"You'll want to hear this," Santiago's comment woke me. I had found, to my dismay and his amusement, that he rose earlier than I did when the sun set. I didn't reply, as I'm sure he knew I wouldn't. As his thrall I could not stop him invading my mind, but he could not force a reply from me.

"*I say you aren't using him as you could. Take advantage of this opportunity."* Even without hearing them speak out loud I recognized that it was Henri. He believed, mistakenly, that noble birth meant he was superior to most people. It showed in his manner and speech.

They were conversing mind-to-mind. Although Santiago was blocking Henri from hearing what he told me. It was something a master vampire could do with his thralls. I hadn't known that was possible until he captured me. Santiago had mastered the art of speaking mind-to-mind in all its nuances.

"You think I haven't?" Santiago argued. *"I've drained him to a skeletal state regularly. I myself am far stronger than I ever was."*

Despite my annoyance at him, I had to admire how cleverly he slid that comment into their conversation. He and Henri had been near equals in strength until Santiago captured/rescued/saved me. My mouth twisted bitterly at that thought. He *had* saved me, and in so doing I was once again a thrall. Which meant more than slave. It came with a desire to please my master that was overwhelming. Along with an obsessive need for even a small taste of his blood. It sickened me that I could feel that way. I thought I had grown too strong for such things.

I shifted the lid of my stone sarcophagus and climbed out, heading in the direction I could feel my master was.

"I tell you," Santiago continued. *"The gift of teleportation is not something he can grant. I assumed it would be if I kept him as mine, but that is not the case."*

"You haven't broken him." Henri countered*. "If his mind were yours to command, his gifts would be yours as well. You have always been too soft on your brood."*

"Henri," even mind-to-mind Santiago's tone was chiding. *"Giving those who belong to me decent clothes and treating them with dignity is practical. They do not plot my demise if they feel we are friends. I would have remained entirely loyal to Sarah had she done so."*

I was near enough to them by then I could hear Henri's snort. I stood in the shadows of the kitchen and watched them as they sat in Santiago's spacious parlor. The fire in the grate there crackled and sparked; the light made the shadows dance in the room.

Even without our mental connection Santiago would have sensed my presence. He spent endless hours out in the woods with me and had learned to value more than his vampire nature to detect things; using the senses he had been born with. What is more, Santiago had risen from the life of a peasant to ruler of a vast estate. He had educated himself. Henri, as a man and as a vampire, had lived

a privileged life and rarely ventured out into the countryside other than to hunt as all gentlemen did, with servants to drive their quarry to them. It made him quite blind in many ways.

"It's foolhardy to leave yourself vulnerable to such a one as Sylvio." Henri argued. "*I say they must all be broken if you intend to wrest control of their power from them. Send him to your dungeons to starve."*

Rage swamped me until I was momentarily blind. How I had existed as Adonas's thrall was far removed from the way even Henri's brood were treated.

Santiago – paused. He'd felt that rage. He took the time to take a sip from his glass. Carefully, he replied, *"I believed Sarah cared for me until she did to me as you suggest. That was the main reason I destroyed her. I won't make that mistake with Sylvio."*

I reeled from the strength of my own emotions and attempted to compose myself. I was often unable to control my feelings in those days, even after Santiago reminded me I was once a man. What is more, my power still far outstripped Santiago's. He was walking a precipice keeping me, and he knew it. I was sure he had come to view holding me as his thrall was akin to keeping a tiger. You can make pets of them, you can provide them comfort and security and enjoy their beauty, but they are never tamed. At any moment, they can revert to their basic nature and make a meal of you.

Santiago sat up straighter, turned his head slightly and said out loud, "Sylvio has awakened."

Henri's astonishment was clear, "You rise before he does?"

In an amused tone Santiago replied, "Clearly, you do as well. You know, for all the mystique that surrounds him, he is not really different from the rest of us. He just chose to go about living in a different way." Then he sent, "*Come Sylvio."* That time he let Henri hear the order.

Even without Santiago sending any compulsion through with the command, I felt my feet begin to move. I forced myself to stillness. I would play Santiago's game and pretend I had been asleep in our crypt.

Again, Henri did not hide his surprise, "It is known Sylvio refuses to speak with us mind-to-mind."

Santiago looked at Henri over the top of his goblet and raised his eyebrows in mock surprise, "He cannot refuse me as my thrall."

"On my way," I replied. I thought adding "master" would be over-kill.

I melted into the shadows of the kitchen, circled the hearth so it would appear I had come through the far door, and walked toward them. I was almost at the door nearest them before Henri sensed I was there. Both Henri and Santiago were less than half my age but were still considered old when compared to most vampires. It was certainly clear that Henri had lived a life mainly insulated from danger.

I walked to Santiago's side and stood behind his chair. "Sylvio, as you can see Henri has come to visit. Pour yourself a glass and join us," he ordered.

I tipped my head in greeting to Henri and reached for the decanter between them. Santiago and I both enjoyed wine. But this was whiskey, which I detest. He must have brought it out for Henri. Still, I poured a glass and took a sip, then waited.

Santiago waved a hand toward the chair next to him, "Here would be fine."

Henri looked from him to me, clearly watching for subterfuge. He was unable to detect it, however, and relaxed into the same frame he'd held before he had seen me. After witnessing my destruction of Vicenzo, Henri had been leery of me and treated me with care, worried that I might strike at any moment. It amused me, which he also perceived. On the other hand, he was a gracious host when Cyneric and I visited his home in Paris, and polite in the extreme.

"It's good to see you again Henri," I said.

"And I'm glad you've recovered yourself and not fallen victim to Iosef's wolves," Henri replied.

"Thanks to him," I said, and gave a nod of gratitude to Santiago that was not an act.

Henri looked from one to the other of us, clearly trying to decide if we were being genuine. "Forgive me, but you did not seem the type to accept bondage."

"Certainly not," I replied. "if I were still who I was when last we met." I spun the glass and enjoyed the light playing in the amber liquid. Simple things often caught my attention. I set the glass down, lest I become mesmerized by it and embarrass myself.

I met Henri's eyes, which vampires who are not of the same brood rarely do, and certainly not a thrall. A master vampire sits above all thralls in our hierarchy, no matter whose brood they belong to. "Santiago rescued me from insanity. I am content to wear the guise of a civilized being." I leaned forward slightly and kept my eyes locked on his. The skin around his own eyes tightened from anger – and fear. "For the time being," I added.