

# Blood Awakening



by **Tessa Dawn**

A Blood Curse Novel  
Book Two  
In the Blood Curse Series

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# The Blood Curse

In 800 BC, Prince Jadon and Prince Jaegar Demir were banished from their Romanian homeland after being cursed by a ghostly apparition: *the reincarnated Blood of their numerous female victims*. The princes belonged to an ancient society that had sacrificed its females to the point of extinction, and the punishment was severe.

They were forced to roam the earth in darkness as creatures of the night. They were condemned to feed on the blood of the innocent and stripped of their ability to produce female offspring. They were damned to father twin sons by human hosts, who would die wretchedly upon giving birth; and the first-born of the first set would forever be required as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of their forefathers.

Staggered by the enormity of *the Curse*, Prince Jadon, whose own hands had never shed blood, begged his accuser for leniency and received *four small mercies*—four exceptions to the curse that would apply to his house and his descendants, alone.

Ψ Though still creatures of the night, they would be allowed to walk in the sun.

Ψ Though still required to live on blood, they would not be forced to take the lives of the innocent.

Ψ While still incapable of producing female offspring, they would be given *one opportunity and thirty-days* to obtain a mate—a human female chosen by the gods—following a sign that appeared in the heavens.

Ψ While still required to sacrifice a first-born son, their twins would be born as one child of darkness and one child of light, allowing them to sacrifice the former while keeping the latter to carry on their race.

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And so...forever banished from their homeland in the Transylvanian mountains of Eastern Europe, the descendants of Jaegar and the descendants of Jadon became the Vampyr of legend: roaming the earth, ruling the elements, living on the blood of others...forever bound by an ancient curse. They were brothers of the same species, separated only by degrees of light and shadow.



# Prologue

Marquis Silivasi stood silently in the shadows. He watched as the last of the humans made their way from the graveside ceremony following Joelle Parker's funeral. He had come to pay his respects but was unable to face the human family whose lineage he had known for centuries. Having to tell Kevin Parker the news of his daughter's death had been one of the worst moments of Marquis's life, and he had lived a very, very long time. His regret was insufferable, his shame for being unable to save her...almost unbearable.

Shimmering out of view, he materialized deep within the Dark Moon Forest at yet another recent grave site—that of his little brother, Shelby. It was the first time he had visited the final resting place since the tragic loss. The first time he had seen the simple white granite marker lying over the desolate plot: *Shelby Silivasi. Honored Brother and Beloved Twin.*

Marquis ran a trembling hand through his thick black hair. The pressing moisture of tears stung his deeply troubled eyes. Shelby had only been five-hundred years old when he died, the same age as his twin, Nachari, but the difference was, Nachari had lived to graduate the Romanian University. Nachari had lived to reach the status of Master Vampire.

Shelby, on the other hand, had stopped just short of receiving such an honored distinction because he had found his *blood destiny*: the one human woman chosen by the gods to be his mate, Dalia Montano.

His one opportunity to avoid the ultimate curse of his kind.

Fulfilling the demands of the Blood Curse and securing his future with the human female had been far more important to Shelby than completing his studies. He had planned to return to Romania as soon as the blood sacrifice was made, yet the young fledgling had failed at both tasks.

Marquis knew he was the one to blame.

He should have been more vigilant.

He should never have let down his guard.

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Things had just gone so smoothly—so unbelievably seamlessly—between Shelby and Dalia that no one had foreseen Valentine Nistor’s wicked scheme.

It wasn’t an excuse.

Marquis was an Ancient. He should have known better.

Marquis balled his hands into two tight fists, struggling to contain the rage—the gut-wrenching heartache—that threatened to consume him. The sky above him had already turned as black as night, and the wind was picking up into a fierce howl. He had to keep his emotions in check.

He kicked at the cold forest ground, causing a not-so-subtle tremor in the earth beneath him in an effort not to cry out. The vengeance he had finally exacted on Valentine was nothing against the breadth of this loss.

*Celestial gods, how could this have happened!*

And it wasn’t just that Shelby would have been a Master, an achievement borne of *four-hundred years* of studies; he would have been a *Master Warrior*, like Marquis. And that meant Marquis would have been in charge of his little brother’s ongoing training: It would have been the first time in four-hundred and seventy-nine years—since their father’s death—that Marquis would have shared his day-to-day existence with another being.

The first time in four-hundred and seventy-nine years that Marquis Silivasi would not have been alone.

Marquis knelt before the simple white slab of granite and bowed his head in reverence. So much loss.

He had seen so many warriors needlessly slain over his lifetime as a result of the wretched curse—a pronouncement made upon generations of males for a sin committed so long ago that the fallen warriors didn’t even remember the crime. They only knew that when the Blood Moon came, they had thirty days....

One opportunity in an otherwise eternal existence to claim the one human woman who could save them from the ultimate fate of their kind. One month to obtain a chance at life, create

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the possibility for love, and acquire the blessing of a family.

*Thirty days to live or die.*

Marquis shook his head. What was the purpose of being a warrior...of being an Ancient...if he couldn't even protect the ones he loved? What was the purpose of surviving this long when his life had been nothing but time, education, endless battles, and loss? And why hadn't that one opportunity to love—to share such a barren existence—ever been given to him?

He was so very weary of living.

Like a slowly boiling cauldron of water, Marquis's body began to tremble with the depth of his anguish. His lungs labored, and his heart pounded from so much rage and injustice, until finally, he could no longer contain his grief, and the pain of a lifetime spilled over.

Hands pressed tightly against his temples, Marquis Silivasi threw back his head and shouted his rage, his grief, in one gut-wrenching cry: a lion's roar that shook the heavens, sending balls of fire the color of blood crashing down upon the earth, hail the size of baseballs battering the valley floor.

As the Ancient Master Warrior's crimson tears fell like raindrops, the rivers overflowed and the heavens shook. Giant boulders perched atop nearby canyons crashed to the earth's floor in violent rockslides, even as the sides of the mountains split open.

And then all was silent.



The anguished cry of the male reverberated through the Rocky Mountains. It echoed through the rising hills, rose to the blackened sky, and stirred deep beneath the cavernous valley, until it finally settled as nothing more than a subtle tremor buried deep within the earth's crust.

Ciopori Demir stirred.

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Her resting place disturbed.

Deep golden eyes, dotted with amber-sparkles like sun-drenched diamonds, blinked once...twice...a third time. Heavy, dark lashes fanned ancient cheeks as eyes that had been closed for centuries fluttered open. A sleeping mind awakened. A soul became aware.

The echo of the male's call stirred Ciopori's heart as she slowly sat up. His anguish penetrated her soul. The cadence of his cry restored her eternal heartbeat. Somehow, his rage reanimated her pure, royal blood...primordial, innocent, and unblemished...even as his grief broke the ancient spell.

