



Stranded with a Wounded Vampire

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Description: A grumpy alien war veteran lives alone on the edge of town in a dusty mansion. He's a recluse with sharp fangs and a questionable amount of alien blood stored in his fridge.

I should stay away from this big guy, like everyone else does. But his gorgeous, molten gaze causes my heart to flutter and I'm fascinated with the sound of his deep, luscious voice. I'm the only one he's ever spoken to and I want to know him better. I need to draw him out from his isolation, but how?

It turns out the sullen alien "vampire" enjoys donuts. Perfect. So I show up on his property to deliver pastries from my small-town bakery.

And then my car breaks down. He's angry that I'm stuck overnight with him in his spooky mansion but I'm here. He keeps insisting it's "not safe" for me to be near him.

But for some reason, I think he's wrong.

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Chapter 1

Willow

It might seem odd, driving to an alien vampire's remote mansion on a Tuesday afternoon, entirely uninvited, but that's how I roll.

Windows are down, sunroof open and I'm singing along to my favorite songs as I wind through twisty roads. Trying to keep focused and not let nervous anxiety cause me to do something crazy, like pull over, turn around and go back from whence I came.

I'm making bold decisions today and will not be deterred.

This out-of-the-ordinary trip is necessary because I've become obsessed with Bruce Bloodworth and I need to get to the bottom of those heated glances he threw my way.

Most people would avoid this Korn who recently moved to our small town, but not me. And I need to know—was that sex appeal that radiated from his body in waves real or imagined?

Because I consistently wake up hot and bothered, thinking about him.

I turn my lights off at night, trying to sleep and...I imagine those luscious lips again and that peek of fang. And I end up reaching more often than usual for my sex toys to provide relief, but it's never enough. I suspect only his touch will do.

I met Bruce only once, at the grocery store and now he's all I think of. That Korn who moved to our town is someone I want to strip naked, climb on top of and shove my tongue in his mouth. Yep, I've got it bad. And I was only in his presence for a few minutes, but that's all it took.

The navigation app alerts me to turn left onto a smaller road, which I do.

I'm not used to needing directions considering I've lived in this small town my entire life. I know this county along the Appalachian trail like the back of my hand. I was born and raised here with zero plans of ever moving away.

Although if that hot vamp, Bruce Bloodworth, whose house I'm driving to, ever wanted to take me away to his own planet to meet his family, I'd certainly be up for that kind of adventure.

My phone rings.

I sigh and tap the screen.

"Willow. Willow? Where are you?" a sharp, agitated female voice grouches.

"Mom, I told you I was leaving this afternoon. I'm out delivering cupcakes to a customer in the hills...and I'm bringing a few donuts along this time. It's my job."

"Your job is here with me, at the bakery. You slipped out without even a proper goodbye. This is your business and I'm supposed to be helping out, not running the whole damn show."

I let out another sigh. My mother is a little overprotective considering I'm an adult now and we don't even live together. "Mom, you're the manager."

“Not full time.”

“I pay you for full-time work. You’re the one who wanted to come out of early retirement to join me on this.”

“Fine, but I don’t like the idea of you being out alone on a delivery so far out in the hills. You’re my only child and you know I cannot abide the idea of anything bad happening to you. Have you noticed there’s a rainstorm on the way?”

“What? No.” I glance out the window, seeing rain clouds that are just now approaching in the distance. Darn it. I reach out and press a button, closing the sunroof. “I thought the forecast was no rain.”

“You were wrong. Why are you even out that far making such a mysterious delivery? Are you trying to visit that alien who lives on the mountain top?”

I bite my lip. Why did I tell her that I’d met him at the grocery store last week? Mistake number one. I should’ve kept that information to myself. “Maybe...”

“Willow...”

“It’s sad that he’s cooped up there alone. Someone has to show him some kindness and welcome him to the neighborhood.”

“Normally, you would be right, but this is not a typical situation. He’s a grown male from another planet. That Korn probably bought the old Masson house specifically to be alone. He likes the fact that it’s hard to get to and thirty minutes out of town. It’s not right for you to go out there and knock on his door when he’s trying so hard to stay away from meddlesome humans.”

A growl rumbles in my throat. I am undeterred. And the last thing I need in my life is

another of my mom's long-winded lectures. "I can't hear you. You're breaking up."

"Willow," she sputters. "You have to listen to me."

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“The reception is bad out here. I have to get off the phone.”

“No, wait.”

I end the call, shaking my head. And keep driving.

It's a beautiful afternoon and I have to focus. Yes, there's going to be rain to contend with soon, but it's probably just a light rain. I can be up there, do my meet and greet, and then be back halfway down the mountain before it even gets bad.

I glance at the pink box of cupcakes and donuts on my driver's side seat.

My obsession for all things Bruce Bloodworth began exactly eight days ago, when I bumped into him at the grocery store.

I knew all about the alien vampire who'd moved into town, like everyone else in the county. It's all we could talk about. He'd purchased and remodeled some of the interior of the historic Masson house, which we were all curious about. There had been sightings about town, so I knew that he came into town occasionally to get food, but I thought that had stopped. I thought he'd finally discovered he could get his groceries delivered.

Korn, as well as Voltare, now live on our planet, yet I've never seen any of them in real life, but these aliens are our friends and allies, not enemies. Many of them have even married human women and they've had kids, so they seem reasonably normal to me.

There aren't that many aliens living on our planet so each of them is basically a celebrity. But we hadn't heard anything in the news about Bruce. He must be on the down low. Maybe what Mom says is true, that we probably hadn't heard of him because he wants to remain isolated.

One day I ended up at the local grocery store on main street, examining the wall of spaghetti sauce jars, in the mood for something new and different, because I'm a spaghetti sauce snob. I thought I was alone in this task and let out a squeak of surprise when suddenly a big man, dressed all in black leather was standing a little too close.

I moved over, to give more space between us and blatantly eyed this guy from head to toe. He was very tall and in a long black leather coat, with a white T-shirt and black boots. And he smelled amazing. It took a minute to realize he was otherworldly and not some motorcycle club guy.

Bruce Bloodworth, the only Korn living in this part of the world, was standing next to me in the pasta aisle?

What were the chances?

I did my best to remain calm and act normal and not like I was in the midst of a celebrity sighting. He was here to shop, like I was, and I'm sure wanted his privacy. And he appeared to be also staring intently at the spaghetti jars, trying to decide which was best.

Korn like spaghetti?

We both quietly gazed at the array of jars for a beat too long. Finally, I reached out and took the jar I'd decided to choose. It was the most expensive type, imported from Italy, sugar free with organic ingredients. I'd never seen it here before and it sounded very yummy.

Then he reached out and got the same jar too.

I turned my head and looked up, about to make a joking remark about how he had good taste. Our eyes met and I was stunned into silence because I swear I saw my unborn children in his hot gaze.

He inhaled and a growl rumbled in his chest.

I was immediately dazed and took a step closer because I couldn't help myself. All my girly parts were sitting up and taking notice and I had to get closer. I reached out and...

And then he was gone.

He moved so swiftly it was a blur.

I was alone again in that aisle, holding a jar of spaghetti against my chest. "Whut...wait..." Where did he go? I walked around the grocery store, looking for him, but he was gone. And I haven't seen him since.

Thus, I'm on a mission to come to him.

After lots of deep thought this last week, I'm determined to have a second chance meeting with Bruce Bloodworth from the planet Korn. Because I think there's something there between us.

And also, I'm depressingly single and would love to be in the midst of a committed relationship. At twenty-eight years old I've gone out on many dates, had a few short-term relationships, but never anything truly serious. I would love to find a guy I could become serious about and start a family. And if that guy happens to be not of this planet, that's okay. All that matters to me is the attraction, love and commitment. I

suspect I can get this from Bruce. And if I'm right, I've got to try. And if I'm wrong...well at least I'll know there's nothing there and learn to let it go.

I'm going to have no expectations. This is a first foray and he'll learn my name.

My business card is tucked into the box I brought. Not to sell more cupcakes, but so he can get in touch with me again if he wants. He'll learn that I own a bakery and that's where I can most likely be found. And maybe when he comes into town he can come to my store, even just to order something, it would give him a reason to see me again, or at least call. Again, not because I'm trying to sell more cupcakes. You think I would be trying for the sale, but I guess I'm not that great of a businessperson. This is only so that I can get more face time with Bruce.

I turn on one windy road and then another. My car isn't brand new, but it's a good car. It's a smaller SUV I originally meant to have for a year or two and then get something bigger for the business. But I ended up really liking it and I'm always surprised at how much I can fit into this car. I've had it for six years and never had a moment's trouble, only needing new tires. I'm not pulling up to his house in a luxury vehicle, but my ordinary-looking car is paid for, works great and has low mileage, and this is what matters to me.

I did dress nice today though, in preparation for this quick meeting. He first saw me on a day off, with my long, red hair, frizzy, in a messy ponytail, and me in my baggy sweats. This time I'm in my favorite outfit, wearing makeup, and a sleek blow out of my hair. I even painted my nails.

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I went all out.

The navigation app lets me know I'm only two minutes away.

Okay, don't be nervous. Don't turn back.

Yes, he ran away from me without saying a word. But I'm certain there was a flash of heat in his gaze and I swear he was staring at my lips, neck and breasts a beat too long.

You can do this, Willow.

Be bold.

There's the house visible between the treetops. Three stories tall, with a tower on each side. Yeah, it still looks a little spooky.

Bruce Bloodworth moved into a historic mansion, built when this area used to be a summer home location for Gilded Age rich people. This isn't a hot spot anymore, but their grand old houses remain, cherished and updated by new generations. This one is the biggest of them all, high on the mountain.

People say it's haunted, mainly because it looks dark and spooky from the front and seems to attract owners who live there in isolated splendor, adding to the mystery of the place.

Luckily, it's early summer, no snow and the roads are clear. But the dark rain clouds

that are forming add to the dark tone.

I pull up the long driveway, surprised there isn't a gate. Thank God. What if there had been a gate? I don't know. I would've had to charm my way in and say I'm here for delivery.

I keep driving and turn a bend and see the entire house in all its glory. There's a huge front lawn, and a curved driveway in front. Now that I'm so close, the mansion looks very charming. It's got that faux Tudor look with mullion windows and dark wood timbers I like, maybe even a bit of rustic French. The gardens are green but overly bushy and sadly lacking in flowered splendor, but I can imagine this being turned into something amazing. A place for gatherings. Hmm...

