

# ISABELLA'S WAY

By

Lydia Parks

Nathan Cotton has been around for four hundred years. Although he doesn't regret his decision to become a vampire, he has no desire to condemn others to the same fate. He walks through the darkness alone, battling the devil within. Nathan's sensual nature, however, is impossible to hide, and he often shares more than just his bed. Occasionally, he even runs across someone who touches his cold heart.

Lydia Parks

## Chapter One

Giant oaks lined the street, allowing only slivers of moonlight to reach the sidewalk. Old houses loomed on each side like sentries. Nathan inhaled to pick up scents of musty attics, budding azaleas, and nearby traffic. Already several blocks from his house and in no great hurry to reach the hospital for his weekly appearance in the blood lab, he was enjoying the night when he first felt it.

He stopped.

The skin below his jaw tingled, and the hair on the back of his neck stood on end. What was that feeling?

Nathan's eyes widened as he remembered. It was something he hadn't felt in decades.

Another vampire. That's what it was — another of his kind.

He turned slowly, inspecting every shadow, but he found no one. There was no quick movement, no quiet sound, no peculiar scent.

Nevertheless, another vampire was near.

Nathan stepped into the heaviest shadow. He stood as motionless as the Sphinx waiting for the decades to pass.

A pair of teenagers walked up from the south,

holding hands and whispering plans for a rendezvous. A late-model sedan pulled into a driveway and a middle-aged woman climbed out, heaving a weary sigh. She walked into one of the houses and eased the door shut.

Several more people made unsuspecting appearances and then went away.

Nathan waited.

His patience was finally rewarded when a door he couldn't see opened and closed. The tingling sensation spread down his neck to his chest and back. High heels clicked on concrete, and a woman appeared from between two houses.

In mid-step, she froze. "Who's there?"

If she'd been merely human, he would have guessed her age at about twenty-five. As a vampire, she wasn't much older than that. He could feel her youth, smell the hint of mortality still clinging to her. It had been perhaps ten or twenty years since her entry into darkness, no more.

"Look, asshole, I know you're there. You tell Spike it isn't working."

She spoke quietly, but loud enough for a mortal to hear if he were standing close. She hadn't yet learned the art of vampire speech, that soft whisper that was quieter than human ears could make out.

The woman was attractive. She didn't have the height of a model, but everything about her was slender curves and graceful movement. Her dark hair was gathered up loosely on the back of her head. When she turned her face in his direction, Nathan saw plainly her golden-brown eyes and the smooth

lines of her face. Her luscious lips were bright red.

Yes, she was quite attractive. The tingle spread over the rest of him as he approached her.

The woman stepped defensively behind a well-used red car. "Look, I don't know who you are, but if Spike thinks—"

"My name is Nathan Cotton, and I have no idea who or what Spike is."

Her eyes narrowed. "Really?"

"Really." He stopped across the car from her. "And you are?"

She glanced around, as if looking for co-conspirators then leveled her stern gaze on him again. "Isabella."

"Isabella. Beautiful name."

She shrugged, her expression unreadable.

"I had no idea anyone *else* was in this neighborhood." Nathan walked around to the front of the car.

She stiffened. "You live here?"

"A few blocks away."

"Oh. And you really don't know Spike?"

"No, I don't. Is he one of us?"

"Yeah."

"And he lives in the city?"

She shook her head. "No, he's in Europe somewhere. I think."

Nathan leaned casually on the car. "I see."

Isabella wore skin-tight jeans and a short knit top that revealed a slice of pale skin and a pierced belly button. Her bare arms were slightly muscular and her wrists were adorned with numerous colorful

bracelets. A small gold purse hung from her shoulder, matching the heels she balanced on effortlessly. Very chic, very modern, and very sexy.

The tingle running over his skin suddenly sank much deeper. "Perhaps we should spend some time together, get to know each other. For the sake of being neighborly and all."

She studied him for several long minutes, her gaze covering every inch of him from head to toe. "Maybe we should." Then she withdrew keys from her small purse and unlocked the car door. "Come by tomorrow."

He straightened and nodded, watching her back the car down the driveway. Tires squealed and smoked as she took off.

"Tomorrow." Smiling, Nathan continued on his path, wondering what the following evening would hold. How long had it been since he'd spent time with one of his own? Fifty years? Sixty? Not since he'd been with Francine Dubois, the world-renowned actress.

Poor Francine. She shouldn't have been so carefree. Or maybe careless was more accurate.

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Isabella paced her apartment, wringing her hands. Any minute now, the vampire would arrive. If it was like the night before, she'd know he was there before he found her door.

Nathan Cotton. It was a strange name to choose.

Granted, he was good-looking. And old. He wore

his age like a cloak. Nathan was a tall, lanky, green-eyed vampire with a hint of an English accent. It was typical of Spike to think he could get to her with a classy guy. He'd already tried everything else.

Isabella stopped at the open window. She wasn't so easily fooled.

A breeze blew in, lifting a magazine page and letting it fall. A cat ran by a floor below, yowling in protest at its imaginary pursuer.

Suddenly light-headed, Isabella gripped the windowsill.

He'd arrived.

"Isabella."

She swallowed hard and leaned out. "Up here."

He stepped around the corner of the house and glanced up at the window.

"Come on up."

His movements were silent in the darkness, but she felt him getting closer.

Isabella had one chance. Only the element of surprise could give her an edge. She was certainly no match for his age without it.

