



Seducing St. Nic

Emma Petersen © 2006

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## **Seducing St. Nic**

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### **Seducing St. Nic**

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## **Dedication**

To my mother, Ruth Ann, who gave me my love of reading and my zany off beat sense of humor. Life will never be the same without you. I pray everything I do and accomplish will be a tribute to you and your memory.

I miss you, Mom.

## Chapter One

I hung up the phone and resisted the urge to toss it across the room. Vampire or no vampire, my boss should have known working on Christmas was just wrong. It was taking the whole condemned soul thing just a little too far. Okay, so maybe it wasn't exactly Christmas. But it *was* the day before the day before Christmas, so it may as well be Christmas.

*Grrrr!* Damn Cypriano San Nicolo. Even a vampire should know the two days before Christmas were supposed to be spent as quality time with family and the mall, but *nooo*. The exasperating, demanding and extremely scrumptious Mr. San Nicolo just had to get this information sent out today.

Stomping to my room, I shoved my arms into the yummy new coat I had won. I grabbed my keys and walked back into my living room to call a cab. I don't like driving under normal circumstances, so there was no way I was going to chance it with the storm the newscaster said was brewing.

"Meow."

I looked down at Duchess, who was eyeing the Christmas tree again. The tree was her arch nemesis and, after their last battle, I didn't think she'd go for a second round. But just in case she built enough courage to wage war with it again, I unplugged the lights.

Patting her on the head, I grabbed my purse and ignored her snarky hiss. Duchess wasn't a fan of my new coat. She treated it as if it were another cat and tried to attack it every chance she got. Even

threatening her with shaken kitty syndrome hadn't discouraged her.

Locking the door behind me, I walked carefully down the icy steps of my apartment building and hopped in the cab waiting for me at the curb.

"Where to, lady?"

"The San Nicolo building on Regents Street, please."

The cab jerked into the street and sped toward the end of the block.

Sitting back, I burrowed deeper into the soft fur of my coat. It was the most luxurious thing I've ever owned, and I forgave Mr. San Nicolo just a tad because his ordering me to work on my day off gave me a reason to wear it.

Sighing, I thought of the enigmatic Cypriano San Nicolo. There wasn't much I knew about him, other than he was rich, gorgeous, and a vampire, and from what I'd heard, a rather old one.

I had been working for San Nicolo International for two years when my previous boss retired. Well, actually, he met the business end of a stake, but that was another story for another time. Instead of letting me go as I expected, the company called me a couple days later and offered me a promotion as the new executive assistant to Mr. San Nicolo. At first I was excited by the news because it meant a pay increase—which would put me squarely two dollars above minimum wage—and I wouldn't have to look for a new position.

But then I found out I'd be working for *the* Mr. San Nicolo. The same man who started the company in 1807. It wasn't his age or the fact he was the evil undead that bothered me. Hell, more than half of the company was the evil undead. San Nicolo International prided itself on being an equal opportunity employer and having more Vampire American employees than any other company since vamps came out of the coffin nearly three decades ago.

No, the fact that Mr. San Nicolo—or St. Nic as I secretly liked to call him—was a blood-sucking fiend didn't really bother me. What bothered me was that he hadn't sucked in nearly a hundred years, and a hungry vampire is a dangerous vampire. When I brought my concerns to Human Resources, they assured me there would be no sucking and that Mr. San

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Nicolo would be well fed long before I started my new position. After seeing Mr. San Nicolo, I couldn't help thinking it was kind of too bad about the no sucking part.

Shrugging, I reached into my purse for a twenty to pay the cabbie after we stopped in front of my office building.

## Chapter Two

"I'm paying you too much."

"I beg your pardon?" I said, trying not to add the words *oh no you didn't* to the end of the sentence.

He hadn't even bothered with a *Hello* or *My, Barbara Jean, you look scrumptious in that coat*.

I counted to ten. I needed this job. Plus, if I kicked him it would make him angry, and it probably wasn't very smart to piss off a centuries old vampire who hadn't had a steady meal in a while.

"If you can afford such a coat, I must be paying you too much."

I blinked and began to count backwards. It didn't have the effect I was hoping for. It was more like I was counting down to an explosion. "Actually, Mr. San Nicolo, the pittance you pay me will barely buy me a pullover at J-Mart," I mumbled under my breath before I promptly remembered, *Hello. Vampire! Supersonic hearing*. He probably heard every word I said.

He arched a perfect eyebrow. "J-Mart?"

*Damn*. He had.

"What is this J-Mart?" The trace of accent was back in his voice. I noticed it came out when we talked about things he had no knowledge of, like fast food, reality TV, kindness.

"Nothing, Mr. San Nicolo. Nothing at all. Can we get started? I want to make sure I get to my brother's early enough to help his wife start preparations for tomorrow's dinner."

He looked at me and, at first, I thought he would say something else, but he merely nodded. I could have sworn there was something in his eyes as he looked at me. Longing? Loneliness? Nah, St. Nic didn't get lonely. He was too busy terrorizing small children, running from the usual mob of angry villagers, and counting his money.

"I need this report faxed to the Milan office."

I looked at the file he handed me. He had called me into work, on the eve before Christmas Eve, to fax paperwork? *Breathe, Barbara Jean! Breathe. Remember, Duchess needs to eat. If you quit, you'll still be able to buy cat food, but it won't be Duchess who'll be eating it.*

*And where's your holiday cheer and good will toward man and, uh, vamps? He doesn't have any idea how to work the fax machine. He just came out of a hundred year dirt nap.*

The good part of me felt sorry for Mr. San Nicolo, who was probably easily confused by all the new technology and shiny objects. The bad part of me on the other hand...

"What I wouldn't give for a stake," I muttered as I stomped out of his office. A sound that sounded suspiciously like laughter followed me.

Walking into the closet people insisted on calling my office, I pulled off my gloves and coat. I tossed the gloves onto the desk and carefully draped the jacket over the back of chair sitting opposite my desk.

I still couldn't believe I had won it. I didn't even remember entering a contest, let alone one for a Mink and Cashmere Coat from Neiman Marcus. But the box had arrived yesterday, and the deliveryman had explained that it was a Christmas contest I had entered earlier in the year.

Who was I to look a gift mink in the mouth?

Opening the package, I had almost drooled. It was the most exquisite thing I had ever seen or ever owned. Squealing like a little girl opening a box to find the Barbie Dream House, I had picked it up and spun in a circle.

Stroking the soft fur, I sighed, and then jumped when a throat cleared behind me.

"Should I give you and the coat a couple more minutes, Miss



Ruiz?"

My back stiffened and my hand clenched in the fur, and I wished it was St. Nic's hair. It would probably feel as soft and silky as the pelt did. Stifling a sigh, I turned to face him.

"Was there something else you needed, Mr. San Nicolo?"

Those ice blue eyes stared back at me, and I shivered. How could such beautiful eyes belong to such a cold man?

"No, I just wanted to know if you knew where the Westchester file was?" He took another step into my office and, suddenly, the small room felt microscopic.

"Beautiful earrings. Were they a present?" He lifted his hand and brushed the nape of my neck, and my skin tingled where he touched me.

*Oh my.* Now that was different. All the blood in my body seemed to head south to pool between my thighs as soon as St. Nic touched me.

*Weird.* Swallowing hard, I nodded. Then frantically shook my head.

"No—no," I stammered. "Actually, I won them from Marin's"

"Did you? Wasn't that lucky."

I swallowed again and ignored the arousal strumming in my veins. It was ridiculous that the way he said the word *lucky* should make me imagine naked bodies and satin sheets. My breathing became shallow, and I couldn't help but think about how lucky a woman would be to tangle in satin with the infamous Cypriano San Nicolo.

