



Tich Brewster
Shalisha Cooper



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Preface

Caleb

Life and death. Those two words mean very little to an immortal. With the gift of eternal life, we don't dwell on such things. Death passes us by every minute of the day, taking mortals to their eternal resting place, while it is nothing more than an afterthought for those of us gifted with immortality.

I'd never given it much thought until now. Death never had a reason to be on my radar, but as I stare into her eyes, those honey-brown eyes of a killer, I now know the fear that death brings. The universe has finally decided to show up and flip my world upside down. Now my heart is pounding, threatening to burst forth out of my chest. I beg death to leave, to run for the hills and let us be.

Will she?

Recognition shines in her eyes, and for an instant I think she might. I believe she will have mercy on me and flee without claiming the life of the innocent...of the one I love. Then the storm rages overhead and I know that she won't. She's come to collect regardless of whether it's right or wrong.

Suddenly, the very thing that I cared nothing for becomes the very thing that terrifies me.

Chapter One

Desiree

"Come on, Des."

Her constant whining, begging me to go out and join her for a night on the town, grates on my nerves like nails on a chalkboard. I keep my eyes on the patient chart I hold in front of me; it's hard for me to focus when she won't shut her mouth for more than half a second. She's insistent, and I wish she would just go away and bug some other poor soul.

Feeling her hovering over me, not willing to walk away without hearing my answer, I sigh. I can hear her intake of breath as she prepares to say something, most likely to continue her begging. Before she can utter a word, I speak. "No." It's clear and to the point.

But, of course, she can't just walk away. Nope. She just has to keep begging, like every

other Friday. “Des, please come. If you hate it, I’ll never ask you to join me. Never, ever again.” If I had a penny for every time I’d heard those words from her lips, I’d be a millionaire.

Pulling the ink pen from my teeth, I finish logging the patient’s progress and turn away from my nagging friend. A big puff of air leaves her lips, and I imagine her with her hands on her hips as she spins around to follow me. I lean over the counter that is the nurse’s station and slip the chart into an empty slot on the rack.

She lets out several long slow breaths, and I know she is trying to think of a way to convince me to go out and party with her. One would think that after years of failed attempts, she would find a new buddy to pester. Turning to face her, I lean my hip on the counter. Looking her in the eyes, I tell her what I’ve told her every week for as long as we have worked here. “Look, Tracy, you know that I have zero desire to go clubbing with you. It’s just not my thing.”

With her hand on her hip, she purses those lips of hers. “Have you even gone to a club, like ever?”

This woman has known me since childhood—I don’t know why she even bothers to ask. “No, and I don’t have any desire to. Besides, I have a house to clean and a cat to feed.” If only I had the ability to freeze time long enough to get out of there without having to endure any more pressure. Every weekend—I listened to her constant whining every weekend.

“The house can wait. As for the cat, feed her when you go home to change clothes.” Tracy’s lips thrust out in a pout, giving me the most pathetic puppy face I have ever been subjected to.

Shaking my head, I push myself off the counter and walk away. I’m a sucker for the puppy face, and she knows it. I need to leave before I lose my mind and cave in. Reminding myself that I have a date with my television tonight to catch up on this week’s daytime soaps, I respond with, “Thanks, but no thanks.”

The smell of disinfectants assaults my nose as I walk down the hall. A meal cart is against one wall and two mobile blood pressure machines are against the other. Constant beeping seeps out from under a door to my left.

Coming to a stop, I peek in the last room on this hall. This patient had been admitted early this morning with heart failure. Heart failure. The poor girl is only ten years old—how can her heart be failing her? My heart aches for this innocent little girl. Why do children have to suffer from terminal illness? I just don’t get it. Why couldn’t this have happened to a serial killer instead of her? Life is so cruel.

She is sitting in bed, the covers up to her chin, and she’s watching a cartoon on television. I knock on the door so I don’t startle her. “Hey, sweetie, I just wanted to say goodnight before I left. I won’t be back for a couple of days, but I’ll see you then.”

Avery’s eyes are sad but she gives me her best smile. “Okay.” Her voice is thick, most likely from a recent cry. She looks down at the bright green frog tucked securely in her hand. “Thank you for my frog. I named him Tulip.” She hugs the stuffed animal to her

chest, kissing it on the top of its head.

Seeing her cling to that stuffed animal makes me glad I took the time to buy it for her. “You’re very welcome.”

Avery’s mother blinks her eyes open, having been woken up by our little chat. The woman has dark circles under her eyes, a sad testimonial of her sleeplessness and worry. I wave to her and she acknowledges me with a weak smile. Backing out of the room, I close the door and continue my journey toward the only exit on this side of the floor.

