



## Fight for Love

By  
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The loud music vibrated through the room, making his head pound. The flashing lights didn't help matters either. Michael McDowell took another long swig of his beer. He couldn't get his mind off the book he found left on his doorstep. Its leather binding showed it was old; the pages dark, as if someone had fingered them often. Some words appeared smeared, making sections difficult to read, but he worked out many of the meanings from the rest of the sentences. His mind couldn't wrap around the fact the book looked hundreds of years old.

When he had opened the pages, the air thickened around him. It was eerie, but he couldn't stop reading. The story of the female vampire especially caught his attention. As he read, the words leapt off the pages, speaking directly to him. He envisioned the woman. Dark hair, her features in shadow, but somehow he sensed she was tough...and in trouble.

One of his friends slammed down his beer bottle on the table, bringing him from his thoughts.

Michael turned to Peter, "You wouldn't believe this book. It talks about a Dark King and White King, both heads over some vampire community."

Peter rolled his eyes. "Mike, you worry me with all this vamp talk, man. Enjoy the scene, pick up a woman, and take her home. Bite her neck if you must." He raised his beer towards a table full of women and Michael's other two friends raised their glasses also. Michael just looked at the women. They were beautiful, but none of them made him feel more than just lust. Even though lust was a strong emotion, it just wasn't enough anymore. He wanted more.

"Now wouldn't that be better than some vampire?" Peter said, looking back at him with a half smirk on his lips, his eyes just a little glossy, showing his state of relaxation. "I bet they wouldn't mind biting you, if that's what you like." Peter wiggled his eyebrows and laughed.

Michael turned his attention away from the women and tried to steer their conversation back

to his interest. “You should see this book. It’s old and talks about this war that has been going on. One story has been marked. Highlighted almost. It talks of this vampire chick.” Michael thought about the story and the way it described her abilities. Quick on her feet and deadly silent. She could sneak up on the most unlikely suspect and kill them without any further thought. Unfortunately, it didn’t describe her and the image he conjured up while reading had quickly faded.

“Well, yeah. This sounds fascinating and all,” Peter laughed and downed his drink while he started to rise from the table, “but I’m out of here, man. Got to get up early.” Michael nodded and took another swig of his beer. Ted and David were still here with him. Soon they also said their good-byes and left him completely alone. Even with all the other bodies in the place he felt lonely. Abandoned. He couldn’t even think of a reason to stay or a reason to go. As he looked around at the gyrating couples, he figured anything was better than sitting, watching other people get lucky.

He hoped one more beer would help him through the night. The cool liquid easily slid down his throat and eased his tension, but triggered his arousal. Even though the liquid was cool going down, it seemed to spread warmth through his body, focusing on his cock. Damn, he needed to get some action.

It had been such a long time since he was with a woman. He missed how smooth their skin felt and how good they could smell. But when he looked at the ones available, he just didn’t feel it. He wanted the feeling that was supposed to be all-consuming, all-powerful. The feeling when you knew you were beyond just one night stands.

“Damn Mike, you’re getting soft in your old age.” He was only thirty, but his life was in a rut. He needed something, anything to shake him up. As he left the bar behind him the night

swallowed up his words, leaving the dark absent of any sound. Even the noise from the bar dissipated in the void of darkness. He shivered.

These days he hadn't really had a chance to date. One day morphed into the next. Loneliness had crept up on him. The books he read kept him distracted enough. But of course, reading about vampires was always an interesting subject. He hoped there was more to this world than just the three dimensional beings here now.

The echoes of his steps on the pavement were loud between the sleeping buildings. Clip, Clip, Clip. Michael laughed. Even his laughter was swallowed up by the darkness. The air crackled around him with some force that felt unnatural, but he brushed it off and continued forward.

Just a few more blocks and he'd be home. Nothing would feel better than crawling into his bed and falling asleep. Well, he could think of one other thing, sliding between silken legs of a dark haired beauty that could wrap her long limbs around his waist. Then he would angle his body so that the tip of his cock would brush against her warm, moist entrance. With his hands he could caress the silky skin along her outer thighs and up where her breasts begged for his attention. He wanted to feel the warmth of a moist pussy sucking his dick into its depth. It has been far too long.

"Damn!" Michael staggered as he grabbed at the bulge in his pants, hoping to move it to a more comfortable angle.

*Crash!*

Something loud fell in the alley he was approaching and caused his carnal thoughts to flee. The alley usually housed the local homeless with their houses made from boxes. He avoided looking down the alley, not wanting to draw the attention of their dark, soulless eyes. Now,

though, something beckoned him forward. The air was electrically charged. His hair stood up on his arms. Someone was fighting. The sounds echoed off the brick walls and out onto the street where he was.

He should probably just walk away. Yes, just walk away and get home where it was safe. But his curiosity always got the better of him, always wanted something exciting to happen to him. The alcohol tonight didn't help him think rationally either.

Michael walked up slowly to the opening in the alley. The stench of urine hung heavy in the air, making him cover his nose and mouth. He placed a hand on the corner of the building and slowly eased his head around, just enough to see what was happening. Trash cans clashed together, some flying across the center of the alley.

