



L SHANNON

Abducting
AERON

ACACIA I

ACACIA

Out of this world erotic paranormal romance.

Book One: Abducting Aeron

L. SHANNON

As a spy for the Acacian moon colony, Aeron is determined to do whatever it takes to uncover the truth about a missing vampire. Although he plans to complete his search in secret, betrayal might leave him in the hands of the enemy and at the tender mercy of his human, planet-side contact.

Acknowledgements

Thank you, M.

Dedication

As always, for my family.

Publisher's Note

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Chapter One

Aeron Parks waited until he was alone before diving back into the complicated digital tech archives. There was some secret here, some clue that would explain what happened to the missing doctor. It was his job, his duty, his mission to uncover the informants who were endangering the Acacian citizens. That meant spending nearly all his time searching through the day-to-day boring data. The tiny beige office sometimes seemed to have become his whole world.

This time it was a medical doctor who had gone missing. He'd been here on Rahla to work, although few had known he was a vampire it hadn't been completely hidden either. He hadn't even been an active operative for their spy network. According to the records Doctor Kaven had been sent planet-side with orders to maintain cover and report possible trouble.

And then he'd just disappeared.

As the supposed lead doctor at the center, Aeron had access clearance for most of the center's tech data. But he'd found a hidden layer of security inside the tech. Cracking the encryption hadn't been easy. He'd been working on it for most of the week he'd been on assignment here. Now that he'd cracked it, he had to wonder if he'd found anything at all. It seemed to be nearly the same data as he'd already searched in the regular files. All the usual lists of patients and blood donors and the same inventory of medicines and blood units and shipment dates were there. Nothing looked suspicious. But considering the extra level of security, there had to be something.

A quiet tap of shoes interrupted his search. He flicked the tech screen back to the regular patient input page.

"Aeron?" Helia Rabino opened the door. She was a beautiful young human with entrancing green eyes and golden blond hair. She was also second in charge of the Southern City Health Center.

She knew what he was and why he was here. As his primary planet-side contact, she'd known from the beginning that he was more than a supposedly human doctor appointed to supervise the collections. She knew he was a vampire, as well as a spy for the Acacian moon colony. "Yes? Is the next patient here?"

"He is. The last one for the day, I think." She held out a disk chart. "I've set him up in room number two."

Aeron logged off the tech screen and followed her to the new donor. Perhaps not so new. The older human already had his arm positioned in the molded plas-steel armrest. Still, Rahlan policy required an official doctor to be on hand for every blood donation, even if the machinery did nearly all the work. Although his documents were all forged, he did at least have enough training to pretend to fit the part.

"Good afternoon. I see you've given blood before." Aeron pressed the disk chart to the reader and noted the man's name. "We'll be starting in just a moment, Gregory." The man nodded, leaning back, and closing his eyes.

Aeron examined the man's arm and found the usual multitude of healed needle marks. Another glance at the chart confirmed that Gregory had been a regular donor for years, as was required by the Rahlan government. "You missed your donation last month. Was there a problem?"

"I was ill. No other problem, just a standard cold."

The moment he closed the armband it began scanning Gregory's bio-readout and comparing it to his standard history. "You've recovered now, I see." Once that was done, he pressed the button to proceed. The machine issued a small hiss while administering a pain blocker and inserting the needle.

The soft, seductive scent of blood flowed over Aeron's senses. *Damn.* His thirst rushed to the surface, swelling his fangs. He gritted his teeth to the point of pain, pushing back the need and forcing himself, against his instincts, to ignore the temptation.

A soft hand touched his shoulder. *Helia.* "I can take it from here."

The woman always knew. He wasn't sure how, but she always knew when he'd pushed himself too far. He bit down harder and offered a short nod.

Her worry faded. "I left your usual dinner waiting in your office."

"Thank you," he whispered, with only the barest lisp. He tried to pass her without breathing in the delicate scent she'd been teasing him with for days, but that was futile. The subtle vanilla captured him, tangling his feet for a moment so that he tilted dangerously toward her long slender neck.

Her sigh jerked him back upright. He'd been about to feed from her, right in front of a donor.

"Go eat." Her hand brushed his arm, gently pushing him toward the door.

He went, but his mind dwelled on the temptation that was Helia.

In his office, he found a small thermal mug filled with warm blood from some anonymous donor. As he brought the cup to his lips, he knew it would do nothing to curb his appetite. The hunger came from a need deeper than thirst. What his body craved was Helia's willing flesh and freely given blood.

He'd have her before this assignment was over. He'd claim her in every sense of the word. A low, possessive growl welled up. To fight back the unfamiliar ache, he swallowed down the blood, letting it ease him as best it could.

He'd held off so far. She might be willing, but he should not take advantage. He couldn't forget that Helia was his contact here on Rahla. He shouldn't misuse her trust. She and her older sister, Bridget were the only ones who knew what he was and could expose him to the Reapers. To betray their trust would be to forfeit his own safety as well as any future agents who needed access to the blood centers.

Still... he needed her, desired her, and every day she grew harder to resist.

"Are you well?" Helia asked from the door.

Hell no, he wasn't well. He was slowly losing his sanity. He drew in her scent from across the room and instantly his fangs ached in ways that the cup of blood hadn't come close to inspiring.

"I had Bridget take over with room two. You were so pale that we were both concerned."

"I'm fine but thank you." He sank down at the computer terminal again. His only hope of not preying on her innocence would be to keep busy, find his answers and get the hell off Rahla. "If there is no one else donating at the moment, I'll continue here."

"Have you found anything yet?"

"No." Even if he had, he'd have answered no. It was never wise to reveal too much to the contacts. If it didn't get them killed it could get him betrayed. Helia and Bridget didn't know anything other than he was here

to find out what happened to the missing doctor. They were mostly in the dark and it was best to keep them there.

"I can help if you'll let me." Helia closed the door and crossed to stand beside him. "You don't need to flip the screen. I won't even tell Bridget if that's what you want."

If she helped, he might get done sooner, but then there'd be no way to keep her in the dark, to keep her safe.

"I have a right to help find him. You know I do." She reached out, her fingers stilling a breath from his cheek, as if she'd planned to caress him but lost her courage at the last second. Then her hand fell away, but her emerald gaze locked with his. "He was my father."

"You knew?" Dr. Kaven had reported that no one knew of his past identity here in the donation center. He'd sworn that even his family would not recognize him after so long and so many changes, including his turning vampire. "How?"

