

MORNINGSTAR



BY JADE FALCONER

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Phaze

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Morningstar

A novel of homoerotic romance by

Jade Falconer

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Dedicated to A Fire Inside, without whom the world would be a much more desolate place.

PROLOGUE

Some said it was the last act of terrorism the human race ever perpetrated on themselves.

Some said it was a stroke of genius that got out of hand.

Some said it was inevitable, merely mankind's vanity and sense of self-importance finally bringing its just rewards.

In the end, it didn't matter what it was.

It was the end of the world as mankind knew it.

It has been said that society is only three meals away from anarchy; it turned out to be truer than anyone knew.

About twenty years into the twenty-first century, someone—speculation ran wild at the time, but no one ever claimed responsibility, and now no one will ever know—apparently planted a virus in the computer that regulated the country's power grid. The delivery of electrical power to the nation had recently become centralized, much to the complaint of conspiracy theorists and the delight of the government, who saw it as a chance to avoid the power fiascos of the early part of the century and ensure an even, regulated supply of electricity to its citizens. In addition, a new generation of supercomputers had been installed to control it, supposedly intelligent, with neural net capability so they could "learn" to handle small crises without human interaction. This was meant to cut out "human error," but in fact played right into the hands of whomever finally took action.

Whether the perpetrators meant to cause all the damage they did remains unknown. If they just meant to cause chaos, or perhaps disrupt comfortable urban lives, they succeeded beyond their wildest dreams.

The virus disabled the central computer almost immediately. Backup systems were of course in place, but these systems weren't intelligent, and shut down the grids themselves when certain parameters went out of the specified range.

Over half of the power providers on the west coast went down in the first wave. The back-up computers tried to re-route the demand for power to other stations, as they were supposed to, but too many had gone down so the load drained all the power reserves. As soon as that happened, the system went into automatic rolling power outages, trying to conserve the power that was left. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough power left for even a reduced load, so the computers started shutting down the entire power network.

Now, nearly a hundred years after the disaster, mankind had barely recovered. The speed at which the world devolved into the dark ages stunned everyone.

The lack of power destroyed much of the perishable food supply. Prices of non-perishables became exorbitant, and costs were so inflated that money itself soon became worthless.

Looting was rampant; the army tried to keep the peace until it was clear that there was little or no government left to pay the army. Very few people were willing to risk their lives when they and their families were starving.

But the biggest problem of all was yet to come.

Tens of thousands of people died in the first days from violence and accidents. Following soon after was anyone dependent upon power to keep them alive. The sick and infirm were next, with no one to care for them any longer. People kept dying as they were denied medicine they needed to stay healthy. Hospitals operated as best they could, but were soon overrun and out of even basic medical supplies. Medicine plummeted back into the dark ages, and people died of even simple afflictions.

Countless toxins and viruses were released when the experimental bio labs lost power. No one really knew just what was released, not that it mattered. There was nothing anyone could do to fight it. People died.

The next problem only became apparent after a few years. There was no organized media anymore, so it was a while before there was widespread confirmation. At least three out of four babies born in the time following were male.

The birthrate had dropped anyway, with the number of miscarriages and stillbirths very high, but that still didn't account for the fact that there were very few girls being born. It could only be assumed that something, some biological agent, was to blame. There was nothing that could be done, except try to protect the remainder of the human race.

Local governments tried to regroup, and succeeded for a while before everything started to wear out. There just weren't enough skilled people to fix everything as it broke, so things like plumbing and social services were but a distant memory for those people who'd made it to the age of thirty.

The rudimentary governments kept some hospitals and labs running, but for the most part people had reverted to the kind of existence the human race had lived a thousand years ago. Those who could, barricaded themselves in compounds, with their own wells, growing their own food, and defending themselves as best they could against marauders. People lived in extended-family groups, and their success varied according to the skills the individuals possessed. Trade was possible, but difficult, as people didn't like to leave their compounds. At least they didn't have to worry about vampires, though. The undead tended to prefer the cities. More readily available food sources.

The cities were in some ways better, and some ways worse, than the country. Trade was easier, with marketplaces becoming more common. The barter system seemed to work, with the few people who were paid (such as the vampire hunters) keeping what currency there was left circulating.

The vampires, of course, had no need for anything but prey, and flourished wherever there were humans. The vampire hunters were the only real police force, as the human race wasn't capable of doing widespread damage to each other any more. Robberies and murders occurred, of course, but they were few and far between compared to vampire attacks.

The presence of vampires among the human race had been a well-kept secret before the disaster. They'd been around for hundreds, if not thousands of years. But their numbers were insignificant compared to humans, so their existence was officially denied. But now, with so few people,

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and no real government, the legends were revealed to be the truth. People believed, and the hunters did their job the best they could. To defend those who survived.

CHAPTER 1

Daniel was exhausted. He was running on four hours sleep and about five cups of coffee, but he had to look over the new potential recruits. They were all young, all in excellent shape, all enthusiastic, and all so very big. He knew they looked at him as if he was a joke. Every single one of them towered over his diminutive five-foot-eight frame, and even with his long, black hair tied tightly back, he just looked feminine.

But that was all part of why he was so good at what he did. He was universally underestimated. Only a handful of top hunters knew that Daniel was the infamous Morningstar, and he intended to keep it that way. Knowledge was power. That was true regardless of the state of the world, and he had no intention of giving the vampires any more power than they already had.

He stopped in front of one young man, arguably the largest of them. "How fast can you run?" he asked.

"Pretty fast," he answered, smirking a little.

"How high can you jump?"

The boy frowned. "Uh, I don't know."

He strolled back in front of the line. "You can be the strongest human being on the planet and you would still be weaker than the newest vampire. Muscle is not going to help you. Intelligence, speed, and eyesight are the only weapons you have." From there he gave them the usual speech about their training. They would all be trained for a month, then let

loose on the world. He only hoped they lived to long enough to get paid.

When the recruits were dismissed, Daniel checked for messages and news of the previous night's success. The brittle, rewashed paper used for official correspondence didn't hold ink very well, and he had to squint to read some of the numbers. He handed the report to his assistant. "Add three to last night's total. I was a little sleepy last night, so I didn't get very far."

The comment wasn't delivered in a cocky manner. Daniel had been off his game. Not enough to get anyone killed, thankfully, but off nonetheless. It seemed so futile, sometimes, the unending battle. Vampires died and hunters died. Slowly both sides were being eaten away.

"Sir? Are you all right?" the assistant asked when Daniel didn't move or speak for a moment.

Daniel gave the young man a weary smile and glanced at the window. "Yeah. I will be," he said quietly. Someday, he mused, when living was more important than dying again. If such a day ever came.

He checked in with the rest of his team, then left to go home and sleep.

CHAPTER 2

The wind blew Scott's long jacket away from his deceptively thin body. The jacket was just for show, an affectation. A remnant of his former life. His real life. He didn't feel the cold. New vamps sometimes claimed to feel it, but it couldn't hurt them. So after a while you ignored it.

Humans called them undead. Scott felt alive. He could feel pain. He could feel pleasure. He could feel happiness. But all he felt right now was ... tired. The sun was rising. He leaned against a mangled piece of metal; a television antenna, from years ago. There was no television now. He only knew what it was because he'd been alive then. Before. When there was television and real electricity and everything that made possible. He'd been alive, not a vampire.

The sky lightened, with spectacular oranges and reds streaking the leaden sky. He stood on the rooftop of a burned-out building, the temporary home to a large group of vampires, chosen because of the extensive underground tunnels it perched over. Scott's memory told him this was once a government building, thus the reinforcements. Perfect for his kind to hide, lots of concrete to protect them from the deadly sunlight.

The sun that Scott longed for, and flirted with, and could feel approaching with more than his eyes. Every part of his body told him to get below; all the other vampires had gone long ago. But he stayed. Pushed it until the last moment.

Took chances. Becoming a vampire hadn't changed Scott that much.

To go below meant darkness. Silence. No escape from his thoughts. Tonight hadn't gone well. He'd warned Steven not to go. Steven had been his friend for almost twenty years, since he'd come across him as a newly risen vampire and saved him from the hunters. His friend had gotten word of a new group of vampire hunters that was training in the old subway tunnels. He'd thought that new hunters would be easy prey. Scott had thought it was a bad idea to deliberately seek them out. Scott had stayed alive, such as he was, for nearly a hundred years by being careful.

But Steven had insisted. And in the end Scott had decided to go with him.

When they'd arrived Scott knew it was a mistake. They were outnumbered at least three to one. The hunters were everywhere; as soon as they walked in they knew it was an ambush. They'd tried to leave immediately. They had run, but even the vamps with their superior speed and strength hadn't been able to outrun the hunters with their crossbows. When Scott looked back he saw Steven go down, an arrow through his heart, and three hunters held him down while one delivered a killing blow with a machete. Steven's head was separated from his body, and Scott knew he was well and truly dead.

There was nothing Scott could do but run. Steven was gone. He'd jumped the twenty feet to an air vent, and fled.

Now he stood on the edge of the rooftop, staring at the brightening sky. If he just stayed here a few moments longer,

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he could see the sun once more ... and he would die. The long wait for death would be over. Just a few more moments, and he'd never lose another friend, never watch another lover die.

The sun touched the top of a higher building, and Scott could feel it like a vibration in his bones. His hands tightened on the metal, willing himself to stay.

But he couldn't do it. The sky brightened unbearably, and he fled again, down to the safe, comforting darkness. To sleep like the dead.

CHAPTER 3

When Daniel woke up it was after six thirty in the evening. He'd been burning the candle at both ends for a week, and on the day that would normally be his day off, it had all caught up with him. Of course, it was only his day off officially. He never took a break. But at least it wouldn't matter if he was a few minutes late.

By the time he started the long walk to the armory that they used as a temporary headquarters it was completely dark. There was hardly a soul on the streets. The city was under a general alert, and only the very brave and the very stupid went out after dark. Daniel didn't really consider himself either. But he spent the majority of his time outside at night. It didn't frighten him; it was his job. Meeting a vampire still did, but fear was good. It kept him alert.

It was brisk outside, and his hair was still damp from washing. He hurried on his way, not wishing to tempt fate until he had his crossbow in hand. Anonymous operatives like Morningstar couldn't be seen with their weapons when they weren't on duty, but of course he still had his knife safely tucked in a back sheath.

He heard light footfalls echoing behind him, and he changed his pace, listening carefully. Every nerve ending in his body tingled with anticipation, every sense heightened from long years of knowing exactly what to look and listen for. It wasn't so much that he could sense the presence of a vampire, but he could read all the signs.

The ache was becoming more painful. Scott hadn't fed in a couple of days, and though he could live for a while on rats, it wasn't pleasant. Animal blood always left a bad taste in his mouth. Feeding on a human could keep him going for a week, and it gave him a high he hadn't felt since he'd been on drugs. Scott had been addicted to heroin, back before he'd become a vampire. He'd been famous, a rock star, with the money to indulge his addiction. He still hadn't found anything close to drugs. Except for feeding on a human. Drugs, even if he could get them, didn't affect him any more. But every time he fed, he felt guilty, and he only killed when he had to. He could wait. He certainly couldn't die. Not from hunger. Well, he could, but he'd heard it took years of agonizing pain.

Lately, it had become harder to feed safely. Humans had become warier. There were more hunters. The vamps were getting taken down faster than new ones could be made, and for once it seemed that humans might win their fight against the undead.

Scott leaned back into the shadows as a small human passed. The idiot was alone. Who walked around, alone at night, in this area? As small as he was, the person—a man, Scott was sure of it, despite the diminutive stature—would be in danger from other humans, let alone vampires. Yet there he was, walking right past one of the oldest vampires in the city. Scott decided to follow. Years of being undead hadn't dulled his curiosity. Perhaps he would feed after all tonight.

Daniel wasn't sure who was following him, or what his intent was, but he knew the streets like the back of his hand and he wasn't about to be taken unaware.

He walked a little faster, raking his long, dark hair back off his forehead, letting it tumble down his back.

He ducked around a dark corner, sliding his hand around his back, fingers on the handle of his knife, just in case. He didn't wish to blow his cover if it was just some random hoodlum looking to prey on someone seemingly defenseless.

If the person was following him, he'd know in a moment.

Scott could see in the dark better than a human, and he saw the man slip around the corner. Clearly he knew he was being followed; interesting. This human was certainly more observant than the rest of his kind. Intrigued, Scott followed; what danger was a human on his own? He could almost smell him now, and the need rose in him. It was almost sexual, but deeper; though for most vamps, drinking blood was as good as sex. Scott moved more quickly; though the man knew he was there, he wouldn't be expecting a human to close the distance that fast. He slipped around the corner, taking care to be completely silent this time.

Daniel had to admit that he was startled. He hadn't really thought it was a vampire, and for a split second he wasn't entirely sure it was. But no human could have caught up to him that quickly. One of the things he was always telling the new hunters was, "If you're within arm's length and you haven't got a sharp chunk of wood buried in its chest, make your peace with the world." He'd outlived nearly every other vampire hunter he'd ever come to know, but it looked like his time was up. The alley was a dead end, and there was no way he could outrun a vampire anyway.

He gasped a little, looking into the vampire's eyes, using the only weapon he had left, the pretense of innocence. "Are ... are you going to kill me?" he said breathily.

Scott faltered, and almost changed his mind; the human was much too pretty to be a man. Long, flowing hair that was either black or dark brown, huge brown eyes and delicate features that belonged on a woman; but no, Scott's instinct told him this was a man. The voice was enticing, made to whisper words of lust. And Scott was on guard; no one could be this innocent looking and be out on his own.

He moved closer, though, and purred, "That's up to you, pretty boy." Scott's eyes fixed on the man; the idea that vampires could control minds was a myth but this man might not know that. "I wish to feed; will you surrender willingly?" He could feed without killing, but it didn't often happen. Humans struggled. They thought they'd turn into vampires instantly.

Daniel knew better. He knew more about vampires than most. And he knew that being bitten didn't necessarily mean dying or becoming one of them. "You won't kill me if I do?" he asked softly. He leaned back against the wall, lifting his chin up, exposing his neck just a little. A subtly submissive gesture, almost seducing the creature into agreeing. Not that Daniel trusted his word, but it was his only hope. He tried to look meek, worried, frightened, playing on his appearance of weakness as he always did.

Scott's eyes widened just slightly; was the man so trusting? Something very like lust ran through him at the sight of that pale, smooth neck. He knew that many vampires

had sex with humans, and that sometimes humans sought out his kind just for that. But he had never done that, had chosen vampires as his lovers since he had been turned. It seemed wrong to have sex with what was essentially his food. But then, he'd never seen anyone quite like this.

"Perhaps," he said. He stepped closer, licking his lips as he smelled the human, and said in a deep, rough voice, "You can't stop me anyway."

Well, if he was going to die, at least the creature was beautiful rather than hideous. "No. I can't," Daniel whispered. He licked his lips quickly, then tipped his head back further. "If you mean to kill me, I wish you'd be quick about it." He swallowed hard, his throat muscles constricting. But despite Daniel's uncertainty, there was a glimmer of hope. This one had to be very old. He looked nearly human, his angular features sharp in the moonlight. And there was something ... some glimmer of mutual attraction. Perhaps that alone would keep Daniel alive.

The words made Scott laugh softly, and he reached out lightning quick, grabbing the man by the arm and pulling him close against his body. He reached around and put his hand on the back of his neck, then changed his mind and grabbed a handful of the man's gorgeous hair. He yanked back on it, exposing the long, lovely throat even more, and almost growled. "I shall take all the time I want, little one." His eyes fixed on the man's neck, smelling the fresh blood just below the surface. He would feed tonight. But, to his shock, the lithe body against him was stirring more than just his bloodlust.

Having his hair pulled was one of Daniel's particular kinks, and it drew an unexpected whimper from him. The way the vampire held him was more like a lover than a murderer. He wanted to scream when he realized the action was making him hard. He looked wide-eyed at the other man, mere inches from his face. Short, cropped hair and intense blue-green eyes, sensual lips that almost seemed to be smirking even when still. He was fucking gorgeous. Daniel knew better than to resist, but he was nearly pulled off balance and his hands instinctively reached for something to hold onto. He clutched at the vampire's slender shoulders, and he could almost feel the muscles flexing beneath the fabric of his coat. Really, there were much worse ways to die.

That whimper instantly aroused Scott, not to mention the way the man clung to him. Scott pushed, pinning the man against the wall with his body. What the hell was his problem? He was here to feed, not to fuck. He didn't fuck humans. But this one was so pretty ... and now he could feel the man was hard against him as well. He moaned low in his throat, and pressed him harder against the wall, dipping his head to the man's throat. His hair was like the finest of silk in his fingers, and Scott licked a long line along his neck.

This time Daniel's gasp was genuine. He felt like squirming against the pressure of the other man's body. God, it had been a long fucking time since he'd been this aroused. It was illegal for human beings to engage in homosexual activity, a law passed to protect the ever shrinking population. Daniel wasn't interested in women, so he had finally just stopped sleeping with anyone. It was too risky. Even in his position,

the law was the law. Even Morningstar wouldn't be excused from it.

But there he was, pinned to a wall by a strong, gorgeous male, fingers tight in Daniel's hair, and his tongue tracing a line of wet fire on his skin. "Oh, God," he rasped quietly. Involuntarily, his hips pressed forward ever so slightly, pressing his erection more insistently against that hard thigh.

Fuck ... the pretty man wanted it, was asking for it, and Scott no longer knew if he wanted to feed or fuck. He knew of the ridiculous human laws, but he wasn't bound by them. He'd always had sex with whomever he chose, male or female. But even when he was alive, his tastes had run mostly to pretty, lithe men ... like the one he held, who submitted so willingly.

Scott was confused, something he wasn't familiar with. He buried his face in the man's neck and breathed deeply, pressing his arousal against the smaller man's stomach. He wanted ... he wanted to drink this man's blood, and he wanted to bury himself inside him. The feelings shouldn't exist at the same time. In nearly a hundred years of life as a vampire, he'd never been tempted like this.

"No," Scott growled. He moved back quickly, releasing the man. He panted and looked at him. He didn't want to kill, and he didn't know if he could control his lust, either. He would find another meal. One that didn't unsettle him. So he jumped, grabbing hold of a rusty fire escape high above. He had to get away.

Daniel looked up, watching him climb. What the hell had just happened? He felt shaken and he squeezed his eyes shut

for a moment. Only seconds before, a vampire had had his mouth on Daniel's neck, and had stopped himself. And from his experience he could tell he was hungry.

Not only that, the vampire had been aroused as well. Daniel should be so many pounds of rapidly cooling meat on the ground right now.

Daniel fled as well, starting off towards the armory again, breaking into a sprint when he thought no one was around to see. He needed to be someplace safe for a few minutes to collect his thoughts. He'd faced down a vampire and lived to tell the tale. He'd let himself get in a position where he should have been killed. He needed to sort through it all, but first he had to stay alert and get to somewhere quiet and safe.

CHAPTER 4

Scott raced along the rooftops until he was safely away. What had he been thinking? He stopped, leaning against a wall, and found he couldn't get the long-haired man out of his mind. The heat of his body against him ... the hardness that told him that the man wanted him, too ... he'd had an easy meal under his teeth and hadn't taken it.

He shook his head to clear it. He needed to feed, and now. He would find easier prey.

When he returned to the lair later that night, he rested and listened to the younger vampires talk. He was full and content; he'd come across a group of thieves who'd been ransacking an apartment, and fed from the slowest. He'd taken no more than he needed, and left the man in an alley. He'd live. Scott hadn't felt a bit of lust, only hunger, and he'd fed without remorse. It was simple, and a relief.

The vampires talked of the hunters, a common topic these days. In particular, they seemed in awe of one they called 'Morningstar.' He sat up, paying more attention now. This Morningstar was more than human, they said. He'd killed hundreds, was the rumor, and was even now training more hunters to track them all down.

Scott snorted, interrupting. "You shouldn't believe everything you hear," he said quietly, but instantly everyone was listening. Times were hard enough without the younger ones spreading rumors like that, discouraging the rest. "No human is that good."

"But, sir, I heard from one vampire last week, he'd seen him take down three at once," one of the vampires protested.

"You heard. He saw. Did you see?" said Scott, rising from his chair.

"No, sir," admitted the vampire, a dark-haired youth who looked barely old enough to be on his own. Had he been a human.

"Then don't believe it until you've seen it with your own eyes," snapped Scott, leaving the room in a swirl of black coat.

He stalked to his sleeping place, a nondescript cubicle of concrete on the lowest level. Vampires these days hadn't the luxury of coffins or any of the *accoutrements* their elders had had; as long as he was out of the sunlight he would be safe. Soon they'd have to leave this place, find a new hideout; the hunters were moving again, seeking them out. But there were thousands of buildings with hundreds of hiding places, and not enough hunters to search them all. He was old, and slept lightly; he'd pit his reflexes against the hunters any day.

Tomorrow night he'd find the hunters, and learn if this Morningstar existed. And find out his secrets.

CHAPTER 5

Daniel allowed himself the indulgence of thinking about his brush with death as he drank coffee in the ready room. He'd never been that close to a vampire before. Well, at least not one that was still moving around. He felt shaken, but he couldn't figure out why he'd been spared. Even if there was a mutual attraction between them, he would have expected to be raped and killed, not ... released.

"Are you okay?" It was Martin, a tall, slender young man who joined their ranks less than a year ago. Martin was reasonable. Level-headed. Cool under pressure. Which was why he'd lasted almost a year.

"Yeah. Just ... something weird happened on my way in," he said quietly.

"You were late. That was taking a big risk walking in here alone at night without your gear."

"I know. I've done it before, though. But you're right. It was stupid." He sighed. In the ten years that he'd been hunting, Daniel had been extraordinarily lucky. That was the only way he could explain it. Perhaps lately he was getting tired of being lucky. He'd seen so much death. Almost every night they lost some young man. Women weren't allowed to be hunters.

"I heard that if you put holy water in a spray bottle and squirt them in the face it burns their skin," one of the newer guys was saying off to one side of the room. The young man couldn't have been more than twenty-one, perhaps younger.

Martin snorted. Daniel didn't even look up, but his soft voice carried. The new ones were either in awe of him or scoffed at his supposed 'experience'. "Water, holy or not, does nothing to them except clean their filthy faces. If you try it you're just asking to be an appetizer."

The one who'd made the comment turned and looked at Daniel, who'd gone back to sipping his coffee from an old and chipped mug. "Have you ever tried it?" he asked challengingly.

Daniel turned his dark eyes to the young man. "No."

"Well pardon me for saying so, sir, but how the hell would you know, then?"

He sighed. Sometimes he was tempted to just let them find out on their own, but there were far too few of them and far too many vampires. It was an uphill battle, but he had to set them straight every time. He put his cup down, stood, and walked over to the young man. He had to look up at him. "I've seen someone else do it. A nice boy, just like you. His name was Gary. He had a beautiful girlfriend and two little boys. He was from the country, and he came here to try to keep the world safe so his kids could grow up." He pushed his long hair back over his shoulder. "When the vampire stopped laughing at him he snapped his crossbow in half, then slit his throat with the tip of the arrow. When Gary fell to the ground I finally got a clear fucking shot at the bastard's chest."

The young hunter paled. "Oh."

Daniel calmly pulled his hair back into a ponytail. It was time to get moving. "If you want to die, go right ahead and try it," he added, turning his back on the other man.

Martin was still standing there, smirking at him. He looked over at the young man who was still gaping at Daniel. "But if you're gonna try it, you better not be assigned to my back."

The group slowly dispersed as everyone collected their weapons and headed out into the night. Daniel took one last sip of his now cold coffee, before buckling the machete holster, and shouldering his own crossbow. "Idiots," he muttered.

Martin walked alongside Daniel. "You did the best you could. You can't save everyone, Daniel."

Daniel sighed. "Let's go." There was no point in talking about it. In ten years he'd seen nearly as many hunters die as he'd personally killed vampires, which was quite a few.

By the end of the night, Daniel's total was five. He reported in, exhausted and covered with blood. He headed home in the glowing dawn, anxious to have a bath and crawl into bed and forget about the world for a few hours.

CHAPTER 6

It all happened in the blink of an eye. They were overrun, and one of the newer hunters lost his concentration for a split second. That was all it took. As he pulled the trigger on the crossbow, a vampire came out of nowhere and tackled him to the ground, and the arrow did indeed find a heart. But it wasn't the heart of one of the undead.

