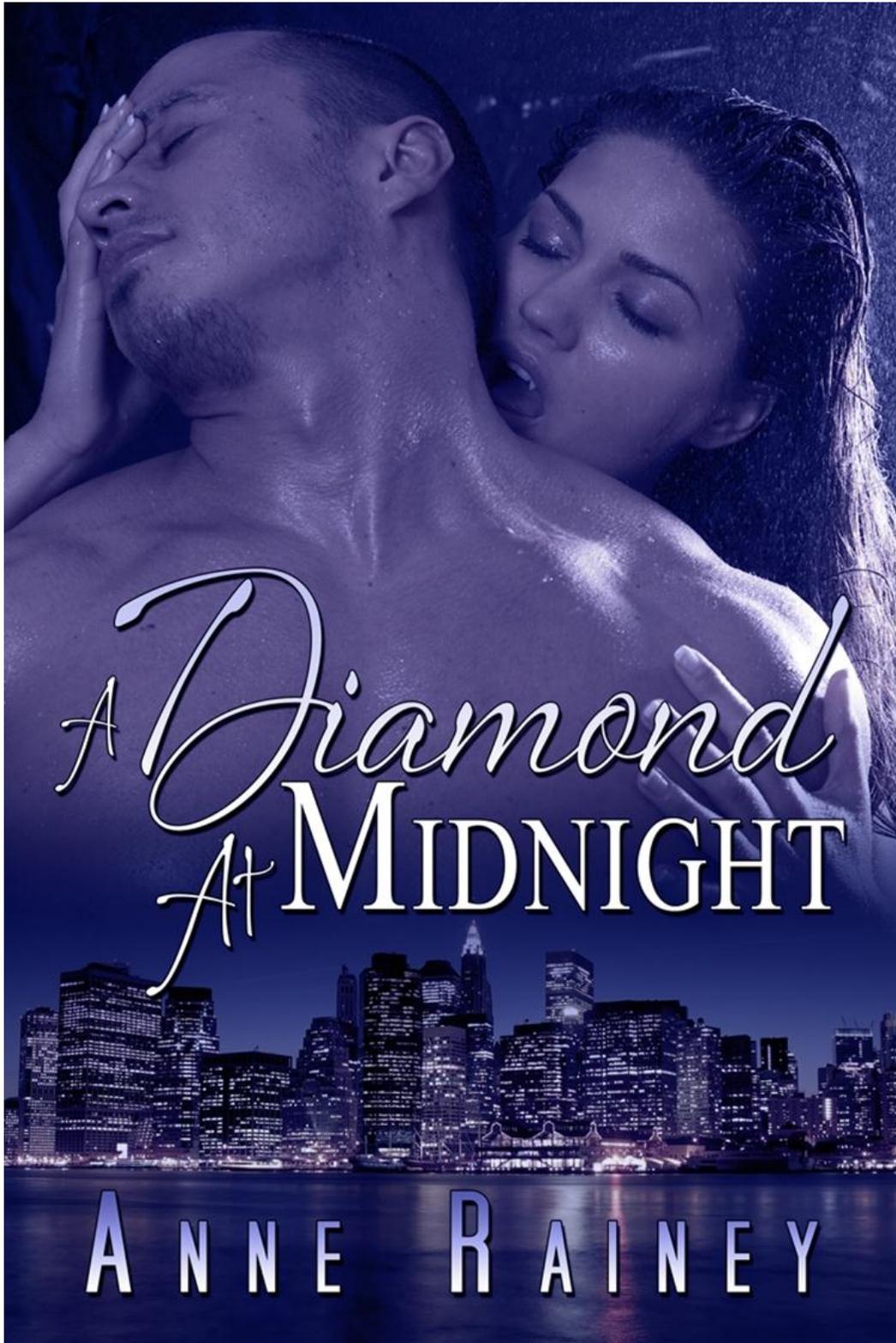


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A Diamond at Midnight

Anne Rainey

ISBN B004MMEFEE

March 2011

Trade Paper; \$14.00 (US)

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Diamonique's life is changed forever when she stumbles across Cain Reed on a dark, lonely New York street. With a single bite, she's given immortality and shown unimaginable pleasure. But before she can explore eternal love his betrayal tears them apart.

One hundred years later, Cain is back to save her from a dark enemy. Rafael, the depraved leader of The Dominion, will stop at nothing to settle an ancient score between him and Cain. Caught in the middle, Diamonique will need to swallow her pride and rely on Cain if she's to survive. But is she handing her trust over to the right immortal or is she merely trading one evil for another?

Anne Rainey

A Diamond at Midnight

Anne Rainey

Dedication

To Faith Smith. Thank you for seeing my potential when I didn't see it myself. I won't let you down!

And my author buddy Desiree Lee. Thank you for being so excited about this story! I truly hope you'll be pleased with my addition to the world of immortals.

A special thanks to my friend and cover artist Valerie Tibbs. You've brought my story to life with your fantastic cover art!

Prologue

New York City, New York

1840

The time was midnight. Someone was following Diamonique and had been since she'd left the party. His rapid footfalls seemed threatening on the quiet New York street. Curiosity caused her to turn and look. Between the light of the full moon and the dim light of the gas street lamp, Diamonique was able to see a tall, muscular man several feet behind. His well-groomed black hair and evening attire should have made him seem less sinister but it didn't. The unholy gleam in the stranger's eyes made her feel as if he were seeing right into her soul—enticing it, cajoling it to do as he commanded. She couldn't look away from his mesmerizing gaze. It positively glowed.

She forced herself to turn back around and increased her speed. The bloom of fear in her stomach grew until it threatened to squeeze her insides. Desperation made her quicken her footsteps even more. Dear heaven, what had she done? In her haste to leave the party and her carousing fiancé, she'd waved off her carriage driver and started

walking. She should have known better. She wished now she'd practiced a small amount of good sense and stayed at the party. At the very least, allowed one of the men to escort her home.

The wind blew her hair across her face, and a shiver ran the length of her spine—with cold and growing fear. Any hope of rescue grew bleaker by the second. Diamonique hazarded another glance backward. Her breath caught in her throat, and she picked up the train of her skirts and ran.

As she tore around a corner, the frightening stories her mother used to tell her sprang to mind. In the hopes of making Diamonique too afraid of going out after dark, thus ensuring her safety, her mother had told her scary tales of winged creatures that sucked the blood of innocent virgins. She now wished she'd taken them more seriously.

A hand closed around her shoulder, bringing her to an abrupt stop. She screamed, and he swung her around as if she weighed no more than a child.

Diamonique stared into death's unholy eyes. The man smiled, although Diamonique knew it was only a veneer. Death came in many forms. In her case, it presented itself as a handsome, caped stranger, with eyes the color of night and a smile to melt any woman's heart. In other circumstances such a demeanor might have fooled her. Out here, on the street, Diamonique only felt terror. Chillingly, bone wrenching terror.

“What a little vixen you are.” His voice seductive and tempting as chocolate.

The frighteningly sensual man pulled her flush against his well-muscled body and used his mouth like a weapon. Holding Diamonique’s inert body, he kissed with a practiced mouth and tongue. It was nothing like the tepid kisses of her fiancé. Her feminine instincts screamed this man was an expert at pleasuring a woman. Helpless, Diamonique succumbed to his ministrations. Soon she was engulfed by his whole being, not even sure where he left off and she began.

A sharp stab pierced the sensitive skin of her neck. She whimpered. Quickly, as if by magic, the pain was nonexistent.

As if she’d only imagined it.

In its place, euphoria. The kind Diamonique had only dreamed of in her nighttime girlish fantasies. He was all over her, even inside her soul. Diamonique’s body tightened and she rode out the surge of pleasure with a climactic moan.

“Lift your skirts, love.”

Powerless, she obeyed his voice. Her hands moved to the hem of her skirts and she lifted them high. The soft night breeze caressed her calves and thighs.

“Mmm, yes, that’s the way.”

The man’s hands scorched her skin while his face continued to nuzzle her neck. He was taking liberties that no one, not even her fiancé,

ever had. Diamonique moaned, her pleasure mounting all over again. Suddenly, he was stroking her feminine spot and her body flew out of control. He rumbled his approval and slipped a finger inside her wet heat.

“You’re a virgin,” he murmured. “A sweet, tempting little innocent.”

She couldn’t speak. The things she felt overrode her ability at rational thought. But he didn’t seem to require words from her.

“Would you like to know what it’s like to be a woman, love? To be able to live forever and have anything your heart desires?”

Her thoughts scattered when a second finger probed her entrance. In her need to have more, Diamonique shouted, “Yes!”

There was a second sting at her neck, and soon she was drowning in rapturous bliss.

Chapter One

Columbus, Ohio

Present Day

Standing at the railing of her balcony, Diamonique stared at the cool, crisp autumn evening. Tears threatened to spill over, as she recalled the exact moment in time when she first tasted immortality. The young and naive girl she'd been, gone for all eternity. Unbidden, an image of Cain sprang to mind. She'd fallen in love with him. Even though he'd turned her world upside down, she'd still given him her heart and soul.

Her body tightened, her craving for blood mounting. She'd waited far too long to feed. Her sigh mingled with the air. She would need to hunt soon. Not even her plush and exotic penthouse suite could calm the hunger. Too much a coward to face the dawn, hence giving herself back to death like a present wrapped in charred flesh, Diamonique's existence was nothing more than an empty tunnel of nights.

