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Catalyst

C.A. Jarrett

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Prologue

"We need to finish your registration as a recognized American vampire, Teddy. Quit screwing around."

"Come on, baby, you know you want to"

"Back off. You know the rules."

"You and your rules," he taunted. "Why a hottie like you thinks she has to play by the rules is beyond me."

"Yes. I'm gorgeous. Can we get back to the matter at hand?"

Once more, eyes snapping with frustration, she thrust the datapad at him. A small digital tablet, it had all the documentation on it to finish his registration with BANI.

Once more, he ignored it.

Instead he leaned against the waist-high wall edging the downtown Atlanta BANI building rooftop. Crossing muscular arms, he slowly and deliberately eyed her up and down. His clear blue eyes were surrounded by thick blond lashes, and he had a strong surfer's build beneath the loose button down shirt and slashed jeans he wore. The moonlight glistened in the tousled blonde hair that carelessly completed the incredibly attractive package.

On an intellectual level, she was more than aware of his magnetism. They, meaning vampires all had it. On a more basic level, she wanted to drop-kick his arrogant ass off the roof and watch him bounce through late night traffic.

It was a privilege of the job to take him so lightly. Without the protections afforded to her through the government agency that employed her, she'd have been under his influence and dancing to his tune between heartbeats.

Faster than she could blink he shifted behind her, running his hands down her arms, his cheek nearly pressing against her own as he peered over her shoulder.

"I could make all your fantasies come true," he whispered. He smelled of salt and the sea. "Even the ones you won't admit to yourself."

"Teddy," she sighed. A shame she'd left her weapon downstairs in her desk, but she wasn't supposed to carry when finalizing a registration. Shooting registrants was generally frowned upon. "We've been over this. And over this. And over this. You are not going to get anything more from me than your registration."

His hands tightened around her arms. "I could make you, you know. You wouldn't stand a chance against me. At the end of it all, you'll be screaming my name, begging me on your knees."

"You accept Atlanta, Georgia as your immediate place of residence," she said doggedly. "You have given the Bureau of Anormal Normalization and Integration, or BANI, all rights and privileges to move your previous place of residence from Huntingdon Beach, California. You have freely and without coercion given us the name of your sire. Further, you have accepted the registration terms and rules and have agreed to abide by them in perpetuity. Is this correct, Theodore Robert Kingman?"

"Playing hard to get? I like it, up to a point." His voice turned ugly. "But you're taking it too far, babe."

"Get your hands off me and sign the registration already," she growled.

His hands turned into vises as he leaned in to nuzzle her neck.

A blinding flash of light, and he was flung twenty feet backwards, landing in a brick planter with a grunt.

"Teddy, dammit!" she barked, spinning around to face him. "What in the hell is the matter with you? Are you *trying* to get yourself unmade? You know that won't work on an agent, and especially not here!"

"Yeah, yeah," he groaned, hauling himself up and brushing the soil and broken pansies off his clothes. "Whatever."

"Look. I am your agent. How many times do we have to cover this? Besides which, you have got to stop this whole dark seduction bullshit. You've seen too many movies and you're just not that good at it. Taking a woman against her will is a good way to get dusted."

"Like you care," he snarled, sticking his hands in his pockets and staring moodily at the asphalt of the rooftop.

She took a deep breath. Then two. Pouting vampires. Wonderful.

Lord save me from navvie angst, she thought to herself.

But what she said was, "Of course I care, which is why I'm telling you. Once you complete registration if you try any of that crap you're going to activate the covenant and get yourself fried. I don't want you to unmake yourself through your own inexperience."

"So I suck at seduction, and now I'm stupid? You have a great way of making your clients feel better, you skanky bitch."

"Once you complete the registration tonight, you are to report once a week to the closest Integration Center to complete protocols and so learn how to exist in society. This will aid you in learning how to cope with your new status in our civilization."

"Like that's going to happen," he sulked.

"You're not going to do anything you agreed to, are you." It wasn't a question.

"Why should I?" he demanded.

"If you weren't going to, then why did you start the registration process in the first place? I told you from day one that once you reached this point you could not get out of it. The partial covenant is already in place. This tonight is more formality than anything else, only without the parts that protect *you*."

"I don't know!" he shouted. "I thought you were hot! I thought it would be a laugh!"

"You having fun yet, kiddo?" She sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Come on, Teddy. You know it can't be the way you want it to be. Use your head. It isn't creatures of the night preying on humanity anymore, it hasn't been since the MetaColl. Now you either play along, or you won't be able to play at all anymore. In return, you get the protection and sanction of the United States government; Bill of Rights, Constitution, the whole nine yards. You don't, and the first time you feed on someone who claims you forced them and you're getting a silver-garlic-holy water injection. No trial. No investigation. If you really do try to force them, the covenant will dust you."

"The whole world is mine! I can do anything I want, whenever I want, and to anyone I want. You don't know the power I have now. I can do anything! You, and your kind, you're nothing. Nothing! I am a *god*. You're just cattle!"

"Teddy...It's not like that. The world won't let you be that way anymore. Humanity has caught on, and we know your kind's little tricks. And we know them a lot better than you do. You're what, three months old? You're just a baby, and you have to learn to crawl before you can walk. We cattle aren't hiding by the hearth fire clinging to our crosses anymore."

"Says you."

"Says the Bureau of Anormal Normalization and Integration. Says the hunter squads who go after rogues. So say the tanks and supertanks where we throw the ones we think we might be able to salvage. We've learned a lot about how to destroy you, especially navvies—new vampires."

Great job, Worthington. You shmuck. Toss a belittling name at him. Why don't you just poke him in the ass with a stick while you're at it?

He stared at her for a moment, face twisting in rage. "Give me the goddamn datapad."

Face blank, she held it out and he snatched it away from her. Pressing his thumb on the scanner plate, he held it there until a blue light flashed and a soft chime played, then he chunked it back at her. It indicated that both his thumbprint and a genetic sample had been taken for a signature. The magic of the covenant ensured that he was giving it willingly, otherwise the light wouldn't have sounded and Sasha's office would have been alerted instead.

"There, you stupid whore. There's your fucking registration completed. But one night, I'm going to catch you outside of this building, without any of your protections on, and I'm going to finish what I started. I'll have you, Worthington. And there's nothing you can do about it."

"I really wish you hadn't said that, Teddy."

"You just remember it. I'm outta' here."

A few leonine strides and he flung himself off the roof. She took a deep breath, checking the datapad to make sure all was in order.

"Friggin' vampires," she breathed.

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