

MOON DANCE

BLOOD BOUND SERIES BOOK 1



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Moon Dance

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Аннотация

Envy's life was great. Great brother, great boyfriend, and the best job a girl could ask for... tending bar at the most popular clubs in the city. At least it was great until she got a call from one of her best friends about her boyfriend doing the vertical limbo on the dance floor at Moon Dance. Her decision to confront him begins a chain of events that will introduce her to a dangerous paranormal world hidden beneath the everyday humdrum. A world where people can transform into jaguars, real life vampires roam the streets, and fallen angels walk among us. Devon is a werejaguar, a little rough around the edges and one of the joint owners of Moon Dance. His world is tilted on its axis when he spies an alluring vixen with red hair dancing in his club, armed with a cynical heart and a taser. With a vampire war raging around them, Devon vows to make this woman his... and will fight like hell to have her.

“Moon Dance”

Blood Bound Series Book One

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Prologue

Angeles National Forest is home to the dangerous cougars and imported jaguars that roam the vast forest. Sometimes, on clear nights, their numbers grow for a little while as the LA were-animals, or shifters as folklore has come to know them, roam the untamed land among their distant cousins. It's those nights that the real animals hunker down in their dens while the predators from the city invade their territory long enough to hunt, or on rare occasion, settle fights that can't be settled on human turf.

There's nothing more vicious than when those shifters fight and, if one of them are injured, they become just as dangerous to humans as their animal counterparts. To protect the humans they live among, shifter disputes, when possible, are always done out of the range of those humans and the best place is deep within their native hunting grounds.

Tonight the forest became hauntingly quiet as the two owners of the biggest club within the city enter the untamed land, stripping the clothes from their backs to let their inner beast run

free. Tonight they were hunting for the grave of a vampire that could destroy them both.

Deep within the forest where no humans could hear them, Malachi, the leader of a small jaguar clan, sprinted through the darkness toward his adversary... a man he should have never trusted over his best friend. His target was another shifter, this one with the blood of the cougar running through his veins, Nathaniel Wilder... his business partner for the last 30 years.

Malachi broke into the clearing to find Nathaniel standing there waiting on him in human form. Taking a couple steps forward, it was like walking from one form into another as Malachi reverted back to his human shape. Both of them were lethal no matter which form they shifted into. As humans they were both athletic with steely muscles tensed under soft skin. Shifters were slow to age and both men barely looked past 30 even though they were well into their 50's.

Had this been a Hollywood movie, it would have taken several minutes to be grossly changed, but this was reality and there were no drooling monsters in this clearing. Nudity was nothing to a shifter and the moon beamed down like a spotlight through a break in the storm clouds above them.

"It doesn't have to come to this," Nathaniel said, as he held his ground while trying to talk reason into his friend. "Listen to me! It was thirty years ago and things have changed... I have changed."

"Thirty years' worth of lies!" Malachi thundered, his voice

echoing in the clearing. His gaze trailed to the spot he'd buried Kane and he felt the sting of moisture gather in his eyes. "Because of you, I bound Kane to the dirt... because of you I have forsaken him for thirty years!"

"I can't let you dig him up, Malachi! You know what will happen if you do," Nathaniel watched nervously as Malachi gazed longingly upon the grave of the man that had once been his best friend. He'd never understood it. Kane was a vampire and dangerous.

Kane had also been one of the two things standing in the way of the partnership forming between the jaguars and the cougars... Kane and Malachi's beautiful, deceitful, cheating wife Carlotta. Nathaniel had loved her first. He hadn't meant for it to turn out this way. In the end, Nathaniel had taken care of the problem in a jealous rage... killing two birds in one fell swoop.

"He was my best friend and he never betrayed me! You were the one who stabbed me in the back!" Malachi blinked back the tears of fury, as he reached up and touched the earring he was wearing; Kane's earring. What had he done? When he'd found Kane bent over his dead wife, he'd paused in confusion, until Nathaniel had confirmed Kane as the murderer.

She'd died right here in this field, so he'd thought it only right to bind Kane to this land... in this soil. He'd even stolen Kane's spell book and used it against him for revenge.

Yeah, Nathaniel was right about one thing. Most vampires were evil, but there were a few exceptions and Kane had been

one of them. But nothing was more evil than what he himself had done. This spell could only be reversed by Kane's soul mate.

Malachi had thought it funny at the time because Kane had been ageless and yet had never met his soul mate. In the past, he and Kane had often joked that such a woman would never be born. His mind flashed back to Kane's smile as he'd said, 'god would have to have a sense of humor to ever create a woman that would put up with some of his antics.'

"He's been under there too long." Nathaniel warned. "With that kind of blood lust and insanity riding him... if you free Kane now, he will only kill us."

Malachi's head snapped up and he glared at Nathaniel. "He will only have to kill me because you will already be dead."

With the threat issued, both men shifted once again into their animal forms.

On the edge of the campground nearest the massive game preserve Tabatha King, or Tabby as everyone seemed to call her, sat on the steps of her parent's huge camper looking up at the stars peeking out of the thick clouds. She blew her bangs out of her eyes glad it had finally stopped raining.

This was the first time she'd ever been camping and the last thing she wanted to do was be cramped up inside the RV. She'd been so excited about this trip and was even happier when they'd agreed to bring the small family dog Scrappy. It'd taken a lot of begging, but after promising to take care of her little best friend,

a Yorkie puppy, she'd finally won her reluctant parents over.

Scrappy was currently barking out at the darkness, wiggling around on his leash, wanting to chase the shadows that had gotten his attention. The little girl gasped when Scrappy suddenly pulled free of his leash and ran off. She stood up on the steel steps when the puppy darted through a small opening in the bottom of the fence that separated the campground from the game reserve.

"Scrappy no!" Tabby cried out and ran after the dog. Her parents had trusted her not to lose him. Stopping at the fence, she inhaled while staring out at the darkness of the trees. "I'm not a coward." She bit her bottom lip in determination before dropping to her knees to investigate the opening.

After a couple of small scrapes, she'd squeezed through the same hole in the fence and was running through the woods following the sound of distant yapping. "You're gonna get me in trouble," she whispered harshly, then started clicking her tongue knowing the puppy often came to the sound.

"Tabby, where are you?"

Behind her, Tabatha heard her mother calling but she was more interested in getting her dog back to the campsite. Scrappy was her dog and she had to take care of him. So instead of calling back to her mom or to the puppy, she stayed quiet and followed the sound of Scrappy's high-pitched barking.

It wasn't long before Tabatha had to stop for a minute and catch her breath. She leaned back against a tree and put her hands on her dirty knees, breathing and listening to the sounds of the

forest. She'd always wanted to stand in the middle of the woods and just listen like the Indians did on the TV movies.

The rain clouds that had parted for a little while came back and the bright moonlight suddenly disappeared. Her eyes widened when she realized she couldn't see the lights from the campground anymore.

Taking a tentative step forward, she looked around wildly but all she saw was darkness, barely discernable tree trunks, and even darker shadows. She whimpered when something growled off in the distance behind her. Deciding she didn't like that direction, she took off running without looking back.

After what seemed like forever, she heard Scrapy barking again and darted in that direction hoping whatever had growled wasn't chasing her. She heard another growl but this time it was coming from somewhere in front of her.

Digging her heels into the ground, she tried to slide to a stop but the soil was covered with slick leaves and muck from the rain. Instead of stopping, she slid even further on her side before dropping down a gradual slope.

The breath was knocked out of her when her body hit a fallen tree stopping her slide. The first thing she noticed after catching her breath was that Scrapy wasn't barking anymore. She heard the growl again and started to climb back up the hill when she heard a soft whimper. Pushing up on her knees, she peeked over the tree trunk and saw a small clearing where the moonlight was shining straight down.

Right there in the center was Scrappy, whining like he'd just been beat up by the dog down the street at home. The puppy was flat on the ground and crawling backwards. Her blue eyes widened when she saw why. Two animals were slowly moving toward each other in the clearing and Scrappy was right in the middle.

“Dummy,” Tabby hissed under her breath.

She recognized the animals from pictures her dad had shown her before they went on the trip. One was a cougar and the other she recognized from television... a jaguar. She loved to watch animal shows and wasn't squeamish like her mommy was when the animals on TV tried to attack each other. But this was different... it was real and a little frightening.

They were cats that could eat you, big ones too. The graceful animals circled each other growling deep in their throats and their eyes glimmered like golden medallions. The deadly sound carried on the breeze, blowing toward Tabatha as she continued to watch them with nervous awe.

“Come on Scrappy,” she whispered, hoping the huge cats didn't hear her. “Get over here before one of them steps on you.” She was going to say ‘eats you’ but she didn't want to scare the poor puppy any more than it already was.

The cats suddenly screamed making Tabatha cover her ears with her palms because it was so loud and scary sounding. They ran at top speed across the clearing, making Scrappy tuck his tail between his legs and squeal out of fear.