Nervous butterflies take flight in my belly. What if he's snooty and thinks I'm not upper class enough? In college I had friends who came from wealthy families and they would invite me for weekend trips to their families' vacation homes. So I'm not a complete newbie to this, but those houses were nothing compared to this mansion. Yes, I own my own business but it's not like I'm super rich. I live in a little apartment not far from my bakery.

I pull up into the curved driveway and park the car and turn it off. Then I rub my sweaty palms against the tiered skirt of my cute, linen, summer dress and exhale. Because now I'm a little intimidated by all the splendor. But I did originally meet this man in the spaghetti sauce and pasta aisle of a very ordinary grocery store. So there's that.

I'm here. I can do this.

I pull on my crossbody purse, which I might not need, but it's got my cell phone and keys. You never know.

I turn off the car and grab my pink box with four cupcakes and two Old-Fashioned donuts. I didn't go crazy, but I did bring him my best. These are fresh out of the oven and decorated just this morning. My best-selling cupcakes. I've brought strawberry champagne, pistachio and dark chocolate, chocolate chip with cinnamon and birthday cake. I figured that's a wide variety of taste options.

I deliver donuts each morning to the grocery store on main and they sell them there. And the owner recently told me that the “alien vampire” bought a box of my Old-Fashioned donuts when he was here in person and now always requests them when he orders his groceries delivered.

He likes donuts. My donuts.

I let out a cough, close the car door and lift my chin, proudly holding the box in my arms.

There's a little flash of movement in an upstairs window, like a curtain moved.

A smile widens across my face. He's here. I know he's here. This is a good time.

And again, I'm just here to offer the donuts I know he likes, plus some of our cupcakes to see if he likes those too. This doesn't have to be a big deal. It's just a quick second meeting. I leave the box and my card behind and go.

I stride up the steps to the grand front door and do a tentative knock. But it's such a thick wooden door I'm not certain he can even hear me. I see a doorbell and push it and hear a deep series of echoing rings.

And then I hear footsteps.

I suck in a sharp breath and paste another smile on my face and shift on my feet.

The door opens and I lift my chin because at first all I see is white T-shirt chest.

He's wearing an outfit very similar to what he wore the first time I saw him except this time no jacket. A white T-shirt tucked into black jeans. And now I can see that he's wearing a form-fitted, long-sleeved gray shirt under the T-shirt, just to cover his arms. He wears a black belt with a large silver belt. I assume black boots but I'm not looking down that far. And I look up at his face, just as handsome as I remember. He needs to shave and his hair still looks short.

“Why are you here?” Bruce Bloodstone questions with a deep, disgruntled voice.

I lick my lips and shift on my feet again. Not exactly the greeting I was hoping for. But I carry on, giving him a big smile. “Hi, my name is?—”

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“I know your name.”

“Oh, you do? Well I know your name too and it’s nice to see you again.” I lift my box. “I’m not sure if you also know that I own a bakery in town. I am here to bring you some of my donuts.”

His brow furrows, but his gaze shifts to the box and I can see I’ve now caught his attention. “I didn’t order donuts.”

“Oh, I know. I know that. I’m just here because?—”

“I need to pay for these?”

“No. Oh gosh. No, no. Let me start over. My name is Willow Brand. And I am here because after we, uh, met that time in the grocery store, I wanted to meet you again. You left so quickly last time, I guess I was worried I offended you. Maybe we need a do over? I’m not here to sell you donuts or cupcakes. I wanted to bring a personal gift and since baking is all I know how to do well.” And now, since I’m nervous I start to babble. “I mean, I can’t write books. Nobody wants me to work on their finances. I can’t fix plumbing. I couldn’t change my own tire, even in the midst of an emergency. And I suck at gardening. There are so many things I cannot do but I can...”

“Make these treats?” he questions.

“Yes. I own a bakery in town and I sell my donuts to Catalano’s Market.”

“I’ve eaten those treats.”

“Yes. Do you remember when we met for a moment in that grocery store?”

He gives a curt nod.

“Well...” I shift on my feet again, because I'm now a little uncomfortable. I thought at this point he would have invited me inside so we could at least talk for a minute instead of leaving me on the doorstep. This does not bode well. Which causes me to continue to nervously overshare. “Like I said, I wanted to make sure I hadn’t accidentally offended you in any way. I'm also here to welcome you to our town and offer my friendship and in the process, give you some donuts because this is something that we do here. When people are new to a neighborhood, we often will bring them food and greet them.” I offer him the pretty pink box.

He shakes his head and sighs like this is the most difficult moment of his life.

And I am concerned that I have made a terrible error.

Even though we're not standing all that close he smells so good. And I’m now shifting on my feet to relieve the ache between my thighs. This is what happened too that first time I was next to him at the store. This is why I’m here, because I’ve basically never in my life been so suddenly, over-the-top attracted to another man.

Does he feel the same? Is it only me?

Can we have something here between us or will there be nothing and me left with my shameful attraction?

“Leave the donuts right there,” he orders, pointing to the ground. “And you have to go right now.”

My jaw drops open and I stare at him for a minute because ever since I started my business I've never had anyone be so blatantly rude like this to me.

Usually, my baked goods bring joy.

I think back to the time spent baking, creating and picking these out for him, driving up here, for nothing. He's telling me to put them down and leave. I mean, not that I thought that this was going to be something major, but I didn't expect rudeness. I guess I thought he'd maybe take a bite from one and tell me it tasted good. Or just some smiles and thank you and later he could tell me how much he liked it.

Cake-making is a symbiotic relationship.

I make the cupcakes and I need to have an audience that eats them, otherwise my performance art is incomplete. And I need to know the customer's reaction because then later it improves my quality. How can I make this better? How can I make more of what they want? Less of what they don't want? So being told after all that, "put them right there and then leave"...I'm cut to the core.

His jaw clenches.

"Okay," I squeak and put the box down.

"You need to leave," he repeats. "Our meeting at the store was a mistake. Go now and never come back. This is for your own good. I do this for you."

I have no idea what he's talking about. How could this possibly be good for me? I nod and turn on my heel.

Okay. I was wrong.

Bruce Bloodworth does not feel the same about me as I do about him.

I swiftly move down the steps, trying not to stumble because there's a stone in my chest and heat behind my eyes. I misunderstood, that's all. I thought there was a moment between us. I thought we exchanged heated glances and there was something important there, like something out of a romance novel, but I was wrong. That's all. That's all. There's nothing for me to be ashamed of. Nothing to be embarrassed about. It was smart to pursue this to get it out of my system as fast as possible.

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My hands shake slightly when I get to the car and take off my purse.

I glance back.

He's still standing there staring at me. Suddenly it feels very important that I leave fast.

I take out my keys and get inside and close the door. Then I start the car and it doesn't turn over.

Oh hell. No.

I try again and again, but there's no flash of life anywhere on the dashboard or from the engine. I look over at the mansion again and see that Bruce is still standing at the front door, watching.

Dammit. He's going to think I did this on purpose. I did not.

I slam my hand against the steering wheel. "Oh, come on," I yell at the car. "Here I am totally humiliated. All I want to do is get away fast so I can go home and lick my wounds. And now you're not working?"

Chapter 2

Willow

Drops of rain start to splatter on the windshield.

Wonderful.

That's when I remember I have a jumpstart kit in the back of the car just for emergencies like this.

Thank God.

I shrug on the thin, yellow rain jacket I always keep in the car this time of year because the weather is so changeable, then I get the charger out of the back of the SUV, reread the directions and get going. I pop and lift the hood on my own, proud that I'm being resourceful and scrappy in this moment of need. Hopefully I can get out of here quick and be on my way.

"What are you doing?" a deep voice growls. "Why haven't you left yet?"

Bruce stands next to me, tall and dominating, with a dark frown marring his face. The black hood of his leather coat makes him look even more intimidating than before.

I cry out in surprise.

How the heck did he get here so fast? And he's so handsome I'm a little stunned and tongue-tied for a moment. I glance down, because I can't help myself and see his crotch is tented.

I bite my lip to keep from letting out a chuckle of happiness.

Suddenly I feel like a weight has been lifted off my chest. All my dark worries from before fly out the window. He does have a reaction to me, but for some reason he's telling me to leave.

Why?

Not that it matters so much right now because I still need to leave. I'm not staying when he says to go. I'm going to try my best to honor his wishes even if they feel nonsensical, but it does feel better knowing that I wasn't completely wrong. The whole premise for me coming up here was still sound. I can jump-start this car and leave but think of this as visit number one. I'll think of another way to approach him.

“Well,” I say, “as you can see, something's wrong with my battery. I can't get the car to start. It's crazy because I didn't leave any lights on in the car. It was working perfectly while driving up here. Luckily, I have this.” I show him my charging box. “I'm single and live in a small town,” I boldly remind him, “I drive around often by myself, so I figure I've got to have these kinds of things. You know, and I live in sort of this country area as well, so I bought this. It's supposed to restart the battery.” I bend down and clamp it to the right places. “Hopefully this will work and then I can get out of your hair.” I press the button to start the charge. Then I walk over, get in the car and try to start it again, fully expecting it to work this time.

And it still won't start. “Dammit,” I grumble.

He walks over to the open driver's side door, his arms crossed. “What now?”

“This is bad. I can't jump it either.”

“What does that mean?”

“This means I need a whole new battery.”

“Power source?”

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The sky darkens and the rain falls harder. I'm now stuck in a full-on rainstorm with the water falling in torrents. I tuck my legs into the car because even though I'm wearing the jacket I'm still in a short skirt and open-toe sandals. Shoot.

"Yes. My car is dead. I'll need it towed from here and taken to town. Or maybe they can bring a new battery along and install it right here and I can drive away. Either of these solutions require a tow truck." I pull out my cell phone. "But I have to warn you, the guy who runs the tow truck company is on vacation and his cousin is covering for him. Jason, the real owner, would move heaven and earth to come out here for me. His cousin not so much."

I put it on speakerphone so Bruce knows what's happening.

It rings and rings and rings and finally Jason's cousin picks up the line. "Yes?"

"Hey, Steve." I glance over at Bruce, who's still standing in the rain, staring at me with a disgruntled look on his face. "This is Willow Brand," I say loudly because even though I've known him my whole life, Steve has never exactly been known for his sunny disposition. Even marriage and children have only brought out a hint of levity in the man. "I'm calling to let you know my car broke down and I need your help."

