



Vampires, Magic, and Monsters

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Description: By day Charlotte is a city of wealth and decorum. By night, the streets become a place of danger and darkness...

Neal Shawn is simply in the wrong place, at the wrong time. At least, he thinks so as he races his car across the city away from the scene that confronted him at a local dry cleaner. He was there on an errand for his boss, Mrs. Reginald Ball, a Charlotte socialite. Neal saw something he shouldn't and now he fears for his life. What Neal doesn't yet understand is that his life will change forever this night. A man will enter his life, a man named Alistair Quinn, and will turn his world on its axis. Neal at first believes he must fear Alistair, but in reality, Alistair is the only thing standing between him and the dark forces lurking the shadows of Charlotte, looking to destroy the innocent and the good. In Alistair's arms he will find a home like his has never known and a world of Vampires, Magic, and Monsters he never knew was real.

Fate brings you what you most need at the exact right time.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Sin Lounge was bouncing with activity, and business was brisk. Alistar Quinn was working behind the bar, something he did often. It allowed him to relax and let go of the day or week's activities. He loved working the weekends, as the clientele was always prime and ready for anything.

He had his eye on several possibilities among the throngs of gorgeous men, but then he saw Von coming towards him, and he was wearing a serious look. Von Hale was his superior and handler. He obviously had a job to do, so fun and relaxation would have to wait. Alistar's weekend was over.

Alistar functioned outside the normal workings of Agincourt and the Kilconnor Coven. He was considered a ghost, a shadow, a fixer, and someone who quickly and quietly took care of problems. He didn't have a formal title or position, but he held status and answered only to Master Elan Kilconnor, second-in-command Sloan Dobre, and Commander Von Hale. They were the leaders of Agincourt Bank and the leaders of the Coven.

"There is a situation that needs your attention Alistar." Von stated as Alistar handed him his particular brand of beer. Von wasn't into hard liquor, but he loved a stout beer especially the imports. He handed Alistar a flash drive. "Everything you need is on there." Alistar stuck it in his pocket.

"Time frame?" He asked.

"Immediate." Von didn't use that stipulation often. Alistar turned and spoke to Danny,

who was working the bar with him and then left without any further discussion.

“Neal Shawn, my name is Neal Shawn.” Neal was trying to make his request understood but the guy on the phone was being deliberately obtuse. He wasn’t even trying to hear him or understand. “I’m personal assistant to Mrs. Reginald Ball and she requires the silver gown that was dropped off yesterday.”

“We’re closed.” The guy barked but didn’t hang up as Neal expected. He got the sense that the guy was playing with him.

"Mrs. Reginald Ball wants her dress. Do you know who she is? If you know the name, then you know that she gets what she wants." Neal knew that the guy was aware of the clout the Ball name held, but he was just being a dick about it.

"We called earlier and said the dress was ready, and no one showed up, so she will get her dress tomorrow." Neal received no such call, but arguing that point would not get him the dress, he ignored it and continued pressing the power and influence of Mrs. Ball.

"What is your name?" Neal demanded. "I need to let her know the name of the man responsible for her not getting what she wanted. The man who deliberately denied her the dress." There was silence for a moment, and then someone else took the phone. He wasn't certain, but he thought he heard laughing. The fucking bastards.

“If you come immediately I will open and give you Mrs. Ball’s garment.” The new man told him and then added. “I will wait thirty minutes if you do not show, you can pick it up tomorrow.” With that the guy hung up. Thank goodness things seemed to finally be working out and maybe he wouldn’t be fired. Neal gave a long sigh and jumped to his feet and rushed out the door.

Mrs. Ball, Franchesca Ball had threatened to sack him if he did not get her that dress.

She wanted to wear it to a dinner party that evening, and apparently, no other dress would do. He'd apparently somehow missed the call from the dry cleaners, and that had absolutely enraged Franchesca. It was just a dress, for fuck sake, but she went crazy at the thought of not wearing it to the party.

It wasn't even particularly attractive or flattering, but it was an exclusive designer that cost her husband many thousands of dollars. Whatever the reason, she was adamant that if Neal did not retrieve the dress, then he would be fired. She didn't joke about her threats, which were solid. If he didn't get the dress, he didn't need to bother showing up for work in the morning.

He drove through town exceeding the speed limit but felt justified since he couldn't lose this job. He was living paycheck to paycheck and didn't have any savings to fall back on. He didn't have time to look for another job and would have to lean on his brother Byron for help.

This scare made it clear he had to find more stable employment, but for now, he needed to keep this job, and that meant getting the dress and getting it to her on time. Tomorrow, he will start sending out his resume.

Neal pulled up to the curb in front of the dry cleaner, hurriedly jumped out, and ran to the door. He pulled the handle, and it did not move; the door was locked. He checked his watch, and it had only been nineteen minutes since he hung up from the call. He frantically pulled on the handle again and again and then cupped his hands on the sides of his face and tried to look through the large plate glass windows. It was dark inside, but there was a light by the counter, and he could see movement, but no one responded to his knocking.

There was considerable movement, and he could see that there were people inside. Neal pounded on the window, demanding attention, and then he got it. The scene, which moments before had been simple shadows and light, became starkly,

terrifyingly clear.

Neal stood frozen to the spot watching the action play out in front of his eyes. They were monsters teeth like sharks faces out of a horror movie and blood so much blood. It was a battle, and they looked inhuman. Shock froze him momentarily as his mind tried to catch up with his eyes.

"What the fuck?" He muttered nervously, and then he locked gazes with a pair of dark eyes that seemed to pierce through his soul. The vision was visceral. He felt it right at his center, and he could not look away. He was captive.

Fear crawled up his spine, and he began to shake with the realization that his life was, very likely, about to end. Whatever was happening was ugly and violent, and it looked like people were dying. He tore his eyes away just as the interior of the shop burst into flames.

He turned and ran to his car anxiously, started the engine, and pulled away, driving fast and erratically. He swerved around the road as his eyes kept glancing at the rearview mirror, trying to see if he was being chased. The man had seen his face and probably his car, and he would come for him. Neal's mind spiraled, running through all the horrible possibilities that lay ahead of him. His heart was pounding, and his breath was shallow, causing him to become lightheaded.

"Get your shit together." He chastised himself and noticed that his hands were shaking on the wheel. All thoughts of Mrs. Ball, her dress, and his job fled his mind as he focused on survival.

Thankfully, he reached his apartment complex and parked away from the lights under some tree cover. It was the best he could do as far as hiding his car. All he could think about was getting inside behind locked doors and hiding. Being in the open was scaring the shit out of him.

It wasn't long before he was in his apartment with the drapes closed and the lights out. He sat on the floor between his bed and the wall and tried to catch his breath. Fear was consuming him, and he knew he needed to call the police, but he was too afraid to move.

Finally, his need to do the right thing overwhelmed his trembling horror and he called and made an anonymous report that there was a fire at the drycleaner. He didn't go into detail about what he'd witnessed he was sure they would figure it out when they got there.

The silence and the darkness around him did not give him comfort and he began to second guess his hiding place. He needed to be more concealed so grabbed his phone and scooted across the floor to the closet. He got in closing the door behind him.

Alistar finished two of the rogues but two had escaped and would need to be tracked down. Four rogues working together was unusual they tended to be solitary operators. The young man pounding on the window caused enough distraction that two had escaped, but they would be found rogues tended to stand out.

He set the business on fire, a hot, cleansing blaze that would completely consume the bodies of the rogues, leaving nothing behind. With that taken care of, he went in search of the handsome little man he'd seen through the window. He was human, and he saw too much, so a mind wipe would be necessary.

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He left the building just as he heard sirens coming his way. Swift and stealthy, he ducked into the shadows and made his way north. He did a quick search of the license plate and came up with the name Neal Shawn, and his address was a few blocks away. He would take care of Neal and then go after the rogues.

Too bad they had to meet under such difficult circumstances which made further contact unlikely. He found the man absolutely delicious big eyes, full lips slender build all his favorites. He would love the opportunity to get to know him every inch of him. He smiled at the salacious thought and pulled into the parking area of the Milton Apartments complex. Neal Shawn lived on the fourth floor in room 427 and his car was in the lot.

The place had several cameras, but they were avoidable, and the main door lock was a keypad which was easy to override. Alistar was promptly inside and taking the stairs rather than the elevator. Nice place plain but functional and clean.

He wondered about the young man and just how scared he was at the moment. Alistar planned to make it quick and be out of his life leaving him with no memory of the chaos he witnessed. In a few minutes, he would be living his life easy and carefree and Alistar took solace in that fact since he was about to frighten the life out of the poor man.

Approaching the door to number 427, he noticed it was another easy keypad entrance and was careful to be as quiet as possible, not wanting the police or neighbors to be alerted. He didn't want to have to spend the rest of the night wiping memories.

Neal tensed when he heard what he thought was a floorboard creaking in the living

room. It might have been the product of his frightened imagination, so he listened more closely, and his heart dropped when he heard it again. Someone was in his apartment.

His heart tightened, his breath caught in his throat, and he squeezed his eyes shut. Panic was eating him alive as he struggled to remain still and quiet while tucked into the back corner of his closet, hidden behind an array of clothing.

The movement continued to get closer, and his bedroom door opened slowly, and someone stepped in. Silence ensued for at least a full minute before he heard them approach the closet. The flimsy door opened, and a man stood there in shadow, obviously staring down at him.

Neal continued to hold his breath as the man crouched down and reached his hand out towards him. The moment their eyes met he recognized him. He had been inside the drycleaner he was the man who saw him.

Neal looked at the hand and at the man and then back to the hand, wondering why he was asking and not just shooting him dead on the spot or dragging him from the closet. Without a word spoken, Neal took the hand and allowed the stranger to help him get to his feet and out of the closet. They stood there in Neal's darkened bedroom, just breathing and looking at one another. Then the guy winked, and Neal gasped.

"Are you going to kill me?" Neal's voice shook so badly he could barely get the words out.

"No, definitely not." The man said way too calmly and stuck out his hand once again. "My name is Alistar Quinn." Neal wasn't sure why, but he took the hand.

"I'm Neal."

“Pleased to meet you Neal.” His voice was so deep it was actually rather sexy and if the circumstances were different Neal would be appreciating the attention.

