

Blood Brothers:
GianMarco's
Muse

Loose Id

Eve Vaughn

Praise for the writing of Eve Vaughn

Blood Brothers: GianMarco's Muse

What an exciting and erotic story. From meeting the Grimaldi brothers with their sensual vampiric ways to the courageous Maggie, you're on a rollercoaster ride of emotions and eroticism that brings you to an unexpected finale that's satisfying and leaves you panting for more. Eve Vaughn brings a new spin on the world of vampires that not only turns you on, but makes you want a set of vampires for your own pleasure. Amazingly deep and exciting. I can't wait for the next installment.

-- Cynnara Tregarth, author of *Jack's Back* (Loose Id)

GianMarco's Muse is a good start to what looks to be a great series. Eve Vaughn's Grimaldi brothers are intriguing, enigmatic, and very sexy.

-- Jeigh Lynn, author of *Adventures of the Soul* (coming soon from Loose Id)

A sassy, warm-hearted, big, black, beautiful woman hooking up with a sinfully sexy Italian vampire stud. Add in a spicy bit of intrigue in the vampire underground and you've got a hot read on your hands! Eve Vaughn's storytelling in *Blood Brothers: GianMarco's Muse* is bold and entertaining and her new slant on vampirism makes for a delightful change of pace.

-- Jet Mykles, author of *Dark Elves 1: Taken* (coming soon from Loose Id)

BLOOD BROTHERS: GIANMARCO'S MUSE

Eve Vaughn

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www.loose-id.com

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This book is rated:

 L I SCORCHING

For substantial explicit sex, graphic language and situations that some readers may find offensive (violence, ménage, multiple partners).

Blood Brothers: GianMarco's Muse

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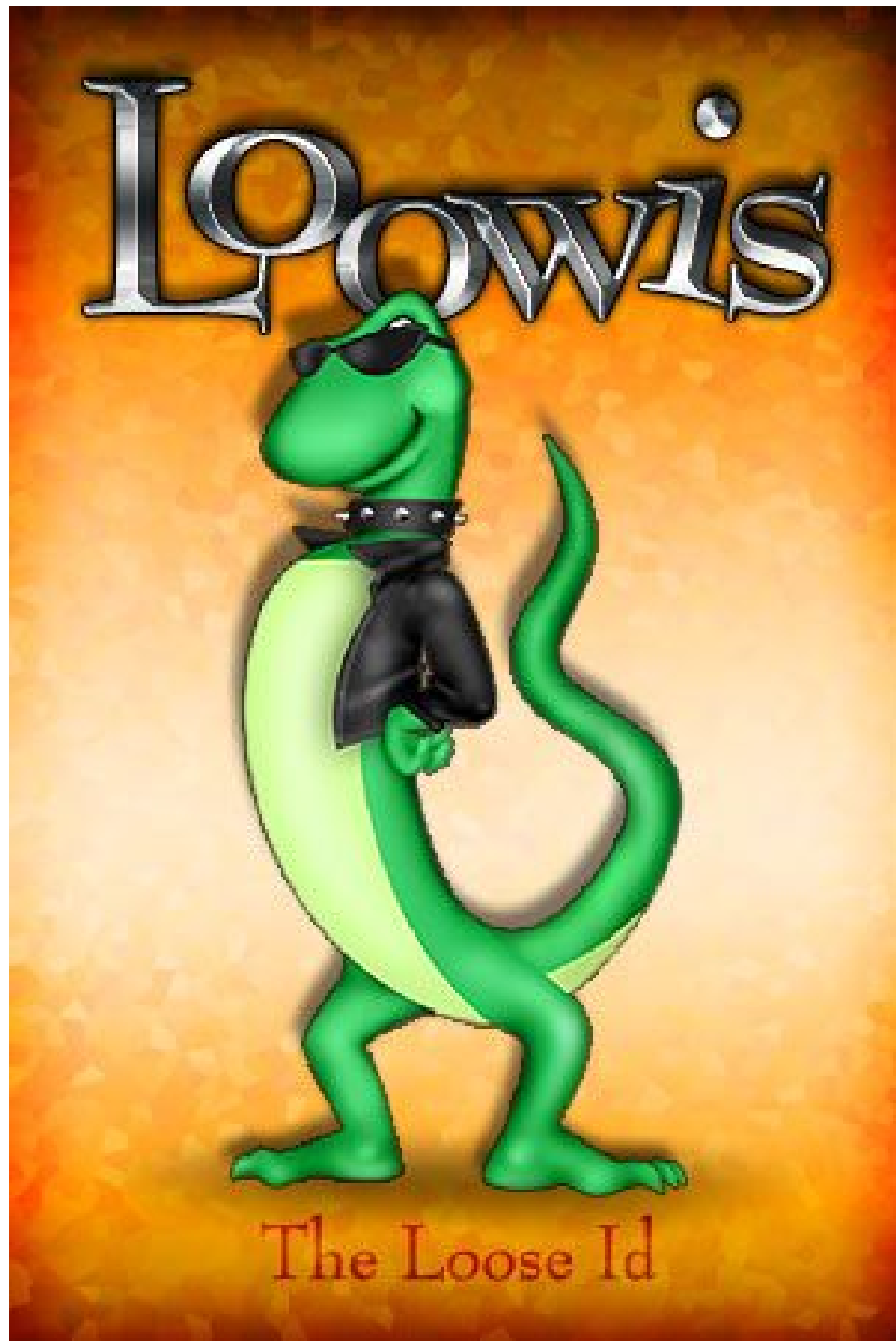
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Prologue

1483

GianMarco Grimaldi was on top of the world. He had just been commissioned to do a painting for Lorenzo di Medici himself, and his career as an artist would be sealed with such a wealthy and influential patron. *Not bad for an eighty-six-year-old vampire*, he chuckled to himself. He was still relatively young for a vampire, so this was quite an accomplishment. This would take the sting out of Leonardo getting the commission to paint Signore Giocanda's third wife, Lisa.

His brother Dante had wanted to help him out, but GianMarco wanted to do things on his own. How would he know his own worth if everything was handed to him so easily? Painting was his passion, and he would not have felt right if he became recognized only because of his brother's help.

He smiled to himself as he walked the busy streets of downtown Florence. The air was crisp and the sun was shining. Thoughts of his beautiful wife, Bianca, filled his head and his heart. She would be home nursing their son, Giovanni, who was only two weeks old. Already the baby vampire was a joy to his mama and papa. Images of his wife's full-figured body made his cock stir. Just the mere thought of her big, firm breasts, thick thighs, and bountiful bottom were enough to give him an instant erection.

He loved running his hands over her voluptuous body. There was no other feeling like making love to big, beautiful women; their soft, pliant bodies, with all that silky flesh for him to partake in, were like rare treasures. It was because of him that his good friend Alessandro began to paint full-figured women. Many people around Florence were all abuzz over Sandro's new painting, *The Birth of Venus*. The model for that particular masterpiece had

once been one of GianMarco's favorite subjects, and he had spent many long nights between her creamy white thighs; but when Bianca came along, everything had changed.

He had met her at a festival. She had looked so warm and sweet, GianMarco knew he had to have her. Bianca had come from a very conservative family, so it had taken GianMarco several months of coaxing to get her to model for him. By the casual observer, Bianca would not be classified as beautiful. Some would say that she was not even pretty, but her curvy frame, sweet smile, and kind, gentle spirit had been enough to make GianMarco fall hard.

Most of his paintings featured her as his subject; she was his muse, and he had never painted so well until he had met her. As he was a vampire, his work was already superior to most artists who were considered masters, but Bianca had inspired him to even greater heights.

She would be so pleased for him about this feather in his cap. With di Medici's patronage, more offers would soon follow. They could use the money he earned to buy the little cottage in the country like Bianca wanted. Florence was an exciting city, but the country was more ideal for raising children.

He hoped they could have more *bambini* eventually, but there was no hurry. They had an eternity, after all. He whistled happily to himself as he walked down the narrow alley to get to his apartment. Suddenly, an alarm went off in his head. Something was not right. He sensed something was wrong with Bianca.

GianMarco hurried the short distance to the front door of his apartment. The door was halfway open. Something was definitely wrong. On numerous occasions, he had stressed to Bianca the importance of keeping the door bolted when he was not there. Young vampires were too vulnerable to the dangers that often awaited them. Bianca had only been a vampire for a year, and their son was newly born. They were prime targets for rogues. The thought of anything happening to his wife and child sent a chill down his spine.

The minute he rushed through the door, the smell of blood filled the air. His fingers sharpened to talons, his amber eyes began to glow, and his incisors descended.

"Bianca!" he called out as he ran to the bedroom.

His heart stopped at the sight that met him. Lying naked on the bed with her legs spread at an unnatural angle was his wife. Dried blood stained her mouth and vagina. There was a huge gaping hole in her chest.

"Bianca!" He cried out in despair as he rushed to her side. He pulled her into his arms as her sightless eyes stared at the ceiling.

"*Carissima,*" he whispered in anguish. "*Cara mia.*" He stroked her silky raven tresses.

Gio! He released his wife and ran to his son's room. The sight of his dismembered son nearly made him faint. Rogues! No others could be so cold-blooded as to kill an innocent

woman and her child. As GianMarco numbly walked back to his lifeless wife, he noticed something in her hand.

She held a large clump of bloody auburn hair. It was obvious that she had put up a fight, but unfortunately, it had not been enough to save her life. He cursed himself for not having been there to protect his family. The rogues who were responsible for murdering his wife and son would pay dearly.

He felt as if his heart would explode with the tremendous pain that had taken over him. GianMarco let out a primal scream before collapsing to the floor in a sobbing heap. His muse was dead, and so was his reason for living.

Chapter One

The Present

“This has got to stop, Marc. We have been through three secretaries in the past six months, and damn it, I am not here to answer phones and do paperwork!” Oliver shouted at his partner, who looked as if he didn’t particularly care.

GianMarco shrugged. His amber eyes glanced at the wall clock in boredom. “What exactly do you want me to do about it?”

“Stop fucking the goddamn secretaries, that’s what you can do! We’re supposed to be running a legitimate business here, not a brothel. And another thing, you’re lucky we haven’t been threatened with a lawsuit.”

“It’s not as if they would win.”

“That’s beside the point.”

GianMarco examined his nails casually, giving his friend only partial attention. “I can’t help that they throw themselves at me.”

“You’re the boss; you don’t have to take them up on their offers, for chrissakes. You know what your problem is?”

GianMarco was fast losing interest in this particular conversation.

“No, Oliver, I don’t know what my problem is, but I’m sure you will enlighten me.”

“You are a sex addict. I know you’ve told me time and time again that vampires need to fuck, but really, I think it’s just an excuse for you to continue what you’re doing.”

“Considering all of the things that one can become addicted to, I hardly think being sex-addicted is the end of the world.”

“But you have sex all the time. That cannot be good for you.”

GianMarco sighed, tired of explaining vampire culture to his human friend, who refused to get it.

"It's the way of my people."

"It's not just part of your culture. You just can't get enough of it," Oliver accused.

A smile touched GianMarco's lips. Oliver Townsend was a good friend and an excellent man of business, but right now he was being a huge pain in the ass.

"So what? I like pussy; it is not a crime. Perhaps my screwing that which is so freely given to me makes you jealous because your wife doesn't put out. I don't see why a virile man like yourself must beg to have a few moments between his own wife's legs. You are my friend; I would gladly share with you." GianMarco smiled wickedly at his partner.

Oliver turned bright red. "I am not jealous, and I will thank you not to talk about Theresa like she was some common trollop. She is my wife. I know we've had our problems lately, but she had a hard time in childbirth, and it's taking a little while for her to get comfortable with lovemaking again."

"Oliver, your wife gave birth over a year ago. Your son is about eighteen months, correct?" GianMarco smirked at his friend's flushed face. It had not been his intention to embarrass his friend, but he was just as frustrated about the secretary situation. The last thing he needed was a lecture on his morals and his imaginary sex addiction.

The private detective agency he and Oliver had founded together was fast becoming successful. They had a reputation for uncovering things that other agencies were hard pressed to find out.

It helped to have a six-hundred-and-seven-year-old vampire working cases. GianMarco could get into places that others couldn't, and hear and see things that most humans would miss. Being a private eye was one of his more interesting professions. Throughout his lifetime, he had amassed a fortune and didn't really need to work, but keeping busy stopped him from thinking about the past.

GianMarco had had many careers over the years. He had been a doctor, a lawyer, a fireman, and a policeman, to name a few. He never stayed in a profession for more than thirty years, lest people became curious about the fact that he never aged. It was such a silly thing, especially when vampires were beneficial to humans, rather than detrimental. He and his kind had had a bad rap. Humans were so full of themselves if they thought vampires did nothing but go around biting people's necks. It was another ridiculous misconception.

His last job as a police officer in Washington, D.C., was where he'd met Oliver. They had been partners and soon became fast friends. Oliver was very perceptive and soon realized GianMarco was something out of the ordinary, so GianMarco had told him exactly what he was.

Oliver had not believed him at first, but he'd witnessed too many unexplainable events, like the time when GianMarco had been shot in the neck by a stray bullet in a shootout. The

bullet had just popped out as if that kind of thing happened all the time. Oliver had had no choice but to believe his friend. They had been partners for nearly ten years when Oliver was injured on the job, receiving a gunshot wound that missed his heart by a mere inch. It was just the thing his wife needed to convince Oliver to leave the force. GianMarco suspected the real reason why Theresa wanted Oliver to leave the force was because police officers didn't make enough money for someone who spent most of her days shopping.

GianMarco had offered to help Oliver financially, but Oliver was much too proud to accept his friend's money. That was when GianMarco suggested they go into business together, with him putting up the money. Their agency, G and T Associates, was born. Oliver had insisted that he put up half of the capital; otherwise he would not have felt it was a true partnership. GianMarco had not cared one way or the other. One day, when GianMarco moved on to his next adventure in life, the agency would belong to Oliver exclusively.

The first secretary they had hired was Oliver's cousin Lolly, who had lasted about a year. Eighteen and fresh out of high school, Lolly spent more time making phone calls than answering them. They had been willing to overlook that, but when they discovered Lolly was helping herself to the petty cash, they had had to let her go.

Next was Georgie, a cute blonde who kind of looked like the actress Reese Witherspoon. After she had made play after play for GianMarco for several weeks, he had given in to temptation.

One day when Oliver had been out of the office, GianMarco threw Georgie on his desk and ate her pussy for hours. That had been their only sexual encounter, because it was obvious that she had wanted a relationship, something he wasn't willing to offer anyone. Georgie had handed in her resignation when it became clear that GianMarco didn't want anything other than sex from her. She had left the agency with a few choice words for him.

Then came Sally. She was a tall, willowy brunette who liked anal sex above all else. She soon went the way of Georgie, lasting only a month.

Their last secretary was Josephine, a haughty redhead who thought her stuff didn't stink. GianMarco liked a challenge, and it had been a pleasure to seduce and screw the shit out of her. Josephine had only been a redhead on top.

It was only when Oliver had come back to the office from a stakeout earlier than he was supposed to that he caught GianMarco with his cock thrust to the hilt in Josephine's pussy. To add insult to injury, they had been fucking on Oliver's desk. The secretary had been so mortified she'd quit on the spot. GianMarco didn't miss her. He had only fucked her to wipe that superior sneer off her face.

Oliver interrupted his thoughts.

"Marc, are you listening to me?"

"What?" GianMarco frowned. "What were you saying?"

"I said, this time I am going to hire a secretary you won't screw."

"Ah, so you are going to hire a man? Although I prefer women, the right man could make me change my mind," GianMarco joked.

"Stop it! I am serious. No more fucking the secretaries, and to ensure that you don't I will make sure that the next secretary is someone you couldn't possibly find attractive."

"And what do you know about what I will find attractive and what I won't?"

"We've known each other for quite a while, Marc. I think I have learned a few things about you."

"Oh? Since you know so much about my preferences, please tell me what it is that I like," GianMarco said, suddenly amused.

"Well, you're my friend, but I have to say you're one of the shallowest bastards I know where women are concerned. You have to have women who are drop-dead gorgeous and without an ounce of meat on their bones. That's why you hate Theresa so much, because she weighs a little more than you think is the ideal of beauty."

Actually, I hate Theresa because she is a bitch.

"If you say so," GianMarco said out loud. "Do whatever you want. I will be out of the office for the next couple of weeks to see to a few family issues. I will not touch the precious secretaries anymore," he stated with disinterest.

If Oliver only knew what his true preferences were.

* * * * *

Maggie Williams carefully looked through the classified section of the newspaper. There were three possible jobs that she might be qualified for.

"Oh, who am I kidding?" She threw the paper down and buried her face in her hands. She wanted this nightmare to be over. This process of getting back on her feet was going to be long and painful. She should have taken Eugene up on his offer; then she wouldn't be looking through the classifieds now. No, she didn't want anything from him. It was time she stood on her own two feet.

If anyone had told her three months ago that she would be living in a tiny efficiency, barely scraping together enough to make ends meet, she would have laughed in their faces. Sure, she knew that her marriage had been far from perfect. In fact, her marriage had been a bit on the rocky side for a while, but she had always thought that she and her husband could work things out.

Life was a joke. The one thing in life that she had wanted beyond all else was to be a part of a loving family. Having been bounced from one foster home to the next as a child, she

had longed for stability. When she had met Eugene in high school, she had thought of him as her knight in shining armor.

She had been a sophomore and he a senior. Maggie had never had a boyfriend before and she was flattered that he would even notice her. Eugene had come along and all the attention that he had lavished on her made Maggie fall head over heels. When she became pregnant at seventeen with his baby, Eugene had offered to marry her. She had thought that all of her prayers had been answered.

Perhaps over the years she had turned a blind eye to the fact that Eugene wasn't the most sensitive of men, or that at times he had treated her as though she were beneath his contempt. Maggie had so desperately wanted to be loved she had pretended she had a normal, happy family. She often found herself ignoring Eugene's late nights and the smell of a perfume that was not hers clinging to his clothes.

She would not have believed that Eugene could treat her the way he had, especially after twenty-three years of marriage. She could remember it all happening as if it were yesterday.

Maggie had been packing their suitcases for a long week in North Carolina. She dreaded the Williams family reunions. Her mother-in-law was less than friendly, if not downright hostile, to the woman she felt had trapped her baby into marriage. The rest of Eugene's family was no better, referring to her as "that woman." The only person in the Williams clan who had even treated Maggie like a human being had been Eugene's grandmother.

When the other members of the Williams clan ignored her, the dear old lady would always have something nice to say to Maggie. Many times, she got Maggie through unbearable family functions. At one particular function she had confided to Maggie that when she herself had married into the Williams clan, she hadn't been considered pretty enough for one of the precious Williams boys. Those in her social circle had not been very nice to her either, until her husband died and she had inherited all his money. She took glee in the fact that they all had to kiss her butt if they wanted something.

Grandma Williams had been a sweetie, but Maggie had not been allowed to attend the funeral a few years back because Eugene had said that the family was upset enough without her showing up. That had led to a huge row and Eugene had left for a month. Maggie was so grateful when he returned that the subject was never brought up again. Eugene had disappeared before, but never for that long. That incident had hurt then, and still did, but she'd pinned a smile on her face and pretended that everything was okay for the sake of her children.

It didn't help matters that Eugene had never stood up to his family on her behalf. She wondered why she was even bothering to go to his family reunion where she would be virtually ignored or treated like a trespasser. At the last reunion, she had brought her peach cobbler that had always been a hit when she took it to the farmers' market. Everyone had

loved it and couldn't get enough of the tasty confection, but when it was discovered that Maggie had made it, her mother-in-law had gone so far as to dump the remainder of the cobbler in the Dumpster.

Eugene had laughed it off, saying his mother could be eccentric at times. In Maggie's opinion, "evil, old battleaxe" would have been a more accurate assessment.

As Maggie finished putting the last article of clothing into the suitcase, Eugene had come into the room with an inscrutable expression on his face. He was below average height for a man, with smooth black skin, slightly darker than her own rich chocolate complexion. He was not what one might consider handsome, but he exuded an aura of confidence that women usually found attractive.

Maggie shut the suitcase.

"I'm done packing. I was thinking that I could pack a few sandwiches and sodas so we won't have to stop as much on the way down. I can be done in fifteen minutes."

"That won't be necessary, Margaret." Eugene sighed heavily. Something was wrong. Eugene never called her Margaret unless he was mad at her about something.

Oh, my, what have I done this time?

"Okay. It was just a suggestion."

"It's not about the damn sandwiches. Look, have a seat." He seemed very uneasy about something. His dark forehead was beaded with sweat. He always perspired when he was nervous.

Maggie sat down on the bed. Whatever Eugene had to say, she had a feeling she wouldn't like it.

"So, what's on your mind? I thought you wanted to get on the road soon."

"I do, but we're not going."

She looked at him in bewilderment. *Now, what is he talking about? He has gone on nonstop about this damn reunion for the past month.*

"Oh?"

"I mean, I'm still going but you're not," he announced.

She sat in stunned silence. Maggie wondered why he would leave it until the last minute like this to tell her. To be honest, she was happy that she wouldn't have to see his rotten family again this year, but she wished he had been a little more considerate by telling her sooner. "Why did you wait until now to tell me? I could have set up my booth at the farmers' market this weekend. Really, Eugene, you should --"

"No. You don't understand. I'm taking someone else with me."

The kids were doing their own thing, so who in the world would be interested in attending his family reunion?

"Who?"

“I am taking my fiancée Shelly.”

“Your fiancée Shelly? You’re joking, right?” Maggie felt as if the walls were closing in on her. This had to be some sort of crazy joke.

“I’ve never been more serious in my life. I’ve met someone else and I am in love with her. Shelly is my soul mate,” Eugene explained as if she were a child.

Her brain was still trying to process exactly what was going on here.

“How long has this been going on?”

“That’s beside the point, and it’s really none of your business. I want to marry her.”

“But you can’t, you’re married to me.”

“That can easily be rectified with a divorce,” Eugene had said with such nonchalance that he could have been discussing the weather.

“But we’re a family. What about the kids? They will be crushed.”

“Oh, stop it. You’re making a big drama out of this when there is no need. Dion and Janice are twenty-three and twenty-two. Adults. I am sure they will get over it. I think I have stayed with you long enough for their sake. I am no longer willing to sacrifice my happiness to keep this illusion of a happy family.”

“But --”

“Please, let’s not argue. Surely you see we haven’t been happy in a long time. I think I probably fell out of love with you shortly after Janice was born.”

Maggie tried to speak through the hurt that was clogging her throat. “We had only been married for a year and a half by then. Why are you saying this to me now?”

“I didn’t want to hurt you.”

“But it’s okay to hurt me now? You stand there and tell me that you want to leave me for some bimbo, and you don’t think that would hurt me?”

He tore into her.

“Don’t you ever call Shelly that again! She is a lady and more of a woman than you could ever hope to be. Let’s face it -- you’re not that great in bed, you never really paid that much attention to me after the kids were born, and if I’m being honest here, you’ve really let yourself go. It wouldn’t have hurt you to use that ThighMaster I bought you last Christmas. It’s a wonder I didn’t leave you sooner.”

Maggie stared at Eugene as if he were an alien. This wasn’t happening. Why was he being so cruel?

“We’re a family. You...” Her eyes filled with tears. “How can you say all these things? I have devoted the past twenty-three years of my life to you and the children. I made sacrifices. I didn’t go to college, and I worked nights in that awful café to help put you through law school. And let me tell you something, mister, I’m not the only one who put on a little weight.” Maggie stared pointedly at Eugene’s pronounced stomach.

"Now, wait just a minute --"

"No, you wait just a minute," Maggie interrupted, getting angrier by the minute. "How dare you tell me that you want a divorce like this? How dare you do this to me after all I've done to keep this marriage together?"

Eugene had the good grace to look embarrassed, but like most people who were put on the defensive, he attacked.

"You were wasting your time trying to save this sinking ship of a marriage. Look on the bright side, Margaret, at least you don't have to go to my family reunion this year. My family's never liked you anyway." And with that, he'd left.

Maggie had stayed rooted to the spot for several hours, thinking that she would wake up from this nightmare. If she had thought that was the worst, there was more in store. She was served with divorce papers that very weekend, and on a run to the bank, she found out that their joint accounts had been wiped out and closed. She had nothing but her own very modest savings.

When Eugene had returned the following Monday, he told her that he was putting the house up for sale as it was in his name only, and in lieu of alimony payments he was offering her a lump sum of sixty thousand dollars. He said it was a fair amount and should be enough for her to get by on until she was ready to seek employment.

That was not a lot of money considering what Eugene brought home every year. She had threatened to find a lawyer to get her share, but that was when he'd played his trump card. He had threatened to withdraw financial backing from their kids, who were both in graduate school. She didn't want to believe that he would use their children in such a way, but wasn't that how he had always kept her in line throughout the years, threatening to take things out on the kids? She realized that her children were adults and could take care of themselves, but she had played the role of their protector for so long, she didn't know how else to behave other than to back down in the face of Eugene's threat.

Maggie's pride had kicked in. She'd flatly refused his money and moved out when she found an affordable place to live. It broke her heart to leave the stately Rockville home they had shared. She had found an efficiency outside the city in Silver Spring, Maryland. She got a job working at a restaurant as a hostess. On Friday nights, she baked cobblers to sell at the farmers' market on the weekends to supplement her tiny income.

She learned that the woman he had left her for was a new associate at his law firm. Unable to help herself, one day she took the train downtown to Eugene's office to catch a glimpse of the woman who had replaced her. Maggie waited until she finally saw Eugene walk out of the office with his arm around her replacement. She was younger, taller, slimmer, and looked like a black Barbie doll. Maggie felt sick. She left before she could be discovered.

Her friend Montana had told her that it was a time for new beginnings. Ha! Life was a joke, all right. She was a forty-year-old, passably attractive female, thirty, maybe forty,

pounds overweight, with no job skills or training. She had two adult children, one of whom was barely on speaking terms with her. Somehow she would have to find the strength to move on with her life.

She was about to get up from the couch when one of the ads caught her eye. *G and T associates, located in downtown D.C., is looking for a secretary/receptionist; no experience necessary; competitive salary. Call Oliver.*

Bingo. This might be just what she was looking for.

Chapter Two

GianMarco stood in the corner of the dark club located in London's East End. "I need some blood or some pussy," he muttered to himself. His amber gaze was surveying the goings-on around him when a cute little redhead walked past him, giving him a come-hither stare with seductive green eyes. He smiled back, realizing that he was going to get both.

"Not tonight, little brother," a deep voice whispered from behind him.

GianMarco frowned. "Dante, you always seem to show up when I'm about to have some fun." He didn't turn around, keeping eye contact with the redhead, who began to dance suggestively for him. She flung her flame-red mane over her shoulders and licked her glossy lips. Her hands roamed over her breasts, pushing them forward for his appraisal. She wiggled her hips and threw her head back as she became a slave to the music and GianMarco's golden gaze.

Dante responded with a soft chuckle, shaking his dark head. It seemed that his youngest brother was always in pursuit of pussy. "You forget that we're not here for fun."

On the dance floor, the flame-haired beauty began to suck her finger between her cherry-red lips. GianMarco answered, his eyes never leaving his quarry.

"I think I have a little time. Romeo and Nico won't be here for another half-hour or so, and our contact won't be here for another hour. That's plenty of time for a quickie."

Dante's dark blue eyes traveled to where the redhead stood. She looked like a tasty morsel. He could smell her pussy from where he stood, and he could feel his groin tightening. No, he had to keep his mind on what they had come here for.

"No, I don't think so. We need to wait for the others."

"Don't be such a killjoy. I know that you want a piece of that, too," GianMarco coaxed. Against his better judgment, Dante gave in.

“Okay, go talk to her, but remember that I get to have a taste as well.”

GianMarco wasted no time walking over to the dancing sexpot. Dante watched as Marco began to dance with the sexy little vixen. She rubbed her body against his brother with slow, deliberate motions.

Dante eyed them enviously. The sour taste of rogue blood still permeated his taste buds and his cock was beginning to ache. He wished that he had a life of his own like his brothers did. He needed this, probably more than his younger brother. He could hardly wait to sink his rod deep within the woman’s dripping wet pussy. He was becoming dizzy with need for her sweet cunt juice and blood.

Marco whispered something to the lady; she looked in his direction and smiled. Dante smiled back, and the two approached him.

GianMarco smiled at his brother with a knowing expression.

“Dante, I would like you to meet Diane. She says there is a private lounge downstairs where the three of us can get better acquainted.”

He had the strangest sensation that something wasn’t right, but he couldn’t look away from the mesmerizing green of her eyes. Dante took Diane’s hand and brought it to his lips.

“I’m very pleased to meet you, Diane.”

“Ello, love, are you ready to party? I’m going to have fun with a couple of handsome gents like you.” She spoke with a slight Cockney accent, and her green gaze surveyed him with approval. He knew what she saw: he was slightly taller than his brother, and his black, wavy hair, a contrast to Marco’s fair hair, fell below the collar of his Armani suit jacket. With two bold black brows slashed over cobalt-blue eyes, he’d been told that he had the face of a dark, dangerous angel.

She seemed to like what she saw. Her nipples had hardened in response to the erotic charge that flowed between the three of them.

“Very ready. Shall we go downstairs?” Dante flashed her an ultra-white smile. Diane nodded her head as if she were in a daze. She led them downstairs and through a narrow hallway to a small room, which was dark and bare save for a velvet sofa.

“So, Diane, how did you know about this room, and how is it that you have access to it?”

“I know the owner. I come ’ere quite a bit. I know ’e wouldn’t mind. Now, forget about that and let’s have some fun.” She stood on her tiptoes to kiss his neck. Her hands were on the buckle of his pants. When she unzipped him, his throbbing cock sprung forward.

“Holy shit! It’s a monster!” Diane shrieked in fear and delight at Dante’s foot-long cock. She ran her fingers reverently along its length. Dante moaned at the feel of her gentle touch.

She fell to her knees and began to stuff as much cock into her eager mouth as she could. GianMarco watched the erotic scene before him as Diane worked her mouth over Dante’s pole. He pulled out his own impressive organ and began to stroke himself, seeming

to grow more impatient with each passing minute. He inhaled deeply as if smelling her sweet nectar flowing and wanting some of it.

GianMarco tugged on her dark red mane, pulling her away from Dante's shaft, and lightly chided, "You have to share, *fratello mio*."

Diane was pulled to her feet, and GianMarco carried her the short distance to the couch. He positioned her so that she was leaning over it with her saucy little rump tilted in their direction. He grasped her hips in his hands and speared her with his hot, throbbing dick.

"Oh, shit! That 'urts! I ain't never had a cock this big before."

GianMarco slid his cock into her deeper still. "Shall I pull out?"

"God, no! 'Urt me some more, damn you, just don't stop fucking me!" she commanded as GianMarco began to pump his cock in and out of her slick pussy.

Dante came over to the couch and grabbed her by the hair. When Diane opened her mouth wide, he shoved his cock between her berry-colored lips once again. She nearly melted with pleasure-pain at having these two horny males fucking her pussy and her mouth.

GianMarco continued to move within her, her juices drenching his cock. He pulled out and knelt behind her, burying his face in her hairless pussy. He drank from her essence. Diane moaned with her mouth still full of cock. GianMarco's fingers transformed to narrow, sharpened tips. Using one sharp nail, he made a quick incision into her inner thigh. Drops of ruby-red blood began to drip from the cut flesh. He leaned over to slurp up the droplets that dribbled down her thigh, then pulled away with a look of confusion on his face.

GianMarco looked up at his brother, who seemed to sense that something wasn't right.

"Taste her."

She whimpered as Dante pulled out of her mouth. He turned her over on the couch and positioned himself between her legs. He ran his tongue over her swollen labia before running his tongue over the cut that GianMarco had made.

He looked up.

She has recently been with a rogue. Tread carefully. We need to get out of here now! he communicated telepathically to the younger vamp.

When both brothers stood up abruptly and began to adjust their clothing, Diane pouted. She whined, still very highly aroused.

"Where are you going? You can't just leave me like this."

Dante spoke with quiet menace. "We have no intention of leaving without you telling us who you're working for."

Her eyes darted from side to side. "I don't know what you're talking about."

“Do not attempt to lie to us; we will know. Who are you working for?” Dante asked once more.

“I... I can't say. 'E'll kill me if I say anything.” It was not their practice to kill innocent humans, but if this woman was in the league with a rogue, she was no innocent.

“You lured us down here, didn't you?” Dante now remembered the strange feeling he had had earlier when she'd led them there.

“E made me!” Dante was about to touch her mind with his to unlock the truth when Diane let out a loud scream. Two vamps came out of nowhere. Their incisors were bared and their hands had been transformed into sharp claws, poised for attack. Their eyes glowed a bright red. Rogues!

GianMarco and Dante's incisors and sharpened nails came out in battle mode as the vampires attacked. GianMarco was punched so hard that he went crashing against the wall. He was up in a flash, rushing toward his adversary and throwing out his fist to administer a blow of his own. His enemy hit the floor hard.

GianMarco fell on top of the fallen vamp, wrapping his fingers around the evil vamp's throat. The rogue brought his hands up to wrap his fingers around GianMarco's throat. They rolled on the ground, neither one giving an inch.

Dante was having his own problems with his attacker trying to bite him. Once a vampire's jaws were locked around flesh, there was no escape without losing a chunk of skin. The Grimaldi brothers could usually take out their opponents without breaking a sweat, but these were no ordinary rogues. There was something different about these two; they seemed stronger than most. When Dante spied the tattoo on the rogue's arm, he knew why.

“Can we join in?” a familiar voice came from the entranceway. Always one to make an entrance, Romeo Grimaldi grabbed the rogue that was giving GianMarco such a hard time.

Niccolo Grimaldi followed his brother into the room, going for the rogue Dante was valiantly fighting. When Niccolo distracted the red-eyed vamp, Dante went for the jugular, tearing out a huge hunk of the rogue's throat. The evil vampire let out a bloodcurdling scream of pain. Not to be outdone by his brother, Nico tore through the rogue's chest and pulled out his heart, crushing it to a bloody pulp in his muscular hand. The dead vamp collapsed to the floor, and Dante and Nico pounced on the body and began to drain it of its blood before it became too chilled to drink.

While Dante and Nico fed off their enemy, GianMarco disemboweled his attacker while Romeo ripped the spine from the offender's back. Together they tore open the rogue's chest to crush his heart, ensuring death. Like their brothers, they began to feed off the vanquished vamp.

When the brothers finished feasting, they all looked at each other.

“I would much rather have been feeding on some pussy, but there's nothing like a good takedown, eh, boys?” Romeo laughed. He was the second oldest of the four brothers and the

rabble-rousing adventurer among them. Romeo was by far the wildest, always ready for action and courting danger whenever he could. Sometimes when trouble didn't come to him, he went looking for it.

"Not now, Romeo. We were set up." Dante hissed at his brother's joke. He raked his fingers through his dark hair.

"Yes, that much is obvious. Our little redhead friend is gone," GianMarco observed dryly.

"I noticed. Let's get the hell out of here before more of these bastards show up." Dante wiped the blood from his mouth.

* * * * *

Once back at the hotel, the brothers discussed the night's events.

"What the hell happened, exactly? We sensed danger the minute we stepped into the club. Why the hell didn't you two pick up on it?" Nico asked GianMarco and Dante, who would normally have never fallen for such a trap.

Dante answered, deadpan. "GianMarco wanted a piece of ass."

Romeo rolled his eyes before glaring at his youngest brother. "Isn't that always the case? That does not explain why you two couldn't sense there were rogues about."

Dante sighed. Romeo was right. He should have known better than to ignore his instincts, but it had been a long time since he had been with a woman.

"It doesn't matter, Dante. We know how much you sacrifice for the Underground." Nico patted his older brother on the back, seeming to pick up on Dante's inner struggle.

Dante smiled affectionately at him. "Thank you for saying so, Nico."

"Who tipped you off to this place, Dante?" GianMarco asked. "He is obviously behind all of this."

"Trent Black. He has been loyal to our cause. I had no reason to disbelieve him."

"I have to ask, are we just tilting at windmills here? No one has ever seen *il Diavolo*; perhaps there is no such vampire," GianMarco pointed out. "Lately, it seems like each mission takes us to a dead end, and it is beginning to get very tedious."

