



MY FAIR MONSTER

MONSTERS IN HOLLYWOOD: BOOK 2

LILA DUBOIS

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My Fair Monster

Lila Dubois

Chapter One

EXT. LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA — DUSK

The fading sunlight FLASHES on the windows of the LA SKYLINE.

A BLACK SPORTS CAR races along the FREEWAY. A BLOND MAN drives the car.

HE is late twenties, with blond hair, blue eyes and a trim, muscular physique. His eyes are hidden behind SUNGLASSES as he drives. His is heartbreakingly handsome, and controls the powerful car with confidence. His mouth is twisted in a grimace.

“If you aren’t out here in two minutes I’m coming in after you.” Cali’s voice was muffled through the closed bathroom door.

“I’m not wearing this,” Jane said, more to herself than her friend who waited in the hall.

“Yes, you are.”

“I look stupid.”

“You look hot,” Cali assured her.

“You haven’t even seen me.”

“Doesn’t matter, don’t need to, you always look hot, you skinny blonde bitch.”

Jane opened the door just enough to flutter her lashes at her friend. “It’s not my fault I have a good metabolism.”

Cali, decked head to toe in black, stuck out her tongue and handed Jane a shot glass. “Here, take this, and hurry the fuck up.”

Jane downed the shot, suppressed a cough and shivered. “Whoa, what the hell was that?”

“Pepper vodka. I’m in love with the owner of one of those Russian restaurants on Santa Monica. Too bad he’s married with kids. Kinda reminds me of the guy from *Eastern Promises*.”

“Viggo?”

“No, the old guy.”

“The homicidal rapist. Lovely. You have such good taste.”

“At least I’m looking, Virgin Mary. Now, one more time, hurry the fuck up.”

Jane pulled the door shut in Cali’s face. With a resigned sigh she picked up liquid black eyeliner and went to work. She outlined her eyes, except the inside corners, and then used a blunt brush to smudge it out. She smeared burgundy powder into the creases of her eyes and then tapped green sparkle eye shadow along her lash line. Pink blush, heavy on the apples of her cheeks, and high-gloss cherry red lipstick finished her face.

Jane stepped back to examine the effect. They were headed out to Sinister in Hollywood, an alternative and Goth club complete with an S&M lounge. By all rights Jane was the last person in the world who should be in a Goth club. Blonde and blue-eyed with a pretty face, she looked, and acted, like the girl next door.

But on this Saturday night, she had put up very little fight when her friends had handed her an outfit. As much as she might look like the girl next door, she was anything but. Screenwriting was a job many dreamed of and few ever realized, but at the ripe old age of twenty-seven Jane had already seen two of her movies go to the screen. Years in Hollywood had turned the girl next door into the girl next door who would do anything, try anything, at least once.

She tucked her lipstick into the rockabilly cherry-studded clutch and exited the bathroom. The girls were clustered in the kitchen, spots of cheap black amid the elegant Spanish revival décor.

“Well, don’t we look ridiculous?” Jane said as she passed Cali her empty shot glass.

“We look hot. Goth hot,” Akta said, reaching up to fluff her ear-length black bob. Akta would no more have chopped off her long hair than she would amputate her feet. The hair was a wig, and when she turned her head Jane saw chunky pink stripes built into the left side. The others, Margo and Lena, were equally decked out in various Goth and alternative wear.

Margo was rocking punk in a ripped White Stripes tee, skinny jeans, fishnet gloves and thick-framed black glasses that she didn’t need, while Cali wore more “traditional” head-to-toe black with plenty of boob. Akta’s wig crowned a Gothic schoolgirl look, complete with pink and black plaid skirt. Lena and Jane both wore short-skirted dresses, puffed out with black netting, and fishnets. Lena had a short red cape draped over her front-lace dress and her hair was pulled into pigtails. Jane wore her hair in loose curls with a black headband. Her dress was tailored with a square neckline and blue edging. Fitted sleeves came all the way down over her hands, ending in loops over her fingers.

“Okay, Jane, you and Lena get together for a picture.”

Jane slid her arm around her best friend’s waist and subtly rolled her eyes. Lena smiled and then pressed her cheek to Jane’s for the picture.

“Why are they dressed up like slutty Goth fairy tale characters?” Margo asked Akta. Lena’s and Jane’s outfits had been Akta’s idea.

“Aren’t they darling?” Akta said, examining the picture she just took.

“Darling isn’t the word I’d use. They look like employees from some alternative Disneyland where the ‘rides’ are Whorey Red Riding Hood and Slutty Sleeping Beauty.”