“I’d say the same, but I really do think you’re going to kill me.” Neal was being casually sarcastic with a man he just saw bloodying up the inside of his local drycleaners and then set it on fire. He must be losing his mind. There was no escape. He was completely at the man's mercy, and considering what he saw at the dry cleaner, mercy was not his strong point.

“I’m not going to hurt you.” Neal wanted to believe that but the way things were stacking up showed the truth to be something different. The man released his hand and nonchalantly put his arm around Neal’s shoulders. He was tall a good head taller than Neal and he was strong with big hands a muscular build and solid as a brick wall. He was dangerous and Neal did not have a prayer.

CHAPTER TWO

Alistar got his first inkling of what was happening when he opened the apartment door and took a deep breath. The scent, so full and deep and beautiful, enveloped him filling his mind and his heart with a yearning he had never experienced before. It pulled at his emotions making him focus on a need and fulfilling that need as soon as possible. The young man’s presence was calling to him on a soul level.

This wasn’t a simple attraction or want this was a blood boiling, heart stopping rage of desire that rushed through him. He stopped and looked around the small apartment taking in the items and layout and then began to move toward the bedroom. Anticipation and desire were taking him over. His adored one was in the bedroom his scent was overpowering and he needed to find him.

Along with the amazing aroma, there was also potent fear. His adored was crippled with fear, and it was tearing him up. There was little he could do to lessen that feeling

under the circumstances, but he had to try. He stood still and listened to the rapidly beating heart of the man hiding in the closet.

He crouched down to see his sweet one sitting in the corner, bathed in shadow. His eyes were as bright as they were when he saw him through the window. The vivid blue was like the water, deep and clear. He had felt a surge of awareness then, and he feels that same awareness tenfold now. This man was his everything, his future, and his life. He extended his hand and waited, wondering if he would battle his apprehension and take the offered assistance or if he was too frozen by his fear.

Alistar was surprised when he took his hand and allowed Alistar to help him out of the closet. He was stronger than he thought. They stood, and the silence was heavy, but it didn't last. The young one, Neal, wanted answers and assurances, and Alistar was eager to oblige.

"I'm not going to hurt you." Alistar reiterated, but it was obvious that Neal did not believe him. He boldly put his arm around Neal's shoulders and pulled him close, hoping the natural power of the Fated bond would begin to ease the tension and gain him some trust.

Neal was just his type, small, soft, and beautiful. Fate had been exceedingly generous, but the conditions of their meeting could have gone better. It was going to take time to gain his trust and consideration.

Alistar led him out into the living room and seated him on the small couch. "Can I get you something, perhaps a glass of water?" This wasn't his place, so he wasn't sure what was available.

"There's water in the fridge." Neal said haltingly his shaking had not ceased. Alistar's concern for the frightened man grew with each passing second. He got the water and noticed there was very little in the refrigerator and even less in the

cupboards. His adored was living a meager life and it angered him.

His loved one should have everything he needed or wanted. He looked at him across the room taking in his size and frame and noticed the dark circles under his eyes and the sunken cheeks. He worked too hard he could feel the tension and anxiety in the air. His lover's life was not easy.

He handed Neal the bottled water and sat down beside him. Neal took a tentative sip and then put the cap back on and set it on the coffee table. Alistar watched him seeing the subtle easing of his fear, but he was still swamped with worry. "Why are you here? What are you going to do with me?" Two reasonable questions.

He had planned to wipe his memory and then leave him alone but that was no longer possible. As his adored Neal's memories could not be touched and there was no way on this earth he was ever going to leave him but how could he say this.

"You killed those men at the dry cleaner," Neal said, and his tone was flat and lifeless, and Alistar didn't like it. Neal was attempting to disassociate in preparation for what he thought was coming.

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"They weren't men, not as you know them to be." That was vague, but Alistar wasn't sure how to explain himself. He was hoping that the awareness that comes with bonding would help him out a bit, but they had just met, and it was a slow process, apparently.

"What were they?" Neal turned to look at him with his eyebrows knitted together. His expression screamed, suspicious and life was returning to his tone. "They were holding a dress for me. They were going to open for me but I had to pick it up right away. I spoke to them on the phone just a few minutes before I arrived." He was speaking in broken sentences as his mind tried to figure out what was happening.

"They were rogues and a danger to our community."

"They were a danger to Charlotte?"

"A danger to the Kilconnor Coven and to Charlotte." Alistar watched as several different emotions played across Neal's features before he turned away and shook his head in frustration. Alistar was not trying to be obtuse, but Neal could only comprehend so much at this time.

"I don't understand." This was not working, and Neal's distress was growing.

"I know and I wish I could be clearer." Neal suddenly grabbed the remote and turned on the television and tuned into the local news. They reported on the fire at the dry cleaners and mentioned no loss of life and attributed the blaze to an electrical issue.

"They found nothing?" He looked shocked and confused, and he began to shake

again. Alistar held him and touched his forehead, which caused him to fall into a deep slumber.

He hadn't wanted to use glamour on him, but his health and well-being made it imperative. Alistar couldn't clear his mind, but he could give him some peace and rest for a few hours.

The glamour was of a low level and would not interfere with his thoughts or free will it simply allowed him to rest. It was the only thing available for an adored and only worked on humans. Fate understood the fragile nature of a human and the dangers they face when suddenly thrust into the paranormal world. It was a cheap shot but it was better than watching his adored have a breakdown.

Alistar picked Neal up into his arms and left the premises. He needed to get Neal somewhere neutral but safe. Two of the rogues had escaped when Alistar hesitated upon seeing Neal at the window. He didn't know if they had also seen Neal and if either would feel compelled to go after him. The had not yet been apprehended so that danger remained.

It was clear from Neal's explanation that they had lured him to the drycleaning establishment much as they had done to others. There was no dress waiting for him there, only death.

Alistar now understood why Fate had chosen this time to bring them together. The legend is that she brings you to your adored when they need you the most, or you need them. If he hadn't been there, Neal would not have survived the night. Fate cut things a little too close for his liking, but he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth. He had his adored, and now he needed to keep him safe.

He put in a call to Von letting him know the outcome of the mission and the fact that he found his adored. "Two rogues escaped. I couldn't give pursuit with Neal in a state

of panic, but they headed east that's all I know at this time."

"What is your plan with Neal?"

"I'm taking him to the Monarch Hotel it's coven owned so it will be safe for him there." Alistar explained.

"Why not bring him here to your quarters."

"I don't want to take him out of the city. He's really skittish and not trusting me at all considering how we met. I fear that if I bring him to Belmont he might continue to panic and close himself off."

"Do whatever you need to do, and I'm here if you need anything," Von assured. "I'll get someone on the rogues and keep you posted."

"Thanks." With that he closed the call and looked over at his sleeping lover looking so quiet and peaceful. He was a handsome man and Alistar intended to get him healthy and happy as soon as possible. The fact that he obviously did not take care of himself was troubling.

Alistar also wondered about a job that would force him to track down a dress at a drycleaner in the dark of night. It sounded abusive to him, but he would ask Neal about it once they were on more friendly terms.

If the job was too stressful, he would try to convince him to let it go and would help him find something more suited to him. There were many possibilities with the Coven and Agincourt where he could be comfortable and happy.

The Monarch Hotel was a luxury hotel with all the amenities and services anyone could possibly need or desire. He booked one of the honeymoon suites because they

were large, fully stocked, were located on one of the upper floors with a good view of the main street. He also made arrangements to arrive through the back entrance that gave access to the underground garage and private parking.

He gathered Neal back into his arms and jogged to the elevator. Within a few minutes, he was carrying Neal into the honeymoon suite and securing the door. Neal hadn't stirred throughout the journey and remained peacefully asleep, which was a blessing.

Alistar brought him to the bedroom and carefully laid him on the large bed. He grabbed the blanket from the foot and covered him, tucking him in and making sure he was as comfortable as Alistar could make him. The glamour would last a couple more hours, and once it wore off, he might wake, or he could remain asleep until morning. He then went through the room, checking the windows and his surroundings. He had nothing to fear at the Monarch, but it was a force of habit.

There were three other suites on this floor, but only one was occupied. He had a complete background check done on the occupants of that room, and they appeared harmless, but he preferred to have the floor to himself. That couple will be moved to one of the penthouse suites come morning. He doubted they would complain.

Alistar checked the kitchen, and it was fully stocked as was the bar they could stay there as long as they needed to. Once the rogues were found and disposed of the danger would pass. He doubted the rogues would pursue Neal but he didn't want to take any chances.

He then removed his coat and poured himself a whiskey before returning to the bedroom. This was not what he expected to be doing that night but even through it all and with heavy uncertainty filling the air he could not be happier.

He pulled a chair up to the side of the bed and took a seat. He then reached over and

took Neal's small, delicate hand in his and held it like the precious gift that it was. He raised it to his lips and took a small taste which would help speed along their bond.

Neal's touch and his taste went right to his core filling him with a sense of fulfillment and a quiet calm. It was difficult to put into words but the sensations wafting through and around him were simply amazing. He closed his eyes and drank it in letting it consume him and he remained like that, basking in the warmth and presence of his adored, for the next few hours.

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Neal woke slowly, very gradually, coming to the surface of wakefulness. He did not move anything but his eyes for the first few seconds. The memory of what had happened came back to him like a gentle flowing wave of awareness. As it washed over him, his body tightened, and panic began to build.

He looked to his left and saw the man from the drycleaner and his apartment sitting there his eyes were closed and he was holding Neal's hand. He didn't know what to make of it all, so he remained still and simply observed. He hadn't hurt him but he'd taken him from his apartment and now he didn't know where he was.

The room was dark, and the clock on the bedside table read 5:35. It wasn't long before the man, Alistar, opened his eyes and stared back at him. His dark gaze was so intense that, again, Neal could not look away. The hand that was holding his tightened just slightly as if he thought Neal might try to pull away and that he didn't want to lose contact.

He liked the touch and found a strange comfort in the embrace, but things weren't as they seemed even and they seemed pretty messed up. There was so much beneath the surface that was starting to come clear to him. He was seeing and understanding things that in reality, his reality, shouldn't make sense. He saw vampires, magic and monsters.

In a sudden rush of confusion, he jerked his hand free and leaped from the bed. His heart was beating frantically as his eyes darted around the room, looking for an escape.