"Information is the only true power. Just after he disappeared, I searched his things. Among them I found a picture of our mother as well as some private letters. It didn't take much guessing to put together who he really was and why he was here with us. That was the reason I offered to be your contact for the Resistance. I just wish I had figured it out in time to help him." She pushed back a wavy blond strand, tucking it behind her ear. "I need to know more about him and how it happened, how he was turned, and why he left."

She did deserve to know the truth. "Your father was active in the Resistance. He was killed by the Reapers during the first wave of exiles to Acacia. He died saving... someone very important to our people. Our queen granted the conversion, and once he'd been turned, he accepted his new life."

"Why didn't he tell us?"

"I'm sure he felt it was best, safest for your family. Even then it was illegal to marry or be married to a vampire. Your mother would have been exiled and you left orphaned. Can you understand?" She didn't answer.

"Let the past go, Helia. Your father is a hero to both our people. If he can be rescued, he will be."

The bright tears shining in her eyes cracked something in him. He didn't even remember his own parents. To Helia this chance to know her

father would be something precious. He caught her trembling hands and tugged her forward until she stood between his thighs.

“I would welcome your help finding Dr. Kaven, but I know he will not thank me for putting you in danger.” He brushed the pad of his thumb across her cheek, wiping away the tear that had escaped.

“Do you think he really is still alive?”

He wanted to lie, to tell her Kaven was fine and all they had to do was find him. But that wouldn't be fair to her either. So instead, he tempered the grim truth with a taste of hope. “I don't know. It is possible, but not very likely.”

She blinked at him. “You think there is a chance then?” Helia crumpled slowly against him. Her body trembled with emotion. Her arms snaked around his neck in her need for comfort.

And all he could do was revel in the contact. He hadn't meant to give her false hope. Her father was almost certainly dead. His primary mission was to retrieve any intelligence the doctor had collected. The last communication had hinted at some problem with the blood supply which had as yet not been discovered. Tracking the doctor's whereabouts was his secondary mission, but only if it did not interfere with getting the information.

But with Helia in his arms and her hopes pinned on finding her father, how could he turn away? Hell, with her pressed so tightly against his body, and his senses clamoring to feed and fuck, how could he even think straight?

Chapter Two

Helia craved the strength she felt in the arms of this virtual stranger. She didn't understand it. Didn't really want to. Trusting him had been easy from first sight, which had only been a week ago. Still, her own contacts had found nothing yet about her father. Aeron might be her only hope of finding her father alive, or whatever version of life the vampires had.

After sharing a world with the undying ones, she should know more about them than she did. Instead, she'd allowed *vampire* to become no more than a word that meant *different*. But Aeron didn't feel so very different. If anything, he felt like a better match than any human man ever had before.

His cool strength enveloped her while one hand slowly stroked up and down her back, soothing her like a child.

But she wasn't a child. The casual touch sent waves of pleasure vibrating through her body, tightening her desire, making it obvious that her body wanted more than just to be held. She'd wanted more right from the first moment she'd met him. More... of everything he had to offer and yet, for a week they had only danced around the attraction.

She was done dancing.

Helia turned just enough to bring her face up before his. His hooded grey eyes burned with something fierce, something she should have been afraid of, but it wasn't fear that welled up in a tight knot, sizzling awareness over her skin. She brought her lips to his, while his descended to claim hers.

They came together with a crash of passion. Nothing light or gentle would be found between them, at least not this time.

His fingers burrowed into her bound golden hair, freeing it, flinging the small hair band and netting aside. His mouth continued to ravage hers. His grip on her hair tightened, turning her into the kiss.

She wasn't one to be led, but he was racing toward exactly where she wanted to go. With her body held so tightly, she was crushed against him. Still, she tore at the front of his clothing, opening it enough to slide her palms over his chest.

His skin was cooler than hers, but the flesh was too tempting to turn away from. His chest was broad, and his body corded with lean muscle. She let her hands explore lower.

Aeron gasped against her mouth, tearing free to trail fiery kisses down her neck. "I want you, Helia. I need you." Fang tips scraped deliciously over her skin. His hands dipped down over her ass, cupping and lifting, pressing the junction of her thighs hard against his erection.

"Yes," she moaned. Her world shrank to where they touched. Nothing else existed now or had ever been.

The thick heavy demand of flesh calling to flesh was emphasized by his low growl. "I'll have you." Then he was a whirl of motion. His hands dragged her from the floor. He surged up and forward until they crashed into the smooth plas-form wall.

The motion dragged her long tunic upward and a deft flick of his fingers tore her tiny scrap of thong off with a brutal sounding rip. The sound sent shivers and aches of need deep to her core. She couldn't wait and didn't have to. With him supporting her weight, she parted her thighs and wrapped them around his waist. Reaching between them, she parted the opening to his pants and freed his cock.

"Helia..."

She guided and he thrust, bringing them together in a single long plunge. She'd have screamed if he hadn't claimed her mouth at that moment. Silently she devoured his kiss while he filled her over and over.

She clawed at his back, levering her body against his wild motion. She ached and burned and shook with the need to be closer, to take more, to become one.

His kiss changed, softened until he broke away. Aeron turned away with a growl. His fangs were fully extended. His eyes glowed with feral desire. He wanted blood and was fighting the need.

"Don't..." She caught his face, turning him back to meet her gaze. "Don't turn away from me, from what you need."

"Helia," Aeron closed his eyes and prayed for control. Every cell in his body screamed that he take her. Even his aching dick wouldn't be satisfied by claiming her body alone. Thrust after thrust brought pleasure and the temptation of oblivion, but without the blood there would be no satisfaction.

Then Helia was dragging his head forward, her grip insistent, tangled in his hair. She guided him to her throat even while her body shuddered with the beginning of orgasm. Her clenching pussy and demanding arms broke his resistance.

She wanted it as much as he did. It was how they were made to be together.

He sank his fangs deep and swallowed her life down. The sweet nectar shattered his control until he was little more than a wild animal savaging her body and soul, taking everything she offered and reveling in the dominance.

"Aeron..." Her hands eased in his hair. Her body relaxed in completion.

Or in weakness... The thought jerked him from his own satisfaction. Had he taken too much blood? Been too violent for her mortal body? He eased backward, cradling her against his chest.

The wound at her throat was not severe. It was already healing. Her color was neither too flushed in shock or too pale from being drained. Relief flooded him. The soft smile on her lips took away the last of his fear and left only the strange urge to hold her and soak in her mortal heat.

Chapter Three

She felt his breath against her neck, coolly caressing the tiny punctures. The chill of danger left her shivering despite the thin white tunic she still wore. His arms tightened a heartbeat before a knock sounded at the door.