Flattening herself against the wall, she unlocked the door, then gripped the wooden stake tightly in both hands and raised it above her head. Light shining from the far side of the room would hold his attention for a moment. That was all she needed.

Closer. He stopped at the bottom of the stairs, then climbed them. He knocked on the door.

Isabella closed her eyes. No matter what, she had to get him in one strike.

The door opened slowly. "Isabella?"

As he stepped in, she whirled around and brought the stake down with every ounce of strength.

It stopped.

"What are you doing?" Nathan held her wrist in one hand and frowned at her.

Isabella growled her frustration and yanked her hand free. Her second strike was even less effective. He ripped the stake from her grip.

"Please," he said. "This is no way to make a guest feel welcome."

Determined to at least inflict pain before he sent her into oblivion, she threw herself at him, fists flying.

He grabbed her and pinned her arms to her sides as he held her to him.

They stood together, and she couldn't ignore the strange sensations that touching him caused. His body was perfect and hard, as if chiseled from marble. Her insides quivered as they had when she was a girl, tasting her first kiss. "What... Who are you?"

He didn't answer for a long time as he stared down at her. His eyes were the green of clover, ringed with a hint of red around the iris. "I told you my name already."

She nodded. "Yeah. Nathan."

"Yes. Are you ready to treat me like a guest, or should I prepare for another attack?"

Isabella struggled against his grip. "Let go."

"Is it safe to do so?"

"Yeah, it's safe." She pushed against his chest and stumbled backwards when he released her.

Nathan stood in the doorway, the stake on the



floor at his feet. After closing the door, he reached down, picked up the sharpened piece of wood, and studied it. "Do you treat all your visitors this way?"

Isabella stepped back to the wall. "Only the ones who plan to do away with me."

He placed the stake on the top of a bookshelf and strolled around her studio apartment, studying it with a look she couldn't interpret. "I assure you, I have no such intention." He stopped in front of her. "In fact, I have quite a different plan."

As he reached out and touched the side of her neck, all the strength drained from her body. She leaned against the wall to keep from falling to the floor.

"Do you feel it?" he asked.

Isabella nodded. Whatever it was, she felt it.

He bent forward, pressing his lips to hers in a tender kiss that held all the mortality she'd forgotten existed in the world.

"I feel it, too," he whispered against her lips.

Isabella closed her eyes, wondering at the odd sense of weightlessness. Nathan's arm slid around her waist and drew her up, and she reached up to hold him.

His shoulders were wide and strong, yet he held her with the tenderness of a first-time lover.

She raised her face to his again and accepted his kiss, opening her mouth to draw him in.

A growl rose from his chest as he took her mouth greedily, his tongue swirling around hers, brushing over her incisors as if caressing them. A shiver ran down her spine, and her fangs suddenly grew in one

pleasant rush.

She clung to him as he pressed her to the wall, his hand pulling her thigh up to his side.

As he drew her tongue into his mouth, she found his fangs in the same state as hers, only longer and thicker. She locked her legs around his hips and discovered that he was also excited as a man. His mountainous hard-on pressed into her crotch.

Isabella growled, suddenly unable to think about anything but fucking him.

Nathan pulled his mouth away from hers.

"Yeah." She looked up at him again. "I *definitely* feel it."

He smiled, and she thought she might melt right then and there. The man had the most spectacular smile she'd ever seen.

But he wasn't a man, was he? He was a creature like herself, and capable of ending her existence.

As he carried her across the room, her legs still locked around him, her hands still clinging to his shoulders, she was surprised to realize that she had no fear left in her. Every ounce of it had been replaced with desire.

The tips of his fangs dented his bottom lip as he swiped the pile of clothes from her bed and lowered her to it beneath him. His jacket, shrugged away, fell to the floor. He kissed her again, this time as if he were a starving man at the dinner table.

Isabella felt the same hunger. She nipped his lips and tongue, and sucked hard.

Nathan's hands traveled up the side of her body, exploring, sliding along her skin and under her shirt,

caressing her breasts.

Human need swelled inside her at his touch, drawing a moan from her throat.

He raised himself up over her and looked down into her eyes. His smile was gone, replaced with something that bordered on desperation.

"You understand what I need?"

She nodded, unable to voice her own desire.

"You also understand what will happen?"

She nodded again. He was asking her permission. That was something new. Spike had simply taken what he wanted from her, never concerned with what he gave or what she thought about it.

"I've been in the darkness a long time." Nathan's voice grew deeper with each statement, roughened by lust.

Isabella nodded then reached up and drew his face down. His mouth matched hers as if made for it.

He held himself on one elbow and explored her body with one hand. His fingers expertly circled her nipple, rubbed back and forth across it, then twisted it, sending hunger shooting through her torso.

She tightened her legs around him.

His hand ran down her side, over her hips, and rounded her butt.

Again he tore his mouth from hers. "I don't know how you got those pants on, but I suggest you remove them if you don't want me to tear them off."

Nathan gave her just enough room to wriggle out of the jeans beneath him before drawing her legs back up around him.

"Better," he whispered.

His hard-on rubbed against her now, swelling more with the promise of pleasure. She was surprised that he kept his pants on, but not disappointed. As he gripped her thigh, pulled her bottom lip into his mouth, and rubbed the outline of his cock slowly up against her tingling clit, she groaned. Continuing the slow humping stroke, he moved his mouth to her neck and pressed the sharp tips of his fangs to her flesh.

Her body sang with anticipation. She gripped his shirt in both fists as the teasing went on.