“I think they’re cute. I have a friend working on a line of mainstream alternative clothing. She’s all about subversive-princess culture,” Akta defended.

“If it’s mainstream, it is, by definition, no longer alternative.”

“Whatever.” Akta dismissed that with a wave of her hand and tucked her camera into a pouch attached to her skirt. “They’re hot. I offered to get you a costume. Both of you.”

“No thanks,” Margo said.

“Rather be eaten by a shark,” Cali added.

“Enough you three,” Lena said, reigning in the mock bitch-slapping session. “Are we going to drink or are we going to be pussies and just stand here talking?”

“Fuck that. Let’s drink.”

Jane leaned on the counter and smiled. She loved her friends—they were her family of choice. There was something special, magical, about leaving home and building relationships with people that were strong enough to support you, creating a family of your own. When it was just the five of them they reveled in the language and mannerism of sailors, which allowed them to become the thick-skinned professional women they were to the outside world.

The five of them had been friends since college. They pushed each other, supported each other and most of all were always there for one another. None of them had had a relationship with a man that had lasted as long as this five-way friendship. But she had a feeling that was going to change.

Lena laughed and tossed her head, pigtails swishing. Jane felt a little pang as she looked at her friend. She was happy that Lena had found love, but it was hard not to be a bit jealous, and impractical to be unafraid of the changes that would bring.

Lena’d done the impossible and found love in the heathen hell of LA’s dating scene. But there was one, rather daunting, flaw in Lena’s man.

“Party time. Let’s go,” Lena commanded, and away they went in a cloud of perfume and a sea of Goth wear.

They took a taxi down from the Hills, where Akta’s house was, to Hollywood Boulevard. The cabbie was not happy with four in the back and one up front, but Cali got in his face, and off they went. The cab dropped them off in front of Sinister where they bypassed the long line of black-clad club goers and made their way up the little alley to the bouncer station. They

probably could have just walked up, and then walked in, based on Akta's celebrity status, but someone, probably Lena, had called ahead. There wasn't a club in the city that didn't want the five of them in it. They were far from being Hollywood royalty, but they were up-and-comers and had been called "ones to watch".

The bouncer didn't bat a lash at their outfits, held their IDs under the light and snapped their wristbands in place. A low thump of music sounded from the club, while a murmur of voices echoed from the back patio. Akta was already dancing in place as she waited for the rest of them to finish being checked.

Jane was last, and, on instinct, flashed a friendly smile at the bouncer, who returned the smile with a cold stare. She swallowed the smile, snatched her ID back and joined her friends. The instinct to be friendly, to smile at everyone and take time to ask about their day, was her Midwestern upbringing rising to the surface.

"Ladies." Lena raised her voice to be heard above the noise poring out of the club's doors. "Are you ready to drink, dance and watch kinky performances?"

"All we're going to do is watch?" Margo asked, her highly glossed lower lip poking out in a mock pout. With Margo and Akta in the lead they pushed their way inside.

As the music hit her, Jane's fingertips began to tingle. A smile pulled up her lips, and this one was oh-so different than the friendly Midwest smile she'd thrown at the bartender. This was the smile of a woman who knew things, could do things, that haunted men's dreams. It was the smile of a woman who could slip between worlds and create realities.

"Fair Snow White, you've enchanted me. Let's dance."

The somewhat-original pickup line grabbed Jane's attention. Her admirer was dressed in a floor-length leather coat, pants and boots. His bare chest was hairless, smooth and muscled.

"She's Sleeping Beauty, moron, and she's mine," Lena sneered at the man and cupped Jane's boob in one hand. He looked Lena up and down, then stared at the pair of them, his fantasy of being in bed with both of them clear in his eyes.

"Buh-bye now," Lena said pointedly, turning Jane away from the man.

Slightly put out by Lena's interference, Jane reached over and pinched Lena's boob.

"Ow," Lena gripped. "What was that for?"

"First of all, you grabbed mine. Second, what's up with the cock-block? A dance wouldn't have hurt me."

"With you, dancing is dangerous. Besides, you don't want that guy."

They moved to the main bar, which was flanked by red drapes that dangled from the two-story ceiling. Aerial dancers, each in skintight suits, dangled and danced in the drapes.

"You see something you like?" Margo asked as Jane slid up beside her.

“Maybe, but Lena pulled a lesbian act and scared him away.”

“Hmmm.” Margo fished the cherry out of her drink and popped it into her mouth.