"Are you going give it to me?"

"What?" I squeaked. Give it to him? Oh Boy, did I want to!

"The file, Miss Ruiz. Are you going to give me the Westmoreland file?"

Mortified, I ignored the heat in my cheeks and turned to grab the folder off of my desk.

Turning, I handed it to him, careful not to touch his skin with mine. No need to get the engine started if I wasn't going to take it out for a ride.

"Thank you, Miss Ruiz."

"You're welcome, Mr. San Nicolo."

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"Is there anything else you need, Mr. San Nicolo?" I stood outside his office door with my coat on and purse in hand, hoping he would take the hint. The one or two hours I'd planned on staying had mysteriously turned into four and, if I didn't hurry, I'd be late getting to my older brother's house.

"Si, as a matter of fact, Miss Ruiz. I was wondering if you could teach me to use the facsimile machine before you leave. Just in case I need to use it while you are gone."

My eye twitched and a scene from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ran through my mind. Not from the series with the uber hot James Marsters, but the original movie edition with Christy Swanson and Paul Ruben. Only I was the Christy Swanson character, and St. Nic was a less greasy version of Paul Ruben.

Taking a deep breath, I automatically reached up to stroke my coat and went to my happy place. Smiling, I said, "Of course, Mr. San Nicolo, do you have time now?"

I was so proud of myself. I didn't point out that since darkness had fallen the building was now crawling with a dozen or more vamps all born within this century, including two or more vampettes who'd be oh so willing to show the big boss how to work the fax machine, among other things.

He nodded, and I felt like a peasant granted a small boon from the king.

*Move it, your majesty. Or the turkey won't be the only thing that'll get something stuck up its keister tonight.*

Removing my gloves, I set them and my purse on the small table near the door for quick retrieval.

"Okay, this is your average fax machine. I figure for your next lesson I can teach you how to send faxes from your computer." I looked up to see if less than jolly old—but still super hot—St. Nic was still with me, only to find him watching me with an intensity I really didn't care for. I'd seen that kind of look before. It came right before Duchess ripped the

wings off of a fly she had cornered.

Suddenly, I felt very sorry for that fly. Gulping, I tried to steady my hand. St. Nic's eyes looked different and a little less focused than they had earlier.

*Quick. Think, Barbara Jean.* Did I accidentally flash him a glimpse of neck or wrist? Surreptitiously as possible with a shaking hand, I reached up to make sure the mink was still wrapped around my neck.

It was. Breathing a sigh of relief, I snapped my fingers in front of St. Nic's face. "Uh, Mr. San Nicolo? Are you okay?" I said loudly, announcing carefully.

No need to talk any louder, I realized. He's hungry, not losing his hearing.

Modulating my voice back to what I hoped was normal, I continued. "I saw on my way in today that the vending machine had been restocked with Vita-Sangre. O-Negative. Yum." I was rambling now, but I didn't care. The mention of the synthetic blood seemed to make the hunger I saw in his eyes recede.

"You can go now." His voice was hoarse and a little less than friendly. As if he was fighting some great battle, and I was a saucy wench in a village he'd just sacked.

I opened my mouth, and I swore I felt Bad Barbara Jean slap me upside my head. *Muy bien, chica. Tu y tu pinche preuntas. Correle pendeja!*

Bad BJ often channeled my dad's Cuban mother when she was scared and, at the moment, was urging me to run. Okay, it was more like, *Shut up with the fucking questions and run, idiot.* But Good Barbara Jean kind of thought St. Nic looked hot when he was all broody and intense like this, and didn't want to leave him when he was in such obvious pain.

*Mira puta*— Stopping Bad BJ mid Spanish insult before my two Sybils could start brawling, I swallowed nervous laughter and began to ease around him toward the door.

It took me more than one attempt to pick up my purse in my nerveless fingers, not once taking my eyes off of St. Nic.

"Well, good night, Satan—uh, St. Nic—uh, Mr. San Nicolo. Have a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year."

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I nearly tripped in my haste to get out of the media center and to the nearest elevator.

### Chapter Three

Safely ensconced in the elevator, I once again reevaluated my chosen career path.

Near sweatshop-like wages. Check.

Excellent benefits. Check.

Murdering blood craving psycho but still really hot boss. Check.

Did the murdering blood craving psycho boss automatically cancel out the excellent benefits? If he tore out my throat, at least I'd be able to go the best hospital to get it repaired. *Yeah. Way to look on the bright side, Barbara Jean!*

Releasing the breath I didn't know I was holding, I pulled out my cell phone and dialed a cab. If I hurried, I could get to my brother's house before Cin put the twin's to sleep.

Cin, short for Cindy, was my older brother Johnny's wife and mother to my adorable twin niece and nephew, Paloma and Sky.

I wanted to make sure I got to their house as soon as possible not only to say goodnight to the twins, but to also make sure everything else was ready for tomorrow night's dinner. Not that Cin couldn't cook or anything, it was just that she was working on my third niece or nephew and was ready to pop any moment.

As I waited in the lobby for my cab, I couldn't help but notice my heartbeat hadn't slowed, but the initial fear had shifted into something different. My nipples were hard, and I ached between my thighs.

I had almost been killed—okay, maybe a slight exaggeration—and

it turned me on. A lot of girls liked a little pain with their pleasure, but wasn't this crossing the line?

Watching the cab pull up, I tried to put St. Nic out of my mind as I walked out to meet it.

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"Hey. Am I too late?" Pushing past Johnny, I stopped to give my sister-in-law a hug, a peck on the cheek, and pat on the belly, before I made a beeline for Paloma and Sky's room.

A lot of people would swear their kid, or their nieces and/or nephews were the cutest and they would be wrong. My brother's children had them all beat hands down.

*"Tia Barbie! Tia Barbie!"*

I got as far as the living room, when two children with black curly hair came running toward me squealing at the top of their little lungs.

"Great, BJ. Get them all riled up so they won't want to go to bed, why don't you?"

Scooping them both up, I swung them around, enjoying their childish giggles and screams, while I stuck my tongue out at my brother over their heads.

"My two favorite munchkins in the whole world," I said, in turn nuzzling each of their chubby little necks and breathing in their wonderful baby smell.

*"Oooh, purrrty,"* Paloma cooed as she stroked my jacket.

That was my girl. She had great taste for a three year old.

My sister-in-law gasped. *"Barbara Jean. That coat is gorgeous."*

Smiling, I put the twins down, did a quick Ru Paul sashay toward her and my brother before executing an end of the catwalk turn, and walking back toward the squealing toddlers.

Putting my hand on my hip and striking a pose, I said, "Isn't it? I won it from Neiman's." Cin ran up to me and we grabbed hands, jumping up and down screaming.

*"Dios mio,"* I heard my brother mutter, but ignored him as the

babies joined Cin and me in our impromptu jig.

"Barbara Jean? What about the earrings?" Cin said as she reached a hand toward my ear.

Turning, I snapped my teeth down near her fingers, causing her to scream with laughter, and I suppressed the memory of another person who had reached out toward me in a similar way earlier that day.

"Contest," I said in a singsong voice.

"You are so lucky," she said.

"I'm lucky?" I rubbed her belly as if I was making a wish. "I'm lucky, but look at you. You make me sick. You've totally got that pregnancy glow going on."

Cin blushed and tossed a loving look over her shoulder at my brother.

Making a gagging sound, I turned back to my favorite munchkins. Unbuttoning my coat, I shrugged it off and laid it over the back of the couch. Crouching down in front of Paloma and Sky, I opened my purse and pulled out two lollipops.

