

THE
ETERNALS

KRISTIE K. SHAFER

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Kristie K. Shafer

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Prologue

Kelly

I filled up my tank, and could not believe the price of fuel. *How was it possible that it had doubled since yesterday? Two vials?*

Two vials had once been enough for me to pay the electricity in my apartment for a month, or a nice pair of shoes. Now, my hard-earned income seemed to go straight to gas or rent, and there was not much leftover for fun.

I shook my head in disgust and closed the gas cap tightly. As I ran into the station to pay for the fuel, it started to rain.

Behind the counter, a sullen, bored-looking teenager sat paying no attention to me as her fingers quickly worked her cell phone.

I cleared my throat to get her attention.

She looked up at me. "Pump number?" she asked, annoyed.

"Pump sixteen," I said, mimicking her tone.

"That'll be two vials puh-lease," she said, holding out her hand.

I reached into the cooling pouch inside of my bag and reluctantly handed over the two vials.

She smiled insincerely. "Thank you for shopping at Gas-N-Go. Have a nice day."

Ignoring her, I grabbed the receipt from her hand, walked out the door, and then drove the short distance to my apartment building.

When I arrived, I unlocked the front door, walked in, and set my keys and purse on the counter. It was a decent enough place, but as I looked around, I had to admit that there were days when I really missed my expansive childhood home.

No need to start feeling sorry for yourself, I thought. You're the one who made the choice to move away from home.

I'd wanted to prove to myself and to my parents that I could do it on my own. So far, I was doing okay, but if things continued and blood became anymore scarce, I wasn't sure where exactly that would take me.

I sat down on the worn hand-me-down couch, kicked off my heels, and clicked on the television. As usual, the first five minutes of the news was about the latest Eternal death. There had been a recent string of them in the past few weeks, and in each case, the M.O. was the same. Obviously, someone or something didn't appreciate us being here, and it was starting to worry me.

From what I'd been told, The Eternals had once been a dying breed, even just a few years ago. They'd been in hiding, and were only able to hunt for food at night. Then, a new leader had risen to power amongst them with a plan. A plan that would once and for all ensure the

existence of their kind. Little had his race known what kind of cataclysmic chain of events he'd trigger by setting it into place.

Chapter One

Rani

“Rani!” my Mom called. “Come on, you’re going to miss the bus!”

I took the stairs, two at time, kissed my mother quickly on the cheek, and ran to the bus stop just as the bus was pulling up. When I sat down, I could barely catch my breath.

“Jesus, Rani,” snorted my best friend, Tyler. “If you would wake up five minutes earlier, you wouldn’t have to run at such a breakneck speed just to make the bus, you know.”

I coughed. “Shut up, Tyler,” I said between gasps. Not everyone is as fit or as perfect as you.”

He smiled at me and then looked out the window.

I reached into my backpack and grabbed a spare brush that I always kept handy. My blonde hair was so thick with knots, that it took almost all my strength to brush the tangles out. I just couldn’t figure out how I could go to bed every night with smooth hair, and in the morning look like a family of rats had taken up residence in it.

“Looking good,” sneered Katie, who was sitting across me. Katie, the bitch, looked as though she got up every morning at three a.m. just to get ready for school. Her hair was always in place, make-up just right, and she never had chipped nails.

“Screw you,” I mumbled in her general direction. I was definitely not in the mood to deal with her bullshit this morning.

Her eyes narrowed. “What did you just say to me?”

I knew she was looking for a fight, and I was so not going to let it happen. “Nothing,” I replied as innocently as possible.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought,” she replied, still glaring at me. Then, thankfully, she turned to her neighbor to finish whatever conversation they’d been having, which I’m *sure* was regarding foreign policies, welfare, or world hunger.

I smirked.

Yeah, just the thought of that made me want to laugh out loud. Katie, who was pretty and popular, was also as vapid as they came. Conversations with her included - who wore it best at an award show, or which color of eye-shadow would make her eyes “*pop*,”

Pathetic.

I stuffed the brush back into my backpack, and zoned out the rest of the way to school, thinking about the future. I was in my senior year and could not *wait* to start college in the fall. I had already been accepted to the University of Minnesota, and am not a brainiac or anything, but I have to say that I do “okay.” Fortunately, schoolwork had always come pretty easy, and I’d never had to really worry about it. Tyler, on the other hand, was a totally different story. He’d *excelled* in sports, but had always struggled in school since the first grade. Many times in

the mornings, I'd be quizzing him on the bus, and no matter how hard we'd studied together, he'd still only average a "C." Anyway, as far as I knew, Tyler had not made any plans for the fall yet, and he hated talking about it, which drove me nuts. I'd even tried pushing him on a few occasions, telling him the importance of college, but he'd get so pissed off.

"Rani," he'd once said. "I already have a mom; I don't need you nagging me, too."

I'd agreed and zipped my lips, hoping he'd eventually figure it out on his own. I just hated to see my best friend flounder.

Tyler.

He actually was a very good-looking guy - tall, with brown hair and *the* bluest eyes I'd ever seen on anyone. His body wasn't so bad either; all those years of football and hockey had given him muscles in all of the right places.

My other friends had always ribbed me about not going out with him, but even as good-looking as Tyler was, however, we just never really had a "spark." I had certainly seen my share of "Rom-coms", and according to those movies, I should have seen rainbows and butterflies when I kissed a guy. Hell, I'd settle for fluffy clouds and a horse. In fact, last year we'd both gone to a party at Mindy McGann's house. Mindy's parents had been out of town, and her older brother, Luke, had purchased a keg of beer for the party. I normally never drank, but that night I'd felt a little daring. So, I'd played Beer Pong with some classmates, and lo-and-behold, I sucked. Apparently, Beer Pong is a lot harder than it looks. In fact, twenty-five minutes into the game, I had already chugged five beers from my red Solo cup. It was then that I'd started to feel warm and a little dizzy. So, I'd gone in search of Tyler, who'd been sitting around the television playing video games with a bunch of other jocks.

"Tytytytylerrrr," I'd slurred and then giggled at the sound of my voice. When he didn't answer, I'd repeated it louder. "Tytytytylerrrr! Come on, let's go."

Tyler had looked at me with a furrowed brow. "Hang on a minute, Rani. I'm about to blast this zombie."

"Tytytyty..." I'd whined, but then had been unable to finish because the damn Beer Pong beer decided, in that very bad moment, to return to the party. I felt my mouth begin to water and I knew exactly what was going to happen. I tried to hold it in, but it was pointless, the beer was coming back and there wasn't a damn thing I could do to stop it. I turned my head and the beer and cheese doodles that I'd been munching on earlier ended up all over Mindy's couch and Jake Callun's head.

"My bad," I mumbled to nobody in particular.

"Oh, Christ, Rani," Tyler had muttered. Then he'd, grabbed me around the waist and hoisted me up over his shoulder.

I then hiccupped-slash-burped and said, "sorry" to a horrified Jake, who was looking down at his coveted letterman's jacket, which was now decorated with bits of bright orange doodles.

Thank God Tyler was a good athlete, because he had us out of that home in under ten seconds.

When we'd gotten to Tyler's car, he put me in the front seat and buckled me in like a child. "You'd better not hurl in my car," he'd warned, getting in next to me.

Still slightly dizzy, I didn't say anything, only closed my eyes as we drove.

"What the hell were you thinking?" he'd asked sternly after a few minutes of silence. "I mean, seriously, Rani?"

I still hadn't wanted to talk, so I'd just shrugged my shoulders.

"Well, I certainly can't take you home in this condition," he'd said with a sigh. "So, let's just go to a park and chill out for a while."

I'd agreed.

When we'd reached the park and got out of the car for some fresh air, it had made me feel much better.

"Here," he'd ordered handing me a stick of gum.

I'd popped the gum into my mouth and the minty flavor had never tasted so good.

"Better?"

"Yes," I'd answered and then began to shiver from the chill in the air.

He'd noticed and removed his jacket. "Here, put this on".

I'd thanked him quietly and then had slipped it on. The jacket had still been warm from his body heat and had felt awesome. Feeling better, I'd nudged in a little closer to him and then rested my head on his shoulder. "Tyler," I'd whispered after we'd sat there for some time. "I don't really know what I'd do without you."

He'd chuckled. "Right back at ya."

Smiling, I'd sat up and then we'd both stared at each other in silence. When no words were spoken by either of us, I'd reached for him, gently pulling his face closer to mine. We kissed, and then kissed some more, and I was waiting for the fireworks, or some type of spark, but there was... nothing.

Eventually, we'd pulled away from each other and then both of us had started laughing at the same time. "Well I guess it is true," I'd said, as our laughter died down.

"What?"

I'd smiled. "Men and women *can* just be just friends."

Shaking his head and smiling, he'd unlocked the door and drove me home.

Chapter Two

Rani

The school year was coming to an end, and as I walked the halls, I noticed that they were still pretty empty.

Damn, that flu virus must be really spreading, I thought in dismay, hoping that I wouldn't catch it.

Recently, we'd been informed about a rampant flu that was going around, and had been told to make sure that we washed our hands frequently, and stayed home if we were not feeling well. Both Tyler and I had been fortunate enough not to catch the bug yet, so our lives went on as usual. But, as time went on, I'd begun to notice that the students and faculty that had been out sick, returned to the school a little bit different than they had been before.

On Wednesday, I noticed a *huge* change in my Social Science teacher. Mrs. Conolly, was usually a shy, quiet, mousy-haired teacher. Normally, she wore the same kind of outfit every day, which consisted of slacks and turtlenecks. She also usually spoke quietly, her voice barely above a whisper.

When she returned to school that morning after being out sick for a few days with the flu, she looked like a new woman. She'd dyed her hair a platinum-blond, was wearing form-fitting clothes, and held a new demeanor that demanded attention.

"Hey, Mrs. Conolly," smirked Jake McNally, eyeing the teacher up and down on her first day back. "Looking good."

I'd expected her to blast him for talking to her like that. Instead, she just smiled and said, "I know, Mr. McNally, and I am feeling good, too." Then, they'd shared a smile as Jake took his seat.

I stared with my mouth open. *Was she serious, did I just hear that?*

The class bell rang and the rest of the students took their seats. Many of the boys in the class were whispering to each other, and one kid in the class starting humming "Hot for Teacher", a song by Van Halen. This made the rest of the class burst out laughing.

I sat quietly, waiting for Mrs. Conolly to bring the class to order, but she didn't. Instead, she turned around and went to the chalkboard. Then, she started writing down the next day's assignment, and I swear - it looked as if she was purposely bending over seductively, trying to give the guys in the front row a show.

I glanced at the girl sitting next to me and she looked just as disturbed as I felt.

Stunned, I looked again at my teacher, and almost threw up in my mouth.

Mrs. Conolly was twerking!

I didn't think anything else could rattle me as much as that did.

Boy, was I ever wrong.

Chapter Three

Tyler

“Tyler!” my mom called. “It’s time for dinner. Wash up and come downstairs!”

I shut off the television, dragged myself out of bed, and went into my bathroom to wash up. When I stepped into the dining room, both of my parents looked at me with odd expressions.

“What’s up?” I asked.

Mom forced a smile. “Um, not much. Hope you’re hungry.”

Even though my mom had made my favorite, chicken enchiladas, I had to admit, I wasn’t feeling very hungry. There was a dance coming up the following week and I’d been trying to think of a way to invite Rani without scaring her off. Although she’d always insisted that we were just friends, I still couldn’t help the intense feelings that I kept hidden from her. Every time we were together, and she smiled up at me or laughed, I wanted to grab her and try that kiss one more time. Make her want me the way that I wanted her. But, I was afraid it would destroy our friendship, and at least that was something.

“Dig in,” my father said as he scooped a generous helping of enchiladas onto his plate. “Looks good, Diane,” he continued, adding a large dollop of sour cream to the top.

“Thanks, sweetheart,” she replied, beaming at him. “Just try to save enough for the rest of us.” She turned to me. “Tyler, honey, you better grab some before your Dad takes it all.”

I nodded and put a small piece on my plate. As I picked at my food, an image of Rani popped into my head again. *How in the hell was I going to get her to go with me to the dance?* I knew she wanted to go, and there was no way I’d be able to handle it if she went without me. No way.

“You okay,” asked mom.

I looked up from my food. “Yeah. Fine.”

“Okay,” she replied, staring at me curiously.

I glanced over at my dad, who normally had half of his plate devoured before I even started, and noticed that he’d barely touched his enchiladas. In fact, as he stared down at his pile of food, he actually looked a little sad.

“Hey, Dad,” I teased. “What’s the problem? Is it too spicy for ya?” We and had the same inside joke. A year ago, we’d gone to the Minnesota State fair and had entered a jalapeno eating contest together. Before we’d even arrived in the parking lot, he’d bragged that since he’d married mom, he’d grown a cast-iron stomach.

“Son, the secret to eating spicy food is to just swallow it whole, and plug your nose,” he’d informed me after we’d sat down at the picnic table, waiting for the contest to begin.

“Okay,” I’d replied, trying to sound braver than I actually felt. I’d had jalapenos before, but not

a lot, and definitely not in one sitting.

“On your mark... get set... go!” yelled the announcer, after they’d given all ten of us a quart-sized bowl of the whole peppers.

I still remember looking down at them, and just the smell had made my eyes water. I’d glanced over at my dad, who’d already swallowed at least ten and was stuffing in another, when I’d noticed his eyes - they were watering and he also had sweat running down his face.

“You okay?” I’d whispered.

Instead of answering me, he’d turned the most curious color of green I’d ever seen. Next thing I knew, he opened his mouth and projected a gush of vomit so intense, that it would have given that kid, Regan, from *The Exorcist* movie a run for her money.

“Oh, my God!” a woman had cried, sitting in the front row, and who was now covered in chunks of jalapenos, corn dogs, and cotton candy. “You’ve got to be kidding me?!”

I’d tried to stifle a giggle as everything began to unravel around us. First, the obese farmer sitting next to my dad must have caught a whiff of the puke, because he also lost it. Then, to everyone’s horror, down the line, each contestant began sputtering, gagging, and emptying out their stomachs.

“Come on,” groaned dad, grabbing me by the neck of my T-shirt. His face was pale and his lips were swollen from the peppers and stomach acid. “Let’s get out of here.” We ran to the nearest bathroom where I watched as he tried his best to clean up.

“Let me guess, the swallowing thing backfired,” I’d teased as he blotted his face with wet paper towels. “And it was too much for your wimpy stomach.”

“Smartass,” he’d replied, trying his best not to smile. “Uh, let’s go home before the locals catch up with us. They might just hang us up by our toenails if they find us.”

Picturing my dad hanging by his yellow toenails had made *me* gag. “Yeah, let’s cruise.”

Obviously, thinking back to the contest, my dad looked up from his plate of enchiladas and winked. “Don’t remind me. That had to be the most embarrassing day of my life.”

“Oh, you’ve had worse,” said mom, and they shared a smile.

I stuffed a forkful of food in my mouth. As I began to chew, I watched my parents curiously. For some reason, neither of them were eating. They both just stared down at their plates somberly.

“You guys sick?” I asked.

“No,” they both said in unison.

“Okay,” I said, watching them curiously. I ate a few more bites and then put my fork down. I just couldn’t do it. Thoughts of Rani were still interfering with my own appetite. “May I be excused?”

“Yes,” she answered, smiling almost nervously. “Why don’t you go the living room; we’re going to have a family meeting.”

I pushed myself away from the table, and then wandered into the living room. Plopping down into the oversized couch, I wondered what this was about. "Family meetings" weren't something our family did very often.

A little tense, and with the spicy food not really settling very well in my stomach, I began to worry that the enchiladas would make a second appearance, and I grimaced.

Dad came in first, followed by my mom. They sat down in the loveseat across from me, and for some reason, I noticed that they both had a mixture of fear and nervousness on their faces.

"Tyler," my dad began, "your mother and I have some very important news for you, and frankly, we just don't know how to begin."

My mom then interrupted him. "What your father is trying to say, is that we have invited a man over to talk with you."

"A man? Why, what's going on?" I exclaimed, sitting up straighter. "You're not sending me off to some swanky college on the other side of the country, are you? I told you I'd be just as happy if I stayed in town."