“Margo...what’s going on? You hate cock-blocking. You almost decked Cali last time she tried it with you.”

Margo looked at Jane, raised her eyebrows and then turned away.

All the hairs on Jane’s neck stood on end.

“What’s going on? Cali? Akta?” They ignored her.

Turning on her best friend, Jane grabbed Lena’s pigtails. Lena’s attention was on the entrance door so she yelped and jumped when Jane used the pigtails like handles.

“What’d you do?” Jane demanded.

“What are you talking about?”

“You’re up to something. The three musketeers over there are acting fishy and you cock-blocked me after saying for months that I need to get laid.”

“You’re very suspicious. I read somewhere that all writers are paranoid. Maybe you should see that doctor in Beverly Hills about a medical marijuana prescription, to help your stress level.”

“First of all I can get my own drugs without some lame doctor, if I wanted them, which I don’t. Second of all, I see through your pale attempt at deflection. I’m asking you again.” Jane tightened her hold on the pigtails. “What did you do?”

“Nothing!”

“Oh my God you set me up on a blind date. Was there a roofie in that shot?”

“No, but that’s a good idea for next time.”

“Lena!”

“Oh calm down! I’m joking, besides, who needs GHB when there’s a good DJ?”

“Quit distracting me. What’d you do?”

“Nothing.”

“Fine, then I’m going to go dance with that guy.”

Lena hesitated long enough for Jane’s friends-with-stupid-plan detector to shoot into red, before Lena said, “Dance with him if you want. I just think you could do better.”

Jane pulled her friend's face close until they were nose-to-nose. "I know where you sleep."

With that ominously vague threat, Jane left the bar, heading for the dance floor. She stopped on the edge, intending to search for coat guy, but a new song started up. It was rich, with a pulsing back beat. The dancers stopped their wild solo gyrations and came together, the music demanding skin-to-skin contact.

The tingling was back in her fingers, the music pressing into her skin, demanding her recognition, her service. Jane stepped onto the dance floor, and started to move.

Lifting her arms above her head, Jane slide one hand along the fabric casing her limb, wishing it were bare so she could feel the contact. She whirled, planting her feet on the downbeat and throwing her head back.

Something brushed against her back, breaking the rhythm of her dance, but when Jane opened her eyes there was no one close enough to touch her. Like her, the others on the dance floor were lost in the song, touched by music as well crafted as a symphony.

Jane halfheartedly glanced around for coat guy, but gave up when the next hard beat sounded. She bumped her hip to the side and slid her hands over her own breasts, down her belly, to the bare skin of her thighs. She bent, waiting, poised, for the beat to give her a signal. When the music spoke to her Jane snapped up.

Her back slapped into something. Someone.

Hands covered hers, urging her to retrace the path over her breasts to her belly, then hips. He pulled, forcing her ass back against him.

Then they moved as one. Rather than a crude thrusting back and forth—a pale imitation of missionary sex—their duel dancing was rhythmic and subtle, hips moving to the beat. Jane freed her hands from beneath his, needing more. Her fingertips brushed a face, and then his hands captured hers, fingers tight around her wrists, pulling her arms up and back, until they were trapped behind his neck. He held both her wrists in one large hand.

Jane gasped as the position stretched her up, until she danced on her toes. Her breasts lifted, and her partner took full advantage, cupping one breast through her dress. He touched her, fondled her, controlled her.

Jane shuddered and moaned. She turned to look at him, but her arms acted like blinders. She tried to speak but her mouth was dry.

"Just dance."

She barely heard the words over the music and the rush of blood in her ears. Had she even heard it? Or was the baritone command a figment of her imagination?

His hand left her breast, which both relieved and disappointed her, until it dropped to her bare thigh and headed north, slipping beneath her short skirt to curl around her hip, fingertips brushing the fabric of her thong.

His touch made her aware of her own wetness, and in that moment she wanted nothing more than for him, whoever he was, to touch her, right now. She wanted his finger inside her, long and hard and thick, in one powerful thrust.

The music stopped.

Sound had not stopped pumping from the speakers, no DJ was that stupid, but the song had changed. This new offering was frenzied, with a screaming singer, and too much techno overlay.

Jane snapped from her dance-induced lust-haze. She jerked her arms free of his hold and the man's hot, rough hand slid away from her thong.

"I knew you loved to...dance." The voice was low, rich and...familiar.

Jane whirled, but there was no one behind her. She scanned the dance floor, but the black-clad, eyeliner-laden throng was thrashing about in the pulsing lights like fish out of water and she couldn't pinpoint any possible suspects.