Once upon a time, she'd believed in happily ever after, but the relationships she'd tried to conceive over the centuries had been but a bandage for her loneliness. At first, after Cain's betrayal, she'd sought

out her fiancé only to learn he'd been shot for having an affair with a married woman. That solidified her feeling that men were not to be trusted. Due to constant relocations to keep her ageless appearance from being questioned, she'd never bothered to pursue a deep relationship. As the sole heir to her family's fortune and her own knack for choosing the right stocks, she'd become independent in her own right, never having to rely on another man or immortal. Cain's monetary guilt offerings over the decades were given to charity. And although wealth came in handy, it was still no comparison to loneliness.

Diamonique shook off her self-imposed pity-party, shifted her body and took to the sky. She soared on raven wings, streaking off into the night in search of sustenance.

She landed silently in a dirty, empty alley, before quickly taking to the sidewalks. Moving through the crowds of people with ease, Diamonique sneered in contempt at how stupid mortals were. Oblivious to the peril they were in just by being in her presence. She could have them, any one of them, with but a flick of a wrist, a bat of her lashes, and a curve of her lips. She knew her own power and reveled in it.

Hunger turned her more dangerous than ever. She was a law unto herself and God help the one who thought to step between her and food this night. The only pleasure she received these days, came from the blood she drank. The sweet warm flow of it as it dripped onto her greedy tongue.

She focused on the thoughts of the city as it awakened with the promise of lusty desires. Those who lived in a dull world by day would emerge by night, changed. They thought to sate their wicked appetites under the cover of darkness. Still, one mind was different. She closed her eyes and stopped dead in her tracks, then tuned her every nerve, her every thought to that one pattern of thought. His boredom struck her like a cattle prod. His need to escape the madness of the city, to leave behind all that was colorful and slip inside his pale loneliness. She searched him out. Coming to an open door, music blasting so loudly the windows vibrated with the intensity, she stepped over the threshold and became like all the other partygoers. With the power of suggestion, they would see an image of mist and beauty and nothing more.

Diamonique weaved through the gyrating bodies, until she was directly in front of the one she'd chosen to give her nourishment. As if sensing her, he turned around. The beauty of his eyes struck her. Eyes the color of the daytime sky she missed so much; striking and sensual, as they caressed her face. Something about his eyes seemed familiar, but she couldn't think why. The song changed to a slow romantic tune and a woman's lilting voice filled the room.

Her lids closed and an image of Cain sprang to mind. It startled her. Thinking of him made her remember all the passion they'd shared. The music, the soft lights, all of it coaxed her into wishing for the unattainable. For once, she let herself float along, feeling the rhythm

catch in her heart. Cain's face, his strong arms and powerful body took over her thoughts. She ached to have his lips pressed to hers just once more. Diamonique wanted his hot gaze searing her and seeing into her soul the way only he could. She needed and wanted and the music gave it to her. If only in her imagination, it was enough.

With her eyes closed, it felt as if she were drifting in a dream. Her hands went where she wanted Cain's to be once more, stroking her own neck the way his lips once had—driving her mad with the tease of his tongue. Her hands journeyed downward, until her fingers hooked beneath the hem of her skirt. A hot breath against her cheek startled her out of her fantasy.

“You're beautiful.”

It was the man she'd come to entice.

Not Cain.

That should have pleased her. Cain was the past.

The song ended, she stepped back and breathed a sigh of relief. But as she studied the handsome stranger, his silent intensity washed over her. His eyes were dark with an enticing promise of an inner fire. She could see and feel what he wanted so clearly in her mind. His body covering hers, entering hers, their passions mounting and dueling. It stopped abruptly; the images disappearing so fast she wondered if she were truly in charge of her own mind.

The music changed once again, the tempo faster, the romantic tune gone, but the mood was still there. She was still as edgy, still as ready, and the stranger was still standing in front of her, staring at her, waiting for her to surrender.

Diamonique glided a step closer, bringing their bodies into contact. She could smell his natural masculine scent. For the first time, she realized what it was about a man that made women lose their heads. That smell, that all too enthralling maleness. It made her long to run her tongue over his beautiful full lips.

Rising up on her tiptoes, she took a taste. Initiating the first contact gave her a sense of feminine power. He kept his hands at his sides, as if not sure how to respond. As her fingers went to his hair, his arms closed around her in a tight embrace. Diamonique grabbed handfuls of dark silk and pressed her lips to his, she was eager to taste him. She coaxed his lips apart with her tongue and delved inside. She angled her head, deepening the kiss and felt the sudden change in him. He'd had enough of standing and doing nothing. When she was ready to pull back, the room spun. She'd gone too long without blood. Her cells were shriveling with each second that passed, her mind turned to mush, as she tried to concentrate on the male in her arms. She wanted to kick herself for using her power of flight when she was already so weak. It made her vulnerable. Not since Cain had she felt this way.

Diamonique longed to feel this man succumb to her lips at his throat. She used her voice like a weapon, softly luring him outside, away from the revelry. To her shock, he smiled and took her by the hand as if unaffected by the hypnotic notes. Suddenly, he was the one in control as he steered her down the alley behind the nightclub, beyond the eyes of the curious.

She tuned out the smells, the stench of the trash that hugged every crevice and seemed to cling to her skin like a sickening glove. She frowned as she tried to concentrate, but all she received for her efforts was a headache and no answer as to why she was letting him take the lead.

Shaking off her lethargy, Diamonique moved in front of him and let him look his fill, allowed his eyes to travel the length of her body. His gaze took in the flow of the silky dress, breasts that threatened to spill out of the scoop neckline, and the black spiked heels encrusted with the diamonds that were her namesake. He watched as she moved her legs apart and let the silk fall away from one calf, the slit reaching clear to her waistline. His eyes heated instantly. His heart beat loud in her ears, his blood pumping hard.

Beckoning her to drink.

Pleading for Diamonique to sate herself with this stranger.

She lifted her hand to the back of his neck and pulled him down, then silently slipped inside his mind, reading his thoughts easily. He was

a flurry of sexual lust. He ached to sink his heavy length inside her body. Nothing seemed to matter to him except the swell of hip that protruded from the open dress.

Diamonique felt his hands there, even as her teeth scored his soft skin. His musky male scent bombarded her senses, as she tasted his sweet blood. Only once before had she tasted such nectar. Before she could explore the remembrance, his strong capable hands massaged the junction of her thighs. Her tongue continued to tease the blood from his willing veins, each in their own way fulfilling their lust. She let the moment drag out, longer than ever before. She loved his strong, capable hands massaging where she needed him the most. Even as her tongue continued to lap sweet sustenance, Diamonique felt her own climax mounting.

Then he spoke.

“My beautiful, Diamond, I thought I’d lost you forever.”

That voice! Warm velvet skimmed the length of Diamonique’s body. Every muscle went rigid with disbelief.

It was Cain!

The one who’d turned her into this monster of the dark.

She wrenched out of his arms.

“You were projecting false thoughts,” she accused, “so I wouldn’t know it was you.”

She readied herself for battle. But he only stood there, eyes full of laughter as if mocking her. His grin triggered Diamonique's rage as his gaze traveled over her body with a possessiveness he had no right to.

Her blood craving withered.

"You must have a death wish." Her voice deliberately harsh and cold as her cells began to pulse with life once more, giving back her strength as her rage grew. Unfortunately, she was also able to see the man who'd so easily hidden his true self from her. No wonder she hadn't recognized him, as an ancient, Cain had cloaked his appearance.

"Now why would you say that, love?"

"You dare come to me after what you've done!"

His eyes lit up with understanding, as if just remembering. "Ah, you must mean the whore. Is that what has you all in a lather?"

Diamonique's spine stiffened. Her fists clenched and unclenched in an effort to stay in control. "She has a name, use it."

"Sareena is dead."

She hadn't expected that, but then she didn't really care. "And you're telling me why?"

He drove a hand through his long black hair and sighed, as if tired. "It's a long story, but her death affects you a great deal."

"Screw off."

"You have a wicked mouth, Diamond."

“And you and I were finished a century ago. Leave here, Cain. This is my turf.”

“Afraid I can’t do that, love.”

“Then I will.”

She turned to go, but he grabbed her and hauled her close.

Too close.

She tried to jerk free, but he was too strong. “Let go, damn you!”

“No. You will listen to what I have to say.”

Diamonique knew it was useless. Cain’s stubbornness would continue until she heard him out.

“Fine. Speak.”

Cain couldn’t help himself; he so enjoyed watching Diamond get all riled. She was just so damn delicious when her face heated and her breasts rose and fell in agitation.

“Good girl.” He hoped to piss her off more. He was rewarded when she stiffened her spine and stuck her impertinent nose in the air. Good. He’d take stubborn any day over the cold, empty look he’d seen in her pretty, green eyes moments earlier.

“You stepped over the line when you took Sareena to bed.”

She swiped her tongue over her lips and licked the remaining droplets of his blood into her voracious mouth, causing his body to ache for her touch. “She meant nothing to me. There was never anything more than sex and only that once. Why must you read more into it?”

She smirked at him, which set off his own anger.

“It’s always just sex with you, Cain.”

Cain looked her over with renewed interest. “Who says?”

Chapter Two

“I don’t suppose you’re here to tell me that you’d decided to join dear Sareena in death like a good little boy?”