I follow the curve of the hall and continue to the elevators that are at the end of this hallway. I’m almost home free. “Des, you’re twenty-four years old and you’re living like a lonely sixty-five-year-old woman.” Tracy had been so quiet that I assumed she had given up and left. Nope, just my luck. “Come on, it’s time to live a little.” When I don’t respond, she sighs. “At least for tonight. Please?”

I press the elevator button, ignoring her in hopes that she’ll take the hint and leave me alone. One could only hope. When the doors open Tracy follows me inside. This girl is my best friend. She’s supposed to be the one protecting me from peer pressure, not the one doing the pressuring. I blow out a breath, feeling defeated. “Okay, fine.” I roll my eyes upon seeing her giddy smile. “I’ll go with you tonight, but you have to promise me that I will never hear you beg me to do this, ever again.”

“Done.” Clapping her hands like a child, her goofy smile spreads even wider. She has finally broken my will, and the little she-devil is proud of herself. “I’ll stop by in an hour, be showered and dressed to impress.”

Oh jeez, it’s going to be one of those nights. I can’t help it; my eyes roll of their own accord. I cannot believe the mess I’ve just gotten myself into. The last time I went out with the girls was back when we were still in high school. Now that I am a full-time nurse, my daily schedule consists of working, cleaning house, caring for my cat, and in my spare time I like to kick back with my medical journals. I am far too busy to have any interest in partying.

On the other hand, she is right. I don’t have a life. Not an exciting one anyway. I will probably grow old and die all alone. How pathetic is that?

The ding signals that the elevator has arrived at the ground level. As soon as the doors open a pair of shiny black cowboy boots enter. I look up, curious as to who the owner of those expensive boots is. Long legs in tight Wranglers, muscles bulging under that white T-shirt, and those hazel eyes stir butterflies in my belly. *Oh, my word, I’ve just met the man of my dreams.*

When our eyes meet, his mouth turns up in a lopsided grin that causes my heart to beat wildly. As if he can hear the commotion in my chest, his smile widens and his eyes twinkle with amusement. I open my mouth to say *hi* but my voice escapes me. He chuckles at my predicament and tips his cowboy hat with a wink.

A shove on my shoulder brings me out of my thoughts. “Come on.” Tracy nudges me again and I move my feet, hating myself for acting like a love-struck idiot. Turning away from the most handsome man alive, I head toward the parking garage. Tracy is following

closely behind me, her footsteps echoing loudly in the quiet.

I unlock my car door and finally look up at her. She has the goofiest grin on her face. No doubt it's from the fact that after all this time she finally got me to cave in and join her night of madness. As much as I want to change my mind, there is no backing out now. I'm locked into this stupid agreement. "So...I'll see you around eight o'clock?"

If Tracy's smile grows any wider, her face will split in two. "Yes. Be ready," she orders before spinning on her heel and heading toward her own car.

I wave as I drive past her black Jeep. Enthusiastically, she waves back and follows me out of the parking garage. Stopping to check for traffic before pulling out onto the road, I glance at my rearview mirror and can see her head bobbing to the beat of whatever song she's listening to.

As I turn onto Farrall Street a wave of panic hits me. I grip the steering wheel so tightly my knuckles turn white. "I don't have anything to wear," I say into the emptiness surrounding me. *What on earth will I wear tonight?* My closet consists of scrubs, a handful of worn-out T-shirts, and a couple of pairs of faded blue jeans.

Glancing out the window, the movie theater comes into view and the shock of how far I've driven brings a gasp out of me. Thank God for autopilot, because I don't remember driving this far. The blinking lights of the movie theater taunt me with the promise of refuge.

Biting my bottom lip, I contemplate pulling in. *If I were to see a movie, then I could easily avoid this soon-to-be disastrous night. It would be perfect, and she would never think to look for me here.* A smile starts to spread on my face at the thought of escaping this hell. All I'd have to do would be shut off my phone, and she wouldn't have the ability to track my location.

My foot slowly presses on the brake and my hand prepares to signal my turn. Right before I press the lever, I speed up and continue my journey home. This isn't me. I don't avoid people, especially my friends. What I need to do is buck up and own this mess. Who knows, I may enjoy myself and remember what it's like to let loose and live a little.

Chapter Two

Caleb

Those perfect brown orbs pierce me to the very depths of my soul. *Who is this woman?* Her eyes venture from my feet up to my face, paying extra attention to my hips and abs. The way her nostrils flare when she appraises my body brings a lopsided grin to my face. Her eyes zero in on my lips and I can hear her heartbeat accelerate. I hope she likes what she sees, because I sure as hell love what I see.