Ciopori rubbed her eyes, trying to clear her mind. She pushed a heavy lock of her hair from her face and struggled to remember: Where was she?

*Who was she?*

The memories came back slowly, one scattered piece at a time: She was the daughter of greatness, the first-born female-child of the Great King Sakarias and his beautiful wife, Jade. She was the caretaker of her youngest sibling, Vanya, and the sister of the royal twins, Jaegar and Jadon. So what was she doing buried deep within the earth? Surrounded by so many layers of rich minerals, crusted soil, and clammy moisture?

The ancient princess suddenly felt entombed in the endless layers of evolution. Trapped in a timeless grave. *Think, Ciopori*, she urged herself, as the dirt walls of her grave seemed to close in on her. *How is it that you find yourself in this predicament? And what must you do to get out of it?* The memories began to creep in incrementally, like water through a leaky dam: all the killings, the endless sacrifices, the loss of so many females.

The last of their great kind, the Celestial Beings, had been reduced to ashes by the moral depravity of their men, their ravenous hunger for power. Their culture had been decimated by a wicked, insatiable thirst for blood that had become unquenchable.

Ciopori sat up and hugged her knees to her chest, rocking in

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a smooth, rhythmic motion, trying to calm her mind. Who was the last person she remembered seeing? Ah, of course, *Jadon*, her beloved older brother. Now she remembered.

Jadon had whisked them away—herself and Vanya—at great risk to his own life. In the midst of a violent storm, he had come into their castle bedchamber like a thief in the night, imploring them to flee Romania at once, explaining that they had to get out of the castle immediately if they hoped to live: Jaegar and his warriors were coming for them.

The men had finally crossed the last and final boundary: They had gone mad from their endless blood-lust, and were ready to make the ultimate sacrifice, the virgin daughters of the great king himself, Jaegar's very own sisters.

Determined to see his siblings live and his society survive, Jadon had whisked them across the vast, open countryside, taking them deep into the heart of the Transylvanian Alps, where he had met up with a convoy of traveling warriors, a secret group of mercenaries led by the infamous wizard, Fabian. Eventually, Fabian had secured passage on a ship across the great sea, taking himself, Ciopori, and Vanya to a foreign land far across the ocean, an uninhabited refuge where they would finally be given sanctuary from their own kind.

*Sanctuary in the form of a living death.*

A deep, dreamless slumber where their bodies would remain alive—immortal, yet asleep—until such time as it was finally safe to awaken them again.

Until Jadon came back to get them.

Ciopori wondered what time it was. *What year it was.* She began to thrash around, frantically searching for her sleeping sister in the darkness of the shallow chamber. She must find and awaken Vanya! How long had it been? How many years had they slept? Had Jadon finally come back for them?

*And whose anguished cry was that?*

Her heart felt heavy from the torment in his voice. Had his sorrow awakened her? Ciopori didn't know why, but she had to

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find that male.

She had to go to him!

Desperately, she began to claw at the ground, digging in frenzied circles as her body scraped against the walls of the earthen tomb.

“Vanya! Vanya!”

She cried out until her voice grew hoarse, digging...turning...clawing...twisting her body this way and that in a frenzied effort to uncover her baby sister. “Vanya, where are you!”

After what seemed like hours, Ciopori dropped her head in her hands and started to weep. The earth was suffocating her. She was about to panic. She had to get out of the ground. Now that she was awake, she could no longer stomach the shallow grave: The smell of damp earth was all around her, the blanket of rich soil encasing her like the burial shroud of a mummy.

Ciopori took a long, slow, deep breath and worked to calm her mind. She was a Celestial Being. *Picture the earth. See the sky above you.*

She shifted until she was on her knees.

“Ancestors, Great Ones, I humbly beseech you: *From deep within the earth I pray, my tomb as dark as night; for freedom from this lonely grave...awaken heaven’s light.*

*Place my feet along earth’s path, the sky above my head—where flowers bloom and children laugh; release me from earth’s bed.”*

All at once, Ciopori was standing in a clearing, her feet on solid ground. Towering pines and fir trees surrounded her, and the sky transformed right before her eyes from a darkened gray to a brilliant aqua blue. Her eyes swept over the land, taking note of the simple granite markers. It was a circular, hallowed clearing.

This was sacred earth.

A burial ground.

Ciopori stepped backward, removing her shoes reverently from her feet as she paid silent homage to the dead. She

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wondered who they were. Were these her father's soldiers?

*And then she saw him.*

The powerful, stunning warrior.

The one whose cries had awakened her.

He was an enormous male, clearly a fighter, with long, thick hair the color of midnight: the color of hers.

His eyes were like the depths of the ocean, so black they gleamed blue. And his remarkably handsome face was stricken with sorrow as he knelt before a simple white stone marker. Ciopori knew immediately that he was a warrior of some standing. It was in the proud set of his shoulders, the way he crouched above the ground with both stealth and purpose, the arrogant slant of his chin. There was a hard certainty in his demeanor...in spite of his sorrow.

Ciopori had spent very little time with her father's guard growing up, but she knew enough etiquette to approach the warrior with respect.

She padded silently around the periphery of the grounds, stopping roughly four feet behind him. As was proper when addressing a male of authority, she averted her eyes, cleared her throat, and awaited his attention.

The male sprang to his feet like a predator, rising and whirling to face her in one smooth motion. He looked startled to find her standing there, as if no one had ever snuck up on him before. His face was a hard line of menace as he stared her down with those hauntingly beautiful eyes.

"Greetings, warrior," Ciopori whispered in the old language.



# one

Startled by the impostor, Marquis sprang to his feet and crouched into a warrior's attack stance. *Great gods*, he must be losing his mind. No one had ever caught him unaware before.

As soon as he realized the intruder was a female—a strikingly beautiful, very unusual female—he began to relax. Her hair was the color of the Vampyr, a deep raven black that shone with highlights of midnight blue. Her eyes were like nuggets of pure gold with amber diamonds in the centers, sparkling like the noonday sun. They were clearly *not human*, and her countenance was positively regal: The woman stood before him like an Egyptian queen, drunk with nobility, as if she owned the entire world. Yet at the same time, she bowed her head and averted her eyes with great deference. She had obviously been raised to behave in such a manner.

Marquis took a step back. He wasn't at all sure who *or what* he was dealing with.

The female squared her shoulders and declined her head once again in the slightest gesture. "I have startled you, warrior. Forgive me. Once again, I bid you greetings."

