

Prologue - Reawakening

I stretched my arms over my head and reveled in the sensation of doing absolutely nothing. A short vacation had been just what the doctor had ordered. In truth, it wasn't ordered by Elliot, my doctor, but by Elijah, who was kind of my biological dad since his original vampire DNA was the glue that held together my multiple demon and human genetic makeup.

Finding out that Elijah could eat food was another shocking revelation, especially to my boyfriend, Jared, who had been a blood-only vampire for over two hundred years. Sure, they had synthetic blood with flavorings, but nothing beats a good rare steak with Béarnaise sauce, mashed potatoes and asparagus. I glanced over to his side of the bed and sighed. He was gone, again. No doubt in the kitchen, either in search of more food or on the computer he had installed there so he could watch cooking shows and broil, grill, sauté, reduce or whatever today's cuisine entailed. It's not that I minded, I loved to eat, and he loved to cook. It was a perfect combination but sex with me used to be on the top of Jared's list of priorities and I suspected I was slipping into second place. The sex was still mind-blowing, but it was repeatedly being interrupted by his stomach.

Jared walked into the room with a bag of veggie sticks in one hand and a jar of hot salsa in the other. Even though he was over two hundred years old, he appeared to be in his late 20's or early 30's, six feet tall and lean, with expansive shoulders tapering down to a narrow waist. His intense eyes were as vibrant and blue as a tropical lagoon, although I'd seen them change to deep sapphire when he was feeling strong emotions, and red with blood lust or severe desire. An angel's face, but his body said he could honestly kick ass and not break a sweat, a deadly combination. His naked body spiked my internal temperature and my skin flushed with anticipation.

"These are so yummy, Annie. Who knew veggies could taste so good without sautéing them in butter, garlic and herbs?" Jared dipped a stick into the salsa jar and popped it into his mouth.

"Did you go into the kitchen to get food without remembering to get clothes on again?" I asked as my eyes roamed up and down his tight body, which just upped my desire even more.

"Yes, he did," Glen shouted from his own room. "I think he blew out the video security cameras and I'm blind!"

"My house," Jared shouted to Glen, and then added, "You can find your own any time."

"And leave my best friend since kindergarten alone with a vampire whose appetite for food, and other things, has doubled in the last month?"

I smiled. Glen was right. The more food Jared ate, the more sex he needed.

“It’s a good way to work off the extra calories I am consuming. You would prefer we accepted a job and fought demons?”

“Nope. We are on vacation since we nearly got killed on the last assignment,” Glen retorted.

“I rest my case.” Jared said, sticking another veggie stick into his mouth.

“Have you heard from Thad?” I asked. We met Thad during our last job. He’s a genetically altered being, like myself, and the closest thing I have to a sibling. Of course, during our first encounter, he’d stabbed Jared and kidnapped me but, in the end, he had rescued us before the self-destruct on a lab in South Dakota exploded the top off a mountain. A man named Matthias was trying to make more demon assassins with the coerced help of Thad’s father, Marshal Blower. Thad had turned into a dragon and had whisked us from the mountain. He hated being an assassin and loved flying so the last time I saw him he was circling the mountain and heading west.

“I have not heard from Thaddeus and suspect he is still a dragon,” Glen replied, always preferring the more formal name than the nickname I gave Thad.

“I suspect you are right,” I said.

“I don’t want to talk about Thad,” Jared growled.

“Then what would you like to talk about?” I glanced over at him.

Jared’s eyes darken. “Nothing. I plan to dip these sticks into the salsa, wipe them over your entire body and lick you clean.

My desire spiked higher as his eyes darkened to deep sapphire.

The house phone assigned to Jared’s security company, rang and Glen and I said together, “Vacation! No calls!”

Jared glanced toward the phone next to our bed. “Let it go to voice mail.”

Then we heard a deep voice that said, “Jared, it’s Lucas Blankenship. There’s trouble brewing and it’s catastrophic.”

“Damn witches!” Jared muttered as he walked toward the phone.

“Witches?” I asked.

“I better call him back and see what is going on. When things go wrong in the witch world, the rest of the world goes to hell, literally. It’s not a good idea to avoid their problems.”

“We haven’t dealt with witches before. Who is Lucas Blankenship?” I asked, as I pulled on the black T-shirt I’d worn to bed, which hadn’t stayed on more than a second or two.

Jared drew on his black sweatpants. “We don’t police the witches. They have their own council and police force. Lucas is a lead cop, among other things, for the witch’s counsel. He handles their problems. If he’s calling for help, things have to be bad.”

“If the world is going to hell, I want to hear why. Put the call on speaker phone.”

Jared nodded and sat on the bed. He pushed redial.

He answered it on the second ring. “I realize you’re on vacation. *Everybody* knows you’re on vacation,” a deep voice said.

I glanced over to Jared. “Everybody?”

The deep voice chuckled. “You must be Annie Bridges, Jared’s mate. Nice to meet you.”

“I prefer partner. Mate sounds so . . . old-fashioned, stupid, and icky.”

Jared rolled his eyes.

“Okay,” Lucas’s voice hesitated and then he continued, “And yes, *everybody* knows that you are on vacation. Not only does the company phone system say they are not accepting any calls but your voicemail message says, ‘We are on vacation! Do not leave a message, do not tell me you need us, do not bother us!’”

I slugged Jared, who turned and frowned at me. “If the world is going to hell, your stomach can wait.”

“Stomach?” Lucas asked.

“Not important, Lucas.” Jared rubbed his shoulder and frowned at me. “What’s going on?”

“Prophecy, powerful sorcerer coming into power, missing magical artifacts and the end of the world.”

“Oh, is that all?” Jared shook his head, chuckled and ate another veggie stick.

“I’m serious, Jared. If this sorcerer comes into their power and goes dark, there will be no stopping them. No power on earth or in another dimension can stand up against him or her.”

“You don’t know if it is a boy or girl?” I asked.

“No, the prophecy is not that specific. It just says sorcerer.”

“What else does the prophecy say?” Jared asked.

“They will take a mate, who will also acquire those limitless powers.”

“So now we are talking two witches with ultimate power?” I asked.

“Yes, and we prefer the term sorcerer to witch, Annie. Too many upsetting memories associated with the word witch.”

“Do you have a lead on the *sorcerer*?” Jared asked, emphasizing his last word.

“Nope, we won’t feel anything until they come into their power.”

“Feel?” I asked.

“Sorcerers can sense each other’s powers. When this one comes into their powers it will be identical to a magical atom bomb going off. The waves will touch every sorcerer on the planet,” Lucas explained.

“And then, it will be a race to see who gets to the sorcerer first?” Jared added.

“Yes. The council believes, and I concur, the new sorcerer will be young, maybe thirteen or fourteen.”

“Why?” I asked.

“That’s when sorcerers are unbound, go to school to be trained and embrace their powers.”

“Bound?”

“Yeah, you don’t want a sorcerer who controls the element of fire to have that power as a three-year old on a tantrum.”

“That makes sense. But that means he or she has to take a mate at thirteen?”

“Well, an honorable sorcerer would mentor the girl or boy and then allow them to choose a mate when they are ready.”

“A power-hungry sorcerer will take what they want and control them.”

“Sounds akin to rape,” I growled.

“Yeah, it will be,” Lucas replied, with a growl of his own.

“How can we help, Lucas?” Jared asked.

“I appreciate that you’re on vacation but would you be on call? If I need you, will you come?” Lucas asked.

“Of course. Do you have any leads?”

“Yes, but the lead is thin and likely won’t pan out, but we’ve got to start someplace. My primary job is to find the missing magical artifacts. There are other agents looking for the new sorcerer.”

“Okay, call me when you need us and keep me updated on your progress,” Jared said.

“Will do, and thanks,” Lucas ended the call.

I glanced at Jared who was frowning. “What?”

“If the world will end in the next few days, I intend to master that damn chocolate soufflé,” Jared said as he rose to leave the room.

I rolled my eyes and flopped back on the bed.