"*Il Diavolo* exists, all right, and when I find him I will rip his heart out and make him eat it." Dante spoke with such conviction that no one spoke for a while.

GianMarco finally broke the silence. "Those rogues were stronger than usual."

Romeo agreed. "Yes. They seemed different. A little wilder, perhaps."

Dante gritted his teeth. "They were disciples of the evil one."

"How can you be so sure?" Nico asked.

Dante looked straight ahead. He would never forget that symbol for as long as he lived. "They bore his mark."

"It was a setup from the get-go, with the little redhead morsel as bait. Whoever gave Trent that message must have been in on it, or perhaps your man Black isn't as loyal to the Underground as you think," Romeo pointed out.

"Don't be such a cynic, little brother. He has never let me down before. I will speak to him when I get back to New York," Dante promised.

"Maybe you should call him instead," GianMarco suggested.

"No. I want to see the look on his face when he sees me. If he is in on this plot, he will be surprised that I am still alive," Dante reasoned.

"I guess that makes sense, but if he is in on it, I'll help you kick his ass." Romeo smiled, looking as if he were spoiling for a fight.

Dante shook his head. "Ro, I think you just want a fight, period."

"Who, me?" The blond vampire smirked.

"Not now, Ro. This is serious business." Dante sighed.

Nico looked at his older brother with concern-filled amber eyes "Dante, have you considered taking some time away from Underground business? It seems to have consumed all your time, and now it seems to be consuming your soul as well."

"It's never far from my mind, but time off is a luxury that I can't afford. No, it is out of the question. How can I rest knowing that *il Diavolo* and his minions are out there preying on innocents? Perhaps it is my cross to bear to take him down, but it is something that I must do." Dante slammed his fist in his hand.

The power-hungry vamps that preyed on other vampires to grow stronger sickened him, and *il Diavolo* was the worst. When Trent had told him about a contact in London who had information about the evil one, Dante had contacted his most trusted agents, his brothers. He felt embarrassed to have been led into the trap. When he was younger and more headstrong, he had gotten himself into such predicaments. Now that he was older, he should have known better.

After barely surviving a brutal attack by rogue vampires himself, Dante had dedicated his life to hunting them down. He had created the Underground, an organization of vampires who were dedicated to the same goal, many of whom had their own reasons for hunting rogues. There were dozens of agents in their organization throughout the world, but he did not trust anyone as much as he trusted his brothers.

Perhaps if he found *il Diavolo*, he could finally find out what had happened to their mama and papa. His brothers were all too young to remember them the way he did, but he would never forget.

Dante knew that at times his brothers thought that he was a tight ass who didn't like to have fun, which was probably why he had not listened to his inner instincts at the club

earlier. He cursed himself for his brief lapse; he would not be that foolish again. Dante vowed to wipe out every damn rogue who came his way.

GianMarco seconded Nico's opinion.

"I know how you feel. No one knows about wanting vengeance more than I do. Take some time off. We are all worried about you."

"It's easy for you to say, Marco, when you have had your revenge. You were fortunate enough to find the rogue who killed your wife and child, but have you really gotten over it?" Dante asked shrewdly.

GianMarco looked as if he didn't understand, but Dante knew that he did. "What are you talking about?"

"You haven't painted since Bianca died."

GianMarco shrugged. "I just don't feel like painting. Besides, it's hardly the same thing."

"Isn't it?" Dante raised one dark brow.

GianMarco shuffled his feet, looking like he wanted to change the subject rather than get into why he no longer painted. "Not really, but suit yourself."

"Look, let's not argue," Niccolo interjected.

Dante sighed. "Who's arguing? It's a simple discussion. I do have another task for the three of you, however."

"Oh, boy! It's ass-kicking time!" Romeo said with glee.

"Can it, Ro. This is serious. Since we are in London already, there is a house in the West End I want you to visit. I hear that it draws an interesting crowd. See what you can find out, and if anyone discovers your presence, take them all out," Dante instructed, before rattling off the address.

"And where are you going?" GianMarco asked.

"Back to New York. I have to pay a little visit to our informant."

* * * * *

A week later, on a flight back to D.C., GianMarco reflected on the last couple of weeks. The nagging comment that Dante had made about him not painting anymore bothered him. He tried to push it to the furthest part of his mind. It was no one's business why he chose not to paint anymore, not even his brothers'. He frowned as he remembered what had happened after they left the hotel the night of the trap.

When he and his two brothers had gained entrance to the West End home they were scouting, they immediately knew why Dante had sent them there. They had hovered in the corner of the room undetected, observing what appeared to be a meeting of four ordinary

men, but who were not ordinary at all. They were vampires, and they all seemed smug about something. They had been talking about an induction ceremony of some sort. It was only when the name of the woman from the club had been mentioned that GianMarco faltered. That was when they had been discovered. The Grimaldi brothers annihilated the four rogues easily, much more easily than the ones in the club.

These missions were beginning to take more and more out of him. GianMarco was disgusted with his performance that night. First, he had slipped up with the redhead at the nightclub and then he'd made his presence known to the rogue before they had gotten all the information they had needed. His brother didn't say anything about it, which only made him feel worse. He still wondered what the redhead had had to do with all of this. At least they had been able to take out some rogues that night. He would take a long rest before going back to the office. He hoped the new secretary Oliver hired was at least someone he could stand to look at.

Chapter Three

Maggie could hardly believe her luck. Unaware of Oliver Townsend's motives, she was delighted to have been hired on the spot when she had gone in for an interview at G and T Associates. The salary she was offered was generous considering her lack of training, and it would at least allow her to expand her food budget to more than just peanut butter, jelly, bread, and instant noodles. So far, in the two days since she began working for the private investigation agency, she liked what she did.

She knew it would take her a little while to get the hang of things but she was eager to learn. She was getting pretty good at reviewing and updating case files. It was interesting work, especially reading about some of the clients, which made her feel a little better about her own sad existence.

Oliver was an easygoing boss. He had insisted they work on a first-name basis. He was a nice man, and easy on the eyes as well, with his curly brown locks and friendly blue eyes. He wasn't particularly tall, but then again, she was only five-foot-four herself, so height was never one of her hang-ups. His looks didn't matter to her anyway, because the last thing she needed right now was a man in her life, especially with the way the divorce proceedings were going.

Now Eugene was demanding that she reimburse him for half the cost of the divorce. He had told her that Shelly thought it was only fair. Maggie didn't give a flying fuck what Shelly thought was fair. Eugene was the one who had started the divorce proceedings so he could damn well pay for it himself. He was so damn cheap; it probably wasn't Shelly's idea at all.

At least now she had a steady job, enabling her to take a break from her problems. The office building where she worked was in Dupont Circle, a prosperous business and residential area. The actual location of G and T Associates was in a suite in a huge office

building with a myriad of different businesses. Maggie liked the setup of the office. She sat at a desk in front, facing the entrance so that she saw everyone who came and went in the office. On either side of her was a huge office that belonged to her bosses. Down the little hallway were a couple of empty offices that Oliver explained would be for future employees once they expanded. Maggie hoped that her other boss, Mr. Grimaldi, was as nice as Oliver.

She sat at her desk, trying to figure out the nuances of her computer. Maggie wished her son Dion were here; he was the computer whiz. She tried to understand the tutorial, but it was like trying to read Chinese. She was so engrossed that she didn't notice the front door open.

"Tell me you're not the new secretary," a harsh voice demanded. Maggie let out a loud shriek. She was easily excitable; Eugene used to delight in sneaking up on her and scaring her out of her wits. "For God's sake, woman, there is no need to scream."

Maggie looked up to see a man standing in front of her desk. Her jaw dropped. He was drop-dead gorgeous! He was tall and broad-shouldered, standing a good few inches over six feet. The blond hunk had fine, chiseled features, full sensual lips, and a pair of liquid golden eyes that seemed to be looking at her very soul. The dark brown brows that slashed angrily over his eyes created a startling contrast to his shoulder-length, ash-blond hair bound by a black band. A stray lock fell across his forehead, giving him a casually disheveled appearance.

Maggie began to salivate. The pair of khaki pants he wore did not hide the indecently large bulge he sported between his legs, and the button-up black shirt did nothing to disguise his svelte, muscular physique. It had been a long time since she had made love, and she would bet her last dollar that this man would satisfy her every waking need. Her pussy began to contract.

He also looked to be in his early to mid-thirties. *Too young for me.*

Actually, she should have thought, *not for me at all.* Men who looked like that would not spare a second look at someone like her. And not everyone was open-minded about interracial relationships. She had never looked at a white guy in a romantic way before, having been with Eugene for so long, but who cared about race with a prime hunk like this one? The most important factor of all was that she had just finished telling herself that the last thing she needed in her life right now was a man.

"Have you finished staring, or should I turn around so you can check out my ass as well?" he asked caustically.

Maggie's dark face grew hot with embarrassment. She didn't realize she had been staring.

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to be rude. What can I help you with? Mr. Townsend is out of the office right now, but he should be back in another hour or so." She was as professional as she could be once she regained her composure.

"You didn't answer my original question. Who the hell are you?"

Maggie's eyes widened. Hunk or not, this man was rude. She generally did not have a short fuse, but Blondie needed to be taught some manners.

Easy, Maggie, he could be a potential client. The last thing she wanted to do was to get fired her second day on the job.

"I'm Maggie Williams, sir. How can I help you?" She pinned a smile on her face to defuse the situation. It didn't seem to work. Blondie eyed her with hostility for several seconds before he spoke.

His eyes raked over her with rude appraisal, as if he found her lacking.

"Please don't tell me you're the new secretary."

"Excuse me?" she asked in bewilderment. *Is this guy for real?*

"You don't look as if you know your head from your ass." He was downright nasty!

That was it. She wasn't here to take his abuse.

"Look, I don't get paid to be insulted, sir. You can either state your business or leave."

"As this is my agency, if anyone is leaving it will be you." His amber eyes glared at her.

Maggie gasped. "Mr. Grimaldi?"

"The G doesn't stand for God." His voice dripped with sarcasm.

Although you probably think you're God's gift. Damn, just what I needed, an asshole for a boss.

GianMarco glared at Maggie as if he had just read her thoughts.

"Listen here, Ms. Williams..." GianMarco began, but was cut off when Oliver entered the office.

Oliver smiled at his partner. "Hey, Marc, I see you've met Maggie. She's a real gem, isn't she?"

"She's something, all right," GianMarco muttered under his breath.

It was loud enough for Maggie to hear, and it was the straw that broke the camel's back. She had had enough. There was no way she would continue to work at this place if she had to put up with this jerk, even if she had to live off peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the rest of her life. She had enough drama in her own personal life without having to deal with a hostile employer.

"Look, Blondie, I might need this job, but I don't need it enough to put up with the likes of you. I think you are a horrible human being, and one day someone is going to slap the taste out of your mouth. Just thank your lucky stars that I'm not the violent type or I would oblige," she said, before grabbing her purse.

She stalked to the doorway and paused, turning around to face the two stunned men.

"Oliver, I'm very sorry that things didn't work out," she finished on a sob, hurrying out the door before she let that odious man see her cry.

* * * * *

After the door slammed shut, Oliver turned to GianMarco. “What the hell just happened? Maggie is a nice lady, not very experienced, but she was so enthusiastic that I decided to take a chance on her. I got the feeling that she really needed this job.”

“Is this your idea of a joke, Oliver? You said you were going to hire someone I couldn’t possibly find attractive and you hired her? I didn’t think you were actually serious.”

“So what if I did? There were a couple of women I interviewed who would make paint peel from the walls. She wasn’t even close to being the least attractive candidate. Like I said, I liked her and I got the impression that she really needed this job. Just because she’s not the eye candy you’re used to seeing around the office doesn’t give you the right to be so nasty to her. She looked so hurt. What has gotten into you?” Oliver demanded.

GianMarco’s jaw clenched. He had tried to block out the look of despair in her eyes as she had stormed out of the office. When he had walked in earlier after this latest mission for the Underground, he had been tired and frustrated. He had planned on resting before coming into the office but remembered some call-backs that he had to make.

Being a vampire had its advantages as he could move without being noticed if he didn’t want to be. He had been taken aback to find a strange woman sitting at the front desk, looking puzzled at what was on her computer screen. She had a smooth, milk chocolate complexion and huge expressive dark-brown eyes. Her hair was worn naturally in a riot of curls and spirals that cascaded to her shoulders. It had looked so soft and inviting, making his fingers itch to run through it. She had been nibbling nervously on her full, sensual bottom lip, which had given her a look of vulnerability.

At that moment he had desperately wanted to sink his teeth into that sexy lip and sample its sweetness. Even though she was seated behind a desk, he could tell that her rounded figure would provide any man many hours of delight. She could not be classified as beautiful, but she was pretty, nonetheless. His cock had reacted to her nearness.

GianMarco had touched her mind with his and felt a deep sadness from within her. He’d wanted to take her into his arms and soothe the sadness away. It had been a long time since he had held a woman in his arms who wasn’t skin and bones, but then again, women who were skin and bones were safer for his equilibrium. He remembered how it had felt to be engulfed in the arms of a full-figured woman. Not since his beautiful Bianca had he gone down that avenue, and he didn’t plan on traveling that way again. It still hurt too much to think about it, even after all this time. He did not want to remember, and he did not want this woman around as a constant reminder.

Damn Oliver and his interference. If his body’s initial reaction was anything to go by, then this woman would have to go. It was not just that he found her physically attractive, because there were many full-figured women in the world who were more attractive than

Maggie Williams. There just seemed to be something about *this* woman that touched his soul, something he dared not examine. He'd known right then that he would have to get rid of her, and fast, so that was when he'd made his presence known to her.

When she had rushed out of the office, he had caught the glitter of tears she had tried to hide from him. The deep pain he had felt within her had hit him with such force that he had taken a step back. He felt low, but he had had to do it.

"Marc, are you listening to me? Why were you such an asshole to her?"

"Look, I'm sorry. Just chalk it up to another frustrating couple of weeks."

"I suppose your brother is still sending you on those suicide missions. You and your brothers are nuts, playing secret agents on the side." Oliver shook his head.

"You know nothing about what I do and the less you know the better."

Oliver shrugged. "I know you go away for chunks of time to play vampire and it's always after a call from your brother. I also heard you talk to him on the phone about some dangerous missions. What am I supposed to think?"

"First of all, I don't play a vampire, I am one. Second, if you know too much about what I do it will be more of a danger to you," GianMarco warned.

Oliver's face went bright red. "Are you threatening me?"

"No, actually, I'm not. I am simply telling you as your friend that I do not want anything to happen to you."

"What about you? If what you're doing is so dangerous, then, aren't you in even more danger than I am?" Oliver had concern etched on his face.

"I am over six hundred years old. I can take care of myself."

"You're not doing anything illegal, are you?"

"By whose standards?" GianMarco wished to change the subject.

"Don't be a smart ass. You know what I'm talking about."

"I won't discuss this anymore with you, Oliver, for reasons that I have already stated, but please know that what I do will never do you any harm. As long as you mind your business, it will not harm the agency either."

"I don't care about the damn agency as much as I care about you, Marc. Just be careful, okay?"

"I try to be."

Oliver sighed in defeat, as if realizing that there was no point in continuing this conversation, but he still pressed on.

"So, what are you going to do about Maggie?"

"What am I going to do?" GianMarco pointed to himself, nonplussed.

"Yes, *you*, asshole. You made that poor woman run out of here and I honestly think she was about to cry."

“What exactly do you want me to do about that? If she doesn’t want to work here, I can’t make her. It’s a free country, is it not?” He turned away to walk to his office, but Oliver was close on his heels.

“Oh, no, you don’t. You are going to go after her and tell her that you’re sorry for being such a jerk. I think that’s the least you could do. If you really don’t want her working here, I will respect that and we can hire someone else, but I think she is at least owed an apology. Maybe you can offer her some kind of bonus for having to leave in such circumstances.”

GianMarco stiffened as pain-stricken eyes flashed through his mind. He let out a deep sigh.

“Why do you care so much? It’s not as if she has been here long enough for you to form an attachment.”

“So what? She’s a human being, and you hurt her feelings. She’s not some cold vampire like you,” Oliver accused.

GianMarco suddenly turned on his friend, his amber eyes glowing dangerously. “If you make one more vampire crack, I will show you exactly how much feeling I have.”

“Don’t take your misguided anger out on me. You should be mad at yourself for being such a jackass.”

“Okay! Okay! *Dio!* I will find the blasted woman and apologize, okay?”

“That’s all I ask, and maybe we can start the secretary search again tomorrow.”

“Whatever. I take it that this woman filled out paperwork and whatnot with her address and where she can be contacted?” GianMarco asked, growing weary of the conversation.

Oliver patted him on the shoulder. “Yes. You’re doing the right thing, Marc.”

“If you say so.”

Why did he have the feeling that Maggie Williams would wreak havoc on his peace of mind?

* * * * *

Maggie arrived back at her apartment with a heavy heart. Damn, she really needed that job, but she let her foolish pride get in the way. She should have killed him with kindness. That usually drove people crazy because then they had no reason to be angry anymore. Her answering machine was flashing.

“Hi, Mom, I was just calling to wish you good luck on your new job and I wanted to let you know how proud I am of you and that I love you. I’ll try to call you again tonight.” *Beep.*

Tears filled her eyes. Dion was so considerate. A mother couldn’t ask for a more loving son. He had been a huge support to her through the past few months. Maggie only wished

that she shared the same close relationship with her daughter Janice. There had been a time when mother and daughter were close, but sometime around the age of sixteen, Janice had changed. At times it seemed the younger woman exuded an air of contempt for her mother. Maggie didn't know why that was, and it hurt, especially when Janice decided to pack up and move to Atlanta. Janice dutifully called every week, but there was always a coolness in her tone.

Maggie would have given anything to get back the closeness they had once shared, but she wasn't sure how to go about it. Janice was twenty-two and entitled to her own life.

Another message played on the answering machine.

"Hey, girl, it's Montana. I just thought I would call to see what's up but I forgot that you got a day job. Give me a call when you get this message. I will be in my office until seven. After that, hit me up on my cell. Later."

A brief smile touched Maggie's lips. If anyone could cheer her up it would be Montana. She picked up the phone and dialed her best friend's number.

"Montana Donovan speaking."

"Hey, Montana, it's Maggie. I just got your message."

"Oh, I only left it half an hour ago. You're home already? It's only two o'clock."

"I quit."

"What! Already? I know you haven't had a real job before, but I thought you would have hung in there longer than a couple of days. Sheesh, girl, what happened?"

"I met my other boss today. He was so rude. I could not believe how nasty he was. You wouldn't think there are people out there like him, but there really are. I wanted to smash his perfect face in."

"Perfect, huh? Now, we're getting to the root of things. You were attracted to him?" Maggie could hear the smugness in her friend's voice.

"No way. Okay, so he was good looking, but that's beside the point."

"No, it isn't. I find this quite interesting. Tell me what he's like," Montana demanded.

Maggie rolled her eyes. *God help my oversexed friend.*

"Montana, stop it! It doesn't matter what he looks like. I quit, so I will never see his hateful face again."

"Too bad, seeing as he seems to have made quite an impression on you. I haven't seen or heard you get this passionate about anything for a long time. Even when that sorry ass Eugene did what he did to you, I never heard you get this angry. My, this guy must be something else."

"Look, I don't work there anymore. How many times do I have to tell you that? Anyway, if there were a chance in hell that I was interested in him, it wouldn't guarantee that he would be interested in me as well. There are just too many reasons why it would be a

bad idea to get involved with someone like him. He's too young for me, he's white, and I am not, I repeat *not* looking for a man."

Montana smacked her lips in disapproval on the other end of the line.

"So what if he's white? I've dated white men before. The rumor about white guys having small dicks is absolutely false. Well, I can't speak for all of them, but, boy, I sure had fun with the ones I was with. There was this one guy Jimmy who was so big that my damn coochie was sore for a month. He sure put a hurting on my ass. Then there was Keith --"

Maggie hung up. She loved her friend dearly and would gladly lay down her life for her, but Montana's one-track mind could be annoying at times.

The phone rang. Maggie debated whether she should answer it or not and decided that she would have to talk to Montana sooner or later.

"Hello."

"Please don't hang up on me again. I've never hung up on you, and I expect the same courtesy in return."

"I'm sorry, Montana. That was very rude of me. I guess I --"

"You were upset because I wasn't giving you the sympathy you expected when you called me. Well, I'm the wrong person to call for that. You don't need sympathy; you need to get your head examined. For twenty-three years, you put up with Eugene's crap. You even put his sorry ass through college and law school while caring for two small children. You've let him sabotage all of your friendships. Lord knows why I stuck around considering how nasty he was to me."

Montana sighed deeply on the other end of the line. "I love you, girl, and it's because I love you that I am going to tell you what you need to hear and not what you want to hear. You and I both come from the same background -- neither one of us knows who our family is, and we've been bounced from one foster home to the next. You had been in bad homes and knew what it was like, but for some reason you latched onto that turd Eugene as if he were the Savior. Now that it's over, you are rolling over and playing dead, as if you're a martyr. You need not have been in this predicament if your damn pride had not gotten in the way. You know I would have lent you the money for you to afford a good attorney to fight him."

"But he threatened to stop paying for the kids," Maggie argued.

"Stop that! He only said that shit because he knew you would fall for it. I would like to think that even he is not that low. Anyway, your kids aren't kids anymore, and you have to think about yourself now. You invested twenty-three years into that marriage, and I can't believe you just walked away with nothing. You should have taken that sucker for half of everything he owns, which is exactly what you're entitled to, but no, you found that little shitbox apartment of yours and started working at the diner for minimum wage. Do you want to know why?"

Maggie remained silent. Tears coursed down her face as she gripped the receiver of the phone.

Montana sighed in frustration before continuing.

“You did this because you think that if you’re a good little girl, this will all go away and Eugene will take you back, then you’ll get to keep your little fairy-tale illusions intact. He’s left you before, and granted, he never served you with divorce papers, but even if things fall through with this Shelly person and he takes you back, he’ll do it again. Stop fooling yourself, girl. He doesn’t love you, and he never did. Hasn’t he proved that to you time and time again? You will get no more sympathy from me, girlfriend. Why don’t you ask Janice why she really doesn’t come to visit? There comes a time when you have to face reality. You are going to have to stand on your own two feet.”

“That’s what I am doing,” Maggie protested.

“Stand on your own two feet without hoping that your ‘perfect’ family will be restored. He’s not worth it. You’re a beautiful person inside and out. I hope one day you can find someone who will appreciate you for you. Now, I have some work to do, but I will call you this weekend and maybe we can go out to dinner. My treat.”

Maggie was silent.

“Are you still there, Mags?”

“Yes, I’m here.”

“Keep your chin up, kiddo. There’s a silver lining to this cloud. You are stronger than you think, girl. Talk to you later?”

“Sure. Goodbye.”

Was Montana right? Was she still clinging to hope because of this desperate need to be loved?

She sat on the nearest chair and cried softly, feeling overwhelmed by the events of the day. It seemed like she had been crying a lot lately.

Just then there was a knock on her door. Now who would be visiting her at this time of day? Hastily, she wiped her tears away and went to the door.

Maggie gasped when she opened it. Standing on the other side was GianMarco Grimaldi.

Chapter Four

“Mr. Grimaldi! What are you doing here?” she asked in surprise.

Maggie felt uneasy knowing that those discerning amber eyes surveyed her tear-stained face. She knew her eyes were still blood-red from crying.

“May I come in?”

“Why? Is there something else you wanted to harass me about? I’ve had enough of that already, thank you very much. You can take your narrow behind out of here and never darken my doorstep again.” She attempted to close the door in his face. GianMarco stuck his foot out to halt the door. “Go away!”

“Please, hear me out. I promise I did not come here to antagonize you further. I will not take up too much of your time.” His amber eyes sparkled with sincerity.

Maggie gave him a long, hard stare before stepping back to allow him entrance into her apartment. She could just imagine what he thought of her small living space but she didn’t care. It was hers and if he didn’t like it, he could kiss her ass. Her apartment was already tiny with only her occupying it, but with this tall, broad-shouldered man in it, the room seemed smaller still. She didn’t want to be polite, but her good manners dictated that she at least offer him a beverage.

“Would you like something to drink? I have iced tea, orange juice, and water in the fridge.” If he took her up on her offer of a drink, she would be hard pressed not to spit in it. She was still trying to figure out what in the world he was doing here. Judging from the way he had treated her earlier, he didn’t seem to be the apologizing type.

“No, thank you. My visit will be brief. I’ve come to apologize for my rudeness earlier. I wasn’t in the best of moods when I came into the office today, although that’s no excuse for my behavior.” GianMarco seemed awkward as he looked down into her eyes. His gaze slid to her lips as if he wanted to kiss her, but Maggie knew that just wasn’t possible.

Maggie stared back at him in surprise. It was a good thing she wasn't a betting woman, because his apology had knocked her for six.

"Apology accepted. Well, I... I guess I owe you an apology as well."

He raised a brow. "What for?"

She wanted to say, *for thinking about spitting in your drink*, but decided not to go there.

"I should have held my temper in check. Had you been a client, I'm sure I would be expected to live by the credo the customer is always right."

"I will not accept your apology, because you don't owe me one. I take complete blame for the incident, and you had every right to stand up for yourself. Let me tell you, if a client had ever treated you that way, they would have been out on their asses. Now, I will accept your apology for thinking about spitting in my drink." He grinned at her.

Maggie's jaw dropped. "How in the world --"

"You have very expressive eyes, Maggie. Big, beautiful brown eyes," he said, taking her soft hand in his. Their eyes locked.

"Mr. Grimaldi --" Just then the phone rang. "Excuse me." She walked over to the phone. "Hello?"

GianMarco knew that he should probably leave now as he had done what he had set out to do, but something compelled him to stay. He could hear yelling in the receiver. If he really wanted to, he could have zoomed in on the conversation to hear exactly what was being said on the other end, but he decided the less he knew about this woman, the better. He didn't want to start caring. He knew he should have gotten the hell out of there the minute she had opened the door with bloodshot eyes and a sad expression on her pretty face. He had felt guilty as hell for being the cause of that look, but on top of that, he could feel his body reacting to her the same way it had in the office.

"There really is no need for you to get nasty, Eugene, and you need to lower your voice. I said that I haven't gotten around to it yet." Maggie seemed calm, but GianMarco could see the tension coursing through her body.

"I can go if you would like." GianMarco put his hand on the doorknob, but Maggie motioned him to stay, so he did. As he waited, he took a look around her apartment. One could literally take three or four steps and be on the other side of the room. His master bathroom was larger than Maggie's entire apartment.

There was very little walking space around the furniture crammed inside. A couch sat in the middle of the room, with two chairs on either side and a coffee table in front. There was a twin-sized bed in one of the corners and a kitchenette in the opposite corner. He assumed that the door beside the kitchenette was the bathroom. Maggie had plants and pictures strategically placed around the apartment, giving it a more homey appearance. It seemed she was trying to make the best of what she had.

Judging from her apartment, it was apparent Maggie had really needed the job at the agency. His guilt increased because he was responsible for running her off. Knowing the threat she posed, could he ask her to come back to work for the agency? Unconsciously, his glance began to stray to the bed in the corner of the room.

GianMarco wondered what it would be like to take her to bed, stripping away each article of clothing, piece by delicious piece, taking his fill of her bountiful chocolate body. He had no preferences about the color of his women. He was far too old to have such petty hang-ups like race. Besides, if the truth were known, it was a huge turn on to make love to women of color, especially dark-skinned women like Maggie Williams.

Just the thought of running his pale hands over her ample dark body was beginning to make his cock rise. He imagined rubbing his dick between her large breasts and then burying his face in her chocolate mons to drink her nectar and perhaps sample some of her yummy blood. GianMarco shook his head, trying to rid his mind of the carnal images. What was he thinking?

I had better get out of here before I pull her into my arms. His feet would not cooperate.

“Eugene, stop it! I told you I would sign those damn papers when I have a chance. I’ve been busy lately. You’re just going to have to wait.” Maggie was now yelling back into the phone, gaining GianMarco’s attention once more.

“No, you have no right to do that, and if you come over here I will not let you in!” She began to tap her feet angrily. GianMarco frowned. Who the hell was this Eugene person?

“No, they will not let you in. You’re the one who wanted this divorce. You can’t just call yourself my husband to gain access to my apartment,” Maggie hissed into the phone. GianMarco resisted the urge to hear what was being said on the other end of the phone, but whatever it was, it caused Maggie’s eyes to narrow.

“Eugene, this conversation is over. I will talk to you again when you’re more civil.” She hung up the phone with a decisive click, then rested her head in her hands. Her shoulders began to shudder gently as if she were crying.

Unable to help himself, GianMarco walked over to her and lightly touched her shoulder. She jumped as if she had forgotten he was still there. To GianMarco’s surprise, when he looked at her face, there was no trace of tears.

“Is everything okay?”

Maggie tried to get over the laughing fit that had just struck her. “I’m sorry. I am being silly.”

“What’s so funny? You seemed pretty upset only a short while ago.”

“It was my husband giving me a hard time as usual. I figured I could either laugh or cry about the situation. Frankly, I am tired of crying.”

"You're married?" GianMarco had been too busy imagining how Maggie would look naked to fully pay attention to her phone conversation. He was astonished and bothered that her announcement should affect him this way.

Maggie twirled a lock of hair around her finger, biting her lower lip. "For now, at least." She shrugged, projecting an air of indifference, but GianMarco wasn't fooled.

"What happened?" GianMarco dragged his eyes away from the tempting sight of her teeth nibbling her lip, knowing he was treading on dangerous ground.

She explained with a nonchalant expression. "It's an old story. Boy meets girl. Girl gets knocked up. They marry. Two kids and twenty-three years later, boy gets tired of girl and trades her in for a sleeker, younger model."

"Is that why you have such a sad look in your eyes?"

"Does it really show?"

"You wear your heart on your sleeve, Maggie, but I get the distinct feeling that you are better off without him."

"I suppose."

"You only suppose? You should know."

"I know. I'm just so torn. There's a part of me that's scared and uncertain about the future, but there's another part that curses myself for putting up with him for so long."

"So, why did you?"

"Well, I told myself that it was because of the kids, but maybe it's because... never mind. I am sure this is all boring to you." She blushed and looked uncomfortable to be sharing such intimate details of her life with him while the incident in the office was still fresh.

"No, this doesn't bore me. I think you were very foolish to stay with someone who didn't appreciate you, but to some extent, I can understand your situation. I think the bigger fool, however, is this Eugene character. Why he would want to trade you in is beyond me."

She gave him a shy smile, revealing even, white teeth. She had the deepest dimples he had ever seen and he felt his heart skip a beat. If he didn't get out of there now, there would be no turning back.

"I... I've got to go."

"Okay. Thanks for coming by. I was wondering though..."

"Yes?"

"I was wondering if I could... never mind. Thanks for coming over. Your apology really meant a lot to me." She smiled, moving past him to open the door. He placed his hand over hers.

"No. Please tell me." His golden eyes stared into hers.

“About my job... Maybe I could help you and Oliver out until you find another secretary at least. I know I’m not that experienced, but I am willing to give my one hundred percent.”

Oh, hell, GianMarco thought. How could he say no to her when she looked at him with those big brown eyes of hers? “Maggie, if you want it, you can have your job back on a permanent basis.

A big grin spread across her face. “Really? That’s wonderful, Mr. Grimaldi!”

“Yes, really. You can come in at 8:30, but on one condition.”

“Anything.”

“You really have to stop calling me Mr. Grimaldi. I noticed you and Oliver are on a first-name basis, and it would be silly if we called each other by our last names. My name is GianMarco.”

“Ah, so you’re Italian. I thought I detected a very faint accent. You don’t look Italian.”

“Why is that?”

“I don’t know. Most Italians I know have an olive complexion and dark hair.”

“I see. That’s more of a southern Italy trait. My family is originally from Rome, but there is some English in our blood. I haven’t lived there for a very long time. Perhaps one day you will get to see a little of it. It’s a beautiful country.”

She smiled up at him. “I think that sounds lovely.”

You’re lovely, he wanted to say. *Get out of here now, GianMarco.*

“Well, I guess I will see you tomorrow.”

As if on impulse, she wrapped her arms around his waist. “Thank you so much, GianMarco.” She stood on the tip of her toes to give him a kiss on the cheek to show her gratitude.

At the exact moment when her lips grazed his cheek, he turned his head so that their lips met. His arms snaked around her, lifting her up against the length of his body. When Maggie gasped in surprise, his tongue stabbed into the warm, sweet cavern of her mouth to taste her more thoroughly.

GianMarco was caught up in a whirlwind of ecstasy so strong there was no escape. Maggie wrapped her arms around his neck as she returned his kiss with an unabashed passion of her own. He had never been so caught up in desire like he was experiencing now, despite the fact that he had been married before. With one arm still holding her tightly, GianMarco slid the other hand down her back to cup her shapely bottom, squeezing it roughly in his palm. Maggie had ignited a fire within him that threatened to consume them both.

“It’s been so long since I’ve been touched and kissed like this,” Maggie said in awe.

GianMarco strode over to the couch with her in his arms, his mouth devouring hers again, as if he could not get enough of the taste of her. His skillful hands began to unbutton her blouse. She was so beautiful. He was on fire for her. His cock was so hard, he felt as if it would explode if he couldn't get inside of her. At this moment, he could think of nothing more than fucking Maggie Williams silly.

She kissed like a virgin but with such fierce enthusiasm he knew that after proper tutoring she would be very dangerous in the art of love. Damn, how was it possible that she had been married for twenty-three years and could respond to him as if it were her first time? Her husband should have been ashamed of himself.

Reluctantly, he pulled his mouth away from hers. Maggie reached out to pull him back to her, and he was pleased that she seemed as eager for him as he was for her. "No. I want to see you." He finished unbuttoning her blouse and pulled it from her body, then he began to work on her bra. She stiffened, and he sensed her withdrawal. "What's wrong, *bellissima*?"

"I'm fat. Someone like you is probably used to model types." She looked self-conscious as she stared down at her rounded belly.

"I don't like that word. You have nothing to be ashamed of, *ciccina mia*. I don't know how it is that stick women have become the ideal of what is beautiful, but let me tell you, those half-starved bitches don't hold a candle to you." He grazed her neck with his lips. GianMarco was going to have fun with her. He could already smell the tangy aroma of her pussy and he wanted it very badly.

He unhooked her bra to free her breasts. Maggie trembled as he reverently lifted the full brown melons in his hands. They were magnificent. GianMarco lowered his head to take one hard, distended, Hershey's Kiss-like nipple into his mouth, sucking greedily.

"Oh, GianMarco, that feels so good."

His tongue lapped at the dark areola, circling her stiff nipple before turning his attention to the other breast.

Maggie buried her fingers into his luxurious blond mane, keeping his head firmly against her chest. GianMarco savored the taste of her, aroused by the unique flavor of her skin. His hand fell on her knee and slowly began to slide its way under her skirt when the telephone rang, breaking them from their trance. They pulled away from each other in stunned silence, as if neither one could believe that things had gone so far.

Maggie crossed her arms over her breasts, a look of shame and mortification in her eyes. "God, we were behaving like a couple of teenagers."

GianMarco stood up abruptly. "Oh, God, Maggie. I'm sorry." He began to adjust his rumpled clothing. "I will completely understand if you no longer wish to work for us." He apologized again before abruptly turning to leave.

Maggie sat there with her arms still crossed over her bare bosom as she watched him walk out the door. Her panties were still damp from his touch. She could not believe what

had just happened. Had the phone not rung, she would have let him make love to her. *What were you thinking, girl?* She shivered as she remembered the feel of his hands against her body. The look of raw desire in his eyes had made her feel as beautiful and sexy as he had claimed her to be. Toward the end of their marriage, Eugene had made excuses not to touch her, and when he did, he would point out all of her flaws, killing her libido and self-confidence. If she were truly being honest with herself, Eugene had never inspired her to such great heights of pleasure. GianMarco had made her feel more desirable in their short moment of shared passion than the entire time she had been married to Eugene.

Perhaps Montana had been right. She was clinging to something that hadn't been real. The phone rang again, breaking her from her thoughts. Hastily, she pulled her blouse back on. That damn phone.

"Hi, Mom, it's Dion."

A smile touched her lips. "Hey, baby. How are you? I got your message earlier."

