

Dreams

In the dreams they shared, there was always desire.

It was the slip of a hand across silky, golden skin. The sigh of quick breath past the lips he always longed to kiss, both in these dreams and in life.

The way she thrust back her head and moaned as he caressed her breasts, the gleam of her red hair under the candle-lit warmth that always seemed to encase these moments between wakefulness. Whether that light was by her design or his didn't really matter, because all that *did* matter was the two of them.

And these precious moments of intimacy.

The dream went on. He watched the rapid beat of the pulse at her neck. Could almost smell the thick sweetness of the blood that ran underneath her skin. Blood he ached

to roll across his taste buds yet again.

She moaned his name, a sound sweeter than life itself. He reached for her, pulling her spirit towards him, wrapping his own around her. Claiming her with a completeness that she would never allow in wakefulness.

But she was his in a way she would probably never understand. He might one day be forced to walk away, but he could never let her go completely. She was a part of him. He'd shared his blood with her and tasted her soul, and there was no turning away from the consequences of that. Not for one such as him--a creature who was more myth and magic than darkness.

He was something that should not be, even in this age of vampire rights and human acknowledgment--if not complete acceptance--that the things that went bump in the night were very real indeed.

But for now, there was just the two of them and this dream. It was everything and nothing, and it would do until they met again in the flesh.

Which would be soon. They'd been apart for too long now.

So he kissed her, caressed her, loved her, until the heat that rose between them would not be denied. And then he took her, their dream bodies merging, hot phantom flesh against hot phantom flesh--desperate, hungry and demanding.

The intensity, the desire, rose to even greater heights, until they were shaking with the need of completion. And as she came, he bit her, sinking his teeth her imaginary flesh, into her vein, until both her blood and her being rushed into his mouth. And it was so sweet, so rapturous a sensation, that he came, his body thrusting against hers urgently, as needful as she.

But however sweet the dreams, their aftermath was always sour. Because there was no lying in the sweaty heat of each other's arms. No holding her sated body until sleep claimed them both. No savoring the delicious rush of warmth through his body that her blood always provided.

There was nothing more than a fading into blackness, until the feeling of utter loneliness once again filled the void of his world.

He sighed and opened his eyes. The pleasure he'd shared in the dream still assuaged his body and his heart beat with more vigor than usual--though it was nowhere near that of a human in normal circumstances, let alone after lovemaking. And yet he felt incomplete. The dreams were good, but he wanted more. Wanted her, for real and in the flesh.

Up ahead, the lights of Melbourne twinkled, neon bright against the clear darkness of the night. He hadn't actually come down here to see Riley Jenson. Indeed, given

how angry she'd been after his ultimatum that she either include him in her life willingly or he'd force her compliance, he'd pretty much figured he'd better let sleeping dogs lie for a while. And given she was a werewolf, that was no mere figure of speech--as bitches went, she could be pretty damn ornery when she wanted to be.

And yet the very thing that annoyed him the most was the same thing that pulled him towards her--her vitality, strength, her independence.

He wanted that tonight. Wanted her.

He leaned forward and pressed the button that lowered the screen between him and the limo's driver. "Henry, there's been a change of plans. Head for Ms. Jensen's address first."

"Yes, sir." The driver's voice was polite and unfazed. But then, Henry had been working for him for several hundred years now. The unexpected had become somewhat commonplace.

The streets slid by smoothly and the anticipation in him grew. Odd that after all these years a mere pup could have him feeling so alive again--even if she did also frustrate the hell out of him with her werewolf morals and free-and-easy ways.

But he had every intention of changing that. Eventually. He was not fool enough to think such things

would happen overnight, however much he might wish otherwise.

The limo came to a halt outside the dour brick building that was her home. He looked up, seeing no lights shining from the top floor windows. She was still asleep, then.

He fought the images of sliding naked into bed beside her, of caressing her flesh for real and not just in dreams, and climbed out as Henry opened the door. "Go to the hotel and get some rest," he said, breathing in the cool night air, letting the heat and life of those within the building flow through him, "I'll call when I need you."

"Thank you, Sir."

He smiled at Henry's formality, then walked up the grimy concrete steps and went through the door. This building was rarely locked, the inhabitants apparently unconcerned about the drug-related crimes that abounded in this area. Odd considering the only ones truly capable of protecting themselves in this building were Riley and her brother.

