

Partnership in Blood
Madeleine Oh

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Chapter One

“Well, lad, you certainly have a style of your own.” Drake Varna shook his head as he surveyed the freighter’s bridge. “A sanguinary style, but...”

“What else was I supposed to do?” Rand was still lightheaded from shock and effort and the smell of blood. “They were out to kill you -- and me.”

“Killing *you* was what they’d been hired for,” Drake pointed out.

“Yeah!” Rand shuddered. The past thirty-six hours hadn’t been the best of his life. “But they planned on doing you in as well. They were going to wait until you woke with blood hunger and let you do the job for them -- and I’d paid you to keep me alive.”

“You had,” Drake acknowledged, a wry smile on his pale face. “Would have been a sad end to my long and illustrious career to have failed on my final job.”

Rand sagged into a chair. His gums itched. The smell of blood was driving him crazy. He ran his tongue over his teeth and nearly sliced it on his extended canines.

“Fanging?” Drake asked.

“I think so. If that’s what you call it. My teeth...”

Drake shook his head and took two steps to stand in front of Rand. “Your *fangs*. It’s not customary for nestlings to initiate their own change, but since you did, you’d best learn to cope.”

“On my own?” Drake was leaving him? Damn! He’d saved Drake, too. Was he going to get abandoned like this in deep space?

“Yes. And since we have such an abundant supply of blood on hand, it would be criminal to let it go to waste.”

“You mean...” Rand willed his stomach not to roil and embarrass him.

“It won’t keep, and after that fight, you need sustenance as much as I do.”

It was, in the end, a whole lot easier than Rand would ever have imagined. It was the blood that did it. At Drake's bidding, Rand lifted the nearest corpse, ripped what was left of the zipsuit off the bounty hunter's leg, and fastened his mouth over the femoral artery.

Richness, warmth and sheer animal pleasure washed over Rand. He was satiated, satisfied and hungering for more at one and the same instant. As he let the drained body fall, he raised his eyes.

"Got the hang of it, I see, lad. Don't overdo it. Gluttony is still a deadly sin, but we have two each. Take your pick."

It was no contest. Without any attempt to hide his glee, Rand reached for the bloodied corpse of Bryn Gorlan. As he sank his fangs into his erstwhile adversary's thigh, he wondered if Harel Larg would send another hunter after him. The worry didn't last long in a tide of heat, pleasure and lust. As he dropped the desanguinated corpse, Rand looked across to Drake, who glowed with the intake of fresh blood, eyes gleaming red with lust.

"How about it, lad? Got your strength up enough?"

Had he? Instinct suggested sex between two Vampires was... different. "I hope so." Shit! He sounded nervous, anxious. Well, damn it! He was.

Drake shoved a used-up corpse out of his way. "Only one way to find out, lad." Reaching over the very dead Gorlan, Drake held out his hand.

Rand grabbed it. Astounded at his own strength, he relaxed his grasp, staring at Drake.

Drake grinned. "Feeling your strength, lad? You can't hurt me. Grab as hard as you want."

Taking the challenge, Rand tightened his hold. Bracing himself against Drake's strength, Rand leapt over Gorlan's dead body and landed ten meters away, smashing against the bulkhead and taking Drake with him.

"Fuck!" Rand muttered as he disentangled his arm from Drake's and pulled his foot from the bend of his knee.

"Brilliant suggestion!" Drake jumped to his feet and looked down at Rand. "Might as well burn off a bit of your surplus energy and teach you what Vampire sex really is."

Rand leapt up, almost bashing his head on the ceiling. This jumping ability was going to require some getting used to. "I'm game."

"I know you are, lad. Now pick me up and carry me to the shower. I'm not fucking you covered with bounty hunter gore."

Good point. They were both generously slathered in blood from various sources, but lift and carry Drake? Rand's mouth opened to protest. He couldn't, Drake was far too heavy... but the glint in the dark eyes held a challenge, a question.

Damn, he could leap meters, jump high enough to almost smash his head on the roof. He could carry Drake... perhaps. "Okay!" Sounded confident, at least to his own ears. Stepping forward, arms ready, he grabbed Drake and hoisted him over his shoulder in a fireman's hold.

So far so good. Rand doubted he'd have managed it if Drake wasn't willing. But Drake was obviously willing and ready. That made two of them. Holding him so close had Rand's cock hard and eager for action. Did all Vamps feel this way? Talk about burning need! Was this what drinking blood did to you?

He'd worry about all that later. Right now, on to the shower. It was as close quarters as ever, but that hadn't slowed either of them before. Rand set Drake on his feet. Was he expected to take the lead here? He didn't usually, but heck...

Trouble was, what did Drake expect now? The balance had changed. Significantly.

"Going to stand here bemused all day, lad?"

"No!"

"Damn good thing." Drake ripped the neck of Rand's already tattered zipsuit. "Get naked, lad. Now!"

No mistaking that! Rand all but ripped off his suit, yanking off his boots at the same time. He was fast, but Drake was faster. As Rand straightened up from kicking off his boots, Drake leaned against the metal door of the shower cubicle, arms folded across his chest, cock stiff as a ramrod. Grinning. "Get in here, lad! You smell of bounty hunter!"

And worse! If there was such a thing. Rand stepped forward. Drake caught him by the waist and swung him into the cubicle. Yes, it was close quarters. Closer still, when Drake closed the door and pressed on the water. A warm cascade dropped on them, drenching hair and skin and running down their legs to pool briefly on the floor and swirl around their feet until the automatic drain whirled it away.

