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Make Me

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MAKE ME

Sierra Dafoe

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Chapter One

"See Me Now Promotions, can I help you?"

The sun wasn't even up yet when Larissa strode into her agency, and already the damn phone was ringing. Christ, she hated the holiday season, which for her really got jumping in early October as boutiques and retailers geared up for their Christmas ad campaigns.

Swear to God, sometimes she didn't care how good the money was—by Thanksgiving, she knew, she'd be tempted to chuck the whole thing.

Darlene, her secretary, cupped her hand over the phone, shooting her an inquiring glance. Larissa shook her head sharply. *Hell no.* She hadn't even had coffee yet. No way was she going to deal with some prick who thought his needs were so crucial he called at – she checked her watch – 7:03 in the morning, before she'd even had caffeine.

Larissa started toward her office but Darlene motioned frantically, tucking the phone between shoulder and chin as she scribbled a note. "I'm sorry, but Ms. Hardy won't be available 'til the office opens at eight... Uh huh. Uh huh..."

Bending over Darlene's shoulder, Larissa glanced at her hurried scrawl.

Man – waiting in your office. Said it was urgent.

"Damn it, Darlene!"

Covering the phone quickly, Darlene whispered, "I couldn't keep him out! He was waiting outside when I got here."

"At seven a.m.? Jesus Christ."

Darlene opened her mouth to add something, but just then the second line beeped. Rolling her eyes, she spun back to the desk and spoke into the phone. "Yes, can she call you back? Great. Thanks... See Me Now Promotions, can I help you?"

Shit, Larissa thought as she paced down the hallway. Early morning was her best brainstorming time, and she'd counted on having her usual hour before opening to work on the Diamond Exchange account – a *major* coup for her, that one. Besides, she was in a piss-poor mood at the moment – and slightly hung over, thank you very much. Once again, her latest dating prospect had crashed and burned, and the last thing she was in a mood to be was pleasant to anyone, much less a prospective client.

What the hell was the problem, anyway? She was everything men always said they wanted – or what they said they wanted in personal ads, anyway. She was articulate, self-confident, attractive enough if no raging beauty – and pretty damn successful if she said so herself. She *should* have had a dating calendar as crammed to the gills as her client roster. But instead, the guys she went out with invariably discovered somewhere around the third beer that what they really wanted was some meek little pushover who'd bat her eyes up at them and make them feel like a real man. Quote unquote.

Larissa snorted. So far as she was concerned, a *real* man wouldn't be intimidated by her height, her smarts or her determination. The only problem was she hadn't met one yet. And when these "Oh, look at me, I buy my suits at Brooks Brothers" Johnny-Come-Quicklies started in with the song and whine about how maybe she ought to try acting a little more feminine, Larissa couldn't resist baring her teeth and saying, "Make me."

The bitch of it all was that not one of them was bright enough to realize she meant it.

Her snort petered out into a deep-drawn sigh. The thing was, she *wanted* to be overpowered by a man. Hell, even Scarlett had had her Rhett. All she ever seemed to get were Ashley Wilkses. But unlike Scarlett, Larissa was smart enough to recognize weakness when she saw it—and not one of her Ashley wannabes had the sense to so much as grab her and give her a single good, solid kiss. They were always too busy either trying to impress her or being pissed that she didn't flutter her lashes and coo like a goddamned dove.

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So no, being polite to some asshole who muscled his way into her office at seven a.m. in the damn morning was nowhere on her list of priorities. Coffee was.

"I'm sorry," she said, putting on her best *I'd looove to talk to you, really* smile as she pushed open her office door, "but we're not even open for another —"

The man standing in her office turned around, and Larissa felt her smile freeze on her face.

Oh...dear...God.

It wasn't just that he was tall – he was, though, tall enough that Larissa could have worn her high heels and she'd still be looking up at him. Tall and perfectly proportioned, with wide, powerful shoulders under a suit that decidedly had *not* come from Brooks Brothers, taut thighs, a lean waist...

No junior executive desk paunch here, she thought faintly. *Nope. Not a bit.*

It wasn't even his face, although saying he was handsome was like saying Mount Everest was big. His features were commanding, with a high-bridged, rather European nose, a strong jaw that swept back to perfectly shaped ears—she had a weakness for ears, for some unfathomable reason—and a broad, even brow. Above it, thick waves of raven-black hair fell in an artful tousle to the collar of his jacket, and his lips had a wicked little upward curve to them that made him seem like he was perpetually imagining something, well, *naughty*.

No, what really made her stop in her tracks, forgetting about coffee, forgetting her words, forgetting about the damn wimpy-assed second-tier stockbroker yesterday evening who'd dithered and fidgeted and *still* couldn't get up the nerve to kiss her good night – was his eyes.

Nobody's eyes are that green...are they? Green like emeralds, rich and deep and crystalline clear. A green that pierced through her like lightning, bypassing her brain altogether and slamming straight to her cunt.

"Fifty-four minutes," he said.

"Huh?"

"You don't open for another fifty-four minutes."

"Yes, I know that." His words pissed her off, for which Larissa was deeply grateful. Okay, she'd felt her fair share of instantaneous attraction—an attraction that usually petered out somewhere about the second dull, unfulfilling fuck—but this was ridiculous! Her knees were literally about to buckle, and frankly she'd always thought that was a myth.

And what *really* pissed her off was that this bastard looked like he knew exactly what effect he was having on her. His eyes gleamed as he studied her, his gaze trailing far too intimately down her body.

"Look," she continued sharply, propping her hands on her hips. "You can't just come barging in here. I've got a lot of work to do this morning. You'll have to make an appointment."

"No."

"What?"

"No. I don't have time for an appointment. I need you to do a campaign for me—"

"I'm sorry, but I don't simply take on clients like some people adopt stray dogs." Her words were tarter than she'd meant them to be, but the corners of the man's mouth lifted in a brief, sardonic smile. "If you'd like to come back later, Mister..."

"Dane. Adrian Dane."

Naturally, Larissa thought. Your parents couldn't have taken it easy on me and named you Phil or Henry or something like that. Of course not.

Worse, the sound of his voice was quickly completing the job on her knees. It was deep, rich, with a faint gravelly harshness to it that seemed to wake every single one of her nerve endings up in a hurry, no coffee needed. Her nipples, she realized uncomfortably, had tightened to hard, tingling points.

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"I'll pay you a ten-thousand-dollar advance, plus whatever fees and expenses you feel are appropriate. Now, can we get down to business?"

Absolutely, her traitorous mind whispered. How does the desk sound? Or the floor? Or we could do it standing up, that'd be fine, too.

Larissa glared. "Okay, I'll give you ten minutes – "

"I've only got five."

"Talk fast, then," she snapped. "What's your budget?"

"Whatever it needs to be."

Either you're clueless or you're insane. She wished he'd sit down. Having him tower over her was decidedly unnerving. "For a major campaign we could be talking seventy, eighty grand, easy. That's print only, no air time."

Adrian just gazed at her flatly, waiting, his expression clearly saying, *Can we get on with it, please*? The number hadn't even fazed him. "Fine," she said, turning toward the counter above her drafting table where—saints be praised!—Darlene had already started her coffeemaker. Not that she was sure she still wanted any; her heart was already beating triple time as it was. "What's the project?"

"A vampire ball. I'm opening a nightclub called Sang Rouge."

"Blood Red," Larissa translated as she poured. "That's not bad."

"Thank you." His lifted eyebrow, though, seemed to say, *Did I ask your opinion*? "The vampire ball's just a gimmick to kick it off. I need someone to advertise the event, and I heard you're fast."

His eyes were definitely short-circuiting her brain, because before she'd thought about what she was saying, Larissa quipped, "That's not a very nice thing to say about a lady."