He climbed the stairs rapidly, making little sound. The thick heat of life swam all around him, the melodious beat of blood through human flesh--such a wonderfully haunting sound.

He reached the top floor and opened the stairwell door.

A solitary globe gleamed forlornly down the far end, leaving the rest of the hall to shadows and darkness. His friend, this darkness, and Riley's. Perhaps that was why she never insisted that maintenance replace all the broken lights. As a part vampire, she could hide in the shadows as well as he.

He walked to her door, letting his senses expand, feeling for her. She slumbered, waiting for him, as insatiable in her dreams as she was in life.

She wasn't alone in the apartment, though. The beat of another heart echoed through the silence. Rhoan, her brother, undoubtedly.

He smiled and entered her apartment. She'd invited him over her threshold long ago, and there was nothing now that she could do to keep him out. It was one of the few vampire laws literature actually had right.

The apartment was in its usual mess, clothes and newspapers strewn everywhere. Neither she nor her brother enjoyed housekeeping, though Rhoan tended to be a little more domestic than Riley.

His smile grew as he headed for her bedroom. Only to stop short in the bedroom doorway.

The other life he'd sensed wasn't Rhoan. She might be asleep and dreaming of him, but she was sharing her bed with another wolf. His nemesis, and rival for her

affections, Kellen Sinclair.

Rage rose in him, thick and fast, and for several seconds it was all he could do not to rip the other man from the bed and throw him out of the apartment. Not out through the door, but through a window, so that he could smash down onto the pavement below and be gone from her life forever.

Damn it, she was *his*. His being had claimed her, and he would *not* willingly share her, no matter what she thought or desired.

She must have sensed his anger, because she stirred under the sheets, murmuring something he couldn't quite catch. She turned, the sheet slipping down her body, revealing the golden skin and full breasts he'd been caressing in his dreams.

Desire stirred beneath the anger. He wanted her for real, not just in dreams. Right here, right now. And he'd be damned if he'd walk away and leave her in the arms of his rival. Not tonight, when loneliness was high and his body and soul ached with need for her.

His gaze switched to Kellen. Slipping into the other man's slumbering thoughts was easy enough, as the fool wore no shields against psychic intrusion. His dreaming state was filled with sated thoughts and happiness, and again the anger stirred through Quinn. It would be easy enough to

slip deep into unconscious thought, to command Kellen to walk away and never come back. To never touch or contact Riley again.

So easy.

So, so tempting.

But Riley would wonder why he'd walked so abruptly, and she'd go after him for a reason. Given her considerable psychic talents, it wouldn't take her long to uncover his interference.

And that would only make her angry. Possibly angry enough to end their somewhat tenuous relationship. The risk wasn't worth it, not until he was sure of her feelings.

Though nothing could stop him from ordering the man away from her side now.

He connected lightly to her sleeping mind, keeping her unaware. Then he forced the young wolf up, ordered him to dress, and marched him out of the apartment. He stopped at the door, but kept the mental leash on the young wolf until he'd driven away. He'd wake in his own bed and wonder how in the hell he'd gotten there.

Amusement ran through him. No one had ever said love was fair, and he had every intention of playing as dirty as he could to win Riley's affections.

He blew out a breath, and turned to re-enter the apartment.

And in that moment, he sensed the wrongness.

He froze, reaching out with both his telepathic and empathic senses, searching for anything--or anyone--out of place. Riley's apartment was peaceful, the beat of her life force strong and rich in the silence. There was no hint of anything out of place.

No, whatever it was, it was coming from below.

He frowned, letting his senses flow downward, sifting quickly through the various floors, searching for the source of that oddness. Humans dozed, some dreaming, some not, the beat of their life-blood thick and strong in the darkness. Hunger stirred, but it was a slumberous thing, easily controlled.

There were no humans, no nonhumans, not even rodents, in the building's basement. But the sense of wrongness seemed to be coming from there.

Only what might be causing it, he couldn't exactly say. There was an odd sort of deadness to the feel of the thing, as if whatever it was had no heat, nor breath of life. It wasn't moving, wasn't even doing anything untoward, but yet its mere presence made him uneasy.

