

WAKING LOVE'S HUNGER

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Books by Rhiannon Ashcroft

Waking Love's Hunger, An Illicit Seattle Novella

Following Love's Hunger, Illicit Seattle Book 1

Embracing Love's Hunger, Illicit Seattle Book 2

Shifting Love's Hunger, Illicit Seattle Book 3

Hiding Love's Hunger, Illicit Seattle Book 4

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CHAPTER ONE

The Hunger

Kat tore off the bathrobe.

Heat moved over her skin in restless waves. She just stood there and let it stay.

The cold shower hadn't done a damn thing.

She dragged her fingers through her red hair, sensation sparking along her scalp.

Not enough.

It was never enough like this.

Her skin wanted something alive.

The IT kid surfaced in her mind—bright, open, unguarded. Easy.

She hadn't needed to touch him.

His presence had been loud in a way most people didn't notice about themselves.

She could've taken more.

For a second, she let herself consider it.

Then she let it pass.

Tonight would be different.

Something sharper.

Something that didn't fade so quickly.

A slow smile curved her mouth.

Yeah. That sounded right.

She reached for the fox fur coat and pulled it on over black silk.

October air hit her face as she stepped outside, clean and cold.

It didn't touch the heat underneath.

The Wilde Rover was already alive when she arrived.

Sound, movement, pressure. A full room that felt like empty space.

Something in it shifted when she walked in—not stopping, not breaking—just adjusting.

A few conversations dulled as she went by. A few eyes followed longer than intention explained.

Most of it was the same.

Familiar.

Expected.

The bartender called her name. She slid onto her usual stool.

A hand touched her shoulder as she sat.

A shot appeared in front of her.

She picked it up.

A laugh somewhere behind her that didn't belong to anyone she could see. A shift in posture. A second drink ordered that no one had decided on yet.

She smiled.

Heat moved over her skin.

Let it spread.
Not pushing.
Not directing.
Just letting it move through what was already leaning
toward her.
Then—something didn't lean.
Not far away.
Not loud.
Just... unchanged.
She turned slightly.
And found him.
Watching her like the room wasn't participating.

CHAPTER TWO

The Wrong One

Henry shifted his appearance back to the yuppie nerd. No one could see him from his favorite corner booth. But he could see them. Hear them. Watch them.

That drunk Texan with the ridiculous mustache was partially blocking his view of the side door. But that body language might be useful to use someday. The bartender's hands darted above and below the bar so quickly, he could've been a stage magician. It was fascinating to watch. The college kids playing darts were drunk already too. He heard and didn't hear the din.

A laugh cut through the noise.

Warm. Bright. Just a little wicked.

It didn't belong here.

His attention snapped toward it before he could stop himself.

And then he saw her.

Wrong.

That realization hit hard.

He forced himself to focus. Analyze. Break it down.

Because whatever she was—

She wasn't normal.

Their eyes met. She smiled.

Something in him leaned toward her before he could stop it.

He sat up. Cold sheets. Cold air. The kind of dark that didn't flicker. He'd lived inside that dark so long, he'd forgotten it had a name. But he'd felt her warmth from across the room. And now the cold had teeth.

CHAPTER THREE

The Architect

Seattle breathes above me — every street, every transaction, every secret moving through its veins like blood through something living. I know this city the way I know my own hunger. Completely. Without sentiment.

They built this city thinking it would obey them.
It never did.

The wine is a 1962 Pétrus.
I've had better.

John's daughter is not supposed to matter.
That is where the problem begins.
She doesn't know what she is yet.

The fertility research is progressing. Thorn doesn't know what he's testing for me. Men never do — until it's too late.

Love is weakness. Weakness is death. This is the law that built my empire. And it is the one rule no one survives breaking.

Henry is useful. More than he knows. He will fall for her, and he will not be able to help himself. That is not a liability. It is architecture.

Onyx will try to intervene. She always does when she believes emotion can be leveraged into strategy. She will fail. She does not yet understand what she is up against.

I hold the threads of this city in my hands. Not all of them. Not yet.

John handles what I don't. He always stands at my side — the only man who has never tried to own me. He sees what I am, and stays. Despite everything. Despite what I am and what I've done, he stays.

I have never understood why.
And I have stopped trying.

Everything is in motion.
And Seattle keeps breathing like it believes it still belongs to itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Contract

Henry followed the directions to park and found the hidden elevator. People seeing his Jonathan Gray alias would see a man in a fancy suit, with blond hair and wicked blue eyes. On exiting the elevator, there was a red neon sign on the wall proclaiming, 'The Second Circle'. It looked like an 1890s brothel or prohibition speakeasy. The large room had an old wooden bar along one side, with red leather-trimmed barstools and a red leather sofa.

A receptionist smiled at him seductively. She must have been five-foot-nine in three-inch stilettos, with legs that seemed to go on forever. Her tight black dress showed off a multitude of curves. Ruby-red lipstick and pale skin contrasted with her long black hair. Her green eyes glinted at him.

Her voice sounded like music to his ears. "You must be Mr. Gray. I'm Onyx. Please let me know if I can help you in any way. Greta is waiting for you in her office. This way, please."

Without waiting for his reply, she led him into the office behind her desk.

Onyx knocked on the door just before opening it. “Mr. Gray for you, Greta.”

Nodding to Onyx, Henry entered.

Behind a large ebony desk was a redheaded woman who seemed to be in her mid-thirties. She had a classical beauty with a sense of power he hadn’t seen before. The woman behind the desk stood. “That will be all, Onyx. Please make sure we are not disturbed.”

Something about her poised command made him uncomfortable. He felt like she could see right through him.

“Please take a seat, Mr. Gray.”

He sank a little uncomfortably into the red leather guest chair, but as Jonathan Gray, he crossed his legs to appear confident, and smiled expectantly at her.

“What can I do for you today?”

Greta eyed him closely. “I was told you were discreet. Are you?”

Henry needed the Jonathan alias to be smooth. He gave her a long, level look and then nodded solemnly. “Very. I couldn’t be in this business otherwise. No one will ever learn from me what we talk about, and the work will be done with the utmost secrecy.”

“Are there any jobs you refuse to take?”

“I am not an assassin and I don’t do abductions. Other than that, we should be fine.”

“I have several needs, and if I’m happy with your work on the first task, I will hire you for some longer-term work.”

“I can be available for that. What do you need done?”

