

JAGGER'S WOMAN

Eve Vaughn

Dedication

To O, thanks for helping me bring the Grimaldis to life. ☺

Prologue

Jagger wiped away the sweat beaded on his forehead. Had the temperature gone up? Squirring in his chair, he tried to focus on what his father was saying. As though noticing his discomfort, Niccolo Grimaldi turned amber eyes Jagger's way, clear concern within their depths. "Are you okay, son?"

"It's gotten hot in here all of a sudden. I know the weather is usually warm in Southern California, but this is ridiculous."

His mother walked over to him and felt his forehead with the back of her hand. "You do feel rather warm, *milaya moya*."

"Mama, I wish you wouldn't call me your little boy. I'm thirty years old, you know."

She patted his cheek fondly, a smile tilting her lips. "You could be five hundred years old and you'd still be my little boy."

"Sasha, you're embarrassing him." Niccolo lightly scolded his mate, although there was obvious affection for her in his voice. Whenever Jagger's parents, the two people he loved above all others in the world, spoke with one another, that particular emotion always lingered there. Sometimes Jagger felt like a third wheel when he was with them, but it was never because they made him feel unwanted or unloved.

"I can't help it. I'm worried about my baby. I haven't seen him like this since he was thirsting for his first blood."

His father's brow was furrowed, confusion etched on his face. "That was *la morte dolci*. He's already had first blood."

"Uh, Mama, Papa, I'm sitting right here. There's no need to discuss me as if I'm not in the room."

Sasha patted his cheek again. "I'm sorry, *moy malish*. How long have you been feeling this way? And do you have other symptoms?"

"Off and on for a couple weeks now, but it's especially bad when I wake up. I've also noticed how difficult it's been to concentrate."

Niccolo uncurled himself from the recliner he'd been sitting in. Joining his mate, he kissed her on the ear. "Sweetheart, would you mind if I had a word with Jagger alone?"

Sasha frowned. "Why? I'm his mother."

Now Niccolo kissed the side of her neck. "I know, sweetheart, but it's kind of a man thing." Their gazes locked and Jagger watched the meaningful look his father exchanged with his mother until understanding finally dawned on her face.

"Ah. I see. Well, I suppose I could do some shopping, maybe pick some gifts for Maggie and GianMarco's baby."

"That sounds like an excellent idea, but I wouldn't buy so many pink outfits as you've been doing. The chances of Maggie giving birth to a daughter are quite slim. In fact, no fem has given birth to a daughter in at least a century."

Sasha smiled knowingly. "But Maggie is certain the baby's a girl. A mother is instinctively aware of these things. I may not be a gambling woman, but I'd put my money on Maggie. In fact, I'll be taking your credit cards." She grinned at her mate angelically.

Niccolo rolled his eyes in mock agitation. "You're going to make us paupers with your spending."

“You are such a teaser. I could spend several thousand dollars an hour and not put a dent in your ... our fortune. By the way, may I take the Ferrari?”

“Of course, as long as you promise no more racing. My police connection is a bit tired of having to erase all those tickets you’ve racked up.”

She pouted. “What’s the point of having such a powerful car if I can’t drive fast?” Seeing the expression on her mate’s face, she quickly amended her words. “I’ll be as careful as I can.”

Jagger noticed she made no promises to his father. As he watched the interaction between them, Jagger was a bit jealous of the special bond they shared. Both had gone through so much to be together, but although he didn’t begrudge them their happiness, sometimes he wished he could have what they did.

He had gone most of his life without knowing who his father was, but several months ago, Jagger had gone on a quest to find the man he believed had abandoned him and his mother. What he’d found himself embroiled in was an adventure beyond his wildest imaginings but, in the end, he had finally met his father and seen his parents reunited. And now, even though he’d only lived with his father for the past few months, the bond between father and son was strong.

Once Sasha had left the men alone, Niccolo took a seat on the sofa beside Jagger. “Son, when was the last time you got laid?” That was his father: direct and straight to the point. It was still something Jagger was getting used to.

“A few weeks. I haven’t had much time for anything else what with our missions for the Underground.”

“Was it a satisfying experience?”

They were close, but this man was his father. Jagger felt his face grow warmer than ever from his embarrassment. “I’m not sure why you need to know all this.”

“Humor me, son.”

"Fine. Not really. I was more frustrated than ever afterward."

"This heat you experience, is it followed by arousal?"

"Sometimes."

Niccolo closed his eyes with a sigh.

"What is it, Papa? What's wrong with me? I never thought I'd feel this way again after I received my first blood."

"Who is she?"

"She?"

"The woman you're pining for. Besides a need for first blood, the most common cause of *la morte dolci* is unfulfilled desire. It happened to your Uncle Marco; had Dante not intervened, things could have gone very badly for Maggie. So I ask again, who is this woman who's brought you to this pass?"

There was only one woman who'd been on his mind the past few months. She was his first thought when he woke and his last at night. He'd memorized her every feature and often conjured up her smooth dusky skin and large soulful eyes, She had the most adorable dimples he'd ever seen, and Jagger fantasized about having her beneath him, her hair fanned out against a white pillow. Remembering her plump bottom and how much he wanted to ride it, Jagger's cock jumped to attention. Why this woman in particular made him feel such instant longing, he wasn't sure. Jagger had had many women, after all, but none had ever caused him to dream about them every single damned night.

"Son," his father prompted.

"Janice Williams."

Niccolo's eyes widened. "Maggie's daughter?"

"Yes. I haven't been able to forget her. I've tried to, but I can't. She's the one, Papa, I'm sure of it."

"Marco has told me she's wary of our kind."

Jagger raked his fingers through his hair. “I’m already aware of that, but it doesn’t make me want her any less. I can’t eat, sleep, or do anything properly because of her. It only took our first meeting for me to fall hard for her, but it was enough. Hell, I even flew to her place in Atlanta. She rejected me initially, but when I left, her last reaction gave me hope. I can feel she wants me, too, but she’s denying it, denying us.”

“So that’s where you went when you needed a couple of days to yourself. From the comments Marco has made, I’ve wondered if something may have happened between you and Janice, but I didn’t want to be intrusive and ask. From what I’ve seen of her, she’s a nice kid, but she’s not like her mother. Her tongue is sharp; she won’t fall at your feet like other women do.”

“No other woman interests me. Besides, if I wanted one of those types, I could have settled down with any number of them. Papa, in my heart, body, and soul, I know she’s the one. She’s my woman.”

“You’re very young to have found your bloodmate already. Marco was in his eighties when he’d met his first bloodmate, and it was several hundred years later when he found Maggie. Your Uncle Romeo and I have also waited many centuries before our mates came into our lives. Are you absolutely sure?”

“Would you think that I’m on the verge of *la morte dolci* if she isn’t?”

His father’s golden gaze met his. “Son, whatever you do I will support you, but I must warn you, she’s under Marco’s protection and he’ll allow no harm to come to her. You’re in a precarious situation, *piccolo*, because *la morte dolci* is a tricky thing. If your need for her goes unfulfilled, it could mean trouble for you. Already your body is going through changes because of your desire for her. You don’t have much time to stake your claim before this illness becomes full blown.”

“How much time do you think I have?”

“Judging from your symptoms ... no more than two weeks.”

Jagger's jaw dropped with incredulity. That was no time at all to woo Janice as he wanted to. How in heaven's name would he be able to win her affections in such a short period of time? "I suppose it's a good thing we'll be flying to Virginia tomorrow for the birth of the baby."

His father's eyes darted away, and Jagger knew there was something he wasn't being told. "There's more, isn't there?"

"Unfortunately."

His pulse raced, and his breathing was now shallow from what he might hear. "What is it?"

"Just because you love her, it doesn't necessarily mean she'll love you back."

That was exactly what he feared.

Chapter One

“If you ask me, I think it’s disgusting that your mother is having a baby at her age.” Eugene Williams followed his scathing statement by downing his fourth glass of wine.

Janice glanced at her watch, wishing this dinner would end. She should have known her father would be up to his old antics. Ever since he’d learned his ex-wife was happy in her new marriage and having a baby, all he ever did was speak of her in a derogatory way.

“Daddy, she’s hardly ancient; she’s just turned forty-one. Lots of women are having their first child well beyond that.” Not to mention she was now a vampire who could probably have children for centuries to come, but that was another issue altogether.

“Well, she still ought to be ashamed of herself. I’m surprised she’s still with that gigolo.”

“That ‘gigolo’ is her husband, and I doubt Marc is going to let her out of his grasp anytime soon. They love each other very much.”

Eugene released a loud belch, drawing stares from the other diners closest to their table. Janice knew she should have driven straight to her mother’s house instead of agreeing to this dinner. She loved her father, but sometimes she didn’t like him a lot. Besides, she was still coming to terms with all the years he’d treated her mother like dirt with his verbal

abuse, cheating, and neglect. It had caused Janice to resent her mother just as much for putting up with it.

Fortunately, with some insight, soul searching, and counseling, Janice had at last come to an understanding with her mother, and now they were closer than ever. Her sense of fair play also made it impossible for her to ignore her father even if he didn't always make sound decisions, like leaving her mom for a younger woman, whom he'd then divorced within a month, stating he'd been coerced into it. Currently, he was dating a woman only a year older than Janice's twenty-two. Janice wouldn't put her money on that relationship lasting very long either.

Her father slouched in his chair. "You mark my words, young lady, when that creature she calls herself married to gets rid of her -- and he will -- I'm not taking her back." His voice was as belligerent as his words.

"Um, Daddy, Mom doesn't want you back, and like I said, Marc isn't letting her go anytime soon. The baby is going to come any day now and he still can't keep his hands off her. I think it's cute." She sighed. "Do you think we can change the subject now? You've been talking about Mom since we got here. Have you forgotten you were the one who walked away? Could it be that you didn't think she'd move on with her life and find happiness?"

"She knew I'd come back to her eventually," he said sulkily, reminding Janice of a two-year-old instead of the middle-aged man he was.

"Did she? You told her you were engaged, and then you served her with divorce papers. What was she supposed to think? Had I been her I would have gotten rid of you a long time ago. You weren't the best husband and neither of you were happy. She's moved on, now it's time for you to do the same."

"As quickly as she got with that white boy, I bet she was cheating all along."

That was it! Janice had had enough of her father's drunken sullenness. "Daddy, I need to leave. Do yourself a favor and call a cab home."

His eyes narrowed to angry slits. "Don't tell me what to do, young lady. Have you forgotten who writes the checks to your grad school?"

"Have *you* forgotten I only have two semesters left? And you've already sent a check for the next one, which has already cleared. I can easily work more hours at the student union to pay for the last one myself."

"I was going to buy you a car when you graduated," he muttered, obviously flustered when she didn't fall in line after his none-too-subtle threat.

"Keep the car. I don't need it. You're always dangling the carrot, aren't you? I've lost my taste for it. What I need is a father, and since you won't be one to me, I'm going to say good night."

"So you're going to turn your back on me just like that faggot brother of yours?"

Besides her mother, Dion was the one person in the world she loved more than anyone and anything else. To hear someone call him by that foul name -- their father no less! -- raised her ire. Had this man not helped in her procreation, she'd throw her drink in his face.

"His name is Dion, and he's your son. He may not be your ideal of manhood, but he knows more about being a man than you ever will. You can keep your expensive gifts. I have no need for them." Grabbing her purse, she stormed away from the table. As she left, she informed the maitre d' to call her father a cab before her dad left. Regardless of what she felt for the man, he was still her father, and she didn't want to see him come to any harm.

She slid into the beat up Volkswagen Jetta she'd had since high school and was annoyed when the engine didn't start right away. Her car was a long-serving hand-me-down. Her father had bought it used for her mother; then when her brother, Dion, had passed his driving test and received his license, their mom had given it to him. Later, it'd become Janice's. "Come on, old girl, don't break down on me now. We made it here from

Atlanta. You can drive a half hour more to Mom's house." As if by magic, when she turned the key in the ignition again, it started. At least it was one less worry. For the moment.

Janice had been happy about seeing her mom again and thrilled at the prospect of a baby brother or sister. She was even happy at the prospect of seeing Marc, her hunky, blond stepfather -- who also happened to be a vampire -- but she was still trying to adjust to her mother being immortal and a bloodsucker, too. It was difficult to accept something she'd been conditioned to not believe in. Maybe her mother was content to be a vampire, but Janice preferred human men. Not that she needed a man.

The couple of boyfriends she'd had were nothing to write home about. She'd given the last guy she dated her virginity, but for the life of her couldn't figure what all the hype was about. And she'd learned a long time ago from watching her parents that she was better off without a man in her life; at least not one who would dominate and control her. When she did finally settle down it would be with a guy who knew up front that she called all the shots.

The thought of spending the next two weeks with her mother brought to mind another dilemma. She'd been told the rest of the Grimaldi clan would also be in residence; the house was certainly big enough, after all. But if the remainder of the family would be there, then so would *he*.

Janice didn't care for men who came on too strong, and in their very first meeting, Jagger's intense amber gaze had stamped her with stark possessiveness. At first, she hadn't known how to react, because no man had ever dared to look at her that way before, at least not without getting told off. Aside from that, he was not only white but a vampire, too. She wasn't sure which was the bigger strike against him.

She had nothing against white men, but Janice felt a black man would understand her struggles and her culture more than any other race could. Relationships were hard enough without the added drama the interracial factor could have. Maybe if he hadn't come to Atlanta, she could have played nice and pretended everything was okay, but he'd ruined it.

Janice had been leaving class, talking to one of her study partners when she'd had the strangest sensation of being watched. As she walked to the campus coffee shop with her friend, she couldn't quite shake the feeling.

"Some guy is following us. Or maybe just you," Terri whispered behind her hand.

"What?"

"I noticed him when we came out of the building."

Janice didn't know why, but something told her not to turn around. Unfortunately, the choice was taken out of her hand when someone grabbed her elbow.

"We meet again, Janice."

The thick Russian accent left not a doubt who stood behind her. Without facing him, she sighed and ground her teeth together in exasperation. "What are you doing here?"

"You knew I'd come for you. Won't you look at me so I can see your beautiful face?"

"I knew no such thing, so how about letting go and leaving me alone?"

"Don't you want to talk to him? If you don't, I'll take him." Terri greeted Jagger. "Hi, I'm Terri. Are you a friend of Janice's?"

"You could say so, although I would like to be a lot more." The deep cultured voice sent shivers down Janice's spine.

Damn.

She wasn't supposed to react to him in any way. Finally pivoting with more than a little annoyance, Janice hissed, "Why are you here? I thought I told you I want nothing to do with you."

Terri looked horrified. "Janice! That's no way to talk to your friend." She gave Jagger a brilliant smile. "She's not usually this way. And since I've introduced myself, what's your name?"

Jagger lifted Terri's hand and brought it to his lips. "This campus seems to be full of beautiful women. I am Nicolai Jagger Romanov-Grimaldi at your service, fair lady, but please call me Jagger."

Terri giggled like a loon, obviously flattered. "Oh, you're charming. You have to come to the coffee shop with us."

Janice rolled her eyes. "Give me a break," she muttered under her breath.

Terri glared at her before smiling at Jagger again. "So, how do you know Janice?"

"Her mother is married to my uncle."

"Oh, so you're related. How interesting," Terri cooed, batting her eyes like a nitwit. Janice wanted to throw up.

