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**Devil's Descent I:**  
**purgatory**

A Miserable Love Series

By Claudia D. Christian

DelSin Publishing, LLC 2010

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Vicious Bliss: fallen

Fracture – A Miserable Love Collection

Love Unfortunate – A Miserable Love Story

## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to all the awesome readers who fall into an unhealthy love with this series. It's nice knowing I won't be lonely in my obsession. Thank you.

# WARNING

Julian Douglas. A despotic, unstable **sociopath** who also happens to be a vampire.

Lily Walker. A foul-mouthed, **broken** girl who begs to be mended.

Julian lives to be something more than Lily's addictive **poison**.

Lily **dies** to be something more than Julian's little poppet.

They continue to revel in their shared **misery**.

They continue to **destroy** the one who makes agony so sweet.

They **continue** to fail.

**Why?**

Because the pain is just too **beautiful**.

Their story isn't crafted for comfort. In fact, it's quite **ugly** and unsympathetic.

This will **not** change.

You will most likely be **repulsed**.

Perhaps even **betrayed**.

However, your **contempt** will never be greater than what they feel for themselves.

They do not **court** your approval.

They do not expect **forgiveness**.

They do not **plead** for acceptance.

All they ask is for the possibility to be something more than what you **understand**.

I should've died two years ago. I didn't. Instead, I was rejected.

## Abandoned.

The town I grew up in, the people I thought I knew, my roots, my legacy—it's now a memorial to shame.

Yet, none of that really matters as much as what you did to me. You cheated, lied...made a fool out of my love.

And I'm still obsessed with you.

I'm still alive because I'm diseased with love for you, Julian.

Damn you to hell.

Do you still remember my face? Do you still crave my blood?

I'm crazy to even care. That time is over. I'm better for it. I can have a life now that I'm not a Resurrector.

One day I might believe that lie.

If I ever see you again, the only thing I'll know is that God truly hates me.

--- Lily Walker

I shamed you. I dishonored you. I destroyed you.

I used your love for me as a way to control you.

So how dare you run from me, Lily?

I've searched for your smile for so long and it still eludes me. You loved me first. You loved me last. So why can't I find you? You've slipped away from me, hiding in the shadows of my dementia.

When will this misery end for me? You sicken me. You are the curse of my existence. I hate you. I truly, truly do.

--Julian Douglas



## **PROLOGUE**

### **One Way to End**

Sometimes it is said the value of a man's existence lays in how well he treats the woman by his side.

Based on that piece of wisdom, Julian Douglas was undoubtedly a piece of shit.

He knew it. She knew it.

Julian shifted his legs. He crouched closer to the door, palm outstretched in supplication. Julian hadn't dropped to his knees for anyone in years untold. The same arrogance which saved him from such idiocies fled. His hand flexed. Green flecked his elegant fingers. It was paint; specifically the door's paint. He looked from his hand to the fresh gouges with confused awareness.

*Just open the door. It's not that hard. It probably isn't even locked.*

After all, he only left minutes before.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Demon's Discovery

*Winter 2000*  
*Montreal, Canada*

Julian stood in the shadows, melting in the background.

Silent, alert, and watching.

Always watching her.

The music's pulsating throb beat into his ears and filled his body, almost mimicking the function of a heartbeat. However, it was a dull mockery of what his heart really felt as he looked out over the crowd and saw her.

*Found you.*

Her scent and taste irrevocably burned into his senses. There was not one piece of her that he had not touched, had not tasted, had not taken. Even now, he suffered a twisted joy in recalling the moments that led him here.

*Oh, Lily. My sweet, little whore.*

Lily Walker, former resident of Vickery Hill, Georgia and former Resurrector of same town, had led Julian Douglas on a merry, merry chase across four continents for two years.

*Thought to shirk me off along with your duties, hmm, darling? For shame! But don't worry, dear. I'll give you just what you need...like always.*

Julian's full mouth unfurled an angelic smile. Memories, both courted and despised, crowded his fractured mind.

*Every story has at least two beginnings. One for you and one for me. But in our case, we have three.*

Once upon a time, a young girl named Lily met her destiny by the moonlit lake. First, she tried to kill him. Later, he befriended her. For years they had been inseparable—but this wasn't Julian's story.

This was Ian's.

*Same body or not, I'm nothing like Ian. He was a different person. Manufactured. Created to believe that Julian Douglas never existed. I was buried in madness which only made the imposter madder.*

Which, unfortunately for them both, was true.

Humble, gentle, and essentially gelded, Ian had worshipped the ground Lily's dainty feet had walked on. His other side had been hidden, banished as if Julian were the personality borne from torment and not the other way around. There was nothing Ian wouldn't do for Lily. Whether it was helping with homework, or teaching her how to drive, or even running out to Grayson's Tavern for doughnuts to satisfy her enormous sweet tooth.

There was also the small matter of committing genocide.

*Sick bastard.*

Ian had helped Lily protect Vickery Hill from all foes, real and imagined. Mostly imagined. He justified his interference through the town itself. Nestled alongside Lake Lanier, Vickery Hill presented itself as a typical southern community—one stoplight, two schools, three gas stations, and enough temples to satisfy five counties.

Except no one ever came to worship outside of Vickery Hill. How could they when Vickery Hill didn't even exist in the human world?

*Is that why Lily ran? She wanted to be somewhere real?*

Once upon a time there were twelve families borne from Pureblood and human lineage. Enhanced genetics ensured these descendents could reign unchallenged over their human brethren. Eventually, greed, cruelty, and hubris made the twelve families too dangerous to run unchallenged. Nephilim, the supreme government all were subject to obey, imprisoned them for crimes against humanity.

Snatched from different centuries, shackled to a tiny piece of earth, stripped of their names and most of their unnatural abilities, the twelve families ceased to dominate the human world. Distant relatives were plucked from obscurity to take their places. The dynasties instantly lost prestige, prominence, and most importantly, power.

Vickery Hill was nothing more than an elegant prison.

However, blood had its way. Pureblooded ancestors couldn't turn their backs on their descendants, even if Nephilim declared them forever off-limits. So the town became a perpetual family reunion spot.

*Which then made the area a fucking beacon for all manners of unrelated angels, demons, demigods, and vampires. Something pulls them there. And I bet know what that something is...*

In the past, a certain balance had been achieved between the undead and the imprisoned. The lower-level creatures kept to the woods and the others went down to Atlanta for entertainment. They paid their taxes, employed the younger residents to tend their lakeside retreats, and all existed as they had for years.

That is until Lily became the Resurrector.

From there chaos consumed Vickery Hill. It was as if Lily's presence inspired violence and madness. The Resurrector was never really meant to fight—only to be a vessel for her governing Spirit. However, under Lily's reign, murders, suicides, and disappearances on both sides weakened the unspoken peace all too quickly.

Secrets were one thing. Those could be protected. Anonymity. Guaranteed. Failure. Failure was an entirely different animal that needed to be put down.

Lily Walker had been failing. Badly.

So unbeknownst to her, Ian had performed a little population control. Despite physically and mentally disassociating from his line a century before, Ian had instinctually used Julian Douglas' legacy as a Pureblood Ascendant to ban all vampires from stepping foot in Vickery Hill. Those who ignored his brazen warning were immediately destroyed.

*Although he claimed it was all for Lily, I know better. He sensed that by killing them, he'd be killing off the darkness inside...killing me. And that's not all he was trying to kill off..*

Next to succubi and incubi, vampires were an extremely amorous lot. Lily was an extremely attractive girl. It was only natural she'd become forbidden fruit. They wanted a taste. So did Ian.

*Ian wanted her in every way known to man or vampire but was too cowardly to do it.*

Ian didn't want others to touch her but he wouldn't do it either. Ian had preferred the role of sexless companion. Prone to guilt for misdeeds—real and imagined—and still unknowingly broken from a year of torture one hundred fifty years prior, Ian had believed himself unworthy to taste such purity.

Lily had other plans.

*She was a whore even as virgin. Good for her that in spite of her escapades she stayed...untouched... until I came for her.*

After Lily's failed artless seduction, Ian had been convinced his vampirism was an obstacle for happiness. He had reasoned it was their differences which would ultimately be their ruin. So Ian kept Lily at arms length until he had found a way out. Unfortunately, the rituals to restore Ian's mortality had gone delightfully wrong. Instead of eradicating Ian's vampiric nature, they had systematically destroyed every nauseating bit of the manufactured persona.

*Conscience? Weakness? Good riddance.*

Julian immediately took control not only through his esteemed name, but also in how he dealt with the girl who'd kept him on a leash. Their first true reunion had played out the way he suspected it would. Denial, tears, rage, and then lovely defeat. He could've left Vickery Hill afterwards, confident in knowing Lily Walker's little heart had been broken.

But then where was his enchanting vengeance?

Instead, Julian had taken immense pleasure in tormenting Lily. He discreetly stalked her, openly mocked her, secretly fought her, publicly courted her, and even made time to cozen all the houses he had offended. Disorder invaded Vickery Hill and Lily was left to blame.

*Lily was unstable, violent, paranoid—and only one hair away from being assassinated. Which did eventually happen via a Reaper named Acrymydion.*

His face darkened with phantom pain. She had lied to him and nearly found herself at the bottom of the lake for it. Julian shook his head, in essence trying to fling away the emotions his thoughts had provoked. He clung to the self-righteous safety of his previous musings.

*Her downfall had been too easy to orchestrate. I should've been bored by the simplicity...*

The morbid correlation between a spiraling death rate and Julian's presence had inspired Lily to keep close—despite direct orders from Nephilim to the contrary. She had watched him almost as much as he watched her. Night after night, she'd prowled in search for him and bitterly regretted it. Lily had been forced to watch him court another as well. She had seen his charm be spent on a tall, blond beauty—something she could never be. She had been left wondering if the feminine screams ringing from his home would ever be hers.

*I didn't want them to be. I didn't want to want her.*

Lily had been losing her mind. The citizens of Vickery Hill saw it. Her family knew it. Her Handler suffered it.

And so did he.

On the surface, he had experienced life like any other urbane, sophisticated vampire, but beneath his polished exterior, Julian Douglas was dying for his prey.

While a kill was always pleasurable, it was the battle with the Resurrector that had made his passions sing. The rough physical contact between them only whetted his appetite for Lily. He was able to throw, slap, punch, and kick her and not only had she taken it, she always came back for more.

To say Julian regarded violence as courtship was a vast understatement.

The memories of his wounds on her body, and hers on his, made Julian tremble with exquisite agony. Never more did he wish they both had the ability to scar. A hand absently brushed across his chest in memory of Lily's last contact.

*She almost killed me. I came close to doing the same to her only once. What would I have done if I hadn't hesitated? What would be left of me without my darling girl?*

Yes, Lily was his darling girl.

Now.

However, Julian's original intentions for Lily weren't always quite so affectionate. There was a powerful reason he hadn't rejoiced in a single mortal death since losing his ridiculous conscience.

Lily Walker's death had been the only one he wanted.

Julian had wanted her dead and he wanted her to suffer. And being the unbalanced, perverse creature he was Julian made sure she underwent much suffering.

*I began to hate the game more than Lily. Not because of guilt, but because my every thought belonged to her. The more I hated, the more she consumed me.*

Julian's torments varied and were by no means confined to the physical pains of their nightly matches. Bruises and fractured limbs hadn't been enough. Lily could take the pain of the body—it was her heart that was vulnerable.

Especially to him.

Lily had loved Ian with every fiber of her adolescent being, yet she couldn't dismiss her real connection with him. How Julian had reveled in it! Her misery was his ambrosia. Every wince, every tear, every sob—all for him.

*The thought of her tears still makes me hard.*

Lily had wanted him to be so much like Ian, the ghost she had loved and lost. She despised herself for being drawn to him, Julian, the one she supposedly hated.

*Hate. What a fickle and undeniably perverse emotion. Definitely my favorite. Second to lust that is.*

In turn, Julian's intent had changed quickly. He'd found himself obsessed with more than her death. He had needed to taint Lily, desecrate her love until it became ugly.

Twisted.

*I still do. I can't help myself. I won't help myself.*

Therefore, Julian had begun wooing Lily secretly. His fists touched her with the promise of a different kind of death. He plied her with gifts, time, and blood. Lily had resisted, innocently drawing out the game until Julian was in danger of losing what little sanity he had left. Then it had happened.

She'd finally submitted.

Even now he wasn't sure why. Granted, he had implied harm to what few family she had, but he still didn't believe his threats were enough. The reason didn't matter to Julian. He had won. He had fucked Lily. He had fucked Lily and she'd loved it.

So did he.

Their night had been incredible. So incredible Julian hadn't wanted to acknowledge how powerful Lily's hold over him had become.

*I fought so hard just so she couldn't see it. I had to destroy her pride so she'd never know that one night wasn't enough.*

Julian remembered how he'd painstakingly begun to break Lily's will. He had started entering her home in no set pattern. Sometimes he'd appear in her bedroom and wait. Other times he'd use the front door and sit in the quaint living room with her too-trusting mother, chatting about how Lily and he had successfully mended their differences.

Just thinking about her reaction to finding him there brought a twinkle to his blue eyes. Lily had tried to bluff that she felt no fear or anxiety over his presence in her home. She never fooled him. Lily's fear manifested itself in many fashions that were simple for a creature such as himself to detect.

It was the way she fidgeted while sitting on the sofa. Or how she had covertly watched him, her life's blood accelerating through her body, singing a tune of fear. And how Lily's little throat would rasp out his name as he pressed her down onto his cock while her mother watched.

*It didn't matter that Rachel couldn't really see what was happening. Lily wanted to die of humiliation. But she still managed to come...*

Lily had been wise to be wary of him.

Occasionally, every monstrous impulse of Julian's demanded he drain the blood out of her. After all, she was food and he a vampire. What else could they really be? Friends, allies, lovers?

Something inside him rebelled.

*Lovers. We were always lovers.*

Just as it was now, Julian's obsessive lust had dominated his instincts, keeping Lily safe for more of his dangerous affection. She belonged to him and he couldn't walk away.

*I still can't walk away.*

Julian knew his sin. Two years before he'd carefully laid the groundwork for Lily's seduction. It had worked but then he got greedy. He had wanted everything she had to offer. Her submission, her blind desire, and most importantly—her love. And not the kind of adoration she carried for Ian.