"Helia!" Bridget's censoring tone was like ice over her moment of reprieve.

She jerked back, flashing wide eyes to Aeron. They were caught, with her in his arms, hidden away in a private office. Good thing Bridget hadn't come in minutes before.

"The donor already left and I was about to close down for the night. If the doctor doesn't need you for anything else, you could help me by doing your job." The cold anger in her sister's tone was warning enough of the coming lecture. Bridget turned and left, hard heeled shoes snapping against the plas-form floor.

Helia spun to catch up, but Aeron's hand captured her wrist, swinging her back to face him once more.

"Be careful. I'll contact you if I find anything." The flash of fang tips was seared in her mind, reminding her of their differences and of how those fangs felt imbedded in her flesh.

She swallowed and spun to catch up to Bridget.

Catching her wasn't hard. Her sister waited at the corner of the hallway. The waiting didn't last. The moment Helia reached her side, the fight was on.

"What did you think you were doing? Don't you get what that creature is? Or how dangerous it can be?" Bridget's voice was low but hissed loud enough that any sharp-eared predators at the other end of the hall would surely hear.

"Stop it, Bridget."

Bridget's voice dropped to a demeaning jeer. "You're such a child. Did you really think he cared? Those animals see us as food. They don't see us as friends or lovers, just potential slaves and occasional snacks."

"What I do is none of your business." She pushed past Bridget to snag the key strips from the utility room. Bridget, as head of this collection

center, had her own pass but the general key strip would work just as well for her to lock up and leave for Aeron like she had every night so far.

Bridget snatched the key strips from her and dropped them into her pocket. "Just shut up, Helia. You don't know anything and this time you've gone too far. I'm getting you out of here right now." She grabbed Helia by the arm and dragged her the last few feet to the exit. "Tomorrow we can go back to normal."

Something about her sister's weird smile was more than scary. Helia dug her feet in and tried to twist free. "What's happening?" But suddenly she had a thought, a truly terrifying one. "What have you done, Bridget? What have you done?"

They went through the exit and into the grey of dusk. "That creature will be gone soon, just like the last one."

"Oh my God. You can't... You didn't..." But she knew in that moment that Bridget had been the one to turn their father in to the Reapers. And now she'd exposed Aeron too. She yanked her arm free, spinning back toward the center just as the door began closing. "Aeron!"

The door closed with a snap. The light beside the door blinked from yellow to red. The cool press of a med-shooter hit her arm a second before she stumbled, and darkness caught her.

Chapter Four

Aeron heard the shout and put together the information a moment too late. Even his superhuman speed couldn't get him to the door before the building went into lockdown. The sickly yellow reserve lights came on after a second of darkness.

Were the Reapers already on their way? How long did he have until they broke in and attacked? What would be done to Helia for helping him? Surely Bridget would protect her sister, no matter what her involvement.

He ran back to the secondary office where he'd been sleeping for the last week. There had been no way to sneak weapons with him back onto Rahla, but since his arrival he'd collected a few medical supplies to use for defense. And of course, he always had fangs ready and willing. The problem with hand to fang combat was that the humans had learned long ago to never get that close.

The ventilation system hissed to life, followed by the sweet scent of sleeping gas. Damn them. The bastards were getting too smart. They wouldn't even be confronting him.

He ran for the surgical room and grabbed the oxygen mask there. Turning the nozzle had no effect. Bridget must have disabled it before dragging Helia out.

What else could he do?

Frantically he searched his mind for any options. Nothing. Much as he wished the old tales were true of the vampires not needing oxygen, they were pure myth and already the sleeping gas weakened him with every breath. Escape...

He ran, fell, crawled his way to the main entrance. The door was locked. The windows were plenty large enough to fit through. He threw himself at one with all his remaining strength. The plas-glass bounced him back. Once, twice... and he stayed down.

Aeron awoke in a cold, far from empty cell. The slick plas-form floor and walls offered no hope to any of the occupants. He and the other three vampires were each bound with wrist cuffs and short chains that extended up to the ceiling. They were literally hanging like meat in a slaughterhouse.

He spun his body slightly to get a better look at his companions. Two of them were truly dead. The third was Kaven and he was well on the way to true death. The vampire's skin had shrunk over his bones, leaving him looking more skeleton than flesh. The madness of hunger burned in his fevered eyes. Kaven had been missing nearly a month, and from the looks of it had not been fed in all that time.

The other two had died in much the same way. There seemed to be little signs of abuse, but their naked bodies had simply given out from lack of nourishment.

Taking stock of his own body revealed the lingering effects of the gas as well as a long, slowly healing wound in his right arm. They'd torn out his biochip to prevent the Acacians from simply tracking him here. His medical advisor on Acacia, Blake, had expected as much. The inability to track or find any of the other missing agents had pointed to this conclusion.

Which was why Blake, with his superior's more than thrilled approval, implanted a second chip into Aeron's left foot. It had still been a risk. The Reapers would have found it if they bothered with a full body scan.

Obviously, they hadn't since he still had two intact feet.

Even that tiny success might not save him. His only hope was that someone would follow up when he failed to check in as scheduled. Fortunately, the check in was for the next day.

Or would that be for today? Depending on the gas concentration he might have been out all night. Even his wounds would have healed more slowly. Hell, he could have been out for several days. There was no way to tell.

The room had no windows or any other indication of time passing.

If Kaven wasn't too lost to the madness he might be able to help answer that question. He turned enough to face Helia's father. "Dr. Kaven, I'm glad to see you alive."

Kaven, more creature than man, snarled a low growl and flailed against his bonds.

There'd be no help from Kaven. There might very well be no help for either of them.

Chapter Five

Helia was more than pissed. She was furious at her sister's ignorant, bigoted, vamp-hating actions. She stormed through the home they shared. She found her sister in the shower unit and tore aside the micro curtain. "Damn you, Bridget. What's wrong with you? Why did you do it?"

Bridget jumped back, almost falling on the slippery floor of the unit.

"What did either of them ever do to you? What did any vampire ever do?" She grabbed up an antique style back scrubber and swung it through the air, dangerously close to Bridget's head to keep Bridget in the unit. "You tell me now, before I beat it out of you."

"You don't know anything, Helia. Vampires are killers and have to be kept from taking over our world!"

When her sister leapt forward, Helia slammed the brush against her chest, smacking her back once more and leaving a red imprint between her breasts. "I know more than you think. I'm not a child, Bridget. Aeron is a good man. He's not some kind of animal to be hunted."

