



The Blood Shadows

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Description: What lurks in the shadows may save you...

Ian Mathews is just taking it one day at a time. He's working a dead-end job, he's got a vicious Uncle harping on him, and he's just trying to get ahead. Working late-night janitorial at Chicago City Hall is a pretty quiet existence, and he likes it that way. Ian thinks this is just like every other night. Ian thinks he will do his shift and go home. What Ian doesn't know is that tonight, his world will shift on its axis. A man will step into his life and save him in just about every way a person can be saved. A mysterious stranger will step out of the shadows just as Ian is about to meet his end. In that stranger's eyes, Ian will find his forever.

Nox Samara isn't your normal vampire. There's a darkness and a power that goes so much deeper. His mother was a vampire, and his father was a demon, leaving Nox with powers and a lineage that makes almost everyone start eyeing the door. It hasn't been easy for Nox to find a place to belong, and his loyalty to Master Rose is unshakeable for taking a chance on him. He's a fixer of anything Master Rose needs done, which brought him to City Hall in the middle of the night and into the path of his forever beloved. No one is more shocked than Nox that fate has given him such a gift. He will protect this gift with everything he has as dangers lurk, wanting to take the life of his beloved.

You don't cross a demon and live to tell.

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CHAPTER ONE

“City Hall is sending someone to investigate our licenses at the Blood Rose. Apparently there was a complaint as to the validity of our right of sale in regard to various products.” Leon, who manages the accounts for all of Rose's holdings, stood before the Master. "The complaint is bogus, but the BACP will still have to investigate, and they may find other things that are not particularly up to code, so to speak."

"Do we know where the complaint originated?" The Master asked.

“Yes, and they have been dealt with, but the complaint is still working its way through the system."

"Contact Drakon and ask him to send Nox to the office handling the complaint. Then, have him erase the evidence and wipe the minds of those involved." The Master ordered, and Leon nodded and left his office. Those handling the complaint were simple civil servants, and there was no need to kill them over a licensing issue.

The Rose Coven had varied methods of crafting their desired outcomes and death was not always a requirement. Nox had the skill to move in and out of places and people unnoticed and soon the complaint will have ceased to exist.

This assignment was not something Nox would normally be called in to handle, but his ability to travel through shadows made entering the office building and gaining access to the paperwork and the employee very simple. Others would have to explain themselves, whereas Nox fades in and out without detection.

His last job was in the darkest regions of the south side. He was sent to eliminate a faction of humans who had gathered together to take over a portion of that business district. Unfortunately for them, it was also where the Rose Coven did business, so they had to go. The faction was cold-blooded and vicious with no redeeming qualities, so Nox was sent. He had the ability to match any evil that came his way.

Nox could turn a person's worst traits against them. Nox Samara was a treasure being half vampire and half demon he had skills that went far and beyond the average vampire. He possessed none of that pesky empathy or understanding that could often get in the way of getting a job done clean and on time.

"Ian, you worthless piece of shit, get the fuck in here and clean the kitchen." Ian was getting ready for work, but his uncle would try to stop him from leaving the house until the kitchen was cleaned. He always seemed to come up with chores for him to complete just as he was getting ready to leave. That way, he had cause in his mind to get angry and abuse him on his way out the door. It was a common ritual, and Ian had gotten used to it.

He had no time to clean the kitchen besides he'd already cleaned it but most likely his Uncle Ron had deliberately made a mess in preparation for this fight. "I don't have time I have to get to work." He said and headed for the door.

"Get your ass back here and clean the kitchen, or don't bother coming home tonight." Ian worked overnight as a custodian at City Hall, so he wouldn't be home tonight anyway. When he got home in the morning, Ron would be fast asleep. The man rarely got up before late afternoon.

Ian had been living with his Uncle Ron for the past four years, ever since his mother went out to buy milk and never came home. She texted Ian and told him to make the best of it because she needed to find herself. She wasn't a stellar parent, to begin with, but at least she'd kept a roof over their heads. He moved in with Ron when the social

worker placed him there and paid Ron a monthly stipend. That ended when Ian turned eighteen, but Ron kept him around because Ian was paying the bills.

Ron was abusive but he wasn't very strong so Ian took a few hits over the years, but it was nothing he couldn't handle or so he thought. He was sure others had it worse and he would rather stay and get his ducks in order than be living on the streets. Ian was paying Ron's bills, but he was also saving and soon he'd have enough money to rent a small place of his own. In the meantime, he'd put up with Uncle Ron.

Ron rushed him as Ian opened the door to leave and started swinging, hitting him in the back and shoulders and kicking at his shins. Ron had been drinking most of the day, so his balance was severely compromised. It wasn't long before he was on his back, cursing as Ian closed the door and headed for the train.

He worked eleven to seven on the fourth floor and worked mostly alone but would sometime have his breaks with other custodians in the break room on the second floor. Not being a people person, he would often find a corner on the fourth floor and read for his half hour break.

He had a half-hour break at two and another at four, and at one fifty-five, he got his coffee thermos and headed to the turnout by the elevators. It was a nice place to sit by the windows and read. It gave him the opportunity to disconnect from work for thirty minutes and lose himself in a good book. Other than a few security checks, the elevators were unused during the night, so the little turnout with the bench and the lamp was a perfect place to relax.

When Nox received the assignment it became clear why he was chosen. It was the covert nocturnal aspect of the job that spoke to his particular talents. He first paid a visit to the home of the investigator clearing his mind about the complaint and all associated information. Now he would make the data, and any paperwork disappear. That required a visit to his office at City Hall.

He could move silently and unseen through the dark, traveling in shadows and bending like smoke with the air currents. It was one of the perks of his demon parentage. Nox never knew his father and never desired to. His mother, a young vampire, had been duped and led to believe that the man cared for her when, in actuality, his father was incapable of care or concern, which was the nature of demons.

The demon disappeared suddenly and completely one day leaving his mother pregnant and alone. Without a better option she hid herself in the mountains of their homeland and raised her son as best she could. She taught him the ways of the vampire and explained what she could of the demon culture.

When she passed, Nox went in search of a coven but there were none brave enough to accept a half demon. Master Rose was the first leader to look at him and see his worth and his value and gave him a chance. Nox swore his allegiance and his loyalty to Master Rose and had served him for many years.

He took one of the cars to City Hall and parked in a lot two blocks north. He didn't need the car, but he liked to travel normally when he could. He'd simply traveled by shadows when entering the investigator's neighborhood and gaining entrance to his home.

Nox didn't want to be seen in the guy's neighborhood, so he didn't use a car. Parking downtown was not an issue. Blending in was easy for someone like him. He wore a black suit and a black trench coat, which is something people see a million times a day.

The building was locked up for the night, but the cleaning crew was still on the premises. Buildings at night were filled with darkness and shadows, so Nox moved quickly and effortlessly to the fourth floor. He could hear the custodial staff talking and moving about, and they were easy to avoid. Finding the office was simple

enough, and gaining access was also easy. He was in the process of clearing hard copies and all digital evidence when someone walked in.

Nox stepped back against the wall disappearing into the darkness and watched the man empty the trash and dust various surfaces. He was being far from thorough, but he was probably under a time constraint. The man was human and yet he was not reacting to Nox which was unusual. He had a presence which hung heavy in the air like a bad omen and should have had the young human scurrying away but instead he appeared unaffected.

After a quick vacuum of the carpet, he gathered his things and left the office. At the threshold, he stopped and looked back over his left shoulder to look around the room. He felt something, perhaps a presence at the very least. The young man took a deep breath and strangely enough looked right into the dark corner where Nox stood, but again there was no reaction at all.

Nox stared back and for a second his gaze connected with the human and then it was over. The human closed and locked the door before continuing on his way to the next office. His reaction or rather lack of reaction to Nox being in his proximity was curious.

Nox finished erasing all evidence of the complaint against the Blood Rose and then moved out into the hallway to observe. Several workers passed by him, and he recognized the familiar shudder and withdrawal as they hurried away. They weren't sure what they were feeling, but the dark vibe made them recoil and run.

The young man earlier did not hurry, nor did he give any sign of a need or desire to hurry. He sensed a presence, but it did not bother him; Nox did not affect him, and that was extremely unusual. He called in the completion of his assignment to Drakon and then went in search of the young man. This was a mystery to which he desired an answer.

He watched him go about his duties and continued to observe him while taking his break. The others gathered together to eat, rest, and socialize, but this man found a quiet corner to sit and read. Nox moved just a bit closer, testing the man to see if he still felt no fear with Nox close by. He looked up once and stared down the hallway toward Nox but then went back to his book.

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His intuition is telling him something, but his conscious mind is dismissing it. Humans rarely used the gifts they were given in this life preferring to trust only their faulty eyes and ears. He noticed the young man flinch and look at his finger there was a small cut there perhaps a paper cut. Nox automatically took a step closer moving with the shadow of the wall. He was compelled to approach but held back fighting the push that he was feeling in his mind.

The scent of this man's blood touched the air, and he took a startled breath. The smell was sweet and full and overwhelming. Nox filled his lungs with the intoxicating aroma and released it on a slow breath. The effect was immediate and consuming.

He had an idea what this was, but it was unbelievable. No one like him had ever experienced a moment like this. His mother had told him that demons were not gifted forever like other paranormal beings. But she got all her information from the demon who betrayed her, so everything he said must be viewed as suspect.

Nox continued to stare at the young man his interest going from mild to extreme in a matter of seconds. Suddenly everything about him was magnified his presence was feeding Nox's excitement and he had to get himself under control before he inadvertently outed himself to the human. He moved back further into the darkness but maintained a watchfulness.

The young man answered his phone, and his agitation touched Nox. The caller was yelling and demanding money for rent, for bills, for absurd things and he heard the name Ian. His human was named Ian, and the simple sound sent a surge of recognition through Nox. He knew this man somehow he knew him. Ian closed the call cutting off the belligerent caller. Good whoever he was he deserved to have more cut off than

just this call.

Nox was absorbing Ian's feeling of upset, and it felt odd. Feelings were pretty foreign to him, because he could not connect with people and things. He mourned his mother, and he celebrated his inclusion in the Rose Coven, but apart from that, simple feelings like being upset rarely touched him.

This man was something special and every minute he spent watching and following him Nox felt his heart and mind reaching and connecting. Ian was average height and average weight and probably to most people in this city would be considered average, but not to Nox.

Nox saw the soft waves of his light brown hair curling at his shoulders and longed to touch it. He noticed the sparkle in his hazel eyes, and it thrilled him. The lovely curves of his body sent shock waves through Nox. This was his beloved, and it would seem that Fate, in her infinite wisdom and generosity, had honored him with a bond, a match, and a connection. She gave him a young man named Ian.

CHAPTER TWO

Ian hurried and closed the call, not in the mood to listen to Ron's demands and his whining. He took a large share of Ian's income, but over the last few months, Ian had gradually cut back because he was eager to have enough to move out and never have to look at Ron ever again. Ian wasn't looking forward to going home. Ron was in a hell of a mood, and Ian hanging up on him would not go well in his favor.

