

Judy Mays



Jingle Buns

Changeling Press

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Daniella Becker should have a great life. The pastry shop, Jingle Buns, which she owns with her closest friends in Chicago, is a great success. She's young, pretty and attracts the interest of more than a few men -- attracts their interest but then loses it because of a small birth defect, an enlarged clitoris, which frightens them away. Her heart has been broken often enough that she's sure she'll spend her life alone.

Her friends, however, refuse to give up and decide to find a man who will appreciate her natural endowment. And there just happens to be a tourist from Germany who's discovered their pastry shop, Maximilian Arnalt. They're sure he'll be perfect for her. After all, everybody knows many Germans like kinky sex.

The one thing they don't know is that Maximilian is a vampire.

Prologue

“Fuck, but I like big tits,” Walter said as Daniella popped open the front of her bra. “Squeeze them for me. Make your nipples hard. That’s it.” His breath raised goose bumps on her skin as he leaned forward, pushed her hands out of the way, and kissed first one nipple then the other.

Arching her back, Daniella hummed with pleasure as Walter suckled. She shuddered as he jerked his jeans open and freed his cock then dropped his hands to her thighs, pushed her shirt up over her hips, and slid both of them into her crotch. Her now moist nipples hardened even more in the cool air when he pulled his mouth away.

“Christ but your panties are wet. You’re so fucking ready for me. You’ve got me so damn hard. I’m going to ram my cock into you and fuck you until you can’t walk straight.”

“Oh, God, yes,” Daniella moaned as she cupped her breasts and lifted them to his mouth. “Fuck me. I need your cock inside me so bad!”

Grunting against her breast as he sucked on a nipple again, he jerked her panties down as she lifted her ass off the table. They slid down over her knees and calves and dribbled to the floor.

Daniella spread her legs wide. It had been too long since she’d ridden a rock-hard cock.

Walter slid his fingers into her wet cunt. Almost immediately he stiffened and jerked his hand away. “What the fuck?” Pushing himself away from her, he stepped back and looked down. “What the fuck is that?”

Panting with arousal, Daniella reached for him. “My clit. It’s just a little larger than normal.”

He looked up into her face and then back down between her legs again. "A little larger? It looks like a frickin' dick. You're not only fat, you're a fucking freak!" he screamed as his cock softened and flopped down to lie against his balls.

Feeling as if someone had dumped a bucket of icy water over her head, Daniella recoiled. "I'm not fat, and I'm not a freak, Walter. Enlarged clits are common."

"Like hell. How come I've never seen one before?" he shouted as he pulled his underwear and jeans up. "I'm outta here. Don't bother calling," he finished as he fastened his pants and bolted for the door. Thrusting it open, he banged the screen door against the outside wall and galloped down the steps.

A burst of cold wind blew through the open door and rushed up over her still open thighs to thrust itself into her cunt. Blinking back tears, Daniella squeezed her legs shut and slid off her kitchen table. Sniffing, she pushed her skirt back down over her hips. Choking on a sob, she kicked her bright red panties across the floor. She'd thought Walter was different. She thought her birth defect wouldn't matter to him.

She was so wrong.

Asshole.

As tears rolled down her cheeks, Daniella slammed the door shut, locked it, then shuffled into her living room where she stopped only long enough to yank the plug of her merrily flickering Christmas lights out of the wall. Then she stumbled on to her bedroom. There, as she sniffled and wiped her tears off her cheeks with the back of her hand, she stripped off her clothing, yanked a voluminous, flannel nightgown from a drawer, pulled it over her head, and flopped down onto her bed. She wasn't a freak! Lots of women had a large clitoris. There was lots of information about them, and lots of men said they liked them. Where were those men? How come she'd never found one?

Pulling the quilt her grandmother had made for her years ago up over her head, Daniella buried her face in her pillow and cried herself to sleep.

* * *

Her ass is too skinny, Maximilian thought as he bent the woman over the back of the couch and screwed his cock into her. Why did modern women have to starve themselves until they looked like poles? Voluptuous women were far more seductive. The bulky clothing this one had been wearing fooled him. He'd thought she was more -- curvaceous. Still, her cunt was hot, wet and tight.

She shuddered and moaned as he swivelled his hips and thrust himself deeper. Moaning, she arched her back, and her cunt muscles sucked his cock deeper.

Maximilian groaned. Fuck but a woman's tight, wet pussy felt better than almost anything on earth. Rising up on his toes, he pushed his cock into her sopping cunt as far as he could then twisted his hips.

"Ahh!" She pushed her ass back against his stomach.

His teeth ached. He could hear her heart pumping, hear her blood gushing through her veins -- hot, sweet blood. Sinking his fangs into her soft body as she orgasmed and having that rich blood fill his mouth would make up for her lack of curves.

He thrust himself deeper.

"Haven't you finished yet?"

Even though her voice jarred his concentration, Maximilian didn't stop grinding his hips. "*Verpiss dich*, Frederica."

"You don't have to get vulgar, and you've been playing with this one for over an hour," his sister continued in a bored voice. "Mutti always told us not to play with our food."

"Shut the fuck up."

His sister snorted. "That's even worse than 'piss off.' The older you get, the more your language falls into the gutter."

The woman began to writhe under Maximilian's hands. She spread her legs wider to give him better access while her cunt muscles sucked and clasped his cock.

Maximilian grunted. He should be enjoying himself.

He wasn't. Once again, his sister was ruining his night.

As the woman shuddered and her orgasm rolled around his cock, Maximilian bent over her and buried his elongated canines into her shoulder. She screamed and screwed herself down onto his cock even further. He sucked her warm, salty blood into his mouth and stopped fighting his own orgasm. Fulfillment and power surged throughout his body while he rested his forehead between her shoulder blades and closed his eyes. Now, if only his sister would go away...

"About time you finished."

Sighing, Maximilian opened his eyes, pulled his cock out of the woman, and straightened. Lifting her, he turned her around and stared into her eyes. "You will dress and go home now in the car waiting for you out in front of this house. You will remember a night of satisfying sex but will have no memory of me or where you've been. Good night."

Smiling, she nodded, pulled on her clothing, and walked out the door.

Arms crossed over her chest, Maximilian's sister stepped out of her way. "Why are you so nice to them? How many more are you going to bring home?"

Ignoring his nudity, Maximilian strode across the room to his bed and stretched out on it. "As many as I want. It's my house, remember?"

"Maxi..."

"Leave off, Fredi."

Striding across the room, she halted next to the bed and fisted her hands on her hips. "It's not your fault Bernhard went rogue. He would have killed you if you hadn't killed him."

He rolled over on his side and presented his back to her. "I know."

"*Gott damn*, Maximilian..."

"Mother told you ladies don't curse."

"If Mother were here, she'd be cursing herself. You need to let go, damn it! Bernhard turned into a monster. It was your job to kill him. Who knows how many he'd have killed, both human and vampyre. You should not feel guilty."

Maximilian sighed. Fredi could be such a pain in the ass. "I don't."

“Then why have you hidden yourself away from everyone? You need to get up and out, do something besides fuck humans.”

“By all that’s holy!” Maximilian roared as he rolled over, rose up, grabbed her wrists, and pulled her face to within inches of his. “Did you ever stop to think I needed a break? That I’ve been hunting rogues for the last fifteen years? I’m fucking tired of killing. I need to relax.”

Completely uncowed, his sister shouted back at him. “Then go on a vacation.”

Christ but she’s more of a nag than Mother! Maximilian thought as he stared into her blue eyes. “I’m leaving tonight,” he snapped.

Surprise leaped onto her face. “You didn’t mention...”

He bared his teeth. “You didn’t give me the chance. Instead, you just burst into my room.”

Wrenching her wrists free, she rubbed one and continued to stare at him. “Where are you going?”

Relaxing his tense muscles, Maximilian sighed and wiped his face with his hand. When would she leave him be? He needed to get far away from his sister and her unnecessary concern. Now, where could he go that she wouldn’t follow him? Russia? England? No. She liked both places. But she didn’t like... “America.”

She started. “America? Why go there?”

Because you don’t like it so you won’t come chasing after me. “I haven’t been there in the last seventy years or so. I thought I’d go see if it’s changed at all.”

The consternation on her face slowly changed to resignation. “Well, I’ve heard that lately New York or Los Angeles can be interesting in a quaint way.”

Oh no you don’t, Fredi. You aren’t going to follow me. “I’m planning on going to the Midwest -- Chicago.” He had to bite the inside of his mouth to keep from laughing at the disgust on her face. His snob of a sister wouldn’t be caught dead -- so to speak -- in a place as unsophisticated as she believed Chicago to be. He’d be able to relax there not only because she wouldn’t follow him but also because he was almost certain she didn’t

have any friends or acquaintances there she'd manipulate into following him around or worse, trying to entertain him.

"Chicago! What can you possibly do in Chicago?"

Smiling, he lay back down. "Take a break from killing and just relax. Now, if you don't mind, I need my rest." Closing his eyes, he blocked out her list of complaints and allowed his consciousness to retreat to the farthest recesses of his mind. Fredi wouldn't stand there and berate him very long. She had to rest herself.

In moments, looking more dead than alive, Maximilian lay still and pale.

Biting off her final comments, Frederica glared at her brother, then stomped out of his room. Chicago? Why in the name of the first vampyre did he choose Chicago? If she remembered her American history correctly, there wasn't anything there but slaughterhouses. And even vampyres could get tired of the constant smell of blood.

Chapter One

The strong, icy wind rolled off Lake Michigan and barreled through Chicago's streets while the dark, billowing clouds swirling around the tops of the tallest buildings wept icy sleet on the rambunctious city. Undeterred, Chicago's residents and visitors went about their business. Christmas was only a week away, and there was still shopping to do. Besides, what was a little wind and sleet? A twenty-five degree wind chill was balmy in the Windy City.

Gott im Himmel, Maximilian thought as the icy rain slapped him in the face. Sleet and light snow had been falling off and on ever since he'd arrived two weeks ago. Not that the cold affected him. He wore his black overcoat not to keep warm but to blend in with the humans -- and to disappear quickly when he wanted to. But even vampyres got tired of wind and icy rain slapping their faces or rolling down the backs of their necks, which is exactly what made Chicago the best choice for his escape from his family. The only better choice would have been a sunny, Caribbean beach. He snorted. He couldn't tolerate the sun any more than the rest of his family.

More ice crystals kissed his cheeks as a passerby furtively glanced at him then muttered a "Merry Christmas." Maximilian simply grunted acknowledgment. He'd learned not to speak unless he wanted something. Sighing, he turned another corner. His German accent was proving to be something of an encumbrance to his wish for quiet and anonymity. Almost anywhere he went in this friendly city, once he opened his mouth, someone greeted him like a long-lost relative. His hasty choice of Chicago hadn't taken into account all of the Germans who'd originally settled here. Hell, if he searched closely enough, he probably could find relatives.

Stopping at a red light, he waited to cross the still busy street.

Once on the other side, he checked the street sign and turned another corner. He grunted again, this time with relief as the icy rain hit the back of his head rather than his face. Then the icy drops rolled down his neck.

He flipped his collar up. *Fucking ice.* He was one vampire who didn't enjoy being ice-cold.

Hunching his shoulders against the discomfort, Maximilian continued his trek through Chicago's dark streets. Pedestrians became fewer and fewer as he traversed four more blocks. When he reached the next corner, he paused. If the directions he had gotten from the clerk at his hotel were correct, the nightclub he was looking for was on this street, Hemlock. How apropos, a nightclub called The UnDead on a street named after a poisonous plant. What's more, the clerk had told him this was not one of the best sections of town, something that had been obvious for the last few blocks. The building to his left was rundown; the one directly across the street abandoned.

But, scaffolding clung to the front of the one next to it, and repairs were being made. Rehabilitation was coming to this part of Chicago.

Turning left, he continued down the street. Red and green Christmas lights blinked on and off in an apartment building's window across the street, and a bright yellow door light glowed a hearty welcome to whoever was walking by. Next to it was a smaller building with a bright neon light advertising Rosa's Tattoos. More Christmas lights in a myriad of colors blinked from the windows of the apartments above the shop.

On his left, he passed first one renovated building then another, both with twinkling Christmas lights. Next was Yuu's Dry Cleaning then Rose's Flower Shoppe with sparkling white lights blinking in the windows.

Interesting, Maximilian thought. The hotel clerk had warned him that this section of town was rundown and not particularly safe after dark. Instead, this street seemed quite -- homey. The fool at the hotel must not have known what he was talking about. Except for the tattoo parlor, a street like this shouldn't have a nightclub named The UnDead that catered to Goths and would-be human vampyres. Maximilian needed to

feed, and a Goth nightclub would be the perfect place to do so. With low lighting and dark corners, no one would think twice about him sucking on someone's neck -- if anyone there was alert enough to see him.

But would he find such a club in a residential area?

He shook his head. Something wasn't right here. He must be on the wrong street. Then a small sign on a large, dark building across the street caught his attention. In bright, white neon, a flickering arrow pointed back to an alley. The words *The Undead* blinked underneath it. At the same time, the swirling wind shifted, and Maximilian was surrounded by the aromas of fresh sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and ginger. Wrenching his gaze away from the flickering sign, he turned his attention to the shop just ahead on his left. Unlike the other stores on the street, this one, *Jingle Buns*, was still open. Every time the door opened, the aroma of fresh German pastries wafted out. He inhaled deeply. The scents were as savory as those in any shop in Berlin, Munich, or any other German city.

Maximilian glanced once more at the dark building directly across the street. A small group of people dressed in the expected black of Goth wear stumbled out of the alley. More than a few complained loudly about the cold sleet as they made their way directly across the street and entered the pastry shop.

Cocking his head to the side, Maximilian watched the group enter then watched another group in Goth dress exit. A few hurried across the street to the club, but the others turned and walked up the street. Two entered one of the buildings at the end of the block after calling a good night to the other members of their group.

Looking up at the dark sky, Maximilian closed his eyes and concentrated. There, to the left, hidden by the swirling gray clouds, was the almost full moon. Without being able to see it, he still knew it was an hour past midnight. Opening his eyes, he stared at the pastry shop, his curiosity aroused. The odors wafting from it were enticing. Why was it open at this hour? Then, however, he shook his head and turned away. As interested as he was in the store, the nightclub came first. He needed blood.

