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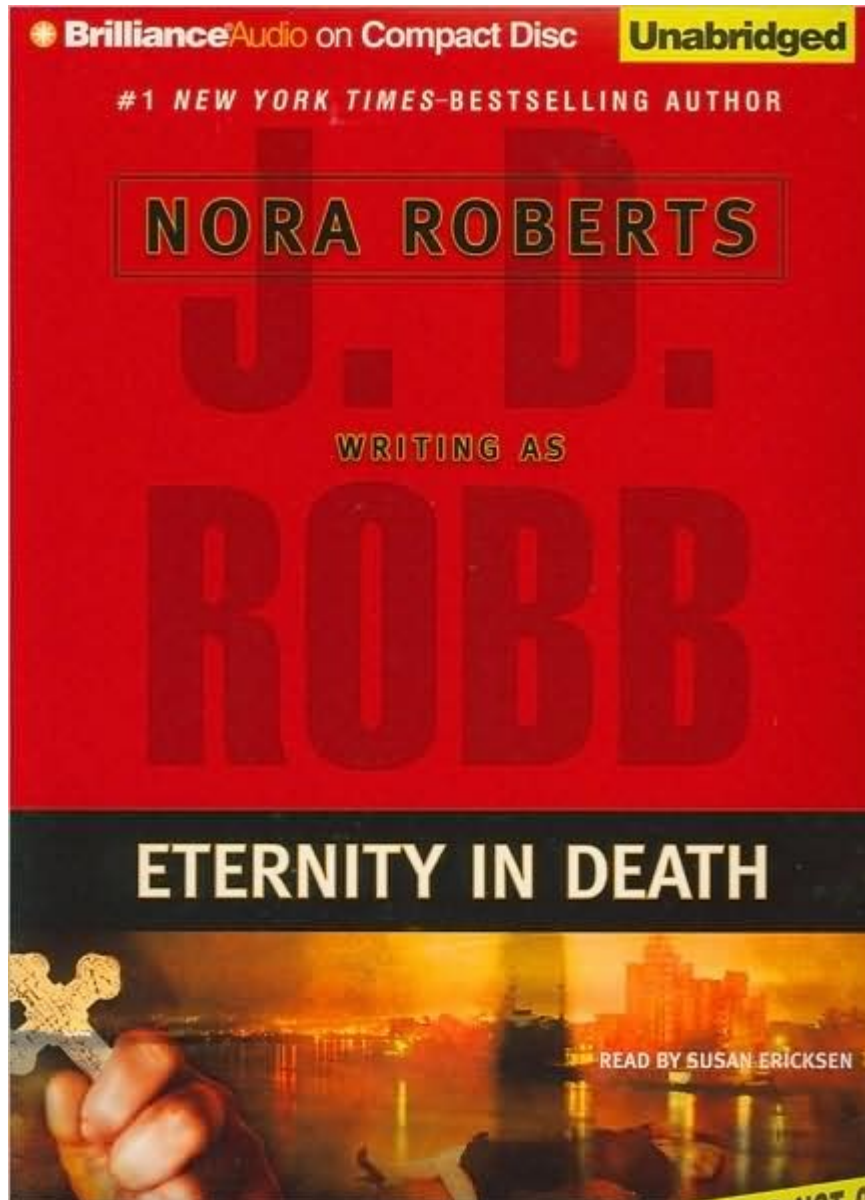
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J. J.  
WRITING AS

ROBB  
ETERNITY IN DEATH

A hand holding a key against a city skyline at night. The background is a blurred cityscape with lights reflecting on water. The text 'READ BY SUSAN ERICKSEN' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

READ BY SUSAN ERICKSEN



**Eternity in Death**  
**Eve Dallas – Book 29**  
**By J. D. Robb**

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The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out,  
At one stride comes the dark.  
—Coleridge

*Whence and what art thou, execrable shape?*

—John Milton

## Prologue

Death was the end of the party. Worse than death, in Tiara's opinion, was what came before it. Age. The loss of youth, of beauty, of body and celebrity was the true horror. Who the hell wanted to screw an old, wrinkled woman? Who cared what some droopy bag of years wore to the hot new club, or what she didn't wear on the beach at the Côte d'Azur?

No-fucking-body, that's who.

So when he told her that death could be the beginning—the real beginning—she was fascinated. She was pumped. It made sense to her that immortality could be bought by those privileged enough to pay the price. All of her life everything she wanted, coveted, demanded had been bought, so eternal life wasn't any different, really, than her pied-a-terre in New York or her villa in France.

Immortality, unlike a penthouse or a pair of earrings, would never get boring.

She was twenty-three, and absolutely at her prime. Everything about her was tight and toned, which she assured herself of by examining her body in the mirror tube in her dressing room. She was perfect, she decided, giving her signature blonde mane a carefully studied, and meticulously practiced, toss.

Now, thanks to him, she would always be perfect.

She stepped out, leaving the double mirrored doors open so that she could watch herself dress. She'd chosen formfitting, nearly transparent red, with a hem of peacock eyes that shimmered and winked with every movement. Chandelier drops swung at her ears, in the same vibrant tones of sapphire and emerald as the accents on the hem of the short, snug gown. She added her blue diamond pendant, and wide pave cuffs on both wrists.

Her sharply defined lips were dyed to match the dress, and they curved now with smug pride.

Later, she thought, after it was done, she'd change into something fun, something for dancing, for celebrating.

Her only regret was that the awakening had to be done in private rather than at the club. But her lover had assured her all that nasty business about being buried, then having to climb out of some disgusting coffin was just the invention of tacky books and bad vids. The reality was so much more civilized.

One hour after the ritual—which was so frigging sexy —she'd wake up in her own bed, eternally young, eternally strong, eternally beautiful.

Her new birthday would be April 18, 2060.

All it would cost was her soul. As if she cared about that.

She strolled out of the dressing room into the bedroom she'd just had redecorated in her new favorite shades of blues and greens. In his bed—canopied to match his mistress's—Tiara's teacup bulldog snored.

She wished she could awaken Bidy as she was about to be awakened. He was the only thing in the world she truly loved almost as much as herself. But she'd given her little sweetie pie the sleeping drug, just as she'd been told. It wouldn't do to have her doggie interrupt the ritual.

Following instructions, she disengaged all security on her private elevator and entrance, then lit the thirteen white candles she'd been told to set around the room she'd chosen for the awakening.

When it was done, she poured the bottle of potion he'd given her into a crystal wineglass. She drank it all, every drop. Nearly time, she thought, as she carefully arranged herself on the bed. He'd slip in quietly, find her. Take her.

Already she felt hot and jittery with need.

He'd make her scream, he'd make her come. And when she was screaming, when she was coming, he would give her that final, ultimate kiss.

Tiara traced her fingers over her throat, already feeling the bite.

She'd die, she thought, running her hands over her breasts and belly in anticipation of him. Wasn't that wild? She'd die, then she'd awaken. And she'd live forever.

## One

The room smelled of candle wax and death. In their fat, jewel-toned holders, the candles had pooled into dripping puddles. The body lay in a lake-sized bed canopied with silk, mounded with a multitude of pillows, and stained with blood.

She was young, blonde, with a bright red dress rucked up to her waist. Her eyes, a crystal green, were open and staring.

As she studied the body of Tiara Kent, Lieutenant Eve Dallas wondered if the dead blonde had looked into her killer's eyes as she died.

She'd known him, in any case, almost certainly she'd known him. There was no sign of forced entry, and in fact, the security system had been shut down from the inside, by the victim. There was no sign of struggle. And though Eve was certain they'd find the victim had engaged in sexual intercourse, she didn't believe it would prove to be rape.

She hadn't fought him, Eve thought as she bent over the body. Even when he'd drained the blood out of her, she hadn't fought him.

"Two puncture wounds, left side of the throat," Eve stated for the record. "The only visible injury." She lifted one of Tiara's hands, examined the perfectly shaped, fussily painted nails. "Bag the hands," she told her partner. "Maybe she scratched him."

"Not as much blood as you'd think there should be." Detective Peabody cleared her throat. "Not nearly enough. You know what they look like, on her neck there? Bite marks. Like, ah, fangs."

Eve spared Peabody a glance. “You think that ugly little dog the maid’s got in the kitchen bit her on the neck?”

“No.” Peabody angled her head, leaned down with her dark eyes wide and bright. “Come on, Dallas, you know what it looks like.”

“It looks like a DB. It looks like the vic had a date that went over the top. There’s going to be illegals in her system, something that dulled her down or hyped her up enough for her killer to jab something into her throat, or, yeah, sink his teeth into it if he had the incisors filed to points or was wearing an appliance. Then he bled her out, and she lay there and let him.”

“I’m just saying it looks like your classic vampire bite.”

“We’ll put out an APB on Dracula. Meanwhile, let’s find out if she was—just possibly—seeing someone with a heartbeat.”

“Just saying,” Peabody repeated, this time in a mumble.

Eve did another scan of the bedroom before stepping out and into the enormous dressing room area.

Bigger than a lot of apartments, she mused, and outfitted with a security screen, entertainment screen, full round of mirrors. The closet itself was a small department store, ruthlessly organized into categories.

For a moment, Eve stood with her hands on her hips and simply stared. One person, she thought, with enough clothes to outfit the Upper West Side, and more than enough shoes to shod every man, woman, and child in that sector. Even Roarke—and Eve knew her husband’s wardrobe was awesome—didn’t rate this high on the clothes-hog scale.

Then she just shook her head and focused on the job at hand.

Dressed for him, Eve thought. Slutty dress, fuck-me heels. So where was the jewelry? If a woman was going to deck herself out for a booty call, down to shoes, wouldn’t she drape on some glitters?

If she had, her killer had helped himself there.

She studied the drawers, the cabinets that ran below the rungs and carousels and protective domes. All locked, she noted, all passcoded, which meant valuables housed inside. There was no sign that she could see of any attempt to break in.

There were plenty of expensive bits and pieces sitting around in the penthouse: statuary, paintings, electronics. She'd seen nothing on her once-over of both levels that indicated anything had been disturbed.

If he was a thief, he was a lazy one, or a very picky one.

She stood for a moment, evaluating. Eve was a tall woman, slim in boots and trousers, with a short leather jacket over a white shirt. Her hair was short and brown, chopped around a lean face dominated by deep brown eyes. The eyes, as they studied, were all cop.

She didn't turn at Peabody's low whistle behind her. "Wow! This is like something out of a vid. I think she had all the clothes in all the land. And the shoes. Oooh, the shoes."

"A few hundred pair of shoes," Eve commented. "And she had the requisite two feet. People are screwy. Take head of building security, see if he's got any knowledge or documentation of who she's been seeing or entertaining in the last few weeks. I'll take the maid."

She moved through the apartment, down a level. The place was full of cops and crime-scene techs, of noise, of equipment. The busy business of murder.

In what she was told was the breakfast room, she found the maid with her red-rimmed eyes, clutching the small, ugly dog. Eve eyed the dog warily, then gestured for the uniforms to step out of the room.

"Ms. Cruz?"

At the mention of her name, the woman burst into fresh sobs. This time Eve and the dog exchanged looks of mild annoyance.



Eve sat so she and the maid were on the same level, then said, firmly, “Stop it.”

Obviously used to following orders, the maid instantly snuffled back the sobs. “I’m so upset,” she told Eve. “Miss Tiara, poor Miss Tiara.”

“Yes, I’m very sorry. You’ve worked for her for a while?”

“Five years.”

“I know this is hard, but I need you to answer some questions now. To help me find who did this to Miss Tiara.”

“Yes.” The maid pressed a hand to her heart. “Anything. Anything.”

“You have keys and passcodes to the apartment?”

“Oh, yes. I come in every day to do for Miss Tiara when she’s in residence. And three times a week when she’s away.”

“Who else has access to the apartment?”

“No one. Well, maybe Miss Daffy. I’m not sure.”

“Miss Daffy.”

“Miss Tiara’s friend, Daffodil Wheats. Her very best friend, except when they’re fighting, then Miss Caramel is her best friend.”

“Are you putting me on with these names?”

The maid blinked her swollen, bloodshot eyes. “No, ma’am.”

“Lieutenant,” Eve corrected. “All right, this Daffodil and Caramel were friends of Miss Kent’s. What about men? What men was she seeing?”

“She saw a lot of men. She was so beautiful, so young, and so vibrant that —”

“Intimately, Ms. Cruz,” Eve interrupted to stop both the eulogy and the fresh tears. “And most recently.”

“Please call me Estella. She enjoyed men. She was young and vibrant, as I said. I don’t know them all—some were just a moment, others longer. But in the past week or two, I think there was just one.”

“Who would that be?”

“I don’t know. I never saw him. But I could tell she was in love again—she laughed more, and danced around the apartment, and...” Estella seemed to struggle for a moment with her own code of discretion.

“Everything you tell me may help in the investigation,” Eve prompted.

“Yes. Well...when you take care of someone, you know when they’ve had a...an intimacy. She had a lover in her bed every night for a week or more.”

“But you never saw him.”

“Never. I come at eight every morning, and leave at six, unless she needs me to stay longer. He was never here when I was here.”

“Was it her habit to turn off her security system from in-house?”

“Never, never.” Dry-eyed now, Estella shook her head decisively from side to side. “It was never to be disengaged. I don’t understand why she would have done that. I saw it was off when I came in this morning. I thought there must be a glitch in the system, and Miss Tiara would be angry. I called downstairs to report it even before I went up to the bedroom.”

“All right. You came in at eight, noted the security was off, reported it, then went upstairs. Is that your usual routine, to come in, go up to her bedroom?”

“Yes, to get Bidy.” Estella bent her head to nuzzle the dog. “To take him for his morning walk, then to feed him. Miss Tiara usually sleeps until about eleven.”

Estella’s brow creased. “Later these last days, since—the new lover. Sometimes she didn’t come downstairs until into the afternoon, and she ordered all the windows draped when she did. She said she only wanted

the night. It worried me because she looked so pale, and wouldn't eat. But I thought, well, she's in love, that's all."

After a long, long sigh, Estella continued. "Then this morning, Biddy wasn't waiting by the bedroom door. He always waits there for me in the morning. I went in, very quietly. He was coming to the door, but he wasn't walking right."

Eve frowned at the dog. "What do you mean?"

"It was...I thought: Biddy looks drunk, and I had to hold back a laugh because he looked so funny. I went in more, and I smelled...it was the candles at first. I could smell the candles, so I thought she'd had her lover in the night. But then there was another smell, a hard smell. It was the blood, I think," she said as her eyes welled again. "It must have been the blood and...her, I smelled her, and when I looked over at the bed, I saw her there. I saw my poor little girl there."

"Did you touch anything, Estella? Anything in the room?"

"No, no. Yes. Biddy. I grabbed Biddy. I don't know why exactly, I just grabbed little Biddy and I ran out. She was dead—the blood, her face, her eyes, everything. She couldn't be anything but dead. I ran out screaming, and I called security. Mr. Tripps came right up. Right away, and he went upstairs. He was only a minute, then he came down to contact the police."

"Could you tell if anything's missing?"

"I know her things. I didn't notice..." Distressed again, she glanced around the room. "I didn't look."

"I'm going to have you look through her jewelry first. You know her jewelry?"

"I do. Every piece. I clean it for Miss Tiara because she doesn't trust—"

"Okay. We'll start there."

She sent Estella to the dressing area with two cops and a recorder. She was scribbling a few notes, adding time lines when Peabody tracked her down.

“Tripps reports that the maid contacted Security at eight-oh-two to report the system was down. She contacted them again at eight-oh-nine, hysterical. He came up personally, went upstairs, verified the death, contacted the police. Times jibe.”

“Yeah, they do. What did he say about the system being down?”

“He said—and documented—that Kent told him she would be shutting it down internally near midnight, and would re-engage it when she wanted. He advised against, she told him to mind his own. She did the same every night for the last eight days, though the time of shutdown varied. She’d re-engage before dawn.”

Thoughtfully, Eve tapped her fingers on her own notes. “So the boyfriend didn’t want to be on the security tapes. Got her to shut it down, came in her private entrance, left the same way. She must’ve been monumentally stupid.”

“Well, she wasn’t known for her brains.”

Eve slanted Peabody a look. If it was gossip or popular culture, Peabody usually had her finger on the pulse. “What was she known for?”

“Clubbing, shuttle-hopping, shopping, scandals. The usual, I guess, for a fourth-generation—I think it’s fourth—megarich kid. She got engaged a lot, broke up a lot—usually publicly and with a lot of passion. Went to premieres, shuttled off to wherever the current hot spot might be. Hobbed and nobbed. Usually something on her in the tabs or one of the gossip or society channels every day.”

“Who was she running with these days, and why did I feel I had to interview the maid about her lifestyle when I’ve got you?”

“Well, she’s tight with Daffy Wheats, and Caramel Lipton, recently disengaged to Roman Gramaldi, of Zurich. But she hangs with the sparkles of the young, rich, and looking-for-trouble club.”

“Trouble she found,” Eve commented, then glanced up when Estella came rushing in.

“Her pendant, her blue diamond pendant, and the cuffs, her peacock earrings. Gone, all gone.” Her voice pitched up sharply enough to cut glass. “He robbed my poor little girl, robbed her and killed her.”

Eve held up a finger to stop the tirade. “Do you have photo documentation of the missing items?”

“Of course, of course. Insurance—”

“I’ll need those. You get me the insurance information of whatever’s missing. Go ahead.” She waited until Estella hurried out again, smiled grimly. “That was a mistake. Sooner or later some big, fat blue diamond’s going to show up. We’ll get the details, then inform next of kin. After that, I want to have a chat with Daffy.”

## Two

As Tiara’s mother was living with her fourth husband in Rome, and her father was currently vacationing on the Olympus Resort with his newest fiancée, notification was done via ‘link.

Eve left the sweepers to finish processing the scene, and headed out with Peabody to interview Daffodil Wheats.

Another penthouse, Eve thought, another absurdly rich, young blonde. She badged and bullied her way past the doorman, past security, and finally past the housekeeper who might have been a clone of Estella Cruz. It turned out to be her sister.