She ran to her friends.

"Did you see him?"

"Who?"

"Don't play dumb! I know you were all watching. Did you see him?"

"Whoa girl," Margo admonished, holding up her hand to hold a panicking Jane off. "We saw you dancing. It looked like you were having fun."

"I was, well sort of. I shouldn't have done that. I hate dancing."

"You love dancing."

"No, I don't."

"Correction. You don't like being vulnerable, and when you dance you drop all your walls. You like dancing."

"Could we *please* not psychoanalyze me in a club when we're all half-way to shit-faced?"

Akta turned from the longhaired cyberpunk she was chatting with and said, "We do some of our best analysis when we drink."

Jane waved her hand in the air, narrowly missing Margo's face. "Not the point! I want to know if you saw the guy. Which way did he go?"

Margo, staring in alarm at Jane's hand said, "He headed upstairs."

"What did he look like?"

“I couldn’t tell,” Margo said, not meeting her eyes.

“Useless! I hope you’re never a witness to a murder. You’d be crap at identifying the killer.”

“This guy really has you spooked, doesn’t he?” Margo leaned in and grabbed Jane’s face, Jane’s lips pooching up like those a fish between Margo’s fingers. “I guess she was right.”

“She who?” Jane mumbled.

“Never mind. Here, take this.” She handed Jane a shot glass. “Knock that back, then go find your true love.”

“Fuck that.” Jane downed the shot.

“So you’re just going to fuck him?”

“No, yes, maybe. I don’t know. I just need to find him. He said something, like he knew me.”

“He did?” Margo’s eyebrows went up. “Hmmm, interesting.”

“Interesting? I hate that word. That’s a bullshit critiquing word. What do you mean? What are you talking about?”

“Jane! You are killing my game and freaking me out. Take this—” Margo handed her a glass filled with clear liquid, “—and go.”

Vodka-something in hand, Jane once more abandoned the bar, heading for the iron staircase that led to the loft-style second floor. Half-way up she heard a sharp *crack* and remembered what took place up there.

She stopped, both feet firmly planted on the step. The upstairs was an S&M lounge, with professional BDSM players performing. She turned back, prepared to leave. Her gaze skimmed the dance floor and she remembered the feel of his body at her back, his words in her ear. No, she had to find him.

Taking a healthy gulp of her drink, which turned out to be vodka on the rocks, Jane started up again.

A tiny brunette, wearing black panties and Xs of electrical tape across her nipples, was strapped to a cross. The man wielding the whip wore gray slacks with a matching vest, the jacket to his suit slung across a gymnastic’s horse. He flicked the whip, almost casually, and the brunette whimpered, writhing in her bindings.

I can’t watch this.

Jane turned to leave, her fear of what she saw cooling the fire alcohol and dance had lit in her veins.

Strong arms came around her, pulled her away from the stairs, into an alcove. He pressed her to the wall, holding her there with his body.

“Are you ready to wake up, Sleeping Beauty?”

“Who are you?” It was dark in the alcove, so though they pressed together knee to chest she couldn’t see him.

“I’m not the prince,” he whispered, his mysterious words flowing over her face in a puff of hot breath.

Warm lips sealed over hers, and everything went still.

Jane could feel the pulse of music through the wall at her back, but it was soundless, music felt rather than heard. His hand stroked her shoulder, sliding down to cup her elbow, lifting her arm and settling it across his shoulders.

She remained passive in his arms only a moment longer, because when she felt the breadth and heat of his shoulders under her arm, Jane snapped. She grabbed a hank of hair with her free hand and pulled his head down, hard, savaging him with a kiss. She sucked his lower lip into her mouth and bit it.

Her nails pressed into a shoulder protected by leather and she growled her frustration. He cupped her breast, thumb rubbing back and forth over her nipple, over the dress. Jane released his lower lip. She opened her eyes, but there were only maroon shadows as the alcove was guarded by drapes that blocked what little light existed.

His lips dropped to her neck, kissing the place behind her ear and Jane whispered, “Who are you?”

“I’m not the prince,” he murmured again, dragging his lips across her cheek.

“Please tell me. Who are you?” Jane pleaded.

“I can’t tell you, you might run away.”

“Why would I run away? Do I know you?”

“Answer my question first.” Their lips sealed together in a kiss that ignited fire in Jane’s blood even as she shivered from the power of it. “Are you ready to wake up, Sleeping Beauty?”