Dropping his phone back in his pocket he quickly got back to work. The night had been odd from start to finish. Every room seemed to feel heavy and expectant. Ian had looked over his shoulders repeatedly because he was swamped with the feeling of being watched.

Then there was that aroma, it was light but filled his senses it smelled like cotton candy but there was nothing in the entire building that could cause the smell of cotton candy. Every corner of every office was filled with the aroma of cotton candy.

It wasn't overpowering just there floating on the air making every space smell nice. What confused him the most was the fact that it made him excited and not scared or concerned. His instincts were telling him that whatever it was it was good, and he had nothing to fear. There was no reason for him to feel this way but just as some instances filled a person with dread others filled them with hope and Ian felt hope in the presence of this aroma.

He wondered if it were a passing spirit or a positive energy that had been left by someone earlier in the day. Whatever it was, Ian took several deep breaths and appreciated the confidence and the hopefulness that spread through him.

"Damn, the place was spooky tonight." Joe, one of the other custodians from Ian's floor, commented as they were all clocking out. "Something was moving through the place, and it gave me the fucking heebie jeebies. Did you feel anything strange, Ian?"

"No, seemed fine to me." He wasn't going to mention the cotton candy it would just start a discussion, and Ian didn't have time to be standing around. Several others made similar observations to Joe and Ian began to wonder why their experiences were so negative.

"I'm bringing some sage tomorrow." One of the older ladies commented. "I don't want anything weird following me home."

"Salt water will protect you." Another joined, and at that point, Ian checked out of the conversation and headed out the door. The sun was just beginning to rise, and the streets were still drenched in long shadows, but Ian simply ducked his head down and hurried to catch the train.

He didn't give the impression or look like anyone who would have money or valuables, so he'd never been bothered. That was until today when a man lunged at him from an alleyway, grabbing him by the hair and knocking him off balance. Ian fell hard onto the cold, wet pavement. Normally, he would have been paying better attention to his surroundings, but his thoughts were on the strange presence he'd felt while working, and now he would pay for his stupidity.

The guy was holding a knife to his throat and straddling him where he lay. Ian had nothing to give him, and his mind was in a panic as he wondered if he was going to survive this attack. Then his fortunes shifted when a force plowed into the side of the guy holding him down, and he flew off him and hit the brick wall to the left of where Ian lay.

All he saw was movement and shadow, but the guy flew down the alley as if thrown by a powerful force. Ian couldn't see clearly what was happening or who was helping him. He clutched his throat, checking for cuts, but the knife had not injured him, thank God. He'd walked this route since starting the job downtown and had never had an issue until now. The guy wasn't just going to rob him. He was going to kill him.

Ian struggled to his feet and brushed off his clothes as he watched the man who had just saved him walk toward him down that dark alley. He was tall and dark and wore a full length black coat. He wasn't grungy he was well dressed the suit and tie were pristine as was the trench coat. He was someone important and he went out of his way to save Ian.

"Are you a cop?" It seemed the most likely reason for the assistance. The man shook his head; no, but it was just a brief movement. His eyes were as dark as his hair, and he seemed to take Ian in with a silent intensity that devoured.

"My name is Nox Samara. The man ran off injured, so I don't believe he will bother you again." The man's voice was deep as gravel at the bottom of a dark pit, but it was

a tone that registered with Ian as pleasing. Ian smiled and held out his hand to Mr. Samara.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Samara. I'm Ian Mathews and thank you for your help sir." Mr. Samara looked at the hand and then at Ian and then back at the hand as if surprised by the action and then took hold in a grip that was significant but not showy. He continued to look at Ian as if he was studying him or waiting for something, but Ian just smiled and thanked him again.

"My pleasure and you can call me Nox." He said and slowly let Ian's hand slip free of his. "May I buy you a cup of coffee?" He gestured to the shop off to their right it was one Ian often grabbed a cup at before heading to the train station.

"Thank you I'd like that." Ian wasn't sure why he was agreeing sitting with a stranger and having coffee was not something he would usually enjoy but for some reason he didn't want this man to walk away. He stood a good five inches or more taller than Ian and he was dressed like someone who held an important job. Why he would insert himself into Ian's problems and invite him for coffee was a mystery that held Ian intrigued.

He also found the guy very attractive and sexy in a dark and deadly way. Dangerously attractive would perfectly describe him. He sat Ian at a table outside and then within minutes he was back with two coffees and set one in front of Ian. Once they were both seated and comfortable Mr. Samara asked him if he was okay.

"That man roughed you up." He stated and then added. "Would you like to see a doctor?"

"No, thank you. I'm okay; I'm just startled more than anything and feeling a little stupid. I wasn't paying attention, and that can be dangerous." Ian drank his coffee and watched as Nox sat there looking completely out of place and yet comfortable. Ian

would kill for such confidence and self-awareness. Strangely enough, Ian could also detect the scent of cotton candy. Maybe he was having a stroke or something because it was similar to what he smelled at work.

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"Were you coming from work?" Nox's voice filled the space between them, and Ian held onto every word, wanting to make the best impression possible.

"Yes, I work night custodial at City Hall." He said clearly, and with pride, it was a good job with good benefits.

"Were you going to the train when you were attacked?"

"I usually pay better attention to my surroundings, and I now realize I got too close to that alley. The walk to the train is only a couple of blocks and until now I've managed it without incident." Ian tried to explain himself without looking pathetic, but he wasn't sure if he succeeded. "I live in an apartment with my Uncle on Hermitage." He hadn't asked where he lived but Ian felt the need to tell him as he continued his long winded explanation.

"Were you coming from work when you saw me?" Ian decided to try and change the subject of him.

"Yes, I work for Mr. Conall Rose," Nox responded easily. Conall Rose was a very important man in the city. He had his hand in many projects, and his name was associated with a variety of businesses.

"Do you work nights too?" That question earned an indulgent smile, and Ian was impressed at how that small expression softened everything about the man.

"I often work nights, but I am on call around the clock."

“That must get tiring.”

Nox shook his head. "I like my job and my employer." They talked for a while longer, and once his coffee was finished, Ian figured he should be on his way. He wanted to get home and be in his room with the door locked before Ron woke up; otherwise, it would be hell trying to get any sleep.

Ian stood and again reached his hand out to Nox. “Thanks again for helping me.” Nox took his hand and held it just a little tighter than the last time. Ian liked the touch of his hand the warmth was reassuring and in a strange way he made Ian feel safe. It was crazy but it was a good feeling, so he was a little disappointed when Nox released him.

Nox reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a card and handed it to Ian. “Call me when you get home. I’d like to know that you made it safely.” It was an odd request, but Ian saw no harm in it plus he got this gorgeous man’s number.

"I'll call." Ian smiled and then turned to leave. He'd gone just a couple of steps and turned back, but Nox was gone. In less than a second, the man had disappeared. He stood still and stared for a few seconds before taking off for the train.

Nox moved with the shadows blended in and disappeared, but he wasn’t far from Ian. He wanted him to call but to be honest he had every intention of following him home. This man was too important to be left to his own devices Nox would make certain he reached home safe and well and in one piece.

He had noticed the perplexed look on Ian’s face when he turned back, and Nox was gone. It obviously confused him but didn’t concern him too much since he shook it off pretty quickly. If he’d known Ian was going to look back, Nox would have waited a minute before taking off. He will remember that in the future.

He sent a request to Ethan their IT department head, for all available information on Ian Mathews approximate age late teens early twenties and provided a description. Nox was touched by how easy it was for Ian to be close to him and how comfortable he was with the handshake.

Humans did not touch Nox not for any reason. The demon in Nox gave a vibe of fear and dread which humans sensed and reacted to by pulling away. Paranormal beings weren't affected but even they tended to give Nox space when he walked through a room. Having a vulnerable human treat him so warm and casual was a new experience and Nox ate it up because the attention was coming from Ian his beloved.

He was pretty sure Ian's comfort and attraction were because Ian belonged to him. It was a shock to discover that he had been given such a gift, and he hoped it wasn't Fate playing a joke. That thought brought a tightness to his diaphragm, and he recognized it as anxiety, another feeling he rarely experienced. Life had opened a new door, and Nox was stepping inside, eager and excited to see what would come next.

Nox didn't bother with the train confident that Ian would be okay. He rode the shadows and the wind to Ian's apartment building and waited and soon he saw Ian making his way down the sidewalk to the building. Nox hid himself but he noticed Ian looking around curiously before opening the door and stepping inside. Nox followed him.

The apartment was on the third floor and numbered 304. Ian unlocked the door and stepped in making as little noise as possible and closed the door behind him. Nox observed the area for a few minutes and then retreated back down to the lobby and then outside to fade amongst the foliage. The call came and he answered, hearing Ian's voice was a delight to Nox's ears, his soft tones soothed his concerns.

"I'm home." He said and then added. "No further attacks." He chuckled and it felt

like pure magic.

"That's good to hear." This sweet, playful banter was nice. "Would you let me take you to dinner tomorrow? I enjoy your company." Nox asked, and Ian responded without hesitation, another good sign that their bond was finding its place.

"I'd like that, thank you." They began discussing where to meet, and Nox noticed Ian was dodging around the offer to pick him up at his door. His uncle was obviously an issue, and Nox didn't want to cause him any unwanted distress.

"Meet me out front of your building." Nox offered and then added. "It will save me having to find parking." He didn't give a rat's ass about parking, but it took the pressure off Ian.

"Okay, I'll be there." Ian sounded excited, and it made Nox smile.

"Goodbye Ian sleep well." Nox closed the call. He kept watch on the building for a while before finally leaving. The thought of folding into the shadows of Ian's room just to make sure he was okay had passed through his mind. The stalkerish feeling of such a move kept him from carrying through.

Nox returned to the coven house and met with Master Rose and Drakon O'Hare. Nox was an enforcer and served under Drakon although he always worked alone. He made a complete report on the issue of the licensing complaint letting them know that minds were cleared and all physical and digital evidence had been removed. Then he moved on to the matter of finding his beloved.

The room fell into total silence, and both men stared at Nox. "Your beloved?" Drakon asked.

"My beloved, sir. He's a night custodian at City Hall, and his name is Ian Mathews."

Nox explained further.

"Is he paranormal?" Master Rose questioned, still acting a little confused by the declaration.

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"No, he's human," Nox responded and then added. "It was a shock for me too."

"I can imagine." Master Rose slowly began to smile and walked over to place his hand on Nox's shoulder. "Fate is surely smiling on us."

"Yes, she is." Nox agreed and felt a flutter of something he could not describe; it was a sense of lightness and maybe joy. Nox also explained saving him from an attack as Ian was walking to the train. "I killed the man who laid hands upon him and sent his remains to the underworld. There is no evidence of what took place there."

"Good thing you were close by and I'm glad your man is safe." Drakon said and Nox nodded.

"If we can be of any assistance to you as you make your claim, do not hesitate to ask. I am so happy for you, Nox." The Master was sincerely pleased for him.