Seeing the traumatized puppy, Tabatha scrambled over the tree and ran toward Scrappy as fast as she could. She was closer to Scrappy than the cats were and dove down, quickly covering his small body with hers just as the two animals leapt up and collided in the air directly above her.

“Please don’t hurt my dog!” she screamed.

She screamed again when sharp claws raked her arm and another grazed down her back. The cats hit the ground directly behind her with a bone-jarring thud, growling and screaming at one another. She remained hunched over Scrappy, who was still shaking and whimpering softly, not daring to look at the animals fighting only a few feet behind her.

Tabatha was afraid to move and held onto the dog as tightly as she could. Her eyes were clenched and she started whispering to Scrappy to run and get help, if one of the cats got her too. Something wet and warm sprayed across her back but she still didn’t move. Finally, the fighting stopped and she chanced a look over her shoulder.

She started shaking and crying when she saw two men lying behind her with blood all over them. Tabatha slowly rose to her knees with Scrappy in her arms and started to back away. Where had the cougar and the jaguar gone? Did they attack these two men then run away? Why didn’t the men have any clothes on?

Nathaniel suddenly opened his eyes and bared very sharp teeth at her.

Tabatha stumbled backwards and nearly fell but regained her

footing. Scrappy squealed again when the man's growl mimicked that of the cougar and fought his way out of Tabby's arms. He ran away into the forest yelping out his fear.

Malachi twitched as blood gushed from his chest. He opened his mouth and growled one word toward the little girl.

"Run!" his voice ended with the ear-piecing scream of a jaguar.

Tabatha didn't think twice about obeying. She turned on her heels and ran from the clearing without daring to look back. She didn't care where she was going; only that she got away from the scary men covered in blood.

"Thank you and this is the local news. Tonight a local family has reason to celebrate. Their daughter, Tabatha, was finally found wandering aimlessly within Angeles National Forest after going missing three days ago from a campsite near Crystal Lake to find the family dog. Apparently the dog had freed itself from its leash and run into the forest. The seven year old courageously chased after the dog and wasn't found until this morning. Unfortunately, the dog wasn't found with her. According to officials, she is at the Community Hospital recovering from shock, as it appears she has survived a cougar attack. Little Tabatha kept telling the forest rangers about two injured men in the forest but after a thorough search of an area of five thousand square miles, nothing has been found. We'll fill you in more later in the hour."

Chapter 1

10 years later...

Loud music pumped rhythmically from the club, its large purple neon sign shifting colors in synch with the beat. The light cast an eerie glow onto the building across the street. On the roof of that building, a man with short, light blonde hair stood with one foot resting on the edge. He leaned forward, an elbow braced on his bent knee, while he smoked a cigarette.

Kane Tripp bent his head slightly and ran a hand through the short spiky hair. He'd hated cutting it, missed the length it had been. He could still remember the feel of its silkiness caressing his lower back. Lifting the cigarette to his lips, he inhaled deeply knowing he missed a lot of things, like the cigarettes he used to smoke before he was buried alive and left for dead.

Forty long years ago he'd been caught off guard by Malachi, the leader of a small jaguar clan, and accused of murdering the shifter's mate. Prior to that night, Kane had been in good standing with the jaguars, and their leader had been one of his closest friends. Kane's lips thinned at the memory. Malachi had tried, judged, and sentenced him in a fit of rage.

Using a spell from the very book Kane had thought he'd hidden so carefully, Malachi had bound him with a curse, unable to move or talk... unable to even defend himself. Then he'd removed Kane's bloodstone earring that allowed him the freedom of walking in the daylight. The bloodstones had once belonged to the first vampire, Syn.

Kane had once asked how there could have been a first and the answer had startled him.

Syn had come to this world alone, injured and starving. A young man had found him and in his starvation, Syn had taken his blood. The vampire quickly learned that the humans of this world were fragile creatures, whose soul would leave them if he shared his blood, in hopes of creating a family on this planet. But once their souls were gone, they were useless to him and little more than monsters.

During his endless life, Syn had only found three such humans who retained their souls... becoming his children. The only difference was that once they'd been turned, the sun would burn... leaving them and their monster siblings to hide from the daylight. This had never been a problem on Syn's planet because of the bloodstone.

The thick armbands Syn had been wearing came from his own world and were made out of the Bloodstone. Chipping off a piece of one of the armbands, he fashioned them into a ring, a necklace, and a single earring. Kane once again reached up and touched the earring he was wearing.

Where the bloodstone had given him a semi-normal life... it had been Syn's book of spells that had been Kane's downfall. Kane had left it for his chosen to use wisely while he slept. Within it was the damning spell, a way to put down the soulless children if they became too big of a risk to the humans.

As the damning spell was used on him, Kane could only watch

with dark, unblinking eyes as his former friend shoveled the black soil on top of him. The last thing he remembered seeing was the star filled sky above a forest of trees.

The darkness had been all consuming and so silent. The spell kept him bound but he could feel things in the earth slithering over him. Tiny, mortal creatures that avoided eating his undead flesh but unknowingly gnawed at his soul.

As time passed, he thought for sure he had gone mad, and then he started hearing sounds every so often... voices. They'd been welcome to him in his prison and he yearned to hear more. Sometimes he heard whole families, and other times he heard only adults.

At times he would try fighting the spell, to call for help or even be some kind of company for himself. The magic held him fast, rendering him completely powerless. He knew this spell... had used it on monsters. It was a complex bit of magic that required the blood of a loved one to release him. A spell of love so strong that only the victim's soul mate could break.

It had always worked with the soulless vampires because you had to have a soul to call to a soul mate. He had used the spell more than once to rid the world of his demonic murdering siblings who knew nothing but bloodlust.

Kane laughed spitefully at the haunting memory of knowing he was doomed... because he didn't have a soul mate. At least, he had never met such an enigma. And if he did have one, then it was unlikely she would just stumble over his grave while bleeding.

Malachi had been so heartbroken... he'd loved his wife so much that he wanted Kane to know the depth of such love and yearn for it.

Yearn for it he did. Many times he would shed tears, begging for whatever god would listen, to bring his soul mate to him so he could be free. Had he truly killed his friend's wife, then it would have been a just punishment. But he had been innocent of such a crime.

One night, long after he'd given up all hope... he heard it. The distinct sound of Malachi's roar broke through his insane inner monologue, accompanied by another animalistic scream of fury. Then to his shock, he heard the voice of a little girl directly above him screaming at them not to hurt her puppy.

The sound of her small, frightened voice broke something inside him, making him crave to be free, so he could protect her from the beast in the night.

'Malachi won't hurt your puppy little one,' Kane whispered mentally.

It was true. Malachi wouldn't hurt anyone unless they'd severely wronged him in some way... especially a child. Knowing his friend was somewhere above him, Kane felt a spark of life return to him. He grew angry when the girl screamed again and he heard something land hard on the ground. Blood... he smelled freshly spilled blood seeping through the soft earth toward him.

It was the most welcome thing he'd ever encountered. The scent invaded his mind and nearly drove him to even greater

heights of insanity, knowing he was unable to reach for it. He was so weak from spending so much time without a single drink... thirsting to death yet never dying. That was when he felt one of his fingers twitching.

Kane concentrated on this and set what was left of his mind to trying to move. He felt the days pass, basing them on the heat he felt from the ground above him. The scent of the blood surrounded him now, driving him onward. Finally, he was able to slowly work his arms and started the slow process of trying to dig himself out of his own grave.

More days passed and when his hand finally broke the surface, he literally cried tears of joy. Pulling himself out of the dirt, Kane opened his eyes and stared upward, laughing almost maniacally when he saw a black sky and stars overhead. Looking back down at the ground, he noticed a piece of cloth that had small droplets of blood dried on it. Picking it up, he held it to his nose inhaling the scent of the blood that had freed him.

Keeping the reminder of his savior clenched tight in his fist, he heaved the rest of his body from the ground. Malachi and the shifter that had really killed the jaguar's wife lay dead only a few feet from his grave.

Looking past them toward the forest, he knew the girl was long gone but Kane was convinced the child was his soul mate. Who else could have broken the spell Malachi placed on him?

Too weak to go in search of the girl, Kane crawled over to Malachi, seeming to tenderly touch the man's cheek. Turning his

face toward him, Kane's breath left him in confusion. Malachi was wearing the bloodstone earring. His earring!

Within an instant of rage and a movement too fast to detect, Kane stood up with the earring held in his fist. Looking over at Nathaniel, the man that had framed him, Kane gathered the darkness around him like a cloak and vanished into the darkness.

Kane exhaled and watched the smoke drift through the air, curling in front of him before blowing away on the breeze. He'd spent the last ten years roaming from country to country, continent to continent, learning everything he'd missed during his thirty-year prison sentence.

He'd slowly built his strength back up, starting with a white Yorkie puppy he'd found cowering inside a hallowed out tree in that forest. It had been someone's pet and he'd felt remorse for doing such a thing, but the need to feed was stronger than his guilt at the time.

Only after he'd fed had he realized the pup belonged to the child that had freed him. Feeling a slight spark of life still within the little fur ball, he did the damndest thing. Biting his own wrist, Kane forced a couple of drops to land on its pink tongue then laid the pup on the ground wondering what the hell he was doing. It would never work... would it?