Marquis blinked several times. He had been so taken aback that he hadn't even noticed—*she was speaking in the Old Language*. But unlike himself—or his brothers for that matter—her accent was pure. Her tongue, absolutely flawless. The cadence was hypnotic.

He cleared his throat. "Be at ease, milady. Should it please you, this warrior would know your name...*and your lineage*." Whoa, where did that come from? He knew, intuitively, that it was the proper response, although he had no idea how.

The female raised her head then, and her smile was positively radiant. "I find your inquiry satisfactory, warrior. My name is Ciopori Demir, begotten of the goddess Cygnus and the human ancestor Mateo Demir. Daughter of our noble King Sakarias and his gracious wife, Queen Jade."

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Marquis cleared his throat and stared at the female like she was an alien from another planet. He opened his mouth to respond, but when no sound came out, he simply cleared his throat a second time and continued staring. He was positively dumbfounded.

The female looked momentarily confused. “’Tis I who would hear your lineage now, warrior. Do you belong to my father’s guard?”

Marquis shook his head, trying to clear the cobwebs. His grief had finally consumed him. He was hallucinating. “Let me get this straight,” he said. “You claim to be the *daughter* of King Sakarias? *The* King Sakarias? As in the father of Prince Jaegar and Prince Jadon: the ruler of the Celestial Beings before the Blood Curse?”

Ciopori’s shoulders stiffened and she raised her chin. “I make no such *claim*; ’tis an assertion of fact, warrior. And I am beginning to find your attitude almost as wanting as your command of our native tongue, far too relaxed for my liking. Do you not have more respect for your kingship? Do you or do you not serve my father’s guard?”

Marquis licked his bottom lip and stifled a laugh, although the situation was hardly amusing. “No, milady; I can assure you that I do not serve your father’s guard...as King Sakarias died *twenty-eight hundred years ago*—thirteen-hundred years before I was even born. And even if he hadn’t, *servin*g is not my thing.”

Ciopori staggered backward. Her eyes grew big, and she cried out before abruptly catching herself. She brought her hands to her mouth to stifle the sound. It was as if such a display of emotion would be undignified in front of a...commoner. Despite her gallant effort, her face became gaunt and her body started to sway back and forth as if she were about to faint. The female was shocked...terrified...and clearly grief-stricken.

Marquis felt as overwhelmed as she looked. Surely, she wasn’t...she couldn’t be...

She did appear to be of their race, though, and she spoke

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their native tongue—obviously better than he did, as she found his dialect offensive. But there were no female Vampyr, only human *destinies* who were sired by their mates. So what else could she be...if not a Celestial Being? Marquis delved gently into her mind, quickly scanning her thoughts, unraveling her memories. He followed the pathways back...back...to—

*Holy mother of Cygnus!*

As tears began to pour down the beautiful woman's face—*Princess Ciopori's face!*—Marquis glanced around the forest. He wasn't at all sure what he was looking for, but given the impossible turn of events, he half expected to see a god or goddess saunter out of the trees, perhaps someone better suited to handle the astonishing revelation than he. Gods knew, he was anything but tactful on a good day, and today was a very bad one.

And then Ciopori fainted.

Marquis moved with all the fluid, supernatural speed of the Vampyr race, catching her just before her elegant form hit the ground. As his hand slid beneath her waist, a bolt of awareness shot through him like a sudden surge of electricity. Memories—*no, dreams*—began to flood his mind at record speed...

They were memories of his own dreams, ancient pictures that had come to him again and again over the centuries. Dreams that had sustained him through battles and losses. A face that had haunted him with eternal loneliness...

They were fantastical visions he had almost forgotten over the endless years: images of a woman with raven black hair and golden eyes with amber irises, dreams of a woman he had always known...

*And loved.*

Marquis looked down at the frail body slumped peacefully beneath him. Was he really holding a living, breathing *female* of his race in his arms? After all these centuries—his people believing not one had survived? And was the angel from his dreams—the raven-haired beauty who had come to him so many

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times in the night—actually a real woman?

Or was he just going mad?

His arms tightened around her waist, and he pulled her closer to his chest, deeply inhaling her scent.

*It was familiar.*

*Dear gods, it was her.*

And she felt exactly as he...*remembered*...exactly as she had felt in his dreams.

Marquis stared down at Ciopori's face, studying every detail, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. He wanted to awaken her, but it had been so long...so many years since he had touched a woman, held a woman in his arms...or his heart. So many years since he believed he even had a heart. Her beauty stole his breath away, and he knew the moment she awakened, he would have to let her go.

Marquis thought about calling out to his brothers telepathically. He had to tell someone what was happening. After all, this had monumental implications for their race. But not yet.

*Not yet.*

Right now, he would hold this angel from his dreams safely in his arms and remain in whatever fantasy-world he had drifted into. Right now, he would imagine she was his.

Time seemed to stand still. It was as if the sun had simply ceased its journey across the sky and all of heaven was holding its breath, while Marquis basked in the glow of Ciopori's exquisiteness...gloried in the feel of her slight frame tucked so reverently beneath his own. Felt alive for the first time in centuries.

And then the princess slowly opened her eyes.

Dear gods, she was breathtaking.

She looked up at him but did not appear afraid. And then she lifted her elegant hand and placed the palm ever so gently against his cheek.

"Marquis?"

Marquis froze. Her voice was like a robin's song as she

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spoke his—

*Dear gods in the heavens, she knew his name!*

Marquis's lips curved into a tentative smile. "Yes."

She blinked several times. "You are the warrior...from my dreams."

Marquis began to tremble as he slowly let his forehead rest against hers. He had never met this woman, yet he knew her intimately: everything about her. The way she moved. The way she talked. The sparkling sound of her laughter. The elegant fall of her hair against her bare shoulders when she...undressed before bed.

Marquis closed his eyes, afraid to hope. He had been alone...forever. Born alone with a Dark One for a twin; cast into solitary existence following his father's disappearance; cursed as a male who had never been given a female destiny...in fifteen hundred years. The only peace he had ever known had been in his dreams—loving a woman he could never possess—throughout the endless centuries of his life. Yet, here she was...

When he opened his eyes, his gaze locked with hers. Her own recognition was reflected in their light: She knew him, too.

Marquis exhaled slowly. "I have waited over a thousand years for you." His voice was not his own.

Ciopori studied his face. She softly traced the hard slant of his jaw to the masculine angles of his cheeks, her fingers gently brushing the chiseled lines as she traced the outline. All at once, she drew back her hand and smiled. "And I, you, warrior. *And I, you.*"

Marquis drew her close to his heart, and held her like she was the very air he breathed—the most precious thing on earth—because she was. When he finally released her, there were tears rolling down her cheeks. He gently brushed them away. "Where did you come from, angel of my dreams?"