The apartment was slightly smaller than Tiara’s, a bit more tastefully furnished. They waited in a living area done in bold, vibrant colors while Martine Cruz went upstairs to wake her mistress and inform her the police wished to speak with her.

“What’s the dish on this one, Peabody?”

“Um, third-generation rich, I think. Not as mega as the vic, but not worried about the grocery bill either. I think the fam made it big in textiles or something back in the day. Anyhow, she’s another party girl and gossip channel regular.”

“Who’d want to live like that?” Eve wondered.

“They do.” Peabody gave a shrug. “You’ve got as much ready as they do, you can buy some privacy if you want it.”

Eve thought back to the acres of mirrors and reflective surfaces at the crime scene. “The type who like to see themselves.”

“Yeah, and unless Daffy and the vic were having one of their periodic fallings-out, they were pretty much joined at the hip. Played together, traveled together, and rumor has it shared some of the same men, maybe at the same time. Been tight since they were kids. Vic’s father was married to Daffy’s mother—or cohabbed, can’t remember—for a couple of years.”

“Small, incestuous little world.”

Eve glanced up. Daffodil Wheats had a short, streaky crop of blonde hair, sleepy blue eyes, and a sulky mouth. She wore a black silk robe that hit her midhigh and gaped open at the breasts so the full white mounds of them played peek-a-boo as she walked down the swirl of silver steps.

“What’s the deal?” she said in a blurry voice, then plopped down on the bright red sofa and yawned.

“Daffodil Wheats?” Eve demanded.

“Yeah, yeah. God, it’s barely dawn. Martine! I’m desperado for that mocha! I was out ’til four,” she explained with a long, feline stretch. “I didn’t do anything illegal, so what’s what with the badges?”

“You know Tiara Kent?”

“Hell, what’s Tee done now?” She slumped, obviously already bored. “Look, I’ll bail her, even if she has been a bitch lately. But I have to have my

fix first. Mocha, mocha, mocha!” she shouted like an Arena Ball cheer.

“I’m sorry to tell you that Tiara Kent is dead.”

The sleepy eyes narrowed a little, then rolled dramatically. “Oh, get off. You tell Princess Bitch that dragging me out of bed to lay it on didn’t get a chuckle. Thank God! Thanks, Martine. Life saved.” She made kissy noises at the maid as she grabbed the tall white cup of steaming liquid.

“Listen up, Daffy .” Eve’s tone had the blue eyes blinking in surprise. “Your pal was murdered last night, in her bed. So you’re going to want to straighten your ass up—and cover your tits, for God’s sake—or we’re going to take the rest of this downtown.”

“That’s not funny.” Slowly now, Daffy lowered the cup. “That’s seriously un.” The hand holding the cup shook as Daffy reached out for Martine with the other. “Martine, call Estella. Call her right now and have her put Tiara on the ’link.”

“She can’t come to the ’link.” Peabody spoke now, more gently. “Ms. Kent was killed last night in her apartment.”

“My sister,” Martine said even as she gripped Daffy’s hand.

“Your sister’s fine,” Peabody told her. “You can go ahead and contact her.”

“Miss Daffy.”

“Go on,” Daffy said stiffly, and the bored young party girl was gone. In her place was a stunned young woman clutching her robe together at her throat with a trembling hand. “Go on, go on. This isn’t a joke, this isn’t Tee taking a slap at me? She’s dead?”

“Yes.”

“But...I don’t see how that can be. She’s only twenty-three. You’re not supposed to be dead at twenty-three, and we’re fighting. We can’t be fighting when she’s dead. How...Killed? Did you say somebody killed Tee?”

Now Eve sat, choosing the glossy white table in front of the sofa so she and Daffy were on a level. “She’s been seeing someone recently.”

“What? Yeah. But...” Daffy looked around blankly. “What?”

Reaching out, Eve took the cup of mocha from Daffy’s limp fingers, set it aside. “Do you know the name of the man she’s been seeing recently?”

“I...She called him her prince. Lots of times she had names for her men. This one was Prince. Dark Prince, sometimes.” Daffy pressed her hands to her eyes, then dragged them up over her face, through her hair. “She’s only been into him for a week or so. Maybe two. I can’t think.” She put her hand to her head, rubbed her temple as if she couldn’t keep her fingers still. “I can’t think.”

“Can you describe him?”

“I never met him. I was supposed to, but I didn’t. We’ve been fighting,” she repeated as tears spilled down her cheeks.

“Tell me what you know about him.”

“Did he hurt her?” Her voice broke on the question as the tears started to gush. “Did he kill Tee?”

“We’re going to want to talk to him. Tell me what you know about him.”

“She...she met him at some underground club. I was supposed to go, but I got hung up, and I forgot. I was supposed to meet her there.”

“Where?” Eve prompted.

“Um...a cult club, underground, near Times Square, I think. I can’t remember. There are so many.” When Peabody offered tissues, Daffy sent her a pathetically grateful look. “Thanks. Thanks. She—Tee, she tagged me about eleven when I didn’t show, and we got into it because I’d forgotten, and this guy I hooked up with and I decided to zip down to South Beach for the night. I was already down there when she tagged me.”



On a long breath, she bent forward to retrieve the cup of mocha, and now sipped slowly. "Okay. Okay." She breathed in and out. "It was my screw-up, about the club, so I mea culpa'd the next day. She was all about this guy, this Prince. But she looked out of it, so I knew she'd been using."

Daffy pressed her lips together. "I'm clean, and I've got to stay clean. My father still holds some of the purse strings on me, you know? If I get in any trouble like that again, he said he'd cut me off. He means it, so...Shit, you're cops. I'm not going to impress you, so the straight deal is this: Besides the edict from my dad, I've had enough of chems."

"But Tiara hadn't," Eve said.

"Tee's always going to go over the top, it's just her way. Always going to push the limits, then look for the next big thing." As Daffy mopped tears, she managed a wan smile. "But she knows I've got to stay clean. She'd been using, and she'd sworn off six months ago, like a solidarity deal? We took an oath, so I was pissed."

"What was she on?" Eve asked.

"I don't know, but she was strung. We scratched at each other about that, but it was mostly her telling me how I had to go with her to this club, meet this guy and his friends. She said he was complete, the absolute. That they'd banged all night, and it was the best she'd ever had. She nagged me brainless about it until I said I'd go."

Shaking her head, Daffy drank again. "Then later I started thinking how even if I didn't use, she would, and I'd get busted. So I tagged her back and told her I wasn't going, and why didn't we hook up with this guy somewhere else. No go. His club or nowhere."

"His club?"

"Not like he owned it. Or maybe he does. She never said; I never asked. But she got stewed because I wouldn't go, and Carm's in New L.A. until next month, so she couldn't pull her instead of me."

Eve waited while Daffy brooded into the mocha she'd so desperately wanted. "Do you know if anyone else went with her to this club? Any of your other mutual friends?"

"I don't think so. I never heard any buzz about it, not from anyone but Tee. Anyway, we didn't talk for a couple days, then yesterday she came by here, earlier than this even. Like just after sunrise. She looked bottomed. Pale and glassy-eyed. Using again, and she hadn't been using before this run for that whole six months. She was still hyped, talking wild. Going to live forever, that's what she said. Laughing and busting around. She and her prince were going to live forever, and screw me for flipping her off. I tried to get her to stay, but she wouldn't, just told me I'd be sorry, I'd had my chance. Now he was only taking her."

"Taking her where?" Eve asked.

"I don't know. She wasn't making any sense. I'm telling you, she was over. I got pissy right back at her, and we yelled at each other, then she stormed out. And now she's dead."

"That's the last time you saw or spoke with her?"

"Yeah. Did he hurt her? I mean...you didn't say how she, she died. Did he hurt her?"

"I can't tell you that yet, I'm sorry."

"She's such a baby about pain." Daffy swiped the back of her hand over her cheek. "I hope he didn't hurt her. I should've gone to the club that night. If I'd gone to the club instead of South Beach, maybe...Is it my fault? I should've looked after her better. She got sucked into stuff so easy. Is it my fault?"

"No, it's not your fault."

"She was almost a year older, but I was the one who looked after her—mostly. I could pull her back from the edge when she went too far. But I didn't, you know? I just told her she was being an idiot or whatever. Only Tee would actually believe in vampires."

“Vampires?” Eve repeated as Peabody sucked in her breath.

“Yeah. The prince deal? The Dark Prince. Living forever. Get it?” Daffy gave a harsh laugh that choked on a sob. “She thought this guy was a frigging vampire, like for real, and he was going to make her one so she’d be immortal. That’s what the club was—a wannabe vampire club. Bloodbath! I remember now. It’s called Bloodbath. Who the hell wants to go to some club with a name like that?” She swiped at tears again. “Only Tee.”

“Didn’t I say vampire? I said vampire right off.” Peabody gave a smug nod as they exited the building.

“And our vic’s going to be deeply disappointed when she just stays dead. Track down this club. I’d love a little chat with the Dark Prince.”

“It’s not like I believe in the undead or anything.” Peabody slid into the passenger seat. “But it wouldn’t hurt, once we find this guy, to interview him during the day. In a room with good natural lighting.”

“Sure. And requisition some garlic and some wooden stakes while you’re at it.”

“Really?”

“No.” Eve swung out into traffic. “Reach down inside yourself, Peabody, and get a grip on reality, however slippery. Find the club. Right now we’re going to visit somebody who knows all about what’s dead.”

Chief Medical Examiner Morris sent Eve an easy smile as he stood over the naked body of Tiara Kent. He wore a snappy suit the color of good claret with a matching tie thin as straw. His dark hair was intricately braided, and curled into a loop at the nape of his neck.

Eve often thought Morris’s sharp fashion sense was wasted on his clientele.

“Running a bit behind today,” he told them. “Sent off for tox as you’d flagged that. Shouldn’t take long.”

She glanced down at the body. Morris hadn't yet made his Y cut. "What can you tell me just from the visual?"

"Lieutenant, this woman is dead."

"Peabody, note that down. We've got a dead woman."

"With excellent breast work," Morris added. "And some very first-class sculpting, belly and butt."

"Jesus, she was twenty-three. Who needs sculpting and new tits at twenty-three?"

Peabody raised her hand, and got a bland look from Eve.

"You're not twenty-three."

"Okay, I've got a couple years on her, but if they're handing out butt sculpting, I'm first in line."

"You have a very nice butt, Detective," Morris assured her, and made Peabody beam.

"Aw, thanks."

"And now, back to our regularly scheduled program?" Eve suggested. "The dead woman on the slab."

"Tiara Kent, party princess. Live fast, die young." Morris tapped his comp screen to magnify the neck wounds. "These are the only injuries or insults to the body. The victim was exsanguinated through these two punctures in the carotid. No visible signs of physical restraint or struggle. Apparently, she lay there and let him suck her dry."

"Suck." Peabody drew a righteous breath through her nose. "See? Vampire bite."

Morris's smile spread to a grin. "Impossible not to have a little play with that, isn't it? The beautiful young blonde, seduced by the Prince of

Darkness—or one of his minions—drained of her life’s blood while in his thrall. Cue fog and shadows.”

“Don’t forget the creepy music,” Eve added.

“Of course. Mostly, however, I suspect she was drugged to the eyeballs, and was punctured by an appliance during sex.”

He lifted his eyebrows as he looked down at Tiara. “Of course, I could be wrong, and she’ll pop up shortly after sundown and terrify the night staff.”

“Let’s go with number one,” Eve decided. “If he actually bit her, appliance or not, there’s going to be saliva. Same if he didn’t use a cloak for sex. I bet even vampires have DNA.”

“I’ll send samples to the lab.”

“Guy had her convinced he could give her eternity.” Eve took one last look at Tiara Kent. “Now she gets a steel box in a cold room.”

## Three

“Got the club.” Peabody studied the readout on her PPC as they drove toward Cop Central. “Daffy had it right about Times Square, it’s under Broadway. Got the hours, too. Sunset to sunrise.” Peabody tracked her eyes toward Eve’s profile. “Vampire hours.”

“Owner?”

“Eternity Corporation, no owner or manager listed in this data.”

“Dig,” Eve suggested.

“Digging. Are we going by the club now?”

“If the guy frequents the place, works in the place, or owns the place, he’s not going to be there when the joint’s closed. We’ll go after dark.”

“I knew you were going to say that. Aren’t you just a little bit creeped? I mean, at the very least this guy slurps blood.”

“Maybe he does, maybe he doesn’t.” Eve stopped at a light, and watched the throng bull, shuffle, and clip its way along the crosswalk. She saw a pair of transvestites in spangled skin-suits, a tourist approaching three hundred and fifty pounds in his baggy shorts—carrying a variety of cams and vids that had to weigh nearly what he did—a kid in a red cape and skullcap streaking through bodies on an airboard, and a mime.

Whatever weirdos existed, New York made them welcome. A self-proclaimed vampire would fit right in.

“She didn’t leave a full pint on the sheets,” Eve continued as the light changed. “I don’t care how hungry some pseudovampire is, no way he’s going to guzzle down more than eight pints of blood in a sitting.”

“Right. Right. Well, then what...”

“He took it with him.”

“I have to say eeuuw.”

“Bottled it up, bagged it up. Maybe he sells it, maybe he stores it, maybe he takes a fucking bath in it. But he came prepped for it.” She turned into the garage at Central. “So we work that. What’s a guy do with several pints of human blood? Let’s see if there’s a call for it on the black market. And we have the list and description of the jewelry missing from the scene. We’ve got the club.”

She pulled into her slot, climbed out. “We’ll see what the sweepers got for us, see if the lab can pull DNA. We’ll check like crimes, see if we got anything like this before.”

Once inside the elevator, Eve leaned back. The car smelled like cop—coffee and sweat. “Somebody saw her with this guy. She hooked up with him at the club, and somebody saw them together. She goes for thrills, gets drawn in. Starts letting him into her place, fun and games. The way it looks, he

could've killed her any time he wanted, robbed her freaking blind. But he waited, and he only took what she either had on or had out.

“He’s picky, and he likes the ritual, likes the seduction.”

Eve stepped off the car to switch to the glides before the elevator got crowded. “Go ahead and write up what we’ve got, keep looking for a name to go with the club. I’m going to try to get a session in with Mira, get a better idea of what we’ll be dealing with when we take ourselves a Bloodbath.”

“I’ll bring the rubber ducky.”

Eve peeled off in the bullpen, headed for her office. As she expected, her ‘link was loaded with calls from the media. A paparazzi darling ends up dead, it’s a ratings bonanza, she thought, and ruthlessly forwarded all of the calls to the media liaison.

She tried for Mira first and ran headfirst into Mira’s admin—the guardian at the doctor’s gate. “Okay, okay. Jesus. Just tell her I’d like five whenever she can spare it. Here, there, in adjoining stalls in the john. Just five.”

Eve disconnected, got coffee from her AutoChef. She set up her murder board, wrote up her notes, studied the time line.

Walked right in, that’s what he did. She practically showered his path with rose petals. More money than brains.

Did he mark her first, or was it just chance she walked into the club one night? A recognizable face that liked to dance on the wild side. Known more for her exploits than her smarts.

A pathetically easy mark.

But if it had been just for the score, why kill her at all, much less in the chosen method? Because the score was secondary, she decided. The killing was the prize.

Eve glanced toward her tiny window, into the light of a sunny spring day, and calculated the time until sundown.

Thinking of that, she winced, engaged her 'link again. She wasn't just a cop, she reminded herself, but a wife. There were rules in both jobs.

She tried Roarke's private line, intending to leave a voice mail telling him she'd be late, see you when, but he picked up on the first beep. And that face, the heat-in-the-belly sexuality of that face, filled her view screen.

Dark hair framed it. Eyes of wild Irish blue gave her heart just a quick flutter that even after two years of having them look at her, just that way, was a surprise. Those perfectly sculpted lips curved as he said, "Lieutenant," with the wisp of his homeland in the word.

"How come you're not busy buying Australia?"

"I'm just between buying continents at the moment. I believe Asia's up next. And how are you?"

"Okay. I know we had sort of a thing on for tonight—"

"Dinner, I believe it was, followed by naked poker."

"That was strip poker, as I recall."

"You'd be naked soon enough. But I'm thinking that competition's been postponed. You have Tiara Kent, I take it."

"Heard about her already?"

"Multimillionaire bad girl murdered in her luxury penthouse?" His eyebrows lifted. "Word travels. How did she die?"

"Vampire bite."

"That again?" he said and made her laugh.

"She was into some kind of vampire cult crap, and it came back to, well, bite her. I've got to check out this club where she likely met her killer. It



doesn't open until sunset, so I'm going to run late."

"Almost as interesting as naked poker. I'll meet you at Central by six. Darling Eve," he continued before she could speak, "you can't expect me to pass up the opportunity to accompany my wife into the den of the undead."

She considered a moment. He'd be useful; he always was. And another pair of eyes, another set of reflexes would come in handy underground.

"Don't be late."

"I'll leave in plenty of time. Should I pick up some garlic and crosses on the way?"

"I think Peabody's on that. Later," she said, and clicked off.

While she was at her desk, she contacted the lab to give them a not-so-gentle push, then began to research vampire lore. She broke off when Peabody poked her head in.

"Did you know there are dozens of websites on vampirism, and any number of them have instructions on how to drink from a victim?"

Peabody cocked her head. "This surprises you because?"

"I know I say people suck, but I didn't mean it literally. And it's not just kids in their I'm-so-bored twenties into this."

"I've got a couple of names we might want to look at, but meanwhile, Tiara Kent's mother just came in. I had one of the uniforms take her to the lounge."

"Okay, I'll take her, you keep digging." Eve pushed back from her desk. "Roarke's going to tag along tonight."

"Yeah?" Relief showed on Peabody's face before she controlled it. "It doesn't hurt to have more of us when we head down."

“He’s an observer,” Eve reminded her. “I’m waiting for a callback from Mira. That comes through, tag me.”

Eve made Iris Francine the minute she stepped into the lounge with its lines of vending machines and little tables, and chairs designed to numb the ass after a five-minute sit-down.

Her daughter had favored her, taking the blonde hair, the green eyes, the delicate bone structure from her mother.

Iris sat with her hand clutched by a man Eve imagined was husband number four, Georgio Francine. Younger than his wife by a few years, Eve judged, and dark and sultry where she was light and elegant.