Laughter rose up at her question. “I think you know me better than that.” He leaned in close and whispered, “I’ve always been a *very* bad boy. Don’t you remember, love?”

He watched Diamonique subtly move away, as if his voice affected her more than she cared to admit.

“Tell me why you’re here so you can leave me in peace.”

He bobbed his eyebrows mischievously. “I have no desire to leave you alone. I’m here to stay.”

She crossed her arms over her chest, which only emphasized the perfection of her tits, and growled, “You leave or I will. Your choice.”

He stepped forward, watching in heated fascination as she stepped back once more. “Do you really wish me to leave, love?”

“Yes.”

He smiled at her quickly uttered word, spoken with just the slightest hint of a quiver. “I think you’re a little liar, Diamond.”

She visibly cringed, then said, “What has Sareena’s death to do with me? Out with it, Cain.”

“In time you will see. Soon, my love.”

Diamonique went instantly rigid. “Don’t call me that. I am no longer *your* anything.”

He rolled his eyes and ground out, “You are way too sensitive, that was always your problem.”

“You don’t know crap about me, Cain. You were too busy stabbing me in the back to get to know the real me.”

“Don’t, Diamond. It’s in the past,” Cain snarled.

Anyone else would have trembled in fright, but not Diamonique. She had never truly been afraid of him. Perhaps that had been the allure. He didn’t know, and he didn’t have the luxury of time to find out. His enemies were near and soon they would find Diamonique. He couldn’t allow that.

“Why don’t you want to talk about your flaws, Cain? Does it damage your perfect ego?”

Cain stepped closer, staring into the most beautiful emerald pools he’d ever seen. It was the first thing about her he’d noticed. It had shocked him that he’d actually taken the time to notice something on a woman other than the more feminine elements of her packaging. That in itself had been a novelty.

She’d blindsided him with her sweet innocence that first night. He’d watched her walking down the street as if she hadn’t a care in the world, her strides so full of energy. Without even knowing it, she’d

tempted him. When he'd held her in his arms, her body molding to his as if made specifically for him, he'd gotten sucked in. Maybe it was the longing he sensed deep inside Diamond, the fire that no one else had ignited or even the goodness of her heart. Perhaps it had been all three but the last touched him more than anything. Right now, however, her entrancing eyes were all but shooting brilliant sparks at him, searing and exciting him all at once. Damn, the woman was lethal and unknowingly seductive in her rage.

And he always did enjoy standing a bit too close to the fire.

His lips kicked up at the corners, as he automatically drew his gaze downward, drinking in the exotic sight of her. Her dress molded to her perfect curves, driving him insane with need. In the past, she'd been partial to reds and blacks, but tonight she wore a green, crushed velvet thing that made her skin fairly shimmer in the moonlight.

Christ, her beauty brought him to his knees every time he saw her; a temptation he'd never been able to resist. A walking wet dream. Diamonique was the kind of woman that made a man want to possess her, all the while knowing it was impossible. After all, how did one go about owning a bolt of lightning?

"You like to get me angry, don't you, Diamond?" Cain searched her face for some sign her resolve to stay mad at him had weakened. He hated to admit it, but he wasn't comfortable with knowing he'd hurt her. Once, long ago, they'd often argued and debated. Cain had taken

pleasure in their little game of matching wits. Their relationship had never been dull or stagnant. But the hurt she tried unsuccessfully to hide tore pieces from him.

Diamonique snorted. “Do us both a favor, Cain; don’t pretend that I hold some special place in your world. I know better.”

Feeling guilty, Cain winced. “It was a hundred damn years ago! Will you never forgive me for that tiny lapse in judgment? If you would only listen to my side you might see that it’s not all what you think.”

She quirked an eyebrow. “Oh? And how many sides to a blowjob are there?” Her tone was dry as she turned from the railing and began walking away.

Cain promptly choked. Jesus, the woman had a wicked tongue. Instead of hurling insults, he could think of at least a dozen other things much more enjoyable for the use of such a wicked weapon.

If she’d only give him the chance to explain.

The sight of her leaving cemented his determination to get back in her good graces. He had to make her see reason. Both their lives depended upon it. Cain followed quietly at a discreet distance, curious as to what she was up to now.

Lord in heaven, he loved the way her hips moved. Her sexy, round ass had just the right amount of sway. Could she be completely oblivious to her own attraction? He didn’t think so. She wasn’t blind, nor was she stupid. Diamonique knew how men watched her. Wanted her.

But she had no real idea how she affected *him*.

Cain wanted her, and he despaired at the thought of never having her again. Never being able to feel her sweet body beneath his, writhing in ecstasy. Diamonique had a body designed for sex. An unwanted thought of her giving all that unrestrained passion to another man sprang to his mind—another seeking bliss at her total lack of inhibitions. Touching her silky skin and lapping up the rapture she emitted with every thrust of her hips. Cain felt a wild urge to howl at the moon. Shit. She'd been the only woman to slide so effortlessly inside his heart. A heart he'd thought had shriveled and died long ago. And she'd somehow made him want to be...civilized. The things he'd felt had been foreign to him.

Before he'd met Diamonique, Cain had liked making people as miserable as he. When he'd begun to slip, going soft, he'd pulled back. It had been a survival instinct to push her away. He'd never intended to alienate her completely, only to put some emotional distance between them. That was the single reason he'd gone to the club that night. That was the reason he'd let Sareena hit on him. He had wanted to prove to Diamonique, prove to himself, that he was fine without her, that he didn't need her. That any warm and willing body would do. He'd wanted to put her in her place.

Then things had gone to hell faster than a fallen angel. Shit, what a mess.

Deep down, Cain knew—no matter how much he wanted to believe otherwise—she'd never forgive him. His Diamond was too stubborn for that. Too damn stubborn. Besides, he had his own agenda. And there was no room for her in his future. But, first, he had an obligation to see to her safety, and he couldn't do that if she kept walking away from him.

Damn it!

Watching her stroll regally down the street drove his libido into overdrive. On the other hand, maybe while keeping her out of harm's way, Cain could soften that hard shell of hers and have another taste of her sweet flesh. Even as the thought came into his mind, she turned a corner and he very nearly lost track of her. When he saw the shimmer of her dress in the moonlight, his breath met the air in relief. When he spied the man leaning against a building watching her, Cain knew what she was after. His pretty Diamond was still hungry. Apparently, she'd been trying to ditch him so that she could feed in private. She'd not had enough when she'd taken his vein.

An unfamiliar feeling invaded, took hold, and created a burning sense of urgency for him to stop her.

He swiftly searched his memories, but Cain was loath to think of a single instance where he'd seen her feed from another male. Of course, the two of them had exchanged blood, which was another of his own rules he'd gladly broken. Cain never exchanged with other vampires, it

created too much of a bond, a mind link that was only broken by death itself. He'd never wanted a link to anyone, so he'd never given his blood to anyone, only taken.

Once again, Diamonique had mixed him up, so friggin' thoroughly that he could only think of her. Of touching her. Watching her face light up with laughter. Feel her body quiver with pleasure, as she tasted his blood. Revel in her orgasm, as he'd tasted hers. He'd done the unthinkable when he dropped his defenses and let her drink her fill from him that first time. They'd made love and it had been beautiful. If he were honest with himself, he'd admit that he'd never made love before Diamonique. Sure, he'd had sex with plenty of women. Over the centuries, he'd never denied himself the pleasure of a woman's body. But with Diamonique, it had been wholly different. He'd wanted to bring her pleasure. Giving her satisfaction had thrilled him, made him feel alive.

After she'd left him, he'd made every attempt to get Diamond to link with him, but she'd refused. After awhile he'd given her the privacy she'd craved, but he'd continued to watch over her by slipping inside her mind unnoticed.

Now he stood frozen, as he watched her touch the human male, licking and suckling playfully at his neck. Even in the darkness of the alley, Cain could make out the lustful look on the stranger's face; the hard bulge in his jeans. Cain's body vibrated with fury as the man

wrapped his arms around Diamonique, drawing her closer to him, fitting her curves to his. His instincts kicked in, and he eagerly allowed the beast in him to rise as the man thrust his pelvis into Diamonique.

With nocturnal speed, Cain flew through the alley and jerked them apart. Diamonique's anger showed in her brilliant green eyes, but his attention was already on another part of her face. His nostrils flared to life at the sweet hint of blood that was staining her plump lips. It still dripped from the man's neck. The stranger looked up at him, dazed.

Dazed and horny.

Cain would kill him with his bare hands.

Chapter Three

He pushed Diamonique further away from the human. She stumbled, lost her balance and fell to the ground. After glancing back to make sure she was unharmed, Cain centered his concentration on the man. He wrapped one hand around the mortal's neck and squeezed, then jerked the man into the air so they were eye to eye. Slowly, he pressed his fingers inward, he could feel the fragile bones groan under the pressure of his grip, determined to bring the man out of his lustful trance in the most painful way possible.

Cain waited and watched as realization dawned. Then, with predatory satisfaction, he reveled in the horror lighting the man's eyes, before he began thrashing about, his lips blue from lack of oxygen. Pitiless as the devil himself, Cain allowed his lengthened incisors to gleam in the dark alley, dipped his head and licked the trickle of blood that still oozed from where Diamonique had scored the man's neck. He smelled her scent and it fueled his rage further.

