

Megan Hussey

The First Book of Nuit

A man is seen from behind, standing in front of a large, arched window with multiple panes. He is looking out at a bright, cloudy sky. The scene is set in a room with dark, ornate walls.

*Under Cover
of the
Night*

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UNDER COVER OF NIGHT

THE FIRST BOOK OF NUIT

MEGAN HUSSEY

Chapter One

Emerging from the velvety depths of a long, cold night, Carlotta Wilkes stepped through stained glass doors into another, better world.

Immediately she was greeted by an irritatingly flawless example of male perfection; one who took her drink order and led her to a rose-patterned settee at the back of the room.

"Your favorite seat, Miss." Aside from his sculpted features and well-muscled frame, the waiter at Club Nuit also had the good sense to call her 'Miss' as opposed to 'Ma'am.'

For the sake of his tip, this is a good thing. The thirty-eight year old grinned as she regarded the polished tile floors, multi-tiered chandeliers and sprawling wall murals that distinguished the Clearview, Florida nightclub; a discreet mecca designed for women only.

Yeah, it's all nice and discreet until they get to the floor show. She let out a decidedly unladylike 'whoop' as Ramon Montague – a longtime friend and one of three owners of Club Nuit – took the stage.

"Bonne nuit, Carlotta!" The tall, muscular Ramon pinned her with a white-toothed smile.

So much for discreet. Carlotta slumped in her seat, but watched closely as her favorite performer addressed the gathered crowd.

"For those ladies who are joining us for the first time this evening, I want to welcome you," his smooth, lilting voice poured forth through full and sensual lips, "to your fantasy."

He tossed his head back, his long, thick ebony hair settling lightly around his shoulders.

"At Club Nuit we leave no woman unsatisfied." He gestured broadly across the room, drawing raucous cheers in response. "We aim to tease you, please you, seduce you and entertain you." Pausing, he winked flirtatiously at the crowd. "And if, at the end of the evening, you're in need of total fulfillment," he beckoned seductively, "please don't be afraid to approach us after the show."

With this Carlotta's gaze flew unbidden to a corner staircase, where a second Nuit entertainer – an angelic blond named Xavier – led a stiff, conservative-looking older woman to the second floor of the club.

She won't be stiff for long, I wager. Carlotta never ventured to the upper level of Club Nuit. Yet the sight of the smiling, rejuvenated women who came frequently down the staircase, and the sounds of club goers who giggled in praise of 'the built-in bordello' never failed to intrigue her.

Ultimately intriguing, however, was the sight of Ramon center stage, swaying rhythmically to the sound of smooth, melodic music piped lucidly through an overhead stereo system.

Although muscular, Ramon boasted an agile, graceful form that seemed custom made for dancing. And he drew an enthusiastic response as he snapped his agile fingers and swiveled his hips seductively.

He drew further enthusiasm when he peeled his sleek ebony jacket slowly and seductively from his shoulders. Soon the jacket was discarded, and he unbuttoned and stripped off the white silk shirt that lay beneath, revealing a massive bronzed chest that drew 'oohs' and 'ahs' from the crowd.

"Nothing like a Club Nuit striptease." She nudged the woman beside her and winked slyly.

"I thought so too," the woman snorted, "until I went upstairs one evening."

Carlotta started. "Did you go with Ramon?"

"Yes." The woman nodded.

Silence ensued as Ramon slid his ebony slacks teasingly down the length of his tight, taut legs; revealing as he did a ruby red thong that just barely concealed his bulging package.

"So how was it?" Carlotta's gaze remained fixed on Ramon's flawless form.

"How do you think?" The woman smirked in response.

She turned to face Carlotta.

"Ramon is an incredible lover." She waved broadly in his direction. "He totally devotes himself to a woman's pleasure, and will stop at nothing to fulfill her desires. And when all was said and done between us, he refused to take any money." She shook her head. "He said I had done just as much for him as he had for me."

"And you did, my sweet."

Carlotta inhaled sharply as Ramon's melodic voice seemed suddenly too close; and his citrus-tinged scent filled her senses.