She'd saved him twice and not even known it. The memory of her frightened voice still had the power to jerk him from his deepest sleep. He wished he'd seen her... just a glimpse to go with the voice that haunted him.

Reaching into his pocket, he took out the small collar and stared down at the bone shaped tag on it. He knew the family name but the address on it was no longer valid... hadn't been for years. When he finally learned how to work a computer, he'd done a search but the girl's parents were dead and the house had been sold. The daughter, whom he was sure was the one who freed him, had vanished without a trace.

Kane tossed his cigarette by his left foot and stomped it out. Upon returning to Los Angeles, he'd immediately returned to the club Malachi had once lived in and ran, only to find it had been sold and his children had moved to a new address. The new place had once been nothing but an abandoned warehouse, but the jaguars had recently renovated it and turned it into a nightclub to fit the times. Malachi's children now ran the establishment.

He shook his head wondering how Malachi could bring himself to remarry knowing how much he'd loved his first wife. She had been his soul mate and even though shifters were known for their sexual appetites, once they met their soul mate it was nearly impossible to love another.

When Kane had researched it, he'd noted that Malachi's new wife had born him four children then died in childbirth to their youngest son Nick.

Malachi had died the night he'd heard the roar from underground, but Kane still felt the need for revenge clawing at his insides. Almost all vampires are born from the darkness and maybe Syn had been wrong about him being so different from his

evil siblings. Just maybe losing his mind for thirty torturous years had done enough damage to where now he was no exception. His mind was still in the dark place where Malachi had put him.

As far as Kane was concerned, it was the jaguars who had drawn first blood. Now he was back to pay his respects in kind... on the whole damned race of shifters, starting with Malachi's children. Oh, but he wouldn't stop there. Next would be the children of the shifter that had framed him... Nathaniel Wilder.

Creating followers to provide him with blood hadn't been difficult. Kane was still amazed at the whole underground Goth scene in the inner city. Many of them only dreamed of being what he was... a true vampire instead of a Goth wanna-be.

All he'd had to do was turn one, and then leave his soulless underling to his own devices. He'd chosen the most dangerous of the group... the one that seemed to have lost his soul already to the darkness. Raven, a rogue, who had been a borderline psychopath as a human... a Goth outcast, who was hungry for blood long before ever having the true need for it.

Raven was the only person Kane had ever told about the backstabbing shifters framing him then burying him alive. He didn't know why he'd told Raven... boredom maybe.

Kane had set the rogue free on the city. Raven had been angry at the world before being reborn as a child of the night and now Kane had given him an outlet for that anger. Raven had taken it upon himself to exact revenge in Kane's name and the soulless vampire used his new abilities to their fullest extent.

He didn't bother trying to talk Raven out of it because it fit in perfectly with his plans of setting up the rest of Malachi's family for the fall. Why would he protect the shifters from Raven? The most he had offered was to tell the boy that he didn't have to kill humans to feed, that he didn't have to do any damage at all, if he didn't want to. It wasn't his fault that Raven had chosen to inflict death instead.

The first time Raven had killed had been the only time Kane had stepped in, catching the boy before he left the dead lying with the mark of the vampire within easy view of the humans. Keeping his kind secret was ingrained within his self-preservation and he had forgotten to share that secret with Raven. Kane then showed him how to slice through the fang marks and make it look more like a simple sadistic murder.

Raven had taken to planting his victims near Moon Dance for the authorities to find. It was the perfect arrangement. Most vampires were innately evil so Kane had spent most of his undead life within the reach of murderers. Seeing this boy kill seemed only natural for his kind.

Had Syn been awake to witness the killing spree, he would have put the world out of its misery by killing Raven or binding him to the grave. Now that Kane had experienced such a punishment, he would rather a quick death be the choice.

Before his banishment, he'd been friends with one other vampire... Michael. They'd been together longer than either of them could probably remember or even wanted to. They'd both

been gifted with the bloodstones because they had retained their souls... they and Michael's brother Damon.

Michael was a good man... still on the side of the angels as they say, though he'd heard through the grape vine that Damon had developed a dark side and was taking it out on his brother. Maybe he'd pay Damon a little visit after he was finished here and teach him some manners. Kane wondered about the sudden sibling rivalry because Michael had loved his brother... but things always had a way of changing.

Kane didn't want Michael to know the evil that the grave had left crawling around inside him. He'd spent some of his time in the last couple of weeks watching Michael from a distance. He knew Michael and the oldest jaguar son, Warren, were now friends... just like he and Malachi had once been.

Shifters were traitors and Michael had yet to find that little fact out. By getting the shifters out of the way, he would be doing Michael one last favor... for old times' sake.

Kane reached up, touching the earring that housed the bloodstone knowing it had always restricted him from killing humans. If his soul were truly evil, then the magic within the bloodstone would not work for him. He'd often wondered how Malachi could have overlooked that simple fact... the proof of his innocence had been right in front of him.

No matter... He'd spent thirty years in his prison for something he hadn't done. "Payback will be hell my friends."

“Telemarketer?” Chad asked, as he tried to hide his smirk, while his little sister slammed the phone down hard enough to make it fall off the wall. It landed with a crash on the floor.

Envy kicked the phone down the hall pretending it was her boyfriend's head before turning on her brother. “Are you all dogs, or is it just the ones I date?”

Chad held his hands up in mock surrender, “In my opinion, girls are just as bad. Now calm down and tell big brother what happened.”

Envy laid her forehead against the coolness of the wall. She refused to let even one tear well up enough to escape. She didn't like Trevor enough to cry over him and she was seriously getting tired of all guys lacking in one way or another. “Jason just called to ask me out. He thought I was single again because he just ran into Trevor at a new dance club. He was practically screwing another girl right there on the dance floor.”

Chad shook his head. He'd feel no pity for Trevor once his sister got her hands on him. “How about we go clubbing then?” he cocked an eyebrow, not wanting to miss this for the world.

Envy smiled, liking that idea, “Give me ten minutes to get ready.”

Chad nodded and sat down on the edge of the sofa and clicked on the remote to watch the news, though he wasn't paying it any attention. He hadn't wanted her dating Trevor anyway. He knew the guy acted like an all American, rich, college prep just to throw everyone off his scent, but that didn't mean he liked him

lying to Envy about who he really was. If Trevor was going to sleep with her, then she needed to at least know the truth about who she was screwing.

Starting a relationship out with a lie wasn't the best way. If you were going to lie, then you shouldn't get involved in the first place. He'd cornered Trevor the last time he'd seen him at the station and told the undercover agent to either tell Envy the truth about what he was doing or to stay the hell away from her. It wasn't his fault Trevor didn't listen to anyone but himself.

It angered him to think that Trevor might be using Envy while he did undercover work in the bar scene. With her being a bartender for a lot of the clubs, it gave Trevor a reason to follow her into the buildings before they opened and stay till after they closed. Being there without the crowds allowed Trevor to do a lot more snooping and Envy was none the wiser.

Chad refused to go undercover, even though the Special Forces team had been trying to drag him into it for a while now. The closest he'd come so far, was being their favorite guy to call when it was time to kick in doors and take people down. And that was fine with him. He would much rather kick the ass of a bad guy, then just sneak around chatting and shuffling papers, trying to find dirt on someone.

Now their friend Jason, on the other hand, would be much better boyfriend material for Envy. She'd gone to school with Jason, but therein lay the problem. Jason had crushed on her all during high school and hung out at the house so much that Envy

considered him a brother... not a guy.

Jason had joined the Angeles National Forest Rangers directly out of school and had held the same job ever since. Envy still loved hanging out with Jason. She also got to see her best friend Tabatha more often, since Tabatha was part of Jason's unit with the rangers.

Chad got up from the sofa and stood outside Envy's bedroom door. They had been roommates for the last four years, since their parents had died in a car wreck, and they'd gotten along wonderfully. He was a cop and she was on call for bartending at several of the clubs within the city.

The only reason he didn't say anything about her getting a "real" job was because most nights she made more money than he did. That made things even better because when rent came due, Envy was the one that usually paid it, while he took care of everything else.

"What club?" he asked through the door.

"The new one called Moon Dance," Envy swept some of her long strawberry hair up in a ponytail, leaving the rest to hang down her back in long layers. "I might as well apply as a bartender while we're there."

Chad frowned. "That's the one out toward the end of town, right?" He walked back to his room without waiting for her reply. Recently, things down on that end of the city had gotten a little dangerous. Disappearances were the most prominent danger and quite a few bodies had been found within a city block of that club.

So far there was nothing they could link directly to Moon Dance, except that the victims of choice were all club goers. It was just the time frame that Chad and a lot of other people found suspicious. There had been some question as to whether or not there was a serial killer hanging out at that bar. Several of the latest victims had been last seen within the club. As a police officer, he couldn't overlook the probability that there was a connection.

