

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall

Prologue

Prologue

Something felt off this morning. I didn't know what, but something felt different as I glanced around the crowded room. Leering eyes watched me from where I sat alone in the mess hall. I sat on the edge of my seat where I sat at the table furthest from everybody. I always tried to sit closest to an exit but my usual spot was taken. I liked it near the door because it gave me an escape route.

For the most part, I tried to go unnoticed; no such luck. I could feel all of their sleazy gazes as they watched me hungrily. I hated this place. I hated that there were no other women here. Most of all, I hated being the subject they loved to torment. All made worse by the fact I could do nothing to stop them.

Keeping to myself, I thought they would leave me alone, but that must be impossible. In a room full of men, I stuck out like a sore thumb. The surrounding chatter quieted down and made me quickly glance around before I ducked my head when I noticed them. Darius had entered the room with my other three mates. They walked to the back of the room, which I thought was a little odd; I rarely saw them here.

Usually, they don't eat here with everyone else. My mates are everyone's superiors? None of the rules applied to them. They made the rules, and I was just another pawn that had to follow their orders. It appeared they had something to talk about with their recruits because Darius spoke about some crap I showed no interest in knowing. Keeping my head down, I ate quickly, wanting nothing more than to get the hell out of here.

The moment I stood up to dump my rubbish in the bin my muscles spasmed, my feet faltered as I took a step away from the table, and my entire body locked up with one command. "Aleera, freeze"

My entire body stopped at the command, I couldn't move an inch, and everyone erupted with laughter. Oh, how I tried, but I couldn't so much set a toe out of line. What were these savage men going to subject me to this time? They never usually went this far. Usually, they tormented me, chased me, hurt me, or used their magic on me. However, this is the first time they used compulsion on me, and it felt wrong as every muscle tensed in my body.

Darius, Tobias, and Lycus watched from the head table. They were always happy to witness my suffering. Kalen, however, glanced around the room before he looked at me and dropped his head.

Something right now felt incredibly wrong. Zac got up from his seat, and my stomach instantly dropped at his cruel smirk. He sauntered over to me before he stopped in front of me. Zac's eyes hungrily looked me over from head to toe. Zac was the worst I have come across here; he had no boundaries. He was always

behind my worst degradation. He walked around me slowly and plucked the sandwich wrapper out of my hand.

“Stand up straight,” He ordered, and I gritted my teeth, my forced body doing as commanded as Zac’s cold magic caressed over me. A violent shudder ran through me in repulsion.

“Nothing to say, Aleera?” He chuckled, and the entire room laughed with him.

“Nothing I say will stop you. Did you want me to beg? Beg for you not to do whatever it is you are about to do?” I asked him.

Being here, I learned quickly not to beg. It did nothing with these monster men. They didn’t care that I was female; they didn’t care I was powerless. All they cared about was the control they had over me.

“You’re right. It wouldn’t stop me; the guys and I want you to put on a little show for us” Zac said in an amused tone. I glanced around the room to find the men all were leaning forward eagerly; one even winked at me while another licked his lips.

My eyes darted to the table where my mates sat, they had similar expressions of disdain. They would not help me, not that I expected them to, they never did. If they just told them who I was to them if their soldiers knew. I wouldn’t have to deal with this shit daily. I knew they would deny it if I spoke up. They threatened to kill me if I told anyone here. So I had kept my mouth shut, they hated me and the feeling was mutual. Yet, I could bear to see them hurt so how could they watch my humiliation with no expression at all?

Darius wanted vengeance, but surely he wouldn’t subject me to this sort of humiliation. My eyes went back to Zac, who looked me up and down. Was he going to make me dance? What did he mean by a show? I was already on display. How much worse can it get?

“You could always say no?” Zac teased before he scoffed.

“Oh, that’s right, you can’t, poor helpless Aleera, always so easily influenced, so easily overpowered,” He mocked, his demonic eyes running the length of me in a sleazy obscene way. His gaze stopped at my breasts, and I felt my stomach drop somewhere deep and cold within me. I knew it before he said it. Prayed I was mistaken, but his following words confirmed my thoughts.