Drake's cock brushed Rand's hip as Rand tugged a soap-cloth from the dispenser. Rand smiled and pressed his decidedly erect cock against Drake's. "Stop playing, lad. You're my offspring now, my get, my fledgling. Time to show appropriate respect. Wash my feet!"

Being on his knees before Drake was no hardship, still... "How do you figure you made me? I think I was more of a do-it-yourself job." Rand squatted back on his heels and looked up.

Drake raised his dark eyebrows and frowned. "Impudent fledgling! First you presume to feed off me." The corner of his mouth twitched, as a glint appeared in his night dark eyes. "Then you question my authority. You, lad, will always be my boy, my get. I'll make sure you never forget that. Not that you'll ever want to."

A shiver of anticipation thrilled through Rand. No, he didn't want to, but the mechanics of the rough and ready transformation from soon-to-die mortal to Vamp still mystified him. But now was not the time to discuss that.

"Start at my feet, lad, wash me all the way to my waist, then you may pause to show your utter respect to your maker."

Sex between Vampires was different!

Gently, Rand soaped Drake's toes, then his feet, pausing to let the water flow away, then moving to his ankles and calves. Were his own this strong? Did it take years, centuries even to acquire this perfection of body, this firm skin over taut muscle? He ran his hands and the cloth over the particularly impressive

thighs -- heck they were like the pictures of young oak trees on Earth that he'd seen as a child reading the holo texts.

Even more worthy of admiration was Drake's cock. Hard as teak or baked clay, smooth as the finest Uldrian wines, sweet as honeycombs from Ambros, exciting as life with a Vampire.

"Lad, your admiration and awe flatter me, but get your mouth where I want it!"

No hardship to oblige there. Rand dipped his head, and closed his lips over the smooth, firm head of Drake's cock. Sheer joy! Closing his eyes to shut out everything but the power between his lips, Rand was oblivious to the water cascading down his face, unaware of the cramped space, or the carnage beyond these close steel walls. He eased his tongue over the smooth head, pausing to suck the bead of the sweetness from the tiny opening, before sliding his lips down just enough to encircle the ridge and flutter his tongue over Drake's frenulum. Drake's long, drawn-out sigh was definite encouragement to continue.

Rand took in a little more, easing his mouth back and forth over the ridge while his tongue took care of the rest. He'd have been content to prolong this indefinitely, but more is often so much better. His smile distorted by the sheer size of Drake's cock, Rand opened his mouth and swallowed him to the root.

And had the satisfaction of hearing Drake gasp. "Lad!"

Strong hands grabbed Rand's head, easing it back and forth until desire spiked and he himself was groaning. Wrapping his arms around Drake's thighs, Rand drew him closer.

Drake shuddered and pulled back, letting go of Rand's head and pulling his cock clear of his mouth. "No!" Rand cried. "Come back!"

"Later, lad," Drake replied. "Patience. Anticipation is half the fun."

What about frustration? Rand's balls felt ready to burst.

"You haven't finished washing me. I still have bounty hunter leftovers on my back."

He did, and Rand didn't doubt he still had more than his fair share. It had been a rough fight.

"Tell you what, lad, let's see if you can wash half of me in the time it takes me to wash all of you."

Nothing like a challenge -- and between two Vamps at that. Rand's hands moved faster than he'd ever thought possible, but he was no match for Drake, who rubbed, wiped and scrubbed, turning Rand around before holding him under the spray. Rand did his level best to keep up, but it was no contest. Not that he was the least disappointed to lose.

Drake held him, hands under his arms, and whirled them both into the even smaller drying chamber before tossing him on the bed.

The grin on Drake's face showed his fangs at full length.

Rand froze a minute in the realization that he, too, now possessed Vampire fangs and all those qualities that made Drake so... Drake.

Drake tilted his head to one side and gave him a questioning look. "What's the matter, lad? Losing interest?" His cool, still slightly damp, hand closed around Rand's cock.

As if he could! "It just hit me. I'm like you now."

"In some ways, lad." A smile quirked Drake's face. His hand tightened, easing down Rand's foreskin and sending shivers of anticipation through him. "We'll talk about it. Later."

Much later, Rand hoped.

Very much later, he decided, as Drake leaned over him and closed his mouth over Rand's left nipple. He didn't want to talk or think, all he wanted was to feel. Drake sucked on the nipple and Rand groaned. This much had changed. Every nerve ending hummed as Drake's tongue lazily toyed with said nipple.

Hell! If he wasn't careful, he'd come by this alone!

And he doubted he'd complain. Drake continued the tease, then nipped. "Yow!" Rand cried out, but on the tail of the sharp pain came a wild rush of pleasure. Double pleasure as Drake subjected the other nipple to the same treatment.

"Damn, that's good! Incredible!" Now Drake nipped his way across and down Rand's chest while Rand let out a series of groans, gasps and cries that only faded when Drake lifted his head and met his eyes.

"I told you it was going to be different, lad. Every sensation is magnified, every nerve ending hypersensitive."

"You aren't kidding!" Rand's entire body sang from just a few nips and kisses. What was a climax going to be like?

Soon he'd find out, but not too soon, he hoped. Rand wanted this to last. If it could. Or did he? Damn! Desire raging in his brain, Rand reached for Drake's shoulders and pulled him down on the bed.

Drake let him. Just. "Got any plans, lad?"

Rand replied with a deep belly laugh, as he reached for Drake's arm and pulled him close. Still holding him by the wrist, Rand leaned up, planted a kiss on the soft inside of Drake's elbow and almost left the bed. Shit! This beat anything so far in his life -- or death, he amended to himself. He proceeded to trail kisses and nips up Drake's arm and across his chest, planning to repeat it all the way to the other wrist.