But they sat like a unit—she recognized that. Like two parts of a whole.

“Ms. Francine, I’m Lieutenant Dallas.”

Iris’s eyes looked exhausted as they lifted to Eve’s, a combination Eve also recognized as grief, guilt, and simple fatigue.

“You’re the one in charge of...in charge of what happened to Tiara.”

“That’s right.” Eve pulled up a chair. “I’m very sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you. Will I be able to see her?”

“I’ll arrange that for you.”

“Can you tell me how she...what happened to her?” Iris’s breath hitched, and she took two slow ones to smooth it out. “They won’t tell me anything really. It’s worse not knowing.”

“She was killed last night, in her apartment. We believe she knew her killer, and let him in herself. Some pieces of her jewelry are missing.”

“Was she raped?”

They would always ask, Eve knew. For a daughter, they would always ask, and with their eyes pleading for the answer to be no. “She’d had sexual

relations, but we don't believe there was rape."

"An accident?" There was another plea in Iris's voice now, as if death wouldn't be as horrible somehow if it were accidental. "Something that got out of hand?"

"No, I'm sorry. We don't believe it was an accident. What do you know about your daughter's activities recently, her companions? The men in her life?"

"Next to nothing." Iris closed her eyes. "We didn't communicate much, or often. I wasn't a good mother."

"Cara."

"I wasn't." She shook her head at her husband's quiet protest. "I was only twenty when she was born, and I wasn't a good mother. I wasn't a good anything." The words were bitter with regret. "It was all parties and fun and where can we go next. When Tiara's father had an affair, I had one to pay him back. And on and on, until we loathed each other and used her as a weapon."

She turned her shimmering eyes to her husband as he lifted their joined hands, pressed his lips to her fingers. "Long ago," he said softly. "That was long ago."

"She never forgave me. Why should she? When we divorced, Tee's father and I, I married again like that." Iris snapped her fingers. "Just to show him he didn't matter. I paid for that mistake six months later, but I didn't learn. When I finally grew up, it was too late. She preferred her father, who'd let her do whatever she liked, with whomever she liked."

"You made mistakes," Georgio told her. "You tried to fix them."

"Not hard enough, not soon enough. We have an eight-year-old daughter," she told Eve. "I'm a good mother to her. But I lost Tiara long ago. Now I can never get her back. The last time we spoke, more than a month ago, we argued. I can never get that back either."

“What did you argue about?”

“Her lifestyle, primarily. I hated that she was wasting herself the way I did. She was pushing, pushing the boundaries more all the time. Her father’s engaged again, and this one’s younger than Tee. It enraged her, had her obsessing about getting older, losing her looks. Can you imagine, worried about such things at twenty-three?”

“No.” Eve thought of the mirrors again, the clothes, the body work Tiara had done. Obviously, this was a young woman who obsessed about anything that had to do with herself. “Did she have any particular interest in the occult?”

“The occult? I can’t say. She went through a period several years ago where she paid psychics great gobs of money. She dabbled in Wicca when she was a teenager—so many girls do—but she said there were too many rules. She was always looking for the easy way, for some magic potion to make everything perfect. Will you find who killed her?”

“I’ll find him.”

Even as Eve made arrangements to have the Francines transported to the morgue, she saw Mira come in. After an acknowledging nod, Mira wandered to a vending machine.

She’d cut her hair again, Eve noted, so it was short and springy at the nape of her neck, and she’d done something to that soft sable color so that little wisps of it around her face were a paler tone. She sat, trim and pretty in her bluebonnet-colored suit, with two tubes of Diet Pepsi.

“Iris Francine,” Mira stated when Eve came over. “I recognized her. Her face was everywhere a generation ago. I always thought her daughter was hell-bent on outdoing her mother’s youthful exploits. It seems she succeeded in the hardest possible way.”

“Yeah, dying will get you considerable face time, for a while.”

“Quite a while, I’ll wager in this case. Vampirism. I had a meeting one level up,” Mira explained, “and thought to catch you in your office. Peabody

gave me the basics. Murder by vampire proponents is very rare. For the most part, it's the danger, the thrill, the eroticism that draws people—primarily young people. There is a condition—”

“Renfield Syndrome. I've been reading up. What I'm getting from the people who knew the vic was a predilection to walk the edge, a desperation for fame, attention, a serious need to be and stay young and beautiful. She'd already had bodywork. And you have to add in sheer stupidity. I get her. She's not unusual, she just had more money than most so she could indulge her every idiocy.”

Eve paused as she broke the seal on the Pepsi tube. “It's him. The method of killing was very specific, planned out, and there was no attempt to disguise it. He took jewelry, but that was more of the moment than motive. He went there to do exactly what he did, in exactly the way he did it.”

“The compulsion may be his,” Mira considered. “A craving for the taste of blood, one that escalated to the need to drain his victim. Have you gotten the autopsy results as yet?”

“No.”

“I wonder if they'll find she drank blood as well. If so, you may be dealing with a killer who believes he's a vampire, and who sought to turn her into one by taking her blood and sharing his own with her.”

“And if at first you don't succeed?”

“Yes.” Mira's eyes, a softer blue than her suit, met Eve's. “He may very well try again. The rush, the power—particularly when coupled with sex and drugs—would be a strong pull. And she made it so easy for him, even profitable.”

“How could he resist?”

“And why should he?” Mira concurred. “He was able to enter her highly secured building undetected. More power, and again cementing the illusion of a supernatural being. She gave herself to him, through sex, through blood, through death. Held in thrall—whether by his will or

chemicals—another element. He removed her blood from the scene. A souvenir perhaps, a trophy, or yet another element of his power. His need for blood, and his ability to take it. You believe she was drugged?”

“I haven’t had that confirmed, but yeah. Her closest pal states she’d been using, and heavily, the last week or so.”

“If he drank any of her blood, he’d have shared the drug.” Seeing Eve had already considered that, Mira nodded. “More power, or the illusion of it. From what you know, they’d only met a week or two earlier. It wasn’t eternal love, which is one way of romanticizing vampirism.”

“I don’t get that.” Interrupting, Eve gestured with her drink. “The romantic part.”

Mira’s lips curved. “Because you’re a pragmatic soul. But for some, for many, the idea of eternity, that seeking a mate throughout it, coupled with the living by night, the lack of human boundaries is extremely romantic.”

“Takes all kinds.”

“It does. However, the way he left the body wasn’t romantic, or even respectful. It was careless, cold. Whether or not he believes he could sire a vampire through her, she was no more than a vessel to him, a means to an end.

“He’ll be young,” Mira continued. “No more than forty. Most likely attractive in appearance and in good health. Who would want eternal life if they were homely and physically disadvantaged?”

“This vic wouldn’t have gone for anyone who wasn’t pretty anyway. Too vain. Her place was loaded with mirrors.”

“Hmm. I wonder how she resigned herself to the lore that she’d have no reflection as a vampire.”

“Could be she only bought what she wanted to buy.”

“Perhaps. He’ll be precise, erudite, clever. Sensual. He may be bisexual, or believe himself to be as in lore, vampires will bed and bite either sex. He will, at least for the moment, feel invulnerable. And that will make him very dangerous.”

Eve drank some of her soft drink, smiled. “Knowing I’m mortal makes me very dangerous.”

## Four

Eve grabbed the tox report the second it came through. Then she stared at the results. She engaged her interoffice 'link, said only, “Peabody,” then went back to studying the lab’s findings.

“Yo,” Peabody said a moment later at Eve’s office doorway.

“Tox report. Take a look.” Eve passed her a printout while she continued to read her computer screen.

“Holy crap. It’s not what she took,” Peabody decided, “it’s more what didn’t she take.”

“Hallucinogens, date-rape drugs, sexual enhancers, paralytic, human blood, tranq, all mixed in wine. Hell of a cocktail.”

“I’ve never seen anything like this.” Peabody glanced over the printout. “You?”

“Not with so many variables and with this potency. It’s new to me, but let’s run it by Illegals and see if it’s new to them. According to the results, and the time line, she downed this herself, before she disengaged the alarm, or just after. Maybe she knew what was in it, maybe she didn’t. But she drank it down, on her own.”

“Hard to say, seeing she’s dead, but she pretty much wins the stupid prize.”

“All-time champ.” Eve paused as her machine signalled another incoming. “And we may have a runner-up. We’ve got DNA.” She scanned the data

quickly. “Semen, saliva, and the blood she ingested. All the same donor.”

“Pretty damn careless of him,” Peabody commented.

“Yeah.” Eve frowned at the screen. “It is, isn’t it?”

“Another conclusion is he just didn’t care—being a vampire.” Peabody shrugged as Eve glanced back at her. “He doesn’t care if we match his DNA because he’ll just, I don’t know, turn into a bat and fly off, or poof into smoke. Whatever.”

“Right. A whole new scope on going into the wind.”

“I’m not saying it’s what I think, but maybe what he thinks.”

“We’ll be sure to ask him when we find him. Meanwhile, go ahead and run the cocktail by Illegals. I’ll do a standard search for the DNA match. Maybe he’s in the system.”

But she didn’t think so. He wasn’t careless, Eve thought. He was fucking arrogant. It didn’t surprise her when her search turned up negative.

“Lieutenant.”

She glanced over, experienced that quick heart punch when her eyes met Roarke’s. He was dressed in the dark suit he’d put on in their bedroom that morning, one of the countless he owned tailored to fit his long, rangy frame.

“Right on time,” she said.

“We aim to please.” He stepped in, eased a hip onto the corner of her desk. “How goes the vampire hunting?”

“I don’t think we’ll have to call in Van Helsing.” When he lifted his brows and grinned, she shrugged. “I do my research. Plus I’ve sat through some of those old vids you like so much.”

“And so armed, we’ll venture into the den of the children of the night. Never a dull moment,” he added and flicked his fingers at the choppy ends



of her hair. “Your case is all over the media.”

“Yeah. Bound to be.”

“I noticed the primary hasn’t given a statement.”

“I’m not going to play the game on this one, or give this asshole the satisfaction. She drugged her own brains out prior—mix of Zeus, Erotica, Whore, Rabbit, Stunner, Bliss, Boost, along with a few other goodies, including her killer’s blood.”

“There’s an ugly recipe.”

“And my money says he provided the brew, pushed on her vanity and stupid buttons, got his rocks off, then drained her like a faulty motor.”

“For what purpose?” Roarke wondered.

“Best I can tell, he wound her up because he could. And he killed her because he could. He’ll want to do it again, real soon.”

“Foolish of him, don’t you think, to have chosen such a high-profile victim?”

She’d considered that, and had to appreciate being married to a man who could think like a cop. “Yeah, smarter, safer to bite a vagrant off the street. But this was more fun, more exciting. Why snack on street whores or sidewalk sleepers, the nobodies, when you can gorge yourself on the prime? Plus, it was profitable. A street level LC isn’t going to be sporting blue diamonds. He’s stoked, believe it, watching all the media coverage.”

“Unless he’s spent the day napping in his coffin.”

“Ha, ha.” She pushed up, instinctively brushed a hand over the weapon at her side. “Almost sundown. Let’s go clubbing.”

Peabody was lying in wait, along with her cohab, E-Division Detective McNab. He wasn’t just a fashion plate, but an entire place setting, and was decked out in pants of neon blue that appeared to be made up almost entirely of pockets. He’d matched it with a bright green jacket with streaks

of yellow jagged across it and some sort of skinny tank that melded all the colors of the spectrum in a kind of eye-searing cloudburst.

“I thought we could use another pair of eyes,” Peabody began even as Eve’s eyes narrowed. “You know, strength in numbers.”

“I did a rotation in Illegals when I was still in uniform.” McNab grinned out of his pretty, narrow face. “And when I worked Vice, we ran into all kinds of freaky shit.”

“You don’t want to miss a chance to cruise a vampire club.”

He smile turned winsome. “Who would?”

She could use him, Eve thought, but she gave him the hard-eye first, just for form. “This isn’t a damn double date.”

“No, sir.” So he waited until Eve turned her back to walk to the elevator before hooking pinkies with Peabody.

“Illegals hasn’t worked the combo,” Peabody began once they’d shoehorned into the elevator. “They don’t even have Bloodbath on their list of watch points. But they have worked a combination of Erotica, Bliss, Rabbit, with traces of blood—usually animal blood—in cases of vampire fetishism. They call it Vamp, and the use generally skews young. They haven’t had any homicides as a result of.”

“Our guy upped the stakes, considerably. Have to wonder why the club hasn’t made their list.”

“It’s new,” Peabody told her. “Way underground. Hadn’t hit their radar until I contacted them regarding our investigation.”

“Underground clubs pop up faster than weeds,” McNab put in. “Live or die on word of mouth. Since it’s more than urban legend that people tend to go down and not come back up, they don’t get heavy tourist traffic.”

“Tiara Kent found out about it somewhere.” Eve strode off the elevator and into the garage.

“Crowd she runs with.” Peabody jerked a shoulder. “New place with a jagged edge? It would be right up her alley.”

“And in less than two weeks from the first time she goes down, she’s guzzling a new, exciting illegals cocktail, and dies from a neck wound.” Eve slid behind the wheel of her vehicle. “That’s fast work, smooth work when you consider the security in her building never made him.” She glanced over at Roarke. “How much would a few pints of human blood net on the black market?”

“A few hundred.”

“What about famous human blood?”

“Ah.” He nodded as she drove out of the garage. “Yes, that might drive up the price to the right buyer. Are you thinking she was specifically targeted?”

“It’s an angle. She’s known, and she’s known to take risks, to slut around, to live wild. Her best friend hadn’t heard of the club before Kent clued her in. So maybe the idea or an invitation got passed straight onto the vic. In any case, she hooked up with her killer there, so someone saw them together. Someone knows him.”

“You know,” McNab speculated, “if you factor out the blood-sucking, soulless demon angle, this should be a slam dunk.”

“Good thing none of us believe in blood-sucking, soulless demons.” But Peabody’s hand crept over and found McNab’s.

Eve caught the gesture in the rearview, just as she caught the way the fingers of Peabody’s free hand snuck between the buttons of her shirt to close over something.

“Peabody, are you wearing a cross?”

“What? Me?” The hand dropped like a stone into her lap. Her cheeks went pink as she cleared her throat. “It just happened that I know Mariella in

Records, who just happened to have one, and I happened to borrow it. Just for backup.”

“I see. And would you also be carrying a pointy stick?”

“Not unless you mean McNab.”

McNab smiled easily as Eve stopped at a light, turned around in her seat. “Repeat after me: Vampires do not exist.”

“Vampires do not exist,” Peabody recited.

With a nod, Eve turned back, then narrowed her eyes at Roarke. “What’s that look on your face?”

“Speculation. Most legends, after all, have some basis in fact. From Vlad the Impaler to Dracula of lore. It’s interesting, don’t you think?”

“It’s interesting that I’m in this vehicle with a trio of lamebrains.”

“Lamebrained to some,” Roarke replied equably, “open-minded to others.”

“Huh. Maybe we should stop off at a market on the way, pick up a few pounds of garlic, just to ease those open minds.”

“Really?” Peabody said from the back, then hunched her shoulders as Eve sent her a stony stare in the rearview mirror. “That means no,” Peabody muttered to McNab.

“I translated already.”

Eve had to settle for a second-level street slot five blocks from the underground entrance. The sun had set, and the balmy April day had gone to chill with a wind that had risen up to kick through the urban canyons.

They moved through the packs of pedestrians—heading home, heading to dinner, heading to entertainment. At the mouth of the underground entrance, Eve paused.

“Stick together through the tunnels,” she ordered. “We can work in pairs once we get to the club, but even then, let’s keep visual contact at all times.”

She didn’t believe in the demons of lore, but she knew the human variety existed. And many of them lived, played, or worked in the bowels of the city.

They moved down, out of the noise, out of the wind, into the dank dimness of the tunnels. The clubs and haunts and dives that existed there catered to a clientele that would make most convicted felons sprint in the opposite direction.

Offerings underground included sex clubs that specialized in S&M, in torture dealt out for a fee by human, droid, or machine, or any miserable combination thereof. In the bars, the drinks were next to lethal and a man’s life was worth less than the price of a shot. The violent and the mad might wander there, sliding off into the shadows to do what could only be done in the dark, where blood and death bloomed like fetid mushrooms.

She could hear weeping, raw and wild, echoing down one of the tunnels, and laughter that was somehow worse. She saw one of the lost addicts, pale as a ghost, huddled on the filthy floor, panting, pushing a syringe against his arm, giving himself a fix of what would eventually kill him.

She turned away from it, passed a sex club where the lights were hard and red and reminded her of the room in Dallas where she’d killed her father.

It was cold underground, as it had been cold in that room. The kind of cold that sank its teeth into the bone like an animal.

She heard something scuttling to the left, and saw the gleam of eyes. She stared into them until they blinked, and they vanished.

“I should’ve given you my clutch piece,” she said under her breath to Roarke.

“Not to worry. I have my own.”

She spared him a glance. He looked, she realized, every bit as deadly as anything that roamed the tunnels. "Try not to use it."

They turned down an angle beyond a vid parlor where someone screamed in a hideous combination of pain and delight.

She smelled piss and vomit as they descended the next level. When a man with bulging muscles stepped out of the dark, turned the knife he held into the slant of light so it gleamed, Eve simply drew her weapon.

"Wanna bet who wins?" she asked him, and he melted away again.

From there, she followed the strong vibration of bass, the scent of heavy perfume, and the ocean surf roar of voices.

The lights here were red as well, with some smoke blue, fog gray shimmered in. Mists curled and crawled over the floor. The doorway was an arch, to represent the mouth of a cave. Over the arch the word BLOODBATH throbbed in bloody red.

Two bouncers, one black, one white, both built like tanker jets, flanked the arch, then stepped together to form a wall of oiled muscle.

"Invitation or passcode," they said in unison.

"This is both." Eve pulled out her badge, and got twin smirks.

"That doesn't mean jack down here," the one on the left told her. "Private club."

Before she could speak again, Roarke simply pulled out several bills. "I believe this is the passcode."