"Terri, why don't you go ahead and find a table for the three of us? Janice and I will join you shortly."

Terri pouted, but when Jagger smiled, revealing perfect white teeth, she gushed. "Okay." The other girl practically skipped off.

"Janice, you're looking lovelier than ever, although it is my fondest wish to see your hair flowing around your shoulders so I can run my fingers through it."

She narrowed her eyes. "You'll never get the chance. I thought I'd made it clear there will never be any *us*. For my mother's sake, I have to be nice to her in-laws, but you're making it very difficult."

A pained expression crossed his face. "It doesn't have to be difficult. Why don't you at least get to know me? My mother would tell you I'm a great guy." He grinned.

Janice didn't appreciate his attempt at a joke, but maybe she wouldn't be so annoyed if he weren't so damned good looking. Jagger was the epitome of tall, dark, and handsome. He stood well over six feet, towering over her five-foot-six-inch frame. His jet-black hair fell to his collar, caught between the edge of long and short. Everything about him was attractive,

but Jagger's eyes were his most arresting feature: their amber gold was emphasized by the dark slashes of his eyebrows.

Why did she have to be so aware of his maleness, the smell of his cologne, and how her body tingled to life in his presence? *Girl, snap out of it; this guy is not for you.*

"Yeah, and your mother is also a witch, isn't she?"

The smile fell from his lips, and his eyelids lowered slightly. "Yes, she is, although I'm not sure what that has to do with anything."

"It has a lot to do with it. Your mother is a witch and your father is a friggin' vampire, and I have no clue what the hell you are."

"The term is vampwiz."

She shook her head. "Whatever. It's not as though I'm in the market for a boyfriend, but even if I were, it wouldn't be to a bloodsucking wizard!" She hadn't realized how loud her voice had risen until passersby stopped to stare. "Look, I have to get out of here. My friend may have invited you to coffee with us, but I'm uninviting you. I'm sure you understand."

As she attempted to move past him, Jagger grabbed her arm. "This conversation is not over." Amber eyes scanned her face with determination.

"Let go! This conversation is most definitely over, and I'm giving you two seconds to release me before I scream."

"What's the point of screaming when no one will hear?"

Before she could question what he was talking about, he snapped his fingers. Janice looked around to see an empty campus. The hundreds of students and faculty trudging along the vast landscape had simply disappeared.

"What the hell?" Yanking her arm away, Janice took several steps back. "What have you done to everyone?" she whispered in horror.

Jagger waved his hand in the air dismissively. "They are still around. It is you and I who are no longer on campus. I'm not very good at this spell, so it will only last a few minutes. I think you could at least give me that time to plead my case."

"I don't have to give you anything."

Suddenly, he pulled her roughly against his hard body, his amber eyes glowing and his eyeteeth descending. "Is this how you see me? Is this the monster you think I am? It is only part of who I am."

Janice was too stunned to do anything but stare, fear holding her still.

"Ah, *milaya moya*." His eyes and teeth returned to the way they'd been before. "*Kagda ya vperveeye vstretil tebya ya srazu ponyal: eto navsegda*." She assumed his whispered words were Russian, the lyrical sounds flowing over her like a soft caress.

Though she tried, she couldn't fight off the trembling in her body. "What ... what did you just say?"

"I won't tell you until the time is right." Their gazes locked. It was almost as if he were looking at her very soul. Cupping her face in his strong palms, Jagger brought his head down, halting when their lips barely touched. "You may not believe we are destined to be together, Janice, but I do, and I will live in hope you'll soon realize it."

Instead of kissing her as she'd expected, Jagger released her face and stepped away. "Give your friend my apologies. Until the next time we meet, *milaya moya*." With another snap of his fingers, the campus jumped to life with people walking around her, but Jagger had disappeared.

The blaring honk of a car horn brought her back to reality. Janice discovered her car had drifted to the center of the road, straddling two lanes. She immediately maneuvered the vehicle to one side and shot an apologetic hand in the air for the driver behind her. Just one more exit to her mother's house.

How was she going to through the next couple of weeks with Jagger around?

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“Maggie, have a seat and put your feet up. Janice should be here shortly; she called to say she’d come as soon as the dinner with her father ends.”

Maggie looked out the window for the tenth time that night. She always worried about her children even though they were both grown. “I know, but I’m concerned that old clunker of hers will break down on the way. I wish she hadn’t refused your offer to buy her a new car.”

GianMarco stood behind her, wrapping his large, sinewy arms around her waist, his hands cupping the considerable bulge of her stomach. They were expecting their first child together any day now, and Maggie couldn’t remember a time when she’d been happier except for the birth of her two older children.

Her husband grazed her ear with his tongue, causing a shiver to run through her body. She leaned against his solid warmth, so in love with this man that she sometimes feared she’d wake up and this would all be a dream.

“Janice is a very independent young woman. She probably gets that stubborn streak from her mother.”

Maggie twisted around to face him, staring into amber eyes. It was still hard to believe this gorgeous man belonged to her. Who would have thought when her marriage of twenty-three years ended abruptly that she’d land on her feet like this?

Left with nothing, she had found herself starting over again at the age of forty. She’d been extremely fortunate to land a job as a secretary at a detective agency, but little had Maggie known then that her hunky, obnoxious boss was a vampire. Things had been rocky for the two of them in the beginning, but when they finally came together, it had been explosive. There had been no turning back then. Now, there was so much happiness and joy in her life, she could barely contain it.

Since she and GianMarco had married, two of her brothers-in-law had also found mates. Maggie only wished that Dante, the eldest Grimaldi brother, would also find what she shared with her husband. Thinking about Dante made her slightly uncomfortable, considering she felt responsible for the rift between him and GianMarco.

She placed her head against her husband's broad chest. "Do you think ..."

"Do I think Dante will come?"

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak. She had been a vampire for not quite a year, so she was still getting used to the nuances of their kind. Mind reading was one of their talents she had yet to grow accustomed to.

"He said he'd come, but I haven't heard from him. He may miss the actual birth, but he'll be around. Don't worry about it, *ciccina*, you are not to blame."

"Where is he?"

"In the Hamptons with some friends of ours."

"The werewolves you were telling me about?"

"Shifters. Don't let them hear you call them werewolves. They'll be highly insulted."

"Oh." She sighed, reveling in the heat of his body.

"Well, all the family should descend on us tomorrow."

"Oh!" Maggie smacked her forehead.

"What is it?" GianMarco's dark brows furrowed together.

"Sasha called earlier and said she, Niccolo, and Jagger would be here tonight."

"And your daughter is on the way."

"Yes. Do you think there will be a problem with Janice and Jagger under the same roof?"

“I don’t know, *ciccina*. It should certainly be interesting, but I think there will be plenty of people in the house to keep each of them occupied. Ro, Christine, and their kids will be arriving tomorrow morning.”

“I bet Romeo and Christine are thrilled the adoptions have been finalized. With the children officially theirs, they can take them out of state now. I’m glad they’re moving down here. There are a lot of houses for sale in this area; it will be so much fun house shopping with Christine. Our baby could use some little playmates.”

“Who would have ever thought my wild brother would have a wife and two children?”

“Based on our first meeting, I certainly wouldn’t have.” Maggie chuckled, then abruptly stiffened. No. It couldn’t happen now. She thought she’d been mistaken earlier, but now she wasn’t so positive.

“Baby, are you okay?”

She didn’t want to alarm her husband, so she answered in the affirmative. “I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. I guess I’m just anxious to see Janice.”

“She’ll be here soon.” He smiled. “I have an idea how to take your mind off of things.”

“Does it have anything to do with making love?”

A large lopsided grin split his face. “You know me so well.”

“I would love to, but I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“Why not? You’ve never been one to turn down our lovemaking.”

“And you know I enjoy it immensely, but my water just broke.”

Chapter Two

“It’s okay, Uncle Marco. I’ll let Janice know what’s happened as soon as she arrives.”

The older vampire looked distracted, running around the house like a headless chicken. Aunt Maggie seemed to be handling this situation much better. “Baby, it will be okay. This is my third child. There’s nothing to be nervous about.”

Niccolo patted Maggie on the shoulder. “You must indulge my brother in his panic; after all, he hasn’t been a father for many centuries.”

Maggie sighed. “I understand completely; however, we’ll never make it to the hospital in one piece if he doesn’t calm down.”

“Which is why Sasha and I will come with you two,” Niccolo said. Once everyone had reassured Uncle Marco sufficiently, they finally left, leaving Jagger alone in the big, empty house.

When Jagger and his parents had arrived not even a half hour earlier, it was to find his frantic uncle and exasperated aunt. They hadn’t expected the baby to come for another few days so everyone was in a bit of shock. Jagger’s mother and father had volunteered to take the expectant parents to the hospital, leaving him in the house for when Janice arrived.

During the entire plane ride to Dulles, he'd thought of ways to get her alone and now it was as if the heavens and God were smiling down on him.

Jagger frowned, looking at his watch. It was nearly midnight. He could have sworn Aunt Maggie had told him Janice should have been here already. Had she changed her mind and decided to not show up because of him? Just as the idea crossed his mind, the loud clanging of an engine drew closer to the house. Hurrying to look out the window, Jagger could just make out the driver behind the wheel. His heart pounded in anticipation of seeing her face again.

Already his prick was stiff as his eagerness became overwhelming. He had to relax and appear as non-threatening as possible; whenever he came on too strong, she fought against him even harder. Perhaps the way to get into her good graces was to take things slowly, but then he remembered his father warning him that *la morte dolci* would take over if he didn't have her soon.

Her wreck of a car sputtered up the driveway louder than ever. Jagger desperately wanted to run outside and haul the dark beauty into the circle of his arms and never let go, but he forced himself to remain where he was. *Let her come to me. Win her trust and everything else will fall into place.*

The car finally came to a halt, but not before releasing a menacing pop. That vehicle was beyond not roadworthy; to think she drove around in that death trap scared the hell out of him. He made a mental note to tell her so when he got a chance.

It seemed like an hour while Jagger waited for her to get out of the car and reach the front door, although he knew it had to be only a couple of minutes. His heart pounded faster than ever at the sound of the doorbell. Taking a deep breath, Jagger opened the door.

To say the look on Janice's face was one of astonishment would have been putting it lightly. Her jaw practically fell to the ground, and her dark eyes widened to the size of saucers.

“Welcome, Janice. I’m glad to see you’ve arrived safely, although I’m sure your car has seen better days.” He moved enough to let her by, but not enough that she could avoid brushing against him.

If possible, Janice was even prettier than he remembered from their meeting at her school earlier in the day; her smooth mahogany skin was free of makeup except for a light coat of gloss on her curvy lips that smelled like strawberries. Never before had he wanted to kiss a woman’s mouth bare as much as he did this one and, for once, her dark hair rested around her shoulders like a silky black cloud instead of the ponytail she seemed to favor.

He allowed his gaze to drift over her body; it was evident that she took good care of herself. She was slender and of medium height. Her breasts were small, as was her waist, but her hips were womanly. And even though Janice now faced him, he couldn’t forget her ass. After having met her, Jagger had fully understood why so many rappers paid homage to black women’s asses in their song lyrics. Many a night he’d lain in bed, his fist wrapped around his cock as he imagined riding her plump derriere.

Janice finally found her voice. “Where is Mom, and why are you here?”

“Come in. You must be tired after a long day.”

“Um, I would if you’d back up.”

Jagger grinned, shifting only the merest of centimeters more. When she apparently realized he wouldn’t move further, she placed her hand against his chest, pushed him aside, and stepped into the house.

“And how do you do to you as well, my lovely.”

She looked around, anxiety seeming to take over. “Where is everyone?”

Jagger closed the door and gestured to the sofa. “You should probably have a seat first.”

“I won’t sit down until you tell me what’s going on. Where’s Mom? Is she okay? Oh, no! Mom is okay, isn’t she?”

“Your mother is fine. I suspect that in a few hours she’ll be more than okay. Uncle Marco, on the other hand, I’m not so sure. He’s the one in need of help, I should imagine.”

Confusion washed over her face before comprehension dawned. Her voice was no more than a whisper. “The baby?”

He nodded. “Very soon your new little brother will be here.”

Janice’s hands flew to her hips, her lips pursed. “What makes you think it’s going to be a boy? Mom is sure she’ll have a girl.”

Jagger shrugged. “The chances of her having a daughter are slim to none.”

“Why is that? I know you vampires aren’t human, but surely there are female versions of you.”

“Yes, there are, and most of them have been made rather than born.”

“But there have been some, right?”

“Only a handful. For some reason, perhaps God’s little joke on us, the X chromosome isn’t produced but every so often in a vampire’s sperm.”

“Oh.” Her disappointment was clear.

“You really wanted a little sister, didn’t you?”

“I already have a brother, one I love very much, but Mom was so sure about the sex of the baby, I began to believe it, too. I was getting used to the idea. Oh, well, I’ll be just as happy with a little brother. I’m glad for Mom no matter what and Marc, too, of course.”

“Of course.”

An awkward silence fell between them, the light ticking of the grandfather clock in the living room corner the only sound. Jagger couldn’t tear his gaze away from her gorgeous face to save his life. Janice, on the other hand, made every attempt to look anywhere but in his direction.

“It doesn’t have to be this way, you know.”

She laughed nervously. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Janice, let's stop playing foolish games. The chemistry between us is real. I know you feel it, too."

"I do not --"

"Oh, yes you do, Janice, but I will allow you your illusions ... for now. However, what we should focus on at the moment is contacting friends and family and notifying them of the joyous event which is about to occur. Do you think we could call a truce for the sake of the family? After all, we will soon have another relative in common."

Warring emotions flashed within the depths of her eyes. Her gaze finally met his, making Jagger's heart skip a beat. The incredible heat he'd been experiencing for the past few weeks resurfaced. His willpower was slowly being chipped away by her very presence.

Jagger licked his now dry lips, taking a step back as much for his sake as hers. The movement must have taken her by surprise because she eyed him with suspicion.

"How can I trust you?"

"You'll just have to go on faith. I promise not to touch you ... unless you want me to."

"That will never happen!" Her tone was snappish.

Jagger smiled. "If you say so."

"I do. No funny stuff, okay?"

"How could I try anything when the rest of the family will be here by tomorrow morning?"

"Well ... if you realize nothing will ever happen between us, I guess we could call a truce, but don't get any ideas."

"Are you saying we cannot be friends?"

"I ..."

"You want to say yes." His smile widened.

Janice giggled, a delightful tinkling sound. "All right, I guess friendship is okay."

"Shall we shake on it?"

"Don't push your luck, buddy."

* * * * *

Montana Donovan squealed on the other end of the phone. "She's having the baby now? Why didn't she call me? I thought we were girlfriends!" Her godmother was an excitable woman; Janice sometimes wondered how opposites like her mother, who was calm and laid back, and Montana, who was high maintenance and had a great deal of money, had remained best friends for nearly thirty years.

"I don't think she had much of a chance. I would imagine since this is Marc's first baby after losing his son that he was so excited he rushed her off. At least that's the version I've been told."

"Who told you? Wasn't your mother there when you arrived?"

"No. Actually, Marc's nephew, Jagger, was here. He's keeping me company, but trust me, you are the second person I called. I had to tell Dion first, of course. He's thrilled."

