

PROLOGUE AND CHAPTER ONE

Of Darkness and Light *Book 2 of the Vampire Realm series* **J.S. Riddle**

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PROLOGUE

Pain, grief, and agony echoed through the halls of my self-made fortress of solitude. As time ticked on it felt as though years had come to a standstill. The more I reach out to humanity the more like a vampire I become.

The rebels became more defiant than ever before, somehow, I'm certain my sister was the cause of it all. Even with the joining of the two clans, Levé's and Krones, we seemed to be at a disadvantage; although I dare not say that to the Nation.

The Vampire Nation held me and my people (or shall I say Greco's people, for I have not lived up to his grandeur as of yet) in very high regard. We were the ones who toppled and destroyed an unjust tyranny plaguing the land. Once the Krones were destroyed, or integrated into the Levé society, it seemed the future held strong for vampires for a while; peace amongst the clans once again.

There had to be some way I could finally snuff out the resistance that had been biting at my ankles for far too long. If left unattended, I knew it could spread like a pestilence through the land, destroying all that we have striven for. I just wasn't certain how I was to go about that very thing. I had all my strategists working on a permanent solution while my soldiers kept them at bay as well as they could.

Drake had been at the helm of all the planning. He seemed as frustrated as I in regard to the rebels. I trusted him fully, although I'm not sure that would do him any good. He needn't mind what I thought, for he had been doing the job of a super-soldier longer than I could ever imagine.

I suppose I overstated things when I called this my fortress of solitude. I'm hardly alone, although it seems as such sometimes. Life, death, and, of course, vampire surround me in a swirling shroud of confusion. Too many pieces to a puzzle that had yet to be completed.

The inter-working of this so-called fortress remains in constant motion like a hive full of bees. Each had their little task to do. My role was evident and the lifeless blood that kept this place running. My advisors (or knights, guides, consultants, legion, whatever one would choose to call them) play an intricate part in my hive, especially Vala who has stepped up bravely in keeping my reign supreme in the old Krone territory. Of course they are my kindred, my proud blood siblings. They each play their part well and it is because of them that I strive so hard to make things work.

Then there are the humans; the servants, the slaves, the livestock. A purpose with each, for the human life is quite precious. If not for them, my kind would never exist. We were born human (most of us anyway, even though I have yet to meet a true blood) and delivered into an elite society. We need humans. As long as they live and breathe we survive through their gift of blood.

Of course there is my family, my human family. They are an intrigue of their own. Their entire existence intertwines with mine. If it were not for my stubborn sister we would have never met. She blames me for the rebellious movement. As far as I am concerned she is so determined to wipe me off the face of this earth that nothing will stand in her way. Because of this she leads her armies to war, leaving her children in harm's way.

At least my nephew, Jason, has grown into a fine young man. He sees the error in what she is doing. His one wish is for us to coexist, which of course had been my plight for quite some time. His loyalty unwavering and he has been taking his job as protector of his charge, my

daughter, seriously.

Of course, now that I am concentrating on my nephew, his sister pops into my mind. That stupid girl. As much as I love her, the pain of watching her grow up despising me can sometimes be unbearable. We haven't spoken in quite some time, and I could only take solace that she is being watched quite carefully. What to do, what to do?

Her uncle (once my lover and the father of my child) had pretty much given up on her. In all honesty, I think giving up is one thing he seemed to be good at. Every trace that I saw of him being strong through my memories, tend remind me of his weaknesses. He is a good father. At least he tries considering the circumstances. He loves Ariana with every thread of his being. I even believe his love for me has continued even as our connection has wavered. He is quite a good lover, though. Occasionally, I revisit the one thing I just refuse to give up from my human life. But the certainty of us becoming strong again is hard to tell. I'm sure he is only there in body, not in mind, or dare I say, soul.

The future of this family, my legacy, weighs heavy on my mind. Even more so the future of my clan, the entire vampire race seems to have been put in my hands. The only real hope, though, is Ariana awakening and ruling by my side, bringing this world, and our races, together as my vision once was.

CHAPTER ONE

Sitting back in her chair Tessa glanced into the corner where her future lay quietly asleep. Her daughter looked like a heavenly angel sent from a benevolent god of old. Her eyes peacefully closed in blissful slumber. She looked like any ordinary six year old, harmless and vulnerable to the world that surrounded her.

