



Seth

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Description: Immortals have been a part of Seth's world since he barged into Kai's life at the age of twelve. And having a group of shifter and vampire assassins he considered family, he thought that he'd seen it all and that nothing would surprise him. But the one night he met Aubrey changed his world, and he'd never been so happy to be wrong.

Aubrey was used to seclusion, even before she had been turned into a vampire. She'd never dreamed of a life outside her tiny little world, but that was until she met Seth. Before she could understand her reactions, she ran from him. But she couldn't stay away. The more she gets to know him, the stronger the connection between them solidifies.

When Seth tells Aubrey that he is her mate, will she take a chance and keep him forever?

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Chapter One

Seth

Seth kept his head down as the pen in his hand absently wandered over what used to be a blank piece of paper, trying to ignore the group of girls near the front of the classroom who had been trying to get his attention for the past fifteen minutes. He could hear his name randomly thrown into the conversation, but chose not to engage them; he knew where that would lead. Each time he'd turned down their offers of getting coffee or an invite to a campus party, they seemed more determined to find something he wouldn't refuse. It wasn't as though he didn't want to find a girlfriend. But when he had tried dating a few times throughout the years he'd been in college, he been unable to find any woman who attracted him for very long.

He'd made the mistake of asking Emily for a date, the one who had been trying the most to get his attention several rows away since he'd walked into the classroom, and it had been a disaster from the moment he'd picked her up for dinner. She had taken a picture of them together at her front door and then proceeded to text her friends through the entire date, clicking pictures of her hugged to his side, until he'd called off the date and drove her home. After that one time, he had no desire to do it again, but he couldn't seem to escape her and her friends' presence.

Although he'd been excited when he'd first started college two years ago, he was glad to be graduating after this last semester so he could start working full-time with Liv in the lab. Along with Hunter, Liv and he hadn't gotten any closer to figuring out what made an immortal unique. An immortal's blood—whether shifter or vampire—could fend off diseases and had the ability to regenerate, but there was no

clue in the cells as to why. It intrigued Seth, although he hadn't wanted to or planned to become immortal. But if they could find out the specifics, then he could protect those closest to him, those he considered family.

And although he chose to concentrate on his career instead of trying to meet the right woman, he couldn't help but feeling lonely from time to time. He knew that the possibility of finding someone for him at school was slim. With his future his top priority, he could push those thoughts aside and concentrate on graduating. And after watching Kai with Liv and Reaper with Ara, he knew that he couldn't settle for anything less than what they had.

But in order to move on, he needed a couple of classes that he'd put off until the last semester of his senior year. He had no interest in economics, but he needed it as a requirement to graduate. Determined to keep his head down and concentrate on studying, he blew out a breath as he leaned back on his chair and hoped that this semester would pass quickly.

Picking up the sound of the back door closing, Seth glanced to his right. His eyes narrowed as he scanned the woman who started down the stairs of the auditorium classroom and took a seat a couple of rows down from him. A hoodie covered her hair and her face but something about her movements, quick and efficient, drew his eyes over her. She must've sensed his scrutiny because once she was seated, she glanced up and met his gaze.

Beautiful. It was the one word that came to mind when he gazed into her silver eyes. He had suspected when she had walked into the classroom, but her eyes confirmed his suspicions. He watched as she scanned her surroundings before she settled her gaze back on him. He couldn't help the tilt of his mouth, a smile that was for her alone. He widened his smile when he could hear the audible intake of breath from the short distance away.

He found himself disappointed when the professor walked in and started class, grabbing her attention away from him. Over the next hour, he couldn't have recited one word of the lecture and right before class ended, he slipped out the door she had come through. He leaned against the opposite wall and waited for her exit.

Time seemed to stall for several moments before the noise of shuffling feet reached him. Most of the class exited through the main doorway near the front of the classroom; for a moment, he thought she had gone with the crowd. He breathed easier the moment the door in front of him swung open. He watched as she raised her hand to readjust the hoodie over her hair but froze when she spotted him leaning casually against the wall. She dropped her hands to her side, and he was able to see her without obstruction for the first time.

It took him awhile to drag his gaze from silver eyes that were similar, yet completely different. His gaze traced over her long lashes that brushed against her skin as she blinked in surprise. There was a sprinkling of freckles across her nose and cheeks but what drew his gaze was her mouth. Her lips were full and two-toned, peach and pink. They opened as he continued his silence while assessing her. Her reddish-brown hair framed her face, and something deep inside Seth's chest kicked, hard.

When he thought that she might not be interested, her gaze dropped to his lips before continuing down. Her eyes scanned him until he felt as though she was already intimate with his body. He was grateful for the assassins and their training regimen over the past couple of years because he had managed to fill out a bit and added muscle to his mostly tall, gangly frame.

“Hey gorgeous, I'm Seth.”

He wanted to reach out and have some tangible proof that she was real and standing in front of him in that moment in time, but he knew that she would run from him before he learned anything about her. And it was crucial that he got to know her.

Instead of reacting to his endearment or his introduction, she leaned closer as her eyes roamed over his face. Before she pulled back, she took a deep breath. “Why do you smell like vampire and several species of animal?”

He didn’t answer her question right away, unable to speak for a moment. His eyes closed as her voice washed over him, smoky and sexy as hell. He opened his eyes and took a step closer to her, but froze soon after. Although her question had seemed innocuous, he took in her tense stance as she maneuvered closer to the exit. Her eyes darted around them. She sensed danger, and he knew that he would have to explain before she bolted.

“My family are immortals. Both shifter and vampire.” He told her the truth, but the minimal amount of information she would need to stop her movements. He counted on her curiosity from his statement that she wouldn’t run from him. “What’s your name, gorgeous?”

Although she didn’t relax her stance, her eyes stopped darting toward the outer door and she stilled.

“Aubrey. But...you’re human.” Her confusion was evident in her words.

“Family isn’t always formed because you share the same blood. Sometimes you find your family along the way, and I found mine right next door and they happen to be immortals.” He kept his voice low. No one knew and he liked to keep it that way.

As he watched her eyes brighten at his words, he took a step forward and stretched out a hand. He had no idea whether he was going to caress her face or reach for her hand, but they were interrupted before he made contact.

“Seth, honey, are you ignoring me?”

Shit!

Without moving his gaze from Aubrey, he flinched at the sound of Emily's voice so close to him. He tried to sidestep her, but she gripped his arm and pulled him in close to her chest. He sent a look of apology to Aubrey and cursed silently as he spotted the hurt flash across her expressive eyes. Wanting to explain Emily's actions to Aubrey and ask her to get to know him, he spent a few seconds trying to subtly release Emily's grip before he used some of his strength to pry her off him. Emily still didn't release his arm; instead, she clutched him tighter, until he turned and sent her a look that had her immediately dropping his arm. A breath of relief escaped as he took a step away from her.

Movement from his periphery had him turning back to Aubrey and this time he cursed aloud. She had moved to the door that led to the parking lot, but before she stepped through, he caught a sad smile as she met his gaze. She slipped out without a word.

More curses erupted from his mouth as he took off after her, pushing through the doors into the damp darkness. He listened for any sounds of footsteps or a car starting, but he knew she had already disappeared. While keeping an eye out for Aubrey, he took his time as he walked to his SUV. Disappointment coursed through him. But as he started the engine, he knew that he had a week. A week to figure out a way to get to know her without scaring her off for good.

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Chapter Two

Seth

Seth put the SUV in park and shut off the ignition, not making any attempt to open the door. His mind drifted back to Aubrey as he drove away from his last class of the day, his movements on autopilot until he reached the one place where he knew he'd be welcomed. He'd never felt as bereft as he did when she walked away from him, and he didn't fully understand the feeling. Instinct told him that she would be important to him, that he needed her in an elemental way, but he had no idea how to reach her or to get her to trust him.

He looked toward the darkened pine trees to the west that surrounded Kai and Liv's house, before his gaze traveled farther up. The full moon illuminated the mountainside. His feelings were a jumble as they settled in the pit of his stomach, but a part of him relaxed at the familiar surroundings of home.

An image of Aubrey flashed again through his thoughts. The beautiful dark auburn hair as it curved around her delicate chin, her pale skin with a concentration of freckles around her nose and cheeks, and her dual-colored lips that were natural, untouched. When she tilted the corner of her mouth in the barest hint of a smile, he wanted to slay dragons for her as long as she continued to smile at him like that.

Throughout the years of being immersed in the world of immortals, he'd never once considered the possibility that his future would include him being a mate to one of them. But now it was all he could think about. That wasn't to say that his attraction to her had anything to do with her being a vampire. He felt as though something righted

itself in his world, and she was the missing piece that made him feel whole. Aubrey happened to be a vampire and him human, but Aubrey was who his heart had chosen.

Becoming friends with Kai, then Liv and the rest of the assassins, had been natural to him. And it was ironic that a vampire had taught him the importance of having a connection with others. His parents treated him as a nuisance and made no attempt to hide what they thought until he was old enough to take care of himself. Then they ignored him completely. He'd been self-sufficient at an early age, taking care of himself as far back as he could remember. His parents focused on their business and little else, not even their own marriage. And because of that, he had been an afterthought in their lives.

But when he met Kai, his world changed. It never bothered him that there was something different about Kai. He was the cool next-door neighbor who never aged, never came out during the day, and yet seemed to know everything that happened around the neighborhood even though he never interacted with anyone.

One night, curiosity got the better of him, and he searched for a way into Kai's house. Seth had been stubborn and impulsive back then and he'd been determined to find what secrets he hid in the gigantic house. But when Seth heard a loud snarl behind him as he fiddled with the downstairs doorknob, his nerves fled and he thought that he would soon be dead. Instead, when he turned around, Kai had a smile on his face and Seth, his body sagging as relief washed over him, impulsively shot out his fist and punched the vampire in the chest.

"Not funny," Seth said.

"Kid, you should've seen your face."

"It's Seth, not kid."

“And I’m Kai.Come on, I’ll show you around.I don’t want you to try to break in and hurt yourself.”

And with that, their friendship had formed.It was tentative at first, but the vampire always answered his questions with honesty and Seth had never once felt anything but safe with Kai.When Kai had fallen for Liv, she had managed to change the dynamic between Seth and Kai.Kai had often said he thought of Seth as a son and would tell him how proud he was.It meant the world to the nineteen-year-old; it still did.And because Seth had come around to spend time with Liv, he had gotten to know the other shifters and vampires and soon they had developed into a close-knit family.He knew that with his immortal family, they cared for him and loved him as he loved them.Hell, they’d bought him an SUV as his high school graduation gift and loaded it with enough gadgets and a bullet-proof body that the president of the United States would feel protected.

Kai and the others had introduced him to what a family truly was, and for that, he would always be grateful.

The cab of the SUV grew colder the longer he sat there, but he couldn’t muster the energy to leave until he thought of a way to get Aubrey to speak to him, to get to know him.He didn’t hear the door open or feel the cold air that rushed inside.But when Kai laid his hand on Seth’s shoulder and squeezed in a familiar way, he shook out of his thoughts and glanced to the left.Kai’s eyes scanned Seth to make sure that he wasn’t hurt, but when his brows drew down in concern, Seth found his voice.

“I met someone.”

Kai’s hand tightened a fraction, but he didn’t interrupt Seth’s explanation.

“Aubrey.She was in class tonight and for the first time in my life, I was drawn to a woman.I was aware of every movement she made.She is different than anyone I’ve

ever met, but I fucked up my chance to get to know her.”

“Why do you sound odd? Did she hurt you?”

“No. She’s a vampire. I noticed her the moment she walked in the classroom. It’s like I sensed her. I’ve never felt anything like this before. But before I could talk to her, to get to know her, Emily clung onto me and Aubrey took off before I could explain.”

Seth relaxed as Kai looped his arm around his shoulders and pulled him out of the cab and into a hug. Seth wrapped his arms around Kai and sighed, his jumbled thoughts and emotions calming as Kai’s arms tightened around him.

Before Seth graduated from high school, Kai had kept a physical distance from Seth, never touching him unless it was absolutely necessary. But over the years, due to Liv’s influence more than anything, Kai had become more overt with his emotions. When Kai sensed he needed a hug or to talk, he made time for Seth. His and Kai’s relationship was exactly what he wanted with his own father. After so many years of disappointment, he’d given up the hope that he would have a salvageable relationship with the man that shared his DNA, but had no interest in him. Instead, Kai was his father, not by blood but by circumstance, and he’d never felt more wanted or loved.

“What’s wrong, sweetheart?” Liv had sidled up to them and put her hand on Seth’s back.

Seth buried his face against Kai’s chest and felt more than heard Kai’s words. “Seth met his mate. She’s a vampire.”

Of course, Liv didn’t react as he expected. Her loud, boisterous laugh echoed around them and Seth found the side of his mouth lifting as he pulled back from Kai’s hug. In the next moment, Liv pressed against him, her light scent surrounding him, and he

could feel the happiness radiating from her. He had no idea why this information made her happy, but the tightness in his chest loosened and he hugged her back.

“Yeah, it would be nice to confirm it, but Aubrey disappeared before I could talk to her.”

There was silent communication between Kai and Liv, and Seth waited for Kai to explain through their mind link what happened after class. Although he didn't really blame Emily—he could've told her more emphatically that he never wanted to date her—he could only hope that he didn't ruin the chance to get to know Aubrey.

“When you talk to Aubrey, you should invite her over.”

“I hope I'll have a chance. She might not be in next week's class. If I've scared her off, I might need Xander's help to break into school records and get her information. If that doesn't work, I'll get Ax to break into the administrative office for me.”

While Liv laughed, Kai groaned. “Not Ax. Shit, anyone but Ax.”

Liv wrapped her arm around his waist and pulled him toward the front door. “Don't worry so much, sweetheart—it'll all work out. Now come inside. Reaper and Ara are over, and Jade cooked her famous lasagna with cheesy garlic bread.”

“I love you guys.”

“We love you, too, kid.”

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Chapter Three

Aubrey

Aubrey blew out a breath and ran a hand through her hair before she glanced outside, absorbing the silence that the darkness brought after the sun had set for the night. Something that she'd grown to love since becoming a vampire.

She smiled to herself as she caught the sound of the crickets starting to chirp right outside her cabin window. She would enjoy them while she could. Soon it would become too cold for them to survive the winter in the mountains of Colorado.

She left the house and after locking up, slid into her old, yet reliable car for the short trip into the center of Snowfall.

For the past week, she had awoken far earlier than her instincts told her was safe. But since class the previous week, she had been unable to sleep until dusk, grateful for the blackout curtains that covered the tiny windows of her home when she had awoken in the early afternoon. Her sleep patterns had changed because for the first time in her life, she had a craving that had nothing to do with blood.