“I need you to plant surveillance devices at the office of Seattle Council-member, Cora Prescott. She takes my money and I need to make sure she is providing the support she promises. I want the information collected to be sent to the place of my choosing. Can you do that?”

He told her he could get it done tonight and the details of what to expect.

Greta nodded. “I think we have an understanding. Onyx will have your retainer waiting for you.”

He stood, happy that Greta hadn’t eaten him alive.

With an unsmiling nod, he shook her hand. “Pleasure doing business with you.” A fiery energy shot up his arm and he shuddered involuntarily. Greta’s eyes seem to look into his very soul. He let go of her hand and walked away nervously.

As Henry approached the reception desk, Onyx pulled out a leather briefcase. “Greta asked me to give this to you. I have also put you on our VIP list.”

After Greta, Onyx warmed him. It seemed to be safe to dig a little.

He leaned on the desk, turning on the charm. “So tell me. What do you do here?”

She smiled back at him with a practiced charm. “We can provide you with company for whatever you desire. If you would like, I can offer you some service now on the house. It’s not our normal hours, but I can find you a woman or man to take care of your desires. Or if I please you, I would be happy to take care of any needs you might have.”

He grabbed the briefcase and avoided looking at her. “I would love to take you up on that sometime, but I need to complete the work Greta has for me.”

Onyx nodded. “Very well, but feel free to call me anytime and I ... we would be happy to serve you.”

Was she normally this way with all of the customers? He decided it might be helpful to play along. He smiled nonchalantly and nodded.

“Thank you, Onyx. I might just do that.”

From the relative safety of his car, Henry looked in the briefcase. Inside there were five stacks of one hundred-dollar bills. He thought about Greta’s eye on him the whole meeting. Like she was measuring something he couldn’t see.

He sat in the car without starting it.

CHAPTER FIVE

Under the Spotlight

Kat reached across the table and touched the customer's hand, letting her hunger take a sip of energy from him. "Do we have a deal?"

His breathing got faster. "Yes, I will have our legal team go over the contract and get it signed. Will you be back to pick it up, or can I deliver it to your office?"

She took another sip of his energy. He looked transfixed. Humans were so easy, and this one's energy was delicious. A bit mature but bright. She needed to completely close the deal before she stopped feeding. Taking another sip, she gave him a suggestive smile. "It would really help me out if you had it sent over the moment it is signed. I'm not in the office very much so it's not worth making a personal trip to see me there."

He couldn't stop looking at her lips. "How about I give it to you over dinner?"

Oops! She'd fed a little more than needed for her goal. She wanted him to feel happy and comfortable, but not so much that he wanted to have sex right then.

She stopped feeding and disconnected from his energy. He still looked spellbound. She stood up. “What a wonderful idea! But maybe some other time. I promise I will take you to lunch to discuss your next project that we can help with.” She nodded and quickly left.

It was always like walking a tightrope to keep sales coming in. In the beginning, she spent some social time with her clients, but she found that having sex with them actually hurt sales, but keeping them wanting more brought in more business. Sex with customers caused too many complications. Many of them were married and she didn’t want them leaving their spouses. And it just felt wrong.

When she got back to the office, the receptionist waved her down.

“They are all waiting for you in the conference room!”

Oh, crap! She had totally forgotten.

“Thanks, I’ll be right there.”

The entire sales staff was filling the huge conference room. Otis Thorn was standing at the front.

“Nice you could grace us with your presence, Ms. Burke.”

It was never a good sign when he used her last name.

She smiled proudly. “I’m sorry, but I did close another big deal before coming back.”

Otis smiled back. “Everyone, if you are going to be late, at least come back with making us more money! That brings us to the reason for this meeting. It’s time to announce this year’s top

salesperson. Kat, since you're already standing, you might as well join me here."

Maybe it was vain, but she knew she had won again. Her Vampire abilities worked wonders with the people who had the power to sign big contracts for their service. It was unfair and felt like cheating, but it helped her stay independent of the Clan. That was more important than any guilt over winning this way. And she loved the way Otis looked at her. He was so proud. She stood next to Otis.

"For the second time in a row, I would like to present Kat with Salesperson of the Year."

Kat took the award and held it up. She knew she needed to act humble and honored even if she didn't feel that way. "Thank you, sir. I hope to always do my best."

"The rest of you should take note. Of the three years Kat has worked here, in all but her first year, she has beaten the rest of you by a large margin. I would like to see you all step up and make this a contest. Believe me, the bonuses will be worth it! Now everyone, please give Kat a big round of applause and help yourself to cake in the kitchen."

The bonus money was well worth it. This job was extremely important to her. Being the best kept her safe and gave her the independence she needed from the Clan. Right now, she was staying under the Clan's radar, but any sign of weakness and she knew she would get pulled in to work at the Clan brothel, or worse. There was NO WAY she would give in to the Clan controlling her. And her father would never control her either. She hated him for abandoning her and her mother. Yes, he had

paid for her schooling and had set up a trust fund for her, but she was too proud to touch his money. She was not going to let anyone buy her love. Or control her body.

CHAPTER SIX

Temptation

Back at the house, Henry got his bag of tricks ready for the night. The bugs he would use to send the data back to a hidden server couldn't be traced back to him and would only be used for this one client.

There was no public parking at Seattle City Hall, so he had to park down the street. This gave him time to look things over and make sure he remembered where the cameras were placed. His magic did not fool technology like video cameras. Normally it wasn't an issue. People in general didn't go over video surveillance unless something had happened, and he wouldn't leave any trace of his visit. The first camera he needed to deal with was at the back door of the building.

He removed a small monocular with a green laser attached to it from his bag and blinded the camera. A security guard came to check the door and camera. They seemed to have increased security since the last time he had visited.

While invisible to the guard, he followed the man back into the building, then took the stairs to the second floor where

Councilmember Prescott's office was located. There was an outer office that held her staff and an inner office where Prescott had her desk. She had her own entrance from the hallway. He listened at the door and there were no sounds, so he picked the lock and went in.

The office was somewhat standard with a large wooden desk, tall-backed leather chair, two guest chairs, a clock on the wall, and some binders on a shelf. With equipment from his bag, he swept the office for bugs. A closer look at the clock on the wall revealed a video camera hidden in its face. He pulled it off the wall and removed the memory card. Whoever else was watching the office was less advanced. Their video camera required someone to collect the video in person.