Ciopori shook her head. "I...I'm not sure. What year is this? What is this...Blood Curse...you speak of? And where am I?"

Marquis shook his head. *Wow.* Where to begin? Perhaps the

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less traumatic information should come first. “You are in Dark Moon Vale.”

“Dark Moon...what? Is this place in Romania?” Her eyes swept the forest floor, the distant canyons, and the high mountain peaks. “We are yet in the Transylvanian Alps, then?”

Marquis blanched. “No, Ciopori; you are in North America. The Rocky Mountains.”

Ciopori sat up then, and Marquis helped her to her feet. She slowly turned around. “Then we did cross the great sea as I remembered.” She rubbed her eyes as if awakening from a dream. “And the strange, uninhabited land, it is called...*North America*? Yes, of course, that’s right. Fabian brought us here. Myself and Van— Oh dear gods, Vanya!” Her tone became frantic. “You must help me find my sister. At once!”



Ciopori explained how she and Vanya had escaped Romania prior to the Curse—how Fabian had placed them both in an enchanted sleep to await the return of their brother Jadon. The story was almost impossible to believe.

Marquis followed Ciopori to the site of her awakening and scanned the earth’s crust for anomalies. Fortunately, it was early autumn, and the ground was growing cold. While he couldn’t see beneath the surface, he could easily detect the slightest variation in temperature. It was a lot like having a built-in, infrared heat detector. Wherever Vanya was, her body would put out a clear, recognizable signal.

Sure enough, the undisturbed sleeping chamber was directly ten feet beneath them, about five feet to the east of where Ciopori had lain...*for twenty-eight hundred years*. As the original Celestial Beings were neither gods nor humans, but the prodigy of the two species intermixing, they had very long life spans. But

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they were not immortal.

No, immortality had been a cruel punishment enacted upon the males when they were turned Vampyr at the time of the Curse. It had been done to prolong their suffering—to make sure they experienced it...indefinitely. Consequently, Fabian's feat had been nothing less than astounding: keeping two females suspended in animation—alive yet not aging—for this many years. Casting a spell that could only be broken by the return of their beloved brother, Jadon.

Marquis shuddered at the thought. Jadon would have never returned. What if Marquis's own cry had not awakened her? He refused to allow the thought.

"She is here," he said matter-of-factly, indicating the ground with his foot.

Ciopori turned toward him. "How will we get her out?" Her face paled. "Dear gods, what if she's—"

"She's alive; just as you were."

"How can you be sure?"

"Because I can hear her heart beat."

Ciopori shook her head in disbelief. "Whatever did my sisters turn you into?"

Marquis ran his tongue over the tips of his fangs, wondering if she knew—from the dreams, that is. He studied the ground intently. "The fastest way to reach her is to dig in a straight line."

Ciopori nodded. "Very well. Where shall we find a spade?"

Marquis smiled then. "A shovel? We don't need one."

"You intend to use a digging fork or some other lesser tool?" She scoffed.

Marquis chuckled. "I'm going to use my mind."

Ciopori frowned.

"I can move matter with my mind," he explained.

"Matter?" Ciopori raised a brow.

"Yes: objects, things...materials." He eyed her sideways. "Never mind."

Ciopori sighed. "Even if one could do such a thing, it would

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take forever.”

Marquis shook his head. “No. Not with enough speed behind it.”

Ciopori cocked her head to the side, like a canine studying a confusing human, lost somewhere in the translation between species. “Marquis, this curse that was wrought upon the males...what did it do to them? You say you are still related to our people, the Celestial Beings, yet you are a separate race altogether: *Vampyr*. What all can a *vampyr* do?”

“A vampire,” Marquis supplied.

Ciopori nodded. “What all can a *vampire* do? What powers do you possess, warrior?”

Marquis rubbed the bridge of his nose, thinking. “We have heightened senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell. We can fly or simply move through time and space at will. We can read the thoughts and memories of others, or change them if we choose. We can control the actions of others, speak to one another telepathically, and harness fire or electricity in our hands.” He paused, trying to think of anything else. “Our strength is tremendous, and our speed is...well, beyond anything you have witnessed, I’m certain.”

Ciopori blinked several times. “Wow, is that it?”

Missing most attempts at wit or humor as Marquis often did, he shrugged. “No, we can also walk through walls and self-regenerate...heal ourselves of almost any injury. We’re more or less just better at everything.”

Ciopori cleared her throat. “Humble as well, I see.”

“No, not really.”

When Ciopori stifled a laugh, Marquis stood quietly, not sure if he should go on.

“Well, I can do magic,” she offered playfully.

Marquis shifted uncomfortably. “Yes...so can my younger brother, Nachari.”

Ciopori laughed heartily then. “Were vampires not given a sense of humor, warrior?”

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Marquis frowned. So that was the source of her amusement. “I guess one man’s humor is another vampire’s...headache. If vampires got headaches, that is. Which we don’t. Get headaches.”

Ciopori wrinkled her forehead. “Pardon me?”

Marquis shook his head, irritated. “Nothing. It was just something stupid my brother Nathaniel said not long ago. Uh...no...we have humor. I mean, they have humor—other vampires—apparently, it’s just me.” He turned away and began studying the ground in earnest. Princess or no, he would not continue to make a fool of himself for a female. “I’m going to lift the dirt from here.” He made a circle with his hands. “And move it over there.” He gestured toward a small grove of birch trees. “The circumference should probably be...at least ten feet around, so that nothing falls in on her.” He glanced up then, to see if she was still laughing.

Ciopori sauntered closer, her eyes sparkling like rare jewels, and he could have sworn his heart literally skipped a beat when she cupped his face in his hands. “Know this, warrior: I have not traveled across oceans—and survived for centuries—in order to enjoy your brothers’ humor. You are the one I have dreamed of.”

Marquis sighed and drew her to him. His hands fell down to the small of her waist. His grip was strong and possessive. “You will come to understand me, Ciopori.” He cupped her chin in his hand and raised her head to meet his gaze. “And I will come to understand you...if such a thing would please you.”

Before she could answer, he bent his head, his mouth suspended just above hers. “Vampires are extremely passionate,” he drawled. “Some of us are better with our bodies than our words.” He brushed her lips with his, kissing her ever so gently. “And all of us are enormously protective.” He pulled her tightly against him, overwhelming her body beneath his own until she was forced to arch her back. When he looked down at her seductive curves, he groaned. “And fiercely possessive.” He

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fisted his hands in her hair, carefully tilting her head until she gasped, and her lips unwittingly parted.