It wasn't something that should be in this building.

He turned to investigate, but at that moment, Riley appeared.

"And the dream man appears in the flesh." Though a

smile touched her lush lips, annoyance sparkled in her cool gray eyes. "Which undoubtedly means you're the reason Kellen's no longer asleep in my bed."

"I'm afraid so." Surprisingly, she'd dressed--if you could call a thigh-length T-shirt and little else dressing--and in cool night air, the heat of her golden skin flowed across his senses as sweetly as a caress. It made him hunger to touch her, taste her, and he curled his fingers into a fist to stop the impulse to reach for her. "He'll wake safe and secure in his own bed, although he may be a little confused as to how he got there."

"You'd better hope he comes to no harm as he sleepwalks his way home." Her annoyance momentarily caressed the air, a rumble of distant thunder that held the promised to be a whole lot more. "It would have been easier if you'd just phoned ahead and let me know you were coming."

"I would have, but it was a last minute decision."

"And as usual, you simply expect me to be sitting around in my apartment waiting for you." She shook her head, and then added, "Is there any particular reason you're haunting the hallway rather than coming inside?"

"I've just sensed something out of place in the basement."

She frowned, and power shimmered across his skin as she flung out her psychic senses. In very many ways, her

psi powers were as powerful as his. Only hers were still growing.

"It feels very odd." Her gaze met his again, and this time those silver depths were alive with excitement--and not just the excitement of the chase. Danger was an aphrodisiac to a wolf, and her hunger had his own blood racing. Such a reaction was a pleasant sensation for one as old as he, and it was something she'd bought back into his life. "Shall we go see just what might be down there?"

His gaze slid down her luscious body. "Dressed like that?"

Amusement teased her luscious lips. "You're right. Wait until I get some shoes on." She turned and ran for the bedroom.

He shook his head and smiled. Only a werewolf would consider shoes the only thing that outfit needed to be decent.

She came back with sturdy-looking sneakers on her feet, and a laser in her hand. Once upon a time, carrying a gun would have been unthinkable to her. He wished it still was, simply because the more she carried, the more it meant she was sinking deeper into the world of the guardians. And he had no doubt that it would take her life one day. Not even a werewolf with vampire blood and extraordinary powers could keep flirting with death and not have it eventually

taking control. Although if carrying a gun kept her safe for that little bit longer, he wasn't about to argue against it.

Because above everything else, he wanted her safe.

They walked back to the stairs. Though they moved as quietly as possible, their footsteps still echoed down the stairwell. In the cellar, the darkness stirred, and a sense of anticipation seemed to flow across the darkness.

"Whatever it is, it waits for us."

He glanced back at her as he spoke, and she raised an eyebrow. "Us specifically?"

"It would seem so."

She grunted, and her fingers tightened around the laser. The weapon whined as it powered up. "So why the two of us in a building filled with people?"

"I don't know." He opened the stairwell door. The basement was dark--no surprise given the lack of lights in the rest of the building. Not that it was a problem for either of them--their infrared vision made the most out of darkness.

"You can't read it empathically?" she asked.

"Not at the moment." He caught the door with his fingertips once she'd stepped through, easing it closed as quietly as possible.

Energy burned across his skin as she probed the

darkness telepathically. "There's a deadness ahead that feels oddly familiar."

Though little more than a whisper, her words seemed to jar the stale air. Deep in basement's darkness, something stirred, and the sense of deadness seemed to retreat.

"It's moving," he said, rather unnecessarily.

"Yes."

Her heart was racing, the beat as sharp and as delicious as the excitement that teased his senses. His hunger stirred again, but this time, it was accompanied by desire. Although the desire had never really left him--she was simply fueling the embers of it.

He led the way forward through the wasteland of old machinery, boxes, and rubbish. They quickly reached the far side of the room, but even so, they were too late. The creature had left--and the only way out was via a fissure in the old brick wall.

"I've never noticed that before." Riley squatted and picked up a chunk of broken brick. She studied it for a moment, and then held it up for him to see. "It looks clawed."

"And newly broken. Whatever that thing is, it's created itself a tunnel to get into here."

She tossed the brick back down and rose. "It's big enough for us to get into."