The hospital scrubs she is wearing hide every curve of her body, but that doesn't stop me from assessing what lies underneath. Though her hair is tied on top of her head in a messy bun and her face is devoid of all make-up, this woman standing before me is the prettiest I've ever seen.

She opens her mouth; it looks as though she's going to say *hi*, but no words leave those beautiful lips of hers. I can't stop the chuckle that leaves my lips when I hear her thoughts about the way my Wranglers hug my hips. In response she intakes a breath, afraid of what I think of her. To ease her fears, I tip my hat and wink at her.

The redhead gives her a nudge on the shoulder. "Come on." Another nudge on the shoulder and her eyes finally leave mine as she stumbles out of the elevator. I don't want her to go, but now is not the time to strike up a conversation with my little siren. She looks as though she's had a long day, and I have business to attend to. At least I know where I can find her—she's obviously employed here.

The steel doors close and I take my cell phone out of my back pocket. Opening the text app, I send a message to the doctor in charge of the critical patients. *On my way up.*

Before I can hit the button for the third floor, my cell phone beeps with an incoming message. *Heading to my office now.*

Shutting off the phone, I shove it back into my pocket. My thoughts immediately wonder to my dark-haired beauty with the chocolate brown eyes. I'm in this hospital once a month. I can't believe I've never seen her before. Of course, I usually make my appointments for late in the evening. Tonight is an exception, because I must be at the club early to go over the inventory.

When the doors open, I step into the hall. Antiseptic air hits my nostrils, and I automatically wrinkle my nose in disgust. The scent is too strong for my sensitive nostrils. Children talking and laughing can be heard from every door I pass. I can't imagine being a parent and having to watch my child suffer from a terminal illness. Which is exactly why I come here every month.

Passing the patient rooms, I turn right. Dr. Hebert's office is the second door on the left. Lifting my hand, I knock on his door. "Come in," he yells, and I push the door open. Dr. Hebert is leaning a hip on his desk, arms crossed. "Caleb."

I close the door behind me. "Dr. Hebert." Laying on his desk is a needle and blood collection tubes. This is a routine for us. Once a month I come in to donate my vampire blood, and Dr. Hebert uses it to cure the children who are most critical. Vampire blood restores the human body to its perfect state, without turning the person into an immortal being.

Rolling up my sleeve, I take a seat. Dr. Hebert ties a tourniquet around my upper arm, then tears the wrapper from an alcohol wipe. Using his forefinger, he locates my vein. Wiping it clean, he positions the needle, bevel up, and slides it through the thin layer of skin and into the vein. Red liquid floods the tube, and once it's full, he switches it for a new one.

Ten tubes. That is what I donate every month. Very little blood is needed to restore the body, so ten usually lasts four weeks. Releasing the tourniquet, Dr. Hebert removes the needle and disposes of it in a red sharps container.

"Thank you, Mr. Shade. I have a patient in immediate need of this. Young Avery is dying of heart failure."

Heart failure at such a young age. *Have mercy.* At least now she can recover and live a normal life. “I’m glad I can help. You have my number. If you need me before our scheduled meeting, don’t hesitate to call.”

The doctor shakes my hand, thanking me again. Really, there is no need to thank me. No child should have to live with the torment these kids are living with. I’m happy to give my healing blood to these unfortunate and innocent children.

The thumping music is deafening, even out here in the parking lot. People are filing into the building, and I survey the crowd looking for a lonely woman desperate for company. After donating blood, I’m starving. Phil is bustling around, pouring drinks for several customers. Spying me, he mouths, “*Wine?*”

“Yes.” Phil has been with us for a while. He knows I’m immortal; he also knows that today is my donation day and I’ll be needing blood to regain my strength. One glass of blood will not be enough to sate my hunger. I’ll need a warm body and fresh blood to curb my appetite.

I take a seat on a barstool while I wait for Phil to fill my drink. My focus is on the napkin in front of me with the Club Infinity logo. When her long fingernails trail up my arm, I smile in triumph. I no longer need to go hunt for that lonely woman to sneak off into a dark corner with. She has found me.

Phil sets my wine glass down on the napkin. His eyes travel to the woman next to me, the one running her black nails along my arm. Before he can ask her what she will be drinking, I drag her off to the dance floor. I don’t have the patience to listen to her life story while she slowly sips whatever concoction tickles her fancy.

Instead I take her to the dance floor, where we’ll dance for a bit while I drink my glass of blood, then I’ll drag her toward the back hallway and drink from her until I satisfy my appetite.