Holding them in front of me, I looked back at my brother and smirked. "Guess what *Tia* Barbie has for her babies."

"*Dulce*," Came Sky's shy reply. He was the opposite of his twin. Where Paloma was outgoing and talked non-stop, Sky was reserved and rarely spoke.

My brother swooped in and snatched the candy from my hands before grabbing and tucking each baby under his arm. "Say g'night to Auntie BJ," he said as he held up each baby to give me a kiss goodnight.

Kissing each baby twice, I pinched his arm. "Stop calling me BJ, dork."

"*Ow*. You saw her, you all saw the abuse."

Cin looked up at the ceiling, and the babies merely laughed as my brother walked out, mumbling about his household's lack of proper respect.

He wasn't gone for more than sixty second before Cin sat down on the couch, grabbed my hand, and pulled me down behind her. "Tell me the truth. Were the earrings and coat a present from St. Naughty?"

Laughing, I slapped her knee. "I did tell you the truth. I won them."

"Ahhh," she said, disappointment clear on her face. "And here I thought you were having a torrid steamy affair with Nos-fer-hot-tu. You are," She crowed when she saw the blush spread on my cheeks. "You're *boinking* the evil undead."

Waving my hands, trying to silence her before my brother overheard her and pulled the overprotective act, I said, "Am *not*."

"Are too!"

"Are what?" Johnny asked as he walked out of the twins' room.

"Barbara Jean's doing the nasty with St. Nic."

"What?" His eyes narrowed, and I waited for the lecture. Since our parents died in a car crash years earlier, Johnny's already protective manner had become even more so.

"Barbara Jean, do you know what you are doing? Cypriano San Nicolo isn't a man you really want to fool with."

My brother worked for the private company that took care of San Nicolo International's security issues, so he had access to information that I never dreamt of.

I tried to resist asking the question that had been plaguing me, not just because it would be asking Johnny to reveal information he may not be comfortable sharing, but also because I was a little afraid of the answer. "Do you know why he went to ground?" I asked, using the term vamps used for when really old vampires went to sleep for long periods of time.

Johnny took a deep breath, looked at Cin, and then back at me. "If you weren't my sister, I wouldn't tell you this, but he went to ground for the same reason he no longer dates humans. He had a human lover and when he tried to turn her, she died during the process."

Cin gasped and my heart broke a little for Cypriano. I couldn't imagine how it must feel to lose your lover so tragically.

"So if he takes interest in you now, Barbara Jean, it's more than likely because he's looking for blood and sex."

I thanked my brother for the information. Cin announced she still had a couple of pies she had to get done, and I was more than welcome to



help her.

Following her to the kitchen, I stopped and kissed my brother on the cheek. "Thanks, Johnny."

The information wasn't what I wanted to hear, but it was what I needed to hear. Even though I didn't want to admit it, I was developing more than a little crush on my boss, and my heart didn't seem to care whether it was a stupid decision or not. But faced with the facts, it was easier to give up my secret hope that something would ever happen between us.

I was quiet as I walked into the kitchen.

"I'm sorry I told Johnny, Barbara Jean."

I smiled at my sister-in-law and couldn't help the tiny stirring of envy that rose up in me. "It's okay, Cin. Johnny's right. St. Nic is way out of my league."

## Chapter Four

I stayed up until two in the morning to wrap Duchess' Christmas presents, all the while trying to convince myself that people other than crazy cat ladies bought their cats presents, and then I put up both our stockings. I felt as if I'd just fallen asleep when I heard the knock at my front door. At first I thought of rolling over and going back to sleep, but remembering the only other time I received a visitor this late made me get out of bed.

My eyes smarted, and I prayed it wouldn't be anyone to deliver the same kind of news they had that long ago morning when my parents died.

"Who is it?" I asked through the door. I was worried, not crazy. I lived in a decent neighborhood now, but I hadn't always. Until I knew who was on the other side of the door, I wasn't opening it.

"It's Cypriano San Nicolo."

Eyes wide, I looked at Duchess and swore her little kitty mouth formed a moue of surprised as she returned my look. Or maybe she just yawned.

After pulling back the curtains to confirm my visitor's identity, I opened the door, and my heart nearly stopped beating as I took in the sight of St. Nic standing on my doorstep.

I guess I *had* been a good girl this year. *Yes, Santa, you rock!*

"What are you doing here? Should you be out?" I looked behind him to see the first rays of dawn spreading across the sky. The sun would

be up in less than an hour. Panicking, I grabbed the sleeve of his wool coat and pulled him into my apartment.

It was true that Mr. San Nicolo was the only vampire I interacted with on a daily basis, but even I knew what happened to a vampire once the sun hit them, and it wasn't only concern for my job that made me react so.

Slamming the door behind him, I went to each of my bay windows, closed the blinds, and then drew down the curtains. I turned to find St. Nic watching me intently with those beautiful silvery-blue eyes of his.

*Step into my parlor, said the spider to the fly.* And to think I used to wish I had wings.

"Sorry to disturb you, Miss Ruiz. Especially on..." He didn't say Christmas Eve, and it made me wonder if he could actually say the word since it had Christ's name in it. I'd heard that speaking any variation of God's name actually gave some vampires physical pain. I guess that meant mass was out. Hysterical laughter bubbled in my throat, but I swallowed it.

I couldn't believe Cypriano San Nicolo was standing in my living room.

"Umm... Can I get you something to drink?" As soon as the words left my lips, I clapped my hand over my mouth. Did I just offer a vampire something to drink?

*Barbara Jean Ruiz, get it together!* It wasn't as if I bared my neck when I said it. I was sure he'd understand. After all, how many vampires had I entertained in my home? It wasn't as if I knew the rules and whatnot, or had a copy of *The Girl's Guide to Entertaining the Evil Undead*.

Was there even such a book? I wondered.

"No, thank you, Miss Ruiz." The corner of his lips tilted upward in a half smile, and my heart stopped mid-beat. If he kept that up, I was going to need a defibrillator. *Clear!*

Wow. If I reacted like this to a half smile, what would I do if he gave me a full-blown grin?

Rip off my clothes and offer to have his children? Could vampires have children?

Heat raced up my cheeks again and before I could stop myself, I blurted, "Barbara Jean."

His eyebrow came up again, and I swore it alone could give Dwayne Johnson a run for his money.

"My name, I mean. It's Barbara Jean, Mr. San Nicolo."

He smiled, and I could have sworn I had an orgasm. Right there in front of my employer, the Christmas tree, and my cat, Duchess, who sat on the bar that connected the living room with the kitchen and watched Cypriano and me curiously.

"Okay, Barbara Jean. I am Cypriano then."

Another shudder racked my body and it was all I could do not to cry out. Lord have mercy. Just my name on his lips had me wet and aching. I concentrated on keeping my breathing even, when what I really wanted to do was rip that custom tailored suit off of his broad shoulders and beg him to bite me. Hard.

*Remember what you're brother told you, Good Barbara Jean* whispered. He doesn't date humans. He just uses them for blood and sex.

*Shut up! Shut up!* Bad BJ hissed. *We may finally get some. You remember how long it's been since we've got some.*

Conflicted, I almost sided with Bad BJ. It *had* been quite a while.

"Umm... Was there something I could do for you, Mr. Ni— Cypriano?"

*Blow job? Ride you until your knees buckled? Bear you an evil undead baby?* It wasn't me thinking those things, I swear. It was all Bad BJ.

*Yeah right,* Bad BJ smirked.

"No, Barbara Jean. It was just getting close to dawn, and your house was the nearest I could think of."