Never had she felt such growing anticipation, such hunger and raw need. She spread her legs wider under him.

He drew her up against his cock, squeezing her bottom with cruel gentleness.

She wanted to feel him enter her, knowing somehow that the experience would be unlike any other. She craved the feel of his teeth sinking into her flesh, and needed to taste his excitement.

She longed for the sweet release.

As Nathan traced the side of her neck with his fangs, Isabella reached between them to free him from his clothing.

"Are you in a hurry?" he asked.

"Yes." She struggled with his pants button, unable to push it through the buttonhole.

The button popped loose, flew across the mattress, and bounced on the floor.

"Please," he said, raising himself to his elbow, "allow me to help."

As he removed his pants, she worked on his shirt.

Several more buttons flew off before she was able to push the shirt back from his shoulders.

His body was magnificent. Pale flesh covered lean muscles that bunched under her touch as he raised her tube top over her head and then shrugged his own shirt away.

They embraced as long-lost lovers, desperate to join and yet unwilling to waste the anticipation. He led her in a dance of seduction that was something she could never have imagined.

She wanted him desperately.

His cock was hard against the inside of her thighs, and large in her hand. As she stroked him, he groaned softly in her ear. She guided him to her hungry cunt and lifted herself against him.

Still he did not enter her.

"Not yet," he said. "I don't think you truly understand."

"I do understand. Take me now."

"No." He lifted himself out of her grip, but he didn't leave. Instead, he moved his mouth to her breasts and feasted on them one at a time. His teeth brushed against her tender flesh, yet never pierced it as he flicked her taut nipples with his tongue.

Isabella squirmed, anxious to move on. Her fangs pressed against her own lips as the beast rose in her, demanding to be fed. "Nathan." His name was a groan.

He stretched out on top of her again, took her hands in his, and held them to the bed on each side of her head.

"I have more memories than you can know. They'll

overwhelm you if you try to take them all at once. Just a taste first."

When he lowered his mouth to hers, she gasped at the nectar. He'd nicked his lip to offer her a taste, and she took it with enthusiasm. What would it be like to drink from someone so old?

The first jolt hit her like a bolt of lightning.

The world spun out of control as she stood alone and in the dark.

She stood in a vacuous theater. A movie played. Unfamiliar characters flew past her, whispering in strange languages and terrifying her.

The bottom of her theater dropped away and she fell, spinning, trying to grab anything that would save her. A horse fell past, and then a wolf. Graves. People. Women with blood dripping from their necks. Men with torches. Ships. More blood. Bodies. She reached out, clutching at cold, dark air.

A woman's pale hand grabbed hers, and she held it.

"Don't be afraid," the woman whispered. Then the woman began to tear the flesh from her own arm as she smiled.

Isabella shrieked and tried to get away. Still she fell, the woman falling after her now. She had to find a place to hide, to get away from the crazy woman whose flesh hung from her like ribbons. The woman laughed.

Isabella hit bottom.

As she sat up, she looked around at the dark green grass — soft and cool — and found herself alone. The fear disappeared, replaced by sensations of longing

and satisfaction rolling up and down her limbs. She'd never felt anything so pleasantly intense and lay back in the wet grass to enjoy it. Her only thought was *more*.

## Chapter Two

Opening her eyes, she stared at the ceiling of her own room. Nathan held her in his arms and stroked her hair, his face pressed into the crook of her neck. "You're safe now," he whispered.

"What the hell was that?" Her voice sounded tinny.

"That was a taste of my darkness."

"Son of a bitch."

Nathan rolled to his side and propped his head on his hand. He studied her intently. "How old are you?"

She sat up, drew her bare legs up in front of her, and wrapped her arms protectively around her knees. "I was twenty-three when I, you know, died. That was eight years ago."

His eyebrows arched. "Younger than I thought."

"What about you?"

"Me?"

"Yeah. How old are you?"

"Counting my time as a mortal, I've been on the earth for three-hundred and ninety-five years."

She sucked in a quick breath. "Holy shit."

He smiled. "Indeed."



She thought about all those years alone, and wondered if she would have held up so well. In spite of the pleasure, she also wondered if she really wanted another glimpse into his darkness. "Will it feel like that the next time, too?"

He shrugged. "It should get less powerful with each taste, until you've adjusted."

"All those things I saw —"

"Were manifestations of my past."

"Wow." She gulped as she released her knees and stretched out beside him again.

He reached over and touched the ring in her belly button. "Should I leave?"

She almost laughed at his concern then shook her head. "No."

He rolled back on top of her and kissed her cheek and chin and nose as he pushed her legs apart with his own.

She reached between them and found his cock hard again. The shaft was wide and long, large enough to make the lower half of her body quiver.

Closing her eyes, Isabella focused on the feel of Nathan's mouth, and recalled the sensations of excitement she'd experienced tasting his blood.

When he drew his fangs along her neck, her entire body turned to molten lava. She pressed her mouth to his shoulder and heard him groan.

"I can't wait much longer," he whispered in her ear.

"You don't have to," she whispered back. Her cunt swelled with needing him, and she shook with anticipation.

His hand slid between her legs and he stroked her clit expertly, lifting her hips completely from the bed by way of mortal pleasure. She approached the edge of a climax, wishing for release, knowing what it would require and ready once again.

"Now, Nathan, please."

"Drink only from my shoulder," he said.

She nodded, willing to do anything.

His cock started into her with wonderful pressure, pushing her apart, stretching her to accommodate its size.