A scream rent the air around him. A feminine shrill cut through the night and made him jump. His heart beat faster as his mind tried to comprehend what was happening. He peeked a little further into the alley. A rush of wind rounded the corner and his eyes watered.

He stood there motionless, trying to put the pieces of what he was seeing together. He regretted having that last beer. If he hadn't stayed at the bar, then he wouldn't be here now watching some mad man beat up...what was it? He squinted his eyes to get a closer look. Was that a woman?

"Holy hell," he whispered.

He could see the individual was small with long, flowing hair that flew in wild strands around the lithe body. The dark alley made her outline blend with its surroundings so that he couldn't tell much about her. Once between kicks and punches, he caught a glimpse of her small waist and breasts. He definitely knew this person was a woman. His heart pounded in his chest. His pulse raced along, pushing the blood in his veins faster and faster. His breathing caught in

his throat and as he watched her graceful fight; he knew he had to help her.

Frozen to the spectacle before him, Michael watched as she landed, then rolled onto her feet like a cat. She crouched down with her hands and one knee on the pavement. The shadows kept her in the dark, but Michael could make out the movements of her head. Slowly, she looked up into her opponent's eyes, waiting for just a second.

Michael held his breath, curious to see what would happen next. His heart beat twice, hard against his chest. The leap was so sudden Michael gasped, and then hoped they didn't hear him. He turned quickly, leaning back against the wall, praying any sounds he made would be absorbed into those of the fight.

He still heard the punches and kicks. Peeking around the corner once more, he saw her hit the bigger guy square in the jaw. No normal woman could throw a punch with that sort of force behind such a tiny fist. Michael's mouth dropped at the sight of watching her pound into the bigger person as if he were nothing more than a practice punching bag. Not once did she let up. Her grace hypnotized him. He felt proud for her as she hit her assailant. The sound of grunts and flesh on flesh rent the air. Wow! There was some strength in that little body. How could someone so small wield such power, he wondered.

Her movements, her passion for the fight aroused him further. What would such a woman be like in bed?

"Raven, STOP!" said the bigger man, his breathing labored from the continuous blows. His muscles looked as if they would burst from his shirt. A mixture of their blood splattered across the front and down his blue jeans. Little splotches dotted his shoes and the pavement around his feet. The sleeves were torn on his shirt from their battle.

Just when she hesitated to listen to him, the bigger guy attacked. Time slowed for Michael.

No sound came from his mouth as he tried to warn her with a shout to watch out. The big guy curled his hand into a fist and brought it down hard across her cheek.

One blow and her body twirled in slow motion to fall lifeless to the ground. How could she not have seen that one coming? Damn! Her black hair blanketed the surface of the cement. Raven's face pointed towards the back of the alley and her arms and legs were motionless in odd angles. Michael watched in shock as the monster of a man looked over her body. Her opponent reared back his leg, landing a kick in her side. A grunt sounded from the broken heap of her body on the ground. Seemingly satisfied, the apparent winner turned and dissolved. *Dissolved!*

Michael gasped! Frozen in place, his limbs wouldn't move as he stared into the darkened alley with the small form lying in the middle. A small light from an upper window illuminated her legs and he saw the small muscles outlined by her black leather outfit.

Michael stood still against the wall, just barely peeking around the corner, trying to comprehend what just happened. Was he hallucinating? Did that last drink really tip him over that much? He usually drank more than what he did tonight. Why was the alcohol affecting him this way now? No way could that man have dissolved into thin air. He rubbed his eyes then opened them again, hoping the unmoving form was not what he thought it was, a dead woman.

No luck. The small, lifeless body still covered the ground. Michael waited a moment to make sure the other guy wasn't coming back before he slowly progressed inside the alley. He needed to see how badly injured this slip of a woman was. He couldn't believe she had taken a beating like that for so long and returned in kind with such force.

Step by step, the petite creature became clearer to him. His heart that had beat so fast just moments ago now stopped as he stared down at her, at Raven. His stomach tightened as his worst thought was realized. She was dead. Standing there in shock at her beaten body, he



became angry with himself. How could he not have tried to help instead of watching as she was beaten bloody?

“I’m so sorry,” he whispered. Maybe it wasn’t too late for her. He looked around and back down to the entrance of the alley. No one seemed to have passed by. How would he explain a dead body to the police? They might even think he was the one who had killed her. Taller than Raven, anyone looking might assume he’d been the one that had beaten her.

Bending down, he placed one knee close to her side. Her jet-black hair partially covered her face, but the bruises peeked out from in between the strands. Black and blue marks colored her jaw line. Anger welled up inside him for allowing such disfigurement. A need to protect her, to shield her from anything more overcame him. Her beauty lay within; somewhere underneath the torture she’d endured. Her split lip trickled blood down the side of her chin. She lay unmoving, almost as if she were asleep rather than dead. The contrast of her pale skin against the blackness of her hair mesmerized Michael. His hand itched to touch her, to feel her pale skin that didn’t look healthy.