Damn. I guessed the blood sucking offspring was out. My stomach tightened as I imagined a little boy with Cyprian's icy blue eyes and my black curls.

Wait a minute. How the heck did he know where I lived? Narrowing my eyes, I looked at him. Was this all part of a heinous plot to eat me? And not in a good way.

Was he looking at my neck? "Brrr. It's kind of cold in here."

Gesturing to the sofa, I said, “Why don’t you have a seat while I go get dressed real quick?”

I didn’t wait for his answer as I raced into my bedroom and shut the door behind me. *Turtleneck. Turtleneck.* Frantically, I pulled open dresser drawers tossing garments left and right as I look for something to keep my neck out of St. Nic’s sights.

Finally I found one, and I couldn’t help but give a little crow of delight. I whipped my nightshirt over my head and looked down to realize what I was wearing. I had answered the door wearing my Grinch green Christmas pajamas. I don’t know how St. Sexy—St. Nic resisted the allure of all that holiday hotness.

Shrugging into the turtleneck, I tried to forget he’d just seen me in my pajamas. It could have been worse; my hair could have been plastered all over my—

Rushing to the bathroom mirror, I nearly screamed as I looked at my reflection. My hair *was* all over the place. Worse, it was frizzy. And not just regular frizz, it was eighties’ height of the perm fashion frizzy. *Oh, God. Green pajamas and Don King hair. Good job, Barbara Jean. Real good job.*

*There goes our chance of getting laid,* Bad BJ whined.

Oh well, didn’t exactly matter. It’s not as if St. Nic would have ever been interested in a girl like me anyway. He probably dated tall, blonde Scandinavian vampettes with fake breasts and straight perfect hair—my total opposite. Sure, I had a decent rack *and* they were real, but a nice pair of breastables didn’t make up for the fact that I was an inch over five feet, had dark hair, dark skin and curly, anti-perfect hair.

Sighing, I reached for my toothbrush and toothpaste. I had no idea what time it was, but it couldn’t have been any later than about five.

Rinsing my mouth, I wondered if Cin was awake.

Last night I had watched the interaction between my brother and his wife and couldn’t help having a twinge of jealousy. It was so easy to see how much they loved each other and still, after twelve years of marriage, they couldn’t keep their hands off of each other. I wanted that. Wanted someone to look at me like the sun rose and set in my eyes.

Sighing deeply, I wondered if I’d ever find that kind of love. An

image of Cypriano flashed through my mind, and I laughed nervously. Nah. I'd never be stupid enough to fall in love with a vampire, especially the vampire in my living room. Talk about a mixed marriage. People had problems when they were two different religions, so I could only imagine how it would be for two people of different species.

Squeezing a little hair cream in my hand, I smooth it into my hair to tame the frizz before securing it with a scrunchy. Before I could talk myself out of it, I quickly applied eyeliner and a swipe of lip-gloss. Looking at my reflection, I gave a practice smile.

"All bett—" I begun to say as I walked back into the living room, only to find Cypriano sprawled out on my couch, asleep. With Duchess sitting square on his chest like he was her Mount Everest and she was claiming him. Well, talk about anticlimactic. I didn't need the turtleneck after all.

Approaching the couch slowly, I chastised her. "Now, is that any way to treat a guest, Kitty Meow Face? You get down from there right now."

Duchess gave me a jaundiced look and hesitated a moment or two before jumping off of Cypriano's chest and flouncing away in a fit of sassy kitty temper. "Bad girl," I said to make sure she knew I was upset with her, and got a tail flick in response, more than likely her version of giving me the bird.

Standing over Cypriano, I couldn't help but notice how still he was and how vulnerable he looked. A lock of hair fell over his forehead giving him a look of boyish charm, and my hand itch to smooth it back. My gaze traveled down his face, noticing there was a slight crook in his nose. It didn't take anything away from the beauty of his face but seemed to make it all that more appealing. And his lips... I bit back a moan as I traced the fullness of his lips in my mind. His bottom lip was plumper than the top, and I could almost taste it beneath my tongue.

My journey continued past his chin, and I resisted the urge to kiss the slight dimple there, to his broad shoulders and muscular chest to...*cat hair*. Oh, my God. Duchess' distinctive white fur was all over Cyprian's more-expensive-than-the-house-I-grew-up-in, no doubt custom-made,

wool coat.

Throwing an evil look her way, I bent to brush it off, only to find my hand clamped in an iron grip. The next thing I knew, I was lying on my back on the couch with two hundred and some odd pounds of angry vampire on top of me.

## Chapter Five

Panting, I opened my mouth to scream, only to have Cypriano cover it with his. Terror leeches out of me as fast as it came and was replaced by something more elemental. Somehow, when I landed on my back, my legs had spread wide and now he lay in the cradle of them. Either he'd been having a good dream before I woke him up, or he was extremely happy to see me.

He slipped his tongue between my lips and stroked it against mine. I moaned low in my throat and hesitated a moment before I wrapped my arms around his broad back. Everything was happening so quickly, but it still felt right.

He pulled the scrunchy off and buried his hands in my hair, titling my head back as he took his mouth from mine. My lips felt swollen, and I couldn't help but bring my hand up to feel them. I looked into his eyes only to find his pupils gone and his irises molten silver.

A shiver of apprehension ran through me. Was he just hungry? I knew for a lot of vamps, blood and sex went hand in hand. Did he know it was me, or would any willing body do?

He peppered my jawline with kisses, then pressed his lips to the material covering my pulse before gently nipping my shoulder. "Barbara Jean, tell me to stop before it's too late."

His hands were under my shirt, skimming over my ribs before continuing their way to my breasts. The moment he said my name, doubt seeped out of my mind. I knew now it was me he wanted and his words



had the opposite effect. I didn't want him to stop. For the first time since I set eyes on him, I let myself admit what I wanted. Him. I wanted this.

I didn't know what he wanted more, blood or sex, and I didn't care. In that moment all that mattered was that he wanted me, and I was willing to give him both and more to have him inside of me.

Arching into him, I ground my sex against his and he groaned, burying his face in the crook of my neck. I could feel the heat from his moist breath as he tongued my pulse through the material of my turtleneck.

Wrapping my legs around his waist, I thrust against him and moaned as the friction drove me a little closer to orgasm. "Cypriano!" His given name fell easily off my lips as he met the movement on a downward thrust and my empty sex clenched.

He began to pull up my shirt, and I eagerly helped him before reaching down to unbuckle his belt.

He bunched my skirt around my waist before he yanked, snapping the tiny straps that held the two triangles of my panties together, and pulled the material from between my thighs.

Grabbing handfuls of my ass, he thrust and seated himself deep.

Crying out, I locked my legs around his waist and waited for the stinging pressure to ease. He was big, bigger than any man I'd ever been with. My vaginal walls contracted around his cock, and he groaned before burying his face in the crook of my neck.

My nipples beaded as he began to lick my naked pulse point.

"God, you feel so good." His teeth scraped against my skin, and my flesh tightened around his cock. "Taste so good." It was difficult for him to withdraw completely since my legs were wrapped constrictor tight around his waist, so instead he just rocked against me with short digs of his cock that pushed me further and further along. All the while, he licked and nipped at the vulnerable vein in my neck until I couldn't help but beg him to do it.

"Please." Unwrapping my legs, I planted my feet flat against the sofa and arched up. Need rode me hard, and I wanted him to do the same. I was so close to coming, but I just needed a little something more to push

me over the edge. "Do it."

"Do what, *bella*?" he whispered against my flesh. "Tell me what you want me to do."

"Fuck me. Bite me. Please, Cypriano. I'm so close."