After staring down the surly, gorilla-sized bouncer guarding the door, Maximilian paid the ten-dollar cover charge and slipped into the club. Strobe lights flickered over the bodies gyrating to loud, discordant music while couples or groups huddled in dark corners and booths. Cigarette smoke wafted through the air along with the odors of beer and whiskey.

Grimacing at the loud music -- he definitely preferred Mozart -- Maximilian inhaled deeply. The odors of human perspiration, perfumes, and vice floated on the air. Stepping away from the bar, he slid around the shadowy perimeter of the room. Not far from the door, he found what he was looking for, a stocky girl with atrociously dyed red and black hair alone in a dark booth with her head lying in the arms she had crossed on the table in front of her. Lifting the glass that lay before her in a puddle of rich, red liquid, Maximilian sniffed then grunted.

The wine's fragrance was surprisingly pleasant.

As he set the glass down, he looked around.

No one paid any attention to him as he slid into the booth next to the girl and gathered her into his arms. Turning so his back shielded her from anyone who might step into the darkness surrounding the booth, he pushed her hair out of the way and sank his now descended fangs into her skin and muscle where her neck and shoulder joined then sucked the blood that welled through the two wounds.

"What?" She tried to pull away.

Maximilian lifted his head and looked into her eyes. "Shhhh. You're safe. Relax. Sleep again."

Sighing, she nodded and closed her eyes.

Maximilian returned to the blood on her neck. As usual, the heady mixture of rich blood and warm woman enticed and excited him. His cock rose and he slid his hand under her black tee shirt. Her breasts were large and soft, and there was no bra to hinder his hand.

Maximilian shuddered. He shouldn't have waited so long to feed. He wanted nothing more now than to rip her jeans away and lay her out over the table so he could bury his cock in her hot cunt.

"Hey, what are you doing to my girlfriend?" a slurred voice asked. "I'm Drac, and you better not mess with me."

Pulling himself away from the girl, Maximilian pushed her into the corner and turned around. Just as well he'd been interrupted. A busy club was not a place he wanted to fuck a woman even if he could make everyone ignore what he was doing. Some vampyres enjoyed being exhibitionists. He didn't. So, he conquered his desire for sex and concentrated on the man at the entrance of the booth.

A twenty-something vampyre wanna-be dressed in a battered tuxedo and cape stood swaying at the end of the booth. Cocking an eyebrow, Maximilian stared into the pale face with multiple piercings in the nose and eyebrows and filed canine teeth then shook his head.

Vlad would be appalled.

Staring deep into his eyes, Maximilian said, "I caught her as she was about to fall to the floor. You should keep a closer watch on her when she's in this condition. Anything could happen."

Blinking as he swayed back and forth, the young man shook his head, blinked some more, then smiled. "Thanks. She can't handle her wine too good, but after she wakes up, she'll be horny as hell, if you know what I mean."

Smiling, Maximilian pushed his way out of the booth past the younger man. Though his cock was now relaxed, it wouldn't take much for his desire to return. Best he leave now. "Ja, I know what you mean."

The younger man staggered a bit. "You got an accent I heard before. Hey, is it German? You really German?" He didn't give Maximilian time to answer. "If you're hungry, you should go across the street to Jingle Buns. They got really good German pastry there."

Maximilian stepped around him and strode through the gyrating dancers who parted before him then surged back across his wake completely oblivious to his true identity. When he reached the door, he was slowed by a small group of chatting men and women who were leaving.

"I'm starved. Let's get some pastry."

"I'm with you," a morbid looking woman with a pale face and black lips said. "Then I need to get home. I've got an early class tomorrow."

"Oh, come on, Professor," answered a young man with a pointy, black Mohawk and more earrings in his ears than Maximilian thought possible. "Just cancel the class. We could use a break anyway. I haven't started that paper on Poe yet."

She chuckled and shrugged into a dark coat. "Stop procrastinating. Class is at 9:00 a.m., and the paper is due Monday."

"Fuck," he grumbled.

Maximilian followed the group while the banter continued and they hurried through the windy alley and across the street.

Lights blinked around the windows and door of Jingle Buns, and again, as a patron left, the scents of fragrant, hot coffee and warm, spicy pastry swirled around the street while the cheery sounds of conversation and merry Christmas carols rolled into the sky.

Chapter Two

“Dani isn’t fat,” Penny said mostly to herself as she watched her friend serve hot coffee and apple strudel to a new group who’d just come in. “She only weighs about a hundred and sixty or seventy pounds and she’s almost six feet tall.”

“Dani? Fat? Who says so? She’s built like a brick shit house,” Teddy said with a chuckle and a swish of his hips as he set a tray of apple dumplings on the counter. “You don’t think she’s fat. You’ve made more than a few passes at her, and you’re particular.”

Penny waved her hand in the air. “And I’ll keep trying. One of these times, she might say yes.”

“When hell freezes over, sweetie,” Teddy answered with a pat to her cheek. “Dani wants a big, solid man with a big, hard cock in her bed.”

“You can’t blame a girl for trying, can you?” Penny sighed but continued to stare at her friend. Her chances of getting Dani in her bed were slim to none. That didn’t mean she didn’t want her friend happy, and if that meant finding Dani a man, then so be it. “Teddy, we have to find Dani a date. She spends all her time working.”

Teddy slid a tray of nutty strudel into the display case. “Well, girlfriend, if she didn’t, you two wouldn’t have a business, now would you? She busted her ass to get this place up and going.”

Penny nodded. “Yeah, but it was my idea to stay open at night to catch the crowd leaving The UnDead.”

“Only because I pounded on the door one night and begged for something to eat before I died of hunger!” Teddy said with a wave of his hand. “And I would have, too, if you and Sammy hadn’t let me in and fed me.”

“You just wanted to pick Sammy up.”

"Well, of course I did. He's one hot hunk of man!"

Penny grinned. "And straight as a couple of parallel lines."

Teddy pushed his lower lip out into a pout then mimicked Penny's earlier comment, "Well, you can't blame a boy for trying, now can you? Besides, look at all the business I brought you. Letting me in was one of the smartest things you ever did."

Penny rearranged some donuts. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you keep telling us."

"Why are you so worried about Dani getting a date? She does okay on her own."

Penny shook her head. "Walter dumped her. She let him upstairs a couple nights ago, and he flipped when he touched her clit. He called her a fat freak."

"Asshole." Teddy sniffed as he slid another tray into the display case. "I knew he was a jerk the minute I met him."

Penny barked with laughter. "You thought he was a jerk because he told you to get lost when you came on to him."

"It wasn't what he said," Teddy said with a shake of his head, "but how he said it -- like I was something slimy that crawled out from under a rock. Dani is better off without him."

"Sure she is, but he's the third guy who's dumped her because of her clit. She's feeling lower than whale shit right about now."

"Shouldn't you two be working," Daniella said as she stepped behind the counter, "and not talking about my love life?"

"But your love life is much more interesting," Teddy said with a beaming smile.

"You mean my lack of love life," Dani shot back. "Besides, my love life is none of your business."

"But, sweet cheeks," Teddy said with mock horror as he clasped his hands over his heart. "If your best friends can't talk about your love life, who can?"

Closing her eyes, Dani shook her head, but before she could say anything, the brass bell above the door jingled, and a blast of cold air rushed across the room.

"Oh my, my, my, my," Teddy said. "Be still my fluttering heart. He's mine."

As Dani turned, Penny lifted her head from behind the counter and looked at their latest customer. "It's not your heart that's fluttering, it's your cock, and if that guy's gay, I'm six feet tall and built like Dani."

Chuckling, Daniella shook her head at Penny's comment. Half Chinese, half African American, Penny, who was slender and petite, continued to wish she were tall and busty. "Stop complaining, Penny, and go see what he wants."

"Maybe you should wait on him, Dani," Teddy said with a wiggle of his eyebrows.

Daniella rolled her eyes. "I am perfectly capable of finding my own men."

"Sure you are," Penny said. "Walter was a real winner, wasn't he?"

"How would you know?" Daniella snapped. "You don't even like men."

Penny shrugged. "So? If there are no people skills, a person's sex doesn't matter. Walter was sooo boring! How in the world could you agree to date an accountant? Everything about him was anal. He couldn't even take a piss without making sure his cock was arranged the right way after he was finished."

Daniella stared at her friend. "And how the hell would you know?"

Penny grinned. "Teddy told me."

Daniella swung around to face her other friend. "You spied on him peeing?"

He grinned back at her. "Of course I did. I hid in the stall last week. Just checking out the merchandise, honeybun. I had to make sure he had the equipment to keep you satisfied, didn't I?"

"Good Lord!" Daniella exclaimed as she shook her head and turned away. "Go wait on the customers. I have a tray full of dough to knead one more time before tomorrow morning." The swinging door almost hit Teddy in the ass -- almost. Daniella didn't push it quite hard enough.

Teddy would have enjoyed the smack too much.

* * *

Flipping his long coat out of the way, Maximilian sat down at a small table close to the door and looked around the shop's interior. The group he'd followed in had piled

into one of the four large booths against the far wall where they hailed one of the employees by the name of Teddy and began ordering various types of pastries.

More tables with two or four chairs filled the surprisingly spacious interior. At the back of the shop, two long display cases holding numerous types of pastries extended from the two side walls to the center of the room where they stopped short of meeting to leave a space where a person could emerge from behind them. Blinking lights of red and green twinkled around them while more flickering lights were nestled in green garland draped around the room.

He looked behind him toward the front of the shop. An artificial Christmas tree bedecked with fake pastries stood in the right corner while a real, fragrant pine tree bedecked with traditional German decorations stood in the left. The joyful sound of Christmas carols filled the room. Mixed into the festive atmosphere were the spicy fragrances of the pastries -- cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, sugar, apples, allspice, lemon, oranges, raisins, and more he couldn't immediately identify -- filling the air.

Again, the brass bell hanging above the door jingled merrily as a group of patrons left leaving Maximilian and the group he'd followed in as the shop's only customers.

Turning around, he eyed the exotic, dark skinned waitress who approached him. The mix of African and Asian heritages in this woman was a sexy combination. Even though he normally preferred his women taller and more voluptuous, he wouldn't mind getting to know this one. He had a feeling that her -- flavor -- would be unique.

"Forget it, big boy," she said in a firm voice when she locked gazes with him. "Your equipment is all wrong for me."

He cocked an eyebrow.

Pulling a small tablet out of her apron pocket she grinned. "I have absolutely no interest in men. You're all either a bunch of whiny wimps or fucking you-have-to-do-things-my-way alpha assholes. I like women, and I like them big and busty. How about you?"

Maximilian simply canted his head to the side and smiled.

She smiled back. "Of course, if you don't like women, Teddy there," she nodded toward the other waiter, "has been drooling over you since the minute you stepped into the place."

Maximilian glanced back at the lanky, tow-headed young man, who probably still didn't shave, dressed in a tight black tee shirt and jeans. The young man smiled and winked.

His lips twitching, Maximilian shook his head. Though he'd experimented -- as most vampyres had -- he hadn't taken long to learn he preferred women as sexual partners. They were so much -- softer. Looking back at his waitress, he said, "Is everyone in here gay? I know there are gay bars that serve alcohol, but I've never heard of a gay pastry shop before. Oh, I'll have coffee -- black and a small piece of the nut strudel."

Her laughter rolled around the room, causing the other patrons to look their way. After she stopped laughing, she stared at him. "Are you really German?"

Sighing, he nodded. Why did everyone ask him that? Wasn't America supposed to be the melting pot of the world? There had to be other people in Chicago who had German accents.

"Oh wow! A real German. Do you eat a lot of pastries when you're in Germany?"

A bit taken aback, Maximilian nodded again. Every other American had asked how he liked Chicago or if he was visiting relatives. "I've had my share." Really, he didn't eat that much. Most vampyres didn't, though they could, especially when trying to blend in with humans. His sister was certainly fond enough of champagne and caviar.

"Hot damn!" his waitress exclaimed. Spinning on her heel, she hurried back to the counter shouting at the top of her lungs, "Dani, get out here. We have a real German to tell us how the pastries are."

Before Maximilian could react to that, Teddy appeared at his side with a plate holding six different kinds of pastries, much to the dismay of the group he'd been waiting on. It was their order.

"Oh, don't get your knickers in a twist," he called to them. "I'll have your order right there." He turned his attention back to Maximilian. "Try these -- on the house -- some apple strudel, nut strudel, Pfeffernüsse, and St. Lucia's buns. Dani got the recipes from her mother who got them from her mother who got them from her mother who... Well, you get the idea. We think we have the best German pastries in Chicago, but you're the first bona fide German to come into Jingle Buns. Your opinion will mean a lot."

Pulling back a bit from the plate Teddy was holding under his nose, Maximilian simply said, "Jingle Buns? That's really the name of this shop?"

"Yeah, cool name, isn't it? Dani said people loved Christmas time so much, celebrating at any time of the year by coming to Jingle Buns and getting some pastries that are only made at Christmas would be a good business idea."

Maximilian raised an eyebrow. "This isn't the best section of town. And the nightclub across the street doesn't exactly cater to a normal crowd. How could you be so sure you'd attract enough patrons?"

Penny returned with his coffee. "Damn it, Teddy. Go get your customers' pastries."

As Teddy blew Maximilian a kiss and sauntered away, Penny said, "We like it here on Hemlock Street."

A new female voice interrupted her. "This may not be the best part of town, but it's what was affordable to us. Besides, a lot of buildings are being renovated and other businesses are moving in. The Yuu's Dry Cleaners and Rose's Flower Shoppe next door are doing better every month, and The UnDead is good for business. Goths are people too, and a lot of the club's patrons aren't seriously into the lifestyle and have regular jobs. Many of them have rented apartments in the renovated buildings in the blocks around the nightclub, and some are opening their own businesses. This section of

Chicago is doing just fine, thank you very much." Sticking out her hand, she said, "I'm Daniella Becker, part owner of Jingle Buns. Welcome."