"Heh. What's wrong with it?"

"The battery is dead."

"Can't you get a jump from someone nearby and bring it in yourself?"

“I tried that. It's not working. I need a new battery installed.”

He grunts. “Where are you?”

I tell him.

“That’s far away.”

“Yes. But luckily, I’m safe while I wait. How long will it take you to get here?”

“Two hours.”

“What?” I sputter. “Why so long?”

“Two hours,” he repeats and then hangs up on me.

I look at my cell phone in my hand and then up at Bruce. And give him a tremulous smile. “Looks like I don’t have a choice in the matter.” I glance at the house because I have to admit, I’m hoping he’ll finally invite me inside.

“Wait out here until the other human arrives to take you and your vehicle back to town,” he orders. “I will wait inside.”

I blink and try my best to hide my surprise.

“You cannot come inside,” he repeats. “We need distance from each other.” Then he strides off for the house, leaving me outside and alone in a rainstorm.

I cannot believe.

His front door closes behind him and he’s gone. At least he brought the box of donuts

inside with him.

Thunder rumbles in the distance.

If the situation were reversed, I would certainly invite him inside. Or I would've given him a ride back to town. It would be hard for me to imagine a situation where I'd let someone I knew who came up to deliver me a gift wait outside for two hours alone. In the rain.

And that's when I realize he walked with a slight limp. I didn't notice it in the grocery store, but I wasn't able to catch him walking. Maybe he's hurt and wants to be alone to recuperate? Or, this is the real reason he doesn't want to get close to me, because he thinks this is something to hide? I've heard whispers about his limp but hadn't thought too much of it. Maybe this, and his long gray sleeves covering more of his body has something to do with his need to be alone or push me away? I have no idea. I wish I knew him better so I could understand his motives.

I shut the car door with a huff because now the rain is falling harder.

This is terrible. I glance around the interior, assessing the situation. There's no food or water and my stomach grumbles. I lick my lips, feeling a little bit thirsty. "This sucks."

A heavy sigh escapes my lips.

I can do this.

My phone pings. I pick it up and see there's another text from my mother, It's raining now...

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As if I didn't know.

I do not want her coming up the mountain to get me in the midst of this storm. It wouldn't be safe for her, driving her tiny car up these roads, and yet she'd do it in a heartbeat.

I'm fine, I lie. I'm in the house with Bruce. I'll tell you all about it later.

Bruce? You're on a first-name basis now with this mysterious Korn? She sends a heart-eyed emoji.

I roll my eyes and ghost.

My mom can't come and get me. And my best friend is eight months pregnant, with two small children in the house and I know for a fact her husband is at work.

Looks like I'm on my own.

Luckily, there's a new romance novel I preordered and it released today. My phone is still almost fully charged. Both Bruce Bloodworth and Steve Banks are lucky I have this book available. This decreases my anxiety by at least eighty percent. My shoulders soften as I pick up the phone again and tap on my reader app and open the first chapter. I smile, loving the familiar words and voice of my favorite author, ready to go in deep.

I settle down and happily read for the next hour on my phone, laughing out loud at my favorite parts.

This works perfectly fine for the first hour because the book is great, sucking me in deep, like usual.

But I eventually the cold gets to me. I get antsy and stiff so when I notice a pause in the rain, I step out after a while and walk around in the just to stretch my legs. But then the storm gets worse and I get back inside.

I think I see a shuffle from the drapes again, this time in a window on the first floor.

Thirty minutes later I put the phone down and look around because I'm getting disgruntled. The rain is now falling so heavy there are puddles in the front yard and driveway and it's really getting chilly out here.

After two hours and thirty minutes of this nonsense I tap the app closed and put the phone down for good and call Steve back. I can't focus on my story when I'm so hungry and thirsty.

It rings and rings and rings again and goes to a recording. I call again, trying to get him to actually pick up. Finally, he responds. "Yeah?"

I try my best to sound normal, like I don't have a care in the world even though I'm now highly agitated. "Steve, it's now almost five o'clock. Are you almost here?"

"Oh, that's right," he offers. "You're on that mountain..."

I let out a whimper of dismay.

"There's been a multi-car crash on route 40. All of us have been called in to help. I can't get to you. Isn't that old Masson house nearby?"

I glance at the house. "Yeah. I'm parked in the driveway."

“It’s raining hard and the storm is only going to get worse. Just stay the night there. I know Bruce Bloodworth. Tell him I said I can’t pick you up and you have to stay.”

“No, I...I...”

“After I’m done helping with this mess on the freeway it’s going to be late. I’m not coming out there in a storm in the middle of the night to get you when you’re not in an emergency. I’ll be there later in the morning. Bye.”

He hangs up on me again.

Oh hell. I look over at the mansion and let out another deep sigh. Then I pull on my hood, grab my purse and sprint through the rain to the porch.

The front door opens.

“Stop,” Bruce yells. “You don’t want to come in here or get close to me right now. This is not a safe location for a human female.”

I swear he looks even more enraged. His eyes are flaming, his skin which is normally preternaturally pale, looks flushed. And I can see both of his elongated fangs. He’s standing with a wide stance and looks extremely determined to keep me out of his house.

And I don’t even care because I’m fed up and standing in a rainstorm. It’s growing ever darker outside and the wind is picking up. My feet are now wet and muddy and I need his help. And even though he’s claiming this isn’t a safe place for me, I’m ninety-nine percent certain those fears are unfounded. The Korn have been on this planet long enough that stories have filtered down about their mating practices and I know they hold the idea of consent prior to blood-sharing super serious, which I appreciate. And I have a basic understanding of their life-long mating practices. But

I've already thought of all that ahead of time because I'm not stupid. I came up here basically knowing what I'd be getting into if I chose to start something with him, and I'm up for it.

“Bruce, I need?—”

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“No...” he growls, cutting me off. “Stay in the vehicle, your other human will be here soon.”

“No, he will not.”

Bruce shakes his head. “Stay. In. Your. Vehicle.”

What the hell? That's it. No more Mr. Nice Lady.

I march onto his porch. “What is wrong with you? This is ridiculous.” I point at my car and word vomit out all my frustrations, raising my voice to be heard over the wind and rain, “I came up here to bring you your favorite donuts, because to be truthful, when we met for that short amount of time at the grocery store, I thought there was an attraction between the two of us. And I was hoping you’d eat the donuts and cupcakes and maybe later you’d call me? Those were the thoughts running through my mind when I first arrived. All those plans fell apart when you opened the door and said for me to...to...just leave and go? I mean, who does that? And then I did not expect you to leave me stranded, hungry and thirsty, in my car for over two hours alone in the rain. I would never do that to you, or to anyone. My car normally never causes me a moment’s trouble, but the battery decided to die and needs to be replaced. This is not planned. I mean, I want out of here as much as you want me to leave. All I want is my comfy bed and leftovers from dinner last night.”

“Then wait for your human and you can go home,” he growls.

“Steve Banks just told me there's a pile up on route 40. He said to tell you I have to stay the night here with you. He’s going to pick me up in the morning.”

A muscle twitches in his jaw.

“I can’t call my mom to come and get me because she doesn’t see so good when it gets dark and the roads are bad. It would be dangerous for her... and my best friend can’t come either. Basically it’s dangerous to call for anyone to come out here right now, especially when it isn’t necessary. Bruce, I’m stuck out here literally in your driveway and you have a big house with lots of extra bedrooms. What should I do?”

Chapter 3

Bruce

I stare at her without answering because, despite her impassioned speech, I’m not entirely convinced having Willow stay overnight is the right move, but I appear to be backed into a corner. Steve Banks is the most sensible human I’ve met so far on this entire planet and his message to me was for her to remain in my domicile. And that male knows my exact circumstance.

“You can stay,” I finally announce.

“Damn right,” she grumbles.

I open the door wider and step aside, allowing this sexy human to enter my domicile. This might possibly be the worst decision I’ve ever made, but it must be done. I cannot allow her to remain in danger outside in the dark storm, although inside with me is equally dangerous.

My female is glorious when angry. But extreme discomfort courses through my veins at the idea of her coming inside, because I know I will lose all control. I’ve ingested two bags of blood antidote while she’s been nearby and still, all I want is to take her to my bed, strip her naked and sink my aching cock into her heat. On top of that, I

want to sink my fangs in her neck and make her mine for the rest of her life.

Knowing this is entirely illegal does not decrease the want and need.

But she is a human who does not understand that I am dishonored, removed from the Korn mating database. Unfortunately, it's illegal for me to mate. I cannot even pleasure mate because this could lead to blood frenzy. I am expected to remain celibate for the rest of my life.

And yet now, here she is. On my home planet, no female would be trying so hard to remain this close to me, especially when it was obvious I was in a frenzy. They'd be running the other direction and I would be quarantined.

On Earth I'm left to fend for myself but still expected to follow the Korn legal code.

When has a Korn ever been this tempted?

Willow steps inside and I close the door behind her.

We both quietly stand together in the front foyer.

A grand staircase behind us leads to the upstairs rooms. Two openings on either side of us expose large, formal living and dining areas. The hallway behind us leads to a sunlit kitchen, informal dining and a smaller living area that opens to the back of the home. I move to the thermostat and turn it up because I've learned that humans become cold much more easily than Korn.

Water drips off her jacket onto the marble floor. She is closer than ever before. That glorious red and golden hair falls in a straight shine past her shoulders. Her green eyes flash fire at me. Her beauty is stunning. I noticed this female that day I was trying to shop at the human market and bring home their food. I walked past an aisle

and caught something out of the corner of my eye and came back. Then I had to step closer. And closer. And I couldn't help myself from eyeing whatever foodstuffs seemed interesting to this particular human. I knew it was wrong and basically illegal to place myself in proximity to a female who caused my body to enflame, but again, the need was too great.

Her height is perfect, the top of her head reaching just beneath my chin. And her slender and yet curvy body was highly alluring that first day, even underneath her baggy clothing.

I've concluded that Willow Brand is the reason my receptors lit up the moment I arrived on Earth. A low-level blood frenzy reaction that was irritating but also easy to ignore. I can never decide if I chose this house in the Smoky Mountain region of Earth because my body knew that she was near, or if it was pure accident.

I've been living like this, banished and without even a pleasure mate, for the last year. It hasn't been difficult, until now. Because I've wanted no female during this time. Until Willow.