"*Come desidero, cara*. As you wish."

I screamed as his fangs sank deep at the same time his cock did.

There was so much pleasure coming from two different sources that it was hard to concentrate on either. Another scream stuck in my throat as the twin pleasures coalesced into one as he thrust into me, pounding me toward climax.

Clutching his back, all I could do was whimper as he continued to drink from me.

I called out his name as I shattered—whether out loud or in my mind, I didn't know. My pussy spasmed hard on his cock as stars exploded in front of my eyes and the world went black.

\* \* \* \* \*

When I woke up again, we were still on the couch, and he was still lodged deep inside of me. The walls of my vagina clenched on his cock, and he groaned. Turning my head into the cushion, I muffled my scream as I felt the delicious prick of his teeth and moaned as he began to suck and thrust at the same time.

Tears leaked from my eyes as pleasure-pain slammed into me with each bump of his cock against my womb. He was so deep, but I wanted him deeper.

"Cypriano..."

"*Si, cara mia*. Yes, come for me." He shifted, pulling me up, and the next thing I knew I was riding him. I wrapped my arms around his broad shoulders and I held him tight, as if he were the only thing keeping me anchored.

Even after everything we had done, I couldn't look him in the face. I buried my face in the crook of his neck, licking the salt off of his skin and fighting the urge to bite into the fat vein throbbing beneath my mouth.

The urge grew stronger, whipping into me as he took my hips and began to work me hard on his dick. I continued licking his neck, tasting his pulse as it called to me, taunting me, and I gave in and bit down as my orgasm and the salty tang of his blood burst over me.

He gave a muffled shout and fucked me harder, and I sucked harder, groaning as his blood flowed into my mouth and another orgasm slammed into me.

Cypriano thrust once, twice, as a muffled curse fell from his lips and his fangs pierced the unmarred skin of the other side of my neck, and the world went black again around me.

\* \* \* \* \*

I awoke alone and in my bed, naked, with a blanket draped over me.

Tossing back the cover, I tried to get out of bed, only to sway dizzily.

*"Essere attento, cara mia,"* Cyprian said, catching me before I fell and pressing me back into the mattress. "I owe you an apology, Barbara Jean."

The fog in my brain made it hard to understand what he was saying. He was apologizing? For what? Did he regret what we did?

"Please don't." I was confused. The last thing I remembered was fighting the need to bite him before giving in. I could still taste his blood and the way it made me feel as I gulped it greedily. "I'm the one who owes you an apology." Tears smarted behind my eyes. "I bit you."

I closed my eyes, wanting to throw myself in his arms, but I didn't have that right. I crossed the line. We shared blood and, though I didn't know what that meant, I knew it bore some kind of significance.

Tears slid down my cheeks and it took everything I had not to lean into his caress as he brushed them away.

*"Ti prego non piangere, tesoro.* Please don't cry. You didn't start any of this, Barbara Jean. I came here knowing what I wanted."

"I wanted it, too," I whispered, and I had. I still did. "Am I a vampire?"

He was quiet and that was all the answer I needed. Only I could intend to get laid and end up the evil undead. But I didn't feel evil, and I didn't feel undead.

"You aren't a vampire, Barbara Jean."

Disappointment washed over me.

"But...you will feel different over the next couple of days because our blood mingled." He paused. "You can't work for me anymore. I'll deposit enough money in your account so you'll never have to work again, but we can never see each other again."

I felt the bed give as he stood up.

Wait a minute. Did he just fire me? Rage washed over me and when I got out of the bed this time, there was no dizziness, only anger sizzling in my veins as I thought of all the ways I could maim him.

Ah, there was the evil.

Padding into the living room, I got there just as he was about to open the door.

"Going somewhere, lover?"

His hand froze on the door and that's when I noticed it was still light out. What the fuck?

He turned, and color rode high on his cheeks.

"Cyppie, you got some 'splaining to do."

I walked further into the living room, my eyes never leaving his. "You were about to go out in daylight."

It suddenly hit me. He was more than likely over six or seven hundred years old, and daylight probably didn't crisp him up like it did younger vamps.

"What kind of fucking game are you playing, San Nicolo?" There was no more Cypriano, no more St. Nic, he didn't even deserve the title mister. I was pissed.

"Barbara Jean, I can explain."

*Fuck that.* "Miss Ruiz."

His eyes narrowed and, for a moment or two, I thought maybe I'd pushed him too far.

"Barbara Jean, I told you I came here on purpose."

"For what? A little fucky? A little sucky?" God, I was stupid. Here I was, more than a little in love with him, and he only came here for a fast fuck. *Great, Barbara Jean, you sure know how to pick 'em.*

"It wasn't like that." He ran his fingers through his hair, and my heart broke a little more. I remembered how those strands felt against my fingertips.

"Why don't you tell me what it was like then?" I tried to hold onto my anger when all I wanted to do was curl up in my bed and cry.

"I've wanted you since the moment I saw you but..."

"But you don't date humans," I finished for him. "You only feed off of them and fuck them."

"Yes."

I almost doubled over with the pain that one word caused me. I wouldn't cry in front of him, and I wouldn't take his guilt money.

"You sent the coat." It wasn't a question. He nodded, and I wanted to throw back my head and scream with the pain of it. "Get out."

He opened his mouth to say something, and I did scream, "*Get out!*"

He opened the door and was on the second step as I remember the coat. "Wait. Don't forget your fucking coat," I said as I threw it at him and slammed the door behind.

I was barely able to throw the bolt on the door before the sobs doubled me over.

"Oh, God," I moaned as I fell my knees, tears streaming down my face.

The pain was so intense I thought I'd vomit.

Crying, I rocked myself and tried to hold it together. I wanted to throw something, I wanted to... I wanted to... I wanted to crawl into Cypriano's arms and beg him to love me.

Picking myself off the floor, I dragged myself into my room. Lying down, I drew the covers over my head.

## Chapter Six

The ringing phone woke me. Moaning, I buried deeper into the covers and tried to ignore it.

I breathed a sigh of relief as it finally stopped ringing. After crying myself to sleep, I felt a little better.

True, I was now unemployed, and St. Nic had ripped my heart out of my chest and carelessly tossed it back at my feet, but look on the bright side...

*What is the bright side?* Good Barbara Jean groused and Bad BJ was mysteriously silent. Bitch. *Let's get some. Let's get some,* I mocked. I was so not talking to my bad side anymore.

It's Christmas Eve, I reminded Good Barbara Jean, and told Bad BJ to suck it.

Pulling back the covers, I padded into the bathroom for a shower.

As the water fell over me, I sang Christmas songs to cheer myself up. Christmas was my favorite holiday, and I wasn't going to let St. Asshole ruin it for me.

I toweled off in front of the mirror and wiped the steam off the glass only to gasp at my reflection. On both sides of my neck I had plum size bruises. Oh my God. I couldn't let Johnny and Cin see them.

I searched my vanity for concealer, knowing it wouldn't hide the bruises enough so Eagle Eye Johnny wouldn't notice them.

Turtleneck.

Shaking, I ran to the living room and snatched the shirt from where

it was wedged between the couch cushions.

Tears welled in my eyes as I looked at the couch and memories of Cypriano's hands against my skin washed over me. Dashing away the tear that ran down my face, I went back into the bathroom to change.

\* \* \* \* \*

I took a deep breath and prayed the last tens hours weren't broadcasting themselves all over my face as I rang my brother's doorbell.

"Merry Christmas Eve!" My sister-in-law sang as she swung the door open.

Taking one look at her swollen belly, I burst into tears.

"Oh, God, Barbara Jean. Are you okay?" She wrapped her arms around me, trying to hug me tight, but the position was a little awkward with her stomach in the way.

Sniffing, I wailed, "I'm never going to have an evil undead baby."

She pulled back, tears in her eyes and a confused look on her face. "Huh?"

Catching myself, I quickly changed it to, "I'm so happy about the baby."

"Barbara Jean Ruiz. You know good and well that is *not* what you just said." She pulled me through the door and into the alcove.

With all the commotion, I was surprised my brother hadn't come running to see what was going on.

"I know. I know," I said between hiccups. "Just forget what I said, Cin."

She put her hands where her waist used to be and glared at me. "I will not. Now what the hell is going on?"

"I slept with St. Evil."

"You didn't. Was he any good?" she asked before answering her own question. "Of course he wasn't if your sobbing like this."

"That's why I'm crying. He was good. He was *more* than good."

"Then why are you crying?"

"Because Johnny was right. He just wanted me for blood and sex."

And he gave me the jacket. So I tossed it right back in his face." I cried harder, thinking about my gorgeous coat.

"That asshole. I'll fucking kill him!" Her hands curled into fists and she shook them at an imaginary Cypriano.

"He is. You should," I agreed as I continued sobbing.

"Who's an asshole?" Johnny asked as he walked into the alcove.

Cin and I both screamed and jumped guiltily.

"God, Johnny. You scared us," Cin yelled, rubbing her belly and trying to look vulnerable.

Wiping my face, my mind raced for an explanation. There was no way I could tell my brother St. Butthead paid me a booty call. Johnny would want to kill him, and there was no way I wanted my brother going after a centuries old vampire.

"The guy who stole my coat," I wailed, covering my face with my hands before peaking through them to make sure Cin got the message and played along with me.

She took the hint. "There, there, dear. The police will find that fiend," she said, hustling me past Johnny into the living room.

"Thank you," I whispered as I sat on the couch, and she handed me a tissue.

Johnny followed us, looking perplexed. He opened his mouth, no doubt to ask me another question, but Cin forestalled him. "Johnny, baby." Sidling up to him, she wrapped her arms around his waist. "Give her a minute before you start asking her questions, okay?" She reached and pressed her lips against him, and I swore I saw his eyes glaze over.

"Okay."

I think he would have agreed to anything she asked him at that moment.

A tear slipped down my cheek and this time I didn't have to fake it as my heart broke all over again. I wanted that kind of love so bad, I thought as I watched them kiss and coo at each other. The kind of love where your heart beats faster every time they come into the room and their smile can make the cruddiest day better. But I didn't want it with just anyone. I wanted it with Cypriano.



"*Tia* Barbie, sad?" The little voice came from Sky, and I sniffled as I picked him up and held him to me, dying a little inside because I'd never hold Cypriano's child like this.

"Not anymore, baby." Hugging him tight, I buried my face in his chubby little baby neck and allowed myself to grieve for what would never be.

\* \* \* \* \*

The dinner I had forced myself to eat sat heavy in my stomach. My vision blurred as I watched the city pass by as my brother drove me back to my house.

"You sure you're okay, Barbie doll."

My eyes burned, and I blinked rapidly before any tears could fall. The last time Johnny had called me Barbie doll was when our parents passed away.

*What are we going to do, Barbie doll?* he had asked as we held each other and wept. And I would do the same thing I did then. I'd survive. No matter how much it hurt. If I could live through that, a measly broken heart wouldn't stop me.

He stopped the car in front of my house and took my hand. "Merry Christmas, Barbie doll. Thank you for being such a great sister. Love ya, *mucho*."

I kissed his cheek and got out of the car. "Merry Christmas to you, too, Johnny. Love you, *mucho*. Night."

Walking up the stairs, I opened the door and heard him drive away as I closed it.

"I didn't think you'd be back tonight."

"*Gah!*" The only thing that kept me in the house was the fact that I knew the voice.

*St. Dickhead.*

Flipping on the light, I glared at him. "What the hell are you doing here, and how did you get in my apartment?"

Cypriano sat on the same couch we had made love on earlier, with

a content Duchess on his lap.

*Traitorous Bitch.* I could hear her purring all the way across the room. *Jezebel.* Stroke her the right way and she'd give a person anything they wanted.

*Remind you of anyone?* Bad BJ asked.

Ignoring her, I hid behind my anger. "Hope you're enjoying yourself because that's the only pussy you'll be touching in this house."

He smiled, and my heart did a little flip-flop. "Kind of crude, Barbara Jean. And a little beneath you."

"What are you doing here?" I asked again.

Setting the cat down, he stood up and took a step toward me.

Raising my hand, I stepped back. "No. No. Whatever you have to say, you can say from there."

Smiling again, he ignored me and took another step. "What, *cara*? Are you afraid of me now? Or are you afraid of yourself and what you'll let happen if I touch you?"

"You arrogant son of a bitch."

I blinked and the next thing I knew, he was across the room holding me in his grip. "Let me go," I screeched as I struggled against him. "The blood bank is closed, and even whores get Christmas Eve off."

He growled and backed me against the wall. "Don't *ever* refer to yourself like that again. Do you hear me?" To drive his point home he gave me a slight shake.

"Why? That's what you made me," I yelled, still struggling. I was too far gone to be concerned about his anger. What was the worst he could do? Rip out my heart? He'd already done that when he walked away from me earlier. "You bought my favors with a coat. Paid in full."

I couldn't stop the sobs that shook my body, and I hated him for making me cry again.

*"Ti prego non piangere, tesoro. Non riesco a sopportarlo.* Please don't cry, sweetheart. I can't take it."

I didn't fight when he picked me up. I gave in to my treacherous heart and buried my face in his neck as he carried me to the couch, sat down, and cradled me on his lap.

*"Mi dispiace, amore mio,"* he whispered.

"In English," I said on a hiccup. I didn't know what the first words meant, but Italian was close enough to Spanish that I knew what *amore mio* meant. "You've been speaking to me in Italian all day, and I don't *capisci*. I only know that word because I've seen it in every mafia movie ever made."

He chuckled, and the sound reverberated through me, warming me. I knew it was stupid to get my hopes up, but it had to mean something that he came back and called me his love. Didn't it?

"It means, I'm sorry, my love. And I am. Not for what I did, but how I did it." He paused, and his chest expanded against me as he took a deep breath. "From the first moment I laid eyes on you, I wanted you, Barbara Jean. For the first time in a long time, I wanted to live again. I have lived on this earth for more than six hundred years and, for six hundred years, I've never felt the way I felt—*feel*—about you."

Oh, this was good, I thought as I cuddled deeper into his embrace.

"Wait a minute. Didn't you take the long siesta because your heart was broken after your human lover died while trying to make the transition?"

He stiffened. Then I sighed as I felt the tension drain out of him. "No, *amore mio*. That was the rumor. I never tried to turn her. She had asked and, when I refused, she went elsewhere looking for someone to turn her. I took my long siesta, as you called it, because I was tired. And jaded. After she died, and I felt nothing, I realized I was dead inside. And sadly, I mourned more for my lost humanity than I did my lover. Ashamed, I went to sleep because I had no reason not to."

Leaning back, I looked into his eyes and was surprised to see a tear rolling down his cheek. Shifting in his lap until I was astride him, I pressed my lips against the moisture on his cheek before licking it away.

"Then, one day, my heart starting beating again of its own accord, and it beat so loud it would no longer let me sleep. So I had no choice but to rise. Do you know what made my heart beat the way it did, *cara*?"

Sitting back, I shook my head.