Rising to his feet, Maximilian lifted her knuckles to his lips. Flawless, ivory skin, a pert nose, blonde hair, a wide smile, vivid blue eyes, and a curvy body voluptuous enough to satisfy a Renaissance painter -- absolutely perfect for him -- if she would be interested. Considering the first two people he'd already met in this particular shop were gay, he couldn't be sure. After kissing her knuckles, he smiled and said, "Maximilian Arnalt. My pleasure." Glancing back to Penny, he said, "Big *und* busty, ja? Yours?"

Chapter Three

Roaring with laughter, Penny collapsed into the chair across the table from his.

Her cheeks burning, Daniella yanked her hand free of the tall stranger's. "I beg your pardon!" she snapped at the man now towering above her. She was close to six feet tall herself, but he had to be at least four inches taller than that.

"She's -- not -- mine," Penny hiccupped between bursts of laughter. "She's -- straight as a -- ruler. Are you -- looking for a girl -- friend?"

Daniella spun to face her friend. "Penny!"

Their German customer pulled her attention back to him as he clicked his heels together and bowed. "Please, forgive me. I meant no disrespect, *Fraulein*." His blue eyes were sparkling with amusement -- and interest.

"Oh, my good gracious! He bows!" Teddy chimed in, his hands fluttering in the air. "Grab him while you can, girlfriend."

Mindful of the other customers watching them, Daniella ground her teeth together. Just wait until she got her hands on these two so-called friends. "There are customers waiting. Go wait on them," she growled. Then, choosing to ignore the previous comments, she said, "Mr. Arnalt, sit down, please. If it's not too much bother, we'd like to have your opinion on our pastries. If you haven't the time, we understand completely." After shooting another glare at her friends, she arranged her face into what she hoped was a completely professional expression and looked back at Maximilian.

He was smiling.

Daniella blinked. Those had to be the whitest teeth she'd ever seen.

Her gaze drifted higher. He had a bump on his nose. He must have broken it sometime. And wow, was his skin pale! She didn't think she'd ever seen anyone with

such pale skin. But -- he was German -- and she was pale too, even in the summer. Too much sun and she looked like a lobster. He was probably the same way.

Daniella looked higher still. His eyes were still sparkling. Damn, but they had to be the bluest she'd ever seen. Then, his expression changed -- became more intense -- as he stared into her eyes.

Why did she suddenly have the urge to drop everything and follow him out the door? She shivered and wrenched her attention up to his broad forehead then to his brown hair. Too bad he wasn't a blond. Blond hair would have been perfect with those blue eyes. Still, his hair was a nice warm honey color which looked good with blue too.

Daniella's gaze drifted back down to his eyes. They seemed even bluer. How blue would they be in passion? In her mind's eye, she pictured the two of them naked on her bed with him sliding a hard thigh between hers to spread her legs wider so he could thrust his big cock into her. Unconsciously, she licked her lips. It was almost closing time.

A rousing rendition of "Jingle Bells" began playing and wrenched her from her daydream. She started. Where had that thought come from? She'd just met this man, and he was a customer, for goodness sake. Oh sure, she enjoyed looking at the men who came into her shop, especially rear views where she could get a good look at their butts, but to even consider leaving with someone she'd just met? She wasn't that crazy! Shit, he could be a serial killer or something.

A single finger caressed her arm, and Daniella started again. When had he lifted his hand?

"Will you join me, *Fraulein*?" His finger slid back up her arm.

Daniella shivered. How could the light stroke of a single finger possibly feel so sexy through the sleeve of her sweater? What had gotten into her?

Mentally shaking her head, she stepped back. "Oh, no. There are customers..."

He raised his voice a bit, and his tone became oddly compelling. "They're all leaving, and your friends are cleaning up."

She looked around. He was right. That group Teddy had waited on was rising and shrugging into their coats as they gulped coffee or shoved pastries into their mouths. Penny and Teddy were busy cleaning tables or checking the customers out.

He cupped her elbow and pulled her closer, and Daniella looked up into his face. He caught her gaze with his, and the vision of their naked bodies straining together leaped into her mind again. His hands were everywhere, her face, her neck, her breasts, her stomach, her clit...

That last mental image threw Daniella out of her musings faster than butter melted in hot pastry pans. No way did she want to envision what would happen when he found out she was a freak. Pulling her arm free, she stepped back.

"You are quite lovely," he murmured in a low voice as he lifted her chin with the knuckle of his index finger so that he once more stared into her eyes. His gaze and voice became even more intense. "Come with me, *Liebling*."

Daniella blinked. Gathering her scattered wits, she stepped back again and looked down at her watch. "I'm sorry, Mr. Arnalt, but it's closing time. We would be glad to have you come back tomorrow to try our pastries if you have the time, however."

At that moment, a departing customer bumped into her, and she fell against the German's chest. He immediately lifted his arms to steady her. Palms flat against his body, she pushed herself back. "Oh, excuse me. I'm so sorry."

Sliding his hands onto her hips, he held her still. His voice was a low whisper. "I am not."

Daniella swallowed. He wore a long, black overcoat, but the chest beneath her hands was hard as a rock. And, he was staring at her with those intense blue eyes again -- almost like he was trying to talk to her with mental telepathy or something.

Again his voice was low, compelling. "Come with me, *Liebchen*."

For a few brief seconds, she was tempted. The thought of pulling off his overcoat and the rest of his clothing was very appealing. Sex with him would probably be fantastic.

Yeah, until he gets a look at my clit. Then he'd be headed back to Germany lickity-split. She shook her head and pushed herself back out of his arms. "No. I can't go out anymore tonight. I have to be back here tomorrow morning. I have a business to run."

For a moment, he simply stared at her, a puzzled expression on his face. Then, his look became thoughtful.

Daniella could hear Penny and Teddy as they moved about wiping tables and counter space. Stepping around him, she picked up the plate of pastries Teddy had set on the table earlier. "I've got to help clean up," she whispered, unsure why she did so.

Finally, the strange, contemplative look left his face, and he bowed again. "Of course, *Fraulein*. How impolite of me not to consider it." He lifted her free hand to his mouth, turned it over, and kissed her palm. Shivers tripped up and down her spine. "I will return tomorrow night," was all he said.

His eyes, however, promised a great deal more.

Another shiver danced up Daniella's spine and zapped her nipples to full attention. Maximilian's glance dropped to her chest and his white teeth flashed again. "Until tomorrow night, *Liebling*."

Spinning on his heel, he strode out the door. The bell jingled merrily as he left.

Outside, Maximilian stepped into the shadows and stared through the wide window at the tall blonde woman inside the brightly lit shop. When Daniella had fallen against his chest, his body had reacted instantly. Though he'd fed early at The Undead, his canines had begun to ache and blood rushed into his cock. She'd been a delicious armful.

Her full, firm breasts had momentarily pressed against his chest, and the hips he'd held had been well-rounded. She was not skinny at all. No, she was much like a fine, red wine -- robust and full-bodied. He would have her naked in his arms with her breasts flattened against his chest as her hips cradled his. She would moan and writhe under him as he buried his cock into her hot cunt and his fangs into her delectable skin.

His cock twitched in his confining jeans as he continued to watch her. Her teeth flashed between full, red lips as she tossed her blonde hair back over her shoulder and laughed at something one of her friends said. Her blue eyes twinkling, she shook her head, gave her friend Teddy a slight shove and then used her hip to nudge Penny out of her way.

Maximilian's cock twitched again and he spread his legs wider apart. He glanced at the shop's name then back at her shapely ass in her tight jeans -- Jingle Buns indeed. If she continued rolling her hips like that, he'd...

He'd what?

His cock was now hot against his leg, and more than anything, he wanted to enjoy jingling her buns until she lay sprawled exhausted on top of him. But... He'd already used compulsion on her, and she'd shrugged it off. How? He frowned and contemplated Daniella more closely. Humans always obeyed a vampyre's command. They were incapable of ignoring it. Both Teddy and Penny had followed his subconscious commands. Why hadn't Daniella? Did she have latent psychic abilities? Was she a human who could be changed?

His cock relaxed as he concentrated on the puzzle that was Daniella, Maximilian continued to watch the three people in the shop. Contrary to what most humans thought, not just anyone could become a vampyre. Vampyres were a race of humans that did not -- unlike what fiction and cinema portrayed -- replenish their ranks by turning humans. Vampyres reproduced like all other mammals -- they had babies. Still, there were records of humans becoming vampyre. Was Daniella one who could?

Lovely, voluptuous Daniella a vampyre? Maximilian's cock stirred again. He'd been searching for the right woman for decades, but no female vampyre had ever interested him. Indeed, the human women his sister despised interested him far more than any of her friends or acquaintances. And now, Daniella interested him far more than any human he'd ever met.

As a fantasy of her sinking her teeth into his chest rolled through his body, a particularly icy wind gusted down the street.

The sound of rapid footsteps accompanied it.

* * *

"Come on, Dani, go for it," Penny said as she helped her friend wipe off tables. "Germans like kinky sex."

"And how do you know?"

"Honey, all you have to do is go to the right German sex site on the Internet, and you'll learn a lot more than you bargained for," Teddy interjected with a smirk. "And I'm sure. I've checked them out."

Daniella snorted. "Go to the right American sex site, and you'll find the same kink. And -- I didn't have to check any of them out to know that."

"Yeah, but you did," Penny countered. "I was there."

"That's because you got me drunk on that cheap wine when you were trying to seduce me, Penelope Yuu. And it didn't work, did it?"

Her friend grinned at her. "Can't blame me for trying to get my hands on that two-inch clit of yours, can you? *I would certainly appreciate it.*" Stepping closer, she put her arm around Daniella's waist and looked up into her face. "Come on, what do you say, sugar pie. Switch over to my side. Nobody can make love to a woman like another woman. You don't know what you're missing."

Daniella laughed and shrugged free of her friend's arm. "Yes I do, a long, hard, thick dick. *I know you don't have one of those.*"

Penny grinned back. "I've got dildos of all shapes, sizes and textures, and I know how to use them. Hell, why don't we get Teddy good and drunk and make it a threesome? He's got a nice dick. I've seen it."

Teddy shook his head. "No way, girlfriends. You're apt to go dominatrix on me, Penny, and I'm not into whips and chains. Dani's not the only one who prefers a hard dick." Then he tilted his head to the side. "Although, it might be interesting to see what a two-inch clit feels like."

"Stop it, you two," Daniella said with a laugh as she shoved Teddy out of her way with her hand and used her hip to move Penny. "You know you won't be able to

talk me into sex with either of you when I'm sober if you couldn't talk me into it when I was drunk."

"Teddy tried to get you to have sex with him?" Laughing, Penny spun toward her other friend. "Teddy! You never told me you were bi!"

Sticking out his lower lip, he fisted his hands on his hips and wrinkled his nose at both of them. "I'm not and you know it. Still, the thought of a two-inch clit is intriguing."

Daniella turned to head to the back of the shop. "I give up. You two are impossible."

Before either could answer, the bell over the door jangled. Daniella turned toward the sound. "I'm sorry. We're closed for the night." Then she saw who'd entered her shop. "Walter! What are you doing here?"

Brandishing a long, wicked looking knife, he lunged at her before anyone else could move. "You fucking, fat freak! You've ruined me! Ever since I saw that frickin' dick you have, I haven't been able to get a hard-on. I'll get even, though, you fucking bitch. I'm going to cut your dick off."

Frozen in place by the virulence in his tone, Daniella didn't move until he was practically on top of her and a fiery pain pierced the inside of her thigh. Screaming, she fell backward, her arms flailing. One palm cracked against Walter's cheek and he stumbled back. However, as her head hit the corner of a nearby table, he lurched forward again, knife held low as he aimed for her crotch.

Penny screamed and Teddy jumped forward, but it was a tall man in a long, black coat that appeared out of nowhere and leaped between Walter and his prey who stopped the madman's attack.

Chapter Four

The rank odor of hatred enveloped Maximilian as a man mumbling obscenities bolted past him and slammed open the door of the shop. The bell jangled discordantly as the flickering lights glinted on the knife in his hand. He yelled and attacked Daniella. Before she finished screaming, Maximilian was leaping through the door. As she stumbled back and fell to the floor, Maximilian landed between her and her attacker. Baring his fangs, he lunged at the much slower human.

Shrieking, Daniella's attacker dropped the knife and stumbled back.

Penny's scream stopped Maximilian's hands from closing around the man's throat. "Oh, my God. There's so much blood."

Alternating shrieking and sobbing, Daniella's attacker stumbled through the door and disappeared.

Promising himself he'd deal with the attacker later -- he'd never forget the man's stench -- Maximilian turned and knelt next to Daniella. Unconscious, she lay still in Teddy's arms as Penny tried to staunch the flow of blood from the wound in Daniella's thigh.

"Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God! Somebody call 911," Penny moaned as she pressed her hands against the ragged wound. Blood oozed from between her fingers.

Without even exposing and examining her wound, Maximilian needed only a second to know exactly how much blood Daniella had lost. Her wound was bleeding profusely, but the blood wasn't spurting out which meant the knife had missed her femoral artery. At this point, she was close to losing about a pint of blood -- not life threatening as long as he got the bleeding stopped very soon.

“Get me some clean towels now,” he commanded Penny as he nudged her out of the way and pressed his hand against the inside of Daniella’s thigh.

“Are you a doctor?”

Not bothering to hide his fangs -- they wouldn’t have withdrawn with this much blood around anyway -- Maximilian smiled. “You could say that.” He stared into her eyes. “Now go and get those towels.” He turned to Teddy as Penny scurried away. “Does she live nearby?”

Eyeing Maximilian’s fangs, he said, “She lives in the apartment above the shop. There’s a stairway back behind the shop.”

Maximilian nodded. As Penny returned with the towels, he commanded, “Clean up the blood and then continue closing the shop as you would any other night. You will remember that Daniella was attacked but that her wound was only a slight cut. Then go home as you usually would after closing. Return here tomorrow at your usual time as if nothing had happened. I will take care of Daniella. Do not worry. She’ll be fine.”

Carefully lifting Daniella’s leg, he reached down to her ankle, grabbed the hem of her jeans, ripped the seam up to her crotch, and stared at the blood welling from a ragged puncture on the fleshy inside of her thigh.