She thrust up, wet, needing him, wanting all of him at once, and he met her thrust with his own.

"Yes," he hissed.

He took the flesh of her neck between his teeth as he thrust his cock deeper, taking her as his primal mate.

She dug her fingernails into the flesh of his back and cried out at the approach of the abyss. Her muscles tightened and her body stiffened.

Holding her down with his weight, he drew his cock from her and thrust it in again and again, unable to get enough of her, offering her all of him.

The beast filled her chest with tremendous hunger, need, desire.

Release.

As his fangs pushed into the flesh of her throat, she bit down on his shoulder, and ecstasy flooded her senses as her muscles pounded through the human orgasm.

The darkness swirled around them both now. She felt and tasted his triumph. His cock exploded inside

her as his darkness invaded her body. The longing, the desires, the loneliness, the deepest needs. She tasted his joy as she knew he tasted hers. She died in his arms and drew life from the death.

Deeper he went into her. His hands were her hands, feeling her flesh and his flesh as one, holding her to him, as she clung to him.

She lost the division between them.

The woman returned, the pale woman with dark eyes. Isabella felt her darkness as Nathan had felt it when the woman first drew him to her. She knew her name, now. Hannah. Sweet Hannah. Isabella wanted her as he had, his human desires for the vampire's body. She felt him lose himself in Hannah's lust. His seed, hot as it pumped from his body. Her fangs, piercing his skin for the first time. His life, drifting into nothingness.

Isabella jumped.

For the second time that night, she emerged from a strange inner world to find herself in her own bed.

This time she was alone.

"Nathan?" She sat up and looked around.

"Yes." He stood across the room, watching her. He'd put on his pants, but his upper body was still bare. Red holes in his shoulder glistened in the dimly lit room.

Raising her fingers to her neck, she found the matching holes, healing already. She shook her head to clear it, then took count of her limbs. They were all there, and they still tingled with indescribable pleasure.

Isabella stretched out across the bed on her side,

feeling like a housecat that had just been fed, wishing she could purr.

Nathan smiled as he approached the bed and sat near her. "Your name isn't really Isabella."

She frowned. "Yes, it is. At least, it is now."

"Why did you change it?"

Strange question. "Spike said to."

"When he brought you into the darkness." It wasn't a question. He knew her now, at least as well as she knew him.

She nodded as she sat up. "He said everyone does it." Narrowing her eyes, she studied him. "But you didn't."

"No."

"You mean, Spike lied about that?"

"He lied to you about a great many things, Isabella." Nathan reached out and pushed a strand of her hair back from her shoulder. "And he is no gentleman."

She laughed then covered her mouth. "Sorry. I'm afraid gentlemen disappeared from the Earth long before I met Spike."

He frowned.

"Most of them, anyway." She rose from the bed and searched the floor for the dress she wanted, then she pulled it on over her head.

He picked up his shirt, put it on, and buttoned what he could. Then he lifted his jacket from the floor and draped it over one of the two chairs. "Why do you live like this?"

"Like what?" She looked around, trying to decide what surprised him.

"In this clutter. And you're in an apartment over a garage, above ground."

"So? The windows are blacked out. And who cares about the clutter? It's not like I'll be here forever. I'm sure as hell not waiting around for Spike to find me."

Nathan's expression darkened. "He should be staked."

She sighed. "Yeah, if only it didn't mean I'd disappear, too."

"What?"

"You know, if the one who makes you dies—" She frowned at him. "That's not true either?"

He shook his head.

"Damn him." All those chances she'd had to do away with Spike, wasted!

Nathan looked around. "What will you do if a baseball shatters one of the windows during the day?"

Isabella stared at the closest window, trying to imagine sunlight streaming through it. "I hadn't thought of that." Then she turned an angry frown on the man who was criticizing her. Vampire or not, he had no right to talk to her this way. "It's none of your damn business. Besides, it's all I can afford."

"What do you mean?"

She threw her hands up in exasperation. "It isn't easy holding down a job when you can only work nights."

Nathan crossed the room and stood directly in front of her, frowning. "Work? Why would you—" He drew back, his frown fading to astonishment. "Hasn't anyone shown you how to use your

powers?"

"What powers?"

He turned and walked toward the door, his fingers pressed to his forehead. Then he stopped and turned back to her. "How have you survived this long?"

Anger welled in her chest. "I can take care of myself just fine. I sure as hell don't need some older, *wiser* vampire showing me how to get around in the dark. You can leave now."

She jumped when he suddenly appeared in front of her.

"How —"

His expression was now one of tenderness, and he touched her cheek. "Sweet Isabella," he whispered. He pressed a quick kiss to her forehead, then smiled down at her. "I'll be back tomorrow, after we've both rested. We have some things to discuss."

"Who says you can come back —"

He silenced her by gently touching her lips, and her anger melted. He was incredibly tender, and amazingly gorgeous. "I'll be back tomorrow night."

She nodded.

Nathan grabbed his jacket from the chair, then walked out of her apartment.

Leaning over the windowsill, she watched him stroll down the driveway and disappear into the night.

Why couldn't he have been the one to make her into a vampire? It might have been an enjoyable experience.

And why did she have a desire to follow him home? That was dangerous.

As soon as she let herself care about him, he'd hurt her just like all the rest had, both before and after her change.

Just like Spike.

No, she wouldn't put herself through that again, no matter how good Nathan made her feel.

Straightening, she frowned at the window. Maybe she should look around for something to cover it with so it wouldn't matter if a kid broke the glass with a baseball.