He craved a different species of love, one completely lacking morality.

Julian's lids swept down, hiding his regret.

*Her sweetness couldn't touch me because I'm so fucked in the head. I only understand this kind of passion...and I'm never satisfied when I get it. If I had a heart I'd leave her to her new life, but I can't because I'm a selfish bastard.*

In time, Julian's plans became realized. Lily Walker became his slave. The inner torment she underwent had been pure sweetness for Julian. Even now he could never

get enough of her delectable emotions. Just remembering every lustful, passionate moment between them made Julian so hard it bordered on pain.

Pain.

A wicked grin twisted his sensuous lips, banishing all softer sentiments. He had taught Lily numerous things, including to crave the pain almost, if not more, than the pleasure. She lived for his approval and was dying each day for his love.

*Lily became perfect for me. It still wasn't enough.*

In three centuries of life, Julian had never encountered anyone who could fulfill his every dark, warped desire. An unrecognizable cinder flamed inside him when she was near. Her smiles made him euphoric even as he did his best to banish them. Her laughter chased away his past, vanquishing the demons just long enough to let Julian remember what life could be without madness.

Did he cherish her? No.

Instead, he punished her for letting him mold her into the ideal concubine. The more he broke her, the sicker he became. The sicker he became, the more power he attained, until his dominance went unchallenged by nearly all.

However, a small slip of a girl managed to destroy him in the end.

*I lost everything—my power, my pride, my control. Yet, here I am lurking in the shadows, like a pathetic stalker. Nothing's changed.*

In Julian's brilliant quest to enslave her, he hadn't counted on the effect of Lily's innocent submission. She made him her slave. The more he needed her, the more he hated her. The more he hated her, the more he needed her. It was a morose cycle, even by his standards.

*And that's why everything started going to hell.*

When Julian had invited vampires back into Vickery Hill, he had made the mistake of rekindling his violent past. Just the memory made his grit his teeth with impotent rage.

*Vivian, my former consort and that fop Phillip. I should've gutted him when I had the chance.*

Obsession had a way of clouding even the best murderous intent. Initially, Vivian and Phillip had been invited to make Lily's world brutally complicated. A reminder of his life before her; something to dig in as deeply as her ignorance of his existence dug

into him. It worked for some time. Vivian's ethereal beauty, outmatched only by Phillip's exquisite doll-like features, had set Lily insecurities aflame. In turn, Phillip's viciousness had kept her worn, tired, and oh-so-vulnerable to Julian's machinations.

However, when a vampire involves his house, things no longer remain private for lovers.

Julian had thought once he had Lily, his obsession for her would fade, eventually to disappear. Then he'd come in for the inevitable kill. Julian's lust would be satisfied and he wouldn't be in betrayal of his kind. Again.

It was perfect.

The problem came when he didn't want to see Lily lying dead at his feet anymore. Caught between Phillip's scheming and Lily's vulnerability, Julian had found himself stretched between duty and desire. Lies became his creed while recklessness ruled his decisions. Eventually, even that was taken from him.

*It was either Lily or them. There was no choice.*

Faced with losing his precious girl or his rebuilt kingdom, Julian had made a decision—one he could never erase or deny.

He became Ian. He'd committed the unpardonable crime of destroying his own kind to save Lily.

*Now I'm hunted like a rabid dog. There's nowhere I can go, nowhere I can hide where I don't have to fight for my life.*

Did Lily ever recognize the worth of his sacrifice? No. His faithless bitch ran that same night. She left Vickery Hill and didn't look back.

*And here we are now.*

He moved through the crowd, dismissing the creatures around him as insignificant piles of meat. Julian's fevered gaze never left sight of Lily. Hidden behind a pillar, he watched his treasure dance with false abandon. Julian knew, with one glance, his innocent girl was gone. Now she looked like any other broken toy. Even so, Lily still had the power to enchant and disturb him in equal measures.

Counterfeit happiness made her ebony gaze glitter with apathy. Lily's lids were half-closed, her red mouth a soft mimicry of joy. However, the hollows etched beneath tired eyes made an already delicate face impossibly haunting. She raised her arms. The pallor rivaled his—completely different from the dusky skin of before.

Lily leaned her head back. Dark hair skimmed a thinner waist. Julian studied her body, seeing how fragile she was compared to his last memories. He didn't like it.

*She's lost too much weight. She looks sick.*

Julian's worry turned to something far more comfortable.

*Too damned sick to be out here shaking her ass in this dump. If I had known where she was going, I would've taken her and force-fed her before I beat her within an inch of her life.*

Julian had followed Lily to this club from a nondescript apartment building an hour earlier. Although he'd tracked a questionable lead placing her in the area, he hadn't really expected to find Lily in this city. It was sheer chance he even saw her leave.

*If I'd been five minutes too late...*

At first, he couldn't believe he'd finally found Lily. However, Julian didn't doubt the way his body reacted. He'd been incomplete all this time without her. He felt whole upon seeing Lily. Julian's primal urges recognized her as his. Several times temptation to seize her off the streets beat at him, but each time he forced his impulses down. There was too high of a chance she could elude him.

Julian had always preached to Lily about the virtues of patience. Now he was required to put them in practice. He'd wait until she went home. Just like before.

His arctic gaze narrowed. The young man dancing with Lily grabbed her hips and pulled her close. Pure menace radiated from Julian, causing several women who were approaching him to scatter away. From the way Lily's body tensed, it seemed she also sensed danger.

*Good.*

An evil look of satisfaction transformed his face to one of unholy beauty. Lily had every reason in the world to feel fear. He hoped she lived and breathed in fear.

Of him.

Of the night when her time of existing without him ended.

Julian's eyes followed Lily's hasty exit out of the club. Satisfaction filled his cold heart with its special warmth. Strolling through the crowd, Julian felt a twinge. He firmly ignored it. He had a different thirst to slake with Lily. After all, it had taken him two years to find her. Why hold off the joyful reunion any longer than necessary?

Reaching outside, Julian saw Lily in a cab a mile up the road.

*Enjoy this time while you can, darling, because it's your last moments alone.*

And just like that, he melted into the night.

And, unbeknownst to Lily, back into her life.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Silent Damnation

Once again, Lily felt wariness creep over her skin. Something screamed for her to leave, to run, to get the hell out of there or else she'd be sorry.

Ridiculous.

Sorry? What was sorry to Lily anymore? She lived with sorry every second of her existence. It was in the air she breathed, the food she ate, and the dreams she didn't dream anymore.

So instead of listening to her instincts, Lily continued to dance. She raised her arms and let her head lean back as she mindlessly followed the music. It filled Lily's body, becoming one with every beat in her heart. All feelings of danger melted away as she succumbed to the empty ecstasy found only in a dance club.

Lily's partner pulled her close to his body until they were molded hip to hip, thigh to thigh. She could feel his cock but didn't care. When the night ended Lily would be going home alone and he'd probably find someone else agreeable for an hour of meaningless sex.

*Sex is definitely not what I'm looking for.*

Lily had tried to lose herself in it once. The naked press of sweaty flesh had felt wrong. The warm breath panting in her ear had made Lily want to retch. After the apologies, yells, and obligatory promises, she had wallowed in guilt. Not for the young man who had been more than a friend, but less than a lover, but for the one who had never truly been both.

*How can I ever allow someone else to touch me after being with Julian? God knows how much I fucked up my life after falling in with that bastard.*

Lily's thoughts shied away from him. They returned to the present—the dance club, the flashing lights, and the frenetic crowd crushed against her. She could think about Julian later, when she was alone.

Hungry, wanting, and dying a little more each day without him.

All pleasure disintegrated. Lily had to get out and do what she did best—run away. Pushing away from the nameless guy, she gave him a sorrowful smile, a small wave, and headed towards the exit. Just as Lily reached the large iron door, she felt a

wave of uneasiness rush over her again. Whipping around to scan the crowd, Lily saw what she always saw.

Nothing.

*What else did you expect?*

She turned back to the door and flung it open. The crisp Montreal air iced the sweat on her body. This normal reaction to temperature reminded Lily of whom she'd been and all that had been lost.

*I'm nobody now. Not a Resurrector, not a lover. I can even say my true name and I don't even want to. It all means nothing.*

Lily raised an arm to signal a waiting cab. Giving her address, she settled her thin frame back on the cracked leather seat. The familiar smell of cigarette smoke made Lily look at the empty space beside her. Azure eyes sparkling somewhere between lust and madness, wicked lips lifted in their perpetual smirk, long, pale fingers tenderly caressing a shaft of nicotine—all dressed in black. He exhaled a long plume of smoke before winking at her impudently. The image, scripted from Lily's conflicted memories, trembled before vanishing.

“Sorry about the pothole. Didn't see that one in the dark.”

“No, it's okay. Thanks though.”

*Thanks for reminding me he's just a ghost now. Just like Ian. Neither of them were ever real.*

Lily turned her shoulder, studiously avoiding the lonely seat beside her. Instead, she thought about her earlier reactions that night. Panic still fluttered in the corners of Lily mind. She hadn't suffered this kind of fear in over a year. Why now?

*Maybe he's found you.*

Not likely.

A small, perverse part of her felt disappointment instead of comfort in that assumption. Julian was probably feasting from some other young body—literally and sexually. He wouldn't be wasting his time with finding her.

*But I tried to kill him, Vivian, and Phillip. I nearly wiped out his entire house. I left him broken, screaming my name...maybe he wants to pay me back?*

Lily mentally scattered. Granted, revenge was a powerful reason to track her down, but what would be the point? Julian had already proved his dominance. All of

Vickery Hill knew of her disgrace—her family, her Handler. Everyone. She could never go back.

She was already dead.

Lily stared out the window. The passing nighttime scenery of neon lights, clubbers, hookers, pimps, and johns reflected in her gaze. Lily closed her eyes, unable to see what had become her concrete reality. Instead, she remembered the madness and desperation that possessed her that last night in Vickery Hill. Witnessing Julian's debauchery, his true contempt for the love she gave him, had broken her reason.

Lily felt ashamed. Even if the town would have rejected, imprisoned, or killed her, how could she just leave? How could she do that without explanation to anyone that mattered? Lily could only guess at what Jonathon, Cricket, and Robbie thought when she never showed up the next morning. Despite her promises, Lily didn't have the courage to face them again.

*I shouldn't have disappeared. I know it now and I knew it then. Hell, I shouldn't even been allowed to. The wards surrounding the town failed and there's only one reason why—I was turned out. Turned out with a big wad of cash. Released into the real world just to die. It's what I deserve after what I've done. Unforgivable.*

A quick distant childhood memory of her mother flashed in her mind. Lily blinked back tears. Her selfishness knew no bounds and her shame no end when she thought of her mother. How could she have just left?

Lily hunched further down in the seat. She didn't want to imagine what Rachel Walker must've gone through when her daughter never came home. Gone through? No. What she was still going through.

*She probably thinks I'm dead. She knows I lied to her for months. She trusted me and I made a fool out of her. No, worse. She has to carry the shame...the blame...of what I did. She didn't deserve her daughter to be nothing but psychotic trash.*

Better she go missing than drag the people she loved through her mess. Lily couldn't put them through her self-inflicted hell again. She was going to be stronger than that.

Even if it meant never seeing them again.

*How strong was it to walk away from your family, Lily? To leave them behind, knowing they'll be imprisoned forever? How strong was it to run away without even*

*leaving a note? Face it—you ran because of him. From him. And that's not all you were running from...what you're still running from. Pathetic coward. You deserve to be alone.*

Lily acknowledged only part of her thoughts. She did run from Julian. She ran from her enslavement. She ran from their twisted relationship. She ran from her perverted love.

*You knew from the beginning Julian was nothing but a vampire prick. You knew that he'd only use and abuse you for his own sadistic pleasures! If you could go back, you'd do it all over again. The lies, the manipulations—all of it. That's what makes you sick.*

*And there's no cure for your kind of disease.*

Lily angrily wiped her eyes and nose. There was no point in crying. She'd made her decision two years ago. Now all she had to do was take each night for what it was—another day in permanent exile.

The cab came to a stop in front of the building Lily called home. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out a couple of wrinkled bills and handed them over to the driver. Lily sprang out of the cab, minus her change, and trudged away. She came to a jarring halt.

*What is that?*

The wilted plant by the doors beckoned. It hadn't been there when she left. Lily stood still, staring down at the life begging for her touch. The winter was far too cold to expect it to survive. Lily slowly reached out. A faint stirring warmed her fingers. She shouldn't be doing this. She'd lost the right to use the privilege her blood carried when she ran away.

Instinct persevered.

*It can't hurt to do it.*

The sad botanical posture transformed to vitality within seconds. Her fingers whipped away, instantly dissipating the green glow surrounding the plant.

*I guess it's still nice to do something good.*

Lily carried the rescue inside and deposited it by Management's office door. She shook off the irrational feelings of abandonment.

*It's not even my plant. I saved its life. I did a good thing.*

Lily took one deliberate step after another. She stopped five paces away and let out a small sigh. She walked back to the little pot and scooped it up; thankful no one could see her display of sentimental bullshit.

*Come on, roomie.*

An empty foyer gave way to an empty elevator, which in turn became an emptier studio apartment. Lily shut the door with her foot and massaged the side of her neck.

*Julian would've teased me to the point of punching his mouth over that plant. Ugh...why the hell do I keep thinking about that bastard?*

Wetness dripped onto Lily's hand. She touched her face.

Tears.

*Why can't I let him go? Somebody...anybody...please make it stop.*

Lily knew she couldn't continue like this. She already spent countless hours of the day yearning for Julian, alternately loving and loathing him. She couldn't sleep, she barely ate, and she saw Julian in every shadow. Every step behind her promised heaven, but when Lily turned around and saw nothing, she only had hell.

*I'm always waiting for him. Waiting for him to make it right. Waiting for the impossible...waiting just so I can run again.*

Lily let out a watery sigh. She really didn't need some introspective montage about her masochistic tendencies. She did need a shower. Long and extremely hot. Afterwards, she'd sleep or at least try to until she fell unconscious from sheer exhaustion.