It was then that he kissed her: the full hunger of fifteen-hundred years unleashed in one erotic brush of passion. He flirted with her mouth, tasted every texture of her tongue, nibbled on her lips, and drank in her taste. He loved her with the hunger of one who had never before been sated. Yes, he had experienced a few romantic affairs with human women before, but such couplings had never satisfied his deeper longings. Not to mention, they were always so dangerous. Vampires were primarily animals—powerful, instinctual predators—and a passionate interlude could easily turn deadly for a mortal woman. Males had to exercise extreme restraint.

In his loneliness, Marquis had imagined his *destiny* many times over the centuries, until he had finally given up believing she would ever come. But this woman—this angel he had loved in dreams long since forgotten—she was his every erotic fantasy, and his body craved hers like his species craved blood: to sustain, quench, and regenerate until he was replete.

His hands rose to cup the weight of her breasts, his thumbs instinctively finding her nipples. “I know how to protect what is mine.” His mouth found the hollow of her throat, and he teased her pulse with his tongue until she shivered. “I know how to defend and avenge that which I hold dear to my heart.” And then he pressed the hard length of his arousal against her quivering stomach. “And make no mistake; I know how to please a woman.”

Ciopori went limp in his arms before stuttering an incomprehensible reply. And then she cupped his face in her hands and returned his kiss, matching him passion-for-passion, desire-for-desire, need-for-need.

When Marquis finally pulled away, his eyes were burning, and they must have been glowing red because Ciopori looked startled. “Your sisters gave us these feral eyes, but the heat you see—that is your doing.” His fangs elongated against his will,

## Tessa Dawn

and he scraped them gently along her carotid artery. “We use these to feed...but I will use them to bring you to your knees *with pleasure.*”

Ciopori groaned as he nicked her skin, then swirled his tongue over the wound, creating the dual sensation of pain and pleasure. “This is who *and what* I am, Ciopori. Can you accept me?”

Ciopori took a step back and rubbed the small wounds on her neck. She stared at him then...taking in everything.

Her eyes missed nothing.

After what seemed far too long for his comfort, she smiled a mischievous grin. “Only if I am to be the one to please you...*and feed you...warrior.*” She stepped forward and laid her head against his chest, just above his heart. “And love you...if you will have me.”

Marquis bit down on his lower lip and closed his eyes. He didn’t dare breathe. Warriors did not shed tears. *Marquis Silivasi did not shed tears.* Yet, for the first time in his life, his heart wept with joy and gratitude. “The gods themselves could not take you from me now, Ciopori.”

Stroking her long raven hair, he motioned toward a tall quaking aspen that still had its summer leaves. “Stand over there, my lost angel. Let us find and awaken your sister.”



## two

Marquis and Nachari stared at the ancient sovereign king of their people with more than a little concern in their eyes. In all their years of living, they had never seen the powerful ruler so rattled. The male could hardly pull himself together.

He paced a quick lap around the formal receiving room of his four-story manse—for the fifth time. He glanced down the hallway toward the bathroom, where the females had retreated to bathe before dinner, and then he glared at Marquis and Nachari as if he had half a mind to throttle them both. For what, they had no idea.

“Jadon and Jaegar’s sisters,” Napoleon rambled. “Alive after all this time.” He wrung his hands together and sat back down on the sofa. “Remarkable, don’t you think?”

Just as Marquis started to speak, the sovereign lord jumped back up.

Lap six.

“Nachari,” Napoleon spoke gravely, “you are a wizard now, are you not?”

Nachari glanced at Marquis. “Yep, last time I checked.”

Marquis shifted uncomfortably and shook his head, regarding his little brother harshly. *Do not be so arrogant*, he admonished telepathically, wondering where the question was headed. After all, Napoleon had already posed the same query. *Twice.*

Sharing Marquis’s sentiment, Napoleon spun around, the silver slashes in his deep onyx eyes growing harsh: “Watch yourself, son. Do not think to be that informal with me, even under circumstances such as these.”

Nachari paled. His strong shoulders drew back as he bowed his head. “Forgive me, milord; I meant no offense.”

Napoleon turned to look out the window then. His waist-length, black-and-silver hair shifted along his back. His proud frame became rigid. “You know, Marquis...” He didn’t turn around to look at the Ancient Warrior. “The county fire department is still extinguishing several blazes as we speak;

public service has been pumping water back into the rivers all afternoon; and there are several cleanup crews removing boulders and debris from the roadways.”

Marquis was too old and too hardened to placate the sovereign lord, although he knew exactly what he was referring to: his earlier outburst at Shelby’s grave. The dangerous results of his unchecked emotions. Marquis remained quiet, waiting to hear what the king had to say.

“If it was anyone else, there might be consequences.” Napoleon turned around to regard the warrior then. “But I know the weight of what you carry, and how long you have carried it. *Marquis*,”—he said his name with veneration—“there were several humans injured.”

Marquis frowned. “Were there any deaths?”

Napoleon sighed and turned back toward the window. “No...*fortunately*.”

Marquis remained quiet. There was nothing to say. *Don’t let it happen again* was implied, and Marquis already knew the gravity of his actions. He also knew that their king had far too much respect for him to reprimand an Ancient Master in front of his younger brother of lesser status. He and Napoleon were two of the oldest males in the house of Jadon. Though Marquis understood clearly who his Sovereign was, the two were more like equals than king and subject.

Realizing that Napoleon had said all he was going to say, Marquis distracted himself by looking around the room. As many times as he had stood in the foyer or entered the Hall of Justice, this was the first time he had ever sat in the king’s private living quarters: Napoleon kept his personal life primarily hidden from his subjects, and seeing the interior of the house for the first time was fascinating.

The sovereign lord’s manse was certainly a home befitting a king: dignified, formal, and reflective of all twenty-eight hundred years of the Original Male’s life. There were four levels to the private rectory, which was linked to the public Hall of Justice by a sealed tunnel that gave the king easy access to the three, ceremonial chambers: the chamber that held the tomes of the Vampyr race, containing the laws, histories, births, and deaths of their people; the chamber where the first-born sons were *relinquished* to atone for the sins of their forefathers; and the

chamber containing the insufferable circular hall, where the sons of Jadon—those who failed to satisfy the Blood Curse—spent their last, agonizing hours.

*The chamber where Marquis's beloved younger brother Shelby had so recently spent his last unthinkable hours.*

Marquis shifted once more on the sofa, forcing the memory from his mind: That was not a safe place to go. Looking up at the ceiling, he gazed at the artistry, his eyes taking in the intricate detail of the hand-painted mural at the top of the dome: It was a scene from the ancient Greek myth about the god Zeus and his son Apollo. Now that was certainly fitting, Marquis thought. Glancing at Napoleon, he could envision the king in the exact same pose, a lightning bolt shooting from his royal hand. Hell, he'd actually seen that vision a time or two in battle, already.