Alistar did not move but his eyes followed Neal's every move. He straightened in his

chair, but he did not stand or approach him. He didn't have to since the door was behind him there was no way Neal was getting out of that room unless he dove out the window.

"Where are we?" Neal saw flashes of things images, sounds and scents they flooded his mind and his emotions. He saw Alistar and the rogues and others and it was blowing his mind.

"Honeymoon suite of the Monarch Hotel." He answered flatly but he was laser focused on Neal his every move his every breath. "You're becoming aware of the things around you." He said as if reading Neal's mind.

"It's confusing at first, but your understanding will continue to broaden. Your mind is opening, and the truth of your surroundings is becoming clear to you." He stood up very slowly and took two slow steps that put him at the end of the bed. It would be easy for him to grab Neal if he wanted to, but he stayed several feet away.

"What is going on here? What's happening between you and me? I feel weird. I feel like I know you." Neal had the strong belief that he knew Alistar that they had met or something he seemed so familiar all of a sudden but he was also certain that he knew no one named Alistar. He took another sensual step, and Neal found himself mesmerized by his movements and his body.

Everything about Alistar started to be important. His hair so black and perfectly swept back from his face, his eyes dark yet seemed to glow with warmth and affection. His hands though, they were Neal's primary focus since their touch had ignited something inside of him.

Neal was captivated by them, and if he were honest with himself, he was captivated by the entire man. Alistar had something going on, and it was fucking with Neal's thoughts and feelings. His emotions were all stirred up.

"The men at the dry cleaner, you said they weren't men," Neal repeated the statement from earlier, but now he had a better idea of what they were. "The rogues, they were vampires."

"Yes." Alistar's eyes continued to track him.

"You're a vampire as well, but you aren't crazy like the guys at the dry cleaner." Neal picked his words carefully as he made his way through the explanation.

"I'm a vampire, but I am not a rogue." Alistar took another tentative step toward him. "Do you know what a rogue is?" Neal shook his head.

"A rogue is a vampire who gives up societal norms and controls and leans into their blood lust. This lust soon leads to death, and once they have killed, then all control is lost. They are shackled to their need for blood, and nothing will stop them. They go on to continue killing until they are stopped. It's a mental deterioration that has no treatment or cure." Alistar's voice was saying such horrible things, yet the sound continued to soothe Neal's nerves. It was a crazy dichotomy.

"The person I spoke to on the phone who told me to come and pick up the dress, was he a rogue?" Things were falling into place, and it was terrifying.

"Yes, there were four of them, and they were waiting for you," Alistar said, and Neal felt a chill run up his spine.

"I'm getting it; things are making sense." He dragged his fingers through his hair, which was roughly agitated and on edge. "I suddenly know things that I didn't know a while ago. I see things and know they're real, even though I should be questioning. Any other day, I would be skeptical of everything that is happening, and yet I believe . . . I believe it all." He drew his eyebrows together in that signature fashion and closed his eyes.

Alistar reached out and touched his upper arm holding him in a gentle touch. The contact went waves of peace and stillness through him it made no sense but with it came further clarity. "Why am I seeing the world this way?"

"My nearness and my touch have opened the world to you. Secrets are told, and you see me, my people, and the paranormal. Nothing will be hidden from you now because you are destined to be one of us. You are destined to be mine." Alistar had a deep, heavy tone, but the words were soft and quiet, so easy on the mind.

"I love the sound of your voice." Neal couldn't hold back, noting the pleasure Alistar's voice gave him. It was odd to voice it, but the sound went right to his heart and did odd things to his mood and emotions.

"It has a strange effect on me. It makes me feel good and safe. It sounds nuts, I know; I just thought I'd tell you." Neal actually slapped his hand over his mouth in order to stop himself from rambling further. He was being ridiculous, but the compulsion to share everything was overwhelming.

CHAPTER THREE

Alistar was pleased with his honesty and directness. Neal was trying to stop himself from talking from saying too much, but it was clearly in his nature to speak his mind. The growing bond between them would simply make that impulse stronger. Trust was growing within him even if he did not recognize what was happening.

"You're not ridiculous, and I love the sound of your voice too." Alistar moved closer to Neal, not touching him but close enough to enjoy his amazing scent and feel the power of their connection. Neal smiled softly and looked up at him with those beautiful, big blue eyes. What a feeling it was to have his adored so close. "I also love having you near me and the way your eyes touch mine."

Neal was silent for a few seconds, and he just stared up at Alistar. "I'm pretty sure you're not going to kill me. I'm getting a sense of warmth and kindness from you that goes against the scene that I witnessed earlier. I do believe you were acting in someone's best interest, probably mine, and not just raging and killing and setting things on fire." He glanced nervously around the room once he made that statement, not sure he was saying the right thing, obviously.

"Thank you for the vote of confidence." Alistar joked and Neal gave him another smile which was lovely.

"I would like to go home. I need to process it this evening and figure out where I can go from here. I won't say anything to the cops about anything I saw; you have my word." That last sentence had a bit of unease attached to it, and that bothered Alistar.

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"The police are not my concern. There are no bodies rogue vampires burn with a blue flame, and nothing is left behind. The business appears to have ignited due to an electrical issue. There is nothing for the police to find or to question. The paranormal world takes care of itself." Alistar briefly explained the situation. "No one will bother you about it."

"That's good, I guess." He looked so uncomfortable and Alistar did not know what to say to make the situation better. The bond was slow, and his understanding was also slow. He knew a little but not enough to know what was happening. "I'd like to go home." He asked again and Alistar could not deny him.

"Okay, I'll take you home, but please be careful and watchful of your surroundings."

"Why?"

"I killed two of the rogues but two escaped. I don't know if they saw you or scented you but until they are caught please do not go out at night." Alistar didn't want to frighten him, but he wanted him to be aware of the fact that there could be danger for him in the dark.

"I'll be careful."

It was killing him, but he couldn't keep Neal there against his will. He'd hoped to have enough time together for the bond to take shape and perhaps get to know one another. But the violence and the blood were weighing on Neal, and he needed time alone to process what happened and what he was feeling. Alistar understood, but he did not like it.

“I’ll drive you home.”

“Thank you.” The relief was palatable, and it hurt a little. He put in a call to have some groceries delivered to Neal’s place. It was the least he could do. His adored needed to eat. He planned to have more delivered tomorrow perhaps a nice steak dinner would be good for him. With those thoughts he reached out his hand and Neal took it without hesitation.

Master Elan Kilconnor sent Rian Dobre and his team out to track down the two rogue vampires that had gotten away from Alistar. It was vital that they be neutralized before they could wreak further havoc on the city.

He received a call just before dawn that they had cornered and eliminated one down by the park among the tourist attractions. He had bitten a human, but Rian was able to save the man and get him care but also wiped his memory of the attack. Rogues could be such a nightmare, putting vampires and all the paranormal world at risk of discovery.

"I thought they would have stayed and hunted together." Rian comments to the Master. "They worked the drycleaning trap together."

“There is no understanding a rogue they act solely in their need for sustenance and at any cost. Nothing will stand between them and their next meal.” Master Kilconnor kept a tight rein on this city. He knew everything and everyone, and there was no place for rogues in his city. "Take care of it, Rian. Rogues are bad for business."

“We’ll find him.” After Rian left Elan put in a call to Alistar. Alistar was the ultimate fixer and while Elan appreciated the fact that Alistar had found his adored and needed time Elan found himself impatiently waiting for the man to be back on the job. Alistar was one of a kind the best at what he did bringing death and destruction to an art form.

This rogue gave Elan a bad feeling. There was something more to him than just rampant out of control thirst for blood and death which governed rogue vampires. The set up at the drycleaning business showed thought and design two things decidedly missing in all rogues.

The death toll at the business had reached three before coming to the attention of his lieutenants. Rogues are anything but subtle and are incapable of making such complicated plans. They are into immediate gratification and nothing else, so this rogue did not ring true.

He put in another call. "Sloan, find out everything you can on that drycleaning business Alistar took out last night. I want everything."

Neal called his brother as soon as he arrived home and asked him to come over. Byron was five years older than him and a good judge of people and situations. He just had a very level head and could see through most bullshit. Neal always ran things by him whenever he had doubts about something or someone. Byron's advice was spot on at least ninety-nine percent of the time.

"I can't come over right now I'm in the middle of a project, but I can put you on speaker and we can talk." Byron was a gaming analyst and a very good one no bugs or glitches ever got past him. He was always busy with a backlog of projects, but he loved what he did so it wasn't really work for him.

"Good enough." Neal just needed to hear his take on everything. He, too, put his phone on speaker and relaxed on the couch with a soft drink and a sandwich. Someone, he's assuming Alistar had bought him groceries, and the manager had given them access. He was touched by the thoughtfulness.

He drank his soda, ate his ham sandwich, and explained his entire night to Byron, including the strange way that Alistar made him feel. Byron did not interrupt, and

when finished, Neal sat silently, waiting for his take on it all.

He hadn't used the word vampire or paranormal just insane and bizarre and also peppered in wild and peculiar. He told Alistar he wouldn't tell anyone about the vampire thing, and he felt the need to hold to that promise.

"Is Alistar part of Agincourt? You know, that banking conglomerate?" Byron asked, not as shocked or dismayed by his story as Neal had expected. Neal wondered how he'd made such a leap, but he wasn't wrong.

"Yes, he works for Agincourt," Neal responded.

"Did he happen to tell you his job title? Is he part of the leadership, security, or a higher-level position?" Neal had no idea where Byron was going with this.

"He just said he's a fixer." That got him a response. "His supervisor or boss or the guy he answers to is Von Hale but I don't know what his title is."

"Holy fuck, Neal . . . Neal, wow . . . I don't know what to say." Byron was flabbergasted and struggling to provide some kind of answer. "He's a fixer for the Agincourt group?" He seemed to need further clarification.

"Yes, that's what he said. He was very kind to me, very thoughtful. He saved my life, Byron." Neal felt the need to defend Alistar.

"I'm coming over, and we have to talk." With that, Byron closed the call, and Neal sat there more confused now than he was when he started.