"So you're in the house alone with ..." Montana's voice lowered several decibels, "one of them?"

"Why are you whispering?"

"Can't he hear you? They have great hearing, you know."

"I'm aware of that, but Jagger's hauling my stuff out of my car."

"You're not still driving that black hunk of junk, are you?"

"I am, and it broke down on me ten minutes from the house. My cell phone battery died, and I was stranded."

"How did you get there?"

"I played with some wires under the hood. This guy I know showed me how one of the cables keeps getting disconnected to this thingamabob. I don't know what it's called, but he told me what to do if my car stalled again. This time I must have done something wrong because there was a mini explosion, but I managed to reconnect the wires."

"So it did start?"

"Sort of. It made the most awful noise, coughing and sputtering the entire way here, and to top it off, it only went five miles an hour. I think my poor baby is on its last legs."

"That piece of crap has been on its last legs for the past ten years. When your father bought that car for your mother, it was already three years old. The cheap bastard could have sprung for a new ride, but I suppose the past belongs in the past. Anyway, do you want me to come over to keep you company?"

"I'm fine."

"Are you sure? I know Maggie says vampires are safe, but ... there's something I can't quite shake about them. Something I don't like."

"Look, I'm not exactly ecstatic my mom has become a bloodsucker, but she's happy with Marc so I'm happy for her."

"I guess you're right, but once when I went to visit ..."

"What?"

"That's just it. I don't remember, but it must have been horrible. I get chills when I try to force the memory. Just be careful, okay?"

"I usually am. You have nothing to worry about. I can take care of myself."

"Famous last words. You just watch yourself, young lady. Maggie tells me the Grimaldi men are great charmers."

"I can't be charmed," Janice shot back, growing frustrated with the conversation.

"Fine, but never say I didn't warn you."

When she finally hung up the phone, Janice was struck with the decision of whether to join Jagger in the living room or run to her room and hide. She certainly couldn't avoid the guy forever, and she'd already made the appropriate phone calls. It was nearly one o'clock now, but she wasn't sleepy.

Pulling a scrunchie from her pocket, she fixed her hair into a ponytail as she remembered how Jagger had told her he wanted to run his fingers through her hair. That wasn't going to happen if she could help it.

She walked into the living room and found him on the couch placing playing cards on the coffee table, a look of concentration on his handsome face. She had never had the chance to study him like this when he was unaware of her. A lock of thick black hair fell over his forehead, and his profile was strong, his jaw square.

Janice's breath caught in her throat. Jagger was too good looking to live. Why did he have to be so easy on the eyes? "I don't need a man. I don't need a man," she chanted under her breath.

"Are you going to stand there talking to yourself, or will you join me?"

Damn his sensitive hearing. "I wasn't talking to myself."

"Oh, so I didn't hear you muttering about needing a man? My mistake." He continued to lay cards on the table, not bothering to glance her way. For some reason, his ignoring her bothered Janice.

"I said I don't need a man!" she snapped.

"Of course you don't," he murmured, still not turning his head in her direction. His accent was too sexy for words. Was there anything about him that wasn't hot?

Get a hold of yourself, and stop acting like an idiot. Stomping to the sofa, she took a seat on the far end, keeping enough space between the two of them. "So, uh, what are you doing?"

"Playing solid."

"Solid?"

"You know, the game one plays alone."

"Oh, you mean solitaire." She giggled at his mispronunciation. It was kind of cute.

"*Da*. That's probably what I meant. My English sometime gets mixed up."

"You sound as if you've been speaking it for years."

"All my life, actually, although I don't use it as often as I should and I don't speak it as well as I'd like. My grandmother is English, so I learned Russian and English from the cradle, but sometimes I get flustered when my emotions are involved."

"What other languages do you speak?"

"Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and a smattering of German. My family is well traveled, so I suppose in time I'll pick up more. My father speaks over fifty languages, and there are so many more for him to learn. I'm sure you can imagine I have a ways to go before I even catch up to him or my uncles."

"Well, you do have an eternity to do it," she whispered, remembering he wasn't human.

"I sense your unease; there is no need to be frightened of me. I'm not so different from you."

Janice couldn't help snorting at that comment. "Um, I'm not a bloodsucking wizard vampire, or vampire wizard. Whatever the hell you call yourself. What do I call you anyway?"

He looked at her, then revealed those perfect teeth of his. "Jagger will do nicely. And I agree you're not a bloodsucker, as you so quaintly put it. You're a beautiful young woman -- and an extremely desirable one, at that, but as I was saying, you shouldn't judge immortals so harshly without getting to know us."

"I know you suck blood. I know you have powers. What else is there to understand?"

He laid the deck of cards down. Sweat broke out on her forehead, when she noticed his muscular hands flexing and unflexing.

“Can I ask you a question without you becoming offended?” His gaze bore into her.

“It depends on what the question is.”

“Fair enough. Answer me this: have you ever been the victim of prejudice?”

“Are you kidding me? I’m a black woman in America; what do you think?” She had an inkling about where he was going with this.

“And how did it make you feel?” he asked softly.

She frowned, remembering a particular incident that still saddened her. A girlfriend she’d thought she was close to had had a sweet-sixteen party and hadn’t invited her. When Janice had asked why, her so-called friend had laughed offhandedly. *My party was probably a little too highbrow for someone like you. I hope you understand. It’s nothing personal.* Someone like her meant black, of course. Needless to say she had severed the friendship.

“Not very good, but when is discrimination ever pleasant?” she answered honestly.

“Having been on the other side of prejudice, I would imagine you’d be a little more sensitive to people different from you. I couldn’t help being born a vampwiz any more than you could help being born a black woman, so how about cutting me some slack? Yes, there are bad vampires, wizards, and shifters, but there are bad humans as well. Prisons around the world can attest to that. However, as my presence is clearly offensive to you, I’ll leave you alone.”

Janice felt like a first-class bitch. When Jagger stood up to leave, she grabbed his arm. “Jagger, I’m sorry. I guess I’m being a little narrow-minded.”

He raised one thick dark brow. “A little?”

“Okay, maybe a lot, but please try and see my side of it. Before my mom settled down with Marc, I had no idea vampires and other immortals existed, and what I knew of them, I

learned from watching horror movies. You can't expect me to change all my beliefs overnight."

He nodded. "I understand. Well, *milaya moya*. I shall turn in. It's getting late. Unlike the movies, I do sleep at night."

Before Janice could protest, he bent over her, grazing her cheek with his lips. "Goodnight, Janice." He was gone before she could respond.

Her hand flew to the spot his lips touched; her skin was on fire.

No! This couldn't be happening. She couldn't possibly start liking him now.

Chapter Three

Jagger tossed the covers off his body. He couldn't stay cool no matter what he tried. Already he had stripped away the last article of his clothing, but the heat was still unbearable. His cock, rock hard and throbbing, ached like never before. He needed Janice so badly, he didn't think he'd be able to stand it much longer.

Too afraid to resort to magic for fear it wouldn't do him any good, Jagger decided to take a cold shower. Sitting up, he listened for any movement in the house. Janice had gone to bed shortly after him.

He climbed out of bed, allowing his feet to touch the cool hardwood floor. His room was one of the few without its own bathroom, so he carefully made his way down the hallway and slid into the shower stall, turning the water to its coldest setting. He sighed with relief as the water brought down his temperature.

His cock, however, remained erect. Placing a hand against the wall, he grasped his dick, sliding his fist along the hard length. God, he hurt. Though the chilly water coupled with his masturbatory motions afforded him some release from his pain, Jagger suspected complete satisfaction would not come until he had some of Janice's sweet pussy. He bet it was tight and would fit snugly around his cock. He just knew it!

Jagger closed his eyes, groaning, imagining it was Janice's hand sliding along his swollen hardness. When he finally got a hold of her, he was going to eat her cunt like it was a buffet. He'd have her screaming and crying out his name until her throat was raw. Then he'd flip her over and take her from behind, slapping that luscious ass of hers as he pounded into her wet box. Maybe he'd tug her hair a bit, too.

Hopefully that moment would soon come but, first and foremost, he needed her pussy. Was she a virgin? Though he couldn't be hypocritical and expect purity in his partner when he'd done his fair share of running around, the very idea of being her first was infinitely pleasing. It didn't matter if she wasn't, however, because he would be her last lover.

Pumping his cock frantically, Jagger moved closer to his peak, reaching and clawing for it. He grunted and groaned, unable to hold back. "Janice," he whispered. If he concentrated hard enough, he could visualize her in the shower with him.

His love and passion for her only intensified the lust coursing through his body. Cum shot from his rod, spraying the shower stall, his body shuddering uncontrollably. His breathing was ragged. Resting his head on the wall, Jagger attempted to calm down when a knock fell on the bathroom door.

Janice. What did she want?

"Jagger, are you okay?"

A groan escaped his lips before he could stop it. "*Da*. I'm fine."

There was silence for a moment before she replied. "Are you sure? You sound as if you're in pain."

What the hell was she doing up anyway? "I'm fine. Please don't concern yourself with me," he managed to bite out. His incisors lowered and the cool water did nothing to ease the ache that had suddenly returned. Jagger knew he'd have to get rid of her or else he wouldn't be able to control what happened next.

"Well, if you need any help --"

“For God’s sake, woman, would you just go away!” Jagger hadn’t meant for his words to come out so harshly, but it was difficult to think when she stood just on the other side of the door. No response followed the sharp rejoinder. He’d apologize later, but for now he had to get himself under control. Why couldn’t he command his body? As much as he willed it, his teeth would not retract.

He’d have to resort to magic after all. Perhaps a winter spell would soothe him. Chanting to himself, Jagger closed his eyes visualizing cold weather. It took a few minutes before he felt the effects of the spell. “Ah, much better,” he sighed.

As his core body temperature lowered, he regained the control he’d temporarily lost. “If I don’t have her soon I don’t know what I’ll do.”

Turning off the shower, Jagger cursed when he noticed a thin sheet of ice on the bathroom floor. Icicles clung to the ceiling, yet he didn’t feel the chill as he should have. Standing as still as possible, he allowed himself to take in the effect of his surroundings for a few minutes before toweling himself dry.

Jagger wrapped the towel loosely around his waist, then stepped into the hallway. Heading back to his room, he became aware of someone watching him. He turned to see Janice with eyes wide and mouth ajar. She was obviously returning from downstairs. When he shifted, the towel fell to his feet. He stood before her in all his naked glory, unashamed of his body.

Janice couldn’t seem to tear her eyes away from him. His cock hardened and elongated. From the way she goggled at him, Jagger could tell she liked what she saw. The hungry gleam in her eyes said it all. She wanted him, but Jagger knew she’d fight her desire.

When moments passed, and she still didn’t move except to dampen her lips with her pretty pink tongue, Jagger realized he needed to put an end to the show -- leave her something to think about. Bending down, he picked up his towel and wrapped it around his waist again, tighter this time.

"I'm sorry to have woken you. I'll see you in the morning. Sleep tight." Turning on his heel, he strode back to his room and quickly closed the door behind him, a smile on his face. She wasn't indifferent to him, after all. A seed had been planted; he was one step closer to claiming his woman.

* * * * *

Janice had not been able to get to sleep after what she'd witnessed -- not that she had been sleeping well before she went downstairs to fix herself something to drink. But when she had walked down the hallway, she'd heard noises coming from the bathroom and decided to investigate, convincing herself that she was concerned instead of needing to see Jagger again.

Janice hadn't expected his gruff tone, however. Maybe he was taking her words to heart that there would never be anything between the two of them. He didn't have to be so nasty about it, though. She had shrugged it off, thinking she'd caught him at a bad time.

But another thought had also occurred to her. Those groans had sounded as though he were in pain. What if they weren't from an injury or illness, but pain from desire. Could it be he had been in there touching himself ... as he thought of her? Even wondering about it had made her shiver from the sheer carnality of it. She hadn't wanted to think about it, but couldn't make herself stop.

After having had her tea, Janice had had every intention of going back to bed, but seeing a very naked Jagger had sent her world spinning off its axis. Beautiful had never been a word she'd associated with the male form until she'd seen Jagger nude. Lean, but muscular, his pecs were toned, and his abs tight and ripped. A dusting of dark hair had covered his chest, and Janice couldn't have moved to save her life. Though she'd tried, Janice had also been unable to keep her gaze from straying below his waist.

Good Lord, he was long. So much for the stereotypes about white men being small. Not only was he blessed with length, his girth had been nothing to sneeze at either. If all the

Grimaldi men were so well endowed, it was no wonder her mother walked around with a perpetual smile on her face.

Janice's pussy had tingled in reaction to the sight of Jagger's nakedness, her nipples hardening. Common sense had told her to move, but her feet had stubbornly remained firmly planted on the floor. And his cock had been hard, of all things. What would it have been like to get her hand around that monster?

What the hell was wrong with her anyway? She had no business thinking along those lines. There was no room in her life for any man, and that was that. When she saw him again in the morning, she'd treat him cordially, but that was it. She'd pretend nothing had happened and she hadn't ogled him like a damned lecher. Janice could help wondering why she had reacted -- and continued to react to him -- the way she did.

He was part wizard. Had he cast a spell on her? It was the only logical explanation she could think of. Damn the man! Well, if he pulled that again, he'd soon learn her will was much stronger than any spell.

Sunlight streamed through her curtains, making her squint against the brightness. She should have been exhausted but surprisingly wasn't. How could she sleep when her mother was in labor?

Mom was in labor! Tearing out of the bed, Janice raced downstairs in only her nightshirt and panties to check any messages she may have missed during the night. Surely Mom would have had the baby by now? The machine revealed no calls had come in. Had something gone wrong?

"That's a mighty ferocious frown you're wearing."

The voice startled Janice out of her musings. Her first instinct was to lash out, but she reminded herself to take things easy. *Don't let him get under your skin, girl.* Janice was relieved he wore clothing this morning.

"I'm worried about my mother. No one called."

"It takes a little longer to birth a vampire child because of how draining it is to both the mother's body and the baby."

"Wouldn't it be easier for a vampire? I'd suspect it would be because immortals don't die."

"Immortals do die, just not by natural causes. And I didn't say she would die, just that it is a physically tasking experience for the mother. Vampire babies need to feed constantly once they're formed in the womb, not just on the nutrients the mother ingests, but on her blood. Once your mother gives birth, the baby must have first blood, usually from the mother and usually quite a lot, from my understanding. Sometimes the baby can take enough blood to put the mother into a light coma-like sleep for several hours. It depends."

Janice tried not to wince as she imagined a baby with fangs sucking on her mother's neck. "Ew."

"It's okay. It's supposed to be a beautiful experience."

Janice crinkled her nose. "Well, if that's the case, I'm glad I'm not at the hospital. I suppose you drained your poor mom dry, didn't you?"

"Actually, I didn't. I'm half wizard remember? Though first blood was necessary for me, I didn't have my first taste until this year." The way he stared at her, he seemed to be saying, "And now I want some of yours."

She backed away, the uneasiness returning when her body throbbed. "Look, I know what you're up to, so don't think you can put your hoodoo voodoo crap on me."

An amused smile tilted the corners of his sensual lips. "What are you talking about, *milaya moya?*"

"You know what I'm talking about, and what the hell do you keep calling me?"