The hot, coppery aroma swirled around him, and his fangs began to ache. The urge to sink them into her flesh on both sides of her wound and suck her rich blood into his mouth was very tempting. But Maximilian wasn’t a young vampyre. He’d been alive for hundreds of years and could control his body’s urges. He had no doubt that he would soon taste Daniella’s blood, but it would not be now when she was sorely wounded and incapable of refusing him.

Maximilian smiled to himself. She would not refuse him.

After tearing the towels into strips and wrapping them tightly around Daniella’s bleeding leg, he lifted her into his arms and stared at Teddy and Penny. “Lock the door behind me and finish quickly. Then go home and sleep.”

Both nodded. Penny hurried toward the back of the shop while Teddy followed them to the door.

The lock clicked after Maximilian stepped outside.

She moaned as the cold air began to revive her. "Whe -- where?"

"Hush, *Liebling*, I am taking you home."

Holding Daniella closer as she began to shiver, Maximilian turned left, strode to the end of the store, and turned back into the alley between Jingle Buns and the building next to it. An effortless leap had him on the second story landing in front of Daniella's apartment's door. Again, he looked down into her pale face. "Key?"

Semi-conscious, she was staring bleary-eyed up at him. "What..."

"Where's your key?"

She blinked, then blinked again.

"Your key, Daniella. I have to open your door, or -- I could break it in."

She blinked again then stuttered, "Fl -- ow -- er -- pot."

Anybody could find it there and break in, Maximilian grumbled to himself as he kicked the bright green ceramic pot that held artificial poinsettias out of the way. Ignoring the sharp sound of shattering pottery as the pot rolled off the landing and fell to the alley below, he shifted Daniella in his arms. Stooping, he scooped up the key then rose, pulled the storm door open, inserted the key into the lock, turned it, and pushed the inside door open. He didn't bother turning on a light -- he didn't need it. He strode through the small kitchen and into the living room. Laying her carefully on the sofa, he reached down to her ankle of her unwounded leg, grabbed the hem of her jeans, and ripped the outside seam up to her waist. Then he simply pulled them from her body.

Obviously still groggy, she tried to pull away. "Stay still, *Liebchen*, I must care for your wound." She shifted again but didn't struggle.

Carefully, he unwrapped the towels around her wound and dropped them on the floor. Blood still oozed from the cut, and its rich aroma tantalized his senses.

Maximilian didn't think twice because his saliva was the best way to heal the wound. Leaning over her thigh, he inhaled the rich scent of her blood then fastened his mouth over the wound and rubbed his tongue against it. He didn't suck any blood from

the puncture -- she'd already lost enough -- but he did lap away the blood still seeping from the wound.

As her rich blood filled his mouth and rolled down his throat into his stomach, fire burned its way outward through every extremity of his body -- especially his cock. Swelling with a harsh, aching need the like of which he'd never experienced before, it strained against his jeans. His stomach rolled then felt as if it fell through the floor. A single drop of bloody sweat rolled from his forehead and down over his nose to drop onto Daniella's thigh. He lifted his head from her leg and looked up into her face. What was happening to him?

The statuette that crashed against the side of his head surprised more than hurt him.

"Get away from me! I'll hit you again! I'll scream! I'm calling the police!"

As she wobbled to her feet, Maximilian gathered his senses about him and retreated to the doorway -- and the closest light switch. He could see her clearly, but she couldn't see him.

As light flooded the room, she blinked and staggered as she adapted to the change from complete darkness. She was still blinking when she grabbed a lamp and raised it.

"I'm not going to hurt you, *Liebling*. I wasn't the one who attacked you. The wound on your thigh needed attention."

Her brow furrowed as she frowned. "Who..."

Smiling, he bowed his head. "Maximilian. Maximilian Arnalt, your German customer from tonight."

Her frown remained. "Why -- where are Penny and Teddy?"

"Cleaning up the blood and closing the shop."

Flinching at the word *blood*, she swayed then staggered forward. Before she could fall, Maximilian was at her side. In what seemed like one seamless movement, he shrugged out of his coat, tossed it onto her sofa, took the lamp from her trembling hand,

set it on the table, and pulled her into his arms. Before she could even begin to struggle, he deposited her on top of his overcoat.

She shrank away from him. "What do you think you're doing!"

Maximilian sighed. Her ability to withstand his hypnotic suggestions was making his efforts to help her much harder than it had to be. Crossing his arms over his chest, he stared into her face. "You knocked yourself unconscious when your head hit that table. You've lost almost a pint of blood from the wound that madman gave you." He nodded toward his coat. "I thought you'd rather not get blood on your sofa, *ja*? Now, will you allow me to help you?"

Blood still seeped sluggishly from her wound. She pushed herself into the corner of the sofa. "You were *sucking* on my leg!"

Knowing his fangs were obvious, he grinned. "*Nein*, I wasn't. I was using my saliva to stop the bleeding. Look for yourself. The wound is already starting to heal."

Chapter Five

An icy shiver of fear rolled up and down Daniella's spine as she stared at the tall man standing over her. The light glinted off his fangs. She'd seen teeth like that before on more than one Goth customer who'd made his way into her shop for a late night pastry from The Undead -- vampire wanna-bes who'd had dental work done to give them the appearance of real vampires. This Maximilian Arnalt, though, his fangs didn't look like theirs. His extended down over his lower lip. They hadn't looked like that earlier this evening, had they? Closing her eyes, she shook her head. Surely she was seeing things?

Unfortunately, shaking her head only accentuated the ache. Gasping, she dropped her face into her hands.

"Do not shake your head. The pain will become worse," he commanded. "You hit it rather hard when you fell." He remained standing where he was. "Who was that man?"

Without thinking, Daniella mumbled, "Walter. He..." She stopped talking and looked up. "Why should I tell you? Why are you even bothering to help me?"

An intense look on his face, he stared down at her. "What would you have had me do? Allow this Walter to kill you?"

"He wouldn't have killed me. He was trying to..." Daniella stopped and dropped her gaze.

"Ja?" The tone of his voice dropped, became gentler, more like a -- caress.

Daniella shivered again. Why was she even talking to this guy -- this guy with really, really good dental work? Those fangs weren't real. What a ridiculous thought. She must have hit her head hard. She was hallucinating.

She shifted as the pain in her head receded to a dull ache, which brought her attention back to the throbbing pain in her thigh. "Damn, that hurts," she hissed mostly to herself. Spreading her legs, Daniella looked down then carefully probed the wound with her finger. A sharp splinter of pain stabbed her leg.

Faster than she thought possible, he was kneeling beside the sofa. Gently grabbing her wrist, he pulled her hand away. "Stop that. You will make it worse. As it is, you're lucky he didn't sever your femoral artery." Using the lightest of touches, he brushed his finger over the wound and wiped away some of the blood. Looking up, he smiled at her.

With him kneeling next to the sofa, his face was level with hers. Again, light glinted off his fangs. Daniella's breath caught in her throat when he slid his bloody finger into his mouth.

"I have never tasted blood such as yours, *Liebling*. It," he paused as if searching for the right word, "intoxicates me."

Another shiver danced up her spine. This one had nothing to do with fear.

Her nipples tingled.

Swallowing, she searched her soul for anger, fear, disgust, anything -- anything other than the desire she was beginning to feel for this, this -- stranger. What was wrong with her? Her ex-boyfriend had just stabbed her, she'd lost a bucket of blood, banged her head off a table, and here she was fantasizing about some vampire wanna-be sucking on her leg -- among other things. *What* was wrong with her?

Daniella closed her eyes. It didn't do any good. Maximilian's steady -- passionate -- gaze was still there, locked in her mind. When his breath meandered over her thighs, she jerked her eyelids open. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Shhh, *Liebchen*. Let me help you." Before she could say anything else, his mouth was on her wound.

Tensing, Daniella tried to pull away, but he clamped his hand on her leg and the other on her waist to hold her still. Her heart fluttered and her stomach rolled as she buried her hands in his hair and tried to pull his head up.

He was too strong. Whimpering, she waited for the sharp pain of his bite. Those fangs were going to hurt.

The bite never came. Instead, he kissed her. He kissed the uninjured skin on either side of her wound then kissed the wound itself. Opening his mouth, he dragged his tongue over the injury then kissed it again, his tongue gently caressing.

Prickles of warmth inside the wound sent tendrils of heat down her leg to her toes and up her thigh. Daniella's stomach muscles clenched. The silky fabric of her bra was suddenly too irritating for her now sensitive nipples.

And -- white-hot heat shot to her groin.

Against her will, Daniella arched her back, and a low moan escaped from her throat. Her heart began to pound and her breathing quickened. Panic grew in her mind. What was happening to her? She shouldn't be feeling anything but revulsion. My God, he was licking a stab wound! Then why wasn't she repulsed? Why wasn't she fighting? Why did his mouth feel -- erotic?

She couldn't stop her moan -- she didn't even try.

Chuckling, Maximilian lifted his head and looked into her face. "You are not immune to me either, *ja*?" He turned back to her leg then stopped. "*Was ist das?*"

At that moment, Daniella realized she was sitting there practically naked from the waist down. Her jeans were gone. All she was wearing were her silky, green panties -- panties that did not hide the bulge of her now distended clit.

Fear attacked -- not fear of the man she barely knew kneeling at her side but rather fear of his reaction to her body. Trying to squeeze her thighs together, she attempted to sit up. "Please, I'm sorry. You must leave..."

"*Nein, Liebling,*" he said in a gentle voice as he stared between her thighs. "You have nothing to be sorry for." He looked up into her face again. Desire danced in his eyes, and he smiled an erotic smile. "This Walter, he is a *Dummkopf, ja*?"

Before she could reply, he reached between her thighs and ripped her panties away. Then he buried his face between her legs and captured her distended clit with his mouth.

“Oh, my God!” Arching her back, Daniella buried her hands in his hair and tried to push his head down further as he sucked on her clit and simultaneously rolled his tongue over it. She arched her back more and spread her thighs farther apart to allow him better access. “Oh, God! Oh, yes! Oh, yes!”

Sliding his hands around her hips, he cupped her ass and slid a single finger up and down the crack in her ass.

Sobbing as fiery sensations she’d never experienced flooded her body, Daniella forgot all about the pain in her head and thigh, yanked her sweater up, snapped open the front clasp on her bra, and cupped her breasts. Never in her twenty-seven years had she experienced anything like this. Even the few men who’d said they didn’t care about her over-sized clit hadn’t *worshiped* it the way Maximilian was. He sucked on it, rolled it on his tongue, wrapped his tongue around it -- “Ahhh!” she gasped. He’d nipped it, and the slight pain sent prickles of pleasure pulsating outward from her groin. “Oh, God, yes!”

Lifting his head, he lapped her clit then raised his head and looked into her eyes. “You smell hot, *Liebling*, molten hot -- and you taste of passion-filled fire.”

Daniella’s thighs quivered and her stomach muscles clenched. She arched her hips up toward his face. “Please, Maximilian, make me come.”

“I will, *Liebchen*, I will.” He bent and sucked her clit into his mouth again but slid his tongue into her slit this time. “I have never tasted anything like you. I cannot get enough.”

Moaning, Daniella pumped her hips, pushing her cunt up against Maximilian’s smooth tongue. When he scraped a fang against her aching clit, she sobbed. When he nipped it again, she screamed and pumped her hips harder.

He sucked harder, stabbing and twirling her clit with his supple tongue. When he nipped it a third time, Daniella shattered. Then, when she’d barely stopped shuddering, he pulled her closer, lifted her legs over his shoulders, and started all over again.

Gasping for breath between her moans, Daniella gritted her teeth and watched Maximilian's head bob and shift between her thighs, his brown, honey-colored hair a surprisingly startling contrast to her golden pubic curls. His tongue stabbed and lapped. Arching, she closed her eyes and longed to close her thighs tight against his head and hold his face with its magical tongue between them forever.

Then, he stopped.

Opening her eyes, she stared into his.

"You taste better than the finest wine." He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. "*Mein Gott*, in all my years, I have never smelled or tasted anything like you. I cannot get enough." Lowering his head, he lapped more moisture from her slick folds.

Daniella rolled her head back. She had never been this wet, not even when she masturbated, with or without a toy. No man had ever affected her like this, nor had one ever cared enough to affect her like this. Why was this man -- this German, Goth, vampire wanna-be? Wanna-be? He wasn't a real vampire was he?

Again, Maximilian sucked her aching clit between his teeth but this time he nipped it -- just hard enough to renew the explosion of heat in her groin. All thoughts of who or what he was fled her mind. She didn't *care* who or what he was. All that mattered was the way he was making her feel -- like she was the most desirable woman in the world. Nothing else mattered.

The entire sofa shook when Daniella came again. Her heart racing, her breath coming in short gasps, curls of hair falling into her eyes, she raised her head and looked at him.

He smiled at her, then dropped his gaze back to her cunt. "*So schon*, you're *so schon*, so beautiful down here, soft and silky as the most delicate red rose, yet sweet and hot, passion-filled and eager for my lips and tongue. Come for me again, *Liebling*. Feed me with your passion." Maximilian lowered his mouth and began a new assault.

Daniella moaned and lifted her hips to his mouth. Tears rolled down her cheeks as wave after wave of hot pleasure rolled through her body.

He said she was beautiful -- her clit was beautiful.

Her small sob had Maximilian pulling her into his arms. “Shhh. *Das tut mir leid, Liebchen*. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

She shook her head. “You didn’t hurt me.” She wiped tears off her cheek and looked up into his face. “You aren’t disgusted.”

Anger flitted past the surprise on his face. “Disgusted? By your little clit? No, *Liebling*. Your clit makes you sexier than any other woman I’ve ever met.”

Before she could say more, he set her on the sofa and rose to his feet. After pulling her sweater and bra from her body so that she sat naked before him, he straightened, ripped off his shirt, and toed off the shoes he was wearing. With a slight wiggle of his lean hips, he slid his jeans and silk boxers down his long legs, pulling his socks off along with them. Daniella got a quick glimpse of broad shoulders, a chest banded with muscle, and finally, the long, thick cock that jutted from its nest of wiry, brown curls before he scooped her up into his arms and smiled his toothy smile.