Cain raised his head and callously stared as the man started to choke, uselessly flailing his arms and legs. He wanted him to suffer, measure by measure, until he'd squeezed every bit of life from his body. In his mind, all he could see was Diamonique's tongue stroking.

Diamonique's lips suckling. A killing frenzy blocked out every rational thought.

Then a whisper of sound registered. Only Diamonique's soft voice could penetrate the layers of rage that was upon him. She was pleading; her desperation and grief stopped him cold. "Please don't, Cain."

The sadness in her voice was the only thing capable of bringing him back to reality.

"Please."

Cain spun around and growled, "You wish for him to live?"

She nodded.

"Why? Do you care for this one?" If she said yes, he would snap the fop's neck.

Diamond belonged to *him*. No mortal or immortal would have her and live.

She shook her head. "I don't even know him. He was only a means of sustenance, nothing more, I swear it." Her shoulders slumped.

Cain searched her gaze. Finally, he released his hold, satisfied that she was not attempting to deceive him. The human fell to the street like a clump of dirt, then gagged and coughed as he attempted to drag precious oxygen into his starving lungs. Cain merely stepped over him, grasped Diamonique's arm and hauled her out of the alley. He needed to get her alone, out of the city, away from other males. Never had he experienced anything as intense as this feeling of...what?

Jealousy?

Cain wasn't the type to get jealous. Women had simply never meant enough to him to inspire such powerful emotion.

Until now.

“Come with me,” Cain growled, grateful when Diamonique acquiesced.

Within seconds, they both shifted into the shape of dark-winged creatures and took to the night sky. Diamonique's small, delicate form easily kept pace beside him. The memory of teaching her how to shapeshift and take flight came to him unbidden. He still heard Diamonique's sweet laughter filling his mind as she teased him to keep up. Cain ruthlessly forced the memory away. It wouldn't do to break concentration several hundred feet in the air.

He flew until he reached the edge of the city. When he spotted a clearing in a small patch of woods, Cain descended, changing back to his clothed human form as he landed and Diamonique followed suit. The instant her feet hit the ground he clutched her by the shoulders and brought her around to face him. They stood so close he could feel her quick choppy breaths on his neck, feel the rise and fall of her breasts. But the vision of her mouth on the man in the alley had yet to leave his mind.

“You have no idea what you do to my head, do you?” His words came out harsher than he'd intended.

She closed her eyes, as if gathering herself, then whispered, “What do you want from me? Why bring me out here?”

“You are in danger, Diamond.”

She shook her head, and he watched a tear trail down her cheek. Suddenly, her image blurred and too late she was gone. Lights and colors were already dancing on the ground and over the cliff’s edge, filling the spot where she stood with warmth.

Diamonique was gone, and he hadn’t told her about the Dark Dominion. He hadn’t been able to tell her why her life was in danger. But he would find her. She might be able to hide her presence from others, but never him. Even though he’d left her alone these last one hundred years, he’d never truly been far away.

Cain closed his eyes and let his soul seek hers. It was easy enough, considering how many times he’d done it over the years. Her life essence was a sparkling light inside his dark soul. It only took seconds to see that she’d gone to her townhouse.

Predictable. He would go to her, explain the peril she was in and then he would take her somewhere safe. Once he knew for certain he’d eliminated the threat to her life; he would take his time in coaxing out the Diamond he’d known so well. He’d show her immeasurable pleasure. Cain would bathe her in it, and once again, she would lower those damned walls and let him in.

When he dematerialized and reappeared outside her apartment building, Cain closed his eyes and sought his beautiful Diamond. Their blood bond brought her image to him with ease. She was standing in her living room, her mind a flurry of activity. Her thoughts were on fleeing the city. Damn good idea, but she'd be leaving with him, not alone.

He'd lost her for too long already. Suddenly, he no longer cared about his enemies. All he wanted was to feast on her body. To seal their bond further.

Cain allowed his body to dissolve into a thousand particles of mist. He soared upwards and slipped inside her apartment, unnoticed. Once again solid muscle and flesh, he cleared his throat.

Diamonique swung around, startled.

“You do not take proper precautions, love. It's too dangerous for you to let down your defenses so completely. I taught you better than that.”

“Get out! You aren't welcome here, Cain.”

Anger and passion warred inside his body. He flew across the room until he stood directly in front of her, grabbed her arms, then growled, “I go where you go. You are in danger, Diamond. You may not realize it, but you are no longer safe alone.”

“I'm not safe with *you!*” She flung back, rage showing in her gorgeous features, as she attempted to yank herself out of his arms.

In a calmer tone, he murmured, “I have enemies who know of you. They wish to hurt me by killing you. So, from now on, I am your shadow. Like it or not, I don’t really give a damn. I go where you go.”

Diamonique rolled her eyes. “What are you talking about? You aren’t making any sense.”

Cain released her and sighed. “Sit down. I have a story to tell you.” She was hesitant, but in the end, she sat quietly and waited for him to continue. “Sareena knew about you, Diamond. She knew I cared for you, and she sought to make me pay by going to the Dark Dominion. They tortured her, after she told them all about the ancient blood that flows in your veins. *My* ancient blood. They killed her.”

“Go on.”

“The Dominion will do anything for power. They’re twisted and depraved and believe that an ancient’s life force gives them immeasurable power, makes them stronger. It’s nonsense, of course, but there’s no reasoning with them. Their leader, Rafael, is deranged. He takes innocents and turns them immortal against their will. Crazy as it sounds Rafael thinks the stronger a person’s willpower the more potent the blood. He learned very quickly that I have a very strong will and he’ll do anything to harness that power for himself. I turned out to be the perfect prey because I had no ties. No family. My father had already tossed me to the street and forgotten about me. A nobody. More importantly, I was tough, determined. Rafael gets a real high off of

forcing the stronger ones to their knees. It's a form of pleasure to him. With me he had a lot of time to play because I refused to submit...at first." Diamonique shuddered, but he continued. "Once you have Dark Dominion blood in your veins there is no escape. As part of the initiation, you're put in a dark soundproof room. The sensory-deprivation brainwashing they put the new recruits through is sheer hell." He shuddered thinking back to those awful days. When no one was around, he'd prayed for death but was never granted such luxury.

"They don't give you any blood for the first three days and nights, then on the fourth evening you're given a few drops. Barely enough to survive, but more than enough to start your cravings." Cain swallowed back the bile that rose up at the thought of how he'd begged for more. "Insanity comes quickly."

She narrowed her eyes, clearly suspicious. "I've heard horrible rumors of The Dominion, and I remember what you said they did to you, but why me? Why would they want me when they could just come for you?"

"With me they would have quite a fight on their hands. I figured out how to separate myself from them. But with you, a mere fledgling, they could drain you dry before you even realized what was happening."

"How many of them are there? Can I fight them?"

Two strides and Cain was kneeling in front of her. "They are a small group, but you will have no chance against them. They have been

around much longer than you, love; longer than me. If they come anywhere near this apartment, I would sense it immediately. No matter how much you wish me gone. It's not safe." Cain hoped he was telling the truth about keeping her safe. The alternative was too horrific to consider.

"Why would you sense them and I wouldn't? What aren't you telling me, Cain?"

Damn, she was too smart for her own good sometimes.

"The one who started the small band of rebels, Rafael, is my creator. He's had it in for me since Lucas, his son, left The Dominion. He blames me because I helped Lucas escape." He paused. "If Rafael comes sniffing around, I'll sense it, which is a good thing. The bad is Rafael can also find *me*."

"It just figures that you would be able to pick out a twisted vampire at fifty paces. What I don't understand is why Rafael has waited until now to hunt you."

"I'm not sure. Maybe he didn't think anything he could do to me personally would be enough. Since he learned about you, he knows my Achilles heel."

"How nice, comparing me to a body part."

He chuckled at her disgruntled attitude and stood.

She watched him, wary.

"So, you see now why I must stick to you like glue?"

She nodded and looked away.

He took that moment to examine her apartment. Cain liked the colorful décor. She'd always had a penchant towards ancient Egypt, and her choice of furniture and wall hangings clearly reflected that. "You have a nice place here."

"Thank you, but don't get too cozy, you're only staying long enough to eliminate the threat, then you're gone."

He grinned . "Of course, love."

Chapter Four

Diamonique rose abruptly, dismissing Cain as if he were an insect, then started walking down the hallway. She could feel him following close behind. She turned and growled, “What are you doing?”

“Scanning our surroundings for any sign of a threat. This is something you should be doing as well, Diamond.”

Automatically, she sent her mind outward. When she found no evil presence lurking, she let out a heavy sigh. “I sense nothing.”

He nodded. “I don’t think they’ve found you, yet.” He shrugged. “I don’t suppose I could talk you into coming with me to my two hundred acre, well guarded property, where I’ll be on my own territory?”

Diamonique stiffened. “No.”

“Be reasonable. We both know I can protect you better there.”

“Really, Cain? Because I don’t think that’s entirely true. I think it’s better to let them come to me. I can be bait. If we go back to your *fortress*, it could be months before they find us. I don’t want that.”

He started to protest, but she halted him with a hand in the air. “I refuse to step foot in that place. You can either stay here and fight or you can leave, but you’ll be alone.”

“Have you always been so damn stubborn?”

She shrugged, sensing her victory. “Probably.”