Lily set the plant onto the small kitchen bar. Haphazardly shedding her clothes all the way to the bathroom, Lily felt a frisson of fear course through her once again. She paused in mid-walk. Tense and alert, she waited for feeling to return. Five minutes into her vigil, Lily began to laugh.

There was nothing out there for her.

"You're definitely losing it, Lily. Isolation, paranoia, and lack of sleep have that effect. So does talking to oneself all the time...attempt to be somewhat normal."

With that wry pep talk, she went into the tiny bathroom and started her shower. Lily stood under the nozzle for several minutes when the familiar pounding began. She stood there for another minute hoping the noise would go away.

Unfortunately, Lily wasn't that lucky.

She turned the knobs off in resignation. Every weekend without fail Clarisse, who lived down the hall, brought home some young stud. In the process of getting off, Clarisse would deadbolt her roommate Kerrie out so she could screw in peace.

*Yeah, but what about my peace?*

Wrapping a towel around her body and one around her hair, Lily went to the door, unlocked it, and cracked it open. She turned back to finish her shower.

“Come on in, Kerrie! Sorry to keep you waiting so long but I was in the shower.”

Lily was almost to the bathroom when the potent smell of smoke and obsession slid in like a serpent.

She froze as every instinct screamed a dire warning. Numbness spread through her body, rooting her to the floor. Afraid to be right, terrified to be wrong, Lily turned around slowly.

He was here. Standing inside her home, looking so darkly beautiful, he was here.

Julian studied her shock and smelled her fear. He smiled and sauntered over to his found pet. Stopping when only mere inches separated them, he whispered, “Hello, darling. Thank you for your rushed welcome. Manners aside, it truly saved us both a lot of time. Time, I’m sure you’ll agree would much be better served in other ways.”

He trailed his hand over her jaw. Julian looked into her eyes and smiled wider.

“Know this—I adore you, my darling, darling girl.”

Before she could utter a reply, Julian closed his hand and gripped her chin. He ignored Lily’s hiss of pain with a cruel smirk.

“I adore you to death.”

## CHAPTER THREE

### Repossession of a Soul

“Julian...”

“That’s right, darling. It’s me, Julian. Your Julian.”

“You can’t be here. Why—”

Julian brushed his lips over hers, stopping Lily’s disjointed flow of words. Ever so slowly, his tongue coaxed hers to accept him—despite the harsh fingers digging to her soft skin. Lily leaned into Julian, mewling in a heady mixture of fear and excitement.

“You were out there,” she sighed between kisses. “In the club.”

Julian released her chin. His caresses grew feverish, constant with the passion of longing.

“Weren’t you?”

He removed the towel covering her hair. “Yes.” He slid his hands through the wet, dark strands. “I saw you, but you didn’t see me.”

“No, but I felt you.” Lily’s mouth opened into a perfect circle when Julian nipped her neck. “Is this an accident?”

“No.”

“Did you stop looking—”

“Never.” His gaze glittered electric blue as he repeated the word again. “Never.”

Lily’s fingers crept out and touched his smooth cheek. This time it was Julian who moaned piteously.

“I never stopped looking either. I never stopped looking back, hoping to see you there.”

His gentle ministrations suddenly turned harsh. Fisting his hands, Julian pulled Lily’s head away. He ignored her garbled cry. “Don’t ever use this mouth to lie to me, darling. You showed your unique contempt for me all too clearly. Don’t insult me further.”

“As did you.” She watched as he brought his exquisite face closer. It tightened with supreme displeasure. She refused to cower. “I loved you and it meant nothing. Don’t judge me for getting tired of my pain.”

“Nothing? It meant everything!” Julian shouted. His lips tightened as he swallowed the rage clamoring for release. “It meant everything then and everything now. As far as your pain goes...”

He tightened his fingers. Julian’s assessing stare caught the imperceptible wince marking her defiant gaze.

“Forgive me, my darling. It slipped my mind that you no longer have the remarkable stamina of a Resurrector.” Julian tilted her head back. His lips and teeth worshipped the slim column, paying special attention to the area between neck and shoulder. “Now you’re just a poor, defenseless, dirty, human doll.”

“I warned you already, Julian,” Lily whispered. “Don’t underestimate me.”

“Advice I kindly give you in turn.”

“You’re never kind.” The white ceiling held false attraction. “Just as I’m never more than a toy to you.”

“And you belong to me, darling doll.” He laved her skin with his cool tongue. “Don’t you remember the words I told you?”

“I do.” Lily’s eyes grew heavy with memory. Her voice rasped with anger and regret. “You’d break me before you let me go.”

“Those would be the ones.”

“It’s too late. You already did.”

Julian bit hard. His words dripped with consolation. “No, I didn’t. You’d be dead if I did.”

Lily’s deepest fear stirred. “Is that why you’re here?”

Julian stopped his tender ministrations. He looked into her shadowed eyes and smiled. “Did I ever tell you that you talk too much?”

“Yes.”

“I missed it. Please continue.”

*And he never answered me.*

Julian’s words inspired a complicated web around Lily—one she had fallen into time and time again. Complacent terror vied with more carnal emotions. Lily’s breasts felt full and heavy, her stomach tight with tension, her limbs weak, and she throbbed everywhere.

Most especially between her legs.

Lily could feel herself growing wet, aching to have Julian inside her. How could she want him though? Even knowing all they had become, how could she still want him so desperately?

*Because you enjoy the game he plays. Pain first, ecstasy later. Nothing's changed. It's as if you never left. You want to play it again.*

Lily felt a plea rise up out of her.

*I can't. It doesn't matter how much we want to go back—we can never change what's been done. I can't change who I am now.*

This wasn't right. Being with him wasn't right. It never had been. The old cloak of submission was sliding over her as if the two year separation had been only two minutes. And what's more, Lily was the one rushing to put it on.

"It'll never be the same. You can't make it that way and I can't keep trying."

"What?" Obviously enchanted with the rush of tasting her shoulder again, the vampire didn't foresee what would happen next.

Lily pushed Julian away. Surprise blessed her when Julian stumbled and fell. Not giving him a chance to recover, Lily savagely kicked him in his midsection. She then picked up her towel and ran.

*I gotta make it to the door! He'll never expose himself if there are others to see him.*

Lily only made it a few steps before Julian tackled her to the ground. He flipped her over only to feel her nails rake his cheek. His eyes flashed gold before settling back to azure.

"All right, darling. Rough it is."

"Let me go!" She bucked against him. Desperation ruled Lily's reason, belatedly remembering she no longer had the strength to make Julian bend to her will. "Get off me!"

"No." He scooped her up, ignoring a tangle of kicks and hits, and headed towards the bed. "I like the posts, Lily. The bed is quite flea market but it's not as if I can expect more from you. I'll have to make sure we put it to marvelous use." He tossed her down and turned away. Preternatural speed brought Julian back with a discarded towel before Lily had a chance to scramble to freedom. He shredded the towel into strips and methodically tied Lily down.

“You can’t do this!”

“You’re wrong. I can do whatever I want. I can remake our world and I can remake you. Not because I want to, but because you won’t let me be anything other than a dirty demon.”

The words tore through her panic. Fatalism took Lily by the hand and led her to her doom.

*You’ve created this monster—just as he created you. Now it’s time to join him in the dark. Maybe if you do, it’ll be over. No more fear. No more nightmares. No more ghosts.*

“You’re right.”

Her calmness set his nerves on edge. “You’re agreeing with me?”

“Yes.”

He shook his head once. “Since when?”

“Since I let you in two years ago.”

Julian considered her words before smiling rakishly. “Behold my lady—submissive as viper. Where’s your lie?”

“No lie.” Lily’s tone dripped with baby softness. “I killed off most of your house. I nearly killed you. I set your home on fire. I left you. I humiliated you almost as badly as you humiliated me. Don’t draw this out.”

Understanding skimmed his expression. He kissed her lips once. “You’re absolutely right, my love. Business first always, eh?”

“It’s how you taught me.”

“So I did.”

“It’s also how I’ll make you pay.”

“So you’ll try.” Julian’s smile died. “Shall we play our respective parts?”

“Please.”

Regret dipped his shoulders once before familiar dysfunction took its place. He instantly struck. Wrapping his hand around her neck, Julian snarled, “You bitch! I should kill you! How dare you think that you can just up and leave? You think everything between us would be over? That is what you thought, isn’t it? Isn’t it?”

Taking her cue, Lily spit in his face. “I needed it to be over! I couldn’t take being your toy! I couldn’t take being whatever it was that you wanted! I couldn’t take not

having the strength to stand up to you! I hated losing my dignity to you! I hated seeing and knowing that I wasn't the only one..." Lily abruptly stopped. She glared at him behind a sheen of angry tears.

"The only one?" Julian let go and stood by the bed, never letting her leave his sight. "So that's, forgive my choice of words here, the heart of the matter isn't it, Lily? Not the other rubbish you were spouting but my lack of fidelity. Imagine that! Even knowing about the nature of Pureblood vampires, you still expected faithfulness from one."

Hearing his mocking scorn, Lily shook from the murderous passion running through her. "I expected you to be a better man."

"No, you expected me to be Ian."

"I expected you to be faithful!"

"Why ever would you think such a thing? We weren't married and were barely dating. As far as anyone knew, you were the deranged Resurrector stalking me and I was the gracious vampire handling you with kid gloves. Besides, I never promised you fidelity, Lily." As soon as the words left his lips, Julian knew he had just broken one of his creeds.

He just lied.

"You swore you saw only me." Her raspy voice quaked. "You swore it, Julian."

"I did."

"LIAR!"

"It's a dead issue, Lily! Besides, you know we were set up by that pious, bureaucratic, useless, outdated governmental party—"

"Set up? If you had any honor there would've been nothing to set you up with! But Nephilim knew you very well, didn't they? Put the bait out and good old Lord Douglas will come out with tail wagging. All it took for you was a room full of naked girls and you were right there. Like always."

"Don't blame me for Vickery Hill."

"Who else is there?" Lily exploded. "I'm an exile because of you! I'm not a Resurrector anymore because of you!"

"Wrong! You're not a Resurrector anymore because you were never meant to be one!" Julian saw how quickly his words ripped open Lily's private wound. Something

akin to pity pricked him. He gentled his tone. “Come on, darling. You never wanted the job. You couldn’t stand living there. You know, as well as I, that you’d be lying at the bottom of that lake by now if you were still the Resurrector.”

Lily shook her head. “Not true. You don’t know that.”

“It is true! How many times would it have taken, Lily? How many times did you have to die to understand that guilt is useless?”

She swallowed hard but the volatile emotions still made her voice warble. “You have no idea what I’m walking around with, Julian. You can’t even begin to understand. You don’t even know what I’ve done, do you?”

“I don’t want to know. I don’t care.” His viciousness made Lily gasp. “I never cared about your life outside of me, darling. It was always my intent to take you out of there. One way is as good as another.”

“Even if I got branded a murderer?”

“Hardly a surprise.”

“Even if I got branded a whore?”

“Even better.” He flashed a lupine grin. “I’ve always been partial to whores.”

“I know. Too bad for you I wasn’t willing to be with one.”

Julian dipped his head. His hair fell in a messy sprawl. “I’m not a whore, darling—just a man.”

“One in the same. Do you really think it doesn’t matter? I told you before. I’d do anything, be anything for you, but there’s one thing I’d never do.”

“Why hold me to a standard that doesn’t exist?”

“It does.”

“How would you know?” he asked slyly, hatefully. “You never saw it at home. Daddy never could live up to you and Mommy’s expectations, could he? That’s why he flew the coop.”

“You’re not my fucking father.” Her remote voice belonged to that of a disinterested stranger. “I saw my mother die each time he came home smelling like his latest whore. It wouldn’t have hurt nearly as much if he had beaten her instead of screwing around on her. I swore I’d never be like my momma. Now look at me.”

Julian lost some of his obnoxious swagger. “They never mattered, Lily. It wasn’t even about them.”

“Them? Why don’t we call them what they are? Nicole, Vivian, Cynthia, and all the ones whose name you don’t even know. They were your lovers.”

“Wrong! You were my only lover.”

“You fucked them, Julian. You put your fucking cock inside them. I even watched you do it. That makes them your lovers and that makes me an idiot for not killing you when I had the chance!”

He loathed her cursing. Two years hadn’t changed that at all. However, it wasn’t the optimum moment to discuss her language. “Women and their debatable notions of fidelity.” Julian plopped down on a nearby chair. He dropped his head in his hands. “Lily, I cannot ask you to understand something I don’t understand myself. Suffice it to say that I truly regret those events.”

“Events?”

He conceded to the venom in her voice. “Affairs.”

“Betrayals.”

“Only to your vanity,” he swore with one hand across his heart. “You always had my loyalty.”

“I didn’t have your loyalty. I had some kind of obsession but never your loyalty.”

Julian peered at her through his disheveled hair. “Which is by far a singular compliment to your person.”

“Quit speaking to me like an old man!” she snapped, finally showing some liveliness. “You’re not a British lord anymore and you haven’t been for almost two hundred years.”

Julian’s crisp, cultured accent faded into warmth. “I missed you.”

Lily looked away.

Encouraged by her silence, he confessed, “I adore you, darling. I know I hurt you. I can see it now when I couldn’t see it then. I want you back, Lily. I want you happy.”

She caught him with her stare. Greed gleamed like honeyed poison, tempting Julian lean forward, just to see if it was possible to glimpse the girl he once knew. “Will you give me anything I want, Julian?”

“Anything.”

“Money?”

Julian tilted his head. He assessed the sincerity of her question. “If that’s what makes you happy now, then yes.” A measure of disbelief narrowed his gaze. “How much?”

“I’m not talking terms. Tell me what else you’d give me.”

“Name your price.”

“No! Tell me what *you* would give *me*.”

Silence crept forth, lengthening its stay and distancing the two even further.

“You don’t even know, do you? Happiness. You still can’t recognize it. All you can do is destroy it.” She laughed once. “I’m stupid, Julian, but I’m not that stupid. You don’t mean a word you just said.”

“That’s not true!”

“Two years ago we both watched Nicole die because she fell in love with you. What kind of people does that make us, Julian?”

“Us. We are what we are, Lily.”

“Do you know how much guilt I still carry because of it?”

“She didn’t matter, Lily. Nicole was only a tool.”