Oh dear God, did I just flirt with him? She was appalled. But Adrian merely grimaced and looked at his watch. "Do you mind if we skip the pleasantries? I'm almost out of time."

Skipping pleasantries was something Adrian Dane would be good at, she'd bet. Even with him standing a good six feet away, she could feel the heat radiating off his body. He probably wouldn't even waste time taking off her skirt – he'd just push it up over her hips, grab her panties, yank them down... A sudden explosion of wetness between her thighs dragged Larissa's thoughts back to the present, and she realized her fingers were trembling badly. Hastily setting down her coffee cup, she replied, "Sure. Whatever you say. When's the opening?"

"Halloween."

She stared at him, mouth agape.

Christ, she *hated* people like him. People who had no idea what her job entailed, who thought you could just book prime ad spots at the drop of a hat or toss up a few flyers and call it good.

"That's impossible," she snapped. "Halloween is next Wednesday."

Adrian gestured impatiently. "It's only Friday. You've got the weekend."

The way he said it staggered her—as if he was suggesting something as simple as putting together a bake sale. Throw up a few card tables, frost a few cakes… "Do you have *any* idea," she demanded, "what it takes to launch a new nightclub in this city? There's no way to put that kind of campaign together in six days' time! You should have started planning an advertising blitz months ago."

His jaw tightened, his eyes flashing green fire, and Larissa suddenly wanted to step back about half a mile. Either that or rip her own clothes off to spare him the bother.

"I'm not interested in what I should have done. I'm interested in what *you* can do. I'll pay you ten thousand up front, right now. We can discuss the rest tonight at the club."

"No," she said, even though her knees were trembling so badly she was afraid she might collapse in a puddle right at his feet. And how would *that* look?

"Excuse me?"

The offended hauteur in his face was really too much. Larissa stalked past him, heading for her office door. "I said no, Mr. Dane. Now, if you'll-"

Quick as a snake, he reached out, grabbed her arm and dragged her to him. His green eyes blazed down at her and his voice was a low, dangerous murmur. The sound sent a tingle all the way from her scalp to her throbbing clit. "Do you *really* want to tell me no, Ms. Hardy?"

Christ, but he was arrogant! And nice-smelling, too, her distracted mind noted. His heat surrounded her, enveloping her in a warm, spicy aroma that made her think of exotic markets, mythical islands...and sex. Definitely sex.

If he tilted his head just two inches more...

Larissa's spine stiffened. Who the hell did he think he was? Did he think he could just intimidate her into caving in? Hell, she couldn't even *count* the number of men who'd tried to tell her she couldn't run her own agency, that she wasn't experienced enough or well-known enough or just plain tough enough.

She was tough enough, all right. Tough enough to have built See Me Now Promotions into one of the best boutique agencies in New York. And if this asshole wanted an ad campaign in five days, then Goddamn it, he'd have one.

But he *wouldn't* intimidate her.

"Fine," she snapped, yanking her arm from his grasp. "You can leave a fivehundred-dollar check with my secretary. That's my usual one-hour consultation fee. What time tonight?"

Unexpectedly, Adrian grinned—a quick, almost feral flash of gleaming white teeth—and damned if *that* didn't make her hornier than ever. "You've got steel, Ms. Hardy. Nine o'clock."

With that, he turned and strode out of her office, leaving her clinging to the narrow support of the counter with her knees shaking and her brain whirling helplessly somewhere between fury and full-throttle lust.

* * * * *

Leaving the agency, Adrian scowled at the sky and slid on his sunglasses. Down here, the streets were still wrapped in shadows, but far above the towering buildings the clear October blue of the sky was already dangerously bright.

He'd have to hurry.

He hadn't meant to stay more than five minutes at the agency. Then again, he hadn't expected to meet such resistance to what was, after all, a straightforward business proposal.

Damn the woman, anyway! The way she'd stood there staring him down, all but coming right out and saying he was mad to be launching a nightclub on less than a week's notice. Maybe he was – but was it *her* place to tell him so?

Adrian didn't think so.

He'd liked what he'd heard about Larissa Hardy. *Tough as nails, but she gets the job done*. That had been one comment, uttered in a tone of begrudging admiration by a local shopkeeper. The man had been right about that, Adrian was certain. Competent, determined – and honest. Ninety-nine people out of a hundred would have taken the ten grand in something less than a heartbeat. Larissa, on the other hand, had practically thrown his money back in his face.

But the main reason he'd chosen her was simply location – her office was only four blocks from the nightclub. That, and the fact that she invariably showed up an hour early. He had to open *Sang Rouge* on Halloween. He *had* to. Adrian didn't know how he knew this, any more than he knew why the derelict brick building had first called to him. He didn't weigh decisions or make careful, drawn-out calculations – he went with his gut. And the moment he'd seen the building, his gut had told him instantly that here, on Halloween night, he would find his mate.

He'd purchased and redone the place lavishly, sparing no expense in his drive to have it completed on schedule. He didn't have *time* to be distracted by some stubborn businesswoman who obviously felt his plans ought to fit into her neat preconceptions.

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Adrian's lips curved in a rueful smile. None of the boutique owners he'd talked to had thought to mention the unexpectedly luscious curves of Larissa's body—curves she obviously tried to disguise under her no-nonsense business suit—or the way her hazel eyes sparked with fire when she was challenged. And nothing could have prepared him for the way his cock had immediately hardened when she'd challenged *him*, eyes flashing, chin raised in defiance.

It had been all he could do not to bend her over her desk and take her right there. Only the impending sunrise had kept his lust in check.

Cutting smoothly through the early-morning press of pedestrians, Adrian glanced at his watch. 7:16. That really *was* cutting it fine. But as he swung around the corner, he could see the sign the workmen had hung only yesterday halfway down the block, its understatedly elegant lettering picked out in gold paint.

Sang Rouge.

He'd long ago lost the insatiable appetite of the newly turned vampire, the frantic bloodlust that had led him to feed on whatever prey he could find. For long, long years now he'd been hunting for more than just meat. He was looking for passion, intelligence, companionship, desire...

An equal. A soul mate. And he was damned if he'd let Larissa Hardy derail his plans.

He could still see her standing there, her long, shapely body rigid with defiance. Its uncompromising posture and unexpected softness had almost seemed to dare him, saying in the wordless language of flesh, *Come on, then. Come on and make me.*

His balls still throbbed with the desire to do exactly that. In fact, his cock was so erect it strained at the waistband of his trousers, and he was painfully conscious of his testicles, heavy with unspent come, rubbing against the fabric. The sensation tormented him as he strode the last few yards to the club, just ahead of the sun's first rays.

Then he stopped short, finally hearing the message his aching balls were sending. His eyes widened in shock. Glancing up at the sign hanging over the entrance, Adrian laughed aloud at the irony of it all.

How ludicrous was it that he'd gone to all this effort, only to find the woman destined to be his mate before *Sang Rouge* was even open?

Chapter Two

Why in God's name had she told him yes? As the afternoon progressed, Larissa had found herself growing angrier, not calmer. Christ, he'd practically *assaulted* her in her very own office!

And her cunt was still throbbing in response to his actions. That was the real problem, Larissa knew. That was what was keeping her out here, dithering on the sidewalk in front of *Sang Rouge*, even though she was already six minutes late.

You wouldn't have been six minutes late if you hadn't changed your outfit three times, ninny.

No. She wouldn't have. And the fact that she'd been that indecisive told her everything she needed to know about whether her attraction this morning had been real.

Soft slats of light fell through wooden shutters, laying a crosshatch of warm golden bars across the dark pavement. The sign overhead creaked lightly in the chill October wind, and Larissa shivered.

This is stupid.