Looking up slowly, she faced the hottest pair of washboard abs imaginable; not to mention a barely concealed cock presented up close for her inspection.

Carlotta's heart thudded in her chest as her clit throbbed wildly; in an effort to fight temptation, she jerked her head upward and away from his captivating privates.

Big mistake. Ramon's wide, dark eyes seared her with a seductive stare, and he gave her a soft, sensual smile that only aroused her more.

"Come see me after the show, Carlotta." His tone was soft and alluring. "It's time for us to take things further - to be together, truly and fully."

Carlotta chuckled. "After the show," she shifted uncomfortably in her seat, "I have to go home and fix Coney dogs and martinis for my husband and his poker buddies. I'm married, Ramon."

She inhaled sharply as the flirtatious dancer swooped down upon her, pressing his warm, sensual lips firmly into hers.

For a moment she felt lulled by the tender ministrations of his sensual lips, and she groaned when he thrust his thick, wet tongue boldly forth to meet hers.

And, heaven help her, she kissed him back.

All too soon he pulled away, regarding her with passion-dazed eyes.

"You just told me all I needed to know." He brushed her cheek softly. "Meet me after the show."

"Speaking of the show," Carlotta nodded to the surrounding crowd, who frowned condemningly in response. "You'd better see to these ladies, before I get lynched in a fit of jealousy."

Carlotta continued to watch attentively as Ramon finished his act, pouting, flexing and flirting until the crowd was in a frenzy.

And no one is more adept at 'pouting, flexing and flirting' than Ramon. She inhaled sharply.

Although always a gentleman, Ramon could – through a discreet stare, the flick of his tongue, or the placement of a carefully chosen word – ignite a fire that spread wild throughout a woman's body.

And while Carlotta's senses were aroused by all of the Nuit men, she had formed a special bond with Ramon; one that also excited her mind. The two often finished off their 'Nuit nights' with spirited discussions of their favorite books; sometimes he even invited her backstage for the viewing of a favorite movie on the club's DVD player, or a spirited game of checkers or chess.

Unlike her husband Neil, who scoffed in the face of her intellectual diversions, Ramon praised her great knowledge and quick wit. And one night he expressed his divine appreciation in a decidedly novel manner.

The couple christened the end of an evening with two glasses of sparkling red wine and a friendly game of chess.

"Victory!" Carlotta raised her arms in triumph as she aced their third game.

"Bravo!" Ramon applauded her heartily, then arched a curious eyebrow. "Care to up the stakes a bit, love? How about a game of 'strip chess?'" His voice lowered, and he pinned her with a teasing stare. "I could let you win. And instead of just looking, you'd be free to touch me as well."

Chuckling nervously, Carlotta stood from the table. "It's been fun, Ramon, but I really have to go now."

With a graceful flourish he arose from his seat and stepped lithely to her side, taking her hands into his. "I'm sorry to be so bold, Carlotta." His voice was whisper soft. "I don't mean to pressure you." He massaged her slightly trembling fingers with the lightest, sweetest of touches. "We're such good friends, but I feel something more." He stepped closer, his sweet breath grazing her cheek. "Let me taste one of your kisses, Carlotta. Lend me a fantasy that will bring great pleasure to my dreams, and to my waking hours, when I touch myself and think of you."

Instead of answering verbally, Carlotta surged forward and pressed her lips hungrily against Ramon's.

Their kiss, while brief, was warm and sumptuous, and Ramon's full and sensual mouth flowed across hers in a show of tender passion. He took in his breath and pulled her closer, sweeping her body backward as he deepened their kiss.

Soon the couple was locked in a heated embrace, and Carlotta basked in the feel of Ramon's strong muscled arms as their bodies clung desperately together. In a

blinding rush she experienced the perfection of his body; the feel of his hard, toned chest as it pressed hungrily into hers, of his lithe, toned thighs as they gyrated ever so slightly, and the light lap of his long, wet tongue as it grazed her hungry mouth.

Finally she drew back, and stared deeply into his eyes.