After the money passed, the bouncers separated to make an opening. As they walked through, Eve shot Roarke an annoyed look. "I don't have to bribe my way in."

"No, but you were going to hurt them, and that's a lot messier. In any case, it was worth the fee as you take me to the most interesting places."

The club was three open levels, dark and smoky, with the pentagram bar as the center. A stage jutted out on the second level where a band played the kind of music that bashed into the chest like hurled stones. Fog crept over it like writhing snakes. Patrons sat at the bar, at metal tables, lurked in corners or danced on platforms. Nearly all wore black, and nearly all were well under thirty.

There were some privacy booths and some were already occupied with couples or small groups smoking what was likely illegal substances inside the domes, or groping each other. Eve's gaze tracked up to note there were private rooms on the third level. The club had a live sex license, and no doubt all manner of acts transpired behind the doors.

She approached the bar where a man or woman worked at every point of the pentagram. Eve chose a woman with straight black hair parted in the center to frame a pale, pale face. Her lips were heavy and full and dyed deep, dark red.

"What can I get you?" the woman asked.

"Whoever's in charge." Eve set her badge on the slick black metal of the bar.

"There a problem?"

"There will be if you don't get me whoever runs this place."

"Sure." The bartender drew a headset out of her pocket. "Dorian? Allesseria. I've got a cop at station three asking for the manager. Sure thing."

She put the headset away again. "He'll be right down. Said I should offer you a drink, on the house."

"No, thanks. Have you seen this woman in here, Allesseria?" Eve drew out Tiara's ID photo.

She saw recognition immediately, then the quick wariness. And then the lie. "Can't say I have. We get slammed in here by midnight. Hard to pick out

faces in the crowd, and with this lighting.”

“Right. You got anything on tap here but beer and brew?”

Once again, Eve saw the lie. “I don’t know what you mean. I just run the stick at this station. That’s it, that’s all. I got customers.”

“She’s not only a poor liar,” Roarke observed. “She’s a frightened one.”

“Yeah, she is.” Eve scanned the crowd again. She saw a man barely old enough to make legal limit actually wearing a cape, and a woman, nearly a decade older, all but bursting out of a long, tight black dress, who was wrapping herself around him like a snake on one of the dance platforms.

Another woman in sharp red sat alone in a privacy booth and looked mildly bored. When a man wearing mostly tattoos glided up to the bar, ordered, *Allesseria* poured something into a tall glass that bubbled and smoked. He downed it where he stood, throat rippling, then set the glass down with a snarling grin that flashed pointed incisors.

Eve literally felt Peabody shudder beside her. “Jesus, this place is creepy.”

“It’s a bunch of show and theater.”

Then Eve saw him coming down the corkscrew of steps from the top level. He was dressed in black, as would be expected. His hair, black as well, rained past his shoulders, a sharp contrast to the white skin of his face. And that face had a hard and sensual beauty that compelled the eye.

He moved gracefully, a lithe black cat. As he reached the second level, a blonde rushed toward him, gripped his hand. There was a pathetic desperation about her as she leaned into him. He simply trailed his fingers down her cheek, shook his head. Then he bent to capture her mouth in a deep kiss as his hands slid under her short skirt to rub naked, exposed flesh. She clung to him afterward so that he had to set her aside, which he did by lifting her a foot off the ground in a show of careless strength.

Eve could see her mouth move, knew the woman called to him, though the music and voices drowned out the sound.



He crossed the main level, and his eyes locked with Eve's. She felt the jolt—she could admit it. His eyes were like ink, deep and dark and hooded. As he walked to her, his lips curved in a smile that was both knowing and confident.

And in the smile she saw something that didn't cause that quick, physical jolt, but a deep and churning physical dread.

"Good evening," he said in a voice that carried a trace of some Eastern European accent. "I'm Dorian Vadim, and this is my place."

Though her throat had gone dry, Eve gave him an acknowledging nod. "Lieutenant Dallas." She drew out her badge yet again. "Detectives Peabody and McNab. And..."

"No introduction necessary." There was another quality to him now, what seemed to be a prickly combination of admiration and envy. "I'm aware of Roarke, and of you, Lieutenant. Welcome to Bloodbath."

## Five

She knew what she saw when she looked at him. She saw in those pitch-dark eyes her greatest single fear: She saw her father.

There was no physical resemblance between the man before her and the one who had tormented and abused her for the first eight years of her life. It went, she understood, deeper than physical. Its surface was a calculated charm thinly coated over an indifferent cruelty.

Under it all was utter disregard for anything approaching the human code.

The monster that had lived in her father looked at her now out of Dorian Vadim's eyes.

And he smiled almost as if he knew it. "It's an honor to have you here. What can I get you to drink?"

“We’re not drinking,” Eve told him, though she would have paid any price but pride for a sip of water to cool the burning in her throat. “This isn’t a social call.”

“No, of course not. Well then, what can I do for you?”

Eve slid the photo of Tiara across the bar. Dorian lifted it, glanced at it briefly. “Tiara Kent. I heard she was killed this morning. Tragic.” He tossed it down again without another glance. “So young, so lovely.”

“She’s been in here.”

“Yes.” He affirmed without an instant’s hesitation. “A week or two ago. Twice, I believe. I greeted her myself when I was told she’d come in. Good for business.”

“How did she get the invitation?” Eve demanded.

“One may have been sent to her. A selection of the young, high-profile clubbers is sent invitations periodically. We’ve only been open a few weeks. But as you can see...” He turned, gestured to the crowd that screamed over the blasting music. “Business is good.”

“She came alone.”

“I believe she did, now that you mention it.” He turned back, angling just a little closer to Eve, until the hairs on the back of her neck prickled. “As I recall, she was to meet a friend, or friends. I don’t believe she did. I’d hoped she’d come back, with some of her crowd. They spend lavishly, and can make a club such as this.”

“Underground clubs aren’t made that way.”

“Things change.” He picked up the drink Allesseria had set on the bar, watching Eve over the rim as he sipped. “As do times.”

“And how much time did you spend with Kent?”

“Quite a bit on her initial visit. I gave her a tour of the place, bought her a few drinks.” He sipped again, slowly. “Danced with her.”

Her father had smelled of candy from the mints he chewed to cover the liquor. Dorian smelled of musk, yet she scented the hard sweetness of candy and whiskey. "Went home with her?"

He smiled, and when he set down his glass his knuckles lightly brushed Eve's hand. "If you want to know if I fucked her, you've only to ask. I didn't, though it was tempting. But bad for business. Wouldn't you agree?" he said to Roarke. "Sex with clients is a tricky business."

"It would depend on the client, and the business." Roarke's voice was a silky purr, a tone Eve knew was dangerous. "Other things are bad for business as well."

As if acknowledging some unspoken warning, Dorian angled his head in a slight nod, shifted his body away from Eve's.

"Did you tell her you were a vampire?" Eve demanded. "That you could turn her?"

Dorian slid on a stool and laughed. "Yes, to the first. It's part of the atmosphere, as you can clearly see. The core clientele come here for the thrill, the eroticism of the cult, the thrill of possibility. Certainly part of the draw is the fear and the allure of the undead, along with the dark promise of eternal youth and power."

"So you sell it, but you don't buy it."

"We'll just say I very much enjoy my work."

"Tiara Kent was exsanguinated, through a two-pronged wound through the carotid artery."

He lifted one arched black brow. "Really? Fascinating. Do you believe in vampires, Lieutenant Dallas? In those who prey on the human, and thirst for their blood?"

"I believe in the susceptible, in the foolish, and in those who exploit them. She was drugged first." Eve took a careless glance around and hated, hated

that her chest felt tight. “I wonder how many illegals I’d net if I ordered a sweep of this place?”

“I couldn’t say. We both know such things aren’t as...regulated underground.” He stared deeply into her eyes. “Just as we both know that’s not what you’re here for.”

“One leads to another. Her killer left his DNA behind.”

“Ah, well. We can, at least, settle that one particular element.” Watching her still, he rolled up his sleeve. “Allesseria, I’ll need a syringe with a vial. Unopened.”

“You keep needles behind the bar?” Eve snapped out.

“Part of the show. We serve several drinks that contain a dram or two of pig’s blood, and it’s added with a syringe for flourish.” He took the needle from the bartender. “Should you do the honors,” he asked Eve, “or I?”

“A swab of your spit would be easier.”

“But not nearly as interesting.” He pumped his fist until a vein rose, then slid the needle neatly—expertly, Eve thought—into it. Depressed the plunger. “Allesseria, you’ll witness I’m providing the lieutenant with my blood voluntarily.”

When the bartender didn’t speak, Dorian turned his head toward her slowly, stared.

“Yes. Yes, I will.”

“That should be enough.” He flashed a hard smile at Eve, then removed the needle, capped off the vial. “Thank you, Allesseria.” Flipping the syringe agilely, he held it out, plunger first. “Dispose of that properly,” he ordered, then handed the vial to Eve. “You’ll mark and seal that in our presence?”

As she did, Dorian swiped his fingertip over the drop of blood on the tiny puncture in his flesh, then laid it on his tongue. “Is there anything else?”

“Did you see Miss Kent with anyone in particular, see her leaving with anyone?”

“I can’t say I did. I believe she danced with any number of people. Feel free to ask any of the staff, and I’ll be happy to ask myself.”

“You do that. We’ll need an address, Mr. Vadim.”

“Dorian, please. I’m known as Dorian. I can be reached here. I’m living upstairs at the moment. Let me give you a card.” He waved his fingers, flicked them, and a glossy black card appeared between the index and middle finger. As he passed it to Eve, his fingers brushed down her palm, lingered for just an instant too long. Then he smiled. “I tend to sleep days.”

“I bet. One more thing. Can you verify your whereabouts from midnight to three this morning?”

“I would have been here. As I said, I’m most often here.”

“Anybody vouch for that?”

His lips quirked again, in a kind of smug amusement that put her back up. “I imagine so. You might ask any of the staff or the regulars. Allesseria?” He turned his black gaze from Eve’s face to the bartender. “You were on last night. Didn’t we speak some time after midnight?”

“I was on until two.” Allesseria kept her eyes locked on Dorian’s. “You were, ah, working the floor before I left, came by the bar for a spring water just before I clocked out. At two.”

“There you are. Lieutenant, it’s been a pleasure.” He took her hand, held it firmly. “But I really need to get back to work. Roarke. I hope you’ll both come back, for the entertainment.”

Through the fog that shimmered and curled, he glided off again, easing his way through the crowd. Eve shifted her body, stared hard at the bartender. “You want to tell me why you lied for him?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Busily now, Allesseria wiped the bar.

“You don’t see a woman whose face is all over the screen and mags, and she comes in at least twice, hangs with your boss. You don’t make her.” Some of the anger she felt for herself snapped out in her voice. “But you remember Dorian got a spring water at two in the morning.”

“That’s right.”

“I need your full name.”

“You’re going to cost me my job if you don’t back off.”

“Full name,” Eve repeated.

“Allesseria Carter. If you have any more questions, I’m calling a lawyer.”

“That’ll do it for now. You remember anything, get in touch.” Eve laid one of her cards on the bar before she stepped away. “If that wasn’t Kent’s Prince of frigging Darkness pigs are currently dive-bombing Fifth Avenue.”

“Blood will tell,” Roarke said quietly.

“Bet your fine ass.”

Once they were out on the street, Peabody’s sigh was long and heartfelt. “Man. Creepshow—even if the Lord of the Undead is intensely sexy.”

“Looked like another freak to me,” McNab muttered.

“You’re a guy who likes women. If you were a woman who liked men, we’d still be rolling your tongue back into your mouth. He completely smoked, right, Dallas?”

Women had found her father attractive, Eve thought. No matter what he’d done to them.

“I’m sure Tiara Kent thought the same even as he was draining the life out of her. I’m going to call a black-and-white for you. I want you to take the

blood sample directly to the lab, wait while it's logged in."

"Got it." Peabody took the sample, stowed it in her bag.

"I'll run our host, and the bartender. This isn't his first time around the block—and she was lying about seeing him this morning. Lab comes through quickly enough, we'll be giving Vadim a very unpleasant wake-up call."

They separated, and as she walked Eve gave Roarke a quick hip bump. Now that she was on the street, away from Vadim, away from those pulsing lights, she felt herself again. "You're quiet."

"Contemplating. He was scoping you, you know. Subtle but quite deliberate." When she started to jam her hands into her pockets, Roarke took one, brought it casually to his lips. "He wanted to see your reaction—and mine."

"Must be disappointed we didn't give him one. Or much of one on your part."

"More puzzled, I'd think."

"Okay, why didn't you slap him back?"

"It was tempting, but more satisfying to let him wonder. In any case, he's not your type."

She snorted. "Nah. I don't go for the tall, dark, gorgeous types who exude sexuality like breath."

"You don't go for sociopaths."

She glanced up at him. He'd seen it, too, she realized. He'd seen at least that much, too. "You got that right."

"Besides, I'm taller."

Now she laughed, and because really, what did it hurt, she turned as she climbed the platform to the car, feigned judging his height as she laid her

hands on his shoulders. She pressed her lips to his, warm, ripe, real, then eased back. “Yeah, I’d say you’re exactly tall enough to fit my requirements. You drive, ace. I want to start the runs on the way home.”

She used her PPC , and though it was limited to a mini-screen, Dorian Vadim’s ID photo still had punch. His hair had been shorter when it was taken, but it still brushed past his shoulders. It listed his age at thirty-eight, his birthplace as Budapest, where according to his data, he still had a mother.

It also listed a very impressive sheet.

“Grifting’s a specialty of our suave Mister V,” Eve related. “Lotsa pops there, starting with a juvie record that was never sealed. Bounced around Europe and came to the States, it seems, in his early twenties. Arrests for smuggling—no convictions on that. Illegals, some pops, some questioned and released. Worked as an entertainer—mesmerist and magician. Hmmm. A lot of dropped charges, heavy on the female vics. Was questioned about the disappearance of two women he reputedly bilked. Not enough evidence to arrest, and no DNA in his records.

“Slithered through the system like a snake,” she muttered. “No violence on record, but wits recant or poof with regularity.” She frowned over at Roarke. “You buy into that mesmo stuff?”

“Hypnotism is a proven art, you know Mira uses it in therapy.”

“Yeah, but mostly I think it’s bull.” Still she remembered the odd sensation she’d felt when Dorian had stared into her eyes. Her problem, she told herself. Her personal demons.

“Anyway, the man’s bad news. And he’s got a pattern of victimizing women, wealthy ones particularly.”

She did a quick run on the bartender and found no criminal on Allesseria. “Bartender’s clean. Divorced, with a kid just turning three.” Eve pursed her lips as Roarke drove through the open gates toward home. “I get her in the box, even alone at her own place, I can break her. She’s lying about seeing



Dorian. I could snap her statement in five minutes without him around. He scares her.”

“He’s a killer.”

“Yeah, no question.”

“I mean she knows it, or believes it. You’re capable of snapping her statement, and he’s equally capable of snapping her neck—and with a great deal less passion.”

“Wouldn’t disagree. I just wonder why you’d say that after one conversation with him.”

“I would have said it after one look at him. His eyes. He’s a vampire.”

Her mouth dropped open as he stopped the car. She hadn’t managed to get words working with her thoughts until she’d pushed out of the car, rounded the hood to meet him. “You said what?”

“I mean it literally. His type sucks the life out of people, and does it for momentary pleasure, just as effectively as any fictional vampire. And he’s just, darling Eve, as soulless.”

Like her father, Eve thought. Yes, Roarke had seen it, too. He’d seen all of it. There was nothing strange or frightening about recognizing a monster.

It only meant she understood her quarry.

Eve stepped in, pulled off her jacket. She gestured toward Summerset, Roarke’s majordomo, who—as he inevitably did—stood waiting in the foyer in his funereal black suit. “I always figured vampires looked like that. Pale, bony, dour, and dead.” She tossed the jacket on the newel and started up the stairs.

“Will you be having dinner in the dining room like normal human beings this evening?” Summerset asked.

“Got work, and nobody who looks like you should toss around words like ‘normal’.”

“We’ll get something upstairs,” Roarke said placidly.

He strolled with Eve into her office, then immediately whipped around and boxed her against the wall. “I think I’ll start with an appetizer,” he said, then crushed his lips to hers.

Her blood went to instant sizzle. She could all but feel her brains leaking out of her ears as his mouth ravaged hers with a kind of feral impatience that thrilled. Even as she gripped his hips, he was doing torturous things to her body with those quick and clever hands.

She gulped in air, and simply gave herself to the wild and wanton moment. And to him.

She would always give. He knew no matter how much he wanted, she would always be there to give, or take, to meet those endless, urgent needs with her own. Her mouth was a fever on his. A moan poured from her as he tugged her shirt apart, then found that warm, trembling flesh with his lips, his teeth.

The taste of her incited a fresh and mammoth wave of hunger.

Her hands yanked at the hook of his trousers as his yanked at hers. And she pressed erotically against him, core to core.

Her eyes were dark when he looked into them and, for one brilliant moment, went blind when he plunged inside her.

She matched him, beat for frantic beat, riding and racing the violent pleasure as he dragged her arms over her head, as he pinned them there. As he battered them both over the last turbulent crest.

Her breath whistled in and out; he rested his cheek on her hair as he caught his own. And in sweet opposition to the force of their mating, he brushed his lips at her temple, soft as gossamer wings.

“I believe I was a bit more than mildly annoyed by having some poster boy for Dracula hit on my wife in front of my face.”

“Worked for me.” Grateful for the wall behind her, Eve leaned back, managed to focus on Roarke’s eyes. “Feel better?”

“Considerably, thanks.”

“Anytime. You know what, I feel like a big, fat hunk of red meat. How about you?”

He smiled, touched his lips to hers. “I could eat.”

## Six

She had an enormous hamburger while she backtracked through Dorian Vadim’s criminal record. She burned up the ‘link as she ate, as Dorian hadn’t just slithered through the system, but had wound his way around the country and in and out of Europe while he did so. She spoke to detectives and investigators in Chicago, Boston, Miami, New L.A., East Washington, and several European cities.

She took copious notes, requested files, and made promises to keep other cops in other cities in the loop.