My parents looked at each other and chuckled. "No, dear," my mom replied. "Nothing like that."

Just then, the doorbell rang. My mom glanced nervously over toward my father before she got up to answer the door.

I could hear the door open, followed by a hushed conversation right before the stranger entered our living room. I had to admit, he was an impressive looking figure - well over six feet, blond hair that was tied back into a ponytail, broad shoulders, and a strong chin. I'd actually expected someone in a suit from a college or church group, but this guy wore a pair of loose-fitting jeans, a black leather jacket, and a dark T-shirt. He actually didn't look much older than me, maybe a few years or so.

"This is our son, Tyler," my dad said, introducing me to the stranger. "Tyler, this is Phillip."

"Please, please," replied the man, holding out his hand. "Call me Phil. It's very nice to meet you, Tyler."

I shook his hand. "Nice to meet you, too, Phil."

"Please, Phillip, err... I mean Phil, have a seat," said my mom, sounding nervous.

I watched Phil as he sat down, trying to size him up, and wondering what the hell he was doing here and what it could possibly do with me.

"Tyler," Phil began, staring at me intently. "Have your parents told you anything about the exciting changes that are happening across the world?"

I shook my head.

"Well," he continued. "There have been many technological advances in the past few years that have made it possible for the human body to stop aging."

Raising my eyebrows, I glanced over at my parents, expecting them to burst out laughing over the absurdity of what this man was saying.

“Ty,” my mom said, noticing my expression. “Just hear Phil out”

“Fine,” I said, sitting back in the sofa. I crossed my arms over my chest. “But so far, I still have no idea what the hell is going on here.”

“Our company,” Phil continued, “has found a way to prolong human life indefinitely. Here, take a look at this video. It will give you an idea of what I’m talking about.” He then pulled his laptop out of his messenger bag, and slid in a CD labeled “Eternals.” The whole room was silent as we watched him prepare the video. When it began, I noticed that it looked like it was shot inside of a hospital room. There was a man on the table, and he had some kind of electrodes on his scalp and chest.

“The readouts are of his brain and heart rate measurements,” said Phil, pointing to the machines next to the bed.

We continued to watch the screen. The video went on for a few moments, just showing the man lying there with the machines around him beeping and buzzing. Then another man entered the room wearing hospital scrubs. He pulled out a long needle and syringe and then plunged it into the patient’s thigh. The man on the bed immediately started to convulse, and the machines that were monitoring his vitals started going nuts. The heart rate monitor, previously at around sixty, sky-rocketed all the way to two-hundred. I watched in disbelief as it quickly started to plummet back down. One-ninety-five, one-hundred, sixty, thirty, twenty, fifteen, ten, and then... flat-line.

“What the fuck was that?” I screamed in horror looking at my parents, then to Phil. “Why would you make me watch a man die? What kind of sick, twisted joke is this?”

“Honey” my mom said as calm as she could. “Just sit down and watch the rest.”

I ignored my mother. “Dad,” I implored. “Please tell me what’s going on...”

“Sit down, son, and watch the rest of the video,” he replied evenly. “Then we can finish our conversation. You’ll understand in a few minutes.”

I reluctantly sat back down.

Phil, who had paused the video, studied me closely and then restarted it.

I sighed.

The man on the video now lay motionless, obviously dead. The video camera moved and focused on the man’s slack face. After about one or two minutes, I saw it.

The man’s eyelids began moving rapidly!

I moved closer to the laptop screen, not believing what I was seeing. The machines that were once silent began beeping again. The heart monitor now indicated a normal heart-rate of close to sixty.

What the heck?

The patient on the table, who had just been dead, was now being helped to sit up. He looked at the camera with a twinkle in his eyes, and gave a thumbs-up. Then the screen went black.

Staring at the blank screen for what seemed like an eternity, I turned to Phil. "How, how is that possible? I saw it with my own two eyes - that dude was dead."

"That is what I am trying to tell you, Tyler," Phil said, smiling triumphantly. "We have found a serum that will allow humans to never age, never get sick. You'll have the same results. Of course, in order to sustain life, your diet will need to change."

"What?" I asked.

He smirked. "Oh, you'll get used to it."

"Get used to what?" I asked, feeling the hair stand up on the back of my neck..

He shrugged. "Blood. Preferably human."

I stared at him in disbelief. "That's just wrong," I said, shaking my head vehemently. "A diet of blood?"

"Think about it - your body is made of about sixty percent of water and you need to keep replenishing it daily. This is almost the same thing, only you'll be immortal and live forever because of the blood." He grinned. "A true Eternal."

I glared at him. "We were never intended to live forever."

"Whether we were or weren't," said Phil. "It doesn't matter, because now we can. You can."

"No," I said firmly. There was no way that I was going to drink blood. The thought repulsed me.

"Yes," said Phil, his eyes turning cold. "And as you'll see, you don't have much of a choice."

"No way!" I yelled, turning toward my parents. "No way will I ever become a freak of nature! How could you even ask me to participate in something like this? It's wrong!"

"Son, it isn't wrong. In fact," my dad said softly. "We've already done it."

"What?!" I shouted, staring at him in disbelief.

"We did," said mom, her eyes filling with tears. "We did it for us, our family."

"Bullshit!!" I retorted. "You made this decision without talking with me first, you and her!" I hollered while pointing at my mother accusingly. "You two did this for yourselves; don't pretend for one second that your decision was based on anything but your selfishness!"

"Tyler!" barked my dad as I ran up to my room and slammed the door.

Could this really be happening? Am I getting 'Punk'd'? Is Ashton Kutcher going to jump out of my closet?

I sat down on my bed, trying to process what had just happened. Phil claimed that we can live forever... never age... or get sick. Oh, but by the way, the only way you can survive is on human blood. How the fuck did I just end up in some Twilight bullshit?

I opened my door just a crack, straining my ears so I could hear what was going on downstairs, but I could only hear mumbled voices. I quietly edged the door open a little further to see if I could hear any better, but damned if I still couldn't hear shit. Trembling and angry, I

slowly opened the door and crept silently to the top of the stairs.

"I am sorry, Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson," Phil was saying, "but, you do know what has to be done, and you also know the repercussions if it is not taken care of," he paused, "tonight."

What has to be done? What repercussions could he be talking about, and why would my parents ever put our family in jeopardy?

I heard my mother start to cry. "I just can't... I just can't do it," she said through her tears.

"What other choice do we have?" my father asked. "Tyler has made it perfectly clear that he does not want to go through with it."

"Well," my mom said sternly, "we can force him to do it. We -"

Phil interrupted her. "I am sorry, Mrs. Jacobson, but the agreement clearly states that an individual, who is over the age of eighteen, has free will on what they choose to do. The choice is - become one of us, or die. There is no in-between or gray area."

"I... just... can't... do... it," said my mother between sobs.

I heard footsteps and the front door slamming.

"Mr. Jacobson, it has to be done. Now," Phil said in a tone which almost sounded remorseful. "Either I do it... or you do."

I could hear my father's heavy footsteps pacing back and forth on the wooden floor in the living room. Was he actually considering letting this crazy stranger kill me, or worse yet, trying to kill me himself?

"Ok," he said in a husky voice. "I will do it, but... I want to do it alone."

"That is fine by me, Mr. Jacobson," Phil conceded. "But, I will be back here in the morning, and I will need proof that your son is dead. Make no mistake - if you fail, not only do you lose your life, but the life of your wife as well."

"I understand" my father said. "I will take care of it."

"Good."

It sounded as if Phil was packing up his laptop. Was he really going to leave my dad alone? I grinned. What a sucker. There was no way that my dad would ever kill me, I thought. He must have a plan for us to get out of this situation.

They moved to the front door and I could still faintly make out a conversation that my father was having with Phil, reassuring him that he'd take care of everything. Then the door opened and closed.

I held my breath, waiting for my dad to come upstairs and tell me what the plan was. I waited and waited for what seemed like an eternity, but then I could hear my father beginning to pace again in the living room.

What the hell was he doing? Was he actually considering going through with it?!

I silently crept down the stairs and stood in the hallway as silently as I could, wondering what

to do. I peeked around the corner and saw him pacing.

I bit my lower lip, considering my options. I could just approach him and pretend that I was blissfully unaware of the conversation that he and Phil just had. “Hey, Dad, crazy shit about that vampire kind of stuff, huh? Wanna go shoot some hoops?” I smiled in spite of myself over the crazy notion. Just then, my father abruptly stopped and went into the kitchen. I heard the kitchen drawers opening and closing, he then headed back through the living room with a chef's knife.

My stomach dropped and I immediately felt dizzy. It was clear, he had made his decision.

Phil

Those were the house calls I hated the most, families that did not see eye-to-eye. I did understand that making such a life-changing decision must be hard for them, but normally once the shock wore off, the majority of people jumped at the chance of becoming immortal.

Who could resist the gift of living forever, without aging or getting sick?

Of course, they did not realize that living like that had its drawbacks. Nor did they realize how long ‘forever’ really was.

I, unfortunately, was never given a choice.

I am the son of one the most powerful and well respected pure Eternals in the world, a pure Eternal is one whose bloodline has not been tainted with human blood. My mother was born a human and my father, one-hundred percent Eternal. It was actually my DNA that was used to create the serum DD8. I cringe when I think about the trials that failed before they finally got the serum right. Even now I shudder when I think back to the poor homeless man who had been the first human guinea pig for DD1. We had picked him up from an alley behind a biker bar in Minneapolis. We'd promised him one hundred dollars for just taking a ride with us.

The man hopped into the van without hesitation, his eyes full of desperation.

“So whatcha guys need me to do?” he asked in a low, gravelly voice. “I ain't no queer, so don't you be getting any funny ideas.”

“Relax” I told him. “We just need to test out a new flu shot.”

“Flu?” he replied, looking at us with uncertainty. “You don't look like no doctors to me.”

I laughed, because he was right; we did not look like doctors. We looked more like a rock band. Big John was the driver and Steve Marder, my right-hand man. Big John was just shy of five feet and couldn't have weighed more than a hundred pounds. He had long, stringy black hair and tattoos that covered almost every inch of his pale body. He definitely looked like a bad-ass when he was sitting down, but unintimidating as all hell when he stood up. Actually, I always thought he looked like a fifth grader gone bad. Steve, on the other hand, had been the exact opposite. Six-foot-five, Native American who weighed in at three-hundred pounds and looked like he could squash you like a bug if you looked at him wrong. I'd been his best friend for years, and was still slightly intimidated by the son-of-a-bitch.

"Nah," I replied. "We aren't doctors, we just work for them"

"How long this gonna take?" the homeless man asked. "I got me a hot date later."

"You do, huh?" I answered with a laugh.

"Shit yeah, I do," the homeless man replied seriously. "Do you know how much ass a hundred bucks can buy me?"

I shuddered to myself thinking about the "ass" the man would be getting later.

We drove the rest of the day in silence until we reached my father's research facility.

The Knightingdale.

Knightsdale during the day was a hustling and bustling legitimate research company whose primary objective was food safety. They were responsible for making sure that all foods being served to large institutions, such as hospitals, schools, and prison were being handled properly and contained the correct amount of nutritional value as outlined by the government. I worked there a few summers back as an intern, and I was shocked at the amount of rodent hair and feces which was legally allowed.

We drove to the back of the facility. Then after we all piled out, we walked up to the huge iron door at the back entrance. I pushed the buzzer and we waited. Finally, my father opened the door.

"Follow me" he said shortly, "we don't have much time."

My father was a very intimidating-looking man. He was an inch or two taller than me, had the same crew cut for years, and his eyes were darkest brown I have ever seen. Sometimes they even looked black.

We followed my father down the hall, and the homeless man had to do a slight jog just to keep up with us. We stopped just outside of one of the smaller research labs.

"Get undressed," my father barked at the homeless man.

"Hey, Doc, I already told your cronies here that I aint into the gay stuff," the homeless man said, sounding a bit nervous.

"Strip down to your boxers," my father said, ignoring the homeless man's previous comments. "And follow me."

"It's ok," I reassured him. "We just need you to get undressed so he can monitor your vitals."

"Well, he shoulda just said that, for Christ sakes," the homeless man said as he removed his shirt. "He don't need to be such a dick about it."

If you had any idea about what a dick he really is, my friend, you would be running out of here right now, I thought.

The room had been transformed and really did look like a legitimate hospital room. In the middle of the room was a hospital bed, and on either side was a heart monitor and what

looked like a ventilator.

"Gimme my hundred bucks," the homeless guy said to me. "Don't wanna do this until I see the dough."

I pulled a hundred out of my wallet. "Here," I said, handing it over. "This will be the quickest hundred bucks you will ever make."

"Better be," he said. "Standing around in a room full of dudes in my skivvies is not how I pictured my day going."

"Quit with the chatter," my Father demanded. "You," he said, pointing at the homeless man. "Get on the bed."

The man quietly walked to the bed and lay down. He looked like he was beginning to get a little nervous.

"Dude," I said, "I promise you, one quick shot and we are outta here, then you can go get that ass." I smiled and gave him a high five.

The man seemed to relax a bit, that is, until my father started to strap his arms down.

"What the hell is this?" he asked as my father tightened the first strap.

"It is for your protection," he answered flatly.

"What the hell kind of flu shot requires straps?" the homeless man asked.

My father quickly looked at me inquisitively.

I just shrugged my shoulders.

"In case you have an allergic reaction," I answered the man quickly. That seemed to settle the man down enough for my father to attach the remaining three straps.

The man was swiftly connected to all the tubing and wiring necessary to monitor his vitals. He was calm as my father attached the last piece of wire to the metal disc.

"Yo," the man said, looking over at it. "This ain't gonna hurt, is it? I may look like tough dude, but man, I hate pain."

"No," I replied, not really sure how to answer him. We'd never done this before. I hoped for his sake that this really would be painless and quick. That he could walk out of here and go get laid.

"Enough!" my father snapped. "We have to do this now, time is running out."

I looked at the clock. It was already three a.m. The facility opened at six a.m., but sometimes the scientists arrived earlier.

My father pulled the syringe out of his pocket and looked over at me. "You forgetting something, Phil?" he asked.

Oh shit, I'd almost forgotten.

I grabbed the camcorder out of the bag and hastily began recording.

"I am ready," I said to my father.

He shook his head and pushed the needle into the man's vein. The man held his breath as the serum was then pushed through.

"Aw... geez," the man complained. "It hurts."

I held the camcorder as still as I could, making sure the man and the machines were all in the shot. After a few minutes, the man's blood pressure and heart rate started to drop. The man seemed to be gasping for air. My gut reaction was to throw the camera down and try to help him, but I knew I couldn't. I agreed to do this and I had to keep filming.

The heart rate monitor was now a flat line. He was dead.

My father quickly checked the man's vitals and was taking notes as he checked all the machines.

Then I heard it. Beep... Beep...

It worked!! My father had done it!

Then it sped up. Beep. Beep. Beep.Beep.Beep The machine started to go haywire.

My father ran to the man and took his pulse. "NO! NO! NO!" he shouted. "This is not supposed to happen."

"What can I do?" I yelled to him.

"Nothing!" he yelled back. "Just keep recording, dammit!"

I watched in horror as the scene unfolded before me. The homeless man was now convulsing fiercely. His mouth began to foam and his eyes seemed to be bulging out of his head. He then opened his lips and it looked as if he was trying to scream, but nothing came out.

I looked over at my father, who was still racing around the bed, trying to keep track of the changes in his vitals. Then, as quickly as it began... it stopped.

The man now lay motionless on the bed. He had blood pouring out of all of his orifices.

I swallowed the saliva that had quickly formed at the sight of his blood.

"SON OF A BITCH!" my father yelled, throwing the clipboard he was holding against the wall. He turned to me. "Clean this up and get him out of here," he ordered, and then stormed out the door.

I turned the camcorder off and looked toward Big John and Steve. They looked just as shocked as I was after witnessing such a spectacle.

"Come on," I said. "Let's get this cleaned up."

"Hey, boss, can we get some of that?" Steve asked, looking at the homeless man.

“No” I replied softly. “His blood is tainted, too dangerous.”

I wrapped the homeless man in the sheet that was on the bed, feeling guilty.

I was nothing like my father. I may be an Eternal, like him, but I respected life, even if it was a *human life*.