The arrow lodged itself squarely in Martin's chest.

Daniel turned away from the creature he'd just dispatched, cleanly cleaving head from torso, just in time to see the look of shock on Martin's face. An unearthly scream came from the boy who'd fired. Daniel spun, his crossbow reloaded in a flash of reflexes honed over a decade, and he fired first on the boy's original target, who was starting to advance. A moment later he fired on the creature pinning the young hunter to the ground, teeth already buried in his neck.

There was no time to even look at Martin. An arrow through the heart only slowed them for a moment, sometimes not at all if they were very old. He swung the machete at the first, again severing the neck in a clean blow. His eyes darted around the scene, alert to any more movement, then he sprinted over to the second vampire and decapitated him as well.

In all it took less than a minute.

The headless body rolled off the boy, who was moaning on the ground, blood trickling from his neck. Trickling was good. Spurting was bad.

"Put your fingers over the wound," Daniel barked. "Keep pressure on it."

He turned to look then, a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. The unnatural heap that Martin's body lay in told him all he needed to know. His white T-shirt was soaked through with blood, and there was a puddle already spreading beneath him. Daniel gritted his teeth and turned to the boy.

"Can you stand up?" he asked, rather harshly.

The boy just whimpered, but he struggled to a sitting position, then to his knees, then to his feet. Daniel stepped close and slid his shoulders underneath the boy's arm to lend him support, holding the reloaded crossbow with his free hand.

"You'll be okay," he said softly.

They didn't encounter any more on the way back to the armory, but it was a long walk, and the boy was getting heavier with each mile. By the time they reached it, Daniel was almost dragging him up the stairs. Several men rushed out of the building to tend to him, and Daniel staggered for a moment at the door, holding on to catch his breath. He couldn't think yet. Not yet. He had to report what happened first.

* * * *

The battle had had an audience, though. Scott stayed still as only a vampire could; and he stayed still until he was sure all the hunters were gone. He'd happened on the fight purely by chance; he'd been tracking the hunters for a couple of

days now but until he'd heard the sounds and smelled the blood, he hadn't known he was that close.

Sunlight killed vampires, of course. So did fire. But other than that, little short of cutting off the vamp's head and cutting out his heart kept him from healing, eventually. Silver, holy items ... all tales, made up over the years to comfort humans. He could walk into a church and bathe in holy water if he wanted to. But the new hunters were wildly successful in killing vampires, old and new. Scott needed to know why. Was it just that there were more of them now, or did they have a secret?

He wanted to observe the hunters, not fight them, and since the vamps they fought were not known to him, he stayed out of it. At first it seemed as if the vampires would win, but then Scott's eyes had been drawn to one of the hunters. He looked so familiar...

It wasn't until the fight was over and Scott could see the man clearly that he knew for sure. His hair was pulled back tightly now, and he looked anything but the meek, pretty man Scott had spared, but there was no doubt it was him. The human he'd caught, and lusted after, and spared because the feeling had so confused him.

Scott watched him go, wondering if he'd made the biggest mistake of his, for want of a better word, life. He'd never seen anyone move like him. He had to know more.

He could no longer see the hunters, but he could hear them as they made their way back to their base with their wounded. He followed, at a distance.

* * * *

When Daniel got inside, he went straight to the commander's office, not even bothering to clean up first. There was some sort of meeting going on, but he didn't care. He knocked heavily on the door and was admitted instantly.

"I'll assume that none of that blood is your own?" the older man asked, after the attendees of the meeting were ushered out and the door closed, leaving the two of them alone.

"No. But Martin is dead," Daniel said flatly. He sank into a chair and rubbed his hands over his face. "Jamison was attacked, but I think he'll be okay. He walked most of the way back, so he can't be that bad."

The commander nodded. "Well, I don't have to tell you that this sort of things happens every day."

Daniel looked up at him sharply. "No. You don't have to tell me. But Martin was good. It was an accident. No fault of his own." The emotions that he'd kept so tightly in check up until then bubbled to the surface as he spoke about the closest thing he'd had to a friend. Daniel wasn't really friendly to anyone, because emotions were a liability. He'd seen too many people die.

The commander was quiet for a moment. "We can't afford to have Morningstar fall apart on us. Perhaps you should go home for the night. I can have someone escort you in case there's more trouble."

"And who the fuck would that be?" Daniel snapped, his eyes clouding with tears. "No thanks. I can get home on my own. My apologies for still having a few lingering human emotions."

He stood up again, and wiped the back of his hand across his eyes. A strand of long black hair escaped the ponytail that had loosened on the arduous walk back, and he tucked it behind his ear. Morningstar or not, he was still just a person. When he needed to be strong, he was. That was all they could ask of him.

Without another word, he left the commander's office, returned the weapons to storage, and headed home.

Dropping silently to the cracked concrete outside, Scott crouched in a dark alleyway. He'd watched the hunters go into the building, then prowled the roof until he heard voices coming from a cracked window. There were sentries, of course, but they were on the lookout for groups of vampires instead of one very careful one. Scott wasn't looking to feed tonight, and he evaded notice easily.

He'd found handholds, and managed to get close enough to listen at the window. Vampires couldn't really climb better than humans, but preternatural strength, and the knowledge that a fall wouldn't hurt him, made it all the easier.

He melted into the shadows as the now familiar man walked by. Who now had a name, of sorts. The man had called him Morningstar. The hunter who had killed more of his kind than any other man, and also the man he'd had helpless against a wall. He almost couldn't reconcile the two in his head; but he'd seen him in action. Why hadn't the man tried to kill him then? If he was as invincible as his reputation claimed?

Scott could still remember the smell of him, the feel of his aroused body against his. He doubted that anyone knew

Morningstar had more than one secret to hide. No wonder he was alone.

Humankind's focus was on building up their numbers again. There was nothing they could do about the skewed birthrate of three males for every female; the rudimentary science the government possessed was nowhere near sophisticated enough for genetic engineering.

So they regulated, as much as was in their power. Thus anything that threatened population growth was outlawed. Same-sex relations, suicide, vampirism ... all were punishable by a lifetime's hard labor in the work camps. The pretty hunter clearly desired Scott, another man; so perhaps that was why he had resigned himself to the solitary life of a vampire hunter. A clever way to hide his inclinations, if a lonely one.

Moving from shadow to shadow, mindful that the man had heard him before, Scott followed Morningstar. He should track the man and kill him, for the good of his kind. But he wanted to know his secret first. He knew he had hours before dawn. He followed as silently as the dead.

Daniel made it to his apartment without incident. He was emotionally exhausted, although he wasn't really tired. It was early still. He lived on the top floor of a nondescript building. Heavily graffitied, missing windows on several floors, just like every other apartment building in the city, although perhaps better than some. He unlocked the multiple locks and let himself in. There was only the door and the fire escape, and the door was heavy and secure.

At that height there was really no one to look in, so he hadn't bothered to replace the roller blinds that had long ago fallen out of the rotting window casings. Besides, he slept better in bright sunlight. It reassured him.

There was no sunlight now, though, and he lit a few candles as he moved through the rooms to the bedroom. He peeled off the blood-soaked clothing as he went, tossing it in a hamper along with other similarly soiled clothes. He made his way to the small bathroom and scrubbed all traces of blood from his hands and neck and face with the cold water from the pitcher and basin. Running water was a luxury that had ceased long ago, although he could still remember what it was like from when he was a boy and a few services were still kept up.

He changed into a clean pair of black sweatpants, and flopped back onto the bed, pulling the band out of his hair. He rolled on his side, facing the window and curling into a ball. He thought he might cry. Have a good long weep in Martin's memory, but the tears wouldn't come. He buried his face in the pillow for a moment, then rolled onto his back again with a sigh.

Scott still followed, creeping up the stairs behind the hunter. He noted the door that closed behind the slim form, and he walked up to the door after it was shut. He touched the door lightly and felt more than heard the locks slide home. The hunter was safety conscious. Smart of him. Of course, Scott could rip the door off its hinges with a bit of effort, but then he wouldn't be able to continue to observe the human. He wasn't quite sure why he was so fascinated.

Scott listened through the door for a few moments, then went back outside. Looking around, he spied a ledge about twelve feet up, and jumped. Missing bricks and broken windows helped him gain the roof, and he crossed the open space. Leaning over the side, he located the fire escape that had to look right in the hunter's room. How convenient.

He dropped over the side, his long coat settling around him as he crouched. There was light coming from the inside, so likely the man couldn't see out very easily. The glass was scratched and dirty but intact, and it was more of a large window than a door. Well, either way, Scott could see in. He stayed to the side, moving closer, leaning over to see if he could get a glimpse of the hunter. If he was spotted, he could be gone in a second.

Daniel wasn't looking out the window. He was lost in thought. He needed to obliterate the image of Martin's face just as the arrow pierced his heart. It was surprise, pure and simple. He'd never seen it coming.

Daniel shuddered, and reached under the bed, pulling out a bottle. He couldn't remember the last time he'd had a drink. It was years ago. But alcohol didn't go bad, after all. At least not pure grain alcohol. It was a store bought bottle. An antique now, probably. He sat up in bed a little and took a swig. He didn't want to get wasted enough that it would dull his reflexes before sunrise, but just enough to take the edge off. The edge of ... doubt. Doubt about whether there was any purpose in the world anymore. Doubt about whether survival was at all preferable to death.

His long, black hair hung down over his bare shoulders, and he stared blankly across the room for a few minutes before taking another swig.

Scott's eyes widened as he made out the small form on the bed. Not exactly how he pictured the feared Morningstar relaxing. He looked even younger now, and so small ... His dark hair made his pale skin look even more pallid. How could this small human have killed so many of his kind?

The man was drinking from a bottle that was almost certainly not water; Scott knew that look well. He could still remember the burn of that first drink. He could still feel that burn, though he could never achieve the oblivion that would come after.

The hunter was mourning. He'd lost comrades tonight; maybe even friends. Scott knew the feeling. He was solitary now, but he hadn't always been. Vampire or human, people still had the inclination to gather together for comfort. He felt oddly as if he was intruding, though this man was his enemy. But still he watched, the candlelight gleaming off his still-damp skin, and suddenly he was reminded of the feel of the lithe body in his arms. His body reacted, and his pulse elevated.

Daniel reached under the bed again, drawing out a small, battered cigar box. He pulled his knees up and rested it on his stomach, taking another swig of the liquor. He opened the lid and pulled out a photograph.

It was a picture of his family. His mother and father were standing under a tree in their backyard, and Daniel's father

was holding him as a baby, high up above his head. His parents were smiling broadly up at him.

It was the only picture he had of his father. The only thing he had to remember him by at all. He'd been killed a year after the photograph had been taken. Photos were rare now, as they had been then, but they'd had a friend who had preserved some darkroom equipment.

He ran his thumb idly over his mother's image. She was so young and carefree in the picture. She'd passed on just two years ago, although she'd been sick for a while. The combination of weakness and all the diseases humans carried, and the difficulty in finding medical care made it rare for anyone to reach the age of fifty any more. Resources were so low that, although hunters got priority for many things, that didn't extend to their families.

When her time came, Daniel had been at work. Probably already covered in the blood of the undead. With her died the last person to which Daniel had felt a deep emotional connection.

He gazed at his father, whom he vaguely remembered. He had been a hunter, too, back when the government was still trying to keep their existence a secret. The official report had been that he'd died from internal hemorrhaging, but he'd died from loss of blood, fighting a vampire in the line of duty. He'd been a hunter for just short of a year.

Just like Martin.

He put the photo back in the box, closed the lid, and slid it back under the bed. Suddenly he felt blissfully sleepy. He screwed the cap back on the bottle and replaced it in its

hiding place. He blew out the candle beside his bed and rolled onto his side with a sigh, his hair spilling across the pillow. He pulled the covers up over himself and closed his eyes, gratefully surrendering to unconsciousness, hoping that he wouldn't remember his dreams come the next day.

Scott watched, fascinated. He couldn't remember being as taken with a human, ever. Well, except when he'd been human, before the world had changed. Then, this man would have been just the sort of pretty lithe body he'd have pursued. He was sorely tempted to go in, see more closely, perhaps even touch ... no locks could keep him out if he was determined.

But he watched the man fall asleep, and in sleep he looked even younger, more beautiful. And though Scott knew he was a deadly hunter, he didn't strike. To protect his kind he should kill the man now, while he was relatively defenseless. Feed on him, drain him, and perhaps save many vampires.

But dawn was near, and Scott was selfish. Thirty years of life as a human and three times as many as a vampire hadn't changed him that much. He'd always done as he pleased, damn the consequences, and though the results had often been disastrous, he was still alive. Sort of.

With one more look in the dirty window, Scott left. He raced across the rooftops, seeking out his resting place. For once he didn't linger, or flirt with the sunrise.

CHAPTER 7

For the next few nights, Scott stalked Morningstar, learning his methods and his habits. Far from having some secret weapon, he seemed to merely train the new recruits with caution, making Scott wonder if the hunters had had any sort of training before. True, the man seemed almost to have preternatural reflexes ... but for the most part, he just seemed.... human. And frail. If Scott hadn't seen him take out three vamps nearly at once, he wouldn't have believed it.

Scott fed sparingly, only when the need was too great. He'd always preferred the knife edge that hunger gave him, unlike the new vamps who preferred to gorge themselves, draining a body nearly with one bite, tearing out the throat so their victim would die. Scott never liked the sleepy feeling it gave him, as though he couldn't move quickly. Even half asleep he could move at twice the speed of a human, but with more hunters out there, he preferred to stay alert. Even he couldn't outrun a crossbow. He'd been that way as a human, too, though he'd gone about it the wrong way...

Scott's life as a human felt like a distant dream, something that had happened to someone else. This was back when vampires were just a myth.

Scott had had a charmed life, it seemed from the outside. He'd been doing what he loved, singing in a rock band, and their fame had risen quickly. The leap from small, dimly lit Hollywood clubs to huge sports arenas seemed almost instantaneous, and the amount of money that flowed into

Scott's hands was obscene. He'd grown up lower middle class, just one small step up from white trailer trash, and all he'd ever dreamed of doing was to sing. He got what he wanted, and he threw himself into it, determined to be the quintessential "rock star."

Well, he had the money, he had the groupies of whatever sex or flavor he wanted, and he had the drugs. He tried everything he could get his hands on. Then he tried heroin. And then began his decline.

He used, and used heavily, but no one bothered to stop him because he could afford it and he could still sing, as long as someone pointed him toward the stage at the right time. His body was wasting away, but he looked like a proper rock star, reed-thin, angular face, and huge, haunted eyes.

Finally, he got caught, and thus he started his dance with rehabilitation. In and out, jail time and lockdown facilities, and still he couldn't shake it. Truth was, he didn't want to. His band finally got sick of him fucking up their tour plans, and they broke up. The funny thing was, he had just decided to get his life together, and had been clean for a couple of months when he'd run into the vampires.

Of course, after that, what had been his real life no longer mattered.

When vampires slept, they didn't dream; at least Scott didn't. But as soon as he woke, he thought of Morningstar. Of the way he'd felt against him. Of the way he fought. Why did this man fascinate him so? One way to find out. Maybe he should seek him out, satisfy his curiosity, and maybe his lust ... perhaps kill the man so he would not kill him.

Perhaps.

Lately, Morningstar had been coming back to his home well before dawn. Scott decided to wait for him. He slipped in without disturbing the locks, merely prying the window carefully from its frame, then securing it again. He settled in, standing motionless by the window. His long, black coat framed his bare chest, tattoos from a former life standing out livid on his pale skin. He was an expert at waiting.

* * * *

Daniel recovered quickly from his malaise over Martin's death. He should have known that getting attached to someone was a bad idea. That was his own error. He never hunted with any one person for more than a week at a time. Assuming he lived that long.

Things had been slow for a few days, the slaughter happening in ones and twos until one night. A report had come in about a group of humans foolishly having a party. Apparently they'd found a cache of liquor, and in their despair had hoped to blot out everything and just have a good time. They were loud enough and generated enough light to attract a pack of vampires.

Twelve hunters set out at once, and met the threat. When it was done they were down two hunters, eight humans, and thirteen vampires. Daniel had personally killed four of them. It was a good night.

He headed home exhausted as usual, but feeling a little triumphant. He let himself into his apartment, pulling off his coat and moving into the darkened bedroom. But something

wasn't right. The hair on the back of his neck stood at attention. As he lit a single candle, he saw what it was. Then he saw who it was.

"Changed your mind?" Daniel asked softly, staying well across the room, though it wouldn't really do him much good.

Scott's mouth curved into a predatory smile. "You're covered with blood, both human and vampire," he purred slowly, not moving, and not answering the question. The blood excited him, the man more so, but he didn't make a move. He wasn't that much a slave to his lusts. "Good night? Or bad?"

Daniel watched him, contemplating whether to reach for his knife or not. "It's never a good day when lives are lost, but I've had worse," he said softly. He was completely still for a long moment, almost statue-like. Then he shrugged a little and pulled the bloody T-shirt over his head. The stench sickened him. He took the knife holster out of the back of his jeans and put it down on the bedside table.

"Mind if I wash up while you figure out whether you're going to kill me or not?" he asked.

Scott's eyes swept over the man's upper body. Muscled, more so than him, but still lean. "Mind if I watch?" he countered, not moving from his spot. He looked at the knife; it seemed to be the hunter's only weapon at the moment. It couldn't kill him. He wasn't in any danger, not at the moment. Though he had seen Morningstar in action, he didn't think the man would be stupid enough to try to kill him now.

Daniel pulled his hair loose, combing his fingers through it, and crossed the room slowly to the bathroom, leaving the

door open. "I don't suppose I could stop you, anyway." It was strange, having a conversation with one of them. He couldn't remember ever having done that before. But this was the one who had let him live for no apparent reason other than they were locked in an embrace that was purely sexual for a few moments.

Daniel poured some water into the basin and began to wash his face. "What's your name?" he asked, his voice muffled slightly by the damp cloth.

Scott moved slowly closer, to keep the man in sight. He'd always walked with a sort of sinuous, confident movement, and his vampiric grace only accentuated it. "My name is Scott," he said softly. He'd once had a last name, but his kind didn't bother with last names much anymore. "And they call you Morningstar," he added, leaning in the doorway of the small bathroom. He caught the man's eyes in the mirror; the idea that vampires had no reflection was another myth.

Daniel looked at him in the mirror, and he felt a lurch of apprehension in his stomach. He swallowed hard. "My name is Daniel. Where did you hear the name Morningstar?" he asked, neither confirming nor denying it. He hoped the shiver of fear running through him didn't show, but if Scott wanted to kill him there was little he could do about it, anyway. He washed his arms and hands then, with another glance in the mirror, leaned over the basin to brush his teeth as if it was the most natural thing in the world to do with a vampire in the room.

Scott could smell the man's fear, and he moved closer, standing just a foot behind him. "I know who you are," he purred. "Don't try to lie, I can tell." Vampires couldn't smell

lies, but older ones such as Scott could sense elevated heart rates and other signs of mistruth. "You are Morningstar, the fearsome vampire hunter, and you've killed more of my kind than any other human I've heard of." He smirked, itching to pull that gorgeous hair again. "But I prefer the name Daniel."

Daniel wiped his mouth with a reasonably clean towel and turned to face Scott. "I never said I wasn't Morningstar. I only asked where you'd heard the name," he said calmly. He was completely defenseless, and he still wasn't dead, so he could only assume that Scott wanted something other than his life. What that was remained a mystery.

He braced his hands on the edge of the counter behind him and looked into Scott's eyes. Vampire or not, Scott was stunning, and Daniel's body was reacting despite every instinct. He hated vampires. He'd devoted his life to wiping them out. And yet he was suddenly lusting after one. "What do you want?" he asked, wishing he would either kill him or leave.

Scott considered whether to tell Daniel the truth about where he heard the name. Perhaps a partial truth. "I overheard a conversation," he said. "I was very surprised to realize that we'd already met," he added, dropping his voice to its most seductive. He clearly remembered the feel of Daniel against him. "As to what I want," he breathed, feeling the familiar ache of arousal, "There are several things." He let his gaze move over Daniel, admiring his smooth pale skin, his delicate features.

Daniel's breath hitched a little. There was no mistaking that look. His mind chose that moment to remember with

vivid clarity the last time he'd met Scott. The slick heat of his tongue, the strong fingers in his hair.

He closed his eyes for a moment. It was crazy. The man coming onto him was one of the undead. If he'd met him while he was on patrol, Daniel wouldn't hesitate to kill him. He opened his eyes again. "Why don't you tell me what they are so I can refuse and you can kill me and we can end this?" But those were just empty words. He was ill with the thought that he wanted this man. He wanted him badly, regardless of the fact that he'd thought he'd killed off all those yearnings years ago.

Scott laughed softly and moved, pressing himself against Daniel's body once more. There were times he enjoyed being a vampire, having his body as fast and strong as it had felt when he'd been high. Now was one of those times. He had Morningstar helpless against his own sink, hand buried in that gorgeous hair once again, and their bare chests pressed together. It was even more intimate this time. "I should kill you," he breathed, eyes locked with Daniel's. "I should rip out your throat right now, feed from you and leave you to die." But then he'd never been sensible.

Daniel's cock throbbed against Scott's body. "But you have all the advantage now, don't you? You can do whatever the fuck you want to do, and that turns you on, doesn't it?" he whispered. He thought he'd forgotten how to flirt, but it didn't seem to matter very much. "So you're not going to kill me. Yet, anyway." He was breathing faster, his fingers tightening on the tiled edge.

"It turns me on, yes," Scott agreed, rocking the proof of that statement against Daniel. He'd always been kinky, a dominant, and becoming a vampire hadn't changed that. "It turns you on, too," he whispered, licking his lips, letting his fangs show for just a moment. The combination of fear and lust he could sense from Daniel was intoxicating, not to mention the hardness of his arousal against his leg.

Daniel's eyes riveted on the fangs for a moment, and he licked his own lips unconsciously. "Were you hoping it wouldn't? Were you hoping you could take something from me that I didn't want to give?" he asked. Scott was clearly very old, and it didn't make sense that even so smoldering an attraction would make him forget just exactly what Daniel did for a living.

It wasn't that Daniel wanted Scott to kill him. It wasn't that he wanted to believe that there was some humanity left in the creatures he slaughtered nightly. He wanted to understand why, despite everything, all he could think about was letting the unbelievably sexy man pressed up against him do whatever he wanted to him. It was thrilling and frightening and confusing all at once.

"No," said Scott softly, frowning. He wasn't even sure why he was here. He'd meant to get more information, and really he should just kill this hunter, but here he was hard and pressed against him. As if they were lovers and not enemies. He tugged on Daniel's hair again, breath hitching. "I ... I've never done this before..."

That made Daniel's lips twitch a little. "Now who's lying?" he said, blushing a little. He knew what Scott meant, but it

was too easy to let pass by. His head was tipped back from the tugging on his hair, and his lips were parted just slightly.

Scott frowned, then realized what Daniel was saying. "Daniel," he said, trying out the name. "I think you know what I meant. I have never.... been with a human. Since I became a vampire." He looked down at Daniel, eyes focused on his mouth. It was a good thing he'd fed recently, or the temptation would be too great to resist.

"I knew what you meant," Daniel said softly. It was a foregone conclusion now. He was going to be fucked by a vampire. But he couldn't think of it in those terms when his body felt only a man, a man whom it craved voraciously. "For what it's worth, I've never been with a vampire, so I suppose we're even. I've never actually even spoken to one, besides you." His pulse thudded heavily in his neck, and he wondered if Scott was going to bite him. He knew that not all bites were deadly. He'd seen victims who had barely been touched, hardly needed any medical care.

"I know of the human laws," Scott whispered, letting one hand move down Daniel's side. "How can you live that way? Your laws make you hide what you are, yet you serve them. You save the people who make you deny what you want." He'd never had this many words with a human either; usually they tended to scream and faint.

Daniel felt caught between shame and arousal. "The laws serve their purpose. The human race is dwindling. The only reason conditions are getting better is because there are fewer people sharing the same resources. Anyway..." He shrugged and cast his gaze downward. "It's not as if I need to

form any emotional attachments. They never work out." It was said simply, with no trace of self-pity. He'd accepted his life, made peace with his situation long ago, and loneliness was just one of those things he counted on now to remind him that he was still human.