Starting with the phone on her desk, he took it apart and wired in a microphone that would be able to record her calls as well as the sounds in the room. Next, he opened the computer tower and wired in a receiver and a key logger to record everything typed on the computer. He installed some software that would forward everything over the internet to his server in encrypted form.

As he went to clean out the memory card from the clock, he heard a noise in the other room. He quickly put the clock back, put the memory card in his pocket, and left the way he'd come in.

If he was lucky, whoever came to change out the card might think someone had forgotten to replace it last time. But Henry didn't feel lucky.

The next morning, he checked that the server was sending data in. He left instructions for Greta to change the password and take over the processing of the surveillance. The job was done.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Long Game

The office had gone dark, the way Greta preferred it. Her green eyes still glittered, remembering today's feedings. She knew her skin felt tighter, her body still fit. Sounds and energies from the brothel told her it would be a profitable night. She fed again off all the collective energies in the brothel.

Onyx had struck out with Henry. Greta knew his name wasn't Jonathan. She wasn't surprised Onyx hadn't seduced him. That one would take a lot more to crack. But she was confident her plan would work. He wasn't infallible. Just a lot more like John.

John. Oh John. Why Silvia? The old pain came back for the millionth time. She pushed it away expertly, turning her thoughts back to her long game. A small smile appeared. She poured a glass of wine and walked over to the window. That fertility research would confirm her suspicions. There was a solid possibility this would work. And then the REAL test would begin.

But first, a few short games needed to resolve. The Marshals were going to be useful on this one. And maybe Henry's parents.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Dangerous Interests

Henry received a voicemail that Greta wanted to meet in person again to talk about more work. As before, the parking lot was empty during the day. Onyx was again behind the desk.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Gray.”

Henry thought Onyx would feel more open to sharing if they were on a first name basis, so he decided to lead her on a bit.

Leaning over the counter, he winked at her. “Hello, Onyx. You can call me Jonathan or Jon. Mr. Gray is so formal.”

She smiled and nodded. “Thank you, Jon. She is waiting for you. Go right in. Make sure you see me on your way out.” Her voice got a little purr in it.

“Thanks, Onyx, I will.”

Henry went into Greta’s office.

Greta motioned for him to take a seat as she finished writing something down. “It’s nice when people show up on time.”

He nodded. This time, he felt a lot more confident. “Not a problem, Ms. Burke.”

“Please call me Greta. This is a family business and there are a lot of Burkes working here. There is less confusion using given names. May I call you Jonathan?” Her sharp green eyes seemed to glitter.

Is Greta trying to work me like I was just doing with Onyx?

Henry forced himself to not squirm at the thought.

“If it pleases you.” He nodded and tried to look like it didn’t matter.

“That is exactly the right answer, Jonathan. Now let me get down to business. I am very happy with your performance on the last task.”

“Thank you, Greta. I strive for perfection.”

“Jonathan, do you know who you are working for? I can tell you are special, like we are.”

Was this a test. Two choices. One of them survivable.

He leaned forward. “I can tell you and Onyx are Veiled, but I am unsure of what type.”

“I could tell you were Veiled the moment I saw you. The cloud of magic is very strong around you. I expect I’m not even seeing the real you.”

I played it right, but I’m not happy she can see my magic.

He wondered how far to push her. Greta freely giving information seemed like a trap. Had he fallen into it already?

Greta tapped the desk with a long, red fingernail. "I would like to trust you with some longer-term work. I need you to take a job at Thorn Technologies and send me reports on research being conducted for me."

He had read about Thorn Technologies in the news recently, related to new bio-tech research on cancer. What research could they be doing for the Clan?

"I'm an expert in computer and network security. If I could be put into a position in information technology (IT), I would have all the access I need to get you what you want."

"That is what I needed to know. I will have a talk with the CTO at Thorn and push him to hire you. I'll let you know the details after I call him."

"Is there anything special I should know about the research?"

"The research is for fertility issues. I will send you the researchers' names when you are set up on site."

Greta paused for a moment. "There is one more thing. I will also need general reports on a Clan member, Kathy Burke, who works at Thorn as a salesperson. She goes by 'Kat'." She looked at him closely. Those green eyes were glittering again. He hoped he still looked emotionless.

She looked out the window and appeared to sigh. "Kathy has done nothing wrong. I want to make sure she is safe and not getting into any trouble. I can pay you well for the work."

Now I know. She needed someone Veiled for this job, but when she hired me, how did she know about me? It makes her the most dangerous client I've ever worked for. Nobody hired a Veiled operative to babysit their own Clan member. Greta was playing something longer than she was showing me.

“Please send me any information you have, and I can read it over while waiting to get the job at Thorn.”

Greta must have something to blackmail the CTO with to be able to pull strings. I wonder what I'm walking into.

“Will a hundred thousand be enough to get you going?”

It looks like I won't have to bring up how expensive I am. This is about what I would normally want up front on an assignment like this. She sure knows more about me than I like. Had he stepped into something that had been set in motion long before he arrived?

“That will be fine. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

“See Onyx for your money. That will be all.” Henry took his cue and went to see Onyx.

“Jon, I have your care package here.”

Onyx placed a leather briefcase on the desk.

“Thank you, Onyx. Hey, how should I return these later? I'm building up a collection of leather briefcases.”

“I have an idea! Why don't I come over tonight? Say 7:00 p.m.? We can have some fun and I can collect any unneeded items.”

Here's my chance to pump her for information. But how risky would it be? Was the risk worth whatever info he could get? This whole gig was full of risk. Intelligence is the safest protection.

“How could I say no? It would be good to learn more about you and the Clan. Greta gave me a little bit of the story, but I would like to learn more about you.”

“Then we have a date.”

Henry pulled out a pen and wrote down the address of a Seattle condo he owned. He hoped this wasn't a bad idea, but he really needed to learn more about who he was working for.

His Seattle condo was in a luxury high-rise building on the 19th floor in Belltown. His place had a gorgeous view of the Seattle skyline and it always impressed the few dates he had brought here.

It had been a while since his last visit, so he went room by room making sure everything was still secure. It was a two-bedroom, two-bath condo. Everything was clean and ready to go. The few secret areas he installed had not been touched. He opened a bottle of wine and set out some bread and cheese; it should be good enough for the evening.