"Not by chance, I'd imagine."

She looked at him. "A trap?"

"Could be." Why else would it attract their attention then retreat?

Her sudden grin was as sexy as hell, and he found himself cursing the thing even as his fingers twitched with the urge to reach for her.

"So let's go spring it," she said, voice low but as sexy as the smile.

"How about I go spring it, and you go upstairs and wait?" Even as he said the words, he knew it was useless, but he had to try. Women's liberation might be standard fare in this day and age, but he still couldn't see the sense in allowing *any* woman to put her life on the line unnecessarily. But then, he was a very old vampire who was somewhat set in his ways, despite the fact he'd seen eras go by and conventions change many, many times.

"You already know the answer to that, so why bother asking?" Her voice was wry, but her eyes danced with amusement and again the hunger rose in him.

He pushed it down again, even as he wished he didn't have to. "Because one of these days, you're going to do the sensible thing and shock the hell out of me."

She smiled again. "Me and sensible? I don't think so." She paused and looked into the hole. "But I will allow you

to go first."

"I'd really rather be upstairs, with you, in bed." He wrapped his fingers around hers. The warmth of her grip flooded through him, spinning desire to greater heights.

"You should have thought of that before you began this chase," she murmured, the amusement so evident in her eyes finally lacing her tones.

"True."

He tugged her forward. The tunnel's entrance was jagged, the brick cut unevenly, and with claws. The creature, whatever it was, had a lot of strength behind it. But brick quickly gave way to clay as the tunnel headed downward, although the earthy smell of soil was quickly overrun by a more odorous scent--human waste.

"Oh Christ," Riley said, dread in her voice. "We're heading into the sewerage system. I think I'm going to puke."

"Breathe through your mouth."

"It's not helping."

The tunnel broke into a pipe large enough to drive a car into. He jumped into the muck flowing gently downward then turned to help her down. "At least it's late at night. Not as many people will be flushing their business."

"Thanks for that cheery thought." She grimaced as her feet disappeared into the flow. "Wrong shoes for this sort

of walk."

"You can always go back."

"And you can always shut up and get moving."

He smiled and led the way forward again, following the flow of the water. The creature was somewhere ahead--a blot of 'wrongness' his senses could get no real fix on.

But the closer they got to it, the more its anticipation grew, and the more disturbed he grew.

Riley suddenly stopped. "I *have* felt this thing before. It's a chameleon."

Chameleons were a rare breed of nonhumans who could take on any background and literally become part of that background. They were also ferocious flesh-eaters, and extremely hard to kill.

He frowned. "Chameleons aren't usually city dwellers. They prefer the wild areas."

But even as he said it, he flared his senses outward, taking a stronger, closer look at the creature ahead. It *did* feel like one of those creatures.

"Maybe so, but this one is old. And it rots, just like the ones we encountered in that underground lab." She hesitated. "You don't think it could be the same ones, do you?"

"I doubt it. The Directorate cleaned that whole place out, didn't they?"

"Yeah, but who's to say one didn't escape?"

"It still makes no sense for it to come here."

"It does if it wants revenge for its kits and partner being killed. It might well hold us responsible because we discovered them."

It was possible. While Chameleons were often considered little more than basic animals, that wasn't based on any actual scientific evidence, as the creatures were elusive and difficult to study. And this creature *had* found them here. That suggested a high degree of intelligence.

"In which case, this trap will be a well prepared one. Perhaps you should retreat and call in the directorate."

"Leaving you to face this thing alone." It was flatly said, and the air fairly burned with her disapproval.

"Riley, I have an advantage over these--"

"Quinn, I'm not going to walk away and leave you to face this thing alone."

Annoyance rolled through him, and he was tempted, so tempted, to roll her with power--forcing her to leave, and therefore keeping her safe. But she would never appreciate the concern behind such an action. Indeed, even if he succeeded in forcing her away from danger, in the end, it would probably damage his long term aim of making her his.

So he shook his head and continued walking. The chill

in the air seemed to sharpen, as did that sense of anticipation. The rank aroma of sewerage swirled around them, but underneath it ran the fresh aroma of earth. His gaze swept the dank walls ahead, but he couldn't see anything that indicated another break in the walls.

He glanced at Riley. "Can you smell that?"

"Define *that*." Her voice was clipped. "Because this place has a lot of different smells, most of them vile."

"Earth. Freshly dug earth."

"It's ahead, another ten yards or so."

He couldn't see it, but then, she was relying on senses other than sight.

"The sense of anticipation is growing," she added. "I'm not liking the feel of what we're walking towards."

Neither was he. He slowed his pace, forcing Riley to do the same. Another fissure came into view, this one larger than the other. Dirt, rocks, and concrete had tumbled out, half blocking the meager flow and redirecting it into the crack.

"There's something odd--"

Her words were abruptly cut off, and her hand ripped from his. He swung around but there was no sense of her in the darkness, no spark of her life force. It was as if she'd completely disappeared.

The fury that swept through him was as cold and as

angry as anything he'd ever experience in his twelve hundred years of life. But as quickly as it rose, it went, replaced by a hard emptiness.

An emptiness that was filled with the certainty that he *would* get back what was his.

He turned around, using his psychic senses to search for any hint of her. The darkness held its secrets well-- there was no sign of her life force, no melodious beat of life.

She had to be unconscious, and in the grip of the chameleons, hidden by their ability to merge with the background.

She wasn't dead. Not yet.

He reached down, deep down into that place in his soul that had never been human, had never been vampire, using powers long since gone from this world to disappear into the darkness. It was more than just wrapping the shadows around him, more than just merging with the background, as the chameleons did. He *became* the darkness, became the air, became a shadow that held no substance--one that would not be seen or heard or felt.

He floated toward the fissure. There was nothing else he could do. The Chameleons had sprung their trap; all he could do now was track them down and make them pay.

The water that trickled underneath his feet began to

swirl as he reached the obstruction he'd noticed earlier. He swung left, into the fissure created by the creatures. The walls were raw, bleeding moisture, the air thick and rank. Though the sense of anticipation had gone, and there was now no sign of either the creatures or Riley, he knew they were up ahead.

The part of him that had shared her blood could feel her nearness, even if he could not see her life force or hear her thoughts.

The tunnel continued on through the earth, winding slowly downwards. Gradually, the way began to widen, until he was in a huge old cavern.

They were here.

He stopped, taking it all in, see the dark red blurs of life that were the chameleons, seeing Riley, a blaze of heat and life lying on the ground. He regained form and attacked.

There were four of them--one larger, three smaller--and they hadn't yet sensed his presence. They were too intent of their prey.

He swept in, grabbing two of the youngsters and tossing them across the cavern. He grabbed the third one just as the mother lashed out, her claws raking his side and drawing blood. The scent of it stung the air and hunger stirred through the darkness. But the flesh eaters wanted

more than just his blood.

He crushed his hand around the neck of the third one and flung it with all his might at the mother. She screamed, a high-pitched sound of fury, as she tried to catch and save her child.

With the chameleons distracted, he grabbed Riley and dragged her out from under the feet of the creatures, hauling her across to the other side of the cavern, near the fissure but not actually going into it. Fighting in close quarters was never a good choice.

With one eye on the creatures, he slapped Riley's face. Hard. There was no time for niceties in moments like this. She muttered something unintelligent, and then her eyes opened. "That hurt."

"So will the chameleons if you don't get moving."

The mother's roar just about drowned out his words. He turned, standing in front of the still groggy Riley.

The creatures merged with the darkness. He switched to infra, following the muted flame of the mother's life force, waiting until she was almost upon him before he launched at her, hitting her hard in the gut, thrusting her backward, into her milling kits. One caught the full force of their weight, driving it into the ground, its short scream suddenly cut off.

He wrapped his hands around the creature's neck and

squeezed as hard as he could, but her skin was thick and leathery under his fingers, her neck thickly corded with muscles.

Claws tore at his back, shredding skin and drawing blood. He hissed in pain but refused to release his grip, tightening instead.

"Hey, bitch," Riley said from behind them. "Let him go or I'll kill your munchkin."

The chameleon froze.

"Quinn," Riley added, almost casually, "I don't think strangling it is the way to go."

"You might be right there."

He may have killed chameleons before, but never with bare hands. Weapons were best--only trouble was, they didn't have any. Heaven only knows where her laser was.