"If I knew what you were talking about, I wouldn't be asking you ... my sweet. That's what I've been calling you. Would you prefer to hear it in English more often? Although I

must say English isn't nearly as passionate or hot blooded as Russian. Such a cold language, English."

"No," she whispered. Why couldn't she tear her eyes away from his mouth?

"No, you wouldn't prefer me to speak in English?"

"No. I would prefer you didn't speak to me at all; barring that, I wish you'd keep your endearments to yourself."

"I can't help how I feel."

"Try," she snapped, backing away from him even more.

"I know what your problem is."

"My problem?" The guy had a huge set of balls. The nerve of him to tell *her* she had a problem.

"*Da*. Your problem. Last night you enjoyed watching me." He stalked toward her like a lazy jungle cat, his intense amber gaze holding her mesmerized. Her muscles stiffened and locked as Jagger stopped in front of her. "And you know what?"

Janice shook her head, not trusting herself to speak.

"I enjoyed you watching me. This is what you do to my body whenever you're near." Taking her hand in his, he slid it down the length of his torso, letting her fingers glide over his solid abdomen. Janice tried to pull her hand away when he pushed it lower, but Jagger's grip tightened. His gaze never left her face, the intensity of his stare making her quiver. Janice gasped when her hand encountered the hard bulge in his pants.

"It's okay. *Milaya moya*. Touch me. I know you want to."

She should have walked away right then and there, but she found she could do nothing but explore the outline line his cock made against his jeans.

"It's so large," she whispered more to herself than him. Janice didn't miss the sharp intake of breath Jagger made.

“You drive me crazy, woman. I have dreamed of you touching me this way and of this.” He captured her face between his hands, bringing their lips together. This was the kiss she'd fantasized about all last night. She hesitated for the briefest moment before she twined her arms around his neck, pushing her body against his.

A stirring in her pussy like never before sent heat waves of delight through her body. When his tongue thrust past her lips, Janice thought she'd lose her mind. His taste was raw, wild, and so very male. He dominated the embrace, seeking and conquering, sweeping over every recess of her mouth. Janice's breasts puckered against the hard wall of his chest. She could never have imagined that the simple touch of their lips crushed against each other could elicit such burning desire.

Before she realized what was happening, Jagger lifted her and carried her to the kitchen table, their mouths never parting. She had no idea what he had in mind, nor did she care. She was completely and utterly lost. Emboldened, her own tongue slid out tentatively, meeting his, but Jagger seemed to have other ideas.

He pushed her back on the table until she rested on her elbows, then dropped to his knees in front of her -- but not before revealing glowing amber eyes. Janice should have been frightened, but she was so dazed with lust, it didn't quite register. “What are you going to do?” Was that her voice? That breathy whisper of a woman in the throes of passion?

“I'm going to do something I've been dying to do since I laid eyes on you.” Pulling her knees apart and shoving her shirt out of the way, Jagger buried his head between her thighs, inhaling her scent. “You smell so good. The aroma of your sweet pussy has been driving me wild.” Gripping the top of her panties with both hands, he ripped them off as if the material were tissue paper instead of the sturdy cotton it was actually made of. Then he placed them in his back pocket.

“You're not going to get them back, not that they'd provide you with much coverage now. Do you know what I plan on doing with them?”

Janice shook her head mutely.

“When I touch myself again, I’m going to hold your cream-smearred panties in my hand until I come, but right now, I’m going to suck your cunt.” Holding her thighs, he pushed them further apart and did exactly what he’d promised. Eager lips clamped on to her labia, sucking them, and the pressure of flesh being pushed together by his hands sent fire licking along every single nerve ending in her body. Janice’s fingers dug into his thick, dark hair.

“Oh, Jagger! Lick it!” she cried out, wanton bursts of passion taking over. Common sense had long since flown out into the wind. Right now all she could think about was how good his mouth felt on her hot sex. If she had to look more closely at what he was doing to her -- in the middle of the kitchen on the table no less -- she knew she’d be mortified.

Using his middle finger, Jagger parted her dewy channel and eased the finger into her as far as it could go.

“You’re so wet for me, just as I knew you would be.” His finger slipped in, then pulled out just to the tip, before it shoved back into her. Her grip tightened in his silky hair. How had she lived this long without experiencing such pleasure? Maybe she’d known all along that he could bring her to this pass, which was why she’d been avoiding him. The delicious things he was doing to her had to be a sin. Yet it wasn’t enough. She wanted more.

Jagger’s tongue ran along her slit. Janice’s juices already wet her thighs with her need of him. He removed his digit only to replace it with his tongue, thrusting in and out of her, reaching deeper than she suspected most tongues could go. Grinding her pussy against his questing mouth, she rode his face.

Jagger rolled her clit between his thumb and forefinger, creating just enough pressure to send a tingling sensation up her spine. He continued to fuck her with his tongue, showing no mercy.

The boy she'd lost her virginity to had never come close to making her feel this way. In fact, the entire experience had left her wondering if she was frigid. Now there was no doubt in her mind she was not. What had Jagger done to her?

The thought didn't linger long before what felt like an explosion ripped right through her. It slammed her down on the table, her arms too weak to brace her. This didn't make him stop, however. If anything, he focused on her pussy with even more ferocity. He licked and slurped at the gush of wetness her orgasm had produced.

"Jagger, oh, my God! I can't take any more!"

He looked up with a growl. "This cunt belongs to me. Don't stop me while I'm feasting." His eyes were glowing again, and she saw that his fangs were out. Janice tried to pull away from him, but the grip he had on her thighs kept her immobile.

A prick on her thigh raised her panic level. *Dear Lord, he just bit me. He's drinking my blood! Holy shit!* The harder she struggled, the tighter his hold became -- but the truly scary part was that the more blood he sucked from her thigh, the more she began to enjoy it. A new sensation hit her, one she shouldn't have liked but did. Too much.

Her pussy clenched again as though ready for more of his skillful ministrations. When Jagger finally lifted his head, he licked away the blood that stained his teeth and lips. "That was just a sample of what's to come."

He finally relaxed his grip on her, and she used that opportunity to escape, sliding off the table and racing out of the kitchen. She didn't stop running until she made it to her room, where she made sure the door was locked before she crumpled onto the floor in a sobbing heap. How could she have let it happen? His spell or whatever he'd done to her was too strong and now she'd been bitten.

He'd made her a vampire whore.

Moments later there was a knock on her door.

"Go away!"

“Janice, there is nothing to be ashamed of. What just happened was inevitable.” Jagger sounded patiently understanding.

“Don’t you have the decency to leave me alone? I hate you!”

His soft chuckle pissed her off. She wanted to wring his neck. “We both know that isn’t true. What just happened between us proved that.”

“You-you put a spell on me. You made me do those things.”

“Janice, I can do many things, but I’m not yet powerful enough as a wizard or vampire to force anyone to do something against their will. But even if I could, *milaya moya*, I wouldn’t do that to you. You’re just going to have to come to terms with the fact that you want me, too, but I digress. This isn’t the reason I’ve come up here.”

“Then why did you?”

“I just received a call from Uncle Marco.”

Janice sat up. “The baby?”

“Yes. The baby has finally arrived. You have a little sister.”

Chapter Four

“How are you, kiddo?”

Jagger went into his uncle's embrace. The arrival of his Uncle Romeo and his family had eased the tension in the house. Janice had been avoiding him ever since their lovemaking session. Besides the joy she had expressed at the new arrival of her sister, she hadn't had much to say to Jagger, choosing to hole herself in her room with her cell phone.

“Uncle Romeo, it's good to see you as well, and you, too, Aunt Christine. You look lovely as always.” Jagger walked over to the petite fem standing by Romeo's side, giving her a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“You're a charmer, just like the rest of the Grimaldi men. How have you been, Jagger?”

“I've been good, but I hear you've been even better. And these two scamps must be Jamal and Adrienne. They're both as adorable as everyone says they are.”

The little girl, whom he knew to be only three, was small for her age. She stuffed her thumb in her mouth while tugging on one of her long braids and stared at Jagger. Romeo lifted his daughter into his arms.

“Say hello to your cousin, *piccola*.” Adrienne shook her head before burying her face against her father's neck. Romeo stroked the child's hair and shot Jagger an apologetic look.

“She’s shy, especially around men. It’s a blessing that she took to me so well. Don’t worry, she’ll warm up to you once she gets to know you.” He turned to the boy beside him. “Jamal, say hello.”

The little boy looked Jagger up and down, intelligent hazel eyes seeming to sum him up. “Hello. Where are you from, mister?” Jamal finally asked. “You talk funny.”

“Jamal, it’s not nice to say things like that.” Christine’s voice was lightly scolding.

“But he does. You sound like that man on that cartoon. The one on *Boomerang*.” He looked up at his mother. “What was the name of that show we watched yesterday?”

Christine turned a bright shade of red. “Um, I think he’s talking about *Rocky and Bullwinkle*.”

“Ah. I’m not familiar with the cartoon.” Jagger couldn’t help being amused by the child’s straightforwardness.

The boy shrugged. “Oh. Well, it’s a really, really old cartoon, so I thought you might’ve seen it.”

Jagger chuckled. He liked this kid.

“I’m really sorry, Jagger,” Christine apologized, although she couldn’t quite hide the smile on her face.

Romeo turned his head away, looking as if he’d burst into laughter any minute. The older vampire seemed content, his happiness evident. Yes, it was quite obvious to Jagger that his Uncle Romeo loved his new family very much. They were a motley crew: an Italian father, Chinese mother, and two African-American children, yet somehow they all fit together. Jagger wanted happiness like that for himself. He vowed he’d have it with Janice.

As if he’d conjured her by his thoughts, she came trudging down the stairs with a big smile on her face and wearing a pink sundress, the perfect foil for her dark brown skin. She looked lovelier than ever. “Hi, Romeo.”

“How are you, brat?” Romeo grinned at her. “I’d hug you, but as you can see, my arms are full. Congratulations on your new little sister. It’s quite a feat that your mother actually had the daughter she wanted. Once word gets out, the immortal world will be abuzz. Female-born vampires are rare, and when they reach adulthood, very powerful. I’m sure Marco is strutting around like a peacock.”

“From what I can tell, he’s very happy. Very surprised maybe, but pleased,” Janice agreed.

“The message that the baby had arrived was on my cell phone when I got off the plane, but I wasn’t given any vitals. What is her name?”

Janice beamed. “Gianna Marie Grimaldi.”

Romeo smiled approvingly. “After Mama and Papa, I suppose.”

“They were your parents’ names?”

Romeo nodded his blond head. “Yes. Forms of them, at least. Mama’s name was Maria; Papa, Giovanni.”

Jagger frowned. “Isn’t that the name of --”

“Yes.” Romeo cut him off abruptly, obviously not wanting to discuss the problems his family faced. Jagger nodded in understanding.

Christine seemed to notice the sudden tension. “Well, I guess since no one is going to introduce us, I’ll have to do it myself. Janice, right?”

“I’m sorry, my love, but it is my right as your husband to do the introductions. Christine, this is the brat, otherwise known as Janice. Brat, this is the love of my life, Christine.”

Janice and Christine shook hands, smiling at Romeo’s words.

“And these two rugrats are my son and daughter, Jamal and Adrienne, two of the three reasons I’m happy to wake up each morning.”

“Aw, how sweet.” Janice sighed. Her eyes gleamed mischievously. “And I suppose they’re also the reason you no longer go barhopping.”

Romeo grinned at his wife. “I told you she was a brat.”

“Pee pee.” Adrienne spoke at last.

Christine held out her arms. “I’ll take her. Janice, would you be so kind as to show me where our rooms are?”

“Of course.”

Jagger watched Janice lead Christine and her daughter upstairs.

“Why don’t you join your mother and freshen up?” Romeo suggested to his son.

Jamal looked indignant. “But I want to hang with the men.”

“And you shall, little one, but you still have pancake syrup on your shirt from this morning’s breakfast. Don’t you want to change and look your best for when you meet the rest of the family and your new little cousin?”

The child tapped his chin as though trying to weigh his options. “What’s in it for me if I do?”

Romeo lifted a brow. “You won’t lose your Xbox privileges.”

“Oh. Well, I’ve given some thought to this and I think it would be a good idea if I do go freshen up.” The little boy raced up the stairs.

It was only when Jagger was sure the child was out of earshot that he burst into laughter. Romeo joined him.

“How old is your son?”

“He’s six going on forty. He’s sharp as a tack, isn’t he?”

“He is certainly that.”

“Jamal definitely keeps me and his mother on our toes.”

“You sound very proud of him.”

Romeo's smile widened. "Extremely. My children had a rough life prior to our adopting them. Their birth mother was a drug addict and they were brought up in an abusive home. Adrienne didn't even speak more than a few words until recently, but Jamal helps her with new words every day. That's my boy. He's already charming the ladies. I have a feeling he'll be beating the girls off with a stick, just like his papa."

Jagger grinned at that. His uncle's conquests were legendary. "And your daughter is precious. She'll have quite a few gentlemen friends of her own."

The smile disappeared from Romeo's face as swift as it had appeared. "The hell she will. Adrienne is never going to be allowed to date. If some punk comes sniffing around my little girl, I'll snap his damn neck."

Jagger could tell his uncle was serious and found the double standard Romeo displayed toward his children very funny. He wondered what Christine would have to say about it. "You really love them all, don't you?"

"More than you can ever know. I couldn't love them more if they were from my blood. I used to tease Marco and Nico about them settling down and beginning families, but now I know the joy of familial love. It is like nothing else, and I wouldn't trade my family for all the traveling, barhopping, hell raising, and pussy chasing in the world. I didn't really understand real happiness until Christine came into my life, and adopting the children has only enhanced what we have."

Jagger had never considered himself an envious man, but he found himself thinking again that he wished to experience the same type of love and relationship with Janice. Still, a comfortable silence fell between the men.

"Why don't you put up your feet? The plane ride from Boston must have been tiring."

"Yes, especially traveling with two restless children."

They went into the living room and took a seat on the sofa. Romeo turned to Jagger. "I hope you didn't take it amiss when I cut you off earlier. Christine is nervous enough with all

this *il Diavolo* business and I didn't want her agitated in front of the children." Jagger couldn't disagree about not openly discussing the rogue vampire who was behind the plot to exterminate the Grimaldi family. *Il Diavolo* had cause great suffering to Jagger's family. He had been responsible for murdering his uncle GianMarco's first wife and child, his uncle Dante's girlfriend, Jagger's maternal grandparents, and nearly Jagger himself.

Jagger's eldest uncle, Dante, was the founder and head of an organization they called the Underground, which Jagger had recently joined, that sought to eradicate the rogue threat. Finding *il Diavolo* -- and taking him and his minions out -- was now the Underground's biggest priority.

"Has Uncle Dante found out who Giovanni is? Is he really your brother?"

"It is certainly beginning to look that way to us, as does the case with Adonis. I feel a connection to both, although naturally it is not as strong as the bond I have with your father, Marco, and Dante. So many unanswered questions remain."

"Such as?"

