



Tracy L.
Ranson

THE UNFORGIVEN:
RAPHAEL

The Unforgiven: RAPHAEL Tracy L. Ranson

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By

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Cover art by Kat Richards, copyright
September 2005
ISBN 1-58608-634-0
New Concepts Publishing
Lake Park, GA 31636
www.newconceptspublishing.com

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Chapter 1

Cigarette smoke filled Club Inferno, circling around the drunken patrons' heads. Dance music, a mix of hip-hop and techno, blared from the giant sound system originating from the wiry DJ working the CDs in the booth. Fake devils and flames comprised the decor, shades of red showing throughout. Did these humans have no imagination. Surely, they could have come up with something more provocative than visions of hell.

Raphael surveyed the room, his hooded eyes narrowing. So far, there wasn't anyone who deserved to die tonight. Oh, sure, there were a few pervs, perps and cheaters out, looking for a good lay. Nothing worth losing their lives over.

"Nothing suits you, I see," Alexandra commented, sweeping yards of long black hair over her shoulder, their table nestled in a dark corner of the bar.

He leaned back, stretching out his long, denim encased legs. "Nada damn thing." he said wryly. His usual hunger for blood wasn't gnawing at him as it usually was. Why, he wasn't sure.

"Our dear Raphael isn't in the mood tonight for a little fun, I suppose," jibed Egyptian-born Nicholas, the only other occupant at their table.

"There's more to life than a good fuck," he said, his gaze still scanning the room. Why did he keep doing that. There was nothing here. He snickered. It reminded him of a story someone once told him of the humans: If they were bored, they had a tendency to go to the refrigerator to find

something to eat. When nothing suited them, they closed the door only to return several minutes later under the conclusion that something new had appeared. "Besides, I am bored with this place. Is there something...."

He stopped, his attention diverted to the sudden, unfamiliar heaviness to the room. Turning toward the main source of the strange feeling, he caught the eye of a young woman at the bar. There was really nothing unusual about her. Mousy hair slipped past her shoulders, clipped at the crown by what the humans called a barrette. Thick black-rimmed glasses covered her eyes, perched on a nearly perfect nose. Full lips resided underneath, the color of dew-covered roses. He sat up straight, his gaze

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scraping up and down her body slowly. What was it about her that drew his attention.

Alexandra's Spanish-lilted laughter broke through his thoughts. "It

looks like Raphael has finally found something."

"Put a sock in it, Alex," he murmured, continuing to watch the woman relentlessly. Her movements were a little nervous and stilted, almost as if she was completely out of her element. From the vibe she was giving off, more than likely she was.

"Who's the lucky woman." Nicholas joined in, his annoying laughter mingling with Alex's, their black heads shining blue in the dim light.

He said nothing as he continued to watch the strangely familiar woman. Her long fingers, tipped with well manicured nails, danced around the rim of her glass as she stared at the atmosphere around her, the boredom in her radiating like a beacon. What was she doing here.

Behind him, he could hear Nicholas and Alex's banal conversation, ignoring it completely. He was too concentrated on the intriguing young woman. There was definitely something about her that he couldn't quite place.

Closing his eyes, he probed her mind, tapping into her innermost

secrets, searching for the key that was truly her. From what he could see, she was a very shy, insecure woman, especially about her looks. Why did she feel this way. Probing deeper, he viewed her memories, feeling a little like a thief.

She had a normal childhood, with doting parents. Unfortunately, she was the only child and in her eyes, not even remotely pretty. Digging ever deeper, she suffered from horrible nightmares. What caused them.

Let me see, he ordered the memories. Then, like a ghost rising from the mist of the Moors, it showed itself. In her most horrific nightmare, the woman was in the clutches of a creature not of this earth, dying the same way his beloved had died.

His eyes flew wide open, his breathing heavy. No, it couldn't be!

A fist pummeled in the belly, his breath catching in his chest. It was his beloved Elizabeth, lost so many years ago to him, returned from the grave.

"What's wrong, Raphael." Alex asked, her dark brows knitted

together.

"He's got a case of the I-need-to-get-laid-blues,"
Nicholas joined in,
jabbing him in the arm.

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"I don't believe it," he said slowly, the heat in his
face becoming more
intense.

"Don't believe what."

"It's Elizabeth."

* * * *

Liz Quartermaine stared at the roaring crowd in
Club Inferno, her
uneasiness growing because this wasn't her
scene at all. As a matter of fact,
she had no scene. She'd only come here on the
advice of one of her students
in order to placate her boredom.

Ha! Some advice. There was nothing here that
intrigued her....

Her belly tightened into a knot, as it always did
when someone
watched her. Warily, she searched the crowded
club until she locked onto
the most beautiful pair of green eyes she had
ever seen. The man behind

them was almost as stunning. Casually tousled black hair trailed over his broad, well muscled shoulders, framing his aristocratic face. Was he staring at her.

Liz turned around, searching for the obvious target of his attention.

There simply had to be a Playboy model standing behind her shoulder whom he was interested in.

She looked.

Nothing.

Then what was he staring at.

She turned back, finding his gaze as intense as before. Why was he staring in her direction. Surely he wasn't looking at her.

Her breath caught in her throat as she gazed at him, almost hypnotized by his stare. White cotton swathed his upper body, outlining every muscle and plane. He leaned back casually in his chair, stretching his long legs out, crossing them at the ankles, his hands behind his head as he stared at her.

This move forced her to look at the rest of him.

Dark blue denim encased his muscular legs, wrapped around his slim waist. She shivered. Did he possess six pack

abs under that shirt.

Despite her better judgment, she kept staring. She couldn't help but notice the obvious bulge between his legs, her mind wondering what lay beneath the strained denim. A shudder passed through her, the heat in her face intensifying. Why did she feel this way. It was utterly obvious that the stranger could not even remotely be interested in her.

Picking up her glass, she drained the last of the contents and sat it on the bar.

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"Would you like another drink, ma'am." the bartender shouted over the noise.

Before she answered, she looked over to where he sat and saw with horror he was getting up, as if to come toward her.

Fear took over, making her move fast. "No thanks," she answered, slamming a ten dollar bill on the granite bar. "Keep the change."

She shouldered her purse and hurried out the door. Once she hit the fresh air, she stopped and leaned against the building, her head in her hand. Why was she acting like a silly schoolgirl. The man was not interested in her so why did she leave so quickly when it looked like he was coming over to her. Tears stained her eyes. Part of her wished he would come over but the humiliation of him passing her by was almost more than she could take....

"Well, well, well, what do we have here." a drunken voice slurred from the shadows near the side of the building.

Her blood froze, the terror inside of her rising to new limits. "I .. I ... was just leaving," she stuttered as she pushed away from the wall.

"You ain't going nowhere, baby," the voice sneered as a man emerged from the shadows followed by six other men.

She put her hands up, her heart beating so fast that she was sure her chest would explode. "Please, don't hurt me," she pleaded as she held out her purse. "Just take my money and go."

"We're gonna take more than that," the

wretched man grinned as he came closer, his friends forming a circle so that she couldn't break free.

"Aren't we, boys."

The rest of them murmured in excitement, encouraging her anxiety to get the best of her. "Let me go!" she screamed as she tried to free herself from the circle of terror.

"No way, baby," he said, stepping forward, his hand gripping the upper part of her blouse and ripping downward. "Let's get them clothes off so we can have some fun."

Hands, greedy and demanding, ripped at her, pulling her hair along with her clothing. Her screams went unheard, the music from the smoky club drifting outside, drowning her completely. Would anyone save her from them.

"The lady said to leave her alone," ordered a male voice in a clipped, British accent from the left.

Their attack halted as they turned to look. "Who are you to tell us

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what ta do, asshole." challenged one of them, his hand brandishing a switchblade. "Come on over here if ya think ya man enough."

"As you wish," he said.

Suddenly, the stranger's swift movements knocked the blade from his hand and the man went down.

Liz saw with relief it had been the same man staring at her in the club.

Thankfully, he had decided to leave the club at the same time, or perhaps he had found his lay for the night. Whatever the reason was, she was grateful for it.

"Hey, that's our bro," the scroungy leader of the pack warned as he stepped forward, getting out his own blade. "You're gonna pay for that, fucker."

The criminal's arm swung to the left, narrowly missing her strange rescuer. Mr. Model stepped backwards, avoiding the first swipe but not the second. Blood poured from the wound in his belly. He stopped and looked down. "Look at what you have done to me!" he said chidingly.

"It ain't nothing compared to what I'm gonna do to you," the criminal sneered.

Her rescuer looked up. His hauntingly handsome face had disappeared, replaced by that of a demon. Red eyes glared out from beneath the folds of the darkened skin, the teeth white and shiny. Where the eye teeth should have been were a pair of fangs, looking as sharp as a cat's teeth.

The horror inside of her mounted. Who was this man.

All of the criminals paled. "What are you." their once ferocious leader demanded.

"Your worst nightmare," he snarled through the ferocious teeth as he waved a hand. "None of you will move until your justice has been handed out."

She couldn't take it anymore. Her world started to spin, and her legs weakened. Before she knew what happened, everything turned black.

* * * *

Raphael caught her just in time, taking her voluptuous body in his arms. The miscreants stood stock still, their

mouths frozen in silent shock.

He turned to Alex and Nicholas and gestured to his captives. "Both of you start and I'll join you once I know that Elizabeth is safe."

Alex licked her full lips, her fangs descended and ready for action. "If you go hungry tonight, that's your fault. I told you earlier that I was starving."

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"Me too," Nick commiserated, rubbing his flat belly affectionately.

"I'm always in the mood for a good bite."

With that, they descended on the bunch like a pack of ravenous dogs, with the familiar crunch of their teeth descending into flesh and the moans of ecstasy at such an overabundance of a meal rising in the night air.

Raphael lifted her effortlessly and took her to a nearby patch of grass.

Laying her down gently. he blinked hard, staring at her.

Elizabeth had returned.

Brushing the wild hair from her forehead, he

reminisced on how long it had been since Elizabeth had relished his embrace. Almost two hundred and fifty years. He frowned. Had it really been that long.

He knelt on one knee next to her, staring at her face. Even the bone structure was the same. The hair and eye colors were different, but in the modern age, both could be changed very easily.

His hand touched her cheek gently, causing her to stir. Her eyes fluttered for a moment and turned to look at him. She started to scream.

"Don't make a sound," he murmured, waving his hand over her face.

At once, she halted her cries, her body as rigid as a board. "Who .. who ... are you." she gasped

Raphael brushed his hands over her eyes. "This is all a dream, Elizabeth. Return to the depths of sleep."

Her eyes instantly closed, her breathing returning to normal very quickly.

He let out a sigh of relief. She had seen his true form and it would not endear him to her if she knew his true nature, at least for now. Later, when

she knew who she was, she could accept him for what he was.

His fingers stroked her arm, feeling the smooth skin that hadn't changed either. He remembered her silky thighs as they wrapped around his waist each time he drove into paradise....

Raphael pulled back. He was getting hard just thinking about their

past and it wouldn't do for now. He had to be patient and understanding.

From her thoughts he knew that she was a virgin again ripe for his taking, a

sweetness afforded to a man once in a lifetime. The only difference now was

that Zakara was not going to get close enough to kill her.

Hunger, painful and cruel, tore at him as he tasted the sweet wine of

her fear. It made him hungrier than he'd been in a long time.

Looking away, he felt the renegade fangs descend again, tempting him

to take her now and taste of the sweetness he'd been denied far too long.

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He glanced back at Elizabeth, his breath hitching slightly. A beam of moonlight landed on her neck, highlighting the pulsing vein full of pure virgin blood, perhaps the sweetest drink of all.

He leapt to his feet.

No.

Not this way. She had to become his of her own volition or not at all.

Raphael turned to see there were only two of the six drunks left.

"We've left you a few bites," Alex offered as she sat down on the ground next to her last victim, her chin still full of blood. "I'm utterly full."

"Me too," Nicholas joined in as he sat on the rock wall outside of the club, the blood staining his white shirt. "Thankfully the humans can't see what's going on or else we'd be in the slammer tonight."

He ignored their comments, his gaze intent on his victims. For the first time in a while, he felt the old hunger return as well as the need to hunt out his meals. For the last few hundred years, he'd eaten sparingly, choosing only criminals or the homeless as his food. Now it was time to feast again.

The reason for his life had suddenly returned.

* * * *

"Have you found him." Zakara purred from her dark throne deep within the bowels of the earth, her voice echoing through the expanse of the cavern. Wet earth surrounded them, filling the air with its acrid, musty smell. Her pets, the lurid bats, lurked in the darkest corners, making only small noises as they waited with the rest of their brethren for the night to fall.

Scattered around the base of her throne lay the remnants of her coven, waiting for the right moment to search the night for food. Strewn in between were the remains of past meals, the bones picked clean.

"Of course, Mother," answered one of her newest minions, only one hundred fifty years old. "He is in America." Josiah shifted uneasily before her, his wide brimmed hat in his hands. She smirked slightly. Even though she had plucked Josiah Johnson from his farm long ago, he still preferred to dress the part of a farmer and not conform to the others.

She held her hands up, admiring the way the gold rings glittered against her dark skin. She alone possessed a haunting beauty, a fatal charm to any man who saw her. Zakara smiled. There was nothing more magical than that. Thankfully, she had inherited her father's darker skin hue instead of her mother's milky complexion. Inwardly, she giggled with laughter. Who would have thought that the illicit union between Satan and Adam's first

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wife Lillith would have produced as glorious a creature as herself. "Where in America."

"A place called Morrisonville, Virginia," Amos replied solemnly.

Excitement shot through her lifeless veins, thrumming through her like an electrical charge. "Where is this place."

"Only a day's flight from here."

She stood up, straightening her silvery gown, the edges of it baring the tops of her dusky breasts as well as her flat midriff. Walking with a gentle

swaying motion toward him, she held out her hand. Josiah kissed it and knelt, as he should. "You have done very well, Josiah. Since you have served me faithfully, I will grant that you will be the one to kill Raphael if I so choose."

Josiah's brown eyes widened and turned a deep red, the glow in them turning hellish, just as she had always preferred it to be. "Thank you, Mother," he murmured, the tips of his fangs showing through his parted red lips.

Her fingers danced against the soft skin of his childish face. "For your excellent work, I will reward you handsomely," she purred as she circled his youthful form. Placing her hand seductively on his shoulders, she leaned close to his ear. "Since you have shown me great loyalty, I welcome you into my bed this night," she whispered. "I will take you to the heights of pleasure you have never experienced."

"Oh, what an honor, Mother," he murmured, closing his eyes to relish in the moment.

"Once Raphael is dead," she continued. "You

will become King of the
Undead and rule beside me."
"Consider him dead already."

* * * *

Morning sun crept through the slit between the
curtain panels, jarring
her sleep. Liz blinked hard, trying to work away
the little granules of gunk
from the edges of her eyelids. What time was it.

She looked at the clock. The digital readout
claimed almost noon.

Where in the hell did the time go. Normally she
was up around seven a.m.

every day, including weekends.

Liz sat up, suddenly feeling that woozy
sensation from drinking too
much. Wow, where'd that come from. If she
didn't know better, she would
have sworn she'd been drinking heavily.

Last night, she'd climbed into bed early and
had the most horrific

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nightmare. She was in the Club Inferno down on
Wharton Street, sitting
there sipping a drink when she met the most
mysterious and enticing

stranger she'd ever want to meet. He was handsome in an intriguing way, his piercing green eyes gazing right through her....

Liz shook her head. It was just a dream. A man like that wouldn't be interested in her in the slightest bit. She was a mousy, plain Jane kind of girl with her nose always in books.

Getting up on weak legs, she wobbled to her dressing table and sat down, staring at the mousy brown hair. Why couldn't she have been a blonde or redhead. Those hair colors always seemed to turn a man's head faster than anything else.

Idly she glanced at the magazine sitting on the corner. The cover contained a beautifully blonde model with a perfect figure and face. If she could only look like that, she'd be able to have a man like the stranger in her dream.

Liz sighed. She'd always had extra weight for as long as she could remember. Her mother called it being big boned. But that wasn't it. She was just big and ungainly, standing at five foot eight. It was no wonder that she'd never had a boyfriend nor really been kissed,

unless you could count the quick kiss Bobby Henshaw had placed on her cheek in sixth grade during a game of Spin the Bottle.

She wanted to laugh. Twenty six and never been kissed! Just as that thought passed through her mind, tears sprang to the corner of her eyes. Instead of being funny, it was really sad. How in the world was she supposed to get married and have children if no man ever looked at her.

Liz leapt to her feet, brushing her tears away. There was no time to think of that now because she had to shower and head back to her office at the college. A new semester was starting and she had to get the new lessons prepared.

* * * *

"Do you think she knows." Alex's question pierced his sleep, bringing him back to the state of alertness he'd been fighting for hours.

"I don't know," he answered her mentally, their favorite form of communication. "I don't want her to know until the time is right." He thanked whatever God there was for Alex.

Without her, he'd never have made it and would have committed suicide long before now.

"Are you sure it's Elizabeth."

He remained silent for a moment, the air in his coffin growing quite

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heavy. Yes, he knew it was her. Her memories of him, of their past, even of their lovemaking rested in the deepest recesses of her mind waiting to be brought back. "It is her, without a doubt, Alex."

She said nothing. He figured as much. Alex was looking out for him, as she always had since the beginning. At first, they sought solace in each other's arms but quickly discovered that they made better friends than lovers.

"I don't want to see you hurt," she thought, the sound of her voice

resounding in his head. "If Zakara finds out...."

"She won't find out."

"How can you be sure."

Alex's question struck him in the chest, making him draw in a deep breath. How was he to be sure. When Elizabeth

had belonged to him before, he had vowed to keep her safe from every harm imaginable. Unfortunately, he could not keep his vow. One night, in a fit of rage, Zakara had killed Elizabeth and forced him to join their coven completely. The only thing Zakara allowed him to do was to hold Elizabeth as the life drained from her body.

His fists curled at his sides. No, the damned bitch would not take his love from him again. "Even if I have to die, Alex, I won't let her down again."

"What do you plan to do."

"It's all taken care of, my dear friend."

Her slight laughter echoed through his mind. "Hmmm, let me see.

You're going to be a visiting history professor who just happens to start teaching history this semester. Am I correct."

He returned her mirth. "The same old Alex. Nothing gets by you."

"It can't," she laughed silently. "I've been around almost eight hundred years and have seen or done it all. So what's the plan after that."

"I don't know yet. I think the first thing I'm going

to do is convince her to change that hair and get rid of the glasses."

"Raphael, you know I love you as much as my own brother, but transforming her into Elizabeth will not make her so."

"Ah, but it will," he countered. "I will bring out all those memories that she keeps hidden deep within the recesses of her mind like so many precious jewels. Once I get her to see that she is Elizabeth, she will be again."

"Is this what you want, Raphael."

"More than anything else in the world."

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Chapter 2

"So you want me to teach all of the night courses on top of my other ones." she murmured quietly as she sat across

from Dean Waters in the most uncomfortable chair in creation. Sweet morning sun drifted in through the church-like windows, staining the oak floor with its brightness. Precious art objects were scattered around the room, resting on light oak bookshelves along with the books. She sighed deeply. It never failed. When there was something they needed done, they always dumped it on her, knowing that she wouldn't fight back and stand up for herself.

Sweat poured down the Dean's face even though the air conditioning was on full blast. "I'm reassigning your other classes to the other professors.

Since your masters is in history, I want you to concentrate on Professor Mitchell's classes, may God help him," Dean Waters murmured, his fat fingers shuffling through the myriad of papers on his desk. "You won't be doing it alone, however. I'm bringing someone in to help you, Liza."

"That's Liz," she said sourly, listening to the sound of his fingers drum irritatingly against the oak top of his desk. For some strange reason, he could never get her name right.

"Sorry, Liz," he corrected as he pulled out a black-leather clad book and flipped it to the middle. He loosened his tie, opening the top button of his shirt at the same time. She cringed when she saw black hair sprouting from the open vee. If nothing else, Dean Waters was the epitome of the old wives tale. If you're bald on top, the rest of your body is usually as hairy as an ape.

"What is her name." Probably some hundred-year-old fossil, she thought dryly, someone who needs to be pushed around campus in a wheelchair.

"His name is...," he took a pudgy finger and scanned down the page, "Professor Raphael Chamberlin."

The moment that name entered her brain, she envisioned a stuffy old Englishman with a cravat and walking cane, topped off with a monocle and top hat. She laughed aloud at the thought.

Dean Water's beady eyes wrinkled as scowled. "What's so funny."

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"Nothing," she said quickly, stifling her giggles. "When will I get to meet this illustrious Professor Chamberlin."

"Right now," echoed a male voice behind her, the sound clipped with a hint of British accent.

She got up and turned, staring into familiar green eyes. Her heart gave a little leap. "You ... you're Professor Chamberlin." For one wild moment, she was sure that she knew him--but from where. Until today, she'd never heard of him.

He nodded, the movement encouraging strands of black hair to cover those hypnotic eyes. "That would be me," he said, the tone of his voice reminding her of a debonair Errol Flynn. She'd always been attracted to Errol Flynn and all the swashbuckling actors of the thirties and forties.

"Raphael Chamberlin at your service," he bowed low. "And you are."

"Liz Quartermaine," she said slowly, holding her hand out. She knew she shouldn't stare but she couldn't help it. He was perhaps the most handsome man she had ever seen besides

Errol. His face was strong and aristocratic with high cheekbones, plump, full lips and a slightly off center nose. For a wild moment, she imagined what experience lay in those lips....

"Very nice to meet you, Mrs. Quartermaine," he said slowly as he lifted her hand to his lips, the gentle kiss searing her skin and sending wild spirals of lust surging through her.

"It's Ms. Quartermaine," she corrected gently as he let go of her hand.

"I'm not married and never have been."

"What luck," he said, standing up to his full height of well over six feet. "I would have thought a woman like you would be unavailable."

His tone was deep and sensual, making her blush. She was so drawn to him that everything else seemed to fade into the background. What was it about him that seemed so familiar.

"Ahem," Dean Waters cleared his throat to draw back their attention.

"May we get down to business."

"Of course," Raphael said as he took a chair next to her, settling his muscular build into it.

She couldn't help but look at him. His shoulders,

clad in a light jacket,
were broad and thick, almost as though he were
into bodybuilding. Blue
chambray swathed his upper body under the
jacket, the first two buttons
undone. Liz drew a deep breath when she
glimpsed the bronze skin around
his throat. Whew, no hair. She had always hated
men with body hair, but in
her situation she couldn't be picky.

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"Are you with us, Liz."

She jerked her head forward at the sound of the
Dean's voice, but not
before she saw the corner of Raphael's lip curl
upwards in a slight smile.

Apparently he was aware of how he looked and
didn't mind being stared at.

"Yes, I am."

Dean Waters perched his bifocals onto his
pudgy nose and looked
down at the semester schedule in his hand.

"Now, I've got Liz teaching the
European History Class as well as the Medieval
History. Professor
Chamberlin, you'll be teaching the American

History as well as Civil War."

He looked up. "I know this is a big load and I'm asking a lot but it's only for a semester."

"I have no problem with it," Raphael offered as he stretched out his denim covered legs, crossing them at the ankles. His muscles flexed as they moved, making her heart leap. "I'm a night owl anyway so it works perfectly for me."

She quickly looked back to the frumpy Dean in front of her, refusing to look at Raphael anymore. He was completely out of her league despite what he had said. He was just being polite, that's all. There was no way he'd ever be interested in her at all.

Dean Waters turned to her. "What about you, Liz. Is this schedule all right with you."

She nodded. "That's fine," she said, muttering under breath, "it's not like I have a life."

Dean Water's face screwed up in question. "What'd you say."

"Nothing," she said, trying to rise from the seat in a dignified manner.

The arms pinched at her thighs and the last

thing she wanted to do was to get up and have the chair stuck to her ass. Now that would be completely embarrassing.

Raphael rose and held the chair for her. "Thank you." The embarrassment flooded her cheeks.

"It's just good manners," he stated in a low tone. "I was taught when a woman comes in or leaves a room, a man should rise."

She ignored the slight chuckle of Dean Waters. "Thank you," she said, tugging at the hem of her flowered print skirt, making sure it didn't rise above her thick knees. "Do you need someone to take you around the campus and show you where everything is."