Since his gun and badge were already in the car, Chad grabbed the small taser and slid it into the back waistband of his pants. With all the bad stuff going on down there, he wanted Envy to have it just in case something went wrong while they were in the club.

Coming out of his room, he glanced down the hallway and stopped dead in his tracks when he saw his sister. A black leather skirt with lace peeking out the bottom at mid-thigh covered her legs followed by a black lace belly shirt. There were leather patches only where it counted... enough to hide her breasts and show off her slim belly and navel.

She was also wearing a pair of black leather boots that came just over the knees with dainty link chains around the ankles. A necklace their mother had given her years ago graced her neck with a beautiful piece of amethyst quartz hanging from it. Most of her red hair was tied up in a high ponytail with some of it falling over one shoulder.

Her make-up was tastefully done with a bit of black eyeliner

and shadow and a dark shade of lipstick. She looked like a dominatrix.

“Damn, out for blood are we?” Chad cocked an eyebrow, giving her the once-over twice. He had a mind to cancel the night out and make her go back to her room for safety reasons.

“Well, I have decided,” Envy raised a delicate eyebrow, “After I take care of Trevor, I’m going to have fun! From now on, I refuse to date just one guy. I don’t want a boyfriend... I want a LOT of them! That way when one acts like a jerk, it won’t matter because I’ll have others that will be more than happy to kick his ass.”

“Yeah, I remember how well that went over in high school.” Chad shook his head, knowing his sister was way more innocent than she pretended to be, “Let’s take my car in case the station calls.”

“Only if I get to play with the blue lights,” Envy smiled, knowing he would let her.

Chad sighed and started walking out to the car. “I swear you’re worse than a kid in a toy store squeezing every stuffed animal that makes noise and driving everyone insane.”

“What?” she laughed. “I like the blue lights. People get out of our way when I turn them on.”

“Like the time you did it when we ran out of coffee?” he asked. “You do know that’s a waste of taxpayer’s money, right?”

“If you don’t shut up I’m going to drive. Then you’ll have to deal with the red lights and the siren,” she warned with a playful

wink.

Chad immediately shut up because the last time that happened, she'd been late for work and he'd been too sick to drive so he'd sat in the passenger seat sound asleep. The chief still gave him grief over it.

Envy clicked off the blue lights about a block away from the nightclub and looked up at the spotlights that danced across the cloud-covered sky. She watched as the two-story building came into view.

She'd been working so much lately that she hadn't had a chance to check out Moon Dance, but some of her customers had raved about it. On the outside it was nothing fancy. It just looked like a brick warehouse with very few windows and a large purple neon sign high on the front wall.

People were standing in line halfway across the massive parking lot dressed in their best club clothes and talking with each other animatedly. The fact there was still a line after ten at night let her know that working here would probably be very lucrative.

"Yep, I'm definitely putting in an application," she smiled at the prospect.

"At least the line is almost gone," Chad said sarcastically, not wanting to wait to see Trevor get a good dose of his sister on adrenaline.

He parked way down on the darkest end of the parking lot

right next to Trevor's car. Before Envy could open the car door, Chad reached out and caught her arm. "Here," he placed the small taser in her hand then, without a single word about it, he opened his door and got out.

Envy wrapped her fingers around the device with a smile. Her brother had taught her self-defense to the point to where she could probably take down most of the cops he worked with without breaking a sweat. But Chad had always said, 'Why fight, when all you have to do is press a button?'

She slid the taser into the little side pocket of the leather skirt along with her ID. She'd press Trevor's button all right. She'd happily press the elevator button going to hell just to see him in it right now. No one cheated on Envy Sexton and got away with it.

They walked toward the line side by side and Envy was especially happy when the line started moving so fast that it only took a couple of minutes to make it inside.

The doorman was dressed in a nice pair of Armani pants and matching suit jacket. The shirt underneath was form fitting and showed off his nice chest. His brown hair fell on either side of his face in waves. A bit of stubble was present on his face and he had piercing dark eyes that almost glowed in the neon light.

Chad paid and they showed their ID's before the man stamped their hand and unclipped the red velvet rope allowing them access. They entered the main doors and walked down a short hall toward another door that slid open as they approached. Both of them stopped when they entered the main room and stared. It

was a lot like walking into another dimension.

For as packed as the parking lot had been, you would think it would be wall-to-wall people inside but it wasn't. Envy's lips parted as she walked across the floor to the massive hole cut out in the center of the room.

Stepping closer to the railing, she looked down onto the dance floor below. On either side of them was a walkway that extended across the main level with a long bar that stretched the entire length. The bar itself looked like sand blasted glass with soft neon lighting weaving all through it.

Two sets of stairs went down from her left and right and met in the middle before descending to the actual dance floor below. The dance floor was glowing with soft light, just enough to cast their feet in a type of black light. It all added to the pandemonium created by the overhead strobe and colored spotlights that moved everywhere except directly on the dancers.

The way it was set up, you could see the dancers from the knees down, but other than that, their bodies were shadowed.

Envy leaned over the railing, looking to see if there were any more bars on the lower level but there was nothing but the dance floor. It kind of reminded her of a pit. Once you went down those stairs, you would be at the mercy of the darkness that shadowed the dancers in privacy.

"It's three stories?" she asked, looking up at the solid ceiling above them. Counting the basement, that would be the third floor and she wondered if it was also part of the club or if it was off

limits.

Cheers and catcalls made her glance back down at the dance floor. She stared in disbelief when an ice-blue colored spotlight hit a cage in the middle of the pit. She was instantly enthralled with the man behind the bars.

Chad's gaze also stopped on the cage. It looked like a small jail cell. Inside it was a man and woman and they were circling each other. Even from this distance, he could sense the heat in their movements. His knuckles turned white as he gripped the banister when the guy in the cage pushed his dance partner against the bars only for her to duck under his arm as he tried to pin her against them.

Spinning around, the guy grabbed her wrist and brought her back flush against him before guiding her hands to the bars in front of her. Making her grip the bars, he rubbed himself against her almost naked body until her head fell backward against his chest as if she was enjoying it.

It was animalistic in nature, almost like a primitive mating dance of some kind. Chad and Envy found themselves captivated by the show, the display affecting each in different ways.

Chad watched them for a few more minutes in silence as the main couple sprang apart only for the man to trap her in a different position. The heat of their movements made his jeans grow tight as the male's hips jerked upward against the girl's ass. Moving his gaze away in frustration, Chad forced himself to look at the decorations on the upper walls that he could see from his

angle.

It was mostly flashing lights with steady black lights near huge portrait style paintings with sleek bodies of jaguars, some fighting and some solo predators on the hunt. The lethal animals seemed to have a life of their own. The still paintings almost moved with the lights, giving the impression that the animals were alive and watching.

He had to admit the theme was unique but it worked. His eyes followed the movement of the lights across the walls and he noticed that chains hung between the pictures, some with spiked collars and black leather whips.

He glanced back toward the cage and was about to go find Jason when he spotted Trevor on the dance floor near one of the spotlights. The idiot was sandwiched between two girls and looked like he was having the time of his life. Glancing over at Envy, Chad knew he didn't have to say a word when he noticed she was staring straight at the trio.

Envy cocked her head to the side trying to study Trevor as if she didn't know him. It made her wonder why she'd dated him to start out with.

She had to admit he was very easy on the eyes. Damn good looking would be the best phrase. He looked kind of like a California surfer dude with his flyaway sandy blond hair, golden tan and grayish blue eyes. He was completely lickable and had been a lot of fun.

But if you took away his good looks, there wasn't much too

really attract a girl. All that was left was a college frat brat who had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. When he was around, he was very attentive but he would also vanish off the radar, sometimes for days at a time.

The only other good thing she could think to say about him was that he was pretty hot in the sack, and had given her some of the best moments of her life.

To think, she'd actually believed he really liked her... more than liked her. Goes to show what the hell she knew about men. Truth be told, she was just getting tired of being alone... but then, that's no reason to start dating a guy.

She sighed longingly as she watched him cup the ass of the girl plastered against him, realizing she felt no jealousy at all. If she'd really been in love with him, wouldn't she be completely pissed off right now instead of simply hurt? What bothered her most was that he'd lied about wanting only her.

Jason had been watching for Envy to come into the club from his bar stool closest to the door. He'd known she would come and he wasn't surprised to see Chad with her. After giving them a few minutes to look around, he smirked in satisfaction when he noticed the tenseness in Envy's shoulders and knew she'd spotted her boyfriend making out on the dance floor.

He'd tried to hide his jealousy for the last couple of months and he didn't want to hurt her, but if this is what it took to get her away from Trevor, then it was for her own good.

Turning back to Kat, the pretty bartender he'd been talking

to, Jason smiled, "Told you they'd come." He nodded in Envy and Chad's direction.

He'd been here over an hour, but after witnessing Trevor's cheating on Envy, he hadn't been in the mood to join the crowd. He'd wound up bored and begun chatting with Kat to pass the time. He'd even told her about Envy's cheating boyfriend.