Then he was gone. Cold air brushed over Jane, cooling skin that had known the heat of her mysterious partner’s body. She opened her eyes to see the alcove’s drapes swishing softly, but he was gone.

He could feel her heart beating in her chest where it pressed to his. He could hear the thumping, even with human ears. If he’d been in his true form he would have been able to see the pulsing vein in her neck, even in the twilight dark.

Michael pressed Jane more firmly into the wall, groaning in delight as her breath washed over his neck, even that touch enough to have his heart skipping a beat.

He wanted this woman, wanted her so bad he felt he was haunted by her, both waking and sleeping. In his dreams she was beneath him, on top of him, laid out on a bed awaiting his pleasure. Her humanity was not an issue. His clan, among all those who called themselves monster, respected and cared for humans. That's why he'd come with Luke on what had seemed to be a desperate mission.

Humanity's opinion of monsters was marked in the history of both species. For a hundred generations monsters had been in hiding, no longer able to protect themselves from man's developing weapons and exploding numbers. And now the world was shrinking, humanity encroaching ever closer on their race.

A confrontation was imminent. What few battles had already taken place between monsters and humans ended in tragedy and horror. Some monsters suggested mass suicide, others wanted to fight. Both possibilities would end with heavy casualties.

Luke had a different idea. He was convinced humans could be reasoned with—that they could overcome their own myths and learn to see the monsters in a different way. Michael was skeptical, but willing to give it a try. He considered himself something of an expert on humans, having grown up with tales of human encounters.

He hadn't expected Jane.

This sweet, beautiful human fascinated him. She was quiet and strong, beautiful in a comfortable way. Though she was open and caring, he was, after careful study, convinced that there was a sex goddess hiding within that sweet shell.

Luke said it was wishful thinking on Michael's part. Henry, the third monster who'd come to LA on the mission, said Michael imagined her to be a closet sex maniac because that's what he liked in females.

"Who are you?" Her breathy question broke the stasis that held them and snapped Michael back from the sensual haze he'd sunk into.

"I'm not the prince," he said in reply, kissing her cheek.

"Please tell me. Who are you?" Jane pleaded. He almost broke, almost told her, but this plan of attack had been carefully orchestrated. She was too complicated for the straightforward approach, that tactic had already failed.

"I can't tell you, you might run away," he murmured against the corner of her mouth.

"Why would I run away? Do I know you?"

"Answer my question first." He sealed their lips together in a kiss that ignited fire in his blood. "Are you ready to wake up, Sleeping Beauty?"

With a final glance at her upturned face—eyes closed, lips swollen and red from his kiss—he slipped away.

Chapter Two

Jane stretched out on the lawn chair occupying her postage-stamp-size balcony. Her view was less than inspiring, as her apartment building faced another nearly identical building, but there was a nice tree that drooped towards her balcony. In the spring and summer, leaves filtered the sunlight so that her whole balcony turned soft gold green.

Jane had her laptop with her, but it was closed. She'd told herself she was going to do work, told herself she needed to work on the backstory for their as-yet untitled "Monster Movie". Ignoring the pending work, Jane tilted her head back against the chaise—gently, as there was the faintest hint of a hangover headache buzzing around her temples. Chugging aspirin with a gallon of water the moment she woke up had prevented the worst of it.

It wasn't quiet, few places in LA were, but she'd grown immune to the distant drone of traffic. Comfy in her sweatpants and tank top, Jane settled in for a good Sunday afternoon nap.

Who was he? Jane could still feel his hands on her, still taste his kiss. She'd probably imagined the sense of familiarity, inferring he knew her from his words, when, really, they hadn't revealed any salient details. Whoever he was, she wouldn't have minded getting to know him better. She didn't regret not having a one-night stand. She didn't have the temperament for them. The next morning she always wanted to cuddle, maybe go out for a long lazy breakfast, and get to know the person better. As soon as the guy sensed this, he was out the door, leaving a comic-book-style puff of dust in his wake.

As she slipped towards sleep, breath deepening, Jane trailed her fingertips up and down her breast. The reality of a one-night stand with her mysterious partner would have been disastrous, but that didn't mean she couldn't think about it, fantasize about his hands running over her bare breasts, his mouth on her nipples, then kissing down her stomach to her sex.

Jane sucked her lower lip into her mouth as she slipped her hand inside her tank top to rub her palm over her pebbled nipple.

Was his hair fair or dark? Fair, gold and slightly curled.

His body? Powerful, with lovely, big muscles, especially across his shoulders. She loved shoulders. His skin would be gold, paired to his hair, so that he seemed god-kissed.