“Strip, Aleera,” Zac said, his voice coming out like a purr. I blinked at him, tried to fight his compulsion with everything in me, even though I knew it was pointless. My eyes burned as tears threatened to spill, and my hands shook as I tried to resist doing what he asked.

“All of it, I want to see you completely bare” My fingers forcibly start to undo the buttons on my black blouse. My breathing became harsher, and a sob tore from my lips that sounded more like a whimper. My vision blurred as my top fell open and revealed my black bra. Zac yanked my shirt off me completely, the shirt tore

off at his forcefulness. The scars that laced my skin were on display for everyone to see. The worst was the burn that went from my shoulder down to my hip.

They hollered and whistled, and some even poked fun at my burned and scar-ravaged skin. Was this high school? Were they truly this immature? Fully grown men and they were all subjecting me to this. Worst of all, my mates just watched. I noticed Kalen looked away when my eyes fell on him; he almost appeared to look guilty or was he ashamed? My fingers were still working to undo the buttons and zip on my black slacks. My eyes stung from the tears that brimmed and spilled over, dropping onto the floor as I bent over to remove my pants.

"Please stop," I sobbed as I stood upright. How could they all be so cruel?

"All of it," Zac commanded again.

My entire body shook at his command, my cheeks burned with the humiliation, tears ran down my cheeks and dripped off my chin, and I could hear them all talking and laughing.

My bottom lip trembled as my hands reached behind my back and fumbled with the clasp of my bra. A hiccuped sob left me as it unclipped. I couldn't handle it, so I clenched my eyes shut so I didn't see their faces watching me. I hoped it was stuck, but of course, it would come undone easily and expose me more.

Zac's hand ran down my arm from my shoulder to my elbow as he pulled the strap of my bra down. My eyes flew open at his touch, his other hand moved to my hip, and I felt the bile rise in my throat. The feel of his hands on me disgusted me. I wondered how far he would take this. Looking over at my mates, I saw Kalen get up and walk out along with Lycus. Darius and Tobias, however, were enjoying my torment.

"Hurry, Aleera, take it off, take it all off," Zac purred, as he tugged my bra strap off my other shoulder. I stared at Darius. Is this what he wanted? Was this still not humiliating enough? His eyes darkened when Zac ran his hand up my side before grabbing my breast roughly, and I felt more tears spill over as my bra fell away. The room erupted with whistles and filthy words.

Darius could stop this. Tobias could have prevented this, and I pleaded with my eyes for them to step in just this once and not subject me to this. I couldn't stop my hands as they reached for my panties. The last article of clothing left.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall

Chapter 1

Aleera POV

If there was one thing I was good at, it was running. Six years I had been running from them, ever since my magic fully manifested. Running from my mates, from the world, and a future I never agreed to or wanted. But I was also running out of choices as I turned up yet another alleyway as I tried to lose the monsters hunting me.

Their heavy footfalls on the ground behind me were getting closer, and I knew they would force me to make a choice. My magic was getting low, my reserves depleting. I tried not to use it because I came closer to running out every time I did.

Once a Fae runs out of magic, we are essentially human. Being human is dangerous in this world. Predators would pick you off in a heartbeat. I could hear the snarling beasts as they chased me down, getting closer with each step while I was getting weaker.

I knew there was only one way out of this. One way I would get to live another day was by setting off a flare off of my magic to them. All I had to do was alert them of my location and pray they would come and didn't ignore it like I had ignored their calls for years.

Growls tore out behind me, and I heard one knock something over as it gave chase, feel its aura as it tried to gain on me, yet adrenaline kept my feet moving despite wanting nothing more than to pass out, yet I fought the urge to give in and accept my fate. I glanced down at my hands, my magic fizzling in my fingertips as I sought another way to lose them. Yet there was no other option.