Cain closed the distance separating them and swept her into his arms. “None of it matters. I’m here and I no longer want to talk. I want to feel your heat surrounding me. The tender clutch of your inner muscles on my cock. I ache to quench this endless hunger.”

He started towards her bedroom and she stiffened, scared all of a sudden. “No.”

“Don’t deny us this moment in time, Diamond. Tomorrow we could both be dead. Let us have one more memory together.”

Diamonique relaxed a little. “This is a mistake, Cain.”

“No, love,” he objected, “screwing up with you, that was the mistake.”

His footsteps continued down the hall as she stared at him, attempting to see into his very soul. She was certain he’d read her mind, because he already knew the location of her bedroom.

Once she relaxed against his hard chest, Diamonique could swear Cain shook. Was he relieved she hadn’t denied him? Although, she was loath to admit it aloud, she still cared. For the first time since leaving him all those years ago, she didn’t feel hatred towards Cain. She felt hope instead. He was the most confounding man she’d ever known, always blindsiding her with his mesmerizing appeal and intelligent quips and comebacks. And through it all, he made her feel alive just to be in his presence.

Cain kissed the top of her head and took her to the bedroom, but as he entered her private domain, Diamonique cringed. He'd never been to her bedroom, or her apartment for that matter. What would he think of her whimsical furnishings?

While the rest of her apartment was decorated in dramatic colors of black and gold and red, her bedroom was just the opposite. She'd always thought it was like stepping right into the pages of a fairy tale. There were unicorns, fairies, princesses, wizards, and even dragons everywhere.

The king size bed was covered by a white, fluffy comforter with the picture of a powerful unicorn embroidered into the center. She loved that comforter. Her bedside table lamp was shaped like an ominous green and purple dragon. There was a large overstuffed chair that looked plenty big enough for two—which gave her all sorts of wicked ideas for later—and the upholstery was covered in fairies of all shapes, sizes and colors. Even the wallpaper had gotten into the act.

“This room makes me feel like an evil lord debauching the virginal maiden.”

Diamonique smacked his chest and laughed. “You're no more an evil lord than I am a virgin.” She shifted awkwardly. “It's just that I've always loved fairy tales. Happily ever after and all that. It really does it for me. Of course, if you tell anyone, I'll have to kill you.”

“Are you saying no other man has ever been in your bedroom, my love?”

“I’ve never wanted anyone in here. Until now.”

He kissed the top of her head and whispered, “You make me want to...feel.”

Diamonique reached up and cupped his cheek. “I’m very glad I do, Cain.”

Neither of them spoke again as he walked them to the bed. Cain laid her down in the center; tenderness engulfed her as cotton softness surrounded her body. He began taking off his own clothes. Cain could simply will them away, but it seemed he wanted her to watch.

He started with the shirt, undoing one button at a time until it hung open, revealing his chest. He shifted his shoulders and the shirt fell to the floor. She couldn’t take her eyes from him. When he reached his pants, she was all but bursting with need. He unsnapped and unzipped and his erection sprang free. When he made no move to join her on the bed, she frowned.

“Undress, Diamond, then touch yourself for me.” Her shock must have shown, because he explained. “For years now, I’ve been watching you, love. I always knew every move you made. I knew each time you swept your clothes aside and slipped those delicate fingers inside that tight hot opening. I knew what you looked like. It drove me mad wishing

I could be here, in this very room. Wishing it could be my fingers taking you to paradise.”

She felt her cheeks heat. “How could I not have known? Shouldn’t I be able to sense you, Cain?”

“Only if I wanted you to. Like the nightclub, I have the ability to cloak myself. I can teach you. Later. Do not think on any of that now. Just let me watch you pleasure yourself. Do it for me, love.”

Diamonique licked her lips and in a flash, she was nude.

Jesus, she was beautiful. Lush and sexy. His beautiful, rare diamond. Enthralled, Cain stood motionless as Diamonique’s left hand went to her breasts, the other to her sweet center. She arched her back and closed her eyes, fondling herself for his viewing pleasure. Two fingers dipped between her swollen labia, then back out. Cain could see her juices—smell her intoxicating scent. As she plucked at her puckered nipple, arching off the bed, Cain went wild.

He flew to her, moved over her aroused body and pinned her beneath him. Using his knee, Cain pushed her legs wide and settled himself between. By sheer force of will, he kept himself from sinking into the cradle of her warmth. He wanted this to last. He never wanted it to end. Cain needed this moment etched into his memory forever.

Grasping her wrists in one hand, Cain raised them above her head. She was stretched out under him like an offering. He allowed his other hand free rein. He drifted his palm down her curves, to cup her soft mound, then stroked her wet folds open and sank one finger deep. Diamonique moaned and thrashed about, her breasts swayed back and forth in her struggle for completion. It was the ultimate temptation. He dipped his head and took one round breast into his mouth, sucking as much of the sensitive orb in as he finger-fucked her.

“Cain, please!”

Her pleading command was music to his ears. He moved to her other sweetly rounded flesh and lavished it with the same amount of attention. Diamonique lifted up, smashing her breasts into his hungry mouth. He felt his incisors lengthen. Unable to stop, Cain bit down, piercing her flesh. She screamed his name and came apart in his arms. Her blood rushed into his mouth and he drank, starved for her unique flavor. The clutch of her tight heat as her juices soaked his finger, drove his body into a frenzy of lust.

Once her tremors subsided, Cain pulled his finger free, sucked it clean, and then licked the pinpricks on her breast. He pressed a gentle kiss to her mouth and lifted his head.

“You give me something I’ve never had from any other woman, love,” Cain confessed.

Her eyelids lifted, her voice raw when she asked, “What’s that, Cain?”

“You give me the sun.”

She frowned. “I don’t understand.”

“When I’m with you, I feel warm again. My soul is brought back to life.”

“Cain.”

Fear resurfaced in her eyes and he hated it—hated himself for putting it there. Cain leaned down and kissed it away, then let go of her hands and sat back long enough to flip her onto her stomach. As he came back down atop her, caging her in with his arms at either side of her head, he drove his throbbing shaft into her with one quick thrust and they both moaned.

“Christ, you feel good,” he whispered into her ear. “So wet and tight and all mine.” The possessive words tumbled out of him, and he was pleased when he felt Diamonique gasp and nod her head in agreement.

He held her still as he pumped into her from behind. He felt his own orgasm building, but he wasn’t finished with her. Maybe he would never be. He moved his hand beneath her hips and seized her clit between his index finger and thumb. Cain rolled the swollen nub, pinching and caressing, then sank even deeper into her tight sheath. When Diamonique’s pleasure crested once again, he moved his hips

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faster, harder, until he was buried so deep he never wanted to leave the safe haven of her body. This time, when she soared over the edge, Diamond took him with her.

Chapter Five

Cain awoke, alert and ready. Out of habit, he scanned his surroundings. A familiar scent permeated the air around Diamonique's building.

"Rafael," he hissed.

Cain nudged Diamonique awake and knew the instant she was aware of him. Her entire body stiffened.

"Wake up, my love. We have company."

Diamonique shot to her feet, then looked down at her nude body. Before Cain had a chance to appreciate her lush beauty, she was covered in a pair of tight black pants, a turtleneck, and boots. He stifled the urge to toss her back onto the mattress and instead followed suit. He moved around the bed and held out his hand, "Come on, we don't have much time."

She looked at his outstretched palm, then back into his eyes.

"Where are we going?"

"Not far. I only want to get a jump on them."

"I thought you wanted to *whisk* me away to your big mansion in the woods."

“I do, but I’ve come to the conclusion that if we run, they’ll only follow. I want this finished once and for all.”

She nodded. “Me too.” When she took his hand, his heart clenched. Cain wanted to see it as a sign of trust, maybe even love, but he was a realist and refused to wish for things that might never come.

He kept her at his back as he left the bedroom, his senses open to danger at all times. To Rafael.

Just as he entered the living room, he felt the change in the air.

Evil brought a heavy, dark scent wherever it went.

“I see you’ve come to save your little gem. How sweet.”

The lamp beside the couch was on, and Rafael’s blond hair gleamed in the light. Cain had always thought the man looked angelic. Too bad his nature was as black as hell itself. The six-foot-six vampire sat at one end of Diamonique’s couch, one leg crossed over the other, his huge body relaxed, as if he’d come to have tea instead of torturing and killing Diamonique.

Cain was angry with himself for not sensing Rafael sooner. For sleeping, when he should have been alert—watching over Diamonique. Christ, he’d practically drawn The Dominion a map straight to her door!

“You’re too late, Rafael. But then, what else is new,” Cain shot back, as he ran through his options. He could easily dematerialize, take Diamonique to safety, then come back and kill Rafael. But, who was to

say that Rafael hadn't already planned for that outcome. Hell, he probably had his minions all over the place, ready to do his bidding.

“See how differently we view things, Cain? From where I'm sitting, I'm right on time.”

Rafael in all his arrogance thought himself unbeatable. Cain would use that character flaw to kill the twisted being. “This is between you and me. Leave Diamond out of it.”

Rafael made a tsking sound. “Wish I could, but it's too late for that, isn't it?”

“Your fight is with me. You want ancient blood? Come and get it, asshole, but she stays out of it.”

With slow, careful movements, Rafael rose to his full height. Anger made his face contort into the hideous creature he truly was. “You dare dictate to me, Cain?”

“You have no hold over me anymore, *old man*. You haven't for a long time.”