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Nathan stretched out on his bed, folded his arms behind his head and closed his eyes as dawn approached. He thought about Isabella. Maybe she'd been right to change her name. She wasn't Betty Miller from Iowa anymore. She was Isabella, the truly magnificent creature of the night.

*My creature of the night.*

Now that Nathan had tasted her blood, she was his responsibility. He'd have to do what the slimy little thief Spike hadn't done and show her how to survive.

Spike. He'd tasted her fear. The snake of a man was cruel and selfish. He didn't deserve to live in either the light or the darkness. If Nathan ever ran across dear ol' Spike, he'd make sure the bastard was erased completely from the future.

But for now he'd sleep and enjoy what remained of Isabella in his blood. She remembered the sunlight, something he'd long forgotten. She knew the way it warmed her shoulders and the top of her head.

Nathan smiled.

Holding Isabella in his thoughts, making love to her as a man, drinking from her as a vampire, he slept.

But Isabella wasn't the only female in his dreams that night. Francine Dubois came to haunt him, as so many others often did.

Dear Francine. She'd been the toast of Paris when he first saw her perform on the stage. With her vampire abilities, she amazed her audience. Nathan was both entranced and appalled by her willingness to show off.

Nathan relived the last night they'd spent together, in all its glory and joy. He'd swept into her dressing room after the performance and found her at her makeup table, the blue silk dressing gown open to reveal her rounded body to him as she wiped her face.

He kicked the door closed, rushed to her, and kissed her shoulder. The anticipation of making love to her was nearly unbearable in spite of his concern. "Francine, you must be more careful out there. Someone's going to figure out what you are."

"Nathan, darling, say hello to Michelle."

Straightening, he was startled by the appearance of a young woman across the room. She watched them, smiling nervously. Her cheeks were hollow but rosy, and her hair was a wild mass of brown curls. She looked very young.

"*Bon jour*," she said.

Nathan nodded, then glanced questioningly at Francine's reflection.



"Our dear little Michelle wants to join us tonight. Are you not pleased with my surprise?"

He frowned. "She's a child."

Francine laughed. "Hardly. She's earned a living on the streets of Paris for five years. She's definitely not a child." She spun around in her chair and began to unbutton his shirt. "Besides, I've paid her well. And we know this will be a night she'll be sorry she must forget."

Francine nipped playfully at his stomach as she unfastened his pants.

"My dear," he said, lifting her face to gaze into her blue eyes. "Shouldn't we go to your flat? This is your dressing room. Someone may hear us."

She laughed again. "We'll just have to be quiet. I love a good challenge."

Nathan's reservations quickly disappeared under Francine's attention, especially with Michelle's help. As the young prostitute knelt in front of him, her hot mouth wrapped around his swelling cock, Francine drew thin red lines across his shoulders with her teeth, not quite breaking the skin.

"Dear, God." He shuddered.

"God has nothing to do with it," Francine whispered.

All fears of being overheard vanished. He urged Michelle to her feet, drew Francine into his arms, and the three of them fell onto the divan and sent it crashing into the wall.

## Chapter Three

Nathan woke with a start. He'd slept well past sunset. Isabella would be waiting. He jumped up, showered and dressed, then emerged from his underground apartment through the trap door into his living room. Nathan didn't even bother to light a lamp as he rushed to the refrigerator, emptied two pints of hospital special and hurried from the house. He made it the four blocks without noticing a single detail of what he'd passed.

Nathan stopped at the base of the stairs to Isabella's apartment.

Surprised by what he heard and sensed, he staggered back a step.

Surprise changed to fury. He charged up the stairs and burst through the door. She hadn't even bothered to lock it.

"Nathan." Isabella looked up from her bed, only mildly surprised by his appearance. She straddled a mortal man, who was stunned into momentary silence as she moved off of him. "You're early."

"Hey, what the hell—" The young man sat up in bed, glistening with sweat. His blond hair was wild, and his cock was hard. Blood pumped loudly through

his veins.

"It's okay, baby," Isabella said, putting her hand over his mouth. "He's a friend of mine." She crawled across the bed, stood, and placed a hand on Nathan's chest. Her naked body was beautiful in the candlelight. "Haven't you ever heard of knocking?"

"What are doing?" he whispered.

"Making a little cash, you know?" She lowered her voice to whisper back. "Besides, I'm hungry. He's dinner."

"What?"

"You know, food? Blood? Vampire meets mortal? Don't worry, he'll fit in the trunk of my car, and there's a lake across town. No big deal."

"You plan to kill him?"

She shrugged. "Yeah."

"You've done this before?"

"Sure. How else am I supposed to survive? It's not my fault I'm like this."

The young man moved in their direction. "What's going on? What are you two whispering about?"

Isabella smiled sweetly at him. "Nothing, baby. Don't worry." Then she looked back at Nathan. "You plan to watch, or split?"

He held her wrist and pulled her closer. "There are other ways. You can drink from him without killing him."

Her eyebrows went up. "Oh, yeah? But then he'd know about me."

"You can make him forget."

"I can?"

Nathan nodded. "With a little training."

She looked back at her intended victim, then focused on Nathan again. "When do we start?"

He glanced over her shoulder at the young man who had no idea how close he'd just come to dying. "Now would be good."

She shrugged and returned to the bed. "Davy, my friend wants to join us. Okay?"