At some point during the process, Roarke wandered out. She’d set up another murder board, typed up her notes, and was talking to the head of security at Tiara Kent’s building when Roarke wandered back in again.

She held up a finger.

“Go back as far as you can. If you see this guy on any of your discs, at any point, I want to know. Yeah, day or night. Thanks.”

She disconnected. “Gist from the cops I’ve talked to across the frigging globe is Vadim is a smart grifter with the conscience and agility of a snake, an ego as big as...how big is Idaho?”

“There are bigger,” Roarke considered, “but I’d say that’s big enough.”

“Okay, we’ll go with Idaho, and an appetite for rich females and illegal substances. I’m damned if he’ll slip through my fingers. Going to wrap him

up quick, going to wrap him up tight,” she told Roarke. “If we get him on any of the building’s security discs, it’s one more—ha, ha—nail in his coffin.”

“Then you might be interested in what I ferreted out, regarding his financials.”

Her expression went from intent to annoyed. “I don’t have authorization to ferret in his financials, as yet.”

“Which is why I used the unregistered. I don’t like him,” Roarke said very clearly before Eve could complain.

“Yeah, loud and clear on that. But I don’t need his financial data at this point, and I can’t use anything you found by illegal means, so—”

“So don’t use it. And if you’re not as curious as I was, I’ll keep the information to myself.”

He walked over, opened a wall panel, and got out the brandy. She lasted until he’d poured himself a snifter.

“Damn it. What did you find?”

“He’s not officially listed as the owner of the club, but he owns it—such as it is. He’s built several fronts, and is registered as its manager.”

“Shady,” she commented, “but not strictly illegal.”

“He’s also sunk quite a bit into the club—more, in my opinion, than makes good business sense on an underground establishment. I’d say Idaho might be lacking in square miles, after all. His overhead’s considerably more than his take, particularly considering his payroll.”

“You hacked into his books for Bloodbath?”

“It wasn’t any trouble.” He swirled, then sipped brandy. “Not much of a challenge. He’s losing money on it, every week. Yet his personal finances don’t reflect that. Instead there’s a nice steady build. Nothing that would

wave flags, which tells me he's very likely tucked away other accounts. I only scraped off a few layers on this run."

"What's his other income?" Eve wondered, and Roarke smiled.

"That's a question."

"Illegals are likely one chute. Bilking, blackmail, extortion. Once a grifter... He could've been milking Kent, but if it was just about money, why kill the really rich cow before she runs dry? It's not just about money," she said before Roarke could. "That's a shiny side benefit."

"Agreed. And I'm going to wager very shiny. I can take a hard look at Kent's finances, but I suspect she was the type who flung money about like confetti on New Year's Eve."

"Yeah, she had hundreds of shoes."

"I don't see the correlation, however," he continued as she rolled her eyes. "With enough time, I could find his hidey-holes, and jibe any unusual income with the same outlay from Kent's."

"Given enough time," Eve repeated. "Hours or days?"

"From the subjects in question, it could take a few days."

"Crap. Poking there won't hurt. But that's not what's going to get him."

"Again, we agree." He strolled over, sat on her desk. He liked it there, where he could look down into those whiskey-toned eyes. Those cop's eyes. "It may be weight, but it won't be your hammer. And as for the club, he's certainly got a second set of books on that, one that includes any exorbitant, and likely illegal membership fees, illegals transactions, and the like. Which I'll find for you, in time, as well."

"You're really handy to have around." She tapped his knee with her finger. "And not just for the sex."

"Darling, how sweet. I'll say the same of you." He bent down to kiss her lightly—another reason he liked sitting in just that spot. "On Vadim, if he

were smarter, he'd be keeping his income and outlay closer on his official records. But he's not as smart as he thinks he is."

"But you're smarter than even he thinks he is." She paused, thought that through. "If you get me."

"Aren't we full of compliments tonight? I'll have to bang you against the wall more often."

She laughed, then picked up her coffee. She drank it even though it had gone cold. "I'll have the DNA match in the morning, maybe get lucky and get a blip of him on Kent's building's security. I'm going to corner the bartender and break down her corroboration of his bullshit alibi. I'll have him in a cage by noon. Then we can take his finances and his records apart, piece by piece. You can add weight to my hammer."

Roarke angled his head. "Except? I can hear an 'except' in your voice."

"Except it's too easy. Roarke. It's all too goddamn easy on his end. He gave up his blood without a blink, and with a smile."

"I particularly dislike his smile," Roarke commented.

"Yeah? With you on that. He has to know he left DNA at Kent's that can hang him, but he didn't demand I get a warrant. And the fact is, it might have taken me some fast talking to get one for it. He may not be as smart as he thinks, but he's not stupid either. He's not worried, and that worries me."

"So, he has an ace in the hole somewhere. You'll just have to trump it. Now, tell me, what else is it that worries you?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You went somewhere else in your head once or twice when we were in the club. And you've been there again a time or two since. Where did you go that worries you?"

"I've got a lot to push through, think through," she began.

“Eve.” It was all he said. All he needed to say.

“I saw my father. I stood there in that ugly place, and he came toward me. Toward me,” she repeated. “Not us, not the group of us, but me.”

“Yes. Yes, he did.”

“Like a dream, in a way. The fog, the lights, the noise. I knew it was for effect, for show, but...I got a hook in me, I guess, and then I looked in his eyes. You said sociopath. You said killer. And yeah, I saw that. But I saw more than that. When I looked into him I saw whatever monster it was that lived in my father. I saw it staring out at me. And it...it sickens me. It scares me.”

Roarke reached down, took her hand. “Knowing monsters exist, as you and I do, Eve, may not always make for easy sleep, or even an easy heart. But it arms us against them.”

“It was like he knew.” She tightened her grip on his hand. There was no one else she could have told such things to. There had been a time when there’d been no one at all she could have told such things to. “I know it was my imagination, my own...demons, I guess you could say, but when he stared back into me, it was like he knew. Like he could see what was small and scared inside of me.”

“You’re wrong on that. What he saw was a woman who won’t stand down.”

“I hope so, because for a couple seconds I wanted to run. Just rabbit the hell out of there.” She let out a shaky breath. “There are all kinds of vampires, you said that, too. Isn’t that what my father was? Trying to suck the life out of me, trying to make me into something less than human? I put a knife into him instead of a stake. Maybe that’s why he keeps coming back in my head.”

“It’s you who made you.” He leaned down now, framed her face with his hands. “And what you are your father would never have understood. Neither would Vadim. No matter how he looks, he’ll never really see you.”

“He thinks he does.”

“His mistake. Eve, do you want to talk to Mira about this?”

“No.” She considered it another moment, then shook her head and repeated, “No, not now anyway. Dumping on you levels it out a little. Taking him down, all the way down—that’ll take care of the rest.”

For a moment she studied their joined hands, then shifted her gaze up to his. “I didn’t want to tell you I’d been scared, much less why. I guess that was stupid.”

“It was.”

She scowled. “Aren’t you supposed to say something like ‘No, it wasn’t. Blah, blah, support, stroke, let me get you some chocolate’?”

“You haven’t read the marriage handbook, footnotes. It’s another woman who does that sort of thing. I believe I’m allowed to be more blunt, then ask if you’d like a quick shag.”

“Shag yourself,” she said and made him laugh. “But thanks anyway.”

“Offer’s always on the table.”

“Yeah, yeah, and the floor, in the closet, or on the front stairs. Time to work, ace, not to play.”

She pushed up to study and circle her murder board, and he knew she was soothed and settled.

“Prior bad acts, and plenty of them. Mysterious income. Contact with the vic, and the profile fits him like a tailor-made suit. Bullshit alibi. He’s running a game in that club, skinning rich idiots with his vampire fantasy, maybe blackmailing them, selling illegals. But that’s only part of the picture. He’s got something,” she said in a mutter now. “He’s got something, and he’s feeling fucking smug about it.”

“Heads up, Lieutenant,” Roarke warned.



She glanced his way, caught the candy bar he tossed across the room. She grinned, tore the wrapper, and biting in, continued to study her board.

When Allesseria finished her shift, she was careful not to rush, careful to do everything just as she did every night. She closed down her tabs, keyed in her codes, passed her station off to her replacement.

She stretched her back as she walked, casually, to the employee-only area where she stowed her bag and her jacket every shift. Even there, behind closed doors, she kept her expression neutral and her movements routine. Everyone knew there were cameras in every section of the club, the boss had made that clear.

You never knew who was watching.

Her yawn wasn't entirely feigned. It had been a long shift, and a busy one as the crowds that patronized Bloodbath liked to stay thoroughly lubed. As she always did, she transferred her tips to her bag, zipped them into its inside pocket. After fitting the bag's strap across her body, she put her jacket over it.

She hung the illuminated cards, given to all employees, around her neck so that one glowed between her breasts, the other between her shoulder blades.

With the gleaming gold pentagram with its boldly red double B's in the center like a shield front and back, nobody would bother her on the way out of the club, on the nasty route through the tunnels. It was something else Dorian had made clear from the get-go, and he'd made an example of a souped-up chemi-head who'd tried a move on one of the waitresses the first week the club opened.

Rumor was the guy had ended up in pieces, and there hadn't been enough blood left to so much as stain the ground.

It was probably bullshit. Probably. But it was enough to keep the path clear for anyone coming or going from Bloodbath who wore the sign.

Still, she checked her pocket, as she always did, for her ministunner and panic button.

An ounce of prevention was worth a lot of peace of mind.

She headed out, and as was usual at shift changes, she left the club with a group of other employees. Safety in numbers. There wasn't much chatter, there rarely was, so she could huddle inside her own thoughts as they wound through the stink and the shadows, through the pounding music and wailing screams.

She'd thought she could handle it, the money was too good to pass up. With salary and tips, if she was frugal, she could move out of the city, plunk down a down payment on a nice little house.

A yard for her kid, a day job.

It seemed like the perfect plan, and she knew how to take care of herself. But it was too much, she had to face that now. The club, the tunnels, the boss himself. It was all too much, and she was going to have to go back to working street level, pulling doubles just to put a few extra aside every week. The house in Queens, the yard, the dog, would all just have to wait a few more years.

She'd walked out of Bloodbath for the last time.

She'd send in written notice, that's what she'd do, Allesseria decided as she finally came out to the sidewalk. She'd use her son as an excuse. Dorian knew she had joint custody, but she could use the night work as too strenuous, too difficult.

Nothing he could do about it, she assured herself as she pulled off the glowing cards and stuffed them in her pocket. Nothing, that she could think of, that he'd want to do. At the salary he offered, he'd replace her in one crook of the finger.

Let somebody else mix pig's blood—God, she hoped it was just pig's blood—in gin to make Bloody Martinis, or handle dry ice to make a Graveyard. She was done.

The cops had been the last straw. She couldn't take any more.

He'd made her lie for him, so there was a reason he needed the lie.

As Allesseria went underground again, this time to catch the subway home, she admitted she'd lied before he'd asked. Something had warned her she'd be better off playing dumb.

Never seen that face before.

Tiara Kent, who'd knocked back a half-dozen Bloodies on her first visit to the club—and had spent a hell of a lot of time up in Dorian's private office.

Okay, she hadn't seen them leave together, but in fact, she hadn't seen either of them leave when Tiara had come to the club. Which meant they might have slipped out through Dorian's office.

And Allesseria hadn't seen Dorian from sometime before midnight last shift. He hadn't come down to work the floor as she'd told the cop he had. He hadn't worked the floor, not once that she'd noticed, after Tiara Kent had gone up those stairs with him.

And she always noticed him because of the way her skin started to crawl.

He could've killed Tiara Kent. He could've done it.

With her arms protectively crossed over her torso, Allesseria sat on the train, struggling with what she should do, could do. A dozen times she told herself just walking away was enough. It wasn't her responsibility, and she'd be smarter to just mind her own business. Quitting was enough. More than enough.

But when she got off at her stop, she thought of her son, how she tried to teach him to do the right thing, to stand up for what he knew was right. To be a good man one day.

So she pulled out the card the cop had left on the bar and her pocket 'link as she walked the dark street home.

Nerves prickled at the base of her spine, crawled up to the back of her throat. Even though she told herself it was foolish, she shot anxious glances over her shoulder. Nothing to worry about now, nothing . She was blocks from the club, and back on street level. As far as Dorian knew she'd backed him up, 100 percent.

She was nearly home. She was safe.

Still, she stayed in the streetlights where she could as she recited Eve's office code. When she reached voice mail, she took a long breath.

"Lieutenant Dallas, this is Alleseria Carter, the bartender at Bloodbath."

She paused, looking over her shoulder again as those nerves dug in like claws. Had she heard something? Footsteps, a rustle in the breeze?

But she saw nothing but light and shadow, the black, blank windows in the buildings.

Still, she increased her pace, felt her knees tremble as she hurried. "I need to talk to you, um, talk to you about Tiara Kent. If you could contact me as soon—"

He came out of nowhere, charging in like some dark and brutal wind. Shock had her sucking in air as she whirled around, as she stumbled back. She managed one choked-off scream as his hand closed over her throat, squeezing out even that single panicked gulp. The black eyes stared into hers when her 'link went flying. As if she weighed nothing at all, he lifted her off the ground.

"You," he said in a quiet, almost pleasant tone, "made a very tragic mistake."

She kicked, her legs dancing and dangling like a hanging man's when he dragged her out of the circle of light from the street lamp. Red dots exploded in front of her eyes while her lungs screamed for air and her hand fumbled wildly for her panic button.

Her feet thudded on broken steps, and tears spurted out of her eyes. They bulged in horror when he smiled and she saw, impossibly, the flash of fangs.

In the dark, those gleaming points sank into her neck.

The minute she was dressed in the morning, Eve snagged a second cup of coffee. "I'm going to check my home office machine, see if I got anything from the lab overnight."

"Being a bit obsessive, aren't you?" Roarke asked from where he sat, scanning the morning financials on the bedroom screen. "It's barely seven."

"You have your obsessions." She nodded toward the maze of numbers. "I have mine."

"Check it from your pocket 'link then. Have something to eat while you're about it."

"How am I supposed to check my office messages with my pocket 'link?"

Roarke only sighed, rose. He walked to her and held out a hand. "They're all connected, my technology-challenged darling, hence the term 'link."

"Yeah, yeah, but then you have to remember all these codes and sequences, and it's just easier to..."

He punched a command while she frowned at him. "Relay any new incomings on home unit Dallas," he ordered.

Acknowledged...There are no incomings since last operator use on home unit Dallas...

"Huh. Okay, not as complicated as I thought. Can I check my unit at Central?"

He only smiled. "Relay any new incomings on office unit Dallas, Cop Central."

Acknowledged...There is one new incoming transmission on voice mail...

“Damn it.” She grabbed the ’link out of Roarke’s hand. “I told them to contact me here as soon as they had—”

Lieutenant Dallas, this is Allesseria Carter, the bartender at Bloodbath.

“Conscience got to her,” Eve decided, watching the face on screen. “Walking home, it looks like. Looks spooked.”

I need to talk to you, um, talk to you about Tiara Kent. If you could contact me as soon—

There was a sound—a rush of wind? Eve saw a black-gloved hand, the blur of it whip in and close over Allesseria’s throat.

“Fuck! Goddamn it.” Eve’s own hand clamped on Roarke’s arm as the screen image blurred, the ’link struck the sidewalk, and the display went black.

“Play it back again,” she ordered Roarke as she yanked out her communicator. “Dispatch, Dallas, Lieutenant Eve. I need a unit, closest possible unit at...” She flipped quickly through her memory to the address she’d pulled out of Allesseria’s data, then snapped it out. Repeated it. “Possible victim of assault is Carter, Allesseria. Female, Caucasian, thirty-four, black hair, medium build. I’m on my way.”

“I’ll go with you,” Roarke told her. “I’m closer than Peabody. You can contact her on the way. You know you won’t find her in her apartment,” he added as they rushed downstairs.

“Maybe she got away. Maybe he just wanted to scare her. Goddamn it, I picked her out for him. I set her up.”

“You did nothing of the kind.” He snatched up her jacket from the newel, tossed it to her as he snagged his own. “He chose her, the minute he asked her to lie for him, he chose her. I’ll drive.”

He'd get there faster, Eve knew, and it freed her to contact Peabody, then take the report from Dispatch. There was no response at Allesseria's apartment.

"Get inside," Eve snapped. "The victim's life is in immediate jeopardy. I have probable cause. Get the fuck inside."

She thumped her fist against her leg as she waited, waited, as Roarke maneuvered her police-issue through streams and clogs of morning traffic.

Dispatch, Dallas, Lieutenant Eve. Officers report the apartment is currently unoccupied. There is no sign of break-in or foul play.

No, Eve thought, there wouldn't be. He didn't take her there. "Start an immediate search in a five-block radius. Repeating description. Subject is female, Caucasian, age thirty-four, black and brown, last seen wearing black pants, black shirt, red jacket."

Eve ended the transmission, stared out the windshield. "I know it," she said, though Roarke had said nothing. "I know it. He didn't leave her alive."

## Seven

Eve scanned sidewalks, the buildings as they approached Allesseria's apartment. It was a tough, low end of the lower-middle-class neighborhood. Most self-respecting muggers would hunt for scores a few blocks away in any direction.

Pickings would be slim here, and the population willing to fight for what they carried in their pockets. Street level LCs would troll for johns elsewhere, too. All in all, the handful of blocks were safe simply because they were poor enough not to warrant much trouble.

But Allesseria Carter hadn't been safe.

Eve's gaze zeroed in on a subway exit. "Pull over, park wherever you can. She'd take the subway, wouldn't she? Cheap and quick. If she did, this would've been her route home."

She slammed out of the car the minute Roarke stopped, then pulled out her 'link to replay the message. Looked for landmarks. "It's dark, and it's mostly her face, but..." She held up her own 'link as if relaying a message, then looked over her left shoulder. "See here, could be that building in the background."

She kept walking, studying the screen, the street. "Here, he took her right about here. Somebody would've picked up her 'link by now, or he did, but it was right about here he attacked."

She scanned again, focused on a narrow building sagging between a Thai market and a boarded-up storefront. It was plastered with graffiti, and what looked like an old, torn CONDEMNED sign.