"I figured you would be home by now." There was something in his tone that concerned her.

"Is everything okay?" Her motherly instinct kicked in.

"Yes, I'm fine. How is the job coming along?" he asked, as if he were trying to change the subject.

"Okay." She decided not to tell him what had happened today, especially when she wasn't exactly sure what had happened herself. Besides, she wondered if she should return to the office after what had just occurred.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course, I'm sure. Now, tell me what's going on with you. I can tell that something is bothering you. I'm your mother, remember?"

"Nothing is wrong. Actually, things are wonderful, but there's something I need to discuss with you."

"You know you can tell me anything, honey."

"I would rather tell you face-to-face. Maybe we can have lunch this week. What time do you usually have off for lunch?"

Now wasn't a good time to get into whether she was going back or not. "Well, the office closes from noon to one-thirty so we can have lunch then. Just name the place."

"Okay, how about that pizzeria we liked so much on Connecticut Avenue?"

"Okay, let's try for the end of the week, though. The work situation is a little weird right now."

"Are you getting along okay?"

"I guess. It's something I would rather not get into right now, but I meant to ask you how your midterms went."

"Pretty good. Better than expected, actually. I'm on track to be finished by the end of the semester, and then I will be able to tell Dad to shove off."

"Dion, you know I don't like it when you talk about your father that way. I think it's very generous of him to finance your education. Not many parents would pay for their children's schooling beyond college."

"How can you defend him after the way he treated you? The only reason I haven't told him to go fuck himself is because you begged me to stay in school." He sounded angry.

Maggie went into "Mom" mode. "Watch your mouth, young man. I think education is very important, and don't think that there isn't a day I don't wish that I went past high school. I don't want you kids to go through some of the struggles your father and I faced when we were starting out. A college degree doesn't make you as competitive in the job market as it once did. It's important to me that you don't throw away the opportunity of obtaining your master's degree, especially when you don't have to pay for it yourself or put yourself in debt to get it."

"It's important to me, too, Mom, but the only reason he is paying for our education is to control our lives. If we get out of line, he threatens to withdraw the money. He makes me sick, and I hate the way he holds it over your head, as well. Don't think I didn't find out about what he threatened you with."

"Dion --"

"No, Mom. I could have handled it. I'm a grown man and I don't need you to fight my battles for me anymore. Janice is tough as nails. She would have been able to handle it, too. Sure, it would have been a struggle, but we would have managed. Dad is a first-class bastard."

"He'll always be your father no matter what happens between him and me." She secretly agreed with his assessment.

"I know, but how can I have respect for a man who treated my mother the way he did? You were the strong one, and he played the dirtiest trick on you by making you believe that you were the weak one. He made you believe that you needed him. You were the one who came to all of our activities. You were the one who stayed up with us late at night when we were sick. You were the one who was always there for us when Janice and I needed you, and where the hell was he? Janice and I were talking, and we think you should have left him a long time ago. The best thing that Dad could have done for you was to leave like he did, because now you're much better off."

"It seems everyone has an opinion all of a sudden," Maggie stated bitterly.

"It's only because we care, Mom. You may not think so, but even Janice cares for you an awful lot. She loves you more than she knows how to express. Call her up and talk to her."

"How is it that you and Montana know more about my own daughter than I do?"

"Mom, do you want to hear the truth or the watered-down version?"

“Oh, my, that sounds ominous. Go ahead. I think I’ve been through enough that one more thing won’t hurt me.”

“She’s hurting, Mom, and she’s angry. She doesn’t know how to tell you, which is why she doesn’t live up here anymore.”

“I wished she would have come to me with her feelings. Why didn’t she tell me this?”

“She feels guilty because she thinks you went through everything because of us.”

“Do you feel that way, too?”

There was a brief pause on the other end of the line.

“Now, listen up. I don’t regret anything I had to go through because of you or your sister. You guys are my babies.”

“I know you don’t resent us and we love you for it. You deserved better than what Dad did to you, and we just find it a bit disturbing that you seem to be rolling over and playing dead. Maybe you should be having this conversation with Janice. I have to get going, but let’s shoot for lunch on Friday. I will call you before then, okay?”

“Sure. I’ll talk to you later.” She hung up.

Maggie stared out the window of her apartment. To listen to everyone tell it, she was a big pathetic loser. She didn’t want to be a loser in life anymore. She walked over to the bureau beside her bed and pulled open a drawer. She took out the divorce papers she had been holding onto for the past three months, then picked up a pen and signed them.

Chapter Five

Maggie waited for Dion at a booth in a pizzeria only three blocks from where she worked. She hummed to herself as she scanned through the menu, thinking that she should probably order a salad, but the smell of marinara sauce filled the air. *Hell, I can have a salad anytime. I want pizza!*

Between Dion's school schedule and part-time job, and with the recent upheaval in her own life, Maggie didn't see her son as often as she used to. She dearly loved both of her children, but Dion would always hold a special place in her heart as her firstborn.

She felt empowered today. This morning on the way to work, she had mailed the signed divorce papers back to Eugene. Now that she had done it, she couldn't imagine why she had been holding off for so long. Everyone was right: Eugene was no good and Shelly was welcome to him. It still hurt like hell at times to think of the callous way he had ended things, but that was now a closed chapter in her life. She still didn't want one red cent from him. She needed to prove to herself that she could stand on her own two feet without anyone's support and to send a message that Maggie Williams was a survivor. Operation Forget-About-That-Jerk was now in progress.

The only cloud in her sky was GianMarco Grimaldi. He was an enigma she couldn't quite figure out. After careful consideration, she had decided she would stay on at G and T Associates. There was no point in cutting her nose off to spite her face, and besides, the incident in her apartment seemed so surreal that it felt like she had imagined the whole thing. She couldn't help but wonder what he could possibly want with a forty-year-old mother of two adult children when he was young and could probably have any woman he wanted. It wasn't that she thought she was bad-looking, but she was a little self-conscious about her weight at times because she knew that some men found it a turn off. Maybe GianMarco was the type to chase anything in a skirt, but she didn't get that impression from him.

When she showed up the next day after what had happened in her apartment, he seemed surprised to see her, as if he had not expected her, but then he had schooled his features and welcomed her back. He had been cool and professional to her ever since. GianMarco did nothing to indicate that anything had ever happened between them, so she followed his lead. Things were less complicated that way.

There were times, however, when he would walk by her desk and she would remember the way his hot mouth had felt against her aching breasts, or the way his eyes had looked at her as if she were precious treasure. As soon as those images popped in her head, she would quickly push them away. To entertain those thoughts would be an exercise in futility. He had obviously been experimenting to see what it was like to be with a big woman or he was amusing himself. Whatever his reasons, they were beyond her. She just had to write it off as one of those things. There was way too much drama in her life already without her adding to it by acting on her lustful thoughts toward her boss... her fine-as-hell boss.

“Hi, Mom.”

Maggie looked up at the tall, lanky, dark-skinned young man. His huge bright smile lit up his already handsome face. She smiled back at him. “Hey, baby, you’re looking a little on the thin side. Are you eating properly? Should I come over to your apartment and make you a proper meal?” She surveyed him with “Mom” eyes.

“You always say that, and I am eating just fine. The last time you came over and cooked for me, the guys ate your peach cobbler before I could get any.”

“Hmm, I think your roommates could probably use a little fattening up as well. I’ll just have to make two cobblers the next time I come over.”

Dion rolled his eyes as he took the seat across from her. “Believe me, those guys eat more than most normal human beings. You could bring five cobblers and it wouldn’t be enough.”

“If you say so. Should we order first, or do you want to tell me what it is that you couldn’t tell me over the phone?”

“Uh, let’s wait until we have something to eat. Did I mention that you look nice? I like your hair like that.”

She grinned, shaking out her dark mane. “Thanks. I like it too. Montana convinced me to go natural. It’s low maintenance, just how I like it.”

“And it suits you. So, is this the new improved you?”

“It’s a beginning. I went by town hall to get the paperwork to go back to my maiden name. It won’t change until the divorce is final though.”

“That’s great. When will that be?”

“I’m not sure how it all works. I mailed the papers back to your father this morning, so I imagine it won’t be long since he wants to remarry. I’m sure your father will notify me when things are final.” *To gloat probably.*

"You actually sound okay with it."

She shrugged. "I am okay with it. There's nothing I can do about it and after a lot of thinking and soul searching, I don't *want* to do anything about it."

"Good for you, Mom. That's the spirit." Dion grinned proudly.

"Now, let's order something. I was trying to be healthy with just a banana for breakfast, but now I think I am ready to gnaw my arm off, I'm so hungry. I was thinking of getting a medium pizza we can split, with everything on it and extra cheese, of course."

"Sounds good to me."

Around the second slice of pizza, Maggie would not be held off any longer. "Now that you have some food in your belly, do you want to tell me what's on your mind?" She smiled in encouragement.

Dion put his slice of pizza down and took a sip of his soft drink before he spoke. "Mom, I've met someone. I think it's the real thing."

Maggie frowned. This was what he had wanted to tell her? It wasn't the big deal she thought it would be. "Well, that's great, honey. You are still young, however, so I think you should probably take things slowly for now. I would love to meet her, though."

Dion prevaricated. "Well, that's just it. This person is different."

"What's so different about her? Does she have a third nipple?"

"Mom!"

"What?"

"Now, why would you think that I would know something like that?" He blushed furiously over his mother's twisted sense of humor.

"Oh, come on, D. You're twenty-three years old. I'd be extremely surprised if you weren't sexually active."

He gave her a stern look. "Mom, please be serious."

"Okay, I'll be serious. So, tell me, what's so different about this girl other than her third nipple?" Maggie batted her eyelashes innocently.

Dion's eyes narrowed slightly before he spoke again. "This person is a little older than me."

"How much older?"

"Twelve years."

Maggie lifted a brow. She remained silent though, because she felt there was more to come.

He absent-mindedly picked at the cheese on his pizza. "This person is white."

"Okay. I guess in the grand scheme of things that's not so bad. Your friend being white doesn't bother me, but I won't lie and say that I'm not a little concerned about the age difference thing. I can't help but wonder if this woman is using you."

“Using me for what, Mom? I don’t make a lot of money.”

Maggie rolled her eyes. “Don’t be dense. I’m talking about sex. I don’t like the idea of someone using you as a boy toy. Where did you meet her?”

“At the company I interned for last year.”

“Has it been going on that long?”

“We started out as friends but it progressed to more than that. We want to get a place together when I finish school. I know I’m young, as you’ve already pointed out, but I’m old enough to know my own heart, and this person is not using me for sex. We didn’t even have sex until very recently.”

Maggie looked at the fierce gleam in his large brown eyes... so much like hers. She was certainly the last person to give relationship advice. Did she ever feel this way about Eugene in the beginning? It was funny, but she couldn’t remember.

“You’re a grown man and no one knows your heart better than you do. I just hope he makes you happy, or he’ll have me to deal with.” She reached over to squeeze his hand in reassurance.

Dion looked at her sharply. “How did you know?”

“I may have been a fool about many things in my life, but I’m not stupid.”

“You never said anything.”

“I thought you would tell me when you were ready.”

“But how did you guess?” he asked in wonder.

“Baby, a mother knows these things, and besides, I remember you used to watch the neighbor’s son mowing their lawn. I guess I started to suspect then.”

“It showed? Oh, God!” He covered his face with his hands.

Maggie reached over to pull his hands from his face. She got up to sit next to him, resting her head against his shoulder. “You have nothing to be ashamed of. This doesn’t change my love for you one bit. Now, tell me all about Mr. Wonderful.”

Dion’s face lit up. “Well, his name is Brian. He’s the CFO of the software company I interned for. He’s so nice, Mom. You’ll love him.”

“If you love him, then I already do.”

* * * * *

Maggie Williams was ruining GianMarco’s life. He couldn’t do anything without thoughts of her warm, luscious body invading his mind. He had just lost track of someone he was supposed to be trailing for a client because he became distracted when he remembered how good she had tasted and how silky her skin had felt. He wanted to sink his teeth into her plump inner thigh and sample the sticky sweetness of her blood.

What he needed was a little pussy to take his mind off his sexy secretary. After this stakeout was over he planned on getting some. What was it about her that drove him to distraction? Every time he walked into the office she would greet him with that cool little smile of hers and go about what she was doing.

She didn't seem at all as affected by him as he was by her, and that bothered the hell out of him for some reason. He would be damned if he lowered himself by reading her mind. If he did, he would be admitting to himself that he cared.

Just this morning he had walked into the office and there she was, sitting at her desk eating a banana. He had watched silently as she slid the long fruit between her glossy lips; his cock had sprung to attention. He had been so damn horny at the sight of her eating that banana that he rushed into his office and closed the door behind him.

He had eased his cock out of his trousers and began to pump it roughly in his fist to alleviate the ache she had caused. Damn her and her stupid banana. Remaining distant from her was not working.

Something caught his eye from across the street. Ah, Mrs. Ewing; his client's cheating wife had just come out of the hotel room with Mr. Ewing's brother. He had been distracted earlier and didn't actually see her go into the hotel, but from her pattern he had guessed correctly that she would end up here. GianMarco pulled out his camera and began to snap pictures. Mrs. Ewing and her brother-in-law embraced each other passionately, kissing as if they were being filmed in a porno movie.

Mrs. Ewing laughed as her brother-in-law groped her ass. GianMarco imagined that she would be a wildcat in the sack since bored housewives usually were. At least his client would now know the truth. Humans were a funny lot with their hypocritical, self-righteous ways. His client was a powerful lobbyist on Capitol Hill who, GianMarco knew, was screwing his eighteen-year-old babysitter. Despite his client's own indiscretions, Mrs. Ewing would probably be hit with divorce papers and a request for a huge alimony suit since the money was hers.

He could not imagine why people acted that way. Vows of love and devotion were meaningless if they could be so easily broken. Vampires were polyamorous by nature, but when they found their one perfect mate, it was forever. They never strayed, excluding the occasional times when it was necessary for a mate to be with different partners, like feedings, but it was hardly the same.

He would tell Oliver that he would not be doing any more of the adultery cases. They were tedious and got on his nerves. He was about to pull out of the parking lot when his cell phone rang. "GianMarco Grimaldi speaking," he answered.

There was no response, just the sound of breathing. His sixth sense was going crazy. Who the hell was this? No one had his cell phone number except his brothers, Oliver, and a couple of important clients. He practically shouted into the phone. "Hello?" He hung up,

telling himself that it was a wrong number, but he couldn't shake the feeling that there was something more to it.

Whatever. He didn't have time to play phone games; it was time to find a partner for a little afternoon delight. He found himself driving downtown where he spotted a petite brunette. She was a little on the thin side, but she had a large, round rump -- perfect for riding. He smiled to himself. Mission accomplished.

Chapter Six

Trent Black was dead. His bloody remains had been found ripped to shreds as if someone were trying to send a message. Since he had come back from London nearly four months ago, Dante had searched for clues as to who was responsible for his friend's death. So far, all that kept turning up were dead ends. Something was just not adding up.

It had been on Trent's advice that Dante had gone to London. Apparently, Trent had met someone there with information on *il Diavolo* and had set up a meeting for Dante and his brothers. Even though it obviously had been a trap, Dante still could not bring himself to believe that Trent would have tricked them.

Although he would never trust anyone like he did his brothers, Dante had had no reason to believe that Trent would betray him. Trent had been involved with the Underground for a couple of centuries and had proved his worth time and time again, so after the London nightclub incident, Dante had wanted some answers. Knowing that his brothers were more than capable of handling the task he had sent them to do, he had taken off.

Dante had flown back to New York to confront Trent and headed straight to Trent's Long Island home. He had been glad to see Trent's SUV in the driveway but the minute he had stepped out of his Ferrari, he knew something was wrong. He smelled an old familiar scent he hoped he was mistaken about. There had been no answer to his insistent ringing of the doorbell and he heard no movement inside, so when he had attempted to pick the lock, he found to his surprise that the door was already unlocked. Just as he suspected, the stench of death hit him the minute he walked through the door. He had rushed into the house in a panic. The house was a wreck, looking as if a tornado had hit it.

The walls and carpet were smeared with blood. Dante had followed the trail to the kitchen, where he found what was left of Trent. Whoever had done this to him must have

been there recently, because after a vampire was killed, the body decomposed to ashes within twenty-four hours. Dante had felt a wave of sadness wash over him. Was it possible that Trent had been set up as well?

At that moment he had never been more determined to find answers. It looked as if someone had been looking for something. Dante had searched Trent's house for clues before he remembered the safe behind a hidden panel on the wall. The safe was still untouched. Whoever had ransacked the house was not someone close to Trent or they would have known about its existence.

There had been nothing out of the ordinary in the safe: a pile of cash, a deed, stock certificates, and pictures. Dante would have tossed the pictures aside, but something told him to look through them.

He began to thumb through the photographs when one picture caught his eye. It had two familiar faces -- the rogues who had attacked them in London. Why would Trent have a picture of them? The next picture made him pause yet again. It was the redhead from the club. There was no name on the back of the picture, but he had a sneaking suspicion that it was not Diane.

The next picture was of the two rogues, "Diane," and another man. He flipped the picture over; on the back it simply read, "D.O.D.-I.C." Dante knew very well what those initials stood for, and he felt chilled to the very bone. Could these be members of the fabled Inner Circle of the Disciples of *il Diavolo*, of which he'd only heard whispers; and if they were, then why was there a human amongst them... or was she human?

The taste of her was human, but there had been something else. Originally, he thought that she had recently been with another vampire but that wasn't it. She had had a taste that he couldn't put his finger on. He wondered who the other man in the photograph was. Dante had slid the pictures into his breast pocket. He would take them and give them a more thorough examination later.

Now, as he wore a hole in his carpet trying to figure out what his next move should be, he stared at the picture again. Who was that young man in the photograph? It had been nagging him for weeks and he didn't seem to be getting any closer to finding out. He seemed oddly familiar, although Dante was certain that he had never seen him before. Something told Dante that this man was the key.

Dante was exhausted. He had not slept for three days straight, he couldn't remember when he had last eaten, and it was all slowly starting to take a toll on his senses. God only knew when he had last had a woman; Diane obviously didn't count. Perhaps his brothers were right when they said it was time for him to take a sabbatical. Underground business was consuming his every waking minute.

He had made a vow, but how could he go on like this? He was no good to the cause if he wasn't one-hundred-percent fit. *Il Diavolo* had been eluding him for many years, and he seemed no closer to finding him now than when he had begun his quest.

Dante sank down into the nearest armchair and rubbed his temples. He couldn't even remember the last time he had actually laughed and enjoyed himself; it had been so very long ago. He envied his brothers that they could carry on with regular lives despite carrying their own separate pain.

Having been responsible for his brothers from a very early age, he felt more like a father at times than their eldest brother. Marco had only been an infant, and Romeo and Nico had been ten and eight when they'd lost their parents. Dante had been relatively young for a vampire himself at the time, only sixty-one. All four brothers had still been vulnerable to any rogue who might prey on them. He had done all he could to protect them, even things he wasn't exactly proud of, but they had all made it this far.

As a rule of thumb, he never tried to interfere in their lives, although he always knew what each of them was up to. But lately, he could feel a great turmoil from within his youngest brother. He loved Romeo and Niccolo, but he felt the strongest connection with Marco, who had fed on him during infancy, creating a special bond between the two beyond that which most brothers shared.

Since he was not getting any closer to finding the answers he sought concerning his adversary, he would break his own rule and find out what was going on with his youngest brother. Perhaps then he could feel useful again. It was time to pay GianMarco a visit.

* * * * *

So much for Toni, or Tanya, or was her name Tara? Whatever the hell her name was, she had not helped. GianMarco was still horny and he had no desire to touch her again. Quickly, he donned his clothing and got the hell out of Toni/Tanya/Tara's house. No matter how many women he slept with, they could not assuage the ache that had built up within him.

The past four months had been absolute torture. Instead of the fire for Maggie being doused by him taking multiple partners, it raged on more than ever. GianMarco was handling most of the cases that took him outside of the office so that he would not have to be there as much. Oliver had no complaints about him taking over so much of the workload; he was going through his own crisis at home with his wife, so he wasn't in the office as much either. Unfortunately for GianMarco, his problem didn't go away because Maggie would be there sitting at her desk, diligently working whenever he did go to the office. He hadn't realized it would be this tough.

Each day he became weaker with need for her while she seemed to remain unaffected by him. He would sit in his office grinding his teeth together as he listened to her humming happily away at her desk as if all was right with the world. He was torn between wringing her neck and fucking the shit out of her. Whatever he decided, he needed to do it quickly or he would go crazy.

In the beginning he was merely attracted to her physically, but now the lust he felt for her had moved to a higher plane. Maggie Williams was not the same woman she had been when she had started working for G and T. She seemed happier; the sadness in her eyes was still there at times but not like it had been four months earlier.

She even dressed better. Instead of the flowery tent-like dresses and floor-length skirts that she used to wear, she wore clothes that showed off her voluptuous form to its advantage while still looking tasteful and businesslike. The skirts she now wore were just above her knees, showing off her shapely legs. Maggie had great legs and GianMarco had spent many nights fantasizing how those legs would feel wrapped around his waist as he drove his cock into her.

Maggie always had a smile on her pretty face and a kind word to say, and the clients sang her praises. He liked the way her cheeks would dimple when she smiled. It made him want to graze his tongue over her soft brown skin. He could still sense a touching vulnerability within her but she hid it well. She had transformed from the quivering ball of nerves he had first seen into a swan. Whatever was responsible for her transformation, GianMarco didn't know whether to be grateful or not, because it put his heart and libido in a more precarious position.

At times he would ignore her, choosing to walk by her desk without saying a word so that he wouldn't have to look at her and want her. Each night he dreamed about their lovemaking on Maggie's couch that day, but in his dreams they had gone further. He would wake up in the middle of the night drenched in sweat. The vivid images of him screwing her in every conceivable position were never far from his mind. His resistance was waning.

Today's incident had only underlined how close his passion was to bursting. When he had stepped into the office this afternoon, Maggie had been on her hands and knees crawling around the floor looking for something. The sight of her round derriere positioned sinfully up in the air was enough to make his mouth go dry and his cock stir. *Dio*, but she was tempting. More than anything he had wanted to fall to his knees behind her, hike up that dangerously short skirt, and slide his dick between those succulently thick thighs of hers.

Instead of acting on impulse as his cock wanted him to do, he cleared his throat to announce his presence. She looked up at him with that sweet smile of hers. "Hi, GianMarco. I left a message for you on your desk. A Mr. Brown was calling about some work you had done for him last month." She turned her attention back to the floor. That was another thing about Maggie. She was the only person who called him by his full first name, and the way she pronounced his name with a slight southern drawl made his balls throb.

"What are you doing on the floor, Maggie?" He knew that he probably should have walked away.

"I lost an earring. I am certain that I walked in here today still wearing it."

"What does it look like?"

"It's just a plain diamond stud, actually. A diamond speck. See?" She turned her head slightly to reveal a tiny diamond in her ear. GianMarco's breath caught in his throat as the delicate lines of her neck were displayed to him. He wanted very much to run his lips over the velvety-looking chocolate skin.

"Very nice," he commented politely as he felt his control slowly slipping away.

"Thanks for saying so but I know it's not much to look at." She laughed softly to herself as she continued to crawl across the floor in search of her lost earring. Her ass wiggled enticingly as she moved; she seemed totally unaware of the effect she was having on him. He quickly scanned the floor from where he stood with his eagle-sharp eyes and spotted nothing.

"How long have you been looking?" His eyes strayed back to her generous backside.

"For the last fifteen minutes, with no luck." She sighed, getting up to her knees. She turned to him with her bottom lip poked out in a pout. "Shoot, I just bought them last week."

"Were they very expensive?" He contemplated running his tongue across her protruding lower lip. His heart began to beat rapidly. The smell of her perfume drifted to his nostrils, and it was driving him wild.

"Well, I spent more than what I normally would have for a pair of earrings. They were on sale and they were pretty small, so it wasn't terribly expensive." She shrugged and attempted to get back to her feet. He automatically reached over and pulled her up, tugging on her arm harder than he meant to, causing Maggie to fly into him. Her hands grabbed his shirt so that she wouldn't fall. GianMarco grabbed a handful of her soft hair and pulled her head back so that their eyes could meet.

Her eyes were wide with bewilderment and... desire? He smiled in triumph at the knowledge that she wanted him, too. As he lowered his head to hers, the door to the office opened. Maggie pushed against his chest in a hurry and twisted out of his arms. It was Oliver.

Bastardo! GianMarco's eyes shot daggers at his friend's untimely arrival.

"Hey, guys, what's going on?" Oliver asked.

"Looking for my earring," Maggie answered hastily before moving to sit behind her desk.

Having missed his two coworkers in each other's arms, Oliver shrugged. "So, has anything exciting happened while I was gone?"

"If it did, you interrupted it," GianMarco answered in a huff, before stalking out of the office and slamming the door behind him.

"Now, what's gotten into him?" he heard Oliver ask. *Nothing that a good fucking wouldn't solve.* GianMarco grimaced to himself. He was literally in pain. His incisors were descending and ascending of their own volition. His cock would not go down and his temperature had risen to a degree that would have killed a human being. He had to get himself under control.

GianMarco knew he was suffering from *la morte dolci*, the sweet death, almost the equivalent to blue balls in a human male, only the pain was tenfold in a vampire. He took several deep breaths, trying to get his body back to normal, without success. If he didn't get some pussy soon, his body would go crazy again, and that was when vampires were at their wildest.

GianMarco hopped into his Escalade and tore out of the parking lot. He had not needed relief this badly since he was a young vamp. He finally pulled up to a bar that he sometimes frequented. The women who came here were usually looking for a good time. That was where he had met Toni/Tanya/Tara. She had been sitting at the bar alone and their eyes had locked. She'd worn her hair in a riot of short curls around her well-shaped head, and she had had smooth chocolate skin a lot like Maggie's. If GianMarco squinted enough, he could almost pretend she was Maggie.

It hadn't taken long before he had followed her home. He'd fucked her for several hours, bringing her to countless orgasms. He ate her out between each fuck, taking his fill of her sopping wet cunt.

By the time she lay on the bed in a happy, unconscious heap, he was worse off than he had been before he had followed her back to her place. Now, here he was late at night with his dick harder than petrified wood, his incisors would not ascend, and his hands would not transform back to normal. His temperature was steadily climbing. There was only one thing left to do.

* * * * *

GianMarco wasn't the only one who was having a very frustrating night. Maggie tossed and turned in her bed. She should have been happy to discover that she had only put in one earring that morning, but it only caused her more upset because that was how much that man had her twisted. She didn't know if she was coming or going nowadays. It was becoming harder and harder for her to contain herself around GianMarco Grimaldi. Just when things were looking up for her, he was the one dark cloud in her sky. Over the past few months, Maggie had learned that there was life after Eugene Williams and it was far better! She didn't have to worry about spending too much or having to account to anyone for her actions.

She had even gone on a shopping spree with Montana and splurged on a new wardrobe. It had taken some convincing to get her to buy more revealing stuff, but when she saw how she looked in her new clothes, she never turned back. She still set up her booth at the farmers' market on the weekends, but now she was getting out more. She was going out to movies and shows, attending festivals, and making new friends. She had even found a new love. Herself. Maggie had never felt so good about herself. She enjoyed her job, and Oliver had even intimated that if she was interested he could train her to become a P.I.

The best change was her relationship with her daughter, which had taken a tremendous turn for the better. Taking Dion and Montana's suggestions, she had asked Janice how she felt about what Maggie had gone through over the past twenty-three years. She smiled as she remembered the conversation, still fresh in her mind.

"Hello?" Janice sounded out of breath.

"Hi, honey, it's me. Were you just out running?"

There was a pause. Janice sighed as if she was reluctant to speak to her mother.

"I just walked in. What's up? You usually call on Sundays."

"Well, actually there is something I wanted to talk to you about. It's important. Do you have a minute?" Maggie trembled. She couldn't remember the last time she'd really had a serious conversation with her daughter.

"Yes, I guess so. What is it? Did you call to tell me that you and Dad are getting back together? If so, congratulations."

Maggie picked up on the sarcastic tone of her daughter's voice; this wasn't how she wanted the conversation to begin. "No, but I wanted to talk about your father and me."

"What about?"

"You have to admit that this conversation is a long time coming, don't you think?"

"I don't really think there is a lot to say about it, Mom. You're a grown woman and your life is your life." Janice sounded so offhand at that moment; it was as if Maggie were talking to a stranger.

This was certainly not going to be easy, Maggie had thought to herself. "Well, if you don't want to talk, at least listen, okay?"

"Whatever."

"I would appreciate it if you watch your tone, young lady. I may have made a lot of mistakes in my life that you don't approve of, but I am still your mother." Maggie paused, sighing. "Look, I didn't call to fuss at you. I want to set things right between us. We used to be so close, baby. What happened?"

There was silence on the other end of the line. "Janice?"

"Fine, do you really want to know the truth, or are you going to stick your head in the sand like you have been doing ever since I can remember?"

Maggie gasped. She had asked for it, and she guessed she was about to get it. "I'd really like to know."

"The night of my junior prom, you were taking pictures of me and my date. Do you remember?"

Maggie's heart stopped. How could she forget that night? "Yes, I remember."

“That awful woman came to our house demanding to see Daddy. You shoed my date and me out of the house as quickly as you could, but I knew why she was there. She wanted to confront you about her affair with Daddy.”

Maggie had closed her eyes as she thought about the night when one of Eugene’s mistresses decided to “claim her man.” She had thought that she had gotten Janice and her date out of the house before they could witness the confrontation. “How did you know that’s what she wanted?”

“I knew about her! I knew about them all, but that look in your eyes when she came to our house... our house, for God’s sake! I thought, maybe now you would leave him. But when I came home, you pretended nothing had happened. I couldn’t understand how you could do that to yourself. I couldn’t stick around and watch anymore. It hurt too much, especially with the guilt eating away at me.” Janice broke out into sobs on the other end of the line.

Maggie had also broken down on hearing her daughter’s pain. “Baby, I didn’t realize you knew about your father’s affairs. I tried my best to hide them from you and your brother. I thought I was doing what was best for you both by staying. You know I never knew my family, and I thought it was important that I keep our family intact. I didn’t realize then that I was making the wrong decision.”

“But that’s just it, Mom. Dion and I prayed for the day you would leave Daddy. The way he treated you, talked to you, and ignored you made me hate him, and then I hated you for not standing up to him. But, really, I hated myself most.”

“Why?” Maggie had asked, shocked.

“Because I should have said something about those women. I will never forget that look in your eyes as long as I live. I felt responsible to some extent. Maybe if I wasn’t born you wouldn’t have been in this position.” Janice had cried harder.

Maggie’s heart had felt as if it would break in two. “Please don’t cry, baby. I don’t ever want to hear you talk like that again. Do you hear me? You and Dion being born were the best things to ever happen to me and I wouldn’t trade you for anything in the world. I would go through everything over again, as long as I could have you two. I love you, baby.”

“I love you, too, Mommy. I’m so sorry.”

“Shh, it’s okay. I’m sorry, too. I only wish I had realized sooner what I was doing to you and Dion; maybe things would have been different. Things will be different from now on. Actually, I hope the divorce will go through soon. I’m learning to enjoy life without your father. You’re going to be seeing a new me the next time you come to visit.”

“Oh, Mom, I do miss you so much.”

“I miss you too, baby. When we see each other, maybe we can talk about this some more, go shopping, and do girlie things.”

“I’d like that very much.”

“You have to promise me one thing, though.”

"Sure."

"If you can forgive me for what I've done, you will eventually have to forgive your father as well."

"No way! Not after what he's done."

"Janice, your father and I are no longer together, but he will always be your father. He may not have been a good husband, but he was a good father, and he loves you and your brother very much. It doesn't have to be instant, but just think about it. Okay?"

"Okay, but I'm not going to be nice to his new bimbo," Janice said mutinously.

The conversation had been a cleansing for both women. They had talked and cried some more and the call had ended with Janice promising to come up for a visit at the next semester break.

Eugene had assured her that their divorce would be final any time now, and that was just fine with her. She was making it on her own and loving it. When her lease was up, she planned to find a bigger place. Life would have been perfect if it wasn't for GianMarco. It should have been illegal for a man to be that damn fine.

She still couldn't believe that they had nearly made love on her couch, nor could she believe that they had nearly kissed earlier today. Her body still went up in flames when she thought of his touch, but she didn't want to think about the ramifications of what an affair with him would mean. She had already been dumped by Eugene, whom she didn't find half as delectable as GianMarco, so she knew she would be devastated if she were to have an affair with him, only to be discarded later.

He was probably experimenting to either see what it was like to be with a black woman, or if that wasn't the case, a woman her size. Whatever it was, she wasn't going to be his "flavor of the month," so she treated him with the same professional courtesy that she gave Oliver.

Anyway, GianMarco ignored her most of the time, only speaking to her when he needed a file or something typed. She didn't want to admit it, but when he ignored her the way he did, it bothered her, especially when she pictured him naked in her mind nearly twenty-four hours a day. She tried not to let her secret lust for him show, however. She was a good pretender; after all, she had pretended that she had had the perfect marriage for twenty-three years.

Maggie was so hot and bothered that she threw the covers off. It was all GianMarco Grimaldi's fault that she couldn't sleep. She stripped, taking off her nightshirt and panties. She dug into her dresser drawer and pulled out her little black vibrator. Her pussy was throbbing with need. Thoughts of GianMarco filled her head. Making herself comfortable, she lay back down on the bed and turned the vibrator on, rubbing the gadget over the tips of her hardened nipples.

Maggie moaned softly, imagining that it was GianMarco's fingers circling the turgid peaks, remembering how heavenly his hands and tongue had felt against her. The very thought of him sent a jolt of pleasure through her body. She ran the vibrator over her belly, tracing slow circular patterns over her skin.

She bit her bottom lip as she slid the tool lower still. As she was about to slide the vibrator into her wet box, a voice said from above her, "You have no need for that, Maggie."

She looked up to see a monster with glowing golden eyes and large, white fangs.

Maggie let out a bloodcurdling scream.

Chapter Seven

There are no such things as monsters, she thought, trying to bring some logic to the situation. It was obviously a man with a set of fake vampire teeth and a pair of weird glowing contact lenses, although that didn't stop her from being scared shitless, especially when she distinctly remembered bolting her door before she went to bed. Maggie whimpered as an oddly shaped hand flew down to cover her mouth to stop her from screaming out.

All Maggie could make out in the darkened room were those oddly glowing eyes and the gleaming white fangs. As the man sat down on the bed next to her, she could see the outline of his powerfully built body, and, oh, sweet Jesus, if her eyes were not deceiving her, he was naked.

Oh, great, now I'm going to be raped and possibly murdered by some weirdo with a Dracula fetish.

"Do not be frightened. I won't hurt you as long as you give me what I want," a deep, gravelly voice whispered to her. Maggie was not having it. In all her experience of watching scary movies, it was very rare when someone didn't get hurt. She often wondered why the females in horror movies just stood paralyzed, waiting to die while the killer stalked slowly toward them. Well, this was no horror movie, and if it was her time to die tonight, she would go out fighting.

Maggie bit the inside of her assailant's hand. When he lifted his hand, letting out a loud curse in the process, Maggie scrambled out of the bed as if it were on fire, unmindful of her own nude state. If she could just make it to the other side of the room, she could get her hands on a knife, and when she did, someone was going to lose a set of balls. She hadn't taken two steps before he was standing in front of her.

The man chuckled. "I'm quite fond of my balls. I would hate to lose them."

What the hell? How did he move so quickly, and how did he know what she had intended? She looked around wildly for a weapon, grabbing the closest blunt object she could get her hands on... which happened to be the Yellow Pages. Maggie lifted it to strike him, only to have the phone book plucked effortlessly from her hands. Before her very eyes, her attacker ripped the thick book in two, straight down the middle.

"This is getting tiresome. Do not resist me. I won't let you."

Holy shit! Enough of fight; it was time for flight, Maggie decided, as she turned for the door, only to see him standing there.

"I am starting to get angry now. I said I would not harm you, Maggie, but I need you to help me."

Who the hell was this? Was he some kind of stalker? People like her did not have stalkers. She was not celebrity or anyone spectacular. She was just plain old Maggie Williams. Maggie took a step back, suddenly remembering that she was as naked as he was. She crossed her arms over her breasts.

"Who... who are you?" In a panic, she looked toward the window. She only lived two stories up. Maybe she could...

"That would not be wise, Maggie. I would hate to see you hurt yourself by jumping out of the window."

"Stop that, it's creepy. How do you know what I'm thinking, who are you, and what the hell do you want from me, because whatever it is, breaking into my apartment in the middle of the night is not the way to get it!" she said, with a bravado she didn't feel.

"Maggie, you know who I am. And we both know that you know what I want because you want it, too. You've been burning for it like I have."

Maggie gasped. Despite the deep, gravelly bass to his voice, it sounded oddly familiar now that she was actively listening to it. No! It couldn't be...

"Yes, Maggie, it is. Turn on the light, *bellissima*," he commanded her softly. The strange hypnotic tone of his voice flowed through her, telling her to obey him. Her hands fell to her waist and she walked over to the lamp as if she were under a spell.

Once the light was turned on, she was too frightened to turn around.

"Look at me."

"No."

"Turn around, Maggie." Again, she felt as if her body were moving on its own.

Maggie's eyes widened in astonishment. GianMarco Grimaldi was standing in the middle of her apartment without a stitch of clothing on, and he had the longest, thickest cock she had ever seen. She couldn't tear her eyes away from the long shaft that he probably could have pole-vaulted with.

She had always noticed the large bulge in his pants, but she had had no idea that he was harboring a weapon of this magnitude.

"I'm glad you like what you see." He advanced on her, breaking her out of her zombie-like trance.

"Stay away from me! Who the hell do you think you are, coming into my apartment like this? Get out! And you look ridiculous in that Dracula get up." She grabbed the throw blanket from the couch to wrap it around herself. No matter how much she had fantasized about him these past few months, there was no way she would let him get away with breaking and entering into her apartment buck naked, expecting her to spread her legs like a back-alley crack whore.

"You know, I find it highly insulting to be referred to as Dracula. Vladimir was just a silly, power-hungry human who didn't know his head from his ass."

"You're crazy. You're speaking as if you knew him personally. Dracula wasn't real."

His eyes glowed full of menace. "That's where you're wrong, my dear. He was a very real man, but certainly not what that silly Irishman made him out to be in that damned book. Now, are you going to give me what I came for or do I have to take it?"

"Stop it. You're scaring me." She took a step back, only to find that she could not go any further as she came up against the wall.

"It is not my intent to scare you, but I need you. I ache for you. The heat has been there between us since the day we first laid eyes on each other. I am in a great deal of pain right now, and only you can give me what I need. If you don't help me, I cannot be held accountable for what may happen next." In a flash, he was in front of her, pressing his frame against hers.

Shivers of both fear and excitement ran down her spine. Never had anyone looked at her with such naked lust in his eyes. A part of her wanted to give in to him, but how could she take him seriously with those silly fangs in his mouth?

GianMarco bent over until his nose was touching hers. "They're very real, Maggie, just like my passion for you. I am burning up for you, and if I don't get some of that sweet pussy that is filling my nostrils at this very moment, I think I will go crazy."

Maggie's heart began to beat faster. His words were affecting her more than she wanted to let on. "Are you trying to tell me that you really are a vampire?" She was in disbelief, not knowing whether to wrap her arms around him and give in to the wave of desire that flowed between them or to laugh in his face. Vampire, indeed; next, he was going to tell her that he owned a bridge in Brooklyn.

"I am not here to debate what I am or what I am not. I came to get some pussy. Will you give it to me or not?" GianMarco could just barely contain himself. His senses were so out of whack from this madness coursing through him that he was quickly losing all rational thought.

Unaware of the imminent danger to herself, Maggie pushed against him. “Look, GianMarco, I will be honest with you. I find you extremely attractive, but you cannot barge into my home without any clothes on and tell me that you want me, especially after you’ve spent the past four months virtually ignoring me. I would like for you to put your clothes back on and leave the way you came.” She wiggled her body away from his, tightly gripping the throw blanket that was still wrapped around her. She turned her back to him, not noticing the slow transformation coming over him.

“Maggie, please! I need you. I can’t hold out much longer.” His voice was deeper and more gravelly than before. The deep longing that she heard in his voice made her turn around.

She screamed when she saw the blood-red glow in his eyes and the subtle change of his features. His fangs looked sharper, his skin took on a pink tint as if he were experiencing a sudden blood rush, and his now unbound mane of blond hair flowed down his back. What the hell was going on? Maggie was now more frightened than ever.

His clawlike hands reached out to grab her, pulling her roughly against his chest. He pressed heated kisses on her face and neck. As she struggled against him with all her might, they stumbled to the floor, his body covering hers. His skin was hot, as though he were suffering from an extremely dangerous fever. All she could think about, however, was freeing herself.

He pressed his long, thick cock against her, causing Maggie to increase the intensity of her struggle. There was no way she would allow him to violate her this way. She raked her fingernails against his face. He let out a loud grunt. His now red eyes glowed with a hunger that would not be denied.

“Maggie, I don’t want to do this to you.” The raw anguish in GianMarco’s voice made her pause.

“Then why are you?” She searched his face, trying to make sense of this. She just couldn’t believe that the man she had worked with and whom she had secretly lusted after would take her by force. She sensed an inner struggle within him, but then she saw something dark and dangerous in his eyes. She had one last conscious thought before she passed out with fright: *Oh, Jesus, I’m going to die at the hands of a vampire.*

“Marco! Stop this now!” Dante grabbed his brother off the unconscious woman.

GianMarco turned on him and attacked, slashing Dante across the chest with his sharpened claws. Dante backed away, trying to avoid this confrontation. He grabbed his brother and administered a stinging blow, sending the younger vampire against the wall. GianMarco was up in a flash, grabbing for Dante’s throat.

“Snap out of it, Marco!”

GianMarco was too far gone at this point and didn’t see his brother. All he saw was another vampire standing in the way of what he wanted.

"Marco, it's me." Dante fought against the hands that were trying to crush his windpipe. In an attempt to shake his brother from the grip that *la morte dolci* had over him, Dante tried reasoning with his brother again. He didn't want to hurt him, but in his rage, Marco was stronger than ever. Dante bough his fist up and slammed it into his brother's face, knocking GianMarco off him.

GianMarco could not be stopped, however. He grabbed his brother with one hand, lifting him into the air by the throat. As GianMarco's hand tightened, Dante tried to touch his brother's mind.

Marco, you must fight this! It's Dante. You know I would never hurt you. I would never try to take what is yours. Mai fratello mio. I only want to help you.

As Dante's calming tone invaded his mind, GianMarco's grip began to loosen.

That's it. Fight it. You are not a rogue. This is not who you are. Do not succumb to this.

GianMarco's eyes began to dull as their natural golden brown hue returned.

"Dante?" He released his brother as if coming out of a trance.

"Yes, brat."

"*Dio!* Please forgive me. You must know that I would never attack you willingly."

"I know, brat."

"You know I hate it when you call me that." GianMarco shook his head again, trying to clear his mind. He was still horrified that he would attack his own brother in such a manner.

"Ah, so you are all right then?"

"I hurt, Dante."

"I know, but we will take care of that for you," Dante promised.

"What are you doing here, anyway?"

"I came to visit, and you were not home, but I felt you. I see that I arrived in time. So, this is the woman who has driven you to this?" Dante looked over his brother's shoulder.

GianMarco looked behind him to see Maggie laying limply on the floor. *Dio! What the hell have I just done?* "Oh, my God. I killed her!" He rushed to her side.

"No, I can still hear her heartbeat," Dante said reassuringly.

GianMarco lifted her into his arms and cradled her against him. Already he could feel the heat coursing through his body again despite her unconscious state.

"We must get out of here. I heard someone calling the police about a disturbance when I entered the building. It won't be long before they arrive," Dante advised.

"I can't just leave her like this. What in the world is she going to think when she wakes up?" GianMarco's heart began to beat at a rapid pace again in response to her nearness.

"Let her go, Marco. You are in no state to be this close to her. We'll take her with us. You need her, but I will talk to her and prepare her for you. I will make her understand what has to happen. In the meantime, how about putting some clothes on?" Dante suggested.

GianMarco grinned sheepishly. "I took them off when I slipped in here."

"Well, hurry up. Did you drive here?"

"Yes."

"Good. You will drive your car home. Go straight home. No detours. I will join you shortly with... what's her name?"

"Maggie." He slipped into his pants. His cock was still hard, and the brush of fabric against his flesh was extremely painful.

"I will take Maggie with me in my car, and we will arrive at your house shortly."

GianMarco threw a look of longing at his unconscious prey. "I ache, Dante. I don't know how much longer I will be able to take this pain."

Dante faced GianMarco and cupped his brother's face in his hands. "I know how you feel but you must be strong, little brother. Trust me, okay?" GianMarco nodded. "Good. Then we will get through this."

"*La morte dolci* is real, Dante."

"I know, but you must know what this means, don't you?"

"Yes, but I can't do this to her. I have to fight this. I just have to."

"We both know that you cannot deny this. Trust me, everything will be okay. Now, go. I will be there shortly."

"I don't feel that I can hold this at bay much longer."

"I know you can. Go now!"

GianMarco shot one last brooding look toward Maggie before leaving them behind.

Dante walked over to the unconscious woman, bending down to lift her up; she was a warm armful. The blanket that she had covered her body with had dipped, revealing a dark-tipped breast. Dante lightly grazed the exposed nipple with his knuckle. She moaned in her sleep. He could sense her passionate nature as he stared down at her, drinking in her gently formed features. She could not be classified as beautiful in the conventional sense, but there was something about her that would warrant a second look.

Dante lightly caressed her neck, reveling in the softness of her skin. Judging from the scratches on Marco's face, she had fought back. She was brave and she would need to be for what was ahead of her. Dante's body was growing warm holding her soft fullness against him. In any other circumstances, he would have availed himself of her charms, but his younger brother's needs came first.

Dante shuddered at the thought of what would have happened if he hadn't showed up in time. He only wished that someone had intervened for him when he had experienced *la morte dolci*, but that was neither here nor there.

What he needed was to help his brother through the next few days and to help Maggie through the ordeal she would face. She would probably be resistant to the idea of helping

GianMarco in the beginning, but Dante would be damned if he put her wishes above his brother's. He would be as gentle and persuasive as he could be, but in the end, he would make her surrender. GianMarco's fate was in her hands. *La morte dolci* was a very dangerous time in a vamp's life, and if it were denied, things could get way out of hand and fast.

Chapter Eight

When Maggie woke up, it took her a moment to gather her senses. Oh, God, what happened last night? Slowly, the events came reeling back. GianMarco had broke into her apartment and tried to force himself on her! Worse yet, he was a vampire! No, it had to be a nightmare. There weren't supposed to be such things as vampires! Before she had passed out, she was sure that she was going to die. Why hadn't he finished her off?

Maggie took in her surroundings for the first time. She lay in a king-sized bed in a dark room. Had GianMarco brought her here to drain her blood? Would she be used as some weird vampire sacrifice? Oh, hell no! She was not going to be vampire chow because she planned on getting the hell out of here and fast. Maggie slid from under the covers and out of the bed. Great, she didn't have any clothes on, which would make her escape rather tricky. Now she would have to search for some clothes.

"You're not going anywhere," a smooth voice in the dark said to her. She shrieked in surprised, grabbing the thick comforter off the bed to wrap around herself. Now what?

The light flicked on. Before her stood a tall, dark-haired man. Had she not seen GianMarco first, she would have said he was the most beautiful man she had ever seen. His black hair and blue eyes created a startling contrast. Her mouth went dry as she looked at him with apprehension. "Who... who are you?"

He stepped closer, taking her nerveless hand in his and lifting it to his full, sensual mouth. She shivered as his lips grazed her knuckles. "Dante Vincenzo Grimaldi at your service, my lady." He flirted with a shamelessness that had broken many hearts throughout the years.

At the mention of his last name, Maggie snatched her hand away. "You're related to GianMarco? But he's a..." Her voice trailed off.

"A vampire? Yes, I noticed. Have a seat, Maggie. We need to have a little talk."

"No! The only thing I need is to get the hell out of here."

"And as I have already stated, you are not going anywhere. I am not in the habit of repeating myself, so I won't do so again. Have a seat." Something in his tone had Maggie scrambling back to the bed. She sat down.

"Good girl." Just then they heard a yell of pain; it was almost a howl.

Maggie jumped. "What was that?"

"That is the reason you're not going anywhere," Dante answered.

"What? I don't understand." She began to shake with fear, realizing she should probably attempt to escape, but something told her it would be no use.

"My brother is in pain, which is why you have been brought here."

"Where am I?"

"You are in GianMarco's house in Georgetown. Now, I will explain things to you so that you will know why you are here. Hold off your questions until I am finished. First, I would like to say that no harm will come to you as long as I am here. Do you trust me when I say this, Maggie?" His intense blue eyes seemed to hypnotize her.

Maggie had no reason to trust this man, but as her eyes locked with his, oddly enough, she did. "Yes," she whispered.

He gave her a small smile. "Good. As you have already learned, GianMarco is a vampire, as are the rest of my brothers and I." Maggie gasped when he revealed this bit of news. "I can imagine what you must be thinking now, but bear with me. We are not the monsters you think we are, but if I am to be completely honest with you, there are some very dangerous vampires out there. We are just like humans in many respects. We eat, we sleep, and we fuck. Vampires feel pain and have emotions. Unlike humans, however, we need to feed on the life essence of others to stay strong. We get this by either blood or sexual secretions. I guess you can say we are an insatiable lot. The older a vampire gets, the less he needs life essence, but we still need it, nonetheless. I'm pretty old and so are my brothers, so we don't need to feed as often as a young vamp would." He paused when he observed her expression, as though he could tell that she was thinking about last night's incident.

"I must apologize for Marco's behavior last night, but I will explain all to you." He got up from his chair to sit next to Maggie on the bed. He lightly touched her throat with a tender caress. "You have such beautiful brown skin. Is it a wonder why I can't help myself from touching it?"

Maggie felt a sliver of sensation run up her spine in response to his gentle touch. *What is wrong with me? I should not be responding to this man... thing... at all.* She scooted away.

Dante sighed as if realizing that this was not going to be easy. "As I was saying, we have feelings just like humans. However, vampires feel things very deeply. Every emotion we have is very intense, so when those feelings become overwhelming, we can be at our most dangerous."

“I don’t understand.” She shook her head in confusion.

“I know. But you will. I guess I’m floundering here.” He grinned.

“A little.”

“Okay. I will try the direct approach. Vampires are powerful creatures who are used to getting what they want, and if they don’t get it they become frustrated. And that can be a dangerous thing for the object of their frustration. Marco wants you, and he will have you.” Maggie’s jaw dropped. “Ah, I see that you are beginning to understand. Marco felt an instant attraction to you from the moment he laid eyes on you; however, he has been fighting it.” Dante paused, as if trying to figure out the best way to explain what he would say to her next.

“Yes?” She prompted.

“My brother especially is used to getting what he wants. You see, most things have come easily for Marco, even by vampire standards. I guess it’s partially my fault for spoiling him the way I did when he was younger, but our parents were killed when he was only an infant. He and my other two brothers were all I had left, so in a way I guess I am more like their papa. Marco was a bit of a brat, flitting through life, taking his pleasure wherever he pleased, not caring about the consequences. There were many times when I had to bail him out of scrapes. That’s the kind of life Marco led before he met Bianca Castinelli. He fell hard for her and she for him, and they were married shortly after they met. She changed his character for the better. He buckled down to his passion, which was art. They were married for about three years when Bianca finally gave birth to a child they so desperately wanted. They were his life. Shortly after his son was born, I would say maybe a few weeks, he came home to find them both brutally murdered.”

“Oh, no!” Maggie’s hand covered her mouth in horror. “They killed the baby?”

“Yes. It was very heartbreaking. Bianca was a lovely woman, and baby Gio... he was a joy for the short time that he lived. Marco changed again, but this time for the worse. He took his pleasure where he liked, just as he did before he met Bianca, but he was very cold and methodical about it. He has distanced himself from anyone and anything that reminds him of what he shared with Bianca. He used to paint the most wonderful masterpieces, and he was on track to become one of the greatest artists ever, but he hasn’t picked up a brush since Bianca’s death. That was several hundred years ago, so you see what I mean when I say we feel things very deeply. After all this time, he still carries that pain.”

“He must have loved her very much,” Maggie said softly, her heart going out to the young GianMarco, who must have suffered greatly because of his tragic losses.

“I guess you can call it love. I am not really crazy about that word,” he answered, not elaborating. At Maggie’s confused expression, he continued. “I need to tell you that after his family’s death, there was a very dark period in his life. Marco went on a wild rampage, killing anyone he thought was remotely responsible for the deaths of Bianca and his son. He eventually had his revenge when he met up with the vampire who killed his family. That

was only a few hundred years ago, but at one time, GianMarco was feared all across the vampire network.

"Now do you see what I mean when I say that frustration in a vampire can make him very dangerous? Never having suffered that way before, his emotions overwhelmed him. Ever since he got his revenge, he has been going through life merely existing, not really living. This is where you come in. When he saw you, it triggered within him a response that he had not felt since he met Bianca."

"Are you saying that he is in love with me?" Maggie was not sure if she really believed in love at first sight. Lust maybe.

"Love is such a mundane word. What GianMarco feels is far beyond what you humans refer to as love. The syrupy, softhearted love that poets spout off about does not exist for vampires, at least in my opinion. What does exist is a feeling so intense that it keeps you up at night, it makes you break out in chills, and it can hurt. This feeling can be dark, deep, and at times a violent raging within the very depths of your soul. It can also be tender and sweet, but there is a very fine line. At the moment Marco is experiencing what is called *la morte dolci*."

"What?" She tried to take this all in.

"Loosely translated it means 'the sweet death.' No one could drive a vampire to this except his bloodmate, but because he has fought against this attraction he feels for you, he didn't recognize the signs, which is why he is in so much pain now. Only you can help him," Dante explained.

"Bloodmate? Are you kidding me? Only I can help him? You mean to tell me you want me to let him drain my blood? I'm sorry but I like my blood where it is: in my body." She shook her head.

Dante's eyes began to glow with impatience. He grabbed her chin in a cruel grip. "Listen, you silly woman, I told you that no harm would come to you."

Maggie's own ire was raised. She slapped his hand away and leapt up. "You have a lot of damn nerve. How the hell am I supposed to feel? Before last night, I didn't believe vampires existed. Your damn brother broke into my apartment buck naked, and scared the shit out of me. I wake up in a strange place, and I am trying to process everything you're saying to me with an open mind. I think I'm doing a pretty good job of not freaking out here, and you have the nerve to call me silly for being a little scared? Considering what I have been through, pardon me for not jumping up and down ready to sacrifice myself to whatever it is you're asking me to do!" she yelled at him, dark brown eyes blazing with anger.

Dante seemed taken aback by Maggie's outburst, and then a slow smile formed on his lips. "It's no wonder Marco has it bad for you, Maggie. There is a fire in you, a fire I would not mind sampling for myself."

Maggie gasped at his boldness.

“You are right, Maggie. This is a lot to take in, but I will try to make things as easy as I can for you. What you need to understand is that vampires have the need to mate, just like humans, and when we find that one mate whom we desire above all others, woes betide anyone who stands in our way. Finding a bloodmate is not an unusual occurrence, but it doesn’t happen that often. For example, my brothers and I are all over six hundred, and we are all unmated. Some vamps are lucky and find their bloodmates right away.”

“Why haven’t you?” Maggie asked.

He shrugged one broad shoulder. “I’ve been very busy. I guess I really haven’t taken the time.”

“How did you and your brothers become vampires? Were you guys bit?”

Dante let out a throaty laugh. “You are adorable, do you know that? No, we were not ‘bit.’ We were born that way.”

“Vampires can procreate?” she asked in wonder.

“Of course we can. Hollywood has convinced you that we are the undead, hasn’t it? I assure you, we are very much alive.”

“But you are very old.”

“We are immortal; it kind of comes with the territory. I suppose living forever can be a curse or it could be a blessing. I would imagine that it depends on how you look at it.”

“So, you can never die?”

“Yes, we can die. We can never die by natural causes as we don’t age past thirty-five, and we are not susceptible to disease.”

“So, if someone drove a stake into your heart you would die?”

“You watch far too much television, Maggie. Let me rid your mind right now of all the vampire misconceptions that you may have. We can walk in daylight, and I actually can get a pretty nice tan at the right time of year. You can’t ward us off with a crucifix, holy water, or garlic. To tell the truth, I actually enjoy garlic. I am Italian, after all. Now, let me see, what other misconceptions might you have about vampires? Oh, yes, we are blood-thirsty monsters who prey on innocent virgins, right?” He lifted his dark brow.

Maggie nodded.

“Well, this certainly dispels that because obviously you are no virgin,” he pointed out.

Maggie found herself giggling at his wry humor. “Okay, you got me there, but you admitted to drinking blood,” she reminded him.

“Yes, I did, but not in the way you think. We are very sexual beings and most of our feeding comes during the act of lovemaking, and even then we do not drain enough blood to kill our partners. I’m not saying that we don’t kill, because we will if we have to, but for the most part, we live pretty ‘normal’ existences. Very young vampires usually feed off of a

parent or a close relative. As I also pointed out, we can feed on sexual secretions. Some of us choose one or the other. Some of us prefer both.”

“What is your preference?”

“I like them both.”

“How were vampires created? How come no one knows of your existence, or rather, how is it that vampires are seen as just creatures of legend?”

“As far as I know we have always been here, but it is said that we are descended from fallen angels. No one is really sure.”

There was another loud groan of agony coming from somewhere in the house.

“Is GianMarco in a lot of pain?” she asked with concern.

“Yes. It's nearly choking me. I can feel it, too.”

“Why?”

“We share a bloodline. We are connected so what he feels I sometimes feel. Now, enough with the questions. Will you help him?”

How could she not after hearing the gut-wrenching pain that GianMarco was experiencing? “Could you explain to me exactly what *la morte dolci* does to a vampire?”

“It's called the sweet death because your body fills with lust at first but when it is denied, it begins to rage within you like an illness. It can transform you physically and mentally. If you are suffering from it, it raises your temperature to a very high degree -- near boiling point, actually. You cannot control the functions that you would in day-to-day life, and your cock hurts so badly that vamps suffering from this condition have been known to mutilate themselves to ease the pain. If not satisfied, *la morte dolci* could drive a vampire insane. Imagine walking the earth for all eternity in a state of madness.”

“Can it kill you?”

“It could drive a vampire to kill himself, but the illness in itself will not kill us.”

“Oh, my goodness. It's that bad? I can't believe I turned GianMarco away.” She groaned, feeling guilty.

“You weren't to know this. I understand why you were frightened. If I were in your shoes, I would feel the same way.”

“Well, what do I need to do to help GianMarco?”

“All you need to do is let him have his way with you. He will probably be very rough in the beginning but that is what I will be here for, to make sure nothing gets too out of hand.”

She shivered as she thought of what he had told her. “This must be some mistake. How can I be his bloodmate? He barely acknowledges me and when he does, he's abrupt and borderline rude.”

“When one of my kind finds his bloodmate, it’s not something that can be explained. It’s instantaneous and there is no use of fighting it. Deep down Marco knew this but did not want to acknowledge it. He was scared of letting himself care for you because of what happened to him in the past. Treating you the way he did was his way of dealing with it. Are you going to help him? I can feel your heat, Maggie. You want this, too. Don’t deny him or yourself, and don’t deny me,” he said, bending over to gently kiss her on the lips.

Maggie nearly creamed herself right then and there. “I don’t know if I’m cut out to be anyone’s bloodmate. I’m not really good at the relationship thing.”

“You and Marco will have to work that out between yourselves later, but tonight is critical. You will do it, won’t you?” he asked, staring down at her with his seductive eyes.

“Yes, but what if he hurts me? He’s very large. I mean it’s longer than my arm, for goodness’ sake!”

Dante chuckled lightly. “He’s quite impressive, but you are exaggerating just a bit. And remember, I will be here to help you both through this. Sometimes you may hear my voice inside your head, but do not be frightened.”

“Can... can all vampires do that?”

“It depends on the age of the vampire.”

“Will GianMarco talk to me inside my head?” Maggie asked, feeling a little freaked out that someone could invade her thoughts in such a way.

“He has that ability, but while he is suffering through *la morte dolci*, it’s a difficult thing to control, so it is not likely that he will.”

“And you... you plan on participating?”

“Of course. It’s my reward.” He smiled with his wicked charm.

“And GianMarco won’t mind?”

“Vampires are generally polyamorous by nature. Once we are mated, however, that’s another story.”

They heard another cry of anguish, but it was closer. The sudden pounding of footsteps got closer and closer. As the door came crashing in, GianMarco stood in the doorway with a wild look in his eyes. This time he would not be stopped.

Chapter Nine

Dante pulled Maggie's trembling body against his. "It's okay, *piccola*. I am here," he whispered against her ear, stroking her hair in a soothing motion.

GianMarco glared at his brother holding *his* woman so intimately. Rationally, he knew that Dante was here to help him, but in the grip of this sickness he didn't care. "Move aside, Dante. I will have her now." GianMarco advanced on them.

Maggie buried her face into Dante's chest. He knew she was scared of what would happen next.

We discussed this, Marco. You will not hurt her, remember? You must be as gentle as you can.

GianMarco nodded as he held out his hand to Maggie. She took a deep breath and put her hand in his.

Dante let go of her as she was pulled into his brother's arms. GianMarco ripped off the comforter she had wrapped around herself.

"You will keep no barriers against me," he said fiercely, looking down at her with a hunger that made Maggie shiver. Before she could respond she was crushed against his naked chest. The heat of his bare flesh against hers was making her sweat. He really was burning up.

GianMarco was in the throes of an illness and she was the only cure.

He smiled, knowing that half of her was frightened by the raw, untamed passion that stirred dangerously within him, but the other half was highly aroused by the fact that she was the one who had driven him to this.

His mouth ground roughly down on hers, kissing her with such a fierce hunger that she whimpered under the pressure of his lips. One arm held her tightly against him, the other hand snaked up to grab a handful of her hair. He yanked her head back so that he

could run kisses along her jaw and neck. As his grip tightened on her hair, Maggie gasped as if in pain. Taking advantage of her parted lips, he slid his tongue inside her warm, sweet mouth.

His tongue explored the unique flavor that was hers alone. The wonderful sensation of tasting her was making his head spin. She tasted better than he remembered. Holding her and kissing her as he was now, he couldn't think of one good reason why he had denied himself for so long.

Kissing was not enough. He needed to taste her pussy or he would surely be driven to the edge. Even now, as he held her in his arms he could smell the delicious scent of the moist treat between her chocolate thighs.

"Oh, my God, woman. You have no idea what you have done to me," he whispered against her mouth as he pressed heated kisses all over her face. The heat seemed to have consumed Maggie as well, taking them both on a whirlwind of passion that neither thought existed. She was returning his kisses as fiercely she was being given them and she had wrapped her arms tightly around his neck.

GianMarco lifted his head to stare into her eyes. "You are mine now. You have no idea how hard I've fought this, but now that you are in my arms, I will not let you go." He tossed her onto the bed, and quickly discarded the boxers that he had been wearing when he entered the room.

Maggie's eyes widened at the sight of his cock. She had not imagined it last night! He had an anaconda between his legs and it looked poised to strike. She looked over to Dante for reassurance, only to discover that now he, too, was naked, and he was stroking himself as he watched. His azure gaze was filled with lust.

Oh, Jesus, he was just as large as GianMarco. *Lord, help me, because my black ass is in trouble.*

GianMarco covered her body with his, grinding his hardness into her. He slid his cock up and down her body to the erotic beat of their hearts. There would be other times when he could delight in all the little treasures of her body, like her large, chocolate breasts, her creamy thick thighs, and her smooth, ample bottom, but now he was only interested in some pussy. Her pussy.

After pressing one last hungry kiss on her mouth, he pulled her thighs apart and slid down the length of her lush mocha body. Maggie moaned as GianMarco rubbed his face into her thick bush. He reveled in the feel of the wiry patch against his face. He dipped his head further down, inhaling the aromatic deliciousness of her dewy cunt.

GianMarco ran his tongue over the slit of her pussy, making Maggie's body shake in the process. He began to lick at her entrance with long, broad strokes. She was delicious, and he wanted more. She moaned as he parted her labia, pressing a deep kiss against her clit.

"Oh, GianMarco, that feels so good." She sighed in pleasure as his lips closed over her blood-engorged clit. She cried out with pleasure-pain when he began to scrape his teeth

against the throbbing nub. The pressure of his mouth increased, making her bite her lip from force of habit so that she wouldn't scream. Eugene had not liked it when she had made too much noise.

It is okay, piccola. The past does not matter. Scream as loud as you want. Show him how much you want him. Dante's sensual voice filled her mind. At his beckoning, she let out a loud moan.

Her body was being taken over by one nerve-jolting sensation after the other. "Oh, God; oh, God; oh, God," she chanted over and over again. Maggie had never felt this way before, and she didn't know how much more she could take before she just expired.

Dante was no longer content to watch. He wanted to play with this ebony love goddess as well. He climbed onto the bed next to Maggie, cupping her face in his hands to kiss her deeply. *Dio*, she was sweet. Boldly, Maggie's tongue came out to meet Dante's. Their tongues dueled for supremacy. Dante's hand slid down her body to cup one generous breast in his hand. His thumb rubbed the stiff peak of her nipple in a circular motion.

Dante lifted his mouth from her so that he could drink in the sultry lushness of her figure, never lifting his hand from the soft mound that he held. He envied his brother in that moment. Here was a woman who would afford GianMarco many nights of hot, titillating passion. He lowered his head again to run his tongue over her kiss-swollen lips.

GianMarco increased the suction on her swollen clit, and Maggie knew that it wouldn't be long before she reached her climax. If anyone had told her that one day she would end up in bed with two gorgeous vampires, she would have laughed, but here she was. One vampire's face was buried between her legs, sucking on her clit as if it were the tastiest thing there ever was, while the other vampire slowly bent over her body to take one dark, chocolate-colored nipple into his mouth. *Eat your heart out, Jenna Jameson.*

Maggie's body began to shudder at the overwhelming sensations that raged through her. "Oh, God. I don't think I can take anymore!" she cried out, thinking she would die of pleasure. *What a way to go!* She sighed as GianMarco slid two long fingers into her wet cunt. Oh, dear Lord, his fingers were nearly as long as Eugene's dick. If she had known that she could feel this way, she would have left his tired ass a long time ago. She felt cheated that she had lived so long without experiencing this awesome bliss.

The warm sticky fluid of her passion coated his digits as GianMarco finger-fucked her at a frenzied pace without lifting his mouth from her swollen clit. She tasted so damn good. He could stay between her satiny thighs forever and never grow tired. This was what he had needed. This was what he had longed for. Nothing could compare with this exquisite heat that generated from her dark tunnel.

Maggie bucked her hips against his face and fingers. She was just as hot for him as he was for her. When GianMarco slid another finger into her sopping hole, Maggie thought she would lose her mind.

“GianMarco!” She screamed his name, and he jammed his fingers harder into her while Dante stimulated her now extremely sensitive breasts. One brother could have easily brought Maggie to her peak by himself, but the two brothers working together were taking her to heights she hadn’t known were possible to reach. This was torture... wonderful, joyous torture.

As she neared her peak, GianMarco withdrew his fingers, causing her to protest. “No, I need more!”

“Now you ache like I ache.” GianMarco deliberately looked into her eyes as he inserted his fingers into his mouth. He thought he would nearly pass out from the exotic, succulent flavor of her. “Maggie, oh, God, you taste so fabulous. *Delizia*.” He lifted her hips to his face to feast on her juices as they leaked from her cunt.

The desire that had been building in the pit of her stomach began to spread throughout her entire body. As GianMarco’s mouth pressed harder against her pussy, Dante began to suck voraciously on one nipple while pinching the other, causing Maggie’s body to explode into such an intense climax that she lost her vision. She screamed her release, and her body began to convulse as if she were experiencing a seizure.

A gush of nectar flowed from her honeyed channel. GianMarco became intoxicated from her essence. Normally, he would have let his brother partake in the tasty treat of a woman’s climax, but he wanted this treasure for himself.

Maggie’s legs clamped over GianMarco’s head as he devoured her. Dante gently grasped her hand and guided it to his throbbing cock. He knew his main purpose here was to make sure that things went smoothly for GianMarco and Maggie, but the scent of her was making his own cock throb to the point of causing him pain. Watching her passionate responses did not help, either. He needed relief.

Maggie wrapped her fingers tentatively around Dante’s thick rod. “Yes, that’s it, *piccola*.” Dante groaned as her hand began to gently pump his cock in her fist. Her innocent caresses worked him into a fervor that an experienced courtesan would be hard pressed to do. Her hand worked him steadily, picking up the pace until he could feel his balls tighten. Pre-cum dripped from his large cock head. Dante leaned over to give her a heated kiss while his hands freely roamed over her body. The sensual way in which he touched her evoked another violent orgasm, causing her to jerk down on the hard shaft in her hand in a rough motion. Dante shuddered as he shot his seed over her body.

When Maggie released Dante’s cock, she felt too weak to move, and he pressed soothing kisses against her face. “*Grazie, piccola*, I needed that,” Dante whispered against her lips.

Maggie gave him a weak smile. She didn’t realize that an orgasm could take so much out of a person, and she had already experienced two.

GianMarco's face was still buried in her pussy, sucking her dry. She was spent. Never in her wildest dreams did she think that she could experience such a wild, ungovernable passion that would leave her as weak as a kitten and yet crave more.

Maggie might have been exhausted, but the Grimaldi brothers were not. Not by a long shot. GianMarco was only just beginning. He lifted his blond head from her honeyed warmth, smacking his lips. His eyes locked with Maggie's as he moved up to her side. Dante pulled back slightly to sit at Maggie's other side, knowing what would come next.

GianMarco pulled Maggie against him and kissed her with a fire that had not been doused, despite the fact that he had just spent well over an hour between her creamy brown thighs. Maggie opened her mouth to the insistent pressure of his tongue demanding entrance. The bittersweet taste of herself on GianMarco's lips was arousing.

She tangled her fingers in his hair and kissed him back with a hunger that equaled his. He pushed her onto her back before covering her body with his. The tumultuous glow in his amber eyes sent uncontrollable shivers through her body. "Now, I am going to give you the fucking of your life." He dragged her legs apart again.

There was still a faint red tint to his eyes, and a wave of fear washed through her at the thought of him sticking his larger-than-large cock into her.

Do not be frightened, piccola. Dante's soothing voice touched her mind again. He leaned over to plant a light kiss on her forehead.

Maggie cried out as she felt GianMarco's thick, bulbous cockhead slide into her pussy. GianMarco had wanted his first time with Maggie to be gentle and tender, but he knew that he could not be those things with her right now. He needed her too badly. "Forgive me, *ciccina mia*." He slammed into her to the hilt.

Maggie moaned rolling her head back and forth. This hurt worse than the time she had lost her virginity. She knew when she agreed to this there would be some degree of pain because of the sheer size of him, but she didn't realize the extent. "It hurts! Take it out."

"I can't," he responded, voice hoarse with desire. GianMarco felt remorse that he was causing her pain, but the guilt that he felt at the moment did not come anywhere close to his need for her. She was so tight and hot around him; he felt he would expire from this aching need that gnawed at the depths of his very soul. Not knowing how much longer he could hold off the raging beast within, he forced himself still so that she could adjust to his size.

Dante took Maggie's hand in his, bringing it to his lips, and squeezing it gently. "I know it hurts, *piccola*, but I can make it better for you," he whispered against her ear.

"How? Are you going to make him take it out? You promised me that you wouldn't let him hurt me," she accused Dante. GianMarco's expression seemed to say that he would not be able to hold off much longer.

“Trust me,” Dante answered, squeezing her hand again before releasing it. She watched through pain-glazed eyes as his hand shifted into a claw. He made a small incision into his wrist and brought it to her lips. Drops of ruby-red blood dripped from the cut. “Here.”

Maggie stared up at him as if he had lost his mind. “Drink it,” he prompted when she shook her head. It was bad enough that GianMarco had tried to puncture her lungs with his gigantic dick, but on top of that Dante wanted her to suck his blood. How in the world was that supposed to help her?

You said that you would trust me, remember? How can I help you if you question my every move? Dante’s cobalt gaze bore into her.

Maggie was still not sure how imbibing his blood would help her, but she had no other choice but to trust him. She lifted her head slightly to the hand held out to her and tentatively stuck her tongue out to sample it first.

“Drink,” Dante ordered as he grasped her chin with his other hand to open her mouth. She latched on to his wrist and began to suck.

As the sticky fluid slid down her throat, a sudden change took over her body. His blood seemed to be relieving the soreness. When it hit the pit of her belly she felt something new.

“I’m sorry, but I can no longer hold back,” GianMarco said through clenched teeth as he reared back to thrust deeply into her pussy.

A sense of calm flowed through her body, opening the door to the pleasure at being so deliciously stretched by GianMarco’s pulsating cock. She felt rejuvenated and was ready for more.

Now for my reward. Dante smiled devilishly at her as he turned her head to the side. *Open your mouth, piccola.*

Maggie obeyed, trembling with anticipation as Dante slid the tip of his own impressive organ into her mouth. Her hand came up to grip him as she greedily tried to stuff as much delectable vampire cock into her mouth as she could. Maggie rolled her tongue around the thick shaft, reveling in the sinful delicacy of his cock. Her lips fit over Dante’s shaft like a tight pussy. He gently thrust in and out of her mouth, careful not to push too deep.

Maggie was in heaven. The animalistic desire that had been unleashed upon her by GianMarco and the gentle soothing of Dante’s tender ministrations were slowly but surely driving her to yet another climax.

GianMarco was totally lost as he continued to screw his woman like a man gone mad... His woman... She was his, he thought, as he branded her with each hard thrust. He wanted to fuck her pussy until they were both deaf, dumb, and blind. No matter what happened after this, he would not let her go.

“Oh, *ciccina mia*. I burn for you,” GianMarco grunted as he moved deeply within her. He looked down at her full-figured, cocoa-colored body. The sight of his pale dick ramming into her dark tunnel was stimulating to watch. Everything about this woman turned him on.

GianMarco's eyes narrowed as he watched Dante slowly thrusting in and out of *his* woman's mouth. When this was over, he was going to tell Dante to get lost, but for now, he couldn't stop fucking Maggie long enough to say so. He was dangerously close to filling her with his seed.

Maggie tore her mouth away from Dante's cock. "Oh, God. GianMarco, fuck me harder!" She bucked her hips against his. As wonderful as Dante's cock was, it was GianMarco's she craved the most.

GianMarco needed no further prompting, propelling himself deeper into her. His incisors descended and his fingers lengthened to sharpened points. Maggie's eyes widened but she was too horny to care about his altered appearance. If he wanted to drain her dry she would let him. She would grant him anything.

Chapter Ten

GianMarco's hot seed filled her thirsty cunt. "Oh, yes, GianMarco. Oh, God. Oh, God." A tremendous joy spread throughout Maggie's entire being. She never knew lovemaking could be quite like this.

"I will taste all of you." GianMarco slowly came back down from the high of rutting furiously into Maggie's tight, slick channel. He pulled his still erect penis out of her and inched slowly down her body.

He kissed her rounded belly before lifting one meaty thigh, nuzzling his face against her flesh. "*La tua pelle e' come seta,*" GianMarco whispered against her thigh. *Your skin is like silk.*

Maggie had no idea what he had just said, but the way he said it sent shivers of pleasure down her spine. He made her feel beautiful when he talked to her so gently and sweetly.

The smell of their joining filled his nostrils, and his balls tightened, ready to take her again, but he had another need to fulfill. GianMarco kissed the soft skin of her inner thigh before sinking his incisors into her skin.

It didn't hurt nearly as much as Maggie thought it would. Actually, the sensation of him slowly sucking her blood created such a head rush that it triggered another mind-shattering orgasm. Never in a million years would she have thought that having a vampire slowly imbibe her blood would fill her with such ecstasy.

Maggie felt as if she were drowning, and she didn't want to be rescued. She dug her fingers into his blond locks. "Oh, my goodness, GianMarco. What are you doing to me?"

GianMarco continued to suck like a greedy child from her silken thigh until Maggie began to feel woozy. She leaned heavily against Dante, who was absently stroking her breasts, making sure that GianMarco didn't take more than Maggie's body could stand.

Enough, Marco. You will drain la piccola, Dante communicated to his brother.

GianMarco wanted to keep drinking Maggie's sweet fluid, but he knew his brother was right. The last thing he wanted to do was to harm Maggie, but that didn't stop him from being a little resentful of Dante's interruption. He lifted his head to glare at the older vampire. His brother smiled back with a knowing gleam in his dark blue eyes. GianMarco knew the look Dante was giving him and he wanted to ignore it, but he couldn't. Dante wanted to fuck Maggie.

You don't want to share? Dante raised one dark brow.

You know damn well that I don't, but you will take her anyway, won't you?

GianMarco snarled back.

Not if you don't want me to, but I'm sure you can imagine my dilemma. Her scent is driving me crazy and my cock needs relief. Will you not let me taste her for just this one night?

Dante's request was not unreasonable. Considering what Dante had just done for them, GianMarco could hardly refuse. He let out a mental sigh. *Okay, Dante, but keep in mind that this will not become a regular occurrence.*

Maggie watched the brothers, frowning in curiosity. They didn't speak out loud yet she knew they were communicating to each other. She didn't know what they were talking about, but she was horny and she wanted some more cock. "Please, GianMarco, I need you," she begged, looking at him with soulful brown eyes.

"And you shall have me. You shall have both of us." GianMarco positioned her on her side and then ground her mouth with his before she could respond to what he had just said.

As GianMarco's tongue invaded her mouth, she felt Dante planting kisses on her neck and shoulders. Handling one monster dong had not been easy, and she had no idea how she would handle two, but the way they were kissing her made her forget everything.

GianMarco lifted his head, only to lower it toward her breasts as he gripped a plump mound in his hand. "You are perfection, *ciccina mia*." He drew a taut, chocolate nipple into his mouth. His other hand squeezed and kneaded her other breast, eliciting loud moans of pleasure from Maggie's lips.

Dante, in the meantime, ran his hand along her spine, overwhelming her with the erotic sensation of his touch. He worked his cock with his free hand until his cum shot against her back. He scooped up some of his sperm and rubbed it between the fleshly cheeks of her bottom, intending to get some ass tonight.

Maggie stiffened as she felt Dante's fingers rub against her asshole. "Relax, *piccola*. You know I would never do anything to hurt you," Dante whispered, kissing her neck. Maggie wasn't so sure. It was one thing to have a cock the size of a boa constrictor in her pussy, but it was certainly another thing to have one up her ass.

GianMarco, as if sensing Maggie's discomfort, lifted his head from the breast he had greedily been nibbling on. "Go easy on her, Dante," GianMarco growled at his brother.

“Now, isn’t that the pot calling the kettle black?” Dante shot his brother an amused grin as he slid his middle finger inside the tight ring of Maggie’s ass. She gasped at the invasion of his long digit. Maggie didn’t know how to feel about this intrusion until he slowly began to move his finger in and out of the tight, little hole.

“Oh,” was all she could say. Tonight was a night full of surprises. She was learning all kinds of things. For instance, having her ass stimulated this way felt pretty damn good. Programmed to believe that her anus was an exit-only hole, she realized she had a lot to learn. She had a feeling that these two hunks would be willing teachers all through the night. Maggie grew hotter than ever. “Dante,” she whispered as he slid yet another finger inside the puckered bud.

Not to be outdone, GianMarco began to finger her pussy. Maggie felt as if she were about to explode with the decadent passion of these two men’s fingers stimulating her ass and pussy. She was so close to another climax that she trembled uncontrollably beneath their touch. “Oh, my God.”

The brothers’ eyes locked with each other. “Shall we?” Dante winked at his brother.

“Of course.” GianMarco smiled back.

Maggie’s eyes widened as he felt their fingers extending inside of her, touching her so deeply her body convulsed into an orgasm so intense that her juices gushed forth as if a dam had been opened within her. GianMarco withdrew his talon-like finger and immediately began to slurp the sweet nectar that flowed from between her legs.

Dante continued to fuck her ass with his fingers, pushing her higher and higher still, not allowing her to come down from her peak.

“I can’t take anymore.” Maggie’s body was not used to such incredible pleasure. Neither brother heeded her words as they continued to deliciously torture her sweat-dampened body.

When GianMarco had his fill of her cunt juice, he moved up against her. His thick cock poked at the entrance of her wet pussy until he slid halfway into her. Dante finally removed his fingers from her slick asshole before positioning his own gargantuan cock against her butt. “It may hurt a little at first but if you relax and let it happen, I promise you I will take you to heaven.” Dante whispered endearments and words of encouragement in Maggie’s ear before stuffing the large head of his rod into her behind.

“Holy shit!” She screamed as Dante slowly filled her ass with inch-by-delicious-inch of his cock. It hurt like hell but it felt good also, with the pleasure slightly overriding the pain.

Dante and GianMarco remained still as they gave her time to adjust to having them both inside of her. GianMarco was the first to move. Maggie thought she was about to lose her mind, but when Dante started to move in sync with his brother, she thought she had died and gone to heaven, just as Dante had promised.

Nothing compared with the feeling of being deliciously filled with two delectable vampire cocks.

"Do you like this, *ciccina mia*?" GianMarco whispered against her lips.

"Yes," she managed to whisper back, her dark, brown eyes locking with his golden ones. In that moment, she felt a fluttering in her heart she had not felt since she was a teenager. How could she have imagined that he would ever have hurt her, and how could she deny what had been between them for weeks?

GianMarco gently stroked her face. Maggie closed her eyes and surrendered to the burst of lust that coursed through her being. The brothers were gentle to start with, but when one picked up the pace, the other followed. They were putting a hurting on her, and she liked it. "Your cocks feel so good," she sighed.

Dante responded by kissing her neck lightly and reaching over to cup one large breast in his palm.

GianMarco placed a gentle kiss on her lips. He was deriving pleasure from the mere fact that Maggie was enjoying herself.

Maggie came again, but the fucking continued. The two men were both insatiable. Just when she thought she could take no more, they would lead her down yet another path of desire. It seemed like hours before Dante or GianMarco showed signs of finishing.

They came almost simultaneously, with GianMarco shooting his hot load inside her channel, then Dante, with a few more powerful thrusts, spasmed against Maggie's round *derrière* before ejaculating inside of her.

Maggie closed her eyes, thinking she could finally rest. She felt that her body could not take anymore of the yummy torture that had administered, but still they had other ideas.

She moaned in protest as the two vampires dragged her body from the bed. GianMarco lifted her into his arms and carried her into his bathroom. He turned on the water before placing her under the steaming jets, then he and Dante stepped into the shower after her.

Maggie was once again caught in a tidal wave of desire as they began to soap her body, leaving no inch uncovered. Now, it was Dante in front of her and GianMarco behind. Dante's hands roamed from the soft, dark pillows of her breasts to the hairy patch between her thighs. He knelt down before her, pushing her legs apart before shoving his tongue up her hot box.

Maggie felt her knees give out, and would have fallen if GianMarco had not been holding her so firmly against him. GianMarco rubbed his swollen member against her rear. "I'm going to fuck your ass, *ciccina mia*. Do you want my cock up your ass?" GianMarco whispered naughtily against Maggie's neck. He bared his incisors, grazing them against her tender skin.

"Yes!" She tried not to lose her mind, which was very hard with his cock rubbing so persistently against her ass and Dante eating her pussy as if he were in a pie-eating contest.

Maggie screamed out as GianMarco's dick gained entrance to her Hershey highway. She grabbed Dante's shoulders to steady herself. *Dear Lord, they might not kill me by drinking my blood, but they are going to kill me by fucking me to death!*

When Dante stood up to ram his cock into her well-eaten pussy, Maggie was beginning to think she was right: they really were going to fuck her to death! She wrapped her arms around Dante's neck as he pumped forcefully into her wet cunt, while GianMarco continued to put a hurting on her tight ass. As if they had practiced it, the brothers slammed into her body like synchronized swimmers. They plundered each hole with such exquisite precision that Maggie felt as if her entire life had been a prelude to this very moment.

Dante lifted her wrist, sinking his incisors into her delicate skin and GianMarco sank his teeth into her shoulder. Each of them was careful not to take too much of her blood, but savored every drop of the ruby-red fluid as it flowed in their mouths. Maggie reached yet another intense peak with the pressure of their mouths sucking on her tender flesh. She screamed out in delight before passing out.

* * * * *

"What the hell do you mean you're not coming in today? I thought vampires didn't get sick... and why hasn't Maggie called in herself?" Oliver sounded a bit peeved on the other end of the telephone.

"I didn't say I was sick. I said Maggie and I would not be in today. How about using the good sense that God gave you? If I know Maggie won't be in today, it obviously means that she is with me." GianMarco shook his head at Oliver's denseness.

Oliver sounded incredulous. "What? Get the hell outta here! What are you and Maggie doing together?"

"You're an adult. Use your imagination."

"If you're implying what I think you are, I don't believe you."

GianMarco was fast losing patience with his friend. "Why is it so hard to believe? Maggie is a beautiful woman, and as you know, I like beautiful women."

"Well... I mean, Maggie Williams? She's a nice lady and a good worker, but she's not what I pictured your type to be."

"Which is why you hired her, right? Well, let me tell you something, Oliver. She is very much my type, whether you believe her to be or not."

"Whoa! Hold on a minute, you know damn well I meant nothing offensive. I merely stated that she doesn't seem like your type. Judging from the women I've seen flit in and out of your life, you can't really blame me. Besides, you haven't been that civil to Maggie in the time she's worked for us. What the hell brought on this about-face?"

"I came to my senses."

"Aww, shit, man, you just can't keep that pickle of yours in your pants, can you? What the hell is wrong with you? When you break this poor woman's heart like you have the rest of them, she will be crushed. She's suffered enough with what she's been through. To top that off, we'll have to look for another secretary."

"And that is what's really bothering you, not that I could break Maggie's heart, but because you will be inconvenienced."

"That's not true!"

"Whatever. Let's not get into semantics here. I won't be in today and neither will Maggie."

There was a pause on the other end of the line. "Fine. I just wonder how long it will be before I have to start looking for a new secretary."

"I thought you didn't care about that?"

"Well, as far as the agency goes, I care."

"I see. Well, in that case, you should start looking right away. I don't want her working at the agency anymore."

"What?"

"I don't want to get into it right now. I'll talk to you later. Try not to contact me unless it's an absolute emergency, and if you need any help manning the phones, get a few temps, okay?"

"But --"

GianMarco hung up. Oliver could be such a pain in the ass. If his wife would actually give him some pussy, maybe Oliver wouldn't be so damn uptight. He turned to look at the sleeping woman in his bed.

Poor Maggie. He and Dante had worn her out. She would be out for a little while longer -- but not too much longer, because he needed more. GianMarco was over the worse part of his illness, and it was not as dire as it had been the night before. This morning he could actually control his faculties once again.

Dante had long since retreated to his own bed. GianMarco was a little bothered by his brother's reaction to Maggie. They had shared women before, but Dante had never been quite as affectionate with any of them as he had with Maggie. It wasn't that he didn't appreciate his brother intervening on his behalf; he was actually very grateful.

GianMarco would have killed himself if he had seriously injured or killed Maggie; however, there was something in the way Dante had touched and looked at her that made GianMarco think that perhaps his older brother might also have tender feelings for his bloodmate. If that was the case, it was too damn bad. Maggie was his!

He loved Dante, but his newly forged bond with Maggie was stronger than anything he had ever felt. He couldn't remember feeling this strongly, even with Bianca. Then again, Bianca had not driven him to this point of *la morte dolce*. He knew from the moment Maggie

Williams walked into his life that it would alter his life forever. He had been crazy to fight it. She had reopened a part of him he had long thought was dead. Unlike Bianca, however, he would not lose Maggie, even if that meant keeping her locked up in his attic.

No, he couldn't do that, but he would make sure she was kept safe. He would take care of her. His eyes scanned her resting form. She looked like a sleeping angel. This was where she belonged. His cock twitched with the need to bury itself between her luscious, thick thighs again. Her warm, soft body had felt like heaven in his arms.

GianMarco had the strangest urge to immortalize her on canvas. Now, where did that come from? It had been such a long time since he had even thought about painting, he wasn't sure if he was still the artist he used to be. He crossed the room to pull a notepad and pencil from his desk and began to sketch her.

It was as if he had never stopped.

GianMarco's pencil flew across the paper until he had several sketches of her. When Maggie began to stir, he put the pad down to slide into bed next to her. He knew she would still be a little sore, but he needed the feel of her body against his. She was his muse.

Chapter Eleven

“You have got to be kidding me! I’ve already told you that I like working here just fine. I don’t want to leave.”

“Maggie, surely you must realize what a distraction you would be for me working here. I would never get anything done. I would not be able to keep my hands off you.” As if to drive his point home, he gently began to kiss her neck.

Maggie moaned as one skilled hand moved up to fondle her breast and the other slowly began to move under her skirt. “See? We would be fucking all day long if you worked here,” he said with his lips against the tender hollow of her throat.

As much as her body wanted to give in to him at the moment, Maggie had to resist. They had had this conversation several times within the past month, with neither willing to relent. After the night of their coming together, she and GianMarco had formed a tight bond. Maggie had never been in a situation where someone openly desired her as much as GianMarco did. Not knowing exactly how it had happened, she had become GianMarco’s woman.

He had told her and shown her in several ways that she now belonged to him, and it frightened and excited her. One night in bed when he had referred to her as his woman, Maggie had laughingly asked, “Don’t you mean ‘girlfriend’?”

“You are definitely not a girl, and you and I are more than just friends. Don’t you think so, *cara?*” he had replied, before making wild, passionate love to her. Just thinking about it now made her shiver.

In the short time they had been together, he would only let her go back to her apartment long enough to get a change of clothing. He insisted on her staying at his house overnight where they would make love until all hours. She hadn’t had a decent amount of

sleep in time they had been together. His artistic talent didn't surprise her; but then, after discovering GianMarco was a vampire, not much surprised her.

GianMarco seemed as if he wanted to own her. As a case in point, he wanted her to give up her job. "No, GianMarco. I don't see why I have to give up my job just because we're having sex with one another."

GianMarco's eyes narrowed. "This is more than just sex. You are my bloodmate, which means we are meant to be together until we are parted by death."

Maggie sighed. "You've already explained that, but can't you see that you're moving way too fast for me? Up until a couple weeks ago we could barely get along --"

"Which we both know was a pretense."

"Yes, I know. I'm not saying that I don't want you as much as you want me, but you can't just take over my life this way. I have every intention to continue working, and if you won't let me work here, then I will find a job elsewhere. I have a little experience under my belt now, so it shouldn't be hard to find employment somewhere. At least let me stay on until I find something else."

"I do not want you working at all."

Maggie threw her hands up in frustration. "Hello! I have bills to pay. I can't live a life of leisure."

"I have told you on numerous occasions that I have plenty of money. I will take care of you."

"And what exactly do you propose that I will do all day? Sit around watching talk shows and soap operas?" she asked in disgust.

"I'm sure you can find plenty to do with your time. Besides, you will probably sleep most of the day anyway because I will keep you up most of the night. How do you think we vampires got reputations for being nocturnal?" He winked.

"GianMarco, can you be serious for one minute, please?" Maggie scolded.

"I'm being very serious. Now, come here and sit on my lap." He grinned at her with sultry amber eyes.

She turned her back to him. The man was impossible, but she had to remain firm. "Listen, has it occurred to you that I don't want to be taken care of? I explained my situation to you already. I was married on my seventeenth birthday. I was just a baby, really. My husband controlled my life to the point where I felt as if I couldn't pee without his permission. Can you believe that after all that I was upset he left? I was weak and pathetic. I don't want to be that person anymore. I don't want to depend on a man for anything, no matter how much I desire him. I'm quite capable of taking care of myself. I think it's sweet that you want to take care of me, because I know your heart is in the right place, but I have to stand on my own two feet. I've barely been back to my apartment. I haven't spoken to my

kids in a couple of weeks, and damn it, you've made me bow-legged." Maggie turned around to him and immediately took a step back.

His eyes were glowing as his anger simmered just below the surface. "Are you finished now?" He spoke the words calmly, but there was an underlying current that warned Maggie that GianMarco was not pleased.

She gulped. "Yes, I'm finished."

"Good. As for your first complaint, if you're so hell-bent on working, I suppose I would rather have you here with me than working for someone else, so you can keep this job... for now. As to your other statements, I admire your courage and strength, Maggie. I recognized it in you from the moment I set eyes on you, even though you didn't realize it within yourself. It was one of the things that attracted me to you." He walked over to her. Pulling her into his arms, he kissed her gently on the lips.

"I am not asking you to give up who you are to be with me. I do not want you to sever your ties with your loved ones. If they are important to you then they are important to me. I want to take care of you because you deserve it."

Maggie's heart did a flip-flop. She found it a bit frightening that she had fallen for him in such a short time period.

"I feel the same way, *ciccina mia*." He rubbed her cheek.

"I wish you wouldn't read my mind like that."

"I don't have to read your mind to know what you're thinking, my sweet. I will give you the time you require, but you must soon accept what it truly means to be my bloodmate."

Maggie shivered. She didn't want to think about it. Not yet.

GianMarco stroked her cheek again. "I have a case that I'm working on and I will be out of the office for the remainder of the day. Use the key I gave you to let yourself into my house."

"I need to go to my own place tonight. I haven't had a good night's sleep in several days."

"Sleep in my bed."

"Yeah, right. When have we ever just slept in your bed?" Maggie raised a brow.

"I will let you sleep tonight. I promise." He smiled at her.

Maggie was born at night, but she wasn't born last night, and they both knew sleep wasn't on GianMarco's mind. "Okay. If you will not spend the night with me, I will spend the night with you."

"Gian--" He placed his finger over her lips.

"No. I will not compromise on this. Now, give me a kiss and I will see you tonight." He rubbed his rock-hard cock against her body as he lowered his head to hers.

Their tongues came out to meet each other, entwining, tasting, and savoring each other's flavors. Maggie's hand boldly slid down between their bodies to grasp the thick bulge in his pants. GianMarco's arm lowered so that he could grip her ass in his hand.

"Oh, God, Maggie, I can't get enough of you," he whispered against her mouth.

"Will you two get a damn room?" Oliver burst into GianMarco's office.

GianMarco lifted his head abruptly. "Can't you knock, for chrissake?" he growled at his business partner.

Oliver looked extremely annoyed. "I did knock but you two lovebirds were obviously too busy to hear it."

Maggie pulled herself from GianMarco's arms, blushing furiously. This was the first time Oliver had caught them in a clinch.

"What the hell do you want?" GianMarco asked.

"Actually, there's someone outside looking for Maggie."

"Who?" GianMarco and Maggie asked in unison.

"A Shelly Thompson, she says. Aren't you supposed to be leaving soon, Marc?"

"In a bit. Who is this woman?" GianMarco asked when he noticed how stiff Maggie had become.

"Eugene's fiancée," Maggie answered.

"Would you like me to handle it?" GianMarco asked.

"No. I want you to stay right here until she leaves." Maggie held her hand against his chest. Neither one of them noticed when Oliver announced that he was going back to his office, leaving them alone once more.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. There are some things I have to do on my own and this is one of them." She adjusted her clothes before walking out into the reception area.

Shelly Thompson stood directly in front of Maggie's desk, tapping her foot with the impatience of a prima donna. She looked every bit the successful attorney in her Donna Karan suit and Jimmy Choo pumps. Her hair was pulled back in a severe bun, accentuating high cheekbones. She wore a look of annoyance on her smooth, caramel face.

"Ms. Thompson, you wanted to see me?" Maggie asked.

The taller woman turned around to look at her. Her eyes widened in surprise as if she were expecting someone else.

"You're Margaret?" she asked in an imperious tone.

Maggie pinned an ironic smile on her face. "That's what they tell me."

Shelly did not look amused. "You're not what I expected. Well, you are chubby just like Eugene described you, but you're not as homely as I thought you would be." Shelly looked Maggie up and down with an insulting sneer.

Heat surfaced in Maggie's face. This black Barbie was about three seconds away from being snatched bald. "To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" Maggie's voice dripped with a false sweetness, something that apparently was not lost on her adversary.

"Don't give me the innocent act. You know why the hell I'm here," Shelly snarled.

Maggie sighed. She wasn't in the mood for guessing games, but it seemed Shelly was. "Perhaps you came here to give me the good news that my divorce is final. Did you and Eugene draw straws to see who got to tell me? I guess you won, right?"

"Are you trying to be funny? Don't try to play dumb. This is no laughing matter. I want you to stop holding up the divorce proceedings and sign those damn papers."

It was now Maggie's turn to look confused. "What are you talking about? I signed those papers nearly four months ago."

"Liar! I don't know what game you're playing, but it ends now. I want you to sign those papers, and let Eugene and me move on with our lives. You are so pathetic. Just look at yourself. It's no wonder he didn't want you anymore. Do yourself a favor and let him go or things can get very uncomfortable for you." Shelly poked her finger into Maggie's chest.

Maggie's clenched fist was about to give Shelly a fat lip when they were interrupted.

"Can I be of some assistance to you, miss?" GianMarco slipped out of his office, smiling pleasantly at Shelly, although there was a coldness within the depths of his golden eyes that made Shelly shiver.

Maggie turned on him, annoyed that he was interfering after she had told him not to. "No. She was just leaving, actually," Maggie stated.

Shelly continued to stare at GianMarco as if she had never seen such a good-looking man before. She was practically drooling.

"That's too bad. Well, in that case I will wish you a good day," GianMarco said.

Shelly shook her head as if coming out of a trance. "Uh uh. I'm not going anywhere until I get what I want from this cow," Shelly snarled.

"I beg your pardon?" GianMarco's eyes narrowed.

"You heard me. Who the hell are you anyway? This is between me and her."

"I can't imagine who I am would be of any interest to you, but I can tell you who Maggie is to me." To both women's amazement, he walked behind Maggie and put his arm around her waist. He then lowered his head to nuzzle Maggie's neck in a possessive gesture before lifting his head to look at Shelly.

"Maggie is my employee and my woman. If this concerns Maggie, it also concerns me. I couldn't help but overhear your conversation, and I must say I take exception to you calling her a cow. If we are going to call each other animal names, I would say you're a dog of the female variety, if you catch my drift." His smile never left his face.

Shelly's jaw dropped. She was obviously not used to being spoken to this way. Maggie pulled herself away from GianMarco. If anyone was going to tell this hussy off it would be her.

"GianMarco, I think I need to speak to Shelly in private. Didn't you say you had business to attend to?"

"It can wait."

"No, it can't. Please let me handle this." Maggie spoke with such determination that GianMarco took a step back.

"But --"

"No. I can take care of this myself. I'll see you later."

"Maggie --"

"I will see you later," she repeated more firmly this time.

"Fine, but call my cell phone if you need me."

"I will. Now, go."

He didn't seem very happy at being dismissed, but left -- though not before giving her a long, hard kiss on the lips.

Shelly stood there the entire time, watching the scene as it played out in front of her. The look in her eyes said that she couldn't believe that someone like Maggie could possibly end up with someone like the blond god she was looking at.

Maggie smiled at the other woman's reaction. It would have really blown that bitch's mind if she knew what GianMarco actually was. She was a little annoyed that he would try to handle things for her when she had asked him not to, and in such a presumptuous manner, but it was so hard to be mad at him. His protectiveness was touching.

Damn you, GianMarco. Perhaps it was a good thing he had interrupted them or else Shelly would have been swallowing her teeth, and Maggie abhorred senseless violence. She had to handle this situation with a little more diplomacy to find out why Shelly believed that she hadn't signed the divorce papers.

"Look, Shelly, I'm sorry for that interruption. Would you like to have a seat? I can get you some coffee and I'm sure we can amicably settle whatever it is that's bothering you."

By now, Shelly had regained her composure to her original haughty stance. "Hmm, having an affair with the boss? He must be pretty desperate if he's with you, although I can't really see that he would need to be. Maybe he's just experimenting to see what it's like to be with... someone like you. No matter, he will lose interest eventually; after all, we both know you're not woman enough to keep a hold of your men."

A few months back, a comment like that would have crushed her, but Maggie was now able to see it for what it really was: the remark of a very unhappy, insecure woman.

"That's enough, Shelly. Judging from your appearance you're supposed to exude class, but you're not acting very classy right now." This seemed to take some of the wind out of Shelly's sails.

"Now, we can either resolve this issue without insults or you can get the hell out of this office. You mentioned me not signing the divorce papers. I can't help but wonder why you would think I haven't. Like I said, I signed them a while back, and I mailed them to Eugene by certified mail. I know he must have received them because I received the signed receipt a couple of days after I mailed it. As a matter of fact, I put it in my purse when I retrieved it from my mailbox. I don't think I removed it. Hold on a sec, let me check my purse to see if it's still there." Maggie spoke calmly.

"You're making this up." Shelly sounded uncertain for the first time since she arrived.

"I'm not lying, and though you may think to the contrary, I would not lie about this." Maggie turned to get her purse. The receipt was still there.

Shelly seemed reluctant to take the green slip of paper from Maggie's hand when it was offered to her. Sure enough, Eugene's signature was on the receipt along with the date. "I... I don't understand." The younger woman sounded confused.

"I don't either. Please tell me why you think I haven't signed the papers."

"Eugene told me you didn't. He said that you were holding things up. He wouldn't lie to me. This receipt doesn't prove anything. How do I know it was the divorce papers you sent and not something else?"

God save me from stupid people, Maggie prayed silently. "Shelly, let me tell you something, because I won't repeat myself again. I am not a liar. If you choose not to believe me, then that's your problem. I have no idea why Eugene would tell you what he did. As a matter of fact, I was thinking that the divorce should go through any day now. As far as I knew, Eugene had taken care of everything."

Shelly crossed her arms and pouted. She looked like a spoiled child, uncertain as to what her next move would be.

"Shelly, I honestly don't know what's going on either but I intend to find out. I want this divorce, too."

"Yeah, right. Eugene said that you fought this divorce tooth and nail. Well, I'm tired of him sitting on his ass doing nothing about it. I'm taking matters into my own hands and I'm telling you that he doesn't want you. Let him go."

Maggie shook her head. This woman was just not getting it. "How about I call him right now and we can settle this issue?"

Shelly's eyes widened with panic. "No! Eugene is in court all day. You wouldn't be able to reach him."

It became apparent to Maggie that Shelly didn't want Eugene to know about this visit. "Look, I haven't got time to argue with you about something you obviously know nothing about."

"Why, you --"

"No. Don't say anything else, Shelly. I would like you to leave."

"So you're not going to cooperate, are you?" Shelly asked stubbornly.

Maggie threw her hands up in the air. What the hell had this woman been smoking? "It seems I'm not the only pathetic person here," Maggie snapped, finally losing her temper.

"Oh, that's rich, coming from someone like you. You've been trying to hold on to a man who doesn't want you anymore. I know how you've used your children all these years to blackmail him into staying with you. Eugene told me the truth, and I know how you manipulated and treated him all these years. Well, listen here, sister, even if you don't sign those papers, Eugene will still get the divorce. We'll just have to wait a little longer and then we're going to be married." Shelly smiled triumphantly.

"And once you're married to him, he'll lose interest in you like he did me, but then again it seems as if he's lost interest in you already if he's lying about the divorce papers," Maggie taunted, tired of trying to be civil.

Shelly's eyes narrowed to slits. "You are just as awful as Eugene said you were. Just because you weren't woman enough to hold him doesn't mean I'm not. I see you won't be reasonable, so I am leaving. I can't say it's been nice meeting you." Shelly turned on her heel and slammed out of the office, leaving a trail of expensive French perfume behind her.

Maggie shook her head, feeling a wave of pity for the other woman. Having been married to Eugene for twenty-three years, she knew Shelly Thompson was in for some very unhappy times ahead. Now why in the world had Eugene told Shelly that lie? She didn't have a lot of faith in her soon-to-be ex-husband, but she had been sure that he would take care of the divorce, as he was the one who had initiated the proceedings.

What the hell was he up to? Because she had been left with so little money, Maggie had not been able to afford an attorney, but now that she was working and had built up a little savings, perhaps it was time to get one to make sure there would actually be a divorce. There was one thing she knew for certain -- she would not allow Eugene to stay a dark cloud in her sky.

Chapter Twelve

He watched her come out of the office and licked his lips in anticipation. She would be a tasty morsel. The thought of sinking his teeth and claws into her flesh made his heart pound. He could almost smell the blood coursing through her veins, but now wasn't the time. He would wait until she was brought over.

Once she became one of them, killing her would be all the sweeter. He smiled as he thought of what it would do to GianMarco Grimaldi to lose another bloodmate. He would make sure to sample this one's sweet cunt juices before he ripped her heart out.

Sweet, sweet Maggie -- he had plans for her. He intended to do her exactly as he had done Bianca. Pure, innocent Bianca. He had gained her trust, making her believe that he was a friend while GianMarco had gone gallivanting through Florence trying to make a name for himself as an artist. What a laugh that had been.

He remembered the day as if it were yesterday.

He had knocked on the door, announcing himself because he knew Bianca had been instructed not to open the door for anyone she didn't know. She had been so sweet and trusting. Bianca had wanted to show him her little son. She was so proud of Giovanni, named for his nonno.

When she had laid the infant down for his nap, he had had his way with her. She had struggled and was quite strong for such a young vampire, but she was no match for him. When Bianca had realized that she could not hope to beat him, she had cried and pleaded for her and her son's lives. He had laughed as he licked the tears that fell from her dark eyes. The fighting had amused him, but the begging disgusted him. Nothing bothered him more than weakness.

He had snatched her tongue out and stuffed it down her throat. He then took pleasure in ripping her heart out. He almost felt guilty about killing the baby but then he'd

remembered whose child it was and the guilt was gone. Now, it seemed after all this time GianMarco had finally found another bloodmate.

She would go the route of Bianca Grimaldi. To this day, GianMarco had not found Bianca's real murderer. Some other vampire had taken the fall for that.

He vowed that he would not rest until the Grimaldi brothers and everything they loved were destroyed. He grinned as he thought of Dante Grimaldi, who still believed he was responsible for the death of his own bloodmate. And then there was Niccolo and his poor lost love. Romeo Grimaldi was the only one who had yet to suffer, but he had a special punishment for that cocky son of a bitch.

It was too bad the incident in the club had backfired. If that stupid cunt hadn't messed things up, he would have taken them all out that very night. That was fine, though -- he had waited this long; he could wait a little longer. As the years had gone by, he had grown stronger and stronger waiting for his time to come. It would be soon... very soon.

Now, for the moment at hand, he would have to find a way to get into the good graces of GianMarco's new love. He liked the slight jiggle to her wide, round bottom. Her smooth, dark skin looked soft, like velvet. Normally, he preferred the creamy alabaster complexion of an English rose, but every now and then he didn't mind tasting a little chocolate. It was too bad she had gotten involved with a Grimaldi, because now she was going to die.

* * * * *

"Where the hell have you been? I've been leaving messages on your answering machine and I haven't heard from you in weeks!" Montana shouted at her friend when Maggie sat down at the restaurant table. "I ordered for us already. I ordered your usual. Chicken Alfredo, right?"

Maggie nodded, already feeling guilty for not contacting her friend in a while.

"I'm sorry, Montana. GianMarco won't give me a moment's peace." Maggie had a satisfied smile on her lips, remembering GianMarco's monster cock deliciously stretching her pussy walls last night.

"GianMarco? Isn't he the asshole boss who's been kind of nasty to you?"

Maggie protested. "He's not an asshole."

"Oh? And what brought on this about-face, and why do you look like the cat with the cream? Are you screwing your boss? I thought you looked different. Day-um, girl! It's about time you got some dick. I hope he's been giving it to you good." Montana grinned, speaking with her usual straightforwardness.

Unable to help herself, Maggie broke out into a wide smile, dimpling up. "Must you be so crude?"

"I knew it! Tell me, is it good? You never looked this way with Eugene."

“Because Eugene was never so fabulous in bed. Speaking of that damn man, you will never guess what happened last week.” Maggie then explained the incident between herself and Shelly.

“What the fuck? Girl, you are better than me because I would have slapped that bitch to next week. So, did you find out what happened about the papers?”

“I tried to contact Eugene, but he played dumb and gave me some lame excuse about these things taking time. He never really told me why his girlfriend thinks I haven't signed those papers, so I finally hired an attorney. Would you believe that Eugene has not sent the signed papers to his attorney yet? I cannot for the life of me figure out why, but now I know he hasn't. My lawyer thinks he may have changed his mind.”

Montana nearly spit out her water. “What?”

“I know. It surprised the hell out of me, too. I mean, why would he go through all this trouble just to let things go like this?”

“So, what do you plan on doing?”

Maggie shrugged, picking up the menu. “My lawyer is setting forth to serve him with papers of my own. It will be expensive, but it'll be money well spent, I'd say.”

“Honey, you know I would have loaned you the money for an attorney months ago.”

“I know, I guess it was my pride getting in the way of asking, and besides I was a fool to think things would just run their course without me getting involved. It's just that he seemed so determined to have this divorce that I didn't think of the possibility he wouldn't send those papers in. And then to lie about it to his girlfriend...”

“I think your attorney's on to something. He's getting cold feet. He's probably realizing how good he had it with you. Judging from what you've told me of Shelly, I think he probably realizes that he's in way over his head.”

“Do you think he wants me back?” Maggie asked in horror.

“Do you want him back?”

“No, but the scary thing is, had you asked me that question a few months ago, the answer might have been different. I don't know what was going through my head for the past twenty-three years.”

“Typical battered woman's syndrome.”

“Eugene never hit me.”

“He didn't have to. He used his words, and they can hurt far worse than physical violence.” Montana was always so insightful.

Maggie mulled it over in her head for a moment. She still carried some scars and insecurities from her long union with a man who had often treated her as if she were beneath his contempt. “Yes, I suppose you're right, but it doesn't matter anymore. He no

longer has the power to hurt me, and after seeing Shelly, I can't help but think the poor woman won't have it any easier than I did."

"I can't imagine why anyone would want the little turd in the first place." Montana pursed her lips in disgust.

Maggie laughed. "Eugene can be very persuasive and charming when he wants to be."

Montana snorted. "Whatever. Now, let's stop talking about the frog and let's talk about the prince. Tell me about GianMarco. He sounds dishy. I like Italian men."

"You like men, period," Maggie pointed out.

"So what? Now stop trying to change the subject. I knew you had a crush on him before you even told me this."

"Oh? And just how did you figure that out, Miss Smarty Pants?"

"Because it was always GianMarco this and GianMarco that whenever we spoke. So, tell me what your first taste of vanilla was like."

"Well, I don't actually think of him in terms of color, but he's not like any other man I've ever met before." *In more ways than you could ever imagine.*

"Have you told GianMarco about Eugene?"

"Yes. He's not happy about it." That was a gross understatement. GianMarco had literally wanted to kill Eugene for holding things up. It was only Maggie's insistence and every ounce of her womanly persuasion that had made him back off. Regardless of her feelings for Eugene, she had had two children with him, and it was for their sake she did not want any harm to befall him. Besides, this was something that she had to deal with on her own... something GianMarco didn't seem to grasp very well.

"Well, I have to say, I've seen a change in you over the past few months for the better, but now you're positively glowing. This GianMarco must be something else. You seem much happier."

"I am much happier. Even the Eugene situation isn't bothering me."

"But something is bothering you."

"No, everything is fine."

"We've known each other for nearly thirty years. I know when something is bothering you, now spit it out."

Maggie lied. "Nothing. Really."

"Maggie." Montana gave her friend the 'I'm-wearing-my-bullshit-detector' look.

Maggie sighed in resignation. There was not a lot she could get past her friend. "I'm falling for GianMarco so quickly that it's scary, but there's a big price to pay for becoming involved with him."

"What? Does he have mob connections or something?"

"Just because he's Italian it doesn't mean he's involved in the mob."

"You know I didn't mean anything by it, now stop stalling. Is he an escaped felon? I can only make assumptions when you don't tell me anything."

"If it were only that simple."

"What's the problem?"

"You're going to think I've lost my mind."

"Maggie, I already thought you were nuts a long time ago when you married the turd."

"No, I'm serious. You will really think I'm crazy."

"So, tell me already!"

"GianMarco is not like other men. Now, Montana, I'm telling you this in the strictest of confidence."

"You know you can trust me." Montana reached across the table to take Maggie's hand.

"He's a vampire," Maggie whispered.

Montana looked at Maggie as if she really had gone crazy, and then burst out into loud laughter, drawing stares from the other restaurant goers.

Maggie looked down, wishing she hadn't said anything. She knew it was a hard story to swallow. She could hardly believe it herself.

The look on Maggie's face silenced Montana. "You are joking, right?"

"I wish I were. I know it sounds like I'm making it up, but he's an honest-to-goodness vampire."

"Maggie, you're the most honest person I know, so I know you wouldn't make something like this up. Do you perhaps think he's playing some kind of trick on you?"

"No, and he has three brothers who are also vampires, apparently. I've met one of them so far."

"This is just too weird. Okay, stop joking. Maggie, this isn't funny anymore."

Maggie did the only thing she could think to do. She began to unfasten the top two buttons of her blouse, revealing quite a bit of cleavage. She discreetly pushed her shirt aside to reveal a recent mark that GianMarco had left about an inch above her areola.

"What the hell? This guy might be some kind of freak, but that doesn't make him a vampire, Maggie," Montana said in disbelief, her eyes never leaving the two teeth marks Maggie had just revealed. Maggie began to tell how she had come to find out about GianMarco, starting from the beginning and going up to the night when GianMarco had gone into *la morte dolci*, leaving out the part about the threesome with Dante.

Montana still had the look of disbelief on her face. "How is this possible? Vampires don't exist."

They were interrupted briefly when their meals were brought out. After the waiter left, Maggie answered. "I know. I didn't believe in them either and what really worries me about the whole situation is that when I fully come to terms with what it means to be his

bloodmate, I'll have to become a vampire as well. He says that he will not let me die as he continues to live."

"Holy shit, Maggie. I don't know what to say. I... are you sure this isn't just some fetish he has?"

"If you were to see the things I've seen, there would be no further doubt in your mind. I don't blame you if you don't believe me, but it's the truth."

"Maggie, you know you're my girl, but you have to admit, this is a pretty hard pill to swallow."

"I understand." Maggie's eyes were downcast.

"That being said, I believe you."

Maggie looked up. "You do?"

"Yes. I guess I must be crazy, too."

"Thank you." Maggie's dimples popped out.

"So, what are you going to do? Will you let him make you a vampire, too?"

"I don't know. That's just it. My feelings for him are so deep that I can't fully explain them, but if I let him bring me over, as he calls it, I will probably outlive my kids, and my grandkids, and so forth, and you. And then there's the thought of no longer being human. It's all pretty overwhelming right now."

"I can see your dilemma, but don't you think your kids would want you to be happy? I know I do."

"I suppose so."

"Can't you make them vampires, too, once you become one?"

"I guess, but it's a little more complicated than that."

"Well, all I can say is this. You've put others before you for so long, maybe it's time for you to be a little selfish. Now, I'm not sure your kids will believe this vampire story. Hell, I'm still debating on whether I believe it, but one thing I do know, you deserve to be happy."

"I am happy."

"Maybe for now, but from the sound of it, if you want to be with GianMarco, you're going to have to make a full commitment." Montana tasted a bit of her pasta.

"I know, but it doesn't make things easier."

"It's understandable." Montana switched gears. "So, GianMarco has brothers. Do you think any of them would be interested in an ebony Amazon goddess like myself who can go all night long?" She smiled lecherously.

Maggie burst out laughing. Leave it to Montana to turn the conversation back to sex. She was such a dear friend.

* * * * *

Maggie missed GianMarco. For three days now, he had been out of town on some business he had to attend to. He had told her that it had something to do with his brothers, but he didn't disclose the full nature of the business and she didn't ask either, not wanting to be a pest. She had a feeling that it had something to do with this Underground thing she had once heard him and Dante talking about. She prayed that he would be okay, but knowing him, she was sure he would be fine. She sure missed waking up in his arms each morning.

The first night by herself she had dinner with Oliver and his wife, and regretted it. Theresa Townsend was a miserable shrew. Poor Oliver; no wonder he always walked around the office with a look of frustration on his face. The next night she had dinner with Montana, which got her thinking about her relationship with GianMarco in a different light.

Tonight, she had dined with Dion and his boyfriend Brian. Brian was a really nice man and it was obvious he was crazy about her son. Seeing those two together, living happily despite the obstacles they would face, made her realize just how much she loved GianMarco. Why was she fighting it?

Yes, the thought of her transformation was unnerving, but with GianMarco by her side, she was sure everything would be okay. Maggie was just getting off the train to go home when she felt someone bump into her, nearly knocking her off balance.

Two strong hands caught her. "I'm awfully sorry, miss," a slightly accented voice said.

"It's okay." Maggie turned around to see the stranger. She froze. He looked strangely familiar, but she couldn't place her finger on it. He had dark hair and eyes that looked nearly black. She turned away, feeling a little uneasy, and would have walked away if he hadn't grabbed her arm.

"I'd like to talk to you," he said.

Maggie looked around for witnesses. It was not rush hour, so the train had very few passengers, most of whom were minding their own business.

"What... what do you want?" She put her hand in her pocket, digging for her pepper spray.

"I've been watching you."

Chapter Thirteen

“Are you sure this is the place?” GianMarco and his brother pulled up to the unassuming building.

“This is the place that appears in several of the pictures I found,” Dante answered.

“Speaking of which, has Romeo found anything out about the other people in the photograph?” Nico asked from the backseat of the black Mercedes.

“No, but he and Wolf are looking into a lead they might have found in Prague.” Dante glanced at his platinum Rolex.

“Putting those two together is asking for trouble. Romeo is a bit of a renegade on his own but throwing Wolf in the mix is just asking for it.” GianMarco shook his head, thinking about his loose-cannon brother and Romeo’s equally wild best friend.

“They’ll be okay. Romeo has a way of getting information, and I know Wolf will have his back. Besides, I think Romeo’s brand of investigation might be what we need right now. Things have been a little stagnant lately,” Dante said, reassuringly.

GianMarco shrugged, feeling bored. “I’m sure you’re right.”

“Are you okay, Marco? Your mind seems to be elsewhere.”

“Wouldn’t yours be if you had a woman like mine waiting at home for you?” GianMarco gave his brother an absent smile.

Dante looked as if he understood all too well. “I understand how you must feel, being away from her like this, but you have been walking around with your head in the clouds for the past few days.”

“You’re imagining things.”

“Have I been imagining that you speak her name in every other sentence and that your heart hasn't really been in this mission since you came? Correct me if I'm wrong, brat.”

Dante raised one dark brow.

“I really wish you wouldn't call me that.” GianMarco sighed.

Dante chuckled. “I notice that you did not correct me.”

“It doesn't matter. We have to go and we all need to keep our heads in the game,” Niccolo interjected, sliding out of the car and closing the door behind him.

Dante sighed. “He's right, but you really need to get it together. This is very important.”

GianMarco folded his arms, watching Dante get out of the car. He didn't want to admit that his heart wasn't in this mission when he knew how much Underground business meant to Dante. He was a little apprehensive at being called away from Maggie for another mission. Normally he did not mind going on missions, but he didn't want to be away from his bloodmate so soon, and GianMarco suspected Dante knew it, too. It had been bugging him for the past few days, and it didn't help when Dante constantly asked how Maggie was doing or what Maggie was up to.

GianMarco had shared women with his brother on many occasions, but it had never driven him to the jealousy he was feeling right now. The one time Maggie had asked about Dante, GianMarco had not been happy. As a matter of fact he had snatched her off her feet, carried her to the bedroom, and fucked her until she begged for mercy. He didn't like feeling this way, but he could not help it. Jealousy was a destructive emotion, and he was worried that if things continued as they were, he would drive Maggie away.

He had thought he was over his sickness, but apparently not. The more he had of Maggie, the more he needed. Being away from her these past few days had been hell. He would lay in bed at night with his cock ready to burst. He could have found someone to relieve the ache temporarily, but he didn't want anyone else. The thought of being with anyone other than Maggie filled him with disgust. He had spoken to her every night he was away and hearing her voice was just not the same as being there.

He loved his brother more than life itself, but the way GianMarco was feeling right now, Dante and the Underground could both go to hell.

There was a tap on the window. “Are you coming?” Dante looked in at him from outside the Mercedes.

GianMarco shot his brother an apologetic look before getting out of the car. *Heaven help me, because I am lost without her.*

* * * * *

“May I help you, gentlemen?” a pretty blonde receptionist asked with a bright smile. She eyed the three men with an appreciative gleam in her eyes.

Dante smiled back in his Prince Charming mode. “Yes, we’re here to see Cliff Lexington, please.”

“Do you have an appointment?”

“No, but I’m sure he will see us.” Dante smiled at the receptionist confidently.

She looked a little uncertain. “Well, umm... I’m sorry, but Mr. Lexington is only available by appointment.”

Dante’s cobalt blue eyes stared deeply into hers. “But I know he will see us.”

“But... I’m not allowed to --”

Dante smiled seductively. His eyes were hypnotizing the unsuspecting receptionist. “We’re old friends. He will see us.”

“Oh, yes. I’m sure he will make time for an old friend. Please go right through. His secretary is out to lunch right now.” The receptionist smiled at the dark, handsome male.

“Thank you.” Dante strode to his destination with his brothers in tow.

Cliff Lexington was going through some paperwork when his door was abruptly opened. “I said no interruptions, Becky. Whatever it is will have to wait,” Cliff said without lifting his head.

“But surely you wouldn’t make us wait?” Dante entered the room.

Cliff lifted his head quickly, his face going pale. He immediately regained his composure and stood up with a smirk on his face. “Well, look what the cat dragged in. If it isn’t the famous Grimaldi brothers. To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit, and where is the fourth Musketeer, may I ask?”

“Cut the crap, Cliff. I think you know exactly why we’re here.” Dante took the pictures out of the breast pocket of his Armani jacket and flung them onto Cliff’s desk.

Cliff only glanced at the pictures, not bothering to pick them up. He raked his fingers through his dark brown hair. He was a small man with dark, beady eyes, which only seemed to enhance his weasel-like appearance. Nico stepped forward in a threatening pose. “Spill it, you little shit.”

Cliff Lexington had been a thorn in their sides for years. He was a rogue, and by all rights should have been taken out by the Underground a long time ago, but he was useful to them and the cause. Apart from being a troublemaker, Cliff had a yellow streak larger than his worthless hide. Cliff hung out with some pretty interesting characters, and it suited Dante to keep him alive in order to gain information. It was the only thing keeping Cliff alive at this point. Cliff looked a little apprehensive. It was obvious he would rather be anywhere else than where he was at the moment.

GianMarco finally spoke. "We haven't got all day to stand here and listen to you breathe, Lexington." Today was not a good day to get on his bad side.

"What exactly do you want to know?" Cliff answered as if he were trying to buy some time.

"Who are the people in this picture, and why does this building appear in a lot of the pictures?" Dante demanded.

Cliff took a deep breath, as if trying to figure out whether it would be safer to give them the information they wanted or to just keep quiet and take his chances. He apparently decided that giving them some information was better than nothing. "The two men on the right were Sergio Rivera and Miles Smith. The other two I don't know. I have seen the man around, but I don't know exactly who he is. I think I may have heard him referred to as Don."

"Don who?" Dante asked.

"I've already told you, I don't know. As for the woman, I have never seen her before."

"You're hiding something, Lexington, and you know we don't like it when you keep secrets from us. If you value your sorry hide, you'll come clean and tell us why the Inner Circle was meeting here in this building." Dante cracked his knuckles, looking as if he wanted to smash Cliff's face in.

Cliff backed away from them. "Look, why can't you guys just leave me alone? I'm trying to run a respectable business now and I don't want any trouble."

"I think we should kill him now. It seems like he has worn out his usefulness." GianMarco advanced on the smaller vampire.

Cliff answered hastily. "No, wait. Please, what I told you was the truth. I only know the names of those guys in the picture, although I heard you guys put an end to them in London. All I know is that they were pawns for *Him*."

"Who is *Him*?" Dante wanted to know.

"*Il Diavolo*," Cliff whispered as if he feared someone was listening.

"And you have no idea who this Don person is?" Nico asked.

Cliff sighed. If he lived through this interview, he was getting the hell out of Los Angeles. "No."

"What about the woman?" asked Dante.

"I already told you that I don't know who she is, either."

"Then, pray tell, why are they shown coming in and out of this building?" GianMarco was ready to take out this piece of trash without a moment's notice.

"I swear it! I don't know who she is."

"That isn't what I said. Why were they here?" GianMarco growled, advancing on Cliff.

“Wait a minute! I’m telling you the truth. Other than the two I have named, I do not know the others. Miles used to be my business partner, and Sergio would come by often. There were times when I was not here, so that could be when the other two came.”

“So the truth finally comes out. Who else has been through here?” GianMarco grabbed the other vampire’s throat. Cliff’s eyes nearly bulged out of his head from the pressure of the hand around his throat.

“Trent Black. He was here quite often.”

“Why?” GianMarco asked. His eyes glowed with a ruthless gleam.

“I... don’t... know,” Cliff said with difficulty as the blond vampire increased the pressure around his throat.

“He was... in cahoots with them. They were planning to get rid of you in London.” Cliff struggled, but GianMarco was too strong for him.

“And yet you don’t know who the other two are?” Dante asked in disbelief.

“No! I swear it.” He gasped for air.

GianMarco’s hands changed to sharp claws, ready to rip Cliff’s heart out. Cliff would have screamed if his windpipe had not been closed off.

“Hold on a minute, Marco.” Dante put his hand on his brother’s shoulder. “He’s telling the truth. He does not know who they are.”

GianMarco’s hand tightened before letting Cliff go. Cliff backed away, baring his incisors at GianMarco. “You need to rein in your watchdog, Dante.”

Dante ignored the comment. “Tell us, are you working with *il Diavolo*?”

“No, but Miles was pretty secretive about his affiliation. I only found out by accident. I do know one thing: it seems like your boy Black wasn’t as loyal as you thought, Grimaldi.” Cliff smirked before GianMarco’s fist flew into his face, smashing several bones.

Cliff dropped to the ground howling as his hands covered his broken face.

“What the hell did you do that for? There’s still information we could have gotten from him!” Dante hissed at his brother.

GianMarco shrugged, unrepentant. “What’s the big deal? His face will heal in a few minutes, and the piece of shit had it coming.”

“Let me handle it from here on. Why don’t you take a walk?” Dante suggested.

GianMarco looked at Cliff cowering on the floor with disgust. “I will go, but this piece of slime had it coming.”

“Let’s both go outside, Marco,” Niccolo said, putting his arm around his younger brother to lead him out of the office.

Once they were outside, Nico ripped into him. “What was that all about? I would expect something like that from Romeo, but you have more finesse than that. To be honest,

you have been acting a bit strange for the past few days. I have never seen you lose your cool in the middle of a mission.”

“I miss her so much, I can't think straight,” GianMarco said, crossing his arms and leaning against the Mercedes.

“Your bloodmate?”

“Yes. I can't stop thinking about Maggie and it's driving me crazy. I guess the even more crazy part is that I am a little envious of Dante for what he and Maggie shared on the night we first came together.”

An amused grin touched Nico's lips. His amber gaze searched his younger brother's face. “Ah, I see. She must be the one you call on your phone every five minutes. Surely you must know you need not worry about Dante.”

“He wants her for himself. I can feel it.”

“You're crazy, Marco.”

“Do you think I'm crazy when I catch him thinking about her, wanting her? I did not imagine that.”

“When did this happen?” Nico frowned.

“The night we arrived in L.A. The woman sitting in the lounge when we checked into the hotel reminded me of Maggie. I confided this to Dante, and an hour later, I got to his room to find him making love to this woman, only in his mind he was not making love to the woman. He was making love to Maggie.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am ninety-nine point nine percent positive.”

“I don't know how to respond to that, but how does Maggie feel about Dante?”

“She likes him, but I don't sense the same need in her as I do in Dante.”

“So, what is the problem? She belongs to you, and she obviously wants you, too, or she wouldn't be with you.”

“I know but --”

“Do you for one moment think, knowing how much Dante loves you, that he would do anything to act on those feelings?” Nico asked wisely. GianMarco's lips pursed mutinously. “Marco?” Niccolo touched his brother's arm.

GianMarco sighed in defeat. “No, I know he wouldn't, but it doesn't ease this jealous beast within me. If I'm thinking rationally, I know I am all of these things, but being rational doesn't come into play where Maggie is concerned. I am jealous of anyone she has a relationship with. Hell, I'm even jealous of my goddamn partner every time she smiles at him. I have never been jealous over anyone before, not even Bianca.”

“You were still very young then. As we get older, our feelings become more intense. It can sometimes work against us.”

“Is this how you felt with Petra?”

A muscle twitched in Nico’s jaw. “To be honest, I can’t remember. That was a very dark time in my life and we only had such a short time together.”

“Do you still think about Jagger?”

“Every day of my life, but I know he is better off where he is. Anyway, you should cut Dante some slack. He has been under a tremendous amount of stress lately with the death of Trent, and then to find out that he wasn’t as loyal as Dante thought. You know how our brother has been driven in this cause. So what if he has tender feelings toward your bloodmate? You and I both know how honorable he is and he would not do anything to hurt you. Let him have his fantasies. You have the reality.”

“I know, but it doesn’t stop the way I feel. I fear that I will drive her away with my jealousy.”

“You’re going to need to get over that. As it stands, you will have to bring her over soon or you will go into *la morte dolci* again. Perhaps that is why your jealousy is driving you so.”

“It could be.”

“Then what is the hold up?”

“She’s a little wary about leaving her children behind and also about not being able to give me a full commitment until her divorce comes through.”

“Well, something needs to happen quickly. Maybe you should take matters in your own hands. Does Maggie realize the danger involved once she is brought over?”

“I explained things to her, but it will not be like the last time. I might not have been strong enough to protect Bianca, but I’ll be damned if I let the same thing happen to Maggie.” GianMarco’s eyes glowed with determination.

Just then, Dante came out of the building, looking pale. Noticing his brother’s pallor and a splash of blood on the otherwise immaculate Armani jacket, Nico asked, “What’s the matter, Dante?”

“I messed up.”

“How? What are you talking about?” GianMarco frowned.

“I didn’t get the information.”

“Why not?” Niccolo asked.

“I killed him.”

Chapter Fourteen

You must remember what I told you, Maggie. Do not forget or it may cost you your life.

Maggie woke up with a start. Her body was drenched in a cold sweat. The nightmare had seemed so real, but all she could remember was the face of a man with dark hair and black eyes, or were they a dark blue? She couldn't remember. She tried hard to recall other details of the dream but kept coming up blank.

Maggie climbed out of bed and headed downstairs to the kitchen. There was some leftover chicken and sweet potato pie from the dinner she had cooked earlier. She had thought GianMarco would be home in time to share it with her, but he wasn't back yet. As the clock ticked away with no word from him, she assumed he wouldn't be back until the next day. Maggie felt like a wife waiting for her man to come home to her.

She was worried because he had called every night since he had been away, but tonight he hadn't. She was aware that he was with his brothers and they would watch his back, but that didn't stop her from thinking that maybe he was in danger.

Wherever he was, she missed him so much that she felt bereft. Sleeping alone in his king-sized bed was lonely, and she would rather have spent the night at her own place than in his house without him. Her old insecurities began to resurface. What if while he was away, he decided he no longer wanted her? Perhaps he was with some young hussy who didn't weigh more than ninety-nine pounds soaking wet. Unhappily, she took a bite of cold chicken.

"Now, why would I want some anorexic bimbo, when I have a real woman at home?" GianMarco asked from behind her.

Maggie jumped out of her chair. She didn't know if she would ever get used to his sneaking up on her this way. "GianMarco, I missed you so much." She wrapped her arms around his waist.

He smiled, happy to be with her again. "Had I known I would receive such a warm reception, I would have come home sooner. I wanted to surprise you, which is why I didn't call."

"I thought you would be here earlier." She looked up into his eyes.

"I know, *ciccina mia*. My flight was delayed. God, I missed you." He lowered his head to brush his lips against hers.

"Are you hungry, because I can warm something up for you. There's plenty of leftover fried chicken."

"As delicious as that sounds, the only thing I'm hungry for is some pussy," he growled before burying his face in her neck, inhaling her scent. Maggie's arms tightened around his neck as she surrendered to the wave of passion that washed throughout her body.

The feel of his lips against her skin sent shivers down her spine. She threaded her fingers through his thick blond hair, guiding his mouth to hers. They kissed long and deeply, both unable to get enough of each other.

"I don't think I'm going to make it to the bedroom." He lifted his mouth from hers with reluctance.

"I don't care. Take me now!" GianMarco pulled her against him, grinding his hardness against her body. "I can feel he wants to come out and play."

Maggie grinned, dropping to her knees. In no time at all, she had his pants unzipped, and his cock sprang free. She gripped the thick shaft, planting kisses over the velvety head.

GianMarco groaned in ecstasy. Maggie ran her tongue over the length of his cock, licking it like it was a popsicle. She took her time teasing and titillating him until he began to shake. She knew he had had enough of her teasing when he buried his fingers into her thick hair, and guided her mouth over his dick. Maggie opened wide so that she could get as much of his cock in her mouth as possible.

His hands gripped her hair firmly as he gyrated his hips back and forth, gently fucking her mouth. Maggie eagerly sucked on his large cock, enjoying the taste and texture of him. The mere fact that she could turn him on this way made her pussy moist. As she sucked his cock, she fingered her clit, heightening the sensation of the moment. Her other hand was still wrapped tightly around his thick meat, slowly taking him to his peak.

GianMarco was so aroused his head began to spin. "Oh, God, Maggie, your mouth is wonderful." She pulled back, releasing her hand from his cock to gently fondle his balls. They were nearly the size of two baseballs! She leaned forward and ran her tongue over the tight sac. She ran her tongue around each ball before taking one partially into her mouth.

GianMarco stood still, as if trying desperately to hold on to the last of his composure. Maggie, noticing this, increased the pressure of her mouth on his nuts, raising the hand that had been fingering her clit to work his cock. She released his throbbing ball before sliding her lips over his thick, long shaft, sucking him with reckless abandon.

“Oh, God, Maggie, I’m going to fucking come!” His grip tightened on her hair as he thrust his cock deep into her mouth.

Maggie’s eyes widened as she felt his warm semen slide down her throat. She slurped every drop of fluid that gushed from him, savoring the tangy, sweet muskiness of his spunk. When Maggie pulled her mouth away from his cock, she looked up at him with her doe-like eyes, dimples showing. “How was that?” she asked boldly, already knowing the answer to her question.

He groaned, hauling her to her feet. “You like to tease, don’t you, woman?” He turned her around and bent her over the kitchen table so that her breasts and palms were pressed against the surface. He stepped out of his slacks and boxers, which had pooled around his ankles, and kicked them aside. GianMarco lifted her nightdress and ripped her panties away from her quivering form.

He licked his lips at the beautiful picture she presented. Her succulent brown derriere was turned up, tempting him beyond endurance. Her legs were spread apart just enough to reveal a flash of the pink lushness between her bountiful thighs.

GianMarco slid a couple of fingers inside of her wet slit before withdrawing them and bringing them to his mouth. “Mmm, you taste good. Do you know how good you taste, woman?”

Maggie shook her head, speechless as he reinserted his fingers inside her.

“This is how good you taste,” he whispered in her ear before placing his damp fingers against her lips. “Open your mouth and suck my fingers. I want you to know how good you taste.”

Maggie obediently opened her mouth and sucked on his fingers. She found that she enjoyed the taste of herself against his skin. He removed his fingers from her mouth to put them back into her gushing pussy. “Did you touch yourself while I was gone?” He twisted his fingers inside her cunt.

“Yes.” She whimpered at the incredible things his fingers were doing to her.

GianMarco rammed his fingers deeper. The sensual torment of his touch was almost more than she could take.

“Did you come when you touched yourself?” he asked, shifting his hand so that his fingers could go deeper still.

“Yes!”

“Did you think of me when you touched yourself? Did you think of me when all that lovely cream gushed from that pretty pussy of mine? That’s right, Maggie, *my* pussy.” When no answer came immediately, he asked again. “Did you?”

He was seducing her with the mere sound of his voice. “Yes, GianMarco. Please fuck me. Please. I missed your cock so much!” she begged, making a move to stand up, but one hand easily pinned her to the table.

“Not yet. I think you should be punished for wasting my cream... cream that you should have saved for me. What do you think, *ciccina mia?*”

Maggie couldn’t have answered if her life depended on it. Before she realized what was about to happen, he brought a palm down on the meaty part of her ass.

“Oww!” she screeched, more out of surprise than pain. The stinging in her ass faded as he caressed the very spot he had just hit. Just as she was beginning to melt under his gentle hand, he smacked her on the ass again, making it jiggle. Maggie cried out with pleasure-pain. He rubbed his hand over her heated, chocolate flesh.

Maggie’s breathing became short. She never imagined that a light spanking could be so sensual and could give so much pleasure. “Oh, my God, GianMarco!” She screamed as he brought his hand down on her ass again in a rapid succession of slaps.

“This will teach you what will happen when you come without me,” he said, before ramming his cock into her ready hole. GianMarco gripped her hips as he pushed deeper into her warmth. “I’ve missed this so much.”

“I missed it, too, GianMarco.” Maggie bucked her hips backwards to meet him thrust for thrust. She felt as if she would explode from the delirious pleasure of his cock impaling her. GianMarco brought his palm back down on her ass as he fucked her with the savage abandon of a starving man.

“Damn, woman, this is some good pussy.” He licked his lips in anticipation of her gushing into his mouth, while his hand continued to smack her abundant rump.

Their bodies were lost to the mindless rhythm of their lust. When Maggie reached her peak, she nearly passed out. “Oh, God, yes!” Spots danced in front of her eyes. Holy hell, if she had any more orgasms like that, she was sure she would go insane.

Experiencing his own climax, GianMarco yelled out, throwing his head back, incisors bared. He pulled out of her, after shooting his seed up her waiting channel and dropped to his knees to fit his mouth over her pussy so that he could catch the flow of her juices, slurping away like a greedy child. Nothing compared with the taste of his woman, GianMarco thought. He lifted his head just enough to sink his teeth into her labia. The mixture of blood and her pussy juice was like nectar for the gods.

Maggie’s body heated up again as he tasted her. She purred in satisfaction as he had his fill. GianMarco stood up, pulling her into his arms, and proceeded to carry her to the

bedroom where he planted his face firmly between her legs once again. He ate her pussy well into the morning.

* * * * *

Maggie woke up with GianMarco curved against her back. His cock was still deep inside of her. His arms held her tightly, and his even breathing told her that he was sleeping.

She looked at the clock. *Noon! Crap!* Oliver was going to hit the roof. She tried to ease herself out of GianMarco's arms. The arm around her tightened. "Where do you think you're going?" One amber eye opened lazily.

"I need to call Oliver. He's probably wondering where I am."

"I called him earlier, while you were sleeping. Now, stop squirming before I flip you over and screw you until you're deaf, dumb, and blind," he teased.

"You already screwed me blind. I would like to keep my ability to hear and speak, thank you."

A cocky grin appeared on his face. "Did I really make you blind?"

"Yes. And take that smug grin off your face, mister." She turned in his arms to face him. Her fingers traced the outline of his beautiful face, and her heart began to flutter. "I love you, GianMarco."

He stiffened, his eyes searching her face.

"GianMarco?" she asked with uncertainty when he didn't answer.

His response was to cup her face in his hands and kiss her slowly, taking her breath away. "Is it true? Tell me that I'm not dreaming, *bellissima*."

"You're not dreaming. I love you. Do you... do you love me?"

"*Eterno*," he whispered, before kissing her again. "*Ti amo*."

"That means I love you, right?" She laughed.

"Of course, *ciccina mia*." He stroked her face.

"Umm, I've been wanting to ask you something."

"Anything, *amore mio*."

"Well, maybe I should have asked the first time you said it, but what the hell does *ciccina* mean? It's sexy when you speak to me in Italian, but I don't know what the hell you're saying." She pouted.

GianMarco threw his head back and let out a boisterous laugh. Maggie smacked him on the chest. "I'm glad you find it amusing."

He grabbed her wrist to bring it to his lips, planting a kiss on her pulse. "I apologize. I did not mean to laugh at you, but you're just so adorable."

Maggie glared at him. "Yeah, yeah, but are you going to tell me what it means or do I have to wait to see your brother again to find out what you've been saying to me?"

The laughter left his face. "Are you so very anxious to see Dante again?" The hand that had been caressing her face gripped it in a vise. The playfulness of the moment was gone.

"You're hurting me." She pushed against him, but he would not release her face.

"Answer me! Are you anxious to see my brother again?"

"No! Let go of me!" She slapped his hand, her eyes tearing up with pain.

When he released her face she slid out of bed and dashed to the bathroom, locking the door behind her.

"Damn!" He swore, jumping out of bed. What the hell had just happened? This should have been the happiest moment of his life. The woman he adored above all others had finally confessed her love for him and he had gone and ruined it with his jealousy. Maybe Niccolo was right; he would end up driving Maggie away from him if he continued to act this way. As things stood, he could hear her crying softly in the bathroom. He felt like an asshole.

GianMarco tapped on the bathroom door. "Maggie, would you open the door, please?"

"Give me a minute." She sounded as if she were trying to regain her composure. She opened the door a few minutes later. Her eyes were red and puffy. Despite her dark skin, he could see fingerprint marks forming on her jaw line. When he lifted his hand to touch her face, she flinched away.

"*Perdonami*. I'm sorry." GianMarco looked at his beloved with pain-filled eyes.

Maggie looked as if she would waver for a moment, but only for a moment.

"GianMarco, I just told you that I love you, and I would never use those words lightly considering my hellish nightmare of a marriage. I understand who and what you are and I accept that, but you will have to accept me for who I am. I will not live the rest of my life in fear of what I say to you. I'm not really sure why you would fly off the handle at the mere mention of your brother. I only brought him up because he's the only other person I know who speaks Italian, for goodness sake!"

She took a deep breath. "And while we're on the topic, the other week when I asked you how he was doing, you threw me on the floor and ripped my clothes to shreds, and you were a little rougher than usual. I didn't really think much of it at the time, but now that I've had a chance to think some more, I do not appreciate you treating me like some kind of hoochie who doesn't know her own mind. At first, your jealousy was sort of cute, but now, it's wearing thin. I think we need a break from each other. I need some time to think."

GianMarco's heart plummeted. He couldn't let her go. He just couldn't. He pulled her into his arms and started raining kisses on her face. "No, don't leave me, *bella*. Stay with me. I need you so much." His mouth crushed hers.

Maggie pushed against his chest trying to twist her head away, but GianMarco was like a rock. He was not about to give up on the woman he would gladly lay down his life for. As

his tongue invaded her mouth, she began to soften against him. Only when she fully returned his kiss with a savage need that equaled his, did he lift his head.

“Now tell me that you want to leave me.” His amber eyes glowed luminously.

To both their surprise, Maggie broke out into tears. “Baby, don’t cry. Please. It was not my intention to make you unhappy.”

“You make me very happy, GianMarco, but you also make me sad when you treat me as if I can’t be trusted. I’m not your possession, and I won’t be treated like one. It’s fine and well when we’re making love, but when you carry it into our lives, then it’s a problem. I’m not saying that we should take a break permanently, just a few days.” Maggie sniffed.

“We were just apart for a few days. I cannot bear to be apart from you for a few more days. Be reasonable, Maggie.”

“No. I’ve made up my mind. Please don’t make this harder on me than it needs to be.”

“Don’t you understand? I ache when you are not here with me. These past three days without you were hell. When will you be mine? I mean really and truly mine?” he asked in despair.

Maggie turned away from him, nibbling on her lower lip. They both knew exactly what he meant. “You know I am waiting for my divorce to go through, and I have to talk to my kids.”

“And how long will that be? How much longer do I have to wait?” he demanded.

“Not much longer. Look, I’m going home now. Can I have the rest of the week off?”

“What for?” he asked petulantly.

“I already told you. I need to get away for a few days.”