There was no way she was going to let some arrogant ass make her be this neurotic. So what if he was tall, or unnervingly handsome, or set her clit to singing like a damn canary? He was a client—no more, no less. A client who just happened to push all her erotic buttons, but *he* didn't know that.

And he wouldn't find out, either.

Briskly, she raised her hand and knocked on the heavy oak door, straightening her shoulders as it opened, determined to be distant, professional, cool...

God, she'd forgotten exactly how green his eyes were.

He stood in the doorway, looking her up and down slowly, his gaze pausing at the plunging neckline of her silk blouse. Gritting her jaw, Larissa tugged her jacket tightly closed. "So can I come in, or would you rather talk here?"

With a small, challenging smile, he stepped back and gestured her inside.

"Thank you." She marched through the doorway, gripping her briefcase—and stopped short, gazing around her in surprise.

Whoever this Adrian Dane was, he'd done a masterful job of restoring the old building. From the spacious magnificence of the main room with its glittering chandeliers to the cozier ambience of the bar, the place exuded a gracious, soothing elegance. Deep-cushioned booths lined the bar's walls. Tables glistening with fine china were spaced around the large dance floor, its oak boards gleaming with layers of polish. Accents of red gleamed everywhere—the leather upholstery of the booths, the antique glass wall-sconces, the deep maroon rugs.

"You like it?"

Like it? She loved it. *Sang Rouge* was incredible. It was like walking onto the set of a Hollywood musical. It was beguiling. Seductive. It practically oozed romance.

It was as hard to resist as its owner.

"It hardly matters what I think of it, does it?" Firmly, Larissa pushed aside her thoughts. "I just have to advertise it, Mr. Dane."

"Adrian, please."

Larissa felt like her smile was made of cardboard. "Adrian."

With another of those cool, challenging grins, he led her away from the arch to the main room and into the bar.

It was ridiculous. She'd spent the first half of the day trying to convince herself that her reaction to him had simply been a fluke, an erotic hangover, if you will, from her frustration of the night before. Then she'd spent the second half trying furiously to lose herself in her work.

And now here she was, walking into an empty, sumptuous nightclub with a man who might have been assembled straight from her fantasies—the broad, rolling shoulders, the tousled, midnight-black hair... A man who, she discovered as he went behind the bar, was capable of making her impossibly wet simply by opening a bottle of wine. He was dressed more casually this evening; suit jacket gone, sleeves rolled up to reveal muscular forearms. She stared at them as he worked the cork out, remembering vividly the way he'd grabbed her, dragging her to him...

Oh, stop *it, Rissa!*

Jerking his head, Adrian beckoned her to a barstool as he fished two glasses out of a shipping box, gave them a perfunctory wipe and poured the cabernet. He seemed calmer tonight, more settled, less impatient. Less like a man who might simply take her right up against the bar, maybe bend her over it with his fist in her hair...

Pointedly ignoring the glass he proffered her, Larissa snapped open her briefcase and took out a notepad. *Client. Just a client. Get it together, girl!*

"So. What kind of advertising did you have in mind, Mr. Dane?"

He was watching her, she saw, as if something about her actions amused the hell out of him—for what unfathomable reason she couldn't begin to guess. He shrugged lightly and sipped his wine. "I hadn't really thought about it."

"Well, did you want print? Radio ads? Direct mail? I have to tell you up front, your options are going to be severely limited at this late stage."

His eyes glinted with a hint of impatience. "I thought that was your job, deciding all that."

"It is, if you want it to be." Folding her arms, she returned his look steadily. His smile broadened and Larissa glanced away, her gaze falling instead on the hand curled around the delicate globe of his wineglass. There was a scattering of small, dark hairs across the back, and his fingers looked both strong and agile.

What would it be like to have those fingers buried in her hair, dragging her head back as he kissed her fiercely – or, better yet, as he fucked her?

Gritting her teeth, she pulled her gaze away, trying vainly to ignore her pulsing clit. God, *why* had she worn a lace thong tonight? She could feel the scratchy fabric tugging at her mons, making her doubly conscious of the hot, moist throb between her thighs.

"How would *you* advertise it—at this late stage?" He grinned briefly, almost mockingly. But even though this afternoon she hadn't been able to generate a single idea no matter how hard she'd cudgeled her brains, Larissa knew. She'd known the instant she stepped through the door of *Sang Rouge*.

"Roses." She smiled.

"I'm sorry?"

"Roses," she repeated. "Blood-red roses."

"Ahh." Adrian rolled the stem of his wineglass between his fingers and Larissa bit her lip, trying to suppress the image of those fingers rolling her nipples in just the same way...

"We do a stealth thing," she continued desperately. "Turn the negatives into positives. No advertising? Fine. Instead, we be mysterious. Enigmatic. Elegant."

"Go on."

Listening, Adrian ambled his way from behind the bar and toward her. Larissa reached hurriedly for her wineglass, clasping it before her breasts like a shield. "Usually, with direct marketing, you figure a ten-three-one ratio—ten people receive your message, three people look at it, one responds. But when it's Halloween, people already have plans... What's your fire-code capacity?"

"Five hundred and twenty."

"So we make it eight thousand long-stemmed red roses, each one hand-delivered with an engraved invitation. Something cryptic, mysterious...pique their curiosity."

She was getting excited—and not, for a change, by Adrian. There was a certain creative thrill, a *rush*, that came with getting a good idea. That rush was what had first inspired her to pursue advertising. It was what still got her juices flowing.

Not that they weren't already flowing enough.

Nodding thoughtfully, Adrian leaned against the bar next to her, so close she could feel the warmth of his body all along her left thigh. She fought to keep her voice steady. "We target young professionals, unmarried white-collar workers...I can't guarantee you capacity, but you should have a good crowd."

Adrian smiled. "I like the way you think."

Larissa flushed with pleasure. When was the last time a man had complimented her brain? Usually it was her breasts—one reason she normally kept them carefully covered. She hadn't tonight, though. Tonight she'd worn a silk blouse with a low-scooped front beneath her jacket—and no bra.

Why in Christ's name had she worn something so revealing?

You know why, Rissa. For the same reason you wore stockings instead of pantyhose, and the patent-leather pumps that make your calves look like a million bucks.

Ignoring that all-too-knowing inner voice she asked, "Don't you want to know what it'll cost?"

He waved a dismissive hand. "Everything costs. You can do this by Wednesday?"

It was *her* turn to be dismissive. This was her home turf, her expertise. Larissa tossed her head with a snort. "Try me."

"Yes," Adrian murmured, and her breath caught in her throat as the warm approval in his eyes shaded into something darker—something almost feral. "Yes. I think I will." Holding her gaze, he bent down and claimed her lips in a searing kiss.

The heat that had been simmering inside her all day exploded into a conflagration. Her thong, already damp, immediately became soaked. When his tongue, firm and undeniable, pushed its way into her mouth, Larissa moaned aloud.

Frantically, she tried to draw back, to pull away, but his hands clamped on her arms, pulling her up to him, turning her so her back was against the bar. His body

pressed against hers, hard and demanding, and she could feel the urgent throb of his cock against her belly.

As he dropped his head to nuzzle her neck, she whispered, "No." Never mind that her entire body was trembling with lust. Never mind that her cunt was practically begging to have him inside her. *No.* No and no and no.

Raising his head, Adrian grinned like a hungry tiger. Then he kissed her again, plunging his tongue deep into her warm, wet mouth. He rocked his hips forward, grinding his erection against the swell of her mons, right against the spot that clamored loudest for his attention. She wobbled on her heels, her brain reeling, her whole body teetering on the verge of orgasm.

He was so sure of himself, the bastard! He simply ignored her refusal, as if it were meaningless, as if he could see straight through her clothes to her sodden cunt. Who the *hell* did he think he was?