"Take all the time off that you need, and I look forward to meeting your beloved," Drakon told him. Nox was encouraged by their support. He wasn't sure what they would say or if they'd even believe him, considering demons do not have mates or beloveds.

"Thank you both."

CHAPTER THREE

Ian lay in his bed tossing and turning his mind, running over everything that had happened for the millionth time. The weirdness at work, followed by the attack and

then meeting Nox Samara the whole night, had been strange, but other parts were amazing. Being rescued by a man like Nox was something he'd have never expected.

Few people are willing to put themselves out in the way that Nox did, and Ian is convinced that the man has saved his life. The attacker had a knife to his throat and was not interested in anything apart from slitting Ian's throat. It was awful and horrific, but Nox was there, and Nox saved him.

He finally nodded off and woke around four to the sounds of Ron stomping through the apartment. His door was locked, and he had placed a chair in front of it just in case Ron decided to start ramming it to get in. The idiot had done that before, and they had to pay for a new door.

Ron started yelling which was not good since the neighbors would start complaining and Ian didn't want to have to put up with the complaints. He got up and pulled on his jeans and t-shirt before unlocking his door and stepping out into the living room.

"Stop yelling, the neighbors are going to start calling." He said and when Ron's eyes met his he looked surprised.

"When did you get home?" He barked.

"This morning after I finished work like every day." Ian rolled his eyes. "I'm going back to bed for a couple hours so try to be quiet or the neighbors are going to start complaining again."

"I'll be as fucking noisy as I want, and the neighbors can get fucked." Ron threw his cup, which looked to be filled with coffee, at Ian but missed and smashed against the living room wall. "Go back to bed, you lazy little fuck. All you do is sleep all day. I should toss your sorry ass out into the street."

“Who will pay the rent if you toss me out?”

“I don’t need you. I give you this roof and don’t you ever forget it.” Ron started stumbling toward him and Ian went back to his room and locked the door. Ron was drunk so there was no use talking to him. Ron was a mean guy, and he was an even meaner drunk. Ian didn’t have the time or the desire to deal with him right now or ever.

Ian didn’t go back to bed, instead he spent the next two hours searching the internet for apartments. He nearly had enough to get into a place of his own and the sooner the better. It was after six when he heard the outer door open and close and assumed Ron had left to go get more beer or go do whatever it was he did. Ian went to the kitchen and made a cup of coffee and a ham sandwich.

He paid for the groceries but still Ron would complain about what he ate. The sounds of Ron talking loudly out in the hall spurred Ian to quickly grab his things and disappear back into his bedroom. Ron had a guest with him so they would most likely sit out on the balcony drinking for the rest of the evening and leave Ian alone.

Ian used to have a couple of friends in the building, but they had both moved away about six months ago. He didn't know anyone in the building now, and it felt rather isolating, especially when dealing with someone like Ron every day. Once he had his own place, he would settle and get to know some people. With that thought, his mind went right to Mr. Nox Samara. There was a man he was desperate to get to know better.

It was going to be hard keeping his mind on work tonight knowing that he had a dinner date with Nox. The guy had style and confidence, and he worked for one of the influential men in town. Everyone had heard of Conall Rose that man owned a good share of the city or at least that was the rumor and what he didn’t own he controlled.

He and his people kept a low profile, and he wasn't seen much in public, but his mark was everywhere. Ian had never met anyone who worked for Rose before, although it was said that he had a large workforce at his disposal. Ian heard voices in the living room and stepped closer to the door to listen. He recognized Ron but didn't recognize the man he was speaking with.

"They'll try again tomorrow." The man said and Rod acted angry about something. "They'll get it done, don't worry."

"Just finish it." Ron sputtered out the words, and it sounded like he was falling against something.

"Go sleep it off." The man said, and now he sounded irritated. "It'll be done by the time you wake up."

"Make sure you get it right this time." Ian had no idea what Ron was into, and he didn't want to know. Ron's issues were his own Ian had enough on his plate, and he would not involve himself in Ron's shit. It was getting late, so Ian showered and got ready for work.

After leaving the Master's office, Nox went down to the IT room in the basement and met with Ethan. He'd messaged him that the background on Ian Mathews was complete. Nox wanted to know all that he could about his beloved in order to better serve and protect his young human.

Ethan read off the highlights of the report. "He was born Ian Ashton Mathews and is currently nineteen years and four months old. His mother is Trinda Marie Mathews, and his father is unknown. His mother abandoned him at age fifteen and has never returned. The state put him in care with his Uncle Ron Mathews, his mother's younger brother. He received compensation for caring for Ian up to the age of eighteen." Ethan paused and looked over at Nox, who was standing at the side of his

desk listening. "He had a rough life Nox." Nox nodded, already recognizing that fact.

"Ian is a high school graduate, a straight arrow with no contact with the law, but the same cannot be said for Uncle Ron." Ethan read off a list of offenses ranging from petty theft to assault. "He was also arrested for beating the snot out of Ian at the age of seventeen, but he wouldn't press charges and said it was not his Uncle who assaulted him. Why the hell does he stay with this guy?"

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"Good question. Perhaps it was misplaced loyalty or a lack of funding or options." Nox was not impressed with the life Ian was exposed to. "Where is his mother?"

"I tracked her to Macon, Georgia. She's living with a boyfriend. She's been there for nearly two years, and before that, she was in Miami with a different boyfriend." Nox watched Ethan scroll through some sites and call up a phone record.

"The strange thing is that she has kept in contact with her brother Ron over these past four years. She calls him the first week of every month, and the calls last about five minutes. Maybe she's calling to check up on Ian. Although she wasn't a good parent even before she abandoned him. She has a thick file with child and family services." Ethan's information was what Nox had expected.

"I doubt she holds any concern for Ian," Nox added flatly.

"She has a record of petty crimes both here and in Georgia and Miami."

"What about Ian's father is there any information on him?" Nox asked curious, and Ethan shook his head. "Would you dig a little deeper on Uncle Ron the guy doesn't seem genuine in any respect."

"Will do." Nox thanked him and went up to his quarters to contemplate his way forward with his newly discovered beloved. He thought about the human that had attacked Ian in that alley and the fact that he was well dressed and seemed more focused on killing Ian than robbing him and it struck him as odd. The guy had no identification on him nothing in his pockets, yet he looked well fed, healthy and clean. It wasn't a crime of opportunity.

The more he considered the possibilities, the more he worried about the safety of his beloved. Was he making something out of nothing? He should have gotten the man's name before he killed him, but emotions were running hot at the time. Ian would be going to work soon, and Nox planned to keep an eye on him.

Ron Mathews headed for the bar as soon as Ian left for work. He'd put too much money into this plan to have it ruined by incompetence. Trinda had arranged it all with her contacts in Macon, but it was Ron's money that was paying the bill. Ron wanted assurances that there would be success, and it would be clean and neat no messy follow ups or questions.

"What are you doing here?" The man stated tightly as he glanced around to see if anyone was noticing them.

"Trinda vouched for you and said you were good at your job, but I'm beginning to think she may be full of shit," Ron stated with barely concealed antagonism.

"Watch your words, friend, or you will become my next job." Ron immediately pulled back and looked shocked. "I wasn't hired to hold your hand or give you a blow-by-blow report on my actions. I'll let you know when it is done, so go home and keep your fucking mouth shut." The guy was angry, and he wasn't hiding it. Ron scowled but didn't say anything. He got up, went to the bar, and sat down, ordering whiskey and beer. He resisted looking over at the guy, focused on his drinks, and idly watched the television mounted to the wall.

After a few minutes the man got up and left the bar. Ron ordered another whiskey and then called Trinda. "If this blows up it's on you." She shouted. "You need to back off and stop acting so stupid."

"They've had plenty of opportunities, but nothing has happened. They're incompetent, Trinda. Where in the hell did you find these guys?" Ron retorted and then looked

around to make sure no one was paying him any attention. It was busy tonight, so no one seemed to be interested in him or his phone call. "Check on them, Trinda. If you've wasted my five thousand, I will personally come to Macon and beat your fucking ass."

"Calm down and keep your mouth shut before you ruin everything."

"Take care of it or I will." He said and then closed the call and downed his whiskey.

Ian noticed Anne, one of the older ladies on his floor, was giving him a strange look. He wasn't concerned enough to ask her about it, figuring if she had something to say to him, she would eventually say it. It was during his four o'clock break that she sought him out and sat down next to him.

"I saw you at the coffee shop yesterday after work with a gentleman." She began being very cautious with her words. "I don't know how to say this, but I feel compelled to warn you." She paused, and Ian was confused about how Anne could know someone like Nox.

"Do you know him?" Ian asked.

"No, but I am a sensitive and I must tell you that he gives off an extremely negative aura. I have felt bad vibes before from people but this man reeks of dread." Anne finished and waited for Ian to comment but Ian was at a loss. There was nothing about Nox that felt negative or dreadful and he had no idea where Anne was coming from.

"Nox is a good man." Ian said with intent and captured Anne's gaze and held it firmly. "He saved me from a mugger and then bought me a cup of coffee to make sure I was alright. There is nothing negative about him." Anne still looked troubled but nodded her head and looked away.

“I just needed to share my impression.” She explained as she stood and started walking away.

"Sure, but you have nothing to worry about," Ian assured her. He wondered what it was that Anne had against Nox. Perhaps it was his suit and tie and his look of importance that made her believe he was insincere.

Ian considers himself a good judge of character, and he sees Nox as an exemplary human being. He went out of his way to help a stranger, but not many people would do that. The rest of the shift went fast, with minimal contact with other staff.

After the comments by Anne, he was afraid others might decide to add their two cents and Ian's private life was just that private. Discussing Nox or their relationship was something that was not going to happen. A few speculative looks were cast his way, but he ignored them and thankfully no one said anything.

He clocked out at seven and took off for the train while making sure to stay aware of his surroundings. After the attack yesterday he made sure to keep his head up and his eyes open. He also made sure to stay well away from the alley entrances.

The walk went fast, and he had the overwhelming sense that he wasn't alone perhaps it was Nox's aura that lingered and gave him confidence and protection. He laughed at his thoughts and quickly boarded the train.

Ron hadn't bothered him while on shift, so that was good, but it also made Ian wonder what was keeping the man busy. Ian couldn't wait for the day that Ron's comings and goings would no longer be his worry or consideration. Freedom was just around the corner.

Nox checked on Ian at work, sliding into the dark hallways and following him for a while. There appeared to be no danger in the building, so he waited outside for Ian's

shift to end. When the gorgeous young man appeared, Nox quickly fell into step behind him, not wanting him to make this trek on his own. The attack from last night was still very fresh in Nox's mind.

Being close to Ian was always a rush. The warmth and the smiles generated by this sweet man were becoming priceless in Nox's eyes. Ian looked back over his shoulder a couple of times making it clear he felt him or at least his energy was felt. Their bond was building, and the sooner Nox could get this relationship on a more personal level the better.