His midnight hue brow rose. "Is this an invitation."

She felt the heat of embarrassment creep into her cheeks as the

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implication of his question sank into her mind. "I just thought maybe...."

Professor Chamberlin laughed aloud. "It would

be a great honor for me if you would be so kind as to show me where I'll be teaching."

His manners were unlike any man she'd ever known. Maybe it was because he'd been raised in Europe....

She glanced quickly at her watch, wanting to get away from him as quickly as possible. Damn, she had class in seven minutes almost all the way across the campus! "Can you meet me in the library in--say--two hours. My class...."

He picked up her hand and kissed it again, making her tremble all over. "Until then, my dear. Parting is such sweet sorrow."

She stared at him for a moment, blinking hard. His lines were a little corny but they sounded quite sincere in an odd old-world sort of way. She shook her head slightly. No, he was just being polite. "Until then," she returned and picked up her purse. "Will you just put the course sheet in my mailbox, Dean Waters."

Dean Waters tilted his head. "Of course, Liza." She gave a quick wave. "That's Liz," she muttered low as she left.

Why couldn't the dumbass ever get it right. Just because she was ugly didn't mean she didn't deserve to hear her name right.

* * * *

Liz waited in the mahogany-paneled library for half an hour, glancing at her watch every few minutes like a nervous schoolgirl waiting for her crush to arrive. Where was this new professor.

Her heart fluttered in her chest. Why did she think of him like that.

All she was going to do was show him around campus, that was all.

Tears pricked at the corner of her eyes. Why did people have to be so cruel. Just because she wasn't a raving beauty, people treated her as if she had leprosy. One time in particular stood out in her mind.

Sophomore year of high school. The prom. Bobby Sinclair.

She closed her eyes, reliving the hateful memory. Bobby, a junior, had been the captain of the football team, tall and totally awesome. She'd practically fallen in love with him the first moment she saw him. Keeping to herself, she would draw little hearts on the inside pages of her history books

and label them 'Bobby + Liz 4-Ever'. Of course, he'd never look at a girl like her so she had felt safe to draw those little innocuous hearts. Unfortunately, Tara Henley, leader of the bitch squad (she had christened the popular clique with this name because that's what they were to anyone who wasn't part of

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their inner circle), stole her book one day and read what had been written.

She'd been mortified.

Tara had let everyone, including Bobby, know what was in it. After

that, she couldn't hold her head up high at all.

Bobby, on the other hand,

seemed nice and understanding, even asking her to the upcoming junior

prom. At first, she had thought he was joking but he insisted that he was not.

Reluctantly, she'd agreed to go. Big mistake.

She'd gone out with Aunt Patty, the woman who'd raised her after her

parents were killed in a fiery car accident, to find a dress. She had found the

perfect one. It didn't do anything for her shape

but she loved it anyway. It had taken most of her savings to buy it.

The night of the prom, she had waited for Bobby on the couch, her palms beneath her gloves dampening. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. The grandfather clock kept time, the hands silently clicking over. She trembled.

He was supposed to pick her up at seven-thirty.

Eight o'clock had come and gone, forcing her to realize he wasn't going to come.

He had never showed up.

The next day, she'd been the joke of the school. When she had asked

Bobby why he didn't come, his glib answer was: "They don't allow pigs at the prom."

She'd been devastated...

"I'm sorry I'm late, Ms. Quartermaine," Professor Chamberlin's softly accented voice drifted over her shoulder, interrupting those hurtful visions.

"I think I must have taken a wrong turn somewhere."

Her spine stiffened. It was time to tuck away all those hateful memories and get on with things. After all, she was an adult woman now

and had to forget all of the past if she wanted to get on with her future.

"That's no problem, Professor," she said, spinning on her heel to face him.

Their eyes locked, intense and powerful.

Her breath caught, the sight of him catching her totally off guard. He

was too handsome for his own good. "Are you ready for the grand tour."

Her voice sounded completely nervous and unnatural. Hopefully he didn't pick up on that.

His hand swept into the direction of the door.

"After you."

"What brings you to our little town, Professor."

He halted in mid-stride. "If we're going to be working together, I insist

that you call me Raphael, Ms. Quartermaine. The other is too formal."

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She started walking again slowly, waiting for him to catch up, her

heart racing. Every word he uttered did something to her body and mind. "I

agree, Raphael, so please call me Liz."

He grinned. "It's Liz then," he said, stuffing his

hands into his pants pockets. "In reference to your question, a possible professorship brought me here. As you might have guessed by my accent, I was born in England and studied in Oxford, where I got my masters in European History."

She stopped and stared at him, confused. "Then why am I teaching Medieval and European history. You seem more qualified...."

His smile seemed to light up the dying of the day. "Because my other master's degree is in American History. Besides, I get a little bored with teaching European history since that's where I'm from." The deep emerald of his eyes seemed to glow, hypnotizing her completely. "Now that you know about me, what about you."

She froze inside. Was he actually asking about her. "I ... I ... think we should head over to the Steely Building. That's where you'll be teaching most of your classes," she said quickly, her pace picking up speed. Bobby had acted like this when he asked her out for the prom. No, she was not going to fall for any man's trap again.

Raphael hurried along behind Liz, his strides closing the distance quickly. He sensed her pain and sorrow, as well as why she chose not to get too close. Damn that Bobby Sinclair for hurting her like this. If it hadn't been for that bastard, Elizabeth might have been a completely different person.

"Do you have a date tonight."

Elizabeth stopped, her body becoming as rigid as a statue. "What did you say."

He walked around to the front of her, tilting her chin upwards and forcing her to look at him. Why did she consider herself so unattractive "I simply asked if you had a date tonight."

"Why."

"Because I would like to take you to dinner."

Fear radiated behind the eyes hidden by the thick glasses. "I ... I .. don't date," she confessed.

"Why not."

She jerked her chin out of his hand. "Because I don't," she answered sharply, the tears springing to her eyes. "Now, if you will excuse me, I need to...."

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He was not about to let her get away. "You don't want to leave,

Elizabeth."

"What did you call me."

"That is your given name, is it not."

She nodded slowly, as if animated, obviously under his spell. "Yes, it is."

"Now, you would like to go to dinner with me, wouldn't you."

"Yes."

* * * *

The attractive little restaurant was a mile or so away from campus. Liz felt nervous and scared as Raphael guided the Jaguar through the middle of town, as if the eyes of every one were on her.

Several times, she glanced over to see his long fingers gripping the wheel, her mind running riot. Would those hands be as experienced as they seem....

"Are you all right, Liz. You haven't said a word since we got in the car."

"Yes, Raphael," she answered in a stilted tone, her fingers gripping the leather seats of the expensive car. "It's just that I've never been in a Jaguar." It was the truth. The closest she'd ever gotten to one was when she had worked for a Jaguar dealership through college. The rule there was look but don't touch.

"It's just a car, my dear, nothing more," he answered casually as he pulled into a parking spot. "Is Italian okay with you."

How in the world did he know she loved Italian. "Sure," she answered, her hand going to the latch on the door.

"Don't," he said. "Wait for me."

Liz sat there in stunned silence as Raphael circled the car, made his way to her side and opened the door for her. She'd never been treated like such a lady before.

Raphael opened the door and extended his hand. "Thank you," she said a bit unsteadily, her hand sliding into his. She got out easier than she thought she would have, her fear that she would embarrass herself slipping

away from her.

He slammed the door and guided her out with a gentle hand on her back. "So, now our biggest question is: do we eat inside or al fresco."

Her nervous gaze darted about. Perhaps she should tell him that this was all a mistake. Suddenly, a calm feeling washed over her, almost as if she

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had taken one of her anxiety pills. "Al fresco, I suppose," she replied, her legs growing stronger every minute.

"My thought, exactly," he said with a laugh.

Within minutes, they were inside. Mediterranean artwork decorated

the walls, making it look as though it was an ancient Roman house. Garlic

hung in the air as the wait staff zoomed by with trays of bread, fettuccine

and spaghetti. She inhaled deeply, the comforting smell calming her nerves.

"How many."

"Two," she heard Raphael say.

"That'll be a two hour wait."

"Here's a little something that should encourage

you to give us the best table you have in about five minutes on the patio."

She glanced over to see Raphael hand the maitre d' a twenty. "Of course sir," the man in the fake mustache and awful clothes answered. "In five minutes."

Her anxiety returned. "You didn't have to do that. We could go somewhere else. McDonald's or some other fast food..."

He held his hand up. "That is not dinner," he said. "That's for men who are too lazy to treat their women right."

She stared at him hard. What did he mean by that. "But...."

Before she could say more, the maitre d' turned up at Raphael's elbow and announced the table was ready.

He gestured her to follow the maitre d' and she complied, all the while feeling his hand on her back, guiding her toward their table. Tremors slammed through her as fear gnawed at her bones. Why was he here with her.

As they passed every table, she felt as though every pair of eyes were

on her. It was almost as if they said silently:
What is that handsome man
doing with that ugly toad of a woman.

"Ignore them," Raphael whispered into her ear,
almost as if he heard
her thoughts out loud.

She spun on her heel, stopping mid way to the
table. "What did you
say."

"I said ignore them. They are just small minded
people."

Liz was dubious. "How did you know what I was
thinking."

He leaned closer, his breath warm and inviting.
"Lucky guess."

The maitre d' ushered them to a quiet table near
the back of the patio.

Small lanterns, giving off suitable but dim light,
hung on wire stretched

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between the hooks that circled the small dining
area. "Your table, sir," he
said in the most awful Italian accent that she'd
ever heard, pulling her chair
out for her.

"Thank you," she mumbled as she swept the

long dress aside and seated herself as gently as she could. Unfortunately, the chair was a bit tight. Silently, she cursed the maker as she sat down, the arms digging into her sides.

Raphael nodded as he seated himself across from her. "Is this table all right with you." His voice was warm and smooth, like the finest wine.

"Yes, it is, Prof...Raphael," she quickly corrected, her hands twisting in her lap. "It's very nice."

"Good," he remarked as he leaned forward, capturing her hand in his.

"I'm glad you decided to come."

So am I, she wanted to say but she restrained herself. "It is very nice of you to ask me," she said, the pain and hurt rising from the depths of her soul. "May I ask you a question."

His dark brow rose. "Yes."

"Why did you ask me." The question had swirled around in her mind like a shark searching for prey. There simply had to be an underlying reason.

"Because I like you and I think you're a very beautiful woman."

She felt the heat of her embarrassment creep

into her cheeks. "Please, Raphael, don't say things you don't mean," she begged, the tears rising in her eyes. More than likely he'd felt sorry for her and that's why he'd asked her out, nothing more.

His finger under her chin brought her head up. "I never lie and I don't say things I don't mean, Elizabeth."

Confusion swept over her. No one ever knew called her by real name.

She always went by Liz and told people that was her given name on her birth certificate. "Why do you call me Elizabeth."

"I think that Elizabeth suits you better than Liz." Concern graced his aristocratic features. "Why. Does that bother you."

She picked up her napkin, settling it in her lap. Her nervous hands had to stay busy because she didn't want him to know what he did to her. "It's just that no one ever calls me that. I prefer Liz."

"I'm sorry," he apologized, letting go of her hand. "I didn't mean any disrespect."

"You didn't, Raphael. You see, Elizabeth should belong to a beautiful woman with long flowing blonde hair and blue

eyes or perhaps a ravishing

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redhead with captivating green eyes," she confessed. "Not someone as dowdy as me."

Raphael studied her seriously for a moment, his emerald gaze sweeping over her. "You don't have to be dowdy, Liz, if you choose not to be."

"What do you mean."

He leaned back, taking a relaxed position. "We are all blessed with the freedom to choose who we want to be or change what we are."

"I know that," she murmured, looking down, her hands trembling in her lap. "But what if we're too afraid to change."

Raphael's hand slid across the table, grasping hers. "If you want to change, Liz, you can. The strength is inside of you and always has been. Until now, you've always been too afraid to turn it loose."

Tears of shame streamed down her face. Raphael was right. Several

times, she'd made appointments at the hairdresser to have her hair cut and dyed only to cancel them a day before because she was too afraid to go. The same thing with the eye doctor about getting contacts. "Can we talk about something else, Raphael." she said abruptly, wanting to get away from the whole mess entirely.

"Of course. What shall we talk about."

* * * *

"You are so beautiful, Elizabeth," he whispered into her ear, the tones *caressing. "I love you with every morsel of my being." His fingers caressed her arm, sending shivers of delight to dance up and down her spine. She felt sexually charged and alive, something she'd never felt in her life.*

She turned to see the stranger next to her, his face hidden by the shadows of the night. Fear that normally would have taken hold of her didn't exist, almost as if she knew the naked stranger next to her.

"I ... I ... love you," she stammered as he moved over her, his hands exploring every inch. In the deep darkness, she

felt his lips touch the tender skin of her neck, his teeth scraping the flesh. Excitement stormed through her, making her privates throb. Who was this man who made her very essence cry out for him.

His hands teased and tantalized her breasts before exploring her ripe body for a more worthy prize. Her nipples hardened as he brushed over them, his thumb caressing them carefully. Next, he touched her soft midsection, teasing her belly button before moving to her generous hips where he circled them lovingly. "So beautiful," he murmured against her

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throat.

Tingles of desire stormed through her as his hand sank lower, searching through the thick, damp forest between her legs for his prize.

Without hesitation, he found her core, teasing her to new heights. His fingers dipped in and out of her, the passion so

strong that she was unable to contain her cries of ecstasy. She moaned against his ear, her hips rising to meet his hungry fingers.

Opening her eyes, she wanted to see what sort of man was here, with her....

What she saw turned her blood to ice.

Fangs, white and shiny, protruded from a large mouth. Fierce red eyes glared at her, as if studying her.

She opened her mouth to scream but no sound came out.

"Love me, Elizabeth, for this is who I am," he whispered, his long talon-like fingers nudging her legs apart. "Join me and become my everlasting love."

** * * **

Liz awoke from the nightmare, her heart pounding so hard it felt like her chest would explode. Sweat beaded her forehead, dampening her sheets.

She breathed heavily, her eyes searching the darkness. Was that Thing here, with her.

She listened quietly for a moment, hearing nothing except the tick of

the clock on the nightstand. Glancing over, she noticed that it was two thirty a.m. Nightmare time, she thought glumly.

She got up to use the bathroom. Turning on the light, she stumbled to the toilet and relieved herself. Finished, she returned to the sink to wash her hands. Water splashed against the porcelain bowl, breaking the uneasy silence. She stifled a yawn and looked into the mirror.

For a split second, she saw the same image from the dream behind her in the mirror. She screamed, turning around as the pace of her heart picked up in volume. There was nothing there.

She looked back at the mirror. All that reflected back were her face and the flowery shower curtains. Gripping the edges of the sink, she leaned into it, rocking back and forth a little. The nightmares seemed to be getting worse instead of better. Dr. Kaplan had said that they were all a product of her troubled mind, nothing more.

Some troubled mind.

Liz took a deep breath. Maybe it was time for mother's little helper.

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Opening the cabinet, she quickly found her sleeping pills and dumped one into her hand. She closed it, staring at her reflection once again. If only she was thinner, perhaps all of this would be over. Maybe she'd find a boyfriend and have some sort of relationship, someone to turn to in the middle of the night when the nightmares were really bad.

She grabbed the cup in the sink, filling it with icy water, and gulped down the pill. Cold moisture slipped down her throat, soothing the dry, tight membranes. She let out a relieved breath. Now she could finally sleep....

Red blotches on her neck glared at her in the mirror. Lifting her hair, she peered closer. Two spots, very close together, appeared as though something had tried to bite her.

Liz let go of her hair, her blood freezing in her veins. Suppose it wasn't a dream. What if it was all real.

On weak legs, she returned to her bed and sat on the edge, her hands gripping the mattress hard. She was a practical

woman, not given to notions of vampires or anything else of that nature. She never watched horror movies because they bored her. Vampires, on the other hand, had always intrigued her but she knew for a fact they did not exist. So why had she dreamed of one tonight.

She leaned back, letting out a long breath. Dr. Kaplan, her therapist, said that most of the nightmares came from her odd hobby of cataloguing vampire legends. She should quit, according to him.

Warily, she slid back under the covers, letting her mind drift to the interesting dinner she had with Professor Chamberlin. *The strength is inside of you and always has been, he had said. Until now, you've always been too afraid to turn it loose.*

She stared blankly into the darkness, thinking about those words. Why did it take a complete stranger to point out the truth of her nature. It was almost as if he had known her deeply, on some other level than as a mere colleague.

Liz glanced at the clock. It was almost three

a.m. She punched the pillow. Great. It would be an hour before the pill kicked in and she had to get up early and teach Missy Hobson's history class because Missy had a doctor's appointment.

Sitting up and bunching the pillows behind her, she knew there was no better method of waiting for the pill to kick in than to read a good book.

She switched on the light and reached for her Dereham's Tales of Unsolved Victorian Murders. Flipping through the pages, she skimmed the material on

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some of the more notable figures. Most of them she was familiar with.

Suddenly, the portrait of a young woman caught her attention. She turned back and stared. Long blonde hair haloed her head in spiral curls, her blue eyes staring out of the painting.

Liz glanced down at the name. Lady Elizabeth Swanson. She looked closer. Lady Elizabeth was probably about twenty when the portrait was

painted. Her figure was on the plump side, as was preferred for women of that age. If she had lived back then, she probably could have had any man she wanted.

She looked at the history on the preceding page. Very interesting indeed. Born in 1742, Lady Elizabeth was the daughter of the Viscount Lynley. She was an acclaimed beauty of the day, wanted by many but she chose only one. Lord Raphael Clarendon. According to the history, she was found murdered on their wedding night, the elusive Lord Clarendon nowhere to be found. Supposedly, he murdered her and fled to the continent with his mistress. No trace of him was ever found

She closed the book for a second, her finger keeping her place.

Raphael Chamberlin. Raphael Clarendon. How odd that both men shared a similar name though the latter lived about two hundred and fifty years before. During that time, the name Raphael was uncommon, just as it was today.

Opening the book back up, Liz continued to stare at the picture, her

fingers moving over the slick page. It was strange, but for a moment the portrait could almost have been her with blonde hair and blue eyes. Lady Elizabeth's nose was almost like hers....

She slammed the book shut. This was insane. She didn't look like Lady Elizabeth whatsoever. Even with blonde hair and blue eyes, she wouldn't be Lady Elizabeth. That woman had died almost hundred and fifty years before.

Taking a deep breath, she opened the book to Lady Elizabeth's page again, twirling locks of her own brown hair with her fingers. She could be like this woman though. Full of confidence and radiance and able to turn men's heads.

She looked down at her own hair. It was mousy and dead. Liz shivered. Could she do this. Could she completely transform herself. Picking up paper and pen along with the phone book in the drawer, she started hunting out a local salon. There was no time like the present to start making changes.

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Chapter 3

Raphael let himself into the dim apartment, throwing his keys in the dish in the hall where they fell with a hollow clink. Tonight had been a very good night. First, he'd planted the seed in Elizabeth's mind about changing.

Next, he'd prowled into her dream, taking her sweet scent and set about marking her when she abruptly woke up. Unfortunately, he'd only nipped her and not put a full mark on her.

"My, my, my," purred a familiar female voice. "My dear Raphael, where have you been for the last few centuries."

He froze in his step, anger storming through his

lifeless veins.

"Zakara," he said slowly as he entered the living room. "How did you find me."

Solid creaks of the leather sofa signaled that she was getting up and coming toward him. "It took a lot of time and expense to find you but it was well worth it, I assure you." Her voice crept closer. "Are you not happy to see me again."

"No, I'm not," he said as he moved to the other side. "Stay away from me."

"Now is that any way to treat me after what I went through to find you." Her voice mocked as she flitted across the room. "Come back with me and I will forget this nasty mess." Long, sharp fingernails raked the side of his face. "I can be very forgiving if I wish to be."

He threw her hand away from him. "No, Zakara. You're not going to trap me again."

"Won't I. You have no idea what I will do if you don't come back to me." Savagery marked her words and he knew the full extent to which she would go.

"Save it for someone who's scared, Zakara. Now get out."

She raked her talon-like nails across his dick and he winced. "You've found her again, Raphael."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

She gripped his balls like a vice. "Yes, you do," she said. "I thought when I killed her the first time, I destroyed the last shred of humanity within

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you. I was wrong. It only made you stronger." He drew in a heavy breath as she continued. "I'll destroy her again if I have to."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Your mark on her won't stop me, Raphael," she squeezed harder and the pain increased. "I would certainly miss this if I had to destroy you."

"I'll kill you," he hissed through clenched teeth. "You can count on that."

She let go. His balls felt as though they had swelled to the size of basketballs. "Oh, I'm counting on it, Raphael." She walked over to the

window and made a parting motion with her hands. Glass panes creaked opened out onto the darkened street, the stars twinkling against the black canvas of the sky. "Since we can't be on the same side anymore, Raphael, I guess to the victor go the spoils. I am certainly going to enjoy killing her a second time and making you watch once again before I kill you."

His rage mounted, fists curling into tight balls. "I swear by all that's holy and unholy, you'll be dead before this is over, Zakara. I'm going to send you back to Hell with your father where you belong."

Her devilish laughter rang through the room as she spread her arms wide. Giant black wings like those of a gargoyle emerged from her back.

"You only have so much time, Raphael, before she is mine. Tell me, will you fail her again."

Before he could answer, Zakara turned and flew out the window, becoming one with the night. He strode to the window, locked it, and closed the curtains.

He sank down on the couch and put his head in

his hands. What was he going to do. Zakara now knew of Elizabeth's existence.

Raphael looked up at the precious portrait hanging over the fireplace.

Elizabeth smiled down at him, her blonde curls framing her angelic face, her creamy hands crossed. Diamonds, a betrothal gift from him, decorated her neck.

I won't let you down again, he promised her silently. I will never let *you go.*

* * * *

Liz's first class went as well as she could have expected. She thought perhaps she'd see Raphael but she didn't. Part of her felt let down, but she knew that he was just being kind to her by taking her out to dinner. It was a one-time thing, nothing more.

She walked to a deserted bench on the student quadrangle and sat

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down. She flipped through her Dereham's book again, turning to Elizabeth's

page. She smiled. That's what she'd taken to calling it. Over the last few days, she had acquainted herself with the mystery of the beautiful Lady Elizabeth. From what she could glean from old texts, Lady Elizabeth had been found on her marriage bed with her throat viciously torn out, the entire bed coated in blood. It was also found that the Lady was with child as well....

A dim shadow from the dying sunlight fell over her book. "Hello again," Raphael said, sitting down next to her. "What are you reading."

She slammed the book shut before he could see what she was reading.

The past of the intriguing Lady Elizabeth was not something she wanted to discuss with anyone. "Just boning up for my classes," she said quickly, shifting so she could see him better. "How was your class."

"Very well. Much better than I expected."

"What did you expect to happen."

"Nothing really," he chuckled lightly as he leaned forward, his elbows resting on the knees of his Armani clad legs. "It's just that I'm used to

teaching in England and the students are a little different there."

Her brow rose. "How so."

"There are no words to describe it, I suppose," he leaned forward, the corner of his mouth turning up into a half smile, "I will tell you this much, I like teaching in America much better."

His sensuality hit her like a wall, making her tremble. "My next class is in five minutes," she lied, trying to get away from him. His magnetism was too strong for her to withstand. She didn't want to pin her hopes on having a relationship with him only to have it all crushed.

"I'll walk you there," he offered, rising from the bench and holding out his hand. "It'll give us a chance to talk."

Suddenly, she felt calm wash over her, almost forcing her to accept. "I don't have a class," she heard herself say.

His black brow arched. "Then why did you say you had one."

"I ... I ... am afraid," she confessed, the words slipping out before she could stop them.

"Of what."

"Of you," she said, her knees shaking beneath

her long, black skirt.

He slid back down beside her, his strong arm going around her shoulders, pulling her closer. "Why are you afraid of me."

She felt the sexual heat of his body seep through her red sweater,

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making her temperature rise. "I've never been with a man," she heard herself say.

"That's all right, Elizabeth," he said gently, his lips going to her neck.

"I'll take everything slowly."