Chapter Four

Rani

Later that afternoon, when I arrived home from school, I was still thinking about Mrs. Conolly's strange behavior, when my cell phone buzzed.

It was Tyler.

I answered. "Hey, Ty, what's going on?"

"Meet me at the park in twenty minutes," he whispered.

I started to answer him, "I have too much home-"

He cut me off. "Meet me in twenty," and then disconnected from the other end.

I sighed loudly as I put my phone back into my sweatshirt. *What in the hell was that about?*

I went to the fridge and grabbed a bottle of water and a granola bar from the pantry. I was famished after being in school all day and something told me that I needed food in order to deal with the rest of the afternoon. Then, I left the house and started the two-block walk to the park, where I found Tyler sitting alone on a bench.

I walked over to him. "What is with the Cloak and Dagger routine?" I ribbed. "Did you watch too many of your 007 movies?"

Tyler didn't speak, only glanced around nervously as people walked by us in the park.

"Tyler?"

He motioned for me to keep quiet.

I normally would have laughed off his foolishness, but the look of fear in his eyes made the hair on my arms stand on-end.

Standing up, he nodded for me to follow him to his car, but once inside, he still remained aloof and quiet. Then he started the engine and we left, turning onto the main street of town. It wasn't until we drove around for a few minutes that he finally he spoke up. "Something awful has happened," he said, with a tear slowly rolling down his cheek.

"Tyler, you're starting to scare me. Please just tell me what's going on," I pleaded.

Tyler pulled into the parking lot of a convenience store and parked the car. He turned toward me. "Now, Rani, I just want you to hear me out," he said with desperation. "And please, don't think I'm crazy."

I looked at him closely, trying to see if he was being serious, or just giving me a line of shit. The look on his face confirmed the latter.

"My mom and dad are dead," he said quietly, looking out the window.

"Tyler, that's not funny! I just saw your mom and dad yesterday at the grocery store," I replied,

refusing to believe what he was telling me.

He looked over at me. "I'm serious, Rani, they're dead, and it's all my fault."

"What do you mean, it's your fault?"

"It's my fault they're dead," he repeated, and then looked down at his hands again. "I killed them."

Chapter Five

Rani

"Please tell me you're kidding," I begged Tyler. "Tell me that this is some kind of joke."

I could tell just by looking at him that he was definitely not kidding. His eyes, usually full of life and love, were filled with fear and anxiety. His clothes were disheveled, his hair was messy, and he even had little cuts on his hands and face. He looked... terrible.

"I have to get out of here, Rani," he said. "They will come looking for me."

"They who?" I asked. "The police?"

"I wish," he said, running a hand through his hair. "The police would be a helluva lot better than who is really coming after me."

"This is crazy, Tyler," I said, growing more and more annoyed by the James Bond behavior. "Who is they, and why would *they* be coming after you?"

He held up his hand. "Look, I promise, I will explain it *all* to you later, but I don't feel safe here. I just don't want to put you in any jeopardy," he replied and then looked into his rearview mirror nervously.

"Tyler, you're my best friend and I want to help you, but I can't unless you tell me what's going on."

Something or someone must have caught his attention, because he tensed up and then insisted that I get out of the car.

"You've gotta get outta here," he repeated urgently. "NOW!"

"But Tyler, I can help you," I begged. "Please let me help you."

"No, Rani, you're my best friend and I love you way too much to drag you into this shit," he said sternly. "I'll try to call you once I feel safe. But please, if anyone starts asking you questions, just tell them that the last time you saw me was yesterday, at school." He then reached over me, opened the car door, and then, kissed my cheek. "Now go!" he ordered, half pushing me out of the car. "I swear, I'm only thinking of you. Shit, I shouldn't have even picked you up."

Feeling defeated, I stepped out of the car and then bent down to look at his face. I wasn't even sure how it was possible, but overnight he'd gone from a carefree teenager, to what seemed like a stressed out middle-aged man. Just by looking at the anguish on his face, I could tell that whatever had happened to him, it had changed him forever.

"Tyler," I said softly. "Just remember, I will always be here for you."

"I know."

I closed the door and watched as his car drove off into the distance. *What the hell am I supposed to do now?*

Just then my cell phone rang.

My heart raced, hoping it was Tyler and that he was going to tell me that it was all a joke and was coming back around to pick me up. I looked at the caller I.D.

Dad.

“Hey, dad,” I said, trying to sound as normal as possible. “What’s up?”

“What’s up is dinner,” he replied, sounding annoyed.

I looked at the time - it was already six-fifteen, which meant that I was already fifteen minutes late.

“Ah crap, Dad,” I said. “I totally lost track of time. I’ll be home right away.”

“Just make it quick, your mom made her famous chili,” he said, and I could hear the amusement in his voice.

“In that case, maybe I should crawl home.”

“Nobody likes a smart mouth, young lady,” he replied teasingly. “Just hurry up so I don’t have to do this alone.”

I grinned. “I will.”

“Good.”

I hung up and thought about my mom, the “Homemaker.” She always loved to cook, clean, and take care of my dad, but the problem was that she’s a horrible cook. Once, when we were out having a nice fried-chicken dinner, she’d decided that it made no sense to leave the house for the same meal she could make at home and decided to make her own special recipe, giving the restaurant a “run for their money.” When she’d mentioned it, my dad and I had exchanged fearful glances, knowing that once she’d put her mind to something, nothing would change it. So, the following week at dinner, my mom had surprised us with something that looked like a platter of burnt potatoes.

“Viola!” she exclaimed proudly. “Fried chicken.”

I glanced at my dad’s face and knew from his expression that we were both terrified of the monstrosity that my mom had made.

She set the platter in the middle of the table, grinning from ear-to-ear. “What do you think?”

“Looks delicious,” my dad said through a gritted smile. “You have obviously outdone yourself again, dear.

“Ah, you are so sweet to me, my darling,” she replied lovingly. “Just for that, you get to have the first helping.”

I had to bite my lip from bursting out laughing as my mom used her tongs to find the biggest piece of chicken on the platter.

“Lucky me,” he answered quietly, looking at me, with terror in his eyes.

I watched in horror as she'd placed the chicken down on his plate, and then scooped a large helping of very sad-looking mashed potatoes next to it. Then, she handed me a plate to fill. "Come on, Rani," she urged. "Don't be shy."

I swallowed hard and looked at my dad, whose turn it was now to be amused.

"Don't be shy, dear," he said mimicking my mom with a twinkle in his eyes. "You don't want the food to get cold."

Giving him the dirtiest of looks, I reached over and grabbed what appeared to be the smallest piece of chicken, and scooped some mashed potatoes onto my plate. Looking down at the meal in front of me had almost made me want gag. The chicken actually looked as if it had been run over a few hundred times by the car. Looking even closer, I noticed that there were lumps in it.

LUMPS!

In the chicken!?

Grimacing, I tried using my fork to cut open the meat, but that had been a "no go." That chicken had definitely needed the big guns.

Grabbing a steak knife, I pierced it, watching in disgust as some kind of oily substance squirted out from somewhere under the skin, actually hitting me in the face, and temporarily blinding me. As I wiped the juice from my face and glanced down at the leg, I almost felt like it had been mocking me.

Oh, it's on now, chicken. This is war,

Chicken: One.

Rani: Zero.

But not for long...

Clutching the knife firmly, I attacked the chicken with more force, removing the skin. Then, when I pushed it aside and looked down in victory at my opponent, my stomach had rolled in disgust. The meat was pink and raw.

Stone cold.

Chicken: Two.

Rani: Out.

"Well for Pete's sake," mom complained, while cutting into her piece. "This chicken is raw."

I looked at my dad and we shared a smile. We knew what that meant.

Pizza!

I pushed away that memory and decided to make a quick detour over to Tyler's house on the way home to see if he returned. I just couldn't believe that he'd killed his parents and was

running from someone. This was real life, not a movie.

I turned onto his street and crossed the road, walking as fast as I could. As I looked toward his house, which was almost a block away, I could already tell there were no police cars or any other kind of action going on at his place. Still, my heart began to race as I neared his home. In fact, when I reached the front door, I almost ran away in a panic. Instead, I forced myself to be brave and rang the doorbell.

Nobody answered.

I tried it again and waited.

Still no one came to the door.

He has to be messing with me, I thought. If he'd killed his parents, there'd be cops around and it would be a circus over here. This is ridiculous.

Turning around, I bound down the steps and took off into a light jog. I knew that my mom was going to be pretty pissed off that I was now almost thirty minutes late for dinner.

When I finally made it home, I walked through the door and took off my sweatshirt.

"You're in big trouble!" my mom hollered from the dining room. "Rani, you're thirty minutes late! Go wash up and come to the table."

I quickly went into the downstairs bathroom and washed my hands. I looked in the mirror.

Holy cow, I was a mess!

Not only was my hair matted to my forehead from sweat, but my makeup had run, and my jeans were wet on the bottom from an earlier rain.

After washing my face, I ran a brush through my hair, rushed out of the bathroom, and took my seat at the table, hoping my parents would just be cool about me being late.

"Sorry, guys," I said, scooping up a bowl of dry chili. "I was with Kelly and we lost track of time."

To my surprise my mom replied, "Rani, we'll let it slide this time, but next time you won't be so lucky, young lady. You know how we feel about eating dinner as a family and not being late."

I apologized again and tried eating as much of the bland chili as I could. I didn't want to piss her off any more by not eating her food.

"How's the chili?" asked my dad, his eyes dancing.

I lied through my teeth. "It's really good. You've outdone yourself again, mom."

She smiled.

Chapter Six

Rani

At school the next day, I expected to see Tyler in our homeroom, but he wasn't there.

"Is Tyler sick?" I asked Mr. Peterman.

"Not sure," replied Mr. Peterman, not appearing very worried about it. He'd actually stopped taking our class attendance last week, and none of us were really sure why. John Oliver, our class president and honor roll student, had asked him why he no longer took attendance. Mr. Peterman's response had been - "What's the point?"

It was weird.

Where was Kelly? I thought, watching the door nervously. I hoped she wasn't sick with the flu.

Kelly Newsauer was my best friend and I'd met her when we'd moved from Minneapolis to St. Paul at the end of fourth grade. My dad had been hired by a large engineering corporation, and wanted to find a place closer to his work. He had said that the commute from Minneapolis to St. Paul had been too chaotic. Not only would he spend almost an hour in traffic, but when there was a snow storm, that time usually doubled. He'd had enough.

Unfortunately, we'd been unable to find a house right away in St. Paul, so his company had put us up in an apartment building while we'd continued our search. It was where I'd met Kelly.

I'd *loved* the apartments. The best part had been the pool right in the center of the complex. We'd had a pool at our old house, and I'd been a regular little fish, often daydreaming about living under the water like a real mermaid. I thought it would have been such a cool life and spent countless hours at the pool, pretending to be one. One day, in June, I'd been jumping off the diving board when I'd noticed a red-haired girl in a red, white and blue striped bathing suit, who seemed to be about my age. She, and a few younger kids, had been playing Marco-Polo. Wanting to join in, I'd swum to the shallow end where they were.

"Hey, can I play, too?" I asked eagerly.

"You bet," the red-haired girl answered. *"But all newbies have to start off by being 'Marco'."*

I agreed. "Marco!" I called out.

We'd spent the rest of the summer attached at the hip. We would pack lunches, and ride our bikes all the way to Como Zoo, which was at least ten miles away. We never even told our parents where we were going- we were ten years old and we were *free*.

Countless hours we'd spend at each other's homes and boy had I *loved* going to her place. Her family had the better snacks, while at my house you'd open up the refrigerator, only to find fruit and healthy stuff, like cottage cheese or carrots.

Kelly, on the other hand, had the *good* stuff. I used to love opening her cupboard and seeing all the things that my mom had banned in our place - like Twinkies, Ho-Ho's, and other sugary goodness. Now, *those* were the things that I really enjoyed sinking my teeth into. Many times

we'd both load up on snacks and soda and drive everyone crazy with our sugar high. It was innocent and a lot of fun, but then one day in late August, Kelly had snatched a cigarette from her Aunt Carol who was in town visiting her family.

"Come on, Rani," Kelly said excitedly, grabbing me by the hand. "I have something cool to show you!"

We raced off to our secret spot, which was actually a brick wall behind our apartment building.

"What is it?" I asked breathlessly, as we'd reached the wall.

"Sit down," she commanded, "and keep a look out!"

I looked around and saw no one.

"We're in the clear," I whispered.

She pulled something out of her shorts pocket and along with a book of matches.

A cigarette!

"Are you crazy?" I yelled at her. "No way am I touching that."

"Come on," she pleaded. "Don't you want to know what all the fuss is about?"

"Nope!" I protested, crossing my arms. "Those things smell horrible."

Kelly sat for a minute, staring at the cigarette, her wheels turning. I could tell that she was up to something, and that something usually ended up getting me grounded.

"OK," she started. "I'll make a deal with you- you take a puff of this, and I'll sneak you out a whole bottle of root beer."

Crap.

I gave her a dirty look. She knew exactly what to say and that my love of root-beer would surpass any reservations about cigarettes.

"Fine, one puff but that's it," I replied sternly.

Kelly put the cigarette into her mouth, lit the end, and took a long puff. Then, she immediately started coughing and hacking. When her coughing fit had ended, she handed me the cigarette. "Your turn," she ordered with another cough.

I grabbed the cigarette and just the smell had made me want to throw up. After I took a puff, it seemed as if I was swallowing fire. I threw the cigarette behind me and immediately puked my brains out.

Kelly laughed so hard that she actually peed her pants. What a pair we were - her with the pee-stained shorts, and me, with chunks of nasty vomit all over my shirt. Still laughing, we rushed to her apartment where I changed into one of her shirts while she changed out of her pee-stained shorts. When she finished, she walked out of the room and then returned with the glorious two liter of root beer.

Life had never seemed better.

Today, I would have given anything to go back to those days.

Thankfully, Kelly made it to class right as the bell rang. Her red curls bounced as she rushed to her seat.

“Ah, hell,” she said, setting down her backpack “Who are the idiots that think we really need to be at school by seven-thirty every single morning?”

“No doubt,” I replied.

Kelly was my one friend who could always make me laugh. She had the quickest wit, and never seemed to care what anyone thought of her.

“So, Chicken,” she asked while putting on a layer of pink lip gloss. “What's shakin', besides my ass?”

Chicken was the nickname she'd given to me after I told her about the horrendous chicken ordeal at my house.

“I need to talk to you about something *very* serious,” I said in a hush toned. “But not here. After school.”

“Oh, come on. You know how I hate waiting,” she said, with a pouty look. “You've *got* to tell me now that you brought it up.”

I shook my head vehemently. “No really, Kelly after school.”

She sighed.

“I'm serious. God, I should have waited to even bring it up.” I turned my head back to the front of the class, hoping she would get the hint.

My cell phone buzzed and I winced, hoping the teacher wouldn't hear it. I carefully slid it out of my pocket and noticed that it was a text from Kelly.

I hate secrets.

I shook my head and replied - *NOT Now.*

The phone buzzed. *Come on.*

No, I typed back.

Buzz. Fine! But be warned... I am going to keep bugging you all day!

I slipped my phone back into my jeans.

It began buzzing again.

Clenching my jaw, I glanced over at Kelly.

She quickly put her phone away and then feigned innocence.

I mouthed *stop.* I knew that if Mr. Peterman saw us using our phones, they would both be

confiscated for the day, and our parents would have to come to school and pick them up. The last thing I needed was to have my phone taken away. I was just hoping among hope, that Tyler would call me. The fact that he wasn't in school was now scaring the crap out of me.

I couldn't wait to get out of school and find out what was going on, but, it seemed to last forever. When the last bell of the day rang, I ran to my locker and grabbed the books I would need for the weekend. I had a huge calculus test on Monday and I knew that I really wasn't as prepared as I should have been.

As I closed my locker, I saw Kelly rushing toward me, looking very determined. She was short, around five feet tall and had an athletic build, thanks to all the years of gymnastics. I used to envy her so much when we were little, because she was so petite and small. I'm medium built, not too fat or too skinny, and stood five-foot-eight. I always felt like Sasquatch next to her, however.