"So that's your best friend and his sister?" Kat eyed the couple but her main interest was on the cop. If Jason hadn't told her that Chad was a cop, she'd never have known it. He was hot as hell.

About six foot one with sun-kissed skin, and brown hair with golden highlights. It was a little longer than the normal cop hairstyle and looked like the wind had blown most of it to the side, leaving him with a slightly wild appearance. She found herself comparing him to Quinn, and then blinked realizing she'd done it again. She glanced back at Jason knowing they both needed to get over old flames or risk the constant burn.

"He doesn't look like a cop," Kat said, eyeing Chad and wondering if he was dating anyone. Jason hadn't said one way or the other.

"Yeah well," Jason almost pouted when he noticed the way she was looking at Chad. He shook his head, "I'll be back in a few minutes."

Finishing off his club soda, he slid off the stool and walked toward his friends. As he closed the distance between them, he laid his hand on Envy's shoulder. Lowering his lips close to the shell of her ear he whispered, "Do you want to dance?"

Envy smiled without turning around. "Oh, hell yes!" she exclaimed, and then took off down the closest flight of stairs, leaving Jason standing there beside Chad with his hand still lying on an imaginary shoulder. He blinked when he heard Chad laughing.

"Damn," Jason sighed as he watched her descent.

Chad patted Jason on the shoulder in pity as he led him back to the bar and leaned against it, "Don't let it bother you. I think Envy has a one-track mind at the moment and it involves revenge."

He glanced at the girl behind the bar and, for a moment, forgot Jason was even there. She was stunning with her bronze tan and very long dark hair that spiraled over her shoulders and all the way down to her hips. Her eyes were just the opposite, light blue with a very thick black ring around the lighter color.

It was her full lips that his gaze was drawn to as he said, "Just a soda please."

"Not drinking tonight?" Jason asked, and tried not to glare at his friend when Chad's eyes stayed on Kat, as he answered. Why was it that all girls liked cops?

"No, I have a feeling I need to stay sober for now. I don't really like Trevor so I gave Envy my taser to play with." Chad tore his eyes from the girl long enough to quirk a grin at Jason. "And I drove the cop car." He knew Jason would read between the lines.

Jason shoved away from the bar suddenly forgiving his friend for being a girl magnet. "Oh hell, then there's no way I'm missing this!" He took off back to the railing, as Chad's laughter followed

behind him.

“Well, that’s two people I’ve made happy tonight,” Chad winked toward Kat, knowing she had been listening, then paid for his drink. He’d best go see what Envy was up to.

Kat nodded when Chad slipped her a twenty and told her to keep the change before he took off to join Jason. Those two guys could be dangerous to a girl’s hormones. Jason had long, sandy brown hair and the face and body of a Bay Watch model.

She’d caught most of the girls as they passed trying to catch his attention. Jason didn't seem to notice any of them and appeared to be lost in his own thoughts... until he’d started telling her about his best friends, Chad, and the girl they both sounded so protective over.

She missed that, someone other than her brothers being so protective over her. She blinked slowly forcing the image of Quinn out of her head and focused on the problem at hand.

It was the taser remark that helped get her mind off Quinn. Kat decided to warn her brothers of this new entertainment that was about to start. They’d had enough trouble lately dealing with the string of murders surrounding the club. The last thing they needed was more bad attention.

Chad leaned over the rail a little looking for Envy. Thank god the cage dancers were still there lending their spot light and making it easier to locate her. Hearing a faint groan coming from Jason, he followed Jason's line of vision until he spotted her dancing in the middle of several guys, near the glow of the

soft spotlight of the cage. He frowned, narrowing his gaze and wondering what she was up to.

“At least she’s looking toward Trevor. By the way, thanks for the call,” he said in a serious voice. “I’ve been waiting on something like this to happen.”

Jason shrugged, “It wasn’t for me. It was for her. She deserves better than him.” He tried to smile, as he watched, knowing she would be single now. But the vision of all the other guys pulling at her attention caused his small smile to have a hint of sadness.

Chapter 2

Envy felt the heat slide over her like a second skin as she descended the steps. She tried to relax her tense muscles and moved onto the dance floor. Taking several steps in Trevor's direction, she felt like she was in a mosh pit of sex, as fingertips softly touched her bare skin and unfamiliar bodies slid against hers.

The dance floor was darker than the other clubs she'd been in or worked at and she found she liked the privacy. It wasn't so much individual couples dancing as it was a group mingling of warm bodies. Feeling the change in the atmosphere, she slowly raised her hands letting her own fingertips brush across strangers in the darkness. The adrenaline rush that followed pounded through her to the beat of the sultry music.

Not looking forward to confronting Trevor, she took a moment to close her eyes and simply move with the music that could only be described as the sound of lust.

As she felt the fleeting touches growing bolder, Envy opened her eyes and found herself staring at several male chests, some showing skin through unbuttoned shirts and some covered in tight material that was just as seductive. She didn't dare look up into their faces for fear of making eye contact.

Becoming a little heady, she started backing up and didn't mind when they followed her in the seductive dance. Feeling the cold iron of the dance cage against her back, she slowly looked up at it on the small platform. Her eyes locked with the guy inside the cage as he drew the girl who was with him down onto her knees under him in a submissive posture.

The whole room seemed to fade away as their gazes locked and held. The way he was looking at her made Envy feel like she was the one submitting. He had ice blue eyes with a very thick black ring around his irises. She didn't think she'd ever seen eyes so startling or intense. She could have stared into them for hours and still wanted more and that scared her.

His look gave Envy the impression that he knew what she looked like naked. The way his eyes roamed over her body and lingered in certain places... made her feel like his hands were touching those same places. The urge to throw herself against the cage bars and beg him to take her hard and fast was almost too much to resist.

Jerking her gaze back from the possessive sight, Envy tried to remind herself she could leave the dance floor whenever she chose.

Trevor wasn't having fun even though he tried to go with the flow of the dance and blend in as much as possible. But hot girls and dancing weren't the real reasons he was here. He kept his gaze on the guy in the cage because that was his true mark.

The guy's name was Devon Santos and he was the last person to be seen with Kelly Foster; the 20-year-old girl who'd been found in a nearby alley last week. She had been in that same cage with Devon the last night she'd been alive.

So far he'd learned that the murder victim had just quit working at a club down the strip called Night Light. She'd only worked at Moon Dance for one night... the night she died. Hers wasn't the only death he was following but it was a lead. Whoever had dumped her body had made sure to leave it near the cougars and jaguars like a gift.

Devon was part owner of this club, along with his two brothers, Nick and Warren, and their only sister, Kat. Rumor had it that the two clubs had a silent feud going on and that the two families had actually been rivals since both their fathers had gone missing over ten years ago.

Trevor's eyes narrowed, knowing the real reason why there was animosity between the clubs. These weren't normal clubs; they were owned and run by shifters. The club Kelly had been working at was run by were-cougars. She'd left there and came to work for were-jaguars, only to turn up dead the next day. That was just too much to ignore.

If the humans knew shape shifters lived among them, there

would be panic... but they had been a part of society for a long time without the secret getting out. As long as they abided by the laws of the human race, there was no need to cause mass chaos by outing them. Human mentality would return to the dark ages if that ever happened.

The theory within the black-ops CIA paranormal command was to deal with it the same way they dealt with UFO's and Alien encounters; lie, hide, and cover it up. There were much worse things out there besides the shifters that fit in well with humanity... other, more dangerous creatures that humans only made bad horror movies from and some that humans were still clueless about.

But when people started turning up missing or dead, his team was dispersed to try to figure out what was going on.

Seeing Devon abandon the girl in his cage and move closer to the bars to stare down at someone, Trevor shifted his gaze. He instantly felt his blood pressure rise by several degrees when he spotted Envy leaning back against the same cage surrounded by a withering mass of guys.

What the hell was she doing here? He left his dance partners without a second thought and shoved his way through the crowd toward her.

Devon growled low in his throat when the girl that had caught his attention raised her hands to grip the bars behind her. He could smell her heat over everyone in the whole club and it called to him. Wrapping his hands over hers, he let his fingers trail

seductively down her arms through the bars of his cage.

Just as Envy was about to look back up at the erotic dancer, someone grabbed one of her arms and jerked it down from the cage. Her lips parted when she saw who it was. She'd completely forgotten about Trevor! The seductive mood broke and she was angry again when she remembered why she'd come to Moon Dance in the first place... revenge.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Trevor snapped a bit too harshly, trying to pull her away from the cage and Devon's dangerous reach. If the jaguar was the killer, then the way he was looking at Envy marked her as his next target.

Envy kept her other hand clenched tightly on the bar simply because she didn't like the way Trevor had decided to manhandle her. He was acting as if she'd done something wrong instead of him. Smiling her sweetest smile, she informed him, “I came to dance... just like you did.”

Trevor's lips thinned knowing she'd seen him dancing with the other girls, but what she didn't understand was that he was just using them as a cover. He didn't even care enough to ask their names. He and Envy glared into each other's eyes for several heartbeats before he sighed.