"That felt good," she grinned, adding silently, *Congrats, Carlotta Wilkes, on what is officially the understatement of the century.*

"Good," Ramon cupped her flushed cheeks and massaged her face with teasing, tickling fingers, "but not enough. I want more, Carlotta."

She remembered these words now, as Ramon delivered the culminating thrusts and flexes of his elaborate striptease.

Finally the stripper stepped smoothly from the stage, making room for the green-eyed Rainyn; a flame-haired hunk who rounded out the Club Nuit trio.

Soon Ramon again stood beside Carlotta's table; but this time, she was ready.

"Ramon, do you happen to have that volume of Dickens you borrowed from me last week?" She motioned for him to take a seat at the opposite end of the settee. "It's due back at the library."

There, I've said the unsexiest thing possible, she mused. That should stuff a sock in the stud's raging libido.

"Indeed I do." He took his seat much closer than she preferred. "It's upstairs, love."

He winked saucily. "Come and get it."

"No rush." She cleared her throat loudly. "So did you like the book?"

"Indeed," Ramon nodded. "I knew Dickens very well."

Carlotta pursed her lips curiously. "You mean you know his work?"

"Of course." It was Ramon's turn to clear his throat loudly. "And how did you enjoy my hand bound volume of Virginia Woolf?"

"Loved it! And I love the fact that you imprinted the title page with a fake autograph from good ol' Virginia." She chuckled. "You always have such good taste – so similar to mine." She nudged him playfully. "You know, Ramon, it's nice to find a friend with whom I can discuss music and literature. My husband's idea of a 'good read' is the Braille commemorative edition of *Bi Biker Babes*."

Leaning forward, Ramon graced her cheek with a whisper soft kiss.

"I bet I could do other things for you that he won't do," he whispered against her ear.

Carlotta sat back sharply against the settee, pinning Ramon with a skeptical gaze.

"Ramon, why do you seem so anxious to seduce me?" She gestured freely around them, pointing out the adoring throng of young, beautiful women who perused her companion with hungry eyes. "Surely you could find someone younger, prettier. . ."

"But could I find someone kinder? Smarter?" His tone grew hushed and heated. "More passionate?"

"What do you know of my passion?" Carlotta watched carefully as he gathered her hands in his. Firmly he kissed her outstretched palms, ensnaring her eyes with his.

"I feel it," Ramon growled, and Carlotta noticed the hardening of his nipples – and the rock hard erection that strained insistently through the fabric of his thong. "I feel you, Carlotta. Why won't you give in to me? Why can't I bring you pleasure?"

"Look, Ramon, if this is about money. . ." Carlotta shook her head briskly.

"This isn't about money for us." He gestured toward Rainyn, who now slithered sensually across the stage before them. "Any of us. We thrive on the sensual energies of women." He kissed her lips, fiercely and impulsively. "Let me show you how, Carlotta. I could make all your fantasies come true, make you feel incredible. . ."

Taking a deep, fortifying breath, his companion fought a wave of red hot arousal that threatened to overwhelm her.

"I have to go now, Ramon." She shook her head briskly to clear it of its horny haze. "I just have to go."

Chapter Two

Later that evening, Carlotta faced a group of men who differed substantially from the staff of Club Nuit; namely, the balding, beer-bellied men who formed the core of her husband's poker circle.

And at the center sat 'the king' himself; her husband, Neil, who now lovingly directed her to, "hurry up that chunky butt and bring on the salsa."

"And your centerfold shoot with *Playgirl* magazine is scheduled, when?" She blocked his answer with a hearty mouthful of salsa and chips. "You have no room to talk, dearest, literally or figuratively."

Hal, Neil's best friend and co-worker, guffawed outright.

"So Carlie," he skillfully annoyed her with the use of a nickname she hadn't heard since college. "I take it you see better looking guys at that beefcake bar on Magnolia Avenue?"

Carlotta shrugged. "You guys single-handedly support the operation of that tittie bar on Fifth." She winked at Neil, who glowered openly in response. "Turnabout, dear lads, is foreplay."