"My kind doesn't form attachments either," admitted Scott softly. "It is too easy to die, even if you're immortal." He looked into Daniel's brown eyes, realizing they had more in common than he could have imagined. "I watched everyone I knew die, after I became a vampire. Either from disease or old age." He wasn't sure why he was saying this at all.

Daniel, too, was taken aback by the conversation and his brow furrowed a little. "I've seen everyone I've ever worked with get killed," he admitted quietly. "My father didn't even last a year at hunting." He shook his head a little. He didn't need to be thinking of that now. "When ... when were you ... changed?" he asked. He was curious to know just exactly how old Scott was.

Scott loosened his hold just slightly on Daniel, but didn't step away. "It was before the disaster," he said quietly. That was how most referred to the day the world changed. "I watched it all happen, and I couldn't even die," he whispered.

Daniel gasped a little and his eyes widened. He felt a strange kind of respect come over him for one who had survived so long in such a world. "Don't you get tired of it?" he asked, his voice small and a little lost.

"God, yes," Scott said, exhaling softly. "Almost every day." He thought of the many times he'd tried to face the sun. "But either I'm a coward, or my will to live is too strong." It had to

be something like that; he'd heard too many times that the amount of drugs he'd done should have killed him a hundred times over.

"Me, too," he whispered. "Somehow I doubt you're a coward." Almost imperceptibly, Daniel relaxed. "Why did you spare me the first time?" he asked. That more than anything had confused him. Troubled him, even.

Scott felt Daniel relax, and so did he. Their bodies still touched, and he was still aroused, but he could think a bit more clearly. "I ... don't kill unless I have to," he admitted. "I lost the taste for it years ago, if I ever had it. I kill only in self-defense." He thought back to the feelings that Daniel had given him. "And you ... confused me. Turned me on. Made me want you when I'd never wanted a human before." He grinned, a bit lasciviously. "If I'd met you when I was human, I would have bedded you in an instant."

Daniel blushed again. "And why is that?" he asked, smiling a little. He thought about how nice it must have been back when homosexuality wasn't illegal. Back when the world was innocent and safe.

"Because you're beautiful," Scott said, licking his lips. "Your hair, your eyes, your face ... you are ... were.... exactly my type. My idea of the perfect lover," he breathed. The lust, the need, was coming back. "I would have pursued you until you gave in and let me take you to bed, and then I would have made you scream my name all night."

Long ago Daniel remembered wanting that, and Scott's words certainly stirred him. "It probably wouldn't have taken very much pursuing," he said with a little smile. He knew he

was good looking, but no one ever mentioned it with the law in place. If any of the hunters whom he worked with were attracted to him, he'd never known it. But here was someone not bound by such laws, amazingly attractive in his own right, and still pressed against him. And telling Daniel that he was beautiful.

"No?" purred Scott. "If we had met back then, when we would have been free to do as we wanted, you would have surrendered to me willingly? Submitted to my desires wantonly? Spread those lovely legs for me?" He was breathing harder now, wishing it could be real.

Oh yeah. He remembered more and more with each passing moment. "That depends. Would you have pulled my hair like that?" he whispered hoarsely. "Were you like this then?" Daniel's hands reached out for Scott's waist and he pressed his hips forward a little, grinding his erection against Scott's thigh, dark eyes locked on his.

"Yes," moaned Scott. "I liked it rough, Daniel. I would have pulled your lovely hair," he said, rocking his hips against the other man. "I would have used it to pull you to the bed, and I would have thrown you onto it and pinned you down, and I would have fucked you into the mattress." He was no longer sure if they were speaking hypothetically. But it was delicious.

Daniel whimpered a little. "I liked it rough, too," he whispered. "Hot, fast, stealing all sense away rough. God..." He panted for a moment. "God it's been such a long time..." Even just touching someone at all felt like heaven. To be wanted this way was making his head spin. His head tipped

forward and rested on Scott's shoulder, his warm breath against the pale skin of his neck. "Want you," he murmured, fingers sliding slowly up Scott's sides.

The incongruousness of this, the hunter in the arms of his sworn enemy, both men victim of their own needs and loneliness, made Scott want to forget everything. "Want you, too, so much," he whispered, shivering from Daniel's touch, his hands so very warm. In a moment he'd shed his long coat, wanting more contact, his hands running over the hunter's back. They were both vulnerable now, and Scott wanted Daniel more than he had wanted anything, anyone, ever. "Want to be inside you..."

Daniel leaned forward again, hands sliding up Scott's chest and around his neck. The irony of the situation wasn't lost on Daniel, either, but Scott's touch had awakened a soul-deep ache that made him helpless in the face of it. He pulled Scott's head down with a gentle touch on the back of his neck and pressed a kiss on his lips, hot and hungry.

Scott gasped, parting his lips to Daniel. He couldn't remember the last time he'd kissed; he was sure it had been before he was a vampire. It was such a human thing to do; vampires didn't kiss when they had sex. Mouths were for feeding. But now, the memories came back to him, of the heat a deep kiss could bring, and, being careful of his fangs, he ravished Daniel's mouth thoroughly. It only made him hotter.

Daniel moaned into Scott's mouth, every muscle in his body straining to fit more closely against him. Whether it was the length of time he'd been alone, the forbidden nature of

what they were doing, the unbelievable sensuality of the man holding him and kissing him and wanting him, he didn't know. He only knew he was on fire, and nothing on earth could have stopped him from responding.

For dozens of years, the only strong thing that Scott had felt was hunger. Now, he felt hunger of another kind, and never in his life could he remember needing someone more. They weren't vampire and human, hunter and killer; they were just two bodies that ached for each other. Scott moved his hands down, smoothing over Daniel's back, sealing their bodies as close as possible. He reached lower, and lifted Daniel, bringing their bodies in line and he held the man against him as if he weighed nothing.

Daniel felt himself being lifted, and he automatically pulled his legs up to wrap around Scott's body, suspended against him. He pulled away from the kiss to take a deep gulp of air. "Fuck," he hissed. "Take me, Scott. However you want me," he panted. His arms tightened around Scott's shoulders and he ducked his head to suck hotly on the side of his neck. "Fuck me," he murmured against his ear. "Please."

Daniel begged as if he would die without Scott's touch, and it was more than the vampire could bear. He backed out of the bathroom, carrying Daniel against him, and headed for the bed. He lowered the man onto it, never letting their bodies lose contact, and kissed him again. Daniel felt perfect under him, hard and yielding at the same time, and he growled with need.

Daniel found himself on his back on his bed, Scott on top of him. He ran his hands back down his sides when he no

longer needed to hold on, and around his waist, over his ass. It was so fucking beautiful to touch someone, to be touched. "Too many clothes," he whispered, wriggling beneath him.

Scott had never had someone touch him like that, and he wanted more. He felt alive again, as if the last countless years had been but a dream and he was human again. He leaned up so that he could unzip Daniel's pants, then his own. As he did, he realized the room was lightening. Dawn was coming, and he'd been so caught up in his need for Daniel that he hadn't even felt it, or thought of it. "No," he said with anguish, looking down at Daniel. He'd never hated what he was more than now.

Daniel's eyes went to the window, and he realized that the sun was climbing closer to the horizon. "Go! Hurry!" he said, sitting partway up in a panic. He surprised himself with the sudden command, but he didn't want Scott to die. He looked into his eyes and said desperately. "There's no time. Just go."

With one more look at Daniel, a look filled with need and sadness, Scott dove for the door. If this building didn't have a basement, he was in a lot of trouble. He unlocked the locks and flung the door open, jumping over the railing rather than descending the stairs. He landed lightly on the ground floor, feeling the sun peeking through the buildings even through the walls. They weren't thick enough. He looked around desperately, and spied a door. It was locked, but he wrenched it open anyway, and with relief he saw a set of stairs leading down. It looked like no one had been down here for years, but it was Scott's only hope. He ran down the steps, his eyes useless after a few feet. Even he needed a bit of light to see

by. But he had no choice. It wasn't as if there was anything down here that could hurt him anyway.

The stairs ended in more darkness, and Scott put out a hand to feel damp concrete walls. This would do. He could no longer feel the sun except to know it was up, and fatigue gripped him. He found a corner and sank down into it, wincing at the filth he sat in. He suddenly realized that he'd left his coat in Daniel's apartment. He cursed softly and wrapped his arms around himself. He'd been careless and nearly died. Because of a human.

A beautiful human, who he still wanted badly.

He drifted into what passed for sleep, and waited for the sunset.

Daniel gaped at the door. He could almost convince himself that it had never happened at all. But no. His body told a different story. He climbed off the bed and went to the door, stepping into the hall and looking over the banister. It was a long drop.

Still shirtless, he started down the stairs. When he reached the ground floor he saw the basement door standing just a little open. He was down there.

He climbed the stairs again and collected a few things, a hurricane lamp, a blanket. He noticed Scott's coat on the floor, but he was reluctant to bring that to him. It was a handy excuse. He scribbled a short note and stuffed it in his pocket, then collected a hammer and some nails, and went back downstairs. He lit the lamp before he slipped into the basement door, closing it behind him. It was dark as pitch, but he found Scott easily enough with the dim pool of light.

Morningstar
by Jade Falconer

He turned a crate on its side and put the lamp down on it, with the note sticking out beneath it. Then he spread the blanket over Scott's unconscious form and ascended the steps carefully in the near complete darkness.

He closed the basement door and nailed it shut, then went back up to his apartment and crawled back into bed, finding a fitful rest in the now bright sunlight.

CHAPTER 8

Scott woke as the sun set, instantly on guard as he saw the light and felt the blanket. Then he read the note.

I nailed the door shut for your own protection, knowing that a few nails will present no impediment to you. The lamp has at least twelve hours of fuel.

Daniel

He stared at the rough bit of parchment in amazement. Daniel had been here while he slept. Morningstar had stood over a sleeping, helpless vampire, his sworn enemy.

And covered him with a blanket and brought him a lamp.

Scott smiled and tucked the note into his pocket as he stood and stretched. He folded the blanket neatly and blew out the lamp, storing them both in the crate. It was pitch dark again, but he moved from memory.

He crept up the stairs, trying to sense anyone beyond the door. When he was satisfied the hall was clear, he pushed on the door, hearing the steel of the nails protest as they were pulled free of the wood. He stepped through and closed it, replacing the nails where he could.

He took a deep breath and looked up the stairs. He wondered if Daniel was up there, or gone to work again. Slaying his own kind. The thought should have troubled him more. He climbed the steps in leaps, and when he reached the top he waited, listening.

Morningstar
by Jade Falconer

He could usually hear a heartbeat within thirty feet, and there was no one in Daniel's rooms. He didn't know whether to be disappointed or relieved.

He needed to go, get away from this place before someone else saw him.

CHAPTER 9

Daniel sat in the locker room for a long time. He sipped the coffee from his old and chipped mug. He'd made a terrible mistake. A critical mistake. It was very bad. When he went out tonight, he wouldn't be hunting the undead, creatures who fed upon the living, sucking the lifeblood from them, monsters. When he went out tonight he would be killing people. Real people with real needs and loneliness.

All his moral compass points were wiped out with that all too brief encounter. Now it was simply kill or be killed. He tried to put it in historical perspective, culling the predators for the survival of both. Was that what he was doing? If the human race was wiped out the vampires wouldn't last long after. The humans, however, could live without the vampires. There would be other predators, other plagues, and hardships. The battle would still be all uphill.

But his life had just gotten much more dangerous. If he went out into the night and hesitated, second guessed himself ... he would be dead in a week. Just like all the others. He had to put Scott from his mind, and just pray that he stayed well clear of anywhere Scott might be. He wasn't sure if he would kill Scott or simply surrender to him, drop his crossbow and bare his throat and let himself become one with his fallen comrades. The fact that he didn't know scared the shit out of him.

CHAPTER 10

The city was strangely quiet tonight. Scott didn't need to feed, so he made his way back to the vampires' building almost leisurely.

He didn't kill unnecessarily. Well, not since he was a new vampire and he'd been drunk with the power of it. When humans had been as thick as snowflakes and no one noticed when they'd go missing. Scott wasn't proud of his actions then, but he was young.

Now, the human population was much smaller, and still dwindling. He tried to tell the younger vamps not to kill, but they only had contempt for the "weak," as they put it. They couldn't understand that they were essentially parasites, not the predators they thought themselves to be. Without the humans, the vampires would die. Slowly.

His thoughts kept coming back to Daniel. If he'd known who he was the first time they'd met, he'd have killed the man, unquestioningly. Morningstar was the biggest threat they'd faced until now. But he hadn't known, and now ... he'd never let himself get close to a human before. He didn't despise them like some, but he stayed aloof.

But Daniel.... he was beautiful and vulnerable and desirable. And fucking deadly. He didn't think Daniel would still kill him, given a chance. He'd never faced him when Daniel was armed.

But he just wasn't sure.

Morningstar
by Jade Falconer

He was so distracted by his thoughts that he didn't sense the attack until he was rolling across a rooftop with a body clinging to him.

CHAPTER 11

There were no specific reports to respond to, and Daniel was glad. He could use a quiet night for a change. No reports meant just a routine patrol, and he insisted on going alone. If he was distracted enough to get himself killed he didn't want to get someone else killed as well.

He was walking down what seemed to be a deserted street. There were burnt out buildings on either side. Habitation was judged by shutters. Not that it did any good, but years before, one of the last civil services was the installation of steel shutters over windows and doors. Daniel chose to go without in his own home. They wouldn't stop a vampire. If anything, they tipped them off to the fact that a human being cowered behind them.

A scream rent the silence of the street and Daniel sprinted in the direction of it. He crept silently between buildings, down alleyways, until he saw it. There was a woman on the ground, her body twitching with the last vestiges of pain and consciousness. Crouched over her was a young boy, perhaps ten years old, his teeth buried in her neck, making loud slurping noises.

It was the youngest one he'd ever seen, but Daniel didn't hesitate. He aimed and fired, piercing the heart through the back, then he approached quickly and pursued the frightened, retreating child until he was close enough to wield the deadly blow. Then the odd perversion of youth was no more.

But neither was the woman.

He searched her body for identification, wondering vaguely if the child was her own. There was no way to know, of course. There were no records of such things anymore, and anyone who could say was now dead. In daylight a special crew would come to dispose of the bodies properly, so he jotted down the address, and headed back to base. He didn't have the heart for any more death tonight.

* * * *

Scott didn't have time to think; he continued his roll, trying to push the body off him. It wouldn't budge. He let himself roll off the edge of the building; if his attacker was human the fall would kill him, and if it was a vampire it just might dislodge him. He didn't have time to check.

They hit the ground, three floors down, with bone-jarring force. Scott was free suddenly, and he gasped for air as he scrambled to his feet. He looked around for his attacker. There was no body on the ground, so that ruled out a human.

Vampires fought, just like humans, mainly for territory. But this seemed so random, and he'd not been aware of any imminent clashes. He sensed movement behind him and whirled, bracing himself for another impact, and brought his arm up just in time to block a blow to his face. The force of it would have crushed a human's skull, and possibly cracked his. Nothing he couldn't have healed from, but it wouldn't have been pleasant. He hadn't had time to see his attacker, only to deflect the blow.

Scott didn't wait for the next attack. He launched himself up to grab at an overhang, needing to see whom he was

fighting. He hung by one arm, and the alley between the buildings was filled with laughter.

"Is that the way you treat a very old friend, Scott?" It was a woman's voice, and he knew it instantly. He looked down, to see a very familiar face looking up at him with amusement.

Scott let himself drop to the ground, still wary. "Morgan." He looked at her. Naturally, she looked as he remembered. She was a vampire, older than he was. She was nearly as tall as him, but the resemblance stopped there. She was dressed all in black, some shiny material that diffused the light almost like oil. There was no mistaking she was female, and the outfit did nothing to hide that fact. Her hair was long and blonde, the only thing light about her. She looked immaculate, and Scott, dressed only in worn black pants and scuffed boots, felt insignificant next to her. Of course Morgan had always made him feel that way. "Are you going to attack me again?" he asked mildly.

"Of course not," she answered, smirking. "I was just seeing if you were still as tough as you used to be." She'd been from England when she was alive, and she still retained the clipped, precise accent.

Scott resisted the urge to growl in frustration. "And what's the verdict, then?" he asked tightly. Morgan was one of the last people he wanted to run into, especially now.

"So brusque," Morgan purred, walking closer. Scott braced himself, but she only walked around him, letting a small hand trail over his back. "Is that any way to treat your lover?"

* * * *

As Daniel walked home that evening, he wondered if he would see Scott, at least to collect his coat. He should have brought it to him. It was a foolish thing, tempting him to return. He should forget him. But he couldn't. Even as he listened to every little noise around him as he made his way to his apartment, he thought about how a part of him he'd thought dead and gone had been reawakened.

But when he reached his apartment, no one was there waiting for him. He pulled off his T-shirt, pulled his hair loose, and washed as he usually did. Though it was early still, barely one in the morning, as soon as he lay on the bed he fell asleep.

* * * *

"Ex-lover, Morgan," corrected Scott. "I haven't even seen you in twenty years," he said, turning to keep an eye on her.

"You're never an ex-lover when you're immortal, silly," she cooed, acting more flirtatious than Scott had ever seen her.

Scott knew when Morgan wanted something. "Just tell me what you're here for," he demanded, stepping back when she tried to embrace him. The touches made him think of Daniel, and he didn't want her hands on him at all. He was just glad he was nowhere near Daniel's apartment. He'd thought about going back to retrieve his jacket, just to see the other man. But now he didn't regret waiting; if Morgan had been following him, that would have been bad.

Morgan put on an innocent look, one he knew to be completely practiced. "Can I not be tired of the cold, and wanting to look up old friends?" she asked, eyes wide.

Scott snorted. "No," he said shortly. Nothing was ever that simple with her. "Are you alone?" Morgan usually traveled with an entourage.

"Yes," she answered, though Scott was still doubtful. A frown creased her perfect face. She'd become a vampire in the prime of her life, and she'd never be less than beautiful. Though now, Scott only saw Daniel when he thought of that word. "Things have become ... difficult."

Scott glanced up. "Dawn is coming, I will show you where we rest," he finally said. Then, without glancing back, he moved as quickly as he could toward the vampire-occupied building. He knew she'd follow.

CHAPTER 12

Three days passed with no sign of him. Every night Daniel left early and braved the dangerous walk home alone in the dark, hoping to find Scott waiting for him. Every morning he checked the basement. Every day the coat was still where he'd draped it, over the back of the only chair.

On the third night, Daniel picked up the coat after he'd rinsed the blood off of his body, and tried it on. It smelled of Scott and he sighed. Perhaps he'd never come back. Of course, it wasn't as bad as losing someone in battle. He wasn't dead. He probably wouldn't be caught, as old and cunning as he was.

He hoped someone hadn't already gotten lucky. He slipped off the coat and replaced it on the back of the chair, crawling into bed. At least vampire attacks had lessened the last few days. That was comforting, although he'd seen it before. They would back off and regroup, and then there would be an unholy bloodbath.

So long as Scott wasn't involved, Daniel would get through it. What choice did he have?

* * * *

For his part, Scott was dealing with Morgan. She'd all but taken over the cell of vampires that Scott lived among, and was trying to organize them. She still wouldn't tell Scott why she'd left her previous home. But she was trying her best to make this one her home now.

And it was clear she had designs on Scott as well.

She followed him everywhere, slept in the same area as he did, and would have wormed her way into sleeping with him had he not been very determined. But she made sure that everyone else thought they were having sex. She was all over him every possible moment, and the more he pushed her away the more determined she became.

"Are you trying to punish me for leaving you the last time?" she said, draping herself over his back as he studied some papers that had been discarded. He was looking for clues to where the hunters would strike next.

"I left you, remember?" Scott snapped back. "After you decided that turning human babies into vampires would be amusing." He stood, pushing her away, and walked to another room. Morgan had a cruel streak that rivaled most all the vampires Scott had ever met.

"But they were so cute," laughed Morgan, leaning so that her long, blonde hair trailed over Scott's bare arm. She'd thought it amusing to watch them; they'd never grow, and never learn to hunt on their own.

The feel of Morgan's hair only served to remind him of Daniel, and how his dark, silky locks had felt in his hand. He pushed her away, and made a decision. "I need to go out, and you're not coming with me this time," he stated.

She pouted, then said abruptly, "Who is this Morningstar I keep hearing about?"

Scott's head whipped around at that. He was just slipping into some black vinyl pants that one of the vamps had made for him. "Just a hunter," he said neutrally.

"That's not what I hear," she said, her gaze panning over Scott's body. He could almost feel it. But they had no doors. "I hear he's the most fearsome vampire hunter there ever was. He's invincible."

"No one's invincible," Scott replied, pushing past Morgan, not bothering with a shirt. He wished he could clean up more, but that would attract questions. "Even you, Morgan."

He walked out of the room, to an open window. "I'll see you by dawn," he said, and jumped the four floors to the ground. He moved as fast as he could, sure Morgan was following but certain he could lose her.

He had to see Daniel.

CHAPTER 13

Nearly a week had passed since Daniel had seen Scott. He knew he shouldn't think about it, but other than thinking about work, there was little else. He owned a couple of books that he'd read over and over, and thought perhaps he could distract himself with one of them again.

He lay on his stomach on the bed. Thin, loose-fitting pajama pants were all he wore, and he slowly turned the pages of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. He found himself being drawn in slowly, letting his mind imagine the dank prison cell rather than the dank, burned-out apartment he lived in.

It took Scott much longer than he'd intended to get to Daniel's. He stopped to feed, and several times he doubled back. He thought Morgan might follow, but she was even older than Scott and nearly as skilled. He stuck to the subway tunnels as much as he could, and he was almost certain that he wasn't followed. He entered by the main entrance, so that if he were observed, it wouldn't be clear which apartment he was going to.

Scott couldn't help but smile slightly as he climbed the steps. He hoped Daniel was here, but if he wasn't, he would wait. He hadn't been able to get the man out of his mind. He hoped Daniel felt the same way.

He stood in front of the door, and knew there was someone inside. He knocked softly and waited.

Daniel slid out of bed silently when he heard the knock. He drew his knife and approached the door, suspicious. He didn't

know anyone who would come to his house unless it was official business, and he doubted that. He'd just left headquarters a half an hour before.

He unlocked the door and opened it, lowering the knife when he saw Scott. He stepped back to let him enter.

"Hi," he said softly. He walked back to the bedroom and replaced the knife in its sheath. It had been so long he wasn't sure what was going on. He stood still, watching Scott, waiting for him to speak.

"Daniel," Scott whispered, drinking in the sight of him. He could tell that the thin pants were all the man wore, and Scott had the sudden urge to lick him. All over. "I ... this was the first time it was safe to come here," he said, wondering why he was explaining, if Daniel even wanted to see him. "Thank you for the light, and the blanket," he added, gaze fixed on Daniel's.

Daniel had forgotten all about the blanket. "Oh. You're welcome." He nibbled on his bottom lip. "What do you mean the first time it was safe? Are you all right?" he asked.

"I'm fine," Scott said, moving closer, slowly. Daniel looked fragile and small, though Scott knew that wasn't the case at all. He wanted to touch him. "I just couldn't risk leading anyone else here."

Daniel smiled a little. "Afraid for me or them?" he asked. His hair was loose and he'd managed to get enough water to take a full bath for a change, so it was still damp.

"Both," grinned Scott. "I was hoping ... we could be alone, anyway. I didn't want company." He wanted to move closer,

but Daniel showed no signs he wanted Scott to touch him. But God, Daniel looked incredible in the candlelight...

Daniel's breath quickened and he took a half step closer. "I didn't think you were coming back," he said lightly, watching Scott's face closely.

"I'm sorry," Scott said. "Do you want me to go?" He hoped the answer wasn't yes. He didn't move.

"No." He swallowed hard. "I don't want you to go." *He should, though*, he thought. Scott was a vampire. He shouldn't want him to stay, but even without touching he could feel himself getting aroused again, like the air between them was heated with potential.

"Good," Scott said, letting out a breath. He moved until he was only inches from Daniel, then stopped. "I could barely think of anything but you, Daniel," he whispered, tracing the line of Daniel's jaw with a finger.

Daniel leaned in to the touch, licking his lips. "I thought about you, too. I'm not ... used to ... this kind of thing. I mean, besides all the extra complications. I ... try not to ... get attached to anyone." He looked into Scott's eyes, already panting a little, wishing he would kiss him.