For a moment, she drowned in the sensations he aroused in her His

scorching lips grazed the line of her neck, licking and teasing. Her breath

hitched in and out of her chest as the newfound emotions boiled within her.

"Please don't," she begged. "I'm saving myself for marriage." That

confession always stayed deep within her soul since she refused to let it out.

"Are you telling me that you're a virgin, Elizabeth." he murmured

against her neck.

"Yes," she muttered as her head lolled back, allowing him even more access.

"I will have to take extra care not to hurt you," he promised.

She was dimly aware of his hand between her knees, nudging them open gently. Slowly his hand crept towards to her aching vaginal area. She wanted to stop him but something inside of her refused to allow her to.

Raphael was not to be denied. His fingers parted the pantyhose and nudged aside her panties, toying with her blossoming nub. Gasps of ecstasy rose in her throat as his fingers slid in and out of her crevice, forcing her hips to rise and offer him more.

"Oh, Raphael, why are you doing this to me...."

"Open your eyes...." he whispered against her.

She did as he commanded. What she saw stunned her. Raphael stood a few feet away, looking puzzled. "Is something wrong."

Quickly, she looked down at her skirt, pushing it this way and that, looking for telltale signs of runs in her pantyhose. There weren't any.

She sat silently for a moment, her breathing labored. Had she dreamed it. Yes, she must have, because Raphael wouldn't have touched her like that, especially in public. Liz was puzzled. Why would she dream something like that while she was awake. Asleep, she could understand but awake.

She gathered her books up in her arms. "No, nothing's wrong, Raphael. Now if you will excuse me..."

He caught her by one arm. "Where are you going."

"Anywhere but here."

* * * *

Raphael watched her as she scurried away from him, her legs pumping. The rapid beat of her heart assailed his ears, making him hunger

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for her more. Why couldn't she understand she belonged to him and no one else. Why couldn't she see that.

"You lost again, Raphael," Alex's mental voice broke through his train of thoughts.

"No, I haven't, Alex. You can bet on that."

Her vital laughter rang through the rafters of his mind. "You shouldn't have toyed with her like that."

"Tell me something I don't already know." For some strange reason, he craved a cigarette. He'd never really smoked, taking only the occasional cheroot socially when he was mortal. Now it seemed like he needed the thing to take the edge off his nerves.

"She's still a virgin, Raphael. You've got to take this very slowly."

"I know, Alex," he hissed silently as he strode across the campus.

"I've got to mark her and soon or else it will be too late."

Silence. Then came Alex's voice, more serious than before. "Zakara knows, doesn't she."

"She does and will do anything, including killing Elizabeth again, to bring me back into the fold."

"Your mark won't stop her."

He stopped. That dreaded fact never left his mind. "I know, but at least I can give her protection until I can kill Zakara."

"Please, Raphael," Alex pleaded. "Do be careful."

Don't forget who
Zakara's father is."

"Satan would not interfere," he said as he picked
up his pace, heading
toward his car. "This is Zakara's affair, not his."

"She won't hesitate to call upon his power if
necessary," Alex warned,
her tone becoming even more ominous.

"I know," he thought as he pulled his key out of
his back pocket and
jammed it into the driver's side door of the silver
Jaguar. "I lost Elizabeth
once. I'm not going to do it again, no matter what
the cost."

* * * *

The odd scene from yesterday still haunted Liz's
mind, as if to taunt
her. She'd hardly slept all night, the feelings his
hands evoked still
thrumming through her body. Every time she'd
thought about him, her hips
automatically rose, making her wet with
anticipation. Why did that dream
seem so real. Was it because she wanted it so
badly.

She looked into the mirror, anxiety storming
through her. Today was
the day for her change. Gone would be the
mousy brown hair and in its place

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would be another color, more vibrant and rich. Red or blonde. She wasn't exactly sure. She'd wait to see what the hairdresser said.

The blue contacts she'd ordered were due in a few days so the glasses would also be history as well.

Liz leaned back, her hands cradled in her lap. Why was she doing this. Just because Raphael suggested she should. Her eyes narrowed. No, she was doing this for herself, nothing more. Then why had she waited so long.

The answer was simple. She was too afraid of change. Afraid of what she would become once she had transformed.

Suddenly, a wild gust of wind burst through her bedroom window, whipping the curtains in a frenzy. She leaped to her feet and hurried to the window, closing it just in time and locking it. Where had that come from.

She leaned against the window, feeling the vibrations of the wind. The

weather forecast had said nothing of high winds today.

Pushing away, she strode over to her bed. There, in the middle of her soft, rose coverlet, was her Dereham's book. It lay open with the pages flipped to Lady Elizabeth Swanson's section. The text with her picture on it wavered slightly before settling down.

Liz sank down on the bed, her fingers dancing over the portrait. Is that what she would look like as a blonde. She looked at it again, studying the bone structure. Hmmmm, it was almost like her own....

She slammed it shut. That woman was beautiful, she wasn't.

Leaping to her feet, she paced around her bed restlessly. Was she really doing this for herself or was it an effort to get Raphael to notice her.

Several times this morning, she'd put her hand on the phone, ready to call the salon and cancel the appointment. Every time, she had pulled back, resisting the urge to call. Now, she was more positive than ever she should cancel.

Don't cancel, her inner voice told her, this is

your chance to live.

Liz sank down on the bed, hot tears of confusion streaming down her

face. What if she went through with all of this and it failed. What would she do then. Was she ready to deal with the emotions that would follow her disappointment.

She looked up, her tears drying quickly. Yes, she would be able to deal with an eventual failure. She had the strength within her.

Liz glanced at the clock. It was almost noon and her appointment was at twelve thirty. Warily, she rose from the bed, gathering her purse in

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trembling hands. Taking a deep breath, she smoothed down her skirt and left the safe confines of her room. Her new life was about to begin.

* * * *

"Honestly, Raph, do you think by getting her to change her hair and eye color that she'll become Elizabeth." Alex questioned as they sat in the

quiet little Italian restaurant where he and Elizabeth had their first dinner.

"With time...."

"Wait, wait, wait," Nicholas joined in, pushing his untouched plate of food away. "Are you telling me that you're going to try and transform her

into Elizabeth. You don't even know it's her."

"I do know it's her," he insisted, doing the same, "because she has the memories stored in her mind."

"That doesn't mean anything," Nicholas warned, his fingers fiddling with a coffee stirrer. "She may have read up on Elizabeth and about how she died..."

"It's her. There's no doubt about it."

Nicholas opened his mouth to say something but closed it quickly, looking around the outdoor patio as if someone watched him.

"What's wrong." He asked the question but already knew the answer.

There was only one time in the world when the hair on the back of his neck stood on end.

"She's here," Nicholas whispered as he leaned forward, motioning them to do the same.

"We know," Alex offered, her hand closing around Nicholas'. "The important thing is that we stick together, no matter what happens."

"She's after me right now, Nick. Once she has me, she'll be after the rest of you," he looked over his shoulder to see if Zakara was in the vicinity.

If she was here, she more than likely had taken a mortal form. "No matter what happens to me, stick together. That's the only way to defeat her."

Nick's dark eyes took on a glaze of fear. "I don't want to ever go back to her. Those are times I'd rather forget."

"As would we all," he said, giving Nick a reassuring pat on the back.

"If I had my way, we'd never go back."

Suddenly, the awful feeling disappeared as quickly as it had arrived, making them all feel a little more relaxed. Since their escape, along with three others from Zakara's coven, he had been their unofficial leader and protector. They had placed their faith and trust in him, the rock which hadn't wavered in two hundred and fifty years. Now came the true test. Would he

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able to save them all, including Elizabeth. "She's gone," he announced, leaning back in his chair.

"That was close," Alex commented, throwing her black curls over her mocha colored bare shoulder. "She knows where we are now."

"She's known for a while, Alex. It's just that now she plans to strike at us because we have more to lose," he said, his gaze trailing over the patio, searching for any sign of Zakara.

All was quiet.

"So she was putting us on edge," Alex replied angrily, slamming her fist on the table. "If that bitch thinks she's going to take my beloved, she's in for one hell of a fight."

"Me too," Nick chimed in, his demeanor quickly changing from fear to anger. "She won't get Tatiana."

"The thing is, she knows what it will take to break us. If we are emotionally beaten, we will be much more likely to assimilate into the coven again...."

"You sound like a damned shrink, Raphael," Nick growled as he pushed away from the table. "I, for one, am not going to sit back and wait for that bitch to take Tatiana."

"Don't you see, Nick. That little visit of hers was meant to fracture us and put us on edge. It's what she wants."

His friend sat silently for a moment, apparently thinking over the words still hanging in the air. "Okay, you've got a point. Now what do we do."

"First, I need to mark Elizabeth and make her realize who she really is. Once she is mine, then we can move forward with our plan to destroy Zakara and send her back to Hell where she belongs." It was the only way.

He was the only one now without his mate. If this was going to work, he needed Elizabeth as much for himself as he did to defeat Zakara.

"Count me in, too," Alex said, leaning forward intently. "What are we going to do."

He looked around as the lesser mortals enjoyed their meals and conversations in relative ease, not realizing that

their inane lives could end at any moment. Nothing came over him to indicate that Zakara the devil was among them anymore. "Not here. It's far too dangerous to talk about it. We have to go somewhere beyond her reach."

"There's really no place...." Alex trailed off for a moment before her eyes brightened up. "I know the place!"

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He was relieved. "Where."

"Follow me."

* * * *

Liz stepped dreamily out onto the sidewalk, her newly dyed blonde hair piled on top of her head. She shivered with anticipation as she started down the sidewalk. What would people think.

Before heading down to her car, she stopped and had one last look in the shop glass. The curls were the color of summer wheat, looking completely natural and lustrous. Sally, the hairdresser, had talked her into dyeing and waxing her eyebrows as well. She'd been pleased with the results

as well as frightened. How would people react to her.

Liz took a deep sigh, garnering all her strength. The optician had called while she was getting her hair done to let her know the contacts she'd ordered had come in early. It was almost too much change for one day.

You have to live, her mind told her. You've hidden too long in the shadows.

Liz stiffened. Her inner voice was right. She had lived in the shadows

for far too long. Now was the time to turn from a caterpillar into a butterfly, to spread her wings and fly.

She started down the sidewalk toward her car, her low heels banging against the concrete. Her heart beat in unison with her steps, the excitement riding her veins like an out of control roller coaster. Since she was on a makeover kick, perhaps she'd have to venture down to TOTALLY WOMAN and pick out some new clothes....

* * * *

He frowned as he bent over the papers on his desk. Didn't these kids put the money that their parents spent on their

education every year to good use. Most of the tests were only filled out halfway while others had only asinine answers because the students hadn't bothered to study. Their main concern lately was how to get a keg over the weekend for the frat party.

A shadow fell over his heap, irritating him completely. "If you need to speak to me, I'll be in my office after lunch," he growled, his red pen going to town on the paper.

"I thought I'd take you to lunch this time, Raphael," cooed a sweet female voice.

He looked up slowly, his cold blood pooling in his feet. His Elizabeth stood before him, in all her glory. Gone were the mousy brown curls. In their place were soft blonde curls framing her face. She had tamed her formerly

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unruly eyebrows and colored them to match her hair. Also missing were the nondescript brown eyes, replaced by soft blue ones. "Is there something

wrong."

He rose slowly, dropping his red pen. "I don't believe it," he murmured as he moved around her. Gone were the bulky sweaters and too big skirts. Instead, she was dressed in a black, fitted pantsuit that hugged every generous curve, topped by a lace dress shirt. He smiled when he looked down. Her abundant breasts filled out the shirt, showing their creamy white tops. "I'm just amazed at the change," he said. "You look ... beautiful," he whispered, his fingers reaching out to touch a golden tendril.

"Thank you," she answered softly, her hand reaching up to touch his.

For a moment, their eyes locked. Long dead emotions sprang to life; desire pulsed in the air surrounding them. Each memory he had possessed of her stormed through his brain, making his body react like any mortal.

"Part of you doesn't believe my words but I speak the truth, Elizabeth. You are a truly beautiful woman." He wanted to bend and kiss her, taste her lips again after two hundred and fifty years, but he restrained himself.

She pulled away, fear radiating from her like a beacon. "I ... I'm sorry, Raphael but I can't have lunch with you today," she murmured, her eyes moistening.

His brow rose as her thoughts floated over to him as if on a cloud.

"Are you frightened of me."

"Please, don't ask me any questions," she mumbled as she turned to leave. "Just forget I said anything."

"Wait, Elizabeth," he called softly in that tone she couldn't resist even if she wanted to.

She stopped and looked to him. "Yes."

"Why are you so frightened. I'm not going to do anything to you."

"This is so silly," she said, wringing her hands. "I don't know why I thought if I changed...."

He held his hand up. "Stop right there. There is nothing silly about the change. It has brought your beauty to the forefront and I, for one, appreciate the change. You should too," he offered and held out his hand. Obediently she took it, coming closer to him.

Her gaze swept over him, as if searching for something. "I don't know

why, but for some reason, I feel as though I've known you all my life--but I couldn't have, could I. We only met a short time ago."

Raphael let his fingers dance along the edge of her smooth face, the

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skin reacting to his touch. "Do you believe in fate."

She blinked hard, her delicately shadowed lids and lashes flashing in the sunlight. "For others, but not for me."

"You should believe in Fate, Elizabeth, because that is what brought you back to me."

Her brow wrinkled as confusion set in. "What do you mean."

"Meet me at Club Inferno tonight and I will tell you."

"Why not tell me here."

Raphael's lips widened. Tonight would be the beginning of her seduction into his world. "Do you trust me."

Elizabeth nodded. "I shouldn't, but for some strange reason, I do."

"Good. Meet me tonight and I will explain

everything."

* * * *

The club seemed a little more alive since the last time she'd been here.

Orange flames created by a super strobe danced up the side of the walls and mingled with the shadows of the people on the dance floor. Gingerly, she wove her way through the crowd, trying not to attract too much attention.

Unfortunately, she couldn't be missed.

"Hey, baby, wanna dance." called one guy she passed.

Instead of answering him, she made her way to the bar amid the clouds of cigarette smoke, past the smelly bodies of the intoxicated partygoers.

She sat down, placing her purse on the bar. Nervously, she looked around and didn't see any sign of Raphael. Suddenly, stark fear gripped hold of her. What if Raphael wasn't going to show. What if this was a ruse just to get her out and make her think he was interested.

"What'll it be, baby." said the bartender, his eyes sweeping up and down her. Last time she had been here, he

merely grunted his request and slammed her drink on the table.

"Sloe gin fizz," she said, ignoring his stare. Instead, she focused on her attire as he ambled off to get her drink.

For tonight's excursion, she'd chosen to dress in all black. A beautiful black silk shirt with a tasteful fitted skirt and heels. Her newly blonde hair cascaded down her back in abundant curls. Gold glittered at her throat and wrists, shining brightly and highlighting her hair. For a quick second, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror behind the bar. Was that really her.

"Hey, baby, wanna dance." slurred the drunken man staggering up to the bar. "Ish not nice to ignore someone."

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"I'm not interested, so please go bother someone else," she ordered and started to sip on her drink. The cool frothy moisture slipped down her throat and would soon be calming the erratic nerves running through her body.

"Hey, watcha too good fer me." he questioned, his hand descending on her shoulder and spinning her around on the stool. "I said I wanna dance!"

Just as the fear gripped her, Raphael appeared, tall and darkly handsome in tight black jeans and matching shirt. "Leave the lady alone," he warned in a deeply male tone.

"Whatchoo gonna do about it, asshole."

"This." With that, Raphael twisted the man's wrist. The sound of snapping bones filled the air, mingling with the man's howls of pain.

"You son of a bitch!" the drunk shouted from the floor, "You're gonna pay for this!"

"I take it you want me to break your other arm, too." Raphael warned, his booted foot against the man's neck.

"Just let me go, buddy!" the man said.

Liz was horrified at the scene but relieved at the same time that her knight in shining armor had shown up. "Please," she mouthed to him, laying a hand on his arm. "Let him go."

"As you wish," he replied and let the drunk go but not before issuing a

dire warning. "You have the lady to thank for your reprieve. If I ever see you around her again, I'll break your legs as well."

The man scrambled to his feet, holding his arm, and ran out of the club without looking back.

Raphael looked at her, his dark green eyes expressionless. "Would you like to accompany me to a table."

"Sure," she said and got down off the barstool onto wobbly legs. What was it that Raphael had to tell her.

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Chapter 4

The table he chose was in the darker part of the club, popular with people who wanted to be alone. There was no light, only a few electric candles on the table, their dim glow useless. He pulled out a chair, gesturing

for her to sit down. "Thank you," she murmured, her nerves running riot now. Desperately, she wanted her drink but she'd left it at the bar.

"What do you want to drink."

"Nothing," she said. Despite the rawness of her nerves, she wanted to remain in control of the situation. There was no telling what would happen if she got drunk.

Raphael sat down, drawing his chair close to hers. "I don't want anything either," he commented as he picked up her hand. His touch made her flesh sing. "You have beautiful hands." She could hear him perfectly above the throbbing beat of the techno music as if it didn't exist.

"Thank you, Raphael," she replied stonily as the awkwardness of the situation enveloped her.

"You're not used to men touching you, are you." His question was innocent but it completely knocked her off balance.

"I ... I...."

"Don't lie, Elizabeth," he murmured as he leaned close to her ear, his hands gently caressing her shoulders, her flesh

burning under his fingertips.

"Being a virgin, you wouldn't exactly be used to the touch of men."

She pulled away nervously, trying not to act appalled at his statement.

She was embarrassed that she was still a virgin at her age. "That's none of your business," she stated sharply. "Now if there isn't anything you want to tell me, I'm leaving."

"You don't want to leave me, Elizabeth," he murmured softly as he pulled her closer. "You don't ever want to leave me again."

Without warning, all of her will left her, making her feel like an automaton. "No, I'm not leaving," she heard herself say.

"I want to dance with you," he whispered as he pulled her to her feet.

Obediently, she followed, unable to resist whatever crazy spell he'd cast over her.

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He moved her toward the dance floor, the crowd magically parting as

they went. Bodies shifted to either side, as if they paid no notice. She watched them in animated motion, their bodies moving very slowly. What was happening.

Just as Raphael put a foot on the dance floor, the music changed to a low, slow dance. Everyone on the floor cleared away, allowing them complete access. She looked around to see if anyone was going to help her but everyone seemed to be in some sort of stupor, refusing to even look in her direction.

What was happening.

Was this all a dream or a nightmare from which she couldn't awaken.

"Trust me, Elizabeth," he said gently as he pulled her to him.

Suddenly, they floating to the middle and with a sick realization, she knew her legs weren't in motion.

The steady throb of music pulsated around them, the beat almost hypnotic. "Who ... who ... are you." she managed to say through her stiff lips.

"Your destiny," he whispered as he pulled her to his taut body, his

hands grasping her buttocks hard and grinding against her. In the vee of her legs, she felt his hardness pushing against her cleft, making her wet with desire.

"Tell me who you are," she begged, her lips becoming dry and cracked as fear stormed through her.

He moved with her, holding her tightly, his grasp on her ass increasing in pressure. "Your beloved," he whispered to her as he rubbed against her in a circle, his movements slow and calculated. "I've searched for centuries to find you. Now I have you again and I'm not letting you go."

Confusion slipped through her as her fingers dug hard into his muscled shoulder. "What do you mean."

"I love you, Elizabeth. You were taken from me centuries ago," he said, his intense green eyes conveying the depths of his desire, "but I've found you again and I'll never let you go again."

Pulses of sexual anticipation rippled through her, making her tremble.

"What are you." Her fear returned fourfold, making her shake even more. If he was claiming he was centuries old....

Raphael's hand swept over her face. The terror that had seized her was suddenly gone, replaced by a sweet bliss. "I'm a vampire."

She blinked hard, the words sinking in. "But ... but ... they don't exist,"

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she murmured as they moved to the sweet music that seemed to go on endlessly. "They're only a legend."

He held her harder against him, his erection pressed to the softness between her legs. "I'm taking you somewhere we can talk," he said, letting go of her and leading her to the table.

Numbly she followed, unable to do anything but obey his commands.

"Where ... are we going."

"Your place," he announced, not even asking her permission or where she lived.

She couldn't say anything though her mind screamed for her to stop.

Why couldn't she resist his advances. Was it true that he was a vampire.

Raphael ushered her past the throng of people

out to his Jaguar parked in two spots. He opened the passenger door for her. "For you, my love," he gestured to the empty seat. "Your chariot awaits."

"What about my car." she heard herself say, the voice echoing from her throat strangely alien.

"It will be waiting for you at home," he said as he urged her down into the seat and closed the door.

With a quick movement, he was next to her, slamming his door hard.

Raphael flipped the key in the ignition and started the engine. It purred with a life of its own and she listened to it, trying very hard to concentrate.

Unfortunately, she couldn't.

Raphael pulled out of the parking lot and zoomed north on Fillmore Street before exiting onto Zion Parkway in the direction of her house.

As soon as he got the car into fourth gear, he reached over and grasped her hand, his fingers softly stroking her palm. "Soon we'll be alone and everything will be explained to you."

At the moment, there was only one thought in her mind. "Are you

going to kill me."

Light laughter escaped his throat. "Why would I kill you."

"If you are a vampire as you claim, you'll need blood to survive. Is that why you've chosen me. To be your next victim." That question floated from her mind to her mouth with nothing in between to stop it. It was almost as if he silently commanded her to say what was on her mind.

"No, my love. I want to protect you."

"From whom. How do I know you're not going to take me back to my house and kill me." Anger boiled beneath the surface, the instinct to survive starting to kick in.

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"I'll tell you when we get there," his British accented voice deepened, the underlying hint of danger rising.

"No, I'm getting out now!" she screamed, the spell hanging over her all evening finally breaking. Taking the latch in her hand, she made a move to open the door. It budged a fraction of an inch

before she heard the snap of Raphael's fingers behind her. The door slammed shut, locking as though it was welded. "Let me go!"

"Not until you listen to me," he snapped as he grabbed her hand, bringing the tips of her fingers to his lips. "Say nothing until we reach your apartment."

As he said those words, that overwhelming calm returned, forcing her to sit docilely next to him. "That's better," he murmured as he zipped off Zion Parkway and onto LaRue Avenue.

She sat with her gaze straight ahead, her hands in her lap. Liz felt like a woman trapped in her own body, unable to do or say anything. This man was going to take her back to her place and try to get her to buy the story he was a vampire. Please! Vampires only existed in ancient legend and weren't real. She should know, she'd studied enough of the legends over the years to be able to decipher fact from fiction. Was this guy straight out of the nut ward.

"Good, we're here," he announced as he pulled into the parking lot of

her complex. Guiding the Jaguar around the corner, he pulled into the available space marked for her apartment number. With horror, she saw her own car sitting there next to his. How the hell did it get here. That's it, she was having another one of her horrific nightmares. That must be the explanation for this.

Raphael opened her door and held out a hand to help her out of the car. "Apartment 203." She nodded. "I've got your keys so no need to worry about that," he said as he ushered her through the parking toward the stairs.

"You know, we can get there a faster way."

She turned, looking puzzled. "How."

"Like this," he said, snapping his fingers. Everything flashed around her, turning to a blur. Reds and blues blended until they were different hues of purple while solid objects had no form, the very essence of life buzzing past.

When it stopped, they were standing in the middle of her modest apartment. "You have a nice place, Elizabeth," he remarked casually as he tossed her keys into the bowl near the door, their

usual parking place.

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"Don't call me Elizabeth. My name is Liz," she choked out, finally

able to say something after the last few minutes.

His fingers caressed her arms, trailing down to her hands, gripping

tightly. For the first time since she'd met him, she realized how cold his

hands really were. "No, it's not," he insisted, "it's Elizabeth."

She jerked away, rubbing her hands together.

"What's the matter with

you. Your hands are as cold as ice." Terror danced along her veins, forcing

her to back away from him. If he tried anything, she was damn sure going to

lock herself in her bedroom and call the police.

"I've already told you," he said, advancing on her. "Now sit down and

listen to the rest of what I have to say."

Part of her wanted to resist his command but something told her that

perhaps she should sit down and listen to his words. "You've got five

minutes then you have to leave. I don't know

what kind of stunt you're pulling here...."