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Nox was pleased that Ian took care to stay alert and aware during his walk to the train. Regardless, he was there to take care of any problems that might have arisen. He wasn't sure how he would explain his presence, but it didn't matter because all that mattered was Ian's safety.

Once he was on the train, Nox dropped back and returned to the alley where the attack had occurred the previous morning. He pulled out his phone and called Ian.

"Hello." He said and with just that one word Nox could feel the connection that was growing between them.

"I wanted to make sure you got to the train safely." Nox told him and Ian sounded pleased and his happiness fed something in Nox.

"I'm on the train and almost home. Thanks for calling." Ian said. "Did you have a good night?"

"It was okay. I'm looking forward to seeing you today." Nox walked the alley, getting a feel for the man who attacked his beloved and looking for any evidence of who he was.

"I miss you. I know we just met, but I like you, Nox, and I'm so glad you called." Ian was not being demure. He was sharing his feelings freely, and Nox wasn't completely sure how to handle it but leaned on instinct.

"I miss you too Ian that's why I called. I wanted to hear your voice and make sure you were safe." Nox responded and then added. "I like you too, very much." They

fell silent for a few seconds and then Ian announced he was getting off the train. "I'll see you tonight at seven. Pay attention to your surroundings and put your phone away." He instructed and Ian laughed.

"I will, and see you at seven." Nox waited for Ian to hang up before closing the call. He felt lighter and more content, having spoken with Ian. The young man's presence was all Nox needed to energize and focus, and he looked forward to getting a taste and experiencing the power of a beloved. They had a way to go, yet before their connection, they would be at a point that would allow him that kind of familiarity, but he hoped he didn't have to wait too long.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ian was shocked at how much that call had affected him. Hearing from Nox made the entire relationship seem real. It wasn't just a daydream or wishful thinking. Men who weren't serious did not call to confirm a dinner date. The few blocks from the train station to his apartment building flew by as he rushed to get home.

Ron would be asleep as usual, thank God, and rather than falling into bed as he usually did this morning Ian wanted to go through his closet and see what he had and what would look good to wear tonight. His clothing options were narrow, but he had a few good pieces. The excitement was bubbling and the exhilaration pushing him to run faster.

When he entered the apartment he found it unnaturally quiet. Ron snored like a buzz saw but there was nothing but silence and stillness. Walking carefully and quietly he took a cursory glance around but did not want to check Ron's room. If he was there fine if he wasn't fine, it wasn't Ian's concern, so he grabbed a drink from the kitchen and disappeared into his room locking the door securely behind him.

Ian had found the outfit for tonight after an hour or so of searching. His closet was

more limited than he thought so it was a pair of good jeans and a nice white button down. It was basic but he felt confident that it would work for most restaurants. Nox didn't strike him as the sort of guy who went to places that were too high end or exclusive.

He seemed as though he liked his privacy, and places like that tended to be in the public eye and all over social media. Ian was talking himself into feeling okay about his outfit since he had no clue where they were going for dinner. It was close to noon, so he needed to lay down for a while, or he'd be tired tonight, and he did not want to be tired. He wanted to enjoy every minute with Nox Samara.

"Be quiet. Don't wake up that fucking kid." The voice was Ron's, and apparently, he had someone with him. He had no friends that Ian was aware of and definitely no girlfriend. Being both grossly unattractive and miserable in general, Ron tended to drive everyone away.

He might have gotten lucky, and they might be a hook up from the bar he frequented. Ian did not want to think about how desperate a woman would have to be to want to hook up with that mess. Ian listened but he couldn't hear the other person, although he did hear the two of them moving across the living room and toward his door. "Shh." It was Ron again.

Ian watched his door and noticed his doorknob turned, but his lock was engaged, and the chair was in place. Ron wouldn't get in, yet it didn't stop him from trying several more times.

"He's in there, damn it." Ron cursed, and Ian heard him walk away. Why wouldn't he be in there? It was just past noon. Ian was always in his room at this time because he worked thenight shift. Ron's reaction when he couldn't get into his room was bizarre.

Maybe he was still drunk from last night Ian rolled over and tried to sleep he wasn't

going to give it more thought than it was worth. Ron and his guest could find their entertainment elsewhere.

As he slowly fell asleep his mind quickly turned back to the dangerously handsome man of his heart, Nox Samara. He lived in Ian's fantasies now as the star in every daydream. Nox with the raven hair and the square jaw the man who moved like the wind and smelled like heaven. Nox transfixed him and made him think maybe he had a chance. It was a fantasy, and it was enchanting, and Ian was going to hold onto it as long as Nox remained interested.

At just before seven Ian showered shaved and dressed in the best he could put together headed out front to wait for Nox. Ron was in his room where he'd stayed all day after trying to get into Ian's room. He wasn't sure if his guest was still with him and honestly he didn't care. The fact that he stayed out of Ian's way on this very important evening was all Ian was hoping for.

He stepped out onto the sidewalk, and within minutes, a long black SUV pulled up to the curb, and Nox got out. It was a beautiful vehicle, and Nox was as handsome as ever. Ian felt his heart do a little flip when Nox took his hand and bent to place a soft kiss on his cheek. This was fairytale material and something Ian could not have ever imagined would be happening to him. He melted as he was led to the passenger side, and Nox assisted him in getting in and getting comfortable before closing the door and returning to the driver's seat.

Nox smelled so good, and that kiss was still tingling. Ian realized that he was being a big idiot about all of this, but he didn't care this was his chance to feel something real and special and deep and he was going to grab it with both hands and hold on.

Nox had spent the day searching through the alley and following up on a name that was attached to the attacker. Nox traveled back to the underworld and sifted through the guy's mind to see if there was anything there to explain the attack.

There wasn't much there except a name, Ward Sinclair. Nox didn't know if it was his name or the name of an associate, but he would figure it out. He really regretted not draining the man's memory before killing him. "Are you familiar with the name Ward Sinclair?" Nox decided to ask Ian while they made their way downtown to a nice restaurant by the lake.

"Never heard of him is he someone important?" Ian sat there looking sweet and gorgeous and Nox just wanted to eat him up.

"I think he had something to do with your attacker."

"His name was Ward Sinclair?"

"I'm not sure if it is the attacker's name, but Ward Sinclair came up during the investigation."

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“There’s an investigation?” Ian was such a lovely young man everything was exciting, and Nox was finding the excitement contagious.

“The Rose corporation is conducting an investigation.” Nox clarified but didn’t go into too much detail.

"I think it was just someone who saw me as an easy mark to rob and kill, and if you hadn't come along, they would have been successful." Ian's tone became somewhat solemn as he completed that sentence. Nox reached over and placed his hand on top of Ian's and let his own calm and stillness be channeled to his beloved. Ian looked over at him and smiled.

“I believe our meeting was meant to be. You and I are meant to be.” Nox offered and waited for a response.

“You think it was destiny?” Ian said with that same sweet smile.

“Yes.”

“You believe in destiny?”

“I believe the universe made sure I was there to save you. I believe in the powers of Fate, and I believe that you and I were brought together.” Nox made himself clear without sounding too peculiar, he hoped.

"I believe there is more than what meets the eye in most situations and with most people. This city can be strange and otherworldly sometimes, and explanations are

difficult." Ian paused, and Nox thought he might give some examples, but he said the words that could melt even the heart of a demon. "Destiny sounds like something I'd like very much as long as it included you."

"Always," Nox stated with a smile that was only for Ian. It was both understanding and conspiring. He wanted this young human and being with him these last couple of days had solidified his desire and forged a bond that would only grow stronger the longer they remained together.

It was the natural way of the vampire, and it was to be his future. Their hands remained connected throughout the drive, giving Nox the impression that Ian was not unaffected by the force of Fate and that destiny was theirs. He pulled up to the restaurant and handed the keys and a tip to the valet before taking Ian's hand and leading him inside.

The Belvedere was a fine respectable restaurant often frequented by Master Rose and many from the Rose Coven. The owner and staff were vampire as were many of the customers so Nox felt confident that he wouldn't upset too many by his presence. The staff would make sure they were not seated near humans.

Ian walked strong and confidently beside him. Nox had always walked alone he avoided relationships of any depth apart from the faith and loyalty he held for Master Rose and the Rose Coven. Now here he was with someone so perfectly handsome standing at his side.

Once seated, he ordered drinks, which consisted of sparkling water since Ian was just nineteen. He couldn't take his eyes off his beloved, still shocked and working out the rush of feelings and attitudes coursing through him.

Until yesterday his life had been flat in many ways nothing upset him no matter how gruesome nothing mattered apart from serving his Master and his coven. His days

were organized and repetitive and he was satisfied with that. Then he met this man a human with an aura that compelled and mystified and filled Nox with thoughts and needs never before contemplated.

"What time must I have you home?" Nox asked, wondering about his work schedule for the night.

"I'm off tonight and tomorrow, so my evening is wide open." Ian gave him that smile again, the one that was teasing and excited. It touched Nox's heart every time, and that was not an easy feat. Nox's heart was buried deep and had hardened solidly over the years.

His demon half balked at the emotions coming to life within him, but his vampire half seemed to revel. His demon had held the reins of his life for years, and it was now time for his vampire to be satisfied. Even as the demon within him pushed for more distance and reserve, Nox could feel the softening and the subtle acceptance of this new addition to his life. He wasn't a changed man by any stretch of the imagination. He was still the demon soldier of the Rose Coven. His softer side was in response to Ian and no one else. Ian held Nox's heart and his attention now and forever. His warmth, his need, his adoration and love all surrounded this one lone human, Ian Mathews.

Dinner came and conversation flowed easy and naturally which was also odd for him. Talk was unnecessary in the bulk of his life because he found that it just slowed things down, but he didn't feel that way with Ian. With Ian talk was soothing and tender and Nox was eager for every word from his mouth and every expression on that beautiful face. He could listen to him for hours.

"Why do you live with your uncle?" Nox asked after they'd spent the meal discussing casual matters such as likes and dislikes. He wanted more information to build a deeper understanding of his beloved.

“My uncle took me in after my mother left when I was fifteen. He isn’t an easy person to live with but at least I wasn’t on the streets. The state paid him a stipend and a social worker came quarterly to check up on me until I turned eighteen.” Ian stopped and took a breath, not completely comfortable with the question obviously.

"I've been working since I was ten years old, first helping my mother out and then earning my keep, as Ron so aptly put it. It wasn't until the custodial job that I started making enough to meet Ron's needs and also be able to put money away. I've been saving and plan to move out within the next couple of months." Ian stared at him, and the look seemed suspicious. "Why do you ask?"

“You’re smart and self reliant and not someone I would describe as naïve or exploitable. Ron Mathews is a small time crook with a bad reputation and an attitude to match. I was just wondering what kept you there.” Nox told him and then added with a poignant stare. “If you need help leaving, I can help you.” The tension he was feeling immediately dissipated and that smile returned.

“I’ve been looking at apartments, so it won’t be long before I have my own place. But thank you for the offer.”

