a sweet girl. You'd like her."

"You're a real gentleman." Viktor laughed, shaking his head.

"Hey, what can I say? She is a sweet girl with a good heart. It's just, well, she wasn't really mine to be with. I was just keeping her warm for someone else."

Viktor raised a brow and drawled sarcastically, "Yeah, I see what you mean about your charm. You're a real gentleman, aren't you?"

* * * * *

"Ahhhh!"

Samantha screamed, jumping up on her couch. Her heart thundered in her chest, her system jolted into action by the sudden scare of the little scaly creature running across the floor of her apartment. Glancing around, she stayed on the couch. The servants were gone and she was all alone in the apartment. She reached for her phone, knowing before she tried to stretch across the impossible distance that she'd never get it. The phone was on the other side of the room.

"Oooh," she whined, leaning over the back of the couch to eye the floor.

The lizard thing was right underneath her. Did she chance making a run for the front door? Did she go to the phone in search of an exterminator? Did she stand on her couch, grossed out until someone came?

"Could I be any more girly?" she mumbled to herself. Even as she said it, she couldn't get the nerve to jump off the couch and face her irrational fear.

"Samantha!"

Samantha jolted in surprise as a loud knocking sounded on her door to punctuate the masculine voice.

"Samantha? Are you all right? What's going on in there?"

She opened her mouth to respond, only to scream as her door came crashing open. "Ah!"

It was Viktor, wearing black slacks. They fit him perfectly, snugly hugging his hips and showing off his trim waist. A looser linen shirt covered his muscles while molding to them at the same time. Her mouth still hanging wide, she blinked in amazement. Her heart beat faster, speeding with each second she looked into his dark eyes.

"Viktor?" she asked. "What are you doing here?"

He stormed into the room, glancing around as if ready for a fight. Tension rippled over his tight muscles with each step. His eyes lit, actually looking as if a fire burned within their dark depths. She was too stunned to take note of it for long.

Samantha's stomach pulled in anticipation. This had to be a dream. What was Viktor doing here? Now? Crashing through her door like some superhero ready to protect her?

He narrowed his eyes, managing to look very aggressive and somehow erotic at the same time. This man had been in her head since the first moment she saw him, tormenting her every thought. Each nerve ending inside of her tingled to life, responding to the beastlike movements of his body. Fog enveloped her senses until she forgot everything but the man stalking around her living room as if waiting to fight for her. The look of him was damned sexy. Viktor's nostrils flared and he turned his attention onto her.

"What is it?" he demanded, his voice carrying a low growl to its tone. "What danger?"

"Lizard," she managed, in shock over his bold entrance. Samantha couldn't take her eyes off him.

"Where?" Viktor glanced around the house, eyeing the ceiling.

"Lizard," she said again, blinking rapidly to collect her thoughts. "Under the couch."

"Lizard?" he repeated, his body relaxing some. "As in a small reptile lizard? An actual lizard?"

Samantha nodded, confused. Remembering the flames encircling his pupils, she looked at his eyes. They were normal. She must have imagined seeing the fire. Still standing on the couch, she shifted her weight, working her feet on the cushioned seat as she nervously swayed back and forth. Her irrational fear of the lizard was replaced by hot, fiery desire for the man in front of her. Remembering the way his body felt pressing hers into the wall, she trembled. Two days hadn't been long enough to rid her of her desire for him. Cream rushed to dampen her panties and the all-too-familiar tingling of arousal ran rampant over her flesh.

"I don't know where it came from," she said. "It's just. Could you get it? I hate creepy crawlies."

Ugh. I sound like such a girl!

Viktor's eyes narrowed ever so slightly. Smirking, he said, "You are a girl. Well, a woman at any rate."

Samantha shivered. Had she said that out loud? She couldn't remember. There was something about seeing him in her living room that took her breath away and made her temperature jump about ten thousand degrees. Her pussy heated, feeling so hot she thought it might incinerate her with the need to be filled.

Striding over to where she motioned, he didn't say another word as he gracefully dropped onto his stomach. Samantha leaned over the back of the couch, bracing her weight on her hands as she eyed his tight body from above, thoroughly enjoying the view. His tight ass flexed as he adjusted himself, leading her eyes down over his muscled thighs.

"Mmm," the small sound left her throat before she could stop it.

Viktor glanced up at her. His eyes swept over her flushed face before turning back to search underneath the couch. He held out his hand, keeping it still. Thinking to hear him whisper, she leaned closer. Whatever he said, she couldn't make out the words. Suddenly, a little head poked out from under the edge.

"Eww," Samantha whispered, bracing herself unnecessarily.

"He won't hurt you," Viktor said quietly, holding his palm out. The creature scurried forward onto his hand only to freeze. He stroked the reptile's head, running the tip down its back to its narrow tail. The creature was only about three inches long. She felt a little foolish for being so frightened by it. "He's just scared."

"Scared?" Samantha repeated, mesmerized by the stroking movements of Viktor's strong finger. Her clit throbbed and her thighs tightened. How nice it would feel to have those thick, long fingers inside her pussy, gliding in her cream, becoming so wet that they'd glide to her ass to fill it as his hard dick filled her ready cunt.

"It's only a newt and he's not very old." Viktor's tone was low and soothing, as if he talked more to the animal than to her. "

His words brought her mind away from sex.

"Actually, it looks like he just underwent his first metamorphosis into his eft stage," he continued. "When he undergoes his next metamorphosis he'll technically be called a newt." See these red spots along its dorsal surface? Aren't they exquisite?"

"Yeah, really beautiful," she mumbled, obviously not seeing what he was seeing. The man really knew a lot about newts.

"Hmm, he wants water," Viktor said quietly.

"What? You can talk to animals?" Samantha asked skeptically. She was still a little shaken from the startling the newt gave her.

Sorry, the eft.

"I can't believe you're scared of a little thing like this." Viktor stood. The lizard sat on his palm, not moving, as if it was quite comfortable right where it was. "He's so tiny."

"Hey, fear of scaly little reptiles is a natural and very common thing. They're just so... Eww." Samantha stepped off the couch, trying not to make any sudden moves as Viktor carried the lizard toward her front door. It leaned oddly on its hinges.

"You have any young boys living on this floor?" he asked. "My guess would be that he belongs to them. It isn't likely that he came up here on his own."

"I'm the only one on this floor. There are no children. The penthouse is mine."

"Hmm," Viktor eyed the door frame as he walked past. "I broke your door rescuing you. Sorry about that. I'll fix it."

"Wait," Samantha followed him as he disappeared into the small entry hall between her front door and the elevator. She caught up to him just in time to see the elevator door closed. "What are you doing here, Viktor?"

"Rescuing you from a great beast," he said, holding up his little friend as the doors slid shut in his face.

"Wait a minute. How did you even get up here? Viktor?"

It was too late. He didn't answer.

Samantha frowned, staring at the elevator for some time. It was disturbing to know that he'd somehow gotten past the doorman. Herman never let anyone by who wasn't on the list. And where exactly was Peter who manned the elevator? With a sigh, she went to study her broken door. The frame was cracked from where he'd busted through. "How in the world did he know where to find me?"

* * * * *

Viktor held the lizard in his hand as he rode the elevator down to the main reception area. He'd seen a young woman at the counter when he sped through the lobby that would surely help him find the creature's owner. By the scent on the left, it belonged to a young boy. The reptile seemed friendly enough and Viktor knew he probably had a good home—otherwise he'd have never given it back.

Glancing up, as if he could see Samantha still standing above him in her broken doorway, he frowned. He'd been waiting to see her again, to see if she was really his mate, to see if he would feel the same way without her first kissing him. In the park he'd been napping, taken by surprise. It had been so long since he'd felt the soft body of a woman. He needed to know that Samantha Egan was really the one—not just the most convenient. Hearing her voice clearly in his head, his frown deepened.

I hate reptiles. Fear of scaly little reptiles is a natural and very common thing. Eww.

This wasn't good. It was bad enough that he'd heard her call and had left his smirking cousin at the small café down the block—a café he'd been waiting secretly at to see a glimpse of Samantha coming from her building so he could follow her. Strange

thing was, he'd waited for two days and for two days she didn't leave her apartment. Unless she was receiving visitors, the woman lived about as solitary of an existence as he did.

Viktor sighed heavily, not sure what his next move should be. It had been so long since he dealt with these delicate situations. Courting women had never been easy for him, but add to it the fact he was sorely out of date when it came to dealing with the fairer sex, and he was practically a hopeless cause. Luckily, some truths stayed the same no matter how much time passed. Women liked to be treated with respect and complete and utter honesty. Those were two things he could always do—until now.

Now he had to deal with the fact that he'd have to explain to Samantha why he'd broken into her home, how he knew she was in trouble and why he even cared. But, worst of all, when he did try to explain it, he was better off not telling her the whole truth. With her obvious dislike of reptiles, he was in for a long road. If she panicked over a newt, what would she do if she saw him shift completely into dragon form?

The elevator doors slid open and he stepped out. Seeing the young girl at the front desk of the apartments, he pasted on a smile. She responded instantly, batting her eyelashes a little faster than before in a subtle but unmistakable sign of interest. Even from across the room he could detect her budding desire for him. For a moment, Viktor considered doing what Laurence was—leaving his first six hundred years with a bang. It would be easy to seduce willing women to his bed. He could literally ride it out until the end of his first six hundred years.

"No, it wouldn't be easy," he whispered to himself, feeling dejected. "The only woman I want is her."

Swallowing over the lump forming in his throat, he glanced up at the ceiling. Samantha was up there. Even now his body was tight with need for her. He wanted more than just a dry hump against a wall. His cock was hard, aching to lay claim, desperate to feel her hot depths clinging around him as he pumped into her. He could practically feel his seed building, ready to explode and mark her as his mate. It was different than the other times, than Elise, even after a hundred years he could feel that. With Elise, he had to force the mating process. It wasn't like that with Samantha. This time, like it or not, when he came he'd be marking the woman as his for all eternity.

* * * * *

"Samantha? Darling? Are you in here? What on earth happened to your door?"

Samantha stiffened at the familiar voice, tugging her clean shirt over her head. No, it couldn't be. Not today. Not...

"Fredrick?" she asked, surprised. What was with today? Was every man she'd ever made out with going to show up at the front door? If her prom date Billy Jenson came over, she was definitely moving to Europe.

"Sammy?" Fredrick yelled louder. "I know you're in here. I can smell your favorite perfume."

Samantha made her way from her back bedroom where she'd just finished a quick change into a sexier pair of panties and did a perfume check—just in case Viktor did come back. Seeing Fredrick leaning opposite her broken doorframe, she stopped. His brown hair was combed back from his handsome face. He was older than she was, Samantha knew that, but he looked eternally twenty-five. There was a boyish quality that hid the smart, intellectual side of his personality and he looked more like a male model than a scientist. "What are you doing here?"

"I was just in the neighborhood and thought I'd check in on you to see how you were doing."

"I was fired from my job and can't seem to find another one," she said, a little too dryly. "How do you think I am?"

Fredrick smiled and glanced around her lavish apartment. "I'd say you're all right, Sammy."

"Don't call me Sammy," Samantha frowned. "You know I hate being called that."

"And yet you're so cute when you're annoyed that I just can't help myself." Fredrick laughed. He'd always been at ease around her. That's one of the things she missed about their relationship. Striding across her living room, he made his way to the kitchen. Samantha scrunched up her face in annoyance, though she really didn't care if he made himself at home, and followed him.

Her kitchen was clean, as it should be since she hardly used it. She had maids who came on a regular basis to clean her apartment. The stainless steel surfaces always looked a little too sanitary for her tastes, but it's the way it came with the house and she had little desire to bother with changing it.

"Got any beer?" Fredrick asked.

"It's early," she scolded out of habit. Really, what did it matter if Frederick drank in the middle of the day? It wasn't her concern.

"Sammy, baby, I'll always be your concern. We're still friends, aren't we?" His tone lowered an octave and he gave her a boyishly charming smile—like a kid trying to weasel his way out of trouble. She hated how he always seemed to read her mind. His smile grew and he winked audaciously at her.

Unable to help herself, Samantha chuckled, instantly loosening up. "What do you want, Fredrick?"

"I'm just checking." He turned to the refrigerator and pulled the door open. Leaning over, he hummed softly as he looked inside. "Still not eating right, I see. With all your money, you could hire a chef to take care of that."

"What do you mean, not eating right?" Samantha sighed. "There is nothing but health food in there—fruit, veggies, juic—"

"My point exactly," he interrupted, shutting the door with a loud thud. "Where's the fat? The thick cuts of meat? The sodas and ice cream? You know, the good stuff. Most women I know at least have a tub of ice cream hidden away for special occasions."

"Butter pecan is in the freezer, back right, behind the giant bag of frozen strawberries," Samantha said, admitting the presence of her secret weakness.

"Really?" His face lightened and he instantly produced it. "Perfect. Now that's what I'm talking about, sweetheart."

Samantha watched him as he got a spoon from the drawer and began eating her favorite ice cream straight out of the tub. He grinned at her, making a great show of sucking the spoon.

"Fredrick? What are you doing here?" she enunciated. Had he always been this frustrating? Watching him audaciously lick a drop of ice cream off his hand, she knew she had her answer.

"I told you. I came to check on you." He took another big bite, moaning in pleasure as he sucked the ice cream off the spoon.

"Well, you checked. Here I am."

"Yes," his tone dipped, "there you are."

Samantha arched a brow, secretly amazed that the tone didn't give her shivers as it once had. There was something very familiar though about seeing him standing in her kitchen, eating her ice cream. They'd spent a lot of time together between personal life and work, attended museum functions and went to parties. Oddly, in that time, Fredrick never once had sex with her. Something always came up to stop them—usually on his end.

Then why was so she mad about him dumping her? Samantha sighed. She was being foolish. It was only her hurt pride that kept her upset. That and she had nothing better to do with her time. It was clear they were not meant to be together. She was young and attractive. Any normal guy would have been trying to get into her pants from date one. Gasping, an idea struck her—eating ice cream straight from the tub, the model good looks, no interest in sex with her, intellectual tendencies, a great sense of style.

Fredrick was gay!

"So, what happened?" He motioned toward the cracked door frame with the spoon, circling his wrist. "Surely you didn't have a break-in, not with the security in this place. You forget your house key?"

"Ah, you know, Prince Charming paid me a visit." Samantha crossed over to her refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of beer that was hidden in the back, automatically tossing it behind her. Fredrick caught it.

"To rescue the damsel in the tower?"

Samantha chuckled. "Something like that."

Fredrick again nodded his head toward the door, leaning against the entryway of her kitchen. "Are you sure it wasn't a dragon?"

Samantha raised a brow. Viktor was pretty fiery when he had her pinned against the museum wall. And she had imagined that fire ring thing with his eyes. "Perhaps."

"Mmm, is there something I should know about?" Fredrick asked, stepping closer. He towered over her, lightly swinging his beer back and forth. "Or perhaps, someone?"

"I didn't realize I needed to report to you," Samantha quipped, slightly irritated that he thought he had some sort of right to pry into her personal life.

"We are friends, aren't we, darling? I had thought you'd be over me by now. You don't love me, you said it yourself. I don't love you, well, not like a man ought to love a woman. What really is the problem here? You're too smart to be dictated by prissy female tendencies."

"I hate it when you're right," Samantha answered, walking past him back toward her living room to sit on the couch. Somehow, the realization that he was gay was comforting. At least she knew it wasn't her fault that he didn't want her.

But I don't want him either. Ugh, the confusing elements of the human psyche. I don't want him to want me and yet I get upset when he doesn't.

No longer carrying the tub of ice cream, Fredrick hopped over the back of the couch and sat next to her. His beer was opened, but he managed not to spill it. "It is a curse, being right all the time."

Samantha rolled her eyes and grabbed the beer, taking a long drink.

"Happiness will come to you," Fredrick continued, "if you just let it."

Arching a brow, she handed the bottle back to him. "Aren't we a guru today? Did something happen? Is there something you need to tell me? Did you get hit on the head with a bowling ball? Or were you sniffing the old snuff powder again out of the Victorian cases?"

"Hey," he protested, "that was only one time and on a dare. I couldn't back down from Wilkenson's challenge."

"It was a bet, not a dare, and a joke bet at that," Samantha corrected, remembering the night she'd spent in the emergency room with him. It was one of the times they were supposed to have a romantic evening together. "For a scientist, you're pretty dumb sometimes."

"I know it, but I did win the five dollars."

"And almost lost your job. *And* ended up with an eight-hundred-dollar medical bill."

"But, I didn't lose my job." He grinned. "And I got the medical bill wiped out because I did some appraisals for the hospital. All in all, I came up five bucks ahead."

"Only you would be proud of that fact."

"Oh, it'll take a little more than some snuff to kill me," he said, his eyes shaded with mystery.

Samantha wondered at his tone. She sometimes got the feeling that Fredrick was hiding things from her. "Is there something you should tell me?"

"Why no, darling, not that I can think of. Why? Is there something you need to tell me?" His playful smile widened.

"You are impossible sometimes. You know that, right?"

"Yep."

He finished the bottle and set it down on the floor. Glancing over his shoulder at the door, a small smile crossed his features as he turned back to her.

"You know." Fredrick lifted his hand, gently stroking Samantha's cheek as he leaned closer to her. "You do have amazing eyes, Sammy."

The compliment took her by surprise. Samantha gasped. Maybe it wasn't the compliment as much as the tone of his voice as he said it. It was low, like a lover's whisper.

Samantha opened her mouth to answer, but she didn't get a chance. A loud roar sounded from the doorway, breaking through her thoughts. Jumping up from the couch, her eyes met Viktor's.

"Viktor," she began, wondering why she felt incredibly guilty at having been caught just sitting on a couch with Frederick. It wasn't like she belonged to Viktor or anything. But then why did she feel like she did? She couldn't get the man out of her mind since she first saw him. Fantasy upon endless fantasy penetrated her mind, stirring her libido to the boiling point.

Samantha trembled as his possessive gaze raked over her. There was no doubt that he was claiming her. Every inch of her body sparked to life, calling to him, wanting him. The display of animalistic dominance was arousing.

"Laurie?" Viktor demanded, his body tense.

A sick feeling unfurled in her stomach at his word. Samantha frowned, tensing with anger. "My name's not Laurie, you jerk! It's Samantha!"

"Uh, Sammy, if I may?" Fredrick tried to cut in, touching her arm. She shrugged him off, ignoring him.

"I know your name, Samantha," Viktor answered. "What I don't know is what you're doing on the settee with another man."

"What are you talking about? Another man? I don't have a first man to warrant Frederick being called another man," Samantha quipped. Why was Viktor yelling at her? Was he delusional? Was she for feeling guilty?

"You kissed me in the park," Viktor challenged. "You knew what we are to each other from the very beginning. You felt it. Why else were you at the castle that day?"

"I thought you were dying." Samantha didn't know why she was getting all worked up. All she knew is that it felt as if every part of her understood Viktor and his anger. The irrationality of it only spurred her anger to counteract his. Logic and emotion warred inside her, causing chaos to reign supreme. She acted on instinct more than rationale. "I was saving your life." Taking a deep breath, she added with just a touch of self-importance, "I was giving you CPR."

“And in the museum? When I had you pressed up against the wall?” Viktor demanded, his tone full of sexual meaning. “Were you trying to save my life as you moaned for my big cock inside of you?”

Samantha paused, her pussy damp with the memory of his erection pressed tightly against her. And the way he said the word “cunt”, he made it sound delightfully wicked. Even through their clothing, she had felt how very huge he was. Tingling erupted, burning a trail up her stomach to her nipples. They ached to be touched, just as her body ached for Viktor to claim her.

“Uh, Samantha?” Frederick gave a small laugh. Embarrassment heated her face as she glanced at her ex-boyfriend. She’d forgotten that he was there, listening. “At a museum? Really? I never took you for a public places kind of girl.”

“And you?” Viktor charged, eyeing Fredrick. “What are you doing here? With her?”

“Listen, Viktor, don’t hurt him. It’s not what you think. He’s my friend.” Samantha moved to step in front of Fredrick, having the urge to explain herself and save her ex from Viktor’s obvious wrath. “Besides, he’s gay.”

“What?” Fredrick blinked, looking confused. “You think I’m—”

“Well, yeah, I know that.” Viktor waved a dismissive hand. “He always has been a little too gay, but I don’t know what that has to do with anything.”

“Viktor, no,” Fredrick protested. “It doesn’t mean what you think it means. I’m gay, but I’m not gay.”

“Huh?” Viktor blinked, his balled fists resting on his hips. “You’re always jesting and laughing, ever since we were children.”

“Wait a minute. You know him?” Samantha demanded, turning to Fredrick.

“Well, I...” Frederick had never looked so guilty. “Yes.”

“That’s how he knew where I lived, isn’t it?” Samantha demanded. “You set this up, didn’t you? You felt bad for leaving me and you set this up. Please tell me you didn’t pay him to come here. Did you set up the newt thing too? Knowing how I hate reptiles? Oh my goodness! That’s how he knew to...and the lizard just jumped into his hand totally at ease to be there. And that’s why he knew all that stuff about newts and efts. It’s his pet, isn’t it! All this talk of rescuing ladies from the two of you, like chivalry was something we talked about every day. You both planned this! Didn’t you?”

Neither man answered.

“Didn’t you?!” she demanded, raising her voice so that it echoed loudly in her home. Glaring at them both in turn, she wasn’t sure she wanted an answer. She didn’t need Fredrick’s pity and she sure as hell didn’t need to be Viktor’s pity fuck.

Her pussy clenched, twinging with arousal. Okay, the fuck part, yes. The pity part, no.

“Samantha—” Fredrick began, his tone soothing. She cut him off with a hard look.

"Get out. I don't need your charity dates. I don't need you to set me up with some elaborate scheme involving a newt and my knight in shining armor. I'm a grown woman and can find my own dates, thank you very much."

Samantha pointed at the door. Fredrick gave a small laugh, but the sound held little humor. "All right, I'll go. Come on, Viktor. Let's leave the woman be."

"Oh, no," Samantha charged, unable to stop herself. "Don't you move a muscle, Viktor. I'm not done with you. There are a few things I need to say to you that I'm too much of a lady to say in front of Fredrick."

"Sammy, darling, I'm not gay," Fredrick protested, his voice nearing a pout. "Quit treating me like I'm delicate or something."

"Fredrick," she warned.

Viktor arched a brow. His body was tense and he was breathing hard. She tried to ignore her attraction to him, but it was hard.