He held his hands up. "No stunt, I promise you," he offered gently as his hand reached up and caressed her cheek. Despite his icy fingers, she felt the scorching heat of desire as it burned along her veins. "Will you trust me for just five minutes."

Emerald green orbs glared back at her, pleading for understanding.

"Five minutes," she snapped and sat down on the sofa, trying to ignore the sensations he brought out in her. It wasn't working. Even his nearness was enough to stir the pot of emotion roiling in her.

Raphael lowered himself to the brown leather sofa next to her, the loud creaking breaking the silence. "I've been a vampire for two hundred and forty years," he confessed, picking up her hand and pressing it to his lips, her skin heating under his kiss. "You were Lady Elizabeth Swanson, the most wanted woman in England. Princes and Lords vied for your hand...."

She held her hands up, leaping to her feet. "Stop! I don't want to hear any more of this!" she cried, putting distance

between Raphael and herself.

"You need to leave my house right now!" she ordered, her teeth grinding together.

Raphael's strong hands descended on her arms, spinning her around to face him. "I'm not leaving you this way."

Angrily, she walked over to the phone and picked up the black handset. "I'm calling the police. I've had enough of this."

Before she could begin to push the buttons, Raphael waved his hand, forcing the small onyx colored phone out of her hand. It shattered against the

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wall, fracturing into a thousand pieces. She glared at him. "Why did you do that."

The corner of his lips turned up seductively as he moved toward her.

"We can't begin this way, you know. But how should we begin. Where we met or when I was born into darkness."

"I don't want to hear any more," she protested. "Enough is enough!"

Anyone with enough reasonable intelligence knows vampires are only myths, not reality!" Her heart raced inside of her, the anxiety building like a fiery furnace. Why was he acting insane.

Raphael clamped onto her hand and brought it to his chest, ripping his shirt open with his free hand. He placed her palm against his perfectly smooth and sculpted but imperceptibly cold skin. "Do you feel anything."

"What exactly am I supposed to feel." she snapped, the desire racing up her spine at the feel of his flesh under her fingertips. No, she couldn't be falling for this deranged maniac!

"A heartbeat."

She tried to pull away. "This is nuts...."

"Just feel," he whispered to her.

Liz concentrated on her hand, waiting to feel something. A heartbeat or even the quiver of skin. "I don't feel anything," she said slowly, the fingers manacled around her wrist gradually releasing.

"You won't because this heart hasn't beat in over two hundred years," he confessed and strode to the kitchen, picking up a knife.

For a wild moment, she knew she was going to die. "What are you going to do me, Raphael. Just because I don't believe you...."

"Watch me."

With that, he dragged the tip of the knife across his heavenly chest and parted the skin. Blood started to pour out of the wound but only for a brief second. The edges of the wound drew together and became smooth, halting the flow of blood.

"How did you do that." Her lips quivered with the question as her fingers traced the site of the cut, finding no evidence of it.

"It's within my power, Elizabeth," he whispered softly into her ear as he bent down, his lips tracing a hot path down her neck. "Come, let me show you how we first met."

"How ... are ... you ... going ... to do that." she mumbled dreamily against him.

"Take my hand," he commanded.

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Like an automaton, she slipped her hand inside of hers, the world suddenly becoming one fast blur.

* * * *

The damned horse had thrown a shoe. Angrily, he'd gotten down, *cursing all the while. Why couldn't the people he trusted, not to mention paid good money, take better care of his animals.*

Pulling up the horse's foreleg, he saw the shoe was gone. Dammit!

Now he was going to have to walk the horse all the way back to the manor.

"Did you lose something." asked a sweet female voice.

He looked up to see the most glorious creature he'd ever seen in his life. Golden curls surrounded her face, topped with a black velvet riding hat.

Blue eyes stared from beneath fans of long lashes. "Perhaps," he said slowly, dropping the horse's foot to the ground.

She shifted in her saddle, the soft rustle of her black velvet riding habit rising through the air. "Is there something I can do for you."

He felt the slam of his heart inside his chest at the sight of her

glorious smile. "What do you have in mind, if I might be so bold as to ask."

The strange woman laughed, a clearly unconventional creature.

"Perhaps something beneficial to both of us," she answered as she slipped from her sidesaddle to the ground without his help. Carefully, she strode over to his horse and lifted the foreleg to look at the hoof. "It seems that the blacksmith did not fit this horse properly," she said and dropped the foot. "If you come with me, I think my smith will be able to fit your horse correctly."

"That's not necessary...." he studied her face, searching for a name since he knew most of society.

Taking a cue, she held her hand toward him. "Lady Elizabeth Swanson at your service, Lord Clarendon."

He took it and kissed the ebony glove most gently. "How is it that you know my name and I did not have the pleasure of knowing yours until now."

Her generous smile covered her plump lips. "I make myself known when I wish to be," she offered as she strode over to her cinnamon hued

horse and stepped up on a convenient log to mount her horse. "Follow me and I will show you the way."

Raphael was stunned. Here was the famous Lady Elizabeth Swanson in all her glory. He hadn't realized he was this close to her land

Gathering the reins in his hands, he followed her soft lope, speaking to her as best he could despite the distance. During that short trip to her manor, he knew he'd fallen in love.

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Elizabeth was like no other woman he'd ever met before. According to court gossip, she was a free spirit, wanting to do things her own way. Since her father's death several years before, she'd been under the nominal supervision of an elderly uncle who preferred the comforts of London to Wyndom, leaving her to her own devices.. Despite all of the best advice and many offers of marriage, she'd refused them all, choosing instead to follow

her own advice.

After a short while, they wound their way through the fields toward a large manor home situated near an abundance of rolling green hills. Here the heather grew wildly, peppering the air with its sweet scent. Mingled in with this wonderful perfume was that of wild honeysuckle and roses.

Instantly, he knew that aroma would always remind him of her.

The house itself was constructed of old quarried stone. Large windows beckoned, offering a glimpse inside. Some of them were open, allowing the fresh spring breeze in. Delicious smells of roasting meat and bread rose through the air, making him hungrier than he'd been in a while.

Elizabeth pulled her horse to a stop in front of the door and dismounted, handing the reins to a waiting groom. "Take my horse and make sure she's taken care of," she ordered and gestured to his horse.

"Please take Lord Clarendon's horse to the smith and see to it that it is shod properly."

*The groom tipped his tricorne hat. "Aye, ma'am."
She beckoned. "Follow me," she said as she
entered the sumptuous
hall. Inside, several servants were waiting to
take her coat, hat and gloves.*

*"Give them yours too," she said softly. He
obeyed her request, his heart
beating quickly as desire for this woman boiled
to the surface. He'd met her
less than an hour ago, yet he was already in
love with her. Why.*

*"Are you hungry." Elizabeth questioned as she
took the pins out of
her hair and let the golden locks tumble down
past her shoulders in a pale
cascade. Her unconventional attitude struck him,
encouraging the flames of
lust to ride higher. Instinctively, he wanted to
reach out and touch the silky
strands to see if they were as soft as they
looked. Decorum kept him from
doing it.*

*"I honestly couldn't impose upon you, Lady
Elizabeth."*

*She held her hand up, gesturing for silence.
"Please call me Elizabeth,
Lord Clarendon."*

"Only if you call me Raphael."

She cocked her head to the side, as if she couldn't believe that was his

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name. "That is a very unusual name. How did you come by it."

"My mother was deeply religious and wanted to give me the name of one the Archangels."

Her brows knitted together. "How interesting," she said as she moved through the dark mahogany paneled hallway. "The dining room is this way."

"I really shouldn't..."

"I will not take no for an answer this time, Raphael. Now, please join me."

He admired her strength and her courage, embracing it to his heart.

Why couldn't more women be like her. Strong and independent yet soft and feminine when necessary. "Of course," he answered as he moved down the hall behind her, the smell of the roses filling the house.

** * * **

Liz opened her eyes, the pounding of her heart almost too much for her to bear. She had felt Elizabeth's every emotion, from the moment she had seen Raphael to the moment they were about to sit down to a meal together. Elizabeth had known who Raphael was for a long time and rejected every suitor so that she would be free to marry him. "That was us."

"Yes, it was my beloved Elizabeth," he murmured against her as he bent down to pick her up. "Now do you believe me."

She wound her arms around his neck as she slid into his arms, his strength unbelievable. Confusion sailed through her, mixing in the turbulent sea of emotion. She wanted to believe those were real memories, but some part of her rejected the idea.

Dimly, she was aware that Raphael had moved down the hallway to her bedroom. "Where are we going."

"I've spent two hundred and forty years without tasting you, my love and I'm not going to wait another minute," he kissed her lips softly as he entered the bedroom and laid her down on the

bed. Light from the lamplight across the street flooded her room, highlighting every plane and muscle of Raphael's open shirt. "You aren't going to deny me again."

Sexual desire burned through her, making her wet with anticipation.

"No, I'm not," she whispered as she lay there, quivering.

Raphael closed the door. He took off the remnants of his shirt, his body a testament to perfection.

Suddenly, new fears surged through her. First, she was a virgin but worst of all, she couldn't let him see her this way! She wasn't skinny or even beautiful....

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"You are beautiful, despite what you think," he murmured as he lowered himself over her. "You are my Elizabeth."

"But...." she tried to protest as his hand slid up her thigh, hungrily searching for what lay hidden beneath the silk.

"Don't worry about being a virgin, Elizabeth," he

assured her, his hungry lips devouring the flesh of her neck. "I promise I won't hurt you."

Drowning in a sea of ecstasy, she allowed him to peel away her stockings and her underwear. Hungry fingers probed within her lips, dipping inside of her, encouraging her hips to rise. "Oh, Elizabeth," he whispered huskily against her. "You feel so good."

She said nothing, instead allowing her moans to speak for her. Taking it as a cue, Raphael unbuttoned her blouse, freeing her breasts from their confines. Thankfully, the bra she was wearing hooked in the front. "How I've missed you," he confessed as he freed her breasts from the bra.

"As I have you," she heard herself say, the voice unlike hers, more mysterious and smoky. Where had it come from.

Raphael dipped his head to her hardened nipples, taking one in his mouth and teasing it to a higher peak while tantalizing the other.

Liz arched against his mouth, her skin heating almost to boiling point.

Her mouth became dry as she continued to gasp

at his perfect ministrations,
her body begging for more.

Raphael could not have imagined a more perfect moment in his life.

Elizabeth was finally his again, the first taking of her body something he'd relished almost two hundred and forty years before. Now he was going to relish it again.

Her perfumed skin called to him like the finest wine and had the appearance of the softest silk. "I love you, Elizabeth," he murmured as he kissed down her belly, his fingers moving around the back of her skirt.

Swiftly, he had her skirt open, pulling the offending garment down her hips. What she regarded as ugliness, he knew was true beauty, a healthy body ready for love.

Silently, he waited for her answer but he knew it wouldn't come, at least not tonight. Her mind was such a confusing mix of emotions that she couldn't even give her name right if asked. In time, she would know everything and he would have the answer he so craved.

Liz felt her clothes slip down under her body and

embarrassment crept in. Instinctively, she covered herself with her hands. "Never hide yourself from me, Elizabeth," he whispered as he pulled her hands away and urged

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her into a sitting position. "True beauty such as yours should never be hidden."

Before she could say anything, he swiped the remainder of her clothes from her feet and threw them into the corner where they formed an inky black puddle. "Please ... I'm ... not ... ready...."

"You're more ready than you think, Elizabeth," he guided her hand to his dick which was ramrod hard and ready for her. "Unzip my pants."

Suddenly, a surge of desire overwhelmed her and she accommodated his wishes, the sound of the zipper breaking the silence of the dimly lit bedroom. Clearly he didn't believe in underwear because he was completely naked underneath. "Touch me," he commanded,

guiding her hand to the head.

Gingerly, she touched him, the tip already glistening with moisture.

Fascinated, she caressed it with her thumb, and the amount of liquid grew.

What if she took him into her mouth. She'd always heard the girls in high school and college talking about 'blow jobs' and how fantastic it was to give one. At the time, it had repulsed her but now it merely fascinated her. Would he allow that sort of thing.

Liz bent her head and took him into her mouth, unsure of what to do.

Softly, she rolled her tongue over the head, the saltiness of it surprising her.

Raphael's hands dug into her hair as she took him in deeper, her hands encircling his engorged organ, manipulating it as best she knew how. "Do you know long it's been since you've done this, Elizabeth." he gasped, his hips rocking against her. "Far too long."

Just as she was beginning to enjoy the power surging through her,

Raphael pushed her away. Picking her up, he laid her gently on the bed and removed the rest of his clothes, throwing them

down with her own.

She was confused. Was it that bad. "Was it something I did."

His sensual smile lit up the room, making her heart skip several beats.

"I want you but not like this, Elizabeth. I want us to take the magical trip together," he said as he slid under the covers next to her.

She'd never felt more wanted her in life. Here Raphael was, wanting her as she was, not as some Barbie doll.

Gingerly, he maneuvered himself between her legs, his lips on her neck again, kissing and teasing the flesh, his hands caressing hers. She felt his hardness press against the delicate folds of her privates, begging for entry.

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Without warning, fear surged through her. Was this going to hurt terribly. She tried to push him away, terror building to new heights. "I'm not ready for this, Raphael," she begged despite the fact that her body burned for

his touch.

Raphael slid his lips from her neck to hers, insistent and urgent. He was gentle at first, giving her light feathery kisses around the edges building up a crescendo. Suddenly, the kiss became harder and more passionate, the fear slipping from her body like water from a bucket. Their tongues intertwined for a moment, his hands cupping the shelf of her jaw, pressing her close.

Without warning, Raphael broke the kiss. He stared down directly into her blue contact tinted eyes. "No pain," he whispered as he lowered his head against her neck. "No pain."

She felt the force of him enter her and felt the bliss flowing from him.

Urgently, she arched her hips, begging for more of him, deepening his thrusts.

He was passionate in his strokes, bringing her to new heights, almost as if he gave her an antidote to the pain. She was only dimly aware of the sharp sting on her neck and quickly dismissed it as a love bite.

Her senses heightened even further, making her

gasp harder, her
fingers digging into his back.

Sensing her approaching climax, Raphael intensified his strokes, bringing about his own orgasm as well as hers. Her blood was the sweetest thing in his mouth beside her flesh, flowing through his veins like the finest wine. He didn't take much this time, like the previous time. It was just enough to mark her.

She felt Raphael tremble and collapse on her, sweaty but well satisfied. "Did ... I ... hurt you." The concern was definitely in his voice, something she feared wouldn't be there once they were done.

"No ... you ... didn't," she gasped as he rolled away from her but kept her safely within the circle of his strong arms.

"I'll know if you're lying to me, Elizabeth," he warned as he kissed her forehead, "I would hate to find out I really did hurt you."

She rolled away, facing the window, tucking the sheets up to her chin.

"No, you didn't, I promise." He didn't hurt her physically but now she was torn mentally. She really didn't know Raphael

that well and that cockamamie story about vampires really sucked her in.... She stopped. What if it was real. Raphael had corroborated some of those nightmares she had had since

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she was a small child. She'd never told another living soul about them, including Dr. Kaplan. All her shrink would want to do was commit her.

"You don't know whether or not you want to believe me," he answered for her. "How about if you just give me time and I'll prove it to you."

She turned to face him. "How did you know what I was thinking."

He chuckled as he stroked the underside of her chin softly, the fire slowly stirring again. "And how many times do I have to remind you that I can read your mind."

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Chapter 5

Soft coos of the birds drifted through the open window as the cool morning breeze entered. Liz sighed heavily, stretching all the while. Had last night been a dream.

No, it couldn't have been. She wouldn't feel this wonderful if it had been.

She turned over on her right side, expecting to see Raphael lying next to her. Maybe he'd be up for round four....

Her jaw dropped.

The place beside her was empty.

Instead of Raphael, there was an envelope with her name neatly written on the front.

Panic flooded her. What if this was his way of saying she was a sucker.

Trembling fingers brought it over to her and she slipped on her horrid glasses. At least she'd managed to take out her

contacts last night.

My dearest love:

Please forgive me for not being there when you awoke. There was *urgent business to attend to but I have not forgotten about you nor the wonderful gift you have given me. If you would do me the honor, please come to my house on 1211 Mount Vernon Avenue in the Waterford District.*

I have a surprise for you.

I will count the moments until I see your beautiful face again.

With all my heart and love,

Raphael

Liz rolled back against the fluffy pillows, re-reading the note again,

her heart lifting. So he wasn't kissing her off since he'd taken her innocence.

He actually wanted to be with her!

Tears of joy sneaked out of the corner of her eyes, staining the pillow beneath her. Perhaps she and Raphael could build something together.

She stifled the urge to giggle. After all, she was a grown woman and not prone to such childish things.

Liz blinked hard and stared up at the popcorn-like stucco on her

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ceiling. What did Raphael want. Was he going to show her some more of his vampire-like tricks.

She pressed the note to her chest. She still wasn't sure what to think about him. He claimed to be a vampire yet could move around in the sunlight. According to all the legends, sunlight would have vaporized him instantly yet he was still walking. That part didn't make sense.

Liz pushed up from the bed a bit reluctantly, shoving the covers back.

It was time to get the day started.

Padding to the bathroom, she stopped at the sink, studying her face.

Did she really look like the original Elizabeth Swanson.

Using her memory of the photo of the portrait -- unfortunately, she'd left her book at school otherwise she'd have it in front of her pronto -- she compared their features. The nose was almost the same as well as the cheekbones. She turned her face to the left.

Very interesting. The bone structure was almost the same. Turning her face to the left, she could see it was almost as identical as well....

Two spots of deep red glared at her from her neck. She peered closer.

They weren't spots, they were puncture wounds! She paled, holding the sink for support, rocking slightly. Did that mean he really was a vampire and had fed from her.

She gripped the sides of the porcelain sink so hard that her knuckles turned white. "No!" she screamed, her voice echoing from around the room.

Why was he choosing to feed from her. Were there no other hapless victims.

He had to mark you for your protection, her mind told her, to keep the *others away from you.*

No, he was not going to use her like this. She was no man's toy, even if she was a little quiet and timid at times. She knew how to fight back.

* * * *

Liz parked her car at the sidewalk and killed the engine. Rage coursed through her veins, mingled with shame. How

could she have let herself fall
for his ploy.

She got out of the car and stood on weak legs
before 1211 Mount
Vernon Avenue, looking at the house. It was an
immense Georgian style
home with dark gables and shutters. Two
porches ensconced the front, both
upstairs and downstairs. Well-manicured flowers
kept to their beds,
sprinkling the air with their flowery scent.

As she moved farther up the walk, she noticed
the huge marble

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fountain sitting in the middle of a circular
driveway, constructed of adorable
cherubs at play. She felt trepidation curl up
inside her belly like a coiled
snake waiting to strike. How was she going to
feel once she had the truth out
of him.

Warily, she approached the door and stopped.
What was she going to
say to him. She pushed the doorbell.

No one answered. I guess he's not home, she
thought glumly to

herself, I got myself so wound up in all of this that I didn't think about the *consequences of my actions.*

Just as she turned to walk away, she heard the snick of the lock. The

door slowly opened to reveal a young woman standing behind it. Her skin was the color of rich mocha, highlighting her jet-black hair. Black leather encased her entire body, including studded wrist bands. "Can I help you."

"I ... I Ra ... is Professor Chamberlin in."

The woman, probably only in her late twenties, early thirties, leaned

casually against the door frame. "Who's asking."

"I am," she managed to stammer out.

"Come on in," the woman said brusquely and opened the door all the way.

Liz stepped into the most sumptuous home she'd ever seen. Antiques were everywhere as well as precious art objects.

"This is a beautiful home,"

she commented as they passed through the foyer to the living room.

"We seem to like it," the woman said as she flopped her leather clad behind on an expensive couch. Casually, she put her feet up on the antique

table and lit up a cigarette, blowing lazy smoke rings. "Whatcha want Raph for. What's he done this time."

She was shocked. "I'm sorry, I don't know what you mean."

The woman lowered her feet, taking a deep drag on her cigarette.

"What I mean is, did he knock you up or something. Cause if'n he did, we got the bread to make it go away."

She stared at this rude woman, trying to get some idea of how she fit into Raphael's life. What did he see in her.

Before she could ask, two twin boys, approximately ten years old, ran from the other room, screaming like banshees. Their dark hair and eyes were unmistakable. "Hey!" the mysterious woman shouted. "I done told ya to get back in your room!" she ordered. "Your daddy'll paddle both your asses once he gets home."

"Aw, Mom, we just wanna play for a bit."

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The moment those words assailed her ears, her blood froze. Why

didn't Raphael tell her that he was married and had children. Tears stung her eyes as she sat there, absorbing the entire scene. He'd used her, just as every man had used her throughout her life.

Her hostess clapped eyes on her. "I'm guessin' Raph didn't tell ya he had a wife," she said with a grin, taking another deep drag from her cigarette. "Ya see, we're Raph's dirty little secret. As long as he keeps me in bread and dope, he never has to see me or them damn kids of his. That way he can go out and cavort with who he wants to," the woman said in a smarmy tone as she looked Liz up and down. "Why he would mess around with a piece of ass as fat as you, I'll never know. Oh, just so's ya know, you ain't the first Raph's been with."

"Please, this is all a mistake..."

"He didn't pull that vampire crap on you, did he."

Liz looked up, her eyes widening. How did she know about their conversation.

The stranger's lips spread into a wide, knowing smile as she exhaled a long ream of smoke. "That's how he gets em' all,

toots. Lures them into
thinkin' he's a bonafide vampire. And when he
bites ya, he has a small staple
puller in his hand that makes the marks."

She rose to her feet, clutching her purse to her
chest. "I think I'd better
go," she said as she pushed toward the door.
The tears were coming hot and
steady now, scorching her cheeks. She couldn't
even see because they were
so thick.

"Before ya go toots, ya outta know that Raph's
crazy and delusional.

He's been in the nut ward more than he's been
out. By the way, in case
you're wondering, I'm Mrs Lillith Chamberlin but
you can call me Lily.

Maybe if'n me and the rugrats stick around this
shithole of a town, we might
become friends...."

She didn't hear anymore after that. She had to
put as much distance
between herself and Raphael as she could. How
could he play her for a fool.

Sliding behind the wheel of her car, she sat
there for a few moments,
trying to gather her strength to move it forward.
How could he take her
heart, get her to believe him before crushing it

under his feet like chunks of dirt.

Liz turned the key and gunned the engine. She had to get out of there.

Fast.

* * * *

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Raphael slipped the key into the lock of his new home, whistling as he did so. This was his gift to Elizabeth. A fine new home to start their life over again, possibly....

He froze in his spot, the whistling dying in his throat. Hair stood up on the back of his neck, his senses tingling. Dear God in heaven, Zakara was here!

"You bet your sweet ass I'm here," she purred as she emerged from the empty dining room, her long nails scraping the wall. "But your little woman isn't," she mocked, putting a finger to her chin. "I wonder why."

He looked at her black leather-clad form, disgust filling him to capacity. How could he have sought comfort in

her arms once. "What have you done." he growled savagely at her, his hands gripping her upper arms and shaking her hard. Rage filled him, an emotion he hadn't felt this deeply in a long time.

"I keep what I own," she said fiercely as she stepped out of his hard grip, backing up toward the wall. "You see, with the help of your 'children'," she gestured to the small children who suddenly appeared in the room. "I convinced her that she was nothing more than a quick lay and that you had a wife and kids."

He watched as the children suddenly changed, growing and lengthening until they became twin adult men dressed in the same black leather. "You see, my accomplices have no problem in getting me what I desire," she purred contentedly as she placed her hands over their leather clad crotches, squeezing hard. He looked at the men's faces, searching for any sign of pain. There wasn't any. "They're loyal to me unto death."

"I'll kill you for this."

"You won't Raphael because I let her live this

time. If you come with me now, she will live a perfectly boring life and die a mortal death again.

Except this time, old age will claim her. If you love her, you'll let her live."

His fists clenched at his sides, the anger boiling over. "I do love her and the only way she'll live is if I kill you," he warned.

Zakara's mouth opened to reveal a row of deadly sharp teeth, her tongue running over the tips of her fangs. "You don't want to kill me, Raphael. I promise that if you come with me now, the past will be forgotten and you will take your rightful place at my side as the King of all Vampires," she offered, her long fingernails scraping the side of his face.