“Who... What are you?” she whispered as she stared at his fangs.

“Your vampyre,” he answered as he carried her to her bed.

Chapter Six

The dull gleam from the streetlights shone through the front windows of Daniella's bedroom as Maximilian laid her on the bed and fell beside her. Pulling her into his arms, he rubbed his engorged cock against her thigh.

He bent his head to hers, but she planted her palm against his shoulder. "Vampire?"

"Vampyre," he answered, correcting her pronunciation. "The second syllable sounds like *ear* instead of *ire*."

She swallowed. "You're really a vampire -- pyre?"

Maximilian smiled at the trepidation in her tone and eyes. "*Ja*."

"Are you going to hurt me?"

"*Nein*."

"Are you going to turn me into a vampyre?"

That question made Maximilian pause for a moment. Could he? Did he want to? He stared deep into her eyes. "Do you want me to?"

"I..."

Silence.

He smiled at her. "Right now I'm going to make love to you, *Liebchen*." He bent toward her.

She still held him off. "Are you going to bite me?"

Excitement coursed through her body as he rubbed his aching cock against her again. "Yes, *Liebling*, I am going to bite you." He kissed first one side then the other side of her mouth. Lifting his head a fraction of an inch, he said, "And you are going to like it very, very much. You may even bite me if you want to. I would like it very, very much."

Lowering his mouth, he slid his tongue along her lips. Shivers of pleasure jolted through him when *she* bit his lower lip and thrust her tongue between his lips to mate with his.

When she shoved her hips against him, Maximilian rolled over onto her. Lifting his head, he looked down into Daniella's face. Passion burned in her blue eyes. Her face was flushed, her lips red. She lifted her head, seeking his mouth. "Please..."

Maximilian's entire body clenched, especially his cock. He wanted to bury himself into her and plunge in and out until he was ready to explode. Then he could sink his fangs into her soft flesh and suck out her sweet, sweet blood. But Daniella wasn't like the other women he'd had. She was different, special, and not just because of her enlarged clit or her ability to ignore his mental commands. In the deepest recesses of his vampire soul, he was sure of this. He didn't know what it meant, but right now it didn't matter. Tonight he was going to take his time. No matter what the future brought, Maximilian intended that Daniella would never forget this night.

"Slowly, *Liebling*, slowly. We want this to last." After a deep, soul-wrenching kiss, Maximilian tore his mouth from hers and turned his attention to her luscious breasts.

When she grabbed his head and tried to pull his mouth back to hers, he captured both of her hands in his and stretched them above her head. Moaning, she arched her back, lifting her breasts.

Burying his face between them, Maximilian inhaled, then dragged his tongue down her cleavage, nuzzling underneath her left breast where he proceeded to kiss and nibble the delicate skin. "Your breasts are beautiful."

Daniella arched and bucked. "My nipples, suck on my nipples. Please!"

Maximilian chuckled against her chest. "If you insist." He nipped her left nipple then sucked it into his mouth.

"Ahh!" She arched her back even more and pushed her breast further into his hot mouth. She tried to wrench her hands free, but Maximilian tightened his grip. "*Nein*,

Liebchen. Nicht so schnell. You go too fast. Let me pleasure you." He sucked her other breast into his mouth.

Rolling her head back and forth, Daniella struggled against Maximilian's powerful, yet gentle grip. She had to get her hands on him, had to pull him on top of her so she could thrust herself onto his magnificent cock. "More, Maximilian. I want more. I need more."

As he continued to suckle her breasts, he shifted his body off hers and slid his fingers between her thighs. Keening, Daniella closed her eyes, arched her hips, and spread her legs wider as he began to play with her clit. He rubbed it, squeezed it, pulled it. Then he groaned as he slid first one, then two fingers into her cunt. He stroked, dipped, and delved until her moisture covered his fingers.

"Look at me, *Liebling*," he commanded. "Look at what I am."

Opening her eyes, she stared into his face. His fangs were fully extended. Long, white, dangerous, they were two of the most erotic things she'd ever seen.

"Do you reject me, *Liebchen*? Should I leave you?"

Daniella's entire body cried out against the thought. More than anything else, she wanted his hard cock buried in her body. "No! Don't leave," she gasped. "Stay with me. Please."

"My *Liebchen*," was all he said. Then he lifted the hand that had been playing with her cunt and clit, raised his fingers to his mouth and, slowly, separately, sucked each one. "You taste of sweet woman -- and hot passion."

Every muscle in Daniella's body clenched. When he slid his fingers inside her again, her internal muscles tried to suck them deeper. When he pulled them out, she moaned. "Don't stop. Please don't stop."

Daniella's reaction to his fondling was putting more of a strain on his control than Maximilian thought possible, something that hadn't happened in centuries. Groaning, he rolled back onto her and spread her legs wider with his knees, murmuring soft words against her mouth. Finally, he cupped her head between his hands and covered her mouth with his again as he rubbed his aching cock against her thighs.

Both of them groaned.

Then, pulling her with him, Maximilian rolled onto his back so she straddled his hips. "Ride me, Daniella. Ride my cock long and hard."

"Yes, oh yes." Her breath coming in short, hard gasps, she positioned herself over him and slowly slid down onto him, her internal muscles shuddering, as she stretched to accommodate his length.

Maximilian's balls tightened as he grabbed her hips and helped her slide down onto his cock. "That's it, *Liebling*. Take all of me." Groaning, he arched up into her as she slid further onto him.

Another low moan escaped her when she finally had Maximilian's cock completely embedded. Then she pushed herself up and slid down again, slowly at first, then faster.

"*Mein Gott*, you're wet." Catching her rhythm, Maximilian surged upward. Grasping her hips tighter, he guided her up and down, concentrating not on her beautiful bouncing breasts with their cinnamon colored nipples but rather on her distended clit. Every time she plunged down and swivelled her hips, it rubbed against his cock.

Fuck, but he'd never experienced anything so erotic in his very long life. "Yes, *Liebchen*. Take me deeper. Rub your clit on my cock."

She shuddered above him and whimpered, "You're so big, so hard."

"Don't stop!"

"Never," she breathed. She screwed herself down even further and sucked him deeper inside.

His balls tightened and began to burn. His stomach muscles tightened. Her wet cunt sucked at his cock as she plunged up and down. She tilted her hips forward and rubbed her clit against his cock. His balls were on fire, and his fangs ached all the way to his gums. The urge to bury them in her body, the urge to drink her sweet blood became unbearable.

Above him, Daniella sobbed. "Oh, yes, oh yes, oh yes!" Her internal muscles grasped his cock with moist heat.

Maximilian pinched her clit. Screaming, Daniella arched then collapsed onto his chest. With her body pulsing around his cock, Maximilian stopped fighting his own orgasm. Burying his fangs in her shoulder, he sucked her blood into his mouth as his cum erupted from his balls.

The minute his fangs cut through her flesh, Daniella erupted in a second orgasm. Satiation like he'd never experienced before flooded Maximilian's body.

Draped across him, she fainted.

Wrapping his arms around her, Maximilian stared at the ceiling. Daniella was different from any other woman he'd ever known. He was never going to let her go.

Loud pounding woke Daniella.

Opening her eyes, she stared at the ceiling, her wits scattered.

More pounding.

Turning her head, she looked at the pillow next to hers. The indentation there told her that last night wasn't a dream.

Raking her hair back off her face, she sat up and swung her legs over the side of the bed, pausing long enough to stare at the wound on her thigh. It was closed, healing, and far smaller than it had been only a few hours ago. Brushing her thumb against her shoulder, she rose and stumbled across the room to the mirror. The two red marks on her skin where Maximilian bit were fading rapidly too. Bracing both hands on top of her dresser, she stared at herself. She hadn't been dreaming. She'd made love to a vampire, let him bite her, let him drink her blood.

Good God, she must be crazy.

More pounding -- even louder.

"Okay, okay, I'm coming." Grabbing her robe, she shrugged it on and left her bedroom. In the living room, she paused long enough to pick up the clothing and bloody towels lying on the floor -- she could hear Teddy's and Penny's voices above

their pounding now -- and tossed them into the closet. Then she threaded her way through her small kitchen and opened her back door.

"About time!" Penny snapped.

"How come you slept so late?" Teddy added as he frowned at her.

"What time is it?" Daniella asked as she looked at the clock on her microwave.

"It's noon!" Teddy exclaimed. "Just how hard did you hit your head?"

Penny pushed past her and hurried into the living room. "Are you alone or is that German guy still here?"

None of your business, Daniella thought. I'm not ready to talk about him yet.

Before she could answer anything, though, Penny's twin sister Rose demanded, "Will you please tell me what these two are babbling about? What's going on? Penny said something about Walter attacking you with a knife, you hitting your head and getting knocked unconscious, and then some German stranger carrying you off. And I wasn't supposed to worry because you were all right. Then Penny went to bed. To bed! And fell asleep right away." Rose fisted her hands on her hips. "When you didn't show up at ten o'clock, Sam called me at the flower shop and asked if I could check on you. I get here and your flowerpot is broken, your spare key is gone, and the door is locked. Christ, Daniella, what the hell happened last night? "

"I told you, Rose," Teddy interjected as he pulled the pot out of the coffee maker and started filling it with water. "Walter tried to attack Dani with a big old butcher knife. Maximilian stopped him, but Dani hit her head. It's not surprising that she'd sleep longer."

Rose gaped first at Teddy then at Daniella then snapped her mouth shut for a few seconds before she burst out with, "A butcher knife? Did you call the police?"

"We didn't need the police," Penny said slowly and carefully as if she were talking to a small child. "Maximilian took care of everything."

"Who the hell is Maximilian?"

"We told you, Rose," Penny said after a long, drawn out sigh. "He's the German."

“What the hell does being German have to do with anything?”

Daniella ignored her friends’ arguing. They could go on for hours like this. Maximilian and his abilities were far more fascinating to think about. Obviously those tales about vampyres being able to compel people to do things were correct. Teddy and Penny were acting way out of character. Normally, they’d have been fighting each other to call the police unless something pretty powerful kept them from doing so.

Pursing her lips, Daniella pursued that specific line of thought. Had Maximilian compelled her to go to bed with him? If he had, why had he asked if he should leave? He had given her the opportunity to stop him, hadn’t he? She raked her hair back off her forehead again and inadvertently rubbed the bump on her head.

Her sharp gasp stopped her friends’ arguing and brought their attention back to her. She smiled weakly and pointed at her head. “Sorry, I touched the knot on my head from last night when I fell.”

“See. I told you she was sleeping in late because of the bump on her head,” Teddy said smugly as he turned on the coffee pot. “Come on now. Quit bugging Dani and let her get a shower.” He wrinkled his nose. “Your hair is a mess, girlfriend.”

“Good idea,” Penny agreed. “Come on, Rose. Teddy and I have to get down to work, and you have a business to run. So what if Dani overslept. She works her ass off every day. She deserves to be able to sleep in now and then.”

Rose looked from Teddy to Penny and back again. Then she looked at Dani. “I *am* going to get to the bottom of this. If I didn’t have such a huge lot of those specially ordered black roses to get over to The Undead for that big party tonight, I wouldn’t leave here until I had the full story.” Spinning on her heels, she stomped out the door.

Teddy shook his head. “She’s sure in a bitchy mood today, isn’t she? Must be PMS.” Leaning over, he kissed Dani’s cheek. “Take your time, sweetie. We have everything under control. Come on, Penny.”

As he strolled out the door, Penny turned back to Dani. “I’m sorry about Rose, Dani, but you know how she can get. If only she were my identical twin. If we had the

same father, she'd have a calm personality like mine," she added with a grin and then followed Teddy out the door.

Daniella shook her head as the last of her friends disappeared. She had something else far more interesting to think about.

Chapter Seven

Once again dark clouds swirled around the tops of tall buildings as Maximilian stalked the streets of Chicago. Five o'clock in the afternoon was far earlier than he normally would be out, but the woman he wanted to see would be impossible to find once true night fell so Maximilian was forced to leave the dark safety of his hotel room. Still, a day such as this presented few problems for vampyres; the overcast sky protected him from the weak rays of the winter sun.

Stopping in front of an unimposing brownstone in one of Chicago's more upscale sections of town, Maximilian looked up at the heavily curtained windows and then at the door festooned with an elaborate Christmas wreath. If anyone could explain why Daniella was immune to his compulsions and why she was rapidly becoming so important to him, it would be the woman who resided here, the vampyre Loremaster of America's Midwest, if she wanted to. Seeking advice from a Loremaster could be very straightforward or unbelievably confusing. In their own ways, they could be as dangerous as Hunters.

Ascending the steps, he knocked on the door.

The young woman who answered it glared at him haughtily. He simply stared steadily and handed her his card. "I'm here to see Dame Sophia."

Wordlessly, she accepted it, opened the door wider, and stepped aside. Once Maximilian was inside, she closed the door, led him down the hallway to a small room, and said, "Wait here."

After he entered, she closed the door.

Shrugging out of his overcoat, Maximilian tossed it over the back of one of the heavy, leather settees and stepped over to the window. Pulling back the thick, velvet

drape, he looked outside. Fat, fluffy snowflakes floated softly onto the brown earth in the small garden.

The click of the door latch had him spinning around. The sight of the elderly woman who walked through the door had him clicking his heels and bowing with respect.

“Bring us wine, Arabella,” she commanded, “and let no one disturb us.” Crossing the room slowly, she settled into what looked like the only truly comfortable chair and motioned for Maximilian to seat himself across from her.

With a nod, he complied.

After a few moments of mutual silence, the door opened again, and Arabella set a tray containing a decanter of dark red wine and two glasses on the table next to Maximilian. Her errand accomplished, she left the room.

“Please pour for us, Baron,” the old woman said.

Maximilian started. That was a title he hadn’t heard in at least a hundred years.

“I am well aware of your family lines, Maximilian,” she said as he poured the wine. “There is little about you I don’t know.”

Settling back into his seat, he savored the bouquet of his wine then sipped it. He looked into her face. “I cannot imagine why the history of an unimportant German barony would interest you, madam.”