"Nor do I," Scott said. "But I still could not keep my mind off of you." He moved his hand, running his fingers through Daniel's long hair. "Or what we would have done had the dawn not come." And he knew he couldn't stay this time. He couldn't be away all night, not until he found a way to get rid of Morgan.

Daniel stepped closer to him and slid his arms around Scott's waist, leaning against him, resting his head on his

shoulder. "You left your coat," he whispered, the casual words in contrast with the intimate embrace.

Scott shuddered slightly, his whole body relaxing somewhat when Daniel touched him. His hands came up to Daniel's bare shoulders, and he moved his arms over the man's back as if trying to memorize the feel of him. "I had hoped you would keep it for me," he breathed, nearly moaning at the feel of bare skin against skin. "I told you I would be back." But he wasn't just back for the coat, and they both knew it.

He needed this. Touch. He was starved for it. "I'm glad you're back," he said softly. "Pity it's already so late." It was almost painful to think they only had perhaps an hour, but he didn't want Scott to be caught so close to dawn again. He nuzzled the side of Scott's jaw, his hesitancy gone in the desperation of the moment.

"I know," Scott said, and it was clear from his voice that he was keeping himself fiercely in check. "There's no time for..." He even hesitated to say it, just ducked his head and pressed his mouth to Daniel's urgently. He hadn't even known until now how badly he needed this.

Daniel tipped his head back and parted his lips under the pressure of Scott's kiss, opening for him with a soft whimper. He didn't wait for an invitation, just delved his tongue deeply into the wet heat of his mouth, stroking against his tongue, fingers clutching lightly at his smooth back.

Daniel's eagerness almost made Scott forget who he was, and what they were to each other. The kiss was so perfect, so engrossing, that he didn't even remember how his hands had

gotten into Daniel's gorgeous hair. He pulled slightly, addicted to the feeling of the long hair in his hands.

Each tug on his hair wrought a small, needy sound from deep in Daniel's throat. He clung to Scott, wanting to make use of every possible moment they had, straining to be closer, though it was hardly possible. He was hard and aching, and despite the fact that he knew he would be left unfulfilled, he would take whatever he could get.

Scott kissed Daniel more deeply, one hand sliding down to the waistband of Daniel's pants, hesitating before slipping into the thin material. He wanted, needed, to touch as much of the other man as possible, and Daniel's skin felt like fire under his hand. He knew he had to go in just moments, but he wanted as much contact as he could.

Daniel moaned deeply and rocked his hips against Scott's thigh, making it obvious how aroused he was. He tore his mouth away to take a breath, panting heavily. His lips were kiss swollen and parted. "Maybe you could come earlier next time," he gasped. He felt at that moment that letting go of the other man was going to be physically painful.

"I wanted to," Scott said, eyes half closed as he gazed at Daniel. "You're so beautiful," he moaned, pressing his thigh against the other man's arousal. "I want to spend all night with you..." He let himself imagine it, feeling Daniel's naked body against his, moving against him. "Soon, as soon as I can," he promised.

Daniel sighed a little, nodding. He knew there were complications, problems. He wanted to push them all aside,

but that would be lethally foolish. "How long before you have to leave?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

Scott didn't have to look over his shoulder at the window to know that dawn approached. "Only a few more minutes," he admitted. "I cannot risk sleeping here again if I can help it." If anyone, especially Morgan, knew who he was consorting with ... "I'm sorry, Daniel, but I could not stay away." He knew it wasn't fair to either of them, but he had needed to see Daniel. To see if what he'd felt was still there. It was.

"It's all right. We'll see each other again, I'm sure," he said softly. He leaned up and kissed him again, just lightly. "You should go. I'm sure you've got more comfortable places to stay than my basement." The look in his eyes was full of regret as he loosened his hold on the vampire.

"I wish I could stay here," Scott said. "There is no better place than close to you." He surprised himself with the truth of his words. Lust was one thing he could understand, but the feelings that Daniel gave him went beyond that. He bent to kiss Daniel once more, mindful of his fangs, then took a shuddering breath. "Every time I touch you it's harder to let go." He paused, then added, "Be careful, Daniel."

Scott's words made him think about the two of them actually spending the day sleeping wrapped around each other's bodies until night came again. He was torn between the absurdity of it, and yearning for it with every cell in his body. "You, too," he said softly. He backed away from him and reached for the coat, holding it up for him with a half smile.

Morningstar
by Jade Falconer

Scott took the coat, smiling back, and said, "I will be back. As soon as I can, I promise you." He trailed a hand down Daniel's shoulder, and then he was gone.

Scott made his way back, and slipped into his place to sleep. Morgan was already there, but it was too close to dawn for her to try much, luckily. Scott drifted off to sleep, and dreamt of Daniel.

CHAPTER 14

In the days that followed, Morgan insisted on knowing more about the hunters, and about Morningstar in particular. She insisted that if they got organized they could defeat the hunters. Many of the young vampires were fascinated by her, and were all for the idea. Scott argued that laying low was the best plan, but Morgan was determined. Scott was getting more and more worried about her plans.

One night, he slipped away early and made his way as closely as he dared to the armory. He wanted to see Daniel, to just be sure he was all right. He couldn't risk going to his apartment again.

Daniel was just heading out to patrol on his own. He preferred hunting alone sometimes. He got a few blocks away from the armory when he could have sworn he heard something. He slowed his steps, keeping close to the wall, eyes and ears alert. The street grew darker as the taller buildings blocked out the moonlight, and he changed direction, moving down an alley by way of a shortcut.

And there he was; even without preternatural eyesight Scott knew Daniel was there. He'd heard him. He waited until Daniel was halfway down the alley when he dropped to the ground in front of him. He stayed in a crouch in case Morningstar was one to shoot and ask questions later. Not that the crossbow would kill him, but it would hurt. "Daniel," he said, softly.

Daniel's arm snapped up and he had the crossbow aimed before Scott spoke. He stared at him wide-eyed for a moment before lowering it and relaxing. "That might not be the smartest way to approach me," he said softly, slumping back against the wall.

Scott rose, saying, "I'm sorry. Would you rather I call out from the rooftops?" He looked around, to be sure they were truly alone. "I needed to see that you were all right." He looked down at Daniel. "There might be a big confrontation coming."

"Do you know where? Or when?" Daniel asked, all business. He straightened and watched Scott closely. It was disconcerting to see him while he was 'on duty', but he couldn't kill Scott. Maybe it was wrong, but he couldn't do it. He'd earned his pay for several lifetimes over, anyway.

"Unfortunately, no," Scott said. Morgan was unpredictable. "I'm trying to stay out of it as much as possible." His gaze roamed over Daniel. He hadn't seen him on duty since he'd first found out that Daniel and Morningstar were one and the same. He looked different. Bigger. Less fragile. He still wanted Daniel.

Daniel was different on duty in more ways than appearance. He glanced quickly up and down the alley, then overhead, making sure no one else was around. When he was satisfied, he stepped up to Scott and slid one hand around the back of his neck, pulling him down for a hard, demanding kiss, loaded crossbow still dangling from his other hand.

Scott moaned, more than aroused, and surprised, by Daniel's forceful kiss. He kissed back, pressing against the

other man, responding to the urgency of the moment. It was beyond dangerous, kissing out in the open like this, but he couldn't get enough of Daniel.

Daniel pulled back with a gasp. "I'm fine. You don't have to worry about me," he whispered, his gaze dropping to Scott's mouth. He kissed him again, hungrily, with a quiet moan. He was addicted to it.

This time Scott grabbed Daniel by his hair, taking control of the kiss. He slammed Daniel back against the brick wall, grinding their lean, hard bodies together. The danger made it even better, and though he knew they should stop, he couldn't pull away.

Daniel whimpered, surrendering control as he hit the wall. The heat of it made him feel liquid inside, and he ground his aching erection against the solid body against him. His hand slid down Scott's body and around his back, grabbing hold of a fistful of coat. All the reasons they shouldn't be doing it trotted across his thoughts, but he just couldn't manage to care. He felt claimed and he wanted it so badly. Since meeting Scott, since that first time before Scott knew who he was, Daniel had started to remember what it was to live, what the purpose of everything was. And there was very little left in the world that he would give that up for now.

So hot, so dangerous, so perfect; Scott had never felt anything this intense, not since he'd become a vampire. This was worth dying for, this feeling, and Scott knew he would kill to feel it again. To see Daniel again. He knew that he would take Daniel fully, make love to him, and it would be soon. He burned for the other man, and nothing would keep them

apart. He pulled back with effort, his eyes glazed with passion. "Soon, Daniel. You're mine." He stepped back and took one more look at Daniel before he was gone like mist. If he'd stayed a moment longer he would have taken Daniel against the wall.

Daniel stood there for another several seconds, stunned, trembling a little. 'You're mine,' he'd said, and Daniel knew it was true. It was a hideously unfair twist of fate, the hunter and the hunted drawn to each other like magnets. It was only after a long moment that he could get his overheated body back under control, and Scott's words came back to him. If there was some kind of big confrontation coming, he needed to warn the others. They needed to prepare. He only wished he had more information about it.

He only wished he could be certain Scott wouldn't show up to that party.

CHAPTER 15

It wasn't until Scott got back to the vampire's hideout that he got his own body under control. The last person he wanted to see right now was Morgan, but there she was, as soon as he arrived.

"Where were you, Scott? You left before I woke," she pouted, draping herself over his shoulder.

"I fed," Scott said shortly, pushing her away.

"I would have come with you," she said, moving around to face him. "I miss hunting with you."

Scott's eyes flicked up to Morgan before he threw himself into a worn-out chair. She knew damn well he'd always thought she was unnecessarily cruel to her prey. She thought of humans as food, and nothing more. He didn't bother to answer.

Morgan looked curiously at Scott's face. "Whatever you fed on, it must have been good," she purred. "You look so ... alive."

Scott looked away from Morgan, and focused instead on the conversation of the other vampires. They were talking about the hunters, of course. And how they were going to wipe them all out.

He listened, hoping to glean their plans. He knew that sooner or later, Daniel would be outnumbered. He wouldn't lose him.

CHAPTER 16

Each time Daniel saw Scott, he ached for him more, and the days afterward were that much more torturous. Daniel was almost relieved to find himself in the middle of a battle, although the scale of it was far short of what he thought Scott had been talking about. Still, there were probably ten vampires, and a dozen hunters were dispatched to the scene.

There was a new underground industry in the city: gin. How they got the resources to make it, Daniel wasn't sure, but stills weren't difficult to construct. The upsurge of alcohol meant an increase in dangerous behavior, and anywhere there was a group of drunk humans outside at nighttime there were going to be vampires.

Daniel was glad for the distraction. He took down one that was gorging itself on the unmoving form of a teenage boy on the ground, and the moment the severed head fell to the ground with a thud he whirled around to see a vampire bearing down on him quickly. In a blink the creature was within arm's length, but in that same blink Daniel managed to raise the bow and fire at close range. The vampire looked more shocked than pained, and Daniel lopped off his head with the machete in the moment of indecision that followed.

He reloaded his crossbow and assessed the scene, looking for any creatures not yet engaged with hunters. The hair on the back of his neck prickled with the feeling that he was being watched.

* * * *

Morgan had insisted on going out hunting, and since Scott didn't trust the look on her face, he decided to tag along. They'd come across the conflict already in progress, and Morgan wanted to watch. At first, it seemed it would be a rout; the drunken humans and the handful of hunters were badly outmatched. Morgan had been about to leave, bored, when reinforcements arrived, and the battle turned. Suddenly vampires were dying, and Morgan took an interest.

Scott's heart nearly stopped when he saw who one of the new hunters was. Daniel. He moved like a phantom, and he looked untouchable. They were crouching on a rooftop and suddenly Morgan hissed, "Look at that one ... he's killed three vampires!"

Scott knew Morgan didn't care about the vampires that were dying. She just wanted to see bloodshed. "So he's lucky." Scott shrugged. "Let's go." It was clear that Daniel was in no danger.

Daniel saw another hunter fall and stepped into the breach. He cut the vampire down in a short series of fluid, practiced movements. Then he felt that strange sensation of being watched again. His gaze scanned the dark alleys around them, and then traveled upward. On top of a nearby building he saw him, standing next to a woman with long blonde hair.

He couldn't devote anymore time to looking. They weren't a threat. He knew Scott wouldn't be, anyway, and there was still more immediate danger close at hand.

But Morgan wouldn't be dissuaded. "He's more than lucky," she said. "He's really good." She looked at Scott, eyes

shining. "I'm going down." Without another word, she leapt down to a balcony only about ten feet above the action.

"Fuck," hissed Scott, wondering if he should just leave. But Morgan was older than any other vampire Daniel had likely faced, and he didn't want to take a chance that she might hurt him.

But the fight was winding down. Most of the vampires had fled or been beheaded, and there were too many hunters free from distraction. "Morgan, it's over," he called. "Let's get out of here. You can feed somewhere else." He saw Daniel glance over, and knew he'd been spotted, if only by him.

Morgan lingered for a moment, disappointed. She wrapped herself around Scott, leaning precariously over the edge, and pouted. "Oh, all right," she said. "This is boring now."

She turned and leapt back up onto the roof, disappearing from sight. Scott sighed with relief, and turned back for one more look at Daniel. He'd just dispatched what looked like the last vampire, and he was still alive.

Daniel looked at Scott for a long moment, then suddenly he heard one of the other hunters call out, "There's another one!" Daniel looked around quickly and saw the man aiming straight at Scott. Without even thinking, Daniel aimed and fired at the crossbow, sending it flying into the darkness.

With the briefest of glances at Scott, he turned and ran towards the hunter to make sure he wasn't injured, although he was reasonably certain he hadn't actually hit him, just the weapon. He came upon the man who was staring at him, a little stunned.

"What the hell...?" the other hunter said.

"It was a misfire," Daniel said smoothly. "Are you injured?" he asked.

"A misfire? You knocked my crossbow out of my hand. A vampire escaped. I would have had him."

Daniel scowled. "I'll take that as a no, you're not injured," he said dryly. He checked the hand as the hunter continued to gape at him disbelievingly. Daniel stepped back, and mustered up all the authority he could. "I glanced towards you to see where you were aiming and my bow misfired. I'll have to have it checked when we return to base," he lied. His stomach churned, but he couldn't possibly admit the truth.

As Scott caught a pipe and swung up out of range, it hit him what Daniel had done. He peeked back over the roof to be sure Daniel was all right, then ran in the direction Morgan had disappeared.

As he ran, almost too fast for a human to follow, his mind was racing. Had Daniel just shot at a fellow human to save a vampire? It had to be. That meant ... that Daniel had feelings for him. Scott already knew he had feelings for Daniel beyond just lust. And that he would kill for him.

He would go see Daniel as soon as he could.

CHAPTER 17

After the report was written, the explanations were made, Daniel kept it together long enough to get back home. As soon as he was safely in the privacy of his own apartment, he started shaking.

Scott could have been killed. He probably would have gotten away, but what if Scott's attention had been interrupted by looking at Daniel, just as Daniel's had been looking at him? He ran a trembling hand through his hair. He was protecting a vampire. Why?

Because he didn't want to lose him. He'd lost so much in his life already, he didn't want to lose the only thing left in the world that made him feel good. He would do it again if it came to it, and possibly worse.

* * * *

Luckily, Morgan hadn't seen what happened, and Scott caught up with her near the river. They went back to the vampires' building after he watched her feed on a transient. She offered to share, but he wasn't hungry.

When they got back, Morgan regaled them all with tales of the battle.

"That was Morningstar," Sean, one of the young vampires, interrupted.

"How do you know?" Scott asked, trying to sound skeptical.

"Long black hair, crossbow almost as big as he is?" Sean shot back. "Moving like lightning?"

"Sounds like him," agreed Morgan eagerly.

"You saw him, then," Sean replied grimly. "That was Morningstar. No one else around here like him."

Morgan was annoyed. "I was that close!" she said, disgusted. Then she smiled. "But now I know him. And I'm going to be the one to kill him," she finished.

Scott just kept silent. He didn't trust his own voice. Now, more than ever, he needed to talk to Daniel. But he couldn't risk it just yet.

* * * *

Daniel crawled into bed after he washed up for the night. He had a couple of swigs from his bottle, just to settle his nerves. He wanted to know who that woman was with Scott. Something about the way she was standing next to him ... he didn't like it. It seemed almost proprietary.

But what did it matter? Scott was a vampire; Daniel a vampire hunter. It wasn't as if they could have any sort of normal relationship together. He knew nothing of how the undead saw such things. They didn't use sex for procreation, so perhaps they had outgrown the concept of fidelity. That troubled him a little. Not enough, however, to keep exhaustion from overtaking him. He drifted off into a restless sleep.

CHAPTER 18

The next night Morgan insisted on staying near Scott, talking of plans to take out the hunters for good. She claimed that she was going to take out Morningstar herself. The very idea pleased her greatly. She didn't believe he could be as good as the rumors.

So it was two days before Scott could get away. Morgan was used to Scott wanting to hunt on his own by now, and she was so caught up in her plans that it wasn't difficult to slip away. It was early, so he didn't expect Daniel to be there. He just wanted to leave a note. And a gift.

Long ago, Scott had explored and found the burnt-out remains of a warehouse that had once distributed wine. He'd known that he couldn't feel the effects of alcohol by then, so he'd ignored it. But now ... he went back. The place had been pretty much ransacked, but he did manage to find one intact bottle. He'd noticed that Daniel's bottle was nearly empty, and he remembered that long ago he'd once gone on a date and brought wine.

He slipped into Daniel's apartment the way he had the first time, thinking that Daniel should secure the window better. He scribbled a note on the back of the note Daniel had left him, and left it by the bed with the bottle of wine.

When Daniel returned to his apartment near dawn, he saw the bottle and the slip of paper immediately. He unfolded the note and read it.

In three days time, I will come here just after sunset. I need you, all night.

S.

Daniel's heart pounded as he read it. It would be nothing to take a day off. He would be here. All night. And they would be together. He was getting hard just thinking about it.

Three days seemed like a lifetime when he actually had to live through it. As he laid down to sleep on the third day he wondered if Scott would be waiting for him when he awoke. If he'd let himself in, or knock as he had before. Daniel scrubbed all traces of blood and grime from his body before going to sleep, and washed and brushed out his hair until it felt like spun silk in his fingers.

Silly. All the little rituals. But it was nice, too. Something to look forward to. Something to live for...

CHAPTER 19

Scott had willingly become a vampire; he'd known what he was doing when he got into it. Or he thought he had; he wasn't known for thinking things through, or he wouldn't have gotten into drugs. He was still suffering from withdrawal and cravings, and his body was a mess; the vampires had promised him immortality and freedom from addiction.

He met Morgan at a party. She'd been charming and beautiful, and he'd taken her to bed before he realized she was a vampire. He'd laughed when she told him; back then, vampires were the stuff of books and bad movies. She showed him her fangs, then took him out hunting. He believed then.

She always had an entourage, even then, and they all looked like rock stars instead of Dracula. To Scott, half out of his mind with the needs of his damaged body, they were beautiful and tempting. Scott always had a weakness for beautiful things.

When Morgan had asked if he wanted to join them, he hadn't hesitated. He had little to look forward to, other than years of probation and rehab. His wife had filed for divorce, and had gotten a restraining order the last time he'd gotten arrested. His band was sick of him.

Morgan had promised him immortality, and a body free from pain and human frailty. Preternatural speed, strength, and he'd never age. And he'd no longer be a part of the society he'd rebelled against all his life.

Vampires didn't seem to care who slept with whom, didn't label each other 'gay' or 'bisexual' or 'deviant.'

Later he'd come to find that didn't apply to all vamps, but by then it was too late.

All that, for a small price.

He'd never see the sun again, and he had to drink blood to stay alive.

He was a bit leery of the blood. HIV was something he'd grown up with, and the distrust of bodily fluids was hard-wired in him.

But human diseases didn't affect vampires, Morgan assured him. She could feed from someone on their deathbed and it would be just the same as a healthy person. Though, she said their blood tasted a bit thin to her. She also assured him that there was no bigger pleasure than feeding, and that included sex. Scott was skeptical, but he no longer cared about much of anything. He suspected that if Morgan hadn't come into his life, he probably would have attempted suicide soon.

So he agreed. He expected a long, complicated ritual, or something painful. But it was really quite simple. The only thing was that it did have to be voluntary. Contrary to popular belief, you couldn't be turned into a vampire against your will. Nor could you be turned from a single bite, or even multiple bites.

It was more like an electrical circuit. To become a vampire, you had to be bitten by one, and let it feed off you. Then, the vampire would let you feed from it. It had to be the same vampire. A closed circuit. One vampire goes in, two come out.

And if the person didn't really want to be a vampire, didn't have the will, he just died.

Scott had the will. The experience wasn't pleasant; he didn't like the taste of blood. Then, a searing pain had shot through him, as if every cell in his body changed. That wasn't far from the truth, really. But it was mercifully brief, and he passed out.

Normally, the vampire that had done the deed stayed around to help the new vamp, teach it to feed, to cope. The new vampire would sleep, sometimes for days, then wake. Ravenous and nearly mindless. The older vampire could control the new one, make sure it fed; only until a vampire fed for the first time did it remember everything that had happened.

Of course, many times the new vampire would be abandoned, and would wake alone. It would rampage, and anything that crossed its path was usually slaughtered. That was what gave vampires a bad name, according to Morgan.

But Scott made the transition smoothly; he'd woken, and fed, and had immediately reveled in the fact that his body felt strong and invincible. It took him a while to get used to the taste of blood, but the pleasure that came with feeding was quite overwhelming.

Scott was a vampire for about ten years before the world changed. Most of the changes didn't affect him; they made his life less comfortable, of course. But there were still plenty of humans to feed on, and in their panic they were easy prey. It wasn't for another fifty years that the hunters became organized enough to make a dent in the vampire population.

Morningstar
by Jade Falconer

Before the catastrophe, humans outnumbered vampires ten thousand to one. Now it was more like ten to one.

CHAPTER 20

The sun had barely set when Scott left. Morgan hadn't even stirred; she'd always been a late riser. He made his way across the city as fast as he ever had, and the sky was still a gorgeous cobalt blue when he let himself into Daniel's apartment. He saw that Daniel was still sleeping; the man lay on his stomach on the bed, and Scott looked at him for a few long moments. Scott was rendered almost breathless by the perfection of him; the curve of his ass under the sheets entranced him.

He stepped closer, letting his coat fall gently to the floor. He didn't speak, afraid to break the spell. He wanted Daniel more than he had ever wanted anything. Wanted him to be his alone.

It was if he sensed someone else in the room in his sleep, and Daniel snapped awake, rolling over and looking up, fully alert. Then his gaze fell on Scott and he instantly relaxed, lying back on the bed again with a sigh. "Oh," he said softly, smiling. "Sorry." He laughed lightly. "I overslept."

Scott could tell that Daniel wore nothing under the sheet, and the thin covering was more arousing than full nudity. He was instantly hard, just from looking at Daniel, and he took a step closer. "Are you free for the night?" he asked hoarsely. He wanted to be sure they weren't starting something they couldn't finish, this time. He intended to fully possess Daniel tonight.

"Yes. I have the entire night off. I think they thought I was losing it when I said I wouldn't be in. I haven't taken a night off in ... fuck ... can't remember." He shrugged. "But yes. I have nothing to do and nowhere to be other than with you," he said softly. Scott looked beautiful, and he wanted to touch the expanse of pale skin. "Standing kinda far away, aren't you?" he asked lightly, looking up at him from the bed, black hair spilling across the pillow in silky ripples.

"I just can't believe how beautiful you are," Scott whispered. "You look like a dream." He moved even closer, slowly. He didn't want to rush, now that they had all night. He reached for the button on his pants, and unzipped them. They sagged nearly off his hips, catching on his erection. He kicked off his boots, then let the pants follow. He kicked them away, and stood naked in front of Daniel. He wasn't cold but he shivered with anticipation. He wanted Daniel's eyes on him.

Daniel's mouth went dry as his gaze slid over Scott's skin. "Oh, God," he whispered. He was instantly hard at the sight, aching and ready. "I'll be your dream if you want me to be," he whispered. "I'll be anything you want me to be." The sound of his own pulse pounding in his ears was nearly deafening.