His eyes would be piercing blue, and he would look at her, stare into her eyes, when he first thrust his cock into her. Sitting on her balcony, half-asleep, half aroused, Jane sank into a daydream fantasy about her mysterious partner.

“Are you ready to wake up, Sleeping Beauty?” It was him, the man from last night, whispering in her mind.

“I’m scared.”

“Of what?”

“I don’t know, life I guess.”

A warm hand covered her other breast, thumb rolling the nipple. Jane gasped, squeezing her eyes closed. This was a vivid dream. If she opened her eyes it would end. But in her mind’s eyes she could see him, tall and gold, leaning over her, trapping her in place.

“This has been a long time coming, Sleeping Beauty.”

“Stop calling me that.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m not.”

“Sleeping, or beautiful?” There was a hint of amusement in his voice, and she could picture his lips, thin, but not overly so, twisted in a smile.

“Both, either.” She moved restlessly on the chaise and her legs brushed his torso. She arched her back so her breast pushed harder against his hand. “Who are you?” She asked again, but he ignored her question. Instead a painfully soft kiss, so tender that her breath stilled, brushed the corner of her mouth.

“You are beautiful. Oh-so beautiful. And you are sleeping. Or maybe you’re hiding.”

“Hiding what?”

“Passion.”

“I know passion,” Jane protested softly.

“Do you? Or do you know the pale human imitation of true pass—”

“Human?” Jane breathed the word. Suddenly the man she saw in her mind snapped into focus, each eyelash in place, and he was no figment of her imagination. “Michael.”

“Who else?”

Jane opened her eyes and it was no dream. Michael was seated on the chaise, one elbow braced beside her shoulder, the other hand on her breast. He smiled down at her, and angels started to sing as pink puffy clouds enveloped them. He was the most beautiful man in the—

But he wasn’t a man.

The pink puffy clouds evaporated.

“I should...um...get up,” Jane said.

“Who did you think it was?” Michael demanded, his fingers kneading her breast.

“I didn’t know who it was. That’s why I kept asking.”

“Jane.” Michael pressed his hips to hers, refocusing her wandering attention, using her name now that his identity was revealed. “Are you truly surprised? Don’t you know how much I want you?”

He shifted to lie beside her on the chaise, his big body crowding hers. Michael’s erection pressed into her hip and Jane swallowed a whimper. Was she surprised? No, not really. She’d known, on some level, that it was Michael. Since Luke, Michel and Henry had entered their lives, Michael hadn’t kept his interest in her a secret. A month ago, after Lena was attacked, Michael had appointed himself her guardian. His interest in her was no secret, though Jane did everything in her power to avoid discussing it with her friends.

“Jane.” His voice slid over her, raising the fine hairs on her neck. “I want you. Do you understand that?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know what I want to do with you, to you?”

Tell me, tell me please. And use details. “Michael, we shouldn’t do this.”

“Why? Why do you push me away? There is no human man in your life.”

“Michael, I can’t have this conversation with you right now.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m...” *horny* “...tired.”

“You’ve been avoiding me.”

“Of course I have.” *Woops, hadn’t meant to say that out loud.*

“Why?”

“Michael...let me go.”

To her surprise he sat up, then stood. Jane crossed her arms over her chest, unbearably cold without his warm body pressed to hers. She looked up at him.

He was dressed head to toe in black, his clothing a foil for his tan skin and blond hair. Muscles roped his shoulders and arms, his flat belly hugged by the plain T-shirt he wore.

He was perfection, physically beautiful to the point that looking at him caused her body to heat. Jane hadn't believed that she could, or would, react to physically beautiful men, but that was before Michael. She wanted him naked, wanted the weight of his muscles on her, his gold skin rubbing hers.

She looked up, and his blue eyes caught hers. They were like sapphires, bright and stunning. She was caught by those eyes, caught by her own desire, and though she told herself to go, she could not turn away.

"Michael," she breathed.

His lids lowered from a moment, breaking the spell. What was she doing? She needed to leave.

She stood and turned to go, but Michael touched her hand. It was just the brush of his fingers over hers, with no grabbing or pulling. She turned back and there was something in his eyes she couldn't understand.

"Michael, I—"

"I don't understand you."

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to send mixed signals."

"Your power is in words, mine is not. Let me show you. Let me touch you."

He promised dark and delicious things with his gaze, but the darkness, the intensity, scared her.

Remembering she was braless Jane crossed her arms. "I'm just not comfortable talking about this."

"Another time."