Her scent entered my lungs and thickened my shaft and I had to swiftly leave the establishment. I wanted to speak to her and listen to her voice and her words. Touching her hair sounded wonderful and kissing those lips and her neck... My fangs were throbbing and I would've pulled her into my arms and behaved inappropriately. Which would've been terrible considering I'm on a primitive planet, not amongst my own species on Korn. And most importantly I'm considered "bad blood" and not able to breed. I might be on an entirely different planet, amongst humans, but the same rules apply.

"Bruce? Bruce."

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I blink and look down at her.

Her hood is now off and her hands are on her hips. “Why is it so terrible that I’ve walked into your home and might stay the night in one of your rooms? Tell me what’s wrong so that I can help fix it. Maybe it’s just a misunderstanding.”

I cross my arms, my body thrumming with both heat and lust. “You have no idea what danger awaits you.” I point at a coat rack. “You can put your rain gear there.”

Her eyes widen at my harsh tone, but she takes off the outer layers of clothing and hangs them up. And now I can again see the curve of her ass and breasts through that short clothing she wears. It’s highly distracting.

“How can I be in danger? I thought the Korn and humans were allies and you easily got along with humans, which is why you’re stationed here in the first place, because you don’t mind being in the midst of a planet with a different species all around you.”

I grunt and stride into the large living room and she follows behind. Then I turn to face her, deciding now is the time to tell her the truth. Willow follows so close, she bumps into my chest, then takes two steps back.

I reach up and run my fingers through my short hair, trying to decrease my agitation. “Female, you needed to leave because I am in the midst of a blood frenzy and I’m trying to isolate myself and you are making this difficult.”

“Blood frenzy? Oh no, that sounds awful. Do you need help?”

“You can help me by leaving.”

She stamps a foot. “But you just invited me inside for the night. You know I can’t leave. Okay, you are sending mixed messages.” She reaches for her pocket and pulls up a small screen. “I can call some other friends or employees. I’m certain one of them can come and get me. It will take another hour, but it can happen. Especially if I offer to pay. But...is it okay for me to be out of danger here with you, but then put someone else in danger to drive up here to get me?”

I clench my jaw again, trying to decide if needing her to leave is that important. “I do not know if it’s safe for those humans to drive up here in the storm,” I admit. “I don’t know the terrain here as well as on Korn.”

“Maybe you should let me know what the danger level is here and then I can decide if I should stay or go.”

“If you stay you might become my legal bride.”

She rears back. “Bride?”

I can scent her arousal, which only makes this more difficult. I could scent her arousal that first moment I stood next to her at the market. This is why I cannot stop thinking of her.

Two hours ago, I heard a sound outside and looked through my upstairs office window to find Willow Brand stepping out of a vehicle in my driveway.

My heart skipped with excitement, but I kept a frown on my face because this also meant I would be tempted again, like never before. I’d left that store as fast as I could and I didn’t not return to town, on purpose. And yet she was here. I could not believe my eyes when I opened my front door and saw her standing on the doorstep. Her

green eyes, a startling color not seen in my own species, flashed with anticipation and warmth. All I wanted was to pull her into my arms, but I was unable.

I must keep this female safe. Even from me.

Instead of contemplating leaving after my bold pronouncement of my intentions, Willow puts her screen back in her pocket and takes a step closer. “Why do you think me becoming your bride is dangerous?”

I decide to take it up a notch. “Because you will instantly become my mate for life. This is not a situation where we can fuck for one night and then you leave me the next morning.”

She bites a lip. “You want to have sex with me tonight? That’s what you think will happen?”

“Desperately,” I rasp. “This is what I’ve wanted since the moment we met.”

“Your worry is that if I stay we’ll...we’ll have sex tonight and then I’ll leave you the next morning and never come back?”

“Not exactly my most important worry, but yes, that would be among my list of problems.”

“No one-night stands for you?”

“No. I am here in isolation on this mountain because I thought if I mainly remained in this large domicile there would be no compatible human woman nearby.”

“Uh oh, I messed that up, didn’t I?”

I can't help but grin, despite the dire circumstances. Her features are truly adorable and I enjoy the sound of her voice. I could easily gaze at this female for the rest of my days. "At first I thought our two species weren't compatible. When I arrived on Earth, I discovered that the first two Korn on this mission were already mated to human females and had offspring. And then not long after, I started feeling symptoms of my own."

"Does blood frenzy mean a feeling of wanting to mate with someone in particular? Did you know who you felt this for?"

"It does, and no, I did not know who this was for. It shouldn't be happening at all. When I felt the symptoms, I couldn't go into a ship and isolate because the military had dropped me off and left. There is no Korn ship in orbit. I purchased this remote domicile in a terrain that reminds me of the location on my home planet. I remain and do my work remotely. This has worked well, until now. I made the fatal error of going into town briefly just to peruse the market to visually confirm what was offered there and whether any of it was foodstuffs I might enjoy."

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“You saw me in the grocery store and you felt it too?” she questions.

“Yes,” I admit.

“Then why are you...” She waves a hand. “Why are you doing all of this, where you try to keep me away from you and you say it’s dangerous? You say you want me as your Bride. Doesn’t that mean you should want me to stay so you can get to know me better?”

“I do this for your own protection.”

“You keep saying that, but I don’t understand. How can me being with you be a bad thing?”

“I did not want you to stay the night here because what I feel for you is very strong. And like I said before, you can’t change your mind later.”

“But...but remember I said I was here because I thought there was something between us? I feel the attraction too. I came up here because I had to see you again and get to the bottom of this. I want to get to know you better. And...and maybe I wouldn’t mind if we ended up in the same bed tonight too.”

“I know,” I answer. “I have scented your arousal since the beginning, when we were at the store.”

“Oh.” Her cheeks flush an attractive shade of pink. “I didn’t know. I’m so embarrassed. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to bother you with that.”

“No, no,” I say. “I’m not bothered. I feel honored that you would feel that way about me, considering it is illegal for me to breed.”

“Illegal? Bruce, now what are you talking about? It can’t be illegal for the two of us to be together. There are two other women who have married Korn.”

Another roll of thunder rumbles in the distance and then a flash of lightning streaks through the large front windows. The wind howls outside louder than ever before and the pound of rain lashing against the structure increases. “Lights on,” I announce and a series of ambient lights turn on in corners of the room.

“Your home is very nice. The couches and the other furniture look warm and comfortable.”

“Thank you.” I look through the window, into the shadowy outside. “We truly are stranded together for the night. This debate between us whether you should stay or go is now moot. I don’t want you to ask anyone else to come up because I don’t want to be responsible for another human getting stuck on the road up here or something happening to them in this storm.”

“Exactly. I agree. But the fact remains that you say that having me here makes you uncomfortable. And that it’s illegal for us to be together? I don’t understand.”

“I’ve been taken off the Korn mating database. I cannot have a mate or even a pleasure mate. It is illegal.”

“But that doesn’t make any sense...you said that you’ve felt this frenzy for me...”

“Since I arrived on the planet. It’s true. It’s been very irritating.”

“How can that happen if you were taken off this database?”

“It doesn’t mean that I can’t be thrown into a frenzy. All females know that I am incompatible and to stay away from me.”

“But I’m human, not Korn.” She bites at her lip again. “Does...does this all stem from the way you walk and how you’ve covered yourself in more clothes than necessary? You don’t have to explain any of this, but you need to know that I don’t care about any of that.”

I inhale, surprised at how meaningful these words of acceptance are to me. But then I remember it’s because my sweet Willow doesn’t know the whole story, the extent of my dishonorable behavior that led to my permanent wounds. She is speaking from a place of misplaced innocence, and if she knew the truth...this human might very well leave me as swiftly as any Korn female.

I step back and stride for the kitchen, this time not bothering to try and hide the slight lurch in my step. I change the subject and remark again over the point I find the most irritating about human mating customs. “There's no dating and no divorce amongst Korn. We can't have this moment tonight and then you leave tomorrow morning and take another human male into your bed.”

She again follows behind. “I know that about your species and I've already accepted it. These last seven days I was thinking out what I’d do if I arrived and we hit it off, because I understood that starting something with you might mean we were together forever. I figured coming up here to meet you was a first step. To be truthful I didn’t expect for things to change so quickly to where we’re now stranded here together tonight, but I’m happy to have the opportunity to get to know you better.”

I pause in front of the refrigerator and turn to look down at my beautiful female. The curve of her bare neck is mesmerizing. “Korn in a blood frenzy move fast. You staying here with me would mean that there would be little time for this ‘getting to know each other’ you speak of and instead we’d be instant mates. And I’d need to

know that you've given your full consent. It is against the law to consume blood from another being and perform the frenzy without full consent."

"Consume blood? Um, well maybe we could take this night to get to know each other better first?"

I shake my head. "I already know that you're the right being, which is why you staying the night is so risky. The problem is that I can't have you."

"How can you know that? You don't know me."

"It is different with Korn. If my body has chosen you, it knows. The choosing is never wrong. The Frenzy is never wrong," I say with a wistful tone, wishing I was truly able to pursue this human as my Bride, give in to this blood frenzy and mark her as mine. "The partner our body chooses is always the right one, mentally and physically."

She crosses her arms and a smile twitches at the corners of her luscious lips. "I don't know if you're really the right guy for me. After all, you were being kind of rude to me at first, telling me to put down my cupcakes and donuts and leave."

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Heat spreads across my cheeks. “It was for your own good. Also, I am still learning how to communicate correctly with humans. I am here on this mission, but I am not like Justice or Hail. They are especially adept at communicating with other Korn, as well as with other species. This networking with humans is not where I excel, I’m the one who works behind the scenes. I make sure everything gets done and the logistics figured out. I communicate back and forth with our government and commerce authority through batches of messages and make sure all documents are correctly filed.”

“Sounds like you're an important part of the team.”

I nod. “I am. And after spending time with Justice and Hale and their brides, I want to be like them, mated to a human I’m reacting towards. But as I already told you, it is illegal. I am a special case. Both Justice and Hale have human brides and half-human, half-Korn offspring. They all appear happy and healthy.”

“I wish I could meet them,” Willow muses.

“But, this doesn't mean that all humans can make a lifetime commitment. I've seen this scourge your species refers to as divorce and to be truthful, I find it disgusting.”

She chuckles. “Really? You find it disgusting?”