Alistar was angry and on edge not a good combination for a man like him. The rogue that escaped Rian was his focus at the moment. The one Rian caught was bald and wearing coveralls. Alistar remembered him. The other was blond well dressed in a

suit and tie and looked decidedly out of place with the other three, but he was taking part and exhibited similar violent and sadistic behavior as did the rogues. He would be dealt with likewise.

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Word was that he was spotted downtown at the eastern end which was less populated, and a bit run down. If the man was looking for victims this would be the place to hang out. Although he would stand out in his suit and tie. Alistar was searching a derelict building one of many on the block when he received a call from Master Kilconnor.

"I hear that you're tracking the rogue." He stated.

"Yes, sir."

"Why are you not with your adored?"

"He wanted some space and some time to process everything. The awareness was coming upon him, and he became overwhelmed." It sounded idiotic now that he said it out loud. They were a Fated pair, and they should be together building their bond.

"I understand the desire to give your loved one what he asks for, but I wouldn't stay away too long, Alistar. I have not found my adored yet, but I remember my father saying that the closeness between a Fated pair is imperative to build a strong and lasting bond." The Master paused for a second and then added the punch.

"The longer you are apart, the more the vampire in you will yearn for and crave your adoration. It will get out of your control, and the hunger will take over. Do not let that happen. I need you back as soon as possible and at full capability. Don't become weakened by confusion and uncertainty." His words were not simply a warning. They were an order. "I know you want to finish this job, but Rian is capable of handling it. Go to your adored and set things right. I need you, Alistar. I need you settled and

back on the job. You're my best."

Alistar was touched by his words. "I'll go to him sir and I will get this settled. I need him and he needs me." It was time to clear the air and lay it out to Neal, they were a Fated pair and he had to be feeling it too by now. The awareness would help him and ease the way. It had been several hours, and the separation was becoming distracting and painful. He thought he could stay away but it was proving impossible.

Byron entered the apartment and went straight for the bottled water before meeting Neal in the living room. He sat on the edge of the chair with his forearms resting on his thighs and he stared at Neal and shook his head. "You're dating a fixer who works for Agincourt and just so you know, Mr. Von Hale is one of the executive level managers at Agincourt."

"Not dating Alistar, but I just met him last night." Neal clarified.

"He saved your life and then provided you care throughout the night."

"Yes, he did." Neal felt good about that fact and found his need to support his new friend was outweighing his fears and confusion. He shouldn't be discussing Alistar with his brother a feeling of disloyalty was coming over him. He should put an end to this Alistar deserved his loyalty and protection.

"Agincourt Bank is a very powerful entity. A fixer is a problem solver who operates below the radar, and in regard to Agincourt, that would be someone who makes their problems go away. When I say go away, I mean they don't care how he does it. They just want it done. Your Alistar is a very dangerous man, and I would advise that you stay away from him." That wasn't what he wanted to hear, and honestly, he could not equate his Alistar with some heartless, bloodthirsty killer, although he did make short work of those guys at the dry cleaner.

“He dealt with some very violent people who were planning to eat me. He took care of me and seemed rather disappointed when I asked to go home. I think he wanted to hang out a while longer. I don't see anything wrong with the guy I was just spooked by everything.” Neal continued to defend Alistar; he felt a yearning in his heart, and he was beginning to miss him.

He wondered where Alistar was and what he was doing and if he was thinking about him. He suddenly felt stupid for needing to go home and talk to his brother. He should have talked to Alistar and worked this out with the source. He wasn't afraid of him, and he longed to be with him again. He couldn't keep his mind on the discussion as his thoughts continually turned to Alistar.

"They're not human." Byron blurted, pulling Neal away from his brooding thoughts.

“Who?” He snapped.

“Agincourt, they aren't human.”

"What are they?" Neal knew, but he wanted to see what Byron had to say.

"I don't know for sure, vampires maybe or demons of some sort. I know you don't believe me, but it's true they're something beyond human, although they look human." Byron took a drink of his water and then stared at it for a few seconds before continuing. "I saw them they're not human."

“You believe in vampires?” Neal asked.

"I do now." He said sharply. "I saw some things at the Sin Lounge a few months ago, and it was eye-opening." He took another drink, nearly draining the bottle. "A friend was working with an associate from Agincourt and told me some scary stuff."

“Who?”

"I don't want to say; I don't want to get him into trouble. Agincourt takes care of themselves, and they have people, like Alistar, who handle their problems quickly and cleanly." He looked pointedly at Neal.

"I know about the vampire angle, and I know there are some supernatural aspects to this town, but with that said, I have to tell you that I trust Alistar." Neal sat up and regarded his brother squarely.

"I was scared at first, but the longer I was with him, the more I understood and the more I liked the guy. I don't know the details of what he does for Agincourt, but I know that what he did last night served to protect us all. Those things were insane." He paused and took a deep breath. "I ran because I was inundated with so much information so fast that I couldn't take it all in. But now I'm starting to understand."

“Are you going to see him again?”

"I hope so." He surprised himself with his own words. It was how he was feeling, but he hadn't expected to put it out there like that. "I was overwhelmed by it all and needed some space to think, and he brought me home, no questions asked. He's not a bad man, Byron."

“If you're lucky he won't pursue this further.” Byron stated direct and to the point as always. “Most of the Agincourt people simply enjoy a good time they aren't into dating or relationships. A few are married but not many from what I understand.” He took another sip of his water and glanced absently around the room.

"The second in command, Sloan Dobre, recently got married to a local boy, a nondescript little man with very little to offer someone of Sloan's caliber. He probably functions as nothing but a blood bag, and I don't want that sort of future for

you."

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"That's gross, Byron. I won't be a blood bag."

"It could be you, Neal."

"Alistar is someone I hope to see again, and I hope she finds me interesting enough to date and have a relationship," Neal told him, but Byron kept shaking his head.

"Why did you bother asking me if you already had made up your mind about it?"

"I hadn't made up my mind but listening to you bad mouth him made me realize that he's really a good man and talking to you made me recognize that my feelings are growing for him."

"Well, when it blows up in your face, remember what I said." Byron sat back and finished his water. Byron was a good judge of people, but Neal was certain that he was not reading Alistar correctly. He never met him and never spoke to him, so he didn't know anything apart from his job title, which seemed to weird him out.

"I'll remember what you said," Neal repeated with a smile, and his brother tossed the empty plastic bottle at him. Just then, he received a message on his phone, a message he'd been waiting for since last night. It was his boss, Mrs. Reginald Ball.

"Don't bother coming to work again, ever; you're fired. That dress was everything to me, and you let it go up in flames. If you'd picked it up on time, it wouldn't have gotten destroyed. Don't bother shopping for another assistant position, I'll make sure everyone knows what a useless disappointment you are." Neal read it several times and then handed his phone to Byron.

"That was brutal," Byron commented.

"It was just a matter of time anyway. She was impossible to please." He then received another text from her stating that he could come and pick up his final check later in the day and it would be ready after five.

"Why doesn't she just mail it to you or use direct deposit?"

"I don't know. She's peculiar. I'd rather pick it up anyway. It could take her forever to drop it in the mail."

CHAPTER FOUR

After speaking with Master Kilconnor, Alistar was adamant that he reconnects with his adored and do it immediately. The distance he was feeling between them was becoming physically painful. He never should have left he should have come up with a reason or suggestion or something that would have kept them together at the hotel.

His plan had been to stay at the Monarch Hotel get to know each other, grow their bond and complete the claiming, at which time Neal would be fully aware and ready to start their lives together. Unfortunately fear and confusion took the upper hand and his adored fled for home and he just let him go. But he couldn't force him to stay there would have been nothing gained by forcing him to do anything.

There should have been more talk and more explanation and more touching and he would make sure all took place this time. He wasn't sure what kind of reception he would receive just showing up to Neal's apartment, but he hoped that Neal was missing him even half as much as he was missing him.

Overriding the keypad was a simple process and it struck him that the complex was far from even moderately secure. He took the stairs two at a time and very quickly

found himself at Neal's door.

This time instead of breaking in, he knocked and waited. There were sounds from inside he could hear his adored and he could feel and scent his presence, and it was wonderful. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes as the closeness washed over him.

There was someone else in the apartment; he heard another voice and felt another presence. He knocked again firmer and harder this time conveying the urgency that was coursing through him.

The door swung open and there he stood looking just as amazing as the first time Alistar had laid eyes upon him. His silky hair, soft skin and those wonderous blue eyes and best of all, he looked excited to see him.

"Alistar!" He said and pulled him inside. Alistar allowed himself to be pulled into the room and closed the door behind him. He saw the other person sitting looking at him and giving him a very decided once over.

"I'm so glad you're here." Neal erupted, and the enthusiasm was exactly what Alistar needed.

"I'm glad too baby. I missed you." He told him and then pulled him close slipping his arm around his shoulders. This was perfect the tension in his bones and the anger and frustration in his heart drained away. He boldly dropped a kiss to Neal's cheek ignoring the pointed stare from the man across the room.

"Byron." Neal exclaimed. "This is Alistar." Byron stood and took several tentative steps toward them, never taking his eyes off Alistar and the possessive way he was holding Neal.

“Alistar this is Byron my brother.” Byron reached out his hand and Alistar took it in his. Both men sizing each other up.

“Pleased to meet you, Byron.” He said with a pleasant smile.

"And you," Byron responded, but there was no smile or sign of acceptance. He was guarded and suspicious. Alistar used the contact of their hands to touch his mind and see what he knew but he could not break through. Byron's mind was untouchable, which was a surprise.

A flash of perception crossed Byron's face, and he pulled his hand away. Alistar wondered how much Neal had shared with his brother, perhaps too much, but a memory wipe was not possible. It would appear that Byron, too, was destined to be bonded. Whoever they were, they were going to have their hands full with that one.

"Come in," Neal said and began pulling Alistar further into the apartment. Neal moved toward the couch, and his brother Byron moved toward the door. Alistar was relieved that Byron did not plan to stay.

"I'll call you later, Neal," Byron announced as he glared at Alistar, and Neal nodded. "If you need me, I'm just a text away. I can be here in minutes." That statement was for Alistar's benefit and not Neal's.

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"He's quite safe Byron I promise you." Alistar answered. Byron continued to stare at him silently for a few more seconds and then left.

"He doesn't trust you," Neal stated the obvious. "But he'll come around; I certainly did."