She smiled as she sipped from her own wineglass. “Unimportant German baronies hold no interest for me. However, when one of those unimportant German barons is also one of the most successful and most dangerous of our Rogue Hunters, I am very interested in *him*, especially when he shows up on my doorstep here in Chicago, a city that hasn’t had a Rogue vampyre in two hundred years.” She leaned forward. “Why are you here? I have received no word of a Rogue within a thousand miles, and if there were, we have Hunters here in the United States to take care of them.”

Maximilian sipped more of his wine as he continued to stare at her.

Sophia's voice had cracked like a whip. She was a woman used to being obeyed - typical for a Loremaster. However, Loremasters didn't intimidate him. Smiling to himself, Maximilian wondered how much he could rattle her cool and collected countenance by telling her there was a Rogue in the area. Then he sighed. A few hundred years ago, he would have concocted a story just to see how angry he could get her, but now he was too old for games such as that. Setting his wineglass on the table, he shook his head. "There are no Rogues here. I simply needed a holiday."

She cocked a white eyebrow. "In Chicago? In the winter?"

He nodded. "It's one of the few places I know my sister won't follow me."

For a moment, she simply stared at him with her dark eyes. Then a knowing smile appeared on her lips. "Why then, have you come here to me, Maximilian? Simple courtesy would have brought you here last week right after you arrived."

Her knowledge of his arrival date didn't surprise him. Indeed, he'd have been far more disturbed if she didn't know he was in her city. As Maximilian had expected, an American vampyre, who allowed himself to be seen, had been following him since shortly after he'd arrived in Chicago. Maximilian was supposed to know about him. However, he also knew about the other, younger vampyre who was following him too. She was good -- but not as good as he. He had managed to elude both of them last night before he entered The Undead. Still, being followed is what he expected. Loremasters couldn't afford to have unannounced Hunters running about unchecked in their cities.

Across from him, Dame Sophia sipped her wine and waited for him to speak. Leaning back, Maximilian steepled his fingers. Now that he was here, did he really want to discuss his private life with a stranger as astute as she? He certainly didn't trust her, but what other choice did he have? "How often do humans successfully convert into one of us?"

She raised an eyebrow again but stared at him silently.

Maximilian kept his face impassive. Obviously, she wasn't going to tell him anything without more pertinent information. Cursing to himself, he leaned forward. "I have met a woman who's immune to my hypnotic suggestions."

“Oh?” Her facial expression and body language didn’t appear to change, but Maximilian sensed a new tension in the air. She was far more interested than he wanted her to be. “Who is she?”

I’ll be damned if I tell you that. If the spy following me hasn’t informed you, and I’m sure she hasn’t or you wouldn’t have asked, I’m not going to tell you. Maximilian allowed a smile to lift the corners of his mouth. “Do I look like a fool, Dame Sophia?”

The slight fluttering of her nostrils betrayed her displeasure at his answer and gave him a great deal of satisfaction. Normally, Loremasters were able to completely mask their emotions. Of course, he’d been reading vampyre emotions for more years than he could remember.

Maximilian braced his elbows on his knees. Hands clasped together, he narrowed his eyes and stared at her. “Let me make myself clear, Loremaster. The woman is *mine*. And, if anyone tries to take her from me, I will use every skill I possess to hunt him -- or her -- down. What’s more, I will deal with that vampyre as if he or she were Rogue. Do you understand?”

She waved her hand. “Threats, Maximilian? Surely you don’t think that I...”

Snorting, he interrupted her attempted nonchalance, his voice tight and threatening. “I know enough, Dame Sophia, to know that humans who are immune to our telepathy are rare, and that when one is found, he or she sometimes... disappears. This one will not become an experiment. I don’t give a damn as to why she’s immune. I just want to know why she’s so suddenly important to *me*.”

Snapping his mouth closed -- he had given away more with that statement than he wanted to -- he leaned back and stared at her.

She stared back.

Tension leaped between them.

Finally, she relaxed in her chair and sighed. “As you know, we vampyre are a very long-lived race. Unlike humans who must find mates and breed up children in forty years or less, we have centuries. Therefore, we are slow to bind ourselves to another. This gives us time to find the one who is our true match. And, we know when

we find that one. Normally, it's another of our race, another vampyre. However, there are exceptions. This woman you speak of, if she is truly so important to you, is your match. How badly do you want her?"

Maximilian considered not answering. He didn't discuss his emotional life with anyone, not even his own sister.

"I cannot help you if you don't tell me the truth."

Cursing to himself, Maximilian nevertheless answered, "I cannot leave this city without her."

She pursed her lips. "An interesting choice of words. Are you sure you do not mean *will not*?"

Turning his thoughts inward, Maximilian searched his soul. What did he mean? Was he infatuated? It had happened before -- that buxom barmaid in England during Elizabeth I's reign and that nurse during World War II. He'd stayed with each of them for a month or so, but leaving them had been easy. Was it the same with Daniella? Would it be as easy to leave her? A lead weight dropped into the pit of his stomach as heat exploded throughout his body. Lifting his hand, he wiped sweat from his brow then looked at the red smears on his fingers.

"Blood sweat," Sophia commented. "Only deep distress brings that on. This woman is more important to you than even you realize, Maximilian."

Lifting his gaze from his fingers, he stared at the old, white-haired Loremaster. "I cannot leave her. If she agrees, I will turn her."

"If she doesn't agree?"

Maximilian leveled a steady gaze at her. "I will deal with that possibility should it arise. You and your people will stay away from her, or no one will be able to guarantee *your* safety. Am I understood?"

She glared at him through narrowed eyes. "Hunters do not threaten Loremasters."

Maximilian smiled. "I am not threatening you, Dame Sophia. I am simply stating a fact. This woman is mine, and I will tolerate interference from no one. *Verstehen Sie?*"

After glaring at him for a few silent moments, Sophia nodded. "I will note it in the Lore."

Rising, Maximilian grabbed his coat and shrugged into it. "Tell the young Hunter you've had following me that she's too noisy." Her disgruntled look made him smile. After a brief bow, he turned and left the room.

"You heard?" Sophia asked when her young assistant entered the room.

Her face carefully schooled to show no emotion, she answered, "Yes, Dame Sophia."

"Your opinion?" the older woman asked.

"I compromised you four times during my training. If he knows I'm following him, he's very, very good."

Sophia nodded. "You are the best I've ever trained. His reputation is warranted then." Frowning, she sighed. "The prospect of controlling Baron Maximilian Arnalt through this woman is tempting, but that would cause almost every Loremaster in Europe to send Hunters here for an explanation. We would not have excuses to mollify them all; he's too important to them. Leave him and his woman alone. Other more important things require our attention."

Chapter Eight

One big hand cupped her breast and his other slid between her thighs. A shiver danced up her spine, and moisture seeped into her panties. As he sucked her nipple into his mouth, he squeezed her now hard clit then began to pump it. As she moaned and pushed her cunt against his hand, he trailed his tongue up her chest to the spot where her neck and shoulder met. Then, as he finger-fucked her to orgasm, he sank his fangs into her skin.

Her orgasm magnified ten-fold.

Penny's voice yanked her from her fantasy. "Dani!"

"What?" she snapped in a flustered voice. Knees wobbling, Daniella sucked in a quick breath. At the moment, her clit was hard and distended, and she was close to coming.

"Stop daydreaming and lend a hand. According to Rose, there's a big party at The UnDead tonight. Business will be hopping."

"I... I'll be right back. I have to go to the bathroom."

Leaving Penny grumbling behind her, Daniella hurried back through the kitchen to the private bathroom used only by the staff, locked the door behind her, put the lid of the toilet down, and slid her jeans and panties to her ankles. Flopping down on the toilet seat, she kicked one ankle free of her jeans and spread her legs. Looking down, she smiled at her hard clit.

Maximilian liked her clit.

She sighed. Maximilian did amazing things to her clit.

Then she shivered. Just the thought of him had her cunt muscles contracting. Too bad she didn't have time to go upstairs and take the time a good fantasy about him

deserved, but Penny was right, they were going to be busy tonight. Unfortunately, she was going to have to be quick.

Sliding both hands down between her thighs, she began to play with her clit. She rubbed, she squeezed, she stroked -- all the while remembering the weight of Maximilian's hard body against hers, his supple fingers on her breasts and in her cunt. With her nipples tingling -- too bad she didn't have time to play with them too -- it only took a few minutes for the familiar rush of heat to surge through her groin and out into all the extremities of her body.

Gasping as her clit pulsated and her cunt muscles constricted, Daniella closed her eyes. Immediately, Maximilian's smiling face appeared and she sighed. She'd never met a man like him before.

Of course, you haven't, her common sense told her, he's a vampyre. How many of those do you think are running around Chicago?

After a last deep breath, Daniella opened her eyes and stared at the picture of flowers hanging on the opposite wall. How many vampyres *were* there running around Chicago? How come nobody knew anything about them? Were they dangerous?

Only if you're trying to concentrate on your work after having one make love to you all night, a flippant voice in her head said. She smiled. She couldn't disagree about that.

Pounding on the door wrenched her back to reality. "Dani, come on. It's getting busy out here."

Gathering her scattered wits, she stood and pulled up her pants. "I'm coming, I'm coming. Jeez, I can't even take the time to go to the bathroom around here." After washing her hands, she unlocked the door and stepped out. A few minutes later, she was too busy to think about Maximilian. The pre-party rush before the bash at The Undead was starting.

Outside, the wind began to blow harder. The fat snowflakes that had been floating to the ground most of the morning and afternoon began to fall in earnest.

* * *

Surprised the flower shop was still open -- it was almost midnight -- Maximilian followed the heady scent of fresh flowers inside. On the counter stood a vase containing five roses that were such a dark crimson they appeared black. "An interesting color," he said to the Asian woman sitting behind the counter marking numbers in an account book.

Turning, she looked at him steadily. "You're the German."

Inhaling again, Maximilian separated the fragrance of the flowers from her particular scent. He'd smelled one much like it last night. "You are Penny's twin, *ja*?"

She nodded. "Rose." Then, "If you hurt Dani, I'll make sure you regret it."

Maximilian chuckled. "I'm not going to hurt her."

"That's what all men say, but most of you are too stupid to know when you do. The rest are sadistic enough to enjoy making women cry. Which are you -- stupid or sadistic?"

Still smiling, Maximilian shook his head. "Neither." Lifting a single, dark rose from the vase, he asked, "How much?"

She stared at him steadily for a moment. "Just take it. They're extras from another order."

He bowed his head. "*Danke, Fraulein*. I promise not to hurt Daniella."

"I'll be watching you," she called after him as he stepped outside and closed the door behind him. The footprints he left as he walked the short distance to Jingle Buns were quickly filled in. As always, the brass bell above the door jingled merrily when he opened the door.

Daniella, Penny, and Teddy were so deep in argument when he entered, they didn't hear him or the bell. Stepping into a shadow between the wall and the Christmas tree, he hid in the shadows and remained out of sight.

Daniella was becoming more and more frustrated with her friends. Clenching her hands at her sides to stop herself from grabbing and shaking some sense into them,

she snapped, "Damn it, you two. Take a look outside. That's a nasty snowstorm. You need to get home while you can."

"But what about our late customers?" Teddy said with his arms crossed over his chest. "We can't just leave them hanging."

"You won't be leaving anybody hanging, Teddy," Daniella said in an exasperated voice as she settled her fists on her hips. "The party at The UnDead will go on for hours yet. They know about the storm, and anybody still there won't expect us to be open when they come out. I already had the DJ announce we were closing when he told everyone about the snowstorm."

From the shadows, Maximilian let his gaze drift down over her hips to her ass -- her beautiful, round, firm ass. How he looked forward to having his hands on it when he bent her over to fuck her from behind. If Daniella's friends didn't leave soon, he'd step out of the shadow and compel them to do so. He wanted Daniella -- now!

Penny glanced out the front windows. "Maybe she's right, Teddy. The storm is getting worse, and I don't want to spend another night on Daniella's couch. I had a stiff neck for three days after the last time. You didn't exactly like sleeping on the floor, either."

He pouted. "We could stay with Rose."

Penny gasped. "Bite your tongue, Teddy! She's my sister and I love her, but you know what she's like. She'll be up by seven o'clock doing those damn exercises. Last time we stayed there, she tried to make us do them with her. Do you really want to be doing sit ups on a cold floor when you could be snuggled in a warm bed?"

Teddy grimaced and shook his head.

Since both Teddy and Penny were beginning to see things Daniella's way, Maximilian refrained from nudging their thoughts in that direction. Daniella was now doing fine by herself.

Teddy stuck out his lower lip further, then looked over his shoulder. A particularly strong gust of wind buffeted and rattled the window. "Well, maybe you're right."

Slipping a hand through each of her friends' arms, Daniella led them toward the back of the shop. "Thank you. Now let's get your coats. You guys have no idea how I worry about you on stormy nights. I have mental pictures of you guys lying frozen on the street."

In a few minutes, all three returned, Teddy and Penny bundled up for their trips home.

Daniella stared out the window at the snowy crystals bouncing against it. "The weatherman said this storm is supposed to last into tomorrow afternoon. Don't worry about making it in to work if the streets aren't plowed. We won't have any customers anyway. I'm closing the shop tomorrow."

Penny looked over her shoulder at Daniella as she walked to the door. "Are you sure..."

Daniella gave them both small shoves. "I'm sure! Now go home and enjoy having tomorrow off!"

After shooing them out the door with hugs and warm *good nights*, Daniella turned to the shadow where Maximilian was hiding and said, "You can come out now."

Pleased that she sensed his presence, he chuckled and sauntered forward, holding out the rose. "For you, *Liebling*."

Taking it, she held it to her nose and inhaled. "Maximilian, it's beautiful."

"As are you." With those words, he pulled her into his arms and kissed her. Sighing, she leaned into his kiss. Lifting his head, he looked down into her face.

Her eyes seemed far bluer than he remembered. She had her golden hair pulled back in a ponytail, but a few wisps had escaped and fluttered over her forehead. He let his gaze slide down her neck. The top two buttons of her blouse were open. Was that a pink bra she was wearing?