“Yes. Humans can pleasure mate, which is normal. But once Korn complete the frenzy we are locked together for life until one of us passes away. So again, I remind you, if this wasn't illegal and I were able to take you...you'd have to take this mating very seriously because it's not like a human mating where you could discard me soon

after. If the next morning you woke up and realized the whole thing was a mistake I am locked physically to you for life and would go mad from not being in your presence. I would have to be isolated, quarantined in order for you to go on with your life with no worries. Not that any of that should bother you. You get to make your own decisions, especially since you're human, but you need to know how serious this is and why I've kept you away from me. This is why I said you couldn't stay here because it will get worse for me. And I... I need to drink some antidote soon.”

“What?”

I open the fridge.

Willow is right behind me, not even trying to remain safe. Everything I'm telling her should make her want to run away and hide in the car from me, even though it's raining. Start walking by foot back down the hill just to get away.

She gasps with surprise. “Why are there bags of blood in the fridge?”

Chapter 4

Willow

Bruce Bloodworth stands with the refrigerator door opened, as if storing bags of blood in the fridge is completely normal. “This is Korn synthetic blood.”

I exhale, happy to hear it's not his own blood, or someone else's. For a moment, I thought his wounds were more serious than I'd first assumed.

“I am concerned,” he continues, “that if I do not drink this blood I will behave inappropriately. And it is important that you come to me with full consent. It is against our laws to lock another into a frenzy against their will.”

I look him up and down, because for some reason it's only now hitting me hard that this man isn't human. "So you have to drink all this blood in order to stay away from me?"

"I have this blood as an antidote. This supply was left behind by the military, as standard procedure. I didn't think I'd have reason to use it, but now that I've met you it's been essential. I don't know if I'll have enough. I've already drank two bags during the time since you've been nearby, this is the only reason why I am behaving reasonably. It helps to decrease the need."

I love it when he repeats his "need" for me. "This is you behaving reasonably?"

"Yes."

"Drinking this blood means we can stay together for a while and get to know each other better?"

"I think you should go into a bedroom upstairs right now and lock the door because at some point I will run out of blood. This is when I will not be able to control my lust."

Ooh. And why does that sound fabulous? I bite my lip again to stop from smiling because now I see his wine rack holds my favorite type of Viognier. "I could do that," I agree, "or... we can eat dinner together." I put a hand on my stomach and hold up a bottle of wine. "Because I'm hungry and we could talk and spend time together."

"Willow, are you listening to me? I will get progressively worse. If I run out of blood, even though our joining would be illegal, I will be trying to talk you into having sex with me and allowing me to mark you with my fangs."

I shrug, looking for nice wine glasses because drinking out of plastic cups while hanging out in this luxury kitchen is depressing. "That doesn't sound so bad to me."

He groans and shakes his head. "I have done my best to stop this between us and to keep you safe."

"You have," I agree. "And yes, maybe another woman would be running in the opposite direction right now. But for some reason all I want is to get closer. And it breaks my heart that you think it's illegal for us to be together. How could your own people have decided you couldn't ever have a wife, girlfriend or kids because you're scarred or simply wounded? I don't know the whole story but I can tell you already there has to be a work-around for that nonsense. I need to get to the bottom of this. Can you explain to me better what blood frenzy means? All I've heard is that it's a bonding."

"I will sink my fangs in your neck and drink your blood."

I place a hand against my neck. "Oh, is it going to hurt?"

"No, it will not. When I sink my fangs in your skin it releases a painkiller."

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“Oh good.”

Is he staring at my neck?

“And when does this happen? Is it during some sort of ceremony...?”

“While we are having sex, when I am inside of you, I will sink my fangs into your neck and ingest your blood and at that moment there will be a heightened response to both of our orgasms.”

I stare at him in wonder and shift on my feet again to decrease the heat between my thighs. I know already that his species does not need to drink blood daily to survive. They only share blood between each other to solidify contracts or for special ceremonies. And now I know they also do this during sex.

It seems like a good time to change the subject. “How about I make dinner now? You can relax and sit while I get food ready for us.”

He nods and takes a seat at the nearest kitchen island.

“I know you get groceries. Do you have anything to eat?”

“I received more supplies this morning. You can check to see if there’s anything you like.”

I open white cabinets that I think might hold some food and that's when I discover he has the exact same spaghetti sauce I purchase. Not only that, the exact same pasta. I

look over at him and give him a big smile. “Ooh, you’ve got the exact same type of sauce and pasta that I purchase. Have you tried this?”

Is he flushing with embarrassment?

“No, not yet.”

And I look in his cupboards further and find a pot to boil water. He has a very nice set of pots and pans. And I find pasta dishes to plate the spaghetti exactly how I like, flat almost like a plate but with a rim around the edge. “Is it okay if I keep looking? If I open up more cupboards, the fridge and everything?”

“Please feel comfortable. Use this kitchen as if it were yours.”

“I wish,” I whisper, gazing longingly at the shiny marble counters, the top-of-the-line stainless steel appliances and not one, but two kitchen islands.

And that’s when I notice the pink box I brought is in the trash, because it’s empty. “Did you already eat all six of the treats?”

“I was waiting a very long time for you to depart and they were tasty.”

“Oh, well that’s good. Which one did you like the best?”

“I still enjoyed the items you call donuts. The other one, with the green spread on the top was good too.”

“Hmm...sounds like you’re still a fan of the Old-Fashioned donuts and you like the pistachio and...” I open the fridge and let out a screech because I’m startled all over again by the bags of blood.

Bruce stands as if readying to come to my rescue.

I wave a hand at him. “That's all right,” I laugh. “Sorry, about that. I promise I'm becoming used to it.” I reach around behind the blood and find the wrapped block of the exact Parmesan that I like to use. “How did you know this is what I purchase? You even have the same grater I use.”

“They told me when I questioned them at the grocery store.”

I open the freezer and find a package of frozen baguettes. He's even got frozen croissants, ciabatta, sourdough and English muffins. “You even get fresh, artisan bread delivered and all you have to do is bake it?”

“I like it. Human food is very good. I foresee that the various foods from your species around this world will become your number one export. Your agricultural products and the creative meals are unlike anything on my planet or anywhere else in the four sectors. I think you'll be famous for your agriculture. And your donuts.”

I turn on the oven to preheat. “Is that a smile? Are you telling a joke?”

He looks away.

“Hmm. And what do we get in response for sharing our fabulous food products?”

“High tech, especially medical technology which can save or improve millions of lives.”

“Oh, that's wonderful.” I fill up the pot with water and get it on the stove to start the boil. The oven is already heated to the right temperature, so I toss the cold baguette inside directly on the middle rack. “You know this kitchen is beautiful and huge. I love the island in the middle and in fact the two islands. This stove is fancy and it's

the type of appliance that normally I would never even see in real life. My commercial kitchen is nice, but the kitchen at my home is just an apartment. This is my dream kitchen.”

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He shrugs. “It was like this when I arrived. I find it acceptable.”

“Why did you decide to move to this exact home?”

“The space of this human domicile is comparable to the family home where I was raised. The terrain is also comparable to the area where I lived on my own planet. I was raised in a warmer mountain climate than most of the rest of my species.”

I pull out a smaller pot to heat the spaghetti sauce and don’t even bother to add hamburger meat because I want the pure sauce. I glance over my shoulder and give him a smile. “You know this house looks a little spooky on the outside.”

“Spooky?” His brow furrows.

“Scary, intimidating.”

“Why?”

“It’s considered mysterious because not that many people have ever been invited up here and all the people who lived here in the past also lived alone, like you do. The outside is a bit dark. I think all it needs is a lighter coat of paint and a lot of bushes trimmed or taken out. Just an updating. Right now, it looks on the outside a little bit dilapidated. Which doesn’t match the inside, because it’s beautiful in here. I’m surprised, in fact, just how nice it is in here. It’s also sparkling clean.”

“The upper floors and the two towers were dusty and moldy when I arrived. I hired some local humans to do some of the major remodeling of the bedrooms upstairs that

needed updating. But I've imported cleaning bots and repair bots and they did most of the work. I brought them with me. I was surprised to discover that Justice and Hale had not brought any. I thought this would be a good technology humans would appreciate.”

I turn down the heat on both the pots so I can walk away for a second. “Oh, I want to see.”

He opens a large utility closet in the hallway behind the kitchen.

I walk inside and see a whole wall of “bots” charging in standby.

“They clean the bathrooms, can do the dishes and make beds. They put away clothes and the repair bots can also fix appliances or anything that tears or breaks down in the house.” Bruce turns one of them on and releases it and it whirrs to life and starts to work, busy cleaning the kitchen floor.

The cleaning bot is small and adorable. The repair bots are taller and more substantial. They are not intimidating at all and instead are almost like having the most expensive floor cleaner, on remote, if it was also like a pet at the same time. “Oh, these will be very popular.”

I feel a vibration from my phone and take it out of my pocket. My mom has already sent me five different texts. “Just a sec, I have to respond to my mom real quick or I’ll never have a moment’s peace.”

I wander down the hall, back to the kitchen and give her a quick update, letting her know that I can’t get towed until tomorrow, and Bruce is taking me in for the night.

I’m coming to get you.

No, you're not. You can't drive at night and the rain is making these roads dangerous. This isn't an emergency. I'm safe. Stay home.

I'm sending someone else to get you.

No. Leave this alone. I'm staying here tonight and that's my final decision.

You're staying the night in that Korn's mansion? Just the two of you?

Yes.

If he hurts you he's as good as dead.

I roll my eyes. Mom, stop. It's fine. I'll text you tomorrow morning when the tow truck arrives.

Grr. She sends a mad face emoji.

I turn off my phone and tuck it in my pocket. Then I glance up and see that Bruce was gazing at my ass.

"I need another bag of backup blood." He announces. In moments he opens the fridge and grabs a bag. He flips open the built-in straw at the top.

"Wait, are you going to drink that right in front of me?"

He pauses. "Yes. Is there a problem?"

I blow out a breath. "No, no problem. Carry on." I need to get used to this. I feel more for him than a simple crush. In fact I could already be seriously falling in love with him, which started the moment we stood together in front of the pasta section. And if

I follow through with this and basically marry this guy, our children would most likely drink blood on special occasions too. I cannot be grossed out by this.

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He drinks the whole container of blood, gulping it down. Afterwards he wipes a small drop of blood off his lips and then goes and washes his hands in the luxurious sink. I can immediately tell that he feels better. There's more color in his cheeks and a smile on his face.