Eve took out her communicator, requested backup at the location. Then drawing her weapon, she started toward the door. "You carrying anything besides half the wealth of the world in your pocket?"

"Burglary tools, though this won't require them."

She nodded, reached down, and took her clutch piece out of its ankle holster. "You're deputized, ace." She sucked in a breath, kicked in the door.

She went in low and to the right while he took high and left in a routine they'd danced before. Sunlight dribbled through the broken windows, striking off shards of glass, filth, vermin droppings.

And blood.

Eve could smell it—not just the blood, but the death. That heavy human stench.

Roarke took out a penlight, shone it on the trail of smeared red.

He'd left her splayed on the floor, arms and legs spread out so her body formed a gruesome human X. Most of her clothes had been torn off, leaving only ragged remnants of black clinging to skin mottled with bruises.



Her blood spread out in a pool from the puncture wounds in her throat. Her eyes hadn't lost their horror with death, but stared at the ceiling in a fixed expression of abject terror.

"Didn't take her blood with him this time," Eve said quietly. "Didn't come prepared for that. But he made sure to hurt her plenty before he bled her out. Got off on her pain, got off on the power. See how he spread her out? Motherfucker."

Roarke touched a hand to Eve's shoulder. "I'll get your field kit."

She worked the scene; it's what she did. What she had to do. She could follow the trail of blood, of smeared footprints, and see Allesseria being dragged inside.

Kicking, Eve thought, her work shoes thudding hard against the broken concrete steps. Hard enough to cut through the cheap canvas before he'd hauled her inside.

He'd punctured her throat immediately, only steps inside the door. There was spatter against the dirty wall where she'd gushed. Where she'd collapsed. Dragged her unconscious from there, she noted. Gave himself a little more room to work. To beat her with his fists, to rape her. All while the blood ran out of her.

But he'd taken some, too. Ingested it, bottled it. She'd find out.

"Time of death oh-three-thirty," she said for the record. "Took her about an hour to die." She sat back on her haunches. "A block and a half from home."

She looked over at Roarke. He stood, his hands in the pockets of his jacket. The morning air fluttered in the broken windows, stirred his dark hair. And lifted the smell of ugly death all around them.

"He could've taken her in the club, anywhere in the underground. She might never have been found, and we'd never prove a thing if she'd been murdered down there."

“He wanted you to find her,” Roarke agreed. “He’s making a statement.”

“Yeah, oh, yeah, because he didn’t have to do this. Even if she recants, he’d find ten others to back his alibi. Ten others he’d bribe or intimidate. He didn’t have to kill her, and certainly not like this.”

“He enjoyed it.” Roarke shifted his gaze, met Eve’s eyes. “Just as you said. Payback was secondary to the killing.”

“And he wanted it to be me who found her,” Eve added. “Because of that click last night, that mutual recognition. But he’s too cocky for his own good. There’ll be DNA again, and he’ll have picked up some of this dirt. Shoes, clothes. He’ll have transferred some of this dirt, this blood, and the sweepers will find it.”

“He attacked her while she was on the ’link—to you, Eve.” Reaching out, Roarke took her hand, lifted her to her feet. “That’s another statement.”

“Yeah, and I’m hearing him. Just like he’s going to hear me, really soon.” She looked over as Peabody came in.

“Nothing on the canvass so far,” Peabody reported. “I got in touch with the ex-husband. He lives a few blocks from here. He’s on his way.”

“We’ll take him outside. He doesn’t need to see this.” Nobody needed to see what cops had to see. “Body can be bagged and tagged. There’s nothing else she can tell us here. Let’s see what she says to Morris.”

She went out, grateful for the sunlight, and for the smell that was New York rather than death. She started to reach for her ’link to nag the lab yet again, when she spotted a six-and-a-half-foot black man with a body like a linebacker sprinting across the street against the light.

He wore short dreads, sweatpants, and a T-shirt, and an expression of fear in his topaz eyes. When he tried—and was well on his way to succeeding—shoving past the uniforms at the crime-scene barricade, she called out, went over.

“Rick Sabo?”

“Yes. Yes. My wife—my ex-wife. A detective called and said...”

“Let him through. I’m Lieutenant Dallas, Mr. Sabo. I’m sorry about your ex-wife.”

“But are you absolutely sure it’s her? She had a panic button, a ministunner. She knew how to handle herself. Maybe—”

“She’s been identified, I’m sorry. When did you—”

She broke off when he just crouched down, dropped his head in his hands as a man would if pierced by a sudden and unspeakable pain. “Oh, God, oh, God. Alless. I can’t...I told her to quit that goddamn job. I told her.”

“Why did you tell her to quit her job?”

He looked up, but since he didn’t straighten, Eve hunkered down with him. “She worked in this cult club—vampire shit—which is bad enough. But it was underground, off Times Square. It wasn’t safe, it’s not safe down there, and she knew it.”

“Then why’d she work there?”

“Made three times what she made on street level. Sometimes four with tips. No doubles. She wanted to buy a house, a little house, maybe in Queens. We’ve got a boy.” His eyes watered up. “We got Sam, and she wanted a place out of the city. We share custody of Sam. But, Jesus, I told her it wasn’t worth it. I went down to check it out right after she took the job. Goddamn pit in a goddamn sewer. Alless.”

There was love here, Eve thought. Maybe not enough to make a marriage work, but there was love. “Did she talk about her work, the people she worked with? For?”

“No, not to me. Not after we went a round about it. Haven’t fought like that since we split. Don’t know that we fought like that before we split. I was scared, if you want to know the truth. Scared for her, and I handled it wrong.”

His hands dangled between his knees now, and he stared at them as if they were foreign objects. “Flat out told her she was going to quit, and I know that’s just the way to make her dig into something. If I’d handled it better, she might’ve...”

He looked up, looked past Eve. There were people gathered on the other side of the barricades, as people always did.

What happened? They’d ask, and as word trickled down, they’d think how awful, how terrible, even as they continued to gawk, to linger, to hope to catch a glimpse of the dead body before they had to head off to work.

Because it wasn’t them, it wasn’t theirs the city had swallowed up. So they could gawk and linger and congratulate themselves that it wasn’t them or theirs—and the next time it might be.

Sabo didn’t see them, Eve knew that, too. Because for him, it was the next time.

“Mr. Sabo, did you meet any of her coworkers or her employer while you were in the club, or after?”

“What? No. No.” He scrubbed his hands hard over his face. “Didn’t want to. I only stayed about twenty minutes. Illegals passing around like party favors. People coming out of the private rooms licking blood off their lips, or it looked like it. She wanted a damn house in Queens.”

“Mr. Sabo, I have to ask. It’s routine. Can you verify your whereabouts between two and four A.M. this morning?”

“In bed, at home. I got Sam. I can’t leave Sam alone at night.” He rubbed at his eyes now before his hands dangled uselessly again. “I have building security. In and out. You can check. Whatever you have to do so you don’t waste time, so you find who hurt Alles. Was she raped?”

Before Eve could respond, he shook his head. “No. No. Don’t tell me. I don’t think I want to know either way. Walk from the subway, after two in the morning, alone. Because of that damn job. Now what am I going to tell our boy? How am I going to tell our Sam his mama’s gone?”

“I can have a grief counselor contact you, one who works with children.”

“Yes. Please. Yes.” His throat worked on a swallow. “I’ll need help. Alless and I, well, we couldn’t stay married, but we were a team when it came to Sam. I’ll need help. I have to get back to my kid. I left him with the neighbor. I have to get back to Sam. Can you let me know when...when I need to do whatever I need to do?”

“We’ll contact you, Mr. Sabo.” Eve watched him walk away. “Peabody?”

“I’ll take care of the grief counselor. Poor guy.”

“Murder kills more than the victim,” Eve said quietly. “We need to wrap up here, get into Central. Feeney may be able to clean up some of her last transmission from my unit. We get even a glimmer of this bastard...”

“I could help with that.” Roarke stepped up beside her.

“You’ve got your own work.”

“I do, but I’d be interested in, let’s say, hammering one of those nails.”

“If Feeney—” She broke off as her ‘link signalled. “Hold on a minute.” She moved aside, answered.

Roarke noted the instant change in her body language—the stiffening, the aggressive stance. When she turned back, he saw it mirrored in the temper that heated her eyes.

“DNA doesn’t match Vadim’s.”

“But—”

“No but about it,” Eve cut Peabody off. “There’s a fucking screw-up somewhere. You want in,” she said to Roarke, “you’re in. You can round up Feeney at Central, do whatever the two of you can do with the transmission. Peabody, with me. We’re going to the lab. Contact Morris.” She moved quickly as she snapped out the order. “I want him to personally take the DNA samples from this vic, have them hand-delivered to the lab. That’s red-flagged.”

“Got it.”

Eve glanced back at the building one last time. “No way, no goddamn way he slithers out of this.”

Peabody had to all but leap into the car to keep up. “Maybe he didn’t kill her.”

“Screw that.”

“What I mean is, maybe he had her killed. Set it up.” Peabody jerked her safety harness tight as it looked like they were in for a hell of a ride.

“No. He wouldn’t deny himself the pleasure of the kill.” Monsters didn’t want to watch, to be told . They wanted to do. They wanted the smell of the blood. “He did them both. Kent because it’s what he set out to do, Carter because he was smart enough to know she wasn’t going to hold up his alibi, and it slaps at me. He picked her, put her on the spot, then he took her out. The lab screwed up, or I did. I did if he switched the vials.”

“We were right there. He drew his own blood right in front of us.”

“Hand’s quicker than the eye,” Eve muttered. “He worked as a magician, he’s worked the grift all of his life. He offered the blood sample without a blink because he knew he could swing it so it wouldn’t match.”

And she’d been distracted, she couldn’t deny it. Tight chest, dry throat, pumping heart. Her own fears had dulled her senses.

“Either way,” Peabody commented, “without the match, with Allesseria vouching for him and being unable to recant, we’ve got nothing on him.”

“That’s what he’s counting on. I played into it, and that pisses me off. Dark club, all that movement and noise. Guy draws his own blood at a bar. Not something you see every day.” Looking into his eyes, she remembered. Caught in them for a few seconds too long, shuddering inside at what she’d seen there, and she’s conned. “Son of a bitch.”

She strode into the lab, only to be cut off by the chief, Dick Berenski.

His egg-shaped head was cocked aggressively as he jabbed one of his long, thin fingers at her. “Don’t think about coming into my shop and saying we fucked up. I ran those samples twice myself. Personal. You want to argue with science, you go somewhere else. I can’t make a match when there’s no match.”

He was called Dickhead for a reason, and it had everything to do with his personality. Eve throttled back. “I think he switched them on me. It’s his DNA on the vic, but it’s not his in the vial you have. I’ve got an idea how he pulled it off, but the question right now is: If it’s not his blood in the vial, whose is it?”

It was obvious Berenski had been expecting a battle. Now, caught off guard, he was more accommodating than he normally would be without a substantial bribe. “Well, if we got the DNA in the system, I can find it for you.”

“I did a standard search, crapped out.”

“Global?”

“Yeah, do I look like this is my first day on the job? But I didn’t run deceased.”

“Blood from a corpse? How’s that going to end up in some mope’s veins?”

“Not in his veins, in a damn vial he palmed off on me. Can you do a global search, deceased donor?”

“Sure.”

“How fast?”

He wiggled his spidery fingers. “Watch and learn.”

He went back to his station, the long white counter with comps and screens and command centers. Sliding back and forth on his stool, he began to work—verbal orders, manual keys.

While he ran the searches, Eve drew out her ’link and tried Feeney.

Her old partner and the captain of EDD popped on her screen. He had a Danish in one hand, and a mouth full of the hefty bite missing from it. “Yo.”

“Roarke’s on his way in. Put him to work. I’ve got a ’link trans, voice mail, from a vic while she was being attacked. Lost the trans almost as soon. It’s dark, it’s jumpy, but if you can clean it up, I might burn this bastard quick.”

“Take a look.” He swallowed. “This your vampire?”

“Come on.”

“Hey, before your time I took down this asshole who was grave robbing, then sewing body parts together. Thought he could make himself a Frankenstein. Weird shit happens. He take another one?”

“Yeah, early this morning.”

Contemplatively, Feeney took another bite of Danish. “McNab said he pulled out a syringe and gave you blood right on the spot.”

“Yeah. There was a screw-up there. Looks like mine. I’ll fill you in later. Anything you can do on the trans, Feeney, I’d appreciate.”

“Your man gets here, we’ll do some magic. Meanwhile, you go up against this guy, wouldn’t hurt to take a cross along.” He lifted his eyebrows when she just stared at him. “Kid, weird shit happens because people are fucking crazy.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

She clicked off just as Berenski made a sound of victory. “Got your blood. And I’m forced to say, ‘Damn good call, Dallas.’”

“I’m forced to say, ‘Damn fast work.’”

“I’m the best. Pensky, Gregor.” He tapped the ID picture on his screen.

Square face, Eve noted. Small eyes, pinched mouth. The data put him at two-ten and six-one, with a long sheet of violent crimes.



It also listed him as dead for nearly a year.

“How’d he get to be a corpse?” Eve demanded.

“Son of a bitch.” Berenski pursed his thin lips. “Been running DNA on a DB.” He called for the data.

“Body found in the woods in freaking Bulgaria, where it was believed he headed after escaping from a work program on his latest visit to their version of the State Pen.” Eve shook her head. “Work program for a guy with this kind of sheet. Bludgeoned, partially dismembered, and how about this, exsanguinated. Peabody, let’s get the full ME’s report on this. I’m betting among his other injuries, there were a couple of puncture wounds in his throat.”

“This vampire shit’s creepy.”

Eve glanced at Berenski. “It would be, if vampires existed. What happened to science?”

He jutted out what he called a chin. “You got science, you got the para side of it. I’d be sharpening stakes if I were you, Dallas.”

“Yeah, that’s on my list.”

“Really?” Peabody asked when they got back into the car.

“Really what?”

“The stake-sharpening detail.”

“Peabody, you’re making my eye twitch.”

“I know it’s out there, but you have to consider all the information. Blood from a corpse. Vampires are corpses, essentially. No trace of Vadim on the first vic, scientifically at this point in time.”

“Because he switched the fucking vials.”

“Okay, okay.” Peabody held up both hands, palms out. “But if you bought into the vampire lore, he could’ve sired this Pensky guy, then—”

“Then his body wouldn’t have been real available for the Bulgarian ME.”

Peabody considered. “There’s that. But do we know, for absolute sure, that it stayed available?”

Give up, Eve told herself. Logical debates can’t be made out of illogical theorems. “You be sure to check on that. While you do, I’ll just stick with the more pedestrian theory that Vadim hooked up with Pensky, killed the shit out of him, and stored the blood he drained out for later use. It’s smart, but it would’ve been a hell of a lot smarter to get blood from some unknown. We’re also going to see if we can pin Vadim’s whereabouts for the time of this Gregor’s murder. What do you bet he was in Bulgaria?”

“He’d’ve been in Bulgaria if he vamped him, too,” Peabody said under her breath. “Guy’s got devil eyes.”

“On the last part we heartily agree.” She pulled into the garage at Central. “And we’re going to give him a shot right between them. All data on Gregor Pensky’s autopsy, Vadim’s whereabouts at the time in question—and last night. Another DNA sample from that slippery son of a bitch.”

Mentally kicking herself one more time on that score, Eve slammed the door of her police-issue. “This one spit—and it’s going to be taken by a certified criminalist. Going to wrap him up before the day ends. He’s not going to bite anyone else.”

“Dallas?” Peabody scrambled inside the elevator. “Do you figure he’s fatally bitten someone before? Bulgaria’s a long way from Times Square. And there are places farther away. Places where bodies might never be found.” Even if, Peabody thought, they stayed buried.

“I don’t think he took a year off between Pensky and Kent.” Eve scowled at the elevator doors. “So yeah, I think there’ll be others.”

“So do I. And listen, whether or not you—I mean we—believe in vampires, who’s to say he doesn’t? I know how he played it at Bloodbath. Like it was

a show, a con—but a legal one this time. Maybe it isn't."

"Mira's initial profile allowed for him deluding himself into believing himself immortal, but his sheet screams con. We get him in the box," Eve decided, "we'll see how he plays it."

"I'm thinking if he does believe it, he's feeling pretty full of himself right now. Sucking out two vics in two nights."

"As of now, he's going on a no-hemoglobin diet."

Inside Central, Eve turned toward the Homicide bullpen. Stopped. Swags of garlic hung from the door frame like some odd holiday decoration. She caught the snickers from up and down the corridor, decided to ignore them, just as she ignored the surreptitious glances shot her way when she walked inside.

She arrowed in on Baxter, strolled to his desk. "How much did it run you?"

"It's fake." He grinned at her. "I'd have sprung for real, even though it's steep, but it's hard to come by enough to make a real impact so we got the fake stuff, too. You gotta admit, it's funny."

"Yeah, inside I'm cracking up. I'm going back down to reinterview Count Dracula. Get your boy, you're backup."

"Underground." His grin vanished into a look of pure disgust. "I just bought these shoes."

"Now I'm crying on the inside." She pushed him aside with a satisfied grin, and commandeered Baxter's computer.

Moments later, her suspicions were confirmed. Two puncture wounds had pierced Gregor Pensky's carotid artery and had been attributed to an animal bite. She had news for Bulgaria, and the standing medical examiner. But for now, she contacted her own.

"What've you got?" she demanded of Morris.

“Saliva and semen, and I had my top man walk them to the lab. Exsanguination was COD. She was beaten pre-and postmortem, he used his fists on her, and wore gloves. Her larynx was partially crushed by manual strangulation. Tox just came back. Traces of the same cocktail inside Kent, administered through the neck wounds.”

“He transferred the drug through the bite?”

“Yes. She didn’t consume any blood, or alcohol.”

“This one wasn’t a party. Thanks, Morris.” She sat back for a moment, organizing thoughts and strategy.

“Peabody,” she said as she got to her feet. “Baxter, Trueheart. Let’s move.” She strode to the doorway, flicked a bulb of garlic with her finger. “You can take some of this along if that does it for you. Me?” She tapped her sidearm. “I’ll stick with this.”