He'd gone it halfway when Drake took over, this time lying on top of Rand to pin him to the bed while they kissed. His tongue forced its way into Rand's very willing mouth and Rand returned the favor. Together their tongues pushed, stroked and caressed until Rand was ready to believe it was possible to climax by kissing alone... but he didn't want to. Not this time at least.

"Damn, Drake!" Rand managed, as Drake paused and Rand pulled back enough to speak. "This is incredible! I've never..."

Drake threw back his head and laughed. "Of course not, lad! You've never fucked as a Vampire before. Think this is good, hang on!" As he spoke, he moved between Rand's legs. Grasping his knees, Drake held them high, pressing his thighs to Rand's chest. Hands on Rand's ass, Drake lifted and

steadied him, pressing his cock against the sphincter.

He entered in a rush of speed, sensation and power, filling Rand completely. Invading him. Possessing him. Enthralling him. The earlier pleasure was a shadow, a summer breeze compared to the tempest of sensation that possessed Rand now. He jerked his hips, bore down and thrashed on the mattress, screaming his pleasure and his need aloud as Drake pummeled into him, pistoning like the wild thing he was, until Rand came in a burst of cum that covered them both.

Rand was ready to sag back, sated.

Drake wasn't.

He continued, ramming his cock even deeper, or so it seemed. Rand shouted and cried out again and again, until finally, with a great feral growl, Drake came, filling Rand with his Vampire power. The surge astounded Rand. He'd been fucked, taken, worn out -- he thought -- but now, with Drake's climax, his power rose again, drawing strength from Drake.

Rand bucked and screamed, raking Drake's arms with his fingernails, biting Drake's chest to draw blood. Rand came again, incredibly, with more force and pleasure than before.

They collapsed in a tangled mass of legs and arms, the scent of sex in the air and their damp bodies a testament to a prodigious fuck.

Rand was astounded to recover in seconds. He sat up, glancing down at Drake, to watch the bites and scratches heal before his eyes. Just as his own did.

"Incredible," he whispered as his mind tried to grasp the full implications of his altered state.

"You are, lad, you are indeed," Drake replied with an almost wolfish grin. "I'd suggest an encore, but along with the advantages of our existence comes the inconvenience of day sleep. Before it embraces us, I strongly suggest we clean up the carnage on the bridge."

And the corridors leading to it, not forgetting the remains of the guard once posted outside the hatch where they'd been imprisoned.

Didn't take them long. Enhanced speed and strength were definite advantages when hauling corpses, or swabbing blood-spattered decks and fittings. The corpses were disposed of courtesy of the still-functioning hatch next to the one Drake and Rand had destroyed between them. Their ruined and ripped zipsuits joined the desiccated bodies.

"I assume you carry spare clothes on this old tub?" Drake asked as he pressed the button to eject the lot into space.

"Yes. Not many, but some." Not that he'd mind them both staying naked, but they would have go planetside sooner or later.

Now was not the time to debate that, if he'd had the energy. A strange lassitude swamped Rand as they both walked back to his quarters.

"It's the day rest beckoning, lad," Drake said as Rand stifled a yawn. "You can't fight it, embrace it."

He just about had time to embrace Drake as well, as they both stretched out on Rand's mattress.

Dead to the day.

Chapter Two

Rand awoke alone, the dent from Drake's head still clear on the pillow. Where was he? He'd found spare clothes. The wardrobe doors hung open and the shower was still damp and misty from use. Didn't take Rand long to wash, dress in a clean zipsuit and find Drake on the bridge, punching buttons and frowning at the screen.

"I've taken it off auto." He looked up at Rand, a dark gleam of remembered passion in his eyes. "Those slugs had it set for Larg Station. No doubt to collect the final payment. I assumed you'd prefer another destination."

Drake assumed right. "Anywhere but there. Even though the original bounty is about to expire..."

"No point in encouraging a renewal. Although if Gorlan and his thugs never surface..."

"Harel Larg will guess what happened."

Drake nodded. "And word will spread across the galaxy that you are one tough freighter captain who disposed of an experienced bounty hunter and his three sidekicks. Can't do your image any harm."

Having Drake by his side would do even more for that image. If he was going to stay. Perhaps last night had just been the final installment of his debt. "Er... I owe you those four thousand credits."

He couldn't quite read Drake's expression. "True, but the situation has altered. Let me get the coordinates reset and we'd better talk."

About what? Drake leaving? To pay him, Rand would have to strike planet somewhere with access to his banking web. That might take a few days. He'd have that long at least. And after...

"How about heading for Darien Station?" Drake suggested. "I see you have enough fuel and it's nicely distant from Larg's stomping grounds."

And it was a major crossing point for half the independent traders in that part of the galaxy. He could get access to his money, and pick up another job. "Fine."

"Right, lad." Drake gave the console all his attention. Rand watched his agile hands move over controls at a speed he'd never have followed with mortal eyes. A programming that would have taken the mortal Rand fifteen minutes was completed in three. "Now." Drake swiveled the control chair to face him. "Time to talk."

Rand was going to be adult about this. He was not going to whine or beg. Would be hellishly difficult and take all he had but... "About what happens when we get to Darien? It'll take maybe two, three days at the most to get the money transferred, depending on where you keep your credits..."

Drake cut him off with an impatient wave of his hand.

Damn it, this wasn't easy! "We agreed..."

"That was before you turned yourself Vampire."