"Your voice," he whispered against my lips. "I was sleeping

peacefully in my apartments when I heard this angel's voice asking if she was going to be fired because her boss, and I quote, *Met the business end of a stake.*"

My own heart beat so fast I thought it would burst from my chest. His apartments were housed over human resources, and I only found that out after I started working for him.

"So I followed my heart and rose to pursue the sound of your voice, only to find you had left by the time I got there. I knew you needed a job, so I arranged for you to come to work for me. I didn't know how to act around you. You, this tiny slip of a girl, terrified me, because I knew you would be my undoing. So I acted gruff and abrupt around you, praying the whole time you'd never find out my secret. Because if you ever did, I'd be wrapped around your finger."

He rested her forehead against mine. My breasts pressed against his chest. Our hearts began to pound in tune, matching each other beat for beat.

"But you seduced me. With every word out of your mouth and every swing of your hips, I wanted you more and more until I nearly perished from it. I saw the rag you called a coat you wore to work, and I couldn't help buying what I thought you deserved. Every time I saw something beautiful it would remind me of you, and I had to think of a way I'd be able to give it to without you knowing who it was from. And last night, I tried to work. I tried to work that stupid facsimile machine, but your scent was everywhere. Taunting me, teasing me, and I followed it until it led me here."

"You walked here from Regents Street?" I gasped. The San Nicolo building was more than ten miles from my house, and it had been snowing last night.

"Yes. The whole time my mind raced to find a reason that I, as your boss, would show up at your doorstep in the early hours of dawn."

"But you left," I said, unable to keep the sorrow from my voice.

"I did, *cara*. Guilt drove me from your arms. The whole time I was secretly courting you, I convinced myself you were purposely seducing me. So last night when I bit you three times, I told myself it was my right

because you belonged to me. But I pulled back after you bit me and passed out. In my mind I could see you dying and I knew if I continued us down the path I'd started, there was a possibility you might not survive the transition." Another tear slipped down his cheek. "And if you died, I'd be alone again. I thought walking away and never seeing you again would be better than risking your life."

"Oh, Cypriano," I breathed, hugging him tight. "What has changed? You said I wasn't a vampire, so one day I'll still die."

Tears slipped down his cheeks as he nodded. "Yes, my love, and there's a possibility I won't survive losing you. But if I do, at least I'll have memories of you. And I'd rather have memories of you than nothing at all, *cara*. And who knows, maybe you will survive the change, if we ever decided to take that chance. And even if we don't, we still have fifty good years together. Who knows, maybe we'll even have an evil undead baby or two."

I giggled then moaned as I felt his erection press against my dampening flesh. "Well, we better get started then. We don't want to waste a minute of that fifty years, do we?"

His lips covered mine. I sighed into his mouth as I helped him take off his shirt and thanked God for the best Christmas present ever.

The end. Or is it?

### **Author Bio**

Emma Petersen wrote her first Romance in high school after falling in love with Historical Romance, and has been writing ever since. She's a Moderator and Reviewer, as well as Paranormal Co-Liaison for the award winning author's resource website and forum RomanceDivas.com. She's a member of RWA, RWAOnline and Passionate Ink Chapters. She shares a tiny shack with her cat, Toussaint, and is currently recovering from shoe addiction.

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Dragon's Mate by Emma Petersen

## Chapter One

"Did you really think you could hide from me?"

The deep, familiar voice jerked me out of my sleep. Sitting up, I looked into the electric blue eyes of the last person I expected to see. *Eric*. How the hell did he find me?

Trying to act nonchalant, I eased back the covers and swung my bare legs over the bed. I didn't bother to ask how he got into my room.

"What are you doing here?" It was a stupid question. I knew the exact reason he was here. Eric Dogori, Second to the *Primul* Leader of the *Born for Water Dragon Clan*, stood between me and the only exit. Almost a month ago, I'd come to Chile and holed up in this posh Ritz-Carlton suite to wait out my breeding time.

I may be small, only five foot two to his six foot six, but don't let my small stature fool you. I'm tough. I had to be to survive as *Primul* Leader of the *Born for Earth Dragon Clan*.

For thirty days, once every century, I come into my breeding time. At this time I am at my most vulnerable. My kind seek me out with two purposes in mind: to procreate or kill. Because most *Dragon Kin* are trapped in human form, females are more vulnerable, no longer having

wings, teeth and claws to protect themselves. In my ancestors' time this made it easier for unmated males to steal mated females, so came the habit of hiding during our breeding time.

Times were a different now, not only had we evolved physically, there was also a mental evolution. Many centuries ago it would have been quite a coup to steal a mated female, now in many Clans it was punishable by death.

Since I was *Primul*, I didn't have to worry much about unmated males, I worried more about ambitious *Dragon Kin* looking to take my heart and title. And being accustomed to treason, I knew very well I wasn't safe even among the female *Kin*. Trusting the wrong person during my breeding time could cost me my life.

When Eric had sought me out a hundred years ago he'd come close to killing me, too close for my comfort. That was long ago, when I was foolish enough to believe he cared for me. I knew better now.

"You're in season." He took a step toward me.

Instinctively, I began to take a step back and stopped myself. If I backed away he would think I was afraid of him. Nothing was further from the truth. During my breeding time, I was at my weakest, but I could still fight, would still fight, to the death if need be, before I let him or anyone else take my Clan from me.

"That doesn't explain what you're doing in Santiago - in *my* territory - without my permission."

All of the Americas were mine. Eric knew that, yet he still dared to come onto my lands without proper sanction.

"Where else would I be? You are my mate."

I shook my head, denying his claim. "You were trying to kill me, marking me as mated was an accident."

"Our laws say differently," he reminded me.

"So you are big on laws now? I guess a hundred years as the *Water Primul's* lackey will do that."

His jaw clenched, but he made no move to attack as I thought he would. He didn't like to be reminded he was second to anyone, even the *Kin* he was raised with as a brother.



"*Următor...* Second is an honorable position."

"It is," I agreed, "but not for an alpha with your illustrious lineage." I was baiting him now. If he was here to try to kill me, I wanted it over with.

My eyes widened as he chuckled. It was the first time I'd ever heard him laugh, and it washed over me like thick, hot honey. *Shit.*

Leaning back against the wall that led to a sumptuous bathroom, he folded his arms over his massive chest and studied me. "Your tongue has not dulled, I see."

Try as I may, I couldn't help devouring him with my eyes. Time had not changed him. He was still the perfect physical specimen who had taken a rather large bite out of the area right above my collarbone. He towered over me then and now. His shoulders were broad and easily blotted out everything when he was above me, inside me.

I shook my head again, rejecting the feelings the image provoked, and the waking fire they sent skating through me. Angry more at myself than him, I headed toward the door, needing to put distance between not only him, but also the memories.

He yanked me back as I attempted to walk past him. I brought my fist up. He effortlessly dodged the oncoming blow, then grabbed and held my wrist like I was an errant child. Growling, I swung my free fist with all my strength, anticipating the satisfying sound of crunching bone when I connected with his nose. He grabbed that one too. Pushing me backwards into the wall, he pinned my arms above my head.

Closing my eyes, I blew out a frustrated breath. "Let go." I counted to ten and tried to ignore the helplessness I felt. I'd faced Eric before and walked away from it, and I'd do it again.

"I'm sorry *mita wicu*, I can't do that."

I flinched, *mita wicu* being the words for *my wife* in Lakota.

"I. Am. *Not*. Your. Wife."

He pulled down the collar of my T-shirt to reveal a jagged bite mark. *His* bite mark. It was throbbing.

"Your body says differently," he taunted.

I prayed it was the pulsing bite mark he referred to and not the languorous heat that began to seep through my veins the moment he touched me.