He sits again on his preferred bench at the edge of the nearest kitchen island and watches me cook.

I turn on the heat for the pots again. In moments the water is boiling and I put a whole package of spaghetti into the water without breaking it in half. I let the dry part stick out of the boiling water for a moment and monitor when I can use a tool to dent the softened bottom and push it all inside, under the roiling water.

“You look more relaxed,” I tell him.

“This is deceptive because I’m still on the prowl.”

“Like an animal?”

“I will be doing my best to try and talk you into it saying yes.”

I pour the jar of sauce into the other warm pot and cover it with a lid. “What's wrong with that?”

“I might be so good at talking you into it, the next morning you could be left feeling that you didn't really agree. Because how could any female Korn or human or from any other species want to meet and have offspring with a male who is dishonored? I

think you don't truly understand that I am a male that is considered the lowest of the low. No female would choose me. I can't trick you by not making sure you're not aware of that. You couldn't be giving your proper consent because you didn't know all the details.”

“This is like purchasing a used car. You could end up getting a lemon because you don't know all the details of the car’s history.”

He must feel comfortable because next thing I know he's telling me some long story which I suspect he hasn't really told that many people. “I am a wounded war veteran. But I am dishonored.”

“How could you be dishonored?”

“I was wounded in the middle of a battle and amongst the Korn this is the worst kind of dishonor. The whole time I was on the ship for a month coming here I was mainly isolated in my cabin because none of the crew wanted anything to do with me.”

“That's terrible.”

He shrugs. “If the roles are reversed, I would have done the same. I understand. The moment I was defeated in battle I knew there would be the scars of dishonor. I took this position originally because I needed to get away from my home planet and start fresh. After what happened in the war I am scarred for life. There are wounds on my chest and the knee of my left leg is not perfectly stable. None of these can be fixed because they weren't given in battle by another Korn at the height the battle juices flow in our veins that cause scarring to become permanent. When skin is torn the wound will never permanently heal I know that I received these weapons because my opponent cheated. But I cannot claim this because then I'm just a whiner supposed to remain stuck. I'm not entirely an outcast. I was chosen for this position after all. My life as a soldier has gone. Females literally avoid me because they consider it terrible

the thought of accidentally thrown into a blood frenzy with someone like me.”

“This is all so shocking for someone like me to hear. You said they’ve made it illegal for you to ever marry or have children?”

“It is illegal for me to breed because I’ve been designated as having “Bad Blood.” I have been taken off the mating database. I cannot have offspring.”

“Why? Is it something physical? An injury, something you were born with?”

“No, although I do have injuries. I’m considered not worthy for my genes to be carried on.”

I take a deep breath. I see again that he is wearing long sleeves and a turtleneck. I thought it was simply a t shirt he was wearing but it isn't.

“I'm scarred for life. Because of this, in the battle, I am dishonored for life.” He frowns. “I was not allowed a med lab to fully heal my leg wound. Nor am I allowed a replacement leg.”

I put my hands on my hips. “There are replacement legs on your planet and you weren’t given one?”

“Normally I could choose between organic or robotic. But in my circumstance, I am allowed neither. My scars would also normally have been repaired.”

“Okay, so the reason you aren’t allowed to mate isn’t something physically wrong with your... It's not something where you can’t...”

He bears his fangs. “No, I can perform.”

“You want to, but it is illegal. Is it illegal on Korn but also here on Earth?”

“All Korn must follow the law even though they are off planet. If I were to commit to a blood frenzy with a human and mark her as mine and breed, for it to be accepted by the Korn, I would need to be given a special dispensation.”

“Who can do that?”

“The King.”

I pause because the pasta is ready. I take the pot off the stove and dump the entire contents into a strainer I’ve placed in the sink. Then I return the pot. “Can we get that dispensation from him?”

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“It has never been done, well once a millennium ago.”

“Hmm.” I put out two different pasta dishes and start to plate our meal. “Never in all this time has someone who has been designated as “Bad Blood” ever wanted to mate outside of their species and been given a special dispensation?”

“Asking for this is also considered dishonorable but isn't illegal. I do not know.”

“Maybe we can find out by asking your coworkers?”

He shakes his head.

I pull the bread out of the oven and use a long, serrated knife to cut it into warm slices. “Dinner’s ready.”

And then the lights flicker and the room is plunged into darkness.

Chapter 5

Bruce

Agrowl rumbles in my chest. Sometimes the primitive nature of this planet is charming, at other times simply annoying.

“Oh, hell, the power has gone out,” Willow huffs. “Well, good thing I’ve already finished making dinner.”

I open a nearby cabinet. “I do have some back up light sources.”

“Oh good.” She uses her small tablet to turn on a flashlight to see what we’ve got. “There’s a few candles and one flashlight. It’ll have to do.”

We work together, readying the candles at the end of table in the large dining room. I start a fire in the fireplace. Willow places our dishes of “pasta,” and place settings and declares that it “feels like we’re at an intimate restaurant.”

We sit down. I’m at the end of the table and she’s on my right side.

I watch her carefully to see how she eats this odd, stringy food I purchased, only because I knew it was something she enjoyed. The tiny ropes of food, covered in a red sauce, twirls around my spiked utensil. After the first taste I am hooked. I was not exaggerating when I told her that human food was addictive. “The food is wonderful and I am enjoying eating with someone else instead of eating alone.”

“You’re like a changed person,” she laughs. “This isn’t the same Bruce who told me to leave my donuts on the porch and get the hell off his property.”

I wince. “I was angered that the female I had learned was the reason for my blood frenzy was so close. I was doing my best to not drag a human into a relationship that she would find distasteful.”

She wipes some red sauce off her mouth with a small piece of fabric. “Because you think you’re unworthy?”

“I am unworthy. I’ve been deemed unbreedable. Blood frenzy is something I’m supposed to suffer through, alone, without finding my mate.”

“Maybe we could just be boyfriend and girlfriend. We could have sex and not share

blood.”

I choke on my bite of food. “Pleasure mates? I don’t know if I could refrain from sinking my teeth into your neck.”

She winks at me.

I’m supposed to be the one losing my mind during blood frenzy, trying to entice this female into my bed, and I wonder if instead the roles are reversed. My body is warm, my cock seems to be continually semi hard and I want her naked. But the scent of her arousal continues to permeate the air. And she has her long hair off the shoulder nearest to me, baring the blue veins on her perfect neck.

We continue eating.

She pauses to ask another question. “Do you think you could live in this house always? Not just for this temporary work assignment?”

“Yes. I like this location.”

“If you were able to really make me your mate and I decided I wanted that too and we for reals went through with this blood frenzy, then I’m hoping you’d stay here in this town because this is where my business is and I like working here. And most importantly my mom lives here and she’d lose her mind if I lived too far away. Just warning you that we are very attached. I promise she’s not a scary mother-in-law type and I am good at creating boundaries, but she’s also my best friend and I love her and I don’t want to be separated from my mother. If for instance you needed me to ever go with you to visit Korn for reasons, then we’d have to invite her to come along too.”

“I understand. My own mother is also very important to me. She’s the only being

who has never treated me less after what happened and she was sad that I had to leave the planet to find a new career. But my father, my brother and my cousins...they all let me know they were disappointed and never believed what they termed as my “excuse” for what happened. My mother hugged me and cried and let me know she thought I’d been treated unfairly. She always believed me. I wasn’t less in her eyes.”

“Mothers are pretty amazing. It’s good to always have someone in your life who has your back.”

“Yes.”

“I’m going to get some of the wine.” She stands up and uses the flashlight to move back into the dark kitchen. “Do you want some?”

“No. But this might also impair your decision making.”

“I know, but it will also take away anxiety, considering my car broke down this afternoon, the power is out and I’m stranded here overnight with a Korn suffering from blood frenzy.”

“A Korn who is forbidden from taking a mate. A Korn who legally cannot follow through with blood frenzy.”

“Okay, I’m actually mixing a drink. Are you sure you don’t want some?”

“No. Blood frenzy and alcohol do not mix.”

“Ah, I see. I’ll make you a non-alcoholic drink.”

“Thank you.”

We stay in the dining room for quite some time.

Then we decide to move into the library which is an intimate space. I bank the fire in the dining room. We take all our light sources and the candle into the library. I use the supply of logs and start a fire in the fireplace there. “This I enjoy because we also

do this back on Korn. There are indeed many similarities between our two species which is why I feel comfortable on this planet. And in this exact setting it's mountainous but not to the extent as other parts on my own planet. It gets cold but not too cold and it does warm. Although I think it does become warmer than I'm used to in the summer."

Willow places two different pitchers and two cups of a refreshing, sweet drink for each of us on a small table.

I begin the tradition of Korn in mating blood frenzy, trying to get to know a mate better, by asking her many questions about her childhood. I learn that her father lives in a different city and is no longer mated to her mother and has instead taken on a different legal mate. And my female does not like this new "stepmother."

"This is exactly why I consider the fact that your species can divorce and have a new mate so disturbing."

"Sometimes it can be very harmful, but also since we often choose the wrong mate, it's good to have an out."

Humans are so very odd.

She tells me stories about how she started her business. And then she even questions me about myself.

I relax in front of the fire.

"Are you going to tell me about what happened? You said you wear more clothing than the typical Korn. Why do you cover yourself?"

I take another large sip of the surprisingly good drink she's made for me. I look down

at my extra layer of clothing. For some reason I feel the need to tell her everything. “I’m wearing my pants, but I’m also wearing a second layer that I always wear. It covers the scars. There are a few on my chest. The deepest scars are on my back and there are some white scars on my arms that can only be seen in a certain light. I cover them because I cannot let any other Korn see my dishonor.”

She doesn't seem to be bothered by my dishonor which is very unusual.

None of the humans have as a matter of fact. This is why I probably have befriended more humans since I arrived than I normally would have. “Steve Banks has always treated me with respect. Since the first moment he came to my house to fix my vehicle, so I did not have to bring it into town. He is also ex-military, a war veteran with a new career.”

She snorts. “He’s nicer to you than he ever has been to me.”

“I haven’t told anyone this story, mainly because they haven’t asked. Everyone believes the story that is told by the Commander.”

Willow turns and meets my gaze.