Hal arched his eyebrows and took a sip of beer. "Of course, one big difference stands between the girls at Allie's Alibi and the guys at Club Nuit." He mispronounced the name of the club so it sounded suspiciously like 'newt.'

His hostess rolled her eyes. "Oh let me guess. You're going to tell me that the guys at Club Nuit are secretly married - to each other."

Hal shook his head. "Oh, I don't think those guys are gay." With this he chomped down hard on a defenseless taco chip. "I just heard they were vampires."

A shocked silence filled the room, and Carlotta fixed Hal with a condemning stare. "I don't find you amusing." She nodded with a sneer toward his neon purple T-shirt that read, 'I brake for babes.' "And your clothes are ugly."

"Heh, it's no joke." Hal held his hands up defensively before him. "My sister got lucky with the blonde dude - Xavier, I think his name is - and said he was incredible. She also claimed that, at the 'moment of truth,' he got all wild-eyed and spouted fangs."

Carlotta froze. "Did he hurt her?"

"No, no," Hal shook his head. "Look, Carlie, maybe she's full of it. The truth is, though, that I've heard stories about those guys." He straightened noticeably, regarding his bored-looking poker buddies with a solemn, knowing nod. "They never come out during the day, and refuse most press and publicity. Their place serves icky, blood red steaks. And rumor has it, they cast seductive spells on their clientele."

Sighing, Carlotta turned tiredly on her heel and headed for the kitchen.

"I've eaten a plethora of blood red steaks at bars," she threw the words snidely over her shoulder, "and believe you me, the dudes at Club Nuit don't need seductive spells. They have killer abs and can talk Virginia Woolf. What more could a woman want?"

Soon she stood in the darkened confines of her kitchen, staring out a corner window at the comforting beauty of a Florida night.

The gentle glow of moonbeams shone radiantly on the palm tree that formed the center of Carlotta's backyard. The moon itself was surrounded by a coterie of glimmering stars, and the hint of a whispering breeze stole beneath the cracked window; teasing her with a light tendril of fresh ocean air.

Suddenly she imagined the breeze as the tenderest of Ramon's touches, molding and worshipping every inch of her body; probing and teasing until she sighed with delight.

Somehow she knew he too witnessed this very moon, felt the same breeze. . .and that, on this night, they'd meet in their dreams.

As the clock struck two in the morning at Club Nuit, the women who frequented the club primarily for a good drink and a quick tease, dispersed; leaving in their wake a diehard core of women who wanted hot, hard action from the 'gentlemen of the evening.'

Blythe Browning fell into this second category. A Nuit investor, she had claimed Ramon Montague for her evening's entertainment.

And while the Rubenesque blonde had no trouble spiriting Ramon upstairs, she now shifted impatiently on the white satin bed that distinguished his private lair.

"Ramon, what gives?" Looking across a room that also boasted a cherry wood reading desk – and a collection of pottery and wall art that represented Victorian, Regency, '60s chic, and modernistic periods – she found him staring reflectively out the wide bay window that formed the border of his room. "I'm needing a little attention here, babe."

Slowly Ramon tore his gaze from the reflection of ebony night, and he regarded Blythe with an apologetic nod.

"I'm sorry, *bella*," he beamed warmly. "You know I would love to be with you this evening. Even so, I fear I won't be able to perform quite up to your expectations."

"Ramon, you've never failed to satisfy me." Her brows furrowed worriedly. "What's wrong?"

Ramon shrugged. "I have a friend who has been coming here for about a year. Carlotta Wilkes is her name, and she's one of the kindest, brightest, funniest ladies I know." He glowed at the mention of his friend. "People of your time always are so fixated on television and films. Carlotta, by contrast, has a love and great knowledge of literature and fine art. She appreciates my enthusiasm about the same subjects, and treats me as a true friend. I could talk to her for hours."

"So what's the problem?"

"I'd rather be making mad, passionate love to her for hours."

"Oh." Blythe leaned forward, regarding Ramon with assessing eyes. "I've talked to Carlotta several times, and she is a nice lady." She arched her eyebrows. "She's also happily married."