"I work for a man with a lot of contacts. Please let me help you." Nox pressed while reaching his hand across the table to take Ian's. He was silent for a few seconds clearly thinking it over and then he nodded.

“Okay, if you have any leads on cheap apartments in good neighborhoods I would appreciate the heads up.” Nox laughed it was just a whisper of sound, but it was the first laugh Nox had uttered in decades.

“I’ll get right on it, Ian.”

“Thanks.” They finished dessert and Nox felt that the date had gone quite well, and

Ian had shared personal and emotional information with him. Their bond was forming but until Nox was able to get a little closer it would be a very slow process. Physical contact would feed the bond and broaden Ian's awareness of the supernatural.

Master Rose had suggested the glamour to open Ian's mind as their connection grew. It helped the human partner to ease into the unknown more easily and with less panic. The glamour was safe and did not interfere with a person's own free will. But the glamour needed touch and intimacy, and their relationship seemed to be a slow starter. He had to ask for more and see if Ian would oblige.

"I'd like for you to come home with me, Ian. I live at the Rose Corporation main building on one of the upper floors. Many who work for Conall Rose live at that location." Nox waited for a response. He still held Ian's hand and tightened his grip as he waited.

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“Is it a nice apartment?” Ian smiled and his eyes sparkled, and it sent a soft tremble through Nox’s body.

"It's very nice. I think you would love it."

"In that case, I like to see it." Nox wanted to stand and exit the restaurant immediately, but he managed to control himself and signaled for the check. He wanted to get home as soon as possible because the thought of having his beloved in his personal space was filling his mind with hot and salacious thoughts.

Going by the hungry look on Ian’s face his mind was traveling in the same direction. After paying the check and leaving a hefty tip Nox helped Ian from his chair and placed his arm around his waist while quickly guiding him outside. He gave the ticket to the valet, and they stood silently with an arm around each other with anxious anticipation pumping through their veins.

Nox noticed a sleek white SUV with tinted windows approaching from their left. It was suspicious in the fact it was traveling slowly as it came to the restaurant but did not turn in. The backseat window on the right rolled down, and a black barrel appeared, and that was all Nox needed to see to process what was happening. It was only him and Ian standing there, so the target was obvious. Nox wrapped his body around Ian and turned just as the shots rang out. They hit Nox several times, but the bullets were like raindrops to a demon. They damaged his suit but had no effect on him. He made sure Ian was completely cocooned within his embrace.

When the car had passed, Nox turned with the wind and disappeared, and within a split second, he was in the back seat of that car, sitting next to the shooter. Their eyes

met, and panic exploded. Nox thrust a short sword into the man's side, puncturing his heart, and death was immediate.

The driver tried to turn and shoot, but he was too slow. Nox pulled out the sword and plunged it through the driver's seat, piercing him through, and then jerked it upwards, tearing him apart. Nox pulled out the sword, and catching the current, he was once again back with Ian cradling his beloved in his arms. He was gone for no more than a microsecond, but there was a shade of bewilderment present in the way Ian looked up at him.

"Nox, are you okay?" The words were frantic, and Ian's grip held him tightly.

"Come with me." Nox held him and together they shifted on the winds and shadows and then they were no longer on the roadway in front of the restaurant but rather standing in the living room of Nox's apartment.

Holding Ian like this, shielding him so completely, gave Nox a little peace and the knowledge that Ian was okay and those men had not hurt him. He knew it was true, and yet he was unnerved by how close death had come.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ian's mind was blown, and at that moment, he didn't know what was real or what wasn't, so he held onto Nox and buried his face against his chest. "How, what, why. . ." The words spilled out. Nox gathered him close and held him until he felt calm enough to talk.

"They shot you." Ian saw it and felt the jolts as the rounds hit, but there was no sign of injury. He ran his hands over Nox's back, and there were no wounds, only tears in his clothing indicative of gunshots. "Your clothes have holes, but you're not bleeding." He looked up at Nox with eyes that were pleading for an explanation.

"As you admitted yourself, there are strange things that exist in this city, and not all have explanations," Nox spoke quietly, his cheek pressed against the side of Ian's head. "I am not an ordinary man." Ian listened closely and let the word sink in. Nox had given the impression of mystery, and the supernatural Ian had felt it from their first meeting. What he saw tonight sealed the fact that Nox was so much more than met the eye.

"Those men they got away, we should call the police make a report we should do something." Ian's mind shifted to the automatic and he started spouting what little he knew to do in such a situation.

"They didn't get away. You saw the car crash and burn. I made sure they will not come for you again." Ian gripped Nox's shirt beneath his jacket needing the contact and the grounding that being this close gave him. He saw the car veer off the road and smash into a streetlight. He saw it burst into flames and then Nox was back. It was coming back to him now.

Nox was gone for a brief moment and Ian had stood alone and then he was back, and the car exploded. He held Ian and then they were in this room. "Did I black out did you drive us here?"

"No, I brought us here."

"You went after that car. You destroyed them."

"I did."

"What are you, Nox?"

"Look at me and then search your mind. You have the answer." Nox lifted Ian's chin up and then took his lips in a devastating kiss. Ian had thought about this kiss ever

since getting the quick very chaste kiss on the cheek yesterday. But this was so much more thrilling than he'd ever imagined.

The kiss went on, and it deepened into a salacious exploration. Nox continued to hold his chin, keeping pinned in place for this sensory onslaught. Ian felt a slight pinch to his bottom lip as Nox's teeth grazed over the kiss-swollen flesh. A tremble passed through Nox, and then his embrace seemed to lock. Ian was pressed tightly to his chest, and their bodies clung together. He was so much taller and larger and yet they fit perfectly.

Ian felt Nox's breath on his neck, and it stirred him to turn and trail kisses hot, wet kisses beneath his ear and down his neck. In response Nox did that turning thing again and Ian felt the movement in the pit of his stomach. It felt like vertigo and then they were standing in a bedroom.

"Are you magic, Nox?" Ian asked, trying to work out what was happening.

"I am vampire, and I am demon, and you are my beloved." Ian looked up at him capturing his gaze and held it as he probed and searched looking for the purpose of such a response. The longer he stared things began to happen Ian could see his mind was opening to what stood before him. It wasn't assumptions or supposition it was a gradual understanding of what he was looking at.

Nox's face all the hard lines and the dark eyes with the fire behind all came into stark clarity. He could see the vampire and he could sense the demon. He shouldn't know what he was looking at never having seen a vampire or a demon and honestly never realizing that they may be real until this very moment.

"It will become clearer," Nox said in a soft and deep voice. "My world is opening to you. The veils and the shields are dropping."

“Why?” Ian was mesmerized by what he was being introduced to and how his little sense of reality was being blown apart. Nox was otherworldly and yet he was still strong, substantial, gorgeous and absolutely breath taking. His parentage added to his mystique and allure and Ian wanted him now even more than he had yesterday. The word beloved was lingering in his mind, and it felt binding and eternal. “Why am I seeing this?”

Nox ran his fingers through Ian's hair gently and lovingly and looked at him like he was precious. Ian had never experienced the feeling of being special, but with Nox, he felt adored. "You are my beloved. You are Fate's gift to me, and my world is welcoming you." Ian couldn't help the smile that stretched across his lips. He reached up and touched Nox's cheek. The flesh was warm and firm, and he felt a thrill of sensations through his system. Nox turned his head and placed a sweet kiss on the palm of Ian's hand.

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“I see you Nox.” Ian was enthralled. “You move with the air currents and through shadows you are like winding and twisting smoke. You travel silently and unseen. You are so beautiful and graceful.” Ian amazed and kept touching Nox needing the contact and reveling in it even though it made no sense at all.

“I see you too, Ian.” He kissed him again it was softer this time but still powerful and had Ian opening eagerly. The buttons on Ian’s shirt opened one by one and Nox rubbed his knuckles against the soft flesh as the white cotton shirt fell open. His hand smoothed the hard planes and soft curves of Ian’s chest feeding the fire that was burning deep in his heart.

Nox slipped off his jacket and dropped it onto a chair and soon Ian’s shirt was off and joining the jacket on the chair. “You have a lovely body Ian, and I ache to experience every inch of it.” It sounded more like Nox was talking to himself it was a slow and low breathless compliment and Nox never took his eyes or hands off Ian’s bare chest.

“I want to see you too Nox. Let me help you with this shirt and tie.” Nox smiled and his eyes bore into Ian. The man had sex appeal that could melt stone and Ian felt a tremble pass through him at the thought of where this night was headed.

Soon, the shirt and tie were with the other clothing items in the chair, and Ian got his first look at a half-naked Nox Samara. The body under that suit was just as impressive as he thought, and maybe more so.

Like Nox, he smoothed the palms of his hands over the heated flesh and basked in the sensations. Ian placed several gentle kisses to Nox's chest and the taste exploded on his lips. The contact was like nothing he'd ever felt before. Everything was

supercharged, and a torrent of emotions was rushing through him.

Nox opened Ian's jeans and started pushing them down while Ian kicked off his shoes. The cool air brushed his overheated flesh when the jeans came off, and he stood there hard and expectant, hungry for whatever Nox had planned. Nox moved closer and took him into his arms, pressing Ian's naked body to him.

Nox was still wearing his pants, and the feel of the rough fabric against Ian's throbbing cock was both fantastic and terrible. Nox's hand moved around his back and cupped Ian's fleshy ass and squeezed while pressing him closer. Ian couldn't stop himself and started rubbing his needy cock against Nox's firm thigh, craving satisfaction.

He was suddenly bent backward still secure in Nox's arms and Nox launched an onslaught of kisses and touches that excited and overwhelmed. He held onto him digging his fingers into the hard muscle of Nox's arms and opened himself to everything. He was picked up and carried to the bed and so gently laid out like a prize or an offering.

Nox ran his hand down Ian's chest to his stomach and abdomen, and then he took his hard cock in hand, stroking it slowly at first and then faster, bringing Ian to the edge and then backing off. Ian moaned and squeezed his eyes shut, and then opened them when the bed shifted, and Nox was over him, naked and wanting, staring down at him with eyes that devoured.

Ian spread his legs and reached for Nox, pulling him down and wrapping his legs around Nox's hips. He felt Nox's cock, thick and hard, press against his own and instinctively thrust upward. Nox pressed down and forced Ian's legs further apart, and then suddenly there were fingers prodding his hole, forcing inside, stretching and massaging the tight little muscle.

His breath caught in his throat when scintillating sensations radiated throughout his being. This was more than just sex; Nox was reaching deep into Ian's mind and heart and demanding devotion, faithfulness, and, above all, love. This was a commitment and a promise he could feel in himself and in Nox.

"I'm going to bond with you, Ian. A vampire bond is permanent. It is forever, and there will be no going back. I am yours, and you are mine." The words were serious, and Ian could feel the heaviness as he contemplated his future and looked into the eyes of the man who was asking for his body, mind, and soul.