## Eight

Baxter might like to joke, and bitch about damage to his slick wardrobe, but he was a solid cop. His uniformed aide, Trueheart, hadn’t shaken off all the green, but he was dependable as sunrise.

There wasn’t a cop on the job—or not a sane one—who would be thrilled to traverse underground, day or night. But there weren’t any who would back her up more reliably.

She took point, left Baxter to take the rear. Below the streets, time vanished. In the world, the day was sunny and heading toward warm. Here, it was as dark and dank as midnight in a winter graveyard. Still, at this hour most of those who inhabited the tunnels were huddled away in their holes and burrows.

Some of the clubs and arcades ran 24/7, and the harsh music still pumped, the ugly lights still glared. Those who came or stayed to do business were more interested in the pain or gain than confronting four armed cops.

A few threats and insults were hurled. One brave soul invited the girls to have a taste of the appendage he was proud enough of to whip out and dangle in their direction.

Eve paused long enough to glance down. "Only thing down here interested in a taste of that is the rats, but they generally like bigger meals."

This comment caused hilarity among the flasher's companions.

"Sir," Peabody said, with feeling, "I really don't think you should tease the animals."

"The rats can handle it."

Eve turned down the next tunnel as the insulted flasher shouted inventive suggestions about what Eve might do with his pride and joy.

"Gotta give him points for originality," Baxter commented.

"And optimism," Trueheart added, and made his partner hoot with laughter.

Despite herself, Eve tossed a grin over her shoulder. His young, handsome face might have been pale and just a little clammy, but Trueheart was game.

The shouts echoed away as they reached Bloodbath. It was locked down tight.

She used the number Dorian had given her. With the video blocked, he answered in a slurred and sleepy voice.

"Dallas, official police business. Open up."

"Of course. One moment."

It took a bit longer than one, but the locks clicked, the security lights blinked to green. And the barred doors slid slowly open.

Eve saw the extra minutes had given Dorian time to set the stage.

Inside the lights were a dim and smoky blue with pulsing red undertones. The screen behind the stage flickered on, filled with images in black and white of women being attacked or willingly baring their necks for fangs. The blood that ran down flesh was black as pitch.

Dressed in black, his shirt open to the waist, Dorian stood above the screen on one of the open balconies. He seemed to float there on a thin river of fog, as if he could, at any moment, simply lift his arms and rise into the air. His face was ghost pale, his eyes and hair black as ink.

“I see you brought company.” His voice flowed, echoed. “Please...” He gestured toward the steps. “Come up.”

“That’s a spider to the fly invite,” Baxter murmured, glanced at Eve. “You go first.”

She hated that her heart stuttered, that her blood ran cold under her skin. Though her stomach clenched in protest, she crossed the club floor where more fog was beginning to curl and snake, and her boot steps echoed on the iron steps as she climbed.

Smiling, slowly smiling, Dorian stepped back. And vanished in the mist.

She drew her weapon. An instant later she had to fight not to jolt as he seemed to materialize directly in front of her. His eyes were so dark she couldn’t tell pupil from iris. In them, if she let herself look, were all the horrors of her childhood.

“Nice trick,” she said casually. “And a good way to get stunned.”

“I trust your reflexes. My home.” He gestured again, then led the way through an open door.

Black and red and silver. He’d played up the gothic touches, Eve noted, but didn’t lack for plush. Iron chandeliers held white candles, wall niches showcased statuary of demons or nudes in pornographic poses.

There were curved black divans and black high-backed chairs studded with metal, and a single life-sized painting of a woman in a diaphanous white

gown, bent limply over the arm of a black-caped man. Her eyes were wide with terror, her mouth open in a scream, as he bent toward her neck with fangs exposed.

“My humble home,” Dorian said. “I hope you approve.”

“A little too theatrical for my taste.” She turned and looked him directly in the eyes. Eyes that triggered memories and fears she couldn’t completely bury. “I’m going to need another sample, Dorian. I’ll need you to come in for this one.”

“Really? I’d think I gave you more than enough blood...for police purposes. A drink for you or your companions?”

“No.”

“Excuse me while I get one. I’m not used to being up so early in the day.” He moved to a bar, opened the minifridge behind it. He took out a squat black bottle, poured red and thick liquid into a silver cup.

“We’ll arrange your transport, have you back for your morning nap.”

“I’d like to oblige you, but it’s just not possible.” He gestured an apology with one hand. “I’m under no legal obligation, after all.”

“We’ll discuss that at Central.”

“I don’t think so.” Carrying his cup, he walked to a desk. “I have here a document that lists me—quite legally—as unable to tolerate sunlight. Religious reasons.” He passed the document to her. “As to the sample, I’m afraid you’ll need a warrant this time. I did cooperate.”

He sat on the sofa, arranged himself in a lazy sprawl. “If this is about Tiara Kent, I have witnesses putting me here in the club at the time she was killed. You spoke with one yourself just last night.”

Studying the paper, Eve answered without looking up. “Your alibi was killed early this morning.”

“Really?” He sipped negligently. “That’s a great pity. She was an excellent bartender.”

“Where were you between two and four A.M. this morning?”

“Here, of course. I have a business to run and patrons to entertain.”

Now her eyes flashed to his. Let him see, she told herself. Let him see that I know . That I won’t back down. “And witnesses to intimidate?”

“As you like.” He shrugged a shoulder, and there was a laugh on his face now, a gleeful amusement smeared with viciousness. “I find religious prejudice tedious, but understandably...human. Those outside the cult often fear it, or smirk at it. For myself, I enjoy it and find it profitable. And there are other, more intimate benefits.”

He rose again, moved across the room, opened a door. “Kendra, would you come out for a moment?”

She was covered in a robe so thin it might’ve been air, and it showed a generously curved body. Her hair was tumbled, her eyes blurry with sleep, and—Eve was certain—chemicals.

She recognized the blonde that had approached and pawed over Dorian the night before. She moved to him now, wrapped her arms around his neck, rubbed her body suggestively to his. “Come back to bed.”

“Soon. This is Lieutenant Dallas, and her associates. Kendra Lake, a friend of mine. Kendra, the lieutenant would like to know where I was this morning, between two and four.”

She turned her head, aimed eyes with pupils big enough to swim in toward Eve. “Dorian was with me, in bed, having sex. Lots of sex. We’d be having sex now if you’d go away. Unless you want to stay and watch.”

“What are you on, Kendra?” Eve asked.

“I don’t need to be on anything but Dorian.” She rose on her toes, whispered something in Dorian’s ear. He laughed, a low rumble, then



shook his head.

“That’s rude. Why don’t you go back in, wait for me. I won’t be long.”

“Kendra,” Eve said as the blonde started back toward the bedroom. “Did he promise you’d live forever?”

Kendra looked over her shoulder, smiled. Then shut the bedroom door behind her.

“Was there something else, Lieutenant?” Dorian asked. “I hate to keep a beautiful woman waiting.”

“This might hold up.” She set the document down. “Or it may not. Either way, we’re not done. You shouldn’t have used Gregor Pensky’s DNA, because I’m going to link you to him.” She stepped closer, ignoring the tickle at the back of her throat as those dark eyes pierced hers. “We’ll talk again real soon, Dorian.”

He grabbed her hand, brought it to his lips. She told herself she hadn’t yanked it away to prove a point. But she wasn’t entirely sure.

“I’ll look forward to it.”

Watching him, she dipped a finger in his cup, sucked the liquid off her finger. “Tasty,” she said as his eyes blurred with what she recognized as excitement.

She walked out, down the stairs. With an effort she kept her expression cool as he once again materialized in front of her, in the mists that now clouded the club.

“I always escort my guests to the door. Safe travels, Lieutenant. Until we meet again.”

“How’d he do that?” Even as her eyes tracked the tunnels, Peabody stuttered out the question. “How’d he do that?”

“Elevator, false doors. Smoke and fucking mirrors.” It irritated Eve that he’d nearly made her jump, disturbed her so that her skin crawled as if he’d run

his fingers over it.

She had to remind herself she'd bearded him in his own den, and she hadn't cracked. Her pulse wasn't steady, but she hadn't cracked.

"Damn good trick though," Baxter commented from the rear. "Did you get a load of the blonde? I might try a little blood sucking if you score that kind of action."

"She's an idiot, and a lucky one," Eve tossed back. "He needs to keep her alive, unless he's bone stupid."

"She was using. You were right on that one, Lieutenant." Trueheart's voice was just a little breathy. "I saw plenty of zoners and chemi-heads when I did sidewalk sleeper detail. She was zoned to the eyeballs."

"Okay, so he likes his women toked, and plays magic tricks. Not so scary," Peabody decided. "And the stuff he was drinking? Syrup, right? Just red syrup."

"No." Eve avoided a smear of some unidentifiable substance on the tunnel floor and aimed for the dim light ahead. "That was blood."

"Oh." Peabody gripped the cross at her neck. "Well."

On the street, Eve snapped out orders as she moved to her vehicle. "Baxter, I want you and Trueheart to find me a connection, any connection between Vadim and Pensky. Use EDD, if necessary, and see if you can pin Vadim in the area Pensky was killed. I'll get you the data I have. Peabody, push harder on the jewelry from the first vic. Turning the glitters liquid may be too hard to resist. We need to run this Kendra moron. My money says she's got a deep well. His pattern is to bilk rich women. However he's escalated, whatever the game, that's his base."

She shoved her way into traffic. "I'm going to the PA. I need a damn warrant, and I want to shatter his religious shield into a lot of tiny pieces."

But an hour later, Eve stood, stunned and furious, in APA Cher Reo's office.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“I’m giving it to you straight.” Reo was smart, savvy, and ambitious, a small blonde dynamo. And she tossed up her hands. “I’m not saying we couldn’t have the order overturned, I’m saying it’s a tricky business, and one that would take time and a lot of taxpayer dollars. The boss won’t move on it, not with what you have. Bring us evidence, even a real glimmer of probable cause on the homicides, and we’ll start the war. And war is the word. The courts don’t like to mess with religious objections and predilections, even when they’re obvious bullshit.”

“This guy bled two women to death.”

“Maybe he did. You say he did, I’m going to agree with you. But I can’t give you a warrant for his residence, his place of business, on what you’ve got. I can’t break down his objection to daylight hours with what you’ve got. Worse, the DNA you took—the vial with your initials on it, doesn’t match.”

“He switched them.”

“How?”

“I don’t know how.” She kicked Reo’s desk.

“Hey!”

“Reo, this guy’s just getting started. He’s pumped. He’s using God knows what to keep pumped, and the killing’s got him flying on his own importance. He’s got a club full of opportunities every damn night. Like a damn all-you-can-eat buffet.”

“Bring me something. I’ll go to the wall for you, you know that. Bring me something I can use. Until you do, I’ll do some research on precedents for breaking through a religious objection. If you can wiggle something that rings on the use or possession of illegals, I’ll get you a warrant to search and seize on those grounds. It’s the best I can do, Dallas.”

“Okay. Okay.” Eve raked her hands through her hair. “I’ll get something.” She thought of Allesseria’s ex. Illegals passed around like party favors, he’d

said. Add three cops and another civilian who had been in the club and they'd all swear they'd witnessed illegals bought, sold, and consumed. "Yeah, I can get something for an illegals raid."

"Make it work. And you know," Reo cast a glance at her office window, "I think I'm going to be damn sure I'm home and behind a locked door before sunset."

## Nine

Eve hunted up Feeney and Roarke in a lab in EDD. She could see them both standing, hands in pockets, as they studied a screen—in the same way she'd noted men often studied motors or other gadgets.

Physically, they couldn't have been less alike with Feeney nearly a head shorter even with the explosion of the mixed ginger and silver bush of his hair. Feeney habitually slouched, just as he was habitually rumped and wrinkled. Roarke may have ditched his suit jacket and rolled up the sleeves of his crisp white shirt, but the contrast remained very broad.

Inside, she knew they often ran on the same path, particularly when it came to e-work. Geeks born of the same motherboard, she thought.

It was a relief to see them, and not so hard to admit. A relief to see these two men—so essential to the life she'd made—after coming from her confrontation with Dorian, and the demons he woke in her.

She stepped in. "Did you clean up the transmission?"

Feeney turned to her, droopy eyes, mournful expression. Roarke shifted, eyes of an almost savage blue. There was a click here, too, but a good solid one, one that made her smile.

Roarke angled his head. "Lieutenant?"

"Nothing." But she thought: Who needs crosses and holy water to fight demons when you have two men like this? Dorian would never have

understood that bright and brilliant human link. Her father had never understood it.

“So.” She crossed to them, and because it amused her, slid her hands into her pockets to mirror their stances. “What’s the word?”

“Good news,” Feeney began. “We got her clean. Bad news, there’s not much of him.”

“I don’t need much.”

“Going to need more than what we’ve got. Computer, run enhanced transmission.”

Acknowledged...

Eve watched Allesseria’s face. It was crystal clear now, as was the night around her, as was her voice. A streetlight beamed over her. The movement—rather than the jerky bounce of her quick walk—had been smoothed out, slowed down.

There was a sound, a whoosh of air, a ripple of fabric on the breeze. Eve watched the gloved hand snake in, between the ‘link and the victim’s face. There was an upward jerk, an instant of pain and terror in Allesseria’s eyes. Then the image flipped as the phone tumbled: sky, street, sidewalk. Black.

“Crap” was Eve’s comment, and her hands fisted in her pockets now. “Anything when you magnify and slow it down?”

“We can enhance so you can count the stitches in the seams of the glove,” Feeney told her. “Can use the scale program to get you the size of it. We can give you the attacker’s probable height calculated from the size, the angles. But we can’t put on screen what’s not there. Got some snatches of audio though, for what it’s worth.”

He set the comp again, made the adjustments, then played it back.

What she heard first was silence.

“We backed out her voice, her footsteps,” Roarke explained, “the ambient city noises. Now...”

She caught it. Feet on pavement, the faintest rustle, then the rush she identified as a run followed by a jump or leap. There was a breath, expelled in a kind of laugh as the hand shot out and clamped Allesseria’s throat. And as the images rolled and tumbled on screen, a single low word. You .

“Not enough for a voiceprint,” Feeney pointed out. “Never hold up in court even if we could match it on one syllable.”

“He doesn’t have to know that.” Eve narrowed her eyes at the screen. “Maybe what we’ve got is just enough to shake him, to make him think we have more.”

Feeney grinned at Roarke, tapped a finger to his temple. “She’s got something cooking up there.”

“Yeah, I do. This time, we con the con.”

Roarke stepped into Eve’s office, closed the door. “I don’t like it.”

She continued across the cramped little room to her AutoChef, programmed coffee. “It’s a good plan. It’ll work.” She took the two mugs of hot black out, passed him one. “And I didn’t figure you’d like it. That’s one of the drawbacks of having you inside an investigation.”

“There are other ways to run him to ground, Eve.”

“This is the quickest. There’s no putting standard surveillance on him,” she began. “There are dozens of ways in and out of those tunnels. I can’t know what kind of escape hatch he might have in that club, up in his apartment. He decides he’s bored here, or there’s too much heat, he’d be in the wind before we got close.”

“Find a way to shut down the club. Illegals raid will put him out of business.”

“Sure, we could do that, we will do that. And if that’s all we do, he’ll be smoke. There are fronts to the business,” she pointed out. “You said so yourself. And it’d take time we don’t have to cut through them and dig down to him. By then he’s gone.”

He set the coffee down on her desk. “All right, even agreeing that all that’s true, or very likely, it doesn’t justify you going in alone. You’re setting it up this way because the DNA crashed on you, and you’re blaming yourself.”

“That’s not true.” Or not entirely, she amended silently. “Sure, it pisses me off he pulled that over on me, but I’m not doing this to even the score.” Or not entirely.

Logic, she decided, was the best way to lay it out. Not as satisfying as a fight, she thought, but quicker. “Okay, look. I go in there with troops or other badges, he’s not going to talk, even if he sticks around long enough for me to corner him. He doesn’t have to stick around at this point. I can’t even pry him aboveground and get him in the box for interview. It has to be on his turf, and it has to be between him and me.”

“Why—on the last point?”

“Why didn’t you like him, from the get?”

She could see irritation cross Roarke’s face before he picked up the coffee again. “Because he scoped my wife.”

“Yeah. He’d like to take a bite, not only because I’m the cop looking at him, but because I’m married to you. Be a big ego kick for him to score off you. And if he thinks he has a shot at that, he’ll take it, and I’ll be ready.”

“Eve—”

“Roarke. He’ll kill again and soon. Maybe tonight. He has a taste for it now. You saw that, and so did I, the first time we met him. I’m telling you I saw more of it today. I see what he is.”

This was the core, he knew, whatever she said. Whatever the other truths, this was the heart of it for her. “He’s not your father.”

“No, but there’s a breed, and they’re both of it. The smoke, the blood, the insinuation: Is he or isn’t he an undead, bloodsucking fiend? That may tingle the spine, rouse superstitions, even tease the logical to entertain the illogical. But it’s what’s under it, Roarke. It’s, well, shit, it’s the beast that lives there that has to be stopped.”

“The one you have to face,” he corrected. “How many times?”

“As many as it takes. I want to walk away from it. Hell, I get within five feet of him, I want to run from it. And because I do, I can’t.”

“No.” He traced his thumb down the shallow dent in her chin. “You can’t.” That, he knew, was what he had to face—again and again. Loving her left him no choice. “But this rush—”

“He’s flying on the moment. Whatever drugs he’s on, they’re not as potent as the kill. As the blood. If I don’t try this, and he gets another, how do I live with that?”

He searched her face, then lifted a hand to her cheek. “Being you, you don’t. You can’t. But I still don’t have to like it.”

“Understood. And...” She took his hand, squeezed it briefly. “Appreciated. Let’s just count on me doing my job, and the rest of you doing yours. We’ll shut him down, nail down that lid, before he knows what the hell’s going on.”

“He best not get so much as a nibble of you. That’s my job.” He leaned down, caught her bottom lip between his teeth. After one quick nip, he sank in, drawing her close, taking them both deep.

Her initial amusement slid away into the dreamy until she could float away on the taste of him, glide off on the promise. When she sighed, eased back, her lips curved up.