Aubrey had been on her own for as long as she could remember. When she lived with her mother, the older woman had thought Aubrey was a bother and acted as though she had no daughter. Because of her mother, she had learned to take care of and keep to herself. Nothing changed when she had been turned into a vampire. Instead of seeking companionship, she became more of an introvert than ever.

After her first day of class, strange new feelings developed. She couldn't identify them right away because she had never experienced them before. It took her some time to realize that she was curious about the tall, handsome man. But more important than that, she desired him in a way that sent her body tingling whenever she thought of him. She wondered how she could desire a man she had met for a brief moment, but logic fled when it came to her feelings for Seth.

From the moment she'd gotten home from class, she tried to keep busy. She had somewhat succeeded by getting plenty of work done, but she couldn't go several minutes without her thoughts moving back toward the one man who made her feel more than she would've thought possible.

And every time she thought of him, a clear image of him standing casually outside of the classroom, waiting for her, would come to the forefront. When she felt truly desperate, she would close her eyes and replay every word he'd spoken to her and every natural movement he made. With her perfect recall, she remembered the way his lips curved into a gentle, yet breathtaking smile when his gaze caught hers. During the conversation, she told herself to keep her eyes locked on his, but she couldn't prevent her gaze moving from his lips and farther down, to blatantly peruse his toned body, not even trying to hide her interest. She shivered as she thought about the broad width of his shoulders, his defined chest and stomach emphasized by his tight black shirt. But she couldn't stop there; her eyes slid down to his narrow waist and down over the jeans that wrapped around his muscular thighs, leaving little to the imagination.

Seth was gorgeous and she couldn't help but wonder why he looked at her with interest. When the brunette sidled up to him and hugged his arm in a familiar way, she didn't miss the way his muscles tensed at the touch, but she was too inexperienced to know whether his reaction to the other woman was positive or negative. Something in her chest throbbed at the sight, taking her by surprise. Before she could think about reacting, she found herself near the door that led outside to her escape. She couldn't

prevent looking back one last time; when he met her eyes, she gave him a smile and left, determined then and there to drop the class and move on with her life.

But she shook her head when she entered the empty auditorium and took a seat at the back of the classroom, clear across the room from where the others had sat last week. She took a quick glance at her watch and cringed at the time. In her eagerness to capture a glimpse of Seth again, she had arrived fifteen minutes early. Although she had gone back and forth with her decision to disappear, she couldn't help but want the opportunity to at least see him one more time. If he moved on to other interests, then she would know that he wasn't worth her time and her decision would be made for her.

Taking out a notebook and one of her favorite pens, she opened to a fresh page and started to doodle. She didn't need to take notes because of her perfect recall—one of the few benefits of being a vampire, in her estimation—but she needed to do something with her hands. She felt proud of herself for being brave enough to show up. It was against her nature to hang around crowds, but it didn't stop her best friend from telling her that she needed to get out more, and he was the reason she had signed up for the class in the first place.

Cole had been the first person she'd met after she had been turned, and instead of ignoring her, he befriended her. Over the years, they had fallen into an easy friendship. She had no secrets from him, but he was under the impression that she needed more people in her life, even though the thought of social interaction terrified her.

But that fact didn't stop Cole from dragging her to the club to act as his wingman, even though the results of the outings usually ended in abject failure.

The man had a horrible track record with dating.

He always managed to find the asshole in the club and proceeded to get his heart stomped on until he was sitting on her couch at three in the morning, crying into ice cream that she kept in her freezer in case of break-up emergencies. But each failed relationship didn't stop him from trying again, as he liked to point out to her each time it happened.

She shivered as she inhaled Seth's scent, bringing her out of her thoughts. Before she could lift her head to search him out, he slid into the seat next to her, taking her by surprise. The outraged murmurs that erupted across the room caused her lips to tilt slightly, but she schooled her features before she glanced to her left at Seth. She couldn't quite meet his eyes, but as she focused on his lips, quirked in a smile, something inside her relaxed.

Aubrey wanted to turn and speak to him but something immobilized her. It had been a long time since she had spoken to anyone new, and she sensed that the conversation with Seth would be more important than a normal, everyday discussion.

"How long ago were you turned?" Seth asked.

"Ten years."

"How old were you when you turned?"

"Seventeen."

She watched as he slid his hands toward the edge of the desk and gripped it as she answered his questions. She heard his heart speed up and his sharp intake of breath; a giggle escaped her before she could contain it. But his next question wiped the smile off her face.

"Do you have family, or are you alone?"

“Alone. Well, not completely. After I turned, I left home.”

Her words were cryptic, but she didn't know how to explain her situation without seeming pathetic. She had Cole and her work, and before she'd met Seth it had been enough for her. But as she glanced into his expressive brown eyes, she couldn't hold back.

“When I was human, it was just me and my mother. She was my mother in name alone. Although we didn't get along, I didn't want to hurt her. The first days I remember that I only thought of blood and wanting blood, so I left. I haven't seen her since, and I haven't tried to find out how she's doing. I have no idea why I'm telling you any of this.” She scoffed but couldn't turn away from his gaze.

“Because you can trust me.” Seth turned to the front of the class when the professor entered and started to speak.

Could I really trust him?

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It was obvious that although human, he interacted with immortals. She could smell the vampire and shifter scents on him again, so he knew about her world. That led to another question. How did he know so many immortals? Would it be rude to ask him?

While she pondered whether she could trust Seth, she absently listened to the lecture. She could sense Seth's every move—when he glanced at her, when he shifted closer—and she felt warmed at his attention. His heart beat steadily in his chest, and she found listening to it comforting.

Too soon, class ended and they stood. She sucked in a breath as he laid his hand on her arm.

“Would you like to go somewhere and talk? I would love to get to know you.”

Unable to speak, she shook her head, not quite ready to be alone with the human who affected her in ways she had yet to understand. “I...not yet, okay?”

He smiled at her and handed her a folded piece of paper. “I understand. I'll see you next week.”

His hand slid down her arm, causing her to shiver, before he reached for her hand. He squeezed it, sending her heart racing, before he let go and stepped back. With one last quirk of his lips, he turned and jogged up the stairs to the exit. Before he left, he turned back and gave her a small wave, which she returned, and he disappeared.

Did I just make the worst mistake of my life?

Her hand tightened at the thought. When the paper crinkled in her hand, she looked down at it curiously. Flipping open the note with her fingers, she smiled. He had written down his phone number.

Chapter Four

Aubrey

As she replayed her conversation with Seth over and over again, Aubrey let herself into her tiny cabin in the outskirts of Snowfall and dropped the keys on the table next to the front door. Placing her bag and coat on the stand by the door, she smiled as a jet-black fur ball wrapped around her ankles. She picked up her cat and cuddled him in her arms.

“Hello to you too, Hades. Did you miss me?”

A loud purr reached her ears as Hades slid his head back and forth underneath her chin as a welcome home. She never tired of his loving response to her. She walked a few feet to her couch and settled onto it, knowing that Hades liked to cuddle with her anytime she'd left the house.

The cat was a wonder. He had shown up on her doorstep one night in the middle of October and scratched underneath it in order to get her attention. She had gone to investigate the sound and jumped back in surprise when the little fur ball darted into the house and settled onto a sofa pillow.

She approached carefully. Normally animals treated her as a predator and avoided her at all costs, but she froze in surprise when the cat rubbed against her fingers instead of recoiling. After a minute, she shook off her surprise and reached forward to search for a collar to see who the cat belonged to, but found nothing.

They had taken a harrowing trip to the vet to check for a chip to identify whether he had an owner, but nothing indicated that Hades belonged to anyone. In the meantime, he decided to adopt her. He was never far from her, choosing to sleep on his bed on her desk when she was awake during the night, and his favorite place to sleep had been between her shoulder and her neck during the day.

As she hugged Hades, her thoughts drifted back to the man she had actually spoken to during class and wondered, again, at her attraction to Seth. He was the first man she responded to, either human or vampire, and she didn't think that she could pass up the chance to get to know him.

In the back of her mind, she worried that she might become her mother if given the chance. She understood that logically she wasn't anything like her mother, but she couldn't help overthinking the possibility when she felt an attraction as strong as the one she felt for Seth.

Although her mother had attracted and gone through men as though they had been disposable, Aubrey usually avoided men or even the thought of dating. Her mother had never been long without a man in her bed; Aubrey had never even kissed a man. And so she ended up the opposite of her mother, never letting anyone close enough to get to know her, and until a week ago, she had been fine with it.

Despite Aubrey settling for being alone, it didn't prevent her from being a hopeless romantic. She voraciously read romance novels, loved cheesy romance movies, and adored happily-ever-afters. Because of the knowledge she gleaned from her books and movies, she could imagine kissing Seth and wondering what it would feel like, what he would taste like. Not his blood, though she was curious about that as well, but his skin. She had caught a trace of mint and citrus as he'd sat down next to her, the scent crisp and appealing, and she pictured herself running her tongue up his neck and nibbling on his jaw.

A knock on her front door drew her out of her thoughts, and she shivered as she felt a tingle in her core. Hades growled low at being displaced, and she chuckled as she strode around the couch to the front door. The moment she opened it, Cole had a comment.

“Why do you look flushed? Did you have sex? Is he still here? Or better yet, is he hot?”

She laughed and waited for him to put the thermal pack on the floor before she pulled him in for a hug, snuggling into his shoulder as he surrounded her with his clean scent. His long arms tightened around her and offered her the comfort she sought. He was another like Hades. His instinct became muted where Aubrey was concerned and if she hadn't sensed other humans' hesitation to be around her before, she would have thought she was a failure as a vampire.

“I met someone, and no, he's not here. I was thinking about him though.”

“You didn't answer my last question.”

She paused for a long while before she answered. “Yes, he's...hot.”

His laugh echoed around her living room. “About time, girlfriend. I've gone ten years thinking that you were defective. Sex is something to be experienced and enjoyed, and while you read about it, a lot, I thought that becoming a vampire had made your lady parts dry up and fall off.”

“Lady parts? Shit, you really are gay. No one calls them that.”

“Just making a point, sunshine.” He laughed and squeezed her tighter.

When she lifted her gaze to his, a fierce wave of happiness sparked in his eyes and

she could hear his heartbeat accelerate. She dropped her eyes and caught his breathtaking smile. Not for the first time since she'd met him, she was glad that Cole was in her life.

"Where did you meet him?" He dragged her over to the sofa before he picked up Hades, placed him against his chest and ran his hand down the soft fur.

"My economics class." A quick flash of her mother had her speaking before thinking. "But I'm thinking about dropping it. Just because you were right about getting out and meeting people doesn't mean I should waste my time in a class I don't need."

The piercing look that Cole gave her had her drop her eyes to her hands, smiling when he placed one of his large hands on hers. He didn't even have to speak in order for Aubrey to feel guilty. Although she had been brave and spoke to Seth, she was scared to see where it would lead.

"What are you worried about?" Cole's question carried none of the censure she'd been expecting.

"I can't get him out of my thoughts. I recall every word, every smile, everything about this man, and I have no idea what to do. I've never even kissed a man, and yet I find myself wanting more than a kiss from Seth. He knows what I am, and he's told me about his family of shifters and vampires. Hell, I didn't even know there were any other immortals in the area, but from what I've scented, there are at least a dozen shifters and several vampires."

She knew that she was rambling so she paused for a long moment and told him exactly what scared her.

"What if I fall for him and he's not for me?"

“Sunshine, look at me.” Cole waited until she had. “I’m the last person who can tell you there is such a thing as a happily-ever-after. I’ve had my heart stomped on more times than I care to remember, but giving up before you even start isn’t a way to live your life. Seth might not be the one for you, but knowing that is better than wondering what if. Life is about taking risks, and since I’ve known you, you haven’t taken one. Isn’t it about time you did?”

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Aubrey grew silent after he asked her the question that had been a constant since she'd met Seth. Yes, she needed to take a risk, even if it didn't work out in the end. As she met Cole's eyes, she nodded.

"Great. Now, I'm off. I have a date with a man that I met online. Wish me luck."

She pulled him into a hug. "Thanks. Be careful. I'm here if you need me. And remember, the offer still stands. I can make anyone disappear without a trace. Especially that last one."

Cole's ex, Mark, had turned out to be an abusive asshole. When Cole showed up on her doorstep with a black eye and a broken arm, she had taken Cole to the emergency room in Denver for care at Cole's insistence that no one at the local hospital know, before she settled him into her guest room. As Cole rested, she tracked the abusive fucker down and instilled the fear of God into the man. She might have shattered his kneecap and broken a few of his fingers, but he would recover. She had made sure that he'd left town and never bothered Cole again. If he ever came back, he knew that she would kill him and make his body disappear. This was Cole's first date in two years, and whatever happened, she would be there for him.

"I'll be careful, sunshine, don't you worry." Cole winked at her as he headed toward the door.

In a serious tone that had Cole still as he held the door open, she told him exactly how she felt. "I love you, Cole. You are the big brother I never had, and if anyone lays a finger on you in violence, there will be no mercy for him. I protect those I love and I will always look out for you."

Tears shone in his blue eyes. With one last smile that conveyed exactly what he felt for her, Cole stepped through the threshold and closed the door behind him.

She stood there until she heard his car start and drive away, and only then did she pick up the container that stored her dinner and breakfast. Pulling out the bag near the top, she resealed the pack, ensuring that the blood would be warm when she fed before sunrise.

She sat at her desk, smiling when Hades hopped up on her lap and settled there. He loved the warmth the blood would give her after she drank. As she waited for her laptop to boot, she sunk her teeth into the bag of warm blood and pulled. It took her a few minutes to drain the bag. When she extracted her teeth from the crinkled material, a drop of blood slid down her lip and onto her chin. She had never gotten the hang of drinking without making a mess, but at least she managed to keep the thick liquid from staining her clothing.

Full of the blood and feeling the warmth from Cole's visit and Hades purring on her lap, she settled into transcribing the court documents she had received the day before. She had built a reputation when she completed the work in a fraction of the time normal transcribers would, and word had spread statewide. Because of her quick work and word of mouth, she had more than enough to keep her busy. But like all other nights since she first met Seth, her thoughts moved off work and onto him.

She wondered whether she should contact Seth, but she wasn't brave enough yet to hear his voice. Determined to wait until the next class, she had decided that if he were to offer her another chance to get to know him, she wouldn't hesitate this time. With that settled, she went back to work.

Chapter Five

Seth

Surprise. The one word didn't even come close to what he felt. Seth was shocked. Every minute since he'd left class the week before, he wondered whether the next class would be the one where Aubrey agreed to get to know him. But he knew not to push. He wanted her to know that his interest wasn't fleeting. The last thing he wanted her to do was run away because he'd pressured her too much too soon.