Their union would seal the bond this act would signal a new and possibly fantastic beginning. Ian's understanding of Nox and his world was coming into sharp focus and Ian was not scared. He saw his future and it was Nox. "You are mine and I am yours." Ian repeated with promise and adoration. Nox had come into his life and began to fill every void. He no longer felt alone or afraid or as if no one cared or saw him. Nox cared and he saw him.

Nox was on the edge of stunned when he looked into Ian's heart and saw the regard he held, and the growing tenderness and it was humbling. "I see you, sweetheart. . . so clearly." He plunged his three fingers back inside his precious lover and worked the tight muscle, loosening it in preparation. He used plenty of lubricant, not wanting to cause his beloved any discomfort. Nox had never been with a human before since in general they found his aura to be difficult and off putting.

In his many years of observation, he'd found humans to be hearty and resilient and tougher than they appeared. His beloved was soft and pliant and the most beautiful being he'd ever encountered but he also knew him to be thoughtful, strong in body and mind and most of all he had an open mind.

Nox kissed him hard and deep just as he lifted him and very deliberately and with pinpoint precision thrust his hard, engorged cock deep inside his lover. The tight heat

and the tender embrace made him tremble with the need to push and drive deeper, but he held and waited for Ian to catch his breath. The room was flush with a quiet intensity, a spell of hope and love. It was intoxicating, Ian was intoxicating.

He proceeded with a slow stroke, and Ian held him, matching his rhythm. The sensations burning through him were building to a climax faster than expected. He slowed and took a breath staring down at his beloved and saw the same need shining back at him.

That look and the energy coursing through him at the touch and taste of his beloved brought his vampire and his demon essence thundering to the surface. His vampire pressing forward, desperate to mark and claim, and his demon presence marveling at the splendor of the touch of this human. Demons were solitary beasts, but he wanted this man wanted to own and be owned. Everyone agreed Ian belonged to him.

Nox continued to thrust while picking up speed as his desires peaked, and the urgency of the act took him over. This was the very first time that emotions were involved, and they were sharp, poignant emotions that demanded attention and satisfaction. Pleasure slammed through his body and struck, sinking his teeth into the soft, luscious flesh of Ian's throat, and he drank.

Their arms were wrapped tightly around one another, and Nox was still buried deep inside Ian's channel. He came hard, filling him full, and at the same time, Nox felt Ian's warm release spread between them, the scent absolutely divine.

He drank deeply, feeling their bond uniting them. He finished, not wanting to take too much and leave his amazing lover lightheaded, and licked the wound closed, forming a tiny scar, marking Ian as his beloved.

He could feel Ian's heart pounding against his and his breath coming out in rapid pants. Ian held onto him gripping him with an intensity that betrayed his need. "I love

you, Nox.” They were coming together in mind and body and still that statement took Nox by surprise. “I just need to say it because what I feel for you is just so large and so overwhelming. Please don’t be scared.” Nox laughed softly at the genuine innocent of his beloved.

“The only thing about you that scares me is the thought of ever losing you.” Nox started and once again took Ian’s lips in a blistering, possessive embrace.

CHAPTER SIX

“The SUV crashed after Nox killed the two shooters. We got rid of it and its occupants.” Fane reported to Master Rose. “I’m surprised since we don’t often have to do cleanup for Nox. He gets rid of the evidence himself.”

“Nox is predisposed providing protection to his beloved.” The Master told him and Fane was understandably shocked.

“Nox has a beloved?”

“Yes, a human and it would seem the young man has stumbled into several near-death experiences, which we all have to admit is a little suspect.”

"He's either cursed, or someone is trying to kill him." Fane offered, and the Master nodded.

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"Nox is not letting him out of his sight and currently they are holed up in his apartment." The Master smiled knowing the couple were enjoying their time together and being holed up was not a hardship at present.

"I want you and Samuel to investigate the shooting. Nox was unable to get the name of the man who attacked Ian in the alley, but the name Ward Sinclair came to him. He's not the attacker but is connected in some way. Get me everything you can because none of us wants to deal with Nox Samara if something happens to his beloved." The Master made the situation clear.

"I doubt the city would survive," Fane commented gravely.

"Exactly."

"Someone is protecting him." She stated that as soon as he picked up the call,

"Who, who is protecting him?" Ron shot back.

"Is he suspicious? Has he acquired a bodyguard?" She wanted to shift the blame for failure onto Ron.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" He wasn't taking it.

"Call Sinclair to arrange a meeting. This is unacceptable." She heard from her sources that the drive-by had ended in death for the two shooters, and Ian was completely unharmed.

"There's no need to call him again. He's useless. I don't know where you found him, but he was not worth my five thousand." Ron paused for a few seconds and then devised a plan. "We're going to have to get our hands dirty and do this ourselves. Their failures are adding up, and pretty soon, the police are going to notice and get involved."

"Nothing has been reported. Whoever is protecting Ian hasn't involved the police, and I don't think Ian has a clue that we're trying to kill him."

Ron laughed. "Blissfully ignorant as always."

"No, not ignorant just too trusting." She said and laughed along with Ron. "You may be right we need to oversee this ourselves. I'll catch a flight and be there this afternoon. Pick me up at the airport, I'll let you know the time and we will put something together. I'm tired of waiting it's time we finished this."

Ian lay in Nox's arms and had never before felt so safe and so protected. After they'd made love, Ian experienced his mind opening, and what Nox called the awareness overtook him. He saw the world of the supernatural; it was everywhere. Things that had given him pause in the past now made sense with this new perspective.

The things that were said last night promised fidelity and forever and it all rang very true the awakening showed him reality and true intent and all of Nox's words were true. He wasn't sure how this all happened, but he had never felt happier or more secure in his life.

Nox was exactly what he claimed to be, a supernatural being half vampire and half demon. Ian could see both of them he'd noticed it before in Nox's eyes, the hard lines of his face and in the way he moved. But Ian had put it down as being simply interesting and extremely fit. He could see it now in all its clarity and Nox was a gorgeous man the vampire and the demon were all Nox, and he was falling very hard

for the man.

"I love you, Ian," Nox said and pulled Ian tightly into the circle of his arms. Those loving and warm eyes searched Ian's face and then placed a hard kiss on Ian's tender lips. "You taste divine."

"You are amazing, and I can't believe that so much was happening around me, and I never knew it. This awakening you gave me is mind blowing in the extreme but I think I'm starting to get used to it and crazy enough it all makes sense. Life is so much more understandable now that I have access to the secrets." Ian laughed softly and tunneled his fingers through Nox's soft black hair and pulled him closer.

Ian looked deep into his eyes seeing the depth of their connection reflected there and feeling the bond that now existed between them. "I can feel you Nox. I can see into your heart and your mind. You are absolutely awesome." Ian kissed him lightly on the lips and then on the forehead and then nuzzled into his welcoming embrace. "I could stay like this forever." He whispered.

Nox had not expected such a surge of emotions to encompass him at the completion of their bond. It was something that tore through him, shredding his reserve and laying him bare to his forever lover. In any other situation, he would feel the need to kill everyone involved, but in this situation, all he wanted was for his lover to kiss him and love him and never stop smiling at him.

The bond was special and selective, there would never be another in his life like Ian and he could not have asked for a better partner than Ian Mathews. Now that Nox had access to Ian's thoughts and emotions he found that he loved him even more.

He loved him for his strength, intelligence, practical and sensible approach to life, and his openness to accepting someone like Nox. The pull was helping but as the Master had explained, if the ability to love someone wasn't already present then the

pull would be useless. Attraction had to be present before Fate could make the relationship happen.

“We are bonded, and I will be by your side for the rest of our days and beyond if I can arrange it.” Nox had connectionseven in the next world and he would certainly do whatever necessary to keep Ian close, but he wouldn’t go into that right now. Ian had a lot to process but his heart was willing and that was all that was required. They would get into the details of Nox’s life and associations at a later time.

“Are you hungry, sweetheart?” Nox used the endearment with ease.

“No, dinner last night was wonderful and filling.” The comment on last nights dinner date brought back the memory of the shooting and Nox felt his beloved begin to tense up.

“Dinner was good, and you were fantastic.” Nox kissed the side of Ian’s head and once again gathered him close in his arms. “I love how easy it is for you to be around me. Humans normally are put off by my presence it's the demon element that they sense and find concerning. That first night, you were not put off by me. You did not fear me. You stood with me without issue, and I was intrigued by you. I followed you, and I am so glad that I did.”

"That sounds really sexy." Ian laughed, and the tension eased.

“You are the sexy one my love.” Nox continued with endearments, and he found them easy and natural when describing his perfect love. He was about to extol further on the many attributes of his beloved when his cell went off.

He did not release Ian but rather reached over to the bedside table and grabbed his phone and answered. “Nox here.” It was Master Rose and what he had to say was not a surprise.

“There’s a hit out on your beloved.” He began and Nox felt his insides turn to ice.

“We discovered Ward Sinclair was the middleman and he has been eliminated. He hired the mugger in the alley and he hired the two shooters from last night.”

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“Who hired Sinclair?” Nox asked.

“Uncle Ron.” That information did surprise him. The man was a lowlife, but Nox had not considered him to be intelligent enough to put together such a plan. “Stay with your beloved I have men out looking for Ron. He’s on the run. Don’t go after him Nox stay with Ian.” The Master paused and then added. “I will keep you posted and let you know when all parties have been dealt with.”

“Thank you.” Nox closed the call and rolled to wrap his arms around Ian and pressed his face into the crook of his neck.

"What's wrong? I can feel your frustration and anger." Ian spoke softly and ran his hands up and down Nox's back, soothing and comforting him in a way only a beloved can do. He chose not to share with Ian the fact that his uncle had paid to have him killed. He wasn't particularly fond of his uncle, but to find out someone wants you dead can be very devastating, and he didn't want his beloved to be devastated.

Sitting around and waiting for someone else to take care of the problem was also something he could not possibly do. He understood the Master's concern for Ian, but he was perfectly safe at the coven, and no human with murderous intent was going to gain entrance to the coven house. He could find Ron faster because he could move faster. The sooner Ron was dealt with, the sooner Ian would be safe.

“Did they find out who shot at us?” Ian prompted.

“Yes, they did, but they're not anyone you know." He wasn't lying since Ian did not know the shooters.

“Why did they do it?”

“I don’t know but we will figure it out.” Nox lay there for a few minutes holding Ian and contemplating his next moves. “I’m going to leave you for a few hours I want to join the search for who is behind these attacks. It is important that you remain here under the protection of the coven while I am gone.”

"I hate to let you go. Being with you like this feels so damn right." Nox felt the same, but it was imperative that Ron and whoever else was behind these attempts were stopped permanently. If he had to wipe out the entire city to ensure the safety of his beloved, he would do it.

"I'll be back as soon as possible. I need to make sure the threat against you is gone. I need to be assured of your well-being and your safety." Nox sat up, and Ian followed.