Even in death she was beautiful, despite the remains of the fight still heavy on her features. What would she have looked like before, with the light revealing every smooth curve of her jaw or the color of her eyes? Would her skin still look pale like it did now?

Michael moved the strands from her face, exposing more of her flesh. Gently, his fingers brushed along her cheek. Jesus! Her skin was already turning cold. He’d been too late to save her. A wave of guilt, along with his anger, tightened his chest. He clenched his fists together, feeling like he wanted to punch something. If anything it would relieve the ache he was now feeling.

As her dark lashes lay softly against her pale skin, guilt built inside him. Why had he not

defended her when the opportunity was there? *How could I have allowed him to even touch you?*

Ashamed, he gently caressed her jaw, knowing that at any moment someone could walk up and find him leaning over her. Her skin was so smooth.

Michael looked back to the edge of the alley once again. He needed to find a phone to call for help even though it was too late, but he didn't think he could leave her. He bent close to her chest and listened, shocked when he heard her heart pounding strong next to his ear. He felt instant relief that she had not died.

Then she took in a deep breath, and as her lips opened slightly he noticed two pointed canines. His heart sped up. Fear gripped him, but he looked closer just to be sure. As she breathed in and out her lips twitched just enough for him to verify that they were in fact longer than the rest and pointed, razor sharp.

"What are you?" He whispered into the night. Unconsciously, his hand went up to his neck and rubbed the skin there.

In his mind he felt a soft flutter, like a hand lightly caressing him. It was welcoming and actually calmed his tight nerves.

*Fear not, human. I will be fine. He did not hurt me too badly. Nothing the blood flowing in your veins cannot heal.*

Startled at the sudden intrusion into his mind, Michael stumbled away from her broken body, crawling as fast as he could until he bumped into the brick wall. He was surely hallucinating now.

What did she say? She wanted his blood!

Just like...just like the vampires he read about. They all needed blood to heal. Could she be for real? With his gaze darting back and forth, he feared one of his friends was playing a cruel

joke on him.

*No one is playing a joke, dear man. I can't explain now, but yes, there is more in this world than just humans.* Her voice drifted softly through his mind. It beckoned him, eased his nerves, and made his body relax. He wanted to float across the air to allow this woman anything she wanted. Yes, he wanted to give her everything.

*Yes, that's it. Come to me.*

"Stop it!" Squeezing his eyes shut, he willed the voice to stop. His senses slowly returned. The delicate caress stroked his senses again, but he forced his mind to stay aware.

*Please come back to me. Don't be frightened. I need to take just a little from you to gain some energy. I will not hurt you.*

The voice grew weaker. Somehow, Michael felt her energy fade. Since he didn't help her before, maybe, just maybe, he could now. What she asked of him sounded a little crazy, but hadn't he always hoped there was more in this life? More than just the boring life he led. Now was his chance to see if what he had hoped for was real. *Could she really be a vampire?*

Michael felt strangely curious and a bit afraid of how her teeth would feel sinking into his neck. But how could he deny such a beautiful woman anything? Especially one that was so mysterious and exactly what he wished for.

He would do what he could for her now and be the man he knew he was, one that helped others and didn't turn away when needed. He couldn't be fearful of life and what was in store for him, even if this turned out to be some crazy episode only in his mind. He hoped it wasn't.

Watching her with suspicion, he made his way across the hard, cool pavement slowly back to her. The unforgiving asphalt underneath his knees caused them to ache. The air around him grew warmer as he felt the ghost of her hand lightly rub his arm. Shivers raced down his spine

and caused goose bumps to rise on his skin. The mental caress was a little creepy, but he continued forward.

The closer he got to her, the more he was drawn into her eyes. He noticed the vibrant blue of her half-open eyes looking unnatural. Nothing in this world could have eyes the color of the clearest ocean. He was happy she had found the strength to lift her lids. Something about her appearance felt familiar. While he looked at her his stomach tightened, his heart beat loudly against his chest. He wanted to scoop her up, taking her away from what stalked her. Her eyes, white mixed with the blue creating a vortex of colors, held his gaze. The different hues swirled together, drawing him closer and closer. He felt his body falling into the colors; the world around him slowly slipped away, the motion carried him forward into an unknown void.

He shook his head hard to clear his mind. "Do not try to," he waved his hand in the air, "do that mind-altering thing to me. I've read about vampires." He'd play along with this little game or hallucination. At least his mind had conjured up a beautiful woman and he wasn't just lying at home alone in a cold bed. *But could this be reality?* He was stressed, but he wasn't stressed enough where his mind would start to play tricks on him.

*Please, love, I am growing weaker. Your blood calls to me like no other... I must have a taste.*

Her transmission through his mind brought his thoughts back to her. Her eyes fluttered shut and did not reopen. He felt a pain in his heart at the loss of seeing their glorious color. His need to help her grew stronger. Michael looked at her beaten body, the thought of what she was asking of him set in.

"What can I do to help you?" He hoped he didn't take too long to respond and she was strong enough to answer him. She didn't move and his heart began to ache, thinking he'd lost

her. Damn. He was too caught up in her to leave her for help. She needed blood, but how could he get her to feed if she had no strength?