“Yeah, I know now what kind of tool she was, Julian. One to keep me in line, to keep me on my toes.” Lily’s mocking smile oozed with self-contempt. “We will both burn in hell for that one.”

“Lily—”

“Later you begged me to forgive you for Vivian only to keep me from killing you. So what are you after now? I can’t stab or shoot you like I used to, so what is it?”

Julian’s eyes hardened. “Bitch.” He tossed back his hair, smoothing it over his neck with a negligent hand. “Fine. I always did wonder if you were smarter than you appear.”

“Out with it.”

Julian crossed his arms over his chest and pretended to ponder her order. Arching his brows, he smirked at the naked vulnerability he saw behind Lily’s anger. “What did you want to know, my sweet?”

Lily let out a low hiss of air. “Why are you here?”

“To take you back.”

“Back to where?”

“To wherever I feel.” He bit his lip with avarice. “As I’ve told you before, I’m an extremely greedy creature. I never let go of my possessions.”

“Including women.”

“Especially women.”

Lily swallowed a flow of venomous, hurt-filled words. She broke with the rules of their game and issued her challenge.

“Okay. You’re right. How can one woman ever be enough for you?”

Julian crossed his legs, patiently waiting for her to finish having her say.

“You don’t need me. You need closure.”

He arched a brow in supercilious humor. “Closure?”

“Yes. I’m sure you’ve heard of it before. You needed to know why I left and I needed to know that you’re still a dick and always will be. So do us both a favor and get the hell out of here. After all, I’d hate to deprive the world of its all-time favorite lover.” She jerked her chin towards the door. “Leave. Now.”

Julian’s smirk disappeared. He stalked over to Lily. His lips hung over hers. “Not likely, darling. First, I’m going to show you what I do to pretty little girls that leave before I’m finished with them.”

Knowing she’d never evade Julian, Lily didn’t bother to struggle against her bonds. However, she gritted her teeth and hissed, “Show me and die. I do what I damn well want. You’re not just going to walk into my life again after two years and tell me what to do!”

“Need I remind you that you left me?! I’m not walking back into anything that I walked out of! You are mine, Lily, now and until the end of time. Mine.”

Female fury made Lily buck against him. She slammed her head against his chin and howled with pain.

“No! Never again! I will never be that broken girl again! I turned myself inside and out for you, Julian! I might as well have cut out my heart and given it to you! And what did you do with it? You threw it away!”

“Yes!” Julian laid full length on top of Lily. He wrapped his arms about her slender waist and buried his lips in her hair. “Yes, I did! I took your heart and put it in a little cage. I looked at it, reveling in the sin that it belonged to me. But I didn’t care for it.

I let it grow wings and fly away. So let me devour it this time. Let me consume it...and you. I swear it'll be different.”

Lily sagged in his hold. The blinding rage burned into ashes, threatening to disintegrate her completely.

“All I can think about is you with those other women...doing to them what you did to me...it's like I was garbage. I trusted you. I believed in you, despite who and what you were. Jesus, Julian! You lied to me for six weeks. You made a fool out of me.”

His face reflected her haunting sadness. “Forgive me, Lily.”

“I can't!”

The wretched finality in her voice woke the wounded beast in his. He wrenched away from her. “What about you, Lily? You swore you'd never leave me! You promised to love me forever!”

“I kept my promise!”

“Liar! You're pushing me away! Now and then! You've never really wanted *me*. You've only wanted Ian. *Julian* doesn't matter to you. It doesn't matter that Ian was a liar who never showed you his true face. You've saved all your love for Ian and left none for me.”

Lily shook her head wildly. “That's not true! It was you who could never let go of the past! Ian, Julian, you're one in the same!”

“Fuck you!” Julian slammed his hands on either side of Lily's head. “I am not him! I don't act like Ian, I don't lie like Ian, and I'm not weak like Ian.” A low growl rumbled deep within his chest. “My name is Julian Douglas and you would do well to remember it.”

Lily's pulse thumped in time with her panic. The monstrous fury in his eyes threatened to incinerate her. But she still had to ask the question. “Why can't you accept who you are, Julian? Why did you have to separate yourself like this?”

His claws dug into the mattress, easily ripping through the synthetic material. “Why couldn't you?”

Lily clearly heard all the other unspoken questions.

*Why couldn't you accept me? Why did you constantly look for Ian in my every word, every smile, and every deed? Why did you keep hoping Ian would come back even while you loved being with me?*

Defeat pressed in. “Just go, Julian. Go back to your mansion by the lake. Go back to your money. Go back to your world. Go back to Vickery Hill.”

Her tired directives infuriated Julian past endurance. He yanked her chin back to him and snarled, “You have no idea of what my life has become since you left! None! Don’t you dare tell me where to go!”

“Yeah? Well at least you can go back, Julian! I can’t! Ever! You don’t know what it’s like to lose your family, your dignity, to be turned out of the town you grew up in...the town you protected...to have the Spirit abandon you...to have the Spirit use you...to be nothing more than a tool...to do what I’ve done...”

Julian wanted to rub it in her face. He wanted to speak of all the nights he spent, pressed between death and despair. He wanted to watch her eyes well up with tears, knowing she was the cause of ultimate fall. Instead, he squeezed her and whispered, “Please forgive me. I’m not always in my right mind...I hate so much...and you pay the price...I’m sick and we both know why...but I can’t live without you. You’re my life, Lily. I need you.”

She sobbed in response.

Julian pulled back. He began to stroke her hair with feverish consideration. “You don’t need the Spirit. We have a bond, Lily. We’re connected.”

Lily cried in despair, “Not anymore. Just like I’m not a Resurrector anymore, it’s the same with us. We’re not bonded anymore. It was severed that night when you wouldn’t—”

“I’m not talking about that! We’re still bonded, Lily. It’s beyond choice, beyond Fate...don’t deny what we are.” When he saw her eyes drift, Julian pleaded, “Punish me all you want. Just let us be like we were. I lead—you follow. By the time I’m finished tonight, you’ll never want to leave me. You’ll be begging for me to stay. And I’ll do it. I’ll do it because I want to come home.” He pressed his hand against her mound. “Let me come home, Lily.”

His ragged words pierced her. Instead of renewing Lily’s jealous fury, they only fanned the flames of her lust. Lust that belonged to the cleft between her legs and the cavity inside her chest. Why couldn’t she forgive him?

Living without Julian was hell. Living with him worse. It wasn’t just Julian. It was the vulnerability to something greater than him.

*He won't protect me and I can't protect myself. I can't...*

No matter what Lily's logic suggested, her heart demanded a completely different subset of emotion.

"I will never forgive it."

"I'm not asking you to right now. I'm just asking you to let me be yours. Can you do that? Just once?"

A sob caught in her throat. The agony threatened to send her into an abyss. It killed Lily to know of his betrayals. It killed her to still want him in spite of them. It killed her to wonder if they'd ever change. And it killed her to know that terror could overpower lust.

*But he's all that I have left of home, my past, my heart. I can forget, just for a little bit. Afterwards, I'll give him hell. Afterwards, I'll deny I ever forgave him. Afterwards, I'll curse myself for even wanting him to get this far. Afterwards, I'll remember every bit of pain locked behind my lust. Afterwards, I'll keep one step ahead...but for now I'll forget everything but this.*

Julian rubbed his palm in slow, sensuous circles. "Do you know how much it's tortured me not to be here? Two years I've dreamed of nothing but this. And now that you're finally beneath me..."

A thousand past erotic memories assailed her weakening mind. The ecstasy she had found time and time again in Julian's arms was too powerful...too addictive.

Addictive enough to forget why they were so wrong for each other.

"I know what you're thinking," he cooed in her ear. "You're remembering what I can make you feel. Do you remember how you used to beg me to stay? Do you remember how you'd cry when I made you leave my bed?"

She shook her head. "I won't beg, Julian. Never again."

"Yes, you will. You'll beg me like I'm begging you." His hand left her. "There's no shame between lovers, Lily."

"There's nothing but shame between us, Julian."

"No! We can forget these two years. We'll pretend it never happened."

"It can never be the same. I'm only twenty-one and I know that. How come you don't?"

Julian ignored her. Instead, he continued as if she had never spoken. The pitiful man of before was replaced by a familiar devil.

“I bet you’re trying to guess if I’m going to fuck you or if I’m going to be gentle. I want to be gentle, but I know you like it best when I just fuck you.”

Lily jerked away. “Stop.”

“Make me.”

Julian placed a delicate kiss on her ear. He caressed her collarbone before moving down to her breasts. His large hands cupped and kneaded her flesh with a connoisseur’s skill.

“So soft, just like a feather...will you let me kiss it, darling?”

A moan escaped Lily’s lips. Her nipples grew hard. She was losing to her own wickedness.

“I left you, Julian.”

“I know.”

“I hate you.”

“I hate you too.”

The words, while casually spoken, still had the power to wound. “Why is this always the way between us?”

“It’s the same reason why I’ve traveled thousands of miles to find you.”

“Which is?” Lily gasped. She didn’t bother to look down to know tiny pinpricks of her blood dotted his claws.

“Neither of us can stop ourselves.” Julian shifted until his stare met hers. “We never could and that’s why we’re here.”

She watched his frozen gaze reflect what she could never leave behind. Crazed passion and death.

“It won’t change, will it?”

“No.” He placed one finger near her lips. A crimson drop lay on the tip. “But you want me so much you really don’t care.”

Lily arched her neck. Her mouth parted in wanton hunger.

“Do you?” he pressed further. “Do you care? Even knowing what I am, do you care?”

“Yes, I care. I care but never enough.” Lily’s mouth closed about the proffered digit. Her tongue laved the skin with perfect adoration.

Triumph made his eyes sparkle with sudden feral delight. “I’ve always known this truth. It was you who always denied it.”

Lily released his finger in favor of sliding her tongue down his wrist. “I’ve denied it but so have you.” She watched his face melt with facile delight. “You want me just as much as I want you. Despite what I did.”

“And I will punish you for it, darling.” His sigh made it seem like the most wondrous delight. “Believe me.”

“For leaving or making you want me? Even knowing what I am?”

Julian laughed. His hand skirted her lips, stopping her volition only to begin his. “My little darling has become quite like her master. It’s as if we never parted company.” Euphoria possessed his entire body. “Only now I don’t want to talk.”

“No?”

“No.” Shudders racked Lily’s body as his hand moved down her naked stomach. He teased her, once again running his fingers close to where she ached the most. “I just wonder how long we’ll draw this out before we lose control. Do you remember how crazy it’d be? At times, I wondered if we’d kill each other.”

Lily shifted, experimentally tugging on her bonds. “Maybe tonight we finally will.”

Julian laughed and dropped his head on her shoulder. His mirth danced between dementia and harmless amusement. “You think so? I could think of worse ways to go. Just promise me one thing.”

“What?” her lips moved reluctantly, already knowing the answer.

“This time—don’t miss my heart.”

An involuntary cry spilled out. “Why would you...ah!” Past hatred vied with present longing. Lily turned her head away from him. Tears trickle down her face.

His laughter died. “Something I say bother you, darling?” He cozened her, mouth tenderly kissing the bare skin beneath his lips. “Why the tears, Lily? You shoved your stake, one I gave you, deep inside my little chest. You did it and you loved it.”

“No.”

“Yes. You loved it when you did it to me. You always loved it. Remember that.”

*It's true.*

She could deny it to Julian, but they both saw her darkness. Lily yearned for his tender cruelties, for his demon, because it gave her a chance to show her own.

“Darling?”

The abyss called her name and she jumped.

Lily turned back to him, waiting until Julian lifted his head. She then kissed him, nipping his lips before sliding her tongue deep inside his open mouth.

Her acceptance only incited wicked glee in Julian. He devoured her for several minutes and let his baser instincts rule him. The feel of Lily, the taste of her worked Julian until he was nearly incoherent. Lost, he murmured her name over and over again.

*I can't let this feeling end. She's all I need. All I'll ever want.*

He cupped her face. “I'm going to fuck you, Lily. You know that right?”

Mouth bruised red, eyes burning bright, she gasped, “If you didn't I'd have to kill you for being a tease.”

Julian rested his forehead against hers for a moment. “But I have to do it my way. You understand?”

Lily let out a soft sigh. Neither knew if it was borne from disappointment or anticipation. “I probably won't make it too easy.”

“I know. You've had two years to run free. I won't go too easy on you either. Just remember this—you love me.”

With those final words of warning, Julian slid off her warm body and stood back from the bed. Not losing eye contact with Lily, he toed his shoes and socks off before shedding his long woolen coat. He pulled off his black dress shirt before moving to his pants. Julian's hands paused in mid-action. He walked over to the bed and climbed on until he was crouched over Lily's face.

“Lily...Lily...” Julian crooned. His hand shot out to slap her cheek when she didn't respond quickly enough. “Lesson One—never lose focus, darling.”

The stinging pain lit another rebellious fire in Lily's heart. Glaring at him, she spat, “Is this better, Julian? I mean it's been so long since I've played helpless slave to the precious Ascendant vampire that sometimes I forget.”

“Sarcasm is not required.” He leaned forward and pointed out, “This isn't very smart of you, Lily. After all, you're in no position to mouth off like that, darling. Tied up,

naked, helpless...” His teeth gleamed like bone. “What if I were insatiable, looking for an easy meal? You should be trying to distract me, making me think of eating something else besides...blood.”

Lily’s stomach and thighs clenched. Lust stirred inside, already heightened by the throbbing in her cheek. Violence had always been a prelude to bliss. The more she stoked it, the better the ending. Although back then Lily possessed inhuman strength. Now she was as fragile as glass.

However, Julian had taught her too well. Cautiousness melted beneath the venom in her mouth.

“Maybe because what’s on top of me doesn’t interest very much.” Lily cocked her head to the side. “You losing your touch there, stud? I remember a time when you could make me do whatever you wanted with just a crook of your little finger. I’d look at you and get wet. Now...maybe your age is finally catching up to you, Grandpa? After all, you’re over three-hundred. Young for an Ascendant, but hella old for a lover, wouldn’t you say?”

Julian’s face stilled, smile still in place, but eyes promising hell. Lily’s heart sped up with a wicked thrill.