"You see, I'm a forgiving woman. I've forgiven you for running away, for taking five of the coven with you. Hell, I've even forgiven you for tearing

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apart my father's grimoire and using the sun spell. But I can only forgive so

much. So you see, it would in your best interest, as well as the interest of the fat toad, to come with me."

He was incredulous. "You forgiving. Has your father's dominion frozen over yet."

"Your smart ass remarks will get you nowhere, Raphael." She looked at her claw-like nails and sighed deeply. "This conversation is beginning to bore me. Come, gather your things and let us be on our way."

'm not coming back to you, Zakara," he snapped. "Nothing you can do will make that happen again."

"Are you certain." she purred in his ear, her grotesque tongue scraping against his flesh.

"Never more certain in my life."

"Tsk, tsk," she said, pulling away from him. "You shouldn't have said that, Raphael. Now you've presented me with a challenge that I must accept."

"That challenge was laid down centuries ago, Zakara. It's taken this long for you to accept it." He knew the mocking tone of his voice irritated her, especially when he implied that she was

slow to take action. "Honestly, I thought you were much smarter than that."

"Ugh!" she cried, scratching his face and leaving long trails of welts.

He removed them quickly. "I see you've learned some of my tricks," she said with a satisfied grin.

"I've learned nothing from you, Zakara, and I never will. Get out of here before I really turn angry."

"You have not seen the last of me," she hissed as thick wisps of smoke filled the room, swirling around in a giant column. As quickly as it had appeared, it disintegrated, taking Zakara and her devilish minions with her.

Raphael took a deep breath and brushed stray black hair out of his eyes. Why hadn't he seen this coming.

He leaned heavily against the wall, banging his fist against the old plaster lightly. The careful work he had done to gain Elizabeth's trust was shattered, much like a fragile wall. Now he had to start all over again.

Raphael stood up, his rage taking over. Zakara had to be stopped and soon, or else all would be lost again.

He stormed out of the house and jumped into

the Jag, gunning the engine. There were only two people on earth who could help him and thankfully, they were only miles away.

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* * * *

"Class dismissed," she said glumly as the six o'clock class drew to a close. Chairs rattled as the students got up and put their books in bags and left the room.

Once the room was clear, Liz slumped in her chair behind her desk, her hands lying against the cold metal top. The class tonight had been horrible but her heart wasn't in it tonight. It still lay shattered on the floor of Raphael's house where his 'gift' was. How could he do something like that to her.

"Thank goodness, you're here," he said from the doorway.

"Well, I was just leaving Professor Chamberlin," she said as she quickly picked up her bag and purse. "Please go amuse yourself at someone

else's expense."

He blocked her exit with a thick arm. "You're not leaving here until I talk to you."

She felt the sting of shame strike her, causing her eyes to fill with tears. "I don't want to ever see you again, Raphael. What you've done to me...."

"I need to explain," he protested as he pushed her back into the room and closed the door, locking it securely behind him.

She heard the snick of the latch fall into place and felt panic rise in her. "What are you doing."

"Making sure that you hear me and don't run off into the night."

Liz backed up, her heart beating in that terrible rhythm that only fear provoked. "No, Raphael, your wife gave me the entire charming story," she cried, "There's nothing left to tell."

He closed the distance between them, forcing her to retreat, her fitted skirt restricting her movement. "That's where you're wrong, Elizabeth. There is plenty left to tell."

She turned away and bent over the desk,

gripping the sides with both hands. "Just go away, Raphael, and we'll forget this ever happened."

His hands were immediately on her hips and she felt him press against her ass and part her cheeks slightly, his hard-on evident. "Can you forget that incredible night. I know I haven't forgotten because that was the most precious gift that anyone has ever given me."

Before she could answer, his expert hands came around and cupped her breasts with a gentle pressure, her nipples beneath the cotton ready to burst. "Please ... Raphael...."

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"So that's what you want me to do, please you. I can do that but only if you listen to me. Is that a fair trade."

Liz remained quiet for a moment as his hands slipped beneath her blouse and bra, his fingers toying with her already hardened nipples.

"You ... have ... exactly ... five ... minutes ... to explain," she gasped as the pressure increased.

He said nothing as he flipped her around and picked her up, plopping her ass on the cold metal table. Raphael pulled her to his taut body and pushed between her rigid legs, holding her tight and grinding against her in order to inflame her senses. "Oh, I don't think I'll need that long," he murmured as he stared into her eyes. "I've only been married once and that was two hundred and forty years ago," he confessed, "to you."

"You've no proof," she gasped as his erection pressed against her nether lips, making her wet with anticipation. "Just as you've never proven to me that you're a vampire."

"Then let me show you."

Fear mounted to new heights as she watched his eyes become red and glow hellishly. Fangs, sharp and lethal, descended from his mouth, glistening wet. "Is this enough for you."

"No!" she screamed, wildly trying to free herself from his grasp, her frantic voice ringing throughout the empty room. Surely someone would hear her and come to her aid!

Raphael's hand swept over her face like a dark

shadow, instantly
calming her fears. "There will be no more of that,
Elizabeth. You should
never be afraid of me or fear anything while you
are with me. I won't let
anything harm you."

"Please ... don't ... kill ... me," she begged softly.

His hand stroked the side of her face, gentle
and loving. "Never, my
love. I've lost you once, I won't do it again. Now,
are you afraid of me."

The hideous eyes disappeared as well as the
fangs, making him seem
more normal. Unfortunately, it did nothing for her
base fear. "A little,
Raphael but that doesn't change what happened
today. Your wife...."

His full, sensual lips curled up in a generous
smile. "If anyone is my
wife, it's you, not Zakara."

Now she was confused. "Who is Zakara."

"Someone you are better off not knowing, but
since I must protect you
from her, I will tell you," he said with soft words,
his lips gracing her
forehead. "Oh, my love, what I would not do to
save you from her."

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"Who is she." Confusion stormed through like a giant tidal wave.

First she met this woman claiming to be Raphael's wife. Now here was Raphael saying that he had no wife. Who was she to believe.

"You've met her before," he murmured, his lips inches from hers.

"No, I haven't," she replied in a breathy whisper, her heart pounding in anticipation.

"Take my hand and let me show you," he commanded.

Unable to control her movements, she felt her hand slip into his, warm against cold. Suddenly, she was transported to another time, another place....

Sheer curtains draped the tall tester bed. She touched them, her body *shivering. Tonight was the night she would give herself as a wife to him, even though she'd already given him her innocence.*

Briefly, she touched her belly. Raphael didn't know that she had carried his child for the last three months.

Tonight would be a perfect night to tell him.

"Will ye be wanting me to warm the bed, miss." asked Amelie, her personal servant for the last few years.

"No, Amelie. We'll be warming it ourselves in a few moments," she answered gently, her mind consumed with thoughts of lovemaking. Raphael certainly knew how to please a woman, and every thought of his magic hands sent tremors down her body.

Elizabeth wandered over and opened the beautiful mullioned window.

Reams of moonlight showered the earth, turning everything a ghostly white.

Trees, green and tall during the day, stood like black bones poking up from the earth. Distantly, she heard the roar of the waves as the surf pounded the rocks. She sighed heavily. She loved the house here but she loved Raphael even more. They would be living at his home mostly, only coming here on occasion. Perhaps she could persuade Raphael to let her have their child here

Warm hands wrapped around her waist, pulling

*her close against
him. "The last guest has left," he murmured as
he swept her golden hair
aside so that he could nibble on her neck.*

*"I see," she said as she watched the carriage
leave the cobblestone
front circle and head out onto the gravel path.
"So now we're finally alone."*

*"Aye, that we are," he answered in a sensually
deep tone, his hands
rubbing her belly, stopping for a second. "My
love, is there something wrong
with you. Your belly seems to have hardened
quite a bit."*

*She turned, the secret her heart had carried
about to be revealed.*

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*"That condition will improve within the next six
months."*

*For a moment, he was confused before his eyes
widened. "You don't
mean...."*

*"You're going to be a father in six months," she
said gleefully as she
flung her arms around his neck.*

He held her tightly against him. "Oh, my dear, I could have asked for nothing better! How long have you known."

"Just a month or so..."

Raphael pulled away, staring at her with an incredulous glare.

"You've known for an entire month without telling me. That is not fair...."

She silenced him with a finger to his lips. "It doesn't matter. You know now, Raphael. The reason I didn't tell you before is because I didn't want you to think that you had to marry me because of the baby. I am perfectly capable of raising the child on my own."

He kissed her hard, the passion flowing between them like a raging river. "I would have found out and made you marry me," he warned as he broke the kiss. "My child will always have the protection of my name as well as you."

"I can...."

He silenced her with more kisses, hard and urgent, as he picked her up. She wound her arms around his neck, pulling him closer to her as he laid her down....

Something black moved in the shadows, startling her. "What was that."

He pulled back, a little put off. "What was what."

Before she could answer, two figures in black emerged from the shadows and grabbed Raphael pulling him away from her and forcing him to his knees at the end of the bed.

"Well, well, well what do we have here." purred a dusky female voice.

"Who the hell are you. What are you doing in this house." Raphael demanded as he tried to struggle free from his captors.

The woman emerged from the shadows. Silvery material wrapped around her lithe body, exposing her midriff as well as the tops of her breasts. Long, jet-colored hair hung in braids around her face, topped off with some sort of silver crown studded with precious gems. Her skin was the color of dry, baked earth. Everything about her seemed normal--except for her eyes. They glowed red, almost as if their intensity was powered by the

fires of hell. "All in due time, my dear boy," she purred and walked over to

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the bed.

Elizabeth lay there, frozen in fear, unable to speak. Those eyes kept her locked in position, refusing to allow her to move or shout. What was this creature.

"I see you've got a beautiful little wife and baby on the way," the woman said, her eyes still glowing. "Too bad you can't keep her."

"Let me go!" Raphael shouted, trying his best to wrest himself free.

"Don't touch her!"

The woman laughed. "I've been watching you for a long time, Lord Clarendon. You've intrigued me from the moment I saw you. Since I'm not a sharing woman, I can't have this sort of obstacle in my way."

"What are you." he said, his voice trembling as fear crept into it.

She laughed. "Do you remember your bible

stories, Lord Clarendon."

she asked as she raised her hand. Elizabeth was compelled by a force beyond her own reckoning to rise. She did and closed the distance between her and the strangely dressed woman, stopping in front of the intruder.

"What does this have to do with your presence here." he snapped angrily.

She felt the woman's claw-like nails sweep her hair aside, stroking the side of her neck. "Hmmm, since you don't remember, I guess I'll have to fill you in. As you know, the world began with Adam and Eve."

"I still don't understand," she heard Raphael say, anxiety rising high in his voice.

"Be patient," the woman said. "I'm getting to that." She took a deep breath and continued on. "You see, what the Bible doesn't tell you is that Adam's first wife was Lillith, a woman fashioned from the same dirt as Adam. For a while, they got along until Lillith decided that she was going to be ruled by no man. In due time, she discovered

a man who was much better than Adam so she left her whelp of a husband for her lover."

"What does all this have to do with us."

"Patience, my boy," the woman warned. Elizabeth could do nothing but stare at the strange creature before her, the glowing eyes still keeping their hold on her. "You see, Lillith was my mother and her lover was my father."

"Who was her lover."

"Satan," she announced proudly. "Out of their union, I was born and given the name of Zakara. My father bestowed power upon me, of the wind and the storm as well as animals of the earth. When the Almighty heard of

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my birth, He immediately cursed me with the thirst for blood, a curse that my father could not undo. So I was condemned to roam the earth, taking blood where I could find it. In time, I formed a coven of vampires who do my

bidding. Naturally, they look to me as their Queen, so I have decided that I need a King." Zakara's nail raked across her cheek, drawing blood. Her long tongue slipped out and licked Elizabeth's face, making her inwardly wince. "Such good blood. It's going to be a shame to have to waste it."

"Leave her alone. Do whatever you want to me but leave her alone!"

Raphael pleaded.

"Oh, I plan on leaving her alone," Zakara announced, her plump lips spreading into a smile. Just as those words died in the air, Elizabeth felt the razor sharp teeth dig into the veins of her neck. She heard Zakara sucking hard, her heart beating quickly. Dizziness set in, her eyes beginning to close....

"No!" Raphael screamed. "Don't do this!"

Zakara said nothing as she continued to feed. Elizabeth felt her heart beginning to slow down as all of her vital fluids passed into Zakara. Death was coming and she was powerless to stop it. Please, let my baby live, she tried to mouth to Zakara but her lips refused to

move.

Her body was weakening now. The once sturdy legs were collapsing under her, allowing her to fall to the floor. Zakara followed, taking the last drop of blood she possessed.

Elizabeth lay on the floor, her eyes open. It was strange. She could see and hear, but she knew that her heart no longer beat. Then why wasn't she dead.

She watched as Zakara made her way over to Raphael and knelt down before him. "Now it's your turn," she whispered.

Elizabeth watched as Raphael tried to struggle away from her but her minions were too strong. Her teeth sank into Raphael's neck with a sickening crunch. Greedily, she drank from him. His body started to weaken, and he swayed between his captors. If only Elizabeth could save him from this monster!

Just as he was about to collapse, she pulled away. "If I take one more drop from you, it will bring about your death. Tell me, with death looming over you, do you wish to live." He mumbled

words much too soft for her to understand. "What did you say. I couldn't hear you."

Elizabeth felt herself rising from the floor. She hurried over to Zakara in a desperate attempt to stop the wicked fiend but it was to no avail. She

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looked over to where she had lain. Her heart sank. Her body was still there which meant her soul was now free. There was nothing she could do for Raphael now.

She looked back to her beloved as he lay on the floor dying. She didn't want him to die the way she did. If nothing else, their love would continue on and someday, perhaps if God was merciful, they would find each other again.

Using her resolve, Elizabeth floated over to Raphael's body and knelt next to him. "You want to live," she whispered. "As long as one of us lives, something of the other does too."

Just as those words assailed his ears, Raphael uttered the condemning words. "I want to live."

"Then live you shall," Zakara said. Opening the top of her strange gown, she drew a nail across her right breast. Holding Raphael's head, she laid his lips against the blood, allowing him to drink.

Elizabeth faded away from the scene, the room suddenly becoming a quick blur. It was time for her to go to her rest. She was going to need it if she was ever to find Raphael again.

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Chapter 6

"Do you believe me now." Raphael's voice drifted through the hazy remnants of the dream-like memories.

She opened her eyes to see the classroom was

just as it had been before. There was no opulent bedroom or tester bed with gauzy curtains. She had no choice but to believe him now. That memory had been the very essence of her nightmares. "Yes, I do, Raphael."

His brow rose slightly as his fingers caressed her chin. "What makes you believe me now."

The soft pad of his thumb drifted across her lips, sending shivers down her spine. For the first time in her life, the evil that had haunted her relentlessly had a name. "Because that nightmare played out to its fullest and I hadn't told you a thing about it. In fact, I've never told anyone," she confessed softly, her body trembling under his touch.

"That's no nightmare," he confessed as he pulled her close, his lips pressed against her forehead. "That was what happened on our wedding night. You died and gave me the courage to live. The only thing I've regretted for the past two hundred and forty years was that I had to endure it without you."

She stared into the deep green pools of his eyes, feeling as though she belonged to him completely and always had.

"What do you want of me, Raphael." she questioned in a quiet murmur.

"I want you to be my loving wife again, Elizabeth," Raphael explained, his voice echoing dully inside the room. "Don't let me go another couple of hundred years without you."

Despite the desire soaring through her body, she broke away from his hold and was surprised that he allowed her to do so. Pushing herself from the desk, she paced the room, her thumb to her lip. Did she want to become one of the undead just as he was, or did she want to live an ordinary life, knowing that there was no one else out there for her. "You don't know what you're asking, Raphael."

"Ah, but I do know what I'm asking, Elizabeth," he said, the sound of his heels hitting the floor as he closed the distance between them, breaking

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the uneasy silence. "Are you willing to give yourself to me again, only this time forever."

She buried her head in her hands. "Please, Raphael, I can't even kill a spider and you're asking me to become this thing that must kill human beings to survive."

"You will be with me, Elizabeth. Isn't that what you want."

Liz leaned against the other side of the desk, both of her hands supporting her chin. "It is what I want, Raphael but I don't know if I can become what you want. I'm not a killer, or a murderer...."

She felt him nudge her forward and slide behind her, his strong arms twining around her. "You're a survivor, Elizabeth and that's what I am, nothing more. We're not murderers or killers but we do have to feed in order to survive."

Tears stung her eyes, threatening to flood her contacts down her cheeks. "I I ... don't know, Raphael," she stammered, her body shaking. In the short span of a few weeks she'd changed her hair and eye color only to

realize that she was truly the reincarnation of Lady Elizabeth Swanson.

He spun her around in his arms, forcing her to face him. "Then let me make up your mind for you."

His lips brushed against hers, soft and feathery at first, dancing across the line. She responded by softening and welcoming his urgent passion into her mouth. Together their tongues intertwined, dancing to a tune only they could hear.

Liz's arms instinctively wrapped around him, pressing against him.

She felt the level of his desire against her belly, heightening her senses. She wanted him but not here, someplace more private.

"Why not here." he whispered against her lips, his fingers unbuttoning her flower printed blouse.

"Be ... because," she stammered as his hands freed her breasts from the constraint of her bra, his magic digits caressing her nipples to marble hardness. She gasped at the emotions rising in her, making him smile.

"Because why." he insisted as he dipped his head and nipped at her

neck, his velvety tongue teasing her flesh.

"Someone might see," she confessed as she leaned further into him.

"Nonsense," he murmured, snapping his fingers. Bright lights

disappeared, plunging them into total darkness.

"No one will see. Besides,

I've locked the door so no one can come in."

"Can't they hear us."

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"Not unless I want them to," he brushed his lips against her forehead.

"You feel so good to me, Elizabeth. I don't know how I lived all these years without you."

She wasn't sure how to respond to his confession. Until now, she'd never known she was looking for him. How can you miss something you didn't know you had. "Oh, Raphael..."

"Shh, don't talk, Elizabeth. Give yourself to me."

Liz gasped as his hands cupped her breasts together. Gingerly, he

teased both nipples equally, running his tongue around each areola. "You

don't know what you do to me, Raphael," she

murmured as he took them
both in his mouth, sucking softly.

He said nothing as he removed his mouth from
her and shifted so that
she was against the metal desk. Surprise
crawled across her face. "I
thought..."

"I know what you were thinking, but I'm going to
show you
something different." Raphael's hands went
around her waist and lifted her
onto the desk.

Her mind went insane with ideas, the cold metal
seeping through her
dress. Was he going to do something very
revolting or extremely titillating
to her. "How different," she purred, feeling
sexually charged again.

"Just lay back and enjoy yourself."

She trembled as she leaned back. What was he
going to do.

Raphael let his fingers travel all over her
glorious legs, feeling the
warmth and softness in them. Why did she
always wear that bothersome
nylon. Tenderly, he hooked his fingers at the
waistband and pulled them
tantalizingly slowly down her thighs amid her
gasps. Her crisp scent

lingered in the air, making him hungrier for her than ever before.

His fingers wandered back up her trembling legs, his thumbs caressed her inner thighs. She was ready for him, perhaps even more ready than ever before. Her juices flowed, sweet and innocent....

Unable to stand the anticipation anymore, Raphael removed her panties, exposing her gentle sex to him.

"What are you going to do to me, Raphael."

"Something I hope you will enjoy, my dear," he murmured as he dipped his head.

He started with her thighs, licking them lightly in an effort to get her to relax a little. This was her first time for this and he could hardly expect her to be ready for it.

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Elizabeth's scent called to him like a long forgotten dream. It clung to her as dew to a petal, bringing back all the wonderful memories he'd harbored for the last few hundred years. He felt her quiver more as his

tongue plunged into her fragrant core, enjoying the sweet juices.

Liz wanted to cry out at all the wonderful emotions his magic tongue provoked. Heat invaded her body as he teased the nub between her legs, his fingers diving in and out of her, making her wetter than she'd ever been in her life. "Oh, Raphael," she whispered in the depths of the dark.

He said nothing as he continued his ministrations, taking her to new heights, her hips arching to meet each caress.

Euphoria swept over her, making her shake violently, the sweat on her body pooling in low areas. What was that.

"Your first taste of a true climax," he told her as he pulled back from her. Taking her hands, he pulled her into a sitting position, his scented fingers caressing the side of her face. "How would you like to try something else."

She trembled, unable to speak. Her legs were weak and rubbery from the orgasm. What else could he possibly expect her to do.

"By the expression on your face, I expect you do," he murmured as he

slipped his hands under her ass and picked her up. In one swift movement, almost too fast for her to comprehend, she was straddling him on the desk.

"What ... what ... happened." she managed to choke out.

"Something I know you'll like," he said softly in his clipped British accent.

Before she could say anything, she felt him slip inside of her. "That's it, love," he closed his eyes, settling his hands on her hips. "Do what comes naturally to you."

Her inhibition disappeared like the rain after a summer storm, allowing her natural instincts to come into play. Liz moved slowly, grinding against him, eliciting moans. Internal muscles she didn't know she had clamped down on him, holding him hostage. "Oh, Elizabeth," he murmured, his hands guiding her hips. "I never knew it could be this good."

"Neither did I," she gasped as she rose up until he was nearly out of her and came down, their juices mingling together.

Under his ministrations, she moved with natural

grace and ease,
bringing both of them to orgasm. Liz let out a
long gasp as Raphael shivered
inside of her. She slumped forward. "I never
knew sex could be this good,"
she whispered against his chest.

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"Always with you," he murmured, his hands
stroking her hair. "Every
time with you is like drinking the finest wine.
Each time you drink, it gets
better."

She lay against him for a second, her head
moving with his breathing.
Inside of his chest, she heard nothing, not even
the faintest echo of a
heartbeat.

"As I've told you before, Elizabeth, my heart
hasn't beat in over two
hundred and forty years," he offered in the heavy
silence of the room. "I
know what I ask of you is difficult, but try to
understand this is the only
way."

"It means giving up everything I know," she said
solemnly, her fingers

stroking the buttons of his shirt.

"Think of what you'll be gaining, Elizabeth. We will finally be together forever. Then, when the time of the Reckoning comes, we will have the choice to be human or vampire."

She jerked her head up and stared into his sparkling, moonlit eyes.

"The Reckoning."

He urged her head back down. "Something I will tell you about very soon, my love. It's getting late and I need to take you home."

Questions had nagged at her mind since the moment she first accepted Raphael's identity and the purpose of her life.

"Can you tell me something."

"Anything, my love."

"How is it that you can walk around in the sunlight and not be affected. According to all legends, vampires are vanquished by sunlight, but you and Zakara aren't. Why is that."

Raphael's soft chuckles filled the air, his hands stroking her hair. "You have so much to learn!" His fingers swept across her cheek, sending tremors of desire racing down her spine. "Zakara keeps a grimoire, given to her by

her father, Satan. Contained within are all the secrets to her powers. I

discovered that one night as I...."he cleared his throat, "left her bed. Please forgive me, my love, for saying that. It wasn't that..."

Liz silenced him with her fingers to her mouth. "You have done nothing to be forgiven for, Raphael. She made you vulnerable and took advantage of you, nothing more."

"But I...."

"No more, okay. There is nothing to be forgiven for."

Raphael's strong arms wrapped around her, holding her closely. "You are a very special woman, Elizabeth Swanson and always will be. No matter

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what it takes, I will protect you from all harm."

The use of Lady Elizabeth's name still sounded alien to her. "As I

you, Raphael. Can you tell me more about this spell."

"It's a sun spell," he offered. "The grimoire gave specific instructions

on how to protect vampires from the sun. So, gathering the other vampires who wanted to escape from Zakara, we all performed the spell, making us immune to the sun. Zakara has tried several times to undo it, but she's failed every time, thankfully."

Liz lay there with him, soaking up the rest of his words. "There is something I've got to ask you and if you don't want to answer, I'll understand."

"What is that."

She drew a deep breath, summoning up the courage to ask. "Is there any way I can get pregnant, at least by you."

He looked at her as the surprise crawled across his face. "Are you telling me...."