Quietly in his mind he heard her answer. *Place me in your lap...gently...cradle my head to your neck...* Her thought abruptly broke away.

Michael carefully but quickly picked her body up from the pavement. He scooped her up in his arms, then pulled her close to his chest. She fit perfectly in his arms, like she'd been made just for him. What would it feel like to have those lush lips brush along his neck? What would it feel like when her teeth broke his skin? Excitement warred with curiosity as he debated the thought.

Michael held her neck beneath her ebony strands. The skin beneath his palm felt smooth. The hair ran over his hand, causing tiny shivers to break out across his body. He closed his eyes for a moment, letting the current of feeling race through his every cell. Her scent smelled of flowers, sweet and a little musky. He inhaled deeply, taking the scent inside him. His groin twitched in recognition of her closeness. He couldn't help the way his attention drifted to her features. She felt good next to his skin. Something inside him called out to her. Where he touched her neck a warm current raced through his fingers, up his arm, and slammed into his chest.

No, not his chest, but his heart.

Opening his eyes, he looked down at her pale face and knew this was the woman he had been waiting for. Being strong, tough, mysterious, and a vampire, she was everything he wanted! He'd sobered up quickly through this ordeal. He couldn't blame what he was doing on a hallucination or drunkenness anymore. This was really happening. He held the woman of his dreams in his lap. And he was about to let her suck his blood.

*Please, I do not have much time before I'll be too weak...*

As the sensation in his arm dulled, he pulled her head to his neck. His mind cleared long enough for him to wonder if her bite would hurt. Would she suck him dry, where he'd be the one lying lifeless on the ground? Was he placing too much trust in his curiosity and in her? Could this be some sort of trick? Vampires were conniving creatures from what he read.

Scared, he pulled her away from his neck.

*I feel your fear. I told you I would not hurt you. In fact, you will enjoy giving yourself to me very much. Please, love; please do not deny me.*

Her desperate plea softened his heart and he pulled her close once again. He held her tight around the back and slightly bent his head so his neck was directly in the path of her lips.

*Ah, her lips.* They brushed his neck softly. His blood instantly charged and raced through his veins, anticipating her. He became even more aroused waiting for her. Michael suddenly didn't just want her lips on his neck, but on his whole body. He wanted to feel them brush over the head of his cock and feel her tongue play along the sensitive ridge.

Every muscle inside his body jerked. He felt his blood rushing inside his veins, making him more aware of the sensation of her lying against him. Her bottom curved against his lap, making his hardness nestle against the leather that held her muscular ass.

Michael pulled her in a little closer, using his other hand to support her head. Just when he thought he felt something sharp scrape his skin, the most overwhelming feeling of desire slammed into him. He fought to keep his hold on her. The pleasure of her sucking on his neck could be felt throughout every limb and down into his toes.

In return, he wanted to stroke his arms over her petite frame while feeling the muscles of her legs under his fingertips. Closing his eyes, he allowed the sensations to course through his body,

making his erection harder.

Images of them formed in his mind. Naked, they lay on a bed of soft moss. His hands held her bare hips as she straddled him. Her hair flowed down around her shoulders in a wave of obsidian, covering the mounds of her breasts. Rubbing his nipples with her palms, his groin reacted to the stimulation and pulsed against the inside of her thigh.

He only thought he'd been hard earlier. Now his erection felt painful, yet pleasurable with his need to be inside her. Her body was no longer bruised, but perfect, pale skin. He wasn't within her yet, but felt her moisture on his hips and knew there would be no resistance. Her honey dripped across his waist and he raised his hips in hopes of easing inside her.

Oh, the feeling of having her on top of him drove into him with excruciating pleasure! He needed, yes! He needed to be inside her.

The world went wild with her movements across his naked skin. The contrast of his warm body and her coolness only made his desire soar. Her hands were all over his body, then one hand made its way between them until she cupped his balls in her hands. He took in a quick breath as her nimble fingers wrapped around his shaft. God, the tight sensation brought his release close. He forced control as she moved her hand up and down, up and down over his erection.

"What are you doing, HUMAN!"

Jerking back to himself, Michael almost threw Raven away from him. But he didn't, instead he held her close as he watched the man standing at the entrance of the alley; the same man who'd badly beaten Raven earlier. They couldn't escape that way.

"Raven is not to be healed!"

Michael wondered if anyone heard the man screaming and had come running to check it out.

If he was a vampire too, then he had all kinds of other-worldly powers. One of those abilities would surely mask any noise that might cause alarm.

Damn. What was he going to do? He needed to make sure Raven survived.

Raven didn't falter taking his blood. Steadily she kept at his neck, but the pleasure grew less as he watched the big man come closer to them. The need to protect her grew in his heart.

Michael couldn't allow that man to hurt her again. No! They had a connection now and he must protect her, even though he knew this monster approaching could probably tear him into bits of nothing.

*You must stop, Raven. Your boyfriend is really close, and I don't think he's too happy about seeing you suck my neck.* Michael was a little shocked that speaking to her mind came easily.