“I was a pilot in the elite royal force,” I tell her. “It is expected that I will do whatever it takes to save the life of our King. I was honored to be chosen for such a highly coveted position and was ready to place my life before his. I thought we were on a simple mission to escort the King’s ship, but I was engaged in battle by a rogue sect of Korn. I was the only one who was hit and my ship suddenly locked up and changed course. It looked like I ran away and left the King exposed, trying to save my own life. The rogue disappeared but my ship crash landed on the planet.”

“That must’ve been scary, landing like that.”

“I thought I was going to die and all I could think of was my mission, how I wasn’t able to save the King.”

“Was he okay?”

“Yes, the rest of our team tightened formation and fought off the intruder and saved our King.”

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“What happened later? Didn’t they understand it wasn’t pilot error but something wrong with your ship?”

I shake my head. “After the review, it was decided that I had left my position, trying to save myself. I told them that the ship had worked incorrectly and changed course, but the flight data said differently and no one believed me.”

She reaches out and squeezes my hand.

“From the moment I arrived at that base they thought I was inappropriate because I came from a lower class. I was not part of the elite Korn bred for that position. Usually, sons and daughters are raised generation to generation to go into this force and I was someone from the outside. It worked out in their favor that I did not meet anyone's expectations. It was agreed that this outcome was expected because only the Korn that had been bred to this, could do this properly.”

“I'm so sorry,” she says.

“My case was high profile and all over the news organizations. All the Korn know the incorrect story that was told of my dishonor, that I was a royal guard who left the King exposed in order to protect his own life. The only thing that helped me carry on was that I was invited to come here to start an entirely new life. It is true that I am grateful that the humans do treat me with respect. But again, I need to make sure that you know the truth about how the Korn feel about me and that's why I've been taken off the database.” I glance down at my cup, surprised I told her so much. “My head feels light.”

“Mine does too,” she laughs. “Wait I don’t have anymore, which one of those did you just drink?”

“That one.”

“No. That's the juice I mixed with wine and soda. I made it sort of a wine spritzer.” She points to the other one. “That was your juice, nonalcoholic. I put in the entire bottle of wine in mine because I wasn't messing around. In fact, you drank from the container not even the cup.”

“I drank all of your alcohol?”

“Well, I had some too, but you had most of it.”

“This explains why I'm behaving differently. It's as if I'd never had the antidote and all my inhibitions are gone.” I glance over at Willow, noting that her inhibitions are gone too, considering she's gazing again at my tented crotch.

Her eyes lift to meet my gaze and her cheeks flush again. “I can’t help it, you’re just so sexy. It’s like you’re turning more handsome before my eyes.”

“It’s true. I’m physically becoming more enticing because my body is trying to lure you into consent.”

She sits very close to me and I watch her beautiful face and see her drifting off. Her eyes start to close and she's asleep next to me.

I take her hand in mine and think through what it would be like to mate with this female. For the first time I begin to contemplate breaking the law. She did say that sometimes amongst her own people if the law or government is completely unfair then it is meant to be broken or changed. There is a team of Korn litigators who

consider what happened to me unfair and they are working to have the truth exposed, but I have little belief that anything will change.

The crackle of the fire is mesmerizing and the warmth of this female next to me is enticing. The humans have been welcoming and this female most of all. I enjoy her spark of life and the sound of her laughter. She is a hard worker and cares deeply for family and friends. Instead of just staying here for a short time on this planet, maybe I could live here forever. They don't judge me for what they deem is my past dishonor. I have a fresh start here. Maybe it was meant to be that I arrived on Earth and this is where I finally I'm in a blood frenzy. First, I thought it was wrong, but now it seems right.

Or is this the alcohol talking?

I want to take her with me to my bed, but a tiny bit of sanity remains. I also feel tired and it is best at this point if I separate myself from her. I put out the candles and keep the flashlight on the cleaning bot which is still half charged. It follows me with its own light shining the way.

She's very light and even though I have to favor my left knee, I'm able to carry her upstairs. I should put her at the very end of the hall, but I only remain strong enough to keep her next door.

She mumbles and shifts in my arms, moving her head closer to my chest.

I open the door to the bedroom next to mine. There is a bed in here ready for guests that I never have but I do have one suddenly. I place her onto the bed and order the bot to remain in her room nearby. It heats up and provides security and a light source if she needs one.

I go into my own room and do not start the fireplace because my body is hot from the

frenzy. We haven't tried at all to stay apart or not touch bare skin to bare skin. I've held her hand for hours and let her snuggle her slight form in the crook of my arm while we sat before the fire in the library.

I lay out on my own bed, with my body enflamed, wanting to go back and sink my teeth and cock in her welcoming heat. My lips tingle and my fangs are elongated, ready to kiss and mate. The thought of tasting her blood and mingling it with mine is keeping me awake with need.

Heavy thoughts continue through my mind.

I cannot have her. It is illegal.

But somehow, I manage to fall asleep.

Chapter 6

Willow

I wake up in the middle of the night because it's raining even harder than before. The lightning and thunder have woken me up.

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I cannot believe. What happened? Where am I?

I push my hair back on my face and lick my dry lips, trying to remember what was happening. Oh my gosh. I look around. I'm not at home and I'm in a strange bed. I'm in Bruce Bloodworth's mansion. But I don't see Bruce anywhere.

And then I spot the welcoming, ambient light of the cleaning bot. It gives me a quiet, cheerful greeting.

“Where is Bruce?” I whisper as I reach for a glass of water to gulp down.

It beeps back in response and lets me know he's next door.

“Thank you.”

Then there's another roll of thunder and I leap out of the bed, my heart pounding. I can't get the idea out of my mind that being here alone is not right. The shadows in every corner give me the chills. I need to see him. I pad barefoot out of my room and make my way into the dark hallway, using moonlight through windows as my guide.

I stop at a larger door and see he put me right next to him. Should I knock? And then there's another rumble of thunder and a flash of lightning that illuminates the entire hallway. When will this storm end? I squeak and open the door and rush inside. In a moment I'm in his bed and snuggling as close to him as I can.

His eyes blink open. “Willow?”

“It’s cold in here. Sorry the storm really scares me. And I’m all alone in that room in this house. I still think it’s a little spooky at night please don’t make me go in there by myself.”

In the blink of an eye he’s on top of me. His lips so very close to mine. “If you stay in this bed with me,” he growls, “I will fuck you, giving you many orgasms and drink from you and you will be my mate. Before you decide to stay you need to give me your consent. If there is no consent you must leave immediately and go to the room I gave you and lock the door behind you. If you hear me roaring in need, ignore me and remain inside until Steve Banks arrives tomorrow morning.”

I lift my head and wrap an arm around his neck, pulling him close for a deep, passionate kiss, letting him know that I am giving him all the consent.

The kiss is so powerful, letting me feel all the need this Korn has pent up inside for me. He finally breaks it off, panting. “I cannot hold back any longer with you in my bed, kissing me.”

“I don’t want you to hold back.”

Hot alien vampire lips brush against my ear. “You will wake up tomorrow morning, carrying my offspring. Is this what you want?”

Bruce smells so good. Like leather and soil with a hint of pleasant but not overpowering cologne. “Don’t worry, I’m on the pill.”

He lets out a deep chuckle. “Weak human birth control does not work against Korn virility.”

“Oh.”

He's now kissing my neck, licking the area I suppose he's wishing to later pierce with his sharp fangs. I'm swooning over the feel of his tongue on my hot skin.

“Is this what you want? You want to mate with me, allow me to drink your blood and plant my seed in your womb so that you will instantly carry me offspring? You will be a mother and we will raise our offspring together.”

How did I not know this part? I thought I knew everything about how Korn mated but I didn't know that the other women had become instantly pregnant. Well, I also didn't know exactly how the blood drinking part worked either, whether it hurt or not.

But I'm so falling in love with Bruce Bloodworth.

I'm loving the idea that he wants what I want—to start a family. He'll never cheat on me and there will be no divorce. He won't be like my dad, cheating and starting a new family and basically ignoring the original family as if it never happened.

I kiss him again and rub my stomach against the unusually thick and large erection I feel under his pants. The cock I've been wanting in my mouth all night. “Take off your shirt.”

“You want this?”

“I want all of you.”

I see the uncertainty in his gaze so I start to wiggle out of my own clothes. He moves off me and I stand next to the bed.

He watches in awe as I take off the cute, sleeveless, linen summer dress with ruffles at the bottom. It's lined so I didn't need a slip. All that's left is my best underwear. I never meant for us to fall into bed together so soon, but I did arrive prepared. I'm

shaved in all the right places, with only a trim of hair on my girly parts.

I reach back and unclasp the bra, lean forward and let it fall off me and drop to the ground.

A growl rumbles in his chest.

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I grin because I know my breasts are my best feature. I've never needed a boob job; I was just blessed with them looking reasonably large and perky.

Then I smooth off my matching panties and toss those to the ground too.

“Now I want to see you naked too.”

“No sentient being has seen me like this. I was cared for by a med lab, that was purposely downgraded to only keep me alive and not repair, replace or heal scars.”

I watch as he lifts the t shirt and it's off and over his head. And then the thin gray, long sleeved shirt is off too. And I swoon at the sight of his hard chest. There are so far only two matching scars on his right pec. Then he unbuckles and his black leather pants are going down. I learn he wasn't even wearing underwear. Finally, all his clothes are removed and he's naked before me. That amazing cock, with seed leaking from the slit at the top, bounces free. He gives it a few rough strokes.

I try to get to my knees, ready to give him a blowjob, but he catches my elbows. “Not yet. I want to come for the first time inside of you. There will be plenty of time for that later.”

I pout with dismay, but to make up for it he spends time on my breasts, hefting them in his hands and sucking on my nipples. It's so wonderful I can't stand up that great anymore and sag against him.

Then he lifts me up and tosses me onto the bed. I splay my legs and his between my thighs in moments. I glance down and see him staring at my girly parts in wonder. He

even fingers my pubic hair; I think because it's the same color as my hair and I know he likes my hair. I hope he then likes freckles too, because I've got lots.

He seems to know his way around because in moments he's licking my clit like a professional. I grab for the sheets bunching them with my hands. It's crazy how quick I go from hot to ready to orgasm. It must be because I've already spent hours alone with him, drinking and flirting and my body throbbing with need. Plus, there was the kissing.

"Oh, right there, that's perfect, don't stop."