Drawing herself upright, she pushed him away firmly. "I said *no*, Mr. Dane. I don't fuck men I work for."

"Your *mouth* said no, Ms. Hardy." Grinning, he slid one hand under her skirt, pulled her thong underwear to one side and trailed a finger through the juice-soaked folds of her cleft. "*This* says yes. Rather loudly, in fact."

Then he thumbed her clit, and Larissa moaned aloud as her climax ripped through her, hot and hard and aching. Only Adrian's hand on her arm kept her upright. Her juices gushed down over his fingers as he worked them inside her, plunging them deep into her clenching passage.

Gasping, she slumped in his grip as the aftershocks poured through her. Smiling triumphantly, Adrian slid his hand from her cunt. Holding her pinned with those emerald eyes, he raised his fingers to his lips and licked her fluids from them.

Even as her clit throbbed again at the sight, Larissa felt fury well up inside her. "How *dare* you?" Tearing herself from his grasp, she whirled toward the door.

Catching her arm, he spun her around, dragging her against him with an inexorable grip. His eyes were narrowed now, no longer amused. "I dare because you want me to, Larissa. I dare because everything in me cries out to take you, to claim you, to ride you until you scream in ecstasy."

He loomed over her, the muscles in his shoulders taut, the cords standing out in his neck. She could feel his cock pulsing against her with redoubled urgency. Jesus, she couldn't move! She couldn't think. Even if she could command her body, his grip on her arms this time was unbreakable.

His words echoed in her skull, eroding her defenses. "I dare because everything in you wants me as badly as I want you. And you *will* make love to me, Larissa—right now."

She couldn't say no. She didn't want to say no. But even as her knees started to give way in longing, Larissa summoned a hard, contemptuous grin. "Really? You think so? Then *make me*."

* * * * *

She was magnificent. Utterly magnificent. Her hazel eyes sparked fire. Her chest heaved. Her body arched against his, daring him to take her.

Adrian's balls pulsed, growing even fuller, their weight an aching counterpoint to the iron hardness of his cock. There was such fire in her, such spirit! She aroused him as no other woman ever had.

Oh, he'd never cared for the weak, vapid females so many vampires favored as prey – such languid meats held little savor for him. But Larissa Hardy made every other woman he'd ever fed from look frail and bloodless in comparison.

How many men had shrank before that regal glare, misinterpreting the challenge in her voice for rejection? Or worse, had responded from the depths of their insecurities, using her ruthlessly in an attempt to assuage their bruised egos? Had even *one* of them

ever heard the note in her voice for what it was—the roar of a lioness demanding her due? Demanding her mate prove himself worthy of her?

He'd been right. He'd been absolutely right. She was his destined mate, his companion, his equal. And he would have her. Now. Tonight. By the time he was done, she would be *his*.

Adrian let his smile grow hard. Wordlessly, he seized the front of her blouse and ripped it open. Larissa's eyes flew wide as her breasts spilled out into the soft light, firm and round and gloriously full. Staring at them, Adrian felt his breath growing ragged.

Her nipples were erect, the dusky areolas around them contracted into furrows. Those two hard, upraised points jutted out at him with the same aroused defiance that tightened her jaw.

Let her resist. That was all right. She would moan wantonly, begging to submit to him soon enough. Clasping the shoulders of her jacket, Adrian dragged it off her and tossed it aside, reclaiming his hold on her before she could retreat. Then he settled himself on a barstool, gripping her tightly between his thighs.

"Take your blouse off," he growled.

"No."

With one swift yank, he ripped it from her. She gasped as the flimsy fabric tore, leaving her naked to the waist—but Adrian saw the gleam of moisture on her lips as saliva suddenly flooded her mouth.

"Now, do you want to unfasten your skirt or shall I do it for you?"

Glaring, she reached behind herself and unhooked it. He released the grip of his thighs just long enough to let it slide to the floor, leaving her standing there in nothing but a garter belt, stockings, a thong and her shoes. The thong, he noted, tied at the sides.

Adrian smiled.

Oh, you wanted this, Larissa. You wanted it as much as I.

Her eyes were wide, her chest heaving—not with fear, he knew. With anticipation. His balls throbbed again, growing tighter as the pressure built up inside them. The desire to seize her, bend her over the barstool, pound himself into her until he found his release, was almost irresistible.

But it wasn't enough simply to take her. He had to make her want it. He had to make her want *him* – want him enough to bind herself to him forever.

Ignoring the clamoring ache in his groin, Adrian lifted his hands to the smooth curves of her breasts. Their weight against his palms redoubled the lust pounding through him. Cupping them lightly, he asked, "Tell me, Larissa. Has a man ever made you come just by touching your breasts?"

Chapter Three

Oh God. Oh, sweet God.

Larissa thought she might faint at the promise in his voice.

Even when she did allow herself to be taken to bed, the reality never, ever lived up to her hopes. Her Prince Charming of the hour invariably turned out to be ham-handed and pushy—a regular wham-bam-thank-you-Ma'am excuse for a lay—or another namby-pamby Ashley Wilkes.

Adrian Dane was neither.

She'd expected him to tumble her to the floor, slamming himself into her with all the finesse of a jackhammer. Instead, his fingertips trailed slow, idle circles around her breasts, so lightly it made her shiver with delight. Her overburdened nerves, still raw after that searing, unexpected orgasm, throbbed with mingled agony and bliss. When his thumbs brushed the hard, raised nubs of her nipples, she gasped aloud.

How was he *doing* this to her? Her womb felt heavy, her cunt practically drowning in cream. Remembering the way he'd licked his fingers, tasting her juices, Larissa dropped her head back and moaned.

Her clit was throbbing again already and her cunt spasmed hungrily, aching for the hardness she could sense mere inches from her crotch. He held her between his legs, his powerful thigh muscles gripping her tightly, his hands moving over her breasts with the delicacy of a painter, barely brushing the skin.

Unable to help herself, she arched into his touch, urging him to fondle her harder. Glancing up at her from beneath those black brows, Adrian smiled lazily. Unexpectedly, his fingers closed on her nipples, pinching them roughly. Fire lanced through her body, sending a jolt of pure rapture through her swollen clit, and she rocked her hips forward, desperate for his cock. "No." His green eyes gleamed with malevolent humor as his thighs clamped harder, trapping her. "Oh no, sweet Larissa. Not 'til I say so."

Gasping, quivering, she stared at him, pleading—but he merely went back to caressing her breasts, moving his thumbs in tight, teasing circles over her nipples.

The ache in her cunt grew into torment. It seemed like every ounce of her awareness was centered in those two burning nubs he tortured unmercifully. Wetting his fingers, he spread his saliva over them then blew on them lightly. The sudden chill made her flinch and whimper.

She honestly didn't know how much more of this she could take. Her thoughts whirled and scattered like birds in a panic. She couldn't seem to tear her gaze from his strong, clever fingers, endlessly kneading and stroking and squeezing her breasts. Spreading his hands flat, he moved his palms in a circle, dragging them over her erect, burning tips. Pressing harder, he rubbed more roughly, and Larissa heard a high, hungry cry spill from her throat.

"Yes," he murmured. "Oh yes, you're close now. Aren't you, Larissa?"

Biting her lip, she fought back a moan. Grinning, Adrian seized her nipples and tweaked them, hard. A spike of delectable agony shot through her womb. Gasping, she felt her cunt start to contract as her clit throbbed in ecstasy.

Dear God, he was going to do it. He was going to make her come just by rubbing her breasts.