Stronger, Raven responded without taking her mouth from his neck. *He is not my boyfriend, he was sent to kill me because his master believes me a threat.*

She stirred in his lap, first moving her legs, then her arms. She brought one arm around him and pulled him closer to her, allowing her chest to press firmly to his. As she began to breathe, her breasts pressed intimately against him. Pulling slightly from his neck, she licked his wound and sent a jolt of awareness to his groin. She planted a kiss on Michael's cheek and rose from the ground. She didn't just stand up, but floated away from Michael before placing her feet on the cement, facing the bigger man.

*When Gregory gets close, my sweet, you will have to distract him. Can you do that?* Raven didn't take her eyes off the towering creature making his way towards them.

Before Gregory got close to Raven, his focus turned to Michael. Michael's heart beat faster as the look in the man's eyes projected Michael's death. Gregory's deep eyes glowed red as they bore into his soul. An evil smile curved the lips of Raven's assassin.



Michael stood motionless as the monster stepped closer.

“You think to protect her, human? She is marked for death. If not by me, then by someone else. Stand aside while I finish this off.”

The adrenaline racing through Michael’s body searched for a release. His skin prickled and a thought niggled at the back of his mind that he might not live through the night. The alley suddenly shrank around him and offered no escape. Heat danced across Michael’s skin, feeling as if the monster was trying to set him on fire.

As he tried to ignore the tingles of heat on his body, Michael looked around him for something to use as protection. There, just a foot away was a wooden pole lying on the ground. It looked sturdy and, if used effectively, it would hinder Gregory from beating him to death. At least not too quickly. Maybe that would distract him and allow Raven to escape.

Raven entered Michael’s mind, distracting him for a moment. The feel of her there was more intimate than anything he had ever come across. He found he liked it as he was instantly assaulted with images. Images telling him how he could kill Gregory. Oddly enough, Michael wasn’t at all sure that he could get close to the big galoot.

Michael chocked up on his weapon, waiting for Gregory to approach. He didn’t wait long.

Gregory strode within a few feet of him. Like a Viking from old, Gregory’s red hair hung wildly around his face. His clothes almost matched the same era, but Michael could see he’d worn modern day jeans that now looked like they’d seen better days.

Gregory screamed his battle cry and launched through the air towards Michael.

As the large form headed in his direction, Michael swung the bat, hitting Gregory in the shoulder. The blow didn’t even faze the otherworldly giant, but did knock Gregory off his intended target.

Facing Raven, Michael still stood with his hand steadily gripping his weapon. Looking at Raven, he felt something foreign flood his senses. She smiled, touching his mind with the knowledge that no one had ever offered protection to her. Before he had a chance to study the implication of the thought she'd sent, a noise dragged his attention back to Gregory.

He stared at Michael with hate-filled eyes. His lips were drawn back in a snarl and showed his large, pointed canines.

*Well, well, another vampire.*

Gregory moved with quick grace, coming within an inch of Michael's face. Michael inhaled deeply. Unfortunately, the scents of the alley engulfed his nose, making him almost gag. His instinctive reaction drew his attention away from Gregory for a moment; long enough for Gregory to rear back and pummel Michael across the cheek.

Gregory pulled his arm back for yet another attack. "Now, human, stay out of our business!"

When the punch landed, Michael felt its power clear down to his toes. The force completely erased all remaining thoughts of this being a hallucination. The pain was more real than anything else Michael had ever known. Lights burst behind his eyes and he willed them to stay open.

Shaking his head, he stepped out of the way just as another blow was imminent. The strike would have killed him if he hadn't moved. Gregory tried yet again to land another blow with his large fist, but Michael stumbled away. He couldn't allow the vampire to connect another punch.

Gregory laughed and continued to advance on him, the look of triumph already across his face.

Michael stepped back and focused on the middle of Gregory's body, hoping he would discover a flinch of muscle that would betray his adversary's next movement.

Gregory continued forward, undeterred.

Michael cocked his weapon as he prepared to administer a blow. Swinging back, his weapon whipped through the air towards his target. It stopped hard after connecting with Gregory's cheek. The vibrations rattled up Michael's arms up into his teeth as if he'd crashed into a wall.

Raven appeared behind Gregory and kicked him in the back. The large man fell forward, then turned to her with heat filling his eyes.

Michael knew he had to do something quick, so he hit him again across the wide expanse of his shoulders to draw Gregory's attention back to himself.

Gregory staggered, then turned back to Michael and attacked.

Raven's blow had only angered Gregory more. The hatred in his eyes grew to massive proportions. As Michael looked into the black orbs, the darkness called to him. A haze crept across his mind. An inviting feeling of peace surrounded him and he dropped his arm with the weapon to his side.

"Don't look into his eyes, Michael," called Raven's sweet voice, pulling him from the clenches of Gregory's power.

Shaking his head, he narrowed his eyes at Gregory. He was grateful that Raven brought him out of hypnotic gaze. It could have been the end of him, and he already hoped for so much more. Specifically, more time to spend with Raven.

As his mind refocused a punch landed in his chest, knocking the air from his lungs and making all thoughts of the future vanish. Stumbling away from the monster, Michael tried to tap into energy he wasn't sure he had.