"What?" The young man swung his legs over the side of the bed and jumped to his feet. "I didn't come here to —"

Nathan focused his thoughts quickly into the middle of Davy's forehead. "It's all right. Just relax."

The young man sat on the bed, then stretched out and lay with his hands at his sides and stared at the ceiling. His rather sizable cock was now limp.

"Cool." Isabella waved her hand back and forth in front of Davy's eyes. "How'd you do that?"

"It's a matter of concentration."

She smiled up at him. "Aren't you going to climb in?"

Knowing the amazing pleasure he could be about to experience if everything went well, Nathan shuddered as he quickly removed his clothes. "Yes, my dear, I think I will."

He sat on the edge of the bed and stroked Isabella's arm. "You need to understand how to project your thoughts. Think about getting Davy to raise his right hand."

Isabella sat back on her feet, squinted her eyes, and stared at Davy.

Nothing happened.

Nathan shook his head. "You're giving him a

command. Try thinking of yourself as him, of how it would feel to lift your own hand, and focus that thought right here." He touched the center of Davy's forehead.

She tried again. Her eyes took on a faint red glow.

Davy's fingers twitched, and his hand slowly raised several inches. Then it fell to the bed.

Isabella beamed at Nathan. "I did it."

He nodded.

"What else can I make him do?"

"Whatever you want," he said. "But you must be careful. If you put too many of your own thoughts in his head, he'll lose himself, possibly forever."

Her eyebrows shot up. "Wow." She leaned forward and brushed Davy's hair from his face. "Why is he so still?"

"I gave him a feeling of total relaxation and peace."

She glanced at the young man's cock. "Maybe he's a little too relaxed."

Nathan laughed as he stretched out on his side. "I think you know how to take care of that situation. I'll release my hold on him a little at a time. Otherwise, he'll never be satisfied." He stroked the tender back of her thigh, enjoying the curve of her buttocks. "And we definitely want him satisfied."

"Do we?"

He grinned. "Oh, yes."

Isabella sat between them, took Davy's cock in her hand, and kissed Nathan. He enjoyed her taste tremendously, and luxuriously stroked his own growing organ in response. It wasn't long before he and his human counterpart were both fully erect.

"Ride him," Nathan said. "Take him to the brink. But whatever you do, don't bite him. And don't let him come."

He watched her mount Davy, taking his stiff cock into her slowly, swallowing him with her body. When Nathan released some of his mental hold on the young man, Davy's back arched and his eyes closed. "Oh, fuck, that's good," he whispered.

Isabella held Davy's shoulders, raised herself to the very top of his engorged shaft, then lowered herself back down. Davy reached up for her waist to help speed her movements.

The human's muscles bulged as he lifted Isabella and pulled her down fast. Blood pumped through his veins, filling the room with a frantic beat. His cock grew as he neared a climax, searching desperately for the depths of Isabella in order to fill her with his seed.

Watching their coupling brought Nathan closer to his own brink of release. His fangs dropped to their full length and pleasantly ached. Yes, he would taste Davy's desire as boiling emotions, primitive and base – the drive to mate, the hunger for fulfillment.

Isabella's head went back as she enjoyed fucking the human. The sight of her fangs in her open mouth caused Nathan's cock to swell even more. He stroked himself faster as he enjoyed the way her body moved, undulating, her nipples standing out as dark points, the muscles of her legs and arms tightening into ropes with each movement.

She looked much as young Michelle had as she'd ridden him, her cunt tightening around his cock. He'd enjoyed her constricting heat as she worked herself

back and forth on him, approaching a climax she obviously hadn't expected.

Francine had delighted in watching them, waiting for just the right moment. "Now," she'd said. "Mount her now."

He'd lifted Michelle, draped her over the front of the divan on her stomach, and, dropping to his knees, driven his cock into her. She'd cried out, gripping the green velvet. "Deeper, yes, deeper."

As her muscles began to pulse around him, pulling him into her, he lifted her body with his arm around her waist and sank his fangs into her shoulder, drawing the sweet nectar that pushed him over the edge. Need, thirst, hunger, all at once filled with driving desire—human desire—sent him into oblivion. As he'd held her, pumping his seed into her, thrilling to the hot, dripping pleasure, he'd felt the pierce of his own flesh, and his pleasure doubled.

He growled.

Francine drew the taste of human ecstasy and vampire release from him as he pumped harder. She held him, her body writhing against his back. As he withdrew his fangs from Michelle, Francine held her wrist to his mouth and he tasted his own joy in her release. Eternal pleasure, circling through them. Never to end. Tying them together.

"He's — close."

Isabella leaned forward, responding to the draw of Davy's blood.

Nathan rolled onto his back and moved to the human's side. "Come to me now. Finish him as you fuck me, and taste his blood when he comes."

She did as instructed, moving quickly from Davy to Nathan in spite of Davy's attempt to hold her back, impaling herself urgently on Nathan's hard cock. She rode cruelly as she stroked Davy with her hand.

The young man cried out as he came, filling the air with the musky scent of his hot semen. Life, urgent need.

Isabella leaned forward and bit his neck, and he gasped and cried out again, his pleasure heightened.

Nathan waited as long as he could, enjoying the pulses of Isabella's climax, until Davy's heartbeat slowed and quieted.

"Enough." As he pulled her hungry mouth to his shoulder, he rolled them both over and sank his fangs into the sweet flesh of her neck.

Davy's excitement, exploding joy, primal urges, rushed into him, drawing him into a glorious release. He drove his cock into her, and she came again, taking the pleasure from him this time.