Henry wondered if this was a good idea. She had to have sex in mind when she made the offer to come over, and having sex with her was definitely risky. Maybe he could lead her on while pumping her for info? What would it be like to be fed on? He set his illusion to look like Jonathan in a black designer suit

with an open black shirt. Looking like a hip nightclub owner, he was ready.

A call from the lobby notified him that Onyx had arrived and was on her way up. Moments later, she was at his door.

He smiled warmly. "Please come in. Let me help you with your coat. Wine?"

Henry hung her coat up in the hall closet. Her perfume was almost as intoxicating as the tight red dress that accented her curves. Her lipstick and three-inch stilettos matched the dress. It struck him that she looked a lot like Eva Green playing a femme fatale in a movie. He could only hope she wouldn't be the death of him.

She gazed out the window without looking at him. "Wine would be wonderful. You have a beautiful place here, Jon."

Henry led her to the living room, and they took positions on the couch. He poured them both some wine.

Henry was not sure how to break the ice. "So, you're Veiled..."

She smiled. "And you are Veiled as well. Right?"

"I guess so. My parents never told me, and I don't know anyone else like me to ask."

"Greta said your illusions make you Veiled. Is this the real you?"

"I could ask you the same question."

Gently, she touched his face and kissed him.

Her kiss hit like a shockwave.

Heat brushed against his thoughts—soft, invasive, wrong

He'd felt manipulation before.

Not like this.

His focus slipped for half a second—

then snapped back hard.

No.

He straightened slightly, jaw tightening

Whatever she was doing, it wasn't going to work that easily.

Henry caught his breath. "Are all Veiled like you?"

She glanced down. "Some are stronger. I'm young for one of us. Our abilities grow with age."

Her eyes lifted to his again.

"That's why Greta could see your magic's aura when I couldn't."

He looked deeply into her green eyes. They seemed to be brighter than before, but they didn't glitter like Greta's.

Green eyes. Just like Greta's. He filed that away.

“I’ll take your word for that.”

He sat back on the couch and sipped his wine. “So tell me more about yourself.”

“We are descended from Vampires who did require blood to live, but through evolution, we have adapted to feed off strong energies. At least that’s what we are taught.”

Maybe that’s why he felt so weird. She was feeding off him.

“How do you feed off energies?”

She laughed. Taking his hand, she held it close to her mouth. Waves of excitement shot through his body. He tried to remain calm. While maintaining eye contact, she inhaled deeply. Her cheeks became bright red and her green eyes glowed weirdly. He was transfixed.

She put down his hand and grabbed her wine glass as if nothing had happened. “Our Clan can only feed off lust and sex, but there are others that can feed off pain, hate, anger, or other strong emotions. We actually partner with a group that feeds off pain to fill some of our customers’ needs.”

He tried to regain control of his brain. No way he was falling into a trap. He cleared his throat and looked away. Focus. Painting. Window. Questions. Anything but her. Remember the questions you piled up to ask her.

He grabbed his wine glass and sipped. Definitely feeling more like himself. He reached his arm across the back of the couch, projecting calm. “Do you like working for Greta?”

“It’s the only job I have ever had.”

“But do you enjoy it?”

“I get to meet lots of important people and the work is easy.”

Onyx winked and took a long sip of wine. She carefully put the wine glass back on the coffee table and looked at him quizzically. “There’s a woman at Thorn you’ll be watching. Kathy Burke. Do you know her?”

There was a flicker on his face before he shook his head no and took a long sip of wine. It definitely felt like Onyx was fishing HIM. He sat back on the couch, keeping his face even.

“Why is Greta having me watch Kathy?”

She sat back on the couch and looked away. “I don’t really know. You’d have to ask Greta.”

Damn. Swing and a miss. Maybe get her to talk about her feelings.

“Do you have to service customers?”

“Are you asking if I have sex with customers?”

He smiled as warmly as he could, trying to be disarming. “I’m sorry for all of the questions. I’m just excited to meet someone like you.”

She didn’t seem to open up, just stayed in her professional, pleasant distance. “My job is to make sure they are taken care of and kept safe. It is not my job to have sex with them.”

“Then how do you feed?”

“Oh, I have some playmates of my own, outside of work.”

“You mean like now, don’t you?”

She smiled back and came closer to him. “Would that be so bad? Don’t worry. I would never hurt you.”

She kissed him again as her hands ran up his arms. His thoughts started to slip, and he sure didn't trust her. He pushed her hands away. "Did Greta put you up to this?"

"Greta has nothing to do with me being here tonight. I just wanted to know what it was like to be with someone Veiled. All of the men and women I have experienced have been Human."

"You don't have sex with other Vampires?"

"With another Vampire, it would be strictly physical, and it would feel a bit like having sex with my brother. Since Vampire men can only get Human women pregnant, they prefer to have sex only with them. Our women are sterile. So our mothers are all Human."

That must be why Greta was so interested in Thorn. Fertility research suddenly made a lot more sense.

"That must be a sore subject. I won't bring it up again."

"Show me your bedroom and all will be forgiven."

Things were moving too fast. She apparently was using this sex thing to manipulate him. He pulled himself back together.

He shook his head. "Not tonight, Onyx."

She looked surprised. "I have never heard that before."

"You are very attractive. But I can't mix business with pleasure. We should just be friends until after the job is over."

"We can be friends with benefits!"

He mutely shook his head again. She kissed him and he felt a huge flow of warmth that turned him on. It burst through his body in waves.

Henry felt his resolve fighting to stay in control. Her eyes glowed even more green. His brain was getting fuzzy again.

Her hands ran across his chest. “Now that’s what I’m talking about.”

The touch of her hands produced waves of erotic need. Kissing her was like warm sweet liquor running through his body. She stroked his legs, running her hands up his back. She moved her head so his lips ran down her chin and then her throat.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, he knew he needed to resist her. He looked into her glowing green eyes; his body screamed with need.

She unzipped her tight red dress and sensually slid it inch by inch down to her butt. She stood to help reveal her naked body.

Just her warm breath on his skin was pleasure itself. Never before had he felt like this. What was left of his brain was sounding the alarm bells. She was feeding off him. The feelings were just as strong as he caressed her body. He was on the edge of his control and his mind raced looking for something to keep him safe. What if he bound and blindfolded her? Or should he just give in to his needs and fuck her with reckless abandon? It was what other men would do right now.

Her eyes glowed with seductive power.

He had to stop this, now. “Onyx, no. I can’t do this.”