"That would be—"

"Have breakfast with me tomorrow."

"I can't, I have plans."

"Then it will have to be dinner tonight. You'll meet me at my place at eight p.m."

"I—you... Where did you learn to do that?"

"Read it in a magazine," he said with a grin.

Jane returned the smile, enchanted despite her misgivings.

"Dinner tonight?" he confirmed.

“Yes, dinner tonight at your place.” Dinner at his place sounded safe, after all, Henry was living there too. Henry and Michael were living in a condo in one of Cali’s father’s buildings. She could use the opportunity to talk with both of them about their culture—monster culture. It was a research trip, not a date.

“Then I’ll see you tonight.” Michael smiled, placed one hand on the balcony rail, and vaulted over.

Jane yelped, leapt over the chaise and leaned over the railing, looking for his broken body. He wasn’t there. No body, no squished flowers in the planter below. Nothing.

Where did he go? Jane pressed her hand against her chest and took several deep breaths. Her heart was racing, body shaking with adrenaline. What had just happened?

Why had he jumped over? Just to impress her? Would it have been easier for him to leave the way he arrived?

Wait a minute...

How had he arrived?

Jane sat on the chaise and put her head in her hands. It hadn’t, until that moment, occurred to her to question how he’d appeared at her side. Had that voice she’d heard in her head been part of her dream? Had she even been dreaming?

Letting out a frustrated sigh Jane grabbed her laptop and opened the document with her running list of “Monster Questions”. At the bottom of page three she added “Telepathy?” and “Invisibility?”.

She would definitely be at dinner, if only to ask Michael how he’d done that while claiming to have a “human” body. Filled with determination, she turned and marched into the apartment, heading for her closet to find the perfect non-date outfit.

Chapter Three

EXT. LOS ANGELES — DOWNTOWN

The BLACK SPORTS CAR weaves through the streets of downtown. It passes HIGH-END RESTAURANTS and CAFÉS.

As it passes a CAFÉ a MAN sitting outside at a CAFÉ TABLE looks up from his BOOK. He watches the car until it turns a corner.

“Did it work?”

“I think so.” Michael dropped onto the couch beside Henry and propped one foot on the coffee table.

“You went for mysterious, right?” Henry asked, gaze on the baseball game being played out on the plasma-screen TV on the wall opposite the couch.

“Yea. Direct sure as hell didn’t work.”

“What about that ‘absence makes the heart grown fonder’ one?”

Michael picked up the article titled “How To Get The Girl” he’d ripped from a men’s magazine. He was a great believer in strategy with regard to seducing females. Though mating rituals for humans were turning out to be far more complicated, and intriguing, than he’d expected.

“It says you have to distance yourself from that person. We see her at least once a week to work on the movie. How the hell would I do that?”

Henry grunted.

A pop fly caught Michael’s attention and they watched the next few moments of the game in silence. When a beer commercial came on, Michael turned back to Henry.

“Why are you being so quiet about this?” Michael said.

“What do you mean?” Henry asked, watching the commercial with more attention than it deserved.

“You were against Luke having sex with Lena, and now you’re sending out bad juju about me and Jane.”

“Bad juju? What have you be watching?”

“Network TV.”

“I’m not sending out bad *juju*. I’ve already voiced my concerns and you and Luke ignored me.”

“We didn’t ignore you. Look at Luke. He’s happy with Lena.”

“But Luke is far less demanding, especially in sex, than you are.”

Michael pushed himself off the couch and went to stand at the window, arms crossed over his chest. “You think I’ll frighten Jane.”

“I think she’s already frightened.”

“Who told you that?”

“Is it true?”

“Maybe, but I know there’s passion in her. You should have seen her on the dance floor. She moved as if her body were not a prison, but a beautiful instrument being played by her soul.”

“Where the hell are you getting this?”

“Oxygen Network.”

“Watch less TV, please. But you need to remember that humans do not think of their bodies as prisons.”

“They should. They’re dreadful, cumbersome things. I hate not having my wings.” Michael rolled his shoulders, which felt uncomfortably naked.

“Even if Jane is this great creature of passion, that doesn’t mean you need to tutor her.”

“What?” Michael turned to look at his friend. The idea that someone would not want to feel, experience, the extreme highs and lows of great sexual passion was beyond him. They, the monsters, had grown to become a fatalistic race, and as far as Michael was concerned this time upon the Earth was meant to be lived to its fullest.

“What if Jane doesn’t want to know passion?”

“Why wouldn’t she?”

“She’s human.”

“I think that I understand humans better than you.”