So when he arrived in class, he asked her about her week before they moved on to speak about the weather, although that seemed to amuse her when he'd brought it up. He barely heard a word his professor spoke, grateful that the man put all of his lecture notes online, and planned what he would say to get her to agree this time. If she didn't—well, he could wait. He could be patient. He'd already determined that she was worth it.

The moment class ended, his careful plan evaporated.

“Would you like to come over to my place and talk?”

His voice had disappeared and he found himself nodding in agreement. He had managed to locate his SUV by chance and followed her to the outskirts of town. When he parked and hopped out, not wanting to waste a moment with her, she directed him to a chair on the porch. He watched as she unlocked her door and stashed her keys and bag inside, before she joined him.

The moment he sat on the padded rocking chair, a fluffy ball darted out of nowhere and jumped onto his lap. Seth smiled down at the little cat and held his hand out for inspection. Instead of sniffing him, the cat butted his head against his palm and purred when Seth stroked his back.

“What’s his name?”

“Hades.”

He lifted one eyebrow before he glanced down into the hazel eyes. Yeah, he could see the mischievous glint shining from the all-black cat, and understood that Hades was a perfect name.

“He’s usually not that friendly. Cole and I are the only ones he’s ever shown affection to. And now you, apparently.”

He stiffened as he heard another man’s name, but before he could ask her who Cole was, Hades chose that moment to butt his head against the bottom of Seth’s chin, pulling his attention back to the loving creature on his lap. Hades must’ve sensed the tension and offered what comfort he could. Smart cat.

“Would you like something to drink?”

“No, thanks.”

Her brows drew down at his quick response.

“I would like to get to know you and time doing that is precious to me,” he explained.

“I would like that.” Her shy response sent heat down his spine.

Before he could speak, they were interrupted by a car pulling into the driveway. His eyes never moved from her face. When she smiled at the new arrival, something in his chest stalled as jealousy washed over him. His gaze darted over to the car; his eyes widened as he watched a handsome blond man step out of the car and smile at Aubrey, walking toward the house with a package in his hand. Seth actually growled, low and deep in his throat, when the other man pulled her into a hug, the affection plain on the man's face.

"Evening, sunshine."

"Hi, Cole."

Before he knew his intentions, Seth gently placed Hades on his newly vacated seat and stepped close to Aubrey in a possessive way that wouldn't have been mistaken as an accident. He watched as the other man's attention pulled away from Aubrey and landed on him. Instead of surprise, the other man smiled at Seth and caught him off guard.

"Is this him?" Cole asked.

Aubrey nodded. "Yes, this is Seth. Seth, this is my best friend, Cole."

Now that he had gotten closer, Seth could tell the man was older than him by close to a decade. He couldn't help wonder at their relationship, but something in his mind understood that Cole wasn't a threat, but a friend to Aubrey. Seth visibly relaxed.

"It's nice to meet you." Seth's hand shot out.

"You, too."

The side of Cole's mouth inched up in a smirk. Ignoring Seth's hand, Cole reached

forward and pulled him into a warm hug. He stiffened in surprise, but it reminded him of Kai's hug the other day, warm and comforting, so he found himself relaxing. Seth returned the affectionate embrace and with one last squeeze, Cole pulled back.

Cole's beaming smile made Aubrey laugh. "I'm glad you took my advice."

"And you—how was your date?"

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“It was wonderful. More than I could have ever hoped for. He’s taking me out again tonight.”

Cole radiated happiness. Seth could feel there was a story there, but he didn’t want to embarrass the other man, so he kept his questions to himself. He glanced at Aubrey, and although he could see her happiness at the news, there was an underlying danger that radiated from her.

“If that changes, let me know.” Aubrey’s words were serious.

“You’ll be the first to know.” Cole pulled Aubrey into another hug before he turned toward Seth. “It was nice to meet you. I hope that we can get to know each other soon.”

“You too. I would like that.”

Seth stepped close to Aubrey as they watched Cole head back out the way he came, giving a wave before he disappeared around the corner.

He turned his attention back to Aubrey, taking a chance and reaching for her hand. As he interlaced their fingers, he could see her amazement at the simple action. Slowly, she closed her fingers around his hand and he smiled at her when she looked up, seeking assurance that she hadn’t hurt him.

“How did you meet Cole?”

He tugged her hand, leading her back to the chairs on the porch. Before he sat, he

lifted Hades off the chair and settled the cat on his lap before he turned his attention to Aubrey, all while keeping a hold of her hand. She smiled at him, seeming more relaxed than she had in all the time he'd known her.

"It was soon after I turned." She relaxed back into her chair, but her brow drew down in thought. "Though I suppose I should start from the beginning."

"I would like to know everything about you," Seth said.

"I would like to know about you, too."

Seth nodded. "After, I promise."

"When I grew up, it had been me and my mother, who had gotten pregnant with me by accident. She had no clue who my father was, and she couldn't have cared less. My mother loved men, a lot, and wasn't particular about who she took to bed. When she had me, she found no reason to stop seeing men. Well, when I was seventeen and close to leaving home for college, she made the mistake of bringing a vampire home."

He couldn't help his reaction; he tensed. Before he could reason with himself, he lowered Hades onto the table next to his chair, pulled her onto his lap and wrapped his arms around her waist. Her head tucked against his shoulder and she breathed out a breath before she continued.

"I was finishing up my homework when I heard a loud snarl in the living room. I usually cleared out of the house before my mother arrived with her lovers, but that night I was running late. By the time I could realize what the sound meant, I was pinned to the floor, with a man on top of me holding down my arms and legs. He told me that my blood smelled sweet, enticing, and before I could say a word, he sank his teeth into my neck. I only remember pain and closing blackness, but before he drained

me, he told me that killing me would be a waste. His teeth pierced me again, but this time I felt a tingle that started in my neck and traveled throughout my body. Distracted from the new sensations, he cut his wrist and dripped his blood into my mouth and I swallowed.

“I don’t know how many days passed, but I woke up in the same spot on the living room floor and I could sense everything. When I stood, my mother was sitting on the couch, cuddling with another guy, laughing when she looked at the blood on my clothes and face. I felt the thirst, but for a reason I couldn’t fathom, I didn’t want to hurt her. I went to my room and packed a bag with everything I had and walked to the front door. She didn’t say anything as I left and I didn’t care.”

Seth couldn’t believe that her mother didn’t give a shit about her only daughter. The callousness of it struck him, and the situation with his own parents seemed insignificant compared to what Aubrey had been through. He held her tighter against him and breathed her in as she burrowed her face against his neck.

“I couldn’t bring myself to feed off anyone after remembering the pain of his bite, so I found myself outside the hospital, debating with myself whether I could go inside and steal a couple of bags of blood. That’s when Cole found me.”

He absorbed the vibration as she giggled at the memory. Having her wrapped in his arms, on his lap, seemed as natural as breathing. Aubrey was his, and he would do whatever he had to to keep her close.

“I had forgotten that I hadn’t cleaned myself before I left the house, so I had blood on my face and clothes. My hair was matted with it, and I’m sure that I looked wild, but he didn’t hesitate to approach me. Of course, he was an emergency room physician and was used to blood. His hands were so warm as he checked me for injuries, and since he had come close to me without any hesitation, I found myself leaning toward him. I was thirsty and he smelled appealing, but when I realized where my thoughts

had led me, I made myself step away from him. It was the first kind gesture I received from someone and I didn't want to hurt him.

“When he couldn't find any injuries, he asked me why I stood outside a hospital. I had no idea why, but I told him everything and watched as the look of horror morphed his kind face. At first, I thought I disgusted him, but when he pulled me into a hug, I knew it was my story that horrified him, not me. He led me to his car and sat me in the passenger seat, asking me to wait fifteen minutes for him. He wouldn't leave until he was sure that I wouldn't bolt, and then he locked me in the car and ran into the hospital. He came out with two bags of warm blood and drove me to his house, where he gave me a guest bedroom until I got a job and could afford to live on my own. Cole has kept me fed ever since.”

The respect Seth had for Cole had grown exponentially in the matter of minutes. The man walked into danger when he confronted Aubrey, and yet he did so because he thought she was hurt. And knowing that Cole could've left her in the parking lot after he'd fed her, but didn't, made Seth feel small for his earlier reaction. He would have to thank the doc later.

Chapter Six

Seth

They had moved inside her house after Aubrey sensed Seth shiver from the plunging temperatures on the late September night. She filled the kettle and set it on the stove to brew him a cup of tea and he couldn't stop himself from asking questions, wanting to know everything about her.

“Why do you have food in your house? Have you tried to eat?”

She laughed and shook her head. “No, but Cole comes over, especially after a break-up, and the only way to cheer him up is by feeding him. I haven't forgotten how to cook from all the years that I took care of myself, so I stock up just in case.”

“You both are the most generous people I've ever met.”

“I was in a spot when I first met him—it's the least I can do.”

“So I take it his dates usually end in disaster?” Seth asked, curious about the man who loved Aubrey like family.

Aubrey handed him the hot mug before she took the seat next to him at her kitchen table. The humor left Aubrey and he nudged her into telling him what happened.

“Usually his dates are losers who discover that he's a ER doctor who earns a well-paid salary. They come to realize that Cole is a people-pleaser and they take

advantage of him.His relationships don't last long after they get what they want from him, depending on the asshole."

"Usually?"

"There was this guy, Mark.I didn't know at first that he started to hit Cole.Cole later told me that it had been a couple of times and he hid the bruises from me, but one night he showed up with a broken arm and a battered face.I took him to the ER and he was patched up, but the emotional toll took longer to get over.Last Friday was his first date in years.I did a background check on his latest date, Simon, and it turns out he's a nice guy.He started a children's charity after his nephew died of cancer.He's never been married, doesn't have kids, and there's no criminal record.But if he ever hurts Cole..."

"Do I want to know what happened to Mark?"

Her answering sneer said it all, but she told him how she had run him out of town after she'd taught him a lesson.After she'd described everything she'd done to the man, his only surprise was that the man was still alive and he told her so.

"Pain is something that lasts longer.If I killed him, he wouldn't remember the fear and pain I caused."

"Well, at least you and the assassins will get along."

"What...assassins?"

"Fuck, yeah.Sorry.MaybeIshould start at the beginning."

He skimmed over his relationship with his parents; they weren't an important part of his life and they could wait until later.

“I met Kai when I was twelve. He was my mysterious next-door neighbor; you know, never out during the day, stealthy, rich as sin. And when my curiosity got the best of me, he caught me trying to break into his house. I thought that he slept in a coffin or had humans chained up in his basement to feed from, stupid shit like that. Well, I didn’t get very far. I suck at trying to pick locks and he caught me.”

She gasped. “Were you scared?”

“I thought he was going to kill me, but he took me inside and talked to me like I was an adult. He let me ask any questions I wanted to and he answered them. He told me he was a vampire—he turned in the early 1800’s—but he wouldn’t tell me what he did for a living. It turns out he works as a government contractor, along with thirty-some shifters and several vampires, assassinating targets that their human counterparts couldn’t touch. I was seventeen when he met his mate, Liv. Liv was human, an immunologist. Her work was stolen and manipulated into making a bioweapon to kill immortals and she risked her life and career to warn Kai and the others. Liv watched out for me and we became close.”

Seth paused as he remembered what happened to Liv.

“What is it?” Aubrey reached for his hands and squeezed gently.

“The scientist who had stolen her work kidnapped her and tortured her. He sent a vampire, Kane, whose mate had been held in exchange for his cooperation to kidnap Liv. He couldn’t find a way into Kai’s secured house, but one day he spotted me as I was going to see her and forced me to open the door for him. Liv exchanged herself for me. She had been beaten within an inch of her life. The only reason she survived is because Kai had turned her while she’d been in a coma.”

“It’s not your fault. You were a kid. Do you think that Liv would’ve allowed you to be hurt in any way? She gave up her career to warn those she didn’t even know and from

what you've told me, she would've done anything to protect those she loves."

Coming from someone who'd never met Liv, Seth finally started to believe that Liv being kidnapped by Kane had been a set of unfortunate circumstances. He still felt guilty, but he never let it affect his relationship with Liv.

"How do you know the vampire's name who kidnapped her?" Aubrey asked.

"Liv had dosed him with a sedative and knocked him out when she realized that Kane didn't want to hurt her. Kane confessed all and learned the fate of his mate. It turned out that Dr. Ames had killed his mate, but pretended she was still his captive to manipulate Kane into doing what he wanted. Liv killed Dr. Ames with the same bioweapon he created, after she learned the fate of Kane's mate. Kane decided that he needed a purpose in life, so when Ghost, the boss, offered him a job, he accepted. After some training, Kane is now an assassin."

"Is Liv an assassin?"

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“No, she uses her skills to find the differences between humans and immortals. I have worked with her over the past three years. I get college credit for work experience, which is why I’m graduating after this semester.”

He cupped his hands around the warm mug and took a sip of tea as he watched Aubrey process what he’d already told her. Although he knew that everything Kai, Liv, and the rest of the assassins had told him was to be kept secret, he knew he could trust Aubrey.

“The assassins work for an organization called the Dark Company, founded by Ghost, who is a white wolf shifter. There are more shifters than vampires who work for Ghost. They used to work individually, but when Kai met Liv, she insisted that she would feel better if Kai had someone to watch his back, so Ghost gave the okay for pairs to work together on all missions. It worked well, especially after Reaper met and turned his mate, Ara. Reaper is a timber wolf shifter and Ara—well, Ara is special. When she was human, she was telekinetic. Able to move objects, manipulate her environment and people. She was turned by accident and is now a red wolf shifter. Her powers have grown exponentially and she can heal and regenerate dead tissue. She brought Reaper back from death.

“You’ll meet Reaper and Ara when I introduce you to Liv and Kai, but the others who are usually around are Xander, Hunter, Gunnar, Ax, Jade—who are all shifters—and Thomas, Isaac, and Kane, the vampires.”

Aubrey was quiet for several minutes, processing everything he’d thrown at her, but he wanted her to be prepared. Hearing about them differed greatly from meeting them.

“What do you mean by mate? Is it like wife or husband?” Aubrey’s mouth barely moved, the question quiet.

“From what Kai and Reaper have told me, it’s a deeper connection. When they both caught sight of their mates, they knew that they were meant to be together. Kai had a little rougher go at it. He denied to himself and others that Liv could be his mate, until she was kidnapped and he had to face losing her. Reaper had known Ara was his mate the moment he laid eyes on her. What they feel is love, but they describe it as a deep need to be with their mate, combined with a strong feeling of protectiveness. It’s hard to describe, but when you see how they act with each another, you’ll understand.”

Seth reached for her hand, smiling when she threaded her fingers with his and curled them around his hand. She was starting to trust him more, but he knew that she was confused about the feelings he brought out in her.

“Do they know about me?”

“Yes. I told them the same day I met you. Kai figured it out when I started talking and through their mind link, communicated his thoughts to Liv. Liv is excited for me.”