Had that pissed him off? Shit! What else was he supposed to have done? Lain there until Drake killed him? Or worse still, have killed Drake himself? That thought had Rand shuddering.

"Money is trivial compared with what we have to do now."

Might be to him. To Rand it was his life savings.

"Your presumptuous but inspired actions in the hatch altered everything."

Okay, fair enough.

"You are my, unexpected if you like, get. I cannot leave you."

"What!" Rand knew he'd shouted, but damn. "Why not?" The best news he'd had in months -- years even -- still...

"You regret it?" Drake asked with a quirk of his eyebrows.

"Hell, no! It's incredible." Having Drake stay in his bed was stupendous, fantastic. "But why, I mean..." Hell, had he really been that good a lay?

"Convention." That had Rand blinking. Drake smiled. "Among Vampires it's considered horrifyingly bad form to abandon one's get. It's custom for a maker to stay with a fledgling Vampire several years, until he or she acquires the skills to survive alone."

Rand scarcely believed his ears. "You mean we stay together for a few years?"

"Does the prospect bother you so?"

"Hell, no! I just only half-believe it!"

"Believe it, lad. There's a lot more to being a Vampire than having mind-blasting sex. We don't always fit in this mortal-run world, and need to make certain adaptations to survive."

Oh! "Like finding safe places to sleep?"

"Just one of the many, lad. The first and most pressing being to assure our food supply."

Took a minute or so to process that one, even with his enhanced senses. "I see. I was your food supply."

“Precisely. Not only have you disposed of my immediate sustenance, you, my lad, have far more urgent needs. I can go up to a month without blood. You’ll need it every few days. By the time we get to Darien, our first job will be to find a willing donor --” Drake paused, as if to let the full import of that sink in -- “and a new crewmember. Someone to hold the fort so to speak during our day sleep.”

“Isn’t that risky?” They’d both be helpless at the same time.

“Yes, but we’ll take precautions. Find someone desperate enough, they’ll agree to what we want.”

And Darien Station was full of rootless pilots and navigators all looking for the next job.

* * *

“What do you think, lad?” Drake asked, as he set his bottle of brew on the table.

“I think the prospect of servicing two Vampires is scaring off even the hardest applicants.” In the three days since they’d landed planetside, they’d met and rejected -- or been rejected by -- almost two dozen assorted navigators, pilots and stray wanderers.

“Never give up, lad. You have eternity. We can be patient.”

True, but hunger would take over in a couple of days. He’d staved it off temporarily by paying three times the going rate for an hour with a sex professional last night. “It sounded so easy when you first suggested hiring someone.”

Drake’s wide mouth curled in a wry smile. “Nothing’s easy, lad. But we’ll find someone. Better to wait for the right one.”

What he meant was someone desperate enough. The prospect didn’t exactly thrill Rand but he trusted Drake. Still... with a nod, Rand lifted his bottle to his lips and tasted the sweet, heady brew.

“Your pardon, but are you Drake Varna?”

Rand almost spluttered. Drake rose from his seat and inclined his head. “I am. And you are?”

Good question. What was an old woman doing here in this seedy bar? Dressed as a pilot? Rand had worked with plenty of females in his time but all had been young, brash and confident.

“I’m Ferda Wallace. I understand you’re looking to hire a co-pilot and navigator in return for a consideration.”

Drake nodded. “We are.” He gestured toward Rand. “My partner, Rand Faràr.” Rand gave her a cautious nod and pulled a chair from the next table. “Have a seat.”

“Thank you.” She sat down, declined Drake’s offer of a brew with an amused smile and looked them both in the eye. “What are you needing?”

“What are you offering?” That got Rand a sharp look from Drake, but hell, she was *ancient*. They’d need extra medikits and resuscitators if she came aboard.

Glancing his way with an odd light in her eyes, Ferda Wallace reached into the pocket of her zipsuit, unclipped two identicards and put them on the table.

She was a licensed pilot and navigator. Both licenses carried endorsements from the Federation and the Union -- recent endorsements. "I'm licensed to fly, navigate or code just about anything but battleships, and that's from choice," she said. "I had that removed a few years back. Rather lost the taste for it."

Reflexes not up to the testing no doubt. "Getting too old?" Rude yes, but damn it! They needed a competent pilot, not an old biddy.

She gave a chuckle -- a deep earthy chuckle that surprised Rand. He noticed the amused twist on Drake's face. "A Vampire calls me 'old'? How many centuries' start do you have on me?"

His jaw dropped. She'd identified them this easily! Neither of them looked pale...

"Excuse my partner," Drake said in the silence, "he is actually your junior, and perhaps missed some of the detail on your authorization."

Rand didn't care for the 'junior' bit and *what* had he missed?

"Captain Wallace is a veteran of the Kyrian wars."

Rand couldn't help the blush. He'd studied them as a schoolboy. "Sorry," he said. "Tactless of me."

"Yes," she agreed with a little smile. "Perhaps a few gray hairs misled you." She had more than a few, and the smile accentuated the creases in the corner of her eyes. "So, given I'm not totally decrepit, what do you need?"

"Someone with your qualifications," Drake replied. "We're pretty much available for any contract work. Hirings take us all over the galaxy."

"Do you have any immediate cargoes?"

"Not right now," Drake replied. "We wanted to get fully crewed first."

She nodded, obviously considering this. Sheesh. Drake was seriously considering *her* !

"How long a contract are you offering?" she asked, glancing at both of them.

"Negotiable," Drake replied. "Perhaps five years?"

"I assume blood is part of the deal. For both of you."