"Tick-tock, Chicken," she said breathlessly. "Time to spill the deets! What *is* this big secret of yours?"

For someone small, she was also very loud and boisterous. You could actually hear her coming a mile away. I only hoped that once I told her about my encounter with Tyler yesterday, that she wouldn't freak out and let the entire school in on what had happened.

"It's Tyler," I began.

"Oh my God, I knew it!" she exclaimed. "You finally let Tyler hit it! I knew it."

I took a step back. "What?"

She grinned wickedly. "It's about time, Rani. That poor guy looks like his pants are going to explode every time he looks at you."

"What in the hell are you talking about, Kelly?" I whispered loudly. You could say that I was a bit irritated with her assumption. "First off, no one has 'hit' *this* yet! And second, for the millionth time, Tyler and I are *just* friends and his pants have never come *close* to exploding."

Kelly started to laugh. "Okay, okay, so you still proudly have your 'V' card. If your cherry is still intact, then what could possibly be such a 'hush-hush' secret?"

I looked around the halls, they were still buzzing with kids. "Let's walk to the park and we can talk there," I said, grabbing my backpack.

"Okay."

On our way to the park, Kelly's boyfriend, Wade, saw us walking and slowed the car

"Hey, Chicken," he said, looking my way.

I gave him a quick wave hello. I liked Wade, but I knew as soon as he and Kelly got together, it would take a hose of cold water to pry them apart.

"Hey, sexy," he said, to Kelly. "You want some candy?"

Kelly giggled and nodded.

"Well come over here then, Hotness," he said. "I've got something sweet for you."

I groaned loudly.

"Rani, I promise, I will be back in two secs," she whispered, and then bounded for his car.

Right.

She opened the passenger door, and as soon as her butt hit the seat, the grope-fest started.

I tried to look away, but it was like watching a train wreck, I just could not stop staring. Kelly had squirmed over the front seat and was now directly on top of Wade, kissing and dry humping him. My eyes actually felt like they were bulging out of my head, as I stared in shock.

I knew Kelly and Wade had had sex before, but they weren't going to do it right here, were they?

I finally had to look away, my inexperience with sex bothering me more than I'd ever let on. Most of the girls in my graduating class were no longer virgins. I, on the other hand, was as close to a virgin as they came, although, there was that time I'd gotten my boobs groped by Bobby Linn in the tenth grade.

I thought back to that day. Kelly and I had gone over to Chris Stein's for her sixteenth birthday party. She had invited most of our classmates, which included Bobby Linn, who I had been secretly crushing on for over a month. The night had been pretty tame at first. We'd played some music, danced, had cake and Chris had opened her presents. The action really started when her parents went upstairs and left us alone.

"I know," said Kelly in a hushed tone. "Let's play Seven Minutes in Heaven."

"What's that?" Chris asked worriedly. "It can't be loud, otherwise my parents will come right back down here."

"Seven Minutes in Heaven," Kelly began explaining, her cheeks turning slightly pink. "Is... cool. We all sit in a circle, spin the bottle, and whoever it lands on, you go in there," she said and then pointed at the closet.

"What are we supposed to do in there?" asked another classmate, Erin.

"Whatever you want to do," replied Kelly coyly.

None of us were really sure how this was going to pan out, or what exactly we'd do behind the closet door. We agreed to try it out, however, and slowly got into a circle.

Kelly grabbed an empty plastic two-liter bottle and looked at Chris. "I'd say that the birthday girl should go first," she said, smiling wickedly.

Obviously nervous, Chris grabbed the bottle and set it on its side. Then, after a few seconds of hesitation, she gave it a spin.

Around and around it went as we all watched in anticipation. When it finally stopped, it pointed toward Tyler.

He quickly looked over at me.

I gave him a “thumbs up.”

He looked away and his cheeks began to turn the cutest shade of pink. Then, they both slowly got up and went into the closet.

Kelly watched the time on her watch as we all stared at each other, smirking. Once the time was up, and the door opened, we all silently cheered them on.

Then, they sat down and I noticed that they both refused to even look at each other. Tyler later told me that she'd giggled the entire time, and that when he had tried to kiss her, it had been so dark that he'd missed and was pretty sure he kissed her eyeball.

“You're up next, Rani,” Kelly said, tossing me the bottle.

My heart pounding, I spun the bottle, hoping it would not land on Scott. Scott was notorious for having the worst breath. It smelled like a mixture of moldy cheese and feet. I closed my eyes and soon heard the others make a collective gasp. When I opened them back up, I was thrilled beyond belief.

Bobby Linn!

Bobby Linn was one of the most popular boys in high school. He played football and hockey and excelled at them both. He was just a bit taller than me, with the coolest California blonde surfer hair. Even though I have actually never been to California, I assumed that all the boys there looked like Bobby. I actually had him in a few of my classes, but never really thought he was hot until I saw him play hockey one day. Watching him on the ice, the way he'd been able to skate effortlessly, how he'd held his stick with such authority, and the ease of how he'd handled the puck had really impressed me.

“Okay, you two,” said Kelly, smiling wickedly. “Have fun.”

I looked over to Tyler for some type of encouragement, but he didn't even look my way.

Gee thanks, I thought.

My legs started to shake as soon as I stood up, and I prayed that the others couldn't see how nervous I was.

Bobby stood up and followed me into the closet.

“Now what?” I asked him after we closed the door and sat down. It was so dark inside the closet that I could not even make out his face. From his heavy breathing, however, I knew he was close.

“What do you wanna do?” he asked, sounding almost as if he was out of breath.

“Umm.... err, we could talk?” I said rather quickly. “So, what's your favorite color?”

I could feel Bobby shifting a little closer to me.

“Or, we could do this,” he whispered as he felt around in the dark for my face.

I held my breath as he moved closer.

When his hands finally found my face, he traced a delicate line from my nose to my mouth.

I swallowed nervously. I could feel his warm breath on my skin as his lips gently touched mine. They felt nice and soft. He opened his mouth slightly and slid his tongue into mine.

My stomach tingled with excitement and I shivered.

It felt so good and so wrong at the same time. I barely knew this boy, and here I was letting him stick his tongue into my mouth.

Bobby must have felt me tense up. "Relax," he said softly.

I took a few deep breaths and we continued our kiss. His hands were on my lower back massaging me in a way that I have never felt before, and soon I was like putty under his fingertips. Then, his hands moved to my waist and I could feel his fingers slowly making their way north. When he cupped my left breast with his hand, I quickly pushed him away.

"Too fast," I said breathlessly.

Just then someone knocked on the closet door.

"Time's up, lovebirds!" another kid shouted in the background.

I opened the door and stepped out. The light from the basement seemed as bright as the sun, compared to the blackness in the closet. I quickly took my seat and could tell that I was at least thirty shades of red. Even the tips of my ears felt like they were on fire.

Bobby, on the other hand, was giving high-fives to all his buddies, making gestures about my breasts, and smiling lecherously.

What a jackass!

That night was the end of my short time crush on Bobby.

As the memory faded, Kelly managed to peel herself off of Wade and then come running back to me.

"Sorry, girl," said Kelly, as she tried smoothing down her tangled mess of hair. "Wade can be such an animal."

"Yeah, Yeah, Yeah. Let's just get to the park, you little vixen," I said, playfully nudging her.

When we finally made it there, we sat down at a picnic table and I noticed right away that the place was dead, which was odd because it was such a beautiful day. Normally the place was jam-packed.

I pulled out my cell phone to see if Tyler had called and noticed that it was two-forty-five. I knew we only had a little bit of time before the younger kids got out of school and we'd be bombarded by them.

"Spill it."

"I had a talk with Tyler yesterday," I began cautiously, "and he dropped quite the bomb on me."

"What bomb?"

I looked at Kelly, and for the first time, had second thoughts of confiding in her. Tyler had been very clear that I was to tell no one, but... surely he could not have meant Kelly? He knew she was my best girlfriend, and my *go-to* gal, whenever I needed her. She'd been the only other person in my life, since meeting Tyler, who knew me better than my parents.

I looked at Kelly, my best friend, and just knew that I could trust her. We had been through so much together. She always had my back.

"Tyler called me yesterday, and told me to meet him here," I said, motioning to the park. "We then took a drive and Tyler told me that he killed his parents."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Kelly shrieked. "That is not even funny! Not even a little bit!"

Then she started to get up to leave. I pleaded with her to sit back down.

"Kelly, I really believe him. You didn't see how serious and frightened he looked when he told me," I explained. "I thought he was kidding at first, too."

Kelly sat back down. I could see she was trying to digest this huge bombshell I'd just dropped on her. "Where is he now?" she asked, sounding a little worn out.

"I don't know," I answered honestly. "He told me his life was in danger, and that he had to leave town. He was also worried that somehow I would be hurt if someone saw him talking to me."

"Danger? Leave town?" she sputtered. "What exactly did Tyler get himself into?"

"I don't know, Kelly. I went by his place yesterday, expecting to see cops surrounding the place, but it was quiet, no one seemed to even be home."

"Well," she said, sounding relieved. "That's a good thing. If Tyler really had killed his parents, the cops would be crawling all over his place."

I smiled. That's what I loved about her. She always pointed out the obvious and knew how to calm me down. She was confirming exactly what I wanted to believe. "Yeah, I kind of thought the same thing, too," I answered, also feeling relieved. "Let's go over to his place right now. I think his mom's shift at the bakery ends at two p.m., so she should be home, by now."

She agreed and we walked the short distance to Tyler's house. Just as I had expected, it looked the same as it did yesterday. No cops prowling around, no detective-looking guys combing the area for prints or suspects.

It looked like it always had – normal.

Kelly and I went up to the front steps and noticed that their morning paper was still outside of the front door. I picked it up and knocked on the door, but nobody answered. I rang the doorbell; again no, answer. Then I realized that I still knew their garage code.

I jogged over to the garage and quickly punched in the four-digit code. The door started to

open and my heart dropped when I noticed that their parents' car, the only one they owned, besides Tyler's, was parked inside. When the garage door opened fully, Kelly and I exchanged the same freaked-out expression.

"We *gotta* get into the house," Kelly insisted, her eyes filled with fear. "What if they're inside, hurt, and needing our help?"

I had a really bad feeling about this, and my hands began to tremble. Although, I really did not want to break into their house, I knew Kelly was right and we had to see what was really going on.

"I know a way we can get in," I said, sighing. "Follow me."

Tyler had once shown me where they hid their spare key. He had a habit of losing his and his parents had gotten sick of driving home from wherever they were at, just to let him inside. So they'd kept one hidden in the backyard.

I went around the house to the patio and lifted up the lid of the grill. Inside, taped to the lid, was the key. I grabbed it, and motioned for Kelly to follow me. We then unlocked the front door and quietly entered the house.

I wrinkled my nose. The house had a funky smell to it, but I wasn't sure exactly what it was.

"Smells weird," whispered Kelly.

"I know."

As we walked into the dining room, we noticed the dinner table - there was still food on it and it definitely wasn't fresh.

We then glanced down at the plates and noticed enchiladas of some sort. As I peered into the glasses, I saw that they were still filled with milk, but it was now thick and obviously stale.

"Rani," Kelly whispered behind me in a shaky voice. "I am getting really freaked out."

"I know, me too," I replied, sounding much calmer than what I actually was. "Let's just finish looking around and then we will get the heck out of here."

"Okay."

We walked up the staircase that led to the second floor and noticed that the majority of the pictures on the wall were crooked. Then I saw Tyler's door and immediately felt sick to my stomach. It looked like someone had broken it because it was only hanging on the hinges and there were pieces of broken wood and bolts lying on the carpeting.

"What the hell happened here?" Kelly asked mirroring my question.

Not knowing what else to say, I simply shrugged my shoulders and walked into Tyler's room.

"What a mess," said Kelly.

Actually, it looked like it usually did - as if a tornado had gone through it.

I walked around the room, not really sure exactly what I was looking for.

“Listen, I’ll check the downstairs and then we are out of here,” Kelly said.

I continued to look around Tyler's room for a few minutes more when I heard Kelly yell from downstairs.

“Oh shit! Oh shit! Oh shit!” she screamed. “Get your ass down here, Chicken!!”

I flew down the stairs, two at a time.

Kelly was standing in the middle of the living room pointing at what looked like two piles of dirt.

I touched my chest. “Jesus, Kelly, you almost gave me a heart attack, it’s just dirt.”

“No, come and take a closer look at this pile of dirt,” she replied shakily.

I walked over and stood beside Kelly, staring down. “Dirt,” I repeated.

“No, Rani, look *into* the dirt,” she said impatiently.

I got down on my knees to get a better look. It certainly looked like dirt with some white rocks. Then, something caught my eye. Near the top of one pile were strands of what looked like blonde hair.

The same color hair Tyler's mom had!

I stood up so quickly that I felt a wave of vertigo.

“See, I told you it was more than dirt,” Kelly said matter-of-factly.

I tried to compose myself and once again and got back on my knees. I carefully touched some of the dirt with my fingertips.

“Oh my God! Are you crazy?” Kelly yelled shrilly. “Don't touch that shit!”

I looked up at her and frowned. “Calm down, Kelly, I just want to get a better look.”

She shuddered. “Fine, just hurry up.”

Looking around, I reached over and grabbed the poker from the fireplace, then started sifting through the dirt. As I examined its contents, I could see what looked like more clumps of blonde hair. Then, I picked up one of the white stones for closer inspection.

It was a tooth.

Chapter Seven

Phil

I returned to the Jacobsons' home and could just sense the wave of doom in the air. Somehow, I knew this wasn't going to go the way I'd wanted, and it made me sick. The knots in my stomach began to tighten as I thought about what the outcome would be if their son continued to refuse the injection.

Just, get ahold of yourself, man.

Frustrated, I pulled the visor mirror down and looked at my reflection. What I saw was normal for me but very unsettling at the same time. As usual, I looked... perfect. Every hair was in place, my blue eyes were vibrant and bright, and hell, even my teeth looked like they could be in one of those toothpaste commercials.

Clenching my jaw, I slammed the visor shut. *How could I look that good on the outside, when deep down, I felt like such a monster?*

I remembered asking him, when I was a young child, if we were monsters, since we drank blood to survive. His stock answer was always, "No, Phil, we are not monsters, we are blessed."

Our lineage went to the beginning of time and he'd often tell me of the mortals who'd been the true monsters. Attila the Hun, Maximilien Robespierre, Idi Amin Dada, Vlad the Impaler, Ivan the Terrible, Caligula and Adolf Hitler.

I remember cringing on his lap as he would tell the stories.

"There was once a Countess named Elizabeth Bathory," he'd once said. "Now, she had been a true monster. This woman believed that the blood of young girls would make her youthful. She'd killed over six-hundred-and fifty young girls, using their blood for her baths, smearing their blood on her face. But, alas, she was wrong. Once the people found out what she had done, they locked her alone a room, and she died four years later. Son, now that is a monster."

Unfortunately, I still felt like a monster at times.

Sighing, I got out of the car and strode to the front door. I rang the doorbell and only waited a moment before Mrs. Jacobson opened the door.

She quickly pulled me inside. "He's gone."

"Who's gone?"

She smiled grimly. "Tyler."

My stomach dropped. "Shit."

Just then, Mr. Henderson walked down the stairs, looking uneasy. "He took off last night."

I rubbed my forehead in frustration as he continued.

"I... I... went up to his room, you know, to do what I had to do. But when I reached Tyler's door, it was locked." He cleared his throat and continued. "He wouldn't open the door, and I was so angry that I just broke it down. When I stepped inside, I noticed his window was opened. He must have climbed down the trellis and took off."

"What do we do now?" Mrs. Henderson asked while nervously rubbing her hands together. "His car was also gone; we spent the entire night searching for him."

I looked at both Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson and had a gut feeling that they were telling the truth.

"What kind of car does Tyler have?" I asked, pulling out a small notepad.

"It's a gray 2006 Nissan Altima," Mr. Jacobson answered. "License plate number is MNF384."

I wrote down the information and thanked them.

"Unfortunately," I said quietly, "we have unfinished business here."

They both looked at me in confusion.

I reached into my back pocket and produced a syringe, one that contained a serum that would destroy an Eternal. The one my father had created. I quickly grabbed Mrs. Jacobson by the back of her blouse.