Slowly, a powerful sensation started in his chest, radiated through his arms and into his fingers. The force continued down his waist and into his legs. He felt strong and firm.

Gregory stopped in his tracks. The man was unmoving, as if something held him locked in place. Michael watched as Gregory struggled to free himself. His movements proved futile. The invisible barrier held him tight.

"Please," said Gregory. "Do not kill me. I only carry out the orders of our king."

Michael felt an unknown entity inhibit his body. His mouth opened as a voice not his own escaped. "I am your true King, Gregory. You will not hurt this vampire and her human anymore."

Her human? Michael's mind tried to process the statement, but the force inside him pushed his own thoughts away. Energy gathered in Michael's hand with the pole. Swiftly the rod was brought down like a stake and buried deep in Gregory's chest, followed by a loud sucking noise. With his heart punctured, Gregory disintegrated instantly as he screamed into the night.

Inside Michael's head the unknown being spoke. *You and Raven are safe for now. Take her away before her Dark King finds her here.*

Then the foreign being was gone.

Michael collapsed to the ground as his energy quickly left him. He felt like a shell now that the other thing left. Slowly, he started to feel normal again. The beat of his heart pounded in his chest and in his temples. Michael grabbed his head in hopes the pain would ease.

Slowly he raised his eyes to Raven, who had raced to his side. Her bruises had vanished and all that was left was the pale porcelain skin and her now perfect crimson lips. Her beauty astounded him. They sat there and stared into each other's eyes while he tried to comprehend how she came to look so healthy.

He wanted this woman. It was like a great hand had worked its way inside his chest to squeeze every organ it could get around. He wanted her and didn't ever want to see her hurt

again. Although she was probably a lot stronger than he was, he hoped neither of them would fight again.

Raven offered her hand to help him rise. Her strong grip easily brought him to his feet.

"Are you okay," she asked softly. "Did you know you could channel entities?"

*Channel entities?* He looked at her, puzzled.

She touched his cheek and smiled. "You didn't know, did you?"

"No, I have no idea what you're talking about. I have no idea what is even really happening here."

She cast her eyes away, but he placed his hand underneath her chin and eased her around to look back at him. Pain and weariness crossed her eyes for a moment, making him wish that he didn't have to dig deeper.

"What's going on, Raven?"

"You have some psychic ability. That was how the other being got into your mind. Also," Raven looked down as if she was nervous. "I am a vampire warrior."

Michael was a little shocked at the outright statement. "What does that mean, exactly?"

What was behind her eyes that she tried to keep hidden? Out of all the books he'd read, he couldn't recall any mention of vampire warriors. Except for the new one that had just mysteriously shown up a few days ago.

"The Dark King was my master and now he wants me dead. After I killed a few maidens of the White kingdom, the guilt was too much for me. I'm tired. I just want to live my own life."

The Dark King? Holy Shit! She was using the titles from the old book. He tried to wrap his mind around what she revealed.

Michael dusted off his clothes. Small aches and pains crept into his muscles.

When she wrapped her arms around his waist he instantly became aware of her softness next to him. An electric jolt shocked him where they touched, but he didn't pull away. He liked the way she tried to handle him. The way she tried to make him support his weight on her.

"Why does he want you dead, and why did that thing inside me call me your human?"

Raven laughed. The sound was like a million angels singing a chorus. He squeezed her closer as they began to walk away from the alley. The night had grown considerably colder and she wasn't giving off much heat.

"I like your laugh," he whispered.

Raven looked over at him with a smile now in her eyes and completely ignored his comment. She continued talking. In his mind he felt her touch. Their blood connection somehow let him feel her feelings. She was embarrassed, but pleased with his compliment. She did have a beautiful laugh.

He leaned in closer to her, enjoying the prickle of sensation between them. He felt her hands on his side. Actually, her arms were nearly wrapped entirely around his stomach, her hands almost touching one another. Just a scant lower and she could brush his semi-erect penis. Inwardly, he groaned and tried to focus on her words.

"The Dark King wants me dead because I will not become his queen and I refused to kill any more of the White King's maidens."

"I can see why he would want you. You're lovely." He felt her blush and the strange feeling that being so close to him was arousing to her. He enjoyed the way she shared his warmth with her at his side and didn't want anyone else to be more important in her life.

A wall erected in her mind, keeping him out. He felt disappointed at the loss. Raven stopped their progress, turned, and looked deeply into his eyes. "I'm a warrior, Michael. Not

soft, not pretty.”

For a moment he thought he saw pain flash in her eyes, but she quickly looked away from him.

He lifted his hand and cupped her cheek. He couldn't believe how soft, how silky her skin felt. He could caress her all day. “You are beautiful, Raven. Very beautiful.”

Time stood still as they stared into each other's eyes. He didn't feel any power, but still he felt captured. She smiled and his eyes were drawn to her full, red lips and the way the tips of her sharp teeth peeked out from the edges of her mouth. Before he knew what he was doing he bent his head, ignoring the pain in his cheek, and captured her lips while acutely aware of the points of her canines.