"I want you to be mine," Scott whispered, running his hand down his own chest and stomach. He couldn't wait to feel Daniel's hands on him again. He walked to the bed, reaching down and drawing the covers off of Daniel's body. He wanted to see all of him. He looked down at the other man, drinking in every inch of his pale skin, exposed and waiting for him to claim.

Daniel reached out and grabbed Scott's wrist as he pulled the covers aside, tugging him down onto the bed, and sitting partially up to press his lips against his. He knew Scott could and probably would overpower him, but he didn't care. He wanted him to. "I am yours," he whispered against Scott's lips.

Those words made Scott moan, and he kissed Daniel hard. He pressed back, pinning the man to the bed, letting him feel his strength. He knew that Daniel liked it rough, but Scott knew he'd have to be careful. Finally, their naked bodies touched, and Scott felt like he was on fire. Never had such passion captured him. Never had he felt so much. Never had he met anyone like Daniel.

Daniel couldn't believe the feel of it. It was raw and sensual and so fucking perfect. Everyone who knew him even a little looked to him for strength. Scott didn't need his strength. Not here. Here he could let someone else be strong, and it felt amazing. He whimpered into Scott's mouth, running his hands over every inch of skin he could reach from his position beneath the other man.

Daniel's touch felt better than he could have imagined; and he'd imagined it so many times since he'd first felt Daniel against him. That night in the alley, when he'd first pinned him to the wall, Scott had known that it would be like this. That the need would consume him when he touched Daniel, and that the rest of the world would no longer matter. Their bodies were meant for each other, and it mattered not that Scott was a vampire and Daniel was human, or that what they were doing would condemn them if they were caught. All

that mattered was tonight. He kissed Daniel like he would die without it.

Daniel shifted beneath him, pulling his knees up around Scott's hips. The kiss was intoxicating, and he realized for the first time what the dull, yearning ache in his chest was, realized why he'd foolishly endangered another hunter to save the man whose naked body now covered his own. Love. God help him, he was in love with Scott. He moaned again, letting his hands travel down over Scott's ass.

Daniel opened to him, and Scott moaned into the kiss, moving against him. They were going to make love, nothing would stop them this time, or Scott thought he might go insane. This was what he'd needed all along, this intensity, this intoxicating feeling of being alive, that had driven him to rock and roll and drugs and becoming a vampire. And now to find it, in the arms of his sworn enemy ... but they were not enemies now, not vampire and human. They were just two men who had been alone too long, and who needed this more than air.

Scott pulled back from the kiss, needing to see Daniel's beautiful face, needing to be sure this wasn't a dream. He was panting. Daniel was so perfect beneath him, and he looked into Daniel's brown eyes. "Need you, Daniel, so much," he gasped, amazed that he could even speak coherently. "Need to be inside you."

Daniel trembled beneath him. He glanced towards the nightstand. "There's ... a bottle of oil in that drawer," he whispered hoarsely. From where he was pinned he couldn't reach it. His eyes returned to Scott's. "I've never wanted

anything as much as I want you," he said softly. He wanted to tell him all that was in his heart, but there would be time for that later. Right now there was need and urgency to be indulged, their night together, alone all night long. It seemed like a luxury beyond anything he'd ever known.

Scott wanted to take his time with Daniel, but he just couldn't. They had all night, and maybe after he claimed Daniel as his own, he could think clearly. But he ached so badly, and with Daniel so open beneath him there was no way he could hold back. He shifted so he could reach the drawer, but he didn't move off of Daniel. He knew that the man wanted it this way, wanted to be pinned and taken with the intensity of blinding need. Scott pulled out the bottle of oil, and it glistened in the lamplight. The oil made it all the more real, and he whispered as he opened it, "How long ... has it been, Daniel?" He didn't want to hurt him.

He lowered his eyes for a moment. "Years," he whispered. There was no shame in loneliness, but he felt a strange twinge of embarrassment about it, a holdover from a former life. He looked into Scott's eyes again, almost defiantly, and his lips twitched. "I guess I was saving myself for you."

"Oh, Daniel," Scott moaned; the idea of this lovely man, untouched by any for all these years, was touching and arousing at the same time. "Well, now you're all mine," he said, shifting so he could sit back. "Every inch of you," he added, running slick fingers down Daniel's chest, and wrapping his hand around the man's arousal. He stroked quickly, just needing to touch him, before moving his hand

lower to stroke Daniel's inner thighs. Daniel was so beautiful, and Scott felt his heart would explode from happiness.

Daniel's fingers gripped the sheets tightly and he whimpered helplessly as Scott touched him. As his fingers trailed over the pale, sensitive skin between his legs, he parted them more, pulling his knees up and out, opening to Scott as much as he possibly could. Offering himself without hesitation. "Oh, God," he rasped. Just being touched drove him mad with desire. He needed this. Never again could he stumble through life, efficient killing machine, soulless corpse, empty shell of duty and honor without needs and wants. "Please," he whispered, writhing beneath the almost gentle ministrations.

Daniel's pleas were just what Scott craved, and he wanted nothing more than to please the man beneath him. He stroked upward, spreading the slick oil against Daniel's entrance. It had been countless years since he'd been with a human male, but he remembered there had to be some preparation. Especially since it had been so long since Daniel had been taken this way. So he leaned forward, brushing his lips over Daniel's chest and nipples, and eased one finger into him.

Daniel gasped at the feel of Scott's finger entering him and the slick heat of his mouth. He arched up, nearly off the bed, bearing down to accept the invasion, craving more. "Fuck yes ... oh, God, Scott ... please ... I'm not going to break," he moaned. His eyelids fluttered closed and he tipped his head back on the pillow, releasing the tight control on his reactions, letting go completely. Surrendering himself.

But Scott knew he could indeed break Daniel, kill him if he wasn't careful, and he was going to go slowly. The way Daniel gave himself over was almost more than Scott could bear, and he added another finger as he ravished his chest with kisses and small bites. He'd fed recently, so he had no hunger save for making Daniel his completely. He wanted to forget everything except their bodies and their need. "Mine," he growled softly, moving his fingers in and out.

The waiting was almost unbearable. He clamped himself down around Scott's fingers, silently begging him for more. "Yours," he breathed, and he knew it was true. He'd never wanted anyone like this, and he knew he never would again. He looked at Scott, his gaze smoldering. "Want you so badly..."

Scott looked up at Daniel, and almost gasped. Daniel looked ethereally beautiful, more lovely than any person had a right to be. His ink-black hair spread around him, over his pale shoulders, and his eyes were fixed only on Scott as if he was the only thing in the world. And Daniel was the only thing that mattered to him. Scott wondered if this was what it was like to be in love. "You have me, Daniel, I'm going to be inside you," he promised, adding a third finger. "Soon..."

There was nothing of fear in him at all, although he was as vulnerable as he could possibly be. It would be nothing for Scott to kill him, but somehow he knew he wouldn't. So many times he'd warned new hunters to trust no vampire, that they wanted only one thing. And here he was breaking all his own rules. But he didn't care. He wanted Scott, and there was no mistaking that Scott wanted him as well. He moaned again,

aching to be filled. "Please ... need you ... take me, Scott," he whimpered, knowing his body was as ready as it ever would be.

Daniel was begging him, and Scott just couldn't wait. He used more of the oil to slick himself, and moved back up the bed to kneel between Daniel's legs. "So beautiful, my sweet Daniel," he whispered. Though he ached to take the other man, he wanted this night to last forever. "Wanted you since I first saw you, baby," he breathed, moving into position. There were many ways he could take Daniel but this was by far the most intimate, and he wanted to look into his lover's eyes.

Daniel's hands slid up Scott's chest and around his neck. The softly spoken endearments made him moan quietly. He wrapped his legs around Scott's waist, urging him forward. "Want you, too ... so badly." He panted. He wanted to give Scott everything. He would do anything to have him any way he could.

Scott pushed forward, gasping as he entered Daniel's body slowly. "Oh, God, Daniel," he moaned, sure he would never fit inside, but unable to stop. "You feel so ... good, so tight ... stop me ... if I'm hurting you..." He'd never wanted anything or anyone this badly, and nothing had ever felt this good. He held back from thrusting deep, using all of his control.

Daniel's arms tightened around him and he bore down to accept Scott's cock into his body with a strangled whimper. It was tight. He felt so full. But it was beautiful. He bit his own lip, trying to relax, let his body adjust. "Scott," he moaned. "Not ... not hurting me..."

Scott moved slowly, filling Daniel, holding himself tightly in check. He was as close as possible to the other man now, and he never wanted this to end. "Daniel ... my beautiful Daniel..." He'd had countless lovers, and not one had he wanted this much, felt so much for. Scott was sure he'd never been in love, but everything was different now. He thrust gently, needing to be deeper inside.

Daniel pressed up towards him, moaning quietly. He loved it when Scott called him beautiful. There was no feeling in the world like it, and like being one with his body. "Scott ... feels so ... perfect," he whimpered. He wanted to say the words that were singing through his veins, but he waited, delirious with the sensations.

Slowly, Scott built up speed and force, thrusting deeper. He kept his eyes locked on Daniel's face as the pleasure mounted. "My Daniel," he whispered, voice deep with desire, as he started to pound. The old bed creaked in protest, and with one hand Scott reached for Daniel's hand. "Never want to stop, never leave you, love you, my Daniel," he groaned, not even realizing what he'd said until it came from his mouth. He'd never meant anything as much.

Daniel stared into Scott's eyes, letting him see every feeling as it crossed his face. "Oh, God ... I love you, too," he whispered hoarsely. He clamped down hard around Scott's cock, almost willing him to come, so close himself he didn't know how much longer he could last.

Scott knew it was true. He loved Daniel, no matter that they were as different as could be, but right now it didn't matter. They were two men, two bodies, two hearts that beat

as one. He drove faster into his lover, not holding back hardly at all, and growled, "So close, baby, let me hear you scream for me..."

Daniel did scream then. He screamed out Scott's name as he came hard, spilling hot seed between their overheated bodies. "Love you, Scott ... love you so much," he nearly sobbed.

Daniel's climax pushed Scott over the edge as well, and he gasped as he filled Daniel, pulsing deep within him. Pleasure greater than he had ever felt washed over him, and he chanted his lover's name as he climaxed, nearly blacking out from the intensity.

As he gradually came down, Daniel gazed up at Scott a little blearily, still panting. He couldn't believe what had just passed between them. He could still feel little trembling aftershocks running through him. "Scott..." he whispered.

"Daniel," moaned Scott. He didn't want to leave the warmth of Daniel's sweet body. "Are.. are you all right? I didn't hurt you?" He'd been worried he'd lost control of his strength.

Daniel smiled. "Only in a good way," he said softly. He felt languid and drowsy and thoroughly used. "Mmm, that was.... amazing." He ran his hand through his hair, then over Scott's shoulder in a light caress.

Scott rolled off Daniel and lay beside him, his body still shaking from the intense pleasure. He moved closer, lying on his side and fitting their bodies together. "You're incredible," he whispered, running his hand down Daniel's chest. He

couldn't stop touching him. And he vowed this would not be the only time he made love to Daniel.

Daniel turned on his side towards Scott and slid his arm around him. "I love you," he said softly. He wanted Scott to know that it wasn't just a sentiment for the heat of passion for him. He'd never said it to anyone other than his parents. He rested his head on Scott's shoulder.

"And I love you, Daniel," Scott breathed, eyes wide. "I ... I don't think I've been in love before," he said truthfully. He held Daniel, still unable to believe they were really in bed together. It was so surreal.

Daniel looked up into Scott's eyes. Something had been bothering him, and he decided to ask about it. "Who was that woman? The one with the long blonde hair that was with you?" he asked softly.

Scott closed his eyes briefly. "That was Morgan. An old..." he hesitated, but he wouldn't lie to Daniel. "An old lover. I hadn't seen her for about twenty years, and now she just showed up. I left her," he explained. "She's not a very nice person." He didn't want to get into too many details right now.

Daniel smirked a little, a couple of comments about 'taking care of her' flitting across his mind without being spoken. He sighed. His brain was still trying to click into work mode, but that wasn't why he'd asked. He hated to admit to himself that it bothered him that he knew so little of Scott's life, and to see him with a beautiful blonde woman...

He nuzzled under Scott's chin. "Doesn't matter," he murmured a little drowsily. "But if she touches your dick she'll find herself headless."

Scott laughed, slightly shocked by what Daniel had said. "A bit jealous, are you?" he asked, smiling. It was touching, and so.... normal, for want of a better word. Almost as if ... they had a chance at a relationship.

"Mmhm," he purred. "Is that all right?" He wasn't really the jealous type, but there was just something about Morgan, even from the brief time he'd seen her, that rubbed him the wrong way.

"Perfectly," smiled Scott, tipping Daniel's chin up so he could look in his eyes. "I'll never let her touch me, I promise." He sighed. "She's dangerous, Daniel. She wants to go after you." He didn't want to get into this now, but he had to.

Daniel was still feeling pliant and relaxed, but even his sleepy expression couldn't hide the fact that he was confident. "I hope she does," he said softly. He really hoped she did.

"I don't," Scott said seriously. "She's older than any vampire I've ever known. She's vicious." He kissed Daniel softly. "I don't want to lose you." He wanted to feel Daniel next to him, wanted to feel it every night.

"You won't lose me. I promise," he whispered. Daniel knew he should have learned not to make promises by now, but the newness of this relationship overwhelmed him with an optimism he hadn't felt in years.

Scott closed his eyes. How could he be thinking like this? Was it even possible that they could be together? They were

enemies. But Daniel felt perfect in his arms, and he wasn't going to let go until he had to. Until dawn. "It's going to be soon," he whispered. "She came here for a reason, and I think it's to wipe out the vampire hunters."

Daniel looked up at Scott again, speaking seriously. "If I run across her..." He swallowed. "I'm going to have to kill her." He didn't want there to be any illusions between them. He was still a hunter, and he was still committed to preserving human life. Anyone who was a threat to that, well, he still intended to do his job. But he couldn't kill Scott.

"I know," said Scott softly. The thought of Morgan dead didn't bother him; in fact it would be a bit of a relief. If he didn't fear for Daniel's life. "And ... I know what you did to save me, the other day. Don't do that again, I'm not worth it." He shook his head. He didn't want Daniel to get in trouble over him.

"Couldn't help it," Daniel said. "I was kind of on auto-pilot." He hadn't been thinking, just acting. He wasn't sure where his protective streak came from, but he knew he would do it again, in an instant. "I don't want to lose you, either," he said simply.

Scott sighed. It was starting to hit him. He'd slept with a human. He loved a human. Even worse, one who killed his own kind. Not that he had any loyalty to vampires; most lived in packs due to convenience. Being a vampire, being hunted, it changed most people. Either you learned to kill, or you died. But holding Daniel in his arms, feeling his body against him, hearing him scream his name ... Scott knew he'd do

anything to keep this feeling. He bent down to kiss Daniel again; he couldn't get enough.

Daniel melted into the kiss, lost in it. Nothing had ever felt as good. Nothing ever would. It seemed to last a long time, just lying there warm and sated, focused on nothing outside of the warm, languid kiss. He fitted his body more closely against Scott's, sliding one knee between the other man's. The only thing reminding him that he was in the arms of a vampire was the occasional brush of tongue near the sharp, elongated canines. Long moments later, he leaned back a little, gazing up at Scott again. "It'll be okay," he whispered. "Just this is enough."

The kiss had left Scott a little breathless; he'd never known kissing could be so satisfying. His body was relaxed and becoming aroused again at the same time. It was a feeling he'd never experienced before. But he knew it had to end by dawn, and he was saddened by that already. "Is it enough?" he breathed. "Can we ... live like this?" Never mind that most humans didn't even think he was alive.

"Do we have a choice? And this is ... so much more than ... than I ever dreamed of," Daniel said. He could feel that Scott was getting hard again, and it fueled his own arousal. He couldn't stop touching Scott, and he ran his hand slowly up and down his chest and over his hip. It didn't matter what they had to do to be together, Daniel intended to do it. Now that he'd felt it, he couldn't live without it again.

Scott moaned, thrusting his hips against Daniel. "Now that I know what it's like, I can't give you up," he panted. He slipped his hands lower, over Daniel's ass, letting the lust

take over and drive the doubts from his brain. "Want you again, baby," he purred. They'd find a way. They had to. He'd die without this. "Mine."

Daniel rolled partially on top of him, feeling Scott's hands on his ass like a brand. He rocked his hips back and forth, grinding against Scott's erection. "Yours," he purred with a seductive smile. "Pull my hair," he whispered.

Scott growled, taking a handful of Daniel's beautiful hair and pulling sharply. He exposed Daniel's long smooth throat, and leaned up to lick at it, like he'd done when they first met. He was already aching again, as if he'd never climaxed tonight.

Daniel whimpered. There was something so ... foolishly, blisteringly hot about the move. It was dangerous. Toying with fate. Like poking at a tiger with a stick. But he didn't care. He felt Scott's tongue on his skin and it sent a jolt straight to his cock. He wriggled his body over more so he was covering Scott completely, and he pulled his knees up until they were snugly fitted around Scott's slim hips, the pressure between them almost unbearable.

Feeding could be as intimate as sex, but Scott had never felt the urge to bite during sex before. But Daniel made him feel even more dominant, and with a deep growl he flipped them over so he was on top of Daniel once again. His hips held Daniel's legs apart, and he still gripped his hair so Daniel's head was wrenched back. He leaned over his lover, eyes fixed on his throat, and bared his fangs so Daniel could see them. He could still control himself, just.

Daniel drew a sharp, trembling gasp. His head was pinned back, chin stretched up, completely helpless. And he liked it. He could almost feel the blood pumping in his veins like molten lava. He looked into Scott's eyes, looked at his teeth, but he wasn't afraid. His cock throbbed, his entire body aching for the other man, but fear had no part in it. He swallowed and it made the muscles in his throat constrict, but he kept watching, wondering just exactly what Scott intended to do.

Scott looked down at Daniel, and saw he wasn't afraid; the man would let him do whatever he wanted, he could tell. That thought made him even harder. Daniel was helpless, but willingly. Scott didn't need to feed, but he wanted to bite Daniel. To show him the pleasures of a vampire's touch. To give his lover something that no one else could. He lowered his head slowly, running his tongue over his fangs, lowering his mouth to Daniel's neck. He licked again, all the way up his lover's neck, lingering over the pulse point. He could smell the blood just beneath the surface. He shifted his hips; in this position his rock hard cock was lined up with Daniel's entrance almost perfectly.

Daniel moaned, almost gasping for breath. He could sense what was about to happen, and he was helpless to resist. He wanted it. "Scott," he whispered. "Love you..." His heart was pounding in this chest, and he was sure Scott could hear it. "Please..."

A low, animal sound came from Scott, and he looked up, still licking at Daniel's neck. "Please what?" he whispered, his voice deeper. His cock nudged against Daniel, and there was

still enough oil that he knew he would slide in easily. He opened his mouth wide, letting his teeth just scrape against the skin.

A strangled whimper escaped Daniel's throat, and he knew Scott was going to make him ask for it. "Want you," he rasped. "Want you to ... fuck me ... and..." His breath came in short gasps. It seemed wrong to want it, but he did. Oh, God, he wanted it like burning ... "Please ... bite me." His entire body strained up towards Scott in silent yearning.

Scott took a deep, shuddering breath when he heard those words, and said, "Love you, Daniel..." Then he closed his eyes, pressing his fangs to the perfect spot by instinct. He bit down and thrust at the same time, claiming Daniel's body with teeth and cock. The pleasure flooded through his body.

Daniel nearly blacked out right then and there. The pain and the ecstasy and the unbelievable feeling of being filled and drained at once forced a cry from his throat. He'd never experienced anything like it before, and he was almost instantly pushed right to the edge of orgasm. He tightened his body around Scott's cock and clamped down for all he was worth, hoping to drive the man on top of him as crazed with pleasure as he felt himself.

Scott thrust hard, and drank Daniel's blood, and thought he would die from it. If he died now, though, he would die happy. The pleasure was incredible, his need for blood and for sex combining to drive him out of his mind. He knew he wasn't taking more than Daniel could spare, and from the way his lover reacted he knew it was just as amazing for him

as well. He knew this was going to last only moments, and his climax was already starting.

Daniel couldn't hold back any longer, and he sobbed out his love for Scott, and moaned his name, barely coherent. The moment he let go he came hard enough to gray out the edges of his field of vision, a shudder running through his small frame. "Scott ... ohhnnhhnn.... oh God, Scott..." He tightened around him again and again with the last ounce of strength in him, milking Scott's cock desperately.

Scott pulled off of Daniel's neck, a small trickle of blood running from the corner of his mouth. He cried out, coming hard, filling Daniel once again as he pulsed inside him. He still gripped Daniel's hair as his back arched impossibly, head thrown back, and he lost himself in the pleasure. He looked down at Daniel as he remembered to breathe again, feeling the heat of his lover's seed between them.

Daniel looked up at Scott, panting hard, eyes glazed. "My God," he whispered breathlessly. There were no words to describe it. He felt owned. He was still for several long seconds, gradually settling back down to earth from the unimaginable high.

Scott couldn't help a crooked grin as he licked the blood from the corner of his mouth. He was still shaking too, and he settled next to Daniel. His eyes were half-closed and he felt more sated than he ever had in his life. "Thank you, Daniel," he whispered, "for trusting me." He'd only taken a small amount of blood, but it had been beyond his wildest expectations.

Daniel curled around him again. "You could have killed me a dozen times over if that's what you wanted to do," he said softly. "And I love you. I'm not even sure when it happened, but ... I think I trusted you from the beginning." He felt completely boneless, and sagged against Scott's body. He knew when the sun rose he would sleep as soundly as any vampire.

"Trusting me, and letting me bite you, are two different things," Scott whispered, holding Daniel close. He wasn't tired, but he was spent, at least for now, and he was content to just lie there for a while. But as the euphoria faded, reality set in. "How ... how are we going to manage like this, Daniel? I cannot give you up." Not now that he'd tasted what it could be like.

"I ... should take more days off. Most hunters only work four nights a week because it's so physically and emotionally draining," Daniel said. He nuzzled drowsily under Scott's jawline. "Maybe I could ... I mean we could ... I sleep during the day, anyway. Maybe we could find someplace safe for you and ... sleep together sometimes."

Scott nodded, hoping against hope that it could work out. "If it weren't for Morgan hanging around, I almost think we could manage it," he whispered. "But if you got caught, Daniel..." Scott trailed off, knowing that for a hunter to be sleeping with a vampire must be an automatic death sentence. Especially a male one. Scott knew he would wreak a wide path of destruction to save his lover.

"We'll find a way, Scott." His voice was calm and certain. "And I won't get caught. No one's been doing what I do as

long as I have." No one's lived as long, was what he meant, but he didn't put it that way. He'd thought for a long time that he was living on borrowed time somehow, but now ... now he had something to live for. He'd be that much more careful.

"Maybe it's time you thought about letting someone else do the protecting?" Scott asked carefully. Maybe it was post-coital bliss, but he was having visions of the two of them running off somewhere together. He knew it was ridiculous, but he couldn't help it. He wanted Daniel, all the time.

Daniel tipped his head back to look into Scott's eyes. "You mean quit my job?" he asked, a little bewildered. The idea hadn't even occurred to him. It was sort of a strange thought. Daniel had fully expected to live out whatever time he had left before luck turned against him as a hunter. But now, maybe he should re-think it. But could they really do without him?

"No one ever retires from being a hunter," Scott replied softly. "They get killed. I won't lose you, Daniel." He knew Daniel was good. But the odds were against him. He felt cold suddenly.

"I'll have to think about it. I ... I don't know how to do anything else. I don't know any other way to survive," he said quietly. He nibbled on his bottom lip. "I just never thought about it before. I've got so much responsibility resting on my shoulders." He knew that if he left, more people would die than if he stayed. More hunters would die. And he wasn't sure he could do that.

"I understand," Scott said. He wanted to say he'd take care of Daniel, but he wasn't sure he knew how. There was only one way that he knew they could be together forever. And he knew Daniel would never want that. He pulled the covers over them. He didn't need the warmth, but Daniel did.

It was bittersweet, the closeness and the looming question of when they would have it again. He told the new hunters that the best thing they could do was live for the moment, not have any regrets. But he saw now what cold comfort that was when someone offered a future.

He snuggled against Scott. "I love you. I'll ... I'll try. I'll try to find a way for us to be together."