"No! No!" shouted her husband as he rushed toward us. "My wife! My beautiful wife! Please, please... don't hurt her!"

I raised the syringe and plunged it into his chest.

Horrorfied, he looked at me, his wife, and then finally to the needle that was protruding from his chest. Then tears streamed down his cheeks as he fell to his knees.

"Noooooooo!" wailed Mrs. Jacobson. "Please don't die, baby, I love you so much!"

Mr. Jacobson fell to his knees, and within seconds, his body erupted in flames. Then, as quickly as the fire started, it was gone, leaving only a pile of ashes.

Mrs. Jacobson, trembling in terror, turned to me. "Please, Phil," she begged. "You *don't* have to do this. I promise, I *will* find Tyler, and we'll make sure your secret is safe... I promise!"

I did not want to prolong the agony of this any longer, nor did I want to give her any hope that there *could* be any other outcome. I had orders, and if I was caught disobeying them, I'd be dead.

Straightening up, I took a deep breath and pulled her toward me. "I truly am sorry," I whispered, plunging another syringe into her chest.

She fell to the floor, and within seconds, there were two piles of ashes at my feet.

Sighing, I quickly made an exit. I then drove away from the Jacobsons' home claspng the steering wheel with shaky hands. I knew that killing them was the only answer, but it still made me sick to my stomach. I just hoped as time went on this would become easier.

Why is this choice so difficult for some of them? I wondered. Who wouldn't want to stay young and healthy for the rest of their lives?

I thought back to the day when my father had explained to me and the other recruiters of how we were actually doing these people a favor. We were giving them a chance to live the life most people dreamed of.

"Sit down," said my father, Dane Slatter, through tight lips. He was one of only a handful of full-blooded Eternals left in the world. "I don't have all day, and we have a lot of material to cover."

We quickly grabbed our seats around the conference table.

I looked around - Big John, Steve, and Gina Montgomery. The four of us had been hand-chosen by my father for this special assignment. We were the ones he trusted the most, and knew how important this assignment actually was.

"I know you are all aware that we have finally found success in creating DD8. Now, after several trials, we are finally ready to set the plan into motion."

We all sat up straighter.

"I have already done the market research in our first test market," he continued. "Unfortunately, not many people will have the honor of becoming an Eternal."

"Why not?" Gina interrupted. "Wasn't that the point of DD8? To make as many Eternals as possible to ensure that we would become the majority?"

"NO!" my father barked. "We are not just going to make anyone an Eternal! The Eternals we want to bring into our fold have to fit a certain criteria." "Here," he said, giving us each a piece of paper. "These are the pre-qualifying factors that each person must meet:

1. Individuals must be between fifteen and fifty-five years of age.

1. Individuals must be financially stable (i.e. two-income homes and must make the minimum of one hundred grand a year.)

2. Individuals must have a current health form stating that they are in good health

I was well aware of my father's criteria. He told me once that he refused to have any poor, losers or vagrants as Eternals. His belief was that if someone could prove that they were hard-working and ambitious, they would be the most deserving, and typically the type of individual who would jump at the opportunity to become immortal. He'd already worked with many CEOs and leaders of various organizations, and had noticed that they'd all shared similar qualities - the need to succeed, regardless of whom they harmed on the rise to the top and greed, even though many had more money than they could spend in a lifetime, they still always wanted more.

"Okay," my father continued, as he handed each of us a large stack of papers. "What you have there, are the list of the families that you will be visiting. We're going to start with Hugo, because they are a much newer community. The neighbors will be less likely to get into other people's business, and we want to be able to visit their homes, without prying eyes watching

our every move.”

I stared at the information on my stack of papers. I'd heard of Hugo. It was a small growing community in Minnesota and home to a lot of younger families who tended to earn decent salaries. At least that's what my father had explained to me.

“Do you really think these people are going to let us into their homes?” Gina asked.

It was a great question, one that I had asked him in the beginning stages of DD8.

“Yes, they will,” he answered, glancing at each one of us. “Once you tell people that by accepting this gift their children will never get sick, old, or feel any pain, ever, their emotions will get the best of them,” he continued, “then their egos will kick in. Just the thought of being immortal, like a god, and,” he snapped his fingers, “bang, we got 'em hooked.”

I returned to the Jacobsons' home later in the day to see if Tyler had returned. When there was no sign of him, I decided to stake it out, for just a little bit.

I parked several houses down and watched, my stomach growling.

Shit, I should have fed.

I'd been very fortunate growing up that I'd never had to kill anyone myself for food. My family had been wealthy enough that we'd had other Eternals go out and get our meals for us. Of course, I'd been well aware of where the blood had come from, but it was easy to push aside the facts when sustenance was always neatly bottled in the fridge and waiting for me.

My stomach growled again.

Although we drink blood to survive, there were some Eternals who liked to compare themselves to vampires, which I thought was totally ridiculous.

Totally ridiculous.

Most importantly, vampires are not real. They are fictional creatures. that apparently, and according to the latest craze of vampire movies, now glitter in the sun. I guess one would say that compared to vampires, Eternals are pretty boring. We *don't* shimmer in the sun, we can't move at lightning speed, we don't have super strength, and we certainly can't turn into bats. The up side is that the sun does not bother us and holy water can't kill us. The only thing we have in common with vampires is that we definitely need blood to survive.

And boy can we survive!

Although, admittedly, being an Eternal does come with drawbacks. For one, our bodies stop aging at the age of twenty-five, which sounds good, but can be complicated, especially when everyone else keeps aging around you. My father, who I tell everyone is my brother, and I have actually moved around so much that I have lost track of all the different cities we have lived. He looks twenty-five on the outside, but he is over two-hundred and fifty years old. I am only twenty-one, the same age my mother was when she met my dad, so I have four more years before I reach full maturity.

I thought about my mother and wondered if my father would ever share more information about her with me. Although she'd been human, he had fallen head-over-heels for her. Knowing it would never work, he'd tried denying the feelings he'd had, but it had been too late. Before he could break it off, she'd become pregnant and he'd ended up marrying her. Sadly, she died in childbirth and I'm not sure what went wrong, as my father refuses to talk about it. I still carry an old worn picture of her in my wallet, however. Many days I'd pull it out and stare at it for hours, wondering what would have happened if she'd have survived.

Pushing my mother and blood out of my mind, I played Candy Squash on my phone. It was such a dumb-ass game, but it was so damn addicting. Just when I was about to pass a level I'd been stuck on, I saw a young blonde girl knocking on the Jacobsons' door. I stopped playing and watched her.

She waited for a few minutes at the doorway, and then ran off when nobody answered.

I tried to follow her with my car, but she zig-zagged through a couple of homes, and I lost her.

Who was that? Maybe a girlfriend?

I went back to the house, waited around for another hour, and then left, calling it a day. I needed blood and if I waited too long, my mood would only get worse.

The next day, I went back to Tyler's home in the early morning, but there was still no sign of him. I played a little more Candy Squash, eventually throwing my phone against the windshield when I couldn't get past the next level.

Damn game.

I sat in the car, listening to the sounds of the neighborhood, birds singing, a lone dog in the distance barking, and the occasional car that would pass me by. I thought it was a decent place to live, one you'd see in a typical new subdivision - perfectly landscaped lawns, two and three-story homes with two or three, stall garages. Unfortunately, I'd never lived in a neighborhood like this. My father had always insisted on living in condos in the city. He thought that living in the suburbs would be as much fun as watching paint dry.

"Son," he'd say. "I love the city life and the commotion. Something is always happening."

Not me, though, I thought, stretching my arms. *I could get used to living in the suburbs.*

I was getting lost in my thoughts, once again, when I saw her again. The blonde girl had returned, and this time she had a small red-haired girl with her. I pulled out my pair of binoculars and watched the pair ring the front doorbell. After a few seconds, the blonde ran off toward the back of the house, followed by the other girl.

What the hell are they up to?

I quickly left my car and quietly made my way near the back of the home, hiding on the other side of a fence. I could hear them talking.

"It should be under here," one of them said.

I stole a glance and noticed that the blonde had retrieved a key from underneath a grill top.

Must be a girlfriend, or possibly a family member? How would she know where the family hid their house key?

The two young girls raced back around the house and opened the front door.

I hastily went back to my car and waited to see what would happen next. After about ten minutes or so, the girls walked out. They had their heads down and seemed to be talking to each other.

Did they see the ashes?

Of course they did, you dumbass, I thought, mentally kicking myself. You should have cleaned up your mess.

This time I was determined that I would not lose the blonde. I followed them at a safe distance until they entered a bakery. They went inside for a few minutes and then left, apparently without purchasing anything. Then, their next stop was a coffee/bistro. I parked my car and watched through the windows as they sat down. After a few minutes, I decided to go inside.

When I entered the coffee shop, the smell of newly crushed coffee beans was a delight to my senses. I'd always loved the smell of coffee, and it was times like this that I wished I could drink the delectable smelling concoction.

I thought back to when I was six years old.

"Dad," I called out, while a commercial interrupted my favorite television show. "Can we please, please, please go to McDonald's?" I wanted to try the chicken nuggets that were on T.V. "Those kids look happy when they eat those chicken things."

"Son," my father replied. "You and I have gone over this a hundred times..."

I stomped my foot. "I know, but it is not fair! I want a McNugget!!"

"If you eat that food, Phil, you will get sick."

"I will not!" I argued.

He smirked. "Fine, let's go."

When he pulled into the McDonald's drive thru, I was actually pretty shocked. My father was usually a very stubborn man.

"One kid's meal with nuggets," my dad said loudly into a menu of food.

"No, Dad! MCNUGGETS!" I yelled, worried that I would get the wrong order and not look like one of those happy kids I'd seen on television.

"McNuggets," repeated my father, sounding a little annoyed.

Unfortunately, he made me wait until we got home before I could dig into that deliciously smelling cardboard box that had a big yellow smile on it.

We took the elevator up to the penthouse level where our condo was located and I was practically bouncing on the walls of the elevator, willing it to move faster.

“Go to the table.”

I ran and took a seat. He handed me the box and I tore it open. Inside was a smaller box. I opened it and took one out, examining the nugget. It was light brown, and had a weird shape to it. I shoved it into my mouth, expecting to be amazed, but... there was nothing.

I could taste nothing.

I could feel the chicken moving around in my mouth as I chewed, but there was no taste whatsoever.

I quickly grabbed another one and it was the same thing.

Hmm? I thought, Maybe they were bad?

I grabbed a few French fries, hoping they'd be different but.... nope.

Sadly, I looked at my Happy Meal box and was pretty pissed off that I was not smiling like the kids I'd seen on the television commercial.

I spent the rest of the evening in the bathroom, throwing up, and I never attempted human food again.

“How many?” the elderly woman asked at the front register.

“Ah, um... one please,” I replied, a little distracted.

“Here you go, hun,” she said, handing me a menu. “The special is tuna-and-rye with tomato soup.”

“Thank you.” I smiled and looked up at her. Unsurprisingly, she reacted to me as most females did. I could already see the faint blush creeping up to her cheeks.

“My pleasure, hun. Your waitress will be right with you.”

“Okay.”

I watched her walk away, and then focused my attention to the reason why I was here. The blonde and red-head were only a few tables, away. I could tell they were having a deep conversation, but, unfortunately, I was not close enough to hear what they were saying.

When the waitress came by, I ordered a black coffee. Just because I couldn't drink it, didn't mean I couldn't enjoy the aroma.

Chapter Eight

Rani

“Who do you think this belongs to?” I asked, pulling the tooth out of my pocket.

“Oh my God, Rani! Put that nasty thing away,” Kelly said with a look of disgust. “I plan on eating at this table.”

I looked at it one more time and then slipped it back into my pocket.

“I just want to forget what we *thought* we saw,” Kelly said, looking nervously around the café. “What if Tyler was telling the truth? There could be people looking for us right *now*.”

I sighed. “You’re being paranoid. I’m sure there is a logical explanation for all of this.”

“The hell I am. I’ve seen movies like this before, and it’s always the people who are trying to be helpful that end up being slashed into itty bitty pieces.”

I laughed out loud. Kelly had quite the imagination and her stories usually ended up with someone ending up in *itty bitty* pieces.

“Fine, we can talk about this later,” I conceded. “Let’s order something to eat. I am starving.”

The waitress came by; we both ordered iced coffees and a tuna sandwich, to share. They had the best food in town and my mouth watered as I thought about sinking my teeth into the sandwich.

As I handed the waitress my menu and looked around the café, I noticed him. He was by far the hottest man I’d ever seen, with blonde hair pulled into a ponytail and *the* bluest of eyes. His lips were a pale pink and looked totally kissable.

“Earth to Rani,” Kelly said, snapping her fingers in my face, ruining the moment of where I was just about to undress him with my eyes.

“What are you staring at?” she asked, looking over her shoulder. Then, she must have spotted what had me damn near in a trance.

“Whoa!” she said, turning back to me. She giggled. “Mama likes.”

I feigned innocence. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Her eyes widened. “Bullshit! That man over there is *the* hottest piece of man meat that has ever graced this town. Don’t pretend for one minute that you didn’t notice him. I ain’t that stupid.”

I snorted.

“Here you go, ladies,” said the waitress, putting our tuna fish sandwich on the table. She handed us two plates. “You need anything else?”

“No, thank you,” we both answered in unison.

"Mm..." said Kelly, as she took her first bite. "This taste as good as he looks."

"You are so wrong," I said, smiling and shaking my head at her.

We sat in silence and finished the tuna sandwich

I sat back in the chair, savoring my last bite, and without realizing it, my gaze immediately went to the hot blonde man. This time, to my surprise, he was looking right back at me.

He smiled and I could feel the heat rising to my cheeks. I quickly averted my eyes and tried to focus on Kelly who happened to be staring at me.

Busted!

"For God's sake, girl, just go over there and say hello," Kelly said impatiently.

"Are you nuts? He looks like a freakin' movie star," I whispered.

"You are really living up to your name, *Chicken*," Kelly teased and then stood up. "I will be right back," she said, walking away.

I watched in horror as she approached the blonde-haired stranger.

What the hell is she up to?

Kelly then took a seat at his table. I could not hear what she was saying to him, but midway through the conversation I saw him look up at me.

OH, MY GOD! I am going to KILL her.

I slid down lower into my chair, just hoping the ground would swallow me up. Instead, I found, to my horror, that both of them were heading toward me.

Oh crap... oh crap... oh crap...

"Rani, this is Phil," Kelly said, smiling at me. "And Phil, this is Rani."

"Nice to meet you, Rani," he said, extending his hand.

Oh, my God, his voice sounded just as hot as he looked. Deep and smooth.

"Nice to meet you, Phil," I replied, shaking his hand. To my surprise, my voice sounded much calmer than I felt. On the inside, I was squealing like a five-year-old who'd just received a pony.

"Here," Kelly said, pulling out her chair. "Sit down, and keep Rani company for a minute. I have to make a call. Be right back," she said smiling wickedly at me.

You red-haired little devil, I am so going to get you back.

"So," Phil began. "Your friend tells me you both are graduating next month. Have you thought about what college you're going to?"

College? College? Who the hell cares about college?!

The only thing that was on my mind was the fact the hottest man I'd ever seen was talking to

me.

“Umm, yeah,” I responded, trying to sound normal “I am going to the U of M.”

“That's a great school,” he said, giving me a killer smile that almost made me melt right there and then.

I nodded. “Yeah, my parents are pretty happy that I was accepted. So, do you go to college?” I asked, interested in learning *everything* about him. Every time he smiled at me, my pulse shot up and I had to stop myself from gaping.

“I graduated last year,” he answered.

I took a sip of my iced-coffee. “So that means you are out in the real world, huh?”

“Yep, and let me tell you... it's not at all what it's cracked up to be,” he said through a soft laugh.

Just then, Kelly came back to the table.

“Well,” Phil said standing up. “I should be on my way.”

Oh crap, please don't go!

I was surprised that this man had provoked such a feeling of desire in me. I'd never met anyone like him, and it sucked that just as quickly as he'd entered my life, he'd be gone.

“Rani,” said Phil, looking at me. “If it's not too forward, I would love to get your number and get the chance to see you again.”