In a heartbeat, Rafael was across the room, his long, bony fingers wrapped around Cain's neck, squeezing. “You think you're so goddamn smart. That was always your problem, Cain. You never could see the forest for the damn trees.”

He squeezed harder. Instinctively, Cain grabbed Rafael's arms and dug his nails into his skin, knowing any blood loss would weaken him. Blood coated his fingertips, and Cain scraped his sharp talons upward,

creating deep furrows. Rafael never loosened his hold and hatred fueled the other vampire's rage.

“I despise you, Cain. It's going to be a pleasure taking your precious diamond from you.”

Fear for Diamonique pushed Cain into action. He drew his right arm back and slammed his fist into Rafael's face. The force of the blow thrust Rafael several feet to the side. He stumbled and came right back, his teeth gleaming, spittle dripping from his mouth.

“You little prick! I never should have made you one of us,” Rafael raged, then his fist shot out. Cain was faster as he swiftly ducked the punch. He grabbed Rafael by the front of the shirt and used his other hand to rip open several deep slices down the vampire's cheek. Rafael howled in rage, then delivered a right hook. Cain lost his hold on Rafael, but recovered from the blow quick enough to see the depraved bastard's fist coming at him again. This time Cain was prepared and dodged to the left, then delivered an uppercut of his own.

“You've lost it, Rafael,” Cain taunted, as he continued to duck and punch. “You need to be put down. You're a goddamn embarrassment.”

Cain dodged a roundhouse kick, then delivered a swift jab to Rafael's jaw. Bone crunched beneath his fist and blood spurted. Finally, the ancient showed signs of weakening from the deep cuts. Then his gaze shot to Diamonique. In an instant, Cain leaped in front of her. Rafael vanished, then reappeared behind Diamonique. He grabbed her

by the hair and yanked her backwards. Diamonique slammed a hand into Rafael's nose, surprising Cain and Rafael both. It was all the time Cain needed to get a message to her.

Cain pulled her away from Rafael and growled, "Dissolve, Diamond, go to our private place!"

Diamonique shook her head, denying him. "I won't leave you to deal with this alone."

He wanted to kiss and throttle her at the same time, but there would be time later for that. He hoped. For now, he needed her gone. "Go now! I cannot fight him if I'm worried about you. I'll come for you, Diamond, just leave now!"

In a flash of color, Diamonique was gone, leaving him alone with an enraged six hundred-year-old vampire.

"You love her," Rafael spat, as if the notion disgusted him. "You've always cared more for her than anything or anyone. It's why I came for her, you know. I wanted to watch you suffer."

Cain sighed, knowing where this was going and helpless to stop it. "Lucas wasn't my fault, Rafael. He saw what you'd become and wanted no part in it. I didn't draw him out of The Dominion. You just wish it'd happened that way. We both know the truth."

Rafael glared at him. "He was my son and you took him from me! You'll pay for that. But not with your life, Cain. I'll force you to live without her. Then you'll know what hell is really like."

“Leave him alone.”

They both whipped around at the sound of another voice in the room. Cain was too shocked to speak. Rafael was not.

“You dare defend him to me? Does your betrayal know no bounds?”

Even Cain could hear the pain in Rafael’s voice. Pain like that could twist a man. He should know.

“He did nothing wrong. You only wish it were so simple. I left on my own. Cain had nothing to do with it.”

Rafael flew across the room until he was within inches of Lucas—possibly the only being the creature ever cared about. “I know he helped you hide from me.”

Lucas shook his head. “He showed me a few tricks, something you should have taught me, nothing more. I would have figured it out on my own eventually.”

“Why? You were to be my successor. You could have had it all, Luc.”

Cain had been about to dissolve. He needed to get to Diamonique while he could, but Rafael’s question gave him pause.

“I didn’t want that kind of life!” Lucas shouted. “I knew when I saw Cain and Diamonique together that The Dominion could never give me what I truly craved.”

Rafael punched the air with his fist. “What could you possibly want that I could not give you?”

“Love,” Lucas tossed right back.

In that moment, Cain felt truly sorry for Rafael.

“You are my son! How can you stand there and say that I do not love you?”

“You love having a son. It’s why you adopted me. Why you turned me. You never loved *me* or you would have understood that by leaving The Dominion, I was seeking something better. I wasn’t leaving you, Father, just the life you wanted for me.”

Rafael pointed an accusing finger at Lucas. “I created The Dominion for *you*. It was all for you.”

“Maybe, but that doesn’t change the fact that Cain is innocent in all this. Leave him be. Deal with me instead.”

Rafael stiffened and Cain knew things had just gone from bad to worse.

“Cain is the reason you left. Cain and his *bitch*,” he ground out. “They’ll both pay.”

Then he was gone and Cain had a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. Rafael knew. He hadn’t expected the old man to know where he and Diamonique’s special place was. He’d thought she’d be safe there, as long Rafael had no path to her. The bastard had read his mind and Cain hadn’t even been aware of it. Emotions. They had no place in

combat with an ancient vampire, but his fear for Diamonique had clouded his brain to the point it might even cost her her life.

His gaze zeroed in on Lucas, his one chance at saving Diamonique. Time to make a deal with the Devil's son. "Will you help me get her back?"

Lucas grimaced. "It won't be easy. He's determined to place the blame squarely on your shoulders."

Cain flew across the room and jerked Lucas off his feet. "Damn you! Diamonique should not have to pay for your decisions," Cain demanded.

"No. You're right." Then Lucas closed his eyes.

Several precious seconds went by. To Cain it felt like hours.

Finally, Lucas opened his eyes, "Put me down, I know where he's taken her." Cain complied and Lucas held out his hand. "Come with me if you want to see her alive."

Was he a fool to trust Lucas? No. Lucas hated Rafael as much as he did. Hell, maybe even more. Besides, without Diamonique, Cain was nothing. He gripped Lucas's outstretched palm. At once, heat flooded his body, then Diamonique's living room dropped away, and he was standing in a dark room. He saw Diamonique. She was nude and chained to a wall. Rafael leaned against a doorway, his smile a frightening thing in itself. There was a young, blond girl kneeling at his feet. She, too, was

nude. Rafael clutched the girl's left wrist and blood trickled out of a gaping wound. Rafael's newest pet.

Chapter Six

Diamonique pulled against the chains, but it was no use. She wasn't strong enough to break them. Something kept burning her skin. It felt like acid being poured onto her—slowly. It hurt like hell, but she refused to give Rafael the satisfaction of crying out. It was just what he wanted.

A roar rent the air.

Diamonique lifted her head to see Cain and another man in the room.

“You bastard!” the man shouted.

Rafael laughed. “Is that any way to speak to your dear dad, Luc?”

Lucas? Cain had mentioned Rafael's wayward son. But whose side was he on?

“Elizabeth has nothing to do with this. Let her go, father, or I *will* kill you.”

Rafael dropped the girl's thin wrist. She fell to the floor, unmoving. She appeared dead, but Diamonique couldn't be certain.

“She's the real reason you left, isn't she?” Rafael hissed. “This pathetic little creature meant more to you than me or The dominion.”

“She is an innocent! She's not part of your twisted faction.”

Rafael laughed. “There is no such thing as an innocent, especially a woman. I taught you better.”

Lucas took a step closer and growled, “You taught me to hate. Elizabeth taught me love.”

Diamonique was fast losing strength from whatever the chains had been coated in, and she was getting a damn headache with all the family drama. Then Cain’s eyes landed on her, and she could feel the intensity of his anger even from across the room. Underlying that emotion was love and its warmth gave her renewed strength.

“Can you free yourself, love?”

His words were as soft as a butterfly touch in her mind. *“I’ve tried, but I’m just not strong enough.”*

As his gaze raked her body, presumably searching for signs of injury and found none, she could sense the relief flooding him. She stifled her urge to call out to him and instead used their mind link to send him a message.

“Look at the ceiling, Cain.”

When Cain’s gaze followed where she indicated, noticing for the first time the glass panels, he stiffened.

“The sun will be up soon, love. We need to get out of this room now.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

“I see you’ve spied the pretty windowed ceiling. I had this place built specially for you and your little whore, Cain. I knew if I took her, you would follow. I wanted to watch the two of you roast together. Thoughtful of me, don’t you agree?”

“Fuck you, Rafael. By the time I’m through, you’ll be the one in this room, burning to death.”

“I think it’ll be fun to watch as you and Diamonique perish together under the morning sun. I’ve set up a special camera just for the occasion.” Then he glanced down at the blonde at his feet. “She’s an unexpected guest of course, but she was readily available and I was hungry. Oh well, she’ll just have to share the room with you. You aren’t upset by that are you, Luc?”

Lucas remained silent, but the rage Diamonique saw in his eyes was a clear sign of what he thought of Rafael’s little plan. Diamonique shivered at

Rafael’s matter-fact tone. He was more demented than any of them had realized.

“Lucas is a true ally now,” Cain told her mentally.

“Be careful, Cain.”

“Always, my love.”

Cain looked back at Rafael. “You might think you’ve thought of everything, Rafael, but there’s one thing you didn’t figure into this little plan.”

Rafael's eyes narrowed. "What are you talking about?"

He stepped towards Rafael and taunted, "You didn't count on Lucas being on my side."

Rafael snorted. "He was manipulated by you, nothing more. In the end, he's my son and will do as I say."