Liz shook her head. "No, I'm not pregnant, Raphael, but since all of the traditional vampire rules don't seem to apply and we're not using anything to prevent it...." she trailed off unable to finish what she was saying. Oh great, now he's going to run, she thought weakly to herself.

That's the last thing any guy wants to hear.

Raphael tilted her head up, staring deep into her

eyes. *"Would that be*
such a bad thing if it did happen."

"No, it wouldn't, but I didn't know if it was possible."

"Between vampires, no. Between a human and a vampire, there is always that possibility," he said, his lips nuzzling against her neck again, inflaming her senses. "Shall we work on that and see what happens."

* * * *

Zakara paced her domain with the quickness of a panther, the sparks flying where her heels struck the stone. Somehow, Raphael had convinced the little fat bitch that everything had been a ruse and that he was not married nor had been in quite a long time.

"Something vexes you, my queen," murmured one of the twins, his hand manacled her wrist. "What can I do to soothe your ire."

She halted her strides, turning to look at him. Long black hair surrounded his angelic face; the blue eyes reminded her of Raphael's. Oh how good Raphael had been for her! He'd known how to please a woman from the start, having been initiated at the age of

twelve by an oversexed

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nanny. His fingers were magical. "What do you have in mind."

"Whatever you wish, my queen," he whispered, bringing her hand to his bulging crotch. Mentally, she summoned his brother and he appeared dressed in the same shiny black leather pants, his muscular torso looking sleek in the light of the burning sconces. Hmm, this gave her ideas.

"Both of you, strip down," she ordered. "I feel the need to have double the pleasure tonight."

Without hesitation, they shed what little they wore and stood before her, erections hard and ready. "Good," she stated in a harsh tone as she went to her throne and sat down. "Come to me."

The twins obeyed her commands and stood before her, their hands behind their backs awaiting their next orders. Just like diamonds cut from the same rock, their bodies were the same, right down to their cocks which

where very large, an endowment that never missed her attention. Taking her hands, she touched the tips of each and garnered a smidgen of moisture, making both men shiver. "I am in the mood for a little game tonight."

"What game would that be, my queen." they both asked in unison.

"You know who I long for and since you both resemble him in a fashion, I've decided that both of you will be him," she said in a husky voice as she leaned back, spreading her legs over the arms. This was a pleasure she hadn't thought of before. "Now, both of you, pleasure me in the manner that he would."

Without hesitation, they knelt before her and buried themselves between her thighs. Two tongues, not as practiced at Raphael's, lapped at her juices and nub in an effort to bring it to blossom.

Zakara leaned back, her hands grabbing thick handfuls of black hair on each head and pulling hard. She knew it hurt them but she didn't care.

They were here for her pleasure, not theirs.

For a moment, she drowned in the sweet

sensation of the orgasm as it swept over her, shutting out everything. She screamed aloud as it washed over her, her hips bucking.

She looked down at the wet, shining faces before her, realizing her mistake. They weren't Raphael and never would be. They were only a close replacement.

I will have you back in my bed again, Raphael, she vowed, no matter *what I have to do. She smiled. If the bitch had to die again, then so be it.*

* * * *

Water sluiced down her body, washing the day away. Liz stayed

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under the hot water longer than she normally did, the feel of the spray like a tonic to her skin. Not as good a tonic as Raphael, she thought as she soaped her hair.

He'd wanted to come home with her tonight, but she wouldn't let him because it would be nothing but an all night sex session and she wasn't up to

it. She'd been very tired lately and couldn't seem to get enough sleep. Not that she didn't want to have sex with Raphael. That was glorious in itself.

No, it was more along the lines of the dreaded pregnancy. What if she did get pregnant by him. What was she going to do.

Liz rinsed her hair and scrubbed her body with the bodywash, rinsing and turning off the taps, refusing to think about it anymore. Why should she.

According to all the myths and legends she'd ever read, a vampire could not impregnate anyone because they were dead and unable to produce any live sperm.

Bubbles and hisses of water going down the drain surrounded her as she wrapped one fluffy towel around her head and another one around her body. Wiping back the fogged mirror, she stared at her reflection. Dark circles had taken their place under her eyes, giving their silent testimony to her sleepless nights. Thoughts haunted her from the time she got up until the time she tried to go to sleep. Why couldn't she just walk from it all.

"Because you're too wrapped up in him,"

mocked a savage female voice behind her. She jerked and twisted to see the same dusky-skinned woman she'd seen earlier in the day. Why didn't she see the mysterious stranger in the mirror.

Out of fright, Liz whirled around to see the mirror showing the perfect picture of the bathroom doorway. The only thing missing was the woman.

"You won't ever see my reflection in any mirror, bitch," she hissed as she entered the room, her stiletto heels banging their own rhythm against the tile of the bathroom floor. "I've no soul."

Liz whipped around, holding onto the bathroom sink. "What do you want with me."

"I don't want anything with you, fat ass. What I want is for you to leave Raphael alone. I've tried nicely to get you away from him, but since you can't seem to take a hint, I'm going to have to cause your departure on a more permanent basis."

Liz felt her resolve build up from a stored well beneath her soul, giving her unbelievable strength. "Like you did last time."

Zakara's face brightened. "So he told you, eh. I expected half as

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much. Did he also tell you that we were lovers for quite a time."

She regarded the dark-skinned creature with contempt. "He did, but I also realized that you took advantage of him in his state," she snapped. She tried to move her way out of the bathroom but Zakara blocked her path.

"You did nothing but use him."

"You've no doubt enjoyed some of the things I taught him," Zakara hissed as she tossed her mane of curly black tendrils behind her shoulders, the moisture on her fangs glistening. "Don't you realize that he's using you.

Did you ever think about why you've dyed your hair blonde or why you've changed your eye color. He's implanted those ideas in your head in an effort to make you into his Elizabeth!"

Zakara thought she knew what Liz was all about but she was wrong.

"That's where you've made your mistake. I've

always wanted to be something different and look different. The only thing Raphael did was give me the strength to do it, nothing more."

She could see the boiling anger in Zakara's black-rimmed eyes, the fire behind them unmistakable. "You little bitch," she snarled and lunged forward, her hands wrapping around Liz's throat. "I'll see you in Hell before I let you have him!"

"You... you ... first...." she choked out, her throat becoming tighter and tighter. Desperately, she clawed at Zakara, the fierce power in her opponent too much for her. I'm going to die a second time at her hands, she thought as blackness invaded her mind.

Just as unconsciousness was about to whisk her away permanently, she felt Zakara's hands yanked from her throat and heard the deep sound of something hitting the hall. "If you ever touch her again, Zakara, I swear the things I will do to you will make your father's minions weep in mercy."

Raphael's voice cut through the deep dark of the apartment, giving her instant comfort. He came for me. Thank you,

God.

"I warned you, Raphael, to come with me or the bitch gets it. Now if

you love her as you say you do...."

"I do but I'm not leaving her side anymore, Zakara. If you want her, you'll have to get by me."

Liz lay on the floor of the bathroom, gasping for breath and barely able to make out the dark figures in the bedroom. Without her contacts or glasses, she was blind.

"That can be arranged," Zakara hissed, her voice resembling that of a snake. "I don't want to kill you but I will if you and the others don't come

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back to me."

"So kill me then," he ordered. "Because the others won't come. Will you."

Suddenly, she heard rustling from the dark shadows of her room.

Struggling to get up, she blinked hard several times to see seven people in her bedroom, not just two anymore. Fear

compounded. Who were they. "So you've brought the renegades with you."

"We're going to defeat you, Zakara," warned a deeply rich male voice tinted with some foreign accent. "Whether or not you want to believe it."

"If all of you come back to me, including you, Nicholas," she gestured toward the direction of the voice. "All will be forgiven and things will revert to the way they used to be."

She heard Raphael's laughter break through the hostile air. "All will be forgiven. In case you don't know, we're the unforgiven, predators of the night, courtesy of you."

Zakara said nothing but Liz could feel the dangerous vibes coming from the dark woman. "All of you will come crawling back to me in one form or another. Be warned now that all bets are off. War has been declared between us."

"It's better this way," Raphael retorted. "Once you're defeated, we can continue on and try to redeem ourselves as best we can."

Liz lay on the bathroom floor, shivering in the towel, listening for

Zakara's tart reply. It didn't come.

Instead, she caught a glimpse of wispy smoke filling her bedroom.

Just as quickly as it came, it disappeared, hopefully taking Zakara with it.

Once it was gone, Raphael rushed into the bathroom. She looked up to see him dressed strangely. Black leather covered his body, right down to his fingertips. "Are you all right, my love." he said softly as he bent down and effortlessly picked her up off the floor.

"I ... I ... think so," she choked out, her bruised throat barely allowing her anything above a whisper.

"If that bitch hurt you...." he trailed off as he entered the bedroom.

Lights immediately came on as he entered, revealing all of the strange people with him. She looked to see a brooding, dark-haired man standing in the corner, his arms folded over his chest. Next to him was a younger version, except his hair was as blond as the winter snow. Three women were among the crowd, all of whom were exceptionally beautiful. One had long dark hair that hung in a curtain past her waist, the warm, deep amber-colored

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eyes glaring out at her from a thick fan of black lashes. Another woman was just as blonde as she was, more than likely natural. Her smile was warm and inviting as well. "I trust that Zakara didn't hurt you terribly, did she." the blonde woman asked in a Scottish accent as she sat on the bed.

She cast a wary glance at Raphael, who reassured her. "Don't worry, my love, Siobhan won't hurt you."

Siobhan patted her bare leg. "No, I won't, my poor scared lass. The only woman I'll ever hurt is Zakara."

The other woman slid onto the bed, taking her hand. "Neither will I, Elizabeth," she said softly and gestured to the woman standing in the corner, with reams of red hair like an out of control fire. "Neither will Gabrielle."

"That's right, Elizabeth," Gabrielle said in a gentle tone, her accent deeply French.

"How did you know my name."

The dark-haired woman spoke up. "I was at the

club the night Raphael found you. I'm Alexandra but they call me Alex for short." Alex's voice immediately calmed her. "We've known about you for what seems to be ages, thanks to Raphael."

Raphael covered her with a blanket and sat next to her on the bed.

"That one over there is Nick," he gestured to the brooding man with the dark hair and intense facial expression. "The other one who looks like a poster child for Norway is Drake."

Drake tipped his head. "Actually, that's where I'm from. If you couldn't tell, I'm a Viking," he remarked with amusement. She looked at him hard, taking in his stature. He was as tall as Raphael and built just as strongly. His blond hair hung below his shoulders in waves, the black leather stretched to the hilt to cover his body. Blue eyes stared out at her, intense but kind.

Nick stood his full height and closed the distance to the end of the bed with two quick strides. "Nicholas at your service," he said with a quick bow.

His voice had a strange accent as well. "I'm

Egyptian," he confessed as the thought of his origin entered her mind.

"You see, my dear, we've all come from different times and places but Fate has brought us all together for one purpose and that's to end Zakara's reign."

She looked from one face to another, the bewilderment growing.

"Why are you all dressed so strangely."

No one answered for a moment, all of them looking at each other

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before deciding to give her the truth. "We dress this way because our prey are less likely to see us coming before we get to them," Alex said. "Don't take it personally, but we do what we must to survive."

Before she could ask more questions, the women rose from the bed and joined the men. They stood silent at the end of her bed before exiting to the living room, leaving her alone with Raphael.

"Those are the ones who have chosen to come with me and break

away from Zakara," he said softly as he slipped deeper in the bed next to her, his arms slipping underneath the covers. Strangely, she found the leather next to her skin extremely exciting. "You know, you are extremely tempting right now."

"Please, Raphael," she begged, trying to ignore the insistent gloved fingers hardening her nipples. "I don't think I can after what I've been through," she lowered her voice. "The others are in the next room."

His fingers brushed the side of her face, the leather as soft as a newborn baby's skin. "I told them to go ahead and hunt without me. When they are full, they'll come back here and stand guard while I feed."

"That's not necessary"

"It's more than necessary," he said in a firm voice as he flicked open the knot on her towel, exposing her naked body to his touch. "Zakara will come back here when you're undefended and make another attempt to kill you. I won't let her." His lips went immediately to her neck, his body moving over her and making her wet with

anticipation. "Have you given any more thought to what I've asked you."

Liz remained silent for a moment. She had thought about everything but still wasn't sure what the right decision was. If she followed him, she'd give up her entire life. But if she didn't follow him, she'd have to give up her heart. "I haven't come to a decision yet," she answered truthfully.

"I'll bet I can help you make a decision," he offered seductively as he nibbled on her ear lobe.

"How so."

"Let me show you."

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Chapter 7

Liz awoke the next morning, her body aching from the bruising it had received the night before. Raphael had relieved

her tensions and aches
through his sexually charged ministrations.

Instinctively, she cast a glance to the bed next to her. It was empty
save for the rumpled sheets. She frowned. If he
was so hell bent on
protecting her, where was he. Liz let out an
exasperated sigh. Why was
Raphael playing games with her.

She threw her arm over her eyes. Could
Raphael be doing all of these
things just to get her to believe his story.

Angrily, she looked at the clock, her heart nearly
stopping. What she
thought was morning was actually late afternoon.
Liz paled. She was
supposed to be teaching class in about an hour
and a half and that didn't give
her much time to get ready.

Getting up, she stood on weak legs, the towel
from last night still
partially wrapped around her. She took a deep
breath and re-wrapped it.

Why couldn't she make up her mind.

Liz padded to the bathroom, brushing stray
golden strands out of the
way. At least....

At the doorway, she stood in shock. The
bathroom had been torn

apart, everything ripped to shreds. Bits of plastic that were once the shower curtain clung to the stainless steel rod, the edges flapping in the wind.

Her toilet was smashed into a thousand pieces, as well as the vanity sink. Tiles were shattered, their tiny bits adhering to the floor. My God, what sort of animal did this.

Warily she continued to survey the damage, the knot in her belly tightening. Small bits of glass covered the floor, threatening to cut her feet if she set foot inside.

Sudden movement out of the corner of her left eye drew her attention.

She turned toward it, her blood turning to ice in her veins.

Her mirror, a family heirloom, had cracked in half, giving a weird half-shattered image. In order to stifle the scream in her throat, she buried her wrist in her mouth. Written in blood on the mirror were the words

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'NOTHING CAN SAVE YOU FROM ME' and a

quick 'Z' scrawled
underneath it.

Without warning, her world spun, making her legs feel weak and rubbery. In slow motion, she fell to the floor, her hands striking the glass on the floor. Who was going to save her now.

* * * *

"Elizabeth. Where are you." Raphael called, listening for the telltale sound of her voice. Lately, he'd convinced her to allow him to take her back and forth to her class instead of going by herself. That would give Zakara less chance....

Hot coppery blood odor hit his nostrils, calling to him like a moth to a flame. His belly rumbled at the smell, making him hungry. Actually the only time he'd felt hunger like this was....

The rumpled heap at his feet mumbled, coming around from the stupor she'd been in.

Raphael fell to his feet next to her, his belly curling into a tight knot. What had Zakara done to her. "My beloved," he whispered, his eyes trailing to the line of blood on the floor. Instinctively, he licked his lips at the sight,

the growling in his belly becoming hard to ignore.

Raphael turned away as his fangs descended, the transformation coming on strong. Fighting the urge to bite, he laid his fingers against her throat to feel the pulse. A sigh of relief escaped his lips. It was strong and steady, beating hard under his fingertips. "Elizabeth," he murmured, bringing her close to his chest. As he held her, he looked around the room, his anger rising. How dare Zakara do this.

His attention was drawn to the mirror. Written neatly in blood was the dire warning issued by Zakara.

Deep growls escaped his throat, the hungry moisture dripping from his fangs. He was finished playing Zakara's games. The time was quickly coming to take Elizabeth and make her his completely, whether or not she wanted to be.

"Wha ... what ... happened." Elizabeth's voice cut through the aura of anger surrounding his head.

He looked down quickly, his features returning to normal thanks to years of practice. "My love," he whispered as he

held her closer to him, the warmth of her skin utterly welcome. "You must have fainted," his gaze flicked to the bathroom, "after what you saw." Painfully, her expression changed to one of absolute fear. "Please

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don't let her kill me," she begged, her voice barely above a whisper. "Where did you go."

He held her tighter. "I had gone down to the store because you had nothing to eat this morning. I was only going to be gone for a few minutes," he confessed as he rocked slightly with her on the floor. "This was all my fault."

"She didn't do anything to me, Raphael. She's trying to scare me, that's all," Elizabeth said in a comforting tone, her words calming the turbulent sea of emotion in him. "I'm not going to let her scare me."

"Neither will I," he murmured, his cheek against the top of her golden head. "I'm never leaving your side again."

* * * *

Liz gazed up into his warm green eyes, her body responding to his touch. Her heart swelled and the tears rose in her eyes. All her doubts about him disappeared, almost like lightning after a summer storm. "Nor will I," she said softly, the smile on his lips spreading wider.

"You know what this means, don't you."

She looked away. "I have to become what you are, Raphael," she said, her voice flat and even. Was she ready to give up her humanity completely.

"Condemned for all eternity to walk the earth in search of blood."

His hand turned hers back. "No, it means we have the chance to band together and defeat Zakara. Once that is done, we will spend the rest of eternity together, the way we should be."

"But that means we'll never have children or a family of our own."

His expression changed to one of sorrow. "It's an even trade, one for the other. As much as I want my children growing inside of you, it won't happen if you become one of us."

Liz blinked hard, trying to push the tears away.

"That's all I've ever wanted Raphael. To be a wife and mother. What you're asking me is to sell my soul."

His fingers traced her jawline. "What I'm asking you is to walk beside me for all eternity, to be my loving wife."

Unable to answer, Liz pushed up from his lap and leaned against the wall for support. She stared at him hard for a moment, taking in his sexy form. A white cotton shirt covered his upper torso, highlighting the bronze of his skin and emphasizing the girth of his muscles. Denim wrapped around his lower body, accentuating the strength of his legs. Black silver tipped boots completed his attire. "I don't know, Raphael. I want to be with you but

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giving up the idea of having children is not something I'm ready to accept."

"Your desire to be with me must be stronger than your desire to have children," he insisted. "With me, you'd never have to worry that I'd leave

you or die. We'll always be together, making love for the centuries. Don't you want that."

She looked down. "More than anything else in the world, Raphael, but I need more time to decide...."

"Time is running out, Elizabeth," he warned as he slid down next to her, his arm going around her shoulders. "Zakara will stop at nothing to destroy you, and I'm not going to let that happen, even if I have to force you to become one of us."

Her eyes widened. "You wouldn't dare."

"I would if it meant protecting you from her. Now, what is your answer to be."

She was incredulous. "I can't believe you would force me to do something against my will," she snapped, rising from the floor. The fragile trust in him that had begun to build shattered into irreparable fragments. "I trusted you up until this point but now, I don't trust you at all. Get out of my house"

Raphael rose to his feet and towered over her, his arms crossed over his massive chest. "No."

Her brow wrinkled. "What do you mean. If you don't leave, I'm calling the cops."

"Go ahead," he growled. "All I will need to do is convince them that you're hysterical because you're pregnant and that you're being unreasonable."

"I'm not pregnant," she retorted as she took a few steps away from him. "Even if I were, don't think I wouldn't run down to the nearest abortion clinic and get rid of it."

His laughter rang through her apartment. "You wouldn't because you want children too much, Elizabeth. Try again."

"Damn you!" she screamed and stalked into her bedroom, locking the door securely behind her. At least here, she could think quietly.

Splinters of shattered wood showered the bed around her as the door blew inward with the force of a hurricane. Her door hung ajar, the hinges torn from the jamb. Raphael stood on the other side, his lips spread into a wide smile.

"What are you doing." she demanded, rising from her bed.

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"When I want to come into a room, no lock can keep me out, Elizabeth," he said in a sensually deep voice as he strode over to her. His hands grasped her arms, pulling her to her feet. "You can't deny the passion between us." He flicked at the knotted towel. It fell away, leaving her exposed to his touch.

She quivered at the effect he was having on her. "Please, Raphael, don't do this."

"Ah, but you want me to," he said as he sank to his knees and took a ripe nipple into his mouth, teasing it to marble hardness while his other hand kneaded the other mound with a gentle pressure.

Liz had no choice but to submit. Desire coursed through her veins like the sweetest wine, a fragrant nectar her body desperately craved. "I'm not on any birth control or anything"

"You said you wanted a baby," he murmured against her flesh.

Liz felt her legs weaken and would have fallen had it not been for his hands around her waist. "When I was married, with a husband...." she trailed off

Raphael looked up, his dark eyes full of sensual heat as well as desire.

"Be my wife now, Elizabeth."

"We need a church, witnesses...."

"Rubbish. We wed all those hundreds of years ago and have been married since then," he softly reminded her as he rose to his feet and slipped his arms around her waist. "This is the wedding night we should have had.

Nothing is going to ruin it for us this time."

He laid her gently on the bed, his fingers unbuttoning his shirt slowly.

Her body cried out for him like nothing else....

Suddenly, her stomach heaved, making the bile rise in her throat. "Let me up!" she screamed as she pushed him away. Instinctively, she ran for the bathroom, her hand over her mouth. Unfortunately, there was too much glass for her to go in.

Weaving around the corner, Liz made it to the kitchen and proceeded to spill the contents of her belly into the sink.

Raphael's hand wrapped around her forehead while his arm supported her against the faux marble countertop. "Are you all right."

His concern touched her deeply. "I think I'm coming down with some sort of virus, that's all," she commented dryly as she spun around, leaning against his chest, her mouth feeling utterly gummy. "I guess this kills the mood, doesn't it."

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"Not really," Raphael said, "but I won't force myself on you if you're not feeling well. There'll be plenty of time later." He tilted her head up to meet his gaze, his fingers touching her face with feathery strokes. "You know, even when you're sick, you're still beautiful."

She turned away to keep from letting him see the tears forming in her eyes. "Thank ... you ... Raphael. No one's ever said anything like that to me before."

"It's true," he insisted, "even when you were in

those misshapen
clothes at the head of the class..."

Her class! How could she have forgotten. "What time is it." she cried frantically as she ignored the lurching of her stomach and hurried back to the bedroom. "I'm going to be late for class!"

Raphael was right in front of her, having moved much faster than she could see. "I'm going to teach your class tonight. You're in no condition to do it, Professor Quartermaine," he said in a determined tone, his hand on her shoulders.

She sank down on the bed as sudden dizziness set in. "Maybe you're right...."

"I know I'm right," he said arrogantly. "What I want you to do is shower, get a hot cup of tea and get back into bed."

Liz gestured to the bathroom. "How am I supposed to shower, Mr. Smarty Pants, with that mess in there."

His brows rose. "What mess."

She looked back into the room. "That ... mess...." she trailed off. Her bathroom was set to rights, the shower curtain hanging as it always had with

the bright yellow flowers stamped on it. The shards of broken glass were gone, as well as the bits of shattered porcelain. It was a completely restored bathroom. Liz looked up at Raphael. "How did you do that."

"It's within my realm of power," he said and looked to the doorway.

Gabrielle was there. She was dressed in tight jeans with a black tank top, her crimson colored hair streaming down her pale shoulders. Her eyes flashed an intense green. "Gabrielle is going to be here with you while I'm gone."

"That's not necessary...."

"It's completely necessary, Elizabeth," Gabrielle said, sitting on the bed next to her. "You see, when we 'parted' company from Zakara, we made a pact."

Her fear rose. "What sort of pact."

"Not a blood pact, if that's what's scaring you," Gabrielle chuckled.

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"The pact we made was that we would take care of each other and help each

other out when necessary. We've been doing so for centuries and there's nothing I wouldn't do for any of the people within our circle." Gabrielle looked up at Raphael. "And they would do the same for me."

Liz was sure she felt some sort of sexual spark pass between them but she chose to ignore it. She really had no hold over Raphael even though he'd professed his undying affection for her. "Well, if you insist...."

"I insist," Raphael said, crossing his arms over his chest as his brows knitted together, his stare intense. "I still think there's something more wrong with you than you're willing to admit."

"No, there's nothing wrong," she insisted, her trembling hands hiding in her lap. If he knew the truth, he'd know there was a good chance she was pregnant right now. Her period was a week late.