Um... yeah! You can have my number and whatever else you want!

“That would be nice,” I answered and then wrote down my number on a napkin.

He grabbed it and put in his pocket. “Great to meet you both,” he said. “And Rani, I *will* call you soon.”

“Sounds great, nice meeting you, too,” I said, smiling.

We both watched as he walked away.

“Now *that*, my friend, is what you call a nice ass!” Kelly said in husky voice.

I gave her a light punch on the arm as we grabbed our stuff to leave.

She elbowed me in the side. “Hey, you're welcome!”

I just shook my head.

The next few days I felt like I was in limbo. Not only had I not heard from Tyler, but Phil never called, either. I kept looking at my phone every five minutes to see if I'd missed his call, but there was nothing. It had been too good to be true.

Why would a man like him even be interested in me?

I figured that he thought I was just a kid, one who was still in high school. It was kind of how I

felt anyway - a silly girl with a crush.

About a week later, I decided to go out for a walk. It was finally beginning to feel like spring, even though it was already the end of May. My thoughts drifted to Tyler and his disappearance. I wondered where he was and if he was okay. I was confused and more than a little hurt that he hadn't bothered to call and explain what was really happening. Kelly and I had both decided that we were not going to tell anyone about the dirt and teeth we'd found, even though it had totally freaked us out. We weren't sure what it was all about, and we didn't want to get into trouble for sneaking into Tyler's house.

On my way home, I felt my back pocket buzz. I pulled out my phone and looked at the caller I.D. *Unknown*.

"Hello?"

"Hi, is this Rani?"

I knew immediately who it was; I would remember his voice forever. "Yes, it is."

"Hi, it's Phil, remember me?"

Remember you? No not at all... you're just the only thing I have thought about since the day at the coffee shop. "Of course I do. How are you?"

"Good, I was wondering if you'd like to get together tomorrow night? Maybe dinner and a movie?"

YES, YES, YES!!!! How about now??

"Sure, sounds good," I said, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible.

"Would you like me to pick you up?"

It was then that I remembered - I had to meet with my guidance counselor tomorrow after school and wasn't sure how long it would last. "Why don't we meet at Les Mexicano's at six o'clock? Does that work for you?" I asked hopefully

He paused. "It sure does."

I smiled. "Great!"

"Okay then, I'll see you tomorrow, Rani."

"Great, see you then."

"Bye."

I slid the phone back into my pocket and practically skipped home, I was just so excited.

The next day at school seemed to drag on and on. The only thing I could think about was seeing Phil. Visions of his smile and those blue eyes flashed through my head all day, giving me butterflies.

Later that afternoon, the meeting with my counselor went much longer than anticipated. As Mrs. Sloan spoke, I watched as the clock tick closer to five.

"Rani?" she repeated, snapping me back into reality. "Do you have any questions for me?"

"Nope," I answered, just wanting to get out of there.

She handed me a brochure of classes that I needed to take during my first year at the U. of M.

"Alright," she said, "looks we are done here then."

"Thank you so much for your help, Mrs. Sloan, I really do appreciate it," I said, tucking the brochure into my backpack.

"You're welcome. Good luck next fall."

"Thanks."

I left her office and drove home quickly. Fortunately, my parents had let me take their car, knowing I had an appointment with Mrs. Sloan.

"Hey, sweetie," my mom called out from the kitchen as I walked in the door. "How was your day?"

"It was good," I answered, running up the stairs.

I was brushing out my hair when she knocked on the door.

"Hey, you took off so quickly," she said. "What's the rush?"

I had not told my parents about the date with Phil, They'd have asked me a million questions that would have exhausted me. *What's his name? What do his parents do? Is he a good student? Where did you meet him? What are you doing? When will you be home? Is he a safe driver?*

"Um, I promised Kelly I would go over and help her with a composition paper that's due on Monday," I lied. As much as I hated lying to her, sometimes it was just easier than having to with the assault of questions she'd hurl at me.

"That is so nice of you," she said, smiling at me "You are such a good friend."

My insides did a flip-flop from the guilt. I really hated not telling her the truth. "Thanks, Mom," I replied as I finished my hair. "Is it OK if I use the car again?" I asked. "I am not sure how long I'll be at Kelly's"

"Sure, your dad and I were just going to hang around the house tonight."

"Thank you," I said and went over and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

She went back downstairs as I finished getting ready.

What the hell was I going to wear?

I wanted to wear something that was cute, but not like I was trying too hard. In the end, I decided on a pair of skinny jeans, with cute new wedges that I'd just purchased. I added a simple black shirt and threw on a silver necklace. Checking out my reflection in the mirror, I smiled. *Hmmm, I looked pretty good.*

I left my room and ran downstairs, calling out, "Bye, Mom," as I got to the front door. "See you

later.”

“Goodbye!”

Crap, I was going to be late, I thought, glancing at the clock on the dashboard.

Five minutes to six.

I pushed down a little harder on the accelerator and prayed that there were no cops behind me.

When I got to the restaurant, I quickly found a parking spot, pulled down the visor, and swiped on a fresh coat of lip gloss, while making sure that my hair was smooth and in place. Then, I quickly got out of the car and entered the restaurant.

As I stepped inside, I looked around in the waiting area, but did not see him anywhere. I started thinking that maybe he'd left already, thinking that I had stood him up, since it was past six. But, to my delight, I saw him at a nearby booth waving me over. Smiling, I walked towards him.

Oh, my God, he looks even hotter than I remember.

“I hope you don't mind,” he said, standing up to greet me. “I grabbed us a booth already.”

“Not at all,” I answered, unable to quit grinning.

We both sat back down and immediately I felt the heat rising deep inside of my belly. My body had never physically responded like that to *anyone*, and it took me by surprise.

“I hope you like Mexican food,” I said, looking over the menu. “I probably should have asked you, yesterday, when I recommended this place.”

“I love it,” he replied, smiling at me. “It's one of my favorites.”

The waitress came over and took our order. I asked for the chicken taco salad, but to my surprise Phil did not order anything.

“I thought you said you liked Mexican food?” I asked, frowning.

“I do, I do.” he said reassuringly. “But, I totally forgot that I'd had a dentist appointment early tomorrow. They want me to fast, just in case they have to put me under. Root canal.”

“Ohhhh, ouch,” I grimaced. “No fun. Well, I'm going to feel bad eating in front of you.”

“No worries,” he replied. “I had a big lunch that filled me up.”

“Well, that's good.” He definitely had a way of making me feel at ease, which I found very comforting.

“So, Phil,” I asked, grabbing a chip from the basket the waitress had brought to the table. “What do you do for a living?”

“Right now, I work with my dad at his research facility.”

“What kind of research do you do there?” I asked, interested in learning everything I could

about the man.

“Well,” he said sheepishly. “What I do is kind of boring. I just write codes for their software.”

Writes codes? He is hot and smart! Ding, Ding, Ding, looks like we have a winner, folks!
“That is not boring at all!”

He smiled.

When my food arrived, I felt a little weird eating in front of him, but Phil reassured me several times that he was perfectly fine. Then, as I picked at my food, we had a casual conversation and I could feel myself growing more and more attracted to him with every passing minute.

“What about your family?” I asked, completely enthralled by him.

He explained that his mother had passed away during childbirth, and that he had a condo in a building that his father owned, in Minneapolis.

After we finished dinner, or at least when I finished dinner, we decided to hit the local theater to check out what movies were playing.

“Let's take my car,” he insisted as we walked out to the parking lot. “I can bring you back here once the movie is finished.”

I agreed and then followed him through the parking lot until he stopped at his car. It was a sleek, black Audi Spyder.

Wow, even his car was hot! I thought, admiring it.

I didn't know much about cars, but I could certainly tell that this one was not cheap.

He opened the doors and we both slid in.

I sighed in approval as my butt hit the leather. It had to have been the softest I'd ever felt.

“Any particular movie you want to see?” I asked Phil while catching a look at his profile. *That man does not have a bad angle.*

“Nope,” he replied, smiling at me. Ladies choice.”

His grin sent a shiver down my spine. What I wanted to do was stop the car and hop onto his lap, the exact same way that Kelly had done to Wade. I envisioned his lips on mine, and his hands all over my body.

I groaned inwardly. *Oh great, now I am a nympho. One date and I was ready to turn in my V card.*

Although I had not intended on being a virgin this long, I'd wanted to wait until I was truly in love, which was unlike most of my girlfriends. The majority of them had done the deed, just to get it over with, saying they did not want to enter college a virgin. I normally couldn't have cared less about being a one, but there was something about Phil that stirred something deep inside of me.

When we arrived at the theater, I picked out a Matt Damon movie, figuring it would have both

action and romance. There was no need to punish the guy with a total chick flick.

As we walked by the concession stand, he offered to buy me popcorn and soda, but I declined. I wasn't about to torture him into watching me eat, when he had to have been starving.

We found a seat in the back; the lights went down and the movie started. I noticed that we were both sharing the same armrest, and soon I could feel the heat radiating between us.

Did he feel it, too?

To my surprise, he reached over and grabbed my hand, placing it inside of his.

I tried watching the movie, but all I could really think about was my hand in his. It felt so small in his large, soft one and after a while, I began to wonder how it would feel on my breasts. Then, before I knew, the credits rolled and they turned on the lights.

"That was really good," said Phil, looking over at me. "Did *you* like it?"

"I loved it," I lied. I really had not been paying attention to the movie.

"Good."

When I drove back to the restaurant, I was bummed that his car was a manual transmission, making it impossible for us to hold hands again. I saw the sign of the restaurant and was even more disappointed that our evening had come to an end. I pointed out my car in the lot and he parked next to it.

"So, here we are," he said, stopping next to mine.

"Yep, here we are," I answered back, surprised by the sultry tone in my voice.

Phil reached over and gently guided my face toward his. First, he gave me a soft kiss and I noticed that his lips were even softer than they'd looked. Soon, his kiss deepened, becoming more demanding, which made my nipples instantly harden. He reached up with his hands and ran his fingers through my hair.

"Oh, my God, Rani" he whispered breathlessly in my ear. "You are so sexy."

No one had ever told me that I was sexy before, and I *loved* hearing it from Phil.

He began kissing my neck and ears, making my insides feel wobbly, like Jell-O. With each kiss, I could feel small electrical charges shoot through my system, all landing directly in the junction between my legs.

We gradually pulled away from each other, needing to catch our breaths.

"I want to see you again," he said huskily.

Still breathless, I just nodded my head.

Smiling, he gave me another kiss and told me that he'd call me tomorrow, after his dentist appointment.

"Okay," I replied, although I was dreading the thought of leaving him. I just wanted to stay with

him all night.

Chapter Nine

Phil

I knew the minute our eyes met, that I was done for. Besides forgetting all about Tyler, I was swept away by her beauty and innocence. It caught me totally off guard.

Rani...

Long blonde hair, beautiful green eyes, and legs that seemed to go on forever. I had never been nervous around a human female before, but this one was different and I actually felt like a tongue-tied fool in her presence.

The night we had our first date, she was late, and I'd been terrified that she'd stood me up. But then I saw her, standing in the entryway. As she'd approached the table, I could not help but feel an immediate rush of desire for such an attractive girl. Her blonde hair had been soft and flowing, her jeans had looked like they'd been painted on, emphasizing her shapely legs, and the black T-shirt had been tight enough that I could make out the outline of her round, firm breasts. I actually had to stop myself from drooling every time I stared at her.

When the waitress came, I'd already thought of the "dentist excuse" prior to dinner. The truth was, I had normally only dated other Eternals, because it was just easier than trying to come up with one-hundred-and-one different excuses as to why I couldn't eat or drink anything.

Well, except for blood, that is...

Sitting across from Rani, it took every ounce of willpower not to reach over the table and kiss her while she picked at her food. She seemed a little uneasy about eating in front of me, and I decided that if we had another date, we would do something that did not involve eating.

At the movies I decided to test the waters to see if she was into me. I grabbed her hand, placing it into mine; she did not pull it away, so that was a good sign.

Driving back to the restaurant, all I could think about was how much I wanted to kiss her, and it was hard to focus on driving when I could feel the hardness growing inside of my jeans.

Once we pulled into the parking spot next to her car, I decided to take the initiative and just go for it. I reached over and grabbed her face with my hands and pulled her to me.

After the first kiss, I knew I was a goner...

She awoke something deep inside of me, something... primal.

When I covered her lips with mine, I noticed that her skin seemed smoother than anything I'd felt before, and I wanted to take her right there and then. I eventually forced myself to back off, knowing that it was dangerous to keep kissing her when I was as hard as a rock, and not thinking clearly.

We made a date for the following day, and by the time I got home, I had to take a cold shower to settle myself down.

I woke up the following morning, and Rani was the first thing that I thought of; I was so eager to see her again. Unfortunately, our date was for later in the day and I still had a meeting with my father - it was time to check in and let him know how the recruiting was going. I decided to not tell him about the Jacobsons yet, and wasn't even sure if I ever would. I definitely did not want to deal with the ass reaming that would surely accompany my major fuck up.

I got dressed and took the elevator up a few floors to his place, grateful that we lived in the same building.

"Come in," my father called out.

I entered his apartment and as always was blown away. Not only was his place bigger, but he had grandeur tastes and had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars furnishing it.

I went into the refrigerator and grabbed a fresh jar of blood. I poured myself a glass and my mouth began to water in anticipation. With all of the excitement of yesterday, I'd forgotten to feed.

I closed my eyes and drank. The first sip was always the best. I loved the feeling of the thick liquid on my tongue, slowly going down my throat. To me, the coppery bitterness was like heaven.

Just then my dad entered the kitchen and directed me into the dining room.

I finished my breakfast quickly, set the empty glass on the table, and followed him to the table.

"So, how is it going out there? Do you have any news for me?"

My stomach quickly dropped. *Shit... does he already know about the Jacobsons? No, I am just being paranoid; there is no way he could. Not this soon.*

I swallowed hard and pulled out the list of names from my back pocket.

"I have met with these families," I said, pointing out the names on the list, "and all of them were successfully recruited and now are members of the Eternal family."

My father glanced at the list and then flicked it back over to me. "We need more," he said. "You know you have a deadline, son, you need visit at least fifteen homes a day." He shook his head in disappointment. "At this rate, it will take you three months to finish."

"Don't worry, Dad, I will get it done."

"Tell me how the people are reacting when you approach them."

Every family I'd met, so far, excluding the Jacobsons, had gone pretty smooth. Typically, I'd show them the video, explaining how they can live forever and never age or get sick. The questions I'd received in return were mostly from middle-aged women asking if they could be younger. Unfortunately, they can't. Once they pass the age of maturity, they stay the same age as when they've turned. Most accept it, but I remember one lady, Rebecca Conolly, raising her hands in exasperation and asking me where I was twenty years ago.

Although most people were a little put off by having to consume blood to stay alive, once I explained the nutrients inside and how their palate will change once they turn, they usually

accepted it.

“Their reactions are really positive, Dad, I had no idea so many people would agree so quickly,” I answered honestly.

“I told you they would, son. Don't ever doubt your old man.”

I laughed in spite of myself. My father describing himself as an old man was comical, considering he looked to be the same age as me. “I never do.”

Although, that was actually a lie.

I *had* doubted him when he'd originally revealed the plan to have the Eternals take over the world and become the dominant race. I'd laughed at him, thinking he was being foolish when we were just a small minority of people. In fact, there had been only a few hundred full-blooded Eternals left in the world - most of them had moved away from the pack-style of living, going off on their own and not reproducing very many full-blooded newborns. This had aggravated my father.

“If we can perfect the serum,” he'd said a couple of years ago. “We will be able to ensure that our bloodline never disappears. Mark my words... over time we *will* prevail, and become the majority.”

My father had always despised hiding his true nature as well as having to move from town to town for centuries.

It was then that he sat me down and explained in detail what our mission was. He and other elder Eternals around the globe were going to choose individuals who fit their criteria to become Eternals. He knew after the amount of time he'd spent with people, they'd jump at the opportunity to become immortal.

“But, Dad, how can we expect them to survive?” I argued. “Do you really think they will be able to look at their own kind now as a meal?”

He waved his hand. “Listen, I have been around a lot longer than you, lad, I know exactly what they are capable of doing. Many of them would turn on their own family members to obtain the gift of eternal life.”