As if sensing her thoughts, Ariana stirred quickly, sat up and looked at Tessa with her deep ocean of a stare. "What's wrong mother?" She asked with such a sweet, tender, soulful tone.

"Oh nothing of any bother. Just the weight of the world on my shoulders." Her sense of humanity seemed to phase the child none, because she just traipsed over and leaned against her.

"You can use my shoulders too if you think that it will help." It was almost like she knew her purpose on the earth. Tessa felt a pride and hope that had been docile for far too long. It was only a tiny seed, though, barely taking root in the desert of her heart. The reality was far too harsh to think positively, at least for the moment.

"Good evening." Isaac said quietly from the doorway.

"Daddy!" Ariana squealed with delight. She ran to him and gave him an enormous hug.

Tessa watched silently and pondered. There were so many human qualities to her daughter, she wondered if she would ever be able to relate to the vampires.

"Tessa." Isaac greeted with a nod. "Good to see you. It's been a while."

Tessa agreed. "Yes, it has." It was true. She hardly had been around when Isaac would come to spend time with their daughter. Part of it was her busy schedule. The other was to simply avoid him. She only interacted with him when she requested he visited her chambers. They had drifted further apart since she had come home triumphant. She had returned a different being, someone not quite as human as she had behaved in the past. It was as if her eyes were opened to more reality and less fantasy. The fantasy was that she could live like a human; live, laugh, love, and all would be okay. The reality was that vampires were ruthless, fearless rulers, and humans were just their subjects. She couldn't just sit on the fence, she had to own up to her responsibilities and what she was.

It wasn't that she no longer hoped for a brighter future and more human equality. It was more like she knew it would be a gradual change closer to a snail's pace. She had to wait to see if Ariana would truly help in the cause or amount to nothing more than being her offspring, no matter how miraculous it all was. Until that time her soul hardened and her heart was locked away from any emotional attachment she might have with the child.

That change is what separated Tessa and Isaac. He grew tired of her progressing coldness and opened his eyes to what she really was. Over the years, his love faded to a trickle. He wasn't even sure how it progressed. He decided that it was best for all to focus on his family.

Tessa took notice of his quiet separation and came to the conclusion it really was for the best. She did not have time to be emotionally entwined in a romantic situation and called off their occasional visits.

"Her governess will be here momentarily, but you can spend time with Ariana until she arrives." She finally spoke, a cold taste lingering with her words.

Isaac picked Ariana up and held her in his arms. "Is this all I'm going to get to spend with her?" He complained.

"She has lessons to attend. They don't just stop with you just willing it to do so."

"She is six!" He raised his voice. "What kind of lessons does she really need?"

Tessa edged closer and said sternly, "Hold your tongue."

"I will not!" He stood his ground "She is my daughter and I don't think that she should be taking lessons so seriously yet. She should be having fun, with both of her parents."

Tessa looked at Isaac harshly and then she barked an order at Ariana, "Little one, come to me." The child nodded and kissed her dad on his cheek before she climbed into her mother's arms. "I want you to go into the next room and select what toys you will be taking with you."

"Okay, Mother." She squirmed down and ran into the other room.

Tessa turned to Isaac. "Might I remind you that you have no authority in this matter." She paused. "Actually, you have no authority in anything."

Isaac's cheeks grew red with frustration. "Seriously? You're going to play that card?" His temper flared even hotter. "You have already cut yourself off from me, I hardly get to see my little girl, and when I do it is only for a few minutes at a time. What has happened to you that you've grown so void of emotion?"

Tessa looked him over. "I'm just being who I am supposed to be. I failed when I got too close to you, and for that I'm sorry." She stood up straight. "You have to realize that all of this is for the greater good; every last bit of it."

"How? By taking away your daughter's childhood?"

She shook her head. "She is more than just a child. She has to be taught the ways of the vampire. She learns extremely fast so of course I want to encourage that." An even colder look grew on her face. "But why do I have to explain anything to you? At this point you have become nothing but an inconvenience and I warn you now to not become a hindrance any longer or I will remove you from her life completely."

"I thought you wanted to keep her in human company? What happened to that?" He attempted to dissuade her.