Ramon rolled his eyes. "Married, yes. Happily, as the kids today would say, not so much." He raised a finger for defined emphasis. "Her husband denounces her because she doesn't fit his ideal of a centerfold fantasy. But this woman, Blythe, embodies my fantasy, and I want her so badly..." He closed his eyes, obviously overcome by the bare intensity of his emotion, and by the sheer strength of his passionate desire.

Blythe stood abruptly from Ramon's bed and grazed his shoulder with a reassuring pat.

"So go get her, love," she encouraged. "In the meantime, I'll head home." She shrugged dejectedly. "Maybe in another day or so, you'll feel up to being with me."

She froze as Ramon's dark eyes grew wide and eerily intense, and his lips moved in what seemed to be a silent command.

Turning quickly she acknowledged the arrival of Rainyn, the flame-haired, leanly muscular performer who appeared the youngest of the Nuit trio.

He looks about twenty-one. She pursed her lips thoughtfully. *With these guys, though, it's hard to tell.*

The young man greeted her with an endearing smile, and the flirtatious flash of his emerald eyes. "Did I hear Blythe say she was leaving?" He pouted adorably. "That's a shame, because I was hoping she'd tie me up and have her way with me tonight."

Blythe gaped openly in the face of this assertion. And when the beautiful young man threw himself brazenly across the top of Ramon's bed, she gaped even more.

"Take me, *bella*." He seared her with a seductive smile, his nubile form writhing invitingly on a surface of soft, warm satin.

Blythe looked uncertainly at Ramon, who directed the sheepish woman toward a nearby chest of drawers.

"The silk handkerchiefs are in the top drawer." His tone was low and hypnotic. "Take him, my sweet. Enjoy him."

"No need to tell me twice." Soon the newly beaming woman had tied Rainyn's hands to the bedpost, and was pulling his skintight leather pants down his long, toned legs.

Now she faced a long, hard shaft that stood respectfully at her attention. And Ramon chuckled wickedly as she devoured his friend's sinfully erect member.

Rainyn threw his head back, releasing a long, catlike hiss that greatly enhanced her arousal. Bracing her hands on his trim hips, she licked and suckled his thick, glistening cock as he purred and moaned his approval.

Finally Rainyn withdrew from his lover's mouth and nodded for her to come closer.

"Tonight is for your pleasure." His tone breathless and inviting. "Come to me, *bella*."

Sliding smoothly over her lover's body, she planted sweet baby kisses on his washboard abs and teasingly nipped his nipples. Then she braced her hands on Ramon's headboard, and seized Rainyn's lips in a possessive kiss.

Breathlessly he smacked his lips against hers, entangling her tongue with his. After a few moments he broke away to lick and kiss her neck, and to bury his head in her womanly breasts as he suckled her nipples.

Finally she closed all distance between them and offered him her throbbing clit.

With a hearty growl he accepted her invitation, nipping and lapping her feminine folds until they opened like a flower before him. Then he fixed his full and sensual mouth around her wet, hard clit, sucking her with a bare intensity she had never experienced.

He enhanced this feeling by flipping the strands of his feather soft hair teasingly against her thighs, and by darting his agile tongue in a rhythmic motion into and out of her pussy.

"Oh!" Throwing her head back, Blythe met the heated gaze of the man who stood quietly beside his window.

Ramon, she suspected, was lost in the fantasy of another woman, in another place. And although he watched her and Rainyn with marked interest, his soft smile and faraway gaze seemed reserved for someone else.

Even so, she didn't object when he dropped his trousers and stroked his rock hard shaft, his fingers playing a vibrant melody across a surface of bronzed skin.

Her own arousal heightening, she thrust her hips forward and filled Rainyn's mouth with the whole of her throbbing nub.

She relished the growl of approval she elicited from her passionate young lover, and the sight of his sinful eyes as he shared her ecstasy.

The sight of Ramon stroking off before her, his chest heaving and his buttocks pulled taut, only excited her more.

Just as Ramon's hard erection lengthened in his hand, she felt the subtle growth of Rainyn's fangs deep in the back of his mouth.