“Where to?”

“Stop it! You don’t own me, so stop acting like you do.”

He could feel her inner turmoil and his heart twisted. “Fine. Take as much time off from work as you need.”

“GianMarco, I’m not doing this to hurt you, but you must admit, you got a little scary on me. Is it a wonder that I want a little time apart?”

GianMarco sighed with frustration. “I know. When will you be back?”

“In three or four days, I guess.”

GianMarco reached out to touch her cheek. “Please don’t make me wait too long. You know I will find you.”

“I don’t doubt it.” She smiled. He wrapped his arms around her, giving her a tight squeeze. She was his full-figured Nubian goddess. He would do whatever it took to make her his forever.

Chapter Fifteen

GianMarco watched as the girl came out of the building. No, that wasn't right; she wasn't really a girl. She was a young woman. Her long, dark hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and she wore a pair of jeans and a Tommy Girl T-shirt. She was cute. Her smooth, chocolate skin was reminiscent of his own ebony angel's. This young woman was perhaps a little too thin for his liking, but her curves were generous enough to fill any man's hands.

He approached her as she headed for her car. "Excuse me."

"Yes?" She turned, eyeing him with curiosity. Her dark brown eyes were wide and heavily lashed. GianMarco's breath caught in his throat at how much she looked like her mother.

"Are you Janice Williams?"

"Who wants to know?" She was cautious, stuffing her hand into her pocket, digging for something.

He smiled at her. "I don't mean you any harm, Janice. There's no need for you to pull out that pepper spray."

"How did you know that? Who are you? What do you want?"

"It was just a hunch. I'm GianMarco Grimaldi, and I wanted to talk to you. Does that answer your questions?"

"Why do you want to talk to me?"

"I'm a... friend of your mother's," he said smoothly, holding out his hand.

She shook his hand automatically. "Is something wrong with Mom?"

"No. Your mom is fine."

"Did she send you down here to spy on me? I just spoke to her on the phone a couple of days ago."

"I take it that she hasn't mentioned me."

Janice paused for a moment before she seemed to understand what he meant. Her eyes widened incredulously. "Well, she did say that she had met someone, but didn't say much beyond that. Are you trying to tell me you're the man she's seeing?"

"Actually, I want to be much more than just the man she's seeing. That's why I would like to talk to you, and no, your mom didn't send me. She doesn't know I'm here."

"Gosh, it looks like Dad wasn't the only one who traded in for a younger, hotter model." She grinned. "I didn't know Mom was into white guys."

"Whether she was or not before she met me, I am definitely into her."

"I have to ask, why are you telling me this?"

"Could we go somewhere for coffee maybe? What I have to say can't be said in a parking lot."

Janice looked at her watch. "Well, I have a couple of hours to kill between classes. There's a coffee shop down the street if you want to follow me there."

"That sounds fine."

When they both had their coffee, GianMarco was the first to speak. "You were only partially right."

"What are you talking about?" She took a sip of her espresso.

"You said earlier that your mother traded in for a younger, hotter model."

"Oh? You don't think you're hot? I'm sure you get your share of female attention. Mom sure hit the jackpot with you." Janice gave him a really good look for the first time. "I'm not into the white guy thing, but you're cute."

Maggie had often related stories to him of her kids, and she was not kidding when she said that her daughter was very outspoken. "I would say I am the one who hit the jackpot."

Janice smiled, revealing dimples like her mother's. "That's an awfully sweet thing to say."

"It's only the truth, but what I was talking about earlier was that I'm not younger than your mother. I'm older. Quite a bit actually, but first let me tell you why I wanted to see you. I've already talked to Dion. He's a fine young man, but I thought I should talk to you as well."

"You talked to my brother? Why? I'm not sure I understand why you came to see me or why you had to see my brother, either. If it's because you're concerned about how we would feel about Mom dating you, I'm cool with it, and I'm sure Dion is in full agreement. Mom deserves a little happiness after the way Daddy treated her."

"Actually, I'm here because your mother has expressed some concerns to me regarding our differences," GianMarco began delicately.

She shrugged. "I don't care that you're white, and apparently, neither does Mom."

“I don’t consider our skin color to be the root of our problems. I guess I am floundering here, trying to explain this to you properly. I will start this off by saying that I love Maggie very much. To be honest, words cannot express all that I feel for her, but love’s the best word I can think to describe it. She makes me very happy, and I want to spend my life making her happy. The only problem is there are certain conditions involved in being with someone like me. As I said earlier, I’m older than your mother, much older than you would guess I am.”

“How old are you?”

“Would you believe me if I told you I was over six hundred years old?”

Janice stared at him as if he had lost his mind, then she started to laugh. “Okay, go ahead and pull the other one.”

“I’m a vampire. In order for your mother and me to be together with any permanence, she will have to become one as well.”

“Okay, did Dion put you up to this? This is no longer funny. What kind of weirdo are you, anyway? If you do know my mother, stay away from her, you sick creep.” She glared at him, making a move to stand up.

GianMarco grabbed her hand. “Look into my eyes and see that I’m telling the truth.” His mind linked with hers, taking her inside the depths of his mind.

Janice tried to snatch her hand away but could not free it from GianMarco’s strong grip. She gasped as she stared into his golden gaze. She couldn’t tear her eyes away from his as a strange glow appeared in them.

He let his hand shift, grazing her skin lightly with his long, sharp nails. Let his incisors descend just long enough for her to get a glimpse without anyone in the coffee shop noticing. After what seemed like several minutes, she blinked, finally coming out of her trance-like state. She plopped back down in her seat.

“Oh, my God! You really are...” She blushed looking around to see the coffee shop patrons were looking over with curious glances. She continued in a whisper. “You really are a vampire! Holy shit! What are you doing out in sunlight? Hell, what are you doing even existing?”

GianMarco laughed at her ignorance. “I’ll let you in on a little secret. I don’t sleep in a coffin either.”

“Now, you’re making fun of me!”

“Never, my dear.”

“Well, this is just weird. Why did you pick my mom? If you hurt her, I’ll --”

“It’s not necessary to threaten me, as your mother’s happiness is my ultimate goal in life.”

It took nearly an hour to explain to the perplexed young woman the vampire culture, and how it was that he had become involved with her mother.

"Whoa," she simply said, taking it all in when he had finished.

"I know it's a lot to digest, especially since before we met you didn't know people like me existed."

"Yes. So, you're saying my mom's biggest concern is leaving me and my brother behind?" She lifted her brows.

"Yes. How does this make you feel?"

It took a while before Janice finally answered that question. "Well, it's kind of weird, you know. I would never have thought I'd have a vampire for a mother. What can I say? The truth is, my mother and I haven't had the best relationship. Maybe I'm more to blame for the lack of communication than she was, but I was just so angry inside. To a certain extent, I still am. I'm not sure what my mom told you about my dad, but he's an asshole. Don't get me wrong, I still love him because he's my dad, but I find it very hard to forgive him for what he's done to Mom. I hated how he used to treat Mom. He would belittle her in public, call her names, and yet she would just take it. I hate him for doing that to her, but after a while I hated her for sticking around. That's when I realized she did it mainly for Dion and me, and the guilt ate away at me."

She looked away. "I'm ashamed to say it, but I wasn't exactly a good daughter. To be honest, I made her life more miserable than it already was. As I got older, I realized what I was doing, so I moved away. I mainly stayed away because of shame. My mom has sacrificed so much for my brother and me. She has a huge heart and deserves a little happiness. I guess this is my long-winded way of saying that as long as she's happy with you, then I'll be happy. Phew! That was a mouthful." She laughed. "Boy, I can't believe my mom is going to be a bloodsucker."

"Have some respect, little girl. I'm going to be your step-papa," he growled.

She rolled her eyes. "Lord, help me."

* * * * *

Two down and one to go. GianMarco's meeting with Maggie's children had gone better than he expected. He wasn't sure how Maggie would receive the news that he had talked to her children, but he couldn't help himself. Their future was at stake. He wanted to take away all her reasons for holding things up. Maybe what he was doing was a little underhanded but he didn't care... she was his! After meeting Dion and Janice, GianMarco discovered that he loved Maggie even more. She had raised two fine young people and what each of them had revealed about their mother made him feel closer to her than ever.

It was driving him crazy that she had gone off the way she had, but she had promised to return in a few days. God, he missed her. He missed holding her in his arms, her scent, and the way her pussy felt so snug around his cock. Had she revealed where she was when

she had called him the night before, he would have tracked her down and dragged her home. Had he not acted like a jealous hoodlum, she would be with him this very minute.

GianMarco had to bring her over soon. He did not want to go into *la morte dolci* again. Considering what happened the last time, he was scared that no one would be around to save him from himself the next time around.

Just then a movement caught his eye. Eugene Williams walked out of his law firm with the tall, leggy, black woman GianMarco recognized from his prior meeting with her in his office. They appeared to be arguing. Unable to help himself, he found himself concentrating on their conversation. There were advantages to being a vampire. Although they stood a good distance away from him, he could hear them loud and clear.

"I know you've been screwing that new paralegal. Your office smelled like sex!" Shelly hissed at her fiancé.

"You're crazy, Shelly. We're not even married yet, and already you're acting like a wife. At least Maggie knew when to shut the hell up." At this, GianMarco nearly made his presence known so that he could rip out the pompous little man's intestines, but something held him back.

Shelly gasped. "So, you're actually admitting it? You slept with that cheap-looking tramp with her dollar-store weave? How dare you humiliate me like this? Your wife was right about you."

It was Eugene's turn to look taken aback. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"It means I went to see her to find out why she was holding up the divorce. To my surprise, she told me she signed the papers months ago. You said she didn't. Now, who do you think I should believe, especially after seeing you with that stank ho? Are you getting tired of me?"

"I should wring your neck! You had no right to go behind my back to see her when I told you I was handling things. Damn you! Is this why you've had an attitude lately? I think you're insecure because my soon-to-be ex-wife has been causing mischief. Baby, I already told you, she's a little bitter about the whole thing. Are you going to believe that jealous bitch or are you going to believe me?" Eugene used her admission as a way out of his own trouble.

Shelly glared at him looking as if she was about to give the little man a piece of her mind. Eugene pulled her into his arms, and she began to struggle, but he was persistent. After a moment, she was returning his kisses, seeming to melt into his embrace. Shelly was an attractive woman, but Eugene was a far cry from Denzel Washington. He actually reminded GianMarco of a slightly taller version of a former child actor that was on an 80's television show he used to watch.

Now, what was the name of that show? It was about a wealthy white man in Manhattan who had adopted two black boys from Harlem. The show was called *Different...* something. Whatever the show was called, Eugene looked like the younger brother, thought

GianMarco. He shook his head in disgust, not able to figure out how that little toad of a man could be such an attraction to a beautiful, seemingly intelligent woman, and how his Maggie had put up with him for so long.

As one of the partners in the law firm, Eugene's status was probably his biggest attraction to an ambitious woman like Shelly, GianMarco supposed, but he didn't particularly care about Shelly Thompson's motives. What he did care about was Maggie, and he hated the fact that this jackass had tried to crush his beloved's spirit by making her doubt her own worth.

GianMarco decided to touch the toad's mind.

I wonder how much longer I can hold Shelly off. Damn, I can't tell her until the Garrison contract is signed. Shit. I should never have sent Maggie those goddamn papers in the first place, but no worries. She'll take me back when this is over. She always does. She should be grateful, and I can keep screwing Kiesha.

GianMarco's eyes glowed with fury. After finding out that last tidbit, he flashed to the unsuspecting couple and tapped Eugene on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, but I would like a word with you."

Eugene looked irritated at being interrupted, while Shelly looked up in surprise. "You! What are you doing here?" she asked.

Eugene frowned. "Do you know this man?"

"That's your wife's boss."

"What the hell do you want?" Eugene stretched his neck to meet the taller man's gaze.

GianMarco glared down at the dark-skinned man. He obviously suffered from Napoleon complex, the little pissant. "I said, I want a word with you. Now, would you like to have a word in private or do you want me to embarrass you in front of your girlfriend?"

Shelly butted in. "I'm his fiancée."

"Are you sure?" GianMarco challenged her, in no mood to mince words with the unfortunate woman.

"Hello! I'm wearing his ring. Who the fuck do you think you are?" she demanded with her hands on her hips.

GianMarco turned to Eugene without answering her. "Do you always have your women fight your battles for you?"

"Why, you... who do you think you are?" Eugene sputtered, taking a step back from his adversary's threatening stance.

"I think I'm a man who has waited long enough for the woman he loves."

Eugene looked at him with a confused look on his face. "Shelly, what is he talking about? Have you been messing around on me with this white boy?" He seized this as a way out of his relationship without having to take any blame.

“No! I only saw him once when I went to your wife’s office,” she protested.

GianMarco snorted in disgust. “I find it insulting you would think I would want someone who isn’t worth ten of who I already have. Shelly, what I have to say to Eugene is private. I would rather spare your feelings for what I am about to say next, but you are making it impossible.”

Shelly looked at GianMarco with a long, hard stare. She looked as if she wanted to say something but thought better of it. She turned to Eugene before stalking off. “I’ll be waiting in the car.”

“Okay, what the hell do you want, and who the hell are you talking about?” Eugene asked with bravado.

“I find that I’m in the same predicament your girlfriend was in not too long ago, except I am not on a fool’s errand. I know about those papers. You never filed them, although Maggie sent them to you a while ago.”

“Are you trying to tell me you’re involved with my wife? You and Maggie?” Eugene burst out into laughter only to be cut off abruptly. Not knowing how he got there, Eugene found himself in an alley pinned against the wall. GianMarco’s hand was wrapped around his throat, holding him up in the air.

Eugene cried out as he stared down into a pair of glowing amber eyes. “Listen, you stupid motherfucker. You will give Maggie a divorce. Within the next couple of days, you will call her. You will tell her that you are taking her to the Dominican Republic, and you two will get a quickie divorce. You will buy those tickets out of your own pocket.”

“Why the hell should I listen to you?”

“Because if you don’t, I will fucking kill you!” GianMarco slammed the toad against the wall, baring his incisors. Eugene screamed in terror, only to have his windpipe closed off by GianMarco’s hands. “Maggie wants a divorce. She doesn’t want you back, and I would suggest you marry your little girlfriend because Maggie belongs to me.”

To add to his complete humiliation, Eugene lost control of his bowels. He burst into frightened tears. “Okay! Okay! Just don’t kill me!” he pleaded.

GianMarco let him go, dropping the soiled man to the ground. He turned up his nose as the foul stench of feces filled the air. “How appropriate that this happened to a piece of shit like you.” And with that, GianMarco was gone, leaving Eugene huddled up in a frightened ball.

Chapter Sixteen

Maggie didn't feel well. For the past couple of days, she felt weak and disoriented. She didn't know what was coming over her. Maybe she was just pining for GianMarco. After she had left him, she had gone to her apartment to sort through her bills and pack. Early in the morning she had taken a cab to a local car rental place. Maggie had found herself driving until she ended up outside of the North Carolina border, where she found cheap accommodations. From the moment she stepped into her hotel room, she spent the remainder of the day getting sick in the toilet.

As promised, she had called GianMarco to let him know that she was fine. He, of course, demanded to know where she was, but she would not tell him. After some cajoling and a promise to come home soon, she was finally able to get him off the phone. She spent the next couple of days thinking about where their relationship was headed.

Now, as she sat in a diner, too sick to eat the meal she had just ordered, she couldn't help but think something was wrong with her. Maybe it was the flu. Even the smell of her coffee was making her nauseous. She attempted to eat a piece of toast, but that only made her stomach turn. Pushing aside her plate, she picked up the newspaper, perusing it with disinterest. There was an article about a famous model's disappearance in connection with a doctor and a teacher. Maggie was too weary to care. Pushing away the paper, she rubbed her temples. She was plagued with thoughts of the future.

How would her children feel about their mother being a vampire? How much longer would it be before her divorce went through, and what game exactly was Eugene playing? She knew these were things she would have to deal with when she returned home, but there was one thing she had already figured out on this little trip: she wanted to be with GianMarco.

She loved him so much she could barely breathe when she thought of him. Her only concern was his irrational jealousy. If they were going to be together, ground rules would need to be set. She couldn't live the rest of her life in fear. If the past twenty-three years of her life had taught her anything, it was that she wasn't going to put up with another man's shit, not even if she was wildly in love with him.

If GianMarco couldn't learn to trust her, then there would be no future. He had no need to worry about her falling for his brother. Although she did find Dante attractive, and she had loved it when they both took her the way they had, her heart belonged exclusively to GianMarco. She supposed that she would always feel some affection for Dante, but it certainly was not love. If she never had another threesome for the rest of her life, that would be fine with her. GianMarco kept her way too satisfied to pine for anyone else. She made her decision: she needed to get out of here and be with the man she loved.

* * * * *

Maggie arrived at GianMarco's house to find it empty. He was probably still at work since it was just before five. As she walked through the living room, she paused as she saw a large canvas sitting on an easel. She gasped as she saw the subject of the freshly painted picture. It was her, as naked as the day she was born, sprawled across the white satin sheets of GianMarco's bed that created a startling contrast with her ebony skin.

The painted eyes seemed to be looking at the artist with a seductive gleam shining in their dark depths. Her lips were slightly parted with just the hint of a pink tongue sticking out. Her hair flared out in a riot of curls and crinkles around her shoulders. A breast jutted out proudly, one hand rested just above the patch of hair between her thighs, while the other hand rested on the side of one lush breast. This picture would make any femme fatale jealous.

Oddly enough, the picture was not obscene. It was painted with the tastefulness of a very skilled artist. Maggie knew GianMarco had once painted but she had had no idea just how talented he was. He made her look beautiful. In GianMarco's eyes, she looked as good as, if not better than, those stick bitches in the magazines. Tears filled her eyes. Only a man in love could have painted this picture. She had learned from Dante that GianMarco had not actually painted since his wife died and seeing her portrait like this was touching.

"Do you like it, *ciccina mia*?"

Maggie nearly jumped out of her skin. She didn't know if she would ever get used to how silently he could move. She turned, throwing her arms around him. "I thought you would still be at work."

"I was, but I decided to come home a little early. I'm glad I did," he said, lowering his head. They kissed passionately, releasing their pent-up frustrations from being apart.

Maggie was the first to break the kiss. "The picture is breathtaking."

"You're breathtaking. This is how I see you, *ciccina mia*. By the way, *ciccina* is an endearment for a voluptuous woman. It doesn't really translate to English properly."

Maggie laughed. "It's good to finally know what the heck that means. You will have to teach me Italian."

"Of course, my love. I can teach you any language you want to know. I speak about twenty."

"Umm, I think Italian will be just fine for now." She chuckled.

He looked at her anxiously. "I take that to mean that you have come to a decision?"

Maggie raised one perfectly arched brow. "What do you think? Of course, I want to be with you, silly! I'm crazy about you, you big, blond jerk, but let's get one thing straight. If you ever treat me the way you did the other night, I am walking away, no questions asked. And another thing, no more reading my mind. There are some things that a woman needs to keep to herself." She poked his chest with her index finger.

"Of course, my love. Forgive me." He cupped her face to kiss her lightly on the nose. He pulled away, noting her worried expression. "What's wrong, Maggie?"

"I'm still a little concerned about my kids. There's no telling how they will react."

"Umm..."

"What?"

"Your kids know." He explained what he had been up to while she was gone. She just stared at him in stunned silence. "Are you mad at me for interfering?" She didn't say anything. "Maggie?"

"Well, I guess in normal circumstances, I would be a little annoyed that you interfered after I told you I would handle things, but I did a lot of thinking while you were away and I know how much I want to spend the rest of my life with you, and..." Her voice trailed off.

"And what?"

"And I think I'm going to pass out." Which was exactly what she did.

With quick reflexes, he caught her before she hit the ground. In a panic, he rushed her to the couch and began to fan her with frantic motions. She had broken out into a cold sweat and her skin had taken on a grayish tint. He unbuttoned her blouse to get her circulation flowing a little better. He rested his ear against her heart. It seemed to be fine, but then he heard another very faint sound. He moved his head a little further down her body and the sound was a bit clearer. His eyes filled with tears and he pulled her into his arms just as she was coming to. He touched her cheek gently.

Maggie's head felt fuzzy as her eyes slowly fluttered open. "What happened?"

"How long have you been feeling this way, Maggie?"

"I don't know. A couple of weeks, maybe."

“When was your last monthly flow?”

Maggie froze. “You don’t think...” She slapped her forehead. She had never experienced morning sickness with Dion or Janice, so it was no wonder she hadn’t read the signs. “How did you know?”

“I can hear his heartbeat. Does it displease you to carry my child?”

“I... no. I don’t know how to feel. It’s all very overwhelming. I mean, I’m nearly forty-one. I thought I was well past my childbearing years. We never used protection because you told me vampires don’t carry disease, but I never thought... I never thought you could get me pregnant.”

“It’s very rare for a vampire to impregnate a human woman because of our different physiology, but this just proves that you are my perfect match.”

“How do you feel about the baby?”

“I’m very pleased. After I lost my little Gio, I doubted that I would ever be a papa again. I would like this baby very much. He’ll be a part of us.”

“Why do you keep saying he? It could be a girl, you know.”

“Well, my love, that’s God’s little joke on us vamps. It’s not likely for us to produce female children. It has happened, but it’s an extremely rare occurrence. I guess that’s his way of keeping the balance.”

“But it is possible?”

“Yes.”

“Would you like a girl?”

“Only if she looks like you, my muse.” He gave her a gentle kiss on the forehead. “Now, come. I will draw you a bath and tonight will be the night it should be. You carry a vampire child, which is why you feel weak, as well as sick. They not only feed off of your food supply, but they feed from your blood as well.”

“What?” She touched her stomach.

“It does not matter. Once I make you a vampire, your body will be able to sustain the life within you. Come, no more questions.” He led her to the bathroom. As he ran a tub of water with bubbles, he sat Maggie down on its edge and began to remove her clothing, one article at a time.

As he removed each piece of clothing, he kissed the flesh he exposed. His lips did not leave one inch of skin untouched. Maggie sighed with pleasure. When she sat completely nude in front of him, he cupped her full, mocha breasts in his hands. “These will feed my child shortly, but for now, they are mine,” he whispered possessively, eyes glowing. GianMarco leaned forward to suck a rigid, dark nipple into his mouth. Maggie groaned as the pressure of his mouth increased. She locked her fingers through his hair, holding his head tightly against her chest.

Her pussy throbbed with the need to be filled by him. He took his time kissing and sucking her succulent skin. Pushing her legs apart, he lowered himself until his tongue touched the puffy outer lips of her cunt. His fingers separated the slick folds to reveal the tiny, pink jewel inside. His lips grazed her clit, drawing a moan of delight from Maggie's lips.

"Oh, GianMarco, I love you so much." Her body shivered from the nerve-jolting sensation of his tongue.

"I love you, too, *bellissima*." He nuzzled his face between her legs before lapping the sensitive bud with long, broad strokes. GianMarco slid a finger into Maggie's damp heat. He ate and fingered her until she screamed out his name over and over again.

A sudden flow of her juices dripped from her as GianMarco continued to lick her until she felt she couldn't take any more. "You are going to kill me. A woman can only take so much, you know." She laughed when he finally lifted his head.

"I love eating your pussy, Maggie. All that yummy, chocolaty goodness is too much of a temptation to ignore. If I had my way, baby, I would lay you on the bed and stay between your sweet thighs for days."

Maggie shivered at the thought. Somehow, she believed he was capable of doing just that if she let him. "You're so nasty."

"And you're so tasty. Now, get into the tub before I fuck you bow-legged."

"That's not much of a threat since I haven't been walking straight since the first time you stuck that donkey dong inside of me."

"But you like this donkey dong of mine, don't you, baby?" GianMarco smirked.

She stuck her tongue out at him. "What do you think?"

"I think if you don't stop teasing me, woman, you are going to get the fucking of your life."

Maggie grinned with a mischievous glint in her eyes. "Is that a promise?"

GianMarco chuckled, pulling her into his arms to rest his forehead against hers. "What am I going to do with you, *ciccina mia*?"

"Love me."

"I already do. More than you know," he said before lowering his head to hers.

* * * * *

Later, after bathing together in the hot tub of bubbles, GianMarco laid a trembling Maggie on the bed. "Are you ready, baby?"

Maggie nodded her head. Her heart was beating rapidly. GianMarco bared his incisors and shifted his hand. With one sharp nail, he slit his skin along his collarbone.

His blood began to drip down his chest. He lowered himself on top of her. “Do you remember what you must do?”

“Yes.”

“Do not be frightened. It will only take a few minutes. You may feel a little weak afterward, but you will feel better in a few hours, I promise. Do you trust me, Maggie?” he asked, amber eyes glowing.

She nodded her head again, too nervous to speak. He sank his teeth into her carotid artery. Maggie squeezed her eyes shut as she followed the instructions he had given her earlier. She knew she would have to drink his blood as he did the same to her. The blood exchange as he called it. Just a taste of vampire blood was not enough. A link needed to be established, blood for blood, and lots of it. In a few minutes, she would no longer be Maggie, the human, but Maggie, the vampire.

Chapter Seventeen

Maggie couldn't believe she was no longer human. A week had passed since the change, and she was still adjusting. Her vision was so sharp she could make out details of a bee on a flower several feet away. She could hear a pin drop in a noisy room. There were things that confused her, however. She thought she would be able to read minds, and do all the other cool things GianMarco could do, but GianMarco informed her that a lot of vampire traits were gradually acquired with age.

She felt a little stronger, but not much more than before. The only things that really changed were her heightened senses and her insatiable need for blood and cock. Maggie had nearly fainted when she had seen herself in the mirror with her new teeth and glowing brown eyes. It would take some getting used to, but with GianMarco by her side she knew she would make it through anything.

Maggie tapped her foot impatiently as she looked at her watch again. Eugene was late! "What if he doesn't show up?" Maggie frowned at GianMarco.

"He will show up," GianMarco assured her, squeezing her against him.

Maggie glanced at her watch again. Their plane for Santo Domingo was supposed to leave in twenty minutes. If Eugene didn't show up, he could forget about GianMarco hunting him down, because Maggie intended to hunt him down herself and kick his sorry ass all the way to Timbuktu.

She felt hot all of a sudden. "Are you okay, baby?" GianMarco asked with concern wrinkling his face.

"I just feel a little warm. Is it hot in here or is it me?"

"Let me go get some ice. It's been a while, but I remember when Bianca was pregnant, she would get hot flashes every now and then. She always felt better when she had

something cool to drink, and when we could get it, she liked to chomp on ice. I'll be back in a flash."

"Thank you. You're so good to me."

"You're easy to be good to." He kissed her cheek before leaving to get ice.

GianMarco had not been gone for a full minute before Eugene appeared with a petulant-looking Shelly in tow. Maggie stood up with a smile. She knew she looked good. Her hair was pulled back into a tight, sophisticated-looking bun, her makeup was expertly done, and she was wearing a black designer suit. The red top she wore dipped dangerously, revealing a generous amount of cleavage. Her skirt rested a few inches above her knees, showing off her curvy legs. Maggie knew she would never be slender, but she was beautiful, and it showed.

Eugene seemed surprised by the picture Maggie presented. Gone was the frumpy housewife he had left. Before him was a new woman. There was something different about her he could not put his finger on.

"Hello, Margaret. How have you been?" he asked formally.

She answered without missing a beat. "I've been sexy."

Eugene's eyes widened in surprise, as if he was unable to believe she was actually Maggie. The Maggie he knew would never have had the balls to say something like that. "Umm... you look sexy," he answered truthfully.

"I know." Maggie smiled at him before turning to Shelly. "How are you today, Shelly?"

"Fine," Shelly muttered through tight lips. She was obviously not pleased with this exchange.

"Well, they should be calling our flight for boarding any minute now," Eugene blurted out. Something appeared to be on his mind. Maggie hadn't been married to him for twenty-three years without learning a few things.

"Is everything okay?"

"This guy you're with... is he... is he putting you up to this? Are you safe?" Eugene wanted to know.

Maggie gave him a funny look. What the heck was he talking about? "Of course he's not putting me up to this. Don't you think this was a long time coming? Look, as you said before, you were not really happy with me, and I can't say I was very happy with you, either. This is for the best."

Maggie patted his shoulder as if he were a child. It was funny because not so long ago, she had played this scene in her head. She hadn't quite pictured herself being the strong one while Eugene looked unsure of himself. Maggie looked at her soon-to-be ex-husband with new eyes.

Eugene was a bit on the short side, standing just under five feet six inches. He was not a handsome man, but his dark face held a devilish charm that made women give him a second

look. Maggie could honestly say that she now felt nothing for this man she had once cared so deeply about. She was grateful to Eugene for giving her two beautiful children, but she had no feelings for him beyond that. Well, that wasn't completely true. She felt pity for him. It was obvious he and Shelly were having problems. Whatever happened, she didn't wish him a miserable existence.

Just as their flight was called for boarding, GianMarco appeared with a cup of ice. "Here you go, baby."

"Thank you, sweetie. I believe you've met Eugene and his fiancée."

"Yes." GianMarco glared at Eugene.

Eugene looked as if he was about to faint. This was going to be one hell of a trip.

* * * * *

"I love you, Maggie Grimaldi." GianMarco cradled her in his arms. Maggie and Eugene's divorce had only taken a couple of days, and on the same day the judge granted her divorce, Maggie and GianMarco exchanged wedding vows, with Eugene and Shelly as witnesses. Shelly had looked on, tight-lipped and annoyed, while Eugene looked as if he would rather be anywhere else but watching his ex-wife remarry. After the wedding, there had been an ugly scene.

Shelly had demanded that Eugene marry her as GianMarco had married Maggie, but Eugene, being his usual evasive self, gave the excuse of wanting his mother at the wedding. At the mention of Eugene's mother, Maggie felt genuinely sorry for Shelly. She would be in for it when Eugene's mother was thrown into the mix. Even though Shelly was the beautiful, accomplished, and poised woman that Eugene's mother claimed Maggie wasn't, she had a sneaking suspicion that Mrs. Williams would have found fault with any woman Eugene bought home.

A huge shouting match ensued, and Maggie and GianMarco wisely decided to leave. They might have been vampires, able to handle themselves in most situations, but even vampires knew when to get the hell out of Dodge. If those two actually did end up marrying each other, it was going to be a bumpy road.

The hotel in Santo Domingo where they were staying was gorgeous. They had a view of the clear, blue ocean in the middle of a tropical paradise. However, they were not paying attention to the surroundings, only each other.

"I love you, too," Maggie whispered, with tears in her eyes, touching her beloved GianMarco's face. Her heart swelled with love. She spread her legs apart, allowing his cock entrance as it nudged against her wetness. "Mmm." She moaned in satisfaction as he buried his rod deep within her.

As he moved gently, they kissed and hugged. GianMarco was so tender, Maggie cried at the beauty of the moment. "Those are tears of joy, I hope." He kissed her softly on the cheek, still moving within her.

"Yes. I never knew love could feel like this."

"I know, *bellisima*. You cannot know how it makes me feel to be inside of you right now, knowing my son grows within your womb."

Maggie had never felt closer to anyone in her life. As his cock stretched the throbbing walls of her pussy, Maggie bared her incisors, hungry for the taste of the man she loved. She sank her teeth into his chest, savoring the taste of the sweet, sticky goodness that filled her mouth. GianMarco cried out in ecstasy. In a move that took him by surprise, Maggie rolled them both over until she was on top with his cock still planted deeply within her.

She lifted her head with a twinkle in her eyes. "I guess I'm a little stronger now. What do you think about that, tough guy?" She winked at him.

"I love a big, strong, sexy woman." He smiled up at her, his eyes glowing with adoration.

"And I love a big, strong vampire with a big cock." Driving her point home, she lifted herself slightly only to slam her hips back down on him, impaling herself on his cock.

GianMarco groaned. "Holy shit, Maggie. You are driving me crazy."

Maggie bounced up and down on his pole. She fucked him with unabashed passion. GianMarco grabbed her hips, roughly bucking his own hips upward to push deeper inside of her. Maggie threw back her head and screamed GianMarco's name over and over again. Maggie pulled herself off his rigid shaft, knowing he was about to come. She wanted to drink every drop of his yummy white cream.

She slid down his body, popping his cock in her mouth. As her lips tightened over the stiff rod, his cum shot down her throat. Maggie greedily slurped him, milking him of every single drop. "How did you like that?" she giggled afterwards, cuddling close to GianMarco.

"You know I enjoyed it. I am a little concerned though."

"Why?"

"We were pretty rough. I'm not sure if we should be so wild in your delicate condition."

"I'm not a shrinking violet, and I'm sure the baby is fine. I suspected you were holding back at first, which is why I had to take things into my own hands." She chuckled.

"I noticed."

"I don't mind making slow, sweet love, baby, but sometimes I want to fuck."

GianMarco raised a dark brown brow with a crooked grin on his face. "Oh, yeah? How about a fuck now?"

"I thought you'd never ask."

GianMarco rolled Maggie onto her back. The phone rang. *Shit! Now, who the hell is calling my damn room at a time like this?*

"Ignore it," Maggie said.

"No. I have to take it. It's probably one of my brothers, in which case it could be an emergency."

"Hello?" GianMarco picked up the receiver.

"You are a fool, Grimaldi."

"Who is this?"

"I killed Bianca," the raspy voice taunted.

GianMarco's blood chilled. He had already killed Bianca's murderer. What the hell was going on? The voice on the other end of the line laughed.

"You're a fool if you think you avenged her death. I killed Bianca, and I'm going to do the same to Maggie. I've been watching her. I know she is one of us now. A tasty little morsel, isn't she? I think I will have some of that black pussy before I gut her like a fish."

"Who the fuck is this?"

"If you really want to know, come find me."

"Where, you sick son of a bitch?"

"Now, what would the fun be in telling you? If you really want to know... I'm looking at a really pretty portrait. I bet you fucked her after you painted it, didn't you?" The caller hung up.

"What is it?" Maggie touched his shoulder. Her heart raced at GianMarco's expression.

"We have to get out of here. Don't even bother packing our bags. I will buy you new things."

"Please tell me what's going on. Who was that? Why does he want to kill me?" she asked.

"You heard? Of course. I forgot your hearing is a lot more sensitive now. Don't think about it, my darling. I will keep you safe. Do you trust me?" He cupped her face in his hands.

"Of course, but..."

"There is no time for questions. We have to leave now."

"I hope we can get tickets out on such short notice."

"No need. I have a friend who can lend me his private jet. Angel Ramirez is a friend of mine."

* * * * *

When their plane landed in New York, a limo was waiting for them. Dante got out of the back seat, along with two other gentlemen who could only be GianMarco's other two brothers. One was blond like GianMarco, while the other was dark like Dante. Not so long ago, Maggie would have been intimidated in the presence of such handsome men, but now she barely blinked an eye. Besides, she was much too worried to think about any of them in that light.

Dante stepped forward, embracing his brother before turning to his new sister-in-law. He pulled her into his arms and gave her a light kiss on the lips. "Welcome to the family, *piccola*." GianMarco looked on, secure in his love for Maggie.

Romeo and Niccolo stepped forward to greet their brother's new wife. "I'm very pleased to meet you." Romeo brought Maggie's hand to his lips.

Oh, boy, this was the smooth operator of the family, she thought; nonetheless, she found herself becoming enchanted by his devilish charm.

Niccolo gave her a warm hug, and a kiss on the cheek. "I am very pleased to finally meet you, Maggie."

"Nice to meet you Niccolo," she smiled at him.

"Please call me Nico. We're family now." His smile was engaging. Maggie liked him, as well. She could tell he was the quiet one, but the Grimaldi charm still radiated from him.

After the introductions were made, GianMarco pulled Maggie aside. "You will stay with my brothers. I will be back with you as soon as I can."

"You're not coming with me?" she asked in alarm.

"No. I can't, but I promise I will call you every night I am away. I promise."

"But why aren't you coming with me? I don't understand. I need you. I... I have to feed."

"I know, *ciccina mia*, but my brothers will help you." He stroked her cheek.

"Do you mean to tell me that I'm supposed to... but I can't. I only want you!"

"I know, baby, but this cannot be helped. I know your heart belongs to me and I don't exactly relish the idea of you being with my brothers, but it's necessary. You are a young vampire and you need to feed. Our baby needs to feed as well. Think about him, and please don't feel guilty if you enjoy it." He kissed her.