He rolled off the creature, felt its hatred roll across him, frying his senses. But as he backed away wrongness in the air increased suddenly.

"Riley, watch out--"

The words were cut off as a huge paw swept him up into the air and tossed him like so much rubbish against the cavern wall. He hit hard and fell to the ground on all fours, the cavern spinning around him and anger rising like a thick and bitter wind within him.

He thrust to his feet. Riley had been backed against

the wall, a blob of darkness towering above her, slashing with sharp claws. Though she managed to avoid most of the blows and land a few of her own, bloody rents marred her golden skin and a darkening bruise decorated her forehead.

No one hurts what is mine.

He ran forward and leaped upwards, landing on the back of the creature, wrapping his arms and legs around its body. But instead of trying to choke it, he reached again for that ancient part of his soul, becoming one with the darkness and the air. Only this time, he rolled it outward, moving it from him to the chameleon, letting it flow across every part of the creature's body, until they were both encased.

It didn't sense the danger. Didn't know it was about to die.

He drew the net of air and darkness tighter, letting it invade skin and muscle, blood and bone, until the creature was one with the air just like him.

It sensed the danger then, sensed the wrongness.

It began to writhe and twist in an effort to get him off its back, but it was too late. Far too late.

He drew in all the threads of energy, and then he took a deep breath and exploded outwards, thrusting the particles of air and darkness that was both he and the creature into a thousand different directions. Scattering

their molecules and forever destroying the creature.

His own molecules reformed, until what stood on the earth of the cavern was once again vampire.

A vampire whose veins pounded with the need to take blood and regain the strength he'd just used.

Riley was staring at him, eyes wide and perhaps a touch of fear in those silver depths.

"What the fuck did you just do?"

"Destroyed the creature." He turned to the muted flame that was the mother chameleon. "Your partner is dead, as is one of your kits. Two remain. If you leave now and forget this madness, they just might stay that way. Stay, and I *will* destroy you all."

The chameleon screamed, a sound filled with fury and pain. He felt nothing for her--certainly no pity--and he would kill her if he had to. But the truth was, his strength was down and one chameleon might still be more than he and Riley could handle.

The creature screamed again, but this time, her remaining kits gathered around her.

"Go," he said softly. "And live. But return here, go after either of us again, and I will hunt you down and destroy you all, even if it is the last thing I ever do on this earth."

The creature left. Which only proved that the

creatures were far more intelligent than anyone had presumed.

With the danger gone, weakness returned. He knees buckled, and if not for the fact that Riley was suddenly there, offering him a shoulder, he would have fallen.

"You need blood," she said. Underneath the concern in her voice, he could taste her alarm. She feared what he'd done--feared it enough to perhaps walk away.

He couldn't allow that. Wouldn't allow it.

"Yes," he said softly. "It took more strength that I remembered to destroy that creature."

She hesitated just a little, then shifted and offered her neck. The sweet pulse of life called to him, and his canines lengthened.

She gasped as his teeth broke her skin, but the sound became one of pleasure as he began to drink. The richness of her blood flushed the weakness from his body, and as she became lost in the experience of a vampire's feast, he let his mind merge with hers, becoming one with her, keeping her unaware and unknowing as he drove down into those parts of her mind that held her memories, altering what she remembered. No one knew what he could do, and he intended to keep it that way--for now.

As he began his retreat, he did one other thing--left her with the gentle desire to take fewer lovers and not

visit the wolf clubs as much.

Unfair, perhaps, but he'd learned long ago that those who played by the rules lost.

This time, he had no intention of losing.

He withdrew his teeth, then kissed her neck to take the remaining sting away.

She smiled at him, bright eyes still filled with lust, the desire he'd raised by feeding from her unquenched by his design. The dreams that had begun this night had yet to be fulfilled in the flesh.

"I think," she said softly, her fingers twining through his, spreading the warmth of life across his flesh. "That we both need to go upstairs and take a bath."

"As long as the bathing involves sex, I don't really care."

She laughed, a rich, throaty sound that rolled across his senses and raised a hunger of a different kind. "You, vampire, are insatiable."

"I think it's the company I keep."

She grinned and tugged him into the tunnel. They moved quickly back through the sewers and into her apartment. It didn't take long to pour the bath, and in the aromatic water they washed the grime and blood from each other.