Fredrick sighed. "Good luck, Viktor. You're going to need it."

"Thanks, Laurie."

"Ugh, I told you, stop calling me that. It's Laurence."

Samantha made a loud noise of frustration. Laurence? Laurie? Fredrick? Who the hell had she been dating? It would seem she didn't know her friend as well as she'd have liked to think.

As if hearing her thoughts, Fredrick turned to her. "Dr. L. Fredrick. Laurence Fredrick. You never asked, darling. You just called me Fredrick like everyone else."

"I can't even comment on that one right now," Samantha said, holding up her hands, frustrated both sexually and mentally. "Just get out of here, all right? I'll deal with you later. First, I have something to say to your little friend here."

"Little?" Viktor gasped as if offended. He looked down to his forming erection. "I am not little."

"Cousin," Frederick offered, a smirk in his voice. "He's my cousin."

"Whatever," Samantha growled in frustration. Viktor looked mad, as if brimming over with jealousy. Fredrick just looked like Fredrick—boyish and charming yet mischievous at the same time. Pointing at her ex, she ordered, "You. Out. Now."

Fredrick bowed, the gesture gallant and teasing at the same time. Viktor didn't move. Their eyes met and locked as the elevator dinged in the hallway.

"You two kids try and play nice now, ya hear?" Fredrick yelled seconds before the sound of the elevator doors closing.

Samantha glared at Viktor in challenge. *Yeah, play nice indeed.*

Chapter Four

They were alone.

Samantha's body felt like it was on fire. What was it about this man? Whenever he was near, passion overtook her, as hot as lava and as fierce as... How had Frederick put it? A dragon?

Yes, as fierce as a dragon.

Looking at Viktor now, she thought the word dragon a very suitable way to describe him. His body was tense, rigid to the point of demanding. He looked dominant, strong, virile. It wasn't just his tight, muscled body either. It was in the way he carried himself. The way he moved, looked around and talked. Everything about him said, "I am in control and you will obey me".

Samantha didn't want to obey. She wanted to tame him. Tame the dragon before her and the beastly nature she detected inside him. How could this be? He was a stranger, wasn't he? Things like this, *feelings* like this just didn't happen.

I don't believe in love at first sight.

Love? When did I start confusing passion with love?

She might not know him with her head, but her body recognized him on a primal level. Her pussy knew it was made for his cock. Their lips were made to join in passionate kisses and their bodies were made to fit together. Even now, just staring at him was more arousing than anything she'd done with another. It didn't take much to remember the feel of his tight body pressing into hers. Last time they'd been restricted by clothes, by the threat of someone happening upon their transgressions.

There was no one to stop them now. The idea of him throwing her down and tearing her clothes from her body thrilled her to no end. What was it about him that made her want to be taken? To be ridden hard and long?

"What do you think you were doing alone with him? Without a chaperone?" Viktor demanded, his chest heaving. She saw that his temper was hot. It shone from his narrowed eyes. "I saw you sitting together, closer than what propriety would allow."

Propriety? Chaperone?

"What right do you have to be possessive?" Samantha yelled back. "And it's not like we're living in the eighteen hundreds. I don't know how they do things where you come from, but I can be *un-chaperoned* as much as I want. I'm my own woman, Viktor. I don't have to answer to anyone. So I ask again, by what right do you come barging in here acting all possessive?"

"You know by what right."

As he said it, her eyes involuntarily traveled down to the thick bulge between his thighs. Samantha put her hands on her hips and quirked a brow. Her mouth went dry. Damn, she didn't think it was possible but he'd gotten even sexier.

"We will discuss you being alone with other men later. But first, it is time. You were meant for me and I have come here to lay claim to you, *agapao*. It is time for our joining and we both know it."

Unable to stop herself, Samantha strode across the room until she was standing before him. Torn between the natural urge to slap him for his highhanded treatment of her and the even more primal urge to jump his bones, she decided to do both. Swinging her hand, she slapped her open palm across his face. The loud smack gave her a momentary sense of deep satisfaction. A second later, she grabbed him and kissed him, drinking in the sweet taste of his mouth as she ravished him with her tongue. His kiss was just as she remembered – as addictive as a drug and as sweet as the most expensive Swiss chocolate.

Keeping hold of his face, she felt the rough texture of the small growth of whiskers beneath her hands. Samantha thrust her body against his, liking the way he grabbed her hips and jerked her even closer to his hard cock. The thrill of him was in her blood, mingling with the euphoric taste of his kiss, the flavor of it a drug of complete passion.

Samantha couldn't stop, even as her breath died in her lungs, making her chest burn for air. Viktor became everything to her. When she touched him, nothing else existed outside of their embrace.

Viktor, her mind screamed, yes, Viktor, yes. I am yours. Take me.

When her lungs demanded she take air or pass out, she finally pulled back, gasping for breath as she tried to slow the frantic beating of her heart. "None of this makes sense. Who are you? What's happening to me?"

A low growl was her only answer. He reclaimed her mouth, taking over the kiss as he penetrated her with his tongue. Pleasure exploded over her body in continual waves, heating her until she forgot all her questions. Nothing had ever felt so right.

Viktor massaged her lower back, dipping his hands over her ass before pulling her shirt up over her head. He tossed it aside, instantly moving to stroke her flesh. His hands were warm, heating her as he explored every inch he could reach. His lips trailed over her neck, causing her to shiver as he nibbled her ear. She heard him breathing hard against her as he thumbed her nipples into erect points, pulling them over the top edge of her lacy bra.

There was an urgency to his touch, as if he tried to caress everywhere at once. Samantha pulled just as desperately at his clothes, clawing them in an effort to get them off. The sensations were too much. Her pussy ached to be filled, to have his stiff cock pounding into her, stretching her cunt wide as she knew he would. The feel of his erection pressing into her stomach left no room for mistakes. This man was incredibly well endowed.

A sudden ripping sounded and she gasped as cool air caressed the backs of her thighs. Her slacks slid off her hips to the floor. Viktor had torn them off. She took a step back as he let go of her.

Samantha stood before him in her red lace bra and panties, watching his fiery eyes swirl. The look excited her, even as fear of the unknown trickled in. Who was this man? She felt his power, knew in the back of her mind that he was more than human. Still, she couldn't scream, couldn't run, didn't want to. Her body needed him to end the arduous torment.

Viktor pulled off his shirt and threw it aside, revealing his rippled chest. Her eyes followed his hands to his waist. He pulled, jerking his pants free. Another rip sounded as he ignored the zipper. The material slid to the floor, unveiling his thick erection. Now free, his cock seemed to grow impossibly bigger, standing tall from the soft bed of hair between his thighs.

Samantha clamped her thighs tight even as her pussy released a torrent of cream in eager anticipation. Veins threaded over the sides of it, leading her eyes to the impossibly thick tip of his powerful cock head moist with pre-cum. She licked her lips, automatically wanting to taste him, touch him, fuck him hard and long.

"Take them off," he demanded, his voice gruff.

Samantha obeyed, not even thinking to question the order. Pulling the straps from her shoulders, she freed her large breasts. They spilled forward, the nipples two erect points begging for attention. Unable to resist, she pinched them, eliciting a moan from within.

"Take the rest off," he repeated, his tone more hoarse than before. "Now. Lest I tear your undergarment from you."

Samantha ran her hands to her hips. Viktor took a deep breath, as if he could smell her body's desire for him. Eyeing the massive serpent between his thighs, she hoped he planned on taking it easy on her—at least at first. Her panties slid to the floor. Viktor moaned as he grabbed his cock and began pumping his fist over the turgid shaft. Following his lead, Samantha slipped a finger into her wet folds, parting them as she found her clit. The bud was hard and ready when she circled it with her finger.

"Ah, yes, your pussy smells so good." Viktor stepped to her, letting go as he pulled her close. The first shock of his naked flesh sent a ripple so intense over her that it took her breath away. She gasped, engulfed within the smell of him, the seductive fragrance of his body. Her pussy tightened in anticipation. He shifted his hips until his cock wedged next to her, hot and so very alive. She shivered. "By the time I finish fucking you, your cunt's going to be molded to fit only me."

Samantha needed to feel him inside her now and tried to pull him back toward the bedroom with her. His massive body resisted. "Viktor?"

Why was he hesitating? They were both ready.

Viktor was breathing hard. He grabbed her face, holding her steady. "This cannot be undone. You must want it. Do you understand?"

Samantha could tell by his tone that there was more to his statement than just asking for permission to have sex with her. Nodding, she answered softly, "Yes, I want this to happen."

Viktor took a step forward, pushing her up against her couch. He kissed her neck, running his hot tongue over her pulse. Cream practically dripped from her thighs, making her squirm. She parted her legs, opening herself to him in offering. His nostrils flared and a low growl sounded in the back of his throat.

Swiftly turning her around, Viktor pushed her over. Samantha's hands sunk into the thick cushion. Hands glided over her flesh, kneading her ass, spreading her cheeks. The texture of his palms changed slightly, becoming rougher. She tried to turn to look at him, but he placed his hand on her back and held her down. Nails scratched against her spine, not hurting but definitely erotic. He slipped a finger around her hip to her pussy, finding the bud hidden in the moist folds.

His cock probed her from behind, spreading her pussy wide as he continued to stroke her clit in small circles. He eased himself in, working back and forth near her opening so just the thick tip of him entered her.

"You're so tight, this might hurt." There was a gruffness to his tone, a gravelly quality it hadn't held before. "Oh, yes, you're so beautiful, your cunt so wet. This is going to feel so good."

The friction along her opening built, as if he'd magically slipped on a French Tickler to add a bumpy texture to his erection. With each push he went a little further, holding her open as he stretched her out to fit him. All she could do was hold onto the couch and enjoy the ride.

Samantha's mouth fell open, her body tense as she waited for that first deep thrust. It came, swift and sure. He was so thick, fitted so tight, it was like he was breaking her open to him. She was hardly a virgin, but Viktor made her feel like one in so many ways. He kept himself buried deep and his cry of pleasure-pain joined hers. His thick mass stretched her open, hitting all the sensitive nerve endings at once.

"*S'ayapo*," he whispered, pulling back only to pump into her. He moaned, riding her from behind. She was trapped beneath him. He drove hard, picking up the pace as he drew pleasure from her. Samantha was helpless beneath him as he rode her. She didn't care. In that moment, she belonged to him. Tension pooled in her hips, driving her to the brink of perfect madness.

"Viktor," she gasped, digging her fingers into the cushion. It felt too good. Her body began to shake as her climax hit her. He kept going, his primal grunts echoing around her. His nails raked her skin before his hands tightened on her hips.

When he came, she could feel his seed entering her. Energy pulsed from where they were joined, spreading over her entire length, filling her with warmth and intense pleasure. Her vision blurred and it felt like her heart stopped in her chest. An eternity passed in mere seconds, punctuated by their harsh breathing.

Slowly, he pulled from her. Samantha heard him drop. Turning, she saw him on his knees—beautiful and naked. He was breathing hard as he looked up at her. His cock was still partially erect, as if it would rise with little provocation.

“I apologize, Samantha,” he said, his eyes narrowing almost sorrowfully. “I did not mean...”

Samantha turned, kneeling next to him on the floor. Then, noticing her front door was still broken and hanging open, her face heated in embarrassment. It was a good thing no one had walked in on them.

“I don’t blame you for being mad,” he said. “It’s been awhile for me. I know that doesn’t excuse my behavior and I can only plead for your forgiveness.”

She was completely sated, so much so that she could but stare at the opened door as she tried to find the strength to stand. Why was he apologizing for giving her the biggest and most gratifying orgasm in her life? Her legs shaking, she stood. “Don’t apologize. You have nothing to be sorry for.”

Then an idea occurred to her.

“Oh, goodness, you’re right. We should have been more careful.” Samantha ran her hand over her stomach. They hadn’t used protection. “I mean, I’m not on the Pill or anything and...”

Somehow, the idea of having a baby didn’t sound so horrible. It wasn’t like she couldn’t afford it. Instantly, she determined that if it came to that, she’d keep the child and raise it as her own. A small smile started to form on her face.

“We’ll just have to be more careful, you know, if this happens again.” Halfheartedly she added, “We don’t need to get me pregnant. Not to mention dis—”

Before she could get the word “diseases” out, he interrupted her. “I promise I will make it up to you.”

Viktor steadily held her eyes with his and he too stood. His naked body towered over hers. Samantha took a step back, wanting to feel his possession once again despite the soreness in her stomach from his tight fit. She slowly made her way toward the bedroom, glancing at the door to the closed elevator beyond in the hall. It was empty.

Thank goodness!

Viktor followed her movements with his eyes before gradually walking toward her. Samantha was heady with the pleasure of their last coupling. That, combined with the sense of freedom she felt at standing naked before him, made her giddy.

Turning, she strode into the bedroom. The lights were dim, her curtains drawn to give a soft red glow. Her large bed was the centerpiece of the oversized room. The tan and gold comforter was embroidered with stylized leaves. Matching pillows were strewn all over it. She’d been resting on the bed earlier daydreaming of Viktor in this very room. Now that he was here, she could hardly believe it.

She crawled onto the high mattress, giving Viktor a clear view of her ass. His breath caught audibly in his throat. Knowing that he was looking at her in such a wanton

position turned her on. Her pussy became damp, the moisture building in readiness for him. What was it about Viktor that made her mad with lust? Made her forget everything but him?

Tossing her hair over her shoulder, she looked back at him and gave him her most provocative smile. His interest wasn't lost on her when she saw his large cock rising to attention. The thick shaft bobbed as he drew closer.

"It is good that you are not upset with me," he said, nodding. "And now that we are man and wife, I promise to make up for my first rough handling."

Rough handling? Who talks like that?

Must be the English as a second language thing he has going. Mm, but the accent is cute.

Hold on a minute. Man and wife?!

"Man and wife?" Samantha laughed. "You really are old-fashioned, aren't you?"

It was a rhetorical question and she giggled louder when he nodded.

"I do like it and the sentiment is sweet and all, but don't you think you're jumping the gun a little? Or it is possible you're mistranslating the phrase 'man and wife'."

His look of confusion answered her. "I know what man and wife means. I have no problems with the translation."

"Oh, okay then, I didn't mean any offense. I mean, it's really too soon to tell if I am pregnant and definitely too soon to dwell on it. If I am, I'll deal with it when the times come. There is no reason to go proposing marriage until then. We'll just be more careful in the future and go from there. Okay?"

"What do you mean 'deal with it'?" he demanded, hands on hips. The authoritative pose was all the more seductive. He took a bold step forward.

"You know, the usual stuff." Samantha sat down, tugging on the covers to hide her nudity. She got a strange vibe off him, almost as if she could sense his emotions and right now he was none too happy. What was wrong with him?

"No, explain it to me."

"Um, well, there's the marriage thing like you said, abortion, adoption—"

He was across the room before the last word was even out of her mouth. "You would dare to rid us of our child?!"

Fury poured from him as he grabbed her roughly by the arms and jerked her up. "Listen to me, wife, I will not—"

"Whoa, buddy, hold up there!" Samantha hollered back, struggling to get free. Great. Go figure. He was delusional. "First of all, let me go. Second, I never said I'd marry you. Third, you don't own me and you sure as hell don't have a say in what I do with *my* body."

Okay, so she'd never get an abortion and she doubted she'd even be able to go through with an adoption, but he had no right to get mad at her about some hypothetical kid.

“First,” he ground out, putting his face into hers, “I warned you that this cannot be undone and that you must want it. I will not let you out of our agreement, even if that means locking you up in a cave until you come around.”

“What?” she gasped. His eyes shifted, filling in with flames. This time euphoria and desire didn’t cloud her vision. She saw the supernatural effect clearly and stiffened in fear.

“You said, ‘yes, I want this to happen’.”

“I thought you meant the sex,” she answered weakly. “You kept saying you were going to mold my cunt to your... I thought you meant sex! I...”

Her words failed her. The fire in his eyes burned brighter and when he opened his mouth, she witnessed his teeth lengthening and molding into sharpened points.

“What are you? Vampire? Werewolf?” Samantha couldn’t tear her eyes from his deadly mouth. The look of it was powerfully seductive.

Viktor tossed back his head and laughed. It was a hard, bitter sound. “I knew better than to claim a woman. I should’ve learned from the past. No matter, Samantha. You are mine and you will never escape me. You signed your fate the moment you kissed me. Like it or not, our lives, our very fates are intertwined.”

“But...” Samantha felt lightheaded. She blinked, trying to focus on what was happening. Things like Viktor didn’t exist. They couldn’t. Not in the real world. “I was giving you CPR.”

It was a weak defense, made even weaker by her frail tone.

“You are my mate, Samantha,” Viktor said. The red lightning that had seemed so seductive before was only terrifying now.

“What are you?” Tears blurred her vision and she blinked them back. The pleasure from earlier faded completely. Bewildered, she repeated, “What are...you?”

“You want to know, madam? Then I’ll show you.”

Viktor let go and stood. Samantha didn’t even try to run. She knew instinctively that it would only anger him and she’d never get away. Besides, where was she to go without her clothes on? Who would she tell? *What* would she tell them?

Hey, policeman, there is this strange supernatural man in my room trying to eat me after we had the best sex of my life. He says I’m his mate. Help.

Yeah, they’d have her in a straightjacket for sure.

Viktor’s sharpened mouth opened wide and a low growl sounded. It turned into a roar as his mouth elongated and shifted, popping loudly in otherwise silent room. His dark flesh hardened, rippling and tightening as black scales grew over his naked length. His muscles bulged, becoming thick and deformed. Falling forward, he landed on his hands and knees. Even his cock turned into an impossibly hard and long scaly weapon—so huge he’d kill her with it if he wanted to. She naturally clamped her thighs together.

Giant wings grew from his back, expanding out behind him even as a long tail grew. It swept around in a long arch and struck her nightstand, splintering it into small pieces. Perfume bottles flew with the shards, hitting her wall and breaking. Samantha screamed, jolting with fear. His height was crowded by the tall penthouse ceiling.

"Dragon," she whispered, staring at him unable to move. "You're a dragon."

Viktor blew fire from his elongated nose. It streamed across the room like a river of flames, flowing over her head along the ceiling. Samantha screamed, scrambling back on the bed to get away from him. When the flames stopped, the ceiling was scorched black. The fire alarm went off, adding chaos and noise to the already panicked situation. Water sprayed from the ceiling sprinklers, hitting her naked flesh and soaking the bedding around her.

Viktor lurched forward, his taloned hand swiping for her. She didn't stand a chance as he caught her. Grabbing the wet blanket tight around her, he pulled her toward him.

Then, just when she didn't think her situation could possibly get any worse, he flapped his wings. A breeze stirred all around her, whipping her wet hair in her face. She blinked, doing her best to see in the rising wind. The sound of the fire alarm kept beeping, but the water stopped spraying from the ceiling.

"Viktor?" Fredrick appeared in the doorway, his face pale. "What are you doing? You can't... Not here. Viktor, stop! Someone will see you. People are coming up. The alarms..."

"Fredrick!" Samantha screamed, trying to free herself enough to reach for him. Her arms were caught at her sides beneath the blanket. Jerking, she hit her head against Viktor's chest, trying to head butt him. "Fredrick, help me! Please!"

"Sammy, darling, don't worry. He won't hurt you. He's just angry right now," Fredrick yelled.

She barely heard the man. Her body bounced hard as Viktor flapped again and she was forced to stop struggling. She caught a glimpse of Frederick coming to her aid only to be shoved back into the wall by the gust of wind Viktor produced.

Viktor pulled her off the bed, drawing his arms close to his reptilian stomach. Samantha let loose a long series of screams, unable to stop. Fear overtook her every thought as she fought him. It was no use. He was too strong.

His scaly chest pressed against her cheek, hard and unforgiving yet oddly soft underneath, like the belly of an alligator. He snorted smoke and Samantha coughed as it drifted down into her face.

Then, with a leap, Viktor dove, lowering his head to break through her bedroom window. Samantha's voice died in her throat and she stopped fighting him. The red drapes fluttered around her as they broke into the light. The curtains drifted down twenty-four stories to the far away street below.

"Oh, goodness," she whispered, petrified. It was bad enough that she was being carried by a giant lizard, but to see herself so high off the ground made her stomach jump. She couldn't take it. "Oh. My. Goodness."

It was too much. Giving in to her terror, Samantha let the darkness have her.

* * * * *

Viktor didn't stop to think as he flew off with his mate. He was so livid that she'd dare to take back her word. And, what was worse, she'd even hinted at ridding herself of their child. She chose him! She said she did. Then why the change of heart? Was she mad that he didn't take her gently that first time? She hadn't acted mad, but what else could it be?

Elise, a voice whispered in his head. She's just like Elise. That is why she changed her mind. She doesn't love you. She can't love you. You're a reptile. She only wants what you can give her. She wants your immortality. She does not love you. She does not love you.

If that is so, if she does not love me, Viktor answered his inner voice, then I will make her love me. Either that, or she will pay dearly for binding me to her. She will pay like Elise should've paid all those years ago. I will not be taken for a fool again.

Stretching his body, he shot up into the low clouds, using them to hide. His giant wings would take him far and fast, away from the big American city. He would go home, to Norway, back to the safety of the mountains, back to where he belonged. Only this time, he wouldn't be alone. Samantha would be with him. Forever.

Chapter Five

Samantha coughed, unable to see in the incessant blackness that surrounded her. The air was cold and stale, so much so that it choked her to breathe it. Chilly stone covered in dirt and pebbles slid under her hands as she tried to sit up.

She pushed her hair out of her face. Her fingers tangled in the messy locks. Becoming aware of her body, she realized she was still naked, wrapped in a blanket. By the rough texture amidst the silk, it felt like the comforter from her bed.

Where am I?

Viktor?

What's going on?

What have you done?

She remembered him saying he'd lock her away in a cave. Had he done just that? Since she'd passed out, she had no idea where he'd taken her. Then the full force of what she was facing hit her.

"He's a dragon," she whispered, but the sound of her low voice brought her little comfort as it faded into the eerie silence.

No, no, I imagined that. I passed out and that was a dream.

Samantha gave a nervous laugh. "Men do not turn into dragons."

She was almost too scared to move, but she forced her hands to glide over the stone as she felt around in a circle. Her whole body shook. The floor didn't seem to end. She didn't hit a wall or larger rock or anything.

"It just goes on and on," she said to herself, trying to bring some small comfort with the sound of her own voice. It didn't work. Tears slipped from her eyes, gliding over her cheek in a slow, hot trail. "No. Now is not the time to cry, Samantha. Get a grip."

She only cried harder.

"Viktor, please," Samantha begged. "Get me out of here. I don't know what I did to piss you off, but please. Don't do this. I'm a very important woman. People will be looking for me."

Okay, that wasn't true, but he didn't necessarily know that. No one, but maybe Fredrick, would even know she was gone. The only problem she saw with that was Fredrick was Viktor's cousin. And he'd known what Viktor was.

Viktor, please...

She sniffed back her tears.

"Samantha?" Viktor's rich, deep voice cut through the darkness like a knife to her soul. The sound brought her such pleasure and comfort, but yet at the same time such

fear and agony. He was her kidnapper, and yet she yearned for him to hold her. Just knowing he was near turned her on, making her body wet with desire. "Samantha, what is it?"

Samantha felt a hand on her arm, moving up to rest on her shoulder. She yelped, jolting back in fear, hating herself for being turned on by him.

"Dragon," was all she managed to squeak out in response.

A low, long sigh answered the word.

"Dragon," she repeated, trembling worse than before. The air was so stale it was hard to breathe. Darkness ate away at her senses, like a tomb she couldn't escape. Her mind yearned for someone to light the way. "Dragon. I saw...dragon."

"Shhh, I won't hurt you," Viktor soothed. "Don't be scared of me. I could never hurt you."

Samantha's eyes rolled around in her head before settling where she thought to sense him in the darkness. Not hurt her? What was he doing now? She was kidnapped and locked in a dark cave! Not hurt her? Was he insane?

"Samantha, hush, just take slow, deep breaths. You are safe, I promise. Nothing here will hurt you. This is my home. You are safe." Viktor's hand touched her again. She knew it was him, felt that it was. A strange, yet somehow familiar vibration worked its way from his touch up her arm and around her body. He tried to soothe her nerves, but she clung to her panic, not wanting to once again fall under his euphoric spell.

"You're having a mild nervous attack," Viktor soothed. "I've seen these fainting spells before. Just breathe. I won't hurt you."

Samantha tried, but she couldn't force herself to pull away. His lips hovered close. She could feel the heat of his breath against her mouth, caressing it in steady, light whispers of a kiss. With each pass, his mouth got closer until finally he joined his lips to hers. The gentle probe of his tongue slipped into her mouth, putting pressure on her teeth until she opened to him.

How could she resist the taste of him, so powerful and sweet? Everything about this man called to her, drove her crazy with lust until she could think of nothing else. Viktor moaned, growing bolder as he slipped his hand from her arm to her chest. The blanket fell away. He palmed a breast, running his fingers over her nipple until it peaked with desire.

So sweet...

Viktor began to push her over onto her back.

Mm, so sweet...

"No," Samantha protested, pushing hard to get him off her. Breathing hard, she stated louder, "No. This can't be happening. Who are you?"

"Mm, Samantha," his voice urged, "come here. Kiss me."

"Who are you?!"

"Viktor. I'm your husband, Viktor. You know me. You feel me inside you. Feel me."

"No," she shook her head in denial. Husband? Why was he still persisting they were married? "We didn't... I can't... You are... What are you?"

"I'm a Dracodomus. When you took my seed inside of you, we were mated. You are my bride for all eternity and I am your hus—"

Samantha screamed, loud and long. This was a nightmare, some weird science fiction delusion that she would wake up from any minute.

Any minute now...

Any minute...

"Samantha?"

Oblivion was easier to face than the madness. Samantha let it have her, thankful for the escape from the dragon, even if it was only an escape of the mind. As her body went limp, she felt Viktor grabbing hold. He called her name, but the darkness was taking over. She didn't have the strength to answer him.

* * * * *

"Samantha? Samantha!" Viktor demanded, shaking her. His body was tight with desire for her. It was a feeling that never completely went away. Even after they had sex he wanted more of her. He wanted to take her inside of him, keeping her close to his soul. When he looked at her, he wanted to devour her with his kisses. But he couldn't. Not now. Not when she was unconscious. He may be a beast, but he wasn't a monster. "Samantha!"

"Uh, cousin, I don't think she is going to answer you right now. I'd leave her be." Laurence said from the cave entrance. He lounged against the frame, grinning and looking perfectly at ease in Viktor's old linen shirt and tight breeches. The fact that he wore them told Viktor that he'd flown right behind them to the cave from New York. Taking a bare toe, the man lightly traced patterns in the dirt. The cave was pitch black, but they saw each other with ease. "Besides, you do realize that she can't exactly see in the dark, don't you? Humans don't have our sight. She was probably more frightened by the fact that she couldn't see you in the darkness and didn't know where she was than just your presence alone."

Viktor felt like someone hit him upside the head. Of course! That's why she'd been looking around with the panic on her face. She was in blackness. How easily he forgot such things. He was so remorseful for what he'd done in bringing her to his lair that he didn't stop and think about finding lights. He never used them and didn't need them.

"I forgot," Viktor said.

"I noticed," Laurence answered, chuckling. "Well, you can't very well keep her in this cave when it looks like this. You're going to need some lights. Also, this place needs cleaning. I can't believe you spent nearly a century holed up in here. We evolved from this kind of existence in the Middle Ages. For crissakes, man! It's a *cave*."

"And I'm a dragon," Viktor defended. Laurence only laughed harder.

"But she isn't." Stepping in, Laurence glanced down at Samantha and sighed. "She deserves more than this."

"You mean more than me, don't you?"

"Vik—"

That was all Laurence got out before the urge to punch his cousin took over Viktor's self-control. He struck Laurence square in the jaw, sending the man sprawling onto his back. For a stunned moment, his cousin looked up from the hard stone floor. Then, with a growl, Laurence leapt, slamming into Viktor's stomach. They both went crashing to the ground, rolling on top of each other as they sparred, each trying to get the upper hand. As they came near Samantha, Viktor felt his cousin shift his weight to roll them away from her. He gladly complied, but not before he got a good, solid punch to Laurence's jaw. Laurence retaliated with a knee to Viktor's side.

Viktor roared, managing to straddle Laurence's waist as he punched his face. Laurence hit back with a fist to Viktor's jaw. Viktor's head snapped back and he fell to the side.

"I didn't sleep with her," Laurence said, breathing hard as he stayed on his back. "And I never said you weren't good enough for her. You read too much into my words. This cave isn't good enough for her. Hell, in my opinion it isn't good enough for you. It's a dirty, filthy, shithole of an existence you have going here."

Viktor glared at his cousin, stopping in mid-motion, halfway off the floor to ready himself for another attack. Laurence took another deep breath. His lip was bleeding, but then again, so was Viktor's. Both men ignored the injuries.

"I said I didn't touch her, not like that. I kissed her once or twice, but I never took her to my bed. There was something about her. I knew she was meant for my family, but not particularly for me. I was surprised it was you, but after seeing you two in the same room, I knew that she was destined to be with you. I never touched her. Never. Not like you're thinking. I do love her, Viktor," Laurence paused, glancing across the floor to where Samantha lay unconscious, "but not like you. Not as my mate."

"Then what are you doing here?" Viktor demanded.

"I told you, I love her. I care for her. I wanted to make sure you didn't harm her. She's..." Laurence took a deep breath, sitting up.

Viktor relaxed his stance. His fist was raw from scraping along the stone, but he didn't care. The wound would heal.

"She's delicate," Laurence finished. "Not like the women you've known."

Viktor followed his cousin's gaze, wondering if the man was hiding more emotion than he let on. "I plan on taking her back. I just lost my temper, thinking of Elise and she said some things that—"

"She is a far cry from that bitch," Laurence swore. "She is nothing like Elise Fenton."

"I know that. Deep inside, I know. She just denied our marriage and I couldn't think straight. It won't happen again. I'll take her back and we'll start over."

"No."

"What?" Viktor asked, his body tensing. "You think to stop me from being with my wife? It's already done, Laurie. You can't stop it. She is mine."

"You can't take her back. Not now. She's seen you shift. The girl is scared of reptiles, not to mention the fact that she just discovered the supernatural kind exists. You've been out of the game a long time, cousin. It's not like before. Science has explained everything to them—often times wrongly—but it's what they believe in. The old stories of our kind are just humorous myths and legends—nothing more. They've romanticized the past, changed it. We have been proven beyond a shadow of their doubt to be nothing more than fiction and lore. The world does not believe in dragons."

"That's ridiculous," Viktor scoffed. "Everyone can't have possibly forgotten us to such an extent. There have always been nonbelievers, but—"

"It is what it is, old chap," Laurence chuckled. "They even doubt those with simple psychic powers like telepathy and foresight. You not only became something she irrationally fears, but you've just proven that humans aren't the only thing in the universe."

"Then what do I do?"

"Keep her here with you. It's your only chance. Woo her. Prove to her that you're worthy of her. Make her love you. It's the only way I can think of. If you bring her back, she'll run. I know Sammy. She has the money and the resources to disappear. Plus, she's got no one anymore. She has nothing to keep her in New York."

"I could find her. We're mated now. I'll always find her no matter where she goes."

"And she'll always run. Is that what you want? To fight your way past some bodyguard to try and win her back? You want to chase her all over the globe, scaring the shit out of her, like some kind of psycho who can't take no for an answer?"

"But I'm her husband," Viktor protested. Had life always been so complicated? He closed his eyes, thinking back. Yes. Yes, it had. It was one of the reasons he'd gone into hiding. He wanted the simplicity of being a dragon in a cave.

I should've never left. I should've never found her.

Opening his eyes, he looked at Samantha. He knew that wasn't true. She was his everything. To go on without her would be to leave a part of his soul behind.

"Husband or not, you'll frighten her," Laurence said.

"Then you think I should keep her here? Won't that make matters worse?"

"Perhaps, but what is done is done." His cousin sighed and picked up a stone. Absently tossing it across the cave floor so it skipped over the rock in hard clanks, he sighed again. "Just make her love you, Viktor. Show her that there is more to us dragons than fire and smoke and a scaly visage. Just make her fall in love with you."

Viktor couldn't move. That was easier said than done. He couldn't force Samantha to love him. He couldn't force her to do anything. "I shouldn't have brought her here. I pushed too hard. She had every right to think I was crazy."

"Going for what we want is what makes us dragons, cousin. She'll see that in time. But for now I recommend we find her better quarters. I saw you still have all your old furniture in storage."

"Yes," Viktor said, nodding. "I do."

"Well, then, let's go make this wife of yours a proper home."

Chapter Six

Samantha didn't move as she pretended to sleep, listening all around her. The only sound she could detect was a fire burning. Peeking through a partially opened eyelid, she barely moved as she tried to get her bearings. A giant wooden framed portrait of Viktor faced her, glowing orange in the flames. It was propped up against the smooth cave wall. His clothes were a lot older in style, but the "lord of the manor" attire suited him somehow. Wood popped, startling her into sitting up as she thought of Viktor spouting flames over her head in his dragon form.

Her eyes fell onto flames in a rough fire pit carved from stone in the middle of the room, as if a giant fist had just slammed a hole into the cave floor, leaving it cracked and dented. Long stalactites hung from the ceiling surrounded by thin straw-like formations. The firelight sparkled off them like fiery diamonds, adding more light to the place. Old Victorian style furniture was fitted about the cavern, including the bed on which she now sat. The bed was huge, too big to have been easily brought to such a place.

At least by a man. Samantha shivered.

It was an odd contrast to see such elegant beauty amongst the rocks. An Oriental rug covered the stone floor and more paintings were propped up along a ridged rock formation. Though the objects were stunning, the cave was far from homey and inviting.

A shadow in the corner formed the outline of what could only be an exit. Dare she take it? She didn't even know where she was or what Viktor wanted with her.

Soft linen caressed her and she discovered that she wore an old-fashioned nightdress. It was oddly conservative with its high collar and long sleeves. Had Viktor dressed her in it? Where did the antique garment come from?

The gown gave her body no definition. Lace ruffles decorated the front, straight bodice. Even so, she was naked underneath it and the feel of the material was seductive in its enveloping softness.

"For nearly a hundred years I have lived within these walls," said Viktor.

Samantha gasped, turning to see him sitting calmly in a chair. He was so quiet, she hadn't noticed him in the darkened corner until he spoke. Her mouth opened, but no sound came out. Dark eyes, lit by orange flames, bored into her. She felt his look like a caress over her entire form.

"I shouldn't have brought you here, not like this. I wish that I could take it back." Viktor didn't move. His wrist rested along his knee, drawing her eyes down to where his cock was hidden by darkness. "I apologize, Samantha."

How can I think of sex at a time like this?

How can I think of anything else when looking at him? He's absolutely gorgeous.

Ugh.

Samantha bit her lip. She tried to be discreet as she glanced at the door. Viktor chuckled softly, proving he saw the action.

"You're free to leave," he said. "I won't force you to stay."

"Really?" Samantha asked in surprise. She slowly edged to the end of the bed, keeping an eye on him. He didn't move. She felt more than saw his piercing gaze on her, begging her not to go. Her nipples tingled in instant response. Her pussy became moist and hot. Viktor let loose a low moan, as if he could detect her longing even from a distance. Her feet hit the cool floor and she instantly made a run for the exit.

"Though I will ask you to stay with me. Please, Samantha," he said. "Besides, you might get lost within the cave systems or the Norwegian wilderness beyond."

She stopped in disbelief, halfway across the cave to the entrance. "Norway? Did you just say that we're in Norway?"

She didn't have a passport, didn't speak the local language and she sure as heck didn't have access to her bank accounts without identification of some sort. How was she supposed to get home if he didn't help her?

When she turned to glare at him, he shrugged and confirmed. "Yes, Norway."

"You kidnapped me and brought me to Norway? Are you crazy?" she yelled, charging to confront him. Viktor didn't move, only smirked, arching a brow. Stopping short of tumbling onto his lap, she growled in frustration. "Viktor, I demand that you take me home at once. This is not acceptable. You can't go around kidnapping people just because you lose your temper."

"You are home, at least for now. Can't you think of it as our honeymoon?" His smooth accent begged her to give into him, just as the look of his body seemed to call to hers with a wanton hunger. "Besides, it's not like you have a prior engagement."

"Don't..." Samantha tried to keep her stern look, but Viktor's expression made a small smile crack on her features. She quickly hid it. "You just said I was free to leave."

"You are."

"But then you said this was my home for now. So which is it? Am I free or am I a prisoner?"

"You're free."

"You say that, but you know very well I can't go anywhere, don't you? Even if I make the hike in the wilderness all I have is this nightdress. I don't have money, I don't have a passport and I don't have a clue how many people in Norway speak English." She took a deep breath.

"Yes, there is that, isn't there?" His look was a little too smug for her liking and he was staring at her breasts, as if he wasn't even paying attention to her.

“Let me make something perfectly clear. We are not married. We had sex. That’s it. There’s a long way to go between the bedroom and the altar and trust me, that’s one path we haven’t walked.”

“According to my people, we are married. You’re my mate. Though if you wish for a church wedding, I am more than willing to seal our bond in such a way as well. I would be happy to marry you, Samantha.”

There was no getting through to the man. The words were so possessive, so final, that she was hard-pressed to believe them, illogical as they were. She kept her resolve strong.

“Ah, according to your people,” she said in continued disbelief.

“Yes. The Dracodomus.”

“Ah, the Dracodomus,” she repeated, throwing her hands up as she turned away from him. There was obviously no arguing with the man. Did he have to be so bullheaded?

“It means dragon family in Latin. From the beginning it has been the name of my kind and eventually it was adopted by my ancestors to be my family’s surname. I was born Viktor of the Dracodomus, which eventually was shortened to Viktor Dracodomus.”

“Your family,” she said, nodding. Sarcastically, she mumbled, “Sure, why wouldn’t there be more of you running around. It only makes sense. I mean, dragon men spouting fire and marrying women with sex. Sure. Why not? You’re probably in every town.”

“Actually, there aren’t too many of us around these days. But in the Middle Ages, when my brother Zarek and I were a lot younger we—”

“Ah, the Middle Ages.” Samantha was sure she was going crazy now. Some doctors probably had her locked up in a mental ward.

Time to up my medications, doc. She glanced over her shoulder at Viktor. He was leaning forward, his elbows braced on his knees. *Better make it fast. I really am losing it here.*

“Yes,” he paused, his brow furrowed in confusion. “Ah, I see. Perhaps you call it the Medieval period now?”

“You were alive in the Medieval period.” Samantha merely nodded. *Go with it, Samantha, just go with it.*

“Yes. As I was saying, in the Medieval period when my brother Zarek and I were younger, there were many of us. Laurence was with us—”

“Fredrick?” she squeaked.

Fredrick was a dragon too?

“No, I mean, I kiss—” Samantha bit her lip, cut off by his possessively hard look. He clearly didn’t like her mentioning kissing Fredrick. Slowly, she rephrased, “I’ve known Fredrick for a long time. He’s not... I mean, he can’t be. Really? Fredrick?”

"Yes, Fredrick," he stated.

"Huh," Samantha mumbled, stunned by that news.

"As I was saying, dragon slayers and knights out to earn their reputations killed most of us off. After that, we didn't really see the reason to repopulate our species. Why have children only to see them killed? We knew if we waited long enough, times would change as they always do and there would be a better time to reproduce—a safer time."

Repopulate? Reproduce? As in have little dragon babies?

Good thing I'm crazy, or I'd be freaking out about now.

"Hu-uh," Samantha gave a nervous laugh.

Okay, crazy or not, I am a little freaked out right now. Doc? Um, doc? We got an ETA on those meds? I need them STAT.

Viktor studied her for a long moment before giving her a small smile. His eyes moved over her, pausing at her flat stomach. She automatically crossed her arms in front of her, as if by doing so she could stop his train of thought. It was clear he wanted her to have his children. The idea of baby reptiles swimming around in her womb was more than a little unnerving. Samantha refused to think of the possibility that she already had Viktor's child growing inside her. Surely the fates weren't that mean. They'd only had sex one time without protection.

One time is all it takes.

Shut up, brain.

"And why now?" she asked, glancing around the cave for an end to the nightmare. After living in New York, the silence was eerie, adding to her apprehension. "Why have reptile...er...*babies* now?"

"My six-hundredth birthday is fast approaching. It was time for me to find my mate or risk becoming sterile. Only mated will I keep my, ah, masculine vigor for procreation."

"Uh-huh," Samantha answered automatically. Was the fire just coming from the light? Or was there a way out she was missing? "Yep. Masculine vigor. Got it."

"I dreamt of you, Samantha. Well, of going to the castle in the New World."

"New World," she repeated, still looking around. Anything was better than staring into his dark eyes as she listened to the hypnotic tones of his seductive voice.

"Or, rather, the United States as you call it nowadays. It was at this castle that I knew I would meet you. So I went and I waited for you to come to me. Then, as I slept, you kissed me and I knew then that you were the woman meant to be my mate."

Samantha laughed, though she knew the sound was far from humored. "Okay, okay, enough. For the very last time, I was not kissing you. I was giving you CPR. C-P-R. I thought you were dying. You weren't breathing. I touched your chest and there was barely a heartbeat. So I—"

"I slow my heartbeat to sleep. It saves energy."

Pretending like he didn't interrupt, she finished, "...was trying to save your life. I was not kissing you."

His smile only grew and she knew he was remembering the museum and later at her apartment. The need to go to him warred with the logic in her head. Desire rippled through her body, flooding her senses. The memory of his first kiss, the taste of it, the feel of his mouth blending with the caress of his hands along her flesh.

She closed her eyes. "But then I was kissing you. I couldn't stop or think. You did something to me. I-I..."

"You were meant for me," he finished. "You're my mate for all eternity."

"No, there was something to your taste. It was," Samantha took a deep breath, trying to concentrate past the feelings erupting beneath her flesh. "...drugging."

"What you tasted was my *risbrosius*. It's used to enhance your pleasure, not to drug. It's a natural secretion of my kind."

Viktor had drawn closer and she didn't move as his hand ran down her arm. She shivered and for a moment, the nightmare wasn't so bad. For a moment, she could see a future living in the cave, a future as the wife of...

Of what? A dragon?

Samantha jerked away from him, only to glare. "If this isn't a delusional dream and you are what you say you are and we are," she motioned around the cave, "where you say we are then I will only tell you this once. I am not your mate for all eternity and I will *never* be your mate. Take me home."

His expression hardened. "I told you this cannot be undone. You took my seed inside of you. You accepted what I offered."

"I accepted sex," she stated flatly. "I accepted your cock in my cunt. That is all."

"You accepted me, *gyni i*. There is more between us than fucking." A low growl erupted in the back of his throat as he pulled her roughly into his embrace. His lips crushed onto her, his tongue delving deep to explore the caverns of her mouth. The taste of his euphoric *risbrosius* flooded her mouth, driving her instantly wild. If she'd wanted to, she could've found the will to pull away. But why? When being with Viktor felt so right and good?

Samantha clawed at his dark shirt, desperate to free him from the tight material. She became very aware of where his body touched hers. His hard cock pressed firmly to her stomach, rubbing up and down as he rocked his hips in a natural rhythm. After she removed his shirt, she began work on his slacks, finding it hard in her desperation to get them off.

Low, primal noise came from the back of his throat and Samantha moaned, panting against his mouth as he pulled back to let her breathe. Very deliberately, he pulled her nightdress up but not off. Taking a step and then another, he walked her back toward the bed. The back of her legs hit the bed. His eyes stared deep into hers, piercing her with their fiery intensity. She was drawn to him.

Running her hands over his chest, she slowly urged him to turn around. Samantha pushed him on his back. Instantly, he crawled backwards until he was lying down. She smiled, grabbing the hem of his slacks and giving them a hard pull. He transferred his weight, helping her undress him.

With his glorious body sprawled out before her, Samantha forgot all about his tendency to shift. Now he looked like all man. Slowly, she scraped her fingernails up over his ankles and calves, watching his erection bob as his stomach tensed. His balls tightened, drawing up as he held his breath. Samantha's mouth watered as she stared at his arousal. His kiss had been so sweet, but what would the rest of him taste like?

The thought urged her on. Pulling at her nightgown, she tossed it aside, liking the freedom of being naked. There was no embarrassment when Viktor looked at her, just desire. She crawled up over him, gliding her hands over his legs to his waist. Straddling his legs, she teased him with her fingers, brushing back his hands when he would touch her.

Samantha took control. She explored his tight waist and hips, touching everywhere but his glorious member. Viktor moaned and his cock only seemed to get bigger with each teasing pass of her hands.

"Samantha, please," he begged. "I can't hold back. I... Ah, yes..."

She licked the tip of his cock, swirling her tongue along the ridge before sucking it between her teeth. His breath hitched and she slowly drew her mouth forward, taking him deeper. Gently, she began to suck him, using her hands to cup his balls and stroke the extra length she couldn't fit comfortably into her mouth. Viktor arched his hips off the bed, pushing his turgid shaft deeper into her mouth until he hit the back of her throat. Samantha gasped in surprise but didn't stop sucking. Rolling her tongue, she bobbed her head up and down.

"Mm, yes, Samantha," he whispered, so light she barely heard it.

Viktor's kisses were great, but they didn't compare to the intimate taste of his flesh in her mouth. She braced her hands on his thighs, kneading the thick muscles beneath her palms. Looking up his body, she saw his face strained in pleasure, his muscled chest heaving for breath as he held himself rigid. She sucked harder, feeling him close to release. Samantha wanted him to come in her mouth, wanted to taste that intimate part of him. Her lips clamped down hard and pulled. He moaned, jerking violently. His body tensed and he came, releasing his seed into her mouth with a loud, unashamed cry.

Samantha pulled back and licked her lips, watching him carefully. The corner of his mouth pulled up, tugging at a secret place within her heart. Why was she fighting him so hard? Every emotion she felt was for him. But how did she know if what she felt was real?

"*Gyni i,*" he said, his voice low. Viktor held out his hand, curling his fingers. "Come. Lay down for me. Let me taste you."

Samantha's pussy was wet and aching with need for him. She climbed off his legs, moving to his side. He lifted a thigh as she moved, brushing his leg against her nipple. The bud tweaked in response, though it was already hard with just the idea of being touched by him. His smell engulfed her senses as she crawled next to him. Her hair fell forward, hiding her face as she peeked through her hair. Then, slowly, she pulled it aside and tossed it over her shoulder.

"You're beautiful," he whispered, reaching for her cheek. "So beautiful. I ache to look at you. I ache for the sweet taste of your cunt on my lips."

Samantha had never heard a man sound like he did. His eyes earnestly looked into hers. His voice was soft with the truth of his words. She believed him, felt that he was telling her the truth.

"*Saghapo, gyni i,*" he whispered. "I love you."

She opened her mouth to respond, but no sound came out. He held up his hand a second later, covering her lips with his fingertips. Samantha wasn't sure what she would say to him if she had spoken. He was a dragon. He was different. Love couldn't happen so fast, could it? Was Viktor confusing great sex with love? In many ways Samantha wanted to believe she was idealistic, but in truth, she was a product of her time, her world. She had no doubt that Viktor was an old soul. His true age was reflected in his eyes. He didn't belong wholly in the cynical place the world had become. No, Viktor was lost in an ideal, a time that no longer was.

Samantha didn't know how she knew it, but it suddenly became so clear to her. Viktor was lost in her age of sarcasm and pessimistic thought. She pulled his hand down and asked softly, "How long?"

"How long what?"

"How long have you been down here? How long have you hidden from the world?"

"A hundred years, give or take."

Samantha nodded. That would make sense. The Victorian era. A time of fine ladies and elegant gentleman. Tradition still ruled at that time, as did notions of not only duty but ideals. The world had gained so much since then, but it had also lost so much. She was used to the fast-paced bustle, even as she felt she had nothing to do. Viktor was used to the solitude of the cave life he'd chosen. Could two people so obviously different be together? She looked around his cave. He'd never belong in New York, not as he was. And she would never belong here. Since Fredrick and her breakup she'd been crazy without a job, without a purpose. It was unrealistic to think that now Viktor and his solitary cave would become her purpose.

"So long alone. Why?"

"Do not speak," he said, though she had no intention of saying anything. "Lay on your back. Let me make love to you. Let me show you how I feel for you, Samantha."

Persuaded by the look on his handsome face, she turned and lay on her back. His hands found hold on her body, caressing every last inch as he gave her a slow, erotic

massage. Tossing her hands above her head, she took in the sensations, enjoying them thoroughly. His lovemaking was slow compared to the first time.

He lightly pinched her nipples, sending jolts of ecstasy straight to her lower stomach. She squirmed on the bed, spreading her thighs in a plea for him to continue down. Viktor's mouth followed the path his hands had taken, sprinkling teasing kisses along her form. His tongue flicked every so often, adding a warm tingling just like when he kissed her mouth. Working his way down one leg, he stopped to kiss the top of her foot before lifting it to his shoulder. Her body was parted even more as he came forward, licking and kissing a path straight to her ready pussy.

He wrapped his lips around her clit, sucking gently. Samantha cried out, pushing up into him. Her leg still draped over his back and she tightened it, pulling him to her. Warm pleasure centered between her hips. Viktor ran his expert tongue along her wet slit, lapping up her taste.

Suddenly, a hot mouth latched onto her clit, sucking hard. She let out a soft pant of surprise. The man's hands gripped into her hips, holding her where he wanted her. Oh, it felt so good. Viktor's mouth moved with such expert precision. His tongue slipped between her wet folds, reaching up into her, and he nibbled her lightly. Her head fell back on her shoulders and she began to tremble.

"Mm," he moaned, his voice vibrating intimately against her.

"Ah," was all Samantha managed to answer.

A finger slipped inside her ready body, hitting the sweet spot hidden beyond the folds. She panted and whimpered, her body naturally washing his lips with her cream. As if playing an instrument, Viktor took over her body, strumming it with perfection, building the tormenting pleasure as he built her to coming.

His mouth became more aggressive. Samantha gasped and panted, so tense she could no longer thrust her hips. It was too much. She couldn't take it. Viktor's beautiful eyes met hers just as his tongue swirled her sensitive bud once again. Coming hard, she met her release in a tremendous force of passion. The climax took over until she could only ride it out.

When finally Viktor stopped moving his mouth, only to pull back with a smug grin, her body collapsed. Flushed and disheveled, Samantha couldn't move. Her limbs felt like jelly and her heart was racing so fast it was like she'd run a marathon.

"Wow," she whispered, trying to catch her breath.

"I see you like my *risbrosius*."

"Mm-hmm." Samantha giggled, feeling giddy. "Very much so."

Viktor laid by her side, running his hand over her throat in a tender caress. "You no longer fear me. I can feel that you don't."

"No, I don't fear you, Viktor. I should, but I don't." Samantha swallowed, reaching to rub her palm over his cheek. "I don't understand any of this. I should be scared out of my mind. I should be screaming right now or trying to escape."

"There is no escape from fate," he whispered, kissing her lightly. She tasted her cream on his lips and opened wider for more, but he pulled back. He brushed his nose along the side of hers. There was a sadness in his eyes, a hesitance.

"It was a woman, wasn't it?" Samantha asked.

Viktor didn't move. His lids dropped over his eyes, shading his gaze from her.

"That's why you're hiding here, isn't it?" Samantha shook her head. A pain worked over her heart. Viktor must have loved the woman deeply to have gone into hiding for a hundred years. How could she compete with that?

Did she want to compete with that?

Swallowing, Samantha knew the answer. She'd always known the answer. Yes. Every ounce of her wanted Viktor. She looked around the cave. Crazy or not, she wanted whatever life she could have with him.

This is crazy.

Love is crazy.

This is love.

"Viktor? Why won't you answer?" Even as she asked, Samantha felt her heart breaking just a little. Did he pine for another woman? He'd said he loved her, but there were different types of love. "Who was she?"

"Her name was Elise. She didn't love me." He glanced up only to look down again. His fingertips skated over her flesh. "She said she did, but she didn't. We were to be mated."

"What happened to her? Did she die?"

"Eventually, I imagine she did. She was mortal after all." Viktor sighed. "I didn't stay in contact with her."

"And did you mate her?"

"No. In the end, she married another of her father's choosing for money. The last I saw of her was her looking back at me from her new husband's carriage as it carried them away from the church. That night, her wedding night, I got a letter to meet her. Instead, I burnt the letter, left my London townhouse and walked away from the world."

"You just left? Just like that? What of Fredrick? Your brother? Your family?" Samantha sat up.

"They have known where to find me. In that way we are connected." Viktor rolled on his back, threading his hands behind his head. "You're disappointed, aren't you?"

Samantha nodded, unable to lie. "A little."

"In me?" He gave a short laugh. "Because I ran from life?"

"Because you'd lived one before me," she whispered. "I can't compete with a dead girl. I can't compete with some woman you're carrying around in your head, pining over for the last hundred years."

“Do you want to compete?” His voice dipped.

“No, I don’t want to have to.”

“I’m not asking you to, Samantha. She was a long time ago.”

“And yet...” Samantha shrugged. He tried to touch her back, but she scooted to the end of the bed. “You know, I have responsibilities. We left New York in a hurry. There’s bills to pay and the hotel is surely going to want an explanation as to why my bedroom ceiling is charred and my window broken.”

“Laurie...sorry, Frederick has seen to it for you. He’s taken care of everything. He’s even offered to have your things sent here, if that is your wish.”

“No, Viktor, that is not my wish. I don’t wish to live in this cave.”

“Then where would you have us go?”

“Viktor—”

“You are my mate, Samantha,” he broke in, his voice rising in a mix of anger and frustration. “It cannot be undone. Like it or not you are immortal and you are mine. It happened. It’s done. We don’t have to live in this cave, but we will be together. Tell me you can’t feel it. I dare you.”

“It’s not the cave, Viktor, it’s you. You’re filled with the memories of some long-lost love.”

“No, I’m not.” He rolled up, pulling her into his embrace. Samantha stiffened. “I want to make you happy. I don’t even think about her.”

“Viktor, you hid out in a cave for a hundred years and you only came out again because of the threat of becoming sterile and probably impotent. You don’t pine for a hundred years because you had a little crush. That woman meant something to you.”

“No, she didn’t. I ran from the changing world. I know it doesn’t make sense, but I ran from loneliness—the loneliness of crowds. There is nothing lonelier than being in the middle of a crowded room and feeling isolated, as if you had nothing in common with those around you. So I came here.”

Samantha swallowed. Now that she could actually understand. How often did she look around New York’s crowded streets, feeling as if she were completely alone?

“Do you know how crazy this sounds?” she asked.

“Do you realize you’re in bed with a dragon? Most of your kind would call that crazy, if I’m not mistaken.”

Samantha giggled. “No, you’re not mistaken.”

“Come here. Kiss me,” Viktor’s lids lowered over his eyes and his voice became a seductive murmur. Glancing down at her mouth, he leaned slightly closer.

“Is that a demand?” she giggled. Why was she resisting so much? Viktor was right. He was her fate. She could feel that it was. Looking at him, she had no protest left.

“I like to think of it as an ardent request.”

She kissed him, long and deep. When she finally pulled back, she whispered, "The children don't have to be reptiles, do they?"

"No," he chuckled. "They will be born human."

Moaning, Samantha reached for him, falling back as she drew him to her mouth. Their tongues danced between them, mimicking the lively movements of their hands. His body was hot, his flesh deliciously smooth. She wanted to make love to him forever.

As he came above her, angling his legs between hers, he looked deep into her eyes. She felt his cock probing her, rubbing up and down her wet slit. His hips flexed into hers. Viktor braced himself on his hands, easing his large erection into her. He thrust inside, sliding with the aide of her natural cream, prying her apart as he claimed her. Samantha arched as he fitted himself deep.

"Viktor," she moaned, grabbing the sides of his face. "Ah, Viktor."

He thrust faster, easing in and out. She moaned in approval, grabbing her breasts and tweaking her nipples. She groaned as Viktor thrust. It was too much. Her body sang with her desire for him. She wanted more, always more. It didn't take long before they were climaxing again.

Viktor collapsed against her, his weight braced by his elbows. His harsh breath beat against her ear. Moaning slightly, she closed her eyes.

Samantha's body was so relaxed that she couldn't keep her eyes open. "I don't know how or why, but I love you, Viktor."

"And I you," he said.

"This is crazy," she insisted, still not moving.

"Shh, rest. You're going to need it."

"But—"

"Shh," he chuckled, covering her mouth with his hand.

She kissed his palm, before rocking her head to the side to free her mouth. "I just have one more question."

"What's that?"

"You seriously don't expect me to live in a cave with you, do you?" Samantha giggled.

"No, we'll live wherever you wish."

Epilogue

Nine Months Later

Samantha smiled, patting her rounded stomach as she looked over the bright, clear water off the island of Mykonos. The island was part of the Cyclades off the mainland of Greece and was an odd mixture of subcultures, blended into the ancient land of the Greek Gods, backdropped by whitewashed buildings created by unknown folk artists and sandy beaches.

Greece was the land of her husband's birth. Viktor. Her husband. Even now the idea of him made her smile. Between the two of them they had enough fortune to do as they pleased and yet they were the same in the fact that they didn't want more than a family and a quiet, peaceful life.

Rubbing her stomach, she smiled, sensing him nearby. She'd come to terms with their joined immortality. The babies within her kicked, as if they too sensed their father. According to the doctor it was one boy and one girl.

"Hey, beautiful," Viktor's smooth voice came from behind. He wrapped his arms around her, supporting her weight as his hands fanned the bottom of her stomach. "Why don't you come inside and relax?"

"The babies will come tonight and I want to watch the sunset," Samantha whispered.

Viktor's breath caught and he instantly swept her off her feet. Kissing her in happiness, he said, "Fine, my love, but then it's straight to bed."

Being near him, she couldn't help but hear the words that often filtered through her head. She felt complete happiness in his devotion to her.

This is crazy.

Love is crazy.

This is love.

"*S'ayapo, gyni i,*" Viktor whispered as the sun touched the horizon.

"I love you too, my darling," Samantha whispered, laying her head on his shoulder. "I love you too."

TIPPING THE SCALES

Mandy M. Roth

Dedication

To *the one* in my life. Regardless how surly I can be, you never let it dissuade you. That or you like my lasagna so much you're willing to overlook it. Thanks for being you, Shane.

To Michelle for suffering through endless of hours of ironing the brothers' kinks out. I still think it would be cool to have a gland that secretes an aphrodisiac.

Last but not least, to Bree for putting up with Michelle and me. That in itself should get you a medal of honor.

Prologue

Zarek of the Dracodomus stared out into the night. A blanket of darkness lay not only over the city of Pittsburgh but also over his heart, doing its best to protect it from the harsh reality of life and loneliness. Not one to be sentimental, he hated the way he'd felt as of late. Hated feeling period. It was easier to exist if he remained numb to the world around him. Dwelling on traditions and curses that he was powerless to change only left him sinking into a depressive abyss. A path he refused to take.

He sighed, letting the cool early summer breeze wrap around him. It held the scents of modern society, pollution and other unnatural odors. He missed the days of smelling only the country air, the freshness, the sight of roses in the wild and miles upon miles of untouched, undeveloped land. Freedom to come and go as he wished and to do so in an environment that seemed to thrive with nature. So much had changed.

Time goes on, whether I am prepared or not.

Zarek's body naturally matched the exterior temperature as it always did in shifted form. While not cold-blooded, he still possessed the skills needed to vary his core temperature. Zarek could also slow his metabolism in shifted, dragon form. It made it possible to hibernate for extended periods and considering the fact that he was immortal, years passed in the blink of an eye. Sleeping them away sounded better and better.

Yawning, he took in the night air, in hopes it would rejuvenate him. It did little more than nauseate him.

Humans.

No part of Zarek felt up to facing what would prove to be defeat again. *The one* was nothing more than a myth. A needle in a haystack of beauties just waiting to be fucked by him. Seeking out a woman had never seemed like a chore before, yet now it did.

If it wasn't for the fact he needed to mate or risk being impotent then Zarek would have never even entertained the idea of finding a woman to call his own. There were so many to choose from. The idea of bedding the same one for eternity knotted his stomach. Variety was the spice of life, at least when it came to the bedroom. Sure, he'd had almost six centuries to fuck his fill and he did but never once had he come across a woman he'd wish to call his own—*the one*. He doubted very much he ever would.

The selection process involved in finding a mate was difficult. Not just any woman would do. No. He needed to find someone who was not only compatible with him sexually but also the one who'd supposedly been selected for him long ago by forces he had neither seen nor truly believed in anymore. Once, in the earlier years of his somewhat jaded life, Zarek not only believed the stories passed down from

Dracodomus, he'd been responsible for passing a few himself. His younger brother by a minute, Viktor, had often looked to him for advice. Why, he wasn't entirely sure.

Zarek no longer bought in to the idea of soul mates. Living as long as he had didn't leave him much hope in that department. The very notion that the clock was ticking, counting off the time until he entered his six hundredth year on this Earth was surreal. Immortality for him, while a gift by all outward appearances, came with a heavy price. A limited number of years to find the one—his soul mate, or risk impotence or at best, still be able to have sex but never be able to father children of his own.

You're too old to run around with false hopes. Might as well prepare for the inevitable. In a few short months you're going to lose the ability have sex.

Talking to himself was surely a sign of madness. Though if that were the case then he'd long since snapped. Solitary by nature, his species of dragon shifters, the Dracodomus, weren't known for sitting about having long, overdrawn heart-to-hearts. Perhaps that had something to do with why they were so close to extinction. They seemed to have issues settling down and committing as well. Hell, they had to have it forced upon them.

Not wanting to think on depressing matters any further, Zarek spread his golden, webbed wings, letting them stretch wide, each extending close to sixteen feet from his body. From head to toe in full dragon form he was just under thirty-two feet. Impressive? Indeed. But not unheard of among his species. His brother was equally as large and equally as stubborn on selecting a mate. Since they shared a womb, they also shared a birthday. If at least one of them didn't find a mate then the Dracodomus line would end soon. A fate none wanted to see come to fruition. It wasn't as if his cousins were any closer to mating and they were as old as Zarek and Viktor.

In all likelihood, we are the last of our kind.

Puffing a cloud of smoke through his nostrils, Zarek felt the stirrings of need in his loins. Shifting slowly into his base form—a human—he stared down the length of his naked body. Already his cock stood at attention, demanding release, as if it knew its days were numbered. The need to bury it deep within a warm, tight cunt was overwhelming. He fisted it, the urge to come so great that he knew he could not risk flying until he found some sort of release.

In today's day and age he had to remain vigilant, flying below radar or sustaining enough of his natural magik to cloak his presence from air traffic controllers. He had learned the hard way some fifteen years earlier that the government could and would send fighter pilots if they picked up on something the size of him in full dragon form flying at top speed. He could heal a great many things. A missile through the heart was not one of them.

He shuddered thinking about his narrow escape. *Never again.*

Humans of long ago hunted his kind to the brink of extinction and they had lacked the use of strategic warfare. They were gifted by the Fay too, but having the ability to wield limited amounts of magik or additional strength was not always an assurance

they could prevail over a dragon. The knights had come, seeking fame and glory by slaying the fire-breathing dragons. Many succeeded. Equally as many failed. One line of slayers in particular proved to be a thorn in Zarek's eternal side—the Brandts, a German family who had been gifted by the Fay to help keep evil dragons and demons in line.

Unfortunately, a select few in the Brandt family stopped discriminating between good and evil and went with the rule of if it was not human, it did not deserve to live. They simply killed because they could. Zarek cringed at the idea of a Brandt slayer existing in today's society. They'd be more monstrous than an Arctic dragon after a complete freeze-over. Deadly, for sure. Thankfully, the line of Brandts that had descended from the original, Fay-aided ones had died out about a century ago. The Brandts in existence today lacked the power, the drive and the knowledge of their hunter ancestors. It was a good thing too. The Dracodomus had enough strikes against them. Indiscriminate demon hunters were the last thing their species needed to contend with.

Mmm, now I need to contend with, he held his erection firmly, *something more pressing.*

Closing his eyes, Zarek drew upon the image, or rather the sensation of a woman on her knees before him, her lush mouth teasing his shaft as her fingers played with his balls. The woman had no face, not even a body he could actually see. No. This fantasy, as the ones before it, had the strong sense of a female, *the one*, or as best he could tell the one but with no real shape or form. Why couldn't he see her? Why was he denied that but not the knowledge of how glorious her touch could be?

It is your mind playing tricks on you. There is no perfect woman for you.

It made little sense to him and with an erection bordering on painful, Zarek wasted no more energy thinking upon it. Instead, he let his imagination slip into thoughts of *the one*, of her tongue over his cock head and her sweet cunt dripping cream just for him.

He gripped his dick harder and let a string of spit fall down from his mouth onto it, lubing it nicely, all the while visualizing her mouth over him. It was easy to picture her hands kneading his sac gently as she took his long cock deep into her throat. The walls of her mouth replaced that of his hands in his mind, and the moment he felt her teeth scraping over his sensitized flesh his balls drew up.

"Not yet," he ground out, his jaw clenched almost as fixed as his cock was.

Zarek didn't want to come just yet. No. He wanted to prolong the feel of the mysterious woman's mouth over him. Imagined or not. It was perfect. Heavenly. If only she were real, he'd have no problem strapping himself down for an eternity to her.

That is probably why they refer to the one as the one, you dolt, he chastised himself.

Rubbing his long, thick cock, Zarek tipped his head back, savoring the imagined feel of ecstasy. He jerked, instantly sending a jet of magik-laced come far from his body. Had it been real, had his mate truly been there, sucking his cock, she would have found herself fully mated to him the moment his seed came into contact with her skin. It was

another assurance that in the event a Dracodomus male found his mate, he would not mess it up and lose her.

Mother Nature apparently knew his species well. The males in his family and species had a long history when it came to settling down, or rather the desire not to settle down. Perhaps that was why they were gifted with six hundred years of bachelorhood to do with as they pleased. If in that time, by some miracle, a Dracodomus male's semen came into contact with their chosen one, they would find themselves mated – a husband and, if luck was on their side, a father.

His cock twitched as the last of his seed emptied. It did little to relieve his rampant want for a hot pussy but it would afford him the chance to fly without pain. Turning, Zarek smiled as he headed back into his home.

"Anankāi d'oude theoi makhontai," he whispered in his native tongue. *Even the gods do not fight necessity.* The great poet Simonides knew this. So would any female who was lucky enough to find herself pinned beneath him in his current state of need.

A deep laugh tore free from him as he took in the scenic view. "Oh, I almost pity the woman I find tonight. She will be so thoroughly fucked that she will not move for weeks."

Chapter One

“Keren, did you miss the memo that we were going out tonight?”

Keren Brandt looked at her co-workers, smiling hesitantly. They were what she considered close acquaintances, not true friends. Considering she’d never actually had anyone close enough to tell the truth about herself, she doubted she ever would have a real friend. “Why?”

Gennie shook her head, sending tendrils of red hair scattering about her shoulders. The woman barely came to Keren’s shoulder but she had a drive about her that had attracted Keren to her. It was rare to find that same spark in another. “You do not look like you’re on the prowl for a man.”

“Because I’m not,” Keren said defensively, squaring her shoulders and standing at her full height of five-nine. In her heeled boots, she reached six feet. When she was younger, she’d been self-conscious about how tall she was but as time wore on, she learned to accept it. “It’s my night off.”

The comment caused a number of speculative looks to be cast in her direction. Keren forced a smile to her face, doing her best to cover her slip. “It’s our night off.”

The women nodded, each grinning. Keren exhaled, happy that was over. As of late, she’d been slipping more and more, coming close to revealing that after her day job was complete she had another more important job. One that she didn’t get to call in sick for or take any sort of real vacation from. One that didn’t allow her to wear a pretty dress, which was why she jumped at the chance to do so.

Being a demon huntress wasn’t glamorous and it sure in the hell wasn’t something she could start blabbing about to anyone. No one outside of supernatural circles was to know that hunters or even non-humans existed and she wasn’t about to break the news or that rule.

Honor the code.

Keren was not on a manhunt. At least not in the way one would associate with going clubbing. No. Tonight she was out to find a hottie, screw him and then forget about him. No working. No commitment. Just pleasure. She seemed to always be on the lookout for demons. Rarely was she ever seeking a man. That being said, she did a quick check of herself. Should she actually bump into Mr. Right, she wanted to look her best. The long khaki-colored crocheted dress she wore swept down to her ankles. The dark brown suede thigh-high boots she’d paired it with made her feel sexy. Just because she didn’t have on a “spank me” little red leather miniskirt like half the girls in the group didn’t mean she wasn’t sexy. Did it? It wasn’t like she didn’t own leather.

Hell, she spent almost every night hunting in it. Was it too much to ask for a break? A night to be feminine, pretty, not covered in supernaturals' blood?

Apparently so.

Ignoring Gennie's comments, Keren opened the door to the club. The smell of cigarette smoke and hard liquor rolled out and over her. She coughed involuntarily and glanced at the group she'd arrived with. Every one of them stood there with their mouths agape. Two of them whistled.

"What?" Keren asked, suddenly nervous. She was not one for crowds or groups of friends. In fact, she wasn't much for friends period. Being stared at by a group of women she'd only really just recently met did not sit well with her. Suddenly, she wished she'd armed herself. There was nothing like the feel of a twelve-inch hunting knife strapped to a thigh to make a girl feel secure both physically and emotionally.

"What?" she repeated.

"Nothing, but I take back the comment on you not being dressed to pick up a man."

"Gennie?"

"Sweetie, your dress is almost see-through. The streetlight behind you just let us all know exactly what you are not wearing under it."

Desperate for her weapons, as if she could have really hidden behind a knife, Keren shook her head. Modest, to a point. Brilliant? Not at the moment. "No, it's not that bad. Is it?" If the weight of their stares was any indication then it was bad.

Wonderful.

Marge from payroll put her hand on Keren's shoulder and smiled. "Honey, if I had a body like yours I'd flaunt it all day and all night. Hell, I might even walk around naked so everyone else could admire it as well."

Keren wrapped her tiny matching cardigan tighter around herself in hopes that it would cover her upper body. Not one who enjoyed wearing a constricting bra, she had gone without, not thinking about how it might look. Thankfully, she'd gone with a tan thong or she would have been completely nude beneath the dress.

At least I wore a sweater.

Oddly, that wasn't very reassuring. Following the others into the nightclub, Keren glanced around nervously and prayed they'd find a table in a dark corner. Her stomach dropped when she saw Gennie heading straight for the dance floor. Loud techno music pumped from the sound system, causing her chest to thump along to the beat. The flicker of the strobe lights left her blinking and a slight headache began. More than human, Keren's eyes were sensitive, allowing her to see better at night. The club lighting and atmosphere were seriously impeding on her natural abilities to sense and react to danger.

You're being paranoid.

Partying it up and dancing the night away was hardly her idea of fun. Keren's idea of a good time ran more towards spending a quiet evening at home—no death, no

monsters, no demons, no hunting. Since moving from New York to Pittsburgh, she'd discovered that almost all of the women in her office preferred the nightclub scene to hers. Not surprising.

"Come on," Gennie said, pulling her to the center of the dance floor. "Let's find you a man for the night."

"Oh, like I want to be pawed by a stranger." She did but she wasn't about to admit that to anyone else. Of course, it mattered who the stranger was. Since she was not quite human, she couldn't contract human diseases or get pregnant by them so sex wasn't risky for her. That being said, she had standards. They had to make her hot or forget it.

Always good to keep expectations low.

Gennie grinned. "Mmm, pawing."

Keren groaned and forced a pseudo-smile onto her face. Any hope of avoiding being felt up by a man she didn't find sexy died the minute Gennie ran off to dance with a blond cutie who, after tapping her shoulder once, had her in the palm of his hands. How any woman could fall that easily for a man was beyond her.

The second Gennie disappeared someone slid their arms around Keren's waist. Her gut reaction was to rip the unwanted added appendages off both herself and the person. Holding back, she took a deep breath in. She fought the urge to vomit as the man's smell assailed her.

"Mmm, you must be a model," he said. "A woman as tall as you with an ass like that can't be anything but."

You've got to be kidding me.

Keren's breath caught in her throat as the man slid his hands over her hips. Nothing about him excited her. His hot breath was laced with the smell of liquor and the liberties he was taking weren't acceptable. Twisting around, she glared at the man. His hair was slicked back from his pale face with so much gel that she wasn't sure if it was sandy blond or just caked full of stuff. It looked as though it would provide ample protection from head injury in the event of a bike or in-line skating accident. It had to be hard enough to bounce anything off of. If he didn't stop touching her, she'd see if his helmet hair would reflect her foot.

He gave her a lecherous smile. She narrowed her gaze, doing her best not to strike out at him and knock it away. It was hard. "I'd really rather not dance right now. Thanks though."

"*Tu as un beau nez.*" His horrible pronunciation of the French language only added to his creep factor rating. His choice of phrases enhanced that tenfold. The man was a lounge lizard extraordinaire and was on her last nerve. Never a good place to be.

Deciding that she'd placated him enough, Keren smiled, still resisting the urge to ram her fist down his throat. If he dared to leer at her like that again, she wouldn't hold anything back. "Does that normally work for you?"

“What?” he asked, caressing her arm with the back of his hand and making her feel as if something was crawling on her. She shuddered. His touch sickened her. Often demons had that effect on her. Keren wasn’t sensing any present but that didn’t mean they weren’t there. Every now and then, a demon would slip past her natural, inborn alarm system.

“Does what work?” he asked.

“Telling a woman she has a beautiful nose with a piss-poor accent.”

His mouth opened but nothing came out. Thinking she’d bested him, Keren turned her back to him to head to a table. He seized hold of her ass, digging his fingers into her cheek hard enough to leave a bruise. All too late, she realized that he was certainly no ordinary human male.

* * * * *

Zarek watched each woman carefully as he walked through the nightclub. It was one of his favorite spots to pick up one-night stands and tonight he wanted an extra-special one. He’d fuck her every way imaginable and he might even invent some new positions if the mood struck him. It mattered not who he selected. The female would go home with him. Not even a boyfriend on her arm could stop Zarek. All he had to do was lift a woman’s hand, bring it to his lips and kiss it. She’d be rendered helpless to her every desire, which more often than not coincided with his desires.

“It’s good to have an unlimited supply of love slaves,” he mused as he continued his dark prowl.

Once Zarek allowed the tiny glands in his mouth to release the natural aphrodisiac his species could secrete, *risbrosius*, all he had to do was get it on a female’s skin and it worked almost instantly, freeing her inhibitions, opening her to endless passion—to Zarek. He had once instructed a woman to drop to her knees in the middle of a crowded club and suck him off. Fucking her mouth with hundreds of people watching them had been divine. Having her strip naked before she did it was even better. The best part was knowing that she wanted it too. Deep down the woman had always dreamt of feeling empowered enough to act out her fantasies and Zarek had given her that gift. There wasn’t a limp dick in the place that night. The woman orgasmed so many times he’d lost count. That was another side effect of the secretion—searing hot, seemingly endless pleasure.

So far, Zarek had found no shortage of sexy women in the club but not that perfect one. The one that would be worthy of the fuck of her lifetime. He’d know her when he saw her. Blondes with little waists that stood only as tall as his chest were his preference. He liked them petite, submissive and fair-haired.

“Ask and ye shall receive,” he mused as a little blonde ran past with a human male hot on her trail. She would work nicely. Exactly what he liked. The male was of no consequence to him. Disposable. All humans were.

Zarek turned to follow her and stopped dead in his tracks. There on the dance floor was the most glorious woman he had ever seen. Close to six feet tall in her heeled boots, with chestnut hair that hung just past her ample breasts, she was the complete opposite of what he normally craved. But tonight—tonight his cock wanted her and he was in complete agreement. It hardened instantly, seeming to point due north at her.

He couldn't tear his gaze away from her. Classically beautiful, was the first thought that came to his mind. Such a rare gift. A jewel still yet unpolished but beautiful all the same. If she had makeup on, he didn't see it. From his vantage point, the woman came by her beauty honestly and seemed unaware of it. That made her all the more appealing.

Zarek could easily imagine her exceptionally full, rose-colored lips wrapped around his cock as she took him down her throat. The urge to have her suck him off in front of the crowded club was not there as it should have been. No. The urge to steal her away to his lair and have her all to himself was what coursed through his veins. Sharing her with others was not an option.

The man she was with stood behind her, his body pressed to hers. It didn't matter if he thought he had her. Tonight she'd have the pleasure of Zarek and no other. She turned slightly. Her brows drew together as she clenched her fists. Could it be that she was angry with the man who accompanied her?

This is almost too easy.

He watched as she twisted towards the man, the strobe lights illuminated her form from behind and Zarek fought to draw in air as what felt like a truck slammed into him. It was pure, unadulterated need. A hunger for this woman and this woman alone. The dress she wore was almost entirely see-through. Every inch of her long, toned legs were visible. Every curve, every dip, was there for him to see. Even the tiny piece of material that covered the mound of her cunt was evident, almost taunting him. He was so caught up in her beauty that he almost missed her verbal exchange with the man near her.

"Does that normally work for you?" she asked, her voice silky, sexy, sultry.

"What?" the human male asked.

"Telling a woman she has a beautiful nose with a piss-poor accent."

The woman turned and looked directly at Zarek, yet she didn't seem to actually "see" him. He watched as the man she'd verbally shot down stormed up behind her. The second the man grabbed hold of her ass, Zarek saw pain register in her face. The beast within him surged towards the surface. The dragon wanted to claw the man to pieces before igniting him. Seeing the man be engulfed by flames would certainly improve Zarek's volatile mood. That was his woman and no man should dare to look upon her let alone lay a hand on her.

My woman?

Ignoring his proclamation of ownership, Zarek calmed his beast the best he could and used his supernatural speed to aid her. He seized the man's wrist and barely

applied any pressure before he heard it snap. “You are to stay away from her. Understood?”

The man’s already pale face drained of any additional color. As Zarek turned to check on the woman, she twisted around with her fist pulled back. Zarek’s eyes widened as her clenched hand came into direct contact with his left cheek. The mere fact that she’d caught him off guard was humiliating enough but that wasn’t all—it actually stung. She wasn’t a shifter. He would have sensed if she was. Whatever she was, she had a hell of a right hook. This beauty would prove to be anything but submissive. His loins burned with the knowledge, eager for the challenge.

Something passed over her emerald green, cat-like eyes and she dodged forward. Grabbing his face, she pressed her lush body to his, rendering him helpless to her. It wasn’t a state Zarek was used to being in. He was used to being the one in control. The one dictating what events happened next. Being at her mercy stunned him. He stood very still, afraid that if he dared to move, he would do something he never thought he would do—beg a woman to touch him. As she stared up at him, he forgot about her managing to hit him and got lost in her eyes instead. They were easy to envision staring up at him as he sank into her depths.

“Shit, I’m so sorry. I thought you were the dickhead who grabbed my ass.”

Her voice was that of a siren’s, so sweet, so perfect, it made his loins stir with desire. Granted, her choice of words was far from elegant but that didn’t matter to him. The woman’s scent, that of honeysuckle and roses, only added to the predicament he found himself in.

Beg her to touch you.

His mind raced.

Touch her. Taste her.

Left with no choice and no will to fight his raging hormones, Zarek dropped his mouth down onto hers. She froze. As he released his natural aphrodisiac secretion from the glands in his mouth, he slid his tongue over her top lip. The gasp that came from her gave him full access to her mouth. Wasting no time, he plunged his tongue in to find hers. The *risbrosius* mixed with his saliva and the second her tongue greeted his, he knew she would succumb to him. All women did.

Wrapping his arms around her toned frame, he kissed her feverishly, unable to get enough. She tasted like nothing he had ever sampled before. Pure perfection. Normally, it was the woman doing this to him by this point. Instead, it was Zarek who pulled her closer, winded from the excitement of her being so near and her tang so exotic, so pure.

The woman placed her palms to his chest and fire shot through his body. Every muscle in his abdomen reacted almost violently. He gasped, afraid he might do the unthinkable and ejaculate in his pants. His cock throbbed with a need so intense that it almost brought him to his knees. Oh, he would certainly allow this woman the honor of being fucked by him for the entire weekend, not just a night.

A worthy one indeed.

As she pressed harder against him, Zarek became very aware of the fact that she was pushing him away, not pulling him closer as she should be. She should be clawing at him, doing her best to get him to fuck her regardless where they were. She should be begging him to slip his cock, which was still very much on the verge of coming, into her every way imaginable. That wasn't the case. Shocked, he drew back from her slightly, still maintaining contact. The very idea of allowing the beauty before him to slip through his fingers sent chills throughout him. Her green eyes locked on him a second before she drew her fist back and delivered another blow to his jaw.

"Why you... you... *you*," she spat out as though that would explain everything.

Zarek was too stunned by her rejection to worry about how much he revealed to her about his kind. If need be, he could use his magik to erase her memories but that was something he doubted very much he'd need to do. The *risbrosius* always worked and his body couldn't react to a woman who didn't want him. It was part of his line's honor, their code. The very fact that his cock was in a state of painful, seemingly never-ending erectness, and his mind fogged by thoughts of possessing this woman, told him just how much the *risbrosius* and his charms should be working.

"I-I kissed you," he stammered out, too stunned to come up with much beyond that.

Her eyes narrowed until they were nothing more than slits. Never in all his years of existence had an enemy given him a look such as that. It was cold, calculated and attached to the most beautiful face he'd ever laid eyes on.

He sighed and it sounded almost dreamy. If he wasn't so enamored by the woman before him, he'd have dropped everything and contacted his brother Viktor immediately to request he be shot for behaving in such a way.

She pointed at him. "And that would be why you got punched – again."

"No," he shook his head, "you desire me. You have no choice in the matter. I released my secretion..."

"Your secretion? Why you...?" The beauty struck again, scoring another direct hit to the very tender spot on his jaw that she apparently had a mental "X" drawn because she'd not missed yet.

How could she resist his secreted aphrodisiac? It was not possible. In six hundred years, Zarek had never once seen a woman so unaffected by *risbrosius*, by him. His cock should have shriveled in humiliation. It did the opposite. It pulsed with the desire to tame the wild woman before him. Pre-cum leaked from the tip of it, and visions of her sweet tongue running over it danced through his head. He wanted to fuck the headstrong female into submission. Something deep inside him told him that wasn't even possible. That only made her more tantalizing.

His conquests were legendary. He was sex incarnate. There was no way Zarek would accept defeat. Not when he was so close to his birthday – the end of his reign of sexual glory. No. He would go out with a bang. Or rather, he would go out banging a female as fiery as the one before him. That much he was sure of.

Rubbing his jaw, Zarek stared down at the female with a mix of curiosity and respect etched on his face. Never before had he thought of a woman as anything more than a means to sate his sexual desires. Aside from the obvious—that the woman appeared immune to his charms—this one was different in other ways as well. He couldn't put his finger on it but knew that he would certainly be putting his dick in it if he had any say in the matter.

The male who had originally been behind the female held his arm to his body and flexed his fingers. Zarek knew for a fact he'd broken the man's wrist. Shattered it to be exact. Seeing him move it meant one thing. The man was not human. Had his concentration really been that focused on the female that he had missed the fact a supernatural was near?

Obviously.

"Who the hell do you think you are? She doesn't want anything to do with you," the man said, daring to glare at Zarek.

Zarek snorted. "And you think she wants something to do with you?"

"She was dancing with me before you showed up."

A redheaded female rushed forth from the crowd that had drawn and stood close to the hot-tempered woman who made Zarek's cock burn. "Keren, what's going on?"

Keren? The green-eyed, hot-tempered one's name moved around in his mind.

Keren rolled her eyes and shrugged. "Hell if I know. Smarmy," she pointed at the man with slicked-backed hair, "got all touchy-feely and then my knight in shining cockiness," she pointed to Zarek, "showed up to rescue me right before he decided that he had every right in the world to kiss me."

She did not just refer to me as cocky. He thought about her comments again and smiled. *She did. Oh, she is truly perfect.*

The redhead raked her hungry gaze over Zarek. He had little doubt that the woman would fuck him. Under normal circumstances, he would have taken her out back, bent her over and used her until he found release. Whatever was happening was certainly not normal. At least not for him. His desires were for Keren and no other.

Pity.

His gaze raked over the redhead once more for good measure. When her attention dropped to his groin and stayed there, Zarek smiled, so did the redhead. "He kissed you, Keren?" she asked, her voice shaking ever so slightly.

"Yes." Keren glared at him. "Can you believe his nerve? I mean, come on, you do not just walk up to someone and plant one on them." She pointed at him. "And you especially don't do it when you've been eating," she smacked her lips and rolled her tongue, appearing disgusted, "whatever it was you'd been eating. Eww, I think I'm going to be sick."

Eww? Was she saying he tasted bad? His brow furrowed. Preposterous. The woman was clearly mad. Sexy, but mad nonetheless.

Her nose wrinkled. "What the hell is that taste? It's still in my mouth, making..."

"Making your body burn with the need to have me buried in you?" Zarek stared down at her, a sly grin spreading over his face. It was about time the *risbrosius* worked. For a minute there he'd started to think it had given out on him with the one female he had wanted to bed most in his long life.

"Pfft, hardly." Keren swallowed hard, looking pale. "It's nauseating."

Nauseating? His kiss was nauseating?

Nonsense. Outraged, Zarek seized hold of her redheaded friend and pressed his mouth to hers to assure himself this was not the case. The female folded in his arms before he was even done secreting aphrodisiac into his saliva. She was putty in his hands, moaning, pulling at him as she sucked madly at his lips. Pleased that he had not lost his touch, Zarek drew back from the female and smiled wickedly, feeling vindicated.

"Wow." She touched her lips gently and stared up at him with nothing short of lust on her face.

"Yes," he nodded, "wow, indeed." Zarek turned, expecting to find Keren in a jealous rage. It would serve her right, daring to deny him and then pretending not to like his kiss. Much to his dismay, Keren wasn't the least bit jealous. She was not even there.

The redhead ran her hands over his torso. "Mmm, more."

Looking down at her, he knew he could get anything he wanted from her. He smiled. "Tell me where your friend went."

"Who? Keren?" the girl asked, rubbing against him like a cat.

He nodded. "Yes, Keren."

"I don't know, home probably. She didn't even want to come out tonight. We had to practically twist her arm." A sexy smile graced her lips as her hand moved over his groin. "I could twist something, if you want me to."

"Does Keren live far from here?" he asked, removing her hand from his crotch.

"Yes, but why worry about her? She was a fool to let you go. I'd never do that to you."

He had a feeling she was right. The redhead seemed a little too affected by the *risbrosius*. It was rare, but did happen. Zarek let his magik spill out and allowed it to run over her. It would lessen the effects within a few short hours. "Tell me, does Keren have a man in her life?"

"Pfft, no. Not a steady one. She tends to think like a man."

He arched a brow. "Meaning?"

"Meaning," she tried again to cup his groin, "Keren likes to use men for sex and then cut ties with them. She thinks we don't know, that we don't hear her telling the men she goes out with not to call her again, to stop sending flowers, that it was nothing more than sex, but we do. We worry about her. No one can live like that forever."

“I know. Trust me on this.” Zarek tossed more magik at her, giving her the urge to find her other friends. She turned and headed into the crowd. He, in turn, headed for the door. He had a green-eyed beauty to track down.

Chapter Two

Rushing out into the night, Keren searched the area for signs of the demon she'd sensed inside the nightclub. The smarmy man with slicked-back hair and lame come-ons had begun to exude the signs of being a demon about a second before his eyes shifted to black. Dead giveaway.

Normally, Keren would have given the man the benefit of the doubt and assumed he was a harmless, albeit pathetic demon, but the minute his eyes flashed to black, her huntress senses kicked in, allowing her to sense his evil deeds. They were numerous and sickening. He preyed on women almost nightly, moving from one place to another to avoid detection. She'd picked up enough from him to know that he'd managed to elude human law enforcement to date. How, she wasn't sure, but one thing was for certain, she would not allow him to harm another human.

She would have slain him the moment she'd sensed his evil deeds if the place had not been full of humans. Slaying demons when there were witnesses was not only bad business, it was another rule from the no-no book.

Honor the code.

Rolling her eyes at her inner voice, Keren nodded. The demon had only been permitted to slip past her because of the amount of witnesses around. Well, that and she'd been sidetracked by an entirely too cocky, too tall, too buff, too sexy arrogant prick who had kissed her.

Keren's blood boiled as she thought about the man. He was everything a woman could want. The problem was, the man knew it. She'd been exposed to enough men like him in her twenty-eight years to know to just stay away. Thankfully, he'd doomed himself by kissing her. Whatever he had been eating prior to the event was quite possibly the worst thing she'd ever tasted.

Following her gut instinct, she turned down a darkened alley and groaned. It was so very like a demon to fall into a cliché. It was supposed to be her night off. A night without blood, carnage and enough weapons to supply a small army. She'd give anything to have at least one weapon with her. Unfortunately, she hadn't even brought so much as a nail file.

That's what I get for thinking I'd be normal and just hang out with the girls for once.

"Care for some company, aghapi mu?"

Startled by the sound of a deep voice, Keren turned to find Mr. Cocky standing there. His black shirt was unbuttoned a bit, leaving his smooth, tawny chest exposed. Black waves of hair skirted the tops of his broad shoulders. He stared out at her from

golden eyes. Had they been that color inside? She couldn't remember. Regardless, they were unnatural and exotic.

A second before she was about to comment on them, the slick-haired smarmy guy from the club appeared behind the man. Keren put her hand out. "Mr. Cocky, come here."

The man arched a black brow and smiled. "Mr. Cocky? Interesting. I much prefer Zarek, but I might be willing to let you call me a few select other things – like master."

Oh, he never stops.

"Yeah, well, if you prefer your head still attached to your body," she seized hold of him and yanked him towards her, "you'll come here."

Zarek slammed into her. The weight of his body was more than she anticipated. They tumbled, first her, then him. Keren struck the ground and went to roll only to find Zarek pinning her with his body. He thrust a well-defined thigh between her legs as he smiled down at her. "This is more like it. I knew you could not resist my charms."

"Your charms?" she asked, amazed he had not only said it but also appeared to fully believe it. "You cannot be serious."

Arching a black brow, Zarek grinned. Even Keren had to admit it was sexy. "Ah, but I am."

"Find your own female," something snarled out, sounding anything but human. Keren stiffened beneath Zarek. "Get off her!"

Zarek seemed unconcerned with the demonic-sounding voice coming from behind him. Having never encountered a human that didn't at least break a sweat when presented with the fact that something more existed, Keren stared up at him in awe. Nothing short of rapture was on his face as he looked down at her.

"I wish very much to kiss you again, Keren," he whispered, pressing his lips to hers. There was no trace of the foul-tasting substance that had been in his mouth just moments before. No. Now the man tasted absolutely divine.

Her nipples hardened and her inner thigh muscles began to tighten as his tongue eased over hers. Running her hands up and over the steely contours of Zarek's body, Keren found herself responding to his kiss. Before she knew it, her tongue was moving around his, circling it with a timed precision, much like her fighting.

My fighting? She stilled as the reality of the situation hit her. *The demon.*

No sooner did the thought run through her mind than Zarek's body was ripped from above her. Keren cried out and tried to reach for him but her momentary lapse in judgment had afforded the demon the chance it needed to gain the upper hand.

"No!" she shouted as she rolled to her feet.

The smarmy guy from the bar had shifted into full demon form. By the size of his fangs and distorted features, Keren knew he was a vampire. How he'd managed to mask his presence as long as he had was beyond her.

He smiled and her skin crawled. "Now, where were we?"

"You," Zarek said, appearing next to her as if nothing had happened, "were just leaving."

The vampire snarled at him and Keren went into full huntress mode. She pressed her body in front Zarek's. He, in turn, lifted her as if she weighed nothing and set her behind him. "Woman, are you mad? Do you not see the vampire standing before you?"

Vampire?

"Wait, you know what that is?" she asked, shocked.

Zarek snorted. "Yes. Are you planning on fainting or screaming now? I would like to be prepared in the event I need to catch you or calm you down before I kill it."

"Faint?" Her jaw dropped. "I do not faint at the first sign of something like that."

A slow smile moved over his face. "I was hoping you would say that. I find you most intriguing, Keren."

"Most intriguing?"

The vampire snarled as it struck out at Zarek. Keren thought for sure he'd be injured since his focus was on her and not the vampire attacking him. Much to her surprise, Zarek lifted an arm, deflected the attack and continued staring at her.

"Why is it you're not scared?" Zarek asked, watching her closely. His gaze seemed to heat her body. "I have never encountered a human who was not frightened of the supernatural."

Human? Supernatural?

Her eyes widened. "What are you?"

"I am the man who plans on taking you home this fine evening and allowing you the pleasure of my body, *aghapi mu*."

Her jaw dropped. "You cannot possibly be serious. I hit my head or something, didn't I? I'm out cold and dreaming of the world's sexiest, cockiest man fighting a vampire he's not even looking at. That's it. I'm crazy."

Zarek's lips curved upwards, showing the slightest of dimples on one cheek. "World's sexiest man?"

"Trust you to only hear that part."

The vampire made another move to attack and Zarek batted it away as if it were nothing more than a fly buzzing around his head. She watched with wide eyes as Zarek caught the vampire by the throat and lifted it off the ground. "I believe you owe this lovely woman an apology."

It hissed and snarled at him. "I am not alone, shifter."

Shifter?

Zarek glanced at her, appearing slightly concerned with her reaction to the news he wasn't human. "Are you planning on fainting now?"

"Are you planning on turning into a wolf and eating me?" she asked, unsure why.

"A wolf? No." He licked his lower lip. "And I fully intend on eating you tonight, though I can assure that you will enjoy the experience."

This man is unbelievable.

"Oh, like I enjoyed that first kiss? The one that made me want to barf?"

Barf? Did I really say that to him?

"Barf?" He arched a brow. "I did not hear you complaining the second time I kissed you."

"That's because it didn't taste the same. It didn't have..."

His eyes widened. "It did not have *risbrosius* in it." Zarek looked shocked. "No. It cannot be."

Keren glanced at the vampire still suspended in air. "I don't know what you're talking about but it was foul." She pointed at the vampire. "Isn't he getting heavy?"

"Isn't who getting heavy?" Zarek asked, his golden gaze locked on her. She motioned towards the vampire and Zarek looked at him. "Oh, no. I forgot I had him. My thoughts are not as they should be around you, Keren. Why is that? And why is it the *risbrosius* does not work on you?"

Unsure what he was talking about, she shrugged. "Just lucky I guess. Now, about the vampire you're holding, he's evil and can't be allowed to harm anyone else. If you could just excuse me for a moment I'll do what needs to be done and then you can explain your comments to me."

"Excuse you for a moment?" He let out a deep laugh that moved over her body. "You are most interesting, Keren. I will not be leaving you alone with a vampire. Sorry to disappoint."

"Why? That's all you've done since I met you," she said, knowing it wasn't the truth but unable to stop herself.

Zarek threw the vampire and it hit the wall with a thud. Leveling his golden gaze on her, Zarek nodded slightly. "I see."

Instantly, Keren found herself consumed with guilt over a man she barely knew. Before she knew it, she was covering the distance between them and cupping his face with her hands. "I'm sorry."

A slow smile moved over his face. "Can I kiss you, Keren Who is Not Easily Intimidated?"

The lure of his lips was great. "Will it taste like the first time?"

He chuckled. "No. It will not contain any *risbrosius*."

She nodded and he wasted no time in lowering his lips to hers. The second his tongue made contact with hers, her entire body tightened. Keren pressed her body to Zarek's, needing to be closer to him but not understanding why. All she knew was that his kiss didn't make her sick as it first had. It was glorious, probing, provocative.

His arms slid around her body and Keren found herself skimming her hands up Zarek's muscular arms and into his hair as they continued to kiss. He rocked his hips against her, making her very aware of his thick, clothed erection. A torrent of cream flooded the apex of her thighs as she matched his motions.

Something swooshed near her head. Zarek broke their kiss, flung her behind him, impairing her ability to see what was going on. He struck out and then a puff of ashes filled the air. He shook his head and they fell from his hair. "Lovely."

Keren couldn't suppress her giggle.

He glanced over his shoulder. "Oh, you find this amusing? He could have harmed you. That is not something I take lightly. You are to be my wife and I have only just found you. I will not allow anyone to take you from me." His brow furrowed and he appeared as confused by his confession as she was. "Umm, I shall see you back into the club with your friends. The vampire is no longer a threat to your life here. You are safe. You have my word."

"Zarek?" The last thing Keren wanted was to be separated from him. It was ironic considering how she'd only wanted to get away from him earlier. There was something about him that called to her on a primitive level. Closing her eyes, she swallowed hard, doing her best to come to her senses. When she opened them, Zarek was gone.

* * * * *

Zarek watched from the top of the building as Keren turned in a circle, looking for him. It was wrong of him to shift and fly away the minute she closed her beautiful eyes but he needed time to think, to understand why it was he'd informed her she was to be his wife. Not only that, he needed time to try to figure out why the *risbrosius* sickened her. She'd more than reacted to him when it was just him, no secreted aphrodisiacs between them.

She wanted me for me.

The thought should have comforted him. It didn't. It confused him. Everything about the green-eyed temptress confused him—from the way she caught his eye when all his life he'd preferred short blondes, to the way she didn't seem the least bit frightened by the vampire in the alley or the knowledge that Zarek was a shifter.

As he watched Keren from his rooftop perch, he couldn't help but remember how sweet her mouth tasted, how lush her curves felt beneath his fingertips. His head said walk away, find another to bed. His heart laughed mockingly at it, knowing there would be no other for him.

The second he went to turn and leave, he spotted a dark shadow creeping towards Keren. Evil radiated from it. So did the fact that it wasn't alone. He knew predators. Hell, some people even considered him one. Whatever was coming had the intent to harm on its mind and it was easy to see that. He tossed his magik up and spoke into the breeze it created. "Go into the bar, *aghapi mu*. You do not need to see what must be done."

Chapter Three

Keren glanced around the darkened alley, looking for any sign of the direction Zarek had left in. She found nothing. The feeling of being watched settled over her and she had the strangest urge to look up. A cool breeze moved past her.

“Go into the bar, *aghapi mu*. You do not need to see what must be done.”

“What?” Keren asked, spinning in a circle, positive she’d just heard Zarek’s voice but not finding him anywhere.

“Zarek?”

“No, Keren, and I must say that I am greatly hurt that you would dare to call another man’s name while in my presence.”

Huh?

A man stepped from the shadows and smiled. She shuddered and stared at him. He had known her name and had spoken as if he knew her personally. His features were hard. He had chin-length blond hair and skin paler than the vampire’s had been. It was always easy to spot the ones who searched her out with the hopes of taking down a slayer. They had a look about them. One that said they thought they were the shit and she better fear them.

Morons.

“I’d ask how you know my name but I don’t really care,” she said, not in the mood to deal with bad guys who wanted to try to prove how manly they were. She wanted to find Zarek, not get sidetracked with a demon. It wasn’t hard to tell that what stood before her was not a man at all. It reeked of evil.

“Such a brave one. I had heard stories but wanted to see for myself.”

“Great, I’m a legend. Now that we’ve got that out of the way, attack me or go home. I’ve got somewhere I need to be.” The urge to look up came again. She gave in to it, glancing up to find Zarek swooping down next to her.

Her eyes widened as he landed, crouched at first but seamlessly. “Zarek?”

He turned and looked at her. “Run, Keren!”

“N-no, I’m a...”

“Go!”

Suddenly, Zarek’s body was propelled back into the air. This didn’t look natural or to be his doing. His body twisted at an odd angle before he dropped to the ground. It was then she realized that the demon had attacked him while his attention was on her. Glancing at the demon, she watched as it shifted into something monstrous. His whitish skin was now more reptilian than human, with a scale-like quality that seemed to reflect

the moon's light. He blinked once and an inner eyelid closed rapidly from the opposite direction. As unnerving as that was, it paled in comparison to the forked tongue that flicked out of his mouth.

Keren bit back a scream when she spotted Zarek's limp body. Torn between running to his side and doing what came natural, slaying the demon, Keren swallowed hard. Never before had she found herself unable to choose. Killing had always been the only choice in the matter. She couldn't help anyone if she was dead too.

Even with this logical train of thought, Keren gave in and rushed to Zarek's side. Dropping down next to him, she ran her hand over his cheek. The slightest bit of stubble greeted her, making the Adonis before her seem a little more real. The fact that he lay motionless on the cold asphalt reminded her of the frailty of life – human or not.

"Mr. Cocky," she said, her voice cracking as emotions she wasn't used to moved through her. Fear for his life consumed her. She barely knew the man, yet Keren found herself blinking back tears as she visually searched him for signs of injury. Blood pooled on the ground next him and Keren knew then that Zarek's wounds were on his back. Scared to move him for fear of causing more harm than good, she bent down and planted a tiny kiss upon his forehead. "Hang on, honey. I'll get help."

Honey?

"You," the demon said, sounding closer than she liked, "will come with me. We have much to discuss, slayer."

A rage like she'd never known began to move over her, making her hands itch with the urge to strike out. Her demon slayer powers wasted no time pushing towards the surface, prepared to do what they do best – kill. Glancing up, she found the demon had removed his shirt, leaving what looked to be the torso of a half-man, half-lizard showing. It was then she realized what he was. "You're a *sphenodus* demon."

He halted in his advance and his gaze darted about. He was worried. It was easy to see in his back shuffle that he hadn't expected her to know about his kind. A slow, maniacal smile crept over her face as she stood to face him. "Going somewhere?"

"What are you? You're not a normal slayer, are you?" he asked, slashing out in thin air with his dagger-like claws.

"I'm your executioner." Keren scanned the dimly lit, seemingly vacant street for a weapon and found none. "You will pay for your crimes against humanity, demon."

He shook his head, still moving backwards. "You will die."

Tired of wasting time, Keren rushed towards him. Leaping into the air, she pulled her dress up, no longer concerned with modesty, and kicked out. She caught the side of his head and just missed being clawed. He staggered and she dropped to her feet with her back to him.

Keren thrust her right arm up and back, delivering an elbow then a fist blow to his sensitive torso. It was the weakest part on him and she knew that. She'd heard about his kind, even fought a few muted bloodline versions. They were kin to the dragons that had once roamed the earth in large numbers. Though from all Keren could gather, the

sphenodus were not as highly evolved as the dragons had been. Though they did have the ability to secrete a toxin through their claws that paralyzed their victims.

Apparently, it was easier to eat their victims if they were still fresh and not squirming around. He'd no doubt injected the toxin into Zarek's bloodstream.

Thankfully, the dragons had been wiped out. She had no desire to try to keep mankind safe from the likes of something as powerful as legends told. Gathering her thoughts about her, Keren spun around and kicked out again, this time striking the demon's lower abdomen. A sickening sound tore free from the demon as it clutched itself.

"This was almost too easy," she said, moving to deliver a killing blow. A moan sounded from behind her and she stopped.

Turning, Keren glanced down at Zarek. Her eyes widened. He was gone. In his place lay a gigantic golden beast. It took up the majority of the alley, almost like a semi-tractor trailer between two buildings. Though this trailer moved on its own and looked beautifully deadly.

Odd combination.

The shimmer from its scaled skin left an almost rainbow-like reflection coming from it. Unable to move out of shock, Keren watched as it flexed its massive wings. Clawed talons wiggled as it splayed its fingers and for a moment, she thought they were reaching for her. When they went past her, at the demon, she understood.

It's attacking the demon.

Keren tipped her head, too stunned by what was going on to do anything more than observe. Its fanged teeth looked razor sharp and she didn't doubt in the least that it could cut through a man with little to no effort. It was in her blood to slay dragons but no part of her wanted to harm it. Strangely enough, Keren wanted to touch it instead, see if its scales were as smooth as they appeared to be.

Since it was in the middle of going after the demon, Keren thought better of getting in the way to pet it. She watched as it corralled the demon with ease. Its size alone was frightening, seeing it in action bordered on terrifying. As its golden eyes locked on her and her heart slammed in her chest as the realization of who it was sunk in.

"Zarek?"

In a flash, fire shot forth from the golden beast's nostrils. Orange and yellow flames engulfed the demon and when they cleared, only ashes lay in their wake. Keren heard screams and when it hit her that they were her own, she stopped. Would Zarek turn on her now? Would his beast set her on fire as well?

Fire?

She gasped. "You're a dragon!"

Zarek moved toward her and seemed to wobble a bit, his pace slow. He was nowhere near as agile as she would have expected a dragon to be. As he did a rather

slow blink, Keren knew what was happening—the toxin the *sphenodus* demon had injected him with was harming him.

She watched as the dragon before her seemed to shimmer brighter than before. Scales pulled away, smoothing out, forming tawny skin and the beast reduced itself in size almost instantly, leaving a large, naked man in its place. Zarek's golden gaze met her green one and she found no traces of a dragon, only a man. A man who was injured.

He reached out to her. "Keren, are you...hurt?" he asked, his voice so much deeper than it had been, possibly a side effect of the shift.

"You're not a monster." Relief swept through her but was short-lived when Zarek collapsed on the ground before her.

Chapter Four

Wringing the wet cloth over the white basin on the table next to her, Keren stared at the man who lay in her bed. Long wisps of black hair fanned out around his head, creating a halo effect. Zarek's tanned skin looked glorious against her eggshell satin sheets. She wiped his brow and brushed a stray strand of hair from his face.

"An honest to gods dragon," she shook her head in disbelief, "in my bed of all places. My grandfather is no doubt having a fit from the hereafter."

The very thought of her grandfather and his set opinions about dragons made her feel guilty about nursing one back to health. The thought of leaving Zarek to die sickened her, outweighing the guilt by a long shot.

He was so cold to the touch. Was that normal? Keren didn't know. All she knew was that he'd been like this for the better part of a week and had shown no signs of recovering. Twice she had thought he'd died when she'd been unable to find a pulse on him. It wasn't until she dug through her grandfather's books that she learned it was normal for a dragon to slow their heart rate when trying to heal or hibernate.

The notes also stated that a dragon was at its most vulnerable when in this state. Nothing would be allowed to harm Zarek. Keren would protect him with her life. Why, she wasn't entirely sure but she knew it to be true.

"You're going to be fine, aren't you?" she asked, the need to hear something other than silence great.

She continued on with the routine she'd perfected. Wiping Zarek's chest with the warm washcloth, Keren chewed on her lower lip. Each time she bathed him was more torturous than the time before. As if having to wipe the swells of each rippling muscle wasn't bad enough, she was forced to touch the most magnificent cock she'd ever seen on a daily basis.

"Oh, yeah, pure hell," she mused, washing Zarek's low abdomen. Moving the sheet down, Keren whimpered as she exposed the object of her fascination – his cock.

It lay across his thigh. The absence of pubic hair intrigued her but that wasn't the only thing. No. The sheer size of his non-erect penis was impressive. The thought of what it would be like aroused was downright intimidating.

She shivered in delight as moisture pooled at the apex of her thighs. Slowly, she lifted his shaft and began to wipe around the base. It jerked in her hand and Keren's gaze immediately went to Zarek's face. He was still unconscious. His cock twitched again, hardening in her hand. She'd been washing him all week and it had never done that.

Pre-cum seeped from the tip of his dick. It lay there, glistening against his velvety smooth skin, almost taunting her. The urge to place her mouth over him and taste what he had to offer was great, but Keren held back. It was wrong for so many reasons but would no doubt feel so good.

Deciding against getting herself into any trouble, Keren went to wipe Zarek's upper thigh and brushed past the pre-cum. Her thumb skated through the cool substance. Instantly, her thumb began to tingle and heat shot through her arm, her upper chest, her entire body before centering in her womb.

Keren fought for oxygen as her entire body lit with both physical heat and the burning desire to touch Zarek. She wanted to run her hands over his firm contours as she traced a line down him with kisses.

Sweat beaded on her upper lip as the need to touch him, taste him, simply be one with him enveloped her. Something was wrong. Yes, she wanted Zarek carnally but whatever was happening was so much more than Keren had ever experienced before. Her lips were actually numbing, starved for his taste. She knew in her gut if she just pressed her mouth to Zarek's sweet body the pain that was building would end.

Leaning over him, Keren did the only thing she could—she gave into the primal urge to taste him. She flicked her tongue out and over his shaft. His cock began to lengthen under her touch, growing to proportions she couldn't imagine accepting into her body. Still, the drive to have more was all consuming. Easing her mouth over him, she took a minute and let her jaw adjust to his size.

Pre-cum seeped out and Keren lapped it up, taking the edge off what seemed as though it could have been painful. Even with that portion stilled the need to have more remained. Never had she desired anyone or anything as much as she did Zarek at that moment.

As hungry as she was for him, the idea of rushing seemed foreign to her. Keren swirled her tongue over the head of Zarek's thick cock, varying the action with long licks as though he were an ice cream cone. Never had she tasted sweeter so he might very well have been.

Bringing her hands into play, Keren took hold of the base of his cock and massaged his balls gently as she kissed her way around the mushroom shape on the top of his shaft. Each peck, each lick made her inner thighs tighten with need and her pussy moist.

She stroked him as she worked her mouth over him, taking him as deep as she could in her mouth before her gag reflex kicked in. Saliva built quickly and Keren used this to her advantage, drawing back from Zarek's cock and then forcing her mouth over him again, fisting him as she went. The added lubrication left her sliding over him like a seasoned pro, savoring every second of it, of him.

"Mmm," she hummed, her mouth still over his penis.

I'm sucking a dragon shifter's cock.

The knowledge should have sent her running from the room. It didn't. Keren scraped her teeth gently over Zarek's skin, whimpering as a slick wetness continued to build between her legs, demanding attention.

No, not a dragon shifter, she thought, arching a brow and staring up the length of his magnificent body. My dragon shifter.

* * * * *

Zarek's body tightened as the pleasure of the mysterious woman who he fantasized about often slid her mouth over the head of his cock, taking him deep down her throat. She toyed with his sac, as she always did in the fantasies he'd had prior to meeting her, and sucked hard on him. Tipping his head back, Zarek silently prayed that the moment never end.

If I am dreaming, do not allow me to wake.

The one—or rather, his mind's invented fantasy of the one raked her teeth over his shaft, driving him so close to coming that he dug his fingers into the palms of his hands to ground himself. He felt the bite of his nails as they made crescent moon cuts in his flesh.

The smell of blood filled the air. The beast within him stirred, its needs all being met, all but the urge to be in control. He lay there, refusing to wake from what could possibly be the best fantasy yet. His body was taut as she cupped his sac with one hand and stroked his cock with the other. Her gifted mouth continued to work its magik and when he smelled even more blood, he realized he was still digging his fingernails into his palms.

Easing up, Zarek fought to make sense of it all. Blood? Never before did he smell blood in his fantasy. There was no denying this woman was *the one*, at least according to his mind's invented version, since *the one* didn't truly exist but never had it gone this far.

Something deep within him tugged gently as the woman sucked his cock eagerly. He struggled to understand it and when he realized it was mystical, his eyes snapped open in time to find long waves of brown hair spilling over creamy shoulders and a lush, full mouth over his cock.

Keren? Drawing in air seemed too big a task for Zarek as he watched her going down on him through slightly hazed eyes. Was it a dream? A fantasy? It felt so real but it couldn't be. Keren had been repulsed by him. Even so, he wanted her, wanted this to be more than it was but was willing to accept the glimpse of happiness for what it was—a gift.

Zarek jerked as his balls tightened and magikally charged cum jetted out of his body. Keren swallowed hard, licking and sucking, drinking him down. The internal tugging intensified and for a split second, it was actually painful. His chest tightened and his mind flooded with images of him, Keren and little ones—their children—running about around them. Every ounce of him wanted the fantasy to be real. He

knew then that he was fantasizing about binding his mate to him and he loved every second of it. He no longer cared if it meant he'd be tied to one female for all eternity. Not if the eternity included her.

He felt himself slipping. The darkness that had consumed him was coming to claim him once more. Something clouded his mind enough to not be able to fight it fully. Zarek didn't want to let go of his dream, of Keren.

"You're still hard," she whispered, her voice sexy, low, alluring.

Zarek nodded, gazing down at her with nothing short of adoration on his face. "You are beautiful."

She blushed. *What an odd thing for a fantasy to do*, he thought, reaching down for her. Never before had his dream allowed him so much freedom and joy. Zarek ran the pad of his thumb over her full lower lip and let his eyes flutter as Keren licked him.

"Aghapi mu."

Nodding, as if she understood how much he needed to be inside her, Keren crawled up the length of his body. Zarek hated the fact that she was dressed in his dream and decided to do something about it. Letting his talons eject from his fingertips, Zarek cut through the thin white material that separated him from his every desire.

"Zarek?" Keren asked, sounding so lifelike that for a moment, Zarek actually thought the woman of his dreams truly was about to mount him. "Don't cut me."

Yanking the tattered material from her body, Zarek pulled his talons back into himself and stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. "I would never harm you, *aghapi mu.*"

"This is wrong," she whispered, not sounding as though she believed that one bit.

Arching a brow, Zarek stared up at her. "Is it? You have the power to stop it. Is that it, Keren? Do you want this to end?"

She bit her lower lip, making his cock twitch with need. "No. I don't want this to end."

"Then," he pulled her down to him and pressed his lips to hers, "what do you want?" Zarek didn't require the use of *risbrosius* in his fantasy. An aphrodisiac wasn't necessary. He simply willed her to want him and she did so he didn't bother to secrete it. It wasn't like he could use it in real life, it made her sick to her stomach.

She wants me for me.

Straddling him, Keren set her wet cunt against his lower abdomen and his cock head teased her asshole, pushing, rubbing past it. He had no doubt he'd claim that before his time ended with her. She kissed his jaw.

"I never wish to wake."

Breaking her kiss, Keren stared down at him, her brow furrowed. "Zarek?"

Reaching down, Zarek took hold of his dick and rubbed the head of it in her slick juices. "That cream is for me, yes?"

“Mmm.” Keren tugged gently on his lower lip as they continued to kiss, driving him even crazier with lust.

He should have been sated. Fantasizing about her sucking him off should have been enough to take the edge off. It was only the tip of the iceberg. He wanted more. He wanted all of her.

Easing the tip of his cock into her hot, wet cunt, Zarek almost came just from the feel of it sheathing him. The lips of her cunt grabbed at him, pulling him into her faster than he wanted to go. He wanted to be gentle, take his time and ease into her. The minute Keren forced herself down onto him, taking the full length of his cock in her, he realized that his fantasy woman didn't need gentle or easy – she needed to be fucked as bad as he did.

Crying out, Keren stilled on him, adjusting her hips a bit. Zarek tweaked her light pink nipples, amazed at just how truly perfect her breasts were. When he had seen them in the club, through her dress, he'd wanted to lick them, touch them there. Now he was free to do as he wished.

Leaning up, Zarek captured a pebble-like nipple with his teeth gently, causing Keren to gasp and ride him faster. Rolling it in his mouth, Zarek imprinted the memory of tasting her in his mind, never wanting to forget his fantasy. So tight. So perfect. Made for him and no other.

Her pants were ragged and he knew she was as close to coming as he was. Reaching down, Zarek cupped her ass cheeks and spread them, guiding her motions. He thrust upward repeatedly, fucking her with as much enthusiasm as he would if he were on top. Her pussy gripped him, doing its best to pull him back in each time he almost exited. She was beyond perfect. Tight. Wet. Needy. The need to cry out in victory for having her, even if only in a dream, was great. Zarek gave in to it, tipping his head back as he ground her into him, sensing how very close she was to culmination each time her swollen clit rubbed against his low abs.

“Yes, Keren, yes.” Zarek slid his middle finger over her anus and rimmed the tiny rosette. Keren stiffened but didn't stop. “Shh, *aghapi mu*, relax. It will feel good. I promise.”

“Uhh, Zarek, baby, I don't know...”

Pressing his finger into her ass, Zarek felt a pop, followed closely by another. Keren went wild, her thrusts fast and furious. She drove herself down onto his finger more, taking it almost all the way.

“You like that, don't you?”

Her answer came in the form of her digging her nails into his upper arms and ripping at his skin. Her aggression only served to drive him onward, making the desire to slide his dick into her ass come to the forefront. Somehow, he managed to hold it off, knowing he would claim that hole as well before he was done with her.

Will I ever be done with her?

The smell of blood once again filled the air, making him wonder why this fantasy in particular was so different, so vivid.

"I'm coming, Zarek."

Keren's cunt tightened around his shaft and he lost his control. Thrusting his hips upward, Zarek pumped into her, tossed his head back and came with a start. His seed filled her hot cunt and he held her hips to him as his cock pulsed deep within her. Her cunt seemed to soak his semen up as quickly as it released. Her body was as starved for his and he was hers. It made sense. It was his dream and he wanted Keren to accept his seed fully.

She collapsed on him, her lush breasts crushed to his chest. Zarek did something he wasn't known to do after sex—he wrapped his arms around the woman on him and hugged her, mentally praying to all the gods he could think of to grant him this one wish—make Keren his mate in real life as well.

Her long hair acted like a veil, shrouding her face from his view but Zarek could sense Keren's emotions as if they were his own.

They are your own, fool. You dreamed her up.

She traced tiny circle over his arm. "Zarek, I'm sorry. I scratched you. I didn't mean—"

"Shh, I will heal," he said, unsure why he wanted to ease her mind when the scratches weren't really there anyway. It was but a dream. Nothing was real.

"What's happening to me? I don't really know you but I..."

Caressing Keren's back, Zarek sighed. "The Fates paired us long ago. They separated a soul. Sent one portion with me and the other was reserved for my mate—the one, for you, Keren."

"You don't really believe that, do you?" she asked, her voice small, almost scared.

"What troubles you? Is it the fact that I am the one they chose for you?"

"No," she said, kissing her fingertips and touching the scratches on his arms, "I'm not worried about that so much as I am about how I feel for you. It's not natural to feel this much for someone this fast, this soon."

"*I syzygos,*" he whispered, holding his imagined version of her snugly. His eyes grew heavy and Zarek knew that whatever his body had been fighting off—whatever had made him ill—had taken its toll on him and he needed rest.

"Does it help to know that I share your feelings, *aghapi mu?*"

Keren drew in a sharp breath, making him try to fight to stay with her even more but failing. "*Ella mazi mou.*" His pleas for her to come with him faded out as he closed his eyes.

An overwhelming peace came over Zarek and he gave in to it. Never before had he felt so at ease, so secure in his life, his future. This fantasy was the best yet. Nothing would ever top dreaming of the fiery woman who made his loins burn as his mate or

the feeling of serenity that followed. Giving in to the need to rest his worn system, Zarek allowed the darkness of sleep to come over him.

* * * * *

“Listen, I can’t come in tomorrow, Gennie. I’m sorry. I’ll need to take another sick day,” Keren said, putting her forehead against the cool refrigerator, doing her best to make sense of all that had transpired.

“Keren, you’re out of sick days and I can’t cover for you much longer.”

She sighed, already knowing that to be the case. Nodding as if Gennie could actually see her, Keren tapped her finger against the cool steel. Why couldn’t she have a normal, safe life? Why did it have to be full of demons, monsters, dragons and other creatures she could not tell anyone else about? It was on the tip of her tongue to let the truth spill forth. To let Gennie know exactly why she’d been missing from work for almost a week and had exhausted her sick days.

Honor the code.

Her grandfather’s words played in her head as Keren thumped her forehead lightly against the refrigerator. It was much easier said than done. The constant lying, living life not knowing when the next demon would surface, where she’d be needed most—the whole time having to keep up the façade of being a normal human with an average, routine life.

Holding down a steady job was next to impossible for Keren. Nursing someone back to health was not normal but taking a beating fighting evil was and the need to spend time recuperating, even if only to give her bruises a chance to heal, factored in on her performance reviews. And it wasn’t as though evil had a set schedule.

Not all demons kept their activities confined to the after hours. Some stalked mankind just as easy by light as by night. It was just a matter of time before she’d have to move again. Start over somewhere else.

“Keren, do you need me to come over? Are you sure you’re all right?” Gennie asked, drawing Keren out of her self-induced pity party and back into reality.

“I’m fine, Gennie, really. Thanks. I’ll call you later.” She hung the phone up and ran her hand over her thighs, double-checking that she had her handguns strapped to her. After being caught unarmed in an alley by a *sphenodus* demon, Keren had spent a couple of hours each night searching for a den or nest. It was all the time she’d been willing to spend away from Zarek.

I had sex with him and loved every second of it. Keren sighed. *Well, right up until he murmured something I couldn’t understand and passed out cold again. Though, I now can brag that I screwed a guy until he was unconscious.*

Pulling her mind off Zarek and onto *sphenodus* demons, Keren recounted what she’d learned about them. The species was prone to communal nesting. It was almost a shame the demon had been killed. It could have led her straight to the rest of them

because she was sure there were more. All of the research she'd done shared one thing in common—none thought the species traveled alone. They also noted their urge and willingness to eat human victims. While humans were not required for survival, they did tend to crop up on the menu, as they so often did in the case of supernaturals.

One smarmy lounge lizard down, countless more to go. She headed out the door and into the night. *Here goes nothing.*

* * * * *

Zarek looked around the bedroom once more, doing his best to figure out where he was. It certainly was not his bedroom, which was done in dark shades of navy and gray. No, this was a far cry from that. A shade just to the whiter side of pink covered the walls. The ceiling was of average height, making him feel a bit claustrophobic. He much preferred vaulted or at the very least twelve-foot ones. It wasn't often he shifted indoors but he liked knowing he could with ease.

A white eyelet comforter bedspread covered him. It had the tiniest of pale pink roses embroidered on it. Roses made him instantly think of Keren. Never before had a woman driven him so mad with lust that he'd dreamt about mating to her. She'd done that and so much more. Zarek had awoken with a notion that he truly was mated to her, that she was now his wife. It had taken him a moment to discern it was just a dream.

As he glanced around the bedroom and took a deep breath in, he froze. Honeysuckle and roses. Keren's scent. It was all around him. Lifting a pillow, he pressed it to his face and inhaled again, confirming his suspicions.

It smells of her. Zarek looked himself over. *I smell of her.*

Visions of seeing her head move up and down as her full lips encased his cock rushed to him. The tightness in his chest and internal tugging sensation returned and it was then Zarek knew the truth of the matter.

"She is the one and now she is my wife."

The knowledge spurred him on, energized him fully. Rolling out of the bed, he came to his feet with ease and tried to lock on to Keren's scent to track her. It was not as easy as it should have been because her scent surrounded him. Giving up on that method for the time being, Zarek spotted his pants neatly folded on a distressed wooden chair near the door. Keren must have retrieved them from the alley. The thought warmed him.

He rushed towards them only to come to a grinding halt when he spotted a picture on the wall. There, a painting of Augustus Brandt, a dragon slayer who had single-handedly wiped out an entire species of dragons, was mounted. Augustus had done his fair share of damage to the Dracodomus line as well.

Why does Keren have him hanging on her wall?

Zarek grabbed his pants, slid them on and headed out of the room. He made it only a few steps down the narrow hallway before he found himself staring at the walls that were lined with photos. It was a virtual who's who in dragon slayer history. One thing was clear, the majority of them were of the Brandts. The age progression in the photos was slow going. That made sense. The Brandts weren't fully human nor were they fully supernatural. A mix of both worlds, they had longer lives than the average human and were stronger, faster, deadly but they could die. It would take more to kill them than it would a human but it could be done. Mating to a supernatural would be the only way to assure immortality.

As if any supernatural would be foolish enough to tie themselves to a Brandt.

His gaze flickered to the right and he reached out to touch a picture there. It was of Keren standing in the middle of a group of slayers. Her long hair spilled over her shoulders and looked slightly sun-kissed, as did her skin. Her green eyes were straight ahead and the look upon her face was so oddly neutral that it was hard to gauge her mood. The need to see her smile almost consumed him and he leaned in closer to the image. It was then Zarek noticed that she wore a silver medallion with the Brandts' crest on it. Zarek drew in a sharp breath and shook his head.

"No! My wife is not a dragon slayer. No. She is my true mate — *the one*. She can't be a slayer."

He focused on why he was in her home and how he'd come to be there. He'd left the club and followed Keren, unable to resist her. Zarek had found her in an alley just a ways from the club.

In an alley, at night, alone.

Keren seemed like an intelligent woman. For her to do that meant only one thing; she was there on purpose. She'd sensed the vampire and told Zarek to come to her if he valued his head.

She wanted to protect me.

Reaching out, he put his hands on the wall for support as he took deep breaths. This couldn't be happening. It had to be a lie. The images were wrong. His wife couldn't be a slayer. He could not love a slayer and there was no way a slayer could love him.

Zarek's gaze flickered over the other photos. Each repeated similar themes. He wanted to shout out, claw at the walls, destroy the evidence that was right before him as the reality of it sunk in.

Keren is a slayer.

Glancing up, he found himself staring directly into the picture of Keren surrounded by slayers. He shook his head.

Not just any slayer — a Brandt.

The knowledge ripped at his gut, leaving him feeling nauseous. He knew what had to be done. The Brandts had abused the power bestowed upon them and were indiscriminant killers when it came to the supernatural. They had stopped seeing the

varying degrees of gray that existed and started only seeing black and white in regards to their kills. If a Brandt was alive who possessed slayer powers, they had to be destroyed. He couldn't risk the rest of the Dracodomus line being wiped out or even that of another line. To do so would not only be selfish but detrimental to the supernatural community at large.

Keren must die.

There were no other dragons in the surrounding area that were up to the task of taking on a slayer from the Brandt line. Zarek's knees weakened and he sank to the floor, not wanting to acknowledge the truth. It was too much to bear. The irony of it all came crashing down on him, making his chest feel as though it were about to burst and his body ache. He would have to be the one to take Keren's life. Another sickening thought occurred to him.

She could be carrying my child.

Chapter Five

Keren kept her back to the stone wall as she edged down it. The sound of water rushing in the river just below the ledge she was walking on was loud enough to mask the sound of anyone approaching. That wasn't a good thing. She lacked some of the extras that supernaturals had. Enhanced night vision. Supersensitive hearing. The ability to follow scents. While her senses were certainly above that of a human, they were nowhere near that of a supernatural.

No part of her wanted to be snuck up on, so she was careful to move slow, check her surroundings and stay vigil. The idea of dying, alone, in the middle of the wilderness at the hands of a *sphenodus* demon did not appeal to her.

I need to get home to Zarek. I need to check on him.

Concern for him had consumed her since she met him. It didn't make any sense and the bit he'd told her of how their souls had been separated long ago only served to confuse her more. All she was sure of was that the idea of him not being there or something happening to him terrified her.

Do not fall for him, Keren.

Even as the thought ran through her mind, she knew it was too late. She had more than fallen for him. The very idea of love at first sight had been foreign to her prior to meeting Zarek. Hell, love period was a concept she couldn't wrap her mind around. The only satisfaction she had was that she hadn't bended to his whim instantly. No, she'd punched him several times first.

Taking another step forward, Keren sensed something moving towards her. She couldn't see it but knew it was there. Knew it was coming straight at her. Whatever it was, it was massive and traveling at a high speed.

Running her hand down her thigh, she touched her handgun and shook her head. "Not until I know what it is."

The idea of killing something sight unseen sickened her. Whatever it was, it was coming up on her fast. Deciding against trying to deal with both *sphenodus* demons and the thing headed towards her at the same time, Keren dropped to the ground and immediately began sliding down the ridge. Dirt, rocks, sticks and saplings greeted her on her descent.

Thankful that she'd worn leather pants, Keren did her best to keep her upper body up. Still, cuts and scrapes continued on the way down. It was pitch black due to the dense tree covering and she couldn't see where she was going. She knew the river was close and that it was a favorite whitewater rafting spot. Falling into it wasn't something she wanted to do but if it came down to it, she would.

Hitting a bump, Keren was flipped into the air. It was a long way down and if she was lucky, she'd hit the raging river and not the rocks flanking it. She cried out as her stomach dropped out on her. Something swooshed near her a second before strong arms wrapped around her waist. When she came into contact with smooth scales and talon claws she entertained the thought of shooting the beast but held back.

Instead, Keren twisted quickly, causing whatever it was to lose its grip on her. Kicking out and off it, she crashed into the cold, rushing water and it stole her breath as it swallowed her. The current took hold of her, thrashing her body around as if it were a large washing machine.

Keren's chest burned, starved for oxygen. Something seized hold of her and yanked her free of the water. Drawing in air, she coughed as the burning sensation in her chest passed. Before she knew it, she was laid out on the bank of the river with something large and wet pinning her to the ground.

"Get off me!"

"No," a deep familiar voice said.

Keren shook her head as she reached for the person pinning her. It couldn't be. As she eased her hands over the contours of her upper body, her inner thighs tightened. "Zarek? How? Why?"

"No, why are you here, Keren?"

She ran her hands over him more and was shocked by what she found. "You're naked."

"I know. I had to shift when..."

"You saved me," she said, in awe that he was not only conscious and well but above her in all his naked glory. She wanted him in ways she shouldn't. The need to have his cock buried deep in her cunt while she clung to him was overwhelming. "You're okay."

* * * * *

Zarek tried to find the willpower to do what needed to be done—to kill her—but couldn't. His eyesight was extraordinary and he had seen Keren going for her gun while her back was against the stone wall. He'd also seen her hesitate and opt to run, draw him away from the area rather than shoot first. That wasn't something the Brandts he remembered would do. No. They would have shot first and asked questions later.

It would have been so easy to let her fall to her death on the rocks below or even drown in the raging river. It would have assured the survival of his race and other harmless, yet supernatural beings that coexisted in peace with humans but he couldn't do it. He could not let her die. He couldn't lose her.

On his way to find Keren, Zarek had thought about how he'd awakened in her bed, not in a back alley or in chains in some government lab. Meaning she'd watched him shift forms and not only kept his secret from humans but also took care of him. It had

been her he had awoken to find cupping his sac and licking his cock, not a dreamed-up version of her. It was Keren who the unknown forces who selected mates deemed to be his and it was her he intended to keep.

She is perfect and she is mine.

She'd had her chance to kill him when he'd been weakened by the toxins from the *sphenodus* demon and didn't. Her compassion and concern weren't a fluke or one-time deal and he knew that. He had seen her choose to take her chances with a violent river rather than shoot blindly into the night sky. He'd also sensed her consider shooting him when he had caught her in midair but decide to merely kick him rather than kill him.

Saving Keren was the only choice Zarek had. She was his mate, his wife and the woman who had managed to do what none before had—capture his heart. From the moment she delivered a blow to his face in the club he'd been hooked. Of course, she'd been sure to hand out several more in the exact same spot just to be sure he got the message. She was a slayer, born to dole out justice when and where it was needed and, in doing so, police the supernatural world. That was no crime and it certainly was no threat to his species. While perfectly capable of violence, they did not act upon it. Rather, Dracodomus spent their immortal lives watching over and even living among humans. Having a slayer in the family now tipped the scales of justice in their favor and assured the survival of their line.

"Keren," he whispered, drawing in her scent and savoring every second of it. His heart thumped madly in his chest, the fear of almost losing her still fresh in his mind.

When she ran her hands over the backs of his arms, Zarek gave in and pressed his mouth to hers. She tasted every bit as sweet as she had when he'd assumed he was dreaming. He slid his tongue into the dark recesses of her mouth, careful not to take one moment for granted. In his life, he had never experienced this feeling with anyone else. This fierce need to protect, to hold close, touch, be one with.

This is what love has reduced me to.

The knowledge didn't slow his sensual assault on Keren's mouth. If anything, it increased it. Rubbing his hips against hers, Zarek ground his swelling cock against her leather-clad mound. The urge to tear her clothing off her was great but he held back. Keren wasn't like him, she couldn't shift into something else to cover herself. She was already wet and cold.

He increased his body temperature, using himself to warm her. If need be, Zarek could light a fire for her to warm by before flying her home but that would mean he would have to get off her. That wasn't something he was quite ready to do.

I am being selfish.

"Fuck me," Keren moaned, making every muscle in Zarek's body tight.

Zarek pressed against her, finding a crease and rubbing his shaft along it. Keren arched her back and bucked beneath him. He knew then that he was stimulating her clit through her pants. He also knew that if he continued as he was—in human form—he'd chafe his cock. Deciding not to risk it, he targeted his shift in his lower region, centered

specifically on his penis. Instead of doing a full-out shift, he simply thickened the skin on his shaft enough to allow him to continue without pain.

Keren gasped and clutched onto the back of his arms. "Zarek, umm, I'm not really sure how to ask this but did your cock just get bigger?"

A manly chuckle escaped him. "Around you, *aghapi mu*, it is always large and hard."

With his exceptional night vision, Zarek was able to see Keren blushing. Unable to stop himself, he placed chaste kisses on her cheeks. As lethal as he was sure his wife could be, she was still shy in some respects. That meant something to him, though he wasn't sure why.

She averted her gaze and bit on her lower lip. "You're like a lump of coal. Am I just freezing or are you warming me somehow?"

"Both," Zarek said, dipping his head down to sample her lips once more. He increased his body temperature again as he licked the inner edges of her lower lip. "I should take you home. See to your needs. Assure myself you are well."