"He's a spy for those creatures. He's not boyfriend material, no matter how much you want to screw him. If I have to kill him myself to protect you from your own stupidity, I will!"

"Which bones of his I jump is none of your business. What I feel for him isn't even that important compared to his mission. You do know why he was sent here, don't you?" None too gently, she threw a towel at Bridget, but she didn't bother to turn off the water.

"He's here to find that other one. I know that. I'm sure by now he's succeeded too!"

The words sank in like an anvil to the head. "You really think they both were taken to the same place? Will they still be alive?"

"No, maybe... How should I know? Why should you care?"

She jumped into the unit with Bridget, slamming her sister back against the wall to get her attention. The water streamed down over them both, but Helia ignored everything but the triumphant gleam in her sister's eyes. "You should know. You should care. That man that you betrayed today was the one man who might be able to find our father, to save him from whatever nightmare you sold him into!"

"What?"

She shoved Bridget hard again, and then backed out of the water. "I said, you betrayed our father. Dr. Kaven was our father, back here to watch over us!"

Bridget sagged and gasped, "No... it's not possible."

"Oh yes! He was our father, and he was too afraid to even tell us who he was. He was probably afraid you would hate him for what he'd become, and it turns out he was right. I found the pictures and letters with his things after you turned him over to those butchers."

The pale, shaking pitiful excuse for a sister appeared to finally get just how significantly she'd botched their lives. For a moment Helia even felt sorry for her. "If you want to see his things I have them hidden under my bunk."

Tears mingled with the water. "I didn't know. I swear I didn't know. He was a vampire, and a threat." The water continued to spray over her, battering her shaking body and already soaked towel. "We were told that father was killed by vampires. I was frightened. I didn't mean to get him killed."

"Killed? You said you didn't know. You said they might still be alive."

"I *don't* know."

Helia turned off the water and grabbed another towel for Bridget. Somehow, she had to get the information out of her and to do that Bridget had to be more together. "It'll be okay. Tell me where they took him. Tell me everything you know." She sat Bridget on the edge of the unit and dried her without much help. "Just tell me and I'll fix this."

"I... They said..."

"Take your time. Just tell me what you know." She might be telling Bridget to take her time, but Helia's mind and heart screamed, demanding Bridget get her shit together so they could save Aeron and maybe even their father.

Bridget took a deep breath. "They said the health center had a sublevel where they did the initial interrogations of the prisoners. They said it was so they would have them close for medical treatment and for blood to feed them."

"How do I get to this sublevel? Do you know where the door to it is?"

“I don’t know for sure.” Bridget pulled the towel tighter. “I think maybe through the back storage room. I saw one of the Reapers come out of there.”

She patted Bridget’s shoulder. “Stay here. I’ll fix this.”

It was kind of odd being the one to comfort Bridget, but also right. As the little sister, she’d been comforted often enough. Together they’d survived when their father had gone missing, presumed dead, and then again when their mother had lost hope and taken her own life. They were sisters and even this was forgivable.

If she could save the men in time.

It was a pretty big if.

Helia rushed back through the rooms to change clothes and gather what she needed. There were no civilian weapons allowed on Rahla, but she had some makeshift devices called blow canisters thanks to some resistance pals. The tiny explosive cases looked innocent, and could slip through most security checks, but were still powerful enough to make good save-your-ass passes as they called them.

She dropped a handful of them into one deep pocket and then snagged the center’s key strips and the anesthesia gun from Bridget’s room. There were still a dozen doses there. With a little luck it would be enough.

Using her minicom she contacted Pierre, who was among the Resistance, to tell him what was happening, while she jimmied the entrance to their home and escaped into the night. The locks on the doors were part of the planet-wide curfew that had been in effect for almost twenty years. Theoretically at this time of night there should be no one but the Reapers out.

That was who she’d have to watch for. Fortunately, she’d only have to make it to the middle of their community to reach the health center.

She skirted the buildings and avoided the nighttime motion sensors. This wasn’t the first time she’d broken curfew. She had little trouble avoiding the roving patrols of Reapers and reached the health center without incident.

Her minicom chirped, signaling a call. It was Pierre explaining he’d been delayed. He wanted her to wait for him, but that wasn’t happening. The doorway was too exposed and who knew what was happening to Aeron while she wasted time out here. “I’m going in. Use your people to

distract the Reapers. I won't need much time to get inside." She closed the connection and turned the minicom to silent.

She doubled over the key strip for the door and used the twice thick material to force the lock open. In seconds she was inside and because it was the right key strip, the building alarm stayed silent. She rushed to the back storage room, praying the whole way that she wouldn't come across any of the Reapers.

Thoughts of being caught made her nervous. All members of the Resistance who were caught were immediately shipped out to the vampire moon as slaves. To all the human world of Rahla they were considered dead, and as far as she knew perhaps the vampires of Acacia actually did kill some or all. Though from what she'd heard that wasn't the case.

Still, slavery was an ugly word.

Much as she thought the vampires deserved the right to exist, she had no desire to become a slave to their every need.

Once in the storage room, she searched for the hidden doorway that might lead to the sublevel. After a few minutes she was beginning to think Bridget had lied or been wrong about the entrance. Perhaps the whole thing had been an act to keep her from finding Aeron, or worse, been a setup to get her caught and exported.

Shit.

No, surely Bridget wouldn't do that. Even if she could morally do so, there was no way she was that good an actress.

The door had to be here... somewhere. Several more minutes went by while she found nothing.

A sudden clanking rattle sent her scurrying behind a stack of boxes. She barely had time to hide before the section of shelving on the opposite wall jerked and opened, revealing two Reapers in full battle gear.

"Damn thing needs to be fixed before we plummet to our deaths. I tell you this, pal, I don't intend to die for this project. I've never heard of such stupidity before. Exactly what kind of secret entrance makes that kind of racket?"

The other one said nothing and the two plodded past without noticing her. Once they'd gone, she leapt out and searched for the hidden lever for the elevator. Now that she knew where to look, she had better luck and found the clasp at the side of the shelves.

The fake wall opened silently, revealing a small room. She stepped inside and withdrew the anesthesia gun and two blow canisters. They would be her only hope if the noisy elevator was guarded at the bottom.

Scenarios ran through her mind of a hundred different things that could happen when the doors opened. Not many of them ended happily for her. She slid into the corner and held her breath.

The door opened without any Reapers waiting.