*Come on, come on, come on!*

Just as planned, Lily’s words cut straight through to his insecurities. He forgot their game and wondered if what she said was really true. He directly settled on a course of action. First, he’d take his belt off and whip her until she was crying for mercy. Second, he’d grab her by the hair and throw her out the window. Third, he’d dump her in the ER and consider himself lucky to walk away from this ungrateful, insulting bitch.

Then he’d come back and start over again.

Clearly stability had never been one of his finer virtues.

Arousal shyly spoke to him. Julian took in the air and noticed it getting stronger. He looked down and observed Lily’s barely concealed eagerness.

*Oh, you bad, bad girl. You’re so good at this.*

Lily flinched when Julian’s hand moved towards her parted mouth. He danced his fingertips across her lips. Her surprised gaze flew up. “I forget how sharp of a tongue you have, Lily,” he murmured with a wry smile. “Sometimes it pleases me, sometimes it doesn’t. I wonder which way it will be tonight.”

Julian moved off her body. He settled at the foot of the bed, knee bent negligently. Brooding, he waited for her move.

Lily raised her head. She studied him in confusion. Julian wasn't reacting the way he would before. His retaliations were always swift, sadistic, and satisfying. Disappointment began to gnaw away at her when he finally spoke.

"It's amazing, Lily, but somehow you've managed to turn the tables tonight. I've imagined for two years how this moment would be. None of them were pleasant for you, my dear." Julian glanced up at her. Lily relaxed her arms and arched her back. His pride swiftly mended. He recognized the gesture for what it was and her docility proved he hadn't lost all control over Lily's will.

"Maybe when all this is done, I'll make good on those fantasies," he murmured suggestively.

"I don't think so," she denied as she shifted provocatively.

"No?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm going to make you want to eat something other than...blood."

Julian's lips parted in a wicked grin. He crawled over to lie length-wise next to Lily. He carefully ran his hands over his precious prize all the while testing his restraint. Julian found something that could pass as control but then Lily's nipples tightened, seducing him completely.

"Forgive me, darling. I just can't seem to help myself."

His mouth closed over the alluring, dark peak. Lily let out a muffled groan and Julian became voracious. He hissed her name, chanting it as a beloved curse while he devoured her flesh.

Lily felt the rough scrape of his teeth several times but it only heightened her passions. She began to tug at her bonds. She wanted to touch Julian so badly.

"Untie me...now..."

A groan of denial burned into her skin. She began crying for release but he simply ignored her. It wasn't until she trilled his name that his mouth swooped up to capture hers.

"Say it again," he demanded between kisses.

“Julian...”

“Again.”

“Julian...”

One of his hands skimmed her waist to rest on her mound. Parting the slick lips, he brushed his finger across Lily’s swollen clit. He rubbed back and forth for a few seconds, all the while listening to her ragged moans.

“Julian...I’ve missed this...don’t stop...”

“Do you still hate it?”

“Yes...”

“Will you try to stop me?”

“Oh, no...”

Moving up to thoroughly kiss Lily again, Julian felt as if he were going to burst at any moment. However, he wanted to hold off the final pleasure for as long as possible. Julian stopped his carnal play and grinned when she mewled in protest.

“I wonder if you taste as good as you smell.”

Lily lost her pout. With a feral smile, Julian brought his finger up to her mouth. Shamelessly, her pink tongue curled up around his finger and drew it in. Lily released the moist digit with a smack and whispered, “Make me scream.”

“As my lady commands it.”

Julian maddeningly took his time down her body. He couldn’t pass up her magnificent breasts and spent several minutes caressing them both equally. Moving lower, he nipped her taut stomach before dipping his tongue into the tiny navel. He then slid his mouth across hips before sliding down further. He drew little moist patterns with his tongue up both of her inner thighs.

Julian delighted in Lily’s strangled cries of frustration. He took his time worshipping her legs. His tongue ran down towards her knees. He first bit one then the other before scraping his elongated nails across the sensitive skin. “I remember you like that, Lily.” His voice dropped a notch. “In fact, I haven’t forgotten anything.”

Frustration making her voice tense, she snapped, “If you remember everything, then what are you waiting for?”

Julian settled his chin on her dark curls and teasingly ran his fingertips up and down her leg. “While I haven’t forgotten anything, it seems that you have.”

Recognition dawned in her eyes. Lily felt a spurt of resistance before she quelled it. She was too aroused to pull back now. Swallowing a lump of pride, she whispered, “Please lick me. I want to feel your tongue...it’s been so long since...”

“And...” he drew out in a chiding voice.

“But only...if it pleases you...my lord.” Lily’s eyes slid away from his. Two fat tears trembled, threatening to undo her composure.

Delighted, Julian dropped an open-mouthed kiss on her thigh. “Ssh, I know how much that hurt. You did very good, my darling.” He waited until she looked up before parting her plump lips with his tongue. Without thought to finesse, Julian began to lap Lily’s quivering flesh.

All too soon, her delighted moans grew louder. Lily’s hips bounced in rhythm to his sinful stroking until Julian laid one hand across her belly to keep her still. He used his other one to stroke her slippery flesh.

When he inserted a finger inside her, Lily’s muscles clenched in pleasure. One finger became two and then three while his lips and tongue busily licked and sucked her swollen clit.

Lily’s orgasm built as all the sensation in her body centered on Julian’s mouth. She opened her eyes and glanced down. Her arousal rose to a fevered pitch. The sight of her lover’s dark head and hands between her widespread thighs brought forth another groan of ecstasy.

Knowing Lily’s body the way he did, Julian sensed she was on the verge of coming. Abruptly, he pulled away from her and sat back on his heels.

Lily screamed in protest. “Julian, you always fucking do this—” Her gaze locked on his. The rest of the words died in her throat. His vampiric stare was so compelling, so hypnotic. She melted. He could ask anything of her and it would be done. She still needed and loved Julian that much. More than fear. More than anything.

Vampire. Resurrector. Enemies. Lovers.

None of it mattered. All that mattered was this.

“You know what I want now?”

“I know what you want.”

Moving up her body, Julian once again crouched over her face. His hands gently touched her cheek before tracing her full lips. Lily nipped his fingers and he laughed.

Lily's lustful gaze fixed on the bulging crotch in front of her. Bringing her head forward, her teeth got a hold of the top button and maneuvered it out of the hole. Painstakingly she repeated her movements time and time again, even though her neck muscles screamed in agony.

All the while, Julian's hands idly played with her hair.

Finally the last button became undone and his long, thick cock sprang forth. Lily's eyes glazed over with delight. She ran her tongue along the underside and felt a thrill when Julian's deep groan rang through the air. Repeatedly, she only tongued the underside, reveling in the power she had over him.

Their positions reversed during moments like this. She became the tormentor and he the helpless victim. The slave became the master and the master became the willing slave. It was poetic somehow.

*I love him.*

Lily kissed the tip of his velvet head. Her sweet gesture elicited a sound of pained pleasure. She enveloped him in her mouth and sighed with contentment. Lily loved the taste of Julian, wanting, needing to consume him until he belonged only to her.

*If I just let myself forget who he is...if I forget who I am...then I'll be happy.*

He rocked his hips; hands now gripped her damp hair tightly. He debated whether or not to come in her mouth. As pleasurable as that would be, Julian wanted more. More sickness, more denial, more rapture.

More. Always more.

*I want to break her a little more. I want to make her cry a little more. I want to make her love me a little more. Maybe one day I won't need these games. Maybe...*

Julian pulled away, leaving Lily open mouthed and obviously aroused. "As great as this is feeling, Lily, I see now that finding you wasn't really worth all the time and effort."

He sadistically grinned at her mounting disbelief and outrage. "What can I say? You're always right. Things will never be the same between us." He gave Lily his back. "I'll just let myself out and forget we ever saw one another."

Lily recognized this game. He would leave her bound and just walk out if she didn't call him back. It could be minutes, hours, days, or weeks.

*I won't! I won't beg him! It's better this way. He's only going to mess me up worse...make me forget what I need to remember. I won't...*

“Julian! Please don’t leave. Not tonight...I need you so much. Please don’t go. It hurts...just...don’t...go.” Her face crumpled as the humiliation of the situation settled on her. Two years had done nothing to end Lily’s compulsive need for him.

*Christ, she said yes.*

Julian’s legs shook as her emotions tumbled through him. He still had Lily just as strongly as before—perhaps even more so.

*She said yes!*

Triumph incinerated his lustful gaze. He leisurely stripped off his dress pants. Looking down, he noted his trembling hands mirrored his brittle thoughts.

*Lily, I need you so badly. I'll die without you. Don't let that happen...don't let me be what I don't want to be. Don't let me become what you hate and what I love. Don't let my wickedness out. Just love me. Love me the way I need...please.*

He bit his lip until it drew blood. Julian let out a slow hiss of air. He would do this. He would keep her. He would not fuck this up.

Now naked, his body prepared for the sweetest triumph yet. Julian’s lean muscles rippled as he padded back to the bed. “You know what this means, don’t you, darling?” He waited until she jerked her head twice. “I won’t let you go after tonight, Lily. You try to leave and I will punish you...and maybe make you live forever. You better be sure of the choice you’re making.”

Lily’s world stopped. Her throat clogged and panic consumed her whole. Then she replayed the end of his threat.

*“...make you live forever.”*

Julian’s cruelty always hurt worse when it was so careless. Or perhaps calculating was actually the appropriate term. After all, he might already know her selfish dread and was playing with it. Lily never knew with Julian. His honesty lay in the technicality of words, not the actual intent itself.

Still Lily clung to the meaning she wanted to believe. “Choice? What choice is there, Julian?” She coughed once before laughing wildly. “But I’m not the only one who’s this screwed up so you better be sure too.”

Julian paused. “I made the choice long ago. You just could never see it.”

“Liar.”

His claws sliced through the bonds on her ankles. He settled between her still-spread thighs. “I’m many things, but a liar is not one of them.” He lunged, seating himself completely within her small body. Lily’s high-pitched scream melted into an aching cry when he reared back and then slammed his hips forward. Julian’s eyes clenched from the overwhelming sensations of finally being in Lily again. She felt so tight and so warm around him. He knew he’d just hurt her with his roughness but didn’t care.

Looking down at her flushed face, Julian lowered his lips until they were a hairsbreadth away from hers. “I’m wondering something, darling. Can I still bed you the way I used to? You’re just a regular human now. You used to like it rough, just like a vampire. Care to find out how much you can take?”

Lily’s delicate mouth parted. Her chest fluttered with quickening motions. Instead of pleading for leniency, she surprised them both by growling, “Just shut up and fuck me.”

Julian took the gauntlet in wicked glee. He reached out and sliced through Lily’s restraints with one dangerous claw. She yanked his head down and simultaneously wrapped her legs around his lean waist. Julian’s tongue mimicked the push and retreat of his lower body while Lily greedily sucked him in her mouth. In unconscious apology, he kept his movements slow and gentle but Lily found dissatisfaction with the sedate pace. Gripping his waist, she moved his hips until Julian’s thrusts became faster. Amusement at her aggressiveness caused him to murmur “Greedy bitch” before kissing her again.

Genetics didn't matter much anymore. Regret would take them both hours later, but right now madness held them as tightly as Julian's hands held Lily's. Their fingers entwined as their bodies' frenzied movements grew increasingly faster. Instinct ruled caution, leaving scrapes, bruises, and little dots of blood.

*It can never be better than this...I feel alive again.*

Lily wanted this to last forever. Her hips surged up to meet and encase all of his rigid length. She ripped her lips away from his. Her gasps grew short and sharp. Thrashing her head from side to side, she felt her orgasm begin to build.

“Yes...Julian...ah...don’t stop...yes! Please! Oh, yes! I’m gonna...oh, yes...”

He ran his tongue down her ear and crooned, “Darling, come for me...I want to hear you come...I want to feel you come around my cock...give it to me...”

Spurred on by his words and body, Lily stiffened as she arched up and screamed his name.

“JULIAN!”

All the pain, betrayal, want, and need manifested itself into that one desperate cry. Once again his body mastered hers with the dark magic of their passions. He was and always would be her salvation and damnation.

*When you stare into the darkness, it stares back at you too.*

Julian released her hands and grabbed both of her thighs in a bruising grip. Lily’s lips and tongue busily sucked and licked his hard flat nipples while her hands roamed his back. She raked her nails down. Superficial bits of skin clung to the little tips, but it was just enough to send Julian over the edge. He could feel his balls tightening in bliss. Desperate now, he savagely hammered Lily’s body. Seconds later, he clutched her helplessly as spasm after spasm rocked him. Julian now knew that everything he had done was all worth it, if only to hold this mortal, this woman.

*My woman.*

Collapsing on her body, he lay there for several minutes. Sweat, fear, lust, release—all of it emanated from the living doll beneath him. Her scent soothed as much as it agitated. Already he wanted her again. “Darling?”

Lily mumbled something incoherent.

Julian rolled over to his side, bringing her with him. He glanced down and saw she had fallen asleep.

*Too slow. I was the only thing that could keep her awake. Left unattended, she always passed out right after sex.*

He flung his head back on the bed. A wry smile danced across lips. Mentally, he relived every moment of the last thirty minutes. It was incredible, even though he hadn’t made Lily beg as much as he originally planned.

Julian studied Lily’s sleeping face, noting each new line and hollow. Tenderly, he kissed her cheek. He had missed her so much! She had been a girl before but now this incredible creature had morphed into a woman. A woman who was his. Julian knew Lily recognized his ownership, although she’d been far too hesitant.

Hesitant. Fearful even.

Something cold slithered in the bowels of his twisted mind. Had Lily betrayed his right of possession? Had she allowed another to be where only he had been?

*Has she been sleeping around on me? Is there someone she's in love with even now?*

Julian's post-coital mood abruptly vanished. Lily's fidelity was not something he'd spent a great deal of time thinking about. Between obsession and survival, he didn't have the opportunity to ponder much about how Lily spent her time—only where. However, the questions burned brightly in his mind now.

Forcing his body to relax, Julian gazed at his sleeping lover. If Lily had been unfaithful to him, she'd undergo all the torments of Hell on earth. Nothing would aid her in escaping his fury.

That was a promise he'd be more than able to keep.