Chapter Three

Desiree

Freshly showered, I stand at my closet with a towel wrapped around my hair and stare at what little I have hanging on the rod, which is nothing suitable. “I have nothing to wear.” Sure, there is a worn-out shirt with a little red cross on it that I got three years ago, after I donated blood. There is also a solid white T-shirt and a red sweater that I bought last year for the hospital’s Christmas party.

The sweater is virtually new since I only wore it for the one event. I free it from the hanger and grab my best pair of jeans, worn thin with a small hole in the back pocket. This is not the ideal outfit for tonight, but it’s the best I have. The world will just have to deal with it.

Just as I begin pulling the sweater over my head the doorbell rings. *What? Am I running behind?* I glance at the clock. Nope, I’m not behind schedule, she is thirty minutes early.

“I’m coming,” I yell. Smoothing the fabric down my waist, I race down the hallway to answer the door.

“Oh, my word,” Tracy shrieks. “You are not wearing that.” She gestures to my outfit.

I look down at myself. Okay, so I’m not dressed in a revealing dress with hooker heels, but I don’t look like the bride of Frankenstein either. “What’s wrong with my clothes?”

She steps over the threshold with a humph, kicking the door shut behind her. “This sweater is like something from the eighties. Where’d you get it, from your grandma?” Sticking her finger in her mouth, she fake gags.

Ouch. I can’t believe that my best friend would dare insult me in my own home.

“Here.” She hands me a plastic bag. “I came prepared.”

I glance down at the name printed on the black plastic. Vanti. “You bought me clothes?” Vanti is a designer store in the mall. A store way out of my price range.

“Well, I didn’t figure you’d have anything appropriate for the club, so I stopped and grabbed you a little somethin’ somethin’.”

Yes, Tracy is my best friend, and it makes sense that she would want to buy me a gift, but this? This is so out of my league.

Snapping her fingers in my face to gain my attention, she makes a shooing motion. “Hurry up and quit wastin’ time.”

Unlike Tracy, I didn’t come from money, so most of my paycheck goes toward school loans. This is the first time that I’ve held designer clothing of my own. My only other experience with expensive clothing was what I borrowed from Tracy when we were growing up. Excitement runs through my veins, and I find myself bursting at the seams to try them on.

Running down the hall, I rush to strip out of my clothes and into the new ones. I’m in such a hurry that I don’t bother closing the door behind me. I just want to slip into these fabulous items. If Tracy happens to peek inside, oh well, it’s not like it would be the first time she saw me naked.

Standing in front of my mirror, I admire the way the clothes cling to my body in all the right places. I haven’t looked this good in—well, ever. The purple halter top hugs my body and gives my breasts a push upward, exaggerating my cleavage. Black hip-hugger jeans with studs on the back pockets and silver heels complete the outfit.

The ponytail on my head is out of place—I need to fix that. Tapping my chin, I think of ways to fix my hair to match my new outfit. I could leave it down, or pull it into a bun on the top of my head. No. That’s not quite the look I’m searching for.

Pulling up the Internet tab on my phone, I search hairstyles. I scroll through page after page of photos. Ten pages later, I spot the perfect style. I dig through my hair accessories drawer and retrieve a large hair clip. Twisting my hair, I pull it up, leaving a few strands to fall in loose curls around my face.

That’s it. This is the perfect look for my outfit. When I walk into the living room, Tracy

lets out a gasp. “You look gorgeous, Des.”

Her praise makes me happy. “Thanks.”

She makes a spinning motion with her finger so I twirl around, letting her get a glimpse of the front and back. A whistle leaves her lips and I smile. “Yep, you’re smokin’, babe.”

By the time we arrive, the club is in full swing. Music is booming as we make our way toward the building, and the volume increases as we near the entrance. The moment I step over the threshold, vibrations from the music pulsate through the soles of my feet and up into my chest.

I have never seen a building this packed out before. Taking a moment to scan the dance floor, I’m surprised to find myself excited. Bodies are everywhere, grinding and swaying to the beat of the music. A smile quickly spreads on my face. I hadn’t expected this, but the music pulsing through my body, mixing with this atmosphere, reminds me of my high school days. A thrill runs through me.

I’m reminded of what it’s like to live in the moment, what it’s like to love life. Why had I been so quick to shoot her down every weekend for the last few years? Warm fingers grip my arm, giving a gentle tug. I look over my shoulder at Tracy. She has the giddiest expression on her face, and I can only assume it matches my own. Interlocking her fingers with mine, she pulls me out onto the dance floor.

We weave our way through the crowd until we find a spot with enough space for the two of us. A few whistles and catcalls come our way, but we ignore them. For now, we are just enjoying the music.