Her sigh rushed out. *It's too soon to celebrate.* She eased into the bright hallway. To the left there was only one door. A peek through the small window showed a stairway leading up. She turned and moved the other way, careful to make no sound against the hard floor.

She was beginning to think she might actually reach Aeron and maybe her father. With that tiny bit of hope came the fear of what she would find. Would they have tortured or killed Aeron? Was there any chance her father would still be alive after a month? She blocked out the insistent images of them battered or dead and focused instead on getting to them.

She let the memory of Aeron's warm smile and wild passions push aside her fears. Her fingers brushed over the mostly healed punctures on her neck. Aeron's mark. He had to be alive. Surely, she wouldn't make it this far without saving him.

The hallway had a series of doors on the left side. Each one opened into small bleak rooms. The first three were empty.

Since there was no window to peer through, she cracked open the fourth door as quietly as she could. The stealth wasn't necessary. The only occupant was dead. Strapped to a table was a vampire with tubes and wires fastened and inserted. The poor woman looked horrible. Her body was wasted away with ghastly sores all over the exposed skin.

In the woman's place she imagined Aeron or her father. She shivered. It had to be stopped. This was no way to treat a living being, or even a not exactly living being.

She backed out of the room and almost died in surprise when she backed right into a Reaper. She swallowed a yelp and spun before he could raise his weapon. She pushed the anesthesia gun against his chest right through his thin uniform, pressing the trigger twice.

The man groaned and collapsed. She tried to ease him down slowly, but his weight made it impossible. The man's weapons clattered against the floor making an ear shattering racket, or so it seemed.

"Jeri, is everything alright?" A smaller man in a long white coat stuck his head out the next doorway on the left. When he saw her, his eyes widened in surprise. "Who are you? What have you done?" He might have said more, but she jumped forward and slammed the anesthesia gun against his neck. He was out too. She dragged him, and then the guard, into the room the smaller man had come from and then looked around.

The room was small and neat with several storage cabinets, one desk and a doorway on the opposite side. Set into the door and one whole wall was one-way plas-glass. Through the transparent surface she could see Aeron hanging naked and bleeding.

Chapter Six

Aeron couldn't believe his eyes. He hadn't even realized the piece of wall contained a door. When it opened, there was no way he would have expected Helia to be standing there, looking worried and heroic.

Yet there she was. She'd come to save him.

She rushed to his side and wrapped a strip of cloth around his arm. The material looked suspiciously like the uniform of a Reaper. "Oh, Aeron, what have they done to you?"

"Surprisingly little actually. How did you find me? Never mind, you can tell me that later. Did you see a key strip or something to unlock these chains?"

Dr. Kaven snarled a low growl.

She jumped at the sound and then ran back out of the room returning after only a few moments that felt like a lifetime. She dragged a chair in with her. "I can't find any keys. I think I can break the chain with a blow canister."

Her scent circled him and in a heartbeat his body didn't care that he was chained and helpless or that he was naked to her gaze. All that mattered was she was here, and he wanted her. His fangs agreed completely with his cock, and both grew ever happier when she moved closer.

She pulled the chair up beside him and climbed up so she could reach the chain. The motions sent him swinging slightly and they bounced together, his face to her breasts. "I'm sorry," she said while helping him to balance.

He chuckled. "I'm not sorry at all, at least not about that little bump. If you don't mind though I could use the chair to take the weight off the chain." Not to mention his aching shoulders. When she didn't object, he swung his bound feet up onto the chair and waited for her to do her thing with the canister.

She pushed the explosive into one link as far up as she could reach, tapping the igniter twice before wrapping her arms around his head protectively.

The pop and snap of the blow busted the chain just as they'd hoped. The sudden weight of the chain shifted his balance and sent the two of

them tumbling to the floor. The crush of her body over his was delicious. If not for the fact that her mad father was watching and they might be killed at any moment, he would have found a way to take her again right there.

Whatever it was about her, it drove the sanity right out of him. Logic and reason suddenly meant a lot less than they had before.

And not only was she gorgeous and sexy beyond words, Helia was also strong and had put her life in danger to save him.

He used his cuffed hands to drag her face down to his for a short hot kiss. Damn, she felt so good in his arms and tasted like heaven. Soon he'd have her again. Soon he'd show her what they could have when they weren't rushed and risking death.

"Thank you, Helia."

She pulled back with a mumbled, "You're welcome." She knelt at his ankles and unbound the cord tying his feet together. "I didn't see your clothes. Better get the Reaper's pants while I see about freeing my father." She hesitated and glanced at where Kaven hung watching them.

"That is him, isn't it?"

"It's him, but you can't help him. Not like you did me anyhow."

"Why not?"

"If you get within reach, he will drain you. He's been starved so badly he won't see you as anything but food, Helia. Until he's fed, he won't regain any sanity."

"Fed? Then we'll need blood." She pulled out a minicom and made a call to someone. "Pierre, I've got them both. The door's at the back of the storage room. Bring down the bags of blood from exam room two." After those few short words she turned back. "How much do you think he'll need?"

"A lot." And even that might not save the doctor's mind.

"Bring everything in that cooler." She relayed it to Pierre and turned off the phone. "He'll bring it down. I told him where to find the door. You need to get dressed while I check the hall and be sure we're still alone."

Odd. He was used to being in control and yet Helia's no-nonsense orders just sounded too sexy and sensible to refuse. He stripped the guard and dressed in his clothes. The man's pants fit well enough, but the shoes were too small and the shirt was useless until he got the chains off. At least he wasn't naked anymore. He took the guard's weapon too. Even if his job

was more focused on never being caught than fighting, now wasn't the time to turn down a laser.

She came back from the hall with a strange bag over one shoulder. Blood. The scent of it tickled his nose despite the fact it was certainly contained in the usual sealed sacks. His hunger sharpened at the thought, but he pushed back the need. If that one bag was all she had, then they might not even have enough to bring Kaven back. His own needs could wait.

"Let me feed him. I know you want to help, but it will be safer for me to be close to him. He won't see me as prey."

She stopped at the doorway and passed the bag to him without argument. "Pierre is watching the hallway for us. He thinks we will have some time, perhaps until the shift change."

"That would be good. Getting Kaven hydrated is one of those things that isn't better, faster." He approached Kaven slowly. "I've blood for you, blood to help you get well enough to get out of here."

Kaven ignored the words, but his feral gaze followed the sack of blood as Aeron raised it up to his mouth. He snarled and turned away from the blood. When Aeron followed the motion, keeping the blood before him, Kaven growled and spit out, "Not blood. Bad blood."