Drake nodded. "We would of course supply more than adequate enriched food supplies, of your selection."

"Fair enough." She was quiet for a few of her heartbeats. "If we agree, I have a condition."

"What do you mean, a condition?" Rand couldn't hold it in, but he cut off the next comment after catching Drake's eye.

“Indeed?” Drake asked, looking right at her. Rand would have to take on faith that Drake knew what he was doing.

“I have a cargo needs transporting. I want you to accept that as the first consignment. I’m willing to pay all charges, help with navigation, and do whatever’s needed to get it safely to its destination.”

“And what is this cargo and the destination?”

“Food and medical supplies for Praeden.”

She wasn’t just old. She was senile! Rand couldn’t keep silent. “Impossible! Praeden is under siege. The Wardens won’t let anyone land or leave until the treaty is agreed on.” It was a nasty little war. A bully war with a giant galactic corporation squashing a community of pioneers, but the proposition was ridiculous... Hell, why didn’t Drake tell her so?

“It won’t be necessary to land on Praeden.”

Drake was still listening. Rand decided to follow his lead.

“In eleven days their moon will be in total eclipse. We can land in the umbra, unload directly to the shuttles who will meet us, and depart unnoticed.”

“Risky,” Drake said.

“Yes,” she agreed, “but not impossible. The timing is tight. The eclipse lasts eight hours. Not long, but time enough, and Praeden is only three Terran time cycles away. It can be done.”

“It could,” Drake conceded.

He was actually considering her plan? Damn!

“What guarantee do we have that the shuttle will be waiting?”

“They will.”

“Just your word?” Rand asked.

“Think I’m too decrepit to know what I’m saying?” Her eyes crinkled at him. “Trust me, they will be there. The pioneers know their survival as a free settlement depends on it. If they can hold out until after the end of negotiations, they will be recognized by the Federation.”

He’d read that much on the holo-screen news.

“What,” Drake asked in her pause, “is your interest in Praeden?”

“I have two sons, a daughter, their spouses, and seven grandchildren there. And of course, there are the other ten thousand pioneers.”

Reason enough, even to Rand’s space-cynical sensibilities, but still...

“Five years, standard galactic pay and all your food supplies. We’ll take the Praeden run first then

whatever comes our way. I quote the price for the Praeden run.”

Drake was accepting her offer! Rand bit his lip until he tasted blood. Not a good idea.

“How much?”

“As much of your mortal blood as we need in the next five years.”

She paled at Drake’s tone. Rand didn’t blame her. Drake sounded like a Vampire on an antique DVD. Still, she only hesitated a second. “Agreed.”

Chapter Three

“You disapprove,” Drake said very quietly as they walked back to the ship.

“Not disapprove, exactly, but she’s old.”

“Not to me, lad.”

Maybe not, but... “She’s not what we had in mind.”

“What *you* had in mind.” Drake’s eyebrows rose as he chuckled. “Fancied a nice athletic young man, did you?”

Was it possible Drake was jealous and had picked her on purpose?

“Not one of the others had her qualifications, as you well know, and she’s desperate to get that cargo to Praeden.”

“And if she deserts us afterwards?”

“She won’t. Women of her ilk keep their word. She’ll do right by us, lad. Old enough to have thick, rich blood. Just you wait and see.”

Maybe, but... “Drake, she’s a woman!”

“Ah!” He drew out the syllable and inserted a depth of meaning. “And you don’t like girls? Oh lad, my lad. You’re no longer mortal. Sex is a mere diversion, an incidental.”

It damn well hadn’t been so far!

“It’s the blood that draws you now. The vessel is unimportant, but you may be surprised. Once you get over a few gray hairs and wrinkles, I think our new crewmember will satisfy you totally.”

Rand wasn't sure Drake knew what the hell he was talking about.

Ferda knew her job, Rand had to grant her that much. He watched as their new crewmember oversaw the lading of her cargo, insisting the loaders place each carton just so, even jumping down into one of the holds to watch that cases were positioned and anchored with no room to shift.

She gave the repaired hatch a curious glance. "Had a bit of trouble with your cargo?"

"Be glad you're joining us on this voyage, not the last one."

She grinned at Drake's reply. "I'll take your word for it!"

She knew her way around the bridge and was appreciatively impressed by some of Rand's modifications to standard equipment. She particularly liked his cloaking device. "Perfect." She gave a crooked little smile. "Couldn't have picked a better craft if I'd gone shopping for one."

"She'll get you to Praeden without any difficulty."

"Good. And if we get back, it will be wonderful."

"We'll get back," Drake replied faster than Rand could get insulted. "You're traveling with Vampires now."

"Yes!" She gave a dry chuckle. "I am. Not for the first time, but it's been a while."

So that explained her easy acceptance. "When?" Rand asked.

"A while back. My father and I got caught up in the Arrand trouble. Did a bit of ferrying back and forth."

Hell, that was before he was born! How old *was* she?

"That Wallace!" Drake let out the closest thing to a Vampire gasp. "You never mentioned that!"

She shrugged. "No point in advertising my age. I sensed young Rand here was expecting me to bring a wheelchair on board."

Given Drake's reaction, he let the reference to 'young Rand' pass.

"You're Captain Wallace's daughter."

"That's me." She gave a little shrug. "It was a sticky situation. Always bothered my father that we didn't get everyone out."

Drake looked ready to kiss her feet. "Between you, you saved hundreds from the Pogrom!"

"Yes. So I frequently told him, but..." She frowned, silent a few seconds before shrugging. "Anyway, that was a long while ago."

Along while ago. She had to be even older than she looked.