“You think so?” I asked in shock.

“Son, man's greatest fear is death,” he continued. “They hate that they have no control over aging and dying. Hell, look at the television. All you see are poor schlubs trying anything to stay young. Men and women alike... going to doctors to have their faces pulled every which way, lips plumped up to appear more youthful, and,” he'd laughed. “Implants for their tits so they don't sag anymore. So you see - greed and vanity are their weakness, and we are the answer that they have been searching for; the fact that they may have to make a meal of their neighbor is just a minor bump in the road for them.”

Unfortunately, what he said was the truth. I, myself, had witnessed the ugly side of humans also.

“I want better for you, my son,” he went on. “I want you to be able to stay in one home for

more than ten years. I want you to have a normal life and be proud of who you are. To never have to hide your true self, and if we are successful in our plan, you'll never have to."

"Dad," I replied. "Why don't we just come out into the open, and tell people what we are? You might be surprised; maybe the people would be accepting? The world is a much more tolerant place than it was years ago."

His eyes widened. "Are you kidding me? The government would hunt us down and rip us open to see what makes us tick. Do you want to live the rest of your life being someone's science project?"

I had to agree with him there, too. Although the world was evolving and changing, it certainly was not ready to accept a different humanoid species. There were still countries that turned their noses up at inter-racial and same-sex couples. If they couldn't tolerate what they perceived as "abnormal" behavior with their own kind, there was no way they were ready to accept us.

My father and I finished our brief meeting about Hugo, and I headed back to my own apartment to shower and shave. I was excited to spend the day with Rani.

Chapter Ten

Phil

"I am so glad we decided to go to the beach today," Rani said, putting on her sunglasses.

We'd been seeing each other every day for the past two weeks, and it had been glorious. I already felt like I'd known her a lifetime. During the day, she was constantly on my mind, and at night, her lovely face found its way into my dreams.

"I don't know if it's warm enough to swim in," I said, dipping my toe into the cool water.

Outside the temperature was close to eighty degrees, which was rare for the beginning of June in Minnesota.

"I don't care if we swim at all," she said, smiling at me. "I am just happy to be here with you." She bent forward and gave a quick kiss on the lips.

"Same here."

I watched as she stood up, unbuttoned the top button of her shorts, and shimmied out of them. I could feel my mouth salivate as she pulled off her tank top; she must have seen me ogling her body, because she grabbed a towel and covered herself.

"Uh... I'm not sure if I am beach ready yet," she said, sounding embarrassed.

Was she kidding?

She had a body that was, in my opinion... perfection. Her white bikini was stunning - the triangle top just barely contained her ample breasts while her thin waist and long toned legs were accented by the small white bottoms. She looked like a super-model at a film shoot.

"Honey," I said, reaching toward her. "You couldn't look bad, even if you tried."

We spread out our towels side-by-side and held hands as we listened to Rani's iPod, bopping our heads and singing the songs we knew together. Granted, neither one of us could hold a tune, but we didn't care. We just enjoyed being together.

After a while, Rani rolled over on her side. "Let's go somewhere private," she said, smiling with a hint of mischief in her eyes.

I stood up right away, not thinking twice about it. I had been fantasizing about getting her alone all day.

"Follow me," she said as she headed toward a patch of woods.

I grabbed the blanket and followed her a few hundred feet into the woods, until she came to a stop. She stood there and licked her lips, beckoning me forward.

My feet could not move fast enough.

When I reached Rani, I pulled her close and noticed that her body was warmed from the sun; it felt deliciously wonderful against my bare chest. I kissed her lips, reveling in her salty

sweetness and our tongues intertwined and danced with each other. It didn't take long before I could feel the hardness beginning to form in my bathing suit. I pressed it against her bikini bottom and to my surprise, she starting rubbing back.

I slowly moved my pelvis up and down, all around her sweet spot. Just knowing that there was only a tiny piece of fabric holding me back from the "promised land", was almost more than I could take.

She matched each motion with her own, our bodies already in sync with each other. I bent down and pulled down one side of her bikini top and released her perfect breast. Her beautiful pink nipple was hard and she arched her back, just begging me to take it.

I bent down and licked the top of her nipple and felt her shiver in my arms. I opened my mouth wider and began licking and lapping at her supple breast.

"Lay me down," she moaned.

My heart began to pound. Over the past couple of weeks, we have had our share of make-out sessions, but none were as hot or as intense as this one.

I quickly spread out the blanket and took her in my arms. Kissing, we slowly made our way onto the fabric, and then I laid her out in front of me, amazed at the sight before my eyes. "My God, you are beautiful," I said, trying to soak up every inch of her body.

I reached down and removed her bikini top, exposing both of her breasts. They were two beautiful perky mounds with rosebud nipples. I took one in my hand as I suckled on the other one, and her moans let me know that she liked what I was doing. My tongue slowly encircled each nipple, teasing, and nibbling as she moaned in my arms.

"I want you so bad," I whispered into her ear.

"I want you, too," she replied, her voice hoarse, "but... not here."

She had already told me that she was a virgin, and I was fine with that. I loved her, and would wait until forever if that is what it took to be with her.

"We can wait," I said, "but, for now, let's keep having fun."

She smiled and pulled me closer.

We began to kiss, again, igniting a fire in both of us. Our passion grew and soon... I could no longer control myself. I reached between her legs and could feel her wetness through the bathing suit. Her legs began to tremble as I slowly began rubbing the fabric of her bikini bottom. I reached in slowly and felt the sticky sweetness on my finger. I began rubbing her clitoris and she began moaning and moving along with my finger, faster and faster my fingers were like the conductor and her sweet spot was my orchestra.

"Phil," she panted.

Smiling, I slid off her bottoms and started to kiss her inner thigh, with each lick and kiss I would look at her to make sure it was okay; I didn't want rush her into anything.

She smiled at me, nudging my face further toward her heat, and with that smile, I tasted

heaven for the first time.

Afterwards, we walked back to the beach, hand-in-hand, and then began packing up our supplies we'd brought with. I smiled to myself, thinking of our naughty escapade in the woods and was honored that she wanted to share her precious gift of virginity with me in the future.

"What are you smiling about? You look like the Cheshire cat," teased Rani.

"Oh, babe, if I told you, you would run right back into those woods with me."

We both laughed and headed back to my car.

"Hey, Phil," Rani said, turning down the radio as we left the parking lot.

"I have to tell you something."

She looked serious, and I instantly became nervous. *Did she not want to see me anymore? Was I moving too fast?*

Trying to sound calm, I answered, "You can tell me anything, honey."

She looked out the window and back at me nervously. "I think I am falling in love with you."

I felt my body begin to relax instantly. *She loved me? Did she really just say that?*

I pulled my car over to the side of the road. I wanted to tell her exactly what I felt with no distractions. "I love you, too, Rani. I think I fell in love with you the first time I laid eyes on you." I leaned over and gave her a kiss, and to my surprise we both had tears of joy streaming down our cheeks.

Chapter Eleven

Kelly

“Mom, where is my new skirt?”

Wade and I had a date in less than an hour, and I could not find it. It was black and short; I just knew that Wade would love it.

“I have no idea,” she yelled back from the living room. “Check in that pigsty you call a closet! I am sure it’s in there somewhere.”

I rolled my eyes. *Whatever, it wasn’t that bad.*

I opened the closet door and quickly changed my mind. *I guess it could be a little neater.*

I started going through the first mound of clothes. No skirt.

Shit.

“Honey,” she said, nearly scaring the crap out of me. I swear she was part ninja or part cat. She had a way of just popping up without a noise. I hadn’t even known that she’d come into my room.

“Jesus, mom,” I said, slightly irritated. “I’m going to put a bell around your neck, you scared me.”

“You are such a smart ass,” she said, smiling at me. “Now, before you head out with Wade, we need to have a quick family meeting, downstairs.”

I did a quick mental checklist to see what I was busted for this time, and came up with nothing. Obviously, it had been a pretty slow month for mischief.

“Fine,” I replied, reaching for the second pile of clothes. I quickly started flinging shirts, pants, shorts and bras out of the way. “But how long is it going to take? Wade and I are supposed to meet at the theater at seven.”

“It will only take a few minutes.” She bent down and grabbed something black. “Is this what you’re looking for?” she asked, holding up my skirt.

I grabbed it and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “You’re a lifesaver, Mom!”

“Meet us downstairs when you’re done,” she replied, walking out of my room.

“Sure.”

Both of my parents were sitting at the kitchen table with a woman I didn’t recognize when I went downstairs.

Now, who the hell is that?

My dad pointed to a chair. “Sit down, Kelly.”

I did, still staring at the woman.

“Kelly, this is Gina Montgomery,” my father said, nodding in the direction of the woman, “and Gina, this is our daughter, Kelly.”

For the next hour, I listened to Gina tell me something that would change my life forever. Had I known the fate of my future, however, I would have never agreed to it.

Chapter Twelve

Rani

I'd been so caught up with Phil and our new relationship, that I felt slightly guilty when I looked at my caller ID and noticed Kelly's number pop up. It had been a few weeks since we'd talked, and I couldn't wait to catch up. I answered the phone and said with smile. "Hey, girl."

"Hey," replied Kelly, sounding a little down.

"Are you okay? You and Wade haven't broken up again, have you?"

Kelly and Wade have had a roller coaster of a relationship. Most of the time, they were as sweet as ever, but when she was angry, watch out. Her fiery hair matched her demeanor and if she was angry with you, her tongue could cut you like a knife. I always felt lucky to have never been on the other side of her wrath. Poor Wade, on the other hand, has seen it up close and personal more times than I could count.

"No, no, Wade and I are just fine. I was just wondering if you wanted to go and grab a tuna sandwich?"

Phil was working and I wanted to see her badly, so I quickly agreed. "You know I am *never* going to say 'no' to a tuna sandwich. What time do you want to meet?"

"How about half an hour?"

"Works for me."

"Cool," she replied. "I'll see you in a bit."

I reached the cafe before Kelly did, and grabbed a table toward the back. The place was sometimes loud and I wanted to make sure we could actually have a conversation.

Kelly walked in, found me immediately, and made a beeline to the table. As she was approaching, I noticed that something was different about her, but I just couldn't pin-point what it was.

Had she gained weight? Lost weight? New hair color?

We gave each other a quick hug and sat down.

I smiled. "It feels like forever since we've hung out."

"I know, right? So, how are you and Mr. Hotpants doing?" she asked, referring to Phil. "You cash in your 'V' card yet?"

I laughed at her blunt crudeness. "Not yet, you little tramp," I teased. "But I think it might happen, soon."

"I have no idea how you could wait this long. I would have had him naked within minutes of our first date. That man is just *too* yummy."

She was right, he was yummy and it had been hard not ripping off all of his clothes, especially

when we were alone. "Simmer down, Chica," I teased. "You have your own yummy man."

We were still laughing with each other, when suddenly, the mood turned serious.

"What is going on?" I asked, noticing the new troubled look on her face.

She sighed. "Do you remember those piles of dirt that we found at Tyler's house?"

Remember?

Even though I'd been busy with Phil, Tyler and those piles were always at the back of my mind. I still wasn't sure what had happened to him or his parents, and now, I noticed that their house was up for sale.

"Of course I remember," I replied. "Why?"

"I found out what really happened and... I'm afraid you are not going to like what I'm about to tell you."

I felt a little annoyed that Kelly seemed to be holding out the truth on me. "Okay... so what's with the piles of dirt?"

Kelly looked around the cafe, and then leaned in toward me. "Those weren't piles of dirt. They were the ashes of Tyler's mom and dad, and... the tooth that you found belongs to one of them."

I gasped in disbelief. "How do you know that?" I asked, a little louder than intended.

She grabbed my wrist. "Rani, I have something to tell you, and it is something that you can never, I mean *never*, repeat."

My eyes widened.

"I'm serious," she whispered. "I am putting my trust and life into your hands by telling you what I've found out."

Life?

I felt a wave of nausea course through my body. It was like Déjà vu - basically the same conversation I'd had with Tyler over a month ago, before he'd disappeared. If she disappeared, I wasn't sure if I could handle another friend bailing on me.

"What are you talking about?"

Kelly then unloaded her story onto me and I sat in stunned silence for the next fifteen minutes, listening to every word. She explained that a woman named Gina Montgomery had come into her parents' home, changing their world completely.

I sat with my mouth hanging open as she finished her tale.

Eternals? Living forever? Drinking blood? Bodies being turned to ashes? It was too much for me to grasp at one time.

"So, let me get this straight," I said, trying to remain calm. "Some lady showed you a video of a man dying and then coming back to life. Then, told you a bunch of lies about some magic

potion that would make you live forever?

"I know it is hard to believe," Kelly said quietly. "But, it's the God's honest truth, I swear."

I stared at her in horror. "And you actually let someone inject you with something?"

Kelly nodded.

"For fuck's sake, Kelly, she could have injected you with some kind of freakin' horse sperm or something! You don't have any idea what that stuff was she put into your body!"

Kelly looked a little amused at the horse semen comment. "No. I knew what it was and I know that it worked."

"How in the hell do you know if it worked?" I asked incredulously. "And how do you know that the dirt at Tyler's house was really his parents' ashes?"

"Gina told me that Eternals who don't follow the rules are killed. Once they die, their bodies turn to ash."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," I interrupted. "I thought you said that these Eternals never die?"

"There is a serum that was also created that can be used to kill them. If they drink or if it gets in their bloodstream, they will die."

"So you are telling me that the Jacobsons were these Eternal things?"

Kelly shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know for sure, but it makes sense."

"OK, so how do you know for sure that you are one of them, now?" I challenged her.

Kelly swiftly stood up. "Let's go," she said, heading toward the front door.

I stood up and followed her. Once outside I asked where we were going.

"No more questions for now," she replied, as she remotely unlocked her car.

We drove a short distance to an old swimming hole that had been closed since last summer. A bunch of little kids had ended up with chigger bites, and they'd never reopened it. Kelly parked the car and I followed her onto an old rickety dock that creaked with every step.

"What the hell, Kelly? Why did you bring me here?"

In answer, Kelly started taking off her shorts and T-shirt.

"Are you crazy?" I hollered. "You can't go in there, the water is nasty!"

Standing in her bra and panties, she turned to me. "I have to prove that I am telling you the truth."

"Fine, fine, fine" I said quickly. "I believe you, just get dressed and let's get outta here." I then turned and began walking away when I heard a splash in the water.

Kelly had jumped in!

Shocked, I ran to the end of the dock trying to see where she went, because she hadn't come

back up. I got down on my belly to try and get a good look in the water, but it was so full of algae that I could not see a damn thing.

Dammit, Kelly! Your crazy stunt is the last thing I need right now.

I knew that she was a good swimmer so I sat up and counted to sixty, watching for her head to pop out of the water. But, sixty came and went, and there was no sign of Kelly.

Oh, my God! Where is she?

Crap!

Okay, calm down...

I counted to sixty again in my head as my hands began to shake. I was so frightened that something had gone terribly wrong, and Kelly was in real danger.

“Kelly!” I screamed.

Still nothing.

I could not wait any longer; she had been in the water too long. I kicked off my shoes and jumped into the nasty, green chigger-filled lake.

ARRRGGGHHH!!!

The water was so cold that it felt like a million pins poking me all at once. The algae from the lake was already clinging to my skin and clothes.

Gross! I am seriously going to kick her ass when I find her!

I inhaled deeply, held my breath, and submerged myself underneath the water. It was at the most, four feet deep, but so murky that it made it impossible to see anything.

I came up for air and dove back down again, for the second time. I opened my eyes, but the algae made it impossible for me to see more than two inches in front of my face.

Dammit, she has to be here somewhere.

I swam a little further out, and still could not find her.

By my third attempt, I was becoming increasingly tired. With a deep breath, I took another pass by the dock, and I was just about to come up for air, when I felt something grab my foot. I opened my mouth to scream, and instantly I was choking on nasty lake water. I sputtered and kicked to the top.

What the hell was that?

I figured it had to be Kelly playing a stupid trick on me.

Forget her! I am going back up to the dock.

I pulled myself back up onto the dock and waited for her to resurface. From where I stood, I had a bird's-eye view of the lake, and would be able to see her when she came up.