“I understand hurry back I’ll be waiting. Maybe we could have lunch together when you return.” Ian was trying to be tolerant and supportive but there still was a shade of disappointment coloring his words. Nox got out of bed and quickly dressed. Ian scooted to the edge near to where he stood and watched him with eyes that contained worry. “Be careful.” He said and reached out to Nox.

Nox grabbed him and pulled him up into his arms. His naked beloved was the finest thing on this earth, and for a split second, he considered staying and returning to bed. But he had to finish this before something happened to Ian. Ron and anyone else involved in this needed to die.

Nox was a tracker, and he was more likely to find this man quickly. He could also plumb the information from his mind and discover who else was involved. Nox kissed Ian hard and exacting putting everything he felt for the young man into that kiss and that embrace and then he sat him back onto his feet.

"I'll be back. Stay here, and do not leave the building." Ian nodded, and after another quick kiss, Nox left, turning into the air current and disappearing.

Ian stood and considered his situation for several minutes. Being in Nox's personal space felt odd and yet comforting. He hadn't much time to consider the space last night when they appeared here, and then things started to happen. He smiled at the memory and felt the exhilaration of the night rush through him.

The bedroom was stark but what he would have expected of a man like Nox. It was a nice solid brass bed that looked antique but was in perfect condition. The bedding was simple and basic but quality, as was the rug and the other linens. He rethought the word stark and figured it was more minimalistic because it felt warm and welcoming even in its plainness.

Walking around, he could feel the man; Nox's impression was everywhere, and it was the source of his comfort. Nox Samara was not the sort of man Ian had ever thought would enter his life. When he told him that he worked for Conall Rose and that he was working nights, it was pretty clear to Ian that his position was a clandestine one. He wasn't taking meetings and solving interoffice issues. He was solving problems in the dark of the night on behalf of Conall Rose.

Mr. Conall Rose had a reputation, and even Ian, as small and insignificant as he was in this town, was aware of it. He never did anything illegal and got caught, but there was a belief that he and his people functioned on the edge of the law and sometimes went over that edge.

He always kept his hands clean, but circumstances would sometimes speak for themselves. Now, with his new perspective, he could see why Master Rose lived the way he did in order to make a safe and profitable life for his people. He was a harsh man, but like Nox, he never hurt anyone unnecessarily.

This world he fell into was a wild one and it opened a lot of doors in regard to understanding the inner workings of this city. Ian was born and raised in this city and yet he had never known just how many paranormal beings existed around him.

Vampires, shifters, and the like are all living and thriving. Magic was the big kicker for him, and now he understood why some people just had the best of luck. He shook his head and went in the direction of the attached bath. He needed to shower and get dressed.

Ian wasn't used to the understated luxury of a large, well thought out bathroom. He stayed in there longer than necessary enjoying the heat and the steam and the soft towels. At home he was lucky to find an old t-shirt to dry off with considering Ron like to use the towels for shop rags no matter how new or expensive they were. Ron. . he was so ready to leave that man in his past.

Stepping into the kitchen looking for a cold drink he'd just swung open the refrigerator when his cell rang. Assuming it was Nox he answered immediately. "How's it going?" He asked hoping to hear that he was on his way home. But what he heard made his blood run cold.

"Hello honey it's your mother." The voice was familiar with its fake sugary sweetness, and it struck him hard. He hadn't heard from her in over four years, not a word. What did she want? She always wanted something.

"I know I've not kept in touch, but I called Ron every week for an update on you. I left because I had to in order to be a better mother for you." It was just a bunch of banalities strungtogether in an order she thought might make her look less of a self-centered bitch and more of a victim. She loved being the victim.

He was just about to get Ron out of his life, so he wasn't going to welcome Trinda back in. Ian was about to close the call without responding when she started talking

fast, and her words were pleading.

"I'm in town. I wanted to see you, but Ron refused to let me come to his apartment. He's being difficult and abusive. Please, Ian, I just want to see you and talk to you." She paused.

"Why, why would you want to see me?" Ian wasn't falling for it at first, but the longer he listened, the more he admitted that he would like to see her and why she left. She was always self-centered and not a good mom, but she was never abusive or cruel. She was just thoughtless and dismissive. He was making excuses for her, and he knew it, but still, what would it hurt?

"I want to try and explain what I was feeling and why I left but I need to look at you when I do. Please honey come see me." The pleading was forceful and Ian felt himself breaking and wanting to hear the explanation to understand why she disappeared.

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“Where are you staying?” Ian caved.

“I’m in room 248 at the Jefferson on Wilmington.” She was happy and excited, but Ian felt nervous. He told Nox that he would wait for him and that he would stay in the apartment.

"I'll meet you this afternoon," Ian suggested.

"No, honey, I'm only here for the next hour, and then I'm catching a flight back to Macon. I purchased a cheap ticket after Ron refused to let me see you. I thought it was useless to hang around. It's not refundable, and I can't afford another ticket. Please meet me here within the hour. Please, honey." Ian wasn't even sure if he could get to the Jefferson in an hour.

“That doesn’t leave much time.”

"You can make it. Please try."

“Okay.” He left it there and hung up. A strange anticipation overtook him at finally getting answers to his questions finally knowing why she left him. As he thought about meeting her the nervousness set in again and a dread began to take shape. His feelings about it were all over the place but in his heart he wanted to see her. It might be the last time.

He thought about dropping Nox a text and letting him know what he was doing but he didn’t want to bother him. It was more than that but that was the reason he told himself. Truth was he knew Nox would try to talk him out of it. He needed to see her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Nox traveled to Ron and Ian's apartment first in order to pick up a scent to follow. No one was there but he caught the scent of Ian of course and of his fellow enforcers Fane and Samuel who obviously had conducted a search.

Then he recognized Ron Mathews' degenerate decay, which came across as a molding rot. He was a dark one for sure and not just an abusive uncle. This man had a history of horrible acts that Ian was not aware of. The man needed to be put down, and Nox was the only man who could make that happen.

He moved around the apartment taking in the desperate and desolate nature of the place. It was dire until he reached Ian's bedroom and when he walked inside he felt a lightness and beauty that fully described his precious lover. Ian was safe now and Nox vowed to make sure Ron and his ilk would never get near the man again. He held the sour notes of Ron's essence and folded into the current of the air and followed his trail.

"He's coming, so don't worry about it. The room is in his name, so it will look like he was staying here and suffered an unfortunate accident. It will come back on us, and once they contact you with the sad news of Ian's death, then you can file for the insurance money.

"It'll be fine." Trinda was so sure of herself as she flitted around the room, trying to make it look like a young man was staying there. She'd taken a few things from Ron's apartment to make it look authentic.

"I get my five thousand back off the top before we split the rest," Ron demanded. "That useless Ward Sinclair was a waste of good money, and now I can't even get hold of him. He's not answering his phone."

"He failed and probably took off with your five thousand. Forget about him." Trinda, with her graying blond hair and pinched face, looked every inch the calculating bitch that she was. "He's not going to say anything. He would be incriminating himself, so forget it for now we can take care of him later." Ron nodded

"We've been playing the long game here, and I don't want to mess this up," Ron stated desperately. "I only took in your brat so I could eventually profit off his ass and you know that." Trinda nodded.

"It was smart getting that life insurance as soon as you took custody and then letting it sit for the last four years. No one will suspect you, dear brother, or me for that matter. I'm simply the uninvolved parent living many miles away."

"It better go off without a hitch. Are you sure he's coming?"

"I'm sure."

"He has a friend, you know, some guy who saved him from the mugging incident and has been seen with him since. He might bring that guy with him. Sinclair said he could be a problem." Ron was running everything through his mind making sure they accounted for every possibility. "We can't fail. He has to die here today."

"He will, and if his friend comes along, then his friend will die too." Trinda was casual about the killing; she had no heart or soul. "Now, you need to get out of here before he shows up. Go back to the bar and wait for me there."

"How are you going to do this on your own." He asked.

"I have some hired muscle that should be here shortly. I'll be fine and will call you when the deed is done." She smiled and waved him off.

Ian found the elevator and took it to the ground floor he passed by a few people that he recognized as vampire, but they didn't talk to him or bother him. It was strange being able to see people for who or what they really were, and Ian was still getting used to it.

He found the door which led out to an alley and that's when he realized the coven house was disguised as a basic warehouse. Looking at the outside one would never guess what lay inside Master Rose was a genius. Ian walked to the main street and once there called for a ride.

As he made his way to Wilmington Ave and then the Jefferson motel he thought of Nox. He should call him and let him know he was meeting his mother but there was a part of him that wanted to see her first get a read on her before introducing her to the most important man in his life. Nox knows him and knows where he came from, but he hasn't come face to face with the players and Ian wasn't sure he ever wanted him to.

The driver dropped him out in front of the Jefferson. It was a decent motel, not too cheap and not too expensive. Trinda was on the second floor in room 248. He looked up to the second floor and just considered what it was he hoped to gain by meeting with her.

There was no way this was going to go well. It was either going to be a shit show, or he would gain a little insight into her life and decision-making. She left, and that was the fact. She left and never looked back, leaving him to be cared for by Uncle Ron, a man who should never be in charge of anyone or anything. She did him dirty, and now she was going to tell him why. Did he really want to know?

He was here now so he might as well follow through. Ian looked around making himself aware of his surroundings just like Nox told him. There was a man by the east corner that was paying him a little too much attention, so he looked at him

directly catching his gaze and holding it. He looked away and then left. It didn't mean he wasn't trouble, but it let him know that he saw him.

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“Okay, time to get this over with.” He headed inside and up to room 248. He stood outside the door and held his breath as he knocked. The door opened and a woman stood there it was his mother, but she looked older and harder. Her blonde hair was graying, and her skin had darkened and wrinkled. It was her but it was a sad version of her.

“Oh Ian, my darling boy come inside.” She reached for him, but Ian stepped back not ready to get all touchy feely with this veritable stranger. She eyed him speculatively and then gave a little fake smile and stepped back to let him enter. Ian walked by her into the room and she closed the door.

“What is it that you want to tell me?” Ian was feeling off ever since entering the room and wanted to end the encounter as soon as possible. He looked around the small room and noticed the bathroom door was closed. He casually moved closer to the door while asking her several questions which she avoided answering. “Why are you back? Why now?”

"I'd offer you a drink, but I have nothing, having just arrived." She moved over toward the bathroom, and Ian moved closer to the door. "I'm sorry for abandoning you, Ian, but it was for the best." She wasn't explaining anything; she was just reiterating her usual lines.

“Okay, sure, well I think I’ll be going. It was good seeing you Trinda, but I don’t want to keep in touch.” When he turned to the main door intending to leave he heard the bathroom door open and Trinda call out to him.

“You’re not leaving.” Trinda’s voice turned sharp and forceful. Ian turned around and

saw her standing with man next to her. He was a thug that was easy to see, and he was the man Ian had noticed outside. The man raised a gun and pointed it at Ian and then Trinda dropped the lies and began to explain why she was in town, and she wasn't there to get to know him better.

"I'm sorry it has come to this, but life happens, doesn't it, honey." She smiled and moved away from the man with the gun.