Lost in the beat, I forget about my bills, work, and responsibilities. The only thing on my mind is the lyrics to “Crazy in Love.” This song is one of my favorites. Swiveling my hips, I spin around, and that’s when my eyes meet his. *Oh, my word, it’s him.* That sexy beast from the elevator is here in the club.

My breath hitches at the sight of him in those snug jeans, moving his body in such a provocative way. His moves are smooth and calculated. Watching him move his body like that raises my body temperature. I bite my lip to keep from mewling.

Movement catches my eye, and that’s when I notice her. He’s with someone...or at least he’s dancing with someone. Like ice water has been tossed on me, my temperature declines at such force a shiver runs through me. Disappointed, my smile falters.

A smile lifts the corners of his mouth and the lights sparkle in his eyes. Oh, how I wish to be the woman in his arms right now. This man is what all women envision when dreaming of the perfect man. He lifts his wine glass, taking a sip of the red drink. *Wait, what?* He’s dancing to this sexy music and drinking wine? Pure talent. If it were me, I’d already be wearing that delicious red right down the front of this beautiful new top.

Everything about him draws me in—his smile, his black hair and tan skin, his faded blue Wranglers that hug his backside like a lover, even his dance moves. I hope that the woman in his arms is not his girlfriend; or worse, his wife.

The butterflies in my belly are dancing at the speed of light, and my heart is hammering in my chest. Again, I bite my lower lip. His eyes have been on me since the moment I spotted him, but when my teeth grip at my lip his eyes widen. One side of his mouth turns up and he winks at me.

I can feel a blush rising from my neck and spreading into my cheeks. No man has ever made me feel this way. His smile widens at the heat in my face. The moment is over all too soon when the woman in his arms gyrates against him and his attention falls back to her.

Sadness. That's what I'm feeling right now, total and utter sadness. His attention is what I crave. I want to be the one in his arms, gyrating against him, and not swaying to this music by myself.

I spin around to tell Tracy about Mr. Sexy, but she is nowhere in sight. Standing on tiptoe, I finally see her a couple of feet away dancing with a man in an old worn-out cowboy hat. At least one of us scored a dancing partner.

The song is fading and I find myself swaying to a much slower tune. It doesn't bother me that I'm standing here moving to the music by myself. There is no other man, besides my sexy Wrangler-wearing cowboy, I want to dance with. Closing my eyes, I move my body in sync with the music, imagining his arms around me. In my mind's eye, our bodies move as one and he leans in to kiss my neck.

A moment passes before I feel strong hands gripping my hips from behind, pressing my body flush against his. I don't need to open my eyes to see who it is. Everything in me recognizes him. Electricity ignites between us, warming my skin where his body is touching mine. His hands slowly travel up to my waist, his fingers splaying along my stomach.

"I haven't seen you in here before."

When those words leave his mouth, I wonder how often he comes here.

"No, you haven't."

His head leans on the crook of my neck and his breath is warm on my ear. "What's your name, darlin'?"

That southern accent makes me weak in the knees. I glance over my shoulder and into his hazel eyes. Oh, those eyes are so beautiful. "My name is Desiree. Desiree Gibson." Nerves make my voice shaky and I hope he doesn't notice.

By now, our hips are doing this seductive sway, dip, sway motion, and his fingers trace circles on my bare stomach. "A beautiful name for a beautiful lady."

Gripping my hips, he turns me in his arms. His eyes shine in the lighting, and he places his hand at the small of my back. The wine glass he had earlier is now nowhere in sight, and I'm left wondering how he had time to return it before joining me.

Just thinking of that wine glass, I imagine him sipping wine and me licking the moisture from his lips. One corner of his mouth pulls up into a smile as if he's read my mind, which is just ridiculous. There is absolutely no way that he could know the thoughts

rolling around in my head. *Right?* A chuckle escapes him, and I wonder if it's possible that he can hear my thoughts.

Not wanting to ruin my evening, I choose to ignore the nagging feeling that he can read my thoughts and just rest my head on his shoulder. Tightening my arms around his neck, I get lost in the feel of him as we continue our seductive dance.

All too soon the song ends and an upbeat tune begins to blare through the speakers. He pulls away, and already I feel cold from the loss of his touch. He places a quick kiss on my cheek. "Thanks for the dance, darlin'." His southern accent seems out of place with his Hispanic features, but it's sexy as all can be.

Licking my dry lips, I notice that his eyes follow the movement of my tongue. Internally, I pump my fist in the air at this little victory. "Anytime, handsome."

His eyes stray to a spot behind me and he nods in greeting. Curious, I turn my head. Tracy is making her way to my side. Taking my hand, he plants a kiss on my knuckles. "I'll see ya around sometime?"