Julian bowed his head. Spasms clutched his heart, giving the lifeless organ the phantom pain of inconsolable grief.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Violent Shades of Reality**

Lily began to shiver. She burrowed closer to the body next to her but found coolness instead of heat. All too quickly wakefulness became more of a threat. A furrow etched itself between her brows. She wasn't ready to face reality yet. Lily heard Julian's voice commanding her to stay asleep and like a perfect pet, she obeyed. Thankful for his bullying consideration, Lily drifted back towards unconsciousness and drowsily smiled.

*I wonder if he's watching me like I used to watch him...*

After several minutes, a dream started to form from the chambers of her mind. Lily saw herself running through Wold Cemetery, pursued by countless vampires. She wanted to turn and fight but instinctively knew she wasn't strong enough.

*What happened to me?*

Running down the road, Lily saw the sign flanking her family farm. She immediately thought she found sanctuary only to realize there was no way she could purposely put her mother in danger. Lily miserably ran past the emotional security of home. Lights dimmed before flicking off. Darkness pressed in while her feet beat a tattoo on the worn asphalt. Fog from the lake slid around her ankles, guiding Lily towards its shores.

All the while the horde was right behind her. Not close enough to catch Lily, but close enough that if she faltered even once, they'd be able to pounce.

She cut across a field, dodging tiny canyons cut in clay. Suddenly, Lily found herself in a thick, mist-filled forest. Her legs were lead and her lungs pushed to one breath short of exploding, but Lily forced herself to keep moving. The will to live, despite seemingly insurmountable odds, was too strong.

*I can make it. I can outrun them. I am not going to die out here tonight.*

She tore past razor branches, shredding her clothes in the process. Agilely, she jumped over rotting logs and skidded down embankments only to have to claw her way up only a few seconds later. The ravenous pack kept frenetic pace—no matter how much distance she covered.

Lily's sleepy smile faded away. She rolled over sought comfort from Julian. She found only emptiness. Panic and terror overwhelmed her and the nightmare lost its objective quality.

*Where to go? Where to hide?*

Just when Lily found herself at the edge of hysteria, an enormous house appeared in a clearing before her. She pushed her body to its limits, not even daring to look over her shoulder. Lily cleared the steps in one leap. Her knee buckled and she crashed against the wooden landing. Palms bloody, legs scraped, Lily pushed up and frantically pounded on the heavy double doors, oblivious to the splinters piercing her. Crimson rivulets snaked down her arms and formed macabre patterns on her skin. These markings undulated in time with Lily's heart, shifting to make familiar brands from a love gone wrong.

*His family crest...his glyph. It's supposed to protect me—so why isn't it? Is it because Julian's dead? No. Not Julian. Ian. Or are they both? I don't remember. Why don't I remember?*

The demonic pack scrambled up the steps and their horrible pants planted doom inside of Lily. Spindly arms reached out, claws eager to stain itself with her blood. She cowered against the door, certain she was just seconds from being ripped apart.

The entrance opened.

Whispering a devout prayer of thanks, Lily rushed in, barely slamming the doors in time. All snarls extinguished. The world entered unnatural silence. Lily collapsed against the door, coughing furiously. Several minutes passed before she looked around to see where she was. Despite the relaxed exterior, a cavernous, medieval-like room with fireplaces blazing on three walls greeted her sight.

*I remember. This is what it looked like before...before me.*

Weapons from a span of centuries hung throughout the hall. Katana swords, claymores, maces, rapiers, daggers, battle-axes, shields, and numerous other deadly weapons spoke their testament to death and destruction. She walked further into the room, momentarily forgetting about the threat outside. The hall held the whisper of the surreal, a timeless aura, as if the original occupants were still there. Cold, black marble floors caused Lily's footsteps to ring loudly as she unerringly moved towards a raised dais near the end of the room.

Someone there was watching her, piercing Lily with his gaze, but who? The observer's features were obscured by shadow. Fire cast a macabre halo around the enormous throne where he sat.

*I know him, but that can't be. I left him. He doesn't know where I am...right?*

Recognition dawned upon her as soon as he stood up. Suddenly, Lily realized she no longer felt winded, but instead felt very, very chilled. Looking down, she saw she was completely nude. Her tank top, pants, underclothing, and shoes were all gone. Lily gasped aloud. Mortified by her nakedness, she attempted to cross her arms over her body.

“NO!”

Lily stood still, wanting to disobey but much too meek to do so. She remained motionless, knowing this was expected of her.

*I have to do this. Pleasing him is the only thing I know.*

His gaze licked over her vulnerable flesh. Without touching, he touched her. Without breathing, he breathed for her. There was not one piece of her that he didn't see. There was no longer one piece of herself that she wanted to hide. It always began as such for them—he pursued, she retreated.

He conquered. She yielded.

Their energy halted when she heard them. Small moans of hunger and salacious desire rippled throughout the room. Wildly looking about, Lily saw hundreds of pairs of glowing, red eyes staring at her.

Despair crashed. Desire broke.

Instead of fleeing to safety, Lily had run right into a den of mad vampires. Bitter tears clogged her throat and madness filled her brain. Lily crumbled to the floor and curled up into a protective ball.

She was trapped. She was going to die.

Lily heard him come for her. Each click of his boots pierced her eardrums. As the pound of his footfalls echoed throughout the hall, the greedy, writhing forms became silent. They recoiled in fear and hugged the walls, each hoping their master wouldn't call for them.

He finally stopped in front of her. Without words, he commanded her to look at him. Tentatively raising her head, Lily's agonized eyes looked into his. “Ian...”

Fury flared before sliding away. “Get up.”

Scrambling to her feet, Lily mentally berated herself for calling him Ian. How many times had she undergone the harsh punishments of his ire for such an infraction?

“When will you learn how to address your lord? Do you think I am anything like Ian? Do I act like Ian? Do I fuck you like Ian would’ve?”

“No,” she sadly whispered.

“Then understand this—I own you. I am all you have, Lily. All you will ever have. You are mine to keep...mine to destroy.”

“I’m sorry. Please...” Anguish made her voice raw. “Why do you hate me? Why do you always hurt me?”

He gripped her by the back of the neck and squeezed until Lily cried out. Leaning forward, he pressed his lips against her temple and answered softly, “Because it pleases me. That’s the only reason I’ll ever need.”

Delighted cries resounded throughout. Lily whimpered in fear. She struggled against his hold. Great wrenching sobs caused her small frame to shudder as the hopelessness of her situation hit her. This was why she had no power, why she couldn’t defend herself against anyone. It was because of Julian and her twisted love for him.

Love had made Lily as weak as any normal human being.

Instead of gloating over her fear, Julian wrapped his arms around Lily’s trembling body. “Ssh, ssh, my darling little girl. Why do you fear this? Why do you fear me? You want to be possessed. You want to be mine. Your love for me is far greater than it ever was for Ian. Why fight it? Give in, give in...”

Numerous voices echoed Julian’s words.

“Give in, give in, give in...”

The seductive promise in his words stilled her sobbing. Dragging in great gulps of air, Lily closed her mind to fear, doubt, to all rational thought, and just forced her body to feel. The entire hall sensed her arousal. The vampires raised their chant to a higher pitch. Julian picked Lily up and carried her to the dais. Languorously lying in his embrace, she noticed he was completely naked, whereas he’d been completely clothed in black just a few seconds before.

“Pretty...”

Julian carefully laid her on a crimson altar that appeared where his throne had been. Her heavy-lidded gaze ran appreciatively over his smooth, pale body. She could die just from looking at his sleekly muscled chest and narrow waist. Lily's insides melted when her gaze traveled lower.

An arrogant smirk was the only sign Julian gave that he noticed her lengthy perusal. He climbed onto the altar. Covering her small body with his large one, he stared down into her eyes for an indeterminable time. It could have been seconds, minutes, hours, days, or even years. It didn't matter to her. All Lily wanted was to fall into his incredible blue gaze and never leave his sight.

And still the vampires chanted for her to give in to their lord and master.

Her lord and master.

"Please..." she implored once again.

As answer, he took her mouth in a brutal, possessive kiss. Her tender lip split from his assault. This only heightened their passions. Hungrily, he licked her bruised and bleeding mouth as she panted for the exquisite pleasure and pain. Lily's body undulated beneath him, needing his tainted touch so badly.

Julian worked his way down, nipping and biting her sensitive breasts, belly, and thighs until he settled between her eagerly spread legs. For several moments he gazed at the dark rose flesh. A deep growl tore through him.

"Mine."

Lily cried out from the sheer ecstasy of having his cool tongue invade her core. Lily's hands roamed her body as her vampire lord greedily drank from her. His lips repeatedly closed over her clit before pulling away to press hot, heated kisses on the delicate flesh. Hazily, she thought of what a decadent sight they made.

*The fallen willingly ravished by the damned. Why am I always scared at first when I love it so much?*

Julian's long fingers penetrated Lily, piercing her thoughts. He worked her into frenzy until the feelings of his mouth, tongue, and fingers finally overcame her. Gripping her fingers in his dark hair, Lily arched her back and screamed his name.

Delighted howls rose from the unholy observers, pulling her from the precipice of unconsciousness. Lily languidly looked upon the masses of moving flesh. Males and females, males with other males, females with males and other females were all taking

part of every perversion known to sex, yet still looking at her and Julian. However, the stares no longer filled her with fear and disgust. Instead, Lily reveled in the unbridled dementia of the room.

They were no longer her enemies. They had become her captive audience.

Softly kissing her nether lips, Julian continued to stroke Lily's damp flesh, bringing forth another cry from her throat. He raised himself up onto his knees and roughly flipped her unsuspecting body over. Forcibly pulling up her hips, he rubbed his erection against Lily, listening to her breathy pants, before slamming into her body.

“Julian!”

Lily was caught in the throes of anguish and gratification. She was helpless, pinned as she was by his body. Lily keened in anticipation. As always, the burning pain of Julian's invasion only enhanced the burning desire she felt for him. Her body shook from the immense force of his thrusts. Great rasping moans tore from her throat and she knew heaven.

Julian gripped the back of her head. He forced her to look up at the countless acts of depravity taking place around them. “Look well, Lily. See what you have caused. You inspire that in them.” He punctuated each word with a thrust.

Fighting back the tears caused by the overwhelming sensations, Lily pushed back against him. Humans weren't supposed to be like animals in lust, but God help her, she was just as animalistic with her lover as vampires were about feeding and fucking.

Julian slammed her head down against the altar and continued to slap his hips into the rounded flesh. “You have no power over anyone, Lily, because of this.” His hand had reached around to cup her quivering flesh. “All that matters to you anymore is fucking—with me or anyone else.”

Whimpering against his words, she gasped, “That's not true! I love you!”

He raised her head up by the hair again. He spoke in her ear and contempt dripped from each word. “Whore, you don't love me. You love this.”

“No! Julian, please—”

He slammed her head back down to the altar. “Shut up! I know it doesn't matter who fucks you as long as you get fucked.” Julian's hatred scorched everything in the dark hall. All movement ceased as Lily's sobs of pain and unwilling pleasure clearly resounded throughout.

“Tell me you love me. Now!”

“I love you!”

“Not...good...enough.” Julian brought her body up again. He wrapped his arms around Lily while continuing his unrelenting assault.

“You make me this way and I hate you for it, Lily. I’m a god and yet you defile me with your lies.”

“I’m not lying. I love you and I’ll never stop.”

Julian lowered his head to her neck. His fangs barely sank beneath the surface of Lily’s skin. Waves of white-hot pain and pleasure radiated throughout her body. Closing her eyes, she reached above her and entwined her arms around Julian’s neck. The primeval rhythm of their mating rapidly threw them and everyone else over the edge. Lily and Julian’s cries of rapture blended with the infernal orgasmic joy of their audience.

It was immoral perfection.

Lily leaned into his beloved embrace. She never wanted to leave. He, however, had other plans. Julian tossed her off himself and the altar.

“Such passion! Now let’s see how much passion can be squeezed out of you before you get fucked to death. It’s such an undeserving mercy for you, my beautiful whore. To die doing what you love—would that we were all so lucky.”

Horror turned her to ice. Julian was once again clothed and sitting on his throne. Several vampires slinked closer to Lily. She gripped his leg and looked into his face. Finding no mercy in his soulless eyes, Lily screamed, “How can you do this to me?! Why are you doing this to me?!”

Julian leaned forward with elegant grace. He gripped her chin and growled, “Because I won’t tolerate your unfaithfulness to me! Have I been your only one, Lily? Have I been the only to touch you? To feel you?”

Her mouth moved, trying to summon up the lie while silently pleading for understanding.

“Don’t bother. I can see the truth in your eyes. You disgust me!” Julian pushed her down from the dais. He impassively watched as several males covered her flailing limbs with their naked bodies. “I’m sure you’ll like these lovers, Lily. Although they’re not as refined in their techniques as I am, I’m sure you won’t complain...for long.”

Watching Lily struggle against them, a sadistic grin twisted his lips. “Don’t think that I never cared for you, darling. Oh, Lily, say hello to my very good friend Cynthia before you die.”

A luscious brunette appeared from behind the throne. Clothed in shades of midnight, her vivid dark beauty unforgettable to Lily, Cynthia captured her attention effortlessly. This was just one of many who had caused countless of hours of pain and bitterness for her. Lily would never forget the moment when she saw both of them together...

Julian smirked while running his hand down Cynthia’s backside. “I’m sure you remember Cynthia, don’t you, Lily? How can anyone forget such a delicious bit of beauty?”

Leaning down, Cynthia captured his lips with her full, glossy mouth. They devoured each other as Lily looked on with sick betrayal. Catching her venomous glare, Cynthia pulled back from Julian with an inhuman smile on her flawless face.

“I definitely remember you, Lily. After all, you stole my life. So I’m just stealing yours.” She maliciously purred, “Don’t hold it against me. You weren’t smart enough to keep it.”

The terrible grin melted into one of enigmatic sadness.

“You still see me as this, don’t you? We’re the same. We always love the ones that hurt us. You forgot what you were, little Lily. You’re just a tool. You forgot that.”

Indescribable torture wracked Lily’s body as the first vampire ripped into her. She mentally shut down as she thought of her ultimate failure. She’d been right. She was going to die that night.

But she died from the desolation of Julian’s deadly faithlessness—his abandonment.

The last thing Lily heard was Julian’s cheerful request of, “Darling, do me a favor. Make sure you stay dead this time.”