Onyx’s eyes narrowed. “What? You can’t do what exactly?”

“I’m sorry but now isn’t the right time.” He pushed her away and zipped up his pants.

A look of primal rage crossed her face, before it was quickly replaced with a professional, distant smile. He wondered if he had imagined it.

She laughed. “What the hell isn’t right about it? We are primed and ready! Let’s get on with it!”

His body wanted to, but his mind was in control now. He carefully moved away. “I need to slow down and understand how your feeding impacts my abilities, before I lose all control and my safety.”

“I thought we were having such a great time.”

“Your feeding is pushing me to the very limits of my control.”

“I can cut down on the intensity of my feeding. I just was going harder since your energy tasted so wonderful and I was having to work harder to get it. You are in no danger from my hunger.”

It still seemed like he was in some danger. Was it her intentions or her hunger?

She crept a little closer to him. "You could drop your illusions and we can go back to having fun." She stroked his leg. "Think how enjoyable that would be."

He pushed her hand away. "I don't know you well enough to do that right now."

"But you knew me well enough for sex?"

"I wasn't feeding off of you."

She grabbed her dress off the floor and put on a weird smile. "Call me when you've mastered your control and are ready for a night of bliss."

Had this all been a game for her? Was the goal for him to drop his illusions and show her everything and then report back to Greta?

He needed to smooth her feathers. "Thanks for being so understanding. Let's try again after the job is over."

Onyx slipped her dress on without looking at him. "I can show myself out."

What did he get himself into? Were the Vampires hoping their magic was stronger than his?

Had he avoided a trap, or missed an opportunity?

He had seen a glimpse of a predator. He should have expected that something that fed from Humans would be one. But she had respected him saying no and stopped. This was complicated, and he didn't know what to think.

He remembered that laugh again. Warm. Bright. Just a little wicked.

The next morning, Henry checked the details for Greta's job. It had the information about his cover story, researchers, project information, and more on Kathy Burke. Greta was able to get him a start date for the job next Monday. She must really have some pull. Companies were not set up for people to start in less than two weeks, after background checks and offer letters.

The address showed Kathy had a condo that was walking distance from his Kirkland house. That would be convenient when it came to watching over her.

She must be a Vampire if she was in the Clan. If last night was any indication, Vampires were predators in a gorgeous package and should not to be underestimated. Maybe Kat was the reason Greta wanted an outsider.

He was mostly to keep an eye on her at work. The job didn't require a surveillance package for her home, which was good. Watching someone twenty-four hours a day crossed a line he preferred not to cross. He just needed to monitor her interactions. He wondered again why Greta wanted him to do this.

Henry arrived precisely on time to the reception desk. He had dressed his alias in a green polo shirt and slacks for his first day. Since he hadn't met his new boss, he wanted to look more like a consultant. He had chosen an alias with the same first name. Just in case.

"Hello, I'm Henry Lancer. It's my first day and I was told to ask for Alan Adams, my new boss."

The receptionist smiled. “Hi, Henry. I’m Sally. Welcome to Thorn Technologies. I will call Alan ... he will be right out. You can have a seat over there.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Sally.”

He looked at the clock on the wall. Twenty minutes had passed and still no Alan. Was this his passive-aggressive way to punish him for not going through the standard hiring procedure? The waiting made him worry. Finally, a man walked up.

“Henry?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Follow me back to my office and we can talk.”

The name plate on the door showed it was Alan Adam’s office.

“Please have a seat. We need people, but I have no idea why our CTO hired you without my approval. He said you are an expert on system and network security as well as policy writing.”

“That is all correct.”

Alan looked him over for several minutes. “I feel like we had higher priority needs than this position, but I can’t say no to our CTO. Let me show you around.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Just call me Alan.”

His new boss took him to his desk and introduced him to the people in Alan’s group. He assigned Jack to get him going and

handed him a packet of information with his badge and login credentials. Jack mostly handled network administration. For the most part, Henry was left on his own to learn how the group worked. His new co-workers seemed to have taken on Alan's unease about him. Normally in a group like this, many of the people would help interview new hires. When an executive directly hired a person without the normal procedure, many times the person was a spy, or a talentless hack, or was hired to decide who was going to lose their job. Henry had to convince them he was one of them, something he was good at, if given enough time.

Once on his computer, he went to work. First, he checked the levels of access he had been given and what areas of the building would be off limits. Some of the research labs were off limits, but otherwise he had full access in the building. His account had access to the file servers and security logging systems. That wasn't going to be enough for what he needed for Greta, but that would only slow him down a little.

Today he would do the job the CTO hired him for: go through their system security and look for intrusions, read through the security policies, and get an idea of the current level of compliance to those policies. Normally it was him causing the intrusions and using social engineering to persuade company employees to give him what he wanted.

It was easy to spot several suspicious entries in the logs. This place would be way too easy to get full access to anything he might want. Nothing else here was looking to be any challenge at all.

He decided to run a quiet sweep of the building. The offices were on the first floor, the same as the IT group, and the labs were on the second. He decided to start on the second floor and work his way down. He found the stairs up and quickly walked through the lab areas he could access without entering any private spaces. It filled in his mental map without looking too suspicious.

What he needed for Greta would be on file servers the researchers used to log their data and notes. A place like this would not leave any paper copies that would have to be shredded. Back downstairs, he checked out the kitchen and break areas. One section of the floor held glass-walled meeting rooms. He hated those fishbowls. They always made him feel like he was being studied by the people passing by.

Henry wondered where Kat's office was. He should've checked the company directory before coming over. Amateur mistake.

He could ask someone—but that risked drawing attention.

Maybe it was time to head back.

Then he heard it.

A laugh—warm, effortless, just a little wicked—curling around the corner like it belonged there.

He went still.

No. Not possible.

But he knew that sound.

He looked anyway.

And there she was, already looking at him.

“You look lost. Need some help?”

He spun around. That shouldn’t have thrown him.

“I’m new here and was just looking around.”

“Hi, I’m Kat. And you are?”

“Nice to meet you, Kat. I’m Henry.”

Her smile hit harder than it should have. Warm. Easy.
Real.

“I should probably get back to it.”

Kat laughed. “I had wondered who had let the geeks out today.”

“Am I that obvious?”

“You’re not slick like the sales guys back here and you’re not wearing a lab coat, so you had to be in IT.”

“You have a good eye.”

“Look closely—you’ll see I have two.”

He grinned. “I noticed! They’re green.”

She was grinning too. “Most men around here don’t look that closely.”

He was sure she was laughing at him. He turned to go.

"I better get back to my desk. I hope you have a good day."

"See you around, Henry."

She was observant. Funny.

Not part of the assignment.

Which meant she already was.

Kat stared at her list of sales prospects. She thought about each person and remembered their energy. None of them were appealing to her today. She tapped her fingernails on the desk, bored.

She wanted something new to taste.

The IT guy surfaced in her mind before she could stop it. That sweet brightness. The way it had slipped out of her reach like smoke — something she could sense but not quite catch. She'd been thinking about it, off and on, since their first conversation. Not obsessively. Just the way you'd keep returning to a word you couldn't quite place.

Hunger was a reliable thing. It had never confused her before.

She picked up the phone.

"Hi, Henry! This is Kat in sales. I need someone to check my laptop for viruses."

"I'll be right down to help."

She set down the receiver. The laptop was perfectly fine, and she knew it. She'd figure out a graceful pivot when he got

here. Humans never questioned her motives — she could redirect before he'd even sat down.

She pulled out a compact and reapplied her lipstick. Then caught herself doing it and paused.

Hm.

He appeared in her doorway. She caught his scent before anything else. Bright, sweet, and something underneath she couldn't name. Not fear, not arousal, not ambition — all the energies she read easily. Just something else. Something that made her hunger tilt its head.

“I understand you have an issue with your computer?”

“Hi, Henry. I hope I'm not wasting your time. Something just felt off.”

“I'm happy to see you again so soon. No worries, let me take a look.”

She watched him work. His focus was clean — nothing performed about it, no sideways glances at her. He just looked at the screen. Most men in her orbit spent their attention on her like currency. He spent his on the problem.

She found herself wondering what it would feel like to be the thing he focused on like that.

Don't, she told herself.

Henry started doing things on her computer. “The company virus software is running and hasn't found any issues. I can look deeper, but I think your computer is fine.”

"Thanks for the peace of mind." She let the smile go a little warmer than strictly necessary. "Feel like taking a break and walking over to the espresso stand? My treat."

He looked at his watch. Something in her braced — they never looked at their watches. "Sure, I have some time, and it would be nice to get out of the building."

She grabbed her purse and exhaled.

Outside, the October air was sharp and clean. She fell into step beside him and tried a small taste — just a brush, nothing he'd notice.

His energy moved differently than she expected. Sweet, yes, but elusive. Like trying to hold water in a cupped palm. She got something, but not enough to read him properly.

She let go, more unsettled than before.

"It's a nice day out."

"It is." He glanced at her sideways. "Do you take all the new hires out for coffee?"

She touched his arm — casual, testing — and took a slightly longer sip this time. Still not enough. She could feel the edges of something bright and layered, but not the shape of it. Her hunger didn't know what to do with him.

He shifted, just slightly. He'd felt it.

She kept her voice easy. "I don't, but you aren't the average new guy."

"Oh, but I'm as average as they come."

She almost laughed — actually laughed, not the calibrated version she used in meetings. He'd said it so deadpan. "Not everybody gets hired into such a senior position as quickly as you."

He grinned a little strangely. "Guess I was being modest. What about you? I see you are salesperson of the year again."

She studied his face a moment. There was something very controlled in him — controlled in a way she recognized, because she lived there too. She wondered what he was protecting.

She gave him a wicked smile instead of pressing it. "I have a knack for closing a deal when it's right for both parties."

Henry rushed forward to open the door for her. "After you."

She stepped past him, and something in her chest did a small, annoying thing she chose not to examine.

She ordered two lattes and brought them to the corner table he'd chosen. Smart. He'd put his back to the wall without making a production of it.

"What's it like to work for Thorn?"

"The man or the company?"

"Both, I guess."

She listened while he listened — she could feel him filing information even as he offered her conversation. He was curious about Thorn in a way that didn't feel like small talk. She almost called him on it. Decided not to.

He wasn't asking about her.

That shouldn't have stung. She was used to men who couldn't stop asking about her — their hunger for her attention radiating off them so loudly it was almost exhausting. This was different. She couldn't decide if she respected it or resented it.

She reached across and touched his hand. His energy moved under her palm in a way that made her breath catch, just for a second — sweet but strange, like a frequency slightly out of range. She got more this time. Not enough.

She leaned forward. "Tell me how you became a security expert."

"Would you believe I'm a reformed hacker?"

She looked at him closely. "I'm not sure. You look too corporate for that."

He laughed — and she felt it before she heard it. A small, real warmth. She wanted more of it immediately.

She touched his hand again.

For a moment she thought she had it.

Then it slipped away.

Sweet brightness. A trace of warmth.

Nothing she could hold onto.

Careful.

"You're right," he said. "I've just had a lot of schooling and on-the-job experience. Also, as part of my CISSP certification, I'm required to keep up to date with classes."

"That must get expensive."

"Normally companies pay for the classes." He looked at his watch again, and this time she felt the flicker of it — the pull,

before he put it away. "I think we better get back. I have a meeting coming up soon."

She stood. Smiled. Let none of what she was feeling reach her face.

When they got back to the building, he held the door again. "Kat, it's been great getting to know you a little better. Thank you for the latte."

"It was my pleasure." She watched him head off toward IT.

She stood there a moment longer than she should have.

His scent lingered — that sweet brightness she still hadn't named. Her hunger turned it over slowly, like a question it didn't have an answer to.

In three years of avoiding the Clan, she'd gotten very good at not wanting things she couldn't read. Wanting them was a liability. Wanting them while they slipped through your fingers like that was something worse.

She pulled out her phone and looked at her prospect list without seeing it.

He looked at his watch, she thought. Twice.

Men didn't do that.

She couldn't decide if that made him more interesting or more dangerous. After a moment, she put her phone away and decided, with great deliberateness, not to think about it anymore.

She wanted another taste and thought about it for the rest of the afternoon.

CHAPTER NINE

Beneath Seattle

His new office was probably meant for contractors. A desk, a cabinet, a couple chairs. Dusty and gray. Forgotten. Temporary.

At least he had two huge monitors. That was luxury. He studied the blueprints of the building in detail. The researchers working on the project for the Clan had desks and large labs on the second floor. He made a list of names and room numbers on a sticky note.

A reformed hacker.

He heard her laugh again. And he'd laughed. Those green eyes had glinted for a second. Warm. Bright.

The room had gotten dark. Back to the assignment. Everyone had gone home for the day. Time to search the lab areas for Greta. It would be best to take the back stairs. Even though he could hide from anyone that he might've missed, it was safer to assume they could see him.

The floors on this level were all vinyl. Some sections were in alternating gray and white to help show different work areas. A few labs were closed off with glass walls and doors. The work areas had black composite tops over white drawers. Sinks and units to burn off samples were shared between groups of labs. There were also some all metal units with a computer interface and a door that opened.

Looking at one of the screens, Henry saw it was requesting a sample number. This must be the machine they used to store refrigerated samples. The lab spaces were identified by letters on the wall. He was looking for lab M, which he found along the back wall in the corner. It was one of the ones with glass walls. Like the rest of the stations, it was clean and sanitary looking. This was in sharp contrast to the rest of the building, where people had personal items and general mess on their desks. No journals, notes, or anything could identify what was done here.

It was good to see the lab, even though he hadn't been able get much. He would just watch the progress from the server where they saved their work. As long as he was here, he might as well snoop around.

Somewhere on this floor, Otis Thorn had a private lab. If anyone was to be hiding something, it would be the boss in a lab no one was allowed into. All he had to do was look for the door with the keep out sign. The best he could find was an unmarked door that had a card key lock on it.

Henry pulled out a master key card and cracked the door open. He paused to listen before going in. Sounds of screaming stopped him cold.

Then Thorn's voice — smooth, calm, almost gentle.

That was worse.

He stood very still for a moment. Then he pulled the door closed, exactly as he'd found it, and walked back the way he came. Steady. Deliberate. The way you moved when something in you wanted to run.

No matter how he felt, he couldn't go rushing in without knowing more. Walking into a trap to save someone wouldn't help anyone. The best he could do was check Thorn's appointments and enter the lab when he wouldn't be there. For all he knew, the person screaming could have some infectious disease that could kill everyone in the building if he let them out.

He went back to his office and searched the company servers. Unlike the researchers, Thorn didn't save anything to the servers that was related to his lab work. Henry hadn't officially met Otis Thorn, but there was something off about him that warranted research. He would need to return some time when Thorn wasn't using the lab.

After covering his tracks in the security logs, Henry went home.

The dark felt different tonight.

He sat with it anyway. Computers didn't scream. In twenty years he'd never heard anything like that. Thorn's voice — smooth, calm, almost gentle — had been worse.

He didn't sleep.

CHAPTER TEN

Blood Ties

Kat considered letting it go to voicemail when she saw his name.

She answered anyway. Old habit. Hating herself a little for it.

"Hello."

"Kat." His voice was exactly as she remembered. Careful. Controlled. The voice of a man who had learned, very long ago, to give nothing away. "I won't keep you."

"You never do."

A pause. She could hear him deciding how much to say.

"There's been a death. Underground, near The Second Circle. We don't know yet if it was targeted at the Clan or something adjacent."

"And you're calling me because—"

"Because you live in this city and you're my daughter."
Another pause, shorter. "Stay out of the underground after dark.
Don't go near the Circle."

"I never go near the Circle."

"I know." Something in his voice shifted — not softer exactly, but less armored. Just for a second. "I know you don't."

She didn't say anything. Letting the silence do what it always did between them — fill up with everything neither of them would touch.

"Is Greta sending someone to handle it?" she asked finally.
"Greta is aware."

Of course she is. Greta was always aware. That was the thing about Greta — she knew about things before they happened, sometimes, which had always made Kat wonder which category this death fell into.

"Fine," Kat said. "I'll be careful."

"Good." He hesitated — she could feel it even through the phone, that particular quality of John's silences, weighted with things he'd been not-saying for decades. "You sound well."

"I am well."

"Good," he said again.

She waited.

"That's all," he said. "That's all I needed."

She ended the call and stood with the phone in her hand for a moment.

That's all I needed.

She had pushed him away years ago. She had made a whole architecture of her life around becoming completely independent — the job, the apartment, the careful distance from the Clan and everyone in it, including him.

It still landed the same way every time.

She set her phone down.

Somewhere below the city, something was dead. Greta was aware. John had called her, which he almost never did, which meant either he was genuinely worried or Greta had asked him to make the call — and she couldn't decide which possibility unsettled her more.

She went to lock her door.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Hidden Evidence

Something startled him awake. He looked up at the clock. Just past 6 a.m. Something felt off for Henry. He checked all the ongoing surveillance for his customers. For the most part, everything seemed to be in spec, except that the monitoring at Cora Prescott's office hadn't sent any new data all night. The connection was good, so maybe it was just a lack of data.

Then the call came.

"Hello, Onyx. What can I do for you?"

"Cora Prescott is dead. Take care of things."

"Consider it done."

Now he knew what the feeling was about. Long ago, he had learned to trust his gut feelings about things. They weren't always right, but they had saved him often enough to pay attention. He quickly shut down the bug operation remotely, but he needed to get them back in order to not leave a trace. He needed to drop everything and do it now if he hoped to get them before a police search found them. Remembering the camera in

the clock, he created a memory card that was corrupted to swap into it. After sending his boss an email that he had a personal emergency, he headed to City Hall.

It was different this time. It was daytime and he had to avoid people, but didn't have to worry about security guards. Cameras would be a problem since the police might check them to find out who had been seeing the Council member. The best he could do was wear a cap to hide his face when he passed by them, and wear gloves while in the office. He would somewhat blend in with others visiting the building. Luckily, there were no cameras in the hallway entrance to her office. It must help when people were looking to influence their elected official.

Adrenaline flowing, he was hyped up for the mission, not that anyone could see it. What people saw was a middle-aged woman. Any witness reports would be confused if someone did look at the video recordings.

Henry picked the lock to the office door and went in. Putting on his gloves, he started with the camera in the clock. Not being recorded was more important than someone finding the bugs. Next he took apart the phone and set the parts to one side.

A woman yelled, "Wait! You can't go in there."

A man's voice said, "This warrant says we can. Don't worry, when she turns up, we will take the heat for looking through her office."

The police must be here looking for clues. He was out of time.

Putting up the illusion of being invisible and silent, he finished putting the phone back together, right before a man and

a woman came in. He stood off to one side so they wouldn't run in to him.

The woman had a Marshals badge. "I don't think she knows Prescott is dead. She was saying she hated her and hoped she was dead in Russian."