“I think, lad,” Drake said looking right at him, “you have no idea whom we have hired. The Wallaces, three of them, rescued hundreds of Vampires from a massacre on Arrand. They literally bombarded the concentration camp where the Vamps were being held. Using wire cutters and saws, they released the silver chains the Vamps had been bound with and ferried them to safety in small freighters. Took some doing.”

Sounded like it. Rand didn’t know what to say, sensing anything would sound fatuous or feeble.

Drake filled in for him. “And you’re hiring yourself out as casual crew these days?”

“Not always.” She almost grinned. “I’m pretty much retired, but getting these supplies to my family in Praeden through normal channels proved impossible. Mortals can get antsy about tricky situations.”

Maybe Vamps should too...

Drake gave her a little bow. “For that service, I and my kin will owe your family forever.”

“Get this cargo to Praeden and we’re even.”

“We will get it there, but we’ll never be even. Vampires will forever owe your bloodline.”

She accepted that with a surprising blush and a little nod. “We all do what we can against tyranny. Speaking of blood, how are we going to arrange that?”

Seemed a bit presumptuous to be sucking on a galactic heroine...

“Rand’s needs are more immediate than mine,” Drake replied. “He’ll need to feed every few days.”

She nodded. “Okay, let me get a shower and I’ll be at your disposal.”

Rand damn well envied her composure. She was so downright matter of fact, and here he was, discovering that Vampires got the collywobbles.

“Worried, lad?”

Rand nodded. “Yeah!”

“Don’t be. The first few live feedings are a little overwhelming, but I’ll give you a hand.”

“You’ll be there?” He wasn’t sure if this was good or alarming news.

“Yes, lad. I’ll be there. I don’t want you going blood crazy and draining the life out of our food supply.”

This was not going to be easy.

“Still worried about doing a girl?”

“Yeah... what if she... I mean...” What the hell did he mean?

“Don’t sweat it, lad. She’s showering for you. Pay her the same compliment while I double check the auto-coordinates.”

Drake joined him in the shower stall just as he was rinsing off. A few minutes naked with Drake and Rand was ready and willing -- at least for Drake.

Instead, Ferda Wallace waited.

If it hadn’t been for Drake holding his elbow, he’d have sprinted back to his quarters. Instead, they stood outside her cabin. Drake tapped the door with his knuckles.

She opened the door, wearing a plain cotton coverall that tied at her waist. Her graying hair was still damp from the shower, and her face gleamed clean and pink and very much alive. “Both of you?”

“Yes. The lad needs help. It will be his first live feed.”

“I see. Or maybe I don’t.” She stood back and let them in. “That must be why the bunk is much larger than standard.”

Drake nodded. “I had them all modified.”

“I see.” She went still. Very still, as if finally registering she had two naked Vamps in her cabin. Two naked, aroused Vamps. Drake was hard, and to his amazement, so was Rand. Drake had been right about the blood calling to him. He could hear her heartbeat, smell her blood in her veins. The pulse at the base of her neck, clearly visible in the open vee of her coverall, had him salivating.

Still... “Look, is this okay?” Rand couldn’t help asking. He needed her blood, longed for it, yearned for it, but...

“Yes, it’s okay. I gave my word and I stand by it. It’s just I wasn’t expecting both of you at once. But heck, my father always told me never to turn down a chance to do something new. Not sure this is *exactly* what he had in mind...” She shrugged and grinned. Her eyes sparkled and her face seemed to lighten. “So.” She looked at Rand. “You’re a virgin when it comes to feeding off a mortal. I’m a virgin when it comes to a threesome.” She turned to Drake. “You’d better take the lead here for both of us.”

“I will, but first, you’re sure? You agree? You are willing?”

“Oh, yes. It’s not often a woman my age gets an offer from two bedworthy Vampires. I’m willing.”

“Good.” Drake took a step closer to her. “Then why are you still wearing that garment? We’re naked. You need to be! Take it off!”

His tone rather shocked Rand.

Ferda laughed. “You want it off, you take it off!”

Before her laugh faded, it was on the floor across the room.

Rand stared. He had to. He didn’t want her, but oh, he needed the blood calling from her veins. His gums itched. His cock hardened even more...

“Easy, lad. Not yet.” Drake reached out and took Rand’s hand, at the same time putting his other arm around Ferda’s shoulders. “Let me show you what to do. The more pleasure you give, the more you get back. It’s always important to give satisfaction.”

Rand’s thoughts went back to their frenzied coupling. He’d received pleasure in abundance. Would it really work the same here?

At Drake’s direction, Rand settled at the head of the bed, Ferda’s head on his thigh. Her hair was soft and still damp. It took all he had not to run his fingers through the short-cropped curls.

Drake settled at the foot of the bed, between her open legs. Fascinated, Rand couldn’t help watching as Drake stroked her full, pale breasts and Ferda let out a little contented sigh. The pads of Drake’s thumbs brushed her nipples. Almost instantly they hardened and she smiled. Not content, Drake took each one between forefinger and thumb and stroked and pulled them until Ferda threw back her head, pressing into Rand’s thigh as she did, and laughed. Drake moved up, fitting his hips firmly between her legs, opening them wider, and bent his head to kiss each nipple in turn.

Her eyes lit with what could only be pleasure as Drake kissed up and down her neck, across her shoulders and down her chest to her belly.

“Stroke her neck,” Drake said looking up. “Use your instincts to find the vein, keep it close to the skin, but don’t bite until I tell you.”