"Giovanni called Dante and set up a meeting with him, but he didn't show. Christine won't listen to me, but I think her friend Nya is in league with him; I'm trying to figure out how. Nya came around to our house a couple of weeks ago to drop off gifts for the children, but when I tried to quiz her, she suddenly left. And then there's the witch, Dyannara, whom we know very little as well. Everything is very confusing, especially since that confrontation in Germany a few months ago. Right now, it might seem as though the entire situation has gone away, but I know it hasn't. This is only the calm before the storm. You mark my words, Jagger, the storm *is* coming and it's going to be a big one. It's just a matter of time and place."

* * * * *

Janice's heart filled with love when Marc placed baby Gianna in her arms. "She's gorgeous."

And she was. Janice ran a finger along Gianna's soft skin, which was a light gold with red undertones. She had chubby cheeks and a head full of curly sandy hair. Just then the baby opened her eyes with a wide yawn, revealing pink gums. Her eyes were still cloudy so her eye color wasn't evident yet, but Janice knew her sister would grow up to break many hearts whether her eyes turned out to be the dark brown of her mother's or the amber shade of her father's.

"Hey, pretty girl, I'm your big sister. It's a good thing you have me to teach you the ropes. You're going to need it in this family.

"Lord help us," Marc groaned, looking heavenward.

The crowd of family in the room erupted with laughter. Almost everyone was here, including Montana and Oliver, Marc's business partner. The only one missing was Dante, but Janice didn't dwell very long on his absence because she was too busy getting acquainted with Gianna. She lowered her face to the baby's head, inhaling that wonderful baby smell. Gianna gurgled.

"I think she likes me. This kid has taste."

Her brother, Dion, snorted. "I think it's just gas."

"Shut up, D. You're just jealous because she didn't open her eyes when you held her."

He rolled his eyes and chuckled. "Now I have two bratty little sisters. Life will certainly get interesting from here on out."

The baby crinkled her little nose and her mouth shaped itself as if to suck. "Uh oh. I think she's hungry." Just as the words left Janice's mouth, the Gianna let out a wail like nothing Janice had ever heard before. "The kid has a set of lungs on her, too." She reluctantly handed Gianna over to Marc.

"I think you're right." He nuzzled his tiny daughter. "Are you up to feeding her, Maggie?"

Her mother lay against the pillows looking exhausted, but content. “Yes, of course. Give her to me.”

When Marc brought the baby to her, the love between the couple was there for everyone to see. It was strong and tangible. “Maggie will need some privacy,” Marc announced.

Maggie smiled gratefully, then asked as the room began to clear, “Baby, would it be okay if I had a few words with Janice alone?”

“Of course, *ciccina*. I’ll be in the hallway if you should need me.” Marc leaned over the bed and planted a lingering kiss on his wife’s lips, and then one on Gianna’s cheek. He seemed reluctant to leave mother and daughter.

Once alone with her mother, Janice averted her eyes as her mother undid the fastening of her gown and offered Gianna a nipple. The baby latched on, sucking hungrily.

Janice giggled. “She’s a greedy little thing, isn’t she?”

“Just like her father. You would have thought I was dying, the way GianMarco carried on last night. He even threatened the doctor. But he was cute; he even cried when Gianna came.”

“Aren’t you thrilled she’s finally here?”

“I’m very happy, I feel like I’ve been pregnant forever. GianMarco and his brothers seem to think having a daughter was an amazing thing, practically a miracle. I think it was meant to be.”

“So was the labor rough?”

“A little. It has been twenty-two years since I last gave birth, after all, and Gianna weighed nine pounds. I think she probably got that from the Grimaldi side; you and Dion were both just shy of seven pounds.” She chuckled. “I think the hardest part was calming GianMarco down. I knew he was worried about me, but I didn’t expect to have a frantic husband hovering over me.”

"Daddy wasn't in the delivery room with you when we were born?"

Maggie shook her head. "He preferred to stay in the waiting room. I guess some people are just squeamish when it comes to childbirth."

"That's no excuse. Daddy was just being selfish as usual."

"Sweetheart, I wish you wouldn't talk about your father that way. No matter what, he's still your father."

"He doesn't act like it sometimes. I don't know how you put up with him for so long. You truly are a saint." She managed to tear her eyes away from her nursing sister. "So what did you want to talk to me about?"

"I didn't really have the chance to speak to you last night, obviously, so I wanted to do some catching up. How was your trip here? When GianMarco called the house, Jagger told him something about your car giving you trouble."

"I'll probably have to put a few hundred dollars into it for repairs again."

"Sweetheart, we've offered to buy you a new one. Who knows where you'll be when it breaks down next?"

"Mom, you know I can't let you do that."

"Why not? We can afford it; what's the point of having a lot of money if we can't spend it on our loved ones?" Maggie sighed. "You don't have to be so stubborn. I know you have a grand idea about being independent, but there's a difference between independence and foolish pride. I had to learn that lesson the hard way."

Janice sank in her chair. She hadn't been expecting a lecture. "Mom, do we have to get into this now?"

"I'm only bringing this up because I worry about you, baby. My fondest wish in life is seeing you, Dion, and now Gianna happy, but I don't want you to pattern your life based on my mistakes."

Janice laughed nervously. "I don't know what you're talking about."

“I think you do. Sweetheart, you’re not fooling anyone but yourself. What happened between your father and me is in the past. I moved on and found happiness far beyond anything I ever could have imagined. I’m not saying you need a man in your life to make you happy, because of course you don’t, but you shouldn’t judge all men based on your father.”

“Mom, it’s easier said than done when I watched you suffer everyday. I’ve tried to get past it, but deep down, I’m afraid.”

“Of what, honey?”

“Afraid of losing myself completely to a man and allowing him to take over who I am and what I stand for. I don’t like being this way, always looking at every man suspiciously, wondering at his motives. I wish I could be carefree and flirt with men like most of my girlfriends do. Maybe something is wrong with me.”

“I don’t think so. You’re like me in more ways than you know. You’ll love only one, but when you find that love, it will be forever.”

“Are you saying you never loved Daddy?”

“I thought I did, but having experienced the real thing, I finally realized that I loved the security I believed he provided. You know that I was in more foster homes than I can count; when Eugene came along, I truly believed he was my knight in shining armor. He certainly did everything to make me feel I could never do better. Looking back, I think his leaving me was probably the best thing that happened to me, because I found something very important.”

“True love?”

“That, too, but most importantly, I found myself. I also realized that I don’t have to lose a part of who I am again in order to be in a relationship. It can happen for you as well, honey. If you find that special someone who’ll treat you like gold, don’t be afraid to give him your heart, because he’ll nurture and cherish that love, not trample it. Believe me, I have that with GianMarco, and you don’t have to look any further than his brothers to see how

much they love their women. The Grimaldi men are strong and powerful, but they love deeply, passionately, and possessively.”

Janice suddenly had a suspicion that her mother had hidden motives for telling her all this. “Did Jagger put you up to this little chat?” she demanded.

Her mother raised that “Who do you think you’re talking to?” brow.

“Sorry,” Janice mumbled. “Well, did he?”

“No. Why did you think he would?”

“Because ... oh, never mind.”

Maggie gave her a knowing smile. “You like him, don’t you? He’s definitely a hunk.”

“Mom! I don’t like him!”

“Of course you don’t, dear. But I will caution you: don’t toy with his affections. He is a Grimaldi, after all, and they’re used to getting what they want.”

Chapter Five

That one taste had not been enough. In fact, it only intensified his need for her. Jagger was fast losing control over his body; the heat would not go away. The chilling spells no longer worked, masturbation only made things worse, and he felt as if he was losing his mind. The ache had become too intense for him to bear.

Something had to be done. He had tried to be patient, to give her space, but it hadn't helped. Whenever he walked into a room, she stalked out. Janice had even left the house for a couple of days to stay with her brother and Bryan, his lover, only returning when Uncle Marco and Aunt Maggie had brought the baby home from the hospital.

The family was gathered in the living room. His papa and Uncle Romeo were arguing over a chess match, the children were playing some sort of video game, and the women were cooing over the baby while his Uncle Marco played cards with Dion and Bryan. Jagger, however, sat on the patio deck chair outside the house, brooding and thinking of ways to ease the pain that had taken hold of him.

“A penny for your thoughts.”

Jagger smiled upon hearing his father's voice. "Your chess game is over so soon? The way you and Uncle Romeo were going at it, I imagined the two of you would be playing for hours to come."

"Romeo cheats. Besides, is it a crime that I should want to spend a little time with my son?"

"Not at all. I welcome your company. In fact, it will provide me with a distraction."

"Jagger, look at me." Niccolo's voice was a soft command.

When he looked in his father's direction, the older vampire gasped.

"What is it, Papa?"

"You face and your eyes. Don't go anywhere. I'll return shortly." In less than a minute, Niccolo was back, GianMarco and Sasha in tow.

"My baby!" his mother cried in alarm. She rushed to Jagger's side and cradled his head against her breast. "You're burning up! Niccolo, do something!"

Jagger pulled away from her and stood. "There's nothing you can do, Mama. Nothing anyone can do."

"How bad is it, Marco?" his father asked.

"From the look of him, I'm surprised he's been able to control his urges for this long. I vaguely remember what it was like, most of the time I could barely think straight, but Dante later told me that when I'd gotten to this point, my mind was no longer my own." His uncle studied him closely. "What's probably sustained him so long is his wizard side. *Dio*, I wish Dante was here. He'd know what to do." There was pain in those words. Jagger's heart went out to his Uncle Marco, who seemed to be taking Uncle Dante's absence the hardest.

"You spoke to him last, Marco, when did he say he'd arrive?"

Jagger knew everyone wanted to know where his uncle was, but this was the first time the question had been openly asked.

Marco shrugged at his Niccolo. "Your guess is just as good as mine." The tightness in his voice said it all. The topic was no longer up for discussion.

"There's only one way to fix this. GianMarco, can't you speak to Janice?" Jagger's mother pleaded. "I know its wrong for me to ask, but look at my baby. He's in so much pain. I can feel it from where I stand."

"No, Mama. Don't. I will not have her come to me out of pity. If she does help, it has to be of her own free will."

"But you're suffering!"

"Then I'll suffer. I love her far too much to coerce her. My only option is to leave."

"You can't go anywhere looking like that. Your face is distorted and your eyes are off color. It won't be long before your incisors lengthen and won't retract."

Jagger laughed without humor at his uncle's words. "Then perhaps people will think I'm wearing a Halloween costume; it is nearly that time, after all. I can't stick around, Uncle GianMarco. Perhaps you'll let me borrow one of your vehicles so I can leave tonight."

"Of course, Jagger, although I'm sorry you have been brought to this."

"Why won't you speak to Janice? This is a family! Are we not supposed to help each other in our time of need?" Sasha's voice rose to near hysterics.

Niccolo pulled his mate into his arms and rocked her. "Sweetheart, I hurt for our son as well, but Marco is in a precarious situation. Janice is his stepdaughter and falls under his protection. His first duty lies with his wife and their immediate family unit, just as you and Jagger are my first priority. This has to be Jagger's decision. I wish he could stay, but having him and Janice in such close proximity will only spur him to *la morte dolci* faster than ever."

"And what will he do when he's in full *la morte dolci*? Are we just going to allow him to suffer needlessly?" The helpless look in his mother's eyes tore at Jagger. He wanted to reassure her that everything would be fine, but he couldn't.

"I'll figure something out, Mama. I could contact Uncle Blade; his powers are strong enough that he may be able to ease the pain I feel."

GianMarco shook his head. "Not even the most powerful wizard can hold off *la morte dolci*. You will suffer no matter what, but he might be able to prevent you from harming yourself or anyone else."

"Is it possible I will ... I mean, will my mind no longer be my own?"

"It is likely. Listen, I can talk to Janice, but I won't sway her one way or the other."

"No. I can't have you do that, uncle. I'll start packing right away and leave once everyone is in bed." Jagger embraced his sobbing mother. "It's okay, Mama. Things will work out, you'll see."

"How will everything be okay when it's possible I'll lose you? When I see you again, you might not recognize who I am. I've lost you once before -- I don't think I can bear it again." Sasha wept, wetting his shirt with her tears.

"Mama, please don't cry. You will never lose me here." Jagger pointed to her heart, then caught a faint movement from the corner of his eyes. Someone had been watching them from inside the house. Could it have been ...? No. His imagination was running rampant, which didn't bode well for his future mental state.

Jagger rocked his mother as she clung tightly to him. He met his father's gaze and saw sadness there. Suddenly, he felt like crying himself for what would never be.

* * * * *

The house was finally silent. Janice tried to gather up the courage she needed to fulfill her plan. "You can do this. It will just be one night." Taking a deep breath, she carefully opened her bedroom door, wincing when it made a loud creak. Closing it behind her, she tiptoed down the hallway to her destination. Not bothering to knock, she twisted the knob and slipped through the door into the dark room. In the shadows, Jagger was haphazardly

throwing what appeared to be last-minute items into an overnight bag; he was leaving just as he said he would.

His head shot up. She nearly lost her nerve when she found herself staring into glowing eyes. She couldn't make out his features but thought he was probably surprised to see her in his bedroom.

"What are you doing here?" he growled. Jagger's voice sounded deeper, gruffer, and more guttural. She could hear the pain in his words and tone.

"I think you know why I came."

"Do I? Look, Janice, it's not safe for you to be here and, frankly, I'm not in the mood for games."

"Who said I'm playing games? I want to help you."

"So it was you earlier. How much did you hear?"

"I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but when I passed the patio door, it was slightly open. I heard my name and couldn't help but listen to your conversation."

"So you're graciously offering your body to me?"

A lump that felt like the size of a golf ball formed in her throat. Her body did call to him. For days, she'd been avoiding him, trying not to remember the heady sensations she'd experienced in his arms. Janice desperately wanted to forget how his hands had felt on her body, how his mouth had devoured her pussy. But she couldn't.

Each night, she'd lain awake with carnal thoughts of the two of them. She hadn't been able to help wondering what might have happened had they gone further. Images of his large shaft sliding into her nearly made it impossible for her to think of anything else. Then to hear of his struggles had sent guilt crashing to her very core. But she had experienced a new emotion, too.

That she could drive him to such a state filled her with such a sense of empowerment that she felt high. This strong vampwiz wanted her to the point of madness. Knowing what

he was going through and hearing his sacrifice on her behalf had given Janice the courage to admit to herself at last that she wanted him, too.

He'd shown he could fulfill her desire; once wasn't nearly enough. "Yes," she finally answered.

He remained silent, the only sound his ragged breathing, deep and shallow. For a moment, she thought he wouldn't speak at all.

"Jagger?" She felt uncertain; she'd been so sure he'd jump at her offer, but he was acting as if he didn't want her.

"While I appreciate your willingness to surrender your delectable body, I'll have to decline."

"What?"

"I don't want or desire a little girl in my bed who thinks she's doing me a favor by coming to me. I need a willing woman who wants to be here."

She felt heat surface on her face. "I *am* here because I want to be."

"After ignoring me these past few days?"

"I had a lot of thinking to do."

"So now you're ready to be thoroughly fucked?"

Janice gulped. What had she gotten herself in to? "If-if that's what you want."

"Oh, you have no idea what I want. The question is, are you willing to give it to me?" Before she could respond, Jagger stood in front of her as if he'd teleported across the room. She took a step away from him, but Jagger followed until her back touched the door.

Janice tried not to tremble when his hand spanned her throat, his thumb grazing her pulse. "I'm here, aren't I?"