*NO!*

Lily shot straight up in her bed. Heart pounding wildly, she felt nauseous and in danger of losing what little food she had in her belly. She thrust her hand beneath the sheet. Lily’s fingers probed between her legs. Although damp and slightly sore, there was obviously no damage.

*Just a nightmare.*

Lily's approaching calm died a quick death when she heard Julian's silky voice float towards her. "What's wrong, darling? Bad dreams?" Emerging from the darkness, he stopped at the footboard and leaned against a post. "Why would such a pure girl like you ever have anything bad to dream about?"

Julian dropped his pose of studied ease and pinned Lily with a menacing stare.

"Unless, oh I don't know, maybe you have something nagging your conscience. Something like guilt." Throwing a stack of letters and photos on the bed, he gave her a few moments to stare at the pile before snapping her attention back to him. "So who is he?"

"What—"

"Don't bother lying. I can see the truth in your eyes."

Lily paled as her nightmare come to life. "You have no right to be going through my things!"

Julian slammed his head against the bedpost. "DON'T!" A small crimson trickle seeped down. He brushed his hair off his face, smearing the blood across his forehead. "All right," he whispered. Looking at her with lifeless eyes, Julian suggested, "Lily, don't say anything else. Just be a good girl and maybe we can move on."

Lily scrambled off the bed. "Julian, I am not going to let you touch me!"

"I'm not going to touch you, Lily."

"No? Then what the fuck are you trying to do?"

Before Julian could answer, a loud pounding shook the door. Their gazes locked onto each other in surprise. Lily knew of only one person who would be out at this hour, coming to her door like an addict.

*God, please don't let him be out there. Make him go away, before anything bad happens.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Dirty Affair with Love

“Lily! Are you in there?” Kerrie’s drunken voice penetrated the dangerous silence. “Clarisse locked me out again...damn bitch. Can I crash here tonight?”

Lily sagged in relief. Her gaze swung from the door back to Julian. She didn’t like what she saw. He seemed like a beast sniffing the air, unsure if Kerrie was harmless or foe. Lily quickly donned his shirt. She moved away from the bed and walked to the door, while keeping Julian in sight. She opened it wide enough to stick her head out.

Kerrie swayed on unsteady legs and started to come inside. Lily put her hands up. “Sorry, Kerrie, but I can’t tonight. I’m kinda busy.” Those were precisely the wrong choice of words.

“Busy? Oh! Sorry, Lily! I didn’t mean to interrupt. I can’t believe you’re finally—”

Lily nervously shouted, “No! I mean, it’s not exactly what you think—”

“You don’t have to explain anything to me. Really. I’m just glad you finally gave Daniel a chance. Hey, Danny! Way to go my man!” Kerrie dissolved into drunken giggles.

*Great! Just what Julian needed to hear.*

“Kerrie, please. It’s not—just let me call you tomorrow. Now I really, really need for you to go.”

Kerrie tossed her brown curls with a laugh. “Hey, not a problem. I’ll find somewhere else to crash. Wait till I see Daniel. That dog! Last I heard he was whining about...well...you know. I never would’ve thought that you and he...well...I know he tried—”

The door opened further, revealing Julian to both dumbfounded girls. Dressed only in his pants, blood absent from his head, he smiled kindly at the shock penetrating Kerrie’s stupor. “Send my apologies to Daniel. I’m the lucky man in Lily’s life now. Kerrie? That was your name wasn’t it?”

The young woman nodded. Julian’s physical effect on her was more apparent because of the alcohol. Although, Lily suspected it’d be the same sans liquor.

“My name is Julian.” He gave her a mesmerizing smile. Casually taking her hand, he lifted it to his mouth and gave it the softest, gentlest kiss. “How do you do, Kerrie?”

Lily elbowed Julian out of the way, breaking his hypnotic hold over Kerrie. Blinking her eyes several times, she eventually focused on Lily once more. “Wow. Definitely not Daniel. Not that that’s a complaint. Umm, damn what was I going to say? Oh yeah. I’ll just crash at Julio’s on the third floor. You haven’t met him yet, have you? You need to meet this guy. I think the two of you would really hit it off.”

Steel laced Julian’s words as he chided, “Kerrie? Are you trying to set my girlfriend up with another guy? That wouldn’t be very nice of you, now would it?”

“Leave her alone. Now.”

Julian slanted Lily a glare of loathing. “I’m not doing anything, darling.”

Kerrie looked between the two in confusion. Lily and Julian seemed more like on the verge of fight, which just didn’t make sense to Kerrie at all. Instead of arguing, she’d be screwing Julian’s brains out if he were hers. Despite her alcoholic fog, Kerrie knew she’d stepped in it and as much as she would love to stand there and stare at Lily’s new guy, she sensed it’d be best for her to go.

That and Lily’s next statement of, “Go to Julio’s and I’ll see you in the morning,” convinced Kerrie it was time to bid adieu.

“Okay.” Her green eyes flitted between Lily and Julian. She felt the need to apologize and said, “And about Julio—I just meant that he’s a really cool guy and I thought you might like to be friends with him or something.”

Lily gave Julian another nasty glare. “I know. It’s okay. I promise. Now will you just go before you pass out and hit your head! Get some sleep!”

Julian slinked his arm around Lily’s shoulders. “I enjoyed meeting one of Lily’s friends. I do hope you’ll give me the chance to get to know you better. You have to visit us one day...or night...Kerrie.”

Warming under his gaze, she promised, “I will. Maybe tomorrow. Nice to meet ya, Julian.” Kerrie grinned and leaned close to Lily. She warned in a loud whisper, “You better keep him away from Clarisse or I bet money she’ll try to snag him for herself.”

Turning around, Kerrie started down the hall. She stopped when reaching the end. Raising a fist, she hammered at the door. “Clarisse! You skank! Hurry the hell up!” She then continued down the hall, rounding the corner while mumbling, “I’m going to rip the lock out of that damn door one of these days.”

Relieved Kerrie was safely away from the volatile situation, Lily closed and locked the door. There was no way Julian would let the subject of Daniel pass. Her nerves threatened to snap but she couldn't chance Julian seeing her lose control. He'd only use it against her. Instead, Lily walked past him to the pitiful hole in the wall that doubled for a closet.

"You've developed quite a life here, darling. Drunken acquaintances, permissive sex, and even lovers-in-waiting. Your mother was always under the impression you'd do more if you weren't stuck in Vickery Hill. I never disabused her of the notion but somehow I never could stomach agreeing with her."

"Be quiet."

"I liked Kerrie. I think I'd also like to meet Clarisse. She sounds like fun. You will introduce us, won't you Lily?"

"Why? So you can screw her behind my back too?"

"I wouldn't."

"Sure could've fooled me with how you were with Kerrie."

"I was being friendly."

"No. You were being a sleeze."

"I was being safe. Think, Lily. We don't want your acquaintances to think you're rotting in some alley when you leave, do we? Now after meeting me, Kerrie will just assume you decided to live happily ever after with your hot new boyfriend."

"What makes you think I'm going anywhere?" she demanded while rummaging in a laundry basket for some underwear and a pair of jeans. Quickly slipping them on, Lily waited for his answer.

"Julian?"

Lily stepped out of the closet. She saw him in the living room, straddling a wooden chair with folded arms and chin resting on top. To the casual observer, he appeared completely relaxed but Lily wasn't fooled. She chose to stand with her back against the wall and waited for Julian to make the first move. She didn't have to wait long.

"Is there a reason why you want to stay?"

"Maybe."

"What?"

“Free will.”

“Really? I don’t think so.” He pursed his lips. “So, Lily, who’s Daniel to you? A boyfriend?”

“No. Whether I slept with him isn’t any of your business either. So let’s just get right to it. No, I haven’t done that either.”

“I haven’t even gotten there yet, Lily. What is he to you?”

“He’s not my boyfriend.”

Julian shook his head. “Oh, I think Kerrie thinks otherwise. What was it she said? Oh yes, I remember now. ‘Way to go my man!’” Julian jumped up from the chair and kicked it viciously, breaking two of the legs. “Now if everything has been innocent between you and this Daniel, why would she think that he was in here?”

Lily sidled away. This was going to be just another one of his sadistic games—one she had no chance of winning. Julian had already read the letters from Daniel and drew his own conclusions. She was already convicted in his mind. Julian was just toying with her, waiting for her to say the wrong thing.

“Julian, it’s not this complicated. Daniel’s a friend—”

Rudely cutting her off, he snarled, “Pay attention, Lily! Once again, why would Kerrie think that you were with Daniel?”

Strain made her temper snap. “Probably because we almost had sex once!”

Julian reared back. His waxen features paled even further. “You almost...did you say?”

Lily refused to falter under the weight of guilt his wounded expression just gifted her. Righteous anger exploded inside Lily and she pushed away from the wall. “I did say! Not only did I say, I’m going to say something more and you’re going to damn well listen! How dare you come into my life and judge me? Once again, what about you? What about all the other women that you were with when you were supposed to be with me? Nicole? Vivian? Cynthia? Those three names ring a bell? How about all the others? Even if I had been with Daniel, what I’ve done these past two years is none of your business!”

Julian remained silent during her vehement tirade. However, her last words inspired an unhealthy reaction. “Like hell it’s none of my business!” Closing the distance between them, he held her upper arms in a vice grip. “Two years or twenty, it doesn’t

make a difference. You are mine! No one has the right to touch you except me! Do you understand me? Do you?”

“What right do you have to claim me as yours? Even if I’m with you, I belong to me. Not to Daniel, you, or anyone else! I belong to me!”

“You sure have changed your tune, darling. Not even an hour ago we both accepted who and what we meant to each other. Now, you’re just ready to toss me aside, aren’t you?”

“You have got to be kidding me! Of all the colossal nerve! You...” Lily sputtered in shock. “I wished I had screwed him!”

“I’d kill you.”

Menace choked the air in Lily’s lungs. She watched in morbid transfixion as Julian’s flinty gaze wavered between azure and gold. “Well, now. It’s a good thing I don’t take the same advice or you’d already be dead.”

Chagrin pulled his mouth for the briefest moments. “We’re different. I have eternity spreading before me. I’ll be damned if I spend it next to someone who can’t give me her loyalty.”

Lily clenched her fists in her hair and screamed. “How the hell are you turning this around on me?!”

“Because you’re lying to me. Now tell me the truth. Or is that too much to ask of you?”

“You immature asshole! If you lived what you preach, you and I would’ve spent the last two years...or however much time I had left...together instead of apart. We’d still be in Vickery Hill and I’d still have a life.”

He tightened his mouth in anger and bit out, “True.”

“What?” Lily felt as if her world had taken a faulty turn.

“I said you’re right.” Julian brushed his hair back in agitation. He began pacing in tight circles. “Maybe I should see this as Karmic Retribution. Maybe I should think this is what I deserve. If I had to honestly answer, I’d say yes. I do deserve this.”

Lily’s mouth fell open. She had never seen this side of Julian. Where was the arrogant smirk? Where was the fine line between insanity and domination? Where was the violence? In the past, he’d destroy a room in a fit of pique. Now, Julian actually admitted to being wrong?

Just who was this man?

“But you know what, Lily? I don’t care. I don’t care what’s fair. I don’t care that I deserve this. What I do want is to kill that little man of yours. What it does mean is this—I own your will, your body, and your heart.”

*I knew it was too good to be true.*

“Stop saying you own me, Julian!”

“But it’s true,” he asserted in a voice filled with terrible grace and dignity. “You don’t belong to me because I make it so. You belong to me because you still love me—”

“That has nothing to do—”

“And that’s the reason why you’ll always be mine.”

Lily wanted to deny it but knew she couldn’t. They stared at each, in hateful passion, before she spoke in a barely audible voice. “I still love you but I wish to God I didn’t. There’s no one less deserving of it than you.”

“And Daniel is someone who deserves it, right?” Julian stalked over to the bed and picked up a strewn letter. He read out loud, mockery heavy in every word, “Lily, I know you’ve been hurt in the past by some jerk but I swear to you that I would never hurt you.’ Airing our dirty laundry, darling?” Julian balled up the letter and threw it, hitting Lily squarely in the chest. “How disgustingly sweet!”

Cringing from the scorn in his voice, she struck back. “What part of me driving a stake in your chest, burning down your house, and decimating your precious family gave you the impression we were still together?”

“If I thought for one moment we were done, I’d have already drained you dry and left you here to rot.”

“You’re so romantic,” she drawled. “It’s no wonder you’ve stolen my heart, sweetie. And what about you? How busy have you been? I can’t imagine you were lonely for long.”

Julian’s lips twitched. All too carelessly he answered, “The fact that I’ve spent the last two years looking for you should show you’re my favorite paramour.”

“I see.”

“Do you really?”

Lily nodded her head and walked over to a small side table. Her fingers ran the rim of the lampshade. “Favorite.” Picking up the lamp, Lily flung it with considerable

might at his dark head. “Fuck you! You fucking, arrogant son of a bitch! I’m not your fancy word for slut!”

Julian dodged the missile. “Fine. Bitch then. You are my bitch just as I’m yours, Lily. I’ve already begged you enough tonight to prove it.”

“You have not!”

“I have. So why don’t you be a good girl and just do it so we can move on.”

“No!”

“WHY NOT?!” he screamed in a pained roar. Tremors possessed his lean frame while a feral glow gleamed from behind his disheveled hair.

“Because I haven’t done anything wrong!” Lily spun on her heel and walked into the kitchen. She opened the fridge and pulled out a soda. Noisily taking a big gulp, she appeared completely unconcerned that her lover? boyfriend? deranged ex-boyfriend? could at any moment turn and snap her neck.

Inwardly, she shook.

Her nightmare showed how dangerous her love for him had been and probably still was.

*What to do?*

Lily turned back to him. She saw Julian in the same spot—head flung back as if in terrible pain. Sorrow drowned her at the thought of losing him once more. He wanted her to beg. Something so childish, so simple, and so twisted.

Eager to please them both, Lily had begged for him to stay tonight. She had accepted his possession and his threat of death, so great was her need for him. She truly loved Julian and would never stop.

*I always beg for you. Even if I won’t admit it, every time I look at you I’m begging. I’m begging now. Please don’t make me leave you. Please...*

But she was also a liar because she loved something more.