Easy for Drake to say. Rand could sense the lines of her veins, and the softly beating pulse was clear, both to his eyes and ears. He stroked her neck with one finger. The warmth surprised him most: living, pulsing warmth, rich blood under soft skin. Damn, Drake was right, his body did respond. Rand wanted her blood, yearned for it, lusted for it.

Needed it!

Hang on, lad! Not yet. The wait makes it sweeter.

Rand stared at Drake, realizing he’d not spoken aloud. Drake was hearing his thoughts!

Might as well spare her sensibilities. Some things said aloud might spoil the mood. The more aroused she is, the sweeter and richer her blood. Follow my lead. With that bit of sage advice, Drake nipped the underside of her breast. Lightly. Twin beads of red appeared on her pale skin. Ferda let out a long, slow groan and jerked her hips. Drake held her steady with both hands as he nipped his way down her belly. Rand stared. Instead of complaining, she was enjoying it. Sighs and moans of what could only be pleasure filled the room. He realized, with a shock, his moans were joining hers. He leaned close and licked her neck.

“Soon, lad, soon.”

Drake’s head was between her legs. Rand watched, fascinated, as his mouth closed on her pussy. She cried out. She’d have lifted off the bed if Drake’s hands weren’t still pinning her down.

“Now!”

Rand bit, his fangs piercing her skin with ease, and tasted instantly. Strong and rich. As her heart sped

with her peaking climax, the flow increased, until he was sucking frantically to absorb the spurting lifeblood.

“Enough, lad!”

Drake’s injunction was all but lost among her screams and shouts, but Rand heard and responded, albeit reluctantly. Drawing his mouth away, Rand stared at her convulsing body. Her face flushed red, her skin glowed, and her entire being radiated joy. He remembered, barely, to lick the site of his bite, closing off the rich flow.

“Not quite done yet, lad. My turn now, and then some. Over here.”

Confused, but never doubting Drake, Rand took his place between her legs. He couldn’t help but stare at her warm, flushed cunt. She was gasping, her heart pounding as her climax eased.

“Get in her, lad, so I can get in you.”

Rand froze momentarily. Drake was serious. What now? Tamping down his nervousness, Rand looked down at Ferda’s spread legs, her body still shaking with her climax.

“Get to it, lad. She needs you.”

Rand swallowed. He swore the sound echoed around the cabin.

“For God’s sake, please!” Ferda cried out. It was close to a shout. Her body was taut with need. Again, after that climax? “Now!” she yelled, sitting up and reaching for his cock.

Her touch galvanized him. Her hands were like warm need wrapped around his erection. He all but came on the spot. Grabbing her hips to bring her closer, he positioned himself at the opening of her cunt, amazed at how moist and welcoming she felt against the head of his cock. She jerked her hips and he thrust, astounded at the living heat that enclosed him. So this was what a woman felt like!

She shouted. Rand groaned, hesitating as her muscles closed around him. His groan became a gasp as Drake’s cool hands parted his ass cheeks and Rand felt the welcome pressure against his own asshole. With a swift jerk of Drake’s hips, Rand was penetrated, just as he penetrated Ferda. The three of them locked in wild carnal embrace, cock to ass and cock to cunt.

Drake began to pump. As he thrust, he drove Rand deeper into Ferda. She reciprocated by pressing her hips closer to Rand. With Ferda’s mortal heat around his cock and Drake’s Vampire strength pounding his ass, Rand was lost in a wild spiral of sensation, force and sexual joy. The harder each one of them thrust, the greater the collective pleasure, until sensation burgeoned with an exponential force.

Rand wanted this never to stop -- to spend his life spearing and being speared, warm body in front, cool strength and power behind. His mind zapped. His body roared with joy and pleasure. Seemed they fucked for hours, days, months, locked in a tangle of muscle, bone, sensation and unbridled sexual delight.

Cries, shouts and yells echoed in the small cabin, mingling the scents of passion, female sweat and male need. As Rand’s climax peaked, Drake’s command penetrated his sex-fogged brain.

“Bite her again.”

Without conscious thought, Rand obeyed, sinking his teeth into her chest. Richness, heat, life and wild passion engulfed him in a frenzy and he climaxed, pouring his power into her bucking, fervent body.

Then Drake came. With the influx of Drake's energy, Rand pulled his mouth from her flesh and, rearing his head back, roared aloud. Ferda gasped, crying out and sweating with exertion as the combined strength of two Vampires pounded her mortal flesh until she came again and again, her triumphant cries mingling with theirs.

As Drake withdrew, Rand eased out of her. He glanced down, and froze. She was so still, her body flushed with sex and passion, the wound on her chest bleeding a little. But she didn't move. Had they killed her?

Panic caught him tight in the throat.

"She's all right," Drake said, brushing the damp hair off her face. "Some mortal women do that after an extremely satisfying climax. It's called *la petite mort*. Little death. Rather links her with us, doesn't it?"

More than that linked them!

Rand leaned over and kissed her flushed cheek. Her eyelids fluttered open and dark blue eyes fixed his. "I think I'll sign on for twenty years." She smiled and closed her eyes again.

In minutes the sound of mortal breathing slowed. She was asleep. They had worn her out. Rand hoped she'd awaken in time to take over the watch when they needed her.

"Don't worry, lad," Drake said as he reached for a cotton blanket to cover her naked, sleeping body. "She'll wake restored. Just you wait and see. But you'd better seal off that last bite. It's a matter of courtesy not to leave your donors bleeding."

"Yeah, right!" Rand bent over and gently lapped the narrow trail of blood before sealing the wound.

She turned her head toward him and sighed. "Nice."