He wants to see me again? *Yes, you will most certainly see me again.* "Definitely."

"Good." He stays just a little longer than necessary, gazing into my eyes, then he departs with a glance over his shoulder.

"Who is Mr. McHottie?" Tracy asks.

I'm so busy watching his hips move that I'm not hearing a word she's saying. Pain radiates through my arm where she hits me. "Ow, what was that for?" Then the she-devil moves in front of me, blocking my view of him.

"Are you even paying attention to me, or are you too busy checking out Mr. McHottie back there?" She jams her thumb behind her, referencing my dance partner.

I stand on tiptoes to see where he disappeared to. Hopefully it's not in the arms of that other woman. Nope. He is now standing on the other side of the bar. Odd, does he work here? Giving Tracy my full attention, I ask, "Uh...what was the question?"

She rolls her eyes, which annoys me. "Mr. McHottie." Turning around, she searches the sea of people until she spots him behind the bar, where he is pouring a glass of wine and staring intently at us—at me. "Does he have a name?"

"Of course, he does." As the words leave my mouth I realize that I hadn't gotten his name. I had been quick to give him mine, but had failed to even ask for his. *Way to go, Desiree.*

"Well?" Tracy raises an eyebrow, showing her annoyance with me.

"Well, what?" Why must this woman play twenty questions while I'm clearly trying to admire my handsome dance partner? He leans forward, resting his forearms on the top of the counter. A smile lights up his face, and his eyes haven't strayed from me this entire time.

"What is his name?" Tracy's words are slow, and she's waving her hand in front of my face.

Take a hint woman, and leave me alone to gawk at this gorgeous man.

“Oh, for crying out loud.” She takes my face in her hands, forcing me to look at only her. “What is his name?”

“Huh?” Half of what she says registers, but I haven’t been able to focus on her while gazing at him. It takes me a minute to remember what she had asked. “Oh.” I frown. “I never asked.”

“What?” Tracy shakes her head. “I can’t believe we’re friends. How do you dance with someone as hot as that,” she nods toward him, “and not ask for his name?”

“Well, excuse me for not being up to date on this clubbing stuff.” Jeez, my friend is annoying. “I just didn’t think to ask.”

“Well, silly, march on over there and get it...and his number.” Letting go of my arms, she points in his direction, but now he’s gone. Tracy’s arm falls when she notices this. “Well, where did he go?”

Great. I had him in my sights and now he has disappeared. Thanks, Tracy. I scan the room. It’s difficult to see with all the bodies dancing and grinding. Then there’s the dim lights that add to my difficulty.

“I don’t see him anywhere.” Standing on my tiptoes, again, I search. My shoulders sag when I realize that he is no longer in this room. He has quite possibly left the building. “This was a bad idea. I knew I should have stayed home. Now I’ll be disappointed all week.”

Shaking her head, Tracy says, “No, this was a fantastic idea.”

I roll my eyes. Yes, fantastic. I find the guy of my dreams, and let him disappear without getting his name and number.

She grips my shoulders, turning me back toward her. “Look, he was just behind that counter, so he obviously works here.” Tapping my chin, she smiles.

It takes me a minute to understand what she’s implying. Then my eyes widen in realization. Why hadn’t I thought of that? Eyeing the bar, I spy two men working quickly to mix drinks for their waiting customers. My dance partner is still nowhere to be seen.

I let out a nervous breath and head toward the bar to gather the much-needed information.

Chapter Four

Caleb

I sit down in my comfy desk chair, sipping cold blood. Yes, I put my blood in wine glasses so I can drink in front of the masses. The humans occupying this joint are completely oblivious to the supernatural surrounding them. Reclining in my chair, I rest my feet on the desktop and reminisce.

When her chocolate brown eyes met mine from across the dance floor, I had been instantly captivated, just like earlier in the elevator. She was sweet perfection, with her

raven black hair pulled up loosely with a few natural curls framing her beautiful face, and that top she wore showing just enough cleavage to catch my eye without revealing what lay beneath.

The way she swayed her hips to the music called to my body like a siren's song. It was like she was one with the music, and it was sexy as hell.

I noticed the way her eyes had strayed from mine momentarily to study the woman in my arms. This beauty was attracted to me. Good, because I was drawn to her as well. I couldn't wait for this song to end so I could lose the girl currently dancing with me and make my way toward my heavenly angel.

Then she had done something that completely tore me apart at the seams. She bit her lower lip as she swayed, dipping her hips low. That provocative move stole the breath from my lungs. I had just about lost all self-restraint; my fingers itched to grip her hips and press her against me as we lost ourselves to the music.