"Does that mean I have to share you, too, sometimes?"

"No. Don't get it into your head that this will be something that's going to happen often. You have needs, and I am providing for those needs by sending you off with my brothers. You don't have to worry about sharing me. Number one, I am very old and I don't really need to feed that much, and number two, you're the only one I want. Surely, you know that by now, *bellissima?*"

Maggie sighed. The thought of what could happen sent a shiver of excitement down her spine as she remembered the night she had spent with GianMarco and Dante. On the other hand, she wasn't sure if she could go through with it if GianMarco wasn't there. "I know how jealous you can get. Will you be angry with me?"

"Never! I'm sorry for being such an asshole before. I wasn't myself. I won't lie and say that I exactly relish the fact that you will have to feed on someone else, but we are of the same blood now. You soothed the beast within me when I brought you over, and I now know that you belong to me and only me."

"But --"

He placed a finger over her lips. "Enjoy yourself, and don't worry. My brothers will keep you safe. All you have to do is take care of yourself and our son. I will come back for you soon. I love you." He pulled her into his arms, holding her tightly against him. His mouth covered hers in a hot, hungry kiss.

"Be safe, GianMarco," Maggie said when her husband lifted his head.

"And you must listen to my brothers. Do not go anywhere without at least one of them. Promise me, Maggie," he said urgently.

"Yes. I promise."

"I think it's time to go." Dante came up to the couple, tucking Maggie under his arm.

Maggie waved to GianMarco as he reboarded the plane. A tear escaped her eye. *Be safe, GianMarco, I love you.*

Chapter Eighteen

“So, how long will you be away this time?” Oliver looked at GianMarco with a wary expression in his eyes.

“I’m not sure. I hope I won’t be gone long, but this thing with Maggie... she’s my number one priority.” GianMarco patted his friend on the shoulder.

“It’s understandable. You know, it’s funny because I didn’t think she was your type when I hired her.” Oliver smiled humorlessly.

“I know what you were thinking, and one day I am going to give you that explanation I know I owe you. I also know I have asked a lot of you by not being around the office much lately, but I want you to know it’s appreciated.”

“I don’t mind. It seems like work is all I have lately.” Oliver looked as if he were going to cry.

“What’s wrong?”

“Theresa left me.”

In GianMarco’s opinion, Oliver should have been jumping for joy, but he kept that particular thought to himself. Then a sudden wave of shame washed over him. Maybe all the extra time Oliver had put into the office contributed to the breakdown of his marriage. “Is it because of all the extra hours you have spent here, picking up my slack?”

“No. We’ve been having problems on and off for the past year. I was just too stubborn to admit it.” Oliver shrugged.

“What happened?”

“I came home late one night to find Theresa packing her bags. She basically told me she hasn’t been happy for a while and that she’s met someone else. But that’s not the worst part.”

“There’s more?”

"She says Johnny isn't mine. Apparently, she's been seeing this man for a while."

"Do you believe her?" GianMarco had thought Oliver's wife was a bitch before, but now he revised his opinion. She was a mega bitch. Knowing how much Oliver loved his son, it was cruel of her to tell him that another man had fathered their child. Any fool could see little Johnny was the spitting image of Oliver.

"At first I did, but when I called her bluff she became belligerent. I think she just told me that shit to hurt me. I never realized how spiteful she could be. No, I take that back. I always knew, but I ignored it. I guess I stuck with her out of habit more than anything else. I'm not even sure if I ever really loved her. She entered my life when I was getting out of a long-term relationship and she stroked my ego. I think I mistook gratitude for love, maybe she sensed it too." Oliver sighed heavily.

"So, what's your next move?"

"Well, I suppose divorce is our only course of action. As much as I hate to admit it, Johnny should be with his mother. Despite her faults, Theresa is a good mother, and babies need their mommies. I only hope she's reasonable with visitation."

GianMarco smiled with a knowing gleam in his eyes. "She will be."

Oliver's eyes narrowed. "You had better not harm one hair on her head. She is still my son's mother."

GianMarco batted his lashes. "I wouldn't dream of it, but I'm sure she will see the light. And if you need some help financially for legal fees or anything like that, let me know."

"I couldn't ask you to do that."

"You don't have to ask. I'm offering it and I want you to hire someone to help you out around the agency in the interim. I'll put some funds into our business account."

"Okay." Oliver shrugged again, looking as if his mind were somewhere else.

"It will be okay, Oliver. You are better off without her. I've wanted to say it for a while, but I didn't think it was appropriate to say anything until now."

"You knew about the affair, didn't you?" Oliver accused.

GianMarco did not want to lie to his friend "Yes, I knew. I saw her with another man when I was on a stakeout, but I didn't think you would believe me, since you already knew I've never particularly cared for her."

"Maybe not, but a heads-up would have been nice. Anyway, it doesn't matter anymore. I guess she and I are finished."

"Things will get better. It seems like I waited a long time for someone like Maggie to come into my life, but she is here, and she makes me very happy. You will find that someone who will make you just as happy. Look, I have to go home and check something out. I drove here straight from the airport."

"Is everything okay with Maggie?" Oliver asked.

“She’s fine. She’s with my brothers.”

“Damn. I still can’t believe you’re married. She’s a good woman. Treat her right or you’ll have to answer to me.”

“If anything were to happen to her, I would gladly let you kill me. Now, I have to get going. Hopefully, I will be back in the next couple of weeks. Maggie, of course, won’t be coming back.”

“Another secretary?”

“Yep.”

“Well, I guess on the bright side I don’t have to worry about you fucking any more secretaries.”

“Nope. I found one who I’m keeping on a permanent basis.”

* * * * *

Maggie looked out the window of Dante’s Manhattan apartment. She was pining for GianMarco.

“Maggie, you have to feed. There’s no use fighting it,” Dante whispered in her ear.

Maggie continued to stare out the window. She was worried sick. What the hell was going on? Who was that caller?

“Marco will be able to take care of himself, Maggie. Now, come. You have to feed.”

“I’m fine. Why didn’t one of you go with him? Why did you just let him go by himself?”

“As I’m sure you’ve discovered, Marco can be very stubborn. I thought one of us should go with him, but he feels you are the one who needs the most protection. You’re a very young vampire, Maggie, and that makes you very easy prey to rogues. Marco is not one to be crossed when he’s on a mission. If he’s in danger, I will feel it, and I will be there in a hurry. Now, come and feed. You have the *bambino* to think of.” He took her hand and led her to the couch.

Nico and Romeo played a game of chess in the corner of the room. “I feel kind of weird about this,” Maggie said.

“Are you not hungry?”

“Starving,” she admitted.

“Then you have no choice,” he said, unbuttoning his shirt to reveal his throat to her. Her breathing became shallow as she noticed the pumping of a blue vein through his skin. God, she was hungry, but all she could think about was GianMarco. “Relax, Maggie. Marco knows this needs to happen. He won’t blame you for it. Remember when I asked you to trust me before?” Maggie nodded her head. “You can trust me now.”

Maggie hesitated a moment more, but as she grew dizzy with hunger, she let her incisors descend. Leaning forward, she sank her teeth into his skin. She drank his blood as he gently stroked her hair.

"That's enough, Maggie." Dante said after nearly half an hour. Maggie grunted. Still hungry, she continued to suck. Dante touched her mind with his. *Enough!*

The abrupt command made Maggie relent. "I'm still hungry," she protested.

"If I let you keep this up, I will have no blood left. You can feed from my cock if you are still hungry," he suggested.

"No!" She stood up. "Can't I feed off them?" she asked, pointing to Romeo and Niccolo. It would feel too much like cheating if she did what he suggested.

"It's not cheating, Maggie," Dante said.

"I would rather not." She shook her head. Another wave of dizziness hit her. She needed more blood.

"It's okay, Dante. I will feed her," Nico offered, leaving the chess game to join them.

"You give up too easily, Nico. You knew I was about to win," Romeo taunted.

"Put a sock in it, Ro," Niccolo answered back.

Maggie licked her lips in anticipation as Niccolo revealed his white throat to her. Without hesitation this time, she began to drink, but, again, it was over too soon for her. She found that she was still hungry when Nico pushed her away. It was Romeo's turn then. Even then, she was still hungry when she was through.

Dante looked at her with an amused gleam in his eyes. He sat on the couch with his pants unbuckled and his cock hanging out. He jerked it in his fist. "Are you ready, *piccola*? You can't fight this. I know you are hungry."

"I can't." Maggie bit her lip. She knew this was part of being a vampire, but she had been human most of her life, and the prospect of taking Dante's cock in her mouth while she wore GianMarco's ring was still disturbing to her.

"Maggie, it's okay. Marco will understand," Nico said from behind her.

As white drops of pre-cum spewed from Dante's rod, Maggie could no longer resist. She was hungry. She walked over to the couch and dropped to her knees. She grabbed Dante's stiff member in her hand before lowering her mouth over it. One hand stroked the rigid shaft while the other squeezed his balls. Dante moaned softly as Maggie worked her mouth up and down on him.

She was so engrossed in the task at hand that she didn't notice Nico and Romeo undress. As Maggie sucked hungrily on Dante, Nico came behind her and began to undo her dress. Maggie was too damn hungry to care. Besides, she was getting very aroused. Nico lifted her dress, exposing her bottom, and began to slide his fingers inside her panties. Maggie stiffened, but only for a moment. The feel of two long fingers rubbing her slit was driving her beyond the edge of reason.

She continued to suck Dante's cock as Nico slid his fingers deep inside her wet pussy. Just as his thumb grazed her clit, Dante ejaculated into her mouth. Maggie relished his essence as she drank every drop. When she had drained his cock dry, he pushed her off him, getting up from the couch to undress.

In the meantime, Niccolo removed his fingers from her cunt so that he could completely undress her before pulling Maggie onto the couch. He sat down with her facing him, fitting her over his rock-hard dick. Maggie gasped. He was nearly as big as GianMarco and Dante. Holy shit, if two Grimaldi brothers had worn her out, then three were going to make her comatose.

Nico grasped her hips to bounce her up and down on his hardness while Dante positioned himself behind her. Spitting on his fingers, Dante rubbed them against the puckered bud of her ass. Maggie squeezed her eyes shut as the head of his cock pushed past her tight ring. "Oh, my God." She cried out as she was filled with two large cocks.

Just when he didn't think she could take any more, Romeo joined in, turning Maggie's head toward him, guiding it to his own large member. Maggie's greedy lips latched onto it, sucking voraciously. The three brothers worked their cocks in and out of her holes, working her body into a frenzy. She was so damn hot! The delicious sensation of three vampire cocks pushing her to unbelievable heights of shameless pleasure was nearly more than she could take.

They fed each of her holes with their cum -- Dante in her ass, Niccolo in her pussy, and Romeo in her mouth. Maggie had a sneaking suspicion that this wasn't the first time they had done something like this. They continued to fuck her, feeding her until she was too weak to participate any further.

She ripped her mouth from Romeo's cock and fell weakly against Niccolo's chest. They must have been at it for hours, she thought in a daze. Reluctantly, Dante pulled out of her, taking her limp body off of Nico's. Dante lifted her into his arms and carried her upstairs into her bathroom where he put her under a cool spray of water. Maggie leaned passively against the tiles as Dante washed her body with reverence.

More than anything he wanted to pull her into his arms and make love to her instead of fucking her as a means to satisfying her hunger, but he realized it was a line he couldn't cross. She belonged to Marco, and she carried his child. It was disconcerting that he should have these inconvenient feelings for his brother's bloodmate, but they were feelings he would have to suppress. When he had finished washing her, he slowly dried her body and laid her on the bed.

"Dante?" She finally spoke as he was tucking her in.

"Yes, *piccola?*"

"I'm new to this vampire thing, but what we did down there, it was okay, right?"

"Of course, Maggie. You were hungry and you needed to feed. Do not feel guilty for something that is in our nature." He leaned over to kiss her forehead.

"Dante?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you," she said drowsily. She fell asleep dreaming of GianMarco.

* * * * *

GianMarco surveyed the damage to his house. It had been ransacked but nothing was taken. It was as if someone was trying to send him a message. He was glad that he had left Maggie with his brothers. He didn't want her to see this. He made his way through the house with anger simmering just below the surface. When he found the bastard who was responsible for this, he would pay.

When he went into the bedroom, lying on the bed was the portrait he had painted of Maggie. It had been slashed in the center. Written in red paint on top of the canvas were the words, *She's next*.

A chill ran down GianMarco's spine. His sixth sense went off.

"You have to get back to New York."

GianMarco turned around to see the redhead from the club, sans the Cockney accent. She actually had a faint Italian accent, if he wasn't mistaken. In a flash, GianMarco's hands gripped her shoulders, slamming her against the wall. She glared at him with feline green eyes, showing no fear. "If you want to see your wife alive, I suggest you put me down." She glared at him.

GianMarco slammed her against the wall again. "Who the fuck are you?" he demanded.

Just then a large bolt of light shot from her hand, thrusting GianMarco off her. He went flying across the room. He was back on his feet just as quickly, charging toward her. She held up her hand and he slammed against something that felt like a brick wall. "You're a witch!" His amber eyes glowed accusingly. That was why Dante and he had been unable to detect what the taste of her was at the club in London. She had obviously used some kind of spell.

"Of course I am." She shrugged as he pointed out the obvious.

"Why did you do this to my house? You are the one behind everything! You are one dead bitch. That force field will not last very long, you know," he warned.

"Are you going to keep threatening me or are you going to listen? If you want to save your precious wife, you will go to New York right now. Don't you realize he wanted you to come here first, knowing that you would leave her alone? Your brothers will not be able to stop him."

"You set us up at the club!"

“Ha! I saved your lives. Had I not intervened, you and your brothers would all be dead.”

“It didn’t look that way from my point of view. Who the hell are you?”

“It doesn’t matter who I am, and I don’t have time to argue with you, vampire. Listen to me now, Grimaldi, he will kill your wife like he did Bianca,” she warned.

“Who?”

“Why, *il Demonio*, of course,” she said, before disappearing into a cloud of smoke.

“Don’t you mean *il Diavolo*?” he said to the empty room. Now, what the hell was that all about? He would worry about that later. If the witch was telling the truth, then Maggie was in trouble.

* * * * *

Maggie woke up sweating. She had that strange dream again. She looked around, suddenly remembering that she was in Dante’s penthouse apartment. She slid out of bed and grabbed a robe that rested by the nightstand. She quietly slipped out the door and headed downstairs. The living room was empty, so she could only assume that Dante, Niccolo, and Romeo were all in bed.

She blushed furiously as she remembered what had happened between the four of them. This vampire thing was going to take some getting used to.

She walked out onto the large balcony, taking a seat and looking out into the city. She hoped that wherever he was, GianMarco was okay. She missed him so much.

Absently, she rubbed her stomach. GianMarco’s baby rested there. She couldn’t wait to see the looks on her kids’ faces when she told them that they were going to have a little sister. Maggie didn’t care what GianMarco said -- they were going to have a girl. She would be just as happy with a boy, but she rather liked the idea of a little girl to dress up in cute dresses and to do her hair. Maggie had had such fun with Janice when she was a baby.

The prospect of having a better relationship with Janice filled her with joy. Everything seemed to be looking up. She was in love with an incredible man, she was free from Eugene, and her children were happy. To add to her bliss, she carried the baby of the man she loved. She couldn’t remember a time when she had been happier. When she stood up to go back into the penthouse, the doors closed in her face. That was odd.

As she reached out to open the doors, a figure appeared. She opened her mouth to scream, but hands wrapped around her throat, blocking her air.

“There’s no use in screaming. You are going to die and your precious bodyguards can’t do a thing about it.” Dark eyes glowed menacingly.

Chapter Nineteen

Maggie's hand shifted into claws. She raked her hand down the side of the rogue vampire's face, tearing into his flesh. He howled with pain, letting go of her throat to slap her with a force that sent her flying across the balcony. Surely, one of her brothers-in-law would hear the commotion on the balcony and come out to help her, she reasoned, but no one came. Wherever they were, she had to think quickly.

The rogue laughed at her, amused by the panicked look on her face. "What's the matter, Maggie? Are you waiting for the Grimaldi punks to come to your rescue? This house is under my spell; they will not be able to break through the barrier I've erected. They can't get out to you; they can't even see out the window. They will not even know the face of the man who killed you because I will be long gone when they get to your body."

Her heart sank. Something told her there was something more to this particular vampire than met the eye. He looked very familiar, but she couldn't think of where she had seen him before. She picked up a chair and threw it at his head. He easily swatted it aside as if it were a fly as he advanced on her. She longed to wipe the smug grin from his face. Not knowing she had it in her, Maggie slammed her fist into his face with all her might.

He stumbled back in surprise. She quickly followed with another jab, and a swift uppercut. As he staggered back, she used every woman's ace in the hole: she raised her foot and kicked him square in the balls. This time the arrogant vampire fell to his knees.

"You fucking bitch! I was going to be nice and make your death quick, but now it's going to be slow and painful." While the rogue lay on the ground, Maggie tried to open the balcony door. It would not open.

Damn it! Swiftly, she grabbed a chair in an attempt to shatter the glass. To her surprise the chair rebounded, throwing her off balance. "Dante! Romeo! Niccolo!" she screamed as she banged on the door. There seemed to be a thick fog obscuring her vision of the inside of

the penthouse. She could hear banging on the other side; they were trapped inside! What kind of hocus-pocus was this?

“Didn’t I tell you that they couldn’t get out?” The rogue grabbed her by the hair, throwing her to the ground. When he fell on top her, Maggie sank her sharp teeth into his shoulder, ripping a large chunk from it. The rogue was pissed off. He had definitely underestimated this one. She fought like a lion. He backhanded her hard, making her head spin. “Now, I’m gonna fucking rip your heart out, Grimaldi whore.” His razor-sharp fingers dove for her chest and her hands shot up to stop his hand’s descent.

Her strength was no match for him. Just as she felt the prick of his nail puncturing her flesh, she suddenly remembered something very important. *You must remember what I told you, Maggie. Do not forget or it may cost you your life.*

“Ignis golom electrok dayum igis.” she whispered.

The rogue’s eyes widened in surprise. He raised his hand to slap her again. “Shut up, you stupid bitch!”

Maggie’s head spun with the next blow, but it did not stop her chant. *“Ignis golom electrok dayum igis.”* Her voice trailed off as she lost consciousness.

The door of the balcony burst open. “Maggie!” GianMarco saw a man standing over Maggie’s unconscious body. His back was turned, and just as GianMarco made his way to take the motherfucker out, he disappeared.

Dante, Nico, and Romeo followed their brother out. GianMarco’s heart sank as he saw Maggie’s still form. There were bruises on her face and blood soaked the front of her robe. He dropped to his knees beside her, taking her into his arms. His hand brushed over her chest. The punctures in her chest did not seem to go very deep. To his great relief, he could hear the steady beat of her heart. She was alive. GianMarco burst into tears of relief.

His brothers looked on, wondering how it was that they could not get out onto the balcony until that moment. Romeo spoke. “There was something blocking us from getting out here.”

“He nearly killed her! Why the hell weren’t you watching her?” GianMarco yelled at his brothers.

“Calm down, Marco, there were other forces involved here. If I’m not mistaken, I believe witchcraft is involved,” Nico observed.

“Witches? The marks on her chest are vampire marks,” Romeo argued.

“Maybe so, but obviously this was no ordinary vampire. He has been dabbling with the black arts. What other explanation would you have for us not being able to get out here, and the mysterious fog blocking our view to the outside? My time with Petra taught me a few things. The odd thing is I think the spell was broken by someone, namely Maggie,” Nico said.

Romeo looked heavenward, in exasperation. "What the hell is going on? It's bad enough when we thought there were just rogues to worry about, but now we have to watch out for witches?"

"There was a witch in my house. It was the redhead from the club," GianMarco added.

"Damn it, I didn't want to do this, but I guess I'm going to have to seek aid from the council." Dante sighed in frustration.

"Those uptight bunch of sticks-in-the-mud? Now, why would you want to do that?" Romeo asked.

"They might know something."

"You know how they feel about us. They would sooner see us all in hell." GianMarco shook his head.

"It's a chance I have to take," Dante said, seeing no other option.

Maggie's eyes fluttered opened. "What... what happened?" Her head ached like a son of a bitch, and the rest of her body was just as sore.

"You were attacked, but you fought him off, my brave little soldier." GianMarco kissed her.

"I was? I just remember coming out for air, then I opened my eyes and you're here."

"You don't remember anything else?" GianMarco frowned.

"No. Baby, I want to go home." She threw her arms around him, burying her face in his neck.

He lifted her off the ground. "Okay, *ciccina mia*. I'll be back, guys. I need to get Maggie settled. Meet me in the living room in about an hour," GianMarco instructed as he carried his wife back to her bedroom.

Once he had her cleaned up and tucked in, GianMarco cuddled Maggie in his arms. "You came back sooner than I thought you would," she whispered, caressing his face.

"I came back for you, my love. It seems I made it back just in time."

"I don't remember anything, but I have a bitter taste in my mouth."

"Rogue blood. Remember, I explained the dangers of being a young vamp."

"Yes, you did."

"It seems, however, that you're quite capable of handling yourself, Maggie. I have to ask, are you sure you don't remember anything? Not even what the rogue might have looked like?"

Maggie wrinkled her forehead, trying hard to remember. "I'm sorry, but I don't remember. It all feels like it was a dream."

"It's okay, honey. Just rest now. I won't be far."

"Please stay with me," she pleaded, not wanting to be alone now.

“Okay. I will stay for a little bit longer, but you need your rest, and I will not argue with you about it. I know I keep saying it, but you have our child to consider now, too,” he lectured sternly.

“Yes, GianMarco,” she said with mock contriteness.

“You saucy little wench. I should take you over my knee.” He smiled.

“Promises, promises. For such a lusty vampire, you sure like to talk.”

“When you’re feeling up to it, I will show you I’m very much a man of action,” he growled, wrapping his arms around her. They lay together for a while, content just to be together. Maggie finally broke the silence after several minutes.

“GianMarco?”

“Yes, *ciccina?*”

“Do you think the baby is okay? My hearing is not quite as sharp as yours. Do you think the attack may have hurt her?”

“Her?” He raised a brow.

“It’s a she.”

“We’ll see.” He slid down her body to listen for their baby’s heartbeat. “Our baby’s heart is still beating strong. He will be strong like his papa.”

“She,” Maggie corrected.

“If it makes you happy to think so then we will call it she, but don’t be disappointed if we have a son.”

“I would love a son with you, GianMarco; it’s just that I have a feeling we’re having a girl. Call it woman’s intuition, but somehow I just know it.”

“Okay, if you say so. Now, rest; you can barely keep your eyes open.”

“Okay.”

As he got up to leave she called out to him.

“Yes?”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too. Forever.” He closed the bedroom door behind him.

* * * * *

Dante paced the floor. “You say your house was ransacked and the redhead from the nightclub was there?”

“Yes. She disappeared almost as soon as she appeared. The strange thing is I’m beginning to believe she wasn’t the one who did it. I’m actually starting to think she was trying to help us at the club,” GianMarco said.

"In what way? She led us down to that room, you remember? It screamed setup." Dante argued.

"What you have to remember is that, for some reason, we didn't hear those rogues approach; but she screamed, almost as if she were warning us."

"There are still a lot of unanswered questions. What happened to your lead in Germany, Ro?" Dante wanted to know.

"Like I already said, a bunch of dead ends, but something did slip my mind. Does the name Don ring a bell?" Romeo asked.

"Yes! That damn name keeps popping up," Nico chimed in.

"Stranger still, when the witch came to my house she mentioned *il Demonio*," GianMarco added.

"You mean *il Diavolo*," said Romeo.

"No. I am very sure she said *il Demonio*."

"*Il Demonio*? What the hell? Could we have been wrong all these years? Have we been chasing down the wrong lead?" Dante was frustrated.

"Or maybe there are two of them," GianMarco pointed out.

"Things are coming to a head. We have to do something. Someone is out for our heads, but they're trying to get to us through our loved ones," Dante concluded.

"Shit! What do you propose we do?" Romeo asked.

"Ro, I need you to keep up with those leads in Europe. Take Wolf with you if you must. Nico, I know this is asking a lot, but you need to get in contact with the Rominovs. They may know something about the witch's involvement with *il Diavolo* or *il Demonio* or whatever name the bastard is going by. I will go to the council."

"What about me, Dante?" GianMarco asked.

"Your job is to keep your wife safe. I understand how unfair it was of me to ask you to be apart from Maggie when your love is so new." Dante touched his brother's shoulder.

GianMarco's eyes were downcast. "Dante, I'm sorry. My head hasn't been in the game lately."

"It's okay. It's understandable. You have a special lady, so take care of her." There was a wealth of meaning in that statement. Cobalt blue eyes bore into amber eyes.

"I will, but if you need me..." GianMarco began.

"There are others in the Underground who will help. I know I have been relying on the three of you too much. I realize the Underground is my life, not yours, and yet you help me out anyway, without complaints. I appreciate that."

"But we're brothers. Brothers look out for each other no matter what. I am here for you," GianMarco said fiercely.

"So am I," Nico agreed.

“Me, too,” Romeo chimed in.

The four of them came together and embraced each other. They might not see eye-to-eye all the time, but the Grimaldi brothers stuck together through thick and thin.

Epilogue

One month later

"How much longer do I have to sit for this? Couldn't we have just taken a family portrait at Sears like normal people?" Janice complained.

"Be quiet, young one. It's almost finished; besides, cameras don't capture a person's essence like an artist can." GianMarco's brush moved across the canvas.

Dion piped up. "Well, I have to leave in a few minutes. I'm supposed to meet Brian at Union Station to catch a movie we have wanted to see for a while."

GianMarco looked at his wife, who looked suspiciously as if she were trying not to laugh. "Maggie, do you have any complaints to add to those of these ungrateful brats of yours?"

"Well... I am hungry." She smiled.

GianMarco threw his hands up in the air and put his paintbrush down. "Fine. I give up. Whatever happened to kids respecting their elders? Maggie, you're not that much better; you encourage them."

Janice stood up to stretch. "Well, you have to admit, we have been sitting here for a long time. My butt is sore. I'm going to get a shower. I promised Dad I would have dinner with him tonight. Poor Daddy, married for less than a month and his marriage is already over."

Dion shook his head as he got up. He refused to feel sorry for a man who had brought all his troubles on himself. "Yeah, but Dad's the kind of guy who always lands on his feet. Mom, I'll come by later this week to help you with your little project." He referred to the decorating of GianMarco and Maggie's new home.

Maggie smiled affectionately at her son. "That would be great, baby. Bring Brian with you, if you like."

"See you later, Mom. Later, Marc." Dion kissed his mother before heading out.

"See you, kiddo." GianMarco did not lift his eyes from the canvas.

"Can I take a peek at the picture, Marc?" Janice asked, trying to look over her stepfather's shoulder.

GianMarco glared at her. "No! Go away, you little pest. You will get to see it when I'm finished and not before. Now, shoo!"

Janice, taking no offense, grinned at him. "I guess that's your way of saying you want to be alone with Mom."

"Maggie! Tell your daughter to leave us alone."

"Oh, come on, GianMarco, be a sport." Maggie was no help at all, amused at the back and forth. Janice had come for a visit and had been staying with them for the past week, and it warmed Maggie's heart that GianMarco got on so well with her children. A playful banter had developed immediately, especially between GianMarco and Janice. She knew he would make a great father when their baby arrived in six months.

"I'll show you what a sport I can be later." GianMarco looked at his wife.

"Well, be like that, Marc, keep your precious painting to yourself. I do have another favor to ask, though..." Janice smiled at her stepfather, batting her eyelashes innocently.

GianMarco braced himself. In the short time he had known Janice, he knew her well enough to expect her to say something outrageous. "What is it, brat?"

"Could you guys not be so loud tonight? I barely got any sleep. Sheesh. I feel sorry for the poor baby, because it's not going to get any sleep with you two constantly knocking boots. You guys might want to consider soundproofing your room." She blew GianMarco a raspberry before leaving him and Maggie alone.

Maggie burst out laughing.

"I think a husband deserves a little loyalty from his wife, especially when I was nice enough to do this portrait of the three of you." GianMarco pulled Maggie into his arms.

"Well, I do think it's awfully sweet of you. As you've learned, my daughter can be very outspoken at times."

"Bah. When does she go back home? I think a man should be free to make love to his wife as loudly as he wants, you know."

"I know. She will be here until the end of the week, but remember, you promised she can move in with us when she finishes grad school, until she finds a place of her own."

"How can I forget?" GianMarco rolled his eyes.

Maggie looked up at her handsome husband, her heart full of love. "Ah, it won't be so bad. Did I tell you how much I love you today?"

"I think you did, but a guy never gets tired of hearing it." He kissed her.

"I love you very much, GianMarco Grimaldi."

"I bet not half as much as I love you, Maggie Grimaldi."

"That's up for debate." She laughed.

Suddenly, she stiffened in his arms. "What's wrong, Maggie?" GianMarco asked with concern. "Is it the baby?"

"No... I remember his name."

"Whose name?"

"I think it was the person who attacked me, but I can't be sure."

"What's his name, Maggie?"

"Adonis. Adonis Grimaldi."

 THE END 

Eve Vaughn

Eve Vaughn enjoys writing above all else. She has been writing short stories to amuse herself since she could form letters. Mischievous as a child, she lost her television privileges quite a bit and found writing to be her outlet. Besides writing, Eve likes reading, baking, volunteering, traveling, and spending time with her family. She currently resides in the Philadelphia area with her husband and turtle.

Eve loves hearing from her fans so feel free to contact her at EveVaughn10@aol.com or join her Yahoo group at evevaughnsbooks@yahoo.com

* * * * *

Read on for a tantalizing glimpse of

Dark Knights 1: Eternity of Darkness

by Ann Jacobs, writing as Shana Nichols

Available Now from Loose Id

Dark Knights 1: Eternity of Darkness

Julie couldn't help shuddering. Not so much at the sight of Stefan sipping blood from a mug, or even by the fact he'd just told her he'd lived for over four centuries, but at a woman on the dance floor who'd just sunk her teeth -- fangs -- into the neck of her partner. The look on the man's face hinted not at agony, but more like ecstasy. He looked almost as though he were experiencing a sexual climax right there on the floor. When he lowered his hands and cupped his partner's buttocks, Julie squirmed.

The woman's skirt swirled about his pale fingers, the burgundy chiffon dark -- bloodlike -- against his slacks. Soft, sensual, it moved with the breeze from their motion, kissing his dark gray suit pants, then retreating. They swayed to the escalating rhythm of muted drums and mellow woodwinds that spoke of smoke-filled rooms, a time live with action...untold forbidden pleasures.

I'm not a voyeur. I'm not. Yet Julie couldn't take her gaze away from the couple. She imagined the man dragging his partner to the floor, spreading her legs, returning her love-bite with many of his own. Not just on the pale column of her throat but on her nipples. Her belly. The insides of her quivering thighs.

Julie trembled with fear -- and yearning, too. What was it about this scene -- highly erotic yet anything but pornographic -- that made her yearn to drag Stefan onto the dance floor? To beg him to take her? She met his gaze, saw the raw hunger in his expression.

"That's the sort of a mating dance that made vampires enjoy. The males are unable to have conventional sex," Stefan explained, as though he'd read her mind.

Damn. She'd forgotten he was an telepath. He probably *was* reading her every thought. She couldn't help thinking how he'd taken her last night. "I remember now. You said you were -- "

"A born vampire." He smiled, his fangs a flash of white made brighter by the colored lights. "Born vampires can mate as humans do. Occasionally we even produce a baby vampire to proliferate our clans.

"And yes, it would heighten your orgasm if I did to you what she's doing to him, at the moment I began to spill my seed. But I wouldn't. Couldn't. I'd risk turning you...or even killing you if I couldn't control my bloodlust."

"Turning me?"

"Making you like them. Consigning you to an eternity of darkness."

Julie sipped her wine, savoring the rich, slightly fruity flavor of the fine vintage. Questions tumbled around in her mind, needing to be set free, explored.

The otherworldly lovers' searing passion encompassed Julie like a soft, sensual cloak of fire, red, orange and electric blue. Erotic echoes of the mellow music caressed her ears, her

soul. Her nipples tingled, and she grew damp between her legs. The dry, fruity essence of the fine red wine heated her throat, curled lovingly in her belly. What was happening to her? She didn't get swept away by colors -- by passion.

The masters who'd tried to unleash her inhibitions, encourage her to express her feelings unabashedly in her art had given up, certain she lacked the emotional depth necessary for greatness.

Here in a den of vampires, though, the haze of convention that dulled her emotions fled. She felt raw terror, not for her life but for her very being. Fear that was deep and real yet eclipsed by an insatiable desire to become part of the milieu, to immerse herself completely in her vampire lover. Excitement crackled all around her, and when she reached over and took Stefan's hand she experienced a jolt of carnal need, yet something more. A forever kind of feeling, a need for him to take her to that plane of ecstasy she sensed lay just beyond her grasp. "Dance with me," she whispered, every cell in her body aching for...

A taste of the rich, red fluid from his lips. Confirmation he was indeed of another time, another place, another world where he might take her, keep her cocooned in his desire so her own might flourish. A place where he would keep her safe from harm. Safe from the monster that was Louis Reynard.

"You don't know what you're asking of me." Setting down his mug, Stefan rose as though resigned to honor her plea, as tall, commanding a presence among his own kind as he was among Julie's. He held her chair, then took her hand. A familiar song from Chicago 's gangster era blared through the speakers, its heavy percussion and wailing woodwinds beating out a rhythm that brought to mind crowded dance halls, gun-toting molls, and hot, sweaty sex. When they stepped onto the hardwood dance floor, the strobe lights reflected brilliant shards of red and gold off his raven hair, forming a macabre halo that encompassed him and her in a kaleidoscope of sensation.

When he pulled her into the circle of his embrace, Julie knew. She wanted him. But did she want to say goodbye to her mortal existence, live for centuries by his side in a shadow world instead of decades as a mortal in the only world she knew? Watch generations of her friends and loved ones age and die? Could she bear living for centuries with her father no longer there to give advice and love?

You'd have centuries with Stefan. Forever in the safe haven of his embrace. Forever seeing all the shapes and colors in vivid hues, experiencing all the sensual, sexual pleasures of belonging to your vampire lover... Seduced by this place, the music, the seething sexuality he wrapped around her even as they swayed together fully clothed, Julie had her answer. She might regret it later, but she couldn't resist. It felt right. So right...

"I want it all. Bite me, Stefan. Transport me to a plane beyond any where I've ever been. Invade my heart and body and mind and make them yours."

He growled, a deep, anguished rumble that seemed to have come straight from his soul, but he grasped her hips, drew her close enough to feel the strength of his erection. Closer.

The heat of his big hands molding the curve of her buttocks, the gentle motion of his breath on her hair, the brush of his chest against her nipples as he led her in the dance all stoked her desire to a fever pitch.

Then he took her mouth, wiped away any doubt that it was blood he'd drunk from that chilled stein. The slightly metallic taste, was unmistakable, like the taste of her own blood when she'd sucked away the pain from a minor paper cut. Arousing, though, not revolting as she'd thought it might be. Hungry, she traced the seam of his lips with her tongue, blatantly inviting him to plunge inside. His groan of acquiescence tickled her lips, and she opened them to his tongue's insistent, rhythmic invasion.

God, but she wanted it all. Wanted it right here and now. Wanted him to raise her skirt, rip away her flimsy panties and impale her on his huge, rigid sex. She laid her head back, bared her throat as she'd seen the vampires do. "Bite me, now."

* * * * *

What people are saying about

Dark Knights 1: Eternity of Darkness

Eternity of Darkness is a wonderful new start to the Dark Knights series. Ms. Nichols shows the dangers and obstacles that need to be overcome when mortal and vampire hearts entwine... I would not hesitate to recommend this book, and I am looking forward to the next in the series.

-- Jaynie Ritchie, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

Shana Nichols has written one of the most intriguing vampire stories that I've read in a while. She dispels all the myths associated with vampire and their habits... *Dark Knights 1: Eternity of Darkness* is a highly recommended read. Make sure that you have plenty of ice water and an extra spot on your keeper shelf.

-- Claudia McRay, *Romance Junkies*