"Jason and her have grown quite close. He is much more the embodiment of humankind than you are."

"What's that supposed to mean?" He felt quite stung by her words.

She gritted her teeth and sighed. "Only that he is the right amount of everything." She raised her hands in frustration, "But why am I even explaining this to you?" She pointed at him, "You do as I say and that is the end of it. I am at rope's end with you, always trying to pull out the Tessa that you want; the weak and emotional one. I'm not going to let you manipulate me anymore." She paused and gathered her composure. "Now as I said before, you can spend time with her until the governess comes, then you will be excused."

Isaac nodded in defeated submission. That last piece of his heart shattered inside of him. He began to head toward the playroom when Tessa put her hand on his chest and looked into his sad eyes. "When I get back we will have to sit down and discuss your reassignment." She didn't leave time for him to respond and instead quickly walked out the door.

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The car door was open by one of Tessa's servants as she slid onto the leather seat next to Vala. "I take it your trip was satisfactory?" She asked as the door shut behind her.

Vala nodded with an air of confidence that surrounded her. Her duty as the head of the old Krone territory laid solely with her.

"Have you gotten the palace prepared for my arrival?" Tessa had not been in Krone territory

since her encounter with Liana. She felt there was no real need to tempt fate more than she had to. She was also not keen to dredge up old memories. Vala had been doing a great job running the territory herself.

“Of course. Things are exactly as you specified.”

“And the Krones?”

Most of them have been submissive, they realize the true authority.”

“What about the others?” Tessa asked.

Vala looked awkwardly to the side, “Those that weren't put to death escaped through the northern route into Strega territory, I believe.”

“You believe?” Tessa asked for more detail.

“Well. The further north we go, the more isolated it becomes. It makes it really hard to do an extensive search, especially as daylight burns most of the day away.”

Tessa nodded. “That's right.” The Northern Hemisphere is known to be vampire hell for at least three months or longer due to the sunlight shining most of the day. She muttered then shrugged her shoulder. “Let them be Viktor's problem, for the time being.” She then turned to Vala once again. “What of the remaining humans?”

“Well, it is mixed news. There seems to be no sign of a rebellion taking place. I'm not really certain there ever was.”

“Well, that does seem to be good news.”

“But...” She continued. “It seems that two thirds have been eradicated. Those who weren't were thrown into the mass prisons.”

“They imprisoned all the humans?” Tessa questioned.

“Most of them. Each and every one of them sits filthy in the prison waiting their turn for the bloodletting.”

“No house servants?” The subject was being processed in Tessa's mind. The last time she was there she could have sworn there were a few humans. Was it not a human's body she inhabited for a time being?

“None. They seem to prefer third class vampires to humans for slaves. Elitism at its finest.”

Tessa scratched her head. “Why is this the first time that I'm hearing any of this?” She grew frustrated. Things had obviously changed since Desdemona's time. Until that moment, she hadn't realize how much the power had really shifted to Liana.

“The Krones were bending so easily to Levé rule that I really was quite grateful. I thought that maybe we could slowly work our way into it. Of course there is another reason.”

“Well spit it out.” Tessa grew impatient.

“It is rather apparent that all progress and communications are being monitored by the council. The last thing that I wanted was for them to deem you an unruly leader.”

“Very good judgment. I appreciate your concern.” She smiled and realized that her victory was holding. She knew the next stage needed to be set. “I think I will journey to the palace in a weeks' time. I want you to inform the Levé council that each and everyone need be present. I think we need to start appointing new regional heads, don't you?”

Vala tilted her head then nodded. “I think that would be wise. To spread out the power amongst regions will keep an eye on all of them.”

“Did you enjoy your position in the palace?”

“As much of an honor that it has been, I am by far a worthy leader. I much prefer being in your company.” Vala said honestly then added, “But if you wish for me to continue I would be more than happy to do as you ask.”

Tessa shook her head. “No need. I think you will be more beneficial by my side. I am stepping up my search for the rebels to try to weed them out. I'm wanting you to join in that sweep.” She said. Not waiting for an answer, she used the intercom in the back of the car to address the driver. “Take us to the prison.”

“Yes ma'am.” He said as he sped towards their destination.