Scott held Daniel until their passion rose again, and they made love twice more before the sun rose. Scott's body ached, but pleasurably, when he whispered in Daniel's ear, "I have to go down to the basement." He didn't want to leave, but Daniel's apartment had no shielding from the sun. He could feel it approaching.

"Can I go with you? I have some extra blankets we could use for bedding. I can nail it shut on the inside." He looked at Scott hopefully. He just wanted to spend the day sleeping in his arms.

Scott's eyes widened. He wanted it more than anything, to wake next to Daniel, but ... "I would be like I was dead, Daniel. Until the sun starts to set. Are you sure you want to see me like that?" Right now, he seemed as human as Daniel. But not while the sun was up.

"Scott, after tonight I'll be sleeping like the dead until sunset," he said, laughing a little. "I just want to be with you."

Next to you." He looked into his eyes, already wondering where he'd put his pajama pants.

Scott nodded slowly. "I love you, Daniel. I want that, too." He kissed him, then pulled back reluctantly. "We need to hurry." The sky was getting lighter already, but he couldn't help but smile. It had been the most incredible night of his life.

Daniel found his pajama bottoms and a few blankets and grabbed the pillows off the bed. He nodded towards the candle and the knife on the nightstand. "Let's go," he said softly.

He followed Scott down the stairs to the basement, and spread the blankets on the floor, creating a makeshift bed, and lay down, waiting for him to join him.

Scott was still amazed that Daniel wanted to stay with him. During the day. "Are you sure?" he whispered, lying next to his lover. It was not as comfortable as the bed, but he wouldn't know the difference. Daniel would, however. But the feeling of the longhaired man next to him was very comforting.

"Do I strike you as the kind of person who does things he's not sure of?" he asked lightly, leaning against Scott's body and pulling a blanket over both of them. "Is this okay?" he asked in the near complete darkness.

"It's perfect," whispered Scott, fitting their bodies together. Not since he'd become a vampire had he slept, actually slept, with anyone. It was a perfect end to a perfect night, and if he never got to hold Daniel again he would have one memory to keep with him forever. "I love you, Daniel,"

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he said, fatigue as well as the sunrise pulling him into slumber.

"I love you, too, Scott," he whispered, his eyes drifting shut. It didn't matter that he was on a cold hard floor in a basement; he was more comfortable than he'd been in years.

CHAPTER 21

Scott was old, and wasn't as vulnerable to the sun as many vampires. Deep in the basement, he began to wake as the sun neared the horizon, perhaps an hour before full dark. He had never woken up feeling so warm before, though, and his eyes flew open. He could see nothing, but he felt and smelled Daniel. His arms tightened around his lover as the previous night came back to him. He'd never felt better.

Daniel made a soft, sleepy sound and burrowed his face into Scott's neck, his lips pressing softly against the smooth skin. He was only half-awake but as he gradually came to, where he was and why he was there came back to him, too. "Is it night already?" he asked groggily.

"Not quite," Scott said softly. He reached over and lit the lamp, and couldn't help but smile. They'd actually spent the day together. Daniel felt wonderful in his arms. "Maybe an hour till dark." He bent down to kiss Daniel gently. He wanted to sleep like this every day.

"Mm, trapped down here for an hour ... whatever shall we do?" he asked softly. He responded to the kiss. Waking up in Scott's embrace was the most intimate thing he'd ever experienced. He felt safe, safer than he'd possibly ever felt. Protected. Loved.

The insinuation of Daniel's remark made Scott groan, and he was fully aroused in a matter of moments. "I can think of a few things," he replied, his voice rough. He kissed Daniel

more deeply, claiming his mouth once again. Daniel made him insatiable, it seemed.

Daniel parted his lips beneath Scott's, moaning quietly into the kiss. His hands roamed over Scott's skin restlessly, as if he was memorizing the feel of him. He slid one knee up over the outside of his lover's thigh, and pressed fully against him, so that it was clear that he was as aroused as Scott was.

Scott groaned into Daniel's mouth, and broke the kiss, panting already. "My Daniel," he whispered, needing to claim his lover again. He thought of something suddenly. "You didn't happen to bring the oil, did you?" he breathed. If not, there were other things they could do.

"Um, no," he laughed a little. "Not like me not to think ahead. Must be all this sudden impulse to declare my undying love and beg to be near you that's fogging up my brain." He sighed a little. "I could run upstairs and get it."

"No," said Scott, holding Daniel. "I don't want to let you go. We can..." He slid a hand between them, wrapping it around Daniel's arousal. "We can find something to do." He stroked slowly, squeezing gently.

Daniel's breath hitched when Scott touched him. "Oh," he said a little suddenly. "Yess ... something ... mmm ... else." He pressed his lips to Scott's throat, letting his hand slide between them as well, mimicking Scott's actions. "Is this what you want to do?" he whispered. "Or something else?"

"God," moaned Scott, thrusting up into Daniel's hand. "Feels so good." He moved his free hand to pull Daniel's hair. "What else do you want to do?"

He gasped a little when Scott pulled his hair. "I ... I want to taste you," he whispered. "Would you like that?"

Gasping just a little, Scott said, "Oh, Daniel, yes," he said. No one had done that to him ... since he was human. Too dangerous with vampires. He'd never trusted anyone that much. "Only if you want to."

He let go of Scott's cock and pushed him firmly onto his back, straddling his thighs and leaning over him, starting to kiss and suck his way down his body. His long hair trailed over Scott's chest as he moved down, licking at each nipple, trailing hot, wet kisses down his torso. He wriggled further down Scott's body as he went until he was nuzzling his belly, hot breath caressing the head of his cock for a moment before Daniel swiped his tongue around it in an eager swirl.

Scott arched up, held down by Daniel's body. He gasped and whimpered as he watched Daniel make his way down his body, that gorgeous hair teasing him. His eyes fixed on Daniel's mouth now, watching as those full lips prepared to take him in. "So good, Daniel," he moaned. His lover was too good at this.

Daniel's lips pressed against him, spreading open slowly as he sucked Scott's cock into his mouth. The noises Scott made drove him crazy with the desire to hear more. He moved slowly, taking him in an inch at a time. He stroked his tongue against him as his lips pressed down firmly on the solid flesh.

Scott was indeed going mad, just from the feelings and the sight of what Daniel was doing to him. A hundred years without a blowjob was a long time. He'd always loved watching, though, and Daniel was beautiful as he took Scott's

cock in his mouth. He knew he wouldn't last long, and he didn't care. "Love you," he gasped, barely able to speak clearly.

Daniel moved his mouth on Scott's cock faster, taking him deeper each time until he was hitting the back of his throat. It had been a very long time since he'd done this to anyone, but he poured as much love and devotion into the act as he felt flowing through him. He relaxed his throat and carefully swallowed the last length of him down the tight, muscled slickness.

Scott slumped back to the bed, gasping for air and for control. "Daniel," he moaned, hands clutching the covers frantically. "I'm going to..." What Daniel was doing to him was blowing his mind, and he had no control. He gave a strangled cry as he began to climax in an embarrassingly short time.

Daniel moaned quietly, the vibration in his throat humming through Scott's cock. He could feel the climax coming and he pulled back a little, swallowing and licking, sucking every last drop from him.

Finally, Scott lay back, breathing hard, completely undone by Daniel and his sweet mouth. "Oh my God," he whispered. "That was..." Words failed him as the ecstasy still ran through him. He felt like he didn't want to move, like his body was boneless.

Daniel slowly pulled his mouth off of Scott and stretched his body out next to him with a soft smile. It was amazingly satisfying to affect him so much, and he laid his cheek on

Scott's shoulder. "I love you," he whispered, unable to stop himself from stating the obvious.

Scott got his body under control at last, and smiled at his lover. His lover. Those words were ones he thought he'd never use again. "And I love you. And I want to reciprocate. But," Scott flashed his teeth, and slid his hand down Daniel's body to wrap around his cock. "Perhaps not quite the same way." He stroked slowly, surely, and rolled them so Daniel was on his back.

Daniel gasped again. He loved the way even small movements that Scott made were unmistakably dominant. Something in Scott's forceful manner called to something in Daniel that wanted to submit, relinquish control to someone stronger. He whimpered at the feel of Scott's warm fist around his aching cock, and his hips thrust up just a little, wanting to hump into it.

Scott loved the way Daniel gave himself over, and his very manner was arousing. He stroked him faster, watching the man's pretty face, and he bent to kiss him as he stroked. He possessed Daniel's mouth as well as his body, wanting to give his lover every bit of pleasure he could. Daniel was his.

Daniel moaned helplessly into Scott's mouth, one slightly trembling hand coming up to rest against his neck, fingers stroking through his soft, short hair. His hips thrust up almost of their own accord, in time with the maddening strokes. He felt like his entire body was controlled by his lover, and he was just responding to the sensations that overwhelmed him, needy and hungry and primitive. His fingers tightened around the back of Scott's neck, massaging his shoulders

sporadically, unable to divert any attention away from the building climax for more than a second or two at a time.

Scott broke the kiss, and stroked faster. He whispered to his lover, "Daniel ... so beautiful ... feel my hand on you, you're mine, all of you, all mine, want to hear you scream." He couldn't take his eyes off Daniel and how he was completely given over to pleasure. He felt possessive and loving and lustful all at the same time. Daniel was heartbreakingly beautiful and vulnerable. "Mine..."

"Oh," he whimpered, "Y-yess ... only ... yours, Scott." He arched up towards the touch, the words only adding to the pleasure. "L-love to.... hear you ... feel you ... oh God ... I'm ... nnnhnnn ... oh fuck ... so close," he moaned. He looked up into Scott's eyes, his own half-crazed with lust. He gasped great gulps of air, his body trembling on the brink before he came, crying out Scott's name, hot seed spilling over his lover's fist.

Scott stroked Daniel until he was finished, then gathered him into his arms. He whispered into his ear soothingly, he never wanted to leave him. Daniel awoke feelings in him that he didn't even know he was capable of. He'd gladly give up anything for Daniel right now, even his life should it be required. They would be together. There was no point in living otherwise.

Daniel came down from the incredible high slowly, leaning against Scott limply, completely trusting, warm, content. If the entire world disappeared and there was only the two of them it would be more than enough. But for now, the world

still existed. "I guess it's time I should be getting ready," he said, much regret in his tone.

"And the sun has set, so I should be off," replied Scott sadly. Morgan would be curious enough already as to where he'd spent the night. He didn't want to have to acknowledge the reality of the world again. He was a vampire, and Daniel was a hunter. "I wish we could spend every day like this," he said. He didn't let go of the longhaired man just yet.

"Maybe someday we will," Daniel said quietly. "I want to, too. I want to spend every possible minute with you, Scott. I don't know how I'm going to go do what I have to do now, but that's how it is." He sighed and leaned close to kiss him again, just a sweet, gentle kiss, warm and lingering for just a moment.

Scott closed his eyes, losing himself in the kiss, then whispered, "Please be careful, Daniel. I'll try to keep Morgan away. But, just be careful." He knew words were inadequate. "And I'll come back as soon as I can." He knew that wouldn't be right away, though. It was too risky.

Daniel nodded, already pulling away, feeling the cold of the night creep in, and fumbling around for his pajama bottoms again. "I'll be careful. I promise. You be careful, too." He wriggled back into his clothes, then looked at Scott again. "I'll be waiting for you, however long it is. If you find someplace safer, you can leave me a note and I'll meet you. Whatever it takes."

Scott nodded. It wasn't enough, but it would have to do. Promises in the night, in a dark basement, and a few stolen moments of pleasure. It was more than most people had, and

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Scott was glad of it. Because of Daniel he had a reason to live. "I love you, Daniel. Forever." He held him, and kissed him. Finally, they stood at the top of the stairs, and Scott wrenched the nails out as he opened the door to let them out.

CHAPTER 22

The first day back was difficult, not so much because his body was sore. He'd spent a good part of his life sore for one reason or another, only in different places. But he struggled with distraction. For Daniel, that didn't impact his performance as much as it might have some others, but he was definitely off his game.

After that it got easier again. He still thought about Scott, but he pushed it aside when he needed to. He had to stay alive for Scott, and he was able to turn his mind off and fight and kill and defend people just as he always had.

For Scott, the loneliness was the hardest thing. To feel a real, human touch after all these years, then not be able to be with Daniel ... this reawakened feelings he'd forgotten he had. After over a hundred years of being a vampire, he'd thought he was over such things as needing a warm body next to him. And though he'd never been in love before, he knew what he felt for Daniel was real. What he didn't know was how they could be together.

He kept an eye on Morgan, and she in turn kept an eye on him. The night and day he'd spent away annoyed her, and the fact that he wouldn't tell her what was going on made her angry. Scott wouldn't have cared, except that he couldn't get away from her. He couldn't risk her following him to Daniel's apartment.

She was still stirring up trouble, rounding up as many vampires as she could get to listen to her. She was intent on

mounting a full-scale war on the hunters, and she was busy convincing everyone she could reach that they needed to strike hard, and soon.

Scott stayed in the background. The vampires never had a leader; their very nature made them mostly solitary. But Morgan was trying her best to become their leader. She was beautiful and charismatic and very strong, and Scott worried that she really could organize the vamps.

When Morgan was alone for a moment, Scott dragged her off into an empty room. She smiled and pushed Scott up against the wall, pressing against him as much as possible. "You finally came to your senses, Scott?" she purred.

"No," he snarled with thinly veiled disgust, pushing her off him. "I want to know what the fuck you're doing."

"Trying to get you to fuck me," she laughed, pushing back so hard that Scott's head slammed back against the wall, cracking the plaster. "Or did that part of you stop working?" she inquired sweetly, advancing and reaching for Scott's crotch.

"Touch me and I'll break your arm," Scott growled. He didn't want her to touch him ever again. "Why are you trying to organize an attack on the hunters? We'll be wiped out."

Morgan laughed delicately, and said, "A few of the slow and weak, maybe. But we'll get rid of them once and for all."

"You're overconfident, Morgan. Why are you here doing this, instead of back in England?" demanded Scott.

Morgan shrugged and said, "The weather is nicer here."

But Scott could tell when Morgan was being evasive. "Tell the truth," he said softly.

"I will if you tell me where you disappear to every few days," Morgan shot back.

"Fuck off," snarled Scott.

"I thought so," Morgan answered, smiling. "I'll find out anyway."

"What I do ceased to be your business years ago," replied Scott, trying not to give anything away.

"And what I do isn't your business either, Scott," she said. "You just go off and play the loner, you do it so well. It's not like you care about any of the vampires here."

"And you do? You're just going to use them as cannon fodder in your little war," he answered.

Morgan laughed again. "Oh, it won't be little," she promised. "And I'm going to take out Morningstar myself. Once I rip out his throat, the rest of them will be easy. And we won't have to be careful any more."

Scott stormed out, but he didn't dare go to Daniel. He had to see him, though, and soon. He decided to get him a message at work. It would be tricky. But safer than leading Morgan right to Daniel.

CHAPTER 23

The next evening when Daniel opened his locker at the armory, he found a note. He glanced around, careful that no one was observing, and tore it open.

I need to see you, but it's not safe for me to come to your place. Meet me tomorrow night, in the basement of the movie theater on Highland. As early as you can.

S.

A few things went rapidly through his head. How had Scott gotten a note into his locker? Why wasn't his apartment safe? But most of all, he felt that instant surge of lust and anticipation. He would have to get the night off again, but that was no problem. His superiors were more than happy to let him go in the interest of keeping him away from burnout.

He folded the note and slipped it in his pocket, then geared up to head out into the night. Again, he managed to block all thoughts of it from his mind in the interest of self-preservation. It was a skill he'd always had, to focus exclusively on one thing when he had to. He wasn't sure if that was responsible for his longevity, but it probably had something to do with it.

At the end of the night he reported in, and gave notice that he would be taking the following night off. He went straight to bed when he got home, wanting to wake up as early as possible. Sleeping wasn't quite as easy to focus on, but he managed, and when he awoke just after four in the afternoon, he bathed, put on the closest thing he had to

decent clothes, a pair of black slacks and a tight black T-shirt, and packed up the wine and some food, the oil, some candles and a couple of blankets in a backpack. He found the theater easily enough, and it was still daylight, so he could explore the place thoroughly in safety. He located the exits, and then went to the basement.

With the remaining time before sunset, he found an old broom and tidied up a little by candlelight. He found a row of old theater chairs and pulled them to the center of the room, laying out the wine, some cheese and a loaf of bread on the blanket on the floor, and waited for Scott to arrive.

Morgan was so wrapped up in her plans, and no doubt pissed off at Scott for rejecting her, so he found it relatively easy to leave without her noticing. He hoped that Daniel had found his note; he was amused at how easy it was to get into the hunter's base. They didn't expect to have a vampire come there, that was clear. He was also glad that Morgan didn't know how easy it was. Though, they'd no doubt be more observant of a group of vampires.

Scott again slipped out before Morgan or any of the other vamps awoke. He'd found that at dusk he could go out while the sky was still light. As long as the sun was below the horizon. If it was cloudy, he could risk it even sooner. It was uncomfortable, though, as if he couldn't get enough air to breathe. But it was worth it, to be able to be sure that he wasn't followed.

He made his way across town toward the abandoned theater. It had once been a famous place, and Scott remembered visiting when he was human. Now, it was little

more than an abandoned husk; the human race had recovered somewhat but it would be a long time, if ever, before such things as entertainment came back.

The place had been built long ago, though, when construction standards were higher, and it had managed to withstand the ravages of time. Scott slipped in and made his way down to the basement. He'd hid out here once, before finding other vampires, but the building wasn't really shielded well enough for younger vamps. It would do for tonight.

He moved to the basement door, and smiled as he sensed movement inside. He went down the stairs, after securing the door as best he could. He didn't bother to be quiet. He didn't want to startle Daniel.

Daniel heard Scott coming, and he smoothed his hair back a little nervously. It was strangely like a date, and he wanted everything to be perfect. He wanted to show Scott how much he'd missed him, and how eager he was to be with him. He stood by one of the beams that made up the building's support, leaning his shoulder against it with his hands stuffed down in his pockets, trying to look casual. The light from the candles cast everything in a warmer, more romantic light than one would normally think of an unused basement, and he watched the door to the stairs expectantly.

Scott opened the door and smiled. There was Daniel, waiting for him. All doubts fled, and all Scott could think of was how gorgeous Daniel was and how much he needed him. He glanced around, and realized how much trouble Daniel had gone to, to make this nice for him. "Hello," he said softly, making his way over to his lover. He slipped off his coat,

leaving him in just black vinyl pants and boots, and pulled Daniel against him. "I missed you." Then he kissed him, passion and need and lust all poured into it.

Daniel melted against Scott, sliding his arms around his neck and leaning against him. He felt starved for him suddenly, and all the aching frustrated desire of the past week that he'd suppressed so vigilantly rushed over him all at once. He'd started getting hard when he heard the footsteps on the stairs and now that he was in Scott's arms he was fully aroused. After several long moments he pulled back from the kiss to take a breath. "Hi. I missed you a little, too," he whispered.

Scott smiled down at him. "Just a little?" he asked, sliding his hands down Daniel's back, feeling the curve of his body. He felt Daniel's hardness and his body responded in kind. He'd been half hard most of the way over himself. Never had he needed to touch someone so much. "You look incredible," he added. It was more than the lighting or his need that colored his perception of Daniel. The man was beautiful. He knew they needed to talk, but it could wait just a little while.

"Mmmaybe a little more than a little," he purred, smiling up at Scott. He wriggled against him, fitting their bodies more tightly together. "It's not like I was thinking about you every day, or sleeping with the pillow you slept on or anything like that," he said. He ran his fingers over the back of Scott's neck, leaning up to gently nibble at his bottom lip.

Scott moaned softly, both from Daniel's words and actions. "I thought about you, too," he admitted. "All the time." He was torn by conflicting feelings of lust and love, but with

Daniel in his arms it all blended perfectly. He slid his hand under Daniel's shirt, caressing his smooth skin. "I love you," he breathed.

"I love you, too, Scott," he whispered against his lips. He stroked his tongue against them lightly and teasingly. "It was hell being separated from you." He had planned to sit and talk with Scott, maybe have some wine, have a nice relaxing evening and then make love. But now that Scott was standing right in front of him, he felt like he needed him desperately.

"Worse than hell," agreed Scott, unable to keep his hands from drifting down, over the curve of Daniel's lovely ass. "I dreamed of you, of kissing you and taking you...." His lust was starting to overcome him now, and though he hadn't come here with the intent of making love to Daniel, he'd certainly hoped. "God, want you so much, my Daniel..."

Daniel moaned softly. "Want you, too," he whispered. He kissed Scott again, deep and demanding, almost daring him to take control. He loved the feeling of Scott's hands on his ass, and he wished they were both naked right at that moment.

Scott was panting when the kiss broke, and he knew he couldn't wait any longer to touch him. He pushed up Daniel's shirt and said, roughly, "Off." He needed to get his hands on Daniel's skin. All of it. "Need you naked in my arms, baby," he whispered. He'd never felt such need, even when he was human.

Daniel whimpered and raised his arms to pull his T-shirt off quickly. He opened his jeans and slid them down his slim hips without hesitation, aching for the feel of Scott touching him.

His heart was pounding, and he couldn't wait either. It seemed as if they were both equally hungry for other, which only made it sweeter.

The way that Daniel stripped for him made Scott even hotter. He pulled Daniel back into his arms and ran his hands all over his lover's body, possessively. "Mine," he growled, running his fingers down the cleft of Daniel's ass. "Every inch of you, Daniel. Mine." He was rock hard, and starting to ache again.

Daniel was panting hard. "Yes ... yours. I belong to you, Scott. I'd do anything for you. Please." He whimpered and pressed his body up against Scott's. The fact that the other man was still partially clothed made it all seem that much more submissive. And hot. "Please take me."

"I will," promised Scott, still touching Daniel everywhere he could reach. He wanted his lover to feel owned. "Gonna take you hard and fast." Maybe someday they could make slow sweet love, but just now they were too desperate. "Take my pants and boots off," he said, almost growling. Daniel just made him feel so dominant.

Daniel knelt in front of Scott, looking up at him as he unbuttoned the front of his pants. He tugged them down his firm legs, then pulled off each boot before removing the pants all together. He didn't stand right away, just looked up at Scott questioningly, his parted lips only a few inches from Scott's erect cock.

Scott looked down at Daniel. The other man looked gorgeous on his knees, and he was sorely tempted to tell Daniel to suck him, but he also wanted to bury himself in him.

He took a handful of Daniel's hair and pulled his head back, just savoring the feeling.

Daniel gasped and let his head fall back, automatically reaching for Scott's hips for balance. He loved the feeling of Scott's hands in his hair, gentle, rough, it made no difference. He nibbled on his bottom lip. "Tell me what you want me to do," he whispered.

"Be mine forever," Scott breathed, almost too softly to hear, then he pulled so Daniel had to stand up. "Tell me you brought oil," he said, almost pleadingly. He wanted to be sure before they went farther. He didn't want to hurt Daniel too much.

Daniel blushed bright pink. "Yes," he said softly. He wasn't sure he'd heard the first thing Scott had said clearly, but if he'd heard correctly, surely Scott would say it again eventually. For now he needed his touch. Tender words could wait until after. "I brought the oil because I wanted you to take me."

That made Scott groan. "I like that, like you're my own personal whore," he said. He didn't think Daniel was a whore, of course, but he suspected the other man wouldn't mind it. "All ready for me."

Something about the term sent a shiver of pure lust through him. He didn't think Scott really thought that of him, but it was part of the game. Part of the amazing heat between them. "So ready," he whispered. "Want you so badly."

"I'm so ready for you," groaned Scott, then looked around. "Get the oil, and then go bend over, leaning against the wall,

legs spread for me," he whispered. "Need to be inside you, Daniel, need it so bad." Nothing else mattered right now except the two of them.

Daniel did as he was told. He retrieved the small bottle of oil from his backpack and bent over, leaning one arm against the wall, resting his forehead against it. He spread his legs wide apart, exposing himself completely for Scott, eager to please him, hungry for his touch, for his cock to impale him.

Scott just watched, almost panting, as Daniel waited for him. He walked up behind him, ran a hand down his lover's back, and rocked against him. His cock lined up with the cleft of Daniel's ass and he moaned softly from need. "So beautiful," he whispered.

Daniel felt naughty and sexy and outrageously hard. He arched his back and pressed back against Scott. "I never thought I would want anyone like this. I couldn't even imagine it," he whispered.