As his gaze drifted from the ceiling to the walls, he noticed that every corner—every window, niche, and archway—was encased in hand-carved white moldings, and the actual windows themselves were made of frosted glass, adorned with scenes of battlements and pictures of the gods etched skillfully into the iced canvases.

While the walls were painted in soft hues of grayish blue, the furniture was far bolder, displaying deep royal blues with red and green accents.

There were art-niches and custom inlays everywhere, each one containing a timeless treasure, items dating back as far as the Barbarian Migrations to the east Roman Empire...when it was still ruled by Constantinople. And the mementos were as eclectic as they were valuable: reflecting the varied cultures of Greece, Persia, and Egypt, as well as North America. Marquis shook his head: The place was equal parts museum and monastery, which just meant that Napoleon lived as he ruled—always a king first, an individual second. It was a good thing their king was so private: If a human being ever got wind of these treasures...

Marquis smiled. Now that would be a sight to see: Napoleon versus an army of humans. Just as Marquis began to play out the scene in his mind, the ancient lord began to speak.

"I asked you here for a purpose, Nachari." He placed his hand on the glass window and declined his head with a seriousness of purpose.

Nachari sat up straight. "As always, I am at your service,

milord.”

Napolean nodded. “Good...because there is a great deal we need to do in a short amount of time.”

Nachari raised his eyebrows but remained, respectfully, silent.

“As a wizard, you are one of the few among us who might be able to make sense of what Fabian did to the women.” He rubbed his jaw. “We do not yet know if they share our immortality, whether or not they are impervious to human disease, what strengths and vulnerabilities they possess. There is much to be learned in a little amount of time if we are to adequately protect them.” With that, the king turned back to the window and became absorbed, once again, in his own thoughts.

Nachari waited to be certain Napolean was done speaking before he replied. “I am honored, milord, and I will do my best to serve you and the daughters of our ancient king.”

Marquis glanced sideways at his polished younger sibling. King or no, Napolean Mondragon was the greatest warrior among them, and his knowledge of magic was legendary...frightening. Indeed, it was a great honor for him to request Nachari’s assistance. And, of course, Marquis could not have agreed more: The safety of the two original females was paramount.

Nachari smiled, and his eyes seemed to twinkle. *You seem to have taken a rather...personal...interest in all of this, my brother.*

Marquis snorted: *I’m glad you’re so amused, Nachari; I see no humor in the situation.*

Nachari leaned back, crossed his legs, and chuckled. *Of course you don’t, Marquis.*

*Stay out of my business, boy,* Marquis warned.

Nachari patted him on the knee and sighed with satisfaction. *Oh, I’m afraid I just can’t do that, Master Warrior. I have waited over four-hundred years for this: You have no idea.*

*Waited for what?* Marquis scowled.

Before Nachari could answer, a door at the end of the hall opened, and a single set of footsteps advanced along the polished marble floors. It was the princess Vanya, and she was wearing a garden motif dress with a draped bodice and a flowing sash in the center: one of several garments Napolean had requested delivery of earlier that afternoon. She looked like a

walking Monet painting: both stunning and timeless.

Nachari leaned forward on the sofa, and Napoleon turned away from the window. Both males were unmistakably breathless. And despite his best resolve, Marquis exhaled slowly. No offense to human women, but the Celestial gods certainly knew how to perfect a female.

Vanya Demir was a princess in every sense of the word. Her body was slender with sleek, regal lines and she sashayed as she moved, her head held at a slight upward angle, her shoulders pulled back and straight. Her soft, sculpted lips were set in a gentle but stern line, and her keen, attentive eyes took in everything around her with noble acuity.

The young celestial female had long, flaxen hair with light blond highlights that fell well below her waist, and her eyes were an unusual pale rose: as stunning as they were unique. She knew she was beautiful. She knew she was royalty. And she knew she commanded the moon and the stars. It was in her every movement, her every breath.

The princess stopped at the entrance to the hall and gracefully curtsied as Marquis and Nachari stood. Napoleon quickly advanced across the room, and then all at once, he stumbled over an antique coffee table—nearly falling over.

Nachari swallowed a gasp and shot a bewildered glance at Marquis. *What the—*

*Not a word*, Marquis growled. *Not a single word.*

Napoleon shot them both a harsh, reprimanding glare, and Nachari took a step back. *Tell me we are not broadcasting our thoughts on a public bandwidth, Marquis. Please...*

Marquis frowned. *Of course not, brother. I do not believe he can hear us speak to one another—but he can certainly perceive our visual images and read our emotions.*

All at once, Marquis sensed a powerful shift in his younger brother's energy, and then he caught the deliberate, fixed image of *the ocean* planted in Nachari's mind. *Four hundred years at the Romanian University to become a Master of Wizardry, and you conjure an image of the ocean to conceal your thoughts? Well, that makes sense—coming from a male who lives in the Rocky Mountains.*

Nachari rolled his perfect eyes.

“Good evening, princess.” Napoleon spoke in the Old Language, motioning toward a cushioned, high-back chair. “Are

you feeling any better?”

Vanya took a seat, her elegant back arched with imperial posture. “A bit.”

Despite her response, her eyes were swollen, and her words came out hollow: Marquis knew that she had been crying off and on ever since they had awoken her. Ever since she had learned that all she once knew was gone. That she had outlived her brothers, her parents, her people...and her civilization. It was an enormous amount of grief to carry, and Vanya was clearly still in shock.

Napolean took a seat beside her and gestured toward Nachari. “You have already met the Ancient Master Warrior Marquis, but this is his youngest brother, the Master Wizard Nachari. He is here to help us sort through this...situation.”

Vanya looked up at Nachari and smiled faintly. “Tis an honor to meet you, wizard. How do you and thy brother fare this evening?”

Nachari gulped. “Very well, thank you.”

Marquis took a seat. “Is Ciopori...is your sister...okay?”

“Indeed,” Vanya replied. “She will be joining us soon, warrior.”

Nachari sat back down as well, and put his hands in his lap.

As the king cleared his throat to speak, his severe silver-pupils were fixed on Vanya’s face like lasers. “I took the liberty of bringing in a temporary chef to cook for you and your sister until we figure out something more permanent. You will both be staying here for the immediate future.”

*And no doubt, the security will be greatly increased,* Nachari commented absently to Marquis.

Vanya nodded. “Thank you. I’m sure the accommodations will be lovely. You did not yet have a chef to your liking, I take it?”

Napolean wrung his powerful hands together like a teenage boy fidgeting, and then he promptly...*stuttered*: “We...uh...we...we don’t eat...food.” He swallowed an obvious lump in his throat.

“I see,” Vanya responded cordially, pretending not to notice.