“Good job,” she told him.

“I do my best.”



“Maybe later you can put in some overtime.”

“Being dedicated to my work, I’ll be available.”

“But for right now, let’s go get the team together for a full briefing. I don’t want any screw-up’s.”

“Lieutenant.” He caught her hand before she reached the door, and tugged her back around. Out of his pocket he drew a silver cross on a silver chain, and dangled it in front of her.

“Knew I forgot something.” But when he draped it over her head, she goggled. “What? You’re serious?”

“Indulge me.” He planted another kiss on her lips, this one brief and firm. “I’m a superstitious man with a logical mind that can entertain the illogical.”

Staring at him, she shook her head. “You’re full of surprises, pal. Just full of them.”

She used a conference room for the briefing. On screen was a diagram of Bloodbath, and a second of the apartment—or the area of the apartment Eve had seen. Both were sketched from memory, with input from the others on the team who’d been inside the club.

As was often the case with underground establishments, no recorded blueprints or work orders could be located.

“There will be alternate exits,” Eve continued. “It’s likely at least some of the staff are aware of them, and will use them. Detaining and arresting waitresses and naked dancers aren’t priorities.”

“Speak for yourself,” Baxter shot out, “on the naked dancers angle.”

“Moving civilians out,” Eve said, ignoring him, “without inciting a riot is a primary goal. Anyone wants to make collars for illegals, that’s a personal decision and can be determined at the time. A couple dozen busts will add

weight to the op, and hang on Vadim as manager. Anything and everything we get on him is a plus, but not at the expense of the primary target.”

She scanned faces. “Nobody moves in, nobody tips the scales until I give the go. My communicator will be open for said go. Nothing, I repeat, nothing, is to be recorded from that source. I’m not having this slime skate on a technicality.”

She paused, ordered the computer to show the diagram of the club only. “Our warrant covers only this area. No personnel are to move outside the club area in search or pursuit without probable cause. All weapons low stun.”

Once more, she switched the screen image. Now Dorian Vadim’s face filled it. “This is primary target. Unless specifically ordered or cleared, he is not to be detained or apprehended. If I can’t pull this off, we have no cause for arrest. Suit up,” she ordered. “Vests all around. Report to squad leaders for transportation to target.”

She laid a hand on her sidearm. “Let’s go kick ass.”

As she bent to check her clutch piece, Baxter tapped her shoulder.

“What?”

“Got something for you.” He held it out as she straightened.

“You’re a laugh a minute, Baxter.”

“Yeah, you gotta admit.” He gave the wooden stake an agile toss.

Because she was amused despite herself, she caught the stake in one hand, then stuck it in her belt. “Thanks.”

He blinked, then roared with laughter. “Eve Dallas, Vampire Slayer. One for the books.”

**Ten**

She went in alone, the way it had to be, as a cop, as a woman fighting her own demons.

She walked the now-familiar path down from the world to the underground, through the fetid tunnels with misery skulking in dirty shadows.

She'd come out of the shadows, Eve thought. So she knew what hid there, what bred there. What thrived there.

Light killed shadows, and it created them. But what loved the dark would always scuttle back from the light. Her badge had given her the light, Eve knew. Then Roarke had simply, irreversibly, blasted that light straight through her.

Nothing could pull her back again, unless she allowed it. Not the nightmares, not the memories, not whatever smear the man who'd made her had left in her blood.

What she did now, for the job, for two women, for herself, was only another way to cast the light.

She moved toward the ugly pulse of red and blue, the bone-rattling thrum of violent music.

The same bouncers flanked the arched door, and this time they sneered.

"Alone this time?"

Still moving, she kicked the one on the left solidly in the groin, smashed her elbow up and out into the bridge of the second's nose.

"Yeah," she said as she strode through the path they made as they stumbled back. "Just little old me."

She walked through the jostling crowd, through the sting of smoke, the crawl of fog. Someone made the mistake of making a playful grab for her and got a boot down hard on his instep for his trouble. And she never broke stride.

She reached the steps, started up their tight curve.

She felt him first, like the dance of sharpened nails along the skin. Then he was there, standing at the top of the stairs, mists swirling dramatically around him.

“Lieutenant Dallas, you’re becoming a regular. No escort tonight?”

“I don’t need an escort.” She stopped on the step below him, knowing it gave him the superior ground. “But I’d like some privacy.”

“Of course. Come with me.” He held out a hand.

She placed hers in it, fought off a jitter of revulsion as his fingers twined with hers. He led her back, away from the crowd, then keyed in a code on his private door. “Enter Dorian,” he said for the voice command, and the locks gave.

Inside candles were lit, dozens of them. Light and shadow, Eve thought again. On the wall screen various sections of the club were displayed, the sound muted, so people danced, groped, screamed, stalked, in absolute silence.

“Some view.” Casually, she stepped away from him and stepped over as if to study the action on screen.

“My way of being surrounded and alone at the same time.” His hand brushed lightly over her shoulder as he walked behind her and over to his bar. “You’d understand that.”

“You talk as if you know me. You look at me as though you do. But you don’t.”

“Oh, I think I do. I saw the understanding of violence, of power, and the taste for it in you. We have that in common. Wine?”

“No. Are you alone here, Dorian?”

“I am.” Despite her answer, he poured two glasses. “Though I planned to entertain a woman later.” This time his gaze traveled over her, boldly

intimate. “How interesting it should be you. Tell me, Eve, is this a professional or a personal call?”

She let herself stare at him, into those eyes. “I don’t know. I guess we’ll find out. I know you killed those women.”

He smiled slowly. “Do you? How?”

“I feel it. I see it when I look at you. Tell me how you did it.”

“Why should I? Why would I? Lieutenant.”

As if impatient, she shook her head. “I don’t have a warrant. You know that. I haven’t given you your rights. I can’t use anything you tell me. You know that, too. I just need to know what you are. Why I feel the way I do around you. I don’t believe in...”

There was no mistaking the hunger on his face as he walked toward her. “In what?”

She could hear her father’s voice whispering in her mind. There are things in the dark, little girl. Terrible things in the dark.

“In the sort of thing you’re selling out there.” She gestured toward the screen. “Turn that off, will you? It feels crowded in here.”

“You don’t like to watch?” he said, silkily. “Or be watched?”

“Depends,” she answered with what she hoped sounded like false bravado.

“Screen off,” he ordered, and smiled again. “Better?”

“Yeah. It’s better with it off.”

“That’s the signal.” Feeney nodded to Roarke. “All units, move in. Move in. She’s playing him,” he said to Roarke. “She’ll walk him right into it.”

“Or he’s playing her.” With Eve’s voice in his ear, Roarke rushed into the dark.

Into the terrible things.

“Hold it.” There was the slightest hesitation in her order as she slapped a hand against Dorian’s chest and shoved. “I have obligations. I have loyalties.”

“None of which fill your needs.”

“You don’t know my needs.”

“Give me five minutes to do as I like with you, and you’ll know differently. You came to me.” He trailed his fingers over her cheek. “You came to me alone. You want to know what I can give you.”

She shook her head, stepped away. “I came because I need to understand. I can’t settle, I can’t focus. I feel like something’s trying to crawl out of my skin.”

“I can help you with that.”

She glanced over her shoulder at him. “Yeah, I bet you could. But I’m not like Tiara Kent. I’m not looking for cheap thrills. And I’m not like Allesseria Carter. I don’t need your goodwill. I’m not afraid of you.”

“Aren’t you? Aren’t you afraid of what I could make you?”

She looked at the portrait. “Like that?” Her voice was just a little breathless. “I’m not that gullible.”

He lifted one of the wineglasses, drank deeply. “There’s more in the world that slips in and out of what’s deemed reality.”

“Such as?”

He drank again, and his eyes went even darker. “Such as powers, and hungers beyond the human. I’ll take you there. I can show you a glimpse without causing you harm. You should drink. Relax. Nothing will happen to you here. It’s not my way.”

“No, you go to them. Kent practically spread rose petals on a path to her bed for you.”

“Hypothetically, invitations are required.”

“In an occupied building,” Eve agreed. “Not in an abandoned one. Like the one where you dragged Allesseria, where you killed her.”

“Does it excite you to think so, to look at me and see her death?”

“Maybe it does.”

“You seek death.” He laid his fingertips under hers, lifted her hand. “Surround yourself with it. Isn’t that what I sensed, what I saw, in you that first moment our eyes met? It connects us, this...fondness for death in a way the man you give yourself to can never understand. He can’t reach that dark bloom inside you. I can.”

She let her fingers curl to his for an instant, then eased back again. “I don’t know what connects us, but I felt something when I heard your voice come in on Allesseria’s ’link message to me. It was a mistake to say anything, Dorian, a mistake not to make certain the ’link was down and the transmission broken before you spoke to her. We’ll have your voiceprint match by morning.”

He lowered the glass he’d lifted to his lips. “That’s not possible.”

“Would I be here now otherwise? Risking all this so I could see you tonight? This goes down tomorrow, and my part in it’s over. I need answers for me. Why would I tell you we have evidence building that could take you down, give you time to poof? I have to know. For me.”

“I have an alibi,” he insisted.

“Kendra Lake? Another spoiled rich girl running on hormones, vanity, and chemicals. She won’t help you. She’ll crack, we both know it. She’s on the juice, she’s your lover. It won’t hold.”

“You’re lying.” He gulped down the rest of the liquid in the glass, heaved the glass aside. “You’re lying. You bitch.”

Okay, Eve thought, time to change directions.

Outside the apartment it was hell. Screams and shouts echoed through the mist some clever soul had boosted up when the small army of cops had burst in, announcing a raid.

Roarke flung one attacker aside, dodged the swipe of a knife from another. Preferring fists to stunner, he used them viciously. Despite the cacophony, he heard Eve's voice clearly in his head.

"She's losing him," he yelled to Feeney. Whirling, Roarke sprinted for the stairs through streams of stunner fire.

"Caught me," Eve said. "I'm lying about any pretense I find you attractive or compelling on a personal level. About the rest, that's a wrap. You not only ran your mouth where it could be heard on Allesseria's 'link, EDD's working on cleaning and enhancing a few seconds on screen during the trans. You moved partially into view.

"Added to that," she continued, "we're about to link you to one Pensky, Gregor. Shouldn't have used a former known associate as a fall guy. Even a dead fall guy, Dorian. Little slips, they'll kill you every time."

She glanced idly around the room. "I bet you saved some of Tiara Kent's blood for a souvenir. I get that warrant in the morning, I'm going to find it, and the jewelry you took off her dead or dying body. You scum. That'll put you down for three counts of murder. Anything else you want to add to the menu?"

"Do you think you can threaten me?" His eyes were black pools. "Play with me?"

"If you're trying for thrall, you're missing. I'll have you locked on Allesseria in a matter of hours. The rest will tumble right into the pile. You're done. I just wanted the satisfaction of telling you personally before—Don't," she warned. She laid her hand on her stunner when she saw the move in his eyes. "Unless you want to add assaulting an officer to the mix. In which case, I can haul you out of here. Sun's down, Dorian."

"Yes, it is." He smiled, and to Eve's absolute shock, showed fangs.



He leaped, almost seemed to fly at her. She drew her weapon, pivoted, but she wasn't quick enough. Nothing could have been. She got off two shots as he hurled her across the room. He took both hits, and just kept coming. She felt it in every bone as she hit the stone wall, and though the stunner spurted out of her hand on impact, she managed to roll, then kick up hard with both feet. The force knocked him back far enough to give her room to flip up.

She braced for the next attack, but instead he hissed like a snake, cringed back. She flicked her gaze down, saw he was staring at the cross that had come out from under her shirt.

"You've got to be kidding me." He snarled as he circled her. "You actually believe your own hype."

Whatever he'd drunk had juiced him up good, she determined. So good, she'd never be able to take him in hand-to-hand. She held up the cross as she tried to gauge the distance to her stunner, and her chances of reaching it.

"I'll drink you dry." His tongue ran over his long incisors. "Almost dry. And make you drink me. I'll change you into what I am."

"What? A babbling lunatic? Why didn't Tiara change?"

"She wasn't strong enough. I drank too much of her. But she died in bliss under me. As you will. But you're strong, strong enough to be reborn. I knew it when I saw you. Knew you'd be the first who'd walk as I walk."

"Uh-huh. You have the right to remain silent."

He sprang, leaping like a great cat. She blocked the first blow, though she felt the force of it sing down her arm, explode into her shoulder. But the second sent her sprawling. She thudded hard against one of his metal tables, and tasted her own blood in her mouth as she rolled painfully onto her back.

He was standing over her now, fangs gleaming, eyes mad. "I give you the gift, the ultimate kiss."

Eve swiped the blood off her mouth. "Bite me."

Grinning, he fell on her.

Outside the door, Feeney pulled out his master and a bag of electronic tricks to bypass the locks.

"I've got it." Blood seeped through the ragged tear in Roarke's jacket where a knife point had slipped through. He flipped out a recorder, closed his eyes to focus first on the tones of the beeps.

Quickly, he played his fingers over the keypad in the same order, then held the recorder to the voice command.

"Enter Dorian," the recorder replayed.

"Hey, Dallas said nothing was to be recorded."

Roarke spared one glance over at Feeney's wide grin. "I'm a poor team player."

They pushed in the door, Roarke going low as he knew Feeney preferred high.

She was flat on her back, blood soaking her shirt. Even as Roarke rushed toward her, she pushed herself up on her elbows. "I'm okay. I'm okay. Call the MTs before that asshole bleeds to death."

Roarke barely spared a glance at the man lying on the floor with a wooden stake in his belly. His own stomach muscles were knotted in slippery fists. "How much of this is yours?"

She looked down at her shirt in some disgust. "Hardly any. Missed the heart. Bastard was on top of me. Gut wounds are messy. Feeney?"

"Contacting the MTs," he told her. "Situation below is nearly contained. Hell of a show. But looks like you're the headliner here. Jesus, what a freaking mess."

“I can’t believe I’m going to have to thank Baxter for being a smart-ass. Lost my weapon. He’d’ve done some damage before you got through if I hadn’t had the pointy stick.”

She started to stand, and with Roarke’s help made it to her feet. Once there, she swayed and she staggered. “Just a little shaken up. Hit my head on various hard objects. No, no, don’t carry me.”

He simply scooped her into his arms. “You’re doomed to have me disobey.” Then he pressed his lips to the side of her throat where he saw the faint wounds. “Got a taste of you, did he?”

She heard the rage, and tried to tamp it down. “Told him to bite me. It’s the first time anyone’s ever taken that suggestion literally. Except you.” She turned Roarke’s face with her hand so that he looked at her rather than Dorian. “Put me down, will you, pal? This seriously undermines my authority.”

“Hey, hey!” Crouched over Dorian, Feeney stopped even his half-hearted attempt to stanch the blood flow. “Is this guy sporting fangs?”

“He must’ve had them filed down that way,” Eve said. “Then had them capped. Easy on, easy off. We’ll sort it out.”

Peabody ran in. There was a darkening bruise on her cheekbone and a nasty scrape along her jaw. “Unit’s heading out to escort the MTs in. Holy crap!” she added when she saw Dorian. “You staked him. You actually staked him.”

“It was handy. Let’s get those medics in here. I don’t want this guy skipping out on multiple murder charges by dying on me. I want to know the minute he’s able to talk. I think we’re going to get an interesting confession.”

“It’s supposed to be the heart,” she heard Peabody mutter. “It’s really supposed to be the heart.”

Eve blew out a long breath. “Keep it up, Peabody, and I may have Mira shrink your head after she’s done with this second-rate Dracula. I want some damn air. I’m going up to the real world.”

Once she had, she took the bottle of water Roarke passed her and drank like a camel. She lifted her chin at the blood on his sleeve. "Is that bad?"

"It damn well is. I liked this jacket. Here, take a blocker. If you don't have the mother of all headaches yet, it's only due to adrenaline. Take the blocker, and I won't haul your stubborn ass into a health center for an exam."

She popped the blocker without a quibble. Then since it was there, she sat on the edge of the floor through the open door of the police van.

"He believed it," she said after a moment. "He actually believed he was a vampire. Drugs probably pushed the act into his reality. Mira nailed the profile from the get. It was the pretending to be the Prince of Darkness that was the pretense, for him."

"More likely he was just pushing the con as far as it would take him—and gambling to use it to plead insanity."

"No. You didn't see his face when he looked at this." She held up the cross. "And thanks, by the way. It bought me a few minutes when it counted."

Roarke sat beside her, rubbed a hand over her thigh. "Illogical superstition. Sometimes it works."

"Apparently. He's got himself some kind of super-Zeus recipe, is my guess. Not just the whacked brain it causes, or the temporary strength. Speed, too. The bastard was fast. Magician training, grift experience, drugs. I wonder when it turned on him, stopped being a way to case marks."

Gently, Roarke traced a fingertip over her neck wounds. "There are all kinds of vampires, aren't there? Darling Eve."

"Yeah." Very briefly, since all of the cops running around were too busy to notice, she leaned her head against Roarke's shoulder. "Under it, he wasn't really like my father. Not the way I thought. My father wasn't crazy. Dorian, he's bug-shit."

"Evil doesn't have to be sane."

“No, you’re right about that.” And she’d faced it—and she’d beaten it. One more time. “Well, the bad news is he’s going to end up in a facility for violent mental defectives, not a concrete cage. But you take what you can get.”

Roarke’s hand rested on her knee. She laid hers over it, squeezed. “And right now, I’ll take a hot shower and a fresh shirt. I’ve got to go in and clean myself up, and clean this up, too.”

“I’ll drive.”

“You should go home,” she told him, but her hand stayed over his. “Get some sleep. It’s going to take hours to close this up.”

“I have this image I can’t shake.” He got up, drew her to her feet. “Of the sun rising, all red and gold smears over the sky. And you and I walking toward home in that lovely soft light. So taking what I can get, I’ll take sunrise with you.”

“Sunrise it is.”

She kept her hand in his as she pulled out her communicator to contact Feeney, Peabody, the team leaders to check on the status below.

With her hand linked with Roarke’s, the demons that plagued her were silent. And would stay silent, she thought, through the night. And well past sunrise.