Cupping them both in his broad, sturdy hands, Adrian squeezed them as his thumbs worked over the tips, rolling them, pinching them against his forefingers. Panting, Larissa hung powerless in his grip, feeling the fire inside her roar upward as he increased the pressure, kneading them ruthlessly.

It was so easy to imagine his mouth upon them, sucking, licking, tormenting as he thrust inside her. *God!* She wanted him. She wanted him so badly. She wanted him to touch her, taste her, *take* her...

The tension building between her thighs was like an inferno, blinding in its intensity. She could see nothing, hear nothing, *feel* nothing but his fingers ceaselessly tugging her nipples, sending the need in her higher and higher...

With a sharp, yearning cry, she felt the tension snap, ecstasy flooding through her like a breaking wave, filling her veins with hot, pulsing, honey-gold light. Trembling, she reached out blindly, clinging to the strength of his wide, solid shoulders as rapture washed through her again and again.

Slowly, she came back to awareness of external things and found herself cradled close against his chest. Her head lolled laxly against his shoulder, and it was only his hands firmly cupping her ass that kept her upright – without his hold on her, she would simply have crumpled to the floor. His cock was straining against her belly, pulsating under the cloth of his pants.

Where had he learned such incredible control? His hunger was as acute as hers—it showed in the throb of his pulse in his throat, in the rigid clench of his hands on her ass—and yet he held it in check with a resoluteness that seemed almost superhuman.

What would it be like, she wondered faintly, to make this man lose his selfrestraint? A wild, wanton lust poured through her as she pictured it, his cock pounding into her, his hands pinning her down...

Smiling mischievously to herself, Larissa realized she knew *just* how to reduce the stern, self-controlled Adrian Dane to absolute savagery.

If she dared. She shuddered nervously as she remembered his fierce, predatory smile. She knew what happened to girls who teased tigers.

They got eaten.

And *that* thought made her knees give way altogether.

Bonelessly, she slid between his thighs, crumpling in a heap to the floor. He grinned down at her, his expression far too smug. It made it easier to ignore his proffered hand, to yank herself away, scowling fiercely, as he tried to help her up.

"Well congratulations, Mr. Dane. I hope you've had your fun."

With all the dignity she could muster considering she was dressed in nothing but a thong, heels and garter belt, she scrambled to her feet and snatched up her skirt and ruined blouse. He stared at her, his eyes narrowing dangerously.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"Home." Head held high even as she tottered while tugging her skirt on, she kept her words cold, measured, dispassionate. "I'm not just some two-bit tumble, Mr. Dane, and I'm very sorry if I gave you that impression."

"Not some two-bit... Is *that* what you presume I think of you?"

"Of course. What else would you think? After all, I only met you this morning after you forced your way into my office. You're very good at forcing things, aren't you, Mr. Dane?"

He stared at her in stark disbelief. With one last, haughty glare, she let the tattered blouse fall accusingly from her fingers. Grabbing her jacket, she turned for the door.

For two terrifying heartbeats, Adrian didn't move. Then he swore violently and came after her, catching up to her in two swift, long strides and whirling her around to face him.

She had expected arousal, passion, even frenzy—but the one thing she'd never expected to see in his emerald-green eyes was anguish. His jaw was clenched, his black brows drawn fiercely together as he gazed down at her, his entire body tensed in an extremity of passion beyond anything she'd ever even imagined. "Are you trying," he gritted out between his clenched teeth, "to drive me mad, Larissa?"

She could see the battle for self-control going on behind his eyes. *Why* was it so important to him? Why didn't he simply take what he wanted?

But it *was* important – *she* was important. The possibility had never occurred to her, and yet his next words only confirmed it. "Do you know how long I've been looking for

you?" His voice was no more than a harsh whisper. "Do you know how long I've *waited*, Rissa?"

The nickname shocked her to her very core. Nobody had ever called her that. Nobody but her father, whose death had been the deepest grief of her life.

"Then take me," she whispered. "Take me. Make me yours."

For a second he seized her to him, his hair tickling her cheek, his face buried against the curve of her neck. She could feel him quivering, every inch of him taut as a bowstring as he bent over her, his breath warm on her neck, his lips whispering against her skin...

Then he pulled back abruptly, his gaze hard and mocking. "You have no idea what you're asking for, Rissa."

Roughly, he thrust her down on a barstool, spreading her feet apart, forcing her thighs wide. Blood rushed to her head, and she heard him unzip his pants, kick off his shoes. His hands yanked her skirt down then tore at the ties of her thong, ripping it off her. Then the hard, swollen tip of his cock pressed between her slick inner folds, nudging her entrance.

Even then, he didn't simply plunge into her. Rocking his hips back and forth, he worked his cockhead in and out, penetrating her just slightly, teasing her until she moaned and arched her ass upward.

"Now," he commanded, his voice rough with desire, "tell me you want it, Rissa. Ask me to fuck you."

Oh, Jesus. His words made her writhe in lust—and embarrassment. It wasn't enough for him to just take her. He was determined to *dominate* her in every way possible. She shifted slightly, feeling the soft cushion against her belly—and then he leaned over her, grabbing her hair, dragging her head up 'til she could see his reflection in the mirror behind the bar. Naked, he towered over her, his shoulder muscles bulging as he pinioned her beneath him. Reflected in the mirror, his eyes burned a deep, dangerous green. "*Say* it, Rissa."

Make Me

"Please..." She bit her lip, feeling tears start to her eyes. His thighs flexed between her own widespread ones, jabbing his cock just an inch into her yearning passage. Then he withdrew.

"Please," she whispered urgently, "please, Adrian, take me. I want you to fuck me."

"Good. Where?"

"Everywhere. My ass, my cunt, my mouth—I want you to fuck me any way you want. Oh, please!"

His eyes gleamed with approval. "You like that, don't you? You like me to make you beg for it."

Unable to hide the tears in her eyes, she nodded, blushing. "Please, Adrian. Please take me now." And then she shrieked in erotic rapture as he yanked her head back, pulling her to him with one fist in her hair and his other hand clamped like a vise on her hips as, with one commanding, punishing thrust, he rammed his cock inside her all the way to his balls.

Immediately, ecstasy exploded inside her and she cried out, again and again, her moans rising higher as he pounded her cunt with an almost mindless ferocity. He roared as her passage spasmed around him, gripping him tightly as he slammed home. His shaft bucked inside her, pulsing as his orgasm burst from him, flooding her with his seed in hot, endless waves.

His thighs quivered as he strained forward, filling her utterly, until at last the tension inside him reached some critical peak and snapped. Slumping forward across her back, he panted, his breath hoarse and ragged in her ear.

After a long, long time, he carefully withdrew. Lifting her gently to her feet, he turned her toward him and kissed her—not at all as he had before. His hand trembled where it brushed her cheek, and there was something tender, almost reverent in the way his tongue probed her mouth, savoring her. "Oh, Rissa," he breathed as he finally raised his head. Gathering her close, he held her in his arms as if he intended to never let her go.

* * * * *

He'd known what she was doing, of course, when she'd spun away from him, threatening to leave. She'd been trying to goad him into losing control. And damn it all, he almost had.

When he'd dragged her to him, he'd had every intention of burying his fangs in her throat. Even though he'd known she was simply provoking him, a sudden, awful terror that he might lose her had ripped through his heart, leaving him momentarily paralyzed. What had followed on that terror's heels had been rage.

It had taken every ounce of self-command he possessed not to sink his teeth into her, *claim* her right then.

And if he had, Adrian wondered, could he have stopped?

That sort of control had never worried him before. He'd always been able to limit his feedings, leaving his victims weak—but certainly not in danger of death. Corpses bred questions, and careless vampires usually ended up dead. If the centuries had taught him anything at all, they'd taught him that.

But Larissa... Larissa was a rule unto herself.