He glanced at the watch on his wrist. "Damn!" he cursed as he brushed a kiss across her cheek. "I'm going to be late for your class so I have to run, my beloved. I'll be back as soon as I can." He stared at Gabrielle with a fierce expression. "Don't let anything happen to

her."

Gabrielle nodded. "Nothing will happen to her, I swear."

"I'll be back soon, my love," he called as he swept out the door.

"Hurry back," she said weakly.

"Why didn't you tell him."

Gabrielle's sudden words cut through her aura of thought. She whirled about, her eyes widening. "Don't tell me you're into reading minds as well."

"No," she laughed as she stood up, urging Liz to rise to her feet as well. "Not really. Unless there's something worth looking at and your mind is definitely worth taking a look at."

She paled. "Look, I don't know for sure so don't say anything to Raphael. It could be stress since I have to peer around every corner and wait for Zakara to pounce on me. I don't know anything for sure."

Gabrielle's light laughter filled her sparse bedroom. "Your secret is safe with me," she said and urged her toward the bathroom. "C'mon, let's get you showered and back in bed where Raphael wants you."

* * * *

Reams of black smoke circled around the bubbling cauldron filled with the blood of butchered humans. The hot, acrid odor of coppery fluid filled the air inside of the dank cavern, making her hungrier than she'd been in a while.

"You are upset, my queen," Arriden, one of her pet twins, said in a

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soft tone. "What is it that vexes you."

Zakara stood up from her throne and paced around the cauldron, her long talon-like fingers scraping the lip of the bowl. "Raphael hasn't seen reason yet and I can't make him understand that if he doesn't, that fat cow of his is going to die. What should I do." Her tone was mocking but she didn't care. Her fury was almost beyond her control at this point and it was better not to scare the others.

"Perhaps get rid of the obstacle," he said with a grin, his black hair framing his face, reminding her of her father's minions. "Let me do this for

you, my queen."

She shook her black curls. "No, my pet," she purred, her fingers running under his chin. "Not yet. There's something I've got to do to break Raphael's spirit and make him understand there is no other place than by my side."

Arriden's eyes glared an intense blue. "Though it pains me to know that once Raphael is back, I will no longer be sharing your bed, I will do whatever is necessary to make you happy."

"I know, my pet," she murmured in a sensually low tone, knowing exactly what impact it would have on Arriden. "Even when Raphael does return, that doesn't mean you won't share my bed on occasion as your reward." Suddenly, the urge to take him grew stronger and stronger. Lately, sex had been the last thing on her mind. The desire to prove to Father that she was completely capable of governing the earth and filling it with her disciples took more precedence these days, riding high up there with getting Raphael back.

Arriden's boy-like smile filled the room with its

brightness. "Whatever
you wish, my queen, I will gladly provide."

Her hand slipped down to his crotch and
squeezed hard. "There is
only one thing that I want more than anything."

"What is that."

"Raphael."

* * * *

Her robe was warm and comforting as she
snuggled into her bed,
diving deep beneath the warm covers. Gabrielle
had braided her wet hair,
making sure it wasn't knotted. For the first time
in a while, Liz felt
comfortable and safe, something she hadn't felt
in a long while.

"Here we are," Gabrielle announced as she
swept into the room with a
tray of tea and a few cookies. "It's not high tea
but I guess it'll do."

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"Thanks," she said as Gabrielle placed the tray
across her knees.

"What kind of tea is it."

Gabrielle shrugged her creamy shoulders. "Not
really sure. Whatever

you had in the cabinet."

Liz stared at the tea in the cup. She never kept tea in the house and if she did, it was only a tea bag or two, never a whole box or even loose tea.

"There wasn't any in the cabinet."

"That's odd," Gabrielle stated. "Because there was a whole box in there."

She threw her hand up as the answer hit her. "I'm sure Raphael picked it up when he went to the store."

"Whew!" Gabrielle breathed a sigh of relief. "You scared me there for a second. I thought maybe...."

"I doubt that Zakara would try anything with all of you around me."

"I suppose not," Gabrielle commiserated as she sank to the bed. "But we never know with her. She taught us everything we know about being vampires but we don't know everything she knows. I'm sure there's a few tricks she has up her sleeve and we've got to be prepared for that."

She took a sip of the tea. It tasted a little bitter. Liz grimaced at the taste but she shook it off. Not being a big tea drinker, she supposed that was

how it should taste. "How can you prepare for something you don't know is coming."

Gabrielle's beautiful face twisted into a scowl. "We have to do the best we can with it," she said and gestured to the delicate china cup. "Let's drink up because Raphael wants you to rest up tonight. You've got a big day ahead of you tomorrow."

Gabrielle laughed. "I'm guessing that Raphael didn't tell you."

"Tell me what."

"You're moving into the new house he's bought for you."

* * * *

"Okay, who can tell me why Henry the Eighth became disillusioned with the Catholic Church." Raphael's eyes scanned the class, searching for some spark of intelligence. There wasn't any. Most of them were still hungover from one of the larger frat parties last night.

"I see no one's read the chapter for this class," he said in a stern voice as he brushed a lock of black hair out of his eyes.

"We were busy," Tommy Jorgensen called out,

his bloodshot eyes a
silent testimony to his state.

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"I'm guessing that frat party took all of your studying energy," he said sourly as he walked behind the desk and sat down. Amid the blank stares, he noticed that a few of the girls were entranced with him. He ignored them because there was only one woman for him.

"Most of my beer money, too," Tommy commented, giving his friend a high five, both of them whooping and hollering.

He leaned back in his chair and surveyed the room. There was only one way to get to them. "Since no one bothered to study for today's class, there'll be a test tomorrow on what you should have studied for today. Also, as an added bonus, the test will be one quarter of your grade."

"That's not fair! Professor Quartermaine wouldn't do this to us!" cried one student from the back.

"Well, I'm not Professor Quartermaine."

"You suck!" came a call from another corner.

He fixed a look in that direction. The offending student suddenly went flying out of his chair and onto the floor, the entire desk going with him. The class looked at the boy in wonder as he struggled to get to his feet and gather all of his things. He smiled. That should teach them who was head of the class. "Any more comments."

The students looked forward, none of them twitching a muscle.

"Good," he said. "Professor Quartermaine is ill but should be back soon.

Until then, I'm going to be teaching your class and therefore the structure will be a little different."

"What's wrong with her." asked one genuinely concerned female student.

"She'll be fine soon enough," he replied, trying to keep all emotion from his face. "Now, any more questions or comments." The room was silent. "If there's nothing else, class dismissed."

The clatter of books closing rose in the air, mingling with the sound of metal scraping the cheap linoleum floor. He sank deep into Elizabeth's chair,

leaning back and resting his ankles on the edge. The girls who passed him gave him a smile and a short wave, their eyes conveying the fact they would love to spend one night in his company. His male students didn't even give him a second glance.

He wanted to laugh at it all but he kept his face grave. It was best not to let anyone know what he was thinking.

Raphael interlocked his fingers and placed them behind his head, staring up at the ceiling. How long did Elizabeth think she was going to keep

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her secret to herself. He grinned. The thought of being a father again thrilled him. It was more than he could have ever hoped for. Normally, vampires couldn't sire children but if the desire was strong enough, it could transcend the barrier between vampire and human....

It hit him in the gut like an express train, his breath leaving his body.

Raphael slammed his feet on the floor, gasping for air. What happened.

Raphael, he heard Gabrielle's voice call, I've had to rush Elizabeth to *the hospital. I don't know what's wrong with her but come to Western General. It's pretty serious.* He leaped to his feet and fished his keys out of his back pocket, his cold blood pooling at the center of his chest. What was wrong with his Elizabeth.

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Chapter 8

Liz felt her belly tightening and loosening again, almost like she was having menstrual cramps but it was much worse than that. She'd vomited several times at home as well as in the ambulance. Finally, there was nothing left in her system but she still felt the awful need to throw up.

Bright lights hung overhead as she was lifted from the gurney to the bed, the murmur of voices around her becoming an annoying blend.

"What's your name, honey." asked one nurse.

Liz blinked hard, not really able to focus at all. The pain was that bad.

"Liz ... Elizabeth Quartermaine," she corrected herself, not really sure why.

"How long as this been going on." the woman asked.

Her belly started hurting worse, the area between her legs damp with what she knew was blood. "Just...a few hours," she gasped, the antiseptic smell of the emergency room making her want to throw up.

"Any information you need, I'll give you," she heard Gabrielle say from her left.

"Are you a relative."

"Yeah," Gabrielle announced. "She's marrying my brother."

Their voices blended together as she felt the sharp stick of a needle in her arm, the pain drowning everything else out. What caused this. Why did she feel this way.

"Where is she."

Raphael's voice broke through the bustle of voices. She couldn't see him because Gabrielle had forgotten her glasses and she hadn't bothered to put her contacts in.

"Sir, you can't be in here right now," said a man, presumably the doctor. "Please go to the waiting room and someone will come and get you."

She looked up to see Raphael standing next to the man, his arms crossed. He was much taller than the doctor and more imposing. "Try and remove me."

The doctor looked Raphael up and down, finally throwing his hands up in the air. "You win, but don't get in my way."

"So long as you don't get in mine," Raphael warned as he strode over

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to her side, taking her hand. "How are you feeling, my love."

"I don't know what's wrong with me, Raphael," she said, gasping as another spasm crossed her belly. "I ... was ... just ... drinking ... tea," she

murmured, curling up into a tight ball. Why wouldn't the pain just go away.

Suddenly, Gabrielle appeared at Raphael's side. "C'mon, Raphael, let's go into the waiting room and let the doctors fix her up."

Something in Gabrielle's voice made him stiffen. "Perhaps," he said slowly, looking at her. "I don't want to leave you alone."

"The ... doctors ... are ... here ... with ... me," she said through stiff lips. "Zakara won't try anything."

Gabrielle urged him up from his seat, her hand gently on his shoulder.

"Come with me, Raphael."

Reluctantly, he let go of her hand. "If you need me, just say my name and I will be here," he whispered to her, brushing a kiss across her forehead.

He turned to the doctor, his stern green eyes grave and dangerous. "If anything happens to her, I'm holding you personally responsible. Do I make myself clear."

"Are you threatening me." the doctor asked nervously.

"No, I'm just warning you ahead of time so there are no fuck-ups," he

said as he moved toward the door.

Liz watched him walk out the door, led by Gabrielle. Part of her wanted him to stay but she knew he had to leave.

Her belly twisted into about forty different knots, making her cry out.

"I'm going to give you something for the pain," the doctor announced, as he slipped on his rubber gloves. "Let's find out what's going on here."

* * * *

Raphael felt his anger boil over and he did his best to contain it.

"What exactly happened."

Gabrielle shrugged. "I'm not really sure. I fixed her some tea and cookies. After that, she fell asleep and woke up, maybe about an hour later howling in pain."

He stared at the odd wallpaper pattern circling the room, his mind whirling on the possibilities. Did it have to do with the tea. "Is that all."

"Zakara didn't get to her, if that's what you're thinking. I never left her side for a second."

He crossed his ankle over his knee, his fingers tapping his booted

ankle. "Where did you get the tea."

"In the cabinet, right where you left it."

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Raphael turned, glaring at her hard. "What do you mean 'where I left it'. I never put any tea in the cabinet."

"Well, I didn't put it there and neither did Elizabeth" she trailed off, her eyes widening. "You don't think...."

"Go and get that tea because I'm going to have it analyzed. If I'm not mistaken...."

His words were cut off by the appearance of the doctor, the man's face grim.

Raphael leaped to his feet and closed the distance between them, fear rising in his veins like the moon at midnight. "Is she all right."

"I'm Dr. Thompson and I do have some news for you. Now if you will follow me...."

"Tell me what's wrong with my fianc !"

"It's hospital policy to take you into a separate consultation room and give you the news," Dr. Thompson announced

and gestured for Raphael to follow him down the hall.

He cast a look at Gabrielle. "Make sure you go in there and make sure nothing happens to her."

"You got it," Gabrielle responded and slipped down the hallway to the emergency room.

Dr. Thompson directed him to a small, closet-like room at the end of the hall. He opened the door and went in, followed by the doctor, who said, "I know you're anxious, Mr"

"Chamberlin," he finished as he slid into a chair opposite the door.

Dr. Thompson took a seat across from him, laying nervous hands in his lap. "As you know, your fianc was brought in with severe abdominal pain...."

"What caused it."

Dr. Thompson held his hands up. "I'm getting to that. At first we didn't know what caused it until your fianc filled us in."

"Filled you in on what." Fear seized him, gripping him in its cold clutches. He didn't want to hear what the doctor was going to say next.

"Oh," Dr. Thompson said, a mask of surprise sweeping over his features. "I guess you didn't know your fianc was four weeks pregnant."

The moment those words entered his mind, everything seemed to blank out, his hope for a new future dying. "You said was. I'm guessing she's not anymore."

"I'm afraid not," Dr. Thompson said sympathetically. "It's actually a

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miracle that she was pregnant in the first place."

His brow rose. "What do you mean."

"Well, we did an ultrasound to look for a heartbeat. Unfortunately, there wasn't one but what we did find was that both of her fallopian tubes are completely blocked."

He leaned back, digesting all of the information.

"Are you sure."

Dr. Thompson nodded his shiny bald head.

"Positive."

"Can I see her." Anxiety stormed through him, the need to see her and make sure she was all right.

"She's resting after the medicine we gave her and she's going to be pretty groggy but she should be up to seeing you."

"When can I take her home." This hospital was no place for her.

Zakara could be hiding in anyone or anywhere, waiting to strike.

"Not for a day or two."

His brow rose, matching his anger. "Why not."

"Because we'll need to do a D&C before letting her go."

Raphael looked at the doctor his eyes narrowing. "I have to take her home today."

"You can't," Dr. Thompson insisted. "There's a good possibility she could bleed to death....."

"Can the procedure be done tonight." He hated what had to happen.

The very thought of his child being sucked out of his beloved's body was almost too much for him to think about.

"Dr. Waterhouse is on call. Perhaps I can persuade her to do it tonight, but I can't guarantee anything. She may decide to wait."

He leaned forward and scowled, hoping that the doctor would see the

seriousness of the situation. "There is no question about it. It is imperative that it be done tonight."

Raphael watched the man's expression change to one of fear mingled with ripples of anger. "I'll see what I can do," Dr. Thompson said brusquely as he rose from the fake leather chair.

"Thank you," he replied, shaking the doctor's hand. "You don't know how much this means to me."

* * * *

Haze surrounded her mind, a fog she couldn't get out of. Everything seemed surreal and illusionary, beyond her control. She tried to focus but couldn't. The grip of the drugs was too strong.

Suddenly a face appeared, the hair dark and expression loving. "How

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are you, my love."

Raphael's voice penetrated the mist around her, helping to bring her back to reality. "I'm ... okay," she said through stiff lips. "I ... guess ... the doctor told you what was wrong."

"Why didn't you tell me."

"Because I wasn't sure," she confessed as she covered her eyes from the blinding haze of the fluorescent light above. "I didn't want to get your hopes up, and I hadn't made a decision about the future yet."

She felt his hand on her arm, loving and gentle. "Whether or not you're pregnant, I'm still going to be by your side. A child would have been an added bonus but that doesn't mean in the future...."

"No, Raphael. This baby was a fluke. I shouldn't have been able to get pregnant at all and now it's gone," she sobbed, the tears rolling down her cheeks. All she had ever wanted to be was a wife and mother. For years, she'd buried herself in school and work, trying to eradicate the pain and misery of her loneliness from her mind. With Raphael, she'd found happiness and had the one thing her in life she'd always wanted. Now it was a distant memory.

Raphael shoved her hand away from her eyes and stared at her with a fierce intensity. "There will be others. I've got

enough money so that...."

"Just go away, Raphael, and leave me alone. I've failed you like I've failed everyone else so it's just best that you go on"

"Stop that!" he snapped, his hands on either side of her face. "I'm staying by your side whether or not you like it. Whether you can or can't have children is not an issue with me. Your love is. Don't you understand I've searched time and again for you. I've lived for more than two centuries without your love. Do you think it's something I'm going to give up." He glared at her, daring her to answer. She remained silent. "No, I'm not going to give it up. What I'm going to do is have two of the others sit with you while I run back to your apartment and pack your things. You're moving in with me at the new house."

"No, Raphael...."

"I'm not taking no as an answer. I can't watch you as closely as I want when you're not with me so this is the best possible solution."

She was too tired to fight and the drugs were making her sleepy. "All

right, Raphael, if you insist. I'm not going to fight you anymore."

He brushed a tender kiss across her forehead. "It's better this way, my love. Trust in my judgment where your safety is concerned." He turned to

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the doorway. "Drake and Nicholas are going to sit with you while I'm gone.

They'll keep everyone away from you."

The brooding Nick and pale Drake entered the room, both dressed like typical yuppies. "Hi again," Drake said softly as he settled himself into a chair. "I was hoping we'd meet again under better circumstances."

"With Zakara about, there's no such thing as better circumstances,"

Nick piped in as he settled into the other chair, crossing his long legs at the ankles.

"You guys know what to do if Zakara shows up."

Both of them

nodded. "Good," Raphael said and looked at her one last time. "I'll be back

before you have to go to surgery. When you're

done, I'm taking you to our new home."

She blinked hard, love for him welling in her heart. "Do you promise."

"Cross my heart," he murmured and kissed her one last time.

With a quick flick of his wrist, he was gone from the room, leaving her with his trusted friends.

"Just sleep now, Elizabeth," Drake said softly. "Nothing will hurt you while we're here."

"You can bet on that," Nick chimed in. "Zakara wouldn't dare."

* * * *

Raphael picked up the tin of tea sitting on the counter and looked at the label closely. "Is this what you gave her." he questioned Gabrielle as they stood in the tiny kitchen.

"Yes, it is," Gabrielle said as she took the tin from his fingers and held it to her nose. "Ugh! This smells like crap."

"Here, let me smell that," he said sourly as he took it back. "I'm British so I should know what real tea smells like." Raphael held it to his nose and sniffed. He took a light puff at first

before drawing a deeper one.

Out of rage, he threw it across the kitchen with such force that the tin embedded itself in the wall.

"What's the matter." Alex cried as she entered the room, followed by a concerned Siobhan.

"There's pennyroyal mixed in that fucking tea!" His rage burned brighter than ever before. "Who did it."

"None of us, Raphael," Siobhan said angrily. "We all made the pact and we're bound to honor it."

Gabrielle placed a warm hand on her shoulder. "I think I might know

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who did it," she offered.

He turned and glared at her. "Who."

"Zakara probably did it when she destroyed Elizabeth's bathroom. She must have had an inkling of the pregnancy and sought to destroy the baby again. So she must have mixed the pennyroyal with the tea, hoping that Elizabeth would drink it," Gabrielle said slowly, the full realization hitting

all of them.

"Oh, no!" Raphael screamed as he bolted for the door. "Get Elizabeth's things and move them to the house. I'll be back with her in a minute!"

He was in the Jag in a flash and fired up the ignition. Zakara had known about the baby and destroyed it just as she had all those hundreds of years ago. Now she would turn on Elizabeth. No matter what the cost, he had to protect her from Zakara's wrath.

* * * *

"It's time to get her ready for surgery," chirped a pretty young nurse entering the room. The starched white uniform clung to her curvaceous body, her cleavage straining the white material. Her blonde hair was piled on top of her head in a careless fashion. Nick noticed her right away and so did Drake. Damn, she looked like she'd walked straight out of Playboy.

"Not so fast," Drake said, his gaze sweeping up and down her form.

"What's your name."

"Anything you want it to be," she purred, her long fingers trailing

under his chin. This one certainly turned him on, a feeling he hadn't experienced since the death of Melissa.

Nick smirked from his chair. Leave it to Drake to get all hot and horny.

Before he could finish his thoughts, an exotic nurse swept into the room, her ebony hair twisted into a tight braid. Nick could certainly see its glossiness from his seat, his mind wandering as to what those locks would feel like falling through his tented hands.

The new nurse bent down, stroking his chin softly and inflaming his senses, taking them beyond his control. "And who might you be." Her tone was warm and sexually exciting, making him really hard.

Suddenly, the only thought in his head was taking this nurse into another room and slamming it to her.

I'm with you, buddy, Drake commiserated telepathically.

Do you think we should. he answered, his gaze completely on the

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exotically beautiful woman in front of him.

Why not. We'll only be gone for a short bit and Elizabeth should be *fine*.

He was silent for a moment, trying to clear his head but the haze

surrounding it would not lift. Let's keep a trail on her and make sure nothing *happens to her. Raphael will be furious if we don't.*

You got it, Drake agreed as he rose from his chair, assisted by the beautiful blonde nurse.

He followed suit, attended by his exotic date. Drake was right. They'd only be gone for a moment then they'd be back before anyone was the wiser.

* * * *

Night fell around them with the vengeance of a wolf on a meal. Dark clouds rolled in, and lightning flashed through the night air. Blood tinted the night, making him hungry again but he ignored it. Elizabeth was in danger, despite the fact that Drake and Nick were with her.

Raphael wove the Jaguar through the deserted streets at the speed of

light, the wheels barely touching the pavement. With time running out, he'd had to use what was necessary to get him back to Elizabeth's side.

Thankfully, he moved so fast that cops couldn't see him, much less pull him over.

He slammed the car into a spot at the hospital parking lot and leaped out, moving at past everyone at the same speed he drove the car, no one giving him a second glance. At the door to Elizabeth's room, his blood pooled at his feet.

Her bed was empty.

So were Nick and Drake's chairs.

Where the fuck was everyone.

Raphael stormed out to the front desk, the heat of anger coloring his cheeks. "Where's my fiancée?" he demanded of a gum chewing nurse at the station who was busy having a useless conversation on the phone.

She put her hand over the receiver. "Just a minute sir," she whispered and removed her hand. "So what did Bobby say about me after I left the party."

Furious, he slammed his hand down on the

phone, shattering it to pieces. "I asked you a question. WHERE IS MY FIANC E." he bellowed.

The nurse, visibly shaken at the remnants of her precious phone sitting on her desk. "Wh ... what ... is ... her name."
"Elizabeth Quartermaine."

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She punched a few keys into the computer, her fingers shaking. "It looks like she's no longer with us."

"SHE'S DEAD." he shouted, his hands gripping the edge of the desk so hard that it left marks.

"No, sir, she was checked out of the hospital a short time ago," the nurse answered nervously, her eye narrowing as she stared at the screen. "It seems she was checked out by a Mr. Raphael Chamberlin."

"That's who I am," he snapped. "Who the hell checked her out."

She picked up Elizabeth's chart and flipped through it. "Here's her release forms," she said softly, her fear growing. "There's your signature,

sir," she offered him the chart with the correct form.

He looked at it hard. It looked like his handwriting but it wasn't. He formed his R's in a unique way. "Where are the two men that were in her room with her." he demanded.

"Right here, Raph," said Drake as he pushed through the doors of the emergency room, clutching his head. "I don't know what happened. They must have drugged us or something."

Nick was right behind him, weaving as he walked. "There were two of them and they used the sensuality spell to trick us into following them.

Zakara wove it in such a way that we couldn't pick up on it."

"Zakara took her," he growled. "I entrusted the most precious thing I have to you and you let Zakara get her!"

"Calm down, Raphael," Nick said as he sank into a waiting room chair. "Zakara is close, I can feel it."

His anger got the best of him. He ripped Nick out of his seat and slammed him against the glass panel of the waiting room, making it tremble.

"You think this is funny. What if Zakara had your

precious Tatiana. Would you think it was so hilarious then." He knew his true form had shown itself but he had enough sense to keep glamour covering it.

Nick's face changed to that of the vampire as well, his anger rising.

"No I wouldn't! Now put me down because the more time we waste here, the less chance Elizabeth will be alive."

He let Nick fall. "You're right," he snapped and stormed out the door.

"C'mon, we've got to find Elizabeth before it's too late."

Rain had begun to fall, softly at first before turning into a torrential downpour. Raphael ignored the water sluicing through his hair as he zoomed to his car with the others.

He stopped at the driver's side door, horrified. Someone had

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completely torn his car apart. Shards of glass littered the ground around the wrecked metal, bits of pale blue paint everywhere.

"Dear God in Heaven, Zakara's been here," Drake said slowly as he walked around the car. "Look what's on the windshield."