"Yes, you are, indeed. But you never answered my question. Will you let me do whatever I want to you?"

Janice nodded, her voice caught in her throat, her heart pounding rapidly.

“Will you let me finger your clit while my tongue slides in and out of your hot hole? What about if my tongue glides along the crack of that luscious ass of yours, tasting you there?”

She licked her lips. “I’ve never let anyone do that to me before but, yes, I’d let you do those things to me.” Just thinking about them sent shivers of anticipation up her spine.

“Will you let me fuck you until you can’t take anymore, even when you’ve already come over and over again?”

“Yes,” she whispered, her heart speeding up with each sinful image that popped into her head.

“What about letting me fuck your mouth? I can see it now, me sliding my cock between your soft lips while my fingers dig into your hair. Your lips would be wrapped around my erection nearly as tight as your pussy. I saw the way you looked at my body, and I know you want to taste me, too.”

“I do. Oh, God, I do.” Janice turned her head away, unable to meet those glowing eyes.

“And your ass? Will you let me fuck it, too? Because if you stay, I will. I want to be inside all your holes, with my fingers, my mouth, and my cock -- all over you.”

Janice stubborn streak appeared. How could she walk away when her panties were wet, her breasts tight, and her body on fire? “You’re not going to scare me into leaving, Jagger.”

With a snap of his fingers, the lights turned on. She bit down on her bottom lip to stop the scream forming in her throat from escaping.

“How about now, Janice? Do you still want me now when I look like this?” Jagger’s eyes were completely red, no pupils evident as though he were wearing novelty contact lenses. His eyebrows were raised in almost a caricature-like distortion, and his fangs were out and menacing. All this, coupled with his flared nostrils, reminded her of the very monster she’d been afraid of, but instead of fleeing, compassion filled her heart.

What he must have suffered and undergone touched her deeply. She reached out and caressed the side of his face. This was obviously not the reaction he'd expected given the baffled expression in his eyes.

"Why aren't you running away?"

"Because I did this to you. Because you hurt on my behalf. Let me make it better." Standing on the tip of her toes, she kissed him where his neck and shoulder met. The contact nearly burned her lips, but she didn't pull away. With trembling fingers, she started to unbutton his shirt.

"Janice," he growled. "This is your final warning. If you stay, I'm going to take you, and I won't be gentle."

"It's okay. I'm yours, however you want me." She opened his shirt to reveal the hair-roughened expanse of his chest, then pressed a kiss against the flat disk of his nipple.

"Janice."

She could tell he was struggling to hold on to his control, but she didn't want him to. His fists opened and closed. "Why suffer when you don't need to?" she whispered, then circled the now-taut peak with her tongue, his musky male flavor adding a tinge of piquancy to her taste buds.

"I don't want your pity, Janice."

"Does this feel like pity?" Boldly, she cupped her hand between his legs, giving the bulge she found there a light squeeze. With a barely surprised roar, Jagger grabbed her hand, yanking it from his body before he lifted her and strode the short distance to the bed. He dropped her in the center none too gently.

"You're damned right you've driven me to this, Janice, and you're going to get what you've been denying both of us." With each word, he tore at his clothing, exposing his chiseled body to her hungry gaze. "You'd better take off your clothes or they'll be nothing but confetti once I get my hands on them."

His warning sent her into action. Hurriedly, she pulled the nightshirt over her head. Janice felt another blush sweep her cheeks when she revealed her nakedness to him. Jagger looked slightly disappointed. “No panties? Pity. I was looking forward to ripping them off again.”

Janice had never been completely nude with anyone before and covered her breasts, feeling shy abruptly. Even the one time she’d had sex, her partner had merely removed her underwear and raised her skirt.

“Drop your hands, *milaya moya*. Perfection such as these should not be hidden in my presence.” She did as he said. Her breasts were small, but well formed, crowned with large, tight nipples that were so dark, they appeared black. She had such lovely skin, and he enjoyed touching her. He’d wanted her for so long, he could hardly believe he was finally going to have her.

Janice didn’t have a chance to react before he sprang onto the bed, covering her body with his. Jagger was hot, more so than any living thing should have been. Instead of kissing her mouth as she thought he would, he placed frantic kisses over her face and neck, then slid down her body.

She gasped when his incisors grazed her throat, breaking the skin, but it didn’t stop the delectable sensations forming throughout her body. His hands were everywhere, her breasts, stomach, thighs, and pussy. Janice squirmed beneath him, eager to for more than just kisses. She’d come to his room with every intention of offering the relief he needed, but she wanted this just as much as he did. Janice couldn’t believe she had fooled herself into believing she could stay away from him.

“Jagger, please,” she begged, not quite sure what she was asking for.

He spread her legs roughly; he’d told her he would, but it still surprised her. Despite the fact she’d gone out of her way to avoid him, Janice had come to learn Jagger was a good man. He played with the children, giving them piggyback rides, and seemed genuinely

interested in what they had to say. He was affectionate with his parents. It was apparent that he cared about all his family. And he had often brought a smile to her face in spite of herself. But this was not her gentle-but-insistent vampire. This Jagger was hungry -- and the only sustenance he appeared to want was her.

His fingers dug into her thighs as he rested his head between them. "Ah, I'll take that little girl comment back. This is most definitely a woman's cunt, so wet and ready to be licked, sucked, and fucked. Ready for my mouth and cock. Don't ever shave it." Lowering his head, he parted her labia with his tongue before clamping down on her clit.

"Oh, Jagger," she cried out before realizing how loud she'd been. She bit her lower lip, not wanting to wake the rest of the house. He suckled on the throbbing bundle of nerves, making her writhe uncontrollably beneath him. She gripped his shoulders, her nails biting into his hot flesh. When Jagger slid a finger into her, Janice thought she'd go insane.

Bucking her hips, she ground against him, unable to handle the torturous bliss of his mouth. Jagger continued to suckle, unheeding of her movements, slipping yet another finger into her slick channel. He twisted and thrust his digits into her with skilled precision.

"Jagger." She moaned his name as loudly as she dared.

He lifted his head then, eyes still blood red. "Don't be afraid to call out my name."

"But the others ..."

"Uncle Marco has recently soundproofed the bedrooms, so what we're doing can't be heard by human ears. But what do you think is going on in nearly every bedroom right now, Janice? At this very moment, my mama and papa are calling out each other's names in their passion for each other. Uncle Romeo and Christine are doing the same. Even your mother and Uncle Marco --"

"Stop. Don't say any more."

"It is the truth. We are a passionate lot. Give over to your desire for me. Scream my name as loudly as you want." Lowering his face between her legs again, he lapped at her

pussy with long, broad strokes, the actions sending torrents of pleasure throughout her sensitized body.

“Jagger!” she shrieked. “Oh, God, Jagger!”

Chapter Six

The more he tasted of her, the more Jagger wanted. No matter what he did, he couldn't get enough of Janice. The sweet cream of her cunt flowed freely, and he drank every bit that escaped from her wet channel. He had to be inside of her now, but Jagger had just enough sanity left to know that if he took her as he wanted, he'd hurt her.

Gliding up the length of her body, his mouth covered hers. She met the thrust of his tongue, hers joining his in a sensual dance as old as time. The blood lust within Jagger drove him to gently nip her tongue. She gasped, trying to pull it back, but his strong lips captured it, and he drew it further into his mouth.

Jagger wanted more of her blood. Releasing her tongue, he caught her lower lip.

"Jagger, what are you doing to me?"

He couldn't stop himself even if he wanted to. He bit and sucked, then licked. Unable to hold off any longer, he rolled onto his back, bringing Janice on top of him. "Straddle me, *milaya moya*."

She hesitated for only a moment, then did as she was told.

"You're going to ride my cock, and while my staff is inside your cunt, I want you to lean over while I feast on your nipples."

Janice shivered in reaction to his words; her lust-glazed eyes proved she wanted this as much as he did. She looked so beautiful hovering over him, her lips swollen from his kisses. Jagger was afraid he'd wake and this would all just be a dream.

"Take my cock in your hand."

She ran her tongue over his lips and wrapped slender fingers around his erection. The contact on his engorged flesh sent electric charges surging through him. He caught her by the waist, lifting her until her pussy was positioned over the helmet of his cock.

"Spread yourself for me with your other hand; open your cunt for my cock."

She looked uncertain for a moment. "You're so big. I don't know if I ..."

"You will take every inch of me. You are my woman, and you'll get used to my size, because I plan on partaking of your sweet pussy and tight ass as often as possible. Now, part yourself. This is what you wanted to do. Your cunt is already wet and ready for me."

Janice spread her labia. Only then did he lower her, congratulating himself on his rigid control. When his cock head made it inside her channel, it took everything in him not to spear right into her.

"Oh, God! It's-I've never been stretched like this before."

"Relax. Just let go, and feel me." He lowered her further, gritting his teeth with pleasure. Goddamn, she was incredibly tight.

Janice wiggled as if trying to adjust herself to him, and that was Jagger's undoing. He brought her down fully on his dick.

She let out an agonized scream. "Let me off!" She tried to move, but he held her firmly against him. Her pussy fit around him like a wet velvet glove.

"I can't." He groaned at the exquisite agony, knowing he couldn't move or he'd cause her further discomfort.

Tears appeared in her eyes. "It feel like you're tearing me apart."

“Relax, *milaya moya*. Your body is tense. Let it accustom itself to my cock. Yes ... that’s it. I promise I won’t move until you tell me otherwise, but please don’t make me wait too long. I burn for you, ache for you.”

She looked unsure.

“Trust me.” He lowered one hand to find the dewy pearl between her thighs. Janice inhaled sharply as his finger slid along her slit.

“Do you like this?”

She nodded.

“Good, because I like doing it to you. I love the way you’re so tight and slick for me. Your pussy took every inch of me, didn’t it?”

“Yes, but I didn’t think it would.” Her whisper was breathy.

“Yet it did. You should have believed me when I said your body was made exclusively for mine.” He stroked her throbbing clit with each word. “I’ve never seen such a tempting sight as your lovely dark body, so perfect in form just waiting for my kisses and caresses.”

Janice placed her hand against his chest, trembling violently. He knew she was turned on again. The very heat emanating from her pussy was enough to set them both on fire.

“Tell me how much you want this.”

“I do.”

“Say the words!” he roared, squeezing her clitoris with enough pressure to make her gasp, but not enough to cause pain.

“I want you. Please take me now. I need you, Jagger!”

“Tell me how much you want to be fucked. Tell me you love my cock in your pussy.”

“Fuck me, Jagger! Do it now! I don’t think I can stand it any longer; I need you.” She groaned almost as if she were the one in agony. He smiled then, knowing how sinister and smug he must appear. She turned her head away, looking slightly ashamed.

“Look at me, *milaya moya*.” Janice faced him until their eyes met once again. “We are doing nothing wrong. This is something we both want. Let me show you how good it can be between us.”

Holding her by the waist once more, Jagger raised her, her pussy sliding along his hardened shaft, causing them both to moan at the titillating sensation. Then he lifted his hips and thrust deeply into her, holding her still as he moved. This gave him a chance to study the expressions on her face. Her lips were slightly parted now and her eyes gleamed with passion.

She dug her fingernails into his chest, her breast jiggling back and forth with each thrust. “Oh, Jagger, this feels so good. I never thought I could be filled like this. I doubt any other man will ever measure up to you.”

At the mention of other men, a feral need to show Janice just who she belonged to took over. “There will be no other men after me!” And to underscore his point, he drove deeper, harder, and faster into her tight hole, branding her his. Janice’s cries of wanton abandonment greeted his ears.

His!

Janice was all his!

She belonged only to him!

Jagger shifted positions, sitting up so that they could now face each other. She wrapped her legs around his waist at his command. His hunger for her drove Jagger to the brink of madness. Leaning forward, he captured a hard nipple in his mouth, sucking and nibbling on it, savoring the heady flavor of her skin.

“Jagger!” She screamed, clawing at his back. “I’m going to come!”

Releasing the taut tip with a pop, he pumped harder than ever, his own peak near. “Don’t hold back. Don’t ever hold anything back from me.” Her breast looked far too tempting to not taste. He sank his teeth on the side of the plump flesh. Janice buried her face

into his neck, her fingers digging into his skin, and her pussy muscles clenching tighter around his member. His orgasm came with an earth-shattering jolt.

Janice reached her climax almost simultaneously, her body shaking and more delicious cream spilling from between her thighs. The coppery sweet flow of her blood in his mouth heightened the sensation of their climaxes. Lifting his mouth, Jagger felt his incisors retract and the heat he'd been suffering was abruptly gone. But his need for her had not lessened.

Lying on his back again, Jagger lifted Janice off his cum-soaked shaft and pulled her up the length of his body until her cunt rested just over his lips, their mingling juices dribbling from her pussy.

"Jagger no! We just --"

"Just fucked? Do you think the taste of you and me mixed so lovingly together disgusts me? No, *milaya moya*, this is one way my kind feeds, and I'm going to do it now, just like this."

Janice covered her face. "But it ..." Her words trailed off when he brought her pussy down on his mouth. Their mingled juices excited him. Loving her this way had been a fantasy of his since he'd first seen her. He shot his tongue inside her channel. Janice wiggled and squirmed, groaning.

"Jagger, you're driving me crazy." He knew it was true; her body told him so. Never had he been with someone so responsive to him. Jagger sucked and licked her until she writhed like a wild woman. He didn't stop until the warm gush of her desire filled his mouth again.

He drank her essence, making him stronger than ever before. Janice moaned and sighed, arching her back and offering even more of herself to him. Only when he had taken what he needed did he move her off his face and lay her on the bed.

Janice looked at him her eyes filled with wonder and an emotion he couldn't quite make out, although he hoped it was the one he wanted it to be. She touched his cheek. "Your face is back to normal," she whispered.

"You've helped me through the worst of my suffering, but don't think I'll let you get away so easily from me."

"I didn't know it could be like this. I believed I was incapable of experiencing the things I felt with you."

Jagger stroked the damp hair plastered to her forehead. "That should tell you we are meant to be together. Get some rest, *milaya moya*, because you're going to need it."

* * * * *

Janice was having the most delicious dream. She lay on the beach under the warmth of the sun, her body naked against its heated rays. Butterflies flitted across her face, tickling her skin, still slightly damp from a swim in the ocean. Her pussy tingled. Something nudged her thighs apart and heat invaded her body.

She opened her eyes to discover she hadn't been dreaming at all. The warmth she'd felt was Jagger's body on top of her, moving deep inside of her. She sighed at the decadent sensations surging through her. A lazy smile tugged the corners of her lips as she wrapped her arms around his neck, her hips lifting to meet his thrusts.

"Mmm, what an interesting way to wake up."

"I thought you'd never open your eyes. You sleep like the dead. I've been playing with your gorgeous body for what seems like hours."

"It couldn't have been that long. It's still dark out."

"Okay, maybe a few minutes, but every second without you is an eternity to me."

Janice felt a twinge in her heart. No one had ever said anything so touching to her before, but he wasn't supposed to penetrate anything but her body. She'd come to him with

the intention of easing his pain and had planned to walk away; she hadn't expected her feelings to get involved. But maybe her emotions had been caught the entire time, and she was only now realizing it.