As she leaned back against the bath, he captured her foot and gently kneaded her arch.

"So," she said eventually. "You came all the way from Sydney just to shag me in person?"

"The dreams were not enough tonight."

"You know all the right words to say, even if they are lies."

She shifted, pulling her foot from his grasp and running her hands up his stomach, making warmth and life flood across his body. There were many vampires who couldn't stand the touch of another, who took the blood they needed with as little human contact as possible. He had never been one of those, which is why he always tried to take what he needed while making love. Blood might sustain his life, but it was physical contact, the warmth of another, that nourished his soul. That made the effort of going on through the darkness and the loneliness that much less of a fight. Even emotionless contact was better than nothing.

But he and Riley had never been emotionless.

Her body followed the journey of her hands up his body, until she lay down on top of him, her full breasts squashed against his chest and her heart beating like a trapped thing. Her desire swirled around him, as tasty and warm as the cadence of her blood.

She raised a wet hand and lightly ran a finger around his lips. It was so soft, that touch, and yet so arousing.

The blood need rose in him, as thick and as strong as desire.

"And just what were are your original intentions?" she said softly. Teasingly. "Before we were so rudely interrupted by the chameleons, that is."

He wrapped a hand around the back of her neck, holding her still as his lips met hers. But this kiss was no gentle thing, but rather fierce, filled with all the hunger and desire that was in him.

"Good intentions," she gasped, when he finally let her go.

"That is only just the beginning." He kissed her chin, her neck. Nuzzled the pulse point at the base of her neck, drawing in the scent of her, the wild muskiness of woman and wolf combined with the sweet freshness of rain on a summer's day. A scent that was uniquely her own, a scent he would never forget, no matter what happened between them.

He slid his fingers down her flesh, and then wrapped his arms around her, sending a wave of water crashing over the rim and onto the tiles as he spun them around, until she was on the bottom and he was on top.

"Ah, the control freak strikes again," she murmured, eyes bright with amusement. "Can't stand having a woman in charge and all that."

"As if there *is* any controlling of you," he murmured,

releasing her arms and sliding down her body again.

When he took one nipple into his mouth and sucked on it lightly, she gasped softly, her body arching into his, urging him on silently.

He teased her, touched her, aroused her, until her blood was humming and her body shuddering, and all he wanted to do was bury himself deep inside her, releasing himself as he filled his soul with her blood and her life.

But not yet. Not quite just yet.

He rose and claimed her lips yet again, his kiss as urgent as before, filled with the unleashed desire that burned between them.

"You know," she gasped, "For a so-called control freak, you're doing a very tardy job of taking what you want."

He smiled at her, his gaze roaming over her features, features that could be as sharp and as pretty as she was. "I didn't think you'd appreciate such assertiveness if it meant cutting short your own pleasure."

"Trust me, you wouldn't be cutting short anything."

He shifted position, so that he was between her legs, his cock pressing against her, teasing, but not entering. "So you're saying that you would like me to take you?"

She grinned. "Unless you've got something better to do."

He paused a heartbeat, pretending to consider. "Nope,"

he said, "I don't believe I do."

And with that, he rammed himself deep inside her. And it was glorious, so *glorious*. The way her body enveloped him, the heat of her surrounding him, claiming him, with the same sort of need and urgency that raged through him. There was a completion in this moment, a wholeness that went beyond mere pleasure. It might create life in others, but for him, it was all about sustaining it.

He began to move, and she moved with him, her supple body shuddering with the force of the pleasure building within her. He could taste her desire, taste her need, as surely as he would soon taste her blood, and it only fueled his own lust to greater heights. He began to move fiercely, urgently, and she was right there with him, wanting everything he could give her.

She gasped, grabbing the bath top for support as his movement grew faster, more urgent. Everything broke, and she was unraveling, groaning with the intensity of her orgasm. Then his own hit, and thought and time stopped as he came, thrusting deep and hard, losing himself deep inside her as his teeth entered her neck and he took the lifeblood he needed.

She came again, her shuddering rolling across his body, her mind filling his, completing him. Making them one.

She was his--in dreams and in life--and one day soon she

would know it.

He'd make sure of it.

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