"You want to kill me?" Ian was confused and scared. He was very scared.

"It's not that I want to. It's just the easiest way to reach our goals."

"Who else is in on this? Is it Ron?"

"Of course, it's Ron. He hired the hit men who failed so spectacularly." She was taking this so lightly as if he were nothing and meant nothing. "It's an insurance policy silly. You die and I get rich." Ian kept his eyes on the man with the gun but tried to keep his mother talking the longer she talked the longer he had time to figure this out.

In his heart he reached out to Nox calling to him and begging for help. It couldn't all end here like this he had a life a beautiful life ahead of him and he didn't want to lose Nox. He needed him so badly. "Please Nox please hear me and come to me."

Nox found Ron at a bar downtown he was in the bathroom. Nox appeared in front of the door standing in the shadow and stepped out as soon as Ron turned away from the sinks and headed for the door. He stopped abruptly when he saw Nox blocking the way.

"What do you want?" He said fearfully. "What are you?" He said and Nox reached out and placed the palm of his hand on Ron's forehead rendering him still and motionless. He couldn't talk and he couldn't breathe.

Nox searched his mind, shredding it as he pulled everything from the dark reaches of his consciousness. The facts hit Nox like a sledgehammer: the plan, the hits, and the fact that Ian's mother had organized it all. The final shred of information had Nox reaching out to Ian as he incinerated Uncle Ron, leaving nothing but gray ash on the bathroom floor.

Then, he was suddenly bombarded by a hysterical call from his beloved. Ian was with that woman. Their plan was playing out, and Nox's heart exploded with the fear of losing him. He hadn't stayed in the apartment he went to her, and she planned to kill him. Nox turned into the shadows and traveled on the wind, desperate and in a frenzy to reach him in time.

"I'm going to kill you." She said, and then she amended that statement with a sickening smile. "Well, actually, he's going to kill you." She pointed at the man next to her. "It will look like a basic robbery-murder. Really unfortunate, sad even." She smiled. "But before he kills you, I got to ask who is the man that keeps saving you."

"That would be me." Ian saw Nox standing behind the man with the gun, and in the next second, the man was dead on the floor with a gaping hole in his chest. Nox had punched his fist through the man, actually completely through him, and he did it with ease. Trinda saw this and started for the door, but in a breath, Nox was standing in front of her.

Ian could see the panic in her actions as she saw her plans falling apart. "Turn around Ian." Nox stated and Ian turned around and when he turned back Trinda was gone and also the gunman.

"Where did they go?"

Nox took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his hands before responding. "I sent their remains to the underworld to join your Uncle Ron, and they will bother you

no more. The plot to kill you has been eradicated, and everyone involved has been destroyed. You are safe, my love." Ian ran to him, wrapping his arms around him and burying his face in his chest. Nox responded by holding him close and kissing the top of his head.

"I'm sorry I left the apartment. Trinda said she wanted to see me. I knew it was a bad idea, but I wanted some answers but as soon as I got here I realized it was all a trap a stupid trap that I walked right into. I'm sorry." Ian was shaking with the pent up trauma and relief.

"I should have told you about Ron and explained the danger you were in. I hoped to deal with it and tell you later to keep you from the sadness I knew it would bring. Although I did not know Trinda was involved until I invaded Ron's mind and saw the plan they had devised. I'm so sorry they let you down, but you're safe now, and I will always keep you safe." Nox squeezed him tight and then in a blink they were standing in Nox's living room.

"I will never get tired of that," Ian whispered against Nox's shirt. He was still pressed to his chest and wasn't interested in moving just yet. "I love you, Nox. Since the moment we first met, you have been there for me. I've never allowed myself to ever lean on anyone. I've never trusted anyone, but I trust you, and I know without a doubt you will always be there for me."

Nox stood silently for a few minutes; just holding and being held and having his beloved in his arms was all he needed to feel the fear of losing Ian slowly drain from his mind. "You scared me Ian and that's an emotion I don't feel often and where you're concerned, I hope to never feel it again."

"I'm sorry I didn't listen, and I'm sorry I believed her." Ian took a slow, ragged breath, and Nox felt his body tremble slightly. "She was going to stand there and watch that guy kill me. She was going to do it for money, and Ron was part of it. I never

expected anything from either of them but did expect simply human decency and maybe a few basic morals.”

"Some beings are incapable of seeing beyond themselves. It has nothing to do with you and everything to do with the fact they have no conscience." Nox tried to soothe his lover.

“I’m not so sad as I am disappointed. I wasn’t stupid; I knew she never liked me, and I knew for a fact that Ron detested my presence. I was there to pay the bills and nothing more. But would never have thought them capable of something like this, the mugger that was going to slit my throat and the drive-by that was going to fill me full of holes that were them; they arranged all of that." Ian drew in another ragged breath, and his despair was palatable. "If it weren't for you, they would be sitting together, laughing about me and counting their insurance money."

"Fate brings a couple together when they need each other the most. I needed to be there to save your life, and you needed to be there to save my soul. I was slowly disappearing into the darkness. Nothing mattered to me anymore except my duty to Master Rose. I had nothing else, and then there was you." Nox lifted Ian's face up to his and placed a soft kiss on his lips. "You changed everything for me. You filled my heart and healed my soul. I love you, Ian. I'm not perfect and never will be, but I am perfect for you." He bent and kissed him again.

The despair lifted and the tension disappeared. Ian started to pull at Nox’s clothing and his need was clear. Their bond was fresh, and their connection needed to be fed. Nox felt his own needs burning through him his vampire was on edge and his demon in him wanted more. It was all about security and assurances and building a love that would stand through the ages.

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He picked Ian up into his arms and carried him to the bedroom. All the while Ian continued to undress him and raining hot kisses to his enflamed flesh. The touch was magical and softened everything about Nox. His thoughts were only for Ian as was his heart. The young human was his life now the center of all that was beautiful, and Nox would guard and protect, love and honor and serve this one man forever.

Ian moved near the bed once Nox set him down on his feet and beckoned Nox to come closer. He removed Nox's clothing paying special attention to his chest with kisses and caresses, and then moved to his firm engorged cock. Ian stroked him repeatedly, heating the flesh and sensitizing him to his touch. Nox was completely naked now, and Ian was still fully dressed, and the scene struck him as deliciously naughty.

He pushed Nox back against the bed, and Nox allowed himself to fall onto it. Ian instantly took Nox's straining cock into his mouth and swallowed him down his throat. He worked it with his muscles, sending spikes and rocket explosions through Nox's system. He stroked with his hand and his mouth, bringing Nox a level of pleasure he had not experienced.

Ian's own arousal flared, and he opened his jeans and took himself in hand, stroking his needy flesh while feasting on Nox. He took him down fully over and over, and Nox felt the dizzying effects of the pleasure that was building with each stroke. He threaded his fingers through Ian's hair and prompted a few shallow thrusts, slowly taking control.

Ian followed, and they fell into a rhythm. Ian gripped him tighter, and then suddenly, Nox pulled him off and sat up, grabbing him under the arms and tossing him onto the

bed beside him. Ian rolled onto his stomach with a soft laugh, and Nox gripped the waistband of his jeans and pulled them down to his thighs.

That bare ass was a work of art, and Nox drooled at the sight of it. Nothing in his long life could ever compare. He covered his cock with lube and slathered it on Ian's waiting hole. "On your knees." He said, Ian scrambled to obey even as his jeans tripped him up a little.

Nox got onto the bed behind him, straddling his legs that were firmly confined by the tight jeans, and used one hand to spread his cheeks and the other to stretch and loosen his tight entrance. His heartbeat was increasing, and his breath was coming out in shallow pants. The effect this human had on him was extraordinary.

He pushed Ian's face down toward the bed so his ass pointed higher. "Stay like that." He said, and then, without further instruction, he lined up his eager cock and thrust inside his needy lover, burying himself to the base. The tightness was amazing. His cock was vibrating with the need to move.

With a sharp slap to Ian's right cheek, he began a punishing rhythm of rapid thrusts, stretching and burning in its wake. The moans and pleas for more told him all was good, so he picked up the speed and the pressure.

Holding Ian's hips, he then began to pull him back, forcing his cock even deeper as he continued to thrust, feeding the need and the passion bubbling between them. Another slap and another moan, and Nox was losing his mind. He slammed in hard and gripped the supple flesh of Ian's gorgeous ass and came pumping stream after stream of his seed deep within his lover. He bent and sunk his teeth into his soft flesh and drank while continuing to pump his tight, warm hole and empty it completely.

The taste of his beloved was wonderful, and it filled him with renewed vitality and energy like nothing else could. He finished and licked the wound close, leaving it sensitive and reactive to his touch.

Nox pulled out and flipped Ian to his back. Ian was holding his cock, preventing his orgasm. The pressure and the need showed so fully in his eyes, and his face screamed for satisfaction. Nox jerked Ian's hand away and took him into his mouth, swallowing his man to the base, and then worked him with expertise that had him squirming and begging for release.

He played him for a few minutes, pushing him to the climax and then staving off the finish, only to push him again, leaving him shaking and sweating and crying out. Nox loved the way the jeans tight around Ian's thighs held him in place while Nox took advantage of all that was on offer. Ian didn't seem to mind and was enjoying himself as well. Perhaps there might be a little light bondage in their future. It was something Nox enjoyed, but it would be Ian's choice.

With that thought in mind, he took hold of Ian's hands in one of his, holding them while he finished Ian off. He jerked and cried out and came in a fierce release, filling Nox's mouth with a flavor that was pure and beautiful. He drank him down, loving the feel of his beloved beneath him and coming apart with the pleasure he was providing.

They lay in bed together following their epic session of love and learning. They lay silent for some time before Ian broke that silence with a question that Nox had not expected. Apparently, he had not made himself completely clear these last couple of days.

“Where do we go from here Nox?” He asked it wasn’t emotionally laden it was just a question of curiosity. In order to eliminate any further misunderstandings or confusion Nox laid it out clearly as he saw it.

“You and I will pack your things from the apartment, and you will move in here with me. This is your home as much as it is mine. You are my beloved and I need to keep you near. You will find that being apart for long periods of time is not pleasant it’s not simply a desire it is a need now that we are bonded we are one in body and soul.”

Ian made no comment so he continued.

"You will be welcomed into the Rose Coven as a member and as the beloved of Nox Samara. Conall Rose will become your Coven Master. I will introduce you, and we will become your community."

"I'll live here with you." Ian said softly and nuzzled closer to Nox's side laying and arm over his chest and kissing his shoulder.

"You will always be with me."

"I won't lie and say I'm not a little bit scared, but the caring, the excitement, and the mystery of it all has me hooked." He paused for a moment to get his words right. "But it's you, Nox, and only you that truly matters. I've never been in love and have never desired someone with the force that I desire you. I will follow you. . . always and forever. I love you, my vampire and demon lover."

"Always and forever," Nox repeated and took his lips in another possessive embrace.

THE END