And then it hits me hard, the sharpest, most intense orgasm of my life. It starts in my stomach and races down my thighs and I swear to the tips of my toes. Then I flop back down on the bed, like a puppet with its strings cut.

His tall, huge frame is above me and he's already got his hard shaft notched at my sopping wet entrance. "Are you ready?" he questions, baring his fangs.

I wrap my arms around his neck. "So ready."

Bruce slides in a little at a time, making sure I'm ready to take him, which I appreciate. Because he is bigger than any man I've been with before. He kisses me the entire time, sliding in and out and back in again, going deeper and deeper. Finally, we both sigh with delight when he bottoms out and we're joined at the hips.

I use my foot to kick him in the ass. "Harder."

He chuckles and then he gets serious.

He's fucking me hard and I can't believe how amazing it all feels. This isn't my first rodeo but it's certainly my best. He's ruining me for anyone else. I don't mind at all

the idea that this is the only man I'm ever going to have sex with again for the rest of my life. Instead I feel smart to have locked him down. All my sex toys have been demoted because Bruce might be all I need.

I feel another orgasm lurking in the distance, ready to hit. And he must feel the same because he pauses, lifts me in his arms so my head falls back and I see a flash of fangs. His fangs pierce the skin of my neck and it's exactly like he said, it doesn't hurt. Instead it starts a cascade of feeling like nothing before. I can feel the tug on my neck and the motion of his lips as he's drinking my blood and that's when my second orgasm hits. And I'm screaming, it's so intense.

And then, when I come down, he breaks free from his drinking and this time I see bloody fangs and he's frozen above me, having his own orgasm. I can feel the hot rush of his come inside of me, again and again and again. Until finally he flops down beside me, holding me close.

I feel the sensation of his tongue, lapping up the bite marks.

And I pass out in his arms.

Chapter 7

Bruce

I have difficulty sleeping because all I want is to mate with Willow.

After the first time, where I drank her blood, we slept.

I woke up, hard and leaking, needing to lick her again to completion and taste her juices. I took her with me into the cleansing unit and licked her to orgasm and then took her again, fucking her hard against the tile wall, her perfect breasts bouncing and

water spraying down. It was wonderful.

I carried her back to bed and we fell asleep.

I woke again later, in the dark, with her mouth on my hard cock. She was sucking me to completion. My bride loves my cock. I shouted as I came in her mouth and she swallowed everything I had to give her.

“You’re good at that,” I told her.

“You’re good at that too,” she said as I moved between her thighs. Then I licked her to a screaming orgasm.

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Afterwards, we fell asleep again.

I wake up the next morning with sunlight filtering through the curtains. The sound of rain has stopped and I can see blue sky through the windows.

The blood frenzy is finally decreased enough that my mind can fully process my actions from last night. And I instantly understand that I've behaved with dishonor.

The bedside light is illuminated, letting me know the power has been restored.

My jaw clenches and there is a heaviness in the pit of my stomach.

There's a gorgeous, naked, human female in my bed. I've used her over and over again all night and early this morning. It took that long for my frenzy to decrease to this point, where I can awaken and think clearly.

I mated with her and marked her, and yet I still have no dispensation from my King. This was illegal.

While she sleeps I reach for my glass tablet. I message Justice Bloodworth and let him know what I've done. And then I message Steve Banks, checking he's on his way to pick her up.

I place a hand on her shoulder and try to awaken her. "Willow...Willow, you must leave."

"What?" she mumbles.

“You need to leave now. It’s best that they do not know that you were involved.”

Her green eyes blink open and she pushes her tangled golden hair from her face.

I gaze down at her beautiful features, love for her filling my heart and mind.

She carries my offspring. A child I will not be allowed to raise. I will have to go back to Korn and enter quarantine in a prison for the rest of my life. This I will do for her and my child. They can live free from my dishonor.

“I accidentally ingested almost a whole bottle of human alcohol in the midst of a frenzy. This caused me to give in and mate with you and give you my mark, even though I knew it was wrong. But the law and military of my home world will not care about these extenuating circumstances. Neither will the King. Bad Blood is a life-long designation.”

“I don’t want to leave. Let me work this out with you.”

“You don’t understand the extent to which this will be bad for you and our offspring. I am separating from the both of you right now so that you can have a good life, without me. If you remain at my side there is a chance they will also take you and our offspring into custody, deeming our entire union illegal and the need for the courts on Korn to decide your fate.”

“Really?”

“Yes. You must get out right now. I have messaged Justice and he will be here soon, I’m sure to take me into custody. He is a male of honor and has his own human bride and half human offspring. I’m certain he will take you under his care and send me off with our military, not letting them take you with them. But he will need to document my arrest to send back to headquarters. You can’t be here when this happens. For you

to remain safe, you must leave right now.”

She is naked in our bed and tears well in her gorgeous, green eyes. All I want is to suck on her breasts again and take her in my arms, but I can’t have her.

“Bruce, I want to stay with you and fight for us, at your side.”

“You can’t.”

“I think I can. I’m the one who gave you my consent last night. You’re not the only one who went into this, knowing it would be difficult. The way they are treating you is wrong and I want to help you right that wrong.”

I stand on the side of the bed, not hiding my scars, not hiding the lump on my knee. Only in front of this one female can I stand proud because she loves all of me, the way I am. But I must discard her, for her own good. “Everyone on Korn thinks I am not worthy,” I say, “that I was not able to follow my duty and protect our King. But they are wrong. I will do whatever it takes to protect you and our offspring you carry.”

“Bruce, I?—”

“Get out of bed and get dressed right now. I don’t want you in here with me. You must leave.”

Her eyes widen and she stands up on the opposite side of the bed.

“Get dressed.” I hate speaking like this to her, but I must have her gone before Justice arrives. And that male is very prompt. Calling Justice as soon as I realized my error and having that time and date stamp, will help our case. “I am being arrested by Justice and will eventually leave the planet and be taken to Korn. You will stay here

and raise our offspring without me, but in peace and safety. This is the only way.”

Tears stream down her cheeks as she puts on her underwear from last night and then slips on the dress that was crumpled on the floor. Then she stands, lifts her chin and meets my gaze. “I love you. I won’t stop fighting for you. For us.”

“I know this is how you feel. Now get out. Right now.”

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She strides out of the room and I slam the bedroom door closed behind her.

Chapter 8

Willow

First, I stop in the bedroom next door to slip on my sandals. Then I go into the bathroom for a quick pee and to check out my appearance in the mirror. It's bad but there's no time for a fix.

I make my way down the stairs, tears streaming down my face. I pull my raincoat and grab my purse from the coatrack. I put both of them on because even though the rain has stopped it's probably still chilly outside.

The cleaning bot beeps from behind me. I give it a sad wave goodbye.

Steve Banks knocks on the front door. I can see through the windows his tow truck in the drive.

Oh great. I look like hell. My hair is a matted mess. My makeup is now dark circles around my eyes. The space between my thighs is still raw from all the hot love-making last night. And I smell like sex. There's a large red bite mark on my neck. And my clothes are wrinkled and dirty. I wipe the tears from my face, lift my chin and open the front door.

Steve turns toward me and lets out a grunt of surprise.

I walk out and past him, doing my best to hide my walk of shame. I'm a mess and it's obvious what happened last night.

He looks me up and down. "Looks like you had fun," he comments.

"Don't tell Cindy," I beg.

He shakes his head, already lifting his phone and taking my picture.

I walk to my car and take out the keys, getting ready to start the whole towing away process.

In moments, Cindy, my best friend, sends me a text, You better tell me everything later or I'm going to kick your ass.

I let out a deep sigh. I will.

And then another small car pulls up in the drive.

It's my mother.

Oh hell.

She steps out and rushes toward me. "Willow, are you okay? What did that Korn do to you?"

I start to cry and my mom pulls me into her arms.

"Wait? Did something bad happen to you? What did Bruce do?" Steve growls. "I left you in his care and at first I thought he cared for you very well. Why are you crying?"

And then there's a rush of wind and a small "spaceship" lands on the front lawn. A ramp lowers and two different Korn males are stepping down.

Steve laughs with amazement. "This is turning into an interesting day."

The front door to the house opens and Bruce is there, after what must have been a fast shower, dressed in a new clean outfit of black leather and white t shirt. But this time I notice he does not cover his arms with an added layer. And despite the fact that he just kicked me out of his bedroom and his house, all I want to do is rush into his arms.

He looks directly at me. "Willow," he shouts, "why are you still here?"

I sniff at my tears because, dammit, I'm still crying.

Steve steps forward with narrow eyes and both fists clenched. "Bruce, did you mistreat Willow Brand? Because if you did this means I'm going to have to kick your ass."

"Before that happens," one of the Korn announces, "we have some business to discuss."

My mom grabs my hand and we all move closer. In moments all six of us, three humans and three Korn, are standing together on Bruce's driveway.

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Justice Bloodworth, the Korn I recognize because he's on the news a lot, and who looks older and more distinguished, steps forward to speak first. "I got your message this morning and as you can see Hale and I are here as quick as possible."

"I appreciate your timely arrival."

Hale shakes his head. "It's not because we're here to perform a citizen's arrest. We're here because we've been in contact with our special investigators this whole time and we finally just had a breakthrough. We were about to get in touch with you anyways to let you know what happened."

"Special investigators?"

"Yes," Justice answers. "I know all about those snooty bastards in the royal guard. I never trusted their story about what happened to you. And because I knew you couldn't afford the steep price for an investigator, Hale and I went in together and got one for you. The investigator and her team have been on the job since you left Korn. She discovered that your ship was meddled with and that was the reason you left your position and crash landed. Your flight log had also been changed. She found the original flight log."

Bruce steps closer. "There is hard evidence, showing that I was set up?"

"Yes," Hale answers. "As a matter of fact, that evidence is being leaked to the news organizations right now, as well as being given to the proper authorities."

Justice smiles. "I have a feeling a special apology and dispensation from the King

will be incoming.”

Bruce looks at me and I swear his eyes are wet. “We don’t have to hide. I don’t have to leave...”

“It’s true, you can now publicly claim your bride.”

“And I won’t have to kick his ass.”

“Willow...” Bruce rasps.

“I want a wedding,” my mom proclaims.

Steve winks at her. “Cindy will want the same.”

I let go of my mom’s hand and race into Bruce’s arms. He swings me around and gives me another deep, magical kiss, in front of everyone. “I love you,” he whispers in my ear.

“I know,” I respond. “I’ve always known.”