Bending down close to her ear, he whispered, “I can explain.” He hadn't wanted to tell her who he really was because, just like her dickhead of a brother Chad, he was afraid she'd only assume he was using her to gain better access to the bars where she worked.

“Come on,” he tried again to pull her away from Devon’s heated gaze. He took a second to glance up at Devon and if looks could kill he would have been a bloody spot on the floor. He gave the look right back then returned his attention to his girlfriend.

Envy shook her head at him. She just bet he would explain. “I came to dance. I can dance with these nice guys, or you can start moving and join us.” She raised a delicate eyebrow, as if it didn’t matter one way or the other to her.

Trevor slowly turned his head and glared over his shoulder at the lustful guys still hanging around waiting to see if they stood a chance. “Scram,” he told them, in a deadly tone, as he slipped closer to Envy. If she wanted to dance, then by god, she was dancing with him.

Envy pouted at him but secretly wondered why he was acting so jealous when he’d just been dancing so provocatively with two other girls. “You’re no fun.” She finally released the bar to run her hands over her own body, nonchalantly slipping the small taser out of her pocket, and then ran her hands over his ribs.

Devon stood to his full height, staring down at the little redhead who’d caught more than just his attention. He didn’t like the smell of the guy who was trying to claim her. He smelled like old gunpowder and that meant he had a weapon hidden somewhere on him. He reached out and unlatched the cage, telling the female dancer to go take a break.

Touching his finger to his ear, Devon listened to his brother inform him through the almost invisible com-link that the girl at

his cage had a taser and had plans to use it on a guy. He looked across the dance floor toward the black light that lit the steps seeing Nick standing there ready to interfere, if needed.

It had been Warren's voice on the com-link, so Devon figured his oldest brother was watching from one of the night vision cameras hanging under the catwalk above him.

Looking back down at her small hands now roaming the guy's body, Devon felt the sudden need to take the guy's head off. That was until he saw the glint of silver as her hand traveled down toward his hip. His lips hinted at a ghost of a smile deciding not to interfere just yet.

"Let me handle this," Devon whispered into the com-link.

Chad and Jason smiled at each other knowing it was getting ready to go down, and then took off for the steps leading to the dance floor.

Trevor suddenly realized Envy hadn't told him she was coming here either, so why did he feel so guilty? "I asked you what you were doing here," he repeated, and this time his voice was steady, as he moved against her. Bad move, he almost lost his train of thought, as most of his blood rushed to his groin, giving him a hard-on for the first time since he'd stepped foot inside the club.

Envy pushed her body against his seductively so she would have a chance to step back really fast. "I came to give you something," she answered and put all the heated desire she was feeling from the dance floor into her eyes to distract him.

"I hope it goes with the same thing I have for you," Trevor

groaned, as he felt her hand cup his groin.

“Let's find out,” Envy hissed, as she pressed the taser against his raging hard on and jerked back just as he spazzed and dropped to his knees without a sound. “Oops!” Envy pouted and quickly slid the taser back in her pocket before turning to flee in the other direction. The last thing she wanted to do was to be still standing there when Trevor found the strength to stand back up.

As Envy made her way through the darkened dance floor, someone snagged her arm in a firm grip. Thinking it was her brother; she didn't look up right away but followed trustingly. Just as she did glance up, a small door was opened and she was pushed through it.

Envy barely had time to turn around before it was shut and locked behind her. A dim overhead light flicked on revealing TV monitors and the guy who had been in the cage. She opened her mouth to speak, but he cut her off.

“I thought maybe it would be best if you watched your handiwork from the safety of the office,” Devon smirked, as he pointed at one of the screens.

Envy glanced toward the screen thinking the sight of Trevor holding his crotch would make her laugh... but instead, she felt really bad for him. It made her heart feel like it had dropped a couple of inches. Seeing him in pain, she was suddenly glad the monitor didn't have sound because she was sure she didn't want to know what he was saying.

She watched in silence as Chad and Jason appeared from the

crowd and helped him the rest of the way up from the floor. She couldn't tell what was being said, but when Trevor pushed Chad away from him with more strength than he should have had seconds after being tasered, her eyes swung to the door ready to bolt back out there before one of them got hurt.

Seeing the dancer shake his head warningly as he stood between her and the door, Envy glanced back at the monitor surprised to see it was actually Jason who grabbed Trevor in an arm lock while Chad placed handcuffs on him.

Feeling a little more than angry with herself for being so childish, she started for the door to tell Chad to let Trevor go. Again, the hand gripped her arm. She glared down at it refusing to meet his eyes, when it was obviously her fault for starting this. The guilt only added to her anger and renewed her courage.

“After seeing me just taser a guy, do you really think that’s a good idea?” She jerked her eyes up to his and tried not to lose her breath from the impact. Now that she had a closer look, his eyes were even more amazing than they’d been behind the bars of the cage.

“Whoever those guys are, you might want to let them get him out of the club before you go back to dance.” Devon warned again, watching the flame shoot into her eyes. He could almost see her fur bristling with the need to go rescue the guy she had just wounded... not that he had any intention of letting her. “What’s your name?”

“Why?” Envy pulled her arm out of his grasp. “So you can

have the owners ban me from the club?”

“Not likely,” Devon growled darkly at the thought. “But you might want to keep that taser in your pocket for the rest of the night.” He watched her glance back at the monitor to see that her victim was gone.

‘Damn it,’ Envy sighed mentally, as she leaned back against the door feeling the vibration of the music through the wood. She bit her bottom lip knowing she’d gone too far. She remembered the other reason she’d come to Moon Dance tonight and wondered if it was a good time to ask for a job. Why not bite the bullet? She mentally shrugged. “Do you know if they’re hiring here?”

Devon couldn’t help the slow smile that spread across his lips. What he’d give to get her in that cage with him for a little while so he could try to tame the fire within her. “Do you dance?” he asked hopefully.

Envy’s eyes widened as she remembered watching him in the cage and her thighs went up in flames... but sadly, so did her cheeks. “No,” she whispered, a little too huskily, “No dancing. I tend bar at some of the other clubs in the area and was going to put in an application while I was here.”

“Pity,” Devon smirked, as he stepped forward and opened a drawer from the desk. He pulled out the application and handed it to her. She still hadn’t told him her name, but if he had her fill out the app, then he’d have all the information he needed. He also wanted to make sure she hadn’t worked for Night Light.

He was getting tired of them sending people over here

snooping. It was Quinn that had ended the friendship between the cougars and jaguars, so the cougars could just leave them the hell alone, as far as he was concerned.

Someone at Night Light had sent the last person they'd hired, and now that she'd been murdered, the cougars were looking toward Moon Dance for answers... and so were the cops. Just his luck, the only night she'd worked here, she had asked to be put in the cage with him.

Devon rolled the chair out from under the desk knowing the fastest way to make her stay longer was to give her what she wanted. "You can fill it out now. Maybe you'll have another job by the end of the night."

Envy sat down but looked back up at the monitor with a frown. "Do you think the owner saw me taser Trevor?" she bit her bottom lip, picturing in her mind how it must have looked. "I really wish I hadn't done that."

Devon leaned over the back of her chair as if looking into the monitor with her. Putting his lips close to the shell of her ear he asked, "If the owner did see and asked you about it, what would you say?" He inhaled slowly, as her scent wrapped around him, heating his blood.

Envy started to turn her head to look up at him but stopped. The sensations he was causing with his nearness had spread out across her shoulder and up the side of her neck. "I was just being mean," she breathed, feeling heat pooling again in her midsection. This guy was dangerous to her senses. She didn't

know whether to turn around and lick him or run for cover.

The corner of Devon's lip hinted at a smile but he didn't move from his position, "So, you go around tasing guys all the time for no good reason?" He could smell her arousal spike and it was making his pants uncomfortably tight.

"No," Envy was glad for the distraction when she grabbed an ink pen from the little holder in front of her and started filling out the app. "Only the ones that really deserve it," she answered, not wanting to talk about it.

Devon stood to his full height and fought the urge to pull her out of the chair and sit her on the desk facing him. As it was, he was already rubbing her silky hair between his fingers where it had spilled over the back of the chair.

He stayed silent while she filled out the application and he read it over her shoulder taking in every word. Envy Sexton, and the cougar and vampire clubs were thankfully missing from the extended list of clubs where she worked. He knew with a couple of quick phone calls he could free up most of her time by telling the other clubs to leave her off the schedule. He didn't feel like sharing this little wildcat.

Envy finished the app and started to stand up but Devon placed his hand on her shoulder to keep her there. He quickly took the paper from her and started for the door.

"Stay here. I'll be back in a few minutes with an answer," Devon reached for the doorknob but paused when she spoke.

"What's your name?" Envy asked, wondering if she shouldn't

just give the paper to the owner herself. Maybe she could even get the interview out of the way.

“Devon Santos,” he answered, then disappeared out the door before she could stop him.

He'd known Nick was waiting right outside the door because he could smell him. Handing the paper to Nick, Devon informed him, “We have a new bartender.” He waited as Nick looked the paper over knowing his brother was looking for the same things he'd already checked.