The man had a Seattle PD badge clipped to his belt. "Wow, Abby! You speak Russian?"

"I have a gift of understanding spoken languages on hearing it. That reminds me: we should ask about the missing assistant on our way out. I wonder if she decided to not show up, knowing Prescott was already dead."

"Good thought. I shouldn't have missed that."

"I should call Jeff and get things going on the computer."

This was getting bad. The woman must be Veiled to be on an assignment like this one. He needed to get out of here now! She didn't seem to notice him, but not knowing anything about her abilities, she could at any moment. He couldn't wait to remove the key logger from the computer tower. The bug from the phone was the best he was going to get. Slowly he moved to the door to the hall.

The woman said, "We made it into her office with her desktop computer."

She continued with, "What was that? Did you hear it on your side or was it just my headset?"

Her headset must be picking up someone else's bug in the room. Henry added an illusion of the door staying closed as he left the room. This was a close call. They would probably start

sweeping for bugs. Someone must have added more since he installed his. Nothing he had would cause interference with a headset or anything else. There was no time to lose, but he also couldn't rush and draw attention to himself. He was back to the illusion of being a woman for his trip out. Once on the street, he took a deep breath.

The key logger couldn't be traced back to him and its data had been removed when he deactivated it. He knew they would find the other devices, and he expected they would credit it to the owner of those bugs.

Putting his leather gloves back in his pocket, he was in the clear, but it was not up to his professional standard to leave the scene dirty. There wasn't anything he could do about that.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Hunt

Henry would have to sneak back into the office, since he wasn't supposed to be there, and it might be hard to explain. He didn't expect anyone to be on site, but Otis Thorn had a high probability of continuing to work in his lab and could be roaming around the building. That was the one person he couldn't afford to be seen by.

Henry arrived at the office around lunch time. He figured the middle of the day would be safer, and if anybody had been in, they might be out for lunch. It wouldn't take long to look at the servers and make a copy of the latest lab report. Looking around the building, he didn't notice any security guards working. Normally there would be a little security during business hours, but they must have been given the time off to save money.

He got inside his private office with no windows, and shut his door. From his computer, he verified he hadn't been seen on any of the security cameras. He set up windows on his second monitor to watch for people, while he connected to the lab server to retrieve the current reports. He copied the report to an

encrypted USB memory stick. His was one of the few computers in the building that had working USB ports to prevent people from doing just that. He would set up a Tor connection to the Dark Web and transmit the report to Greta from offsite.

With the report in hand, he decided to check and see if anyone else had visited while the office was closed. The logs didn't show any exterior access other than his, which he removed. It did show access to Otis Thorn's lab via a special key card. It could be Otis or it could have been the researcher. He couldn't tell since both used identical cards. It was strange that the card hadn't been used to get into the building, but Henry had always thought there must be a secret entrance he hadn't found yet that Thorn used to come and go.

Movement caught Henry's eye on the second monitor. He looked at the video feeds and didn't see what it could have been. Everything looked normal.

It happened again. Something moved on the video feed. Henry focused on the live feeds, determined to see what it was. He could rewind the feed to find out, but might miss something happening now. A black shadow passed by one of the exterior cameras. Now he had to rewind and pause the stream. A raven? A crow he could understand, but a raven wouldn't be seen in this area. Why would it be making loops around this building as if it had a purpose? This felt wrong.

Suddenly, several black SUVs approached the building from the front and back with U.S. Marshals emblems on the doors. Being found in the building could get him mistaken for a hostile. If they were coming for Thorn, he expected they were Veiled and might see through his illusions. A man and a woman

got out of each SUV, all of them in SWAT style body armor and carrying rifles. This wasn't good. If they were smart, they would clear every room as they moved forward and would find him.

Escape, hide, or hope Thorn had another exit? Trying to hide could work but if something happened, the building could be sealed off for quite a while and it might be even harder to escape, and if found, even more trouble with the Marshals. It would be best to get out when there were only four Marshals here and a lot of ground to cover. They were picking the lock on the front door.

The power went out. They must be trying to disable any alarm systems. Important functions would switch to battery for the couple of moments needed for the backup generators to take over. Henry went for the security system and powered off the system for the security cameras. It would help him make his escape and people would think the machine crashed from a power surge and didn't reboot.

The back door slammed shut. The second pair of Marshals must have entered from the back. Henry moved as quickly and quietly as he could in the direction of the side door he had come in. Hearing doors fly open, they were getting closer. In a moment, they would get to this area. It was bad luck they didn't go through the other side of this floor first. Trying to stay ahead of them wasn't going to work. It would push him to the front of the building where the other team had entered, and it was a large open area with the stairs to the second floor. Jumping up and trying to hide above the ceiling tiles would make too much noise.

Quickly he moved into an unused office, went behind a desk and used an illusion to visually hide in case they entered the room far enough to see that spot. The two Marshals looked through the open door panning the area with guns and one made hand signals to continue on.

The illusion held! He waited until he heard them in the area around the corner before he continued to the side entrance. He took a deep breath and pulled the hoodie over his head to obstruct a view of his face, in case something on the other side could see through his illusion. He added the illusion of the door staying closed as he opened it and went through.

Once outside, he ran for his Subaru Forester. Fortunately, he had parked a couple of buildings away to not draw attention to it in an empty parking lot. It was beyond the Marshals' SUVs. Hitting the button on the remote, he flung open the door and drove off. After a few miles, he knew for sure he had gotten away.

He was mad at himself. It was stupid to not have gotten the report he needed his last day in the office, before they closed for the shutdown.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Thaw

Henry could read the writing on the wall. Thorn Technologies was about to get closed down and this assignment would be over. Marshals didn't deploy like that without a reason. Thorn was in trouble. The company probably was too.

The cold still had teeth. Henry sat with the full weight of his fear. For a man who had built his entire life around being untouchable, he suddenly felt ripped open.

Thorn was collapsing.

The assignment was ending.

Greta would move on.

He should have been relieved.

Instead, for the first time in his life, Henry found himself wishing for more time.

And that was dangerous enough.

And if Kat ever learned the truth—that he'd been paid to watch her from the beginning—she'd probably never want to see him again.

He sat in the dark a long time.

Warm, for once.

Terrified.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Architect's Design

Greta looked over Henry's analysis and lifted her wine glass.

Exactly as planned.

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