"And I never imagined anyone as sexy and perfect as you, Daniel wanting me." Scott groaned as he took the bottle of oil from Daniel's hand. He slicked his cock, then dribbled some down his lover's ass. It was all he could do to keep from shoving inside him right away.

Daniel moaned, raking his hair back off his forehead and across his back with trembling fingers. "Want you so much. Please ... please fuck me, Scott. Need to feel you inside me. You're all I've ever wanted."

Scott slid a slick finger inside Daniel, but found him already slippery. "Did you prep yourself for me?" The idea of

Daniel wanting him that much, and not wanting to waste any time, was incredibly arousing.

"I thought ... it was such a long time, and I want you so badly, and we have so little time together..." He hoped Scott wasn't upset about it. He thought he might want it hard and fast the first time, like it had been before. And then they wouldn't be so desperate for each other and could take their time.

"You're so hot, Daniel," gasped Scott, almost losing control. "I love the idea of you all ready for me." He pressed his aching cock against his lover and whispered, "I've dreamt of this." He was almost was out of his mind for Daniel.

"Take me. Claim me. Oh, God, Scott, please..." He was crazy with desire for the other man and he strained to open himself even more for him. "My body belongs to you."

Scott whimpered at that; no one had ever come close to making him want, need this much. "Mine, all mine," he growled, and shoved forward, pushing his cock inside Daniel as fast as he dared. Claiming Daniel's body with his own, gasping for breath, Scott buried himself in Daniel.

Daniel nearly sobbed with relief at finally feeling Scott inside him. It was more forceful than even the last time, and it took a good deal of strength to stop himself from slamming into the wall. It was raw and brutal and perfect. "Yes, ohGodyes..." he moaned. "Feels so fucking good."

Scott thrust quickly, gripping Daniel's slim hips as he drove in and out. It was intense and so good he hoped he could last more than a few minutes. He reached out and grabbed a

handful of Daniel's long hair and pulled. "I love you," he gasped.

Daniel whimpered loudly, his head jerking back a little when Scott pulled on his hair. He meant to say that he loved him as well, but he was beyond coherent speech. He held on as Scott pounded into him, grunting between gasps of air, already so close to the edge.

"So ... good...." Scott gasped. "You're all mine, baby, feel my cock in you." Later they could be sweet and slow; he needed this now. He slammed into the smaller man, over and over, each time better than the last.

"Oh, God, Scott ... I ... I'm gonna..." His fingers curled into fists against the concrete wall, scratching his knuckles a little, but even that fleeting sting was almost unnoticeable. His body clamped down hard around Scott's cock.

"Come, Daniel, let go," urged Scott. His voice was a deep growl, he was so close himself. He held back his own release barely, waiting for his lover to climax. He kept pounding in, gripping Daniel's hips hard enough to bruise.

Daniel cried out, nearly losing his grip on the wall as his entire body reacted, legs shaking, muscles shuddering with the overwhelming release.

Daniel tightened around him, and Scott followed helplessly. He kept thrusting into Daniel as he filled him, chanting his name as the pleasure gripped him. He felt like it went on forever.

Still panting, Daniel pressed his forehead against the wall as the motion slowed, then stopped. He ached deliciously, feeling sated and sore at the same time. "I love you," he

murmured. He wanted to be in Scott's arms, though, curled around him as close as he could get.

Scott gathered Daniel into his arms and turned him around. He held him close, still panting, their naked bodies sheened with sweat. He glanced around; there was a makeshift bed of blankets and he led Daniel over to them.

Daniel sank down onto the blankets, tugging Scott down with him. He physically needed to be close to him, yearned for the touch of his skin. "That was amazing. It's ... it's always so much more than just sex. It's like, I feel like we're a part of each other. You're the part of me that I've been missing," he said quietly.

Scott said, "I know, Daniel. I can't go on without you." He sighed. Why did life have to be so unfair? Finally he'd found the love of his life, and they couldn't be together. Not easily.

Daniel settled himself against Scott's chest. "I'm yours. You don't have to go on without me," he said softly, still feeling that cozy, drugged bliss being with Scott always brought on.

Scott wished that were really true. But, he'd lived at least three times as long as Daniel, and he knew it wasn't going to be that easy. He'd outlive Daniel, even if he wasn't killed by a vampire. But he didn't say anything. He just held Daniel close, keeping him warm.

Daniel relaxed in Scott's embrace for long minutes, cuddling closer, kissing his neck and nuzzling him. "I want you to do me a favor," he said softly, when he finally spoke. "Stay away from Liberty Square for the next few days, okay? Just stay on the other side of town if you can."

Scott opened his eyes and said curiously, "Stay away? Why?" He was sure he hadn't heard of anything going on in that area. He'd been listening to Morgan's plans carefully. He looked down at Daniel.

"We're setting a trap. I don't want you to be involved. Please. Promise me you'll steer clear," he said quietly, looking up into Scott's eyes. The last thing he needed was to be distracted by the thought of Scott being in danger. If he knew for a fact that Scott was far away from the violence he knew he would fare better, and fewer lives would be lost needlessly.

Scott just gazed at Daniel. "You're setting a trap." His mind worked fast, considering. "Morgan is planning a full-scale attack. She's getting every vampire she can, to be involved." If she walked into the trap, he'd be rid of her once and for all. And she'd killed cruelly, needlessly. But many other vampires would lose their lives. Not that he felt any loyalty to them. But it did make him feel slightly guilty. He could help, but could he send others to their deaths?

"Scott, please promise me. I don't want you involved. I don't want your help. I don't want you to plant information. I don't want you to be anywhere near there. Please," he said, his soft tone growing a little desperate. Even if Scott's assistance would be valuable, he would never ask that of him, and he would never endanger him like that. "If something happened to you, I'd have no reason to go on."

Scott thought of Daniel in the midst of all those vampires, and he knew in that instant he'd kill every one of them to save Daniel. "And if something happened to you, I'd throw

myself onto a machete blade," he answered. "I can make sure she takes the bait." He also couldn't promise he'd stay away.

"No. Scott." He looked up into his lover's eyes. "Please. She'll hear about it easily enough, I'm sure. Please stay out of it. I don't want you there, and I don't want her to get suspicious of you." He shouldn't have told him. He just wanted to be sure Scott wouldn't be involved, but he supposed it was better at least that he knew it was happening. At least he would be on his guard. He was starting to realize he wasn't going to wring a promise from him. "You're going to be stubborn about this, aren't you?"

A small smile quirked Scott's mouth. "I've learned to be stubborn, Daniel. It's kept me, well, alive, for want of a better word." Most humans wouldn't think he was alive, though. He certainly felt alive. Especially when he was with Daniel. "I want this over with, and I want you to be safe," he said, knowing that wasn't what Daniel wanted to hear.

Daniel sighed again. "You'd better be careful. If you get yourself killed, I'll never speak to you again." He knew it was a rather half-hearted attempt at humor, but he didn't laugh. He buried his face in the crook of Scott's neck, breathing in the warm musk of his skin. "Please. I can't lose you," he whispered.

"You're not going to," said Scott. "I ... Morgan will probably insist I come along. If I refuse it will look suspicious, and she might not come." He wanted this over with. He had no idea how they would live, being on opposite sides of a war, but with Morgan gone it would settle down somewhat.

Daniel nodded. He knew that was probably true. Morgan's apparent attachment to Scott was something that he hadn't let himself think about much. In battle, any excess of emotion, even anger, was counterproductive. But now, having a day off, having no one to battle, it bothered him. "Has she ... does she ... try to ... get with you?" he asked, leaning back and looking into Scott's eyes again.

Scott closed his eyes, not wanting to get into this, but he wouldn't lie to his lover. "Yes," he admitted. "We used to be lovers, but not any more. I belong to you, Daniel. Please don't worry about that." He didn't want Daniel to be distracted by jealousy.

Daniel nodded. Deep down he didn't believe that Scott could settle for anything less than the electricity that passed between them every time they were together. "I wasn't worried, Scott. I trust you." His lips twitched a little. "If you hadn't noticed." The mark on his neck was still visible, but nearly healed. Still, few people would willingly offer up their neck to a vampire.

The sight of his marks on Daniel made Scott moan slightly. He leaned down and licked at the spot, and felt his body react to the memory. "I can give you more than anyone else, Daniel, you know that, and I only want you." He couldn't imagine anyone else making him feel like this. No one ever had. He knew his bite could bring pleasure as well as pain, but he'd never wanted to make anyone scream for him like he wanted Daniel.

"Well, I'm all yours, Scott, for as long as you want me," he murmured, tipping his head back as Scott licked his neck. He

remembered that moment so clearly, and he could feel his body stirring to life again already. "Oh God, that was so ... when you took me like that ... I want that again," he whispered.

"I want it, too," Scott whispered, breathing deep of Daniel's scent. "But I want to be sure you're up to it. You can't afford to be weak from blood loss." But God, he remembered how it felt to be connected like that, his cock deep inside Daniel and his teeth buried in his neck. As close as possible.

"Then you'd better do it soon so I have more time to recuperate," he whispered with a smile. He hadn't felt really any worse for it last time. He must have taken so little as to not make that much of a difference. But the feel of it still seared through Daniel's heart.

Daniel's eagerness made Scott's breath hitch. "Maybe you'd better have something to eat first," he said, tilting his head toward the food that Daniel had brought. "I don't want you passing out on me." He wanted Daniel now, too, but they had all night. He wanted the need to build up to a fever pitch again.

Daniel resisted the urge to say something sarcastic. He pulled away and sat up slowly. He opened the bottle of wine and passed it to Scott. He knew Scott didn't need anything but blood to sustain him. "You can still ... you can eat and drink if you want to, right?" he asked.

"Yes, I can," Scott said. "Though if I have too much, it makes me feel sick." He didn't usually bother any more, but he wanted to share this with Daniel. To pretend, if only for a

little while, that they were both human. They had no glasses, so he drank from the bottle, handing it back to Daniel. Alcohol had been one of his weaknesses when he was human, but it had no effect on him now. It still tasted good, though.

Daniel tore off a piece of bread and a small chunk of cheese and turned to Scott with a smile. He accepted the bottle, but pressed the small offering of food against Scott's lips. He realized he was the one that was supposed to be eating, but the idea of feeding his lover was too tempting to pass up.

Eyes fixed on Daniel's, Scott parted his lips to accept the food, sucking Daniel's fingers lightly as he did. He swallowed, and licked his lips, then reached for the food to do the same for Daniel.

Daniel opened his mouth obediently when Scott held out a piece of bread and cheese for him. He stroked his tongue against Scott's long fingers as they came near his mouth, then accepted the food, chewing it slowly and washing it down with a sip of wine. He ate another few pieces himself, trying to keep his strength up, as Scott had asked, even though he was hardly hungry. For food at least.

Scott watched with satisfaction as Daniel ate. He knew his lover needed to keep his strength up, especially with the big battle coming. If Daniel wasn't at his best, Scott would never forgive himself. Every other bite, he kissed Daniel, the taste of the food and wine mingled in their mouths.

It was slow and sensual and lovely, and Daniel was soon clinging to the kiss for longer and longer intervals. When he'd

finished one decent-sized piece of cheese, he slid his arms around Scott's neck, signaling the end of his meal.

Scott could feel the change in Daniel's demeanor, and knew the man didn't want any more food. His body responded, his half-arousal hardening fully at the mere thought of taking Daniel again. "You want something?" he purred unnecessarily.

"Mmhmm," he hummed, smiling. He hadn't smiled so much in years as he had in the short time that he'd been with Scott. He hadn't had much to be happy about. "Your cock and your teeth," he whispered, pressing Scott back against the blankets and lying partially on top of him.

Scott hissed with arousal as Daniel pressed him back, and though he could have easily resisted, he didn't. "Demanding human," he said, letting his fangs show. "You only want me for my body." He ran his hands down Daniel's naked back, scratching lightly.

"Well, we could do something else if you want, Scott," he said quietly, but with a smile in his voice. "I could take a nap and you could go skulk around looking scary. And sexy, of course. If I'd known you were going to get tired out so easily I could have brought a book." He rolled off of Scott, lying next to him, acting as if he was quite content to doze off instead of be ravaged. He even managed a reasonably convincing yawn.

Scott smirked. Then, moving faster than most humans could follow, he rolled, ending up on top of Daniel, grabbing his hands and pinning them above his head. He bared his fangs and growled, "I think not, baby. I'm going to have my

wicked way with you." He was rock hard again, and Daniel felt perfect under him.

Daniel was panting instantly. The way Scott was holding down his hands sent a jolt straight to his cock. "Hey, I was only trying to make you happy," he said. He wriggled beneath Scott's body until he could pull his knees up around Scott's hips. "But you can have your wicked way if you insist," he said with a sultry smile.

"I do insist," Scott said, pressing Daniel more firmly to the ground. "Struggle if you want, it makes no difference, you're all mine," he purred, knowing Daniel liked it when he took charge. His cock, pressed against Daniel's body, throbbed, ready.

Daniel whimpered. "Do you want me to struggle, Scott?" he asked, his voice a silky purr. It might be fun to play at resisting. He'd do anything for Scott. Everything.

Stifling a moan, Scott nodded silently, not even trusting his voice. The struggle excited him even more. The very idea of it made him breathe faster.

Daniel gasped a little, excited by the idea, himself. He tugged experimentally at his wrists. Scott's grip was firm, as he knew it would be. He pulled harder. It would be enough force to break away from an average man, and he writhed underneath him as if he was really trying to get free, moaning at the delicious pressure of Scott's body against him.

There was no way Daniel could get away; Scott's grip was like iron and he was far stronger than any human. He loved the way Daniel struggled, though, and it made him even more

aroused. "You're mine, all mine, I can do whatever I want to you," he breathed.

"What are you going to do?" he whispered, still struggling. "Are you going to use me? Like a whore?" He was panting and the game was only making him hotter. He was half-crazed to feel Scott taking him again.

"Yes, like my own little whore, Daniel," groaned Scott. "Use you for my pleasure, hard and fast." He shifted so that his cock slid almost into position. Daniel was still slick and ready from the last time. "Beg for mercy."

Daniel moaned. "Oh, God ... please don't hurt me. Please, use me however you want, but..." It was no use. He wanted to hurt. He loved the way it felt when it was rough and brutal. "Please..."

Without warning, Scott thrust up into Daniel's body, at the same time dipping his head to bite at his nipples. He groaned deeply as he was surrounded by the tight heat of his lover's body. "Mine," he gasped. "All. Fucking. Mine."

Daniel nearly screamed at the sudden invasion. "Fuck! Yes ... all ... yours." He stopped struggling then, wrapping his legs around Scott's body, pulling them high around his waist.

The game abandoned, Scott drove in and out of Daniel desperately. He still kept Daniel pinned, though, as he pounded into him. "Give me your neck," he ordered, already so close.

Daniel tipped his head back, exposing the long pale column of his throat. The place where Scott had bitten him before wasn't much more than a fading bruise now, with two healing

punctures in the middle. "All yours," he murmured again. "Every part of me belongs to you."

Scott leaned down and licked the other side of Daniel's neck. He didn't want to bite the same spot. "You want this, baby, want me to bite you?" he asked, driving hard into him. He knew Daniel wanted it, he just needed to hear it.

He was trembling already, so close to the edge. "Yes. Fuck yes. Bite me, Scott, please. Makes me feel completely yours."

"You are mine, Daniel," growled Scott, pressing his fangs against Daniel's neck but not breaking the skin. He still pounded hard into him. So close...

Daniel tipped his head even farther to the side, arms stretched over his head, impaled on Scott's cock, completely helpless. "Love you," he rasped. He was trembling and vulnerable and teetering on the edge, aching to feel that incredible rush that he knew was coming.

And Scott gave it to him, biting down as he thrust in, gasping as Daniel's blood flowed over his tongue and his body yielded to him. Incredible, magnified pleasure washed over him, as if he could feel Daniel's ecstasy as well as his own, and he kept pounding into his lover as he drank from him. The two pleasures of his life, combined into one incredible moment, with the man he loved...

Daniel let out a lusty scream, pushed past the edge of his control as he came hard. It seemed to go on forever, and he was drowning in an abyss of sensation, while at the same time his mind seemed focused to a pinpoint on Scott. He filled up Daniel's field of vision, and his entire physical being felt possessed by his lover. Finally, he was moaning his name

uncontrollably as indescribable release shuddered through his small frame.

Scott had never known anyone like Daniel, so strong yet so willing to surrender to him. He rode out Daniel's climax, never slowing down, wanting to give his lover every drop of ecstasy possible. Only then did he let himself come, removing his mouth from Daniel's neck so he didn't accidentally take too much. He made sure his eyes were open wide, so he could see the beautiful man under him as he thrust once more, then stilled as he gave in. He was quieter than Daniel, but no less enthralled, and he came hard and long and he never wanted it to end.

Daniel stared up at Scott, still panting hard. A thin trickle of blood still oozed from his neck, and wisps of black hair clung wetly to his temples. "Love you," he whispered again. He wanted to say more, but no words could possibly convey all that he was feeling. Except just those two. Love. You. The yearning to be with Scott always was soul deep and only the afterglow kept him from the despair of their situation.

Scott almost collapsed then, so drunk on blood and passion and love, and he kissed Daniel desperately. He poured all his love and emotion and need into the kiss, and when he finally pulled back he was panting. "Love you, Daniel, forever," he promised.

Daniel stroked Scott's back gently, feeling a little breathless again from the deep, passionate kiss. "When can we be together again, do you think?" he asked softly. Less than once a week and he was going to feel extremely deprived.

"That depends on how it goes," Scott said, reminded again of the upcoming battle. "And how soon." He sighed and rolled off Daniel to lie next to him. The best that could happen would be that he'd be rid of Morgan forever. It was too much to hope for.

Daniel nodded, curling around Scott's body. "Well, that's incentive to do it as quickly as possible, at least," he said quietly, smiling a little. He wanted it over with, too. "Being separated for long periods of time is quickly becoming not an option." He nuzzled into Scott's neck.

Scott nodded as he held Daniel close. This was wonderful, but he knew they were living on borrowed time. Even if Daniel survived this battle, there would be others. Someday he would lose his love. He couldn't bear to think of it. There was only one way to resolve that, and that was one thing Daniel would never want. He sighed, and kissed Daniel. This would have to be enough.

Daniel dozed off for a few minutes, sleepy and content and warm. He'd lived his entire life thinking of the future as no further than next week. To make plans in his profession was foolishness. He'd seen too many lives lost in their prime to imagine he would be any different. But he was different. And now that he had something he wanted to live for, he'd been trying to figure out what it was that had allowed him to live so much longer than everyone else.

Scott let Daniel doze, content to watch over him as he slept. He wasn't sure what the future held for them, if anything, but at least they had these moments. It wasn't

much, but compared to what his life had been like before, he was grateful for it.

When Daniel awoke, they made love again. They took their time, and spoke little, both feeling that more words would ruin it. It was slower and gentler than any time before, as if they both knew that it could be the last time, and they wanted it to last.

When morning came, they both slept, sated and happy for the moment.

* * * *

When the sun set again, Scott knew he had to leave. He kissed Daniel goodbye and went back to the building the vampires called home. He knew something big was up when Morgan didn't even bother to berate him for being absent.

She was standing on a table in the middle of the biggest room, and at least thirty vampires surrounded her. She was telling them that she'd heard a rumor of a big party the humans would be having. Outdoors. At night.

"It's one of their silly holidays, apparently. They're going to gather and honor the past or something equally ridiculous," she was saying as Scott entered. "They'll be in Liberty Square. They'll be easy picking, and once we start to slaughter them, the hunters will arrive." She paused, catching sight of Scott and smirking. He ignored her, and she went on. "But what they won't know is that only a few of us will actually be visible. The rest of you will be hiding, to catch them unaware. By the time the rest of the hunters get there,

it will be too late." Morgan seemed to think she had it all figured out.

Scott sighed; clearly he wouldn't have to entice Morgan to take the bait, she was doing it all on her own. But he was also sure that if he stayed away, she'd become even more suspicious. Though even Morgan with her devious mind would never guess Scott's real deception.

CHAPTER 24

After his day off, Daniel was ready to meet the challenge. Ever since he'd learned about Morgan and her designs on wiping out the hunters, plans were set in motion. Hunters from neighboring cities had been called in for the ruse. They were en route, expected in just a day or two. Some had already arrived.

Daniel was working on training an unprecedented number of new recruits. He was ruthless with them, because he knew the situation was desperate and they had to be ready if they were going to survive it.

Nearly every attendee of the 'celebration' was going to be a hunter. The few civilians who would attend were volunteers, a handful of people who were terminally ill or had simply lost too many loved ones to care to live any longer. They were willing to give their lives for the cause of protecting their fellow man, and Daniel's respect for them was overwhelming. Even at that, they were to be given some means to protect themselves. Knives, sharpened stakes, anything that could be gathered together in the arsenal.

The hunters masquerading as civilians were outfitted with smaller, more easily concealed crossbows, which were nonetheless just as deadly. Their only drawback was in shortened range. In normal battle a few yards could mean the difference between life and death, but they were hoping that the confusion and chaos would work in their favor.

Either way, many would die. Daniel only hoped it was more of them. Except for Scott. But at least he was forewarned.

He couldn't think of that or he would lose his resolve. He pushed it aside. Scott would be all right, and things would be easier afterwards. He clung to that, and carried on.

* * * *

With time running short, Scott knew he couldn't risk seeing Daniel again. He knew both sides of the plans now, so he was as informed as he was ever going to be. The hardest part was going to be standing aside and letting it happen. He'd promised Daniel he'd stay out of it. Though if his lover was in danger, he didn't know what he'd do.

Morgan was so confident it made Scott want to scream; but he didn't dare tip his hand in the slightest. He ached for Daniel, but didn't stray far from the lair. He knew Daniel was working hard on his preparations and he didn't need distraction. At least with the upcoming battle to focus on, Morgan left Scott mostly alone.

Scouts came back with reports that the square was being decorated and readied. The vampires gathered, and waited. Scott had never seen so many of them in one place.

CHAPTER 25

On the day of the deception, Daniel was unable to sleep. He drifted in and out for a few hours, but finally he realized it was useless. There was too much to do, too much to think about. He was never going to be able to settle his mind enough for sleep, so he headed for the armory around noon.

He wasn't the only one unable to sleep, but for the most part, the offices were deserted. A temporary dormitory had been set up in the room they used as an infirmary for those who had traveled from out of town. Every luxury they could afford was lavished on their brothers coming to their aid.

That meant that there was plenty of coffee for a change. Daniel helped himself to a cup, a comfortable chair, and reviewed the plans for the hundredth time as he waited. By three, people started to arrive. Dozens of hunters, some old—relatively speaking—some new. Daniel supervised the assignment of weapons for a while, watching as the counterfeit revelers headed out for the walk to Liberty Square.

Everything was going according to plan. So why did he have a feeling of dread?

When the Commander and his assistants finally arrived to take over handing out weapons, Daniel got his own crossbow and machete, and headed out. He meant to conceal himself nearby until the attack began. It was still light out by the time he arrived, so he took his time canvassing the area, trying to gauge where the vampires would arrive from in the largest

numbers. Some hunters had already positioned themselves in trees, and Daniel thought perhaps that wasn't a bad idea for the first wave. He found a likely spot and climbed up, hugging a high branch and finding good enough balance to have both hands free to aim.

They waited for the sun to set. At dusk, the celebration began. Barrels and barrels of water labeled as gin lined the square, and hunters and civilians alike took a few minutes to actually enjoy pretending to be drunk. Nonetheless, every last one of them was as sober as a judge, at least Daniel hoped so.

CHAPTER 26

If it wasn't for the fact that he needed to be sure Daniel was all right, Scott would have disappeared before the big night. He couldn't stand the self-absorbed overconfidence of the vampires. They were immortal, and thought nothing could hurt them. They joked about having a contest for who killed the most humans tonight. He was disgusted.

But what worried him the most was that Morgan was actually quiet tonight. She was watching everyone, a small smile on her face. Scott supposed she was proud of herself; she'd arranged this. He almost felt a twinge of pity for the vampires who would die tonight, but it wasn't as if a single one of them would break a nail to save him. Vampires were notoriously selfish, and were only working together tonight because Morgan had convinced them that they could get rid of the hunters this way. Surely there would be many of them assigned to guard the people, and more would come when the attack was reported.