As they thrust against each other, their bodies and minds fused, the waves of bliss went on and on. Circling. Eternal. Never ending.

After the last of the orgasm faded, Nathan rolled to his side and held Isabella through the aftereffects. He knew she would be gone for several minutes at least. The first time it had taken hours for her to return.

He admired the heavy lines of Davy's body in repose, remembering what it was like to be young and virile, aware of attracting women's gazes and thrilling to the chase of the fairer sex.

Isabella awoke with soft sounds of satisfaction on her lips.



Nathan kissed those lips, enjoying a moment of tenderness.

She stretched against him. "That was amazing."

He nodded.

"And he's still alive?"

Nathan listened to the soft but steady heartbeat. "Yes."

"What do we do with him?"

Nathan kissed her once more before rising. "Where did you find him?"

Isabella swung her legs over the side and sat up. "I met him outside the Back Room."

"The Back Room?"

She gestured with her head. "A bar down the street."

"Does he have a vehicle?"

She nodded. "The black pickup that's out front."

Nathan pulled on his pants and shirt. "We'll put him in the truck and drive him back to the bar. I'll suggest he forget tonight completely, and when he wakes up he'll just go home, wondering how much he drank before he passed out."

She smiled. "I like that."

He stopped and studied the young woman, catching the glint of light from the gold ring in her belly button. "There are a few mortals that we call resisters because they aren't easy to manipulate. If you insist on bringing people here instead of finding another place, you run the risk of exposure when one of them wakes up and remembers."

She jumped to her feet, anger flashing in her eyes. "Look, I don't need your advice. I've been doing just

fine up until now. If he wakes up and remembers, that'll be your fault. I planned to kill him."

Nathan bit back a nasty retort. "I'm only trying to help you, Isabella. I've made it through a few more years than you have."

"Yeah? Well, you probably live in a sterile dungeon somewhere." She picked up a pair of shorts and a sleeveless shirt from the floor. "I like my life just like it is."

Her comment about the dungeon was a little too close to the truth. His hands curled into fists. "I suggest we take care of this matter," he said, pointing to Davy. "We can finish the argument later."

"The *argument's* already finished. You're not my goddamn guardian."

"Fortunately."

The young woman was impossible. He only wanted to help her survive in the world she seemed to know nothing about, and she was ready to take his head off.

*Fine.*

They worked in silence to dress their victim, then Nathan carried him quickly to the truck. Isabella drove while Nathan planted thoughts of confusing, drunken sleep in the man's brain. It would probably be the middle of the day before Davy returned to consciousness. He'd just donated a very large amount of blood.

At the bar, they moved Davy behind the wheel then walked together back to the street. By that time, Nathan had started to regret the harsh words that had passed between them. Isabella was feisty if nothing

else. That was one of the characteristics that attracted him to her.

"Would you like to spend the day in my sterile dungeon?"

She looked up and her anger faded to amusement. "Sounds real tempting, but I think I'll pass."

Nathan nodded, trying to hide his disappointment. He'd bide his time and find more subtle methods of instruction. It would be easy to enjoy a few decades fucking Isabella every night, if they could manage not to argue afterwards. Maybe he'd been alone too long.

Back at her apartment, she took up a position at the window, as if waiting for him to get his coat and leave.

Nathan put his jacket on, then stood behind her, running his hands up and down her bare arms. "Perhaps tomorrow night we should try something a little different."

"Like what?" She glanced at him without turning.

It would be a challenge to keep her amused. "If we find a couple already warmed up, we could invade their bed and take advantage of both of them."

She smiled, one eyebrow raised. "There's a motel about a mile down the road."

He nodded.

Yes, it would be interesting to have Isabella and a human couple, and no doubt enjoyable.

He kissed her neck, fighting back the urge to pierce her skin again. Too much at once and they'd quickly tire of each other. "Tomorrow," he whispered. Then he hurried outside and down the stairs.

On the dark, quiet sidewalk, he felt her and

thought for a moment that she had followed him, but when he looked back he didn't see her. Maybe she'd watched him from her door, and their link was simply stronger now.

Pleasantly stronger.

Smiling to himself, Nathan shoved his hands in his pockets and strolled home through the soft night.

## Chapter Four

**W**hen he woke the following evening, Nathan was surprised by the storm rolling through town. Thunder shook the house above him, and rain pounded his roof.

He dressed and fed, waiting to see if the storm would subside, but it showed no signs of doing so. He stood in front of the living room window, watching the river of water flowing down the side of the street, thinking about Isabella. He would enjoy having sex with her while lightning flashed and rain beat against the window. Maybe they should have a quick round together before starting out in search of amusement.

Yes, just the two of them, tasting the desire in each other as they fell into the pit of lust together. His cock hardened, picturing the scene. Isabella's little gold ring would rub against his stomach as she impaled herself on his aching cock and locked him in her legs. They would sit together on her bed with the storm raging around them, humping in a lazy rhythm until they couldn't stand the pleasure anymore. She'd pull his mouth to her neck...

Growling, Nathan extracted his cloak from the closet, wrapped it around him, and ran from his

house in the rain. He moved so fast that he was barely wet when he stopped under a large tree at the bottom of the driveway to her apartment.

Something was wrong.

He didn't feel her at all. Not even a hint. Had she left for the night without him?

He closed his eyes as a memory invaded his brain.

"Francine," he called through the door. "Let me in."