He could see the doubt reflected in her eyes.

“They want what’s best for me and you are what’s best for me. I noticed you the moment you walked in the classroom. And when you walked away from me the first time, I was devastated. I know that this world is new to you, even though you’ve been a vampire for ten years, but I know something that you don’t. I’m your mate.”

Chapter Seven

Aubrey

As the silence stretched between them, she sensed that Seth's gaze never left her face as she processed all the new information that she'd been given. His words were said with such assurance that she had no doubt he believed in the possibility of her being his mate, but she couldn't help but wonder what that meant for him as a human. The more they spoke, the more she desired him in ways that were beyond physical. The pull that had her lifting her eyes to his the first day of class had somehow grown stronger. It had grown to the point where she needed physical contact with him, and would defend him if anyone were to even look his way with ill intent.

"Is that why I wanted to rip that girl's head off for touching you?"

Seth threw back his head and laughed, all while keeping her hand firmly in his. The corner of her mouth lifted up.

"I'm serious. The reason I moved away was because I was scared that I would hurt her. I had to stop myself from thinking about it and for the entire week, I debated whether I should drop the class."

Seth grew serious and before she knew his intent, he cupped her face and drew closer to her. Her breath hitched in her chest as she took in his handsome face, moving closer to her, until she glanced down at his lips. Her own parted and he took advantage. His tongue traced around the edge of her lower lip, sending tingles down her body.

A low, needy sound escaped her and the next moment, she found herself sitting in his lap. The hard muscles of his thighs opened under her and she settled her bottom against his...erection. Her eyes opened and locked on his, and instead of a smile, his eyes sparked with emotion and desire. Without waiting another second, she opened her lips to his and moaned at the sensation as she lowered herself to press against his hardness.

His hands slid under her hair to grip the base of her neck, and when he tilted her head a fraction to deepen the kiss, nerve endings she had never known existed sparked to life. She crowded forward, pressing their chests together. She hadn't noticed a reaction in her own body until she shifted closer to Seth and her hardened peaks brushed against the hard muscle of his chest. The sensation shot straight to her core, causing her to gasp in surprise and need.

As she pressed harder against him, he moved one hand from her neck to her hip, holding her tight against him as he plunged his tongue inside her mouth, stealing her breath. Acting on instinct, she pursed her lips and sucked his tongue deeper into her mouth, loving the groan that rumbled through his body and into hers. Before she understood the spell he cast on her, he had pulled back and laid his forehead against hers, his breathing choppy and shallow.

"Fuck, gorgeous, we need to stop. I only meant to give you a small kiss."

"Why do you want to stop?"

Their breathing sounded loud in the modest cabin, but her body was alight with sensation and the last thing she wanted to do was stop. But when she glanced at his face, he cringed in what seemed to be pain.

Her heart stopped and she found herself across the room, standing near the kitchen sink. She bowed her head and willed her body to calm down. The last thing she ever

wanted to do was to hurt Seth, and yet she managed somehow by kissing him.

So lost in her own thoughts, she jerked back against his chest when he wrapped his arms around her waist and tightened his hold. She was disappointed in herself, getting carried away by a simple kiss while they were supposed to get to know each other.

“I don’t want to take advantage of you—that’s why I stopped. I want you to trust me.”

“I do trust you.” She wasn’t surprised by the vehemence in her words; she meant them.

“And I trust you. I’ve never wanted a woman in my life as much as I want you. You consume my thoughts. You make me happy.”

With his hands splayed on her hips, he turned her around in his arms, until she faced him. Unable to quite meet his gaze and show him all of the emotions that were written on her face, she pressed against his chest. She became overwhelmed in his scent and wrapped her arms around him, pressing herself closer to him. Her body had cooled enough that when she placed a kiss on his chest and pulled back to look at his face, she could smile. He cupped her face and pressed a chaste kiss on her lips, before he led her to the sofa.

“Have you ever wanted to feed from a human?”

The thought of feeding from a human, hurting them for no other reason than to gain sustenance, was, to her, deplorable.

“No.”

“Aubrey, that vampire who turned you was a complete prick. All vampires have a numbing agent in their saliva as well as in the venom in their teeth. With the venom,

you can control how much or how little sedative you administer. One lick on a human's neck is enough for a bite not to hurt."

She could feel her body shake at the news. She had no idea.

Seth squeezed her hands in his before he continued. "And with mates, the bite is an aphrodisiac, of sorts, to the human. When the human turns, then the mates can feed from the other so they don't have to go elsewhere for sustenance. Kai also told me blood tasted metallic and bitter, whereas when he fed from Liv, it was magnificent. He hated feeding before, but he couldn't get enough of Liv. It was the same with Kane."

"Wasn't Kai worried that he would hurt Liv?"

"I think he was too busy fighting his feelings for her, because somewhere deep inside he knew that she was his mate. It goes against all instincts to hurt your mate. He knew that he would have to drink from her when they were sequestered in his house for a couple of days because of the people after her, and she was the only one he could feed from. The luscious taste of her blood was a surprise."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"I want you to feed from me."

His statement was simple, and before she could outright deny him what he wanted, she glanced at him. His eyes were imploring her to consider what he requested, and although it went against every instinct to hurt Seth, she did believe what he learned from others' experiences. He wouldn't put himself in danger.

“I need a little time to think about it.”

“Sure, no pressure.”

His answering smile had her relax her shoulders a fraction. He had her intrigued. Although the blood that Cole had brought to her over the years had been warm and filling, she couldn't say that she enjoyed the taste. She drank it quickly and treated it as though it was another chore to get through. But if Seth was right, his blood would taste perfect for her and her alone.

But with each new thing she learned about being a vampire, she couldn't help but feel a little ignorant about her immortality. Over the years, she had never sought out another vampire because of her experience with the one who had turned her. She had thought that they were all cold-hearted bastards like the one her mother brought home.

A couple of years after she turned, she'd come across the scent of what she believed was a cross between an animal and human, or a shifter as she recently learned. Although intrigued, her instincts blared at her not to seek them out and she'd listened. She couldn't help the curiosity that bloomed at the thought of vampires and shifters who were Seth's family, but she didn't want to assume that she would meet them. She'd already crossed the line by getting lost in his kisses.

She turned toward him and lowered her head to smile as she thought about how his lips felt against hers. While she was lost in thought, he crowded closer to her. His fingers caressed her cheek before moving down to her chin, and gently raised her gaze to meet his.

“You never thought about turning before?”

“No, it never really occurred to me. I wanted to get through college and start working full-time with Liv as I trained with the assassins in order to protect myself. They’ve taught me a lot because they think of me as vulnerable, since I’m human. Until I met you, I never thought I would have an immortal mate, so wanting to turn wasn’t even in the realm of possibility. Now, I want to because the thought of living without you hurts me more than I can say.”

Overwhelmed by his confession, she blurted out the first thing that came to mind. “I want you to kiss me.”

She could hear his pulse accelerate at her words, but she held her breath, wondering whether he would push her away again. Instead, he brushed his lips against her and the sizzling spark that had ignited the first time they’d kissed, flared again. He swallowed her moan and took her by surprise when he nipped her lower lip. The moment her mouth opened, his tongue darted inside. Each touch of his lips, his tongue, his teeth made her melt against him as he took her mouth in a practiced, yet sensual way. The thought of him kissing other women that had jealousy flare in her chest, and she couldn’t help but wonder how many women he’d seduced from his mouth alone.

“There is no one else but you, gorgeous. There will never be, because the moment I spotted you, I knew we belonged together.”

“Wha...what?”

Instead of answering, he bent and brushed his lips against hers, before he stood and captured her gaze. “I can’t wait for next Friday to see you, and I would like you to see where I live. Do you want to come over after sundown?”

“Are you leaving?”

“It’s getting close to dawn and you need to eat before you sleep. This way I’ll get some sleep, too, and we’ll have all night together.”

She wanted to ask him to stay, but she had skipped her dinner and wasn’t in total control of her thirst. She nodded and memorized the address the moment he spoke it.

“I’ll see you soon.”

Seth drew her in for another intense, yet too short kiss that left her breathless and aching. When he pulled away, she reached for his hand and squeezed once before she let him go.

She couldn’t help but watch intensely as he strode down the driveway and into his SUV. She leaned against the doorframe and watched as he turned the SUV toward the main road, smiling when he waved at her before he disappeared around the curve.

Something settled inside her at the thought of seeing Seth in less than ten hours. She went back into her house, making sure that the door was locked and the blackout curtains were in place. As she drew out a blood bag and sank her teeth into it, she couldn’t help the happiness that radiated from the inside out. She had been brave, taken a chance, and although still new, she could see spending her life with Seth.

After eating, she slid into bed and settled down for a day of sleep as Hades cuddled against her. She smiled as she thought about how much her life had changed in such a short amount of time because of one handsome human who, as she had come to believe, was the one destined for her.

Chapter Eight

Seth

Seth stopped pacing the moment the perimeter alarms Kai had set up alerted him of the car coming down the drive. By the time Aubrey parked, he was leaning against the front doorframe; when she emerged from her car, something in his chest settled. The last thing he wanted to do once she accepted him into her life was to be separated from her, but he'd told her things that changed her understanding of her immortality and he wanted to give her time to think.

He'd been a little worried that she might not show up. If she pulled back from him, he would have given her more time. But he wouldn't have given up.

He met her halfway between her car and the porch. Without wasting one more second, he pulled her into his arms and kissed her. By the time he lifted his head, they were both breathless and his cock hard. He placed his hand on her lower back and escorted her toward the front door.

"Let's go inside."

She stopped after step. He couldn't see her reaction, but he could hear her intake of breath as her eyes raised and scanned the isolated house.

As ridiculous as it sounded, even in his own mind, he wanted her to like his home.

"I wanted a place of my own, yet close to the others. I earned money from helping Liv

in the lab, so I purchased the land and the others helped me built it. It turned out to be bigger than I'd imagined. The wrap-around porch was Liv's idea."

"It's beautiful," she whispered.

"Thank you."

They entered the house and he locked the door before he turned back to Aubrey. He bent down and brushed a kiss to her forehead, lower still as he kissed her eyelids closed, and then her cheeks before he captured her lips in a searing kiss. He cupped her face in his hands; when he tried to end the kiss, her hand pressed against his neck and she bit his lower lip. It wasn't enough to draw blood, but he moaned as he thought about her tasting him.

She blinked up at him as the kiss ended and her eyes sparkled as she looked up at him. "I was starting to wonder whether I'd dreamed you."

The next words out of his mouth stalled when her hands started to caress his chest. It was the first time she initiated any touch between them, and he found her tentative touches more erotic than he'd experienced in the past. When she brushed a finger over his nipple, he bit his lip and suppressed a moan that stuck in his throat. His muscles tensed and he closed his eyes, lecturing himself to control his need for her.

"What is it?" she asked.

A breath escaped as he opened his eyes and caught the devastation on her face. When she took a step back, he threw caution to the wind and devoured her mouth, tasting her. She sank into him and kissed him with abandon. He loved it when she pushed him against the wall and ravaged his lips.

He found that he loved when she discarded all thought and kissed him as though she

needed him to survive. A growl escaped his throat when she wrapped one leg around his and jerked him closer. But when she found that they couldn't get close enough standing up, she snarled into his mouth and ended the kiss. The silver of her pupils had all but disappeared; when he glanced down at her mouth, he noticed her fangs had extended. Feeling dangerous, he flicked out his tongue and licked the sharp point of one.

"Fuck, you bring out the demon in me."

A wave of emotions swamped him at that moment, and they weren't his. Although Kai had told him that he could feel Liv's emotions while she was still human, he never heard Liv talk about being able to feel Kai's. He didn't understand why he could feel Aubrey's, but dismissed the thoughts because he had other concerns. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the jumble that assailed him. It took him a few minutes, but when he opened his eyes, he understood her prominent emotion. Jealousy.

"Why are you jealous?"

"Wha...how do you know that?"

"I can feel your emotions and the strongest one is jealousy. I think I felt the same thing yesterday."

She burrowed against his chest and sighed. He pulled her closer as he rubbed his hand up and down her back, hoping to project how much he cared for her. It amazed him; when he had her in his arms, he could easily forget that although she might seem fragile, she was as deadly as any immortal he knew.

"I...you're very good at kissing."

His brows drew down. Pulling back, she met his gaze. The meaning behind her small smile had his heart stopping.

“Yes, there have been a couple of women I’ve dated, but they never lasted longer than a few months because they weren’t you. When I met you, everything changed. I knew that you were exactly who I need in my life. When I kiss you, you’re all I think about. There will never be anyone else for me because you... Aubrey, you are the woman I need.”

The silence stretched between them as she assessed his words. He didn’t know what to expect, but as long as he could hold her in his arms then he could handle anything.

“I want you. I want to make love to you.”

His arms tightened around her back and he leaned his forehead against hers. “Fuck, gorgeous, I want you, too. Are you sure?”

“Yes,” she breathed.

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The stranglehold he had on his control evaporated and within seconds, his hands slid down her back and under her sweater. As he encountered hot, soft skin, a deep groan vibrated through his chest and she shivered against his touch. He couldn't stop his hands from wandering up and down her back, memorizing each curve and indent as he went.

This time, her mouth met his. His hands tightened against her back, pressing her chest against his, when he realized that something was missing.

“Are you naked underneath this sweater?”

Without answering, she leaned back a couple of inches and reached for the hem of her sweater. If he hadn't been paying attention, he would have missed the swift removal of the garment up and over her head. Within seconds, he wrapped her in his arms and plundered her mouth as though she could slake any thirst he had. Her fingers found the hem of his shirt and without breaking the kiss, she ripped open his shirt, buttons flying everywhere and forgotten as she pressed against him.

“I can't wait. I'm going to claim you, make you mine.”

Her answering moan was all the encouragement he needed and without finesse, he made quick work of the button and zipper on her jeans. Kneeling to remove her clothes, he had to remember to breathe as his movements exposed inch after glorious inch of her beautiful pale skin. He pressed a kiss to her hip. When he pulled back to finish stripping her, he could smell her arousal. As soon as her clothes were discarded, he stood, making quick work of his jeans and boxer briefs.

Taking her hands in his, he stepped back enough to see what a beautiful sight she made. Pink tinged her cheeks and when he spotted matching freckles across the top of her breasts, he wanted to kiss each one. He reached out and, with the tip of his finger, he drew in down her breast and with the slightest touch, brushed over her nipple with the rough pad of his finger.

“Seth, please.”

He captured her mouth and easily lifted her, his moan lost in her mouth as she wrapped her legs around his waist. His cock brushed against her wet core. Knowing that she had no experience with men, he held his hips still as he walked them into the bedroom and laid her gently onto the bed. Breaking the kiss, he dropped to his knees in front of the bed and took a long moment to peruse the entirety of her body.