Nick had run off a couple of vampire groupies and one vampire who'd slipped in and it had ruined his mood for the night. He hated vampires and any human that was stupid enough to hang out with them. Not seeing any indication that this girl was associated with them and smelling his brother's arousal the girl had caused, Nick decided to let Devon handle his own affairs.

He finally handed the application back, “Tell her to leave the taser at home.” Nick eyed his brother for a moment before adding, “Kat said the guy she tasered was her boyfriend and the guy who hauled him off in handcuffs was her brother.”

“That boyfriend of hers had a gun. I could smell it.” Devon shrugged, even as his eyes narrowed, “Maybe he wasn't so good of a boyfriend.”

“You might want to be careful around that one.” Nick shook his head, as even more interest flared within his brother's eyes. “If you want her, then you're in charge of controlling her while she's here.” Nick gritted his teeth when he caught a whiff of

vampire. Without another word, he took off back up the stairs.

Envy glanced around nervously and saw an elevator she hadn't noticed before. She raised a delicate eyebrow seeing it had a keypad instead of a simple button. She tapped the pen on the desk wondering how long she should wait. She still needed to find out if Chad really arrested Trevor or just made him leave the club.

She glanced around the desk to try to get her mind off it for a moment. She was a born investigator just like her brother, though Chad tried to hide that fact. Truth was, Chad would make a great detective. He told everyone he was just a beat cop but that wasn't anywhere near true. He was the leader of the SWAT team.

She finally looked down at the paper she'd absentmindedly picked up. It was a supply receipt. Her gaze trailed across the billing information to see the name at the bottom. She slammed the piece of paper back down on the desk. Devon Santos... damn him. He was one of the freaking owners and had let her think he was just a dancer.

At that moment the office door opened and Devon stepped back in. "When do you want to start?"

Nick rushed across the dance floor and up the stairway leading to the entrance. He pushed open the door with more force than necessary and glared at the man trying to get past security. Since most of the bouncers were shifters, they could smell a vampire even when there were no outward signs.

The fashion sense of a normal vampire around the city seemed

to stem from the Goth crowd. In the last few months, however, about ten wearing business suits or just regular club clothes had attempted to get in. That's the reason they relied so much on scent now rather than appearance. Rule number one... no vampires were to pass without one of the owner's permission.

"What's your business here?" Nick asked, trying to sound professional because of their human audience. The man tilted his head to the side and gave a wicked smile that made Nick's stomach churn.

"I'd like to go in." Raven said, as his pupils enlarged, using his powers to enthrall anyone that was capable of falling under the vampires compulsion spell.

Nick eyed him up and down. The guy had black hair with dyed neon pink ends that hung low over his face. He was young; probably not even twenty-five, with very pale skin and heavy eyeliner around his eyes. His lips were done up with black lipstick, even his nails were painted black.

"Sorry mister..." Nick stood very still watching the vampire's every movement. No matter the size or age, vampires were dangerous and not to be underestimated.

"Raven, call me Raven," the man answered, wondering just how far you could push a jaguar.

"Sorry Raven, we're at capacity." Nick explained, as he wrapped his fingers around his two shot derringer, that was deep within the pocket of his leather jacket. It had hollowed-out silver bullets filled with holy water. The corner of his lip hinted at a

sadistic smile, as he felt the wooden blade of the bone handle knife attached to his forearm.

“Then why are these people all still standing in line?” Raven asked, seeing the golden tint start to override the jaguar’s irises.

Nick smiled but it felt like he was gnashing his teeth. “They have reservations.”

Raven’s eyes shone in the dim light for a moment looking like they were glowing ominously with inner fire. Nick descended the three steps to street level and placed himself between Raven and the crowd of humans, then he leaned close to Raven’s ear.

“Leave now, vampire,” he whispered with cold calm, as he pressed the point of the wooden dagger against Raven’s ribs where no one would see it. “You’re not getting in.”

Nick straightened up and folded his arms in front of him so it would be but a quick jerk to stab him with the dagger. “I’m sorry sir, have a good evening.”

Raven smiled again, this time almost pleasantly, “Oh, I plan to.”

He turned away from the door and started walking down the street with his hands buried in the pockets of his black jeans and whistling an ominous-sounding tune. When the jaguar leaned down to whisper in his ear, Raven had seen his master slip past them and into the club. He hadn’t seen Kane for some time. In fact, this was the first time in several weeks, even though he’d felt his sire’s eyes on him many times.

What surprised Raven was that Kane would willingly walk

into the den of his enemies. The Master had told him the story of being buried alive by the leader of this jaguar clan. Did his master have a plan of his own?

‘They framed you my master, but this time I’m making sure the blood is on their hands.’ Raven whispered to himself before blending in with the shadows. He knew he wouldn’t have to wait long. He could still smell the blood of his latest victim as the scent floated on the breeze toward Moon Dance.

Kat watched as Chad and Jason helped the unfortunate boyfriend out of the club... in handcuffs. They always said curiosity killed the cat, but she just had to find out what they planned on doing with him. If nothing else, just to keep her from wondering about it for the rest of the night.

Going out one of the side doors, she stayed in the shadows as she followed them. With her heightened senses, she didn’t have to be all that close to hear what they were saying.

Chad and Jason blocked Trevor in between his car and the cop car so the jilted boyfriend couldn’t stomp back into the club after Envy. Chad removed the handcuffs knowing he really couldn’t arrest him without a legit reason... that is unless Trevor pushed him.

“I bet it was you who told her I was here!” Trevor growled at Jason. “Don’t think I didn’t notice the hard on you carry for her. Just couldn’t keep your nose out of it, could you?”

Chad threw his arm out when Jason took a threatening step

forward. “Jason, I’ve got it from here. Why don’t you go back in and see if you can find Envy? I don’t want her out here until Trevor’s gone.”

“You can’t stop me from going back in there. I’m working!” Trevor hissed without thinking.

“Yeah, we saw what the hell you were working on,” Jason’s hands fisted at his sides, but with a pointed look from Chad, he knew he’d best go inside before Trevor wasn’t the only one in cuffs tonight. Spinning on his heels, he tossed one more remark over his shoulder for Trevor’s benefit, “You’ll find us on the dance floor... wrapped around each other.”

Trevor shot forward but Chad shoved him back against his car. To Chad’s surprise, Trevor was a lot stronger than he looked and it was a struggle. “I warned you not to be screwing my sister unless you told her who you really were and the real reason you are always hanging out at the clubs. Hell man, Envy thinks you’re nothing but a damn frat boy. If you wanted to impress her, then you should have told her the truth. One thing she’s never been able to stomach is a liar. Especially if they are lying to her.”

Kat narrowed her gaze on Trevor. What was all that supposed to mean?

“You know as well as I do that if I’d told her I was working under cover, she’d have always wondered if I was using her when I hung around the clubs with her.” Trevor thundered, as he righted himself but didn’t try to go back toward the club again. If he used his real strength then Chad would be a dead man and

Trevor would be no better than the people he hunted.

That knowledge did a lot to calm him down long enough to rein in his animal instincts but he couldn't help still being pissed. "She fucking tasered me!"

"You deserved it because you're a lowlife, cheating boyfriend. Hey, it's what you get for not telling her the truth. You're done for the night unless you want to go haunt one of the other bars. Besides, Envy still has the taser," Chad smirked. "I'd advise you to leave her alone for the rest of the night... or better yet, the rest of her life if you can't come clean with her."

Trevor gritted his teeth but didn't say anything else. Chad couldn't tell him to stay away from Envy, but letting her cool down was probably smart advice.

"Fine, but that," he pointed at the club, "is not a safe place for your sister to be hanging out and you know it!" He jerked his car door open, forcing Chad to take a step back to avoid being hit by it. Slamming the door behind him, it took only seconds before he was burning rubber out of the parking lot.

When Trevor was far enough down the road so that Chad couldn't see his car lights, he grabbed his cell phone and tapped in the number to someone who owed him a favor. He pulled over at the closest store and parked behind a transfer truck so he wouldn't be noticed.

It frustrated him to leave her back there after the way Devon had looked at her. Even if Devon wasn't a murderer, that look was not a good thing. Chad thought he could strong-arm him when it

came to Envy did he? Let's see how he likes it when he finds out he's the weaker one. He'd fix Jason too while he was at it.

Kat shifted deeper into the shadows when Chad turned and looked in her direction. She frowned, knowing it was impossible for him to see her... he didn't have the night vision shifters did. She blew her hair out of her eyes and waited while he just stared toward her, then sighed when he finally turned and went back in the club.

So, Trevor was an undercover cop and Chad's sister didn't know it... obviously neither did Jason. The stickler was Trevor said he was here working on a case. Kat gritted her teeth knowing it had to be the murders. She needed to tell Warren to hurry and find out who was leaving a trail of blood before they got the blame.

Envy slowly stood up wondering why Devon didn't just admit he was an owner and could very well hire her himself. She hated it when people lied to her, but she didn't know him and he didn't owe her anything, so she swallowed what she was about to say. Too bad it wouldn't stay down.