I had avoided setting it off my mark for six years. But with my magic running this low, I had no other choice. Either alert them to where I am or be killed by what is chasing me. One thing I knew was they wouldn't kill me; they would come for me. But would I be any better off if they did?

They would be furious. I knew my mate's magic was still strong despite me not being there. Fae's power is shared with their other mates. That's how we remain strongest, and I was the link to all of them. I was the power keeper, yet somehow they found a way without me. I could feel their power, constantly searching for me, trying to draw me nearer and promising me safety, but I knew I wasn't safe with them either. They just wanted to use me to get stronger.

Growing more tired, as I ran up these darkened streets, the light coming from the full moon lit my way; and that was the worst time to be in a werewolf city surrounded by savage beasts that loved nothing but the chase and to kill for sport.

I pushed harder and ran past some garbage bins, twisted my wrist, letting my magic flow from my fingertips, and blasted one and made it explode, hoping to slow them down as I ran on the wet ground, puddles splashed my legs, and my clothes were drenched making it more challenging to run.

Fae were the most powerful creatures in the world. As long as we had magic and our mate, it turns out I have four, and not one of them was a good option. Unfortunately, the longer I have gone without them, my magic has become weaker.

I sure as hell didn't want to belong to those Savage men. My mates are the ones responsible for my parents' deaths. They tore my house apart and tore my heart from my chest the day Darius killed them. Then they crushed it further by leaving nothing left of them to bury.

Only to be forced into a bond I never wanted, but I was out of options, and I just had to pray they would have mercy on me when they found me because from what I know of them, mercy wasn't a part of their vocabulary.

I turned up yet another darkened street. I heard the howls in the distance as more joined the chase. Shifters could smell a Fae easily; they could smell the power in my veins even as weak as mine is right now. I knew I should never have tried to get into the city at night. But I was desperate and hadn't eaten in four days. Most of the water sources outside the city were polluted.

Sure, I could have conjured up water, but it wasn't worth the energy it would burn with me using magic. One stupid decision has just cost me another year's supply of my power, all burned up trying to escape these growling monsters.

A year was all I had left to find a human community to hide in and maybe live without fear of them finding me. Instead, here I am being hunted by werewolves and god knows what else through a city I was unfamiliar with. This was not part of my plans or how I saw my day turning out.

Just when I thought my luck couldn't get any worse, the street turned out to be a dead-end and made me spin around as I looked around for another escape. There was no getaway. I didn't find any. That is when I realized they had herded me here, and now I was cornered and about to be torn apart all because I stepped into the wrong city.

How was I supposed to know it was a shifter city? It's not like they had a huge ass neon sign at the city limits saying 'shifters only.' However, it did explain the stench of wet dogs, I thought to myself. Now was so not the time for my sarcastic inner monologue.

A growl shoved me into reality again. Nine werewolves were closing in around me. Oh oops, make that ten; I didn't see the one on the roof drooling down its chest, wanting to munch on me like a damn chew toy. I was about to become chum dog food because I still couldn't bring myself to let off a flare of my magic to them.

I didn't spend this much time running, only to beg them for help. The wolves closed in, my heart pumped in my chest, and I knew I didn't have enough magic left to kill all of them.

I weighed up my options, both unappealing, and neither option had any sense of hope for me. I would be doomed either way.

My eyes moved to the marking on my wrist, their marking that said my soul belonged to them. I just have to alert them, and they would know my exact location, but what if they didn't come? What if they let me die? They would have to know I must be desperate to be calling on them. They didn't need me; they have kept their magic strong without me. Maybe they might think, well fuck her, let her die.

Hesitation ran through me, and I prayed to the fates to not stuff me over again and hoped this wouldn't be the worst decision I ever made. Yet nothing felt right about the decision I was about to make. It wasn't just them killing my parents. I had additional reasons, reasons they could never know about me.

I swallowed down my fear and rubbed my fingertips over the infinity symbol of their four names. Each of us has the same markings. All of us are born with them on our wrists, yet they only appear when our powers manifest. Not only did I run from them, but they also waited until I was eighteen before they called on me, which I thought was odd.