My eyes popped open as I felt him grow against me. I clenched them shut again, like a child wishing the monster beneath her bed would go away. I moaned as I resisted the urge to tilt my pelvis into what felt like the beginnings of an impressive erection.

He kept my wrists pinned as he bent down to nuzzle the mark on my neck, making it tingle even more. He lifted his head and as our gazes met his nostrils flared. He flinched as I leaned forward and did what I had wanted to do since I woke up to find him standing in my room. I licked his bottom lip and his pupils bled black. Letting go of my wrists, he gathered handfuls of my T-shirt and ripped it down the center, exposing my breasts.

The action was so sudden and violent, all I could do was gasp. My nipples instantly beaded as they met the cool air and his hot gaze. I moaned as he filled his hands with my breasts.

When he went for my panties, I protested. "No. No, your shirt goes first."

Surprised I was able to form a coherent thought let alone a sentence, I braced myself against the wall as he stepped away to pull his shirt over his head. His onyx eyes never left mine as the shirt came up to reveal his battle-scarred chest.

The long, thin knife wound two inches below his heart was mine.

As he came back toward me, I leaned over and followed the long-healed cut with my tongue. I could feel his heart pounding beneath my mouth as I swept my tongue over his skin. My own heart beat like some trapped wild thing in my chest as I tried to control the shaking of my limbs.

I grabbed handfuls of his lush black hair and pulled his mouth toward mine. He didn't resist, but came into the kiss willingly, crowding me against the wall. He brought his thigh up and lifted me, forcing me to ride it.

I knew after he fucked me senseless he would kill me, but all I could think was, *What a way to go*. I should have felt scared, but all I could think, feel, was the heat of his body and the taste of his kiss. Moaning into his mouth, I ran my hands down his back, marveling at the feel of corded muscle and the slight scaling beneath his skin. It was one of the physical traits that marked him as *Dragon Kin*. It was warm to the touch and gently abraded my fingertips. He wasn't human, nor was he dragon. He was both, the same as me and the rest of our kind.

His hands went to my waist and as he lifted me I wrapped my legs around him. His hands moved to my ass, titling my pelvis into his. As my softness met his hardness, I melted.

He carried me farther into the room and dumped me onto the recently abandoned bed. Staring down at me, he was completely still, as if looking at something he'd never seen before. Suddenly and absurdly shy, I resisted the urge to cover my breasts with my hands. I flinched as he leaned down and splayed his hand against my belly, resting it for a moment against the tiny swell, before taking a deep, shuddering breath and stepping back.

He didn't touch me. He just stood watching at me. I wanted to know what he was thinking that had him looking at me so intently. Afraid, I remained silent rather than break the spell that seemed to capture us. Minutes, years later, he began to unbutton his pants.

I closed my eyes. I knew I didn't have to do this. I would have fought him if I didn't want him to touch me, but the truth was, I wanted him to. With every fiber of my being, I did.

The bed dipped and I could feel the heat radiating off his body as he lay beside me.

Opening my eyes, I turned toward him and ran my hand down his chest. His hair, which fell in an inky black wave to his waist, obscured part of his face. Because of the shape of his eyes, many mistook him for being of Asian descent, but he wasn't. His people had lived on the plains of Northern America centuries before Columbus had talked his queen out of her panties and the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria. Eric was the last of his *Dragon Kin* bloodline, but not of the Lakota Nation.

Hungry to memorize his features, I traced the contours of his sharp cheekbones before I leaned forward and covered his mouth with mine, his tongue met mine, his breath my breath. He tasted familiar, like an exotic sweet I had once had and craved every day thereafter. He rolled me onto my back and made a place for himself between my thighs. Only my panties separated us, and I could feel him hard and hot resting against me.

“Admit it.”

The two words should have been like ice water tossed in my face, but I was too far gone. I wanted him, but I wasn’t ready to say the words out loud.

“Please –” I choked out, hoping the word I rarely used would satisfy him.

It didn’t. He leaned over me and took my nipple into his mouth. Worrying it between his teeth before soothing it with his tongue, he repeated his demand.

“Admit. It.” He sucked my nipple fully into his mouth, and heat pooled between my thighs. Grinding myself against his erection, I said nothing.

Taking my crest into his mouth while he palmed the other, still wet from his mouth, he growled low in his throat, “Stubborn to the end.”

He reached for my panties and I lifted, eager to help him ease them off.

He didn’t enter me, but instead leaned over and tongued the bite mark. With every pass of his tongue pleasure echoed between my thighs.

“Eric.” I only said his name, but there was a world of pleading behind it.

Over and over he licked and nibbled at it until his entire mouth covered it and sucked.

I screamed as pleasure so intense it bordered on pain shattered through me. My pelvis rocked forward as I searched for something to ease the unrelenting ecstasy that hammered through me. The harder he sucked, the harder the currents pulsed through me. Tossing my head back, I convulsed as wave after wave crashed into me. I continued to sob his name, begging for mercy and receiving none.

When I came back to myself, I was limp, exhausted, and more than a little surprised. If pleasure like that could be elicited from a bite mark, no wonder my kind mated for life.

I opened my eyes to find him staring at me with an intensity that scared me. It was difficult for me to meet his eyes, knowing he was the only person on Earth who'd ever be able to bring me to such heights. I refused to think about how it made me feel because if I was honest with myself, I would start sobbing for a reason that had nothing to do with pleasure.

"Eric." I didn't know what else to say, I wanted more of him but I was still too proud to ask.

I nearly wept as I felt his hand part the folds of my wet pussy, searching for and finding my clit. I was close, I could feel another orgasm gathering deep in my belly, but I didn't want to come alone. I wanted him with me, inside of me. I grabbed his hand and brought it up to my mouth. Looking into his eyes, I slowly licked my juices from his fingers, sucking each one into my mouth until he groaned and shuddered.

I pushed his shoulders back until they met the mattress and mounted him. Lifting me, he sat me back down on his length. He grunted as my moist heat slid slowly over his cock. I wanted to move, but he held my hips still until I cried out, needing him deeper. Withdrawing until he was at my entrance, he sank inside of me until he reached the mouth of my womb.

I bit my lip to hold back a gasp as he began to thrust. It had been so long. "Harder."

Wrapping his arms around me, he turned until I was on my back, open, vulnerable. I pushed at his shoulders, wanting to be on top again. Being beneath him reminded me too much of our first time, *my first time*, and it shook me. I cried out as his mouth passed over the bite mark again, sufficiently distracting me so that I didn't protest when he captured both of my wrists, pinning them above my head.

His body continued to move over mine and low, husky words in Lakota matched his rhythm. I understood very little of the language, but

my body recognized the words, the tone. I knew he was promising dark, sexual ecstasy if I gave in.

Unbidden, my hips rose to meet his. He let go of me, knowing he had me where he wanted me. I wrapped my legs high on his waist in an effort to bring him closer, as he began to stroke into me deeper, faster.

My eyes stung as I recognized the Lakota word for heart. I needed to silence him, for every word he spoke flayed me open and left me hoping for the impossible, I pulled him down and his mouth met mine. Too close to the edge not to surrender, I closed my eyes and tried to imagine myself with someone else, but I couldn't. I was his; if he had commanded my heart to stop beating, it would have.

I screamed as my orgasm hit me. He continued thrusting hard and fast until he propelled me into another. Pain coalesced into pleasure as our bodies became one. I held onto him and forgot about everything else. As he shuddered and spilled himself inside me, I buried my face in the crook of his neck and prayed that if he felt moisture on his skin he'd assume it was sweat from our exertions and not the tears that ran unchecked from my eyes.