Even now, his entire body still throbbed with the force of his climax, a peak beyond anything he'd ever felt. Even the erotic rapture of feeding from a woman as he was fucking her, his fangs buried in her throat, his cock deep in her cunt, couldn't begin to compare to the utter intoxication of making love to Larissa. Nothing in all his countless years of experience had even come close.

And if he'd bitten her...

A jolt of horror flowed through him. If he'd bitten her, she'd likely be dead right now.

He could do anything to her. He could make her fuck him—any way he desired. He could drive her to heights of ecstasy she'd only dreamed of. He could sink his teeth into her, drain her life's blood...

But the one thing he couldn't make her do was bite him back. And unless she drank his blood in return, Larissa would remain mortal.

Obsessed with his conviction that *Sang Rouge* would bring him and his mate together, he'd thrown all his energies and vast resources into making the nightclub the perfect backdrop for bonding with his elusive soul mate. He'd never once stopped to consider how awkward explaining what he was to her might prove. He'd simply assumed that, just like the movies, they'd fall into each other's arms and it would all magically work out.

No fool like an immortal one, Adrian thought caustically. He'd been just as much a slave to wishful thinking as Tom Sawyer rhapsodizing over Becky Thatcher's chewed gum.

For the first time in his long existence, he found himself wishing he could go back, could become human again, just one more mortal male doomed to live and die. It would be worth it to spend that brief life with Larissa. It was impossible, of course. But the fear he'd felt when she'd turned away from him – even in play – haunted him.

What if she couldn't accept what he was?

Somehow he knew, with a strange leaden certainty, that if she didn't, he would be alone forever. There would never be another woman like her again, no matter how many centuries he searched.

Closing his eyes, he breathed in the sweet, musky scent of her, feeling something close to panic tighten his throat. He couldn't lose her. He *couldn't*.

But he couldn't force her to choose him, either.

There was no other way. He had to tell her who he was -what he was. He had to take that risk.

Chapter Four

"Rissa?"

Larissa murmured a reply. Her arms were wrapped around Adrian's neck, her head pillowed on his shoulder. She was half-asleep on her feet, her entire body relaxed in a languorous afterglow.

No man had ever made her feel like this before—so safe, so protected, so *cherished*. His arms encircled her, clasping her to him, his bare chest warm and solid against her breasts. Soft black hairs were scattered across the swell of his pecs, and Larissa trailed one hand down over them, stroking them lightly.

"Rissa, about this morning..."

"Mm-hmmm?" Was he going to apologize for how he'd acted? How sweet. Though he really ought to, of course, after the way he'd behaved in her office.

"Remember how I was in such a hurry to leave?"

She was definitely in a mood to forgive him anything. And she was starting to be in a mood for more than just that. Nodding her head in answer, she nuzzled his chest, licking a line from his breastbone to his left nipple. It was small and dark, hardening under the touch of her tongue. Unable to resist, Larissa closed her lips around it, tugging slightly. Adrian's chest rose under her cheek as he sucked in a quick, surprised breath.

"Rissa, I'm trying to tell you something."

Yes. He was. And it was really quite nice of him to want to apologize, but right now she was far more interested in exploring his body.

His abs were flat, rippled with muscle, and below his navel more dark hair ran in a silken line down to his groin. Following it idly with her fingers, she curled her hand around his penis and felt it flex in her grip, hardening against her palm.

"Rissa, *listen*." Reaching down, he grabbed her hand, forcing it away from his cock.

Something in his tone sent a trickle of apprehension through her post-coital haze.

Oh God. This is where he tells me he's married. Or gay. Or simply, it's been nice, but I think you ought to go now.

Larissa felt a bone-deep panic creep through her, twisting her stomach into knots. She *couldn't* lose him. She couldn't. No other man had ever made her feel this way. No man had ever reached deep inside her and found her passion. He started to speak, but before he could, she slid her arms around his neck again and plunged her tongue into his mouth.

Almost instantly, she felt him respond. His lips pressed against hers as his tongue delved deep. Between their bodies, his cock lengthened further. Finally, Adrian came up for air.

"Damn it, woman, you're not making this easy." His voice was the low, rumbling growl of a tiger, but she could sense his want of resolve. The man who had mastered her, making her obey him, was gone for the moment. Taking advantage of his diffidence, Larissa glanced up at him, smiling impishly.

"Of course not. I'm trying to make it hard."

With that, she sank to her knees and wrapped her lips around his half-hard cock, determined to end any possibility of conversation. Whatever that strange, reluctant tone had portended, she knew instinctively she didn't want to hear it.

Swirling her tongue over his cock's velvety head, she reveled in the feel of it, exploring the smooth, curving glans, the swollen rim, the sweet little slit at the very tip. His shaft flexed under her stroking fingers and, pressing her head forward, she took it deep into her mouth. Adrian moaned above her, and Larissa felt a small wave of

triumph. He *would* want her, damn it – by the time she was done he would want her so badly he couldn't help himself.

His hands stroked her shoulders and toyed through her hair. But she wanted more than that – she wanted him to *fuck* her. Fuck her with the same ruthless abandon he had earlier. Lapping eagerly, she tormented his cock, alternately plunging her head forward and drawing back to dart her tongue over his shaft.

Slowly, she felt the tension building in his body. His caresses grew firmer. Then his hands clenched on her shoulders. Purposefully, she pulled all the way back—and was rewarded as he grabbed her hair and yanked her head to him, his hips thrusting as he forced his cock deep into her mouth.

Oh God, Adrian, you taste so good. She sucked hungrily, feeling her own desire mount as his hips pistoned steadily. Larissa moaned, and his cock flexed against the roof of her mouth, responding to her voice's vibration. His breathing grew deeper, harsher, and his cock, already so thick it stretched her jaw wide, hardened further until it was like iron pounding between her lips.

His strokes grew faster, more frantic, and Larissa slid her hands to his balls. They were heavy, so swollen with come they were almost rigid, hard as stones inside their protective sac. She fondled them carefully, squeezing just a bit as she tilted her head back and gazed up at Adrian.

His face was slack with arousal, his emerald eyes clouded with lust as he watched his cock gliding in and out of her mouth. The sight of his forearms, the muscles bunching and flexing as he tugged her head forward and back, almost made her reach her climax right there. She arched her back farther, remembering how he'd ridden her, spreading her thighs wide and tilting her ass in the air as he pounded into her, fucking her furiously.

As if reading her thoughts, Adrian groaned. As his restraint crumbled, he buried his fists in her hair, holding her in a vise-like grip as he rammed his cock deep into her throat. It ached for a moment—but even the ache was part of what she'd always dreamed of, what she'd secretly wanted and never received. She whimpered in delight as he hammered into her, his cock bruising her lips, his hips working desperately. His thighs flexed under her palms as he stroked even faster, caught in the tidal wave building inside him.

Larissa's world contracted to intimate sensations – the silken steel of his shaft, the salty tang of his juices, the ragged sounds of her own frantic breaths in her ears. She wanted it to go on forever, and at the same time wanted him to come right *now*, wanted him to fill her mouth with his come, shoot his juices into her as he hammered and thrust, wanted to give him a release so deep and so powerful that he couldn't – he *wouldn't* – ever let her go.

His groans became gasps. His cock throbbed in her throat. His balls were so distended they felt hard as marble against her stroking fingers. He was going to come for her, he was going to come in her mouth...

She cried out in anguish as he yanked his shaft from her lips, leaving her gasping and yearning and terrified she'd lost him. Lost him before she even knew what she'd found.

He hauled her to her feet and she stood there, shaking. His nostrils flared. His eyes burned like gemstones. He looked ready to shred the flesh from her bones.

But she *couldn't* let him go—she just couldn't. "Please," she whispered desperately. "Please, don't make me leave you."