The softness, the moisture, the delicate way she opened for him made him delve deeper, tasting what was uniquely her. Something he didn't ever want to get enough of.

He pulled away from her and looked deeply into her eyes again. She smiled; her eyes crinkled, showing her sinful intent. She projected images of them wrapped in each other's arms, their nakedness glowing from the passion they shared.

When the vision passed, she reached out and ran her fingers down the buttons on the front of his shirt. She searched for more of his warmth. “I have never felt a connection like this with any other. And surely no human. I want to burrow in your warmth. I want to feel your skin on mine.”

Raven slipped more of the buttons free while the tips of her fingers brushed his stomach. The erotic motion sent his cock into instant hardness. His stomach tightened at her welcome touch.

Michael couldn't help but pull her to his chest. He held her tight, rubbing his hands down

her back. Petite in his arms, her body fit perfectly with his. If he held her tight enough, he thought, she might melt right into his body, and then they truly would be one. The strong thump of her heart against his chest could be felt as if they were wearing no clothing.

Raven rubbed her hands along the backside of his arms. He enjoyed having her there. The place where he knew she belonged.

“There is so much you can’t comprehend, Michael. So much in my world that is ugly.”

“Then tell me about it, Raven. Tell me while we walk back to my place. We can recover there.”

“It would be easier if I showed you.” Before he had any idea of what she intended to do, she placed her hands on his shoulder and closed her eyes.

Michael sucked in a breath while images rushed in his mind. Nothing made sense at first. Everything moved with quickness and only allowed a few quick stops of memories that he didn’t understand. Evil beings danced across his mind, making him not only cringe but fill with anger that she dealt with such beings. Finally, the images slowed and started to make sense. She’d shown him her life.

Her parents had long since been dead and she’d walked the earth for centuries. Centuries alone until the Dark Vampire King found her. She thought he was her savior.

The Dark Vampire King had found Raven one night while out hunting. He looked upon her beautiful face and instantly fell in lust. He wanted to possess her, whether she wanted to be his or not. When she looked upon the King, he looked deep into her eyes and almost had her caught if not for a human distracting her. Fleeing, she’d been pursued by the crude King until he blackmailed her to carry out killings of the white maidens in exchange for leaving her alone.

When she stopped the slayings, he placed a hefty bounty on her head, deciding if he couldn’t



have her, no one would.

Michael looked down at her, wanting to take away all the pain he'd felt her endure from her memories.

“That’s terrible, he made you do those things.”

“I didn’t particularly like killing those of the white kingdom, but to keep him away from me, I obeyed. But now I have defied him.”

Sadness emitted from her. “Now I find I don’t want him at all, despite his handsome features. There is another I would rather spend my time with.” She gave him a shy glance, then straightened up. “Let’s get going. I still need to recover before he sends another one of his minions to hunt me.”

Michael grabbed her wrist and stopped her advance out of the alley. “I will protect you.”

She laughed. “Michael, darling. You’re human.”

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Michael brought Raven back to his apartment. The thoughts of the evening still fresh in his mind, he eased her into the room towards the couch. There were still many questions he wanted to ask her. He watched her sitting quietly on his brown couch, seeing her stark contrast to her surroundings.

She looked so out of place in her black leather Queen-of-the-Damned outfit. It was as if she was some heroine that had come to life out of a fantasy novel.

He couldn't believe that just moments ago she had been lying on the cement of a dark alley looking half dead. Michael eased onto the couch beside her. The coldness of her skin radiated from her. He noticed again how pale her skin looked, but also remembered how it glowed underneath the lamplight.

*Was she really a vampire?* Before he had a chance to censor his thoughts, she answered.

"I am a vampire, Michael. How do you explain the blood I took from you earlier? I know this sounds outlandish, because humans do not believe in things so easily--." She explained.

"It's not that I don't really believe you're a vampire, but I'm just shocked at these..." God, was he really about to blurt out how he felt about her?

Quickly he tried to quell his thoughts, but from the expression on her face he knew she had caught his unspoken emotions.

Lust glowed in her eyes. It called out to his own need. Too bad he couldn't read her mind. He felt the barrier keeping him from discovering anything more.

"It could be easier for you, you know." Grabbing his hand, Raven wrapped her small fingers around his large palm. The mixture of his warmth and her coolness blended together as she squeezed to hold him tighter in her grip.

"Excuse me?"

"It is so natural for me to scan others thoughts. Your ability will fade unless I turn you."

"What?" Michael said, curiosity lighting his eyes.

"I could bring you over," she said quickly.

"Bring me over? As in, become a vampire? I don't know, Raven. I do want to spend more time with you, and who knows, forever may be in the mix, but..." He turned his body to her. His knee touched her thigh and he held her hand close to his chest. There was a powerful connection between them.

"Then become like me, Michael. The things we could do, the things we can see together."

Wide, blue eyes pleaded with him to understand. Her loneliness quickly engulfed him and he felt something more than her lust projected toward him.

Her puckered lips pouted. "I could train you to be a warrior. I'm sure the Dark King will know I'm still alive. I'll have to train harder to protect myself."