A line formed between her brows, and she appeared to be concerned about whether she held my attention. Her gaze, once again, traveled to the woman in my arms. As her eyes bore into the back of my dance partner, her nostrils flared and her heartbeat accelerated. I had to ease her worries. The woman I had chosen to dance with was nothing more than a stranger to occupy my time on the dance floor, someone I had originally planned on sneaking off with to snack from.

There was something about my angel that I was drawn to—I'd felt it when I ran into her at the hospital. The longer I stared at her beautiful face, the stronger those feelings became. In my long life, I had never felt this way about a woman.

Needing to reassure her, I waited until her eyes turned back to mine, and then I smiled. Her eyes softened and her heart sped up. Among all the other people in the crowd, her thoughts projected toward me the loudest. Opening my mind to her, I read those thoughts and couldn't stop the chuckle from leaving me. At first, she was impressed at my ability to dance with a glass of wine without spilling a drop, then her eyes and thoughts traveled the length of my body, admiring my physique.

A blush had spread into her cheeks, and it was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. I've been around for centuries and have seen many women blush, but on her it was exquisite. The smile that curved my lips deepened, knowing that I was the cause of the heat radiating through her body.

Our dance plays over and over in my mind. The feel of her body pressed against mine, the scent of her shampoo, and the hint of a cotton candy fragrance that clung to her skin all drew me in like a sailor to a siren.

I raise my hands above my head and watch the monitors surrounding me. There she is, standing at the bar, twirling one of her loose curls on the end of her finger. I tap my short nails on the metal arm of my desk chair. These blasted monitors don't have audio, and now I'm wishing I had purchased the ones with sound so I could hear her mystical voice.

The bartender, Phil, approaches her with a grin. I zoom in so that I can read her lips. "Excuse me, but can you tell me the name of the man that was just back there a moment

ago? He wore faded blue Wranglers and a crisp white T-shirt.”

Phil darts a glance up at the camera, knowing that I'm in my office watching the monitors. My fingernails continue tapping as I watch their interaction. He doesn't answer, but rather offers her a drink.

“She's in there asking about you.”

That baritone voice startles me as I hadn't heard anyone approaching. I jerk my head to the side to look at my intruder. Alex is standing in the doorway, arms crossed. My cousin is the total opposite of me. Where I have darker skin and black hair, he is fair-skinned, with freckles and bleach blond hair.

I give him an accusing look. “Someone stole all the blood from my mini fridge. Care to explain yourself?”

Alex takes a step closer, examining my darkened eyes. “Why didn't you feed before coming in?”

Removing my feet from the desktop, I stand. “I had a snack. I had Phil pour a bag into a wine glass, and I had every intention on luring my date back to finish nourishing my body, but I was mesmerized by Desiree's captivating eyes.” I glance back at the monitor for another glimpse of her.

Turning my gaze back to Alex, my nostrils flare at the smirk on my cousin's face. For whatever reason, that smirk irks my nerves and my lips pull back in a snarl. How is this funny? My body is wound tight, yearning for some oxygenated blood to fuel my system, and he is standing there, completely sated and a smirk etched on his face.

A part of me wants to body slam him into the concrete floor, but I know that is just the bloodlust worming its way into my mind. I close my eyes and take a deep breath to calm the beast that is on the rise.

How long has it been since I've had a full meal? A day, two? I have done nothing but snack on a glass of blood here and a glass there. My body needs fresh, warm nutrients, or the bloodlust will take control and I'll become a wild beast full of rage and end up killing someone.

My eyes wonder back to the monitor where Desiree is sipping a drink, her eyes searching the crowd. Searching for me. I would go back out there to her, but the emotions I feel when I'm with her are strong. Mix those emotions with my hunger and I would have an uncontrollable desire to feed from her. I don't want her to see that side of me, and I'm afraid of what would happen to her if my bloodlust did overrule me.

Alex reaches in his front jeans pocket and pulls out a set of keys. Flipping through several on the massive ring, he grips a small golden key and extends his hand. “I have two bags in the mini fridge behind my desk. I'll stall her, you feed, and then get yourself out there before I decide to take her home.”

“Thanks.” I take the offered keys and then point a finger in his face. “You keep your grubby hands off her. She's mine.”

The smirk on his face grates my nerves something fierce. “Really? Because as I see it,

you still haven't given her a name, so how can you lay claim?"

I dart forward, fully intending on grabbing him by the shoulders and breaking his neck, but he has obviously read my mind. With moves as quick as lightning, Alex is standing behind me with one arm around my shoulders and the other on my head.

"Now, now, cousin." Alex releases his hold on me. "Don't go getting your panties in a twist."