"Did you miss me, baby?" Alistar teased and tilted Neal's face up to his and took those sweet red lips in a kiss that was heart-stopping. Neal wrapped his arms around Alistar's waist and joined the kiss with an ardor that was unexpected but thoroughly appreciated.

Alistar pressed him close, molding their bodies together while deepening the kiss and drawing out every sensation. This was what was missing: the connection between them and the heat that was building with each passing minute. He ran his hands down Neal's sides, pulling him even closer, and moved to trail sensuous kisses down his throat.

Neal held him, and he felt the warm brush of his panting breath against his cheek. "I missed you Alistar. The longer we were apart, the more I knew and wanted." He turned and softly kissed Alistar's jaw, and he felt Neal's hands smoothing salaciously along the curve of his ass. Neal was not shy, which was refreshing and allowed Alistar to be equally forward with his needs.

Neal was shocked by his own brazenness, but he also had no intention of curbing or tempering his desires. There was no danger here. He could feel the acceptance and Alistar's familiar heat in his touch and in his looks. He wanted him, and Neal was not going to deny himself. All his concerns of earlier and his self-righteousness were

taking a firm backseat to the need to know this man and to hold him close.

Clarity was taking over and things that had never crossed his mind before were becoming facts and his old reality was shifting taking on various new forms. None of this felt off or harmful it just was, and he felt himself accepting and understanding things that normally would have freaked him the hell out.

“This is all real?” He whispered.

"It's all real, my love," Alistar responded.

Neal took in the gentle kisses and the soft touches losing himself in the romance and excitement. Alistar belonged to him he could feel that truth in his soul and he belonged to Alistar. They just met and yet their bond was obvious and clear. He knew him before he met him, or he was simply delirious with desire.

“The desire is strong, and it is all true all the thoughts and feelings rushing through you right now are all true. Once we have bonded completely you will experience a full awakening, and you will know even more. The world of the supernatural will be wide open for you.” Neal wasn’t sure what he was referring to since so much had already been revealed he couldn’t imagine what else would come to light.

Alistar led him into the bedroom and quickly helped relieve him of his clothing. Neal was standing there in nothing but a quiet smile waiting for Alistar to say something. He ran his hands down Neal’s body, and his eyes took in every inch. The seconds ticked by, and the tension was building.

"You're so beautiful, Neal. Your body is flawless and perfect." His words were breathless, and the sound and feel of the sentiment sent a sensuous shiver down Neal's spine. "I want you; I want to claim you and mark you as my own. I need everyone to know that you are my adored."

A lot was being said, and Neal had the feeling that it was all very important, but all he could think about was getting Alistar naked and experiencing that incredible body close-up. "I want you too, Alistar." That's all he could get out before reaching for him. He pulled at Alistar's shirt and grabbed for his belt before Alistar took over and again lost the clothing in record time.

He watched the shirt come off, followed by the pants, and he was absolutely mesmerized, but when the briefs were removed, his want and longing shot to the moon. "Yes." He moaned the word and again reached for Alistar, who eagerly pulled him close, molding their bodies together once again

"I'm going to claim you." He said again and again Neal did not resist or object. He knew that it was life changing he felt that in his heart, but he also knew that he was ready for whatever Alistar asked of him. He wanted this man, and he wanted him forever.

He helped Neal onto the bed, laying him out on his back, touching and kissing him throughout, making Neal's head spin with pleasure and anticipation. He felt his heart beating fast and his breath labored and shallow. Alistar stretched out beside him and continued to touch and sensitize his tender flesh. Neal wasn't expecting it when Alistar suddenly bent and took Neal's hard, pulsing cock into his mouth and slid it between his lips.

The feeling was mind-numbing, and he was sure his eyes were rolling to the back of his head. This wasn't his first blow job, but it was the best by far. His lips, his tongue, and his teeth all played him to the heights of exhilaration. Neal tensed and relaxed with each movement, and the sensations playing through his system were building to an intensity that was beyond his control.

Alistar never slowed, never wavered, never quit. He took him down over and over and used his hands in a way that ignited every part of his body and mind.

Overwhelmed was an understatement as his vision narrowed and his breath caught in his throat. He gripped Alistar's shoulder, buried his fingers in his hair, and held on as he came harder than he could ever remember.

Alistar kept going, and Neal was losing his mind and couldn't open his eyes as he held his breath throughout the explosive wave of pure pleasure. He slowly came down as his heart slowed and his breath evened out, but the experience would remain in his heart and mind. Alistar was his focus and his center, and whether it be healthy or not, he craved this man.

In a move that was both swift and effortless Alistar was now above him looking down into his eager eyes with an expression that heated and electrified. Neal didn't know exactly what was coming, but he knew it was going to be epic. Alistar abruptly grabbed him, flipped him on to his stomach, took him by the hips, and pulled him up at the waist while pushing his head down to the bed.

He felt the cool air touch his lower regions just before he felt several lubed fingers penetrate, filling his tight entrance. He moaned and rolled his head where it was pressed against the bed.

Hot breath and wet kisses spread across his flesh, and the fingers stretched and forced their way further, sending a sharp thrill through his senses. Anticipation swamped him as Alistar slammed his large digits inside over and over, sensitizing and preparing him for more.

Nothing else in the world existed except for him and Alistar. All things faded in the ecstasy flooding the room. "Alistar." He panted his name and gripped the bedspread in his two fists. "I need you."

Before he could struggle to say more, Alistar spread out over him and plunged his hard thick cock deep within him, going to the base and stretching him full. Kisses

rained down on Neal's shoulders, and his hands continued to soothe and sensitize.

The feeling of Alistar over him and all around him was incredible. The scents and images filling his mind stirred feelings so deeply and brought to the surface a raw excitement that was unbelievable.

Alistar plunged inside over and over, needing every touch and experience all that his adored had to offer. He needed all of it. He needed his sweet lover in his arms forever. Neal moved beneath him like a dream, with every touch and sound going right to his heart. "Neal." He said his name just as the first thrill of release washed over him.

His mind and soul became singularly focused, and his vampire came surging to the surface. He felt his teeth punching forward in preparation, and this beautiful little man, his adored one, Neal Shawn, lay in wait. The surge was upon him, and he drove deep, emptying and filling his adored tight hot channel, and in that moment, he struck.

Alistar held Neal fast and sunk his teeth into the tender flesh of his shoulder. He drank in the exhilarating essence, feeling it pump through him and energize every part of him. The blood was sweet and powerful, just as legend stated, far more potent than any other.

He continued to hold him and drink, letting the bond seep in and take control. It would kick the awareness into full gear, and within a few hours, Neal would be fully conscious of the world beyond his. He would have a full and clear picture and understanding of Alistar and all the people of this strange new world.

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Neal already had some truths and was accepting as the revelations presented themselves. He would soon understand everything, and their lives together would honestly begin. The claiming and the coming together like this were so powerful in its own right and the added gift of the awareness made everything right and without misunderstanding.

He finished and licked the wound closed, leaving a small scar that would forever mark the beginning. "I love you, Neal." He whispered against his ear, not sure if he heard him or not. He just felt the need to say it because it was how he felt. Neal groaned salaciously and squirmed beneath him. "You're mine now, baby, all mine." He pulled out slowly, letting the loss and sensation touch Neal in gradual measures.

"You feel so good, Alistar." Neal moaned out the words and dropped down onto the bed, exhausted but pleased and satisfied.

"You feel like heaven to me Neal. I've waited so long for you, and it was so worth it." Alistar laid down beside him and pulled him into his arms and kissed firmly on the lips.

Touching and being close with his adored felt as natural as breathing. Neal was so real and honest and natural, and he truly loved the little human. Romantic love was not an emotion he was familiar with, but it hit him as clear as day that this man was the reason for the hope and the want and the wonder that filled his heart.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Has he arrived Maxwell?" Mrs. Ball asked clearly on her last ounce of patience.

Maxwell stepped back and put several feet of clearance between them. He did not trust her not to lash out at him since she had done it before when displeased.

"No, ma'am, he has not." He told her and watched her face contort in a rage. She needed him to complete her treatment. Maxwell had offered a replacement, but she was adamant that it had to be that one. It had to be Neal Shawn.

He decided to make the offer once again since she was obviously running out of options. They did not have any further connection to the young man now that she had fired him, but he wouldn't bring that up not in her current state of anger. "I can find you someone else."

She rounded on him and began pointing her index finger into his face. "I want him and only him, Maxwell. He's a useless human with no ties and no worth, and no one will miss him." She ranted. "I tried to clear his mind when he inadvertently walked in while I was pleasuring myself with a donor, and I could not clear his mind. He's destined to be an adored, and the power and the potency of his blood is priceless. I must have him before he is discovered and claimed. He must be mine, Maxwell."

"They're looking for me, and they think I'm a rogue like the others. Agincourt and the Kilconnor Coven intend to kill me." All he got was laughter from Franchesca. His torment and fears meant nothing to her. He had to stay in hiding but she would not stand for that.

"Perhaps he will come tomorrow. He's going to want his final check; he won't leave it." Maxwell suggested.

"I have half what I need, and it will not last until tomorrow. I must have him, and you will get him for me, or you will take his place." She swung around, giving him her back, and headed for the door, leaving him alone in the salon.

She was serious. He'd watched it happen to a previous employee. If he didn't bring that young man to her, it would be his blood filling her purpose. He had a feeling he was going to die soon, either at Kilconnor's hands or Franchesca's. No one lived long who worked in the employ of Mrs. Reginald Ball.

He had an address, and it was getting on past nine. The sun would be completely set soon. He decided to take two of the guards with him and simply take the man by force if he had to. He walked over to the window and looked out onto the street below. It was an old and monied section of town big, grand homes and manicured lawns and best of all everyone minded their own business.

Neal had settled into Alistar's arms easily and naturally. He couldn't believe that this was the same man who had frightened the life out of him such a short time ago. He was convinced at the time that Alistar was planning to kill him, but that belief left as soon as he experienced his warmth and his heart. The longer he was with him and the better he got to know him, the more Neal fell for him.

The supernatural aspect of it all just added a spice that was shocking and confusing at first but now seemed interesting and exciting. He felt no strangeness or danger, and that's what made the information, or rather the awareness, as Alistar called it, easy to accept.