Both sides were trying to set the other up, and Scott knew how it would probably end. He just needed to stay out of the way once the action started. His only purpose was to protect Daniel.

He looked up as Morgan finally strolled over, decked out in a black, clingy outfit that made her look every inch a vampire. "So," she purred, standing in front of him. "Are you coming or not? Maybe you just want to watch. It seems all you're capable of these days."

Scott ignored the insult, and stood up, looming over her. "Yeah, I'm coming." He didn't say more. Let her figure out why he'd be there. She'd never guess the real reason.

Morgan looked up at him now, smirking. "This is going to be a big night for us, Scott," she purred. "We're going to wipe out the hunters, once and for all."

Scott tried to look impassive. "You seem awfully confident."

Morgan sneered. "There has never been this large a gathering of vampires. Some nearly as old as we are. They don't stand a chance."

Scott couldn't help it. "I don't know, the hunters have been pretty lucky lately."

"Their luck is about to run out," Morgan snapped, annoyed. "Because I'm going to take out Morningstar. That's my only purpose tonight. Let the rest feed on the humans. I'm only after one."

Scott had been expecting that, but it still made his blood run cold. He affected a nonchalant attitude, and shrugged. "He might not even show up."

"Of course he will," replied Morgan. "He won't pass up an opportunity to put more notches on his machete. Filthy human," she spat.

Before Scott could answer, Morgan called out, "Everyone! Time to go! Let's go wipe them out!"

A ragged cheer went up, and Scott held back a growl. This was it.

* * * *

It seemed they'd been waiting hours, although it wasn't really that long. When they finally arrived, the melee began. The initial plan was for those stationed in trees to support those on the ground. Vampires seemed to come from everywhere at once, but the hunters still outnumbered them.

The moment the attacks began, Daniel started firing. All his years of experience, and his familiarity with the hunters made it easy for him to pick out the enemy. And that same experience gave him unparalleled accuracy. He'd skewered six vampires before he even came down from the tree. The hunters on the ground dispatched the heads.

He checked his immediate vicinity carefully before dropping to the ground in a wary crouch, and it was perfect timing. A vampire had just spotted him a moment before and would have attacked him in the tree if he'd waited. But he was able to pivot and shoot up at it before it had a chance to pursue. As the creature fell to the ground he beheaded it with one clean slice.

He dashed to the edge of the square, seeking higher ground. He climbed up on the base of a statue, solid concrete at his back, and began firing into the crowd again, pinpointing another half dozen vampires in rapid succession. He caught a flash from the corner of his eye and raised his machete just in time to remove another head of a vampire intent on removing him from his convenient perch. He had to shoot him through the heart second. He hated it when they got that close.

The battle raged, and it seemed like their plan was working. Some hunters fell, but by and large it appeared that the vampires were expecting no resistance. Obviously they

weren't expecting to encounter so many hunters. Daniel continued firing, praying that Scott had the sense to stay out of the way. He barely had time to focus his eyes on them before he pulled the trigger. But something told him that if he saw Scott he'd be able to stop himself.

Three vampires combined their efforts to try to get him down, advancing on him in a small pack. He managed to shoot one and behead another simultaneously, and just barely evade the third as he reloaded, climbing higher on the statue. He slipped and nearly fell as he felt a hand clamp on his ankle and yank. As teeth punctured his skin he fired at close range straight through the creature's sinus cavity, and it dropped back with a scream.

But it had shaken Daniel's edge. He wasn't crippled. He wasn't weakened. But he was a little freaked. Other than Scott, that was the closest any of them had ever come. He finished off the three, and jumped down to join the crowd, taking them out one at a time. Shoot, decapitate, reload, repeat. Over and over again. He paid no attention to his fallen comrades, although he did provide cover for those retrieving the wounded. He just attacked endlessly, immune to the ache in his muscles and the blood drenching his clothes.

Scott had hung back as the vampires swarmed the square. He knew what to expect, but he was stunned by the sheer number of hunters. He hadn't known there were that many in the country. He'd found a place on the roof of a neighboring building; he wanted to be closer but he knew there would be perimeter guards posted. He wasn't trying to kill anyone, so he was able to move silently and nearly invisibly.

His main objective, of course, was to spot Daniel, but that was nearly impossible. He knew Daniel wore black when on patrol, and with his long hair tied back, Scott was having a hard time spotting his lover. He knew he was down there, though.

Easier to spot was Morgan; he could see her blonde hair as she stalked the outside of the crowd, clearly looking for the same person Scott was. She paused occasionally to join in the fight, but never for long. Daniel seemed to be out of sight, deliberately. That was good.

Daniel pressed on, and the battle was definitely going their way. However, it was far from over. The vampires seemed to keep coming. For every two he mowed down another two would be waiting. It was like there were more hanging back, waiting to join the battle. If they'd all come at once perhaps they could have won, but although the hunters were tiring, they were clearly inspired by their success.

More and more, however, he felt like a target. Vampires would pass by wounded, easy kills to pursue him in threes and fours. He felt that he was being pushed further back to the edges of the mob. There were hunters free to help him, though, so he was never completely overwhelmed. He'd lost count of how many he'd killed.

Then there was the problem of so many new hunters among them. Some fell from the arrows of their comrades gone astray, and they were easy pickings for the creatures. Daniel very nearly fell victim to that himself, but he moved at the last moment. In the unending motion, his hair eventually

worked its way free of the tie, and swirled around his shoulders as he moved.

And still he was being driven back to the edges. Back towards the cover of the trees. The progress was slow, but inexorable. For each yard of ground they pushed him back he regained a foot, and so it was, back and forth and back again.

Scott had been watching Morgan, thinking that was the key to making sure Daniel was safe. He had to trust that his lover could handle any of the other younger vampires. It was odd to think of him as his lover now, but he couldn't think any other way. If Daniel died, he'd step in front of a crossbow. There would be no point to living on.

Still, there was no sign of Daniel. He saw Morgan hanging back, watching something that seemed to be going on right below him. He moved closer to the edge of the roof, just in time to see a swirl of black hair and a flashing blade that could only belong to Daniel. He was surrounded by vampires, and though he seemed to be doing well, and there were other hunters nearby, from this vantage point it was clear what was going on. Morgan was using the other vampires to isolate Morningstar, so she'd have time to toy with her prey. That was the way she was. Scott was sure she was already concocting the stories she'd tell after the battle was over, of how the dreaded hunter begged for mercy before she ripped his throat out.

Now the vampires surrounding Daniel were almost out of sight, out of the square, and Scott needed to follow. He saw Morgan closing in, and he knew time was running out.

Just then, there was the smallest sound behind him. Scott dropped, rolling, and a crossbow arrow thunked into the wall behind him. He turned to see a tall, thin boy aiming at him on the ground.

"Time to die, scum," the boy said, his too-young face set in a furious scowl. He fired at Scott's chest, and he moved, but not fast enough. He had a momentary flash, wondering if Daniel had trained this boy before the arrow tore into his thigh.

"Fuck," he hissed, but he couldn't wait. The boy, apparently thinking he'd wounded the vampire more seriously than he had, moved in for the kill, machete swinging.

But Scott wasn't there. The arrow in his leg hurt like a son of a bitch, but he could still move, and he'd jumped out of the way in an instant, grabbing the discarded crossbow and hitting the boy on the back of the neck with it.

The boy slumped to the ground, unconscious, but he would live. Scott snarled and jumped off the edge of the roof. There was no time to pull the arrow out. He needed to get to Daniel.

Two vampires took arrows in the back and Daniel didn't wait to see if anyone was close enough to finish them off. Luckily they were about the same height and he swung the machete, toppling them both in one blow. He didn't have time to be impressed with himself, however, as number three and four were already bearing down on him. Arrow, machete, arrow, machete, pause, reload, arrow, machete, and on it went.

The other hunters who'd been trying to draw some of the vampires off of him were flanked suddenly, just as Daniel was

pressed further back, just out of view of the rest of the battle. Down a side street. He couldn't even spare a moment's attention to see if anyone was behind him, and he felt a sickening lurch in his stomach.

Help wasn't coming. Help was all on the other side of the four ... no five now ... vampires that were advancing on him. He took down one, but to get close enough to cleave his head from his body would have meant getting too close to the others. He reloaded and shot at the next closest one, then the next, and the next, and finally he had a little room to wield the heavy blade.

But there were more behind the bodies, young ones, and with all the foolishness of overconfidence, but there were still many of them, and he was alone. At best he could reasonably handle three or four at once, but their numbers increased the further back he was pushed. For every three he took down, three more were right behind him.

He was going to die, he realized suddenly. It didn't stop him, though. He would take down as many of them as he could manage. If only it weren't suddenly so eerily quiet away from the thundering crowd of battle.

When Scott made it down to street level, it was clear the fight had moved on from here. Only bodies, both human and vampire, littered the streets. He could hear fighting, but in the distance. Where had Daniel gone? He looked around frantically, trying to pinpoint the sounds, but they echoed off of the tall buildings that surrounded the square, and even Scott's sensitive hearing wasn't equal to the task. He didn't see Morgan either, though he'd been sure she was just below

him. He moved off toward a side street, to see if he could see anyone.

* * * *

Daniel was panting from exertion as he chopped down another vampire. Then, suddenly, they stopped coming, and he looked up. The one Scott had called Morgan was advancing on him and the others were backing away a little.

He reached for an arrow, only to find that there were none left. The crossbow clattered to the ground and he held the machete out in front of him with both hands, centering his footing. He stared at her evenly. This was the one he had to kill. For Scott.

"I can still kill you, you know," he said, his deceptively gentle voice in stark contrast to the bodies littering the ground around him. If nothing else, he was grateful for a pause to catch his breath.

"You can try," Morgan replied, smiling appraisingly. "But I must have the wrong person. You can't possibly be Morningstar. You're not very impressive." The other vampires laughed nervously. They'd seen what the hunter could do. So had Morgan, but up close he just looked so ... unthreatening. She still stayed out of range of the machete, though.

Daniel smirked. He'd never minded being underestimated. He'd rather he was, actually. But he knew she knew who he was. "If I'm not Morningstar then it's hardly worth it for you to waste your time with me," he said, arching an eyebrow.

"Ah, the little human wants to play games," she purred, hands on her hips. "Well, I like to play games, too. Ones that

mean you take a long time to die." She didn't even glance back as she said, "Leave us. Go help clean up. I wish to take my time with this one."

The other vampires didn't question, just faded off into the night as if they'd never been there. Morgan just stood there and smiled.

The odds were much, much better this way. Regardless of how difficult Morgan was going to be to kill, she was a damn sight easier without another dozen of them at her back. "So you like to play with your food? You seem a little old for that, don't you think?" he said, smirking again. The longer he kept her talking the more rested he'd be when he tried her.

He just hoped Scott was far away.

"I am older than you know, little man," Morgan said, frowning. "And you are not my food, you are my enemy. Why should I not torture you like you kill my kind?"

"I wouldn't kill your kind if they didn't kill my kind first, ma'am," he said. She looked just vain enough for the term to irritate her. "So, your speed against my reflexes, then? I've killed more of your kind this day than you likely kill in the span of a month. Perhaps more. So, with all due respect..." He took a deep breath, gathering his strength. "Bring it."

It did irritate her, a crease appearing in her lovely forehead. "Not just my speed, human. My strength as well. Surely you of all people know the strength of a vampire." She took a step closer. "Though perhaps this is the closest you've ever been to one that's still alive, since your crossbows work so well?"

Daniel paled a little, thoughts of Scott intruding on him when they were least wanted. Oh, he knew their strength all right. "I know you're strong. Actually, I wouldn't be at all surprised if you killed me. Although you can be sure I'll do my best to return the favor." He smiled politely at her. She was pathetically easy to taunt.

Morgan smiled, baring sharp fangs. "You're not afraid of death, then? Perhaps that is your secret, Morningstar."

"I don't have a secret. I just do what needs to be done." He didn't like all the romanticizing about him. He was just a person like any other. If he understood why he'd lived so long he would have explained it to the other hunters long ago. He held up the machete, ready to use it at the slightest twitch.

"As do I," Morgan said, and leapt. She ducked under the blade, moving too fast to be seen, reaching up to push the machete out of the way. The hunter held the blade in both hands, and her aim was to get so close enough that the long blade was useless.

Daniel swung with all his might, but she was too fast and agile. There was obviously a reason she'd lived as long as she had as well. The blade connected with her upper arm, just below the shoulder, making a deep gash. The blow would have sent a human flying, but it barely seemed to trouble her.

Morgan hissed at the pain, but it only made her angrier. Now, though, she had the man. She grabbed the machete by the handle as it sliced her flesh and tossed it carelessly away. It clattered to the ground and she pushed Daniel against the wall as if he was a rag doll. She saw his head hit the wall and

he slid down it slowly. "Now you're mine," she growled, advancing on him.

* * * *

Scott had been prowling every side street fruitlessly when he heard a metallic sound, and he could definitely pinpoint that one. He ran as fast as he could, and approached the mouth of yet another alley soundlessly.

* * * *

This was it. This was how it was going to end. *I love you, Scott*, Daniel thought silently. He stayed still, fairly sure that his arm was broken. But his fingers were tantalizingly near his knife in the back holster. He reached for it with a pain so intense he thought he might vomit, but he had it out. Now he just had to get his arm out from beneath his body.

Morgan took care of that for him. His silence and stillness apparently distressed her, because she lifted him by his good arm, pulling him off the ground at an odd angle, but it was enough. He was grateful that the broken limb had started to go numb and he prayed silently that he had the strength to move it. He did, and the blade slid home just beneath the vampire's ribs. It wouldn't kill her. It wouldn't even slow her down. But it would hurt like a bitch.

She saw the flash of the blade just before it slid into her stomach. She cried out, partly in pain but mostly in anger, ripping the knife out of her stomach and the hunter's hand. She dropped him, backhanding him across the face as she sank to the ground on top of him. "I will make sure you suffer

before you die," she snarled, pinning him to the ground with all her strength.

A thin trickle of blood escaped the side of Daniel's mouth. He closed his eyes and swallowed hard. He'd probably killed close to fifty vampires. It would have to be enough. Somehow they were going to have to survive without him. He sobbed a little, not in pain, but at the thought of Scott, finding out he'd been killed. "I'm sorry," he whispered, but not to Morgan.

Morgan didn't hear what Daniel said, nor did she care. She was angry now, and all her attention was focused on the vampire hunter she was going to kill. She was bleeding, but already healing, and it hurt. "You kill vampires by cutting off their heads, and cutting out their hearts," she said menacingly. "Perhaps I should do the same to you. Return the favor. Rip out your heart with my bare hands." She reached down and ripped off Daniel's shirt as if it was tissue paper. She held Daniel's hands with one of hers and used the other hand to cut a shallow line down the man's chest.

* * * *

Scott finally arrived at the alley, and at the very end he could see a figure ... no, two figures. One of them was on the ground, and the other was Morgan. He couldn't see the one on the ground, but he was willing to bet he knew who it was. He rushed down the alley, hoping to hell it wasn't too late, and vowing to rip Morgan limb from limb when he had a chance.

Daniel moaned, more in anticipation of the pain than the actual pain. He didn't want to die this way. He prayed silently

that Scott wouldn't be the one to find him, that he'd be able to get away from Morgan. That ... that a miracle would happen.

"No clever words now, little Morningstar?" Morgan purred, the pain of her wounds spurring on her cruelty. "No final words before I gut you like the animal you are?" She drew the knife down again, more sharply, blood welling from the wound. She bent to lick at the blood, so absorbed that she never heard Scott approach.

Scott wanted to scream as he ran up, as he saw who it was on the ground, and what Morgan was doing to him. He watched as the knife bit in again, deeper yet, the blood pouring out as the gash widened. He didn't stop; he didn't even pause, just picked up Daniel's discarded machete and swung it with all his incredible strength at Morgan's head.

She wasn't expecting it, and she didn't even have a chance to look surprised as her head parted company with her body. Her body slumped sideways, well and truly dead at last. With a roar, Scott pushed her body off Daniel and fell to his knees beside him. He looked down at the wound; Daniel was cut open from his stomach to his ribs.

"No," he all but screamed. "Daniel! You can't die! I love you." He leaned over to look at his lover's face, willing him to still be alive. Not that it would matter. In the days before the disaster, Daniel could have been rushed by ambulance to an emergency room where they might be able to repair the damage. But there was none of that now.

Daniel coughed weakly and turned glazed brown eyes to Scott's face. "I'm sorry," he rasped. "I ... love you ... too." He

could feel his life ebbing away, and he was strangely calm about it. "You were the best ... thing that ... ever happened to me." He coughed again, tasting the blood that filled his mouth as he did so.

Scott felt tears course down his face for the first time in close to a hundred years. "No, Daniel, you ... I love you, can't live without you, stay with me please..." He was desperate, and the only thought that of being without Daniel. He'd die. He pressed his hands over the wound in his lover's stomach, the wound that was slowly killing him.

And he made a decision.

There was one way to save Daniel, and only one. To make him a vampire. He could heal the wound easily as a vampire. And he'd never die. Never leave him.

Scott knew it was wrong. Knew Daniel would hate him for it. But he was weak. And if he hesitated, Daniel would die, and even Scott couldn't bring him back then.

So Scott whispered, "Forgive me, my love," and bent to bite Daniel's neck.

Daniel was feeling a little disoriented. Weak. Fuzzy. But Scott's breath on his neck, then his lips, then his teeth ... it made everything ... better, somehow. He would rather die from being bitten by Scott.

Yes. This was better. End it quickly, giving to his lover. But he was so thirsty suddenly. Somewhere in the back of his mind he knew it was shock. He'd seen it in the infirmary with those who'd lost a lot of blood.

Scott knew he had to drink deeply of Daniel's blood; he'd never made anyone a vampire before but he knew the way to

do it. But Daniel had lost a lot of blood already. He hoped it wasn't too late. With one hand he reached for the knife that Morgan had used on Daniel. He pulled away from Daniel's neck, and knew his lover was still alive, but barely. Then he sat up and used the knife to slash across his own wrist with a hiss of pain. He hoped Daniel was awake enough to drink. He made sure his blood was flowing freely, then pressed the wound to Daniel's mouth. "Drink, baby, stay with me," Scott whispered desperately, willing Daniel to live.

Daniel's lips pressed against Scott's wrist like a kiss. He was barely conscious now. He neither knew nor cared what was happening. He wanted to sleep. Sleep and make all the pain go away. He felt his mouth fill with ... something ... and he swallowed. His tongue reached out to taste Scott's skin, then he was sucking on it.

The pain came into sharper focus again and he moaned. He blinked a few times and his breathing became stronger, more regular. But he couldn't get enough of the liquid filling him, warming him.

Scott watched, and his heart raced as Daniel started to drink from him. He didn't know how much he had to drink, but he seemed stronger already. It was working; he was saving Daniel's life, but at what cost? He couldn't think about that now, though. All he could think about was that Daniel wouldn't be gone. He kept his wrist to Daniel's mouth, letting him drink.

Daniel moaned louder. If anything, the pain was growing more intense. He pulled his mouth away forcibly and rolled onto his side, curling up in a tight ball. "What...?" he gasped.

"Oh, fuck," he cried out. It was excruciating, and it wasn't just his chest. It seemed to be everywhere at once. He felt hot tears sliding down his cheeks, but he was in too much pain to sob openly. All he could do was cringe to keep from screaming at the top of his lungs. "What did you do to me?" he gasped.

Scott hated to see Daniel in pain, but he knew now that it was working. Daniel would live. He wouldn't lose him. Unless of course Daniel never forgave him. Forever was a long time when you were immortal. "I'm sorry, Daniel, it will only hurt for a little while." The pain was bad, Scott knew that; he'd lived through it. But it wouldn't kill him. It couldn't. "I saved your life."

The wounds were already healing, but Daniel didn't feel any better. "Oh, God," he whispered tightly. "How?" he asked. His eyes opened and riveted to Scott's face for a moment before another wave of pain washed over him. He certainly felt like he was dying.

For the second time, Scott felt tears roll down his face. The look on Daniel's face was killing him. "I'm sorry, Daniel, but ... I couldn't lose you. You were dying..." He couldn't say the words, couldn't say, *I made you what you hate most. A vampire.*

On some level, Daniel understood. If he'd been more lucid he might even have agreed to it. But right now he just wasn't convinced that dying wasn't exactly what he was doing.

The human brain can only process so much pain, then it short circuits. Or, Daniel thought a little hysterically, it was as his mother used to say, that God only gives us what we can

handle and no more as far as difficulty was concerned. Whatever it was, Daniel got to a point where nothing made sense anymore, and he felt like he was falling down a deep dark well into nothingness.

Then everything went black.

It was almost a relief when Daniel passed out, because Scott knew he wasn't in pain anymore. And he wouldn't have to try to explain anymore. There would be plenty of time for that later. When it came down to it, he knew Daniel would live and that was all that mattered right now.

Scott finally realized where they were. He had no clue about how the overall fight had gone, but it had looked as if it was going the way of the hunters. If that were true, they'd be doing mop up operations by now, sweeping the streets for wounded. And they needed to be gone from here. No longer was Daniel one of them. Daniel was a vampire, and even his colleagues wouldn't hesitate to kill him now. They would think they were doing him a favor.

He looked around to see Morgan's headless body just feet away. He felt nothing when he looked at her save hate. She'd tried to take away the only person he'd ever loved, the only good thing in his whole life. He'd kill again to save Daniel.

He hesitated for a moment. He knew that cutting the head off a vampire killed them. He knew it. But he couldn't shake the feeling that he wanted to be sure that Morgan would never ever come back. So he picked up the knife, Daniel's knife, and plunged it into Morgan's chest. He twisted it savagely, opening a hole in her, then pulled out the knife. Blood seeped out weakly, since most of it had been spilled

already, and he reached in and ripped out her heart. He flung it across the alley, and wiped his gore-covered hand on her dress.

"Burn in hell, bitch," he whispered, though he believed in neither heaven nor hell. It just seemed appropriate. He left the knife next to her body, hoping that the hunters would know that Daniel was dead, and not search for him. He left the machete and crossbow, too. Daniel wouldn't be needing them. When he woke he'd be strong enough to rip someone's head from their body with his bare hands.

He picked up Daniel's still form. He was breathing evenly, deeply unconscious. Scott knew it would be days before he woke. A new vampire's body shut down like this so it could process the changes it was undergoing. Supposedly the government had done research on the subject of vampirism, but any knowledge they'd gleaned had been lost when all the computers became no more than useless hunks of plastic.

Scott carried Daniel to the mouth of the alley, listening with all his might. He could sense no one nearby, and dawn was approaching. He ran, carrying Daniel as if he weighed nothing, and considered where to go. He didn't want to take Daniel back to the vampire's hideout. He wasn't sure why, but he reasoned that it might not be safe. The hunters might have tracked a wounded vamp back there. He knew that he could handle a hunter, but Daniel was helpless until he woke and fed.

That left Daniel's basement. The theater was too far away, in Scott's opinion. It wasn't ideal, but as far as he knew, no one else knew about it. It would have to do.

Scott made his way there as fast as he could, but the sky was lightening as he went in. He went to the basement door, glad to see that no one had been there since he had. He carried Daniel down the steps, and lit the light that they'd left down there. A bit of exploring, and Scott discovered there was a sub-basement whose door was nearly cemented shut. He put Daniel down and wrenched it open, then carried him down another flight of steps.

Scott was satisfied; this would do. It was further belowground yet, which would make it safer for Daniel. He put him down again, and ran back to secure the door to the upper basement, and retrieve the bedding. Finally, he shoved the sub-basement door closed, convinced that no human could open it, and dragged some crates in front of it. The sun was already rising when Scott lay Daniel down on the makeshift bed, and he held off his slumber as he blew out the lamp.

He collapsed next to Daniel, covered in blood and gore, but there was nothing he could do about it now. He slept, curled next to his lover, hoping someday Daniel would forgive him. But he'd do it all again, because Daniel still breathed next to him.

About the Author

Jade Falconer is new to Phaze with the release of *Morningstar*. Inspired by the important things in life: beauty, love, and passion, she has spent several years writing erotic fiction. The forbidden nature of homoeroticism has been the basis for many megabytes of fiction that has delighted a wide circle of online readers. Please feel free to visit Jade on MySpace at www.myspace.com/jadefalconer.

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