Nachari put his arm along the ridge of the sofa and leaned back as if taking in a very interesting show. *I believe our king is...drooling...Marquis: I swear, in all my years, I have never seen Napolean react like this...to anything.*

Marquis didn't respond.

*Although, I can hardly blame him; she is breathtaking, is she not? I don't think I've ever seen a more beautiful creature in all of my life.*

All at once, Napoleon's head snapped to the side in a wicked, serpentine movement. His eyes flashed from onyx to red—then back again—the warning so swift it was almost imperceptible. His top lip twitched in the same rapid manner, displaying a lightning quick flash of fangs.

Nachari shot back on the sofa and looked down. *I don't care what you say, Marquis; he can hear us!*

*Well, perhaps you should shut-up then, little—*

*Of course I can hear you!* Napoleon's eyes never veered from Nachari's. *I have the blood of every male in the house of Jadon in my veins, including your own: I know where each one of you is and what each one of you is doing...at all times. Trust me: I can do far more than intercept your private communication at will. I am your Sovereign, and I can reach into places you do not even know exist, youngster.* There was a clear note of warning in his voice.

*Oh gods—*Nachari shrank down on the sofa—*I'm sorry...milord.*

Napoleon smiled then. *You are young and proud, wizard. There is no offense taken...yet.*

Just then, Nachari's cell phone went off, and he reached into his back pocket so fast one would have thought the thing was on fire. "Excuse me," he said, opening a screen to read a text. He immediately turned to Marquis. "Brother, Chad has been trying to reach you for the last hour; is your cell phone off?"

Marquis shrugged. "I don't know...maybe." He checked all of his pockets. "I must have left it in the truck."

Having the ability to either fly or materialize at will, vampires rarely drove their vehicles. Unfortunately, Marquis had needed a way to transport Ciopori and Vanya to Napoleon's, and it wasn't possible for a vampire to materialize carrying anything more than fifty-pounds at one time. As for flying, he could have easily carried them both, even cloaked their appearances for safety; however, soaring through the air at supernatural speed might have been a bit much for Vanya at the time. Of course, learning about the automobile had been an adventure in its own right for both females.

"Well, it looks like there's a *situation* at the casino," Nachari explained, showing Marquis the text.

Marquis took the phone from Nachari. Chad Baxter, his security chief at the Dark Moon Casino, rarely, if ever, tried to get a hold of Marquis at home, unless there was something really pressing going on. “Do you mind if I step outside and make a call?” Marquis asked, addressing his Sovereign.

“Not at all,” Napoleon answered.

“Thank you.” Marquis headed for the door. On his way out, he heard Vanya whisper to Napoleon—

“What’s a...call?”

Marquis just shook his head. Communication was going to be a major challenge between himself and Ciopori for a while. He was hoping like hell he could simply transfer huge blocks of information to her at one time: the same way he could with his Vampyr brothers. Otherwise, she was looking at relearning everything—including a new language.



Marquis dialed the casino and smiled at the thought of spending that much time with Ciopori.

“That you, boss?” The voice on the other end of the phone sounded anxious.

“You texted Nachari: What is it?”

Chad sighed like he had something to say but was afraid to say it.

“I haven’t the time, Chad,” Marquis warned his employee.

“It’s Kristina...and Dirk.”

“Again?”

“Yeah...”

“How bad?” Marquis asked.

“Well, she certainly can’t work her shift tonight, and I’m afraid if she goes back home...he’s gonna kill her this time.”

Marquis frowned. Kristina Riley was more than just the casino’s most productive cocktail waitress; she was a close friend and ally to the Silivasi family: Only eight years earlier, the human female had been a homeless runaway when Kagen Silivasi had brought her into the house of Jadon. He had been flying over the outskirts of Silverton Park one night when he heard a woman cry out from the back end of a dark alley. Though

vampires rarely got involved in human affairs, the unmistakable scent of a Dark One had permeated the air, and Kagen had known, instinctively, that one of two things was about to happen: Either a Dark One was about to feed on a human—draining her of every drop of blood she had—or worse, he was going to take her back to his lair, impregnate her, and force her to undergo a gruesome ritual which would end in her agonizing death and the birth of his twin sons.

Marquis shook his head. He didn't want to think about that. He didn't want to remember his youngest brother's recent death at the hands of Valentine Nistor—a son of Jaegar who had done the exact same thing with Shelby's *destiny*, leaving the youngest Silivasi brother to die at the hands of the Blood Curse.

Fortunately for Kristina, Kagen had slain the son of Jaegar and brought her back to the Dark Moon Health Center before the Dark One could carry out his plan. After learning of her circumstances, he had given her a temporary place to stay and worked with Marquis to find her a job at the casino.

Kristina had worked out beautifully.

And over time, she had become an ally if not a friend.

Due to her deep gratitude and absolute ability to keep a confidence, Kagen had not erased her memories. He had allowed her, instead, to retain full knowledge of who and what the sons of Jadon were, knowing that every now and then, having a human who could go human places, do human things, and move undetected in the deepest arenas of the human world came in handy. Having a second set of eyes at the casino had proved to be especially useful.

Marquis scowled, thinking about Kristina's idiot boyfriend, Dirk. The man was a human menace, or at least he wanted to be. He rode around on a purple Harley with a tattoo of a scorpion on the side of his neck, another of a python on his steroid-enhanced left bicep. He smoke, drank, cursed like a sailor, and tried way too hard to convince the world that he was the scariest thing next to Satan. Marquis scoffed. He could have squashed the human like a bug on several occasions, drained the blood right from underneath that ridiculous scorpion, but Kristina had strictly forbidden it. In fact, she had begged Marquis to stay away from him. What she saw in the imbecile, Marquis would never know. Still, he had always respected her wishes—

Until now.

Enough was enough.

“Where is Kristina now?” he asked.

Chad sighed. “She’s in your office. We cleaned her up, but she needs to see a doctor.”

Marquis restrained an instinctive snarl. Chad had no idea he was a vampire. “Where’s Dirk?”

“Don’t know—probably down at the bar getting drunk. He’s not in the casino, but that’s just a matter of time, especially if she doesn’t come home after her shift.”

“Well, keep her in my office; I’ll be right there.”

“Will do. Oh, and boss—”

“What?”

“Sorry to bother you away from work.”

“I’ll be there in a minute.” Marquis hung up. He placed the phone in the inner pocket of the light-weight jacket he wore over a well-fitted, black muscle-tee and turned around just in time to catch the beautiful sight of Princess Ciopori stepping out onto the front veranda.

Her hair was twisted to one side, the ends collected in a thick, looped braid that hung enticingly over her bare shoulder, and she was wearing a sleeveless, ruffled dress that hugged her curves like it had been made just for her—another thoughtful contribution from Napoleon.