"No. He was never truly your ally. You just couldn't admit that to yourself. And now you've taken someone he loves and turned her into a puppet."

Rafael barely spared the girl a look as he said, "The little slut was asking for it."

The degrading remark sent Lucas over the edge. He shot across the room and wrapped both hands around his father's throat. "I hate you! I will never stand by your side, never!"

"Be ready!" Cain shouted in her mind, then within seconds, he was in front of her and wrenching at the heavy chains, but there were so many. It took several attempts before they all fell to the cement floor. Diamonique practically collapsed into his arms. Cain turned, and they both saw Rafael and Lucas in a bloody battle.

Cain tucked her tighter to his chest. The next moment, they materialized inside his home. Diamonique was barely able to hold herself upright so he took her straight to the couch.

As soon as she was seated, Cain snarled, "He will die a slow death for this."

Diamonique frowned and looked down her body, then shivered when she saw the wounds on her skin. “How?”

“The chains were dipped in holy water.”

“Then I am truly grateful to be alive.” Cain had saved her. She fastened her gaze on his dear face and then scanned his body.

There were red welts on his hands. “Cain, your hands.”

“They’re sore, but I’ll live.” Cain leaned in and kissed her cheek, then whispered, “And it won’t matter to me if you have scars. You will always be my beautiful diamond.”

“Cain, I—”

“I need to help Lucas,” he cut in. “I also cannot let Rafael’s crimes go unpunished. When I return, we will talk, love.”

“See that you don’t come to any harm, Cain.” She had so many things to say. She loved him—had always loved him. It took nearly dying to see the truth.

Cain had nearly gone insane earlier attempting to locate Diamonique. Rafael was the oldest vampire of any of their kind and hiding his location had been no great feat. An hour had crept by before he and Lucas had managed to break through Rafael’s mental shields. When he’d seen Diamonique chained to the wall, fear in her eyes, he’d

nearly wept with joy that she was still alive. Then rage had set in, and he'd ached to rip Rafael's heart out with his bare hands doing away with the monster, once and for all. He thought of the glass ceiling in the dungeon-like room and quickly made a cape appear in his hand. He flung it over his shoulders and wrapped the hood tightly around his head, then made a pair of gloves materialize to protect his hands from the chains. He closed his eyes and focused on Lucas and Rafael. In an instant, he was in the room again.

The sun was coming up. He had maybe ten minutes before they'd all roast.

Cain cursed when he felt the heat stinging him through his clothing.

He swung his gaze around the room. Rafael held Lucas off the ground. The old man was pummeling him, showing no mercy. Lucas was barely recognizable. Cain flew across the room and yanked Rafael backwards. Lucas dropped to the ground and began to crawl towards Elizabeth, her flesh already burned in several places from the rising sun.

Rafael jerked away and ground out, "You're dumber than I thought, Cain. You should have stayed with your bitch and left me to my son."

Cain reached for Rafael and grabbed him by his hair. "I had some unfinished business, Rafael. Now you die."

With Diamonique safe from harm in his protected mansion, Cain allowed his rage free rein. He pulled Rafael to the far wall where the chains he'd yanked from Diamonique's body still lay. In his mind he saw her burnt flesh once again. Vengeance gave him the power to throw Rafael against the cold cement wall, where he crumpled. Whether the rapidly advancing sunrise had helped deplete the older vampire's strength, Cain didn't care. Any aid he could get was welcome. Before Rafael could gain his feet, Cain struck him with the heavy metal. Blood oozed from Rafael's arms and torso. Although, the ancient vampire tried to fight back, soon his face resembled a mass of bone and tissue.

Cain crouched down and whispered into his ear, "You should never have touched her." Then a wooden stake materialized in his hand and with all the force of a vampire avenging his mate, Cain slammed it into Rafael's chest. Rafael gurgled and clutched at the wood protruding from his heart. A ray of sun crept across the bloodstained floor and touched the vampire's limbs. His body burst into flames.

Cain stepped back, and for the first time realized, the sun had burned through his clothes. The smell of his and Rafael's scorched flesh filled the air. Anger was a powerful painkiller it seemed.

He turned to find Lucas cradling an unresponsive Elizabeth in his arms, tears streaming down his bloody cheeks. Cain reached out a hand and ordered, "Take my hand."

Lucas grabbed hold. Cain closed his eyes and instantly they were out of the room and inside one of the guestrooms in his home.

“Where are we?” Lucas asked, as he carried Elizabeth to the bed and laid her down, and then carefully covered her with the heavy red quilt.

“My home. You may stay as long as you wish.”

“Thank you, Cain. For everything.”

“Is she alive?”

“Barely,” Lucas muttered, then sat beside her and stroked her cheek. “I will be forever in your debt for coming back for us.”

“Don’t give me too much credit.”

Lucas frowned. “I don’t understand.”

“I didn’t go back for you. I went back to deal with Rafael. He never would have stopped until one of us was dead. He wanted me to suffer.” In his mind, Cain saw Diamond chained and at Rafael’s mercy. He wanted to kill him all over again. “We’re free of him now.”

Lucas nodded. “Yes, and thanks to you, Elizabeth and Diamonique are alive. That’s all that matters.”

“Too true.”

“If you ever have need, I would be honored to repay my debt to you.”

Cain looked at Elizabeth. “You can repay me by keeping her alive. She will save you, Lucas. In more ways than you can know.” Then, before Lucas could say anything else, Cain dematerialized.

When he reappeared, he was standing inside the doorway to the living room. Diamond had settled back into the cushions and closed her eyes, though he could tell she wasn't really sleeping. With Diamond unaware of his presence in the room, Cain took a second to simply watch her. Christ, every time he closed his eyes he was going to see her bound to that cold brick wall, Rafael smiling. He'd come so close to losing her forever.

Never again.

He yearned to stay close, but they both needed nourishment so he forced himself to leave. He landed in the street, near a nightclub. There was a car close by with two young men and two women inside. They were just girls really, barely out of their teens. Cain didn't relish taking their blood. He hadn't really wanted the blood of women since meeting Diamonique. However, it couldn't be helped; he needed whatever he could get tonight.

Cain strode up to them and knocked on their window. The silly fools rolled it down. Anyone with an ounce of sense would check, before blindly rolling their car window down in the middle of the night on a dark and empty street. Hadn't their parents taught them a damn thing

about survival? Before the night was through Cain would teach them a lesson they would never forget.

One of the boys laughed at something the other said, but all Cain heard was their hideous music. He never could figure why young people had to kill their eardrums in order to enjoy the sound of an instrument.

“What do you want?”

The skinny want-to-be stud was entirely too brave for his own good. Cain smiled, allowing his fangs to gleam under the light of the moon. The pierced youth stuttered and stammered, giving Cain ample time to take full advantage. He wrenched his door open and grabbed him by the front of his t-shirt.

“You have something I want, boy.”

The gangly boy flailed about, his feet dangling above the sidewalk, totally at Cain’s mercy.

“What’s your problem? Let me go!”

Cain smiled. He had to hand it to the kid; at least he was attempting to appear brave in front of his girlfriend.

“You’re about to be dinner.” Then Cain dipped his head towards the boy’s throat, stabbing at his jugular with his sharp incisors and then drank greedily. Cain was careful to take only a small amount, then closed the holes in his neck with his tongue. The marks would ensure the boy remembered this night. He wanted to instill a little fear in him. Maybe next time he would think twice before talking to strangers.

After sitting him gently on the sidewalk, Cain looked through the open door of the car. The other three stared in awe. As if he were some damned hero from a movie. They should have been scrambling to get away from him! One girl was dumb enough to say, “Awesome.”

What the hell was the matter with kids today? Cain reached in and yanked out the other guy. He had dark hair like the first but was considerably larger. There was no argument at all this time. In fact, this one seemed eager. Even bared his neck.

“Lord save me from teenagers,” Cain growled.

A moment or two later, he sat the second teen next to his friend and turned to stare at the two girls in the back seat. One was a blond who didn't look any older than thirteen. The other a redhead. To his chagrin, they actually smiled at him and got out of the car. The blond sidled up next to him and batted her pretty baby blues. The little chit was flirting with him! Well, hell, didn't that just beat all.

If they only knew moments ago he'd thrust a stake through the heart of the leader of The Dark Dominion they'd be running in fear. But, like sacrificial lambs to the slaughter, they both bent their heads and bared their necks for him. As if that wasn't strange enough, the blonde one also tugged at the miniscule tank she was wearing until her tiny breasts spilled over the top, then smiled coyly up at him and murmured, “You can bite me *anywhere* you like.”

Christ, she was just a kid! If he had a daughter who acted like this, he'd turn her over his knee. He frowned at her blatant display and tugged her top back up, covering her barely-there chest.

"Go home little girl, before you find yourselves getting into more than you can handle." He started off, but not before he heard one of the boys call out to him.

"Hey dude?"

Dude?

Cain laughed. In his many centuries, no one had dared to call him *dude*. He turned back and arched a brow in question.

"Does this mean we're going to become vampires now, too?"

So, that's what this had all been about. They were hoping for immortality. Ah, the follies of youth. The bigger boy was much too eager and excited to truly understand what he'd just asked.

Cain walked back and watched sadly as they anxiously awaited his answer. He decided the only way to make them understand the dangers they were naively putting themselves in was to give them a demonstration.