Despite his fury, Raphael walked around the front of what was left of his vehicle, his eyes narrowing. The windshield, the only intact thing on the car, bore a strange message to him.

Raphael,

I told you I'd get her and I did. Now it's up to you to find her. You have exactly forty eight hours. If you don't find her by then, she'll die. I will give you the first clue.

Z

His fists pounded the hood of the car, fracturing what was left of the metal. "That fucking bitch!" he shouted into the night. "When I'm done with her, she'll wish she stayed in Hell where she belongs."

Nick pushed him away from the car. "Allow me." With a quick flick of his wrist, the car began to repair itself. Metal joined where it should have been, the shards of glass became one again. Within a few moments, the car was completely restored, the haunting message

erased from the windshield.

"C'mon, let's go! Time's wasting!"

Raphael fished the keys out of his back pocket and jammed them into the lock. All three of them slid into the vehicle and waited for Raphael to start the engine. Before he could, Raphael saw the white paper taped to the steering wheel, the handwriting completely familiar.

He jerked it away, nearly tearing it in half.

I told you I'd leave you a clue so here it is. This will be the only one.

Swept by the sea, a serpent is led.

Some say by the blood of man he is fed.

He hunts by night, searching for his food,

An act so evil, nothing is good.

So here is your clue, dear Raphael,

You'll know where to find me, the waters never calm or still.

Your love will leave you, if you choose not to save her.

So there it is, my dear Raphael, the clue that you seek.

You have forty eight hours to find her. Without her, you are weak.

Though your anger blinds your vision, you will return to me, of that I have

no doubt.

Z

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The letter turned to fire in his hand, the gray ashes falling into his lap.

"Damn her back to hell where she belongs," he growled through clenched teeth, his anger bringing the beast within him to the surface. "She'll wish that's where she'd stayed when I get a hold of her."

"Then let's go, bro because there's not much time left," Nick snapped as he settled into the passenger seat, buckling himself in.

"Do either of you know of the place that she's talking about." His hands gripped the wheel so hard that the metal started to buckle under his fingers. Where the hell had Zakara taken Elizabeth.

Drake's expression brightened. "There's a place near Carnova Beach that has caves as well as waterfalls. I would bet my life she's hiding there."

Raphael leaned back in his seat, laying his head

against the rest. It made sense. She would choose to hide somewhere where it was dank and where she could cavort with her favorite familiars, the bats. There was no doubt she'd brought a few trusted minions with her to do her bidding, leaving the rest of them in her realm in Europe. "Do you know how to get there."

"This car isn't going to take us there, Raph. You know how we have to get there."

Damn! He hadn't flown in a long time and wasn't sure if he could anymore. "I'll drive to a remote location and we'll go from there."

"Then let's go!" Nick cried.

With those words still hanging in the air, Raphael gunned the engine and tore out of the parking lot and onto the wet streets, headed for someplace quiet and rural. His blood remained cold in his body, turning to ice as his anger stoked even higher. Zakara would know what punishment was when he found her.

* * * *

Liz opened her eyes to darkness, her heart

beating quickly. Where was she. Fear gripped her in its claws, not allowing her to move. Dimly, she could feel fingers and tongues dip into the wetness of her wrists. Had the hospital's electricity gone out. No, it couldn't have. A hospital wouldn't smell like a dark, musty cave.

"I'm glad to see you're awake," purred a slightly familiar female voice.

"Where ... am ... I." she said through dry, cracked lips. She longed for a drink of water but somehow, she knew she wasn't going to get it in this place.

Golden light flicked for a second and filled the room with dimness.

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What she saw raised her fear immensely. The moist, ominous chamber was made of black rocks. Terror caused her to try to rise, but she couldn't. Her wrists and ankles, splayed out, were tied down.

Jerking her head left, she saw that there were vampires on either side of her, licking at her arms. She screamed when

she saw all the puncture wounds on her, the blood running down her arms in rivulets. "What are you doing to me." she shouted, her voice echoing through the room.

Zakara stepped forward. She was exotically beautiful with her dark skin and topaz eyes. Long jet-colored hair hung down to her waist in abundant curls, topped by a crown of bright silver filled with precious gems.

A sheath of silver material skimmed her body, allowing her flesh to show through in strategic places. Evilly, she smiled, her long fangs appearing white and lethal. "By allowing my children to feed on you, I'm keeping you weak, my dear."

"Why did you bring me here."

Zakara laughed deeply. "To get Raphael here, of course. You're my bait. Once he gets here, I'm going to kill you again and bring him back into the fold. After all, he does belong to me."

"You can't own people, Zakara. Raphael is his own man...."

Zakara's footsteps echoed around her and the long talon-like fingernails skimmed up her leg. "Everyone I

create, I own. Shall I tell you about the time I made Raphael."

She turned her head away. "I don't want to hear this, Zakara. If you let me go, I'll see to it that Raphael comes back to you," she bargained, hoping Zakara would take the bait.

"Not good enough, Elizabeth. You see, if you were still alive, Raphael would try to escape me again to get back to you. I can't have that. Didn't you know I'm a woman who can't share."

"Whatever you do to me, don't kill him," she begged, the tears streaming down her eyes.

"I have no intention of killing him," Zakara replied in a deep voice. "I will enjoy him," she laughed. "Now it's story time." She turned to one of the other vampires, dressed all in black leather, and gestured for something. In a flash, a large chair resembling a throne was brought to the side of the stone slab that Liz lay on. Zakara sank down and crossed her legs demurely.

"Hmm, let me see, where to begin.... Ah, yes, the first moment I saw him. I guess it was several days before he'd met you. He was riding...." she

stopped, her face curling into a snarl. "Oh, this will never do. Here, let me

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show you what happened." She looked to one of her minions. "Bring me my crystal ball." Faster than the blink of an eye, it was in her hand. "Now, watch."

The globe was clear for a moment and turned milky, the smoke inside swirling around. Suddenly, the past started to come alive.

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Chapter 9

Strangely, her vision was clear, despite the fact that she was nearsighted. It was almost as if she had her

glasses on.

Rolling green hills greeted her, followed by vast forests and mountains. She saw Raphael riding his horse over the plush ground. He was gorgeous beyond all words. His dark hair curled over his collar, much longer than it was now. Custom-made breeches clung to his powerful thighs, disappearing into dark boots. His silk shirt was unbuttoned casually to his waist. He looked like he'd slipped off the cover of a romance novel.

Raphael continued to ride a little farther. Just as he was about to round a bend, he spied a broken down carriage with a young woman beside it.

"Are you all right." Raphael asked the young, dark-haired woman.

"My carriage is broken down and night is falling," she replied, rubbing her shoulders. "I'm frightened to be out here after dark."

Raphael's lips spread into a warm and inviting grin. "Where are your driver and footman."

"I've sent them on ahead to find help. I've got to stay here with the carriage because everything I own is here."

His grin widened, almost as if he was calculating something. "Why don't you come to my home and rest. I'll have some of my men come and gather your things. Then, in the morning, I can see you safely to your destination."

"Much thanks, m'lord, but I cannot...."

"Nonsense. Climb up on my horse and I'll take you to my home."

The girl seemed a little frightened but undaunted. Quickly, she strode over to his horse and took his hand.

Once the girl got up on the horse, Liz could see her identity. It was Zakara.

When his passenger was safely loaded, Raphael kicked his purebred horse in the flanks and headed toward the direction of the woods. Was that the way to his home.

The scene continued on until they reached a cavern buried deep within the forest. "Why are we stopping here." Zakara asked in a soft,

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girlish voice.

"No reason," he answered as he dismounted and pulled her from the horse.

"Then what are we doing here."

Liz could hear the fear in Zakara's girlish voice, her heart sinking.

Was Raphael going to commit the ultimate crime against a woman.

Raphael's lips immediately went to her neck, his hands all over her body.

"No!" she screamed, trying to get away from him but it was no use. He was far larger than she.

He overpowered her quickly. "Stop it do you hear! This is my land," he snapped, "And anyone or anything," his gaze traveled up and down her body lustfully, "belongs to me to do with as I wish."

Raphael was vicious and cruel as he forced the girl to the ground, violating her as harshly as possible.

Liz turned away. No, this wasn't the Raphael she knew. "Stop all these lies, Zakara," she said wearily, the tears running

down her cheeks. "I don't and won't believe anything you tell me or show me, no matter how long you torture me."

Zakara waved her hand over the globe, banishing the horrific vision.

"But it's not lies, bitch. Now you finally get to see the real Raphael. He is out only for himself and doesn't care about anyone. When he came upon you, he was looking to get laid, nothing more. You were just a toy to him."

"That's not true," she insisted weakly, her body feeling as though it were composed of nothing but wet rags. Deep in her heart, she knew that Raphael loved her beyond all question.

"Oh, but it is, my dear lard ass," Zakara purred as she set the globe on a red velvet pillow next to her. "It's all true. Now, tell me, are you willing to sacrifice yourself for someone who cares nothing for you."

She didn't miss a beat. "Yes. If by my death it means he will be free, then so be it."

Zakara's black brows knitted in anger, her darkly bronzed skin wrinkling in response. "He will never be free,"

she snarled as she rose up from her throne, moving her body in a fluid motion. "He was born to be my consort and rule by my side. Nothing will ever, EVER, change that. Not even your death will free him."

* * * *

Raphael's feet touched the beach at the same time as the others, anger

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fueling his movements. He stood there for a moment, catching a scent too faint for mortals to detect. It was the scent of death and fear, a once beautiful odor but no more. The only thing it signaled was the possible demise of his beloved. "She's around here." He inhaled a little deeper, trying to get the direction of her scent.

Several dank cave openings yawned before them, almost as if teasing them to try and choose the right one. "It figures she would choose this place," Nick muttered as he moved to Raphael's side, the sound of creaking leather mingling with the sting of the water

crashing against the rocks.

"I can smell her," Raphael said slowly as he moved toward the middle opening, his fists balling at his sides. He felt beads of blood form where his nails pierced his skin. "She's in the middle one."

Siobhan sniffed as well. "I thought perhaps she wouldn't want us back, but she does," she observed. "She wants us to return badly."

"That can't happen." Raphael charged ahead, the edges of his black leather coat whipping around his ankles. "I'll die before we go back to her."

"I'm hoping that won't be necessary," Drake said as he rose in the air.

"I'm ready for this fight tonight."

Raphael rose as well as the others. "So am I, my friend," he replied, his gaze trained toward the cave opening. "So am I."

* * * *

Liz opened her eyes. She was in completely new surroundings.

Instead of the dark little room she'd been in, she was in a wide open courtyard.

Moonlight came from an opening in the ceiling, the pale light turning

everything a ghostly gray. Tall stones surrounded the rock-hewn floor and pale colored moss grew all over everything. To one side, she could see a door chiseled with ancient symbols. She looked to her right. There was an identical door. Where was she.

She could feel the hard slab of rock underneath her, the points digging into her back. Tight iron bound her wrists to the stretches of stone on either side, the metal digging into her wrists.

Dark shadows moved within the arched porticos. Silently, they descended the steps, heading toward her. She couldn't see their faces because of the cowls covering their heads.

Liz wanted to scream but she wouldn't give Zakara the satisfaction of her fear even though she knew this was the end for her. Whatever happened from this moment on, she had to be strong for Raphael's sake.

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The figures stopped five feet away from her, their white, lethal fangs

glistening in the dim light.

Fear gripped her in its strong claws but she wasn't going to give in to it.

"They frighten you, I can tell," Zakara purred behind her.

"No, they don't," she replied as firmly as she could.

Clip. Clap.

She heard Zakara's footsteps as she came toward her. "Yes, they do,"

Zakara said, circling Liz. "No need to hide it from me, my dear. Beside the

stink of your body odor, you have the smell of fear," she announced, her

mouth opening to show the lethal fangs. "But don't worry, it will all be over

soon."

"I'm ready to die."

"No, you're not," Zakara snapped. "You humans are such a pathetic

race! You have the ability to remain young and beautiful forever, yet you

turn away from it! Do you not know the power of a vampire."

"I would rather die than become one of you."

Zakara strode to the table, leaning over it so that she hovered above

Liz's face. "You would become one if Raphael

wanted you to be."

She held her chin up as best she could. "He has already offered me your," she swallowed hard, "gift, and I did not accept it."

"How long will you hold out, mortal. A week. A month. A year.

Even if Raphael is true to you, how will you feel when you begin to age year after year yet he remains the same. What will you do then."

She turned away. Zakara was right. She had thought about it all.

Raphael was the center of her universe now, a man she could love for all eternity. Except her eternity was limited. "If you're going to kill me, bitch, just get it over with. I'm tired of your games."

Zakara let out an evil laugh. "You think I'm toying with you now. My dear, you have no idea of the games I have in mind for you." Her black eyes flicked to the band surrounding the stone slab. "Show her, my children, what kind of games I'm ready to play."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," warned a male from the dark shadows near her feet.

Liz craned her neck and saw with relief it was

Raphael stepping from the confines of the blackness. "Raphael, don't come any closer! If she kills me...."

"Then there will be hell to pay," he said, stepping forward, his pale

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face gleaming in the moonlight. Dark leather encased his body, topped by a flowing black cloak. Ebony hair danced around his shoulders, much longer than she had ever seen it, bits of it clouding his eyes. From her position, she could feel the anger radiating from him.

She turned to look at the others. Nick, Drake, Gabrielle, Alex and Siobhan were all standing behind him, outfitted the same way with the same determined look in their eyes.

"I see my prodigal king has returned to me," Zakara purred as she strode over to him with a panther-like grace. "Come, it is time to end this poor creature's life so that you can return to my side."

"If you end her life, then mine ends, too," he

snarled.

"You belong to me," Zakara insisted as she stroked her hand down his chest.

Liz felt her wall of resolve let go, allowing the fear to flood her entire being. She started to shake and shiver, the room suddenly much colder. How were they all going to stand against the most powerful vampire of them all.

"You never had me," he snapped as he gripped her wrist. "Let Elizabeth go."

Zakara cast an evil glance in her direction, making her heart beat even more erratically than before. "Never."

"Then, what you will not give, I will take by force," he warned, his white fangs shiny.

Zakara looked at her. "Sound familiar, you fool."

Liz looked away in order to avoid looking at Raphael. Even though she knew they were lies, the scene still lingered in her head.

Raphael's brows knitted in confusion. "What do you mean."

"I showed her our first time together, Raphael," Zakara purred.

"Surely you remember."

Liz watched Raphael's expression fall for a moment before turning to one of pure, unadulterated hatred and anger. "That wasn't how it happened and you know it."

"Come with me and I will show her the truth," Zakara promised as she brushed her supermodel body against him.

"No," he looked at Zakara's minions around her. "Get back." None of them moved a muscle. "Let me make things a little easier for you."

With a wave of his hand, vampires went flying around her head, their bodies smashing against the ancient stone pillars, their cries of anguish rising up through the air.

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Zakara laughed heartily. "That is the consort I remember," she turned to the others. "Get him!"

Liz watched in horror as Zakara's minions rose up and flew all around her, becoming streaks of black as they moved. Zakara herself stood back and watched Raphael and the others battle, her evil

laughter rising high in the air.

Please let him live, she prayed silently, because I don't want to live without him.

Without warning, some of Zakara's minions started bursting into

flames, turning to dust with no explanation at all. Zakara's face turned from one of mirth to abject horror as her precious children crumpled to dust before her.

"What have you done." she cried, rushing over to Raphael.

"I warned you, Zakara," he growled as he picked her up by the neck and held her off the ground. "You took what was mine once. I will not let you take her again."

She writhed in his grasp, the guttural growls escaping her throat. "You learned from my grimoire, didn't you. No one knows how to do that but me."

"I learned all of your tricks from that grimoire, including your sun spell. Now that you are no longer in power...."

Just as those words escaped his throat, Zakara laughed one more evil laugh and twisted in his grip, turning to smoke in

the process. Wisps rose up through the opening of the cavern, her laughter a dying echo of the cave.

"We have to find her," Nick murmured as he watched the last of the smoke disappear through the opening, "and destroy her."

"She'll live to fight another day," he said slowly. "What's important is that I have my Elizabeth back."

Raphael rushed over to her side, smothering her face with kisses. "Oh, my darling, they didn't hurt you, did they?"

She looked at him weakly. "A little," she stared at her arms. "Look."

Thunderous anger crossed his handsome features as he stared at the wounds. "My God, Elizabeth...."

"I'll heal, Raphael. The important thing is that you're still alive and well, maybe...."

His stare was intense and serious. "Zakara is gone, Elizabeth, and could strike you again at any given moment. I have to protect you and give you all the abilities to survive her. Do you know what that means."

"Free my hands," she begged. He snapped his fingers and the chains

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broke, falling to the floor with a clank. Now that her hands were unbound, she gripped his face between them. "I know what it means, Raphael."

"Are you willing to walk with me through eternity and be my loving wife."

She nodded without hesitation. Raphael was the only man for her and she knew that she would never find another man like him. "Yes, I will."

Raphael's lips spread into a wide, loving smile. "I'll make it as painless as possible."

"I know you will."

Liz turned her head so that Raphael could get better access to the artery in her neck.

Instantly, his lips grazed her throat, igniting all the sexual flames within her. Gently, he nipped here and there, trying to get her mind off of what he was about to do. She held her breath, signaling she was ready.

Taking his cue, Raphael sank his teeth into her

neck, the pain dull. Her heart beat quickened, all the better to pump her blood inside of him.

He sucked her throat hard, drawing all her blood into him. Dizziness set in quickly, her breathing becoming shallow. Strangely, she found this act completely erotic, the sudden rush of orgasm surging through her body....

Raphael pulled away, his mouth and chin covered in her blood. "Your heart is getting ready to stop," he said as he folded back the leather on his wrist. "I've got to give you what you need to save your life." He sank his teeth into his wrist, opening up a gaping wound. Blood poured from it, running down his arm. He slipped it to her mouth. "Drink."

The blood tasted salty at first but she quickly developed a taste for it.

She sucked from him, her hands wrapping around his arm. Greedily, she kept drinking....

"Enough!" he cried, jerking his limb away from her.

Immediately, she felt as though someone had punched her in the belly and every cell in her body was withdrawing from

a drug. She jerked around,
writhing on the stone slab.

Raphael's hand on her forehead did little to
calm the pain. "Your body
is dying its mortal death, my beloved. It will all be
over in a few moments
and you will be reborn."

Her heart beat slowed down even more, her
breath becoming harder
and harder. Is this what death was really like.

Beat ... beat ... beat....

Liz's heart stopped completely. She lay there for
a moment, unable to

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hear or see anything. Time seemed to stand still;
the coldness of the air crept
into her bones, making them slightly stiff. She
felt the others still around her,
watching and waiting for her to take her first
breath...

"Ugh!" she cried as she took her first breath.

"My beloved," Raphael murmured in her ear.
"You've come back to
me."

She rose up from the table and stared around
her. Everything seemed

so new, so bright. Her vision was restored to better than what it would have been had she not needed glasses. "Why do I feel so strange." she questioned as she sat there, looking around.

"Because you are now one of us," Raphael offered. "Look at your hands."

She looked down to see the prettiest hands she'd ever seen. The fingers were long and tapered with sculptured nails, unlike her short stubby fingers. Instead of a non-descript skin color, she was creamy with a rose tint to it. "Is this me."

"For all eternity," Raphael whispered as he lifted her off the table and into his arms. "Since this is your first night as a vampire, I thought we'd do something very special."

"Like what."

"Make love all night long," he said into her ear.

"I think I can handle that," she replied as she wrapped her arms around his neck. "But there's one problem. I'm still bleeding from the miscarriage."

"No, not anymore," he said. "You're no longer human."

She remained silent for a moment, his words sinking in. Not being human meant no more periods, which for her was a godsend because she'd always had horrible ones, but that also meant no possibility of children. She laid her head against his shoulder. "I suppose it doesn't matter now," Liz looked up into Raphael's deep emerald eyes, finding the strength there she need. "I have a question."

"What is that."

"How are we getting home."

The corner of his mouth turned upwards in a sensual motion. "Don't you know. Vampires can fly."

* * * *

"I'm sorry to see you go, Liza," Dean Waters said half-heartedly as he shifted through the mountain of papers on his desk. "You are well respected

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and well liked."

She squeezed Raphael's hand tighter. "There's more to life than respect and likeability."

Dean Waters looked up, his eyes full of questions. "I'm amazed that you and Professor Chamberlin became close so quickly," he said in astonishment. "I guess it's the new hair color and attitude."

She nodded, her heart full. For the first time in her life, she felt as though she truly belonged somewhere. "Maybe, but I think it was Professor Chamberlin's gentle nature that helped me see the light." Liz turned and caught Raphael's eye, smiling all the while. "I think it's time to get out and see a bit of the world."

"Like where."

This time, Raphael chimed in. "We're planning on visiting my ancestral home in England. After that, who knows."

Dean Waters rose from his chair and extended a hand. "Well, best of luck to both of you. Though I hate to see you both go, I want you to know there's always a place for you here."

She rose and took his limp, clammy hand. "Thank you, Dean. I might come back ... someday."

"When are you leaving."

Liz stifled a giggle. "Soon."

"Can we at least throw you a going away party. I'm sure some of your students would like to say goodbye."

"There won't be time," Raphael offered as he shook Dean Waters' hand. "We're leaving this afternoon."

"That's a shame. What airline are you taking."

They looked at each other, smiling all the while.

"It's a brand new airline so I'm sure you've never heard of it."

Raphael gestured for her to go ahead and she stepped out of the confines of the chair. "We've really got to go, Dean but we'll keep in touch."

"Please do," he called out to them as they left his office.

They hurried down the hall and out to the waiting limousine, the gray skies looming overhead. A chauffeur held the door open to allow her to climb in. Raphael followed.

The door slammed, giving them some privacy. Raphael quickly found the privacy glass button and pushed it, the gentle motor pushing it up.

"Finally, we're alone," he murmured. His hand crept up her thigh.

"Not here," she said weakly, thoroughly enjoying

the attention.

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"Let me show you something."

"What."

"Just close your eyes. It will be something you'll enjoy."

* * * *

Fingers of orange spread out into the deepening sky as the sun sank low behind the horizon. Sea tinted air swept around them as they stood on the cliffs overlooking the ocean, watching the sun-dappled waters drift lazily by.

"I'm going to miss this," she sighed against his chest. "I've always loved sunsets."

"I will as well but it's better to start traveling by night now. Zakara more than likely went back to Egypt to search her grimoire for an antidote for the sun spell." He said quietly, his arms tightening around her.

"Do you think she would."

"Without a doubt."

Strange questions began to fill her head. "What

are you going to do
with the Jag."

"I had it shipped over yesterday. As for your car"

She hugged him tighter. "I've already rented my
apartment and car to
someone on campus. They'll take good care of it
until I get back."

"You don't need those things, you know."

"Just like you don't need the Jag," she chided
softly.

He laughed quietly. "Okay, you got me there."

Raphael let out a
resigned sigh. "Do you regret anything."

She looked up into his loving eyes. "Not one
thing." Liz looked out at
the beach one last time, watching the surf come
in to kiss the balmy white
sand. "Are you ready."

"I've never been more ready in my life."

* * * *

Her tongue ran over the tips of her fangs,
drawing beads of blood as
she watched Elizabeth and Raphael on the edge
of the cliff, rising high in the
air as they took off and headed for Europe.

Zakara's nails dug hard into the tree she held
onto, bits of bark falling
to the ground at her feet. If Raphael thought he
could best her by turning that

fat toad into a vampire, he'd better think again. She wasn't finished yet, not by a long shot. In fact, she'd barely begun.

Her lips curled into a tight smile as the black blurs disappeared against the haze of the setting sun. She would let them have a short time together, let

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them get comfortable and get their guard down. When the time was right, she was moving in for the kill.

"You make me proud, my daughter," Father echoed behind her, the intense heat from his body almost blistering her skin.

She turned to see Father standing there, in all his hellish glory. "That's all I've ever wanted to do," she confessed. "But now it seems I've failed."

His black brows wrinkled. "How so."

"I've let Raphael slip through my fingers."

Father let out a maniacal laugh, his talon-like fingers going to his hips.

"If I know you as well as I think I do, Zakara, he will not stay out of your range for long."

She turned to stare at the setting sun, watching the last rim of the orb disappear below the horizon. "You can count on that, Father."

THE END