Marquis placed his hand over his heart. There were no words.

Ciopori instantly brightened. “Do you see something you like, warrior?”

Marquis stepped toward her and purred, a deep throaty growl rising from his broad, muscular chest. As he bent to taste her lips, his hands found their way to the small of her back and he pulled her tightly against him. “Mmm,” he moaned, his tongue sweeping over hers. “Yes, I do.”

Ciopori smiled, and then she took a step back. “Something troubles you, warrior, and it is more than the concern you share for myself and Vanya.”

Marquis shook his head, not wanting to let go. “It’s nothing—just business...work. Just something I need to take care of. Believe me, I will handle it as quickly as possible and return to you this night...I promise.”

Ciopori's eyes positively sparkled. "And I will hold you to your word." She rested her hand on her stomach and became all at once serious. "I must confess, I am fearful of falling asleep again. After twenty-eight hundred years in the ground, I am terrified that the spell might—"

Marquis pressed his finger against her lips. "Shhh. None of us will let you slip away, Ciopori. Don't worry about such things."

The princess smoothed out her dress then. "I'll try." She looked off into the distance, took a deep breath, and turned back once more to look at him. "Now then, as for your proprietary affairs. Be it known, warrior, that I do understand a man's obligations. Do not forget that my father was the king"—she stumbled over the word *father*, her losses too great to comprehend, and then, she simply collected herself with an ingrained dignity and continued—"but if you do not wish to share the details of your business, that is acceptable as well."

Marquis reached out to take her hand, still enamored by the way she spoke. He gently pulled her back into his arms. "It's not that, Ciopori. It's just that it's ugly business...nothing you need to concern yourself with right now. Trust me: You will see more of my life than you care to, soon." He gently nipped at her throat, nibbled just beneath her ear, and kissed his way forward from her jaw to the corners of her mouth. *Blessed gods*, he couldn't help himself. The door suddenly opened, and they quickly broke apart.

Nachari poked his head out. His deep, forest green eyes appeared darker in the natural light, and his thick mane of hair fell forward as he glanced around. "Did you get a hold of Chad?"

Marquis shot him an annoyed glance. "Yes. What do you need, brother?"

Nachari looked at Marquis, glanced over at the princess, and then stared at Marquis again....smiling a huge cat-that-ate-the-canary smile.

Marquis sighed. "Do you have a purpose, Nachari?"

Nachari blanched, feigning insult at Marquis's blunt dismissal. "Do you mean right now—or as in life in general?"

Ciopori cleared her throat.

Marquis turned to regard the princess then. "Forgive me;

have you met my youngest brother?"

"No, I have not yet had the pleasure." Her voice was deliberately kind. "I believe he was speaking with Napoleon when I passed through the room."

Marquis gestured in Nachari's general direction. "This is my brother, the Master Wizard Nachari. He was born of the last set of my mother's twins."

"Tis a pleasure to meet you, wizard," Ciopori said.

"The pleasure is all mine, princess. And I have to tell you, it is a gift from the gods to have you and your sister back where you belong."

Ciopori nodded and smiled, her manner gracious.

And Marquis waited...while the angel of his dreams took her first real, in-depth look at his little brother.

There was no question: All of the Silivasi brothers were handsome to a fault, and Marquis's harsh beauty had a powerful effect on females, but Nachari Silivasi was in a class all to himself. And unfortunately, he knew it. Whenever he flashed that radiant, flawless smile—and his ridiculously perfect features lit up like he was more god than man—women lost their composure. They swooned. Stuttered. And sometimes just stood dazed with their mouths gaping open, until eventually, they got used to the sight of him. His masculine beauty was arresting.

Ciopori looked back and forth between the two brothers. "While the adjustment is overwhelming, we are fortunate to have been found by my brother's descendants." She quickly turned her gaze back to Marquis, her eyes glistening with adoration...for only him.

Marquis glared at Nachari. "Well?"

"My phone," Nachari said.

"What?"

"*My phone*. You asked me, *what do I need*—I need my phone back."

"Oh." Marquis retrieved the phone from his jacket and tossed the thing so hard it became a missile, the casing shattering upon impact with Nachari's hand.

Nachari cursed and glowered at Marquis, incredulous. Fortunately for the Master Warrior, all vampires had lightning quick reflexes, or the phone might have entered the house and struck the king—or worse, Vanya.

“I’m sorry,” Marquis quipped. “I—”

“Yes, I know,” Nachari snarled, “you underestimated your own strength.”

Marquis peered at the hundreds of little pieces of metal in Nachari’s palm. “Did the SIM card make it?”

Nachari frowned. “You need therapy, my brother; you really do.”

Marquis waved a dismissive hand. “Our kind does not...do therapy. Why do you always say such...inconsequential things?”

Nachari rubbed the bridge of his nose with his free hand. “Why, indeed, Marquis.”

Marquis pulled back. “You are angry now, wizard? I can buy you another phone.”

Nachari just shook his head and turned to face Ciopori. “Good luck with him,” he mused. And then he pulled his head back inside and shut the door.

When Marquis looked over at the princess, she was standing several feet away with one hand on her hip, the corner of her mouth turned up in a scolding smile. “So, I take it vampires are not only passionate...and protective...but they are also extremely jealous and territorial. Is that not right, warrior?”

Marquis bared his fangs and stalked over to the beautiful female, moving very, very slowly, his gait the easy shift of a predator, his large, muscular frame expanding and contracting with every step. “*Extremely territorial,*” he snarled.

Ciopori laughed and covered her mouth with one hand. “You mustn’t be concerned about other men, Marquis.” And then she eyed the strong warrior from the tip of his head to the bottom of his toes and let out a long, drawn-out sigh. “You have absolutely nothing to be jealous of, my love. *Trust me.*”

# Books in the Blood Curse Series

**Blood Destiny**

**Blood Awakening**

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# About The Author



Tessa Dawn grew up in Colorado where she developed a deep affinity for the Rocky Mountains. After graduating with a degree in psychology, she worked for several years in criminal justice and mental health before returning to get her Masters Degree in Nonprofit Management.

Tessa began writing as a child and composed her first full-length novel at the age of eleven. By the time she graduated high-school, she had a banker's box full of short-stories and books. Since then, she has published works as diverse as poetry, greeting cards, workbooks for kids with autism, and academic curricula. The Blood Curse Series marks her long-desired return to her creative-writing roots and her first foray into the Dark Fantasy world of vampire fiction.

Tessa currently lives in the suburbs with her two children and "one very crazy cat" but hopes to someday move to the country where she can own horses and a German Shepherd.

Writing is her bliss.