"You shouldn't have to protect yourself. This sounds tempting. I've always wondered what it would be like to be a vampire." He hesitated, thinking of the implications. "How about we take things a day at a time and enjoy what develops between us?"

Raven laughed. "Fine, but I will ask you often. I think I would like to have a protector." Raven's eyes showed her smile as she leaned forward and closed the gap between them. Her full lips brushed lightly over his.

His cock, now begging for some action, pushed tightly against his pants. "Eventually, I'll probably let you turn me. Being a hero is pretty interesting stuff. And to have you in my arms, beneath me forever, sounds like a great idea."

Michael pulled her closer to him, warming her cool flesh before he crushed his lips to Raven's with a fierce passion.

His hands brushed her sides and he turned more toward her, yanking her hard against his chest until her breasts pressed against him. The leather that held them deliciously for his sight fueled his passion more.

A sound, much like a low purr, escaped her lips.

Ooo, she liked it a little rough, huh? That little noise made his body clench with need.

She allowed her wall to dissolve and let her desire flood his senses in gentle coaxing, taking him higher and higher.

"Michael," she sighed, leaning her head down to his neck. She kissed him there and he wondered if she would bite him again. He wouldn't mind. He would gladly donate his blood again if it were anything like earlier. This time they wouldn't get interrupted.

Slowly, he lowered her until she lay flat on the couch with him beside her.

“You’ve had a lonely life, huh?” Michael said as he worked the laces at the sides of her leather top. Her breasts spilled out once the strings loosened, calling to his hands. She arched into him.

“I have.” Raven closed her eyes, her hands working at his shirt, picking up where she left off earlier.

She turned her head to offer her neck to him. The creamy expanse of her skin felt cool under his lips. He licked and kissed across to her collarbone, feeling the fine bone beneath. He found her naked breast and with one hand smoothed the nipple with his palm. Her back arched higher. The pounding of her heart beneath his hand was hard and fast. The sign of a life.

“You don’t have to be lonely any longer.”

“Mmmm...” Raven worked her hands underneath the waistband of his pants until he felt her touch the tip of his erection. The quick brush of her hand had him almost coming, but he held on to his control while she explored him. Her little fingers sought him out until he couldn’t stand it any longer.

“Raven, I want to be inside you.” His cock pulsed with longing to be released from the confines of his jeans. At his words, her hands finished removing his clothes. They stripped each other and let their hands roam over the exposed flesh of their bodies, learning each other, memorizing each indentation, each curve.

Raven swung her leg over his hips until she straddled him like she had in his fantasy in the alley. He felt the heat of her body across his middle and his erection reached up to touch her entrance. He ran his hands down her sides and reveled in the real feel of her under his fingertips.

Earlier he had thought about a moment just like this, but his imagination didn’t do the reality

justice. She was heaven and hell, fire and ice as her body was warm, but parts felt cool. The woman was a strange variety of everything.

She leaned forward until her breasts rubbed against his chest. God, she felt right, like she belonged on top of him. Michael closed his eyes and grabbed her head, bringing her lush lips to his. He let his fingers play in her strands, but he wouldn't let her up from their kiss when she tried to pull away. She eased her hips down his body. Just a little further. Just one more inch and he would feel the tip of his cock at her opening. He imagined the warmth, the moistness, the bliss that awaited him.

Then she moved, none to slowly, impaling herself on him. His body tightened and he had to force himself to think of something else while she worked her moist pussy down onto him. When she began to ride him, all thoughts fled except the way she wrapped him. In and out, she worked their bodies into a heated dance of passion.

He picked up the pace and together they found a rhythm that built the power inside them. "Raven," he whispered against her lips as her body worked his higher. His fingers grasped her hips, squeezing as he felt his climax approaching.

She moaned. "Come with me, Michael. I want to feel you spill inside me. Now, tomorrow, and forever."

Her kisses trailed over his jaw and down to his neck. He anticipated the pain a moment before her teeth invaded and sent them both into ecstasy, plummeting over the edge of passion. Yes, he would definitely enjoy their time together.

*Epilogue*

The White King watched behind his eyes at the female vampire warrior and the human making love. He couldn't help the upward tug of his lips. The time had come for the warriors to find their mates.

It was too bad he had to kill Gregory, but he was one lost to the darkness. Some of the others were irrevocably lost also, but the ones holding a speck of goodness in their heart would unite with their chosen partners.

A beautiful woman came up beside him and stroked his arm. Her red hair flowed over her shoulder and down to her tiny waist. Her deep green eyes looked at him as she leaned in to capture his lips, but she let an inch separate them. Her other hand roamed down his chest until she cupped his bulging erection.

"My King, would you need some servicing tonight?"

Oh, he loved the way her small hand cupped him. She almost made him forget what he was thinking about.

"Not right now, Jade. There are a few things I need you to do before we find our pleasure."

Slowly, she moved away from him and bowed her head. "Anything you wish, my King."

"Find me the names of the Dark King's warriors. Then find the names of their mates. All the mates."

Her head popped up quickly, eyes growing wide with astonishment. "But my King, their

mates? But that would mean...”

“Yes, Jade. It’s time for the Kingdoms to unite.”

The End