“So beautiful. Mine, all mine.”

“Yes. You’re mine, too.”

With her words bouncing in his head, he began to explore. His lips started at her knees, not wanting to startle her by moving too quickly. As he kissed up her leg to her outer thighs, he smiled against her skin as he heard her breath stutter. His movements were slow and very thorough, kissing back across her leg to her inner thigh, staying several inches away from her core. As he reached her inner thigh, he pressed his lips against her skin and sucked.

“Oh...oh, please. Seth, please.”

Drawing out her pleasure, he bypassed her core and pressed his lips against the soft skin of her belly. His hands weren’t idle as they ran up and down the sides of her legs. When his mouth reached her taut nipples, he couldn’t stop himself from having a little taste. His tongue swirled around the hard bud, loving each sound and breath that

let him know how much she enjoyed his touch, before he closed his lips around her and sucked.

Her body arched against his, seeking more contact. Not to neglect her other breast, he slid his fingers across the other hard bud and when he relented on his suction, he squeezed his fingers over her sensitive nipple and tugged. He smothered her scream with his kiss, loving how she clutched at him as he devoured her mouth. Her body vibrated with need beneath his.

Breaking the kiss, he glanced down and almost smiled at the sight of her silver eyes glazed with lust. They were beyond the stopping point as her body arched into his, seeking contact and relief.

“One more kiss, Aubrey, and then I plan on tasting you until you come in my mouth.”

As with all the other kisses, it quickly grew out of control. But this time when he pulled back with the need to devour her, he hadn't noticed that her fangs had extended and one scraped against his bottom lip. A snarl torn from her throat had his head snapping to meet her gaze. Her pupils had dilated and instead of the silver he was used to seeing, her eyes were black and focused on the blood that pooled on his lip.

The tension he'd kissed and touched away was back. He could feel her hands fisting by the side of her hips as she locked down her body. She hadn't tasted his blood, but he could see as she struggled with herself, strain in her muscles, worried that even one little taste would make her crazed. Without thinking, he took the decision out of her hands.

“Taste me, gorgeous.”

Her eyes opened and her mouth dropped open in shock. He leaned forward and kissed

her, the blood smearing on both of their lips.

“What...”

Her tongue darted out and licked up the blood he dabbed on her lips as they kissed. The silver in her eyes flashed before she jerked him down. He had been worrying the split on his lip the moment he ended the kiss and had successfully reopened the wound. He waited for her reaction to his taste, and this time, her tongue darted out and swiped off the blood.

Before he could blink, he lay alone on the bed. His eyes darted around the bedroom; he found her in the corner of the room, fists clenched and head down.

Determination and need coursed through him as he gazed at his mate. Quickly standing, he strode over to Aubrey, needing to close the distance between them before he lost his mind. He knew that by the end of the night, he would find a way to prove to her that she wasn't a danger to him.

Chapter Nine

Aubrey

Seth's taste called to her in a way she'd never thought possible, but images of pain and gushing blood rose in her mind. She was afraid that she would lose control from the taste of his blood, and worried she would rip out his throat. The images filtered through her mind, over and over again, and she panicked before she could quell them. Finding herself across the room hadn't been a surprise. She couldn't take a chance on hurting him.

The rustle of the sheets pulled her from her thoughts. She turned toward the sound and caught his languid movements as he rose from the bed, beautiful and completely naked. The sound, a cross between a moan and a plea, escaped through her pursed lips. The corner of his mouth tipped up in a semblance of a smile, and for a moment, he stood still and allowed her to look.

Desire flooded her core as her eyes traced down to the corded muscles of his neck and then lower, over the defined muscles of his chest and arms. She memorized each indent and rise as she ogled his firm stomach, and in a matter of seconds, forgot the entire reason she moved away from Seth.

Her eyes darted back to meet his as he took his first step forward. Although his steps were slow and casual, something dangerous flashed in his eyes that promised sensual torment.

He held her gaze as the distance between them disappeared. She almost cried out in

relief as his body crashed into hers. But instead of pressing her up against the wall and feeling his skin against hers, he leaned away from her.

Then the real anguish began.

She could feel the heat radiating off his naked body, but nothing other than his lips touched her as he devoured her with sure strokes of his tongue. He cupped her face and her sensitized skin tingled as his callused fingertips slid down to caress her neck, moving her hair out of the way, before his mouth found the sensitive spot behind her ear.

Tired of the teasing, she wrapped a leg around the back of his thighs and pulled him closer. Breathless and throbbing, her core flooded with warm, wet heat at the feeling of Seth's cock pressed up against her stomach. He swallowed her moan and jerked his hips forward, echoing her need in his growl. Vaguely aware that their rough kissing had split his lip again, she sucked on the wound, savoring the drop of blood that touched her tongue.

Seth pulled back and studied her face, searching for something that she could only suspect was her acceptance of their situation. The last emotion she could feel with him pressed against her body, promising pleasure beyond what she could have imagined, was fear.

"I trust you completely, gorgeous."

Without waiting for her response, he lowered himself until he knelt in front of her. Her brows drew down in confusion, but in a flash she understood. He angled forward and placed a kiss right above her clit, before his eyes found hers and he smiled.

"I've never...I don't...I can't..."

“I know, but you can, Aubrey. And I’ll be here to catch you.” His voice had deepened.

With his breath washing over her sensitive clit, she dropped her head back against the wall and closed her eyes. “Okay.”

“All I want is your pleasure and your taste on my tongue.”

Before she could ask what he meant, he gently raised her right leg and draped it over his shoulder, exposing her fully to his view. Her cheeks flooded with heat and before she could open her mouth to protest, pleasure beyond her comprehension exploded from the inside out. The touch had been slight—a gentle flick of his tongue against her clit—but her hand threaded through his hair and clenched. She wanted to beg for more while at the same time cry for mercy, because if he touched her again, she thought her body would give.

His tongue darted another lick to her clit, but without any time to recover, his lips pursed around the place his tongue had been the moment before, and he sucked her into his mouth. Heat shot up her spine and even her moans were silent, caught in her throat at the sensations that ran throughout her body. She felt the slide of his hands as they moved to her hips, as he continued with the onslaught that left her breathless. He pulled her closer while he flattened his tongue, taking one long, wet lick across her sensitized clit.

“Fuck, Seth. I can’t take it.”

Over the next heated minutes, he set a rhythm without taking his mouth from her pussy. As he pulled her forward, his tongue would flick against her clit several times before he relented. Before she realized that the torment wasn’t over, his tongue traveled to her entrance. It wasn’t anything she’d ever felt before; it was electric. When he curled his tongue and pushed it inside her pussy to steal her wetness, she clenched her fingers in his hair as her body jerked against his tongue. Without warning, her

orgasm washed over her and her hips jerked in an unnatural way as his tongue never left her.

By the time she caught her breath, her legs couldn't hold her up any longer and she slid down the wall. Not caring how hard she hit, she closed her eyes, ready for sleep to take over.

Instead, Seth wrapped her in his arms and carried her to his bed. When her head hit the pillow, she forced open her eyes and smiled. His dark eyes sparked with something she couldn't define. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and moaned as his lips contacted hers. His tongue darted in; she could taste her essence on his lips and moaned when his hardness brushed against her sensitive skin.

"I want to be inside you."

"Yes."

Without hesitation, she wrapped her legs around his waist and pulled him closer. This time, instead of hiding away from the sensations that he drew from her, she stared with wide eyes as his hand moved between their bodies and he easily glided a finger inside her.

"More," she begged.

Although she wanted to watch Seth's reaction to their joining, she became riveted on his cock as he pressed the crown inside her. She could feel her muscles stretch to accommodate the intrusion, but there was nothing but pleasure and the need for more. Slowly and a little torturously, his hips pressed forward until her tight, wet heat surrounded him.

"So...good."

With one hand on her hip, he pulled back; a loud whimper escaped her throat. Her legs tightened around his waist and with that small movement, he drove into her. He touched something deep inside her that lit up her body, and she begged him to fuck her harder. His mouth slammed down on hers and while he kissed her, nipping her lips, he kept up his thrusts.

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“You are so beautiful.You’re mine, gorgeous.All mine.”

“Yes, always yours.”

At her words, his movements became erratic as he gathered her in his arms and buried his face against her neck.His hips rocked back and forth, drawing against the one spot that had her seeing stars as she screamed for him to fuck her harder.With one last thrust, the head of his cock pressed against the exact spot that made her come apart in his arms.But what stole her breath was the rush of warmth that filled her as her pulse beat in time with the throbbing of his cock.

She clung to him long after consciousness returned, pressing against his neck and breathing in his minty scent.Seth grounded her in a way routine and self-imposed seclusion had never done, and as she savored being in his arms after making love, she found herself smiling against his neck.

“What are you thinking about?”

“You.You make me happy.”

“You’re all I need, Aubrey.”

She raised her gaze to meet his, and she could see another need reflected back at her in those dark eyes.Without overthinking the possibilities, she allowed her teeth to elongate.When she nuzzled her nose against his neck, her fang scraped the sensitive area by his ear, drawing a loud moan from him.Her tongue slashed against the vein she could see throbbing before she gently pierced his skin with her teeth.

His blood was unlike anything she'd ever tasted—the sweetest, most delectable flavor to ever pass through her lips. Although she loved the taste of him, erotic sensations pulsed in her core at every pull. She straddled his leg and pressed her exposed pussy against the taut muscles of his thigh, rubbing back and forth. His arms tightened around her, encouraging her to do what she needed to lessen the pressure as the blood rushed down her throat.

“Fuck!”

Another need more pressing than thirst had her pulling her fangs gently from his throat, making sure that she sealed the punctures. She would marvel later at how quickly the wounds disappeared, but she needed Seth again.

Shifting her body as she settled on his lap, she clasped his cock in her hand and guided him to her entrance. His hands gripped her hips and she allowed the sensations of his touch to direct her. Her hips shifted forward as she sank down, absorbing his entire length in one stroke. Instincts alone had her lifting herself on her knees until just before he slipped out of her and dropping back down as he met each of her downward movements with a deep thrust of his hips.

“Aubrey, I’m gonna come.”

His fingers flicked against her clit and with that, she came apart in his arms, only to shiver when his cock swelled and he came deep inside her. She fell onto his chest and closed her eyes as he wrapped his arms around her waist. He lowered her onto her side as he pressed his chest against her back, enveloping her in his arms. A little while later, he reached for the blankets that were pooled at their feet and covered them both. She snuggled back into his arms and let out a contented sigh.

“Good-night, Aubrey.”

She hummed her response from her upturned lips and allowed the blackness of sleep to pull her under.

Chapter Ten

Seth

Consciousness hovered just out of reach, but he snuggled closer to the warmth that pressed against his chest and came close to falling back to sleep. His arm tightened as an image of Aubrey flashed and the events of the night before emerged from the recesses of his mind with sharp focus.

When he blinked open his eyes, he found his nose and mouth pressed against her beautiful red hair and he inhaled a deep breath. She smelled of cinnamon, with a hint of orange. That brought a smile to his lips as he savored every nuance he learned about her. As she snuggled closer to him, he pressed a kiss to her head, marveling that he'd finally found his mate.

“Seth.”

“I’m right here, gorgeous.”

She cuddled against him and with a deep sigh, fell back to sleep. As with everything else that fascinated him about Aubrey, he listened to her even breaths and shivered when she gripped his hip to move him closer. It had been the same the night before. They had clung to each other as their bodies moved in a rhythm as natural as breathing, each touch as intense as the last, until it built to a crescendo that had both of them crying out in release. He'd never been so aware of his body and the sensations that she drew from him, but it had been her pleasure that he wanted most of all.

He had tasted her, marked the sensitive skin on her neck and breasts, claiming her in every way. But nothing compared to when she drew from him. A piece of the puzzle that had been missing his entire life clicked into place with ease, and he understood that he existed to be Aubrey's mate. After the bite, everything righted in his world. Although he could feel her strong emotions before, such as jealousy, after they'd made love and she had some of his blood, he could feel her more fleeting emotions. Her worry for his well-being had her retracting her fangs before she was truly sated, and as she settled into his arms to sleep, contentment and happiness washed over him as she burrowed back against his chest.

For the first time since he learned about the existence of vampires and shifters, he could see himself transitioning into a vampire. The one reason that the assassins had bought him the SUV was because he had never wanted to be anything other than human. He knew that Reaper or even Liv would have turned him if he'd asked, but it had never been an interest to him. Until now.

Kai and Reaper had told him that the transition from human to immortal was a very intimate time between mates, and could be painful. He didn't care about the pain. As long as Aubrey stayed with him, he would be okay. But he worried about how to broach the subject with her. It wasn't every day that your new mate asked to be turned into a vampire. But he trusted her completely, no doubt in his mind that this was the course of action he wanted to pursue. But first, he had to convince Aubrey.

"What are you thinking about?"

He glanced down and met her sparkling silver eyes that never failed to make his heart beat faster. "I'm thinking about our future together."

Pushing herself up, she turned toward him. She brushed a quick kiss against his lips before she leaned back and searched his gaze. "And I hope that means us, naked, in various positions that I've read about in my romance books?"

A laugh erupted from deep in his chest as he brushed a kiss against her lips. “Yes, but that’s not all.”

Sensing the seriousness of the conversation, she sat up and wrapped a sheet around her to cover her naked body from view. Sitting cross-legged on the bed facing him, with her elbows resting on her knees, she scanned his face for any clues. “Are you worried about my reaction?”

“A little, but I couldn’t live without you in my life, so the decision is a fairly easy one to make.”

Her brows drew down and she stared at him for a long while. “You want me to change you.”

“Yes. I can’t live without you, Aubrey. You are my mate, and I am yours. I would be willing to sacrifice everything to be with you, so what’s a few days’ pain in the long run?”

“How long have you been thinking about it?”

He blew out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding. She wasn’t rejecting the idea outright. He understood that she wasn’t going to overreact to his news, possibly because of the reaction and ease in which she drank from him.

“Since the first moment I spotted you in class.”

“Why?”

“Because you are my mate, and I plan to be with you for the rest of our lives. That would be much easier if I was a vampire.”

She contemplated his words for several long minutes. She never moved away from him, and he felt safe enough to thread his fingers through her hair. He wanted to tell her of his feelings for her, but he couldn't influence her decision.

“Don't make a decision right now. I want you to meet my immortal family and you can think about what you want. I promise I won't pressure you. I want you to know everything about me.”

Nodding, she took him by surprise and leaned forward to kiss him, a playful brush against his lips. He deepened the kiss and as she opened for him, time lost all meaning as he savored each gasp and moan. Happiness shot through him, multiplied by his feelings and hers swirling together in his chest, until he could sense anxiety that wasn't his own.

“What's wrong, gorgeous?”