There was a scratch on her thigh. That he licked too before gently licking her thighs clean. He took his time, inhaling the scent of her, savoring her taste and wondering if all women were like her. That he doubted. Ferda seemed very much one of a kind.

"Come on, lad. We've work to do."

Rand followed Drake out, back to the bridge, where the screen displayed the coordinates for Praeden.

They were heading into a war zone.

Two days later they were circling a safe distance from the siege force surrounding Praeden, waiting for the eclipse. Ferda sat at the console, body tense, one hand gripping the edge of the console, the other clenched in a fist, as she scanned the monitors. She nodded thanks as Rand placed a carton of energy drink beside her and sat down in the adjoining chair.

“I really appreciate the intense cloaking device you have. Doubt anyone could penetrate it. Bet we could slip right past them if we had to.”

“And get blasted the minute their heat sensors picked us up.”

“True. Best stick to my original plan.” Which he’d picked holes in, before conceding it was their only viable option. “Ever thought how risky this really is?” he asked.

“I try not to. Don’t have much choice. My babies are down there and they need what we’re carrying to survive.”

Right. And in the past few days he’d learned two of her ‘babies’ were members of the ruling council, another a colonel in the sadly almost neutralized Praeden defense force, and another a major figure in the information and media on planet. He hadn’t managed to find out what her numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren did for their homeland, but if they all had her will, balls and courage, they’d last the siege out. If only they could get the supplies to them in time.

If only...

“Another couple of Terran hours, and we can get into position,” Drake announced from across the bridge where he readied the communication channel. It was a narrow bandwidth, but any wider and they risked the Wardens picking up the transmission.

The real danger of what they were doing had struck Rand days earlier. Now fear settled cold in his gut -- not so much for him and Drake. They’d pretty much survive if captured. Everyone in the world -- almost everyone -- valued Vamps. But Ferda... what would the Wardens do with an old warrior? And if they sussed her connection to the Praeden community... Rand shuddered.

“Cold?” she asked.

“No. Scared witless.”

“Me too. Risky business, this. I would never have pulled you two into it, but I needed transport.”

As far as Rand was concerned, she’d already paid tenfold for the use of the damn ship. Drake hadn’t been kidding about the energizing effect of live feeding. And come to that, she certainly looked none the worse for it herself.

Nobody spoke much the next two hours. Ferda toddled off to the latrines and fetched another energy drink. She had to be wired by now, but he didn’t grudge her the drug. He’d used it enough in his mortal days. Action he could handle, it was waiting that drove him crazy.

* * *

They were almost thirty Terran minutes, according to his console, from setting trajectory. The moon was already entering the penumbra when an explosion rocked the ship.

Drake swore. Rand glued himself to the console and righted the ship as Ferda picked herself up off the floor. He wouldn't respond to the blood from the gash in her forehead. Later. Later.

"Something took out the rear engine."

Hell and damnation! That was his good engine. The forward one had always been dicey.

"They found us?" Ferda's voice was tight with fear and worry.

"Don't think so. Just hellish timing. Nothing else wrong. It wasn't penetrated. Just gave up purring."

Drake broke the silence. "What can we do with the other one?"

"We can land, but can't take off." Or they could limp to the nearest space port. Unlikely. Getting away unnoticed entailed leaving very fast. What the hell. He was landing this cargo for Ferda. Then he'd start worrying.

"We could shift the cargo to the escape pods. Send one down on automatic and I'll guide the other..."

"No!" the Vamps interrupted her in unison.

"We made an agreement," Drake said as she stared at them, openmouthed. "We stand by it. We're a partnership now."

Ferda smiled. Slowly. "Thank you. I will be indebted for a long time." She put her hand to her forehead, looked at the blood on her fingers and back at them both. "I'd better take care of this..."

Drake walked across the bridge, licked her skin clean and closed the wound. "Now let's get into position and make contact."

It shouldn't have been so easy, but after the shock of losing the engine, maybe the gods took mercy on them -- or the beleaguered Praedens.

They took up position in the umbra -- more slowly than intended, but they got there. Ferda took over communications, passing codes back and forth. At her signal, he cut back the engines and gingerly landed, an hour later, right on target.

Ferda was the first down the exit chute. By the time he and Drake joined her, she was surrounded by a hubbub of children clinging onto her, teenagers trying to hug her, adults all ready to shift and heave, and a babble of voices. Rand shoved away the moment of envy.

Time to clear the hold.

"Not so fast."

Though the Wardens might have been lurking in the skies above, Ferda insisted on introductions. Rand missed half the names, but didn't miss the almost veneration he and Drake shared with Ferda. "We will

ever be in your debt,” her son, one of the council representatives, told Rand.

Adulation hung uneasily on Rand’s shoulders, but he could almost ignore it in the bustle as Ferda marshaled the crowd to shift and carry. “You’re stuck here a little while,” she said as she handed Rand a carton. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m not,” Rand said. “Doubt Drake is either. Time we stayed put for a while. Nothing like being in on a victory party.”

“Might be a few weeks.”

“Yeah!” he replied without bothering to suppress the grin. “We’ll get hungry waiting.”

She grinned back. “Good.”

Stay tuned for more exciting *Adventures in Blood* ...

Madeleine Oh

More years ago than she cares to remember, Madeleine Oh left her native England to teach her way around the world. She didn’t get very far. In Turkey she met the love of her life, a handsome US Air Force captain from South Carolina. Since then, she’s raised three sons, taught regular and special education, worked as a tutor and educational assessor, moonlighted as a bookseller and somehow managed to get a master’s degree in her spare time.

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