"That's not how it works," Cain said contemptuously. "I told you once to go home, but now it's too late." He let a wicked smile slip across his face. "Now I want to play."

Fear began to register on the blond girl's features. Finally! Time to show the boy what he was messing with. Cain allowed his eyes to

change and turn a demon red as he stared, willing her mind to obey his command. Cain then opened his arms and said, “Come to me, sweetheart.”

Her eyes glazed over as she fell quickly under his compulsion. With any luck, one of the boys would jump to her aid before she actually reached him, because he really didn’t want to touch her. But he had to do something, before they really did meet up with something evil. There was no way of knowing if Rafael’s death would scatter his followers to the wind.

Cain smiled cruelly as he became aware that she was trying to fight against his compulsion. Good. At least she wasn’t coming to him so eagerly now.

“Get down on your hands and knees. Crawl to me.” That ought to do it. No self-respecting boyfriend was going to allow his girl to crawl to another man.

“No way, asshole!”

Cain wanted to let it go at that, but for their benefit he knew they needed something that would make them err on the side of caution in the future. “Don’t interrupt me, boy,” he growled, then flung his hand out towards the bigger teen that had stood up and tossed him through the air. He landed on his ass several feet away and shook his head, dazed but unharmed. He let go of the girl’s mind and watched as she and the other

one scrambled inside the car. “Where are you going, I was just getting started?”

“Screw you!”

“Not very nice,” Cain admonished. In two strides, he reached the car and with ease jerked the door completely off its hinges. The two girls screamed and huddled together, trying desperately to get the far door open so they could escape. Cain was delighted to see that the braver of the two boys wasn’t bothering to wait around to see what happened next. He simply ran over to his friend, yanked him up off the ground, and pushed him towards the car.

When he got within arm’s length of Cain he saw the car door lying on the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street. His bravado melted away. “Look, mister, just let us go, and I swear we won’t say anything about this to anyone.”

Cain tapped his lip with his finger, pretending to consider his request. “You’re certain you don’t wish to become like me?” A smile almost escaped when he saw the teen shake his head *no*.

He shrugged, then stepped away from the car and gave them a grand exit. He lifted himself into the air and hovered just a few feet above them. They stared in horror when he contorted his features to appear more beast-like, then he shifted in midair and took off in a blaze of speed.

When he landed several streets away he saw a drunken man stumbling towards him and Cain groaned. Damn, the only thing worse than feeding off a man was feeding off a drunken man.

He quickly took care of the task of replenishing what he'd lost, then left the man to recover. He stepped around the corner and found another man alone. This time he took enough for Diamonique. She would be hungry when he returned, and he alone would satisfy her cravings.

Chapter Seven

When Cain reappeared inside his home, Diamonique still lay naked on the couch, her eyes closed. In two long strides, he was across the room and kneeling at her feet.

“My love, talk to me.”

Her eyelashes drifted upwards, green heat landed on his face. “You came back for me.”

“Of course. You are my world, Diamond. Without you, I am nothing. Don’t you know that?”

“Why did you take Sareena to bed, Cain? To *our* bed.”

Tears spilled down her cheeks. It was like shards of glass cutting away at his skin. “You scared me, love. The things I felt for you scared me. I lashed out in the only way I knew. If I could take that day back, I would. Believe that if you believe nothing else. But I cannot. There can be no going back. Only forward. Will you walk into the future with me, Diamond?”

“Are you planning to...lash out like that again?”

He shook his head, more terrified than he cared to admit at the possibility she would leave him, and he’d be left a shell of a man. That he’d end up like Rafael. “I would rather cut out my own throat than

cause you an ounce of pain. You are my precious Diamond, and I will always love you. No matter if you leave me right now, I will always love you.”

Diamonique reached up and stroked his cheek, then murmured, “I love you, too, Cain. But if you ever hurt me like that again,

I’ll cut out your heart and feed it to the rats. Are we clear on that?”

He laughed and shook his head. “Crystal, my love.”

Then she frowned and said, “What happened to Lucas and Elizabeth?”

“They are upstairs, in the guestroom. I have a feeling he’s not going to let her out of his sight anytime soon.” Then he thought of something else. “Lucas may not know it yet, but The Dominion won’t let this matter rest. They’ll want his head for this.”

She nodded. “He loves her and he was willing to risk everything to save her. I could see it on his face when he saw her at his father’s feet, looking so broken. It must have hurt him very badly to see her that way.”

“Yes, and I shamelessly used that knowledge to work him into a rage. It was my only chance of getting you out of that room alive.”

“So, none of it was about ancient blood? It was all revenge?”

“It would appear so. Lucas was the only thing that kept Rafael sane. When he left, Rafael’s mind went with him.”

“It’s sad really.”

Cain dipped his head and pressed his lips to hers, then whispered, “Let’s not think of it anymore. I have one hundred years to make up for, my love.”

She tugged on his shirt and growled, “Then why are you still dressed?”

He grinned and with a single thought, he was naked. “Better?”

Diamonique shook her head and touched one of his burns. “We’re quite a pair, you and I.”

“Yes, we are,” he murmured as he leaned forward, picked her up and took her to his room. The instant he entered, he placed her gently on the bed and lowered his body beside hers.

“Now it’s time for some new and better memories I hope.”

When she smiled, Cain pulled her, his precious diamond, into his arms and kissed her. Only then did he feel peace steal through him.

Diamonique wrapped her arms around Cain’s neck and drew him in for a deeper kiss. As his tongue swept between her lips, she trembled. She wanted to make love to him, to ensure their fragile bond, but she was so weak from the holy water. Her arms dropped to her sides, useless.

“I need blood, Cain.”

“I know. I stopped before I came home. He swept his ebony hair aside. “Take what you need, love. I will always provide for you.”

Diamonique lifted her head and kissed Cain’s neck, then bit his flesh. Blood flowed over her teeth and tongue. She moaned, greedy for him in every possible way. Cain wrapped both hands around her waist and lifted her, careful not to disrupt her feeding, then placed her body on top of his. As his hands drifted over her back and ass, Diamonique heard him whisper sweet words in her ear. Words she’d never heard from him before.

“You’re warmth heals my soul, Diamond. You are beauty and laughter in my dark world. Kindness and joy. I exist because you exist.” Then he entered her and suddenly she was filled by him.

She pulled back when she was finished feeding, swiped her tongue over the twin holes in his neck, and then slipped down his body. As she took him into the palms of her hands, Cain groaned.

“You said I give you the sun.”

“Yes,” he growled.

“It’s the same for me. It always has been.”

“I love you.”

She smiled, then slipped his entire length into her mouth and sucked hard.

“Diamonique!”

Cain let out a hoarse cry of pleasure, grabbed fistfuls of her hair and held on tight. She wrapped her arms around his hips and dug her fingers into his buttocks as she swirled her tongue over and around the bulbous head of his pulsating shaft.

His moans filled the room, and she used one hand on his balls, fondling and caressing the way he liked. When he seemed close to climax, she leaned back and released him. He was still shaking when she smiled and licked her lips. “Is that the way you like it?”

“Little witch. You know I loved it.”

“I’m glad,” she whispered, then lifted until she was seated on top of his erection. Diamonique rode him with slow, gentle movements. Ever so often Cain licked the burn marks on her chest and torso. Together, as if one entity, they came apart. Joy flooded Diamonique’s body at the beauty of it.

Their loving was more about seeking each other’s souls than sexual pleasure. It was as if they were starting fresh. A clean slate. In that moment, Diamonique was filled with relief that she’d chosen love and forgiveness over bitterness and anger.

Suddenly, Cain flipped her over and caged her in, his muscled strength creating a protective embrace. “My diamond,” he growled. “You are home.”

She lifted her hand and cupped his cheek, then murmured, “Yes. I am.”

“I was dead without you. I would have ended up a shell like Rafael.”

She kissed him, hating the pain in his voice. “No, never like him. He was evil, Cain, his soul black. Yours isn’t. Just a little gray.”

He smirked. “Gray?”

She shrugged. “Well you aren’t lily white, that’s for certain.”

Suddenly he sobered. “I don’t deserve you. I never did.”

“Don’t, Cain. Neither of us is perfect.”

“You are. You’re my flawless gem.”

She adamantly shook her head. “No. I’m as tarnished as the next vampire. You just choose not to see it.”

“It matters little. I’m just glad you’re giving me another chance. I will spend eternity proving it was a wise decision.”

“She nodded, tears of happiness streaming down her cheeks. “Eternity together is a lovely thought, Cain.”

“Yes, eternity together,” he murmured. “As it should be, my love.”

More About The Author

Anne grew up in a small town in central Ohio the only girl with three rowdy, older brothers. When she wasn't playing tackle football with them she could be found tucked away in her mother's book room getting lost in mysterious worlds created by authors such as Martha Grimes and Andrew M. Greeley. She's had a variety of odd jobs including Chiropractic Assistant, Frame Stylist, Restaurant Hostess, and Nail Technician.

Anne now lives with her fabulous husband, two gorgeous teenage daughters, two ornery dogs, three snooty cats and a snake named Salizar. When Anne's not dressing, feeding, cleaning or spending time with them, she can be found at the computer writing stories hot enough to make your toes curl!

Anne loves to hear from her readers. You can find her on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pages/Anne-Rainey-Fan-Page/121274891238824 or email her directly at annerainey11@gmail.com. Join her newsletter for updates on new

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