“Your family hasn't even met me. How do you they know I wasn't a threat to you?”

“Because they trust me. If I was at all worried, Liv would have had Xander scour the Internet for any record of you, and you would have probably been surveilled by Jade or Gunnar to ascertain the danger you posed to me.” He laughed as he thought about his family, surprised that they hadn't already done some of their own research. “Have you caught a scent around your place that you haven't recognized?”

“No. I can smell them on you and in your house, but they aren't familiar to me.”

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“Good. Now on to more important things...are you sore from last night?”

Her answering blush shot straight to his cock as it twitched at the thought of making love to her again. A breath escaped as she dropped the sheet and he caught sight of her hardened, dusky pink nipples. His gaze shot to hers, needing to make sure he didn't do anything to hurt her.

“No.”

“Fuck, gorgeous. I need you again.”

With agility and grace, she crawled over to him and straddled his thighs. Her hips glided closer to his cock and she sucked in a breath as her wetness brushed against his hardness. In the space of a heartbeat, she lifted her hips and lined his cock at her entrance, before she lowered herself slowly. It was torturous, yet exquisite. Their breaths caught as she squeezed him, but a loud groan escaped him as she lifted off his cock and slammed back down again.

His hands gripped her hips, guiding her movements as he used the leverage of his position to drive up into her. Pleasure and need made his movements jerky, but neither of them cared as they strained toward the other, hoping to send the other over the edge. Caressing the soft, silky skin on her back, he pulled her forward as he aimed for a kiss that would leave them breathless. But she had other ideas. She nipped at his lip, moving to his ear, and when she licked a swath across his neck, he groaned in anticipation of what was to come.

“Seth, may I?” she asked.

“Please.” His voice came out deep and almost pleading.

A low snarl escaped her throat, and he shivered as the sound caressed him. Instead of sinking her teeth in, she numbed the area several more times before he felt the pinch of her teeth on his neck. This time when she bit down, he could feel the slow slide of her teeth piercing his skin as erotic sensations exploded throughout his body. His back arched and his hips drove up, but he didn't come until her lips pressed against his neck and hummed her pleasure.

“Oh, fuck, Aubrey.”

His body hadn't given him any warning as the pleasure from her bite overwhelmed him. Her inner muscles squeezed him and when he felt her hot, wet heat wash over his cock, his arms clamped around her to hold her to him as he erupted inside her, the scream of pure satisfaction escaping his throat.

It took him several minutes for him to shake off the intensity of their orgasm, but he smiled when he realized that Aubrey had only just finished drinking from him. She gently pulled her fangs from his neck and licked the area several times, closing the punctures. Seth experienced nothing but sated pleasure as she dropped onto his chest and he wrapped his arms around her to hold her close.

“You should eat. I drank a lot from you this time.”

He pulled her closer, not wanting to end the bliss that had been with him since he woke up with Aubrey in his arms.

“Soon, after we take a nap.”

Her laughter warmed him and when she made no move off him, he reached for the blanket and covered them both. He pressed a kiss to her lips before his eyes closed

and the warmth of her body pulled him into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter Eleven

Aubrey

The past week had been the best of Aubrey's life. They'd sequestered themselves in Seth's spacious cabin as they had gotten to know each other more each day. They had barely managed to drag themselves to class at the end of the week, and she hadn't paid much attention.

Emily had watched Seth walk in the classroom with his arm around Aubrey and for the rest of the lecture, she could feel the other woman's glare. Seth had told her all about their so-called date, and found that she didn't care about the woman anymore.

The one thing that bothered her was when Seth waved off her concern about his other relationships. Although she loved their time together, she worried that she kept him from his family, but he reassured her that they would understand.

"When Reaper found Ara, they would disappear for hours, days at a time, because when you find your mate, they are all that matters."

They had spent hours talking about everything that came to mind as they lounged in bed or curled up on the couch. Hades had adopted Seth and when they were talking, she could find him curled on Seth's lap, fast asleep. Since they had first made love, she started to sense his moods but also when he needed her touch. Their movements seemed to reflect a natural closeness that she'd never felt with anyone other than Seth.

When he needed to eat, she would go into the kitchen with him and sit on the counter as they talked, or sometimes when he challenged her cooking skills, she would cook for him and take pleasure when he praised her. When she needed to feed, he would sense her hunger and pull her into his arms and expose his neck. They were never far from the other and they hadn't tested the boundaries of separation. The day after they'd made love, she needed to pick up Hades, her clothes, and laptop from her cabin. She asked him to go and visit his family and encouraged him by hinting that Liv might miss him considering he hadn't been to their place in close to two weeks. But he wouldn't hear of it. She felt relieved at his refusal, but guilty as well.

Aubrey could admit to herself that Seth's focus on her and her alone felt spectacular. She loved being able to touch him whenever she wanted, to kiss him before he wrapped her in his arms and devoured her mouth. In his arms, she knew that she was safe.

Seth had even arranged his sleep schedule around hers. During the evenings and into the early mornings, they spent time together in all ways special to her. On colder nights, they would curl up under a blanket as they watched movies. As they both loved to read, he shared some of the mysteries he enjoyed and although he wouldn't try to read one of her romances, he listened intently as she described her favorite books and why she loved them. It was a domestic life that she'd never experienced before.

One evening, Seth had arranged a surprise for her. When she heard a knock at the door, she thought that Kai and Liv, or another immortal, had come to visit. But when he opened the door, Cole rushed to her and picked her up in a hug that was so familiar, she could feel tears sting her eyes as she blinked to stop them from falling.

"It's good to see you," she breathed.

Cole pulled back from the hug and went to give one to Seth, who accepted it without

a thought.

“Well, Seth called last Saturday and told me that you didn’t need blood delivered any longer. We started talking and he invited me over. I’ve missed you, sunshine.”

“I missed you, too.”

This moment with Cole and Seth had her heart swelling until a lump formed in her throat.

“How is it going with Simon?” She cringed when she remembered that Cole hadn’t told her his date’s name.

With a hand on his hip and a narrowing of the eyes, Cole glared at her. “You checked him out before I even went out with him, didn’t you?”

“Yes. After what happened with Mark, I check all the guys you go out with. Too badass holedoesn’t show up on their profile. It would save time.” She folded her arms across her chest.

Cole laughed at that and pulled her into another hug. His eyes lit up with what could only be described as love. He started to pace, as if he couldn’t contain the excitement that talking about his relationship caused.

“Simon is great. We’ve been seeing each other almost every day. He cooks me dinner after my shift and we spend hours talking, about everything and nothing. I’ve never felt so electrified by a kiss before.”

Seth wrapped his arm around her waist as he joined in on their conversation. “You seem happy, Cole.”

“I am as happy as you make Aubrey, and I thank you for that, Seth.”

“Can we meet him?” she asked.

“Yes, I would like that.”

They sat down to dinner—well, Seth and Cole did—and talked about all they had missed over the past few weeks. Seth told Cole about him knowing that Aubrey and he were mates and about his decision to transition into a vampire. Of course Cole had brought logic into the conversation, reminding her that forever is a long time to be without someone you love. Cole had left soon after dinner was finished, admitting with a smile that Simon had asked him to spend the night. Aubrey hugged her friend before she watched Seth and Cole hug, as if they had been life-long friends.

Her eyes drifted over to her right and for a long moment, she watched Seth’s chest rise and fall with deep breaths as he slept. Aubrey had woken early and despite the warmth Seth provided, couldn’t go back to sleep. She pulled a book from her pile of to-be-reads and after making sure that she hadn’t disturbed Seth, lowered her eyes to the page and started to read.

Minutes later, her head jerked up and she concentrated on the sound that had come from the front of the house. She choked back on the snarl that formed because of the threat. Setting aside the book, she moved soundlessly out of the bed and pulled on a sweatshirt and black yoga pants. Locking the bedroom door as she left Seth sleeping, she crept toward the alcove near the front door, slipping into the dark corner. She almost sucked in a breath when a shadow crossed in front of the windows and stopped right at the door.

The door flung open, missing her face by mere centimeters. Aubrey took a deep breath. Something about the woman’s scent triggered a memory, the scent familiar to her from the first day of class when she had come close enough to Seth to scent

him. She took a split second to run her eyes over the only other female vampire that she'd ever seen, and something about her calmed Aubrey. Amazed by the tiny vampire with long, curly brown hair, Aubrey missed the other woman's movement as her hand shot out and caught the door before it slammed against the wall near the closet.

Without thinking, Aubrey stepped from the shadows, surprised when the other vampire hadn't noticed her movement. She watched in amazement as the woman slowly closed the door, locking it, before she blew out a relieved breath.

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“Hello?” Aubrey had tried to keep her voice low, not wanting to wake Seth.

The vampire squealed, loudly, at Aubrey’s voice. She whipped around to face Aubrey while she pressed her back up against the front door, her eyes wild and searching. Not wanting to present herself as a threat, Aubrey locked down her muscles and lowered her gaze to the floor, cursing herself for startling the other woman. She opened her mouth to apologize, but the words stuck in her throat as she tilted her head up and watched the fear evaporate from the other woman’s features. The vampire sniffed the air and Aubrey watched, puzzled, as the vampire beamed at her.

Even with her perfect eyesight, Aubrey couldn’t track the blur the smaller woman made as she rushed forward and pulled Aubrey into a hug. The hug encompassed her, and the scent of apples and lemongrass assailed her senses. Tears pricked at her eyes at the embrace. It had been the first hug she ever received that felt...motherly. Before she could sink into the small vampire, she pulled back and smiled at Aubrey.

“Hi. You’re Aubrey, right? I’m Liv.” Her words were spoken fast and if she wasn’t a vampire, she would have missed it.

“Yes, I’m Aubrey. It’s so nice to meet you, Liv. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Liv pulled Aubrey into another hug that relaxed the last of her muscles.

“I knew that Seth was safe, but I’ve missed him, so I thought I would drop by and see him for a few minutes.”

Liv’s words caused a stab of guilt. She apologized for keeping Seth away from his

family.Liv waved her off, pulling back from the hug and giving Aubrey a glowing smile that had her relax further.Liv reached for her hand and led her to the table, and Liv grew quiet the longer they sat in silence.

“Are you worried about me hurting him?Because I wouldn’t...I couldn’t, ever.”

Liv’s laugh washed over her, settling some of the nerves that flared.

“Did Seth tell you about his parents?”

“He glossed over it.”

“They weren’t cruel in the sense that they hurt him, physically.They ignored him all throughout his life.When he met Kai, he found a family for the first time in his short life, and he clung to his family.And I clung to him—we all did.But there was always a sense of loneliness about him, even surrounded by those who loved him.When he came by after the class the night he met you, we knew immediately that he found his mate, that he found you.It made complete sense to us that he would find an immortal to love.”

Aubrey worried her bottom lip with her teeth before she voiced her worry from the past week.“I don’t know if I’m good enough for him.My mother was a horrible example of a person and I’ve only had one friend in my life up until this point.”

“Because you’re worried about it makes you perfect for him.Let me let you in on a little secret.Once Seth makes up his mind, he’s never going to change it...ever.”

“He wants me to change him.”

Liv’s brows drew down as her intense gaze pinned Aubrey to her seat.“Is this relationship not as important to you as it is to him?”

Aubrey reached for Liv's hands and gently squeezed. "No, he's everything to me. I don't want to hurt him. I don't remember my transition, other than waking up scared. Hurting Seth is the last thing I would ever do. And what do you think? You, Kai, and the rest of his immortal family—does anyone have concerns because they haven't met me?"

Liv giggled as she squeezed Aubrey's hand. "I like you already. So will the others. But you have to remember that this is a decision that Seth has to make for himself."

"What if he regrets me turning him? What if I'm not who he wants?"

"Aubrey, honey, Seth is the greatest judge of character that I've ever met and he's never been wrong. Can you feel his emotions?"

She nodded. "Although he can feel mine more acutely, for some reason."

Aubrey sat back against the kitchen chair, relieved that all of her fears that had been holding her back from what she most wanted in her life no longer mattered. She loved Seth, and that was all that counted.

Chapter Twelve

Seth

Seth had woken the moment Aubrey had left the bedroom and locked the door behind her. He knew that their visitor had to be either Liv or Kai, because they knew how to disable his perimeter alarms and they had a key to his house. His suspicion was confirmed when he heard Liv's startled cry, the one she gave whenever anyone snuck up on her. He chuckled. For a vampire, Liv had held on to her tendencies as a human, forgetting that she was stronger, faster, and had enhanced senses. But he loved her, as did Kai and the rest of the immortals.

He opened the bedroom door and their voices drifted to him. Although they kept their voices low, he could hear the anxiety in Aubrey's as she laid out her concerns about being right for him and her major concern, his transition. He hadn't pressed Aubrey over the week they had spent at his house, wanting her to come to the decision based on her feelings for him. He should have known, based on their conversation, that she worried he might change his mind. But he knew that would never happen. He had fallen in love with the vampire and couldn't live without her. And if he had told her, then she wouldn't have doubts about his feelings.

As Liv and Aubrey's voices faded, he threw on a shirt and donned on a pair of jeans before he headed out to the kitchen. As he rounded the table, he leaned down to give Liv a kiss on her cheek. Her answering smile warmed him. Without giving her a chance to protest, he lifted Aubrey in his arms and settled her onto his lap. Her eyes widened at his boldness, but he pressed his smiling lips against hers for a mostly chaste kiss.

Liv stood and smiled at both of them. “Come by tomorrow night. Everyone is excited to meet you, Aubrey.” And with that, Liv disappeared through the front door, leaving them alone.

With Aubrey still in his arms, he stood and encouraged her to wrap her legs around his waist before he went to lock up the house. Without wasting any more time, he headed toward the bedroom and laid her on the bed. His lips found each inch of skin that he exposed, taking his time to savor her taste and the sounds he drew from her when he found the exact spot where she loved to be touched. Soon, they were both panting and she begged him to take her. Lifting himself on his arms, he looked down at her naked body beautifully displayed on his bed, her skin flushed from desire and areas reddened by his scruff.

“I want you, gorgeous.”

“I want you, too. I can’t wait any longer.”

His fingers trailed down her soft belly and when he reached her lips, he sucked in a breath at the wetness that coated his fingers. He cupped her face in his hands and placed a gentle, yet deep kiss against her lips, swallowing her moans and adding some of his own when she arched against him. He pulled back from the kiss and waited for her to catch his gaze.

Her lashes slowly opened as he held himself above her, and although he could see the desire in her eyes, there was something that he sought.

“I love you, Aubrey.”

Her wide, shocked eyes searched his for the truth. He had known how much she meant to him when he’d spotted her in the classroom that first day, but spending each day with her had solidified his feelings.

She pressed her hand against his chest, right above his heart, and gave him a small smile. "I love you, too, Seth. With everything that I am."