"Panties?" I shove him. "Do I look like the panty-wearing type?" His silence and constant smirking is grating on my very last nerve. "I'll allow you to keep Desiree company until I've fed, but only because I don't want her leaving here without getting her phone number."

Chapter Five

Desiree

Slightly irritated by the lack of information, I tap my nails on the cold martini glass in my hand. This is the third song to play since my dance with Mr. McHottie, as Tracy calls him. I'm beginning to think he left the building, my presence already a distant memory of his. For the umpteenth time my eyes scan the bodies out on the dance floor. Still nothing. The man is nowhere to be found.

Where could he have gone? I thought for sure he was interested in me. *Please tell me I'm not wrong about that.* Surely the universe wouldn't be so cruel as to bring a sexy man like that into my life only to tease me with his presence.

No, I refuse to believe that I meant nothing more than a three-minute dance.

Multi-colored lights flicker on the dance floor, making it hard for my eyes to keep focus. As I continue to scan the room, my leg starts a nervous bounce. My dance partner has a name, and dang it, I intend to find out what that glorious name is so I can properly dream of my sexy man. I'll stay all night if I have to; maybe I'll even camp out front until he returns. Anything to ensure I see him again.

Ten minutes later and my shoulders slump. I've been sitting here for what feels like an eternity and still no sexy hunk of a man. "Ugh, such is my life."

From across the room I spy Tracy having the time of her life. The new guy she's found has been stuck to her like glue. They have danced together since she sent me to find my man. How nice for her. I know I shouldn't be jealous of her, but I am. She found a guy that is totally digging her, and I find one that can't leave me quick enough. *Le sigh.*

A man sits on the barstool next to me, his hand just mere inches from my elbow. "Can I buy you a drink?"

Is the fool blind? I have a full martini in my hand, and he's asking to buy me a drink? *Weirdo.* "No." I hold up my glass as a sign that I am not in need of a drink.

Not taking the hint, he slides closer, brushing his fingers along my arm. "How about something a little warmer than that fruity mess you have there?"

Standing up, I move to a seat further down the bar and turn my attention in the opposite direction. *What a pig.* Crossing my legs, I take a sip of the apple martini. Drinking isn't really my thing, but this sweet goodness has my taste buds doing the tango. It's a party-in-my-mouth kind of drink, and I may have to order a second one before the night is over.

Warm fingers grip my arm above the elbow, and give a firm squeeze. "Now, that was rude."

Glancing down at the hand gripping me, my mouth forms a tight line. How dare that creep put his hands on me? "Get your nasty hands off me."

His nostrils flare and his eyes harden. "Come on, baby, I just want to buy you a drink."

A hand slams down on the counter between us. "I believe the lady said to take your hands off her." With one hand still on the counter, the bartender raises his other and jams a finger into the upper arm of the guy squeezing me. "I'll give you to the count of three to leave this club."

The guy hurting my arm releases a puff of air. His breath assaults my nostrils, and the stench is worse than a sewer. "This place is a buzz-kill anyway." Releasing my arm, the jerk takes off, weaving through the sea of people toward the exit.

"Thanks," I look at his nametag, "Phil."

"You're welcome." His eyes shift behind me, then he smiles and tends to other customers.

Resting my elbows on the counter, I let out a breath. Some people really know how to damper the mood. Running my finger over the rim of my glass, I dip my finger inside and lick the stickiness off. Lost in my own little world, I never hear any footsteps, but who can hear a thing with this music blaring and people shouting above the noise? When a hand clasps my shoulder it startles me. I jump and nearly spill my drink down the front of my shirt.

Hoping that it's my sexy cowboy, I smile and turn around, but my smile fades when I spy the blond-haired man standing there. He extends his hand. "Hello."

I glance at the offered hand like it will suddenly grow fangs and bite my fingers off. The hesitation causes him to push it out further, clearly unwilling to be ignored. In hopes of rushing him along, I accept his hand, giving him an awkward shake. "Hi. I'm actually waiting for someone."

Bringing my hand to his lips, he plants a gentle kiss to my knuckles. "So, what's your name?" Clearly, he is ignoring the fact that I'm waiting for someone.

Pulling back my hand, I frown when his grip tightens, holding me in place. *Ugh, does this man have no manners?* I really don't feel like dealing with another creep. "Uh." I look down at our joined hands. "Can I have my hand back? I kind of need it for work on Tuesday."

The multi-color lights twinkle in his eyes, changing the color of his irises. Glancing up to a spot above the bar, he smirks and my eyes immediately follow the trail he had followed. Hanging from the ceiling is a surveillance camera. I hadn't noticed that before.

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