A lot of things in Charlotte were making sense now that he knew the whole truth regarding some businesses and residents. It also cleared up some questions he had about his boss Mrs. Reginald Ball. She was part of the Kilconnor Coven he knew that now not sure how he knew it, but he did.

"Do you know Mrs. Reginald Ball? Her husband is a big wig in the arts. I think he's a collector or something and he's worth a lot of money. They live up on the gold coast with the other privileged few." Neal lay with his head on Alistar's shoulder loving the comfort and the safety he felt being so close.

“They’re members of the Kilconnor Coven, but you know that.” He smiled and kissed the side of his head. “The awakening is unfolding many mysteries for you.”

“It's quite eye-opening.” Neal agreed. “I work as her personal assistant, or rather I did. She fired me when I failed to retrieve that dress from the dry cleaner. That's why I was so desperate to get it, but in retrospect, I'm glad I failed. I'd rather lose a job than lose my life.” He snuggled close, clinging onto Alistar, and drank in the masculine scent. Nothing smelled as good as this man. Neal wanted to bathe in the aroma and cover himself in it.

“She fired you?” He sounded incredulous. “That bitch.” Neal chuckled at his contempt. “You don't need her. Besides, she has a reputation for not keeping assistants or household staff long. Be glad you're away from there.”

“The money was good, but the demands were constant and difficult.” Neal would miss the money but not the woman.

“You need anything, I will take care of it. There are better jobs out there and I will help you.” Alistar was unwavering on this point and fighting him on it seemed useless since he’d welcome the help in securing another job before his bills started coming due.

“Thank you.” He said and left it there.

Alistar moved to cover him and began spreading kisses across Neal’s shoulders and down his chest, covering him in rousing, spiningling sensations. Neal noticed that for a large man, Alistar moved swiftly and easily. He was suddenly on him, kissing him hard and fully taking his lips in a ravenous embrace while his hands worked Neal's body to a fever pitch.

“I want to claim you again,” Alistar growled against his ear.

"Every inch of me aches for you, Alistar." Neal wasn't sure where that sexually aggressive retort came from, but he wasn't going to temper it. His body ached, and his heart raced in anticipation of what Alistar could do.

He slid his body against Neal's and seated himself between his legs, rubbing their bodies together slowly and sensuously, building the want and the desire to a heated pitch. Neal felt the sweat gathering on his brow as he fought to resist the need to come. He held, and he waited, allowing the rhythm of their bodies to take shape.

"You're mine, Neal. You belong to this vampire forever and always." It came out like a chant, and Neal could not deny his eager desire for this man.

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“I belong to you Alistar and you belong to me.” He added and Alistar smiled showing those teeth that should frighten but instead exhilarated. Neal pulled him down for another breathtaking kiss.

The stroking and pressure were pushing Neal to the edge, and with a sharp whine, he began to thrust. "Not yet, my love, not yet," Alistar whispered and abruptly thrust inside Neal's tight channel, going deep and spreading his legs apart, pressing on his thighs to keep them apart and open him wider for Alistar's pleasure.

Neal could not stop the salacious moans that tumbled from his lips one after the other. The sensations that Alistar was stirring made his head spin and his vision blur. He'd never known such lovemaking such incredible lovemaking.

Alistar was filling him with each thrust, stretching him tight and making him feel everything. He picked up speed, and the thrusting became frantic yet rhythmic, and Neal felt a slow burn of heat begin and then grow into an explosion of sharp, exquisite pleasure. It shot through him, electrifying every nerve end.

Neal was everything he could have ever asked for in a man and in a lover. He was innocent and pure, adventurous and bold, and he only had eyes for Alistar, who was faithful, honest, and true. He plunged inside and held while the sensations surged through him, and he came with a roar filling and marking his adored once again.

He felt Neal tense, and then suddenly, his warm, sweet release filled the space between them, filling the air with sex, love, and amazement. He kissed the small scar on Neal's shoulder and then bit down, sending an electric shock through his adored and eliciting a second sweet release. Alistar drank deeply, filling himself with the

essence of his love.

Neal held him tightly, digging his fingers into his upper arms, eliciting a sharp mix of pain and pleasure. Alistar gradually eased off and licked the wound closed once again. The area was highly sensitive and brought forth intense sensations of pleasure whenever he touched it. He dropped several kisses to the new scar, and Neal shivered and moaned with each touch, which made Alistar smile with a satisfaction that was only possible with his adored.

"I love your passion everything you do you do with passion. Every time we come together I feel your passion and it keeps intensifying beyond expectations. I've never known a lover like you Alistar." Neal looked at him with admiration and enthusiasm.

Alistar moved to lay beside him once again and tucked him close to his him wrapping him in his arms. "Your understanding of me, us and my world will come on you fully and soon. You have gotten insights and a certain level of comprehension and discernment but within a few hours there will be no shadows remaining you will be clear." He kissed him softly on the lips needing a taste of their sensitive beauty.

"I understand a lot more than I did. I know what you are, and it doesn't scare me." Neal spoke so confidently and surely. "I can't say it wasn't a shock, but it's a shock I got over quickly. I saw you as the prize, and I wasn't going to get so caught up in my head and try to force myself to understand that I ended up losing you. I just let it wash over me. Somehow, I knew that to let it happen was the way to go, and now here I am."

"And now here you are," Alistar repeated, feeling like his life had just exploded in happiness. "There is much that you still need to learn and much that may be difficult, but I am here, and I will always be here. We are fully bonded, and that means we shall never part."

"That should be terrifying." Neal chuckled. "Our manner of meeting was outrageous, but even then, I felt drawn to you. It was the reason I asked for space. I thought I was delusional, but it wasn't a delusion. It was destiny. I'm not sure where I fit in this new world, but I'm excited to find out as long as you're by my side." Alistar felt his heart getting bigger by the minute and his love for this little human overflowing.

"I'll never leave you, and that I promise."

"I feel so much for you, Alistar."

"I feel the same, baby."

They snuggled close and burrowed into the blankets appreciating what they had and what they'd found. Alistar finally felt confident that his adored understood and was prepared for life as his partner, and forever lover. This was day one of a long and intense process, but Neal was ready for it he knew that as well as he knew he loved this man and would love him forever.

Maxwell pulled up and parked out front of Neal Shawn's apartment building. The two guards he brought with him parked across the street and walked over to join him. They weren't the typical guards that the Kilconnor Coven trained and assigned, and these men were specially curated by the Madam herself.

She found them as new recruits and brought them on staff early on hiring them outright and forging a loyalty that was both solid and sordid. It was much the same way she hired him and although he had good days in her employment the majority were trying and foul.

This was his life he'd chosen it, so he pushed forward and did all in his power to take care of himself. There was no teamwork in her organization it was all scramble and competition. She didn't kill many of the vampires in her household for that would

come to the attention of the Master, but she could torture, and torment and she was a master at both.

The humans and shifters did not fare as well they were there to provide and were not considered actual employees they were products, and their deaths were virtually invisible. Mrs. Ball was careful to not kill too many, but that number had continued to grow every year since Maxwell had begun working for her.

She brought people to her with promises and a show of wealth and sophistication, and then she killed them heartless and cruel. It had been going on now for five years ever since she decided that she needed special treatments to maintain her youthful appearance and that special treatment came at a terrible cost. It wasn't a cost to her, so it was acceptable in her mind.

She, somehow, found out that Neal Shawn was destined to be an adored one and she became obsessed with him. If it were ever discovered that she harmed an adored she would be killed and so would anyone that was assisting her. Maxwell thought about that for a moment but believed the biggest threat was Madam her anger was a certainty whereas discovering was only a possibility.

"His apartment is 427 and he lives alone. The main door is a keypad as is his apartment door. We should have no problem entering and rendering him incapable of resisting." He spoke to the guards, and they said nothing.

"Carry him out to my car by the front entrance. Put him in my back seat and make sure he is restrained. If anyone sees you make sure to do a memory wipe." They nodded, and the three of them headed inside.

"I'll order us something." Alistar stated and pulled out his phone. Neal was in the bathroom washing up and Alistar was still stretched out on the bed in all his naked glory.

"Thanks to you. I have a fully stocked kitchen, so I could prepare something for us." Neal offered as he stepped out of the bathroom and went straight to Alistar, placing a kiss on those delicious lips before sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Already ordered." Alistar smiled.

"I'll go pick up the living room and get us some drinks." Neal stood and Alistar took his hand looking up at him and his expression was so tender Neal caught his breath.

"I love you, Neal." Neal took a deep breath and let the words set in. They were powerful, and he wanted to repeat them, but lingering uncertainty kept him silent until the moment passed. Alistar stood and kissed him gently and excused himself to go to the bathroom.

Neal walked out into the living room and began straightening things mindlessly. His thoughts were consumed by the fact that he had just had the most amazing man in the world tell him that he loved him, and all he could do was stand there. He should have said something. Even if he couldn't repeat the words, he should have said something. He felt like a fucking idiot.

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He was so distracted that when he heard a knock on his door, it startled him. At first, he simply stared at the door, and then came another. It wasn't an urgent knock, just a couple of soft taps, but he wasn't expecting anyone and no one buzzed him from downstairs.

After a couple more seconds the knocking came again whoever they were they weren't giving up. Slowly, as if he had a premonition as to the danger hanging in the air, Neal approached the door. Just as he was about to look through the peep hole the door burst inward knocking him backward onto the floor he yelled for help as three goons rushed him.

CHAPTER SIX

Everything happened so fast that Alistar reacted on instinct. He was in the living room in less than a second upon hearing the upheaval and Neal's cry for help. Seeing his adored on the floor and three fucking vampires attacking him, Alistar went full-on assassin. Alistar grabbed the two large ones, pulling them away from Neal, and very quickly had them together on their knees and dying. He was trained in death, and he could deliver it swiftly and painfully.

The third tried to escape, but he wasn't fast enough. Alistar slammed the door shut and bent the man backward in half, staring into his eyes the whole time as he questioned him with a dagger pressed against his throat. Alistar remained deadly calm, and the man looked resolved to his impending fate. Neal moved away, crawling to the back wall well away from the bodies and the mayhem.

"Who are you, and why are you here?" Alistar demanded.

“He was supposed to be alone.” That infuriated Alistar.