Keren whimpered and began swiveling her hips beneath him, rubbing herself against his cock. Taking what was rightfully hers—pleasure from him. She increased her movements and the smell of her arousal drove Zarek to the brink of coming. The knowledge that he was so close to entering heaven only served to enhance the feeling. The memory of how good her tight cunt felt encasing his cock was still fresh in his mind. The woman below him had the power to bring him to his knees with but a look and made his loins burn with nothing more than the thought of her. He would never get his fill, never have enough of Keren. She was his everything. So many years he'd spent not knowing her touch. Zarek would gladly exchange them for even a moment in time with her.

"Know that when I get you home and warm, I am going to sink into you. I will fuck you until you scream for me. Will you scream for me, Keren?" He knew she would. He just wanted to hear her say it.

"Zarek," she whispered, her jaw going slack and her breathing halting.

"That a girl. Come for me."

No sooner did he get the words out of his mouth than she did. Her cry of ecstasy echoed through the wilderness and left Zarek grinding on her just so. He gave in to the need to release. His magikally charged seed splattered out and onto the front of Keren's leather pants.

Zarek knew he should have been appalled at himself for daring to lose control and come when he had not even entered her but he wasn't. Keren held power over him. Her very presence drove him crazy with desire.

"Off! Off, now!" Keren shouted, pushing on his shoulders.

Shocked by her response to what they'd shared, Zarek stared down at her with wide eyes. "*I syzygos?*"

Keren knocked him off her with a force he wasn't expecting. The second she went for one of the guns strapped to her thigh, his stomach tightened. "No. I was not wrong. You are not a..."

She fired two shots off, just missing him. Every part of his body wanted to shift, attack, protect itself. Thankfully, his mind was having too many issues with the idea his wife would attempt to kill him to do anything more than freeze.

Something landed with a thud next to him and he glanced down to find a *sphenodus* demon lying there. Its claws were out and it was clear it had intended to use them. "You stopped him from harming me."

Keren rolled to her feet. "Of course I did. What did you think I was...?" Her eyes widened. "You thought I'd hurt you?"

"I-I thought...erm...you're of the Brandt line so that... No. I didn't," he stammered, opting to lie at the end.

"After what we shared? What we've done together, you honestly thought I could hurt you?" She backed away from him, shaking her head in disbelief. "You're acting like I'm the one who can breathe fire, shift into a huge dragon and incinerate a man with little effort. You're acting like I'm the..."

Zarek's body tightened as Keren just stopped short of calling him a monster. "Say it. You know you want to. Say it, Keren."

He expected a fight, tears, anything that showed she cared. When she snorted and bent down to the edge of the water, he could almost feel an eerie calm settle over her. She lifted water to herself and used it to wash away his cum. It was symbolic in ways he didn't want to acknowledge but there it was. Her washing any trace of what had transpired between them with an odd sense of peace.

Zarek could hardly blame her. He'd assumed the worst, that she would harm him. If roles had been reversed, he would have been hurt that she could have thought so little of him.

As she went to stand, a clawed hand shot up and out of the water. It seized hold of Keren's face and jerked her under in the blink of an eye. Zarek went to dive in after her and found himself suddenly surrounded by a group of *sphenodus* demons.

Kicking out, he caught one in the chest before spinning and allowing his body to do a partial shift into dragon form. Scales rippled over him, giving his still distinctively human-looking form a tougher exterior.

He thrust out, let his claws emerge from his fingertips and wasted no time cutting through the demon nearest him. With one blow, he removed its head and eyed the next one eagerly.

It foolishly tried to strike out at him. Having learned his lesson once about the toxins their claws carried, Zarek artfully avoided them, choosing instead to thrust his hand up and through the demon's vulnerable stomach.

Two remained. Not wanting to waste any more precious time, Zarek shifted his upper body and faced more. The second he'd formed enough of his dragon head to breathe fire, he did. The demons dropped easily, leaving nothing but charred remains in their place.

He shifted back to his base form—human—and looked around, expecting to find Keren slaying the one she'd been with. He found nothing but dead demons and silence.

"Keren!"

Nothing.

"Keren!"

His chest tightened as he thought back to what had happened. The demon had grabbed her by the face with a clawed hand.

Claws. Toxins.

"I mated with her. She could have my weakness to the toxin now." For the first time in his long life, Zarek experienced real fear. Real unadulterated terror. He had started the night out with the objective of killing Keren. Though his mind had changed, the end results were the same. He cost her her life.

"Keren!"

Doing a shift, he took flight, scanning the river banks for her. The minute he spotted her with a *sphenodus* dragging her from the water, a rage like he'd never known tore through him. He dropped down, shifted back into human form and glared at the demon. It shifted into human form as well, surprising him.

"I mean her no harm," the man before him said. He leveled his blue gaze on Zarek and ran a hand through his long blond hair. This *sphenodus* demon didn't seem smarmy as the one from the club did. No, this one seemed almost regal. He squared his shoulders and didn't seem the least bit concerned that Zarek wanted to kill him. "I heard the others talk of killing the female slayer in the area and did what I could to give them false leads. Ra'chini found her about a week ago. He did not return, that is how I know he was successful in locating her. I warned him that she would not be an easy opponent nor would she submit willingly to being his mate."

Ra'chini?

Zarek thought about the demon who had attacked Keren in the alley. It made sense why he did not return. He was dead. "You should know that your —"

"I am well aware Ra'chini is gone. He was of no great loss to my kind. He lost his way at some point, believing he no longer had a purpose and deciding to lash out against mankind. I shudder to think of the atrocities he was responsible for." The man before him bent down next to Keren and smoothed her wet hair back from her face. Zarek's first reaction was to incinerate him but he'd harm Keren and that wasn't acceptable.

"Step away from my mate," he said, bristling with fierce protectiveness and jealousy at the sight of another male near his wife. Zarek's fingernails bit into the palms

of his hands as he fought back the beast within, knowing Keren was too vulnerable for him to risk attacking the man.

The man's eyes widened but he didn't back away from Keren. Instead, he slid closer to her and caressed her cheek. "It is you...erm...you are he?"

"He who?" He was dangerously close to losing control.

"The father of the child she carries?"

Zarek's entire body tightened at the confirmation of what he'd suspected. She was with child now. "Yes."

The man nodded. "I smelled her near our den. I caught scent of the child as well and knew it was part dragon shifter. I knew my instincts had been right in protecting her. She is not an evil slayer but one of justice. One capable of loving what she should want to destroy."

Zarek moved in close to the man and stared down at his wife. "Is she...?" He couldn't bring himself to acknowledge Keren might be dead. Losing her wasn't an option.

"Sleeping?" the man asked. "Yes. I released only the portion of the toxin that lulls another to sleep. I did not release any of the actual poison. I suspect she is immune to it but the child may not be. I know not how much dragon shifter DNA it carries and was not willing to risk harming it. A child is a great honor to our kinds. They are growing rare among supernaturals."

It was true. All the supernatural races had seen a decline in new births over the last century. At the current rate, their kinds would be wiped out as quickly as the dragon lines were fading if all were not careful.

The man cast him a friendly look. "Take your mate and see her to safety. The ones who were evil among us are dead now, thanks to you."

Zarek swept Keren up in his arms and held her to his chest. "I am Zarek of the Dracodomus."

The man stood with him. "And I am Philo of the *sphenodus*."

Philo? The name meant love.

He smiled. "I am in your debt, Philo of the *sphenodus*."

Philo shook his head. "No, you helped to wipe out the evil that had plagued my people while I was away. Upon my return home, I not only found news of a female slayer in the area but also found that my den had been overrun by monsters. You rid me of them. So, Zarek of the Dracodomus, I would venture to say that we are even."

"That being said, I shall not forget your kindness." Zarek shifted forms and took flight with his wife tucked safely to his body. He let his body temperature rise to keep her warm and savored the feel of her near him. He would never let her go again, never assume that she intended him harm and he would cherish every moment with her. Well, almost every moment. The punches were still a toss-up.

She stirred slightly. "Zarek?"

“Yes, wife?”

“Wife?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

He chuckled. “We are mated, *aghapi mu.*”

Chapter Six

Keren stood in awe, unable to form a complete thought for a moment as she stared at the room. A high-domed ceiling was lined with the most ornate molding she'd ever seen. It looked as though various scenes of dragons breathing fire, hoarding treasures and flying were carved into it. Stepping into the room more, Keren realized that was exactly what was on it. She smiled. Only Zarek would find that amusing. The scenes depicting what people thought of the supposedly mythical beasts.

The walls, which were only visible for a few feet due to the enormous built-in bookcases that lined the room, were navy blue. The bookshelves matched the molding and were a deep mahogany. As she skimmed the titles, she smiled. A mix of fairy tales, classical literature and non-fiction filled them.

Armless, high-back, upholstered chairs flanked the sides of a large fireplace that sat against the far wall. A matching S-curve sofa sat out a ways and had end tables next to it. Each held what looked to be ivory carvings of dragons. They were beautiful, as was the entire room.

"Do you like?" Zarek asked, coming up behind her and sliding his arms around her waist.

"It's gorgeous. And I like your choice of décor." She pointed towards the molding. "Cute touch."

Running his hands over her lower abdomen, Zarek kissed her ear and hugged her tight. "Do you like them enough to want something similar in the baby's room?"

She smiled. "Mmm, yes, though I think you'll have some time to bring someone in to do them. I just found out that I'm technically married to you now. I think my system needs some time before we start trying to have children. I am going to be spending a lot of time packing pictures of dear old crazy granddad away. I'll be too busy to start painting a baby's room."

Zarek nibbled on her earlobe playfully. He pressed his erection against the small of her back, sending a tingling sensation through her inner thighs. He chuckled as he drew in a deep breath. "I love how you smell when you're wet for me, Keren." He kissed her neck. "Come to think of it, I love the way you smell all of the time. Especially now."

Tipping her head back, she reached back and cupped his ass, forcing their bodies together more. "Why, because my pussy is damp for you?"

Zarek made a noise that sounded as if he were in pain as he nodded. "Yes and because you smell of me."

"Hey, I showered when we stopped at my place on the way here. I do not..." Keren stopped and thought about their line of conversation. He'd asked about carvings in a baby's room as he caressed her lower abdomen. She stilled.

You smell of me.

Zarek's words ran through her mind as he began to inch her skirt up her legs. He moved his hand and cupped her *mons*. Sliding a finger in, he moaned softly in her ear. "Ah, you are heaven, you know that, right?"

"Zarek? Are you trying to tell me that I'm...umm...that we're...uh...pregnant?"

"Mmmhmm," he whispered, easing his finger into her cunt more.

Without thought, Keren began to ride it, the feel too good to pass up. Zarek added another finger as he bent her forward, over the back of the sofa. The telltale noise of a zipper sounded a moment before she felt the head of his cock pressing against her wet entrance. He eased it through her juices, rubbing them and making even more collect. He moved his cock along the cleft of her ass, sparking tiny jolts of fear and passion. Would he take that carnal hole? Would he enter her in a forbidden spot?

Zarek moved his other hand around and continued to fist his dick with one hand while tracing his way over the globes of her ass with the other. Keren gave in and whimpered as he teased her anus with his finger. He rimmed it in a daring fashion. Her breath caught and she did her best to stay levelheaded when all she wanted to do was melt into a puddle.

"Zarek, please."

"Please what?"

"Take me."

The moment he slid a finger into her ass, she felt a pop followed quickly by another before her body loosened a tiny portion around the intrusion. Her need for him was raw. So pure and primitive Keren couldn't even begin to describe it, nor did she care to bother. All she knew was how much she needed him not only in her body but in her life as well.

Fire shot through her lower region as he eased the head of his cock into her, stretching her, filling her completely. Tiny tremors shook her as Zarek sank into her cunt. The sweet torment of his slow finger fuck drove Keren towards her zenith.

"So perfect. So fucking perfect."

A straggled moan was her only response. The pleasure was too great, too overpowering. The bulging fullness from having him fill her with his cock and his fingers left her pussy dripping wet. It was Zarek's turn to moan.

"You are soaked. Come for me, *aghapi mu*. I want to feel your cunt clamping down on me." He nipped at her shoulder as he continued to thrust into her. "Know that I am going to fuck this hole too before I'm done."

His words pushed her over the edge of culmination and left Keren panting as her pussy milked his cock. The pleasure didn't end there because Zarek didn't end. He

continued to thrust into her, sending blinding pleasure rippling throughout her body. Keren clung to the back of the sofa as Zarek drilled into her body. He moved his free hand around and played with her clit, tweaking it just right, keeping her on the verge of coming but not quite letting her. He pulled his fingers from her ass and she mourned the loss of them.

She countered his thrusts, silently encouraging him to be more aggressive. He listened. The wet slapping sounds of sex filled the room and when Keren realized she was crying out, she did her best to quiet down. Zarek didn't seem to mind the noise. In fact, he was grunting and making a good deal of his own noise as well.

Glancing over her shoulder, Keren watched as Zarek's golden eyes swirled. The look he gave her was carnal, feral, exciting. "Your cunt feels so good, Keren. I shall never get enough of you."

Her jaw dropped and she could merely nod as the feel of his large cock ramming into her and his fingers rubbing her clit left her speechless. Zarek withdrew and pressed the head of his cock to her ass. Her ring of muscle didn't want to allow him in and Keren's entire body tightened.

"Easy, I would never harm you," he whispered, his voice soothing and his caresses comforting. "I need to fuck your ass. I need to feel that tight hole wrapped around my cock. Allow me this."

Keren did as he instructed, giving him the opportunity to insert his shaft further into her body. Her cheeks flushed with feverous delight and she couldn't help but feel empowered by her own wanton behavior. Letting him in, letting him fuck her so completely left Keren on the verge of exploding yet again. She bore down as he pumped in and out of her ass.

"Oh, yes."

"Ah, yes," he panted. "So tight. Take all of it. That's it—every inch of my cock." He pulled out before pummeling into her ass again, causing a fire to ignite within her.

It was too much. Pleasure that was just this side of pain consumed her, stimulating her body, making her muscles tighten around his shaft. He rode her body like a deprived man, claiming every hole, allowing Keren no room to question who she belonged to. She was Zarek's and always would be.

Zarek swatted her ass cheek, causing tingles to run through her inner thighs. He rubbed the spot he'd slapped before delivering another love tap to the fleshy part of her cheek. Heat continued to build until Keren thought she might explode. His cock kept drilling into her ass, taking her without restraint as Zarek continued to spank her playfully. The pressure gave way, opening the flood to her orgasm.

"Oh gods, Zarek! I'm coming again."

"*Saresi afto?*"

Clutching onto the back of the sofa, her brow furrowed as she stared back at her husband.

He smiled. "I asked if you like this?"

Keren came with a start. Her entire body had a spasm tear through it, causing her pussy to clamp down on his cock. Zarek growled out, rooted himself in her and came in a wave, spilling his seed into her ass.

"Never mind," he whispered, planting a kiss on her shoulder while staying locked in her. "I think I got my answer, *aghapi mu.*"

"You've been calling me that since we met. What does it mean?"

"It means my love." He kissed her shoulder again.

"How do you say I love you?" she asked, standing slowly but keeping his cock in her.

"*Saghapo.*" Zarek held her to him, making her feel so safe, so loved. "In our case it is more like *ine keravnovolos erotas* – love at first sight."

She laughed. "Or love at first strike."

Zarek threw his head back and laughed. "Only I would be lucky enough to have a wife who not only can knock me out but has no qualms reminding me of that."

"Zarek?"

"Yes."

"*Saghapo,*" she said, glancing over her shoulder at him.

His golden eyes swirled again. "I love you too, *aghapi mu.*"

Epilogue

Zarek held his baby daughter to his chest and cradled her head in his hand. A slight tugging on his pant leg drew his attention and he glanced down to see his middle son, Jace, watching him through golden eyes. "Daddy, I thought you said I was getting a baby brother."

The slight pout the four-year-old wore left Zarek biting back a smile. Jace was correct—Zarek and Keren had assumed she was carrying another boy child. Females weren't exactly common among the Dracodomus. In fact, children were scarce period, boy or girl.

He kissed the top of his daughter's head gently and nodded at Jace. "I am as surprised as you, little one."

Zarek's eldest sons, Lex and Thanos, exchanged hushed laughs, doing as twins often did, communicating in ways others could not understand. He arched a brow. "What is so amusing?"

The eight-year-olds glanced at one another, their golden eyes full of mischief. Lex, the spokesman of the pair, smiled. "You always tell us that Mom's temper comes from her having green eyes. We're just wondering how bad Philomena's temper is going to be. She looks just like Mom."

Zarek let out a deep chuckle. "I do believe the two of you were reading my mind earlier." He winked at them all and motioned towards the master bedroom door. "Your mother wants to see you all. She fears I have destroyed all her hard work while she was having your sister."

Lex wrinkled his nose. "We won't tell her you burnt our toast every morning."

"Or that you almost forgot to take me to my soccer game," Jace said, still clutching onto Zarek's pant leg.

He looked at Thanos. "Have you anything to complain about?"

"No. You were smart enough to order pizza instead of trying to cook dinner so I'm fine."

Zarek couldn't suppress his laughter. Of all the boys, Thanos was the one who had Keren's personality and wit. "You know, prior to meeting your mother, I did just fine on my own."

His sons shared a look that said how very much they doubted his claim. In truth, they were right. He didn't do fine on his own. For almost six hundred years he'd lived without his soul mate. The last eight years had proven to him how right the Fates were in pairing him with Keren. She was the one, his everything, his soul. She had given him

four beautiful children and was as eager as he was to try for more. Keren had also given him the gift of her love. He would never want for anything more.

Pushing the door open, he glanced at his sons, each as eager as the next to see their mother. She'd spent the last two days in labor with Philomena and threatened Zarek's life so many times he'd lost count. Now that she was showered, had rested and eaten a bit, she was back to being herself. He reached up and touched his jaw line where she'd delivered a rather wicked punch during the height of her labor. It had instantly reminded him of the night he'd met her. Her right hook was still as vicious as ever but he knew at the end of the day, Keren was his and would remain that way forever.

"Hey you guys," Keren said softly from her seated position on the bed.

Zarek stood rooted in the doorway, staring at his wife.

Her brow furrowed. "Zarek, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, *aghapi mu*. You are so very beautiful. *Saghapo*."

Keren's cheeks tinged pink as she glanced at the floor. It still amazed him how deliciously sweet his demon-slaying wife could be. His eldest sons made gagging noises and he shot them a pointed look. "One day, you will both know what it is like for a woman to own your heart and when that day comes, I truly hope I am there to see it."

Thanos and Lex rolled their eyes, not looking the least bit concerned by the idea of finding their mates. Zarek silently prayed that his sons would not have to wait six hundred years to find their mates. Though Keren was not a shifter, the boys had all been born as if they were full Dracodomus males, each capable of shifting and breathing fire. Jace had proven exceptionally talented at this and left both Zarek and Keren teetering on the edge of sanity through his terrible twos. Thankfully, he had grown out of it. When they hit puberty they would develop the glands needed to produce *risbrosius* and he'd already warned them that not all women were responsive to the natural aphrodisiac. Though Zarek had referred to it as breath freshener, not wanting to have to explain what an aphrodisiac was to his young sons. Keren had mumbled about it being more like onions and garlic mixed with something that had long since died as he tried his best to explain it to the boys.

Jace tugged on his pant leg. "Will I grow up and have a woman own my heart too?"

"If I have any say in the matter then yes." Zarek ruffled Jace's dark hair. "You are smiling. Does this please you?"

Jace gave an enthusiastic nod. "Oh, yes. I love Mommy and think she's beautiful too. I think she owns my heart."

Zarek laughed and looked up to find Keren on the verge of tears. "Ah, little one, I believe you own hers as well. You all do."

Philomena cooed and squirmed a bit. Zarek kissed her temple. "And you, green-eyed one, I fear will age me rapidly, worrying about the boys who will try to come into your life."

"Zarek," Keren said between tears. "She's less than a day old. Don't start worrying about her getting married anytime soon."

"Ah, but, *aghapi mu*, you forget. I know her mother well. If I am not worrying about dating, I will be worried about what she might try to slay."

Keren flashed him a smile and her eyes lit with amusement. "Did you see the tiny mark on her ankle?"

Pulling back the pink blanket that covered his infant daughter, Zarek checked her ankle. His eyes widened as he found a black mark that looked similar to a tattoo. It was the shape of a dragon, with its wings spread wide. His gaze locked on his wife. Keren had developed a similar marking right after they'd conceived Philomena. He'd called his brother and his wife for assistance. In the end, they'd all concluded that it was the markings from the Brandt family crest yet altered enough to include the Dracodomus one as well.

"Does this mean she is as you are?" Zarek asked, hopeful that his baby girl would indeed grow to be a powerful slayer.

"You seem pleased."

He nodded. "Yes, *aghapi mu*, if she is capable of beating the boys away on her own, it would make my life much easier."

"Zarek," Keren bit her lower lip and looked as if she were trying not to laugh at him, "I love you and all your overprotectiveness."

"I love you too, *aghapi mu*."

About Michelle M. Pillow

Michelle M Pillow has always had an active imagination. Ever since she can remember, she's had a strange fascination with anything supernatural – ghosts, magical powers, and oh...vampires. What could be more alluring than being immortal, all-powerful, and eternally beautiful? After discovering historical romance novels in high school, it was only natural that the supernatural and romance elements should someday meet in her wonderland of a brain. She's glad they did, for their children have been pouring onto the computer screen ever since.

She is married (madly in love) and has a wonderful family.

Michelle would love to hear from you and tries to answer her emails in a timely fashion. That is if the current hero will let her go long enough to check the computer.

About Mandy M. Roth

I grew up fascinated by creatures that go bump in the night. From the very beginning I was odd and creative – a combo every mother hopes for. After studying art all the way through school, I majored in it at college. One rather unexpected child later, I changed my major and finished with a great balance of art and business. I'm working on my MBA with a concentration in marketing but it's taken a back seat while I plug away at the keyboard.

I live in Ohio with my husband and three boys. They definitely keep me busy. Between convincing one he really doesn't need to have his eyebrow pierced, listening to the middle one's philosophy on life and pulling the youngest off the countertop, I do manage to eek in a very small amount of writing time during the day. More often than not, my writing is done from 8pm until 3 am.

If the following years are half as good as my first one in writing, I'll be a happy gal! I'm doing something I love, meeting tons of new people, have the greatest readers in the world and the support of my family. The only thing I still don't have is that hot lycan on a motorcycle. I'm working on it, though.

Michelle and Mandy welcome mail from readers. You can write to them c/o Ellora's Cave Publishing at 1056 Home Avenue, Akron, OH 44310-3502.

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