It made no sense. After such starvation, Kaven should be desperate to take any blood he could. They didn't have time for him to talk the man back to sense if it was even possible. He slammed the sack of blood forward until the other vamp's fangs snapped through the thin seal. The blood squirted out, much of it hitting Kaven's mouth.

After several ineffective attempts to spit the blood out, the hunger and taste beat him and Kaven began to drink the blood down. He emptied another three bags without complaint or comment. Kaven didn't even flinch when Helia entered the room and examined the two dead vampires.

Aeron could have told her to save her energy, but he was too busy feeding Kaven to worry about her sensibilities. Or at least he was until she gasped.

"I know this man, but this doesn't make sense."

"What doesn't make sense?" Aeron snapped another blood sack onto Kaven's fangs while both turned enough to see what Helia was talking about.

"This man, I recognize his tattoo. He worked at the health center for a couple weeks, but I was told he was transferred. I didn't even know he was a vampire."

"What is strange about that?"

"He was transferred last week, just before you arrived."

Aeron stared at the shrunken corpse. It wasn't possible for a vampire to die of starvation in only a week. Actually, now that he thought about it, even Kaven shouldn't be as bad off as he was after a month. He would have lost weight and the madness surely would have taken hold, but he wouldn't have been shriveled yet.

"I'm right, aren't I? Harlin. That was his name. Harlin shouldn't have been able to starve like this, should he?"

"You're right. I don't understand it."

Kaven spit off the empty sack. "The blood... it's the blood." His mumbled words made no sense, but the fact that he was alert enough to follow the conversation was a good sign.

"Let me blow this chain and we can get out of here. Toss me a canister." Kaven lurched to the side against the chain. "Key strip... is under the... desk."

Helia searched the desk again and returned with the strip to open the cuffs for Aeron first and then her father. Then it was easy to find a long medical coat for Kaven. Within moments they were making their way down the hall toward the exit.

The man waiting at the end gave them a grim nod just as the elevator clanked loudly announcing its descent. "I'm Pierre, and I did not call the elevator."

Helia slammed open the door next to them. "Then we should take the stairs."

While supporting Kaven as best he could, they began ascending the stairs. Pierre led the way and Helia followed, watching the rear. If he didn't know better, he would have thought Helia had proper military training. Then again, he only knew what he'd read in her file. There was so much more he wanted to learn. She and the mysterious Pierre worked well and offered good protection coming and going. If they had a small amount of luck, these stairs would come out somewhere quiet and they'd make a good getaway.

Chapter Seven

Helia followed them up the stairs and tried not to stare at Aeron's ass. Even in the ill-fitting pants, it was a fine behind, and she really should be paying more attention to keeping them safe than lusting after his butt.

The stairs led to a hallway and then to another set of stairs. The higher and farther they went the more hopeful she grew. They might just make it out of here.

Just as she had that thought, the warning lights brightened and began flashing red over them. The alarm was a low threatening throb.

Then they were suddenly at the entrance. Pierre held the door and urged them out into the darkness. She blinked at the inky night. The stars danced above them, and the city lights were dimmed through a thick tree line.

"Hurry, Helia." Pierre tugged her forward and jammed a wooden bar through the door to block it. "We have to get you to the detention center."

"The... what? Why?" He was insane. Why would they go to the very place they were trying to avoid?

Aeron reached back and caught her arm. "It's the easiest way to get transport. We can get back to Acacia. Connections with the Resistance can smuggle us out as prisoners. It's our only chance."

Fear welled up. "Your chance maybe, but I'll be nothing but a slave there." She might have argued further, but just then, a dozen Reapers burst from the tree line. The bright flashes of laser fire sent them all running as fast as they could. Kaven slowed them down, but it mattered little.

"Not much farther." Pierre pushed her from behind. "If you were spotted breaking into the center, you'll be on the run here."

Damn him for being right. Maybe she would be on the run, but the alternative was no better. "I'd rather be on the run than caught and a slave."

Aeron's grip changed, sliding down to claim her hand. "You won't be there long enough to be processed as a slave. We can send you back with a new identity, but for now it is your only chance." He leaned in closer. "Your father needs you. I need you. Come with us."

With the Reapers on their heels, she didn't have much time to argue or even consider other options.

"Just ahead there is a secret entrance. The people there will smuggle you through --" A burst of laser fire and Pierre's cussing cut off whatever else he would have told them. Pierre fell and even as she reached for him, he waved her off. "Run, Helia!"

The next shot nearly hit her, lighting the dry leaves on fire inches from her feet. She ran, rushing to catch up to Aeron and her father. They dodged through a small copse of trees. Behind one thick trunk, the secret door opened.

"Hurry, in here!" a young woman called out.

She and Aeron helped her father into the narrow entrance, and Aeron pushed her through. Then Aeron jerked and fell in as well. Black and red char marks spread across his side and back. He'd been hit. Even as the other woman closed and bolted the door, Helia tried to assess how badly Aeron was injured.

Her medical training kicked in, helping to push aside the insistent agony of seeing Aeron hurt. She rolled him to examine the burn across his bare back, but the girl grabbed her arm and tried to drag her away. "You have to go. The transport's ready to leave, and you have to be on it. The Reapers will be here any minute, and if they catch you, we're all dead."

"I can't leave him. I won't."

The girl looked down at Aeron and shook her head. "Then drag him if you can. I'll see to the other one. Just hurry or you'll both die here."

Kaven and the girl staggered off down the rough sided tunnel.

Helia tried to wake Aeron and when that didn't work, she did drag him. With one of his bare arms pulled across her shoulders she fought his dead weight through the tunnel. Although the distance was surely no more than a hundred feet it seemed more like ten miles. The further she went the heavier he grew. But she wasn't leaving him behind.

Finally, they made it to a brighter area where a man joined her and helped to carry Aeron forward. "We don't have time to offer him any medical aid. The best we can do is hope he survives his injuries long enough to be helped by the Acacians." The man motioned to the tube-shaped container pods that were used to move people from the planet to the moon colony.

"He needs medical attention now. Put us both into one and I will treat him during transport."

The man's eyes narrowed. "It might be your funeral, but whatever you want." He opened one of the pods and helped to roll Aeron's limp body inside.

A speaker beside them blared a countdown for launch.

She jumped inside with Aeron. Good thing she wasn't claustrophobic. The space was meant to be comfortable for one person but would hold them both without too much of a problem. She turned Aeron onto his side and lay down behind him.