"Who the hell are you?" He tightened his hold, bending him further and hearing the bones cracking. "Why do you bother my adored?" That had the man reacting and looking shocked.

“He’s your adored?” Alistar nodded and again tightened his hold.

"Why do you want him?" The man shook his head, not willing to say more, and Alistar was losing patience.

"You can't save him. She will come for him." That statement resulted in Alistar ripping his throat out. He dropped the man to the floor and looked back over his shoulder to see his adored cowering against the far wall. He wiped the dagger clean and stuck it back into his boot. He then stepped over the carnage and walked toward Neal, who was staring wide-eyed at him.

"Who were they?" He asked, his voice strained and breathless.

"Miscreants, lowlives not worth your concern." Alistar worried for his sensitive lover. He didn't regret killing them, but he regretted doing it in front of Neal.

“I know the one in the suit and tie the smaller one by the door.” He commented slowly.

"So do I," Alistar told him. "He's the rogue that escaped from the dry cleaner. He was part of that mess."

"He was at the dry cleaner?" Neal was startled and looked confused by the information.

“Yes.”

"I know him as Maxwell. He works for my former boss, Mrs. Ball. I don't know what his title is, but he was with her a lot. I thought maybe he was a companion of sorts." Alistar reached out his hand to Neal, who took it, and Alistar helped him to his feet. Neal wasn't ready to step away from the wall yet. The bloodshed in the room was keeping him back.

Alistar put in a call for a cleaner and notified Von of what had taken place. Neal held his hand and his arm and kept his face averted. “Let’s get you a coat and get out of here. I have people coming to take care of this and when they’re done you’ll never know anything happened.” Neal looked at him incredulously and comically so.

“I’ll know.” He said. "I don't ever want to come back here, Alistar."

"You don't have to, baby." He bent and kissed him on the forehead. "I want to take you to my place. I live in an apartment in the coven house in Belmont. It's a nice place you'll like it."

"Agincourt has their offices there. It's exclusive and elite, and only Agincourt people live there or are allowed in the area." Alistar understood that Neal was still in shock and not thinking clearly.

"It's the coven headquarters, which is why it's exclusive and private. Agincourt, in many ways, is used as a cover for the Coven. This will all become clear to you as you integrate." Alistar got Neal's coat for him, put it on, and then navigated him out the door and down to the sidewalk below. Neal held tight to him, and Alistar was cursing himself for killing those bastard vampires in front of him.

"Do not mourn those beasts. They would have killed you or brought you to someone else who would have killed you. Their intentions were vicious and cruel." Alistar

walked him over to where he'd parked and just held him for a few minutes, letting him calm down and get his bearings.

“They were vampires, Maxwell was a vampire.” He mumbled.

“Yes.”

“They’re all members of the Kilconnor Coven.”

"I don't know Maxwell. He is not a member, but as you know, the Ball family are all members. She and her husband are not a Fated pair. They do not have the bond that Fated pairs like you and I enjoy, and they no longer live together, from what I understand." Alistar did not keep up with social gossip, but the separation resulted in a financial issue involving the bank, so he remembered their breakup. It also drove home to a lot of vampires the importance of waiting for your Fated love because nothing else would do, and nothing else would last.

“She had a lot of humans working for her.” Neal seemed to be rambling, but that observation was important.

“Are you sure of that?” Alistar asked and carefully moved Neal into his car and buckled him in.

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“Yes, I mean I wasn’t aware of the vampires around me, but I knew several of the other staff and they were like me just work a day people from Charlotte. They weren’t vampires were they?” Neal turned to look at him and waited for his response.

"I don't know. I never had much to do with them, but most coven members hire other vampires because humans are fragile and can be problematic if they happen to see one of us acting out our vampire selves." Alistar wasn't sure how to explain it, but it was easier to hire other vampires than to go through the difficulty of having a human on staff.

Neal looked forward and nodded. "Yeah, that makes sense. You're right; no one has worked for her very long. The humans especially seemed to disappear quickly."

“Master Kilconnor requires those that have humans on staff to keep him abreast of who they are and other specifics. Humans can be taken advantage of, and he makes sure that does not happen.” Alistar started his car and pulled away from the curb. He was relieved to be taking Neal home with him. He would be safe at the Coven house.

Alistar wasn’t going to relax until they figured out why those vampires came after Neal. Maxwell had been at the drycleaner and had participated in baiting Neal with his employer’s dress. After that fell through and his cohorts were killed he still tried to come for Neal when he could have gone after any human. What was so special about Neal? Until he answered that question he was going to stay very close to his adored.

“What about Byron?” Neal erupted. He turned to Alistar consumed by fear and panic and grabbed at his arm. “We have to go back what about Byron?”

Alistar pulled to the side of the road and parked before giving Neal his full attention. "What has you so afraid? Why should Byron be in danger?" He asked and put his arm around Neal comforting him with his touch.

"What if they go after him? What if he stops by, and they see him and target him?" Neal was panicking, and his anxiety was taking over, but Alistar knew he had to solve the problem and not try to convince him there was no problem. He understood worry and anxiety and how it can build, and he wanted his love to be at peace.

"Call him and let him know that you're going to be staying at my place for a few days and inform him that if he wants to stop by and see you he is welcome."

"You're okay with that?"

"I'm okay with anything that makes you happy, my love." Alistar cupped the side of Neal's face and turned it up to him and kissed him thoroughly. "You're my adored and I will do anything for you."

"Thank you, Alistar."

"I'll also have someone keep an eye on him until this issue is resolved. He won't know they're there, but you can then be assured of his safety." Alistar was blessed with a big smile and a heartfelt hug.

"Thank you that makes me feel so much better." Alistar put in a call to Von who assigned a guard to Byron Shawn. He had no problem or qualms with giving Neal everything he needed.

"Maxwell and the men he took with him failed, Madam."

"Are they dead?" She demanded.

"Yes, they are dead, and the Coven has disposed of their remains. They have not connected them to this household or to you."

"Where is Neal Shawn?" She turned on the messenger and grabbed him by the throat. He was a clever vampire, but she easily overpowered him.

"He left with the vampire who killed them. That vampire also killed those at the dry cleaner. He was sent by Kilconnor to eradicate the rogues." He coughed and tried to get her grip off his neck but to no avail. "It's only a matter of time before they trace all of it and all of them back to you. You need to leave; you need to hide."

She tightened her grip as her eyes took on a blood-red hue in her anger and thirst. "That human will not best me. That little bastard will not get away from me." She threw him across the room, and he slammed into the far wall. "Find him and bring him to me."

"I will bring you another. He is not worth it, Madam." He pleaded with her.

Franchesca lost it on him. She flew across the room, landing on top of him, screaming and tearing at his face. He tried to throw her off, but she dug her long nails into his neck and began ripping away the flesh. She continued with her nails and her teeth until he lay still and silent on the floor. She twisted his head and gouged at connecting tissue until she could tear it off and held it in her hands when one of her private guards stepped into the room and froze at the bloody scene before him.

She took the head and tossed it toward him, and it rolled to a stop at his feet. "Are you going to tell me it's too dangerous to go after Neal Shawn, or are you going to bring him to me?" She growled as blood dripped from his mouth and hands.

"I will bring him to you." The man said and promptly left the room.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Alistar didn't begin to relax until he pulled into the garage of the Coven complex. The building was large and housed all of Coven leadership along with guards, soldiers, support and surveillance personnel. Other members resided in neighboring buildings and structures within the Kilconnor compound.

His adored would be safe in his quarters and he planned to convince him to move in the sooner the better. He had no desire to return to his apartment so he might as well make the move now.

"This is really nice." Neal had commented on the landscaping and then the architecture and now the interior layout. "It looks like this place has been here a long time. This isn't any kind of new build is it."

"It's been here a couple hundred years but has been updated and expanded over the years. Master Kilconnor maintains the historical look so the old and the new blend." Alistar didn't know a lot about the structure, but he knew that much. Architectural style and designs were not his interest. He could appreciate a nice look, but he didn't dwell on it.

"Everyone looks so serious." Neal whispered and stepped a little closer to Alistar as they made their way down the hall on the third floor to Alistar's apartment.

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“Don’t let it bother you.” He told him. “They’re just showing off for the new guy because they think you’re cute.” That got a chuckle and Alistar slipped his arm around Neal pulling him up close.

He opened the door and ushered Neal inside his apartment. “It’s three bedrooms, two baths, large kitchen and dining room and the living room has a view of the city. Feel free to make yourself comfortable and please make it your home.”

"This is huge and lovely. You have good taste, Alistar."

“I hired someone to decorate the place all I asked for was don’t make it frilly, but you can do anything you like. You have no restrictions.” He pulled him in for a hug and a kiss. “Okay with that said, I want you to move in here with me we’re bonded and our lives are entwining so why wait.”

Neal looked up at him and then around the apartment. “You think you’re ready to have me invade your space?” he asked.

He again pulled Neal in for a full-body hug. "I've been ready for you for years, baby. I am so glad you're finally here." He kissed him hard, going deeply and claiming what was his once again. He pulled back gradually, trailing kisses along his jaw and down his throat. "You taste so good, baby."

"Apart from the blood and death, this is like a dream come true. I can't believe I've been so lucky to have found you."

“I’m the lucky one, my love.”

"I'm seeing things for what they are now. The awakening you spoke of simply pulled back the blinders and cleared the haze that kept things secret and out of sight." He smiled so relaxed, and it pleased Alistar.

"This world is an amazing place a little scary with the magics and the monsters but the paranormal in general is not anything to be afraid of. The vampires and shifters are pretty basic actually." He chuckled again and Alistar was discovering how much he loved that sound.

"Are you calling me basic, baby?" Alistar teased.

"Not you, other vampires." He laughed. "You're amazing, wonderful, gorgeous and I love you Alistar." The last few words were spoken in solemn sincerity and they were the words Alistar waited to hear.

"I love you to, baby." He said and Neal pulled him down for a kiss that was both chaste and hungry. He felt Neal explore and escalate until he suddenly pulled back panting wildly and smiling. Alistar loved his enthusiasm.

"I want you so badly I don't know if it has anything to do with my near death or what, but I need you Alistar." Neal was being very open with his feelings and Alistar was feeling the same but first he wanted his adored to eat. The dinner he'd ordered earlier was lost and forgotten in the chaos and his adored needed food before anything else.