Lily remembered the nightmare. She thought of Cynthia’s words.

*“After all, you stole my life. So I’m just stealing yours...you weren’t smart enough to keep it.”*

No.

*I don’t care if it’s stolen. I’m not going to die again. Not for him. Not for anyone.*

This was going to get resolved. No matter what happened.

“Julian?”

He looked over at her with a dead stare.

*She doesn't care. I'm not the only one who exists for her, like she does for me. She could think to replace me with someone else when all that's kept me alive are the thoughts of her. I'm losing Lily. Maybe I already did.*

Julian's entire body shook. Agony turned his gut. He'd never suffered such an emotion as this. Even when Lily had left, all he felt was rage and unfulfilled lust but never this kind of anguish.

A sickly smile pulled the corners of his taut mouth. He'd spent two years searching for the missing half of himself only to find it didn't want him back. Karmic Retribution did exist and he deserved every last bit of it.

Julian Douglas had many sins. Murder, passion, and obsession were rarely indistinguishable to him. As such, he had caused the destruction of many a mortal woman's heart. However, never had he been so *emotionally* entangled in what his little obsessions had felt for another. Many of the women he had seduced loved someone else. That was part of the challenge. It was what had always drawn him towards them.

Yet, those enticements no longer applied to his Lily.

Perhaps it was because she had been the ultimate pursuit. There hadn't another man to woo her away from. The only suitor for Lily's heart had been the weaker, false side of himself.

*Ian.*

Apparently, he was going to pay for being a selfish beast.

Julian smoothed back his hair again. He walked over to the threadbare couch and settled himself, one long leg crossed over the other.

“So, do you love him?”

“What?”

“You heard me. Do you love him?”

Lily took one step before thinking better of it. Distance was always the smarter choice between them and right now she was inclined to make use of her intelligence. She positioned herself across from the brooding male. “No. Screwing does not equal love and almost screwing equals even less. Feel better?”

Julian inclined his head. “I do.” He patted his lap. “Come here, Lily.”

“I don’t think so.” He had accepted her answer far too easily.

“Why not?”

She took a slow slide backwards. “Because I don’t want to.”

“What are you afraid of? Is it the same thing that always sent you running from me?”

Lily’s stomach clenched. “I...”

“I can smell it, you know. The fear. It’s usually intoxicating but not this time.” Julian tilted his head back. “And it’s just gotten stronger. Secrets are part of what drove us apart.”

“Yours too! Not just mine!”

“Agreed. But here we are. Together. Right?”

Lily bit her lip. “Julian, I...” She turned away. She couldn’t admit this final secret. Death had followed her too long. She had to keep running.

*He’s going to be the end of me. I know it. I can’t trust him. I never could, even less now that I’m just a human again. He’ll never be able to protect me. Death wants me back. I’ve cheated it too many times. It’s coming for me and I can’t...WON’T...deal with this.*

Going back to the closet, Lily slipped on her jacket and a pair of shoes. She looked over her shoulder and noted his perfect, precise positioning. Julian was so perfectly imperfect. Once, it was enough. No longer.

Julian was wrong about Daniel and right about her faithlessness. She was in love with someone else—herself. Lily had to remind herself of that, even though the idea of existing without him hurt her so badly she doubted she’d ever recover.

“Where are you going?”

“Out.” Lily never heard Julian get off the couch. He whirled Lily around and slammed her against the door. She flinched from what she saw in his face.

It was more than cruelty. More than violence. More than hate. It was indescribable, something she’d never seen in him before.

“What are you keeping from me?”

“Nothing!”

“You’re lying!”

Lily's terror mated with vulnerability. She wanted out. Now. Her voice cracked as she fought to keep all emotion banished. "I've grown up, Julian. I do what I want, when I want. And what I want is to leave."

He tightened his grip. "There's something more, Lily."

"You're wrong."

Julian hissed a profane curse. "Why are you still like this? Two years ago you wouldn't tell me about Acrymydion or the priest and look what happened!"

Lily refused to cower in the face of his predatory rage. "My fate was mine, Julian."

"Wrong! You should've told me! You should not have kept it a secret!"

"Why not? I should've told you so you could do what? Laugh at me? Tell me how happy you were because it saved you the trouble of killing me yourself? Or was it because someone else was going to take your prize? After all, we both know how much you wanted to be the one to send me into the lake."

Julian snapped. Releasing her arm, he slapped her. The vivid imprint of his fingers glowed obscenely in the dark.

Lily touched her cheek. Madness flirted with betrayal. "Perfect. You hit me for telling you the truth. And you wonder why I don't trust you."

Regret and sorrow tightened his jaw. He roared with guilt and punched the wall above her head. Despite the threatening gesture, he quaked with impotence. Julian's azure orbs darkened with self-loathing.

*She knew what I wanted. She always did because I never made it a point to not let her know. It's how I got close to her. I rubbed it in Lily's face even as I made her scream. I'm sick. I push when I want to pull. I won't admit how much it hurts that she was willing to die alone before coming to me.*

He released her. Lily's haunted gaze shimmered with words she didn't want him to hear.

"It's more than my betrayals, isn't it?"

Lily remained mute, mouth locked against him.

"What has you sick with fear, darling?" he asked gently, almost loving. "What's made you a ghost?"

She whirled away, bruised cheek pressed against the wall. Lily's throat closed in raspy spasms. It was obvious she was trying not to vomit.

Julian touched her shoulder with the tips of his fingers. For a moment, he felt her. Excitement sped throughout his body. It was like before, when they were bonded. Then the connection flickered out. However, it was enough for him to whisper, “There’s no hope in you, darling. None. Why?”

Lily’s resolve splintered under his kindness. “Why are you doing this?! Why won’t you leave me alone? Isn’t it enough that you broke me two years ago? Isn’t it?”

Julian bit back his initial response. She was baiting him, trying to distract his focus, and like a fool, he was all too ready to respond. “You’re broken but it’s not by me.”

“Of course not!” she spat over her shoulder, neatly shrugging his hand off. “It’s not your fault. It’s never your fault.”

Julian stepped back. Violence thrummed inside him. He couldn’t risk letting his instability to dominate him. “You’re still not answering me.”

Lily started laughing. The fine hairs on Julian’s neck stood to attention. Despair colored each note, making him wonder if he’d finally driven her mad. So many emotions ran through him and he couldn’t focus on any one.

*What’s wrong with my darling girl? I don’t like this.*

Julian had thought things were close enough to being the same. Lily had responded to his touch like he expected her to, the way she always had before. But something was terribly wrong.

She stopped laughing.

“Julian...you’ll never understand. You’re a god...immortal. You can’t even comprehend what’s stalking me.”

He turned her around. She didn’t bother to resist. Cupping her face, he dipped his head until it was level with hers. “Stalking you?”

Death loomed over Julian’s naked shoulder. Like always, it beckoned, shimmering and swirling with memories of borrowed time. She slid her submissive attention back to Julian.

*Maybe I should end it now. I’m just so tired.*

Lily’s neck bent to the side. Her breath quickened. “Don’t you miss the way it tastes?”

“What?”

“My blood. Don’t you miss the way it tastes?”

Julian's fangs lengthened instantly. His fingers curved into dangerous claws.

Lily noted his primal reactions. She giggled. "It's probably not as rich as it was once, but I bet it's still good. Do you wanna taste?"

He leaned in. His nose brushed her neck, mouth open with hunger. "Why are you doing this?"

"Why aren't you doing this?"

Julian shuddered. "Don't."

"Don't what?"

"Don't distract me." Julian deliberately stepped back. "Who's stalking you, Lily?"

She closed her eyes in frustration and pushed past him. "Pussy."

He ignored the insult. "I don't understand this...you."

"What's there to understand? I take it you got what you came for, right? We fucked. It was awesome. Let's do it again sometime."

"Quit trying to anger me!"

Lily shrugged her shoulders. "Sorry."

He let out a ragged sigh. "I'm here, darling. I'm not going anywhere. So just tell me the truth. Please." She didn't react. Instead, she headed for the door—oblivious or uncaring that he would never allow her to leave.

She stopped when she reached the threshold. "You don't want to drink from me. Do you think I'll taste bad?"

He narrowed his eyes in confusion. "No."

"Why not?" Before Julian could answer, she clarified. "Because I will."

"Will what?"

"Taste bad."

"Why do you say that?" he asked cautiously, unnerved by the emotionless currents drifting between them.

Lily gifted Julian a tragic smile. "Because it's true. You know what else is true? We're not going to live happily ever after." Her voice dropped to a brittle whisper. "You're wrong to try to make other people think otherwise"

"Living happily ever after is such an infantile notion, Lily. Only fools like Kerrie buy that."

Humiliation and hopelessness burned at the core of Lily's damaged heart. "Not just Kerrie." Giving into the devastation of her emotions, she slid down to the floor. Ugly sobs burst from her lips. All too soon she lost control and began crying as she hadn't cried in years.

Julian's legs buckled from Lily's infinite sadness. Almost without thought, Julian dropped to his knees and enveloped her in a hug. He felt her body jerk in surprise at the tenderness of the gesture.

"Don't cry, darling. Not for this," he murmured while pressing countless kisses against her hair. "I told you already—you belong to me. Eternity is ours. There is no Lily without Julian and no Julian without Lily. Isn't that good enough?"

She wailed louder and began rocking violently. When she tried to bash her head against the door, Julian covered it with his hands. He whispered nonsensical words of endearments, hoping to soothe the anguish inside her heart. When she wouldn't stop sobbing, he pressed his mouth against hers. Taking the jagged gasps into his body, he tasted her tears and they made him want to cry too.

"Lily..."

Julian felt that small part of him miraculously start to expand; to feel something other than just his selfish desires.

*Is this what love was? Could it be?*

Trailing the end of those thoughts, he felt a great internal struggle. Love? Why would he ever want to be tainted by it? It was weakness. Love had and always would be the end of all things. To love this woman was to sign his own death warrant.

*Didn't you already do that two years before? Aren't you a target now? Your bloodline's been condemned.*

No, this was different.

Possession was his only intent when it came to Lily Walker.

Doubt slyly touched him. Already Julian felt conflicted, taking such strange joy in comforting her, even though it obviously wasn't working. What was he doing?

*I'm loving her.*

Julian's ashen features molded themselves into an exquisite mask. Only the deep blue of his eyes betrayed the maelstrom brewing beneath the surface. Love? No, he couldn't possibly be succumbing to that insidious sentiment.

*Vile weakness.*

All he had to do was look at Lily and know love wasn't for him. No matter how badly he had treated her, and undoubtedly would continue to treat her, Lily still came back for more. She lacked pride, restraint—power. There was no doubt he was mad for her, but Julian could never, ever love her.

*We all have a purpose and a place. Time has proven to me that I'm not worthy of sustaining love, only destroying it. That's what I do. That's all I am...all I'll ever be. I won't survive love. I'd rather be dead than know I'm in love with this pet.*

Julian pulled away from Lily. Standing up, he stared at her crumpled body. He waited until her sobs subsided. “If you need my will and strength to destroy any who stalk you, let me know now. Otherwise, pull yourself together.”

Lily flung her hair back and stood up to face him. The room was empty and so was she. “I'd rather die than ask for your help, Julian.”

“So you are going to die, are you?” he pounced, reveling in the familiar emotions of rage and bloodlust.

“Of course I am. I'm just a girl now. Unlike before, I don't know my expiration date. If there was any upside to being a Resurrector, that was it. At least I knew when I was going to die. Especially, thanks to your oh-so-helpful insight. Six weeks, right? I'd say I hit that on the nose. So why are you asking me now? Isn't that one of your bloodline's talents? To see how much time someone has left? So tell me, Julian. How much time?”

His mouth tightened. Apathy marked him. “I can't read you well. I don't...I don't know.”

“Really?”

Julian bristled at her doubt. “Really.”

“Hmm...I wonder why that is. Strange.”

“I agree. Now answer me. You're just a girl like everyone else. Or almost like everyone else. Is that all?”

Her shuttered gaze lit up with ghastly humor. “That's all.”

Julian reached out to probe Lily's mind, something he'd never been able to do before, but surely could do now. An intricate barrier of sterile walls instantly rose up to

meet him. He couldn't find one trace of emotion in her much less the trail of any secret. It was as if her mind was completely dead.

Helplessness enraged him.

*I'll make her tell me. And if she still won't tell, I'll make her pay.*

"Okay, Lily. Keep your secrets. Shut your mouth but don't pout when I do this." Julian dragged her protesting body over to the bed. "You don't want to talk and I'm not through with you yet, darling. Now what do you think I should do about it?"

Lily struggled to get out of his grasp. She growled between clenched teeth, "Let go of me!"

He hurled her onto the ruffled bed before throwing himself on top of her. "Not happening, darling. I told you I've had two years to plan this night. You didn't think a slap and tickle was going to satisfy me, now did you?"

Lily knew he was trying to punish her for her silence. She let out a low whine. "Julian, don't—"

"Your 'don't' doesn't mean anything to me. You had your chance. Take your secrets to the grave because I just don't care anymore. I forgot what you are. You're just a pretty doll I play with when I'm bored." Correctly reading the look of pain that flashed in her eyes, Julian poured more salt into the wound. "Isn't that right?"

Snaking an arm out from under him, she attempted to deliver a right cross only to have him block it. He captured her fist and cursed it with a languorous kiss. "Nah, ah. I didn't pull this string, poppet."

Lily's expressive eyes blazed. Poppet had always been his pretty euphemism for puppet. Puppet being no better than marionette or Mary; a common slur for Resurrectors.

"Oh, that's good. I can feel your hate, Lily. I always did think that taking you in hate is as much fun as taking you when you're repulsively in love with me."

"What does it matter to me? Fucking you now would be as memorable as every other time—barely worth the memory. Get it over with, Ian."

Julian clenched his jaw as he felt the impact of her well-placed barbs. He gathered his turbulent emotions under control and smiled with such incredible sweetness. Lily's unguarded reaction proved she was reminded of his other self.

The one she just called him out of spite.

That damnable Ian.

It seemed like his Lily was a slow learner. It was once again time to teach his little poppet a lesson. It was also time to learn something himself.

There was no place for love in a vampire's life. Love was just a sick, dirty affair Julian needed no part of.

Not even for Lily.

## AUTHOR NOTE

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