Her words warmed him, and he felt as though he had been gifted with the world.

"Thank you for showing me how to trust and love."

"You're worth everything I have, gorgeous. You are everything that I've ever wanted, and that is why I want a chance to be with you, forever. I know I haven't pressed this, but I would love you to turn me so that we could be together."

"I know. I worried that I might hurt you, and that is the last thing I ever wanted. But I've realized that three days is a fraction of time compared to our entire lives, and if I am careful, and with the help of Liv, I think that you can go through the transition with little or no pain. But whatever happens, we can get through it together."

The lump in his throat refused to budge, so instead of responding with words, he let her know how he felt through his kiss. They nipped at each other's lips, and he moaned as she drew blood from his. Whenever her fangs elongated, he tensed in anticipation of the exquisite feelings that rushed through him whenever she drew from him.

"Seth."

His hand slid along her side and he gripped her hip, tilting her as his cock pressed against her entrance. Without warning, he plunged inside and groaned as she clamped down on his cock. Pleasure and need sharpened his movements. Sliding out until the head of his cock nestled against her entrance, he drove back in and swallowed her moan at the sensation. He concentrated on her pleasure first, sliding against the spot that drew the most moans and gasps, as he sipped at her lips. His tongue teased hers, and when she scraped against it and drew blood, he sucked a deep breath. She took

advantage of his momentary lapse in concentration and sucked his tongue into her mouth, lapping up his taste.

“Fuck, Aubrey.”

“Yes.”

Increasing his pace, he slid his hands underneath her hips and with each drive forward, he lifted her against him. Her answering moans drove him crazy, and his control snapped. He scooped her up until her face pressed against his chest. The position gave him more room to maneuver, and as he lifted her hips and pressed her down, he drove deeper into her, seeking oblivion.

Her mouth opened in a soundless scream as her body clamped down on his cock, and with one last thrust, he emptied inside her. His entire body shook as they came down from their high, but he clutched her to him, not even wanting an inch to separate them.

“Are you okay?”

Aubrey giggled against his chest as she tightened her arms around him. “That was...intense.”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too, Seth.”

With a sigh, he pressed his lips against her neck and lowered them both onto the bed. Their limbs stayed entangled, and he reached for the blanket and draped it over both of them. As he caught her gaze, he pressed a kiss against her lips before he settled her onto his chest. Within moments, they were both asleep.

Chapter Thirteen

Aubrey

Aubrey had been lost in her thoughts on the short drive from Seth's home to Kai and Liv's, so when she found herself outside the front door, laughter and loud noises brought the present into sharp focus. There were voices—some were laughing, with snarls and growls peppered into the cacophony. Seth had put a hand on the small of her back, moving her forward into the most chaos she ever experienced.

The men who were eating took up a vast amount of space at the huge rectangular dining room table next to the kitchen. Her eyes traveled over the group and landed on the one vampire she knew. Liv leaned into the arms of the vampire she assumed to be Kai, and her breath caught at the familiar look of love on Kai's face. It was similar to the one Seth gave her.

Taking in the couple in front of her, she hadn't been aware that the talking had ceased. When she pulled her eyes from Liv and Kai, she jerked back in Seth's arms as she met the gazes of several people staring at her. Despite Seth's reassurances that they had already acknowledged her as his mate, she didn't expect to be accepted so readily.

Kai wrapped his arm around Liv's waist and together they walked the short distance to where Seth held Aubrey in a similar fashion. Letting go of Liv for a moment, Kai wrapped Aubrey up in a hug, that again, felt familial. Hesitating only for a moment, she wrapped her arms around the muscular vampire and laid her head on his chest.

Seth snuck his arm around her waist and before she was ready, she had been pulled from the hug and back into Seth's arms.

"It's nice to meet you, Aubrey. I'm Kai."

"You...too."

Liv hugged her next, but Seth refused to let her move from his arms, so Aubrey laughed as Liv squeezed her for a second and let her go.

As Liv stepped back, Aubrey scanned the rest of the room and felt her eyes widen as she took in the group of assassins.

"Holy shit." The words were out of her mouth before she could stop them.

The men were larger than Kai by several inches, muscular and fit, but everything about them screamed predator. The way they held themselves, ready to pounce at any threat she posed, had her tense in Seth's arms. He held her tighter against his chest, and when she happened a glance back, his face was taut and his eyes flashed as she sensed someone stepped closer to them.

"I'm surprised how big they are. There is no way they could pass as human."

Seth relaxed at her words, but he didn't let go of her.

Curious, her gaze returned to the group and she took her time studying them. She could tell the difference between the shifters and the vampires. Shifters were bigger; they also had a distinct scent. Not to say that the vampires weren't as impressive. Both groups radiated strength and danger.

"Seth, is it okay?" A shifter with piercing green eyes and jet-black hair looked at her

curiously.

“Yeah.”

“Hi, I’m Hunter.” Without waiting for her reply, she was lifted off her feet and into the warmth of the giant shifter. He smelled of the woods and she smiled as he squeezed her once and moved her into the arms of a slimmer man, this one with sandy-brown hair and hazel eyes.

“Gunnar.”

There was Ara, a beautiful dark-haired woman who then introduced Aubrey to her mate, Reaper. The wolf shifter had a lazy smile and although he hadn’t hugged her, he took her hand in his and squeezed it, before she stepped back for the remainder of the introductions. She met Ghost, the assassins’ boss. He had a shock of white hair and his easy smile and hug made Aubrey feel warm. Then came the three other vampires. Kane, Thomas, and Isaac. She could sense a sadness in Kane and remembered Seth’s story about Liv’s kidnapping. Without being obvious, she drew him into a hug, tightening her arms a bit, before she released him. His answering smile and Seth’s brought a smile to her face.

As she turned to meet a blond man, who introduced himself as Axel, she raised her brows at the look on his face. Sultry was the only word that came to mind. When he stepped forward to hug her, she gave him a warning.

“Hands above the waist, handsome. I would hate to have to break your fingers.”

The pout on his face was priceless, but when he picked her up and settled her against his chest, she smiled. Back on her feet, she turned and caught another with white hair, but when she gazed into his coral-blue eyes, she could sense sadness. It was different from Kane, who had lost his mate. Without thinking, she walked right up to him and

hugged him.

“This is Xander.”Seth answered her silent question.

For a reason she couldn't understand, she connected with this shifter.“It's nice to meet you Xander.”

When she pulled back from the hug, not letting him go, he gave her a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.She leaned toward his ear.“After nearly ten years alone, I found Seth by happenstance.Maybe it's not your time yet, but you will meet your mate.”She hugged him once more before she moved back to Seth's arms.

Xander stopped her movements when he gripped her hand for a second.“Thank you.”

She smiled at him.Seth wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her close.

Out of the corner of her eye, she caught a flash of red that moved closer to them.Turning fully to the sight, a beautiful redhead with a fabulous smile made a beeline toward them.Well no, toward Seth.An instinct she wasn't familiar with settled inside her and she stepped in front of Seth, a protective hand on his wrist, keeping the beautiful woman away from her mate.

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Ignoring the warning Aubrey tried to send, the redhead stalked closer. With her vision narrowing on the woman, her fangs elongated and she bared them at the woman. When that didn't get through as enough of a warning, a loud, vicious snarl ripped from Aubrey's throat. The shifter stopped in her tracks.

"Not you, too. Look, I'm Jade. I'm just saying hi. We're friends—just friends."

Aubrey snapped out of her defensive position and blinked. She stood straighter, only to have Seth move his arms back around her waist, this time tighter than before.

"Jade really is just a friend," Seth assured her.

"Of course her name is Jade," Aubrey mumbled.

Everyone in the room laughed. When she met Jade's amused face, Aubrey nodded and watched with tension running through her body as Seth pulled Jade into a short hug. Seth turned to her as he released the beautiful woman and Aubrey walked into his outstretched arms, and she shivered when he lowered his lips to her ear.

"It's okay, gorgeous. Mates always feel possessive about each other. I didn't like it when you touched the shifters, but I know that vampires and shifters aren't compatible as mates."

"I don't know what happened. I spotted her coming toward us and I felt rage. Does the possessiveness go away when the human mate transitions?"

"It hasn't happened so far."

“What do you mean, transition?” Hunter asked.

Seth glanced up at his family and smiled. “I’ve found my mate and I want to be with her forever. I’ve asked Aubrey to change me, and she’s agreed. You won’t have to worry about me being a breakable human for much longer.”

“We’re happy for you, Seth. Let us know if you need anything,” Ghost said.

Aubrey couldn’t believe how accepting they were of Seth’s decision. Although she struggled with it for so long, his family loved him and supported him, no matter his decision. And they accepted her without an interrogation that she thought would take place.

She grew more relaxed with Seth’s family as the hours passed. They were so comfortable with each other. Although she could sense that the assassins could pounce at any moment if they were threatened, all of them together, laughing and joking was as natural as breathing. Never being part of a family wasn’t something that she’d missed being on her own all these years, but now that she had a taste of it, she wouldn’t be able to let it go. She could see how much they loved Seth, and how much he loved them. And with that one spectacular realization, she knew how lucky she’d been to take a chance on Seth.

Several hours later, she could sense a shift in Seth’s demeanor, and when she lifted her gaze to his, he nodded. They had planned to make the transition after he spoke to his family. All of her qualms about changing Seth had vanished with the acceptance from those closest to him. For a split second, she felt a small twinge of sadness at leaving.

Seth pulled her close and whispered in her ear. “We’ll see them soon. Trust me, your part of the family now, good luck ever getting rid of them.”

Everyone chuckled at Seth's words, but agreed with him. After another round of hugs, and a kiss on the cheek from Xander, Kai and Liv walked them to the door.

"Here's my cell number. If you have any problems or doubts, or you just want to talk, we're here." Kai slipped the paper in her hand.

Tears welled up in her eyes, but before she could wipe them away, Kai pulled her into another familiar hug. She smiled at Kai's reaction before she stepped back and looked at Liv.

"Here's several vials of morphine. You'll be able to tell when he's in pain, but don't give him more than fifteen milligrams every four hours. You can do this, Aubrey. I know you can." Liv hugged her tight.

"Would you like to be there through his transition?"

"We trust you. It's intimate to drink from a mate, and unless you run into something abnormal, we want to give you the space you'll need."

Those three words gave her strength, and with one last hug for both Kai and Liv, Seth pulled her close and they walked to the SUV. All her worries had been purged after talking with Seth's family. She vowed to make Seth's transition as painless as possible. With one last smile at Kai and Liv, they headed home.

Chapter Fourteen

Seth

The front door shut behind them, and while he held Aubrey close to him, he reached behind him to lock the door. He reached for the buttons on her red button-down and when he had them undone, he pushed the shirt down her arms and off in one quick motion. Leaning forward, he traced the top of her breast with his tongue, before moving to the other. Her bra followed her shirt on the floor. Not wanting any barriers between them, he knelt on the floor and unbuttoned her jeans, dragging them and her panties down her long legs. He discarded them somewhere behind him, forgotten.

Standing, he captured her lips in a ferocious kiss, loving the moan he drew from her. Pulling back, he caught her gaze and smiled.

“I love you, Aubrey. I always will.”

“I love you, too.”

“I need you now, gorgeous. Is that okay?”

Her head tilted a fraction and he moaned in anticipation. His hand drifted down over the soft skin on her belly and his fingers drifted against her clit and farther down, testing her readiness for him. He sucked in a breath at the feel of her wetness coating his fingers, and while holding her gaze, lifted them to his lips. His tongue wrapped around one, tasting the sweetness that was uniquely Aubrey, and shivered as she moaned at his actions.

Without waiting another second, his hands trailed to her thighs and encouraged her to wrap her legs around his waist. When her arms draped around his shoulders, he pressed a kiss to her lips a split second before drove his hips forward, his cock buried deep inside her wet, tight heat. Each time they made love, the intensity of their connection would take him by surprise, and this time was no different. His knees threatened to give way. Pressing her harder against the door, he swallowed her gasps of pleasure as he soon found a rhythm that had both crying out.

He slowed his thrusts, wanting to draw their pleasure out for as long as he could.

“Seth, more. I need more.”

Holding her close to his chest, he walked toward the bedroom and settled her in the middle of their bed. She wrapped her arms around his neck and brought their lips together, leaving his head swimming with desire. Distracted by Aubrey’s hypnotic kisses, he lost himself in her taste and forgot about everything but Aubrey and her body pressed to his. When she retreated from their kiss, he found himself on his back in the middle of the king-sized bed.

Without any words between them, Aubrey lowered herself onto his cock. Her head arched back, leaving her elegant neck exposed. He shivered as the sounds of their pleasure soon filled the room as she took what she needed from him. Watching her pleasure herself, the bold woman that she’d become over the last few weeks, left a lump in his throat. She was his entire world.

His hands traveled over her body, feeling the light sheen of moisture that developed as she made love to him. As she lowered herself on him, she twisted her hips and drew a growl from deep in his throat. A string of curses left his lips at the feeling of his cock touching her cervix. By the way her moans turned into tiny screams of pleasure, he brushed his cock against her G-spot, time and time again. Before long, she drove her hips down and twisted. Her body convulsed and tensed against his, and an instant

later, his hips drove up as he released deep inside her. He waited for her bite that would draw pleasure out for both of them, and when her tongue licked a swath across his neck, he moaned in anticipation.

She eased her teeth into his neck and he gasped in pleasure. His cock twitched inside her.

It took him a few moments to realize that she hadn't pulled from him; instead, she released venom into his bloodstream. The tingles from her venom sent waves of need through him and with two strokes, he released inside her for the second time.

Lethargy threatened to pull him under as she removed her fangs from his neck. When he opened his mouth to speak, he found that he couldn't. His eyes widened as he watched Aubrey lift her wrist and with a quick slice from her fingernail, opened the vein in her wrist and held it to his mouth to drink. Without hesitation, he drank her blood, assured that being with Aubrey, forever, was all he would ever need.

The blood flow lessened and Aubrey lifted her wrist to her own mouth, sealing the wound with a swipe of her tongue.

His body humming with satisfaction and weighed down by the blood and venom in his system, he allowed his eyes to close.

"I love you, Seth. I'll be with you the entire time. I love you, so much."

He wished he could reassure her that he would be fine, but before the thought had completed, he slipped into darkness.

Chapter Fifteen

Aubrey

Aubrey glanced at her cell phone charging on the nightstand for the twelfth time in the past hour, and wondered whether she should just call Liv and Kai for moral support. It had been thirty-two hours since she introduced her venom and blood into his system. In that time, he showed no signs of pain or discomfort, managing to sleep peacefully during the transition.

She could feel his confusion when she had delivered the venom to his system, not drinking from him, as he expected. But she didn't know whether the blood loss would affect his transition by weakening his body, and she couldn't chance his transition on her thirst.