"Leave me?" A dangerous light flickered in those green depths. "You're not leaving me, Larissa. Not tonight. Not ever."

A grateful warmth unfolded in her heart, so keen and piercing it was almost painful. Then Adrian thrust her against the bar, turning her away from him so her belly was pressed against the polished wood, her breasts jutting over it as she braced herself on her hands. Grabbing her hair, he yanked her head upward and she stared, wild-eyed and frightened, into the mirror. Reflected behind her, she could see Adrian, his mouth twisted in an expression that was more snarl than smile. You know what happens to girls who tease tigers.

Yes. Yes, she did. And she wanted him to devour her, to consume her utterly. So why was she so completely terrified?

Suddenly, she heard his words again, the words she'd thought were a promise. *You're not leaving me, Larissa. Not tonight. Not ever.*

A promise—or a threat? His emerald eyes held her as he whispered in her ear, his breath hot against her upstretched neck, "I tried to warn you, Rissa. Now tell me to take you."

"Yes," she hissed. "Adrian, please. Please take me."

With that, he grinned, and she saw the flash of light on his impossibly long, sharp teeth for just an instant before he drove his cock inside her and plunged his fangs into her throat.

* * * * *

Rapture crashed over him, so rich and thick it stunned his mind into silence. There was nothing, nothing but the hot explosion of her blood in his mouth, the searing throb of his balls as he shot inside her, filling her cunt even as he sucked and swallowed. They were locked together, welded into one, rocking in an endless, timeless ecstasy.

Rather than fading, his orgasm grew stronger, soaring to impossible heights as his balls contracted again, pumping his fluids into her. Her blood coursed through him, intoxicating – he was drunk on her, drunk on her essence, feeling her inside him just as he was inside her. Her spirit, her strength roared through his veins, goading him higher into a white, silent realm where nothing existed but the fire in his loins, the rich, salty taste of her in his mouth...

Her mouth was open, her neck taut with screams, but he could hear nothing, nothing but the thunder of his pulse in his ears and the distant, frantic hammer of her fading heartbeat...

Roaring, Adrian threw himself back, tearing out of her violently as she collapsed to the floor. He reeled backward, panting, and caught himself against one of the booths, his gaze never leaving her still, huddled form.

Jesus. Oh Jesus. What have I done?

He wanted to go to her, touch her... He didn't dare. He was too terrified she would be dead.

"Rissa? Larissa!"

Then she moaned, the sound as faint as the mew of a newborn kitten. Relief tore through him, so fierce it left him trembling. He staggered to her side, gathering her limp form into his arms. Her heartbeat was so low, just the merest flutter of life in her chest. Her head lolled loosely on her neck, and Adrian flushed with self-condemnation as he saw the two ragged puncture marks on the side of her throat.

Oh, you bastard.

It didn't matter how hard she had pushed him. It didn't matter that her mouth had tormented him until he was half-blind with lust. There was no excuse. He hadn't warned her, hadn't even tried to prepare her...

What he'd done was unforgivable.

Now there was only one thing he *could* do. Grimly, he pulled on his clothes and yanked a heavy linen cloth from one of the dining tables. The crash of fine china as it shattered on the floor echoed the silent, jagged cry of his fractured heart.

Not even that disturbance could rouse Larissa. Carefully, he wrapped her in the soft white tablecloth and lifted her up in his powerful arms.

Chapter Five

She'd awakened in the harsh white glare of a hospital. For a moment, Larissa had been convinced she was dead. Then she saw the bag of crimson fluid hanging on a hook above her bed, the red liquid flowing down the plastic tube into her arm.

Policemen had come, asking her if she remembered what happened. She'd shaken her head weakly. As they'd left, she'd heard one of them mutter, "Goddamn Goth freaks. There's a few every year."

But she *did* remember. She remembered every second of her night with Adrian. His fierceness. His tenderness. His unexpected hesitation.

You're not leaving me, Larissa. Not tonight. Not ever.

She didn't *feel* any different, though. After two days they'd discharged her, and as she'd walked out, unaffected by the bright Monday morning sunlight, something inside her had almost grieved.

So much for that myth.

You don't really believe it? Larissa asked herself sternly. She was sitting on the edge of her bed in her Upper East Side apartment, dressed in a gorgeous, wine-red 1940s ball gown. Matching silk opera gloves covered her arms, and the sequined mask she'd chosen for Darlene's Halloween party lay beside her on the coverlet. She'd added a scarf to conceal the fading marks on her neck, although there was hardly any need – the doctors had been puzzled at how quickly they'd healed.

She doubted they'd even leave a scar. Except on her heart.

No, she didn't believe it. He was a man, that was all—inhumanly charismatic, maybe. Most psychopaths were. But she didn't believe that, either. Whatever else Adrian Dane might or might not be, one thing she was certain he *wasn't*, was mad.

Shaking herself briskly, Larissa rose, grateful when the buzz from the front desk cut through her wandering thoughts. Picking up the mask, she headed down to the lobby.

She was striding toward the doors and the taxi she could see waiting outside when the building's desk clerk called after her. "Miss Hardy!"

She turned and saw him coming toward her with a single rose in his hands. A single blood-red, long-stemmed rose.

"Thank you, Matthew." She took it, feeling the light prick of thorns through her gloves, and went outside to the taxi.

There was an envelope tied to it with crimson ribbon. In the backseat of the cab, she opened it, admiring the elegant silver-foil engraving. It was just what she would have chosen to use herself.

He'd done it, then. In a way, she was glad – it had been a good marketing idea.

She ought to have been furious with him, she knew. She *definitely* ought to have reported him to the police. But Larissa couldn't find any trace of resentment inside her. Confusion, yes, and a strange sense of loss, but no anger, no wish for vengeance.

It was over, that was all.

Raising the rose to her face, she inhaled its sweet fragrance, picturing how *Sang Rouge* would look tonight with its chandeliers blazing, masked and laughing people swirling gracefully on the dance floor. *An enchanted place*, she thought to herself, and laughed slightly. It had certainly enchanted her.

As had its owner.

Glancing out the window, Larissa saw groups of Halloween revelers, their masks like a slideshow of the supernatural. Devils, demons, monsters—and yes, vampires swirled past in the darkness, visible for just a moment and then gone.

Where did all those myths come from? she wondered suddenly. What if they're not simply old stories? She remembered a college course she'd taken once – Ancient Religions and Primitive Beliefs. The instructor, a bearded, bespectacled fellow who favored tribal

prints and Birkenstock sandals, had lectured frequently on the subject of universal archetypes.

Every myth must be viewed as an expression of reality, however changed or distorted. There's a core grain of truth buried in any fable. Our job is to dig for those truths, setting aside our preconceptions.

Rapping on the safety glass, she spoke to the cab driver. "I've changed my mind. Take me downtown."

* * * * *

Floodlights illuminated the delicate gold lettering of the sign above the entrance, but a small notice on the door read "Closed for private party". Larissa bit her lip, trying to peek through the wooden slats of the shutters. The place was well lit, but she couldn't sense any bustle inside. In fact, except for the lighting, *Sang Rouge* appeared completely deserted.

Hesitantly, she tried the door. It wasn't locked and she slipped inside, betrayed by nothing more than the soft rustle of her full, deep-red skirt. She peered into the main room. The place was empty.

Then she saw him, standing in the shadows at the edge of the dance floor, his eyes closed. An old Billie Holiday tune filled the air. He seemed so vulnerable standing there like that, his head thrown back, his stern features lax as he listened to the music. He was dressed in a vintage tuxedo, his tousled black hair just brushing the collar.

He was so handsome it almost took her breath away.