Blood pooled low in his groin, and his cock thickened and strained against his jeans. His gums began to ache.

Bright, fiery passion danced in her eyes.

Lifting his hand, he brushed the loose hairs off her face, then tucked his knuckles under her chin and lifted her head. "Say no, now, *Liebling*."

As Maximilian's "Say no, now" rang in her ears, Daniella raised herself up on her toes and pressed her mouth against his. Say no? After masturbating in the bathroom while daydreaming about him when she should be working? No way.

He pulled her hair free of its ponytail, then slid his hand down her side and over her hip to stroke her ass and pull her closer.

The fragrant rose pressed between them, Daniella grabbed hold of his shirt and spread her legs so she could ride his thigh. His hard erection lay against his leg and pressed against her stomach. Moaning deep in her throat, she opened her mouth against his and sucked on his tongue.

Lacing his fingers in her hair, he tilted her head so he could deepen the kiss. His tongue sparred with hers. He slipped his fingers inside the back of her jeans, and her bare skin seemed to burn under his massaging fingers.

Whimpering, Daniella clenched his shirt even more tightly. She wanted him more than she had ever wanted any man. She jerked and his buttons popped so she could feel his cool skin. After a quick caress on each nipple, she swirled her fingers among the silky curls on his chest then traced the thin line of hair down across his hard abdomen. His belt buckle stopped her from venturing lower.

All the while, their mouths remained locked together -- their teeth clashed, their tongues twisted and stabbed. The fragrance of the black rose crushed between them enveloped them. She tugged at his belt.

Pulling his mouth from hers, he looked down into her face. "Give yourself to me, *Liebling*. Give your body and soul into my keeping, and I will love you forever."

Gasping for air, Daniella looked into his eyes. Blue flames danced in their depths, and something darker and more exciting flickered behind his desire. Love?

Daniella blinked. Love -- at first bite... er... sight? She'd barely known him twenty-four hours. Her common sense told her love was impossible. But, her heart...

Her gaze drifted down to his mouth where the tips of his fangs now rested against his bottom lip. Those fangs had been embedded in her shoulder last night when she'd experienced the most explosive orgasm of her life -- after at least four other orgasms, each more intense than the one before.

She looked back up into his eyes. They were an even deeper blue than they had been before. Desire stabbed her, and her cunt muscles clenched and unclenched. Her nipples tightened to aching nubs -- and her clit thickened and throbbed.

Shivers rolled up and down her spine. Forever? Isn't that what every woman wanted? "Forever?"

"*Ja, Liebchen, forever.*" Pulling his hand from her ass, he clasped her waist and lifted her onto one of the tables.

"Wait," she gasped. "The door..."

"No one will come in, *Liebchen.*"

"You can do that?"

"*Ja.*" His voice was rougher than Daniella had ever heard it, and it excited her. Was she so sexy to him that he was losing control?

Daniella pulled her sweater up over her head. Her bra fastened in the front, and one quick snap had it open and off. As the cool air -- and Maximilian's hot stare -- caressed her breasts, she jerked her jeans open and shimmied out of both those and her silk panties. All the while, her gaze never left him.

He'd toed off his shoes and slid his jeans and boxers down over his lean hips. As his erection leaped free, Daniella licked her lips. Hers. That hard, thick cock was all hers.

Sliding off the table, she fell to her knees and sucked it into her mouth.

As soon as her hot, wet mouth closed around his cock, Maximilian's balls contracted. When she rubbed her teeth on the head, pleasure/pain simmered within him. Throwing back his head, he buried his fingers in her hair and thrust his hips forward.

His cock touched the back of her throat. "*Verdammt!*" He pulled back and thrust forward again. She took all of him. The hot, wet scent of her cunt drifted up to his sensitive nose, and he licked his lips. Soon, he would taste her again.

Her tongue swirled around his cock. She sucked harder. He fought against coming deep in her throat. Too soon. It was too soon to come. He had to satisfy her first. "*Bitte, halt, Liebling.* You'll have me finished before I start."

She looked up. Her eyes were unfocused, and her entire body was flushed. Her breasts were swollen and both nipples tight and pointed. Shifting, she spread her legs. "I need your cock inside of me, Maximilian! I need your hands and mouth on my clit."

A shudder racked Maximilian's body. The urge to bury both cock and fangs in her body was almost overpowering -- almost. He *would* slow down, *would* calm himself -- and fuck her until she didn't know which way was up.

He lifted her up onto the table and pushed her down. Bending, he picked up the rose. "Your scent is far headier than this rose's," he said as he slid its soft petals over each breast and nipple then down over her shuddering stomach.

Gasping, she braced herself with her arms and arched her back.

He trailed the rose down to her erect clit and stroked it. "I love how your clit rises out from between the soft lips of your cunt. You excite me more than any other woman ever has."

"More?" she gasped as he continued to stroke her clit with the rose.

"More."

Her thighs began to shudder.

His voice became lower, more gravelly. "I need to taste you." Dropping the rose on her stomach, he lowered his head and sucked on her clit.

When he sucked on it, she arched her back more. She squeezed her legs shut, then opened them. "Oh, God, yes!"

Concentrating on her pleasure, Maximilian sucked and licked her clit.

She shuddered and tried to squeeze her thighs shut. He used his shoulders to keep them open and slid a finger into her. "*Verdammt!* You are wet."

Moaning, she lifted her head and looked at him. "I need you, Maximilian. I need your cock inside me."

Chuckling, Maximilian picked up the rose and slid it down through her golden pubic hair to her pussy. As he slid two fingers into her, he held the rose in his other hand and stroked her erect clit. His cock ached and his balls burned, but he wasn't done playing yet. Her engorged clit both fascinated and tantalized him. He just couldn't get enough of it. Bending over, he sucked her clit into his mouth again.

Chapter Nine

As soon as Maximilian's tongue touched her clit again, a jolt of blazing pleasure rocketed through Daniella's body. Slamming her fists against the tabletop, she arched her back, wrapped both legs around his neck, and pushed her pussy against his mouth. "More! Now!" His chuckle sent his warm breath rolling over her sensitive clit. She ground herself against his mouth. "Oh, God, yes! Oh yes! Oh yes!"

Sliding his hands up her sides, he grabbed her waist and pulled her pussy tight against his tongue and lips. Licking, stabbing, and sucking, he attacked her with his tongue.

Groaning, Daniella ground her hips against his face. His tongue was fantastic! He was fantastic! As much as she tried to hold back her orgasm, she knew she was rapidly losing the battle.

Then, he stopped and lifted his head. "Enjoying yourself, *Liebchen*?"

"Nooooo! Don't stop now!" Pounding both fists against the table, she lifted her head and glared at him.

"You are not enjoying yourself?" His grin widened. His teeth gleamed. He lowered his head, lapped her clit once more, sucked on it, then nipped it.

As Daniella melted over the table, she felt a sharp nip on the inside of her thigh, one that only intensified her pleasure. She closed then opened her eyes. While flashes of light danced before her face, he lapped first her left thigh, then the right. He dragged his tongue across her still pulsating clit, and she dissolved into further spasms of pleasure. He lapped her clit again, and again, and again.

While Daniella shook uncontrollably, Maximilian rolled her over, pulled her to the edge of the table so that she bent over it, and thrust his hard cock into her. Pushing

down on the small of her back caused her ass to rise. Grasping the two firm cheeks, he kneaded them with his fingers while he stroked the crack between them with his thumbs. Throwing his head back, he groaned with pleasure as her tight muscles closed around him.

His second groan echoed one of hers. "*Verdammt*, but you're tight." Grabbing her hips to keep her from sliding away, he pulled back then thrust himself deeper. Daniella's moans became sobs.

In, out, in, out, his thrusts became stronger, slid in deeper.

Massaging her ass, he raised himself up on his toes and screwed his cock even more deeply into her. Then he buried his face against her neck. In this position, he was able to thrust his cock even deeper into her.

Screaming, she pushed herself up on her forearms, threw back her head, and orgasmed long and hard. "Oh, God, oh, God, oh God!"

Her slender throat was completely exposed. Her hot, slippery cunt felt like it was melting his cock. He wanted to, needed to come. Even more, he needed to sink his fangs into her. The gums around them ached worse than any toothache he'd ever experienced. The little bit of blood he'd licked from the inside of her thigh had only whet his appetite for more.

He hungered for not only sexual satisfaction but also for the fire her blood lit in his body. His soul demanded it. He needed blood -- her blood. Now! With his cock buried deep inside her, his balls drawn up tighter than they ever had been, Maximilian had to give in to his body's demands -- now! He had to drink her blood -- now! No other woman would ever satisfy him again. He was as sure of that as he was of his own name.

The hot muscles of her cunt gripped his cock and sucked it deeper. As his cum erupted, Maximilian slid his hands up her abdomen and gripped her breasts. Then he slid his right hand up to cup her chin. He stroked her lips with his fingers as he slid his fangs into the fleshy muscle where her neck and shoulder joined. As he sucked her

sweet blood into his mouth and swallowed it, his entire body seemed to burst into flames.

Simultaneously, she bit his wrist. Pleasure such as he'd never experienced erupted throughout his body. If her teeth had been fangs...

Time stood still.

* * *

Daniella woke up in her bed. Blinking, she looked around.

Standing at the window, Maximilian was staring at the swirling snow. As she let her gaze wander down his naked body, she sighed. Damn, but he had a great ass.

He must have heard her sigh because he turned around. Smiling, he walked back to the bed rubbing his wrist as he did so. "You bit me."

She dropped her gaze. "I'm sorry. I couldn't help myself." Damn, but he had a great chest too. "Where did you get all those muscles?"

"Wearing armor strengthens one." He braced his hands on the bed and leaned closer, his voice low. "I like you biting me, *Liebling*."

Her chuckle was low. Then she sat up straight. "Armor? Just how old are you?"

He grinned. "Old enough to know what I want."

"Oh? And what do you want?"

"You."

Daniella looked down at her naked breasts then looked back up again. "I'd say you already have me."

He sat down on the bed next to her. "I mean forever." His gaze was steady, compelling.

She could hear the nervousness in her laugh. "What are you trying to do, hypnotize me?"

He shook his head. "I can't."

She frowned. "Can't?"

Maximilian's gaze was still intense, but his smile was gentle. "You are the only person I've ever met that my powers of compulsion do not affect."

Daniella stared back. "The only person? What does that mean?" She sat straight up. "You mean you tried?"

He brushed some wisps of hair behind her ear and caressed her cheek. "The first night we met. You fascinated me immediately. Then, when I couldn't compel you to come with me, I knew you were different from other women, and far more important to me than I'd ever thought possible. We're meant to be together." She continued staring at him. He lifted her hand and kissed it. "Join with me, Daniella. Spend eternity with me."

"Join with you? Do you mean -- become a vampyre?"

He kissed her wrist. "*Ja.*"

She pulled her hand free from his. "Stop that. I can't think." She looked at the window then back at Maximilian. "It's daytime. Shouldn't you be sleeping in a coffin or something?"

He threw back his head and roared with laughter. Daniella crossed her arms over her chest and glared at him.

When his laughter finally subsided, he shook his head. "I do not and never have slept in a coffin, and I don't know any vampyres who have -- except those trying to play a very poor practical joke." He captured both her hands in his. "Daniella, vampyres are not the undead creatures of the occult that so many novels and motion pictures portray. We are simply another race of humans with some slight physiological differences."

"Like needing to drink blood?"

"*Ja*, and living far longer than normal humans."

"You want me to become a vampyre, don't you?"

"*Ja*, and be my wife."

Daniella blinked. "You're proposing?"

He smiled. "*Ja.*"

"But I only met you two nights ago!"

He continued smiling. "For me it doesn't matter. I've been looking for you all my life, and now I've found you. I cannot give you up."

She leaned back against the headboard of her bed. Maximilian wanted to marry her. Was he crazy? She stared at the mirror on the opposite wall. Her reflection stared back. Was she crazy for considering it?

"I know we have just met, Daniella, and I'm not sure what love is, but I do know that I need you to make my life complete."

Daniella stared at the bottom of her bed. He needed her? Did he really? Why would he lie to her? If he only wanted sex, well, he'd gotten that and could have more without asking her to marry him. He knew that. That meant he had to be serious about his proposal. Why? Did she want to spend the rest of her life with him? Lifting her head, she met his gaze in the mirror. "You have a reflection," she said.

His reflection grinned. "I have a soul, too. And I like garlic."

She turned and looked at him. "You don't have to sleep all day?"

"We don't have to sleep any more than any other human, but we are more sensitive to sunlight. It's easier to sleep during the brightest time of the day."

"What would I have to do?"

He leaned forward and kissed her forehead. "Drink my blood."

Daniella made a face. "That doesn't sound very appetizing."

His stare became intense. "I've always thought of it as erotic."

Her nipples began to tingle and her breath caught in her throat. "Are you sure you're allowed to convert people?"

Laughing, he slid into bed next to her and cuddled her close. "*Ja*, but no one would be able to stop me anyway."

"What about Jingle Buns?"

"I would not take you away from here if you didn't want to go. Sooner or later, though, your friends will notice you aren't aging as fast as they are."

"You'd move to Chicago? What about your job?" She frowned. "What do you do, anyway?"

"I'm a Hunter. I hunt vampyres who break our laws. I can do that here just as easily as in Europe." He kissed her shoulder.

"So you're a cop." She shivered -- not from the cold.

"Ja." His hand slid under the blankets and caressed her thigh.

"I've always," she gasped as his fingers found her clit, "liked cops."

Pulling her with him, he slid down until he lay on his side. "I'm glad." Dipping his head, he nuzzled her breast. Then, he nibbled her nipple.

Humming with pleasure, Daniella lifted her arms over her head and arched her back. Warmth spread throughout her body as Maximilian's mouth and fingers began to work their magic all over again. Vampyre? Her? As he trailed kisses down over her abdomen to settle between her legs and suck on her clit, she moaned. Her last coherent thoughts revolved around Maximilian's dedication to her clit. Six or seven hundred years of this? She could get used to it.