Janice didn't want to care about him, but perhaps Jagger had been right all along. Maybe it had been inevitable they'd be together. From the moment she'd first met him, Janice had thought he'd been pushing her too hard, but that had been just an excuse to shy away from him. She must have recognized a potential soul mate in him and panicked.

His cock pulsed within her now, the hard wall of his chest crushing her breasts. No more words were needed as they ground, slid, and moved together. Janice's arms tightened around him when they both climbed the heights of ecstasy to their mutual satisfaction. Their mouths melded together; the kiss was hot, hungry and needy. She could still taste the two of them on his tongue.

Janice pressed closer to him. She wanted this man so much she didn't know how to handle it. When Jagger finally lifted his head, Janice could hardly catch her breath.

"Janice, I need you again."

She giggled at his lustiness. "Already? You want more?"

"You know a few times with you will simply not do for me. Remember when I said I wanted your ass?"

She shuddered, nervousness getting the better of her. "I ..."

Amber eyes twinkled with amusement. "Weren't you the one who promised I could have you any way I wanted? You are many things, *milaya moya*, but I never thought a coward was one of them. Who would have thought a little ass play would frighten you so."

"Coward! Me? I am not a coward. Wouldn't any woman be nervous at the threat of your humongous penis?"

"My size is not so great."

Was he kidding? “According to whom? The Jolly Green Giant? That thing should have its own ZIP code.”

Jagger chuckled. “You had no problem riding it earlier.”

“After a lot of adjusting.”

“What happened to my brave little spitfire? Are you going to go back on your word?”

“I didn’t say that, either.”

“Prove it.”

She’d never been one to turn down a challenge. Janice’s eyes narrowed slightly with determination. “How do you want me?”

“On your hands and knees.” Jagger rolled away from her, giving her the opportunity to move into the position he wanted her. He shifted behind her, grasping her hips, and she trembled with fear, thinking she must be crazy to go through with this. Never in a million years would Janice have thought she’d be having anal sex, but she wasn’t foolish enough to believe curiosity didn’t play a part in this. He’d made her feel good in so many other ways, why not this one?

“Janice, for this to be an enjoyable experience for you, you’ll need to completely relax,” he commanded in an soft whisper.

She took deep breaths, trying to do exactly that. “Don’t you need ... I mean, you will use lube, won’t you?”

“Yes, only the best kind.” He reached between her legs and eased two fingers inside her pussy. Janice quivered as an instant surge of passion sped through her. Jagger slid those digits in and out of her several strokes, then pulled them out.

Her gently spread her cheeks and rubbed those dew-slicked fingers across her puckered hole. Janice resisted the urge to flinch, or at the very least clench her buttocks tight. Jagger soothed her, whispering in Russian. His ministrations began to elicit the heat she’d felt earlier.

She cried out when his fingers slipped past her tight ring.

"Easy, my love. Easy."

"I'm not sure if I like this," she said honestly when he was knuckle deep.

"Give it a chance; it's all I ask."

Janice relaxed as best as she could, allowing him to finger her ass. Jagger took things slow. At last, she began to feel the old familiar stirrings of lust. He must have hit a certain spot, because she shuddered with delight.

"That's it, my love," he crooned encouragingly.

She soon found herself pushing against his steadily moving digits.

Jagger leaned over and kissed the nape of her neck. "Do you like this?"

"Yes."

"Are you ready for my cock?"

"Mmm, as ready as I'm going to get." She bit her lip, preparing herself for his invasion. Jagger removed his fingers and replaced it with the tip of his dick. "Oh, my God!" she squeaked, more from surprise than pain. She gnawed the inside of her mouth when his massive cock gradually slid into her. He stilled, and she knew it was for her benefit. She appreciated his thoughtfulness. It took a moment before the discomfort vanished. Janice shifted against him, taking more of his length.

Jagger groaned, grasping her hips. "Don't move unless you mean it."

"I do." By now, waves of carnal gratification like electric currents dipped through her entire being. He pushed balls deep into her ass. Janice yielded to him completely, aroused by the newness of these sensations. Ecstasy licked her nerve endings.

"So round and big; this ass was made for fucking." His palm slapped onto one tender butt cheek.

"Ow!" She certainly hadn't expected that. "You're asking for trouble, buddy."

“Is it not my right to do what I wish with this ass?”

She squealed, not sure if she should be upset or laugh at him. “Your ass?”

“Yes, mine.”

“Just as I suppose your cock belongs to me?”

“Of course. We belong to each other. God, you’re so incredibly delicious. I’m so close to coming I don’t know if I can hold on.”

Janice’s fingers clutched the sheets, her arms holding her braced as Jagger pounded into her, his balls slapping against the seat of her ass. He pumped harder, creating an erotic hurt like nothing she’d thought she could possibly enjoy, but she did. She loved it, loved the feel of his cock in her ass.

Jagger reached around and rubbed her clit, intensifying the already explosive yearning within, then howled his climax moments later, his seed shooting into her tight bottom. When her orgasm hit soon after, Janice collapsed, unable to endure such feverish sensations any longer. Jagger followed her down, sliding his dick from her rear and pulling Janice into his arms. He kissed her shoulder.

“Now that wasn’t so bad was it, *milaya moya?*”

Janice had to admit it hadn’t been. She suspected that after tonight, life would never be the same.

Chapter Seven

Adonis pushed deeper into Nya's snug cunt. He could fuck her a million times, but it would never be enough. His need for her consumed him when she wasn't around. Her near-midnight dark skin against the paleness of his created a sensual contrast he found utterly erotic. But she was a quiet lover, gasping and moaning softly. He knew she pretended not to want him, but her wet pussy told him otherwise. One day he'd have her screams.

His cum shot into her slick channel, filling it before he fell on top of her. He captured her plump bottom lip between his teeth, nibbling none too gently. When Nya attempted to turned her head away, he caught her chin and held it firmly.

"Don't look away from me, my beauty. You've denied me your presence for too long. You have been very naughty lately, haven't you?"

She averted her eyes, lips firming to one thin line. He hated when she wouldn't give her all to him. Her secrets drove him insane, and he didn't like it one bit.

"Look at me, Nya," he commanded gruffly.

Seemingly reluctant, she finally met his gaze, her expression unreadable.

"I wonder what you hide behind those lovely brown eyes."

"My thoughts are my own. Please get off me."

Adonis narrowed his eyes. "Perhaps it doesn't suit me to do so. Besides, I still have need of you. You've been away longer than expected. Where did you go?" He knew very well where she'd been, but for once he wanted to hear it from her lips. She'd be quite surprised if she knew he was aware of where she was at all times.

"I ... I had something I needed to take care of."

"What?" he demanded again, losing his patience with her secretiveness.

"Nothing important."

"That nothing important being your friend, Christine?"

Her eyes widened. Adonis smiled with satisfaction. Other than in bed, it wasn't often he could wring a reaction from her. "You didn't think I knew, did you? I grew tired of your disappearing and coming and going as you please, so I had you followed."

"Leave Christine out of this. Your vendetta does not lie with her." Nya actually sounded concerned. His heartless fem actually did have feelings it seemed. How touching.

"My vendetta, as you so quaintly put it, is with the entire Grimaldi family. Hasn't she just recently joined with Romeo? The very one who foiled my plan with the Council? I plan to pay my little brother back for that one. And it's my understanding they have two children. How darling." He laughed, taunting her with his knowledge.

Nya wiggled from beneath him -- only because he allowed it. "Don't you dare harm them. They have nothing to do with any of this."

"And what do you propose to do about it? Who's going to stop me? Certainly not you, my beautiful traitor."

Nya hopped off the bed and grabbed her clothes, hurriedly throwing them on.

"Don't think warning her will do you any good, because there's nothing that can stop what I'll do next."

She paused in the midst of zipping up her black leather pants. Her tight black T-shirt, two sizes too small, emphasized her braless breasts. His cock rose once again. He was

tempted to pull her back on the bed and fuck her senseless, but decided he'd have plenty of time later.

"What are you planning to do?"

"Why do you want to know, Nya? So you can run and tell my brother of my plans? I think not. You think you're safe with Giovanni, but I'm always one step ahead of him and my younger brothers. Watch your step, Nya. My desire for you will not prevent the repercussions you'll suffer if you continue to defy me by going to him. The freedom you think you have is only what I've granted you. Make no mistake about it: I made you, and I can just as easily destroy you."

"You are twisted."

"I am what they've turned me into, but I at least know which side I'm one. Whose side are you on?"

She glared at him briefly and, for a second, he almost felt hate emanating from her. Adonis shook his head with a smile. She could hate him all she wanted, but Nya would soon realize his true power.

"Mine," she said simply. She turned to leave.

"Where are you going?" he demanded harshly.

"Out."

"When will you be back?"

"Maybe I won't be."

"Oh, you'll be back, or I'll track you down and drag you back. Don't stay away so long this time."

She didn't acknowledge him as she left, slamming the door on her way out. Adonis chuckled to himself. There was so much fire in her. In the nearly two hundred centuries since he'd found her, Nya had never bored him like many women had in his lifetime. It was

one of the reasons he allowed her so much leeway, but there was only so far he'd let her to go.

Nya probably believed she was the one in control, but she'd soon fall in line. A smiled touched his lips. She likely wouldn't heed his warning about the younger Grimaldis and would try to warn Giovanni, but it wouldn't do any good. He chuckled. She could warn them all she pleased because it suited him for her to do so. That way, when his plan was completely implemented, they'd wonder what the hell had happened. He'd waited too long for the perfect revenge, but now the time had come.

He'd ruin all their love, and just when they wished they'd never been born, he'd destroy them. Each and every one of them.

He laughed to himself as he picked up the bedside phone and called one of his contacts. "Ulm, she's left the house. Follow her and don't let her out of your sight unless you want to meet your death -- I promise it won't be swift or merciful." He hung up.

It was time.

* * * * *

Jagger rested his head on Janice's lap as she absently stroked his hair, feeling utterly content for the first time in a while. The two of them had volunteered to take Jamal and Adrienne to the park for a picnic lunch. Still, he could tell something was on her mind; she'd been silent for most of the day, letting everyone else do the talking.

"What's wrong, sweetheart?"

"Everyone knows what happened between us. When Mom looked at me with that smug grin, I wanted the floor to swallow me."

"Janice, what we did was natural. No one thinks badly of us. You are my bloodmate. We would have eventually made love even without *la morte dolci*."

“But under my mother’s roof? My God. If anyone had told me that I’d do that, I would have called them a liar. All the noise we made could have woke the dead, soundproofing or no soundproofing.”

“Does it really make you uncomfortable?”

“A little. I know it’s probably not a big deal for vampires, but I wasn’t raised like this.”

Jagger suspected there was something bothering her that was entirely different from what she’d just said, but instead of probing further, he let it go for now and lifted his head to see what the children were up to. Jamal was pushing his little sister on the swings. Adrienne yelled with glee, pumping her little legs and trying to go higher. The closeness they displayed toward the other was obvious.

Jagger smiled at the scene. “Aren’t those two adorable?”

“Yes. They’re good kids. It will be interesting to see what it’s like for them growing up with Romeo as a father.” Janice giggled for the first time that day.

“Ah, there is that smile I’ve been looking for. You like children?”

“I love them. Who doesn’t?”

“You’d be surprised. One day, we’ll have a few of our own, but of course I’d first have to bring you over.”

“Children? Bring me over? What are you talking about?”

“I’d have to turn you, make you a vampire, before you’ll be able to carry a child of mine to term.”

“Who said I was having children with you?”

Jagger sat up quickly with a frown. “You just said you like children.”

“But I never said anything about having them with you, and certainly nothing about being a vampire.”

“Did you really think I’d allow you to remain human, knowing I’ll outlive you? I don’t think so.” He didn’t like how this conversation was going.

“What does it matter? Nothing is forever. Relationships dissolve all the time.” So this was what she’d been keeping from him. She was having second thoughts about their being together. Janice could think about it all she wanted, but he’d be damned if he’d let her undermine what they had.

“Maybe others do, but ours certainly will not.”

“Jagger, can we please not get into this?”

“Were they all lies last night when you said you cared for me?”

“No. I do care, but I can’t do this vampire thing and children. Well, I’d like to have some kids eventually, but you’re moving way too fast. Who knows what will happen between us?”

“I do. We will be together forever. I wish you’d stop doubting us. Why are you so afraid?”

“I don’t want to talk about it. Can we change the subject?”

“No. We damned well can’t. We’re going to have it all out.” When she attempted to stand he grabbed her by the arms and pulled her back down.

“What is it you want from me?”

“I want everything from you. Not just your body when you feel like giving it to me, but your heart as well. Why won’t your trust in my love for you?”

Tears sprang into her eyes, and she tried to twist away. “Don’t do this to me.”

“I must. I have to know why you’re already regretting what’s between us.”

“Because you’ll eventually hurt me!” Her outburst opened the floodgate to her tears. “Love dies. I know it does. Why can’t you just be happy for us to have sex?”

“Because if I only wanted sex, I could get it from someone else. I may not have lived as long as my father and uncles, but I know what I feel, and this is real. I think you know it, too, but you won’t admit it. Tell me why. Please.”

“It’s my parents,” she sobbed. “I know I shouldn’t let what happened between them distort how I look at relationships, but I can’t help it.”

He pulled her shaking body against his as she revealed the story of how a little girl had watched helplessly as her mother suffered the humiliation of her father’s countless affairs and verbal abuse. She’d somehow blamed herself, and it had eventually warped her view of all relationships. Her childhood certainly explained a lot.

“*Milaya moya*, you have to stop blaming yourself for what happened in the past. Your parents are not you and me. Look at your mother now. She’s happy.”

Janice sniffed. “I know, I see that, but that’s just it. I can’t help thinking in the back of my mind that something terribly wrong will happen. Mom gave up her hopes and dreams to be with my father. I have hope and dreams, too, and never expected to want to settle down with anyone so soon. I’m only twenty-two. I still have a year of grad school, and then I’ll work on my doctorate. I want to be a psychologist, see the world, look at the view from the tallest building on earth. It seems like you want to take, take, take, and I’m the one who’s supposed to be doing all the giving.”

Jagger captured her face in his hands. “That isn’t true, Janice. Love requires sacrifices and compromises on both sides. What makes you think you couldn’t still do those things together?”

She looked surprised. “You mean you wouldn’t object to my continuing my education?”

“Of course not. I am your biggest supporter. If you want to finish school in Atlanta, we can get a place down there together.” He shook her gently. “Sweetheart, I’m not asking you

to give up your dreams, only to allow me to be a part of them and share them with you. But I admit there's something I want from you first."

"What?" The suspicious look in her eyes returned.

"For once, I'd like you to be honest with me. Do you love me?"

She looked away as she wiped her face.

"Janice?"

She turned to look at him again, smiling. "Yes, I do. I think I felt it when I met you, but I didn't understand then. All I knew was how frightened I was of you. Now I know why."

"Because you love me?"

She nodded.

Jagger felt like shouting his joy to the world. "Believe it or not, I was scared, too. Love is new for me as well."

Janice snorted with apparent disbelief. "You didn't seem scared. You were relentless."

"I had to be. I wanted you very badly, and it made me more aggressive than I should have been. I know I should have taken things more slowly."

"I think you did the right thing, though. You never gave up on me, and if you hadn't persisted, I'd still be fighting. But ..."