There was a table set with places for two, just to one side of the dance floor. All the other tables had their chairs turned upside down, their legs jutting into the air like a forest of elegantly-carved toothpicks. On the one table in use, candles burned in their silver holders, their white tapered lengths already half-consumed. As Larissa looked around, taking it all in, the song came to a close and then started again. Adrian didn't move.

How long had he stood there like that, his eyes closed, waiting to see if she would come? Hours, maybe. Maybe ever since sunset.

Do you know how long I've been looking for you? Do you know how long I've waited, Rissa?

Her heart ached, watching him. It was time for the waiting to be over.

Silently, she descended the three steps into the main room. But as quietly as she moved, he must have heard her because his eyes opened, their piercing emerald green blazing with longing.

Adrian stayed unmoving as she walked toward him. Then, still without speaking, he took her into his arms.

They danced, revolving slowly around the empty floor, their bodies barely touching as the song played again and again. Finally, Adrian murmured, his voice rough with relief, "I didn't think you'd come."

"Neither did I."

"Larissa, I—"

She raised a hand to his lips, silencing his apology. "It's not enough just for you to drink my blood, is it?"

His eyes widened momentarily. "No."

"Then..." She bit her lip, feeling tears sting her eyes. "Then you can't really keep me forever, can you?"

"No. Not unless you choose to drink mine."

Larissa stared up at him. "You mean, I have to..."

He nodded, his gaze never leaving hers. Moving closer, she laid her cheek against his chest, felt his arms close around her as they continued to dance. The heat of his body soothed her, arousing and yet at the same time comforting. Intoxicating—and as familiar as home.

His hands trembled slightly on the small of her back. The throbbing ridge of his erection pressed against her belly. She felt the muscles of his throat work as he swallowed. "Larissa. Larissa, I would never...never ask you—"

"Don't. Don't ask." She cut him off abruptly. Raising her head, she breathed in his ear, feeling his whole body stiffen as he heard her words. "Don't ask, Adrian. *Make* me."

He jerked his head back, staring down at her in shock and disbelief. Then he dragged her against him, kissing her fiercely, his mouth moving over hers as if starved for the taste of her.

Pinning her to him with one arm, he yanked off his tie, his jacket, unbuttoned his shirt. Her fingers worked eagerly at his belt until the proud length of his erection jutted before her. Closing her gloved hand around it, she pumped it lightly, hearing him gasp as the red silk caressed him. He lowered his mouth to her breasts, dragging the bodice of her dress down with his teeth. Seizing one nipple between his lips, he sucked it ravenously as his hands worked at her zipper.

Her dress slid downward in a rustle of red satin, leaving her standing in nothing but her garter belt, heels and gloves. Had she known this was where she really was going, hours before as she'd carefully dressed? She must have, she realized wonderingly – or why else would she have neglected to put on panties?

Drawing back, he looked down at her, admiring every inch, each luscious curve. "Oh Rissa," he breathed. Then he pulled her to him, tumbling them both downward, dragging her atop him and pushing her down onto his cock. She cried out as his rockhard shaft impaled her, filling her utterly, jarring her almost to the brink of climax. Poised above him, she quivered as fire raced along her veins.

Clasping her hip with one hand, Adrian moved her up and down on his cock, while his other hand played through the curls of her sex. Sneaking one finger between her folds, he ran it around her opening then forced it inside her alongside his shaft. Larissa whimpered, and pushed down against him. "No. No, sweet Rissa. Not yet, my lovely." He fucked her like that a moment longer, stroking both his finger and cock inside her. Then he slid his finger out, smearing her swollen clit with her juices, and glided his finger back and forth over the throbbing nub. She moaned, biting her lip, trying to hold back the conflagration building inside her. She was going to come, right now, right...

Adrian stopped stroking, leaving her shuddering, gasping, on the very brink of orgasm. "No. Not like this."

Seizing her hips, he pulled her to one side, rolling her smoothly onto her back as he rolled with her, his cock still buried inside her passage. Holding himself above her, his shirt falling open around his broad chest, he pushed down into her lightly. She cried out, arching her back, wanting more, wanting all of him inside her, *now*.

"You like that, Rissa?"

"Oh Jesus, yes."

"You want to come with my cock inside you?"

She nodded. His emerald eyes held her, feral and intent.

"You want me to fuck you, pound my cock into you, take you 'til you scream and beg for more?"

"Yes. Oh God, Adrian, yes!"

He grinned, his expression hard, forceful, utterly dominating. "Then bite me, Rissa."

He thrust inward, and paused. Her cunt clenched in longing. Would she? Could she? Did she dare?

Then Adrian let his weight down upon her. Wrapping his arms around her thighs, he dragged them upward, groaning as he rammed in to the hilt. His face was pressed against hers, his breath gusting in her ear, his entire body quivering with tension as he fucked her ruthlessly. Larissa felt lust coiling like a snake in her belly, tight and hot and yearning toward a bliss that was just out of reach. His cock stroked inside her,

pounding her passage, and she could feel her orgasm growing, building, gathering like a storm about to burst...

The smooth, warm skin of his neck was pressed against her cheek. All she'd have to do is turn her head, and...

"Do it," he whispered urgently. "Do it, Larissa!"

Shuddering, she hesitated—and he froze above her, pulling out of her quickly, leaving her gasping as her cunt clenched around a sudden, unendurable emptiness. Her need roared upward, fierce and undeniable, and she thrust her jaw forward, biting down 'til she felt the skin break. Adrian slammed back into her, howling in triumph.

His balls pulsed against her ass as he shot into her, the hot jets of his semen triggering her own climax. She snarled, biting harder, tasting the rich, salty tang of his blood in her mouth. Releasing her thighs, Adrian clasped her head against him, forcing her to drink deeper as his body arched in ecstasy. His cock throbbed inside her, spilling stream after stream of come deep in her cunt, and a second peak burst through her, searing like fire as she swallowed his essence, binding herself to him forever.

* * * * *

The candles had burned down to soft, molten stubs before Larissa could summon the energy to open her eyes. When she did, she gasped.

Had she thought *Sang Rouge* was enchanting? It was a fairyland. Light sparkled everywhere like gleams of rare diamonds—off the crystal, the silver, the chandeliers. The very air seemed speckled with light.

"Yes," Adrian murmured above her. "It's like that."

He lifted his head, and she smiled up at him tenderly, running a finger over the soft curve of his lip. The marks where she'd bit him were already starting to heal. "Forever?" she whispered, and he nodded.

"Forever."

He rolled off her, his arms gathering her close, and she laid her head on the warm swell of his shoulder. Trailing her hand down over her belly, she cupped his softened cock, squeezing it lightly. He flinched slightly. "Stop that."

"No."

"Stop that. I'm sore."

"Awww," she cooed. "Worn out already?" Sliding downward, she gave his cock a soft, teasing kiss—a kiss that turned quickly into something more as she wrapped her lips about it, stroking with her tongue. It hardened beneath her ministrations, and Adrian hissed as she sucked it deeper, feeling it glide against the strange new length of her fangs.

"Damn it, Rissa! I said stop!"

Raising her head, Larissa smiled wickedly. "Make me."

The End

About the Author

An award-winning author who received three CAPA nominations in her first year of publishing, Sierra Dafoe has been writing for as long as she can remember, beginning her career with the classic tale "Tommy the Turtle" in second grade.

She has since expanded her repertoire of animals and now pens sexy werewolves, dragons, and other shapeshifters. She also enjoys vampires, sci-fi, epic action-adventure, and the occasional foray into the Middle Ages.

Sierra lives smack in the middle of New Hampshire's White Mountains with her incredibly tolerant hubby, her thoroughly obnoxious cat, and her twelve-year-old puppy.

Sierra welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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