The lid closed and a small line of light brightened the container enough so she could examine his laser wound. There was an emergency med-kit and she used it to apply antiseptic. Among the supplies were also some tiny, medicated blood capsules. She placed two in his mouth before examining the wound again. The injury was healing, and it would thankfully be a quick process. Aeron's body, no matter how amazing, had been through a great deal in the past twenty-four hours. His vampire healing should be enough, but a few hours of enforced rest might make all the difference. Good thing the transport would take a full day to make the trip.

Chapter Eight

Aeron smiled grimly into the darkness. It seemed all he did anymore was wake up someplace he hadn't gone to sleep. He took a moment to adjust to the unfamiliar space. There was a soft warm body tucked tightly against his own. He drew in a slow breath. *Vanilla*. Helia was tucked in here with him, wherever he was. The steady beat of her heart comforted him. She didn't seem to be worried.

His stomach tightened in hunger. How long since that meager cup of blood and the sip he'd taken from Helia? He pushed aside the thought.

The quiet hum and whoosh of recycled air was familiar too. They were in a transport pod. The Resistance had obviously stowed him away to be shipped back to the moon colony.

And Helia had come with him, despite her fears.

He stroked the back of her head where it pillowed on his shoulder. In the health center's light, her hair shone bright as spun gold but here in the dark he felt soft waves and silky tangles. His fingers slid through the length, combing the tangles out.

Her hair was a distraction and a good one, but not good enough. The hunger burned at his gut and his fangs ached.

Helia shifted beside him. "Aeron? Are you awake?" Her hand stroked lightly down his jaw.

Her touch deepened his need. He bit down on his lip, using the pain to keep from pouncing on her, but her fingers slid further over his lips, brushing ever so gently against one protruding fang. The contact was electric. A low growl of need burst from him before he could regain control.

"You need blood." She shimmied up his body, pulling his head toward her throat where he'd tasted heaven before.

Didn't she understand the risk? Was she so willing to throw her life into the path of danger? "Helia..." How could he explain?

"It's okay. I trust you. Take what you need."

He wanted to hold back, to be careful, but caution lost out to the animal within. The soft flesh of her neck gave way under his assault. The fiery life of her blood scalded him, seared his soul and healed his body. What she gave so freely meant more than she understood.

To his people, to give the blood like this, to save the life of an injured vampire, held a deep promise. She saved him with her blood. He would forever protect her with his life. They were bound together for all time.

He was overwhelmed and helpless before the force of his emotions. They surged outward and flooded her with his every thought. In that moment she knew his heart. Even if she rejected the connection, he'd have had it no other way.

She didn't reject him. If anything, Helia's heart thundered her approval. She caressed his shoulders and back, checking his wounds, he knew, and he smiled inwardly at her attention. But then her hands moved lower, where she had no excuse except passion. They danced over his hips and thighs and then back up toward where his cock pushed against the front of his pants. She undid the belt and fasteners and pushed the fabric down to free him for more exploration.

His feeding slowed. He had taken enough blood. Now he only lapped at the punctures to maintain their connection. It was too precious to give up.

With his thirst sated, his body made its own demands. He followed her example and began the quick stripping of her clothing. It was a little awkward working within the confining space, but he was more than up to the challenge.

Before long they were both naked and the skin-to-skin contact sizzled between them. Capturing her knee, he tugged her up astride him. Her thighs to either side of his waist, he continued to nibble at her neck. Despite the fascination of her blood, he wandered upward to claim her lips and down again to suckle at her breasts.

She let him have his way for a while and then took control, sliding her slick pussy over his cock. The wet heat brought his attention back at once to where she wanted him to focus. He was torn between enjoying her erotic writhing and moving on to a deeper satisfaction.

Helia rolled her hips against him until the ache was too much. With a smooth shift, she angled the heavy length of his cock upward and sank down over him slowly, an inch at a time until she had him to the hilt. Only then did she resume the slow ride, rocking forward and back. She tightened over him and was rewarded by inner spasms as well as Aeron's low rumbling growl.

She repeated the pattern, slowly riding him and then tightening to take him deep. Again and again, she tormented them both.

“Helia... please.”

She rolled against him again. She liked the sound of him begging. The big bad vampire spy needed what only she could give him. She felt it in his mind. He needed her. Just as she needed him. That didn’t mean she wanted to rush their pleasure. *“Not every time will be like that quickie in the office, love.”*

His hips bucked upward in response.

Had she just called him “love?” It hadn’t been aloud. Maybe he hadn’t heard.

“I heard.” Even his mental tone was little more than a growl of desire. His hands abandoned her breasts and slid down her body to her ass. “Enough games. When we get out of this pod, I promise you hours of retribution to make up for that quickie.” His grip tightened and locked her in place while his hips pistoned up, thrusting deep into her until she could do no more than gasp for breath through the pleasure.

Was it three thrusts or three hundred? It was enough. She shattered over him while he roared and joined her in orgasm. Gradually she settled back to the ground, or rather to the transport pod, somewhere between Rahla and Acacia.

Only then did she realize he hadn’t said anything about love. In fact, he had barely acknowledged her own declaration. She hadn’t meant to say anything. She still hadn’t spoken the words, the truth, aloud.

The possibility of any kind of lasting relationship was unlikely at best. What did they really have in common, besides good chemistry?

They weren’t even the same race.

His race fed on hers.

And it felt pretty damn good to feed him.

Okay, so that wasn’t really a negative. Still, he might not feel the same way. Hell, he might have blood slaves on the moon colony to feed on and wouldn’t need or want her around to muck things up. Or he might even be sent back out on another assignment. Or this might just be a neck fling for him.

Aeron’s arms tightened around her. He vibrated with laughter. “A neck fling? I don’t believe I’ve ever heard of such a thing before.”

Oh hell. She smacked his chest. "Quit eavesdropping." She ducked her head against him and tried hard to not think anything.

"This is more than a fling, Helia. I've never been in love and hesitate to burden you with such a heavy word, but this, whatever we have between us is something of value. I don't know what the future holds for either of us, but I'm not ready to give you up." He kissed the top of her head and hugged her against his body. "And no, I have no personal slaves on Acacia. I've never stayed long enough to need or want any."

"I can't be a slave, Aeron. I'd never be able to handle that whole *obey* thing."

"Then you'll never be a slave. You have nothing to be punished for. You can return to Rahla as soon as you wish, though I hope you aren't in too big a hurry to leave me."

"Is being a slave the only way I could stay with you?"

"If you wish to be human and live on Acacia you would have to accept slave status. But there are other options. You could become vampire. Or we could both return to Rahla to work with the Resistance."