"But what?"

"This vampire thing, I don't know if I can take that step."

Jagger sighed. Bringing Janice over as quickly as possible would have been ideal, but she was still so young. There was plenty of time. "Okay. I'm willing to make this concession to you for now; however, you must meet me halfway. Eventually, it will happen. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"There's something else I would like from you."

She lifted a brow. "And what would that be?"

"Tell me you love me again. I need to hear you say the words."

"I love you, Jagger, even if you're a white, bloodsucking wizard." She grinned at him.

Jagger chuckled. He loved this woman so much. "I see your love for me hasn't changed your sense of humor. You see, *milaya moya*, loving me doesn't have to change who you are. This can work. I promise I'll spend the rest of my day making you happy."

He cupped her cheek and brought their mouths together. This kiss was infinitely sweeter than any they'd shared before, because this time their hearts were fully engaged.

The happiness he'd thought he'd never find was finally his. Jagger pressed Janice down onto the picnic blanket, his cock straining against his jeans. In the back of his mind, he knew they were in a public place, but whenever Janice was in his arms, he couldn't think properly. He cupped her breasts in his palms, his thumbs grazing her nipples till they became hardened peaks.

Janice wrapped her arms around him with a groan, smiling widely. "Mmm, we shouldn't be doing this, but I can't help myself."

"Nor can I. Wait until we get home. There's a bed with our names just waiting for us."

"Mom and Dad do that a lot. They say it's because they love each other. Do you two love each other?"

Jagger looked up to see Jamal and Adrienne standing over them. Janice pulled away from him, a sheepish expression on her face. He refused to let go of her hand, however.

To his surprise, it was Janice who answered the question. "Yes, we're in love."

"Are you going to get married?" Jamal questioned as if he were the Gestapo.

Janice smiled vaguely. "Not yet, but maybe one day."

Jagger squeezed her hand reassuringly, liking the sound of that. Progress had definitely been made.

The little boy crinkled his nose in disgust. “Well, I’m not getting married. Girls have cooties, and I don’t want no part of that.”

Janice burst out into laughter, Jagger joined her, even though he had no idea what cooties were. It sounded funny, though.

Jamal didn’t look amused. “Adrienne has to use the bathroom.”

Janice rose, sliding her hand out of Jagger’s. “I’ll take her.” She held the little girl by the hand and led her to the public stalls.

“Jamal, why don’t you have a seat with me until the women get back. In the meantime, you can explain to me what cooties are.”

Jamal sat down, reached into the picnic basket, and picked out a handful of grapes. “Everyone knows what cooties are. Don’t they have cooties in Russia?”

“Obviously not.”

“Well, maybe that won’t be a bad place for me to live. My dad is going to take me and Adrienne to Italy. I’ll ask him to take us to Russia, too.”

“You’ll like it. Tell him to take you to Red Square.” Jagger watched as the boy steadily munched on the grapes. “You never did tell me what cooties are.”

“Oh. They’re girl germs,” Jamal said gravely. “No one really knows what they look like because they’re invisible, but I think they look like ticks. Bobby at school told me that if you get them, your hair falls out or something. Then you itch like crazy. I’m safe though, because I got my cootie shots and so has Adrienne.”

Jagger was trying desperately to hold in his laughter. “Well, I can assure you that Janice does not have these cooties you speak of.”

“I’m glad. I like her.”

“I like her, too.”

“Then you should marry her. A real gentleman doesn’t kiss ladies like that unless he’s gonna marry her.”

Jagger raised his brow. This was obviously not a little boy; he was a grown man shrunken down to child form.

“And where did you learn this?”

“I saw it on TV.”

“Well, I do intend to marry Janice. I love her very much.”

Jamal looked like he was thinking it over, then nodded. “I guess that’s okay then.”

And Jagger believed it. Everything would be okay from now on.

Chapter Eight

Maggie had decided to throw a party. GianMarco’s partner, Oliver, had shown up, and Maggie’s friend, Montana, was also here. GianMarco knew his mate was up to another one of her matchmaking schemes, and although he had to admit that Oliver seemed quite smitten with the outspoken Montana, how things went between them remained to be seen.

This was the last night the entire family would be together. Everyone would be going their separate ways in the morning. Niccolo and Sasha were headed back to L.A. sans Jagger. Romeo and his family were going back to Boston to tie up loose ends before they returned to go house-hunting in the area.

Jagger was sticking around for a few more days, then he was going back to Atlanta with Janice. Niccolo had a club in that area and Jagger was going to manage it while he found a house for him and Janice. Indeed, the fact that the two of them had settled their differences had been the biggest surprise to GianMarco.

Since the night after Jagger had nearly succumbed to *la morte dolci*, his nephew and stepdaughter couldn’t seem to keep their hands off each other. He was relieved Jagger was over his suffering; having experienced it himself, he wouldn’t have wished it on his worst enemy. GianMarco was equally happy his stepdaughter had finally stopped fighting her

attraction to his nephew. He'd always suspected she reciprocated Jagger's feelings, but hadn't thought it was his place to bring it up.

As for his mate and child, Maggie was radiant as ever, and he adored his new baby. Everything was perfect, except Dante wasn't here. GianMarco hadn't heard from his brother and it tore him up inside.

"Is everything okay?" His wife came from behind him, carrying Gianna.

GianMarco smiled at his two favorite girls. He was quite pleased about having a daughter and loved every hair on her little head -- and didn't care who knew it. He'd always remember his little boy, but having his *bambina* helped ease the pain a little.

"Here, let me hold her. She's wants her papa, don't you, Gia?"

Maggie carefully handed her over. "She's been fidgeting all day. I've fed her and just changed her diaper, but I don't know why she's so restless."

"Probably from all the stimulation around her." GianMarco kissed Gianna's curly hair and stroked her back. She gurgled. "See. I told you she needs her papa."

Maggie chuckled, patting his shoulder. "Seems like you're her favorite tonight. She only wants Mommy when she's hungry."

"Well, you've heard the expressions, 'mama's boy' and 'daddy's girl.' When we have another child, we'll probably have a son, but Gia's all mine."

Maggie raised a brow. "Well, I guess you can change her diaper when she does number two."

GianMarco lifted his daughter in the air, contorting his face for the baby. "I don't mind. I'll cherish every second with her. They grow up so fast."

Maggie rested her head against his back. "I miss him, too," she said softly, seemingly at random.

"Yes, well, I suppose he had his reasons for not being here, but wherever he is, I hope he's happy."

"He is. He's very happy, and he's very sorry for not coming sooner."

GianMarco and Maggie whirled around to see the eldest Grimaldi brother.

"Dante!" Maggie exclaimed, throwing herself into his arms. Dante whirled her around and gave her a light kiss on the lips.

"You look lovely as always." He placed her back on the floor. "Congratulations on your new arrival."

"Thank you." She beamed at him.

Dante turned to GianMarco. "I suppose this gorgeous *bambina* is my niece?"

GianMarco's first impulse was to demand where the hell his brother had been, but he was so happy to see him that he bit the question back. The urge to brag about Gianna took over instead. "Yes, she is beautiful. Would you like to hold her?"

Cobalt eyes twinkled with longing. "May I?"

"Gia, this is your Uncle Dante."

"What a day. I got to meet a new sharp-as-a-tack nephew and two precious nieces. Gia is definitely a beauty, Marco. Just like her mother." Dante held the cooing baby against him.

"I'm going to see to the other guests." Maggie smiled at him again before leaving the two men with the baby.

"I'm sorry for staying away, but I had to get my head together. There were --"

"Dante, you don't have to explain yourself to me. I'm just glad you're finally here. You seem rested."

"I am. You know I stayed at Paris's house in the Hamptons; Persephone and her friend, Isis, entertained me."

GianMarco sensed Dante was holding something back, but he figured his brother would tell him when he was ready. "I'm glad your time was relaxing."

“Actually, I ended up having quite an adventure with some Hunters. Seems Gage is back. Once we deal with this *il Diavolo, il Demonio* mess, we may have to look into the situation. I’ve sent some agents out to investigate further.”

“This sounds serious. Are the Kyriakises all right?”

“For now, but I believe they’ll have some rough times ahead, similar to what we’re going through now.” Dante looked down at the baby again. “She’s asleep.”

“Here, let me take her.”

Dante transferred Gianna into her father’s arms. “Congratulations, again.” He took a deep breath, then looked into his brother’s eyes. “I’m very happy for you and want you to know I’m sorry for how I acted. While I was away, I realized what I felt for Maggie was infatuation, pure and simple. She touched a part of me I thought had died, and I mistook it for love. I obsessed over it until it drove a wedge between us. I never want anything to do so again. I love you, Marco, and I promise, no matter what happens, we’ll work out our difference before I act like a jackass again.”

“I appreciate that very much. Of course you’re forgiven. We’re brothers. Nothing will change that.”

“Thank you. That means a lot to me. I wouldn’t have come between you and Maggie, you know.”

“I know. I’m just glad to have you back. Speaking of *il Diavolo*, have you heard anything on that front?”

“No, and it’s worrying the hell out of me. I have a bad feeling about this. We’re going to have to be very careful.”

GianMarco’s grip tightened on his daughter. Unfortunately, he had the same foreboding.

* * * * *

"Can this all really be happening? I mean, is it really true?" Janice wrapped her arms around Jagger's waist when he walked into her bedroom and shut the door.

"It's true, but I'm wondering if I should be the one asking that. I'm the one who feels like he's in the middle of a dream." Jagger's hands slid down her back and cupped her bottom in his hand, then squeezed. Instant arousal tingled between her legs.

She kissed his jaw, a feeling of happiness she'd never felt before soaring within her. "Are you sure you'll be okay moving to Atlanta with me? It will only be for a year till I finish school. Then I'll apply to one closer to my mom so we'll be around the family."

"Milaya moya, I'll go wherever you lead."

"I love you, Jagger. So much, but I'm still afraid this won't last."

"Well, whenever you think such a thing, just remember this: I wanted you when you were acting like a horrible brat, so if I didn't run then, I certainly won't leave you now."

She slapped him playfully on the shoulder. "I was not a brat. I should be offended by that remark, buddy."

"Oh, you know you were a brat. There's no use denying it. Even Uncle Romeo calls you that."

She sighed in mock exasperation. "Maybe I was a little difficult," she conceded.

"A little?" He quirked his lips.

"Okay, I was more than a bit difficult, but I'm here now, and I'm so in love with you, Nicolai Jagger Romanov-Grimaldi, that I don't know what to do with myself."

He grinned that devilish grin of his. "You might not know what to do with yourself, but I certainly do."

"Oh? And what's that?"

"I'm going to make love to you." Without preamble, he began to unbutton her shirt, placing kisses against her skin as he unfastened each button. Janice was suddenly flooded

with a burning desire as well. Her hands fumbled with his clothes. She wanted to feel his naked flesh against hers.

“You’re so beautiful,” he groaned when their clothes had been discarded. He lifted her into his arms and took her to bed.

Gently, Jagger covered her with his body. Love shone within the depths of his amber eyes. Janice’s heart was so filled with emotion for him, she could barely contain it all.

She opened herself for him, ready to take each inch of his delicious cock. She sighed with relief as he slid his hard shaft into her. Lifting her hips to take him deeper into her hot box, she whispered, “I love you, so much, Jagger. I don’t know why I waited so long to admit it.”

“I understand, my darling. Sometimes we’re afraid to listen to our hearts, and you hadn’t had a shining example of what love is.” Jagger slowly pulled out, then slid back into her. The moment was so tender, tears swam in her eyes.

“Please kiss me.” She cupped the back of his head, pulling it down until their lips touched. Their tongues met, twining and dancing in a gentle, explorative demonstration of their love for each other. Her nipples ached deliciously as they rubbed against his chest hair, the friction sending scorching balls of fire through her system.

“Janice, *ya tak lyubyu tebya*. I love you very much.”

“I love you, too.” She clung to him, their bodies moving and grinding together. Her heart felt as if it would overflow with love for him. No matter what happened in the future between them, she would always have this moment. She’d trust in him and their love.

When her climax came, she screamed out her release. “Jagger! love you!”

“And I, you, *milaya moya*.” When he peaked, her pussy muscles tightened around his cock, milking him of every drop he had within him. Finally, he rested his head within the crook of her neck.

Janice ran her fingers along the along his spine. “Jagger?”

“Yes?”

“Remember when you came to my school, you said something to me in Russian? You told me you’d tell me when the time was right. Is the time right, yet?”

“Most definitely. I said, ‘When I first met you, for the first time, I understood it’s forever.’”

And she believed him.

%%Epilogue

Janice woke with a smile. Her body still felt the effects of Jagger’s lovemaking from the night before. She reached out for him, but he wasn’t there. Instead, she encountered something wet. Her eyes slowly opened. Bringing her hand to her line of vision, she let out a piercing scream. Her hand was covered in blood!

Sitting up, she looked around the room to see blood not only saturating the bed, but it was also spread on the carpets and smeared on the walls. Was this some kind of crazy nightmare?

She slid out of bed and grabbed her robe, miraculously blood free, from the foot of the bed. The sun was just starting to rise, so she wasn’t sure if anyone else was up. They would be soon enough.

Janice sprinted through the halls and banged on every bedroom door in the house, shouting frantically. Dante was the first one out of the bed. His eyes widened when he saw the blood on her hands.

“What’s happened?”

“I don’t know. Jagger wasn’t in bed when I woke and the room is covered in blood. I think it’s his.” Tears ran down her face. This couldn’t be happening.

Niccolo whirled her around to face him, face more pale than usual. “What’s happened to my son?”

“I don’t know,” she whispered.

Sasha raced to the bedroom where Janice and Jagger had spent the night. “My baby!”

Another scream filled the house, followed quickly by another. The men took off to investigate, Janice on their tails. She looked into a bedroom to see Romeo and Christine tearing the room apart. They looked as panicked as the others.

“Jamal isn’t here.” Romeo said as he ran out of the room. “I’m going to check Adrienne’s room.”

Janice had a sinking feeling. Jagger was missing, and now Jamal and possibly Adrienne. She gasped. Mom!

Janice ran to the nursery to see her mother lying in a heap, sobbing in hysterics. GianMarco had lost all color and looked to be in shock.

“Not again. Not again,” he muttered over and over again.

“Mom?” Janice was too scared to check the crib. She slowly moved toward it and sucked in a breath when she looked in. Only a crumpled bloody blanket lay there.

She passed out.

* * * * *

Dante tore through the house searching for his nieces and nephews even though he had an awful feeling they were no longer there. He ran outside to seek out any clues he could find. There had to be something.

This was his fault. He shouldn’t have stayed away from his family for so long. He should have been diligently working to track Adonis down. Instead, he’d allowed this to happen. Because of him, the children were missing and possibly dead. Hadn’t his brothers suffered enough without this? How had the rogues gotten into the house? Though the rooms were soundproofed, surely someone would have heard the children being taken? And judging by the quantity of blood in Jagger’s room, why hadn’t Janice woken up?

This travesty had Adonis written all over it. Dante knew if the children didn't make it, his brothers would never recover.

This was the final straw. They'd fucked with the Grimaldis for the last time.

It was time the rogues felt the full weight of his wrath.

~ * ~

Eve Vaughn

Eve Vaughn enjoys writing above all else. She began 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.