Recipes from Jingle Buns

Apple Strudel

Sauce

1 cup apple juice
4 ounces bittersweet (not unsweetened) or semisweet chocolate, chopped
1 tablespoon brandy
½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Filling

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons apple juice
½ cup dry white wine
3 whole star anise
1 cinnamon stick
1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise
⅓ cup (packed) dried Bing cherries
⅓ cup (packed) pitted prunes, halved
1¼ pounds Braeburn apples, peeled, cored, cut into ½-inch cubes
⅓ cup (packed) golden brown sugar
1½ tablespoons cornstarch

Strudel

⅔ cup hazelnuts, toasted, husked
½ cup Graham cracker crumbs
3 tablespoons sugar
9 17x12-inch sheets fresh phyllo pastry or frozen, thawed
½ cup unsalted butter, melted

For sauce:

Boil juice in small saucepan until reduced to ½ cup, about 6 minutes. Remove from heat. Add chocolate and let stand 1 minute; whisk until melted and smooth. Stir in brandy and vanilla. (Sauce can be prepared 4 days ahead. Cover and chill. Rewarm before serving.)

For filling:

Combine 1 cup juice, wine, star anise, and cinnamon in large saucepan. Scrape in seeds from vanilla bean; add bean. Bring to simmer. Remove from heat. Cover; let stand 10 minutes. Add cherries and prunes. Cover and simmer until fruit is plump, about 5 minutes. Discard star anise, cinnamon, and vanilla bean. Mix in apples and sugar; simmer until apples are tender but hold shape and liquid is reduced to 3 tablespoons, stirring occasionally, about 45 minutes.

Mix cornstarch and 2 tablespoons apple juice. Add to filling; stir over medium-high heat until filling thickens and boils, about 3 minutes. (Can be made 3 days ahead. Cool slightly, cover, and chill.)

For strudel:

Preheat oven to 375° F. Lightly butter heavy large baking sheet. Blend first 3 ingredients in processor until nuts are finely ground.

Place dry kitchen towel on work surface. Place 1 phyllo sheet on towel (cover remaining phyllo with plastic wrap and damp towel). Brush phyllo lightly with melted butter. Top with second phyllo sheet; brush with butter. Sprinkle with scant 3 tablespoons nut mixture. Continue with 6 more phyllo sheets, brushing each with butter and sprinkling with scant 3 tablespoons nut mixture. Top with remaining phyllo sheet. Brush with butter. Spoon filling atop phyllo stack in 12x3-inch log, starting 2 inches from 1 long side and 2½ inches from each short side. Fold short edges over filling. Using towel as aid and beginning at edge close to filling, roll up strudel jelly-roll style. Place strudel, seam side down, on prepared baking sheet. Brush strudel with butter. (Can be made 4 hours ahead. Chill.)

Bake strudel uncovered until golden, about 45 minutes. Let cool at least 30 minutes. Cut warm or room temperature strudel into slices; place on plates. Serve with ice cream and warm chocolate sauce.

* * *

Dried Cherry and Walnut Strudel Bundles

1½ cups dried cherries
¾ cup boiling water
¾ cup walnuts, ground
6 tablespoons apricot jam
24 fresh phyllo pastry sheets or frozen, thawed
6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, melted
6 6-inch-long pieces kitchen string
Powdered sugar

Place cherries in small bowl. Pour $\frac{3}{4}$ cup boiling water over. Let stand until softened, about 30 minutes. Drain well. Pat cherries dry with paper towels. Mix cherries, nuts and jam in medium bowl.

Lightly oil heavy medium baking sheet. Stack phyllo sheets on work surface. Trim to 10-inch square (save scraps for another use). Cover stack with plastic and damp kitchen towel. Place 1 phyllo square on work surface. Brush lightly with butter. Arrange another phyllo square atop, with corners at a slight angle. Brush lightly with butter. Repeat with 2 more squares, arranging corners at slight angle. Spoon $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sherry mixture in center of phyllo stack. Lift edges of phyllo and bring together around filling, forming bundle. With string, tie bundle just above filling. Place on prepared sheet. Repeat with remaining phyllo and filling, forming total of 6 bundles. Brush outside of filled portion (but not tops) of each bundle with butter. (Can be made 1 day ahead. Cover carefully and chill.)

Preheat oven to 325° F. Bake until phyllo is golden about 35 minutes. Transfer sheet to rack and cool. Carefully cut string from each bundle. Sift powdered sugar over bundles and serve.

* * *

Christmas Pies

Filling:

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup raisins
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sultanas
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dates
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup candied peel
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup glace cherries
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flaked almonds
1 ripe banana, peeled
4 tbsp. Brandy or whisky
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground ginger
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. grated nutmeg
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. mixed spice

Pastry:

1 cup flour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup shortening
6 tbsp. cold water

Filling: mix everything together either by hand or, if you desire a smoother texture, in a food processor.

Pastry: rub shortening into the flour until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add enough flour to enable the pastry to hold together. Roll out pastry and cut into 12 cm circles. Press circles into the bottom of lightly oiled baking tins. Put the filling inside and cover with another pastry circle. Press down at the edges and make a small steam hole in the top.

Bake for 10 minutes in a hot oven (425° F). These pies can be frozen before baking either in the tin or removed from tin once they are solid. Filling will keep for 1 week covered in the fridge.

* * *

German Stollen

½ cup raisins
½ cup candied red cherries, halved
¼ cup currants
¼ cup candied citron, diced
¼ cup rum
4½ cup flour
2 yeast, active dry packages
1 cup milk
¼ cup butter or margarine
¼ cup sugar
½ tsp. salt
2 eggs
1 tbs. orange peel, finely shredded
2 tsp. lemon peel, finely shredded
½ cup almonds, blanched chopped

In a medium bowl combine raisins, cherries, currants, citron or citrus peel, and rum. Set aside. In a large mixer bowl combine 1½ cups of the flour and yeast. Heat milk, butter, sugar and salt over low heat, stirring constantly until warm (120° F to 130° F).

Add to dry ingredients along with eggs and fruit peels. Beat at low speed of electric mixer for 30 seconds, scraping sides of bowl. Beat 3 minutes at high speed. Stir in fruit-rum mixture, almonds and enough of the remaining flour to make a soft dough. Turn out onto a lightly floured surface and knead in enough of the remaining flour to make a moderately soft dough that is smooth and elastic (5 to 6 minutes). Shape into a ball. Place in a greased bowl, turning once. Cover. Let rise until double (1 hour). Punch dough down. Divide in half. Cover and let rest 10 minutes.

On a lightly floured surface roll each half to a 10x8-inch oval. Fold lengthwise in half so the top half overlaps to within a half-inch of the bottom half. Press folded edge firmly.

Place about 4 inches apart on greased baking sheet. Cover and let rise until double (45 minutes). Bake at 200° Celsius (~400° F) for 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown. Cool. Serve sprinkled with powdered sugar or spread with Confectioners' Glaze and decorate with candied cherries. Makes 2 loaves.

Confectioner's Glaze

Mix 1 cup sifted powdered sugar and 1 tablespoon milk. Add more milk, 1/2 teaspoon at a time, until spreading consistency.

* * *

Hazelnut Cookies

1 cup plus 4 tsp. powdered sugar

3/4 cup plus 2 tbsp. ground hazelnuts (you can also use almonds, coconut, or any other nuts)

2 egg whites

Baking wafers -- 3 inches round (these crisp, flat wafers are widely used in European baking and are available in specialty food stores in the U.S.)

Mix together all ingredients. Use a teaspoon to drop small scoops of dough onto the baking wafers (the wafers make it easy to remove the cookies from the cookie sheet). Place on a cookie sheet on the second shelf from the bottom of the oven. Bake until golden brown at 350-375° F for 20 minutes.

* * *

Kletzenbrot (Fruit Cake)

3 cups wheat flour

2/3 cup brown sugar

2 tsp. baking powder

1/4 tsp. salt

2 cups buttermilk

1 cup chopped nuts (walnuts, almonds)

1 cup chopped prunes

1 cup chopped dried figs

1 cup chopped dried dates

1/2 cup raisins

1/2 cup currants

Sift the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt into a bowl. Slowly add the buttermilk and stir the mixture into a smooth dough. Mix in the nuts and dried fruits. Place into a loaf pan and bake in a hot oven (350° F) for about an hour.

* * *

Saffron Buns (St. Lucia's Buns)

1½ cups milk
1 g saffron (app ¼ tsp.)
50 g fresh baker's yeast (app 3½ tbsp.)
¾ cup sugar
⅔ cup butter or margarine
5 cups all purpose flour
1 egg
1 cup raisins
a pinch of salt

Melt butter or margarine in a pan and add the milk and the saffron. Warm the mixture to body temperature. Use a thermometer; the correct temperature (36.6° C or 100° F) is important! Pour the mixture over the finely divided yeast, then add the remaining ingredients (except for the egg and the raisins), which should have a temperature of 21-23° C (72-75° F).

Mix into a smooth dough. Cover the dough with a piece of cloth and let it rise for 30 minutes. Knead the dough, divide it into 25-30 pieces and form each piece into a round bun. Let the buns rest for a few minutes, covered by a piece of cloth.

Form each bun into a string, 15-20 cm long, then arrange the string in a suitable shape, e.g. like an S or a double S. Regardless of the shape, the ends of the string should meet. Press a few raisins into the dough.

Cover the buns with a piece of cloth and let them rise for 40 minutes. Whip the egg together with a few grains of salt and paint the buns with the mixture. Bake them for 5-10 minutes in the oven at 250° C (475° F) until golden brownish yellow.

* * *

Pfeffernüsse

4 cups flour
½ cup sugar
1¼ tsp. baking soda
1½ tsp. cinnamon
½ tsp. cloves
½ tsp. nutmeg
1 tsp. freshly ground pepper (optional)

¾ cup light molasses
½ cup (1 stick) butter
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup walnuts or almonds, finely chopped or ground (optional)
powdered sugar

Combine all dry ingredients in a bowl. Heat molasses and butter in a small saucepan and stir until butter has melted. Cool to room temperature and stir in beaten eggs. Add dry ingredients and nuts to mixture and mix well. Cover and chill dough overnight. To bake, shape chilled dough into 1-inch balls and place 1 inch apart on greased cookie sheet. Bake at 350° F for 12 to 14 minutes. Let cool on a wire rack. Roll in powdered sugar while still warm.
Makes about 5 dozen.

* * *

Springerle

4 eggs
4 drops anise oil
2 tablespoons butter
4 cups all-purpose flour
2 cups white sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ cup anise seed

Beat eggs in large bowl until light. Add in anise oil and mix. Cream in sugar and butter until mixture is light and fluffy. Add dry ingredients and combine. Knead dough until smooth, adding more flour if needed. Cover dough and allow to chill in refrigerator for at least 2 hours.

Roll chilled dough on a lightly floured board until ¼ inch thick. Then form designs using a Springerle rolling pin or use the Springerle wooden molds. Cut forms into separate cookies, place on a cookie sheet, and allow them to stand overnight, uncovered in a cool, dry place.

Bake the cookies at 350° F for 15 to 20 minutes, being careful not to let the cookies become browned. Cool completely and store in an airtight container for at least 1 week before eating to allow the anise flavor to mellow.

* * *

Spritzgebäck

1 cup (2 sticks) butter
1¼ cups powdered sugar
5 egg yolks or 3 whole eggs
¼ tbsp. vanilla extract or grated rind from ½ lemon
1½ cups ground almonds or hazelnuts
3 cups flour

Cream butter and gradually add sugar. Beat in eggs or yolks one at a time. Add the vanilla or lemon rind. Beat well, while gradually adding the nuts and flour. Knead the dough briefly.

To form the cookies, use a piping bag or cookie press with a tube fitting of the desired shape. Press the dough through the bag or press onto a baking sheet 1 inch apart in the form of discs, rings, sticks, or S-shapes.

Bake at 375° F for 10 minutes or until light brown. Cool on a wire rack.

Variation: Add 3 oz. grated dark chocolate or 2-3 tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder to the dough to produce a chocolate cookie.

* * *

Zimtsterne

3 egg whites
pinch of salt
1 cup + 2 tbsp. sugar
2½ cups almonds, ground (with skin)
2 tsp. cinnamon
½ tbsp. lemon juice
2 cups powdered sugar, for rolling

Beat egg whites together with salt until stiff. Slowly add sugar and beat until stiff but not dry. Set aside about ½ cup of the sugar and egg white mixture. Add to the remaining mixture the ground almonds, cinnamon, and lemon juice. Form into a ball and allow to chill for 1 hour.

Remove 2 cups of dough from the refrigerator. Spread a ¼-inch layer of powdered sugar over the work surface and roll the ball in the sugar until covered. Roll into a flat disk about ¼-inch thick. The dough will have a sticky consistency; continue to add powdered sugar as needed to make the mass workable. Use a star-shaped cookie cutter, or other forms if desired, and place cut shapes on a baking sheet covered with baking paper. With a pastry brush, brush a small amount of the reserved egg white mixture onto the top of each cookie. Bake at 300° F for 25 minutes.

* * *

NUSS STRÜDEL (Walnut Rolled Strudel with Filling)

4 cups flour
4 tablespoons sugar
1 cup lukewarm water
2 eggs slightly beaten
2 cakes yeast regular or dry
½ cup soft butter
1 teaspoon salt

Crumble yeast in bowl, add water and sugar stirring till mixture liquefies. Blend flour and butter with wire pastry blender. Mix well, mix in eggs, salt and yeast. Mix until dough is smooth and leaves side of bowl clean. Do not let rise. Divide into four portions and roll each out in a rectangular shape spread with filling and roll up like jelly roll. Prick roll with toothpick on top and sides to keep roll from splitting while baking. Place in greased baking pans. Bake at once in 350° F oven about 30 to 45 min. or until brown.

Walnut filling

1 pound of freshly ground walnuts (finely)
1 cup raisins
1¾ cups of sugar
¼-½ cup honey
1 cup of boiled milk
¼ cup melted butter

Mix filling in bowl using only ¾ cup of boiled milk. If not spreadable, use the rest of the milk. Divide into 4 portions, one for each dough roll up. These cakes can be wrapped in foil and stored in the freezer after they are baked.

Judy Mays

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