I grabbed my phone and checked the time. I figured that I would give her another minute

before I left without her; I was starting to get cold and stunk like nasty ass lake water.

The water was calm, and I did not see any ripples of movement. I grabbed my phone once again and to my surprise, three minutes had passed.

Maybe she wasn't joking and she really needed my help? I figured that if she was just goofing around, she would have already surfaced. Besides, there was no way anyone could stay under that long.

Frightened, I jumped back into the water and quickly swam to the spot where I thought I felt something grab my leg. I went underwater a little further until I bumped into something soft.

Kelly!

I opened my eyes, and to my surprise, I could make out her face and she was smiling at me. Looking closer, I noticed that she was holding onto some kind of seaweed.

I scowled and jerked my thumb upwards.

Kelly looked at me and shook her head.

WTF, Kelly!?

I was running out of air and had to resurface. My body was now shaking from both the cold and the fear I felt.

How in the hell is she doing that?

I took another breath and swam back down to her. She was in the same spot, just as calm as could be, smiling and waving. I tried pulling her up as hard as I could, but she wouldn't budge. Her grip was tight around the weeds, and I was weak. I gave up and swam to the surface. Seconds later, she did, too.

"Believe me now?" she hollered, as I stood up on the shore.

"Just come to shore," I replied, feeling defeated. I was tired and my mind was spinning.

Kelly swam to shore and saddled up next to me. To my surprise she wasn't even out of breath.

"So, do you want more proof?" she asked seriously.

"No." Obviously, if she could stay under water for that length of time, then she *had* changed.

Kelly smelled her arm and grimaced. "Let's get out of here, we smell like ass." Then she walked back to the dock and grabbed her clothes.

The drive back to the cafe was a quiet one. I needed time to absorb what I had just witnessed. *So what she'd told me was the truth? That there really are things out there called Eternals that could live forever?*

It sounded crazy but what other explanation was there?

Kelly parked her car in an empty spot and then shut off the engine.

"Why?" I asked

Kelly looked perplexed. “Why, what?”

“Why did you become one of them? How could you even consider killing another human being, just so you could live forever?”

Kelly took her time in answering. “I don't see it as me killing someone in order to live. In fact, I believe that the people who are not chosen to become an Eternal will be serving their own special purpose. It's kind of like that scene from the Lion King, you know the circle of life.”

“Circle of life, my ass!” I barked. “You made a choice to become a cold-blooded killer, and I think it is disgusting, selfish, and wrong!” I started to unlock the door to get out when Kelly grabbed me by the arm.

“Rani,” she said fearfully. “You cannot tell a soul what I've told you. If you do, not only will they kill me, but, they will kill you, too.”

I shook her hand off of me, now unable to look at my former best friend in the face. As far I as I was concerned, I would *never* be able to look at her the same. She'd made a decision that I couldn't understand, and would never be able to forgive. “Don't worry - your dirty little secret is safe with me,” I hesitated and then said under my breath, “for now.”

I left her and walked home, feeling as if I had the weight of the world on my shoulders. All I wanted to do was go home, get into a hot bubble bath, and pretend that this day never happened.

When I opened the front door of my house and was about to head upstairs, I heard strange grunting noises coming from the living room.

Oh my God! My parents better not to be doing it in there! I'd walked in on them once when I was ten, and knew that just seeing my dad's naked ass had already scarred me for life. It was a horrifying experience, one that was now forever etched in my mind. I felt myself shudder at memory.

Disgusted, I walked back to the front door, opened it and then closed it loudly, hoping they'd hear it.

Thankfully, it must have done the trick, because the moaning and weird noises stopped. As I was about to head upstairs, my mom called me into the living room.

I groaned. “Can it wait, Mom?” I didn't feel like explaining why I was covered in green muck and smelled like rotten fish.

“No, it *can't* wait, come in here now.”

“Fine, I'm coming.” I slowly walked to the living room, picking as much of the dried up green crud as I could. When I stepped inside, I was surprised to see that my parents had a visitor. A stranger.

Oh crap, she must be selling something. As usual, my parents were the one couple in the neighborhood who just couldn't say “no.”

“Oh, my goodness, what in the world happened to you?” mom asked while eyeing me from head-to-toe.

My dad looked around. "What is that smell?"

I smiled innocently. "I dunno, maybe the sewer is backed up again?"

"Rani," said my mom, who was now standing right in front of me. "*What* happened to you?"

"Kelly and I were just goofing around by the old swimming hole, and I fell in, no big deal," I said as nonchalantly as I could.

"You girls. *Always* getting into mischief. Well, I don't like it," replied my dad, still trying to figure out where the horrible smell was coming from.

"Geez, Dad, it was an accident." I was totally embarrassed that my parents were treating me like a child in front of a complete stranger.

The woman cleared her throat.

"Oh, my heavens," said my mother, looking quite embarrassed. "I am so sorry for this."

The woman laughed. "It is not a problem, Mrs. Vass."

"I'll be right back," she replied. She then left the living room for a moment and returned with a towel from the closet, spreading it on the couch. "Here, Rani," she said, smoothing it down. "Sit here."

I sat down and stared at the woman, curious as to why she was in our living room and what exactly she was selling.

"Oh, my stars, I guess my manners have completely gone out the window today," said my mom, looking uncomfortably nervous. "This is our daughter, Rani, and Rani... this is Gina Montgomery."

I could feel the blood drain immediately from my face and it felt like the walls were closing in on me. *Gina Montgomery? That was the same name as the lady who went over to Kelly's house! What the hell was she doing here?*

I stood up and could feel the rage coursing through me. I faced my parents. "What the fuck is she doing here?" I yelled

My parents looked at me both wearing the same stunned expression, not saying a word.

"I said, what the FUCK is she doing here?" I whipped around and faced Gina. "GET OUT! NOW!"

Gina also looked a little surprise by my outburst. "Rani, I just want to talk to you," she said in a calm and soothing voice.

"I know what you are, and I want you to get the FUCK outta my house!" I snapped, shoving her toward the front door. "There is no way my parents, or myself, would ever agree to become a monster like you!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Vass," huffed Gina, as I pushed her closer and closer to the door.

"You just leave them alone!" I snarled, giving her a final push to the door.

“Rani!” hollered my father, rushing toward us, “That’s enough! I didn’t raise you this way!”

My eyes filled with tears. “But Dad, you don’t know what she is! She’s a... she’s a monster!”

He grabbed me and pulled me into his arms. “Just sit down and hear Gina out,” he whispered. “I promise you’ll like what she has to say.”

A chill suddenly passed through me; I pushed away from my dad. “Oh, my God! Did you already do it?”

He didn’t respond.

I stared at both of them in horror. Dad had a pained expression and my mother was crying. She lowered her head, unable to meet my eyes. It was obvious that they’d fallen for the same bullshit that Kelly had.

I closed my eyes and shook my head; my world seemed to be crashing in around me.

How could they do this?

The fact that they’d agreed to this made my heart ache. Apparently, I didn’t know my parents at all.

It became too much, and I knew that I had to get out of there, and quickly. I backed up and turned around, running as fast as I could out of our front door.

“Rani! Please come back, baby!” I heard my mother sob out as I raced down the driveway.

I ignored her and ran and ran, until my lungs felt like they were on fire. When my side hurt and I couldn’t do it anymore, I hid behind a car that was parked on a deserted street to try and catch my breath. Then I pulled my cell phone out.

Several missed calls already from both my mom and dad.

I began to cry. *How could my parents do this to me? Why would they choose to become one of those things?*

Overwhelmed with emotions, I sat behind the car until it started to get dark, ignoring the dozens of calls from my parents, along with the numerous voice messages.

What am I going to do? Where am I going to go?

Just then, my cell phone buzzed again.

Christ, just leave me alone!

I glanced at the caller ID.

Phil. Thank God! I swiped my fingers across the phone and answered.

“Hey, sweetie,” Phil said before I could say hello. The sound of his voice sounded like a chorus of angels to my ears.

“Hi, babe,” I whispered.

“Why are you whispering? You ok?” he asked, sounding concerned.

I decided that I needed to tell someone what was going on. I was afraid and not sure if I could handle this on my own. “No, actually, I am *not* all right.”

“What's wrong? Where are you?”

I sighed. “I am not exactly sure *where* I am.”

“What do you mean? Rani, you are really starting to scare me! Where are you?”

I stood up to try and read a street sign or something. Our neighborhood has grown so much over the years that new streets seem to pop up every day.

“Um... I am not exactly sure, hang on just a sec.” I carefully ran toward the end of the street where a sign was posted. “Okay, I’m on the corner of Elm and First.”

“Stay there. I will be there in 10 minutes.”

“Okay.”

I hung up and sat behind another parked car, realizing that I still had lake goo all over me.

Oh great, the man of my dreams is going to see me covered in green slime and smelling like dead fish.

Several minutes later, I recognized the headlights that were approaching. I jumped up and waved Phil down.

He saw me, pulled up to where I was standing, and I got into his car.

“What happened to you?” he asked, looking me up and down.

“Long story. Can we *please* go to your place so I can take a shower?”

Phil put the car in gear and we headed in the direction of his condo. “So, you going to tell me what is going on?”

I slunk deeper into the seat, mentally exhausted. The day’s events slammed into me, all at once, like a million bricks. My parents. Kelly and the lake. Gina. The Eternals. It was just too much. “Can we talk later? I just need to rest my eyes for a minute.”

“Of course.”

I closed my eyes and let the motion of the car lull me to sleep.

Rani

I woke up in a panic.

Where was I?

I glanced around the candlelit room and immediately relaxed. I was in Phil's living room.

I looked down and noticed that I was no longer wearing my crud-covered clothes and that I was now in a luxurious robe.

What is this, cashmere?

I hugged it closer to my body, loving the way it felt against my skin. Then, when I peeked down the front of the robe, I noticed that I was naked.

“There is my sleeping beauty,” said Phil, walking into the room.

I smiled.

He gave me a kiss on the cheek. “Here, drink this,” he said, handing me a cup of steaming hot cocoa.

I grabbed the mug and took a sip. The chocolate felt wonderful as it slid down my throat and then warmed my insides. “So,” I said, peering at Phil over my mug. “How *exactly* did I end up in this robe?”

Phil cleared his throat and chuckled. “Well, I tried to wake you, but you were out like a light. I hate to say it, but you kind of had a funky odor going on.”

I could feel myself turning red. “You washed me off?”

“Babe, I had to... the smell was making my eyes water.” He gave me a smile that almost made me melt right there and then. “So, do you want to tell me what happened?”

I nodded and nervously began retelling him the horrific events that had transpired. I was so afraid that he would think that I was crazy, or worse... not believe me.

Chapter Thirteen

Phil

I stared at Rani, already aware of what had happened. In fact, I'd received a call earlier in the day from Gina, telling me that Rani's recruitment hadn't gone as planned.

"How did you let her get away?" I'd barked into the phone.

"She surprised us all by taking off so quickly," she'd argued. "She was gone before I could react."

I'd frowned into the phone, trying to quickly think of a way to rectify the situation.

"Phil? Are you still there?" she'd asked.

"Yeah, just... gimme a minute." .

"Sure."

I'd closed my eyes and rubbed the bridge of my nose. "Okay, here is what you're going to do - report to my father and tell him that all three were successful recruits."

"But," Gina had argued, "we can't do that. Your dad will find out. The new serum has some kind of tracking device. Remember?"

"Don't worry. I'll take care of it."

"But how? We have no idea where she went."

"Do as I say and... don't worry about it. I said I would take care of it, and I will."

"I hope so."

I'd only wanted Gina to make the change for the Vass family, so my hands would be clean. I loved Rani so much, that I did not want my identity to sway her decision in any way. I even loved her enough that if she chose not to change, I'd have found a way to keep her alive.

Now, the woman I loved was sitting across from me, looking like a small child wrapped up in my robe, eagerly waiting for me to respond to the story she had just told me.

"Phil, please say something... anything."

I reached over and put her hand in mine.

"I am so sorry that this has happened to you."

"Yeah, well, I'm sorry it happened, too, Phil, but what in the hell am I going to do?"

I felt the syringe in my pocket and knew what I had to do. I just prayed that someday she would realize that I did this out of my love for her. There was really no other way.

"Phil?"

My heart was heavy as I looked into her innocent, trusting eyes. I knew there was nothing I could say or do to make her feel better. I also knew that her life, after tonight, would never be the same again. Ever.

Chapter Fourteen

Rani

“Phil, say something,” I begged, “anything.”

He just stared at me.

I stood up and moved closer to him, but felt so dizzy and lightheaded, that I stumbled.

“Take it easy, sweetie,” said Phil, pulling me into his arms. “You have had a really rough day.”

I lay my head on his chest and listened to his heartbeat.

Thump, thump, thump...

The rhythmic sound put me at ease at once.

“I wish you would have stayed,” Phil said as he was stroking my hair.

“Stayed where?” I asked, confused.

“Your house,” said Phil softly. “I wish you would have stayed at your house, and listened to what Gina had to say.”

A chill ran through me. I pushed him away and stared into his eyes. The fear and sadness inside of them made me catch my breath. “What the hell do you mean - I should have stayed? Did you not understand what I said about her? She’s a monster!”

“I know what she is,” Phil said grimly, “because she and I are one in the same.”

I slapped Phil in the face, horrified by what he’d just said.

He was an Eternal? A monster?

I shook my head, not wanting to believe it.

“I am so sorry, Rani,” he whispered, looking defeated.

The next thing I knew, he pulled out what looked like a syringe and quickly plunged it into my arm.

“No!” I hollered, staring at him in horror. I could feel whatever was inside of the syringe, course through my body.

Oh, God, no.

The liquid felt like it was burning me from the inside out. I tried to move my legs and then realized that I was completely paralyzed. It then must have somehow reached my heart, because I could actually feel it begin to slow.

Please, please, this cannot be happening!

Just as my heart was taking its last few beats, I heard him whispering in my ear, “ I am so

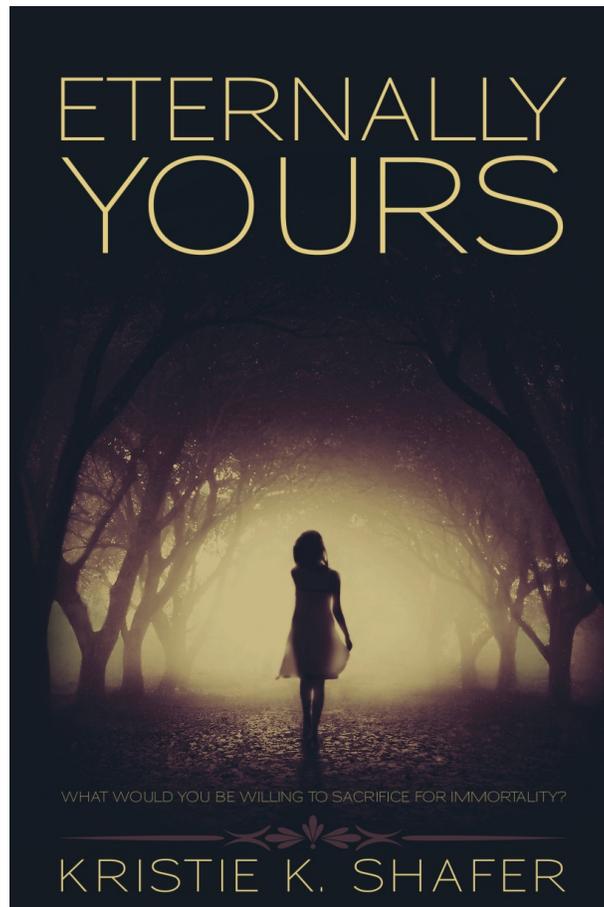
sorry, Rani, I hope you know how much I love you.”

I felt him softly kissing my lips.

Then in an instant... there was nothing.

Nothing except... darkness.

End of Book One



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Authors Note

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my first published story. I truly, truly hope that you enjoyed reading it. If you didn't get into the story, I also respect that and am grateful that you finished it. If you did like the book, I hope that you might consider writing a review, as it helps other readers discover new authors. Again, thank you for taking the time to read The Eternals!

XXOO

Kristie K. Shafer