"I'm going to order you something to eat. I know you haven't eaten much today, and you need to keep up your strength." Alistar urged, and after a few seconds of consideration, Neal nodded and admitted he could eat.

"What would you like?" He asked and pulled out his phone.

“Something light since it’s so late.”

"Soup, salad, sandwich, what would you like?"

"Soup and breadsticks. I love breadsticks." Neal told him and Alistar put the order in the kitchen. "It will be delivered in approximately thirty minutes. So, while we wait, I'll get you something to drink." He went to the kitchen and called out. "Fruit drink or protein drink?"

“Fruit drink.”

"You got it, baby."

When he entered the living room with the drinks Neal was looking at some snap shots that were framed and on the wall. “You have to tell me about these?” He said.

“They’re family that are no longer with me.” He pointed out his parents and a sister, Trista. “My parents died many years ago, but they lived full and happy lives. Vampires have an extended life span and so will you, now that you and I have bonded. My mother was human and my father vampire. I took after my father and have full vampire abilities, but Trista took after our mother.”

“She didn’t get any vampire abilities?” Neal asked.

"She was fully human and unfortunately lived a human life span. It was very hard on my parents. We'd hoped that Trista would find her adored within the paranormal community, which would extend her life, but that did not happen."

“It’s only you now? You have no other family?”

“Only me now.” Alistar never considered himself alone since he always felt like his

family were with him. "How about you do you have family other than you brother Byron."

"No, it's just me and Byron." He didn't seem sad about it, more resigned. "I never knew our dad, and he left shortly after I was born. Byron told me it was no great loss. He wasn't much, and we lost our mother when I was fifteen and Byron was twenty. Byron took over guardianship of me until I was eighteen."

"I see now why you two are so close."

"He's a good man, and he'll warm up to you. Just give him time."

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"As long as you've warmed up to me, that is all that I ask."

"I'm very warm, sweetheart, very warm," Neal responded.

"Sweetheart, is it." Alistar teased and pulled Neal back into his arms.

"Lover?" Neal tried with a half grin.

"Lover is good, too." Alistar trailed kisses down his neck and along his shoulder. Neal's hands smoothed down Alistar's chest and settled on the growing hardness that was becoming so prominent between them.

"Is this for me?" He whispered and took him in hand.

"Always." Alistar answered breathlessly. All talk ended and Neal slid down Alistar's body to kneel before him. He looked up at him with that need and desire clear in his eyes and Alistar felt it right to his bones.

Neal knew he was being forward and demanding, but it felt right. He wanted to touch and taste his lover, and he wanted it now. Alistar remained still and watched while Neal opened his pants and pulled them partially down, exposing the thick hardness within. Alistar was built like no one Neal had ever seen. He was magnificent, but thankfully, he managed to keep that observation to himself.

Lately, everything he thought seemed to pour out of his mouth, not that he was ashamed or embarrassed by any of it. His thoughts and feelings were valid, and right now, all he could think about was getting that hot, pulsing cock between his lips.

He let out a salacious moan before grabbing the base and slipping the girth into his mouth, taking it as deep as possible. The flavor was sharp and tangy and set his heart on fire. The need to devour was fierce, and he experienced a wildness that pushed him to take what he wanted.

Alistar threaded his fingers through Neal's hair, cupping the back of his head and taking some control. He thrust gently, finding his own satisfaction within the moist heat of Neal's mouth. Neal glanced up at him and again saw the raw desire and the urgent need in his stance and expression. It pushed Neal to go harder and deeper, taking all he could, stroking and building the sexual momentum to an unbearable height.

Neal took him down his throat as Alistar thrust forward and came in a heated rush, filling Neal's throat and mouth with his warm essence. The taste was glorious, and the sensations that raced through him were intense, sending a shiver down his spine and forcing a desperate moan from his lips.

Alistar grabbed him under the arms and lifted him to his feet and planted a kiss of similar desperation to Neal's lips as he held onto Alistar's upper arms. The kiss went on and on until there came a knock at the door. Neal jerked back in surprise and Alistar laughed softly.

"It's just the food deliver my love." He assured and quickly tucked himself back into his pants and zipped up. Neal headed to the bathroom and washed up before meeting Alistar back in the living room. Alistar took their glasses and walked over to the kitchen. "I'll get us more to drink I'm sure you're thirsty." He teased.

"I'll answer the door." Neal offered, and Alistar nodded.

Elan received the report on the drycleaner and Franchesca Ball two entities he believed were behind the recent rash of disappearances of both human and

paranormal staff. The thought of what was taking place made his blood boil with rage at the fact they operated in the open and no one including him had a clue what was happening.

The only reason the situation came to light was because someone spotted a suspected rogue at the drycleaner. It was believed isolated and a single issue but as it turned out there was something much more widespread and insidious going on. The rogues were working for someone.

“Does the practice extend to anyone else in the Eastover area?” Elan asked Rian who had conducted the investigation and provided the report.

"Not that I have found it, but it is very unlikely that the closest neighbors didn't have some clue what was happening and chose to ignore it. It's been going on for nearly five years, so someone knew something." Rian's anger was barely in check.

“Find out if they knew and deal with them accordingly. I leave that in your hands, but Franchesca is mine." Elan would make an example of her and her minions. There is no room in this world, Elan's world, for monsters like her, and he would weed them out wherever they dare to take root.

“Her husband Reginald is not involved and seemingly unaware of the activities.”

"Inform him after we complete the purge, not before. Check him out thoroughly and his associations."

“Yes, sir.” Rian was about to leave Elan’s office when he received an alert from the underground garage. “I distributed pictures of the vampire guards and staff working for Franchesca to make sure none would show up here on Coven grounds, and I just got a hit from Dax in the garage. He recognized one of the guards and said he arrived here an hour ago."

“Find him do whatever necessary but find him.” Elan exploded. He then put in a call to Alistar to warn him to keep his adored close but there was no answer. “Check on Alistar first, he brought his adored back to his quarters last night and he’s not answering his phone.”

"Yes, sir." Rian rushed from the office, and Elan arranged to visit Eastover.

Alistar was refilling their glasses when he heard what sounded like a scuffle at the door. He raced from the kitchen in time to see some asshole vampire holding Neal by the neck with a knife positioned under his chin. “Stay still, baby.” He told Neal.

"What's your plans?" He spoke to the vampire, who looked out of his depth and on the edge of panic. He had to keep him calm until he could get Neal out of his clutches. A nervous vampire with a knife was not a good combination.

"I'm taking him with me. Back up, or I'll kill him right here in front of you." He threatened.

"And then I would rip your head off and feed it to the dogs," Alistar stated cold and final.

"I'm leaving, and he's coming with me." He stuck the tip of the knife into Neal's flesh, drawing blood.

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"You're not leaving here alive; it's just a matter of how painful your death will be." Alistar started stepping from side to side, all the while watching for an opening. The guy was losing his nerve but was not yet ready to give up. "Let him go, and I will make it quick, but harm him, and I will make you suffer for days before I finally give you the sweet release of death." The guy started to back up still holding Neal and pulling him backward with him.

A knock at the door behind him startled the guy just enough to give Alistar the edge. When he glanced to the side, Alistar grabbed the knife he was holding to Neal's throat by the blade. It cut deep, but Alistar held tight and twisted it backward. He pulled Neal free with his other hand and watched him scurry away on his hands and knees.

Alistar held the knife to the guy's throat and opened the door behind him. Standing there were two guards who stepped back. "I'm going to kill you, but I'm not doing it in my quarters in front of my adored." He told him, and once they were far enough down the hall, he buried the knife in his throat. He held his gaze, watching the life drain out of him.

"She was going to kill me if I didn't bring him." He stuttered as blood poured from his mouth.

"Franchesca Ball?"

"Yes, she wanted the power of his blood. She has killed many." That was the last he had to say as his body slumped and Alistar dropped him to the floor. He wiped his hand on his pants and then turned to the two guards.

“I want him incinerated.” He ordered. “I don’t trust that fucking witch. Everything associated with her must be burned.”

“Master Kilconnor is handing it and there will be nothing remaining when he’s finished.” Rian told him as he came up behind the guards. “I’m sorry your adored was bothered. Go to him and let us finish this.”

Alistar nodded his appreciation and hurried back to his apartment eager to get Neal into his arms and to assure him that the nightmare was now over.

Elan entered the property with a team of guards who fanned out and searched the area, killing those who were a party to the slaughter and rescuing those who were being victimized. It was a very dark day for the Coven, and it was made evident by each horror that presented itself within that mansion.

He found her in the basement pool room, readying herself for a private soak. The pool was small, approximately twelve by fourteen feet, and it was filled with blood. The entire room smelled of pain and death, a sickening sweet odor that turned the stomach. She was dressed in white chiffon and looked surprised to see him.

"Who let you in? Why are you down here? You can't be down here." Her angry outburst had no effect as Elan walked toward her.

"You're an abomination." He stated, and in one swift move, he swung his sword and took her head off. One of the guards came up to stand beside him, and he looked shell-shocked.

"There is so much here, Master, so much awfulness but no survivors."

“Neal survived,” He told him and that one little victory seemed to ease some of the sadness. “Burn it to the ground and salt the earth.” He ordered as he walked away.

Alistar found Neal by the door, waiting breathlessly for his return. The moment he stepped into the apartment, his arms were full of his adored one. "It's okay, my love. He's gone, and you're safe."

"But what about the next time? When will they stop coming for me?" he cried into Alistar's chest.

"No one will be coming for you, the Master has ended it," Alistar explained who was behind it all and her reasoning for the torment she caused.

"If you hadn't come along, I would have been killed like all those others." He trembled at the thought.

"Fate made sure I was there for you."

"Thank you for staying close and not letting me do anything stupid. I can't believe I worked for a serial killer. I may not have the nerve to leave this apartment for days, maybe months." Neal held tight to Alistar.

"You're safe, I'll always be there for you." Alistar kissed the top of his head and led him into the living room. "I love you, Neal."

"I love you too, Alistar."

"I'm going to order you another dinner and hopefully this one you'll be able to eat." He chuckled.

"You answer the door this time."

"Definitely."

THE END