“A lifetime of listening to old family stories does not make you an expert on humans, An—”

“Stop. I hate that word.”

“Fine. Corrupt Jane. Have your wicked way with her. Then what? Will you mate her as Luke’s done to Lena?”

“Maybe,” Michael said. In reality he was not thinking in those terms. True he wanted sex with Jane. Again true he found himself thinking about her at odd times, all the time really. And of course he would kill any other man who touched her and the death would be slow, lingering and as painful as possible. And occasionally he would hear a beautiful love song, think of her and tears would come to his eyes... But that didn’t mean he wanted to mate her, or love her, as the humans were so fond of saying.

“You’ll hurt her.”

“I won’t.” Sudden jealousy whipped through Michael and in one leap he was across the room, pinning Henry’s head to the back of the couch by a death grip on his throat. “What’s your interest in my woman?”

Henry's face was turning red, then slightly purple. The air around him wavered and Henry's skin began to ripple. His neck thickened, his body growing even as he sat on the couch. Henry was changing from human to his true form as a monster.

Michael drew on the spell that bound him in human form, rooted in the elaborate tattoo along his spine. Henry's fingers, now scaled and tipped in claws, wrapped around his arm, the tips digging in, just short of drawing blood.

"Whoa, what the hell?"

Lena stood in the door, shopping bags in her hands. Luke, busy closing the door, looked up at her exclamation, saw what was happening and shoved Lena into the kitchen, ordering her to stay there, out of harm's way.

Luke, still in full human form, moved between them, shoving the half-monster half-human creatures apart. "Complete your change or return to human," he commanded. "It's dangerous to take a half-form."

Luke's words hit them like a slap, and Michael released his friend's throat, backing away. Henry pushed up from the couch, bowed his head and returned to his human form. Michael did the same.

Michael's T-shirt was shredded, and his jeans had split at the side seam. Luckily his shoes were okay as his change hadn't reached his feet.

"What happened?" Luke demanded in a low voice.

"Michael's losing control."

Michael snarled and Henry's words. "My control is fine. Henry has designs on my woman."

"See?" Henry demanded.

"Ah...Jane."

"He's seeing her tonight," Henry advised.

"Henry, are you interested in her?" Luke looked at Michael as he asked the question.

"No, but I am concerned—"

"Not now. You are not interested in her, that's what's important."

"She's human. She's fragile. Michael's going to hurt her, break her," Henry protested.

"I know more about humans than you do," Michael retorted.

"Doesn't seem like it," Henry replied.

“Stupid fucker,” Michael growled.

“Asshole,” Henry replied.

“Morons,” Luke broke in, “you’re both being fucking morons. I know more about humans, especially human women, than both of you. Jane is very sweet, but she can take care of herself. If there is one thing I’ve learned, it’s that human women are not fragile.”

“Damn right!” Lena shouted from the kitchen.

Chapter Four

Casual dinner. This was just a casual dinner. Jane tugged at her thin white cardigan. She’d pair the sweater with a robin’s-egg blue tank top and dangly silver earrings. She’d gone back and forth between jeans and a tailored white skirt for a few minutes, okay, two hours, and settled on the skirt.

It was the perfect, casual summer outfit. It was a bit more daytime than she might have liked for a seven p.m. meeting, but the sun was still out, so it would have to do. She brushed her fingers through her bangs, making sure they were in place, before ringing the doorbell.

Michael opened the door, and Jane swallowed, hard. He was in black slacks.

“Hello, come in.” He stepped back, all cool confidence, and Jane had to remind herself to breathe.

“Hello,” Jane managed, taking a small step. That step brought her in range of his long arm and Michael took her hand, guiding her into the foyer. Michael pushed the door closed and raised her hand to his lips. He kissed the back of her hand, her knuckles and fingertips. Then he raised her other hand and repeated the process. By the time he was done any pretense of this being a casual, research-oriented get-together was gone.

“I’ll take this for you.” Michael took her purse, then slipped her cardigan off her shoulders. Her outfit went from summer casual to date-appropriate in one easy step. Jane swallowed. Her mouth was dry, her palms and lower back sweaty, and she was very, very nervous.

“Would you like a glass of wine?”

Jane jerked her head in a nod.

He laid her sweater and purse on a table in the foyer, then slid his arm around her waist, leading her into the living room. Jane stopped in her tracks as they came around the corner. Small halogen spotlights accented the art on the walls lighting the living room. The only other light came from a plethora of navy candles that dotted every table and lamp stand. They pearl