It was the night after their encounter with Michelle, and he'd spent the day with a fever for Francine's body, longing for sunset. It was barely dark outside, but he was sure she'd be at the theater. Her show started in less than twenty minutes. He planned to take her quickly against the dressing room wall so she'd still have time to get ready for the show. Then later, they'd savor a slow, luxurious union. Perhaps they'd even invite another human to join them.

"Francine." He tapped on the door, but she didn't answer.

Something was wrong.

As panic swelled in his dead heart, Nathan twisted the doorknob, snapped the lock, and flung the door open.

He staggered against the doorframe at the sight.

Francine lay on the divan, her arms flung out, a wooden stake protruding from her chest. Her face had aged to that of an old woman, and her breasts sagged beneath her silk dressing gown.

Dropping to his knees beside her, Nathan yanked the stake from her heart and flung it across the room. "No, Francine, please don't go."

But it was too late. As he watched, the wrinkles in her face deepened, and her hair fell out around her head. A patch of skin peeled away from her chin.

He moaned in grief and closed his eyes.

The noise of a heart pounding in fear pulled him around. He stared at the man who stood cowering against the far wall, his eyes wide, a wooden mallet in one hand. His whiskered, weather-beaten face hinted at years on the street.

"Why?" Nathan rasped.

The man pointed a shaky finger at Francine. "S-s-she hurt one of my girls. S-s-she's a monster. Y-y-you—"

Footsteps in the hall brought Nathan quickly to his feet. He dashed through the door and into the darkness.

Lightning flashed, pulling him from his horrid reverie. Isabella's car was parked at the end of the driveway, and his sense of dread grew. She wouldn't leave without it.

Glancing around, Nathan assured himself that he was alone, then dashed through the rain and silently climbed the stairs. Her door—not surprisingly—wasn't locked.

Inside, he found the stake where he'd left it on top of the bookshelf. Clothes cluttered the floor as before, and the bed was empty.

He stood in the room and turned a slow circle. There wasn't quite as much of a mess. She'd taken a few of the clothes and books with her, but not all. She must have left in a hurry.

He walked to the mirror, studying the message

scrawled in lipstick. "Nathan, gotta go. Things to do. See you around. Love, Isabella."

And that was it. She was gone.

He shed his dripping cloak, draped it over a chair, and sat on the edge of her bed. At least she was still out there somewhere.

He pictured the surprise on her face when he'd interrupted her encounter with Davy. There was no chance she'd last four centuries.

Then he remembered the way her body moved with wicked pleasure as she rode the human.

She was strong-willed, if nothing else. And she knew how to enjoy herself. Maybe she'd make it long enough for them to cross paths again. "See you around, Isabella."

\* \* \*

Nathan wasn't sure how long he sat on Isabella's bed, but the storm had subsided by the time he stirred. Rain dripped from rusting gutters over the windows, and someone in an adjacent apartment opened a window to fill the night with music.

As he rose, the feeling hit him again, starting at the base of his neck and sliding down his spine. "Isabella." He hurried to the door with her name on his lips.

But Nathan stopped with his hand on the doorknob.

It wasn't Isabella he felt.

A car engine died in the driveway and a car door opened and slammed. Heavy footsteps echoed up the



driveway, and then thudded on the stairs.

Nathan grabbed the stake from the top of the bookshelf, stepped quickly across the room, and stood with the stake hidden at his side.

When the door opened, he recognized the beast who stood in the doorway, a sneer frozen on his ugly face by confusion. This was the man he'd seen in Isabella's memories.

This was Spike.

"Who the hell are you?" he growled.

Nathan tried to hide his grin, but he didn't succeed.

Spike glanced around the room before focusing on Nathan again. "Where the hell is she?"

"I assume that you're asking about Isabella." Nathan stepped forward, his fingers tightening around the shaft of wood.

"Yeah." Spike's eyes narrowed as he also moved forward. "You're one of us."

"One of *you*? No."

"Bullshit. I can tell." Spike squared his leather-clad shoulders, drawing himself up as tall as possible. He smelled like the beast that he was.

"No." Nathan stopped an arm's length from his adversary. "I am a vampire. You are lowlife scum. A mere worm."

Spike seemed to realize he was up against something he didn't understand, because he started to retreat.

Nathan rushed past him to the doorway, taking him by surprise.

Spike spun around to face him. "Look, I don't

know what you think you're doing, but I'm here to get Isabella. She's mine. I made her."

Anger swelled in Nathan's chest. "By *making* her, you became her protector, not her owner. You relinquished that responsibility the first time you lied to her." He jumped, whipping Spike around and encircling the foul beast with an arm around his neck. "And you relinquished the right to exist the first time you raped her."

Spike was large, but young, and his protests were as useless as those of a fly in a web.

Nathan drove the stake through the bastard's heart, enjoying the muffled screams and writhing, until he felt Spike's body go limp.

After dropping the body to the floor, Nathan returned to his place on the edge of the bed. He'd watch Spike decay for awhile before loading him into the trunk of his own car. There was a lake across town that would swallow the remains of beast and car, and hide them from prying eyes.

"You're free," he whispered to Isabella. Maybe, wherever she was, she felt the freedom.

He hoped so.

Nathan was sure now that they would meet again.

He smiled.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lydia Parks grew up in New Orleans, the city of sin and vampires. Although she left her hometown years ago, she carries an appreciation of the dark side of life. Lydia lives in the Southwest US where she works a regular day job as an engineer, and she spends the evenings and weekends writing erotica. Visit her webpage at:

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