"That was awfully fast," she looked at him expectantly, as she crossed her arms over her chest.

"I put in a good word for you. Sometimes they listen to me." Devon watched her curiously, smelling her scent change. She was angry with him. It smelled good.

"Maybe that's because you're the owner," Envy's small smile

vanished.

So that was why she's mad. She doesn't like it when she feels like someone is hiding something from her. He'd keep that in mind. Devon slowly dipped his head in a small bow, "I am only one of the owners. Me, my two brothers, and my sister all own this club. We do try to run things by each other when we hire new people."

Envy glanced up at him suddenly feeling bad. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..." she gave up with a sigh and lowered her arms.

"At least your taser stayed in your pocket," Devon smiled, hoping to lighten the mood.

Envy blushed and felt the need to get out of his sight before she made an even bigger fool of herself. "I've been working mostly in the afternoon and I'm off tomorrow, so if..." she nervously informed him, as she kept the exit in her sight and started moving toward it before this became the shortest job in history.

"Tomorrow night then," Devon opened the door for her, as she inched her way toward it. "At seven."

He watched her run and let her go because he knew he could catch her if she ran too far. He closed the office door and turned to the monitor to watch her make her way around the outer rim of the dance floor toward the stairs. His eyes narrowed as one of the guys from earlier grabbed her arm to get her attention. Devon started toward the door but Kat slipped inside it before he could go after Envy.

"That girl with the taser..." Kat started but was cut off by a

hard look from her brother.

“Her name is Envy and you get to show her the ropes tomorrow night. I just hired her as a bartender.” Devon crossed his arms over his chest, as he leaned back against the edge of the desk.

“Put your claws away,” Kat tilted her head when Devon glanced back at the monitor and tensed. Following his gaze, she smirked seeing Jason and Envy in the middle of the screen. “My my, doesn’t she just have a lot of admirers tonight.” She knew it wasn’t exactly true but she wanted to catch Devon’s reaction. She got her answer when the thin plastic on the back of the computer chair cracked where he was gripping it a little too hard.

Devon snapped his eyes toward Kat, “Why are you in my office?”

Kat just smiled at him. This was going to be so much fun. She walked over and pointed at the screen. “This guy, his name is Jason Fox and I spent quite a while chatting him up at the bar before his two friends showed up.”

Devon cocked an eyebrow at his sister waiting for her to get to the point.

“Jason was the one that called her so she would come to the club. He actually asked her out.” She smirked when the crack in the chair broke the rest of the way off in Devon’s hand. “I don’t know what she told him but Jason said, ‘Then why the hell is Trevor making out on the dance floor with someone else?’”

“So, he’s the reason she showed up,” Devon drawled, dropping

the piece of plastic on the desk. "I'm sure you have a point here somewhere."

"Yes I do, but it's so much fun watching you squirm," Kat decided to get on with her story, when he gave his patented go-to-hell look. She was definitely going to buy the rights to that expression someday. "Anyway, it was all a setup from what I heard. Her brother gave her the taser knowing she was mad enough to use it on her cheating boyfriend, but the truth is, Trevor wasn't really cheating on her."

"What?" Devon growled, not liking where this was leading.

Kat spent the next ten minutes filling her brother in on everybody's dirty little secrets. Just for kicks, she didn't forget to leave out the fact that Jason had a serious long-term crush on Envy.

Chapter 3

Jason pulled Envy into his arms, "You owe me a dance."

He was so glad she wasn't the type of person that would shoot the messenger. If it weren't for him, she'd still have a boyfriend... granted it would be a cheating boyfriend but then that's why he'd made the phone call in the first place. "Sorry," he whispered in her ear, as he pulled her tighter against him and started to move with the music.

Envy rolled her eyes letting him off the hook without a second thought. "Nothing to be sorry for." She trailed her fingers down his spine as she moved against him. "I'm free again and I landed me another job in the process."

She smiled as she glanced around the dance floor again. “This place is a little different from the clubs that I’ve worked at but I think it should be interesting.”

Jason didn’t say anything for a moment as he felt the leather covering her breast glide across the front of his shirt and felt himself swell. He was glad she didn’t know what she was doing to him because he had a feeling if she did know she would stop.

“Want to come rock climbing Saturday morning?” he let his hands trail down her sides then gripped her hips.

“Rock climbing? That sounds fun. It’s been a while,” Envy nodded, then her eyes widened when Jason pulled her forward and she came in contact with something long and hard pressed against the softness of her belly. She gulped as her eyes flashed up to meet his.

“Where’s Chad?” she breathed, knowing she’d done it again. She hadn’t meant to. Jason had been and still was one of her favorite people in the whole world; the last thing she ever wanted to do was screw that up by sleeping with him. She loved him too much for that.

“Last time I checked, he was taking the trash out,” Jason sighed when she pulled back from him. He placed his fingers under her chin and raised her eyes to his, “Trevor doesn’t deserve you.”

“Chad didn’t really arrest him did he?” Envy asked, grabbing Jason by the hand and leading him toward the steps. She’d avoided this conversation for years and she wasn’t ruining her

track record now.

“No, I think being tasered was enough punishment... that and losing you. Chad was just making sure he found his way to his car,” Jason smirked. At the top of the stairs he noticed Chad was standing at the bar next to the door waiting on them. Keeping Envy’s hand in his, he led her in that direction.

The guilt was making Envy’s chest hurt. She really wasn’t a mean person at heart, and what she’d done to Trevor had been a very bad thing. It had only felt good for a moment and now that moment was gone. She kept her eyes lowered, too ashamed to even look at her brother.

Chad took one look at Envy and knew it was time to take her home. “You ready?” he asked, taking a step away from the bar.

“I can take her home,” Jason offered, then quickly added, “If she wants to stay with me for a while.”

Chad could see the hope flare in Jason’s eyes and wondered if he was doing the right thing or setting their dearest friend up for a fall. He felt his phone vibrate on his hip and held up his hand, “Hold that thought.” Seeing that it was the police station, he worked his way toward the door so he could hear more clearly.

Envy blew her bangs out of her eyes, knowing as bizarre as this night already was, she had a feeling Chad had just been called into work. She watched him pocket the phone as he walked back toward them.

“Will you be okay with Jason?” Chad asked. When she nodded, he placed his finger under her chin and lifted it. “You

did the right thing with Trevor so chin up. I probably won't be home until the morning, so don't wait up."

Envy gave a small smile as he walked away. They had both touched her chin in the same way and told her that this was Trevor's fault and not hers. She loved Jason because he was just like Chad and that's why she would never give into the knee-jerk need to date Jason for real.

Just as Chad left through the front doors, Jason's cell phone started buzzing. She turned and watched him as he answered, then frowned as his face turned serious. She knew he was on call this week and silently wondered if it was the rangers needing him in the middle of the night. In her opinion, that couldn't be a good thing.

When his eyes locked with hers, she could see his shoulders slump in disappointment.

"Envy I'm sorry, I gotta head out. Come on, I'll take you home on the way." Jason shoved the cell phone back into his pocket like it had become the enemy. He'd hoped to get a few minutes of alone time with Envy one way or the other.

Envy frowned because she knew that home was probably not the direction he was heading. "Thanks for the offer Jason, but I think I've caused enough problems for one night. Besides, I start working here tomorrow so I'm gonna hang out and watch the bartenders." She shrugged and pasted an excited smile on her lips that made her face hurt, "Who knows, I might even pick up a few tips while I'm here."

Jason nodded reluctantly knowing he needed to hurry, “Okay, but you’ve got my number if you need me.”

Envy waved her hand at him, “Yes I do. Now go to work. Work hard, make money, and take me out clubbing soon now that I’m single.”

Jason smiled brightly at her and quickly made his way out the door.

Envy let the numbness filter in, as her smile faded, then turned back toward the dance floor, looking it over again before heading to the bar. She slid onto one of the soft cushioned stools and leaned her elbows on the bar top.

She sat there staring down at the bar for several minutes before she noticed the clear surface rimmed with neon lights changed colors periodically. There were bits of some gray colored stones embedded in the thick Plexiglas that shone like they were covered in glitter. The ‘glitter’ was mixed in with the Plexiglas in such a way that, if the lights were black, they would have looked like stars against a twilight sky.

A glass suddenly appeared in front of her with a long-fingered hand holding it. The nails were painted a pretty shade of red, with black slashes along the nails of the ring fingers, that looked a little like claw marks.

Envy looked up in surprise at the woman in front of her. She had long, slightly curly black hair and an exotic look that made Envy blink. She was beyond beautiful. Her skin was a warm bronze and her eyes were an odd shade of blue. Not the striking

blue she'd seen on Devon, but very close.

“It’s on the house.” Kat said and pushed the drink a little closer. “All bartenders get free drinks and my brother just hired you, right?” she smiled, wanting to get to know the girl that had turned her brother's head so quickly. It wouldn’t have been that big of a deal, but Devon never took girls seriously because he was surrounded by hundreds of them every night. But this girl had rattled his cage.

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