She had gone without blood for two days, and knowing how Seth tasted, she wasn't willing to take a chance being alone with him and not feeding. Without leaving Seth's side, she had called Cole earlier that evening and asked him whether he could drop off several days' worth of blood. Of course, her friend had agreed immediately.

She had told Cole that she had turned the perimeter alarms off and where she hid the key to Seth's house, and it wasn't long before she could sense Cole's presence close to her.

He sat the insulated pack near her chair, and she blew out a relieved breath. Soon, she would eat. But something about Cole pulled her from thoughts on her thirst. Before she could look over at him, she could feel his happiness, and without turning her eyes

from Seth, she smiled.

“Is Simon the real deal?”

“Yes. I’m in love with him. Simon is the most caring man I’ve ever met, and we’ve been spending all of our free time together. He’s decided to move his charity to Snowfall to be with me. He told me this morning that he loves me and can’t live without me.” Cole’s last few words came out choked with emotion.

Aubrey pulled her friend into a hug, her hands rubbing up and down his back as he relaxed into her hold. He had always taken care of her and all she wanted was for him to be happy. This time, he had a shot at that happiness and she would be supportive while keeping her skeptical thoughts to herself. She would have to meet Simon soon.

“I hope that we can get together soon. I would love to meet him.”

“We will. How’s he doing?” Cole glanced at Seth, lying still in bed.

She blew out a worried breath and glanced up at Cole. “Liv gave me some morphine in case he’s in pain, but he hasn’t shown any signs over the last day and a half. And since the transition varies from person to person, and circumstance to circumstance, I have no idea how long he will be in this state.”

Cole pressed his fingers against Seth’s neck, silently counting each pulse for a minute. Nodding at the results, he pressed his head against Seth’s chest and listened to his breathing. When he turned back to her, his smile reassured her.

“He’ll pull through just fine, sunshine. He has everything to live for.”

Cole pulled her into a long hug. His scent and warm embrace comforted her and she let her shoulders relax as he continued his embrace.

“I love you, Cole. I’m so grateful that you are in my life.”

“Love you, too, sunshine.” With one last squeeze, Cole walked toward the bedroom door. “See you soon, and try not to worry too much.”

After listening to Cole drive away from the house, she settled back into the chair next to the bed and reached for Seth’s hand, linking their fingers together. She pulled out a blood bag, carefully closing the pack that held her next few meals, and sunk her fangs through the plastic. The taste revolted her, but she needed the sustenance. So she continued drinking, shutting off her mind as she traced Seth’s face with her eyes, seeking any signs of discomfort. With the last pull from the bag, she wiped the blood that dribbled down her chin and tossed the emptied bag in the trash and turned back to scanning Seth’s vitals.

Two hours after she fed, a movement from Seth had her at full attention. It had been subtle, so at first she thought that she’d imagined it. But when she looked closer at his face, she noticed that his brows drew down a second before his face relaxed. She searched for a long few minutes, but couldn’t see any other displays of change. She debated with herself whether his move had been because of a dream or whether he felt pain for the first time.

Her eyes perused the rest of his body. When she noticed his fists clenched at his side, a spear of pain pierced her chest and she felt the tears in her eyes. She placed her hand on his forehead and spoke quietly, waiting to see whether he would relax at her words. When she moved back to survey him, his hands hadn’t loosened and he gritted his teeth as his back arched slightly off the bed. With jerky movements, she retrieved the vial and needle from the bedside table and drew the amount Liv had told her to use, making sure no bubbles were visible in the syringe. Her fingers sought the vein in his right arm and with sure movements, she injected the morphine into his system.

Seth settled back onto the bed and his muscles relaxed, but Aubrey reached for her

phone and called Kai.

“Aubrey?”

“I’ve given him a dose of the morphine, just now.”

Something in her voice must’ve alerted him to her distress. “Do you want Liv and me to—”

“Yes, please.”

Unable to leave Seth for a shower to look presentable to Kai and Liv, she changed into some clean clothes, never wandering far from Seth.

Not for the first time since they had talked about Seth’s transition, she wondered whether Seth would believe that she was worth all the pain that the transition brought. But in the end, she realized that she couldn’t live without Seth and his transition would’ve happened anyway. He wouldn’t have it any other way.

For the first time since Seth had slipped into a deep sleep, Aubrey exited the bedroom when she heard the crunch of car tires outside. The moment she opened the door, Aubrey launched herself at Liv and shook with worry, grateful that they were here.

“It will be okay. He’s strong and he wants to be with you. He’ll pull through.”

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“Thank you for coming.”

Kai pulled her in for a long hug, his scent already familiar and calming. She led the way back to the bedroom where Seth hadn't moved since she'd been gone. There were no signs of the pain she'd witnessed earlier, but she stood back as both Kai and Liv searched for any signs of trouble.

“What happened to make you give him the morphine?”

She explained everything that she witnessed and mentioned his reaction after she'd given him the shot.

“Good. It seems like that pain wasn't overwhelming, but the morphine eased him back into a restful sleep.”

Aubrey leaned into Liv, grateful that she hadn't fucked anything up.

“When was the last time you slept?” Liv's voice carried the weight of her concern.

“Um...” Aubrey couldn't actually remember. Three days, maybe.

“You've watched him the entire time, haven't you? Did you feed?” Kai's voice was incredulous.

“Cole brought me some blood bags. I've been fine, just worried that I hurt him unnecessarily.”

Liv hugged her. “You need to sleep. We’ll stay here and watch over him and wake you the minute anything changes.”

Aubrey held Liv’s gaze for several long seconds before she nodded, agreeing that she needed to get some sleep. She had to keep up her strength because when Seth awoke, he would need to feed from her.

“Okay.” Moving the love seat over to the foot of the bed, Aubrey curled in the corner and rested her hand on Seth’s foot.

Liv and Kai both gave her a warm look and she smiled back. “Thank you, for everything.”

She hoped that Seth would wake strong and healthy. The last thing she remembered was Hades cuddling up in his favorite spot and Liv’s fingers running through her hair as she finally drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Sixteen

Seth

The transition between unconsciousness and awareness happened rapidly. He blinked open his eyes and noticed the stillness in the room, as if he were alone. But that wasn't quite right. He could sense people in the room, but was unsure whether one of them was Aubrey.

The last thing he remembered before he fell asleep was Aubrey's worried face hovering above his. He tried to dredge up the words she said before he was pulled under the darkness, but he couldn't remember. With a flare of panic, he flung his feet off the bed. His head whipped side to side as he scanned the room, but was unable to sense or see Aubrey anywhere near. He tensed his muscles the moment he stood, ready to search the house for her, but familiar arms wrapped around him and held him tightly to his chest.

"Kai?"

"It's okay, kid. She's asleep. Look at the foot of your bed."

In a second, he found Aubrey curled up on the love seat, sound asleep. Hades blinked at him from his perch between Aubrey's neck and the arm of the love seat, before closing his eyes and going back to sleep. Relief flooded through him as he listened to her breathing, deep and near silent, and his legs gave out on him. Kai lowered him back onto the bed and sat next to him, keeping his arm around his shoulders.

“She hadn’t slept for three days while she worried about your transition. She thought you were in pain and gave you a dose of morphine about four hours ago. It seemed to work. You settled back to sleep. Liv convinced her that she needed to be rested before you awoke.”

Seth glanced at Kai for the first time since he’d awoken and watched his familiar silver eyes widen in surprise. Seth gripped his forearm; his body tensed immediately, sensing Kai’s stress.

“What’s wrong?”

Kai pulled him into a tight hug. “Nothing’s wrong. I didn’t realize that I would miss your brown eyes this much. But it’s still you. You are the son I never had and I’m happy that you found your mate.”

“Thanks, Kai. That means the world to me.” He swallowed his tears and hugged Kai back.

Sniffling pulled them back to the present. When Seth glanced up, Liv wiped the tears from her cheeks as she smiled brightly at the two of them. Seth stood and grabbed her hand, pulling her into a hug before Kai wrapped his arms around both of them. He couldn’t help but feel grateful for his family and his mate. He absorbed all the warmth and the love from the two people who changed his life by just knowing them.

“I love you both, very much.”

“We love you, too, kid.” Kai’s eyes were glazed with tears as he stepped back and pulled Liv to his side.

Liv squeezed his hand before they turned toward the door. “We’ll give you some time to yourselves. We’ll see you soon.”

Seth nodded and watched as they disappeared through the door. He didn't even bother to listen to their departure, knowing that as long as they had each other they would be fine. Instead, he turned and walked to his mate. Hades sensed that they needed time alone and with a huge stretch and a purr, hopped down and sauntered out of the bedroom.

As he knelt in front of Aubrey, he wondered whether he should wake her or let her sleep. In the end, he traced every inch of her face with his gaze, memorizing the face he loved most in this world. Aubrey was the most beautiful woman he'd ever known, and she was his. His mate and the love of his life. There wasn't any thought that settled him more than that one.

Unable to keep his distance from her any longer, he leaned forward and brushed his lips against hers. Her eyes opened immediately and he sucked a breath as he spotted the gray flecks sprinkled throughout her silver irises that he'd never seen while human. They were even more beautiful to his enhanced vision.

"You're okay. This isn't a dream, is it?"

"No, gorgeous, it's not a dream."

Lifting her into his arms, he dropped back down on the love seat and settled her on his lap. He nipped at her bottom lip, drawing a loud moan from her, before he kissed her breathless. The kiss was desperate, yet it conveyed to the other how much they were loved.

She shifted onto his lap, straddling his thighs, and he absorbed the hot, wet heat that he could feel through their layers of clothing. Without waiting another moment, he used his newly acquired strength to rip their clothes off in record time. He abandoned their torn clothing onto the floor before he ran his hands up and down her body. He savored the silky skin of her soft belly, around to appreciate the curve of her spine,

before he lowered his hands to cup her exquisite ass.

“More.”

Her breathless plea severed his taut control. He lowered his fingers that gripped her hips at her words and brushed against her core to test her readiness for him. He found her wet and ready for him.

Without a word, he lifted her into his arms and carried her back to bed, laying her on top of the covers as he draped his body over hers. He hissed in pleasure; she opened her legs and his cock brushed against her wetness. He gathered her in his arms and thrust his hips forward, sheathing his cock deep inside her and capturing her mouth in a scorching kiss.

He found that instead of concentrating on one thing at a time like he had when he had been human, as a vampire he became aware of everything, all at once. Her skin glowed with each movement she made under him. Her pupils were dilated and he found that he missed the gray flecks he'd discovered earlier. Her moans were intermingled with her exhales, and when she gasped in pleasure, it shivered over his spine and drove him deeper with need.

Before he realized her intent, she brushed her long hair behind her ear and exposed her neck to his view. He knew the fundamentals of what he needed to do, but when presented with the realities of it, his mouth watered in anticipation. With ease, he picked out exactly where he needed to pierce her skin, and when he pressed his tongue against her skin and licked against the vein, he growled as he truly tasted her. Her answering moan encouraged him to continue. Using the utmost care, his fangs broke through her skin. The moment her blood touched his tongue, he moaned as the sweetest, most satisfying flavor he'd ever tasted rushed into his mouth and down his throat.

Aubrey drove her hips up and he sank his cock deeper as he drank. With a few strokes, she tensed against him and screamed her release. Not wanting to hurt her in any way, he pulled his teeth from her neck and closed the punctures with a swipe of his tongue.

When she returned the favor and numbed his neck, curses flew from his mouth. Shivering in anticipation, she didn't make him wait long before she pierced his skin and drank from him. Overwhelmed by the depth of sensations that rushed through his body, he stilled above her as he gathered her in his arms. His release slammed into him as she drew one last pull, and for a long moment, his vision had faded to black as he gasped for breath.

"Seth, are you okay?"

Focus snapped back at her words and without responding, he captured her mouth in a slow, languid kiss.

"I love you, Aubrey. I'm sorry I worried you, but I didn't feel any pain during my transition. I was fighting through a daze to get back to consciousness and to you."

"I love you. So much. I'm glad you're okay."

He held her tight against his chest. "So, when are we going to get married? The sooner the better, I say."

Chapter Seventeen

Aubrey

Aubrey smiled at her husband of six hours as the lavish party the assassins threw wound down. She laid her head on his shoulder and reflected how much her life had changed in such a short amount of time.

She had gotten to know and love Seth's family over the past month, loving how dedicated they were to one another. Although she had fallen in love with Kai, Liv, and the others, she had grown closest to Xander. She found him to be brilliant at all things technical, but because of his analytical mind, he thought of all things as black and white. And because he hadn't found a mate, he figured that he had missed the opportunity to find a mate or she had died. Although all she had was her words of encouragement and her belief that all of the assassins had a mate, Xander had believed her. They still talked about it, but Xander was more relaxed than he had been before and the sadness she'd noticed the first time they met had vanished.

Cole had finally introduced Simon, and Aubrey found Cole's boyfriend to be genuine in his feelings for her best friend. Simon couldn't help concealing the love he had for Cole each time he looked at him, and for the first time since she'd met Cole, she relaxed in knowing that he would be okay.

During the rehearsal for the wedding, Cole and Simon had been introduced to Seth's immortal family. It had been comical to see Cole's reaction to meeting the group of shifters and vampires.

“Is this a magazine cover shoot or have I died and gone to heaven?”

The immortals all laughed, quite used to the stunned reactions when first introduced, and talked and joked with Cole and Simon throughout the night and into the early morning.

As she took in the sight in front of her, her entire family gathered in one place, she relaxed against Seth’s chest.

“Thank you.”

Seth’s arm tightened around her and he smiled. “What for?”

She glanced around again, smiling at the people she loved most in the world. “For everything.”

Days before the wedding, she found herself more anxious to become Seth’s wife than nervous. When she awoke the evening of the ceremony, her anxiety gave way to happiness. The simple, yet emotional ceremony took place in the courtyard behind Kai’s house, surrounded by white peaked mountains and beautiful pine trees. Having everyone she loved gathered together on the tremendous fall night was as close to perfect as she’d ever dreamed. She had managed to quell her tears until the minister announced that they were man and wife, but when she kissed Seth, her husband, for the first time, her tears welled over.

The reception had been a whirlwind of activity. Everyone danced, including the single assassins who hadn’t bothered to bring dates. Seth had snarled a few times when Ax had held her too close to his huge body, but Aubrey knew that Ax meant no harm. He was a natural flirt. Finally, she ended up in the arms of her husband, unable to keep the smile off her face.

“What are you thinking about?”

She drew a deep breath as her eyes wandered around the eclectic group. “I finally found a home and a family, with you. I couldn’t be happier.”

Seth’s lips brushed against hers before he laid his forehead against hers. “No regrets?”

“None.”

“I love you, gorgeous. I will for the rest of my existence.”

“And I love you, husband of mine. Forever.”

The End