Her gaze flashed to his and even in the dark she could see the possessive gleam. "I like being able to feed you. I didn't think I would, but I do. I couldn't do that as a vampire. Do you really think they might let us both return to Rahla?"

"We can help your father get settled. Then you'd have to decide. Once I'm debriefed, I'll certainly be sent back to continue my work. You could come with me, if you wanted." He cupped her chin and studied her face. "Would you want to be with a vampire spy? Could you love a man like me?"

"I already do." She claimed his lips, putting all of her heart into the kiss. She pressed her naked body against his and reveled in his instant response.

Of course, that was the exact moment when the transport handlers chose to open their pod.

Chapter Nine

The next two hours passed quickly. Aeron gave his initial report to his supervisor and then they were guided to a medical exam room.

"I guess we'll wait here to get cleared to leave the port terminal."

Helia smiled up into Aeron's beloved face. She could easily see his wicked intentions even before his long fingers grazed up her sides, lingering slightly at the sides of her breasts. "Oh no... you can't think... We shouldn't..."

His lips came flush against the skin at her throat, and she sighed as the pleasure shot through her veins with every delicious scrape of his fangs.

"You are thinking *that*." She sank her fingers into his long loose hair, tugging just hard enough to bring his attention back to her face. "Won't we get in trouble?" She looked meaningfully around the pristine medical room.

They'd been shuffled here almost directly from the transport capsule. With her father in a room just down the hall, she'd finally relaxed. Somehow, they'd all three safely made it to the Acacian moon colony. But apparently Aeron had more on his mind than just being alive and away from the Reapers who all wanted them dead.

"Relax, Helia. It will take the Medics a while to get all the paperwork organized." His head ducked back to her neck where he began nibbling in earnest.

"Paperwork? You have that here too, huh?" The more he did that thing with his tongue the less inclined she was to continue the debate. He was quickly bringing her to a boil.

"The older we are the more paperwork there will be. Med Blake is an old one. We have plenty of time to get where we're going."

"Mmmm..." She tugged at his torn pants, all that remained of the borrowed Reaper uniform. "I guess we *were* asked to undress and change into the medical gowns..."

He shed the pants in seconds. His motion was fast, almost too fast to follow with the human eye, which was a comfort after seeing him so badly injured. His wound was healed over, leaving little more than a fading

white scar from what had been an expansive laser burn. He pressed a hot kiss over her lips then pulled back. "Hey woman, get out of those clothes. Can't have you defying Med Blake's orders, can we?" The final word was said with a playful slap to her ass.

"Aeron!" She stripped off her clothes while glaring at him. "Just because here on the moon, I'm considered nothing but a slave --"

"Not just *a* slave, love..." He kissed her again. "You're *my* slave."

She shoved him back with a deeper glare. Surely, he was joking. Despite her objections, they'd processed her status just moments after opening the pod. Now she was officially listed as his personal slave while on the moon colony. It was the rules. All humans were slaves here. But he didn't mean to make it true in fact... did he?

He laughed and dragged her back into his arms, bringing their naked bodies together with a slap of skin to skin. "I'm teasing you, Helia, my love. If anything, you own me. Haven't you figured that out by now? Not to mention, once we go back to Rahla, when you will once more be free, and I would be hunted as a spy if anyone lets my identity slip."

"I would never."

"I know you wouldn't. Just like I would never abuse your status here. I want us to be happy and free in both our worlds. Any status assigned to us by others has no meaning." He kissed her with a tender passion, reminding her how little they knew about each other and how very much they had yet to learn. But it was worth exploring all they could share together. She deepened the kiss, letting the fire flare up between them. His fangs throbbed against her lips, and his cock hardened, pressing hotly at her hip.

Her body awoke, demanding that sweet fulfillment that only he seemed able to satisfy. When his fingers brushed over her pussy she gasped at the shock, then immediately clenched her thighs over his hand.

Not that he was escaping. Oh no, with his other hand and his body weight as leverage he boosted her to sit on the edge of the exam table. Then he was back between her thighs. He stroked shallowly through her folds and dipped into her slick pussy over and over.

She reached for him, wanting to offer the same pleasure, but he caught her hands and pulled them back behind her back in sweet restraint. All she could do was hold on through his torment.

With a growl, he deepened his strokes, rubbing his thumb over her swollen clit until she was sure she'd explode from the tension. Gasping for air, Helia was caught in the pleasure, lost to its brilliant crush, falling into his wonderful passions.

"That's it, come for me." He stroked her back while he cradled her so gently in his arms. But the tender motions also maneuvered her back to the edge of the table, parting her thighs once more. He moved his body smoothly against her own. The moment his hot cock brushed against her entrance, she was jolted upright and brought face to face with her vampire lover in full lust. His eyes glowed red and his fangs pulsed with his need.

Yet, like always, he'd been so careful with her.

She loved him more than she'd ever thought possible. Instead of pouring out the words in her heart, she showed him. Tilting her head, she bared her neck to him. *"Take me. Keep me. Love me."*

His cock and his fangs pierced her in one beautiful violent motion. No more than a heartbeat later she was flooded with his pleasure, hers and theirs bouncing back on shimmering echoes that left her with no control. Deeper and deeper he filled her, while she could almost feel her blood filling him. Together their union was perfect, overflowing, overwhelming.

She clung to him, reveling in each stroke of his cock, each pull on her vein. Heat flushed through her, a flash storm she'd never get enough of. The emotion running through her mind was one of gentle shelter and comforting arms. It wasn't hers.

Aeron eased back from her neck. His eyes were full of glistening love. His strokes had slowed but were still just as deep and commanding. Only now he was sharing all his needs with her. Not just for blood and sex, but also for a love he'd been missing for a very long time. She dragged his mouth down to hers, kissing him with everything she had, showing him that she understood and offered him everything she was.

Her legs tangled around him, locking them together, and she wrapped her arms around him, just holding him. This, she knew was what he needed. His hips continued to rock against her, grinding them together in a deep slow motion. Their kiss, too, was a reflection of that desperate need. Long, slow and lasting. This wasn't just making out in an exam room. This was forever.

She knew someday he would offer, or someday she would ask, and the decision would be made. She'd become a vampire like him so they

could be together so much longer than just a human lifetime. She welcomed that day, be it in a week, or not for another fifty years. She would say yes. She would do whatever it took to love him a little bit longer.

Physical release when it came was sweet and shattering. Looking into his eyes during that perfect moment, she saw his love, her love, and eternity.

And they lived happily ever after.