She never questioned this part of the encounter, bizarre as it was. Nuit fangs never hurt or pricked, but only provided an extra 'push' to the pleasure of those bitten.

The feel of Rainyn's fangs pushed her over the edge, throwing her entire body into the throes of an incredible orgasm. Finally she screamed her release, her mighty cries echoing those of a visibly entranced Ramon.

Ramon breathed deeply as his massive cock exploded into his hand, releasing a torrent of suppressed lust that had held him captive all evening.

His hard, naked body trembling wildly, he watched in a haze as Blythe untied Rainyn's hands and joined him across the bed. The couple cuddled and kissed sweetly, their bodies entangled in a cocoon of mutual fulfillment.

One day soon, he vowed, he too would share his bed with a loving, passionate partner; one who he hoped to tease, please, and make love to thoroughly – and perhaps even make his mate.

Chapter Three

Carlotta lay back in the stiff cotton sheets that distinguished her bed; a bed she shared with a perpetually snoring mate.

Recently she had taken one of those cheesy magazine quizzes designed to rate a woman's love life. And when faced with the question "If your sex life was a movie, what movie would it be?" she quickly ignored the answers offered, in favor of a unique write-in option.

I stated, unequivocally, that my sex life is based on the cinematic epic 'Night of the Living Dead.' She gritted her teeth. *On reflection, not a good sign.*

And although her husband never initiated sex, and often fit in their 'romantic interludes' during the three-minute cooking segment of their favorite evening news show (*Although he tells me I really shouldn't be skipping the cooking segment, because I could stand to improve my meatloaf.* She stroked her chin thoughtfully. *Does that qualify as 'dirty talk?'*), she wondered if their inactive love life was partially her fault.

I have been going to Club Nuit a lot lately. She switched off the television set and shifted slightly, regarding her sleeping husband with curious eyes. *Neil never complains. In fact, he's elated that I've found a pastime that gets me out of the house—and out of his sight—on a regular basis.*

What Neil didn't know was that Carlotta harbored a fantasy of another man. A fantasy that reignited every time she stepped through the doors of Club Nuit.

Maybe I've been too preoccupied by Ramon. She placed a warm but tentative hand on Neil's sagging shoulder, *to the detriment of my marriage.*

With this in mind, she leaned forward to talk softly into her husband's ear. "Sweetheart, I hate to wake you," she whispered.

"Then don't." She cringed at Neil's stern reply.

Another moment passed before she made another attempt at romantic conversation.

"If you'd like to talk a bit, I'd love to hear about your day." She rubbed his back lightly. "Unless, of course, you'd like to do something other than talk."

Neil, much to her surprise, actually rolled over onto his back and opened his eyes.

"As a matter of fact, I would like to do something else," he sneered. "Sleep." He narrowed his eyes. "What's up with you? Didn't you get your weekly lap dance at Club Nuit?"

Carlotta drew back sharply. "Indeed I did." Her warm gaze hardened, and her tone darkened considerably. "In fact, I think I might just go back tomorrow and pick me up some more."

Grumbling roughly, Neil turned his back on his wife.

"Fine by me, Carlotta." He buried his head in the pillow. "I'll be working late anyway."

"Again?" Carlotta's forehead wrinkled confusedly. "Your workload seems to be increasing substantially. Your paycheck? Not so much."

"You wouldn't understand." Neil moved farther away from her.

"Apparently not." Carlotta shut her eyes tight and tried to sleep; seeking escape in dreams of the man who truly understood.

Once again Ramon stood quietly at his window, regarding the ebony night beyond with marked contemplation.

"It's show time, Ramon."

Ramon's thoughts were startlingly disrupted by the entrance of Xavier; the glorious blond angel of the Nuit trio.

Xavier's wheat blond hair fell nearly to his waist, and framed a pair of opal eyes, carved cheekbones, and full, moist lips.

"What do you think of the costume?" Tonight, the tall, muscular Xavier wore a white silk shirt and black velvet pants. Covering this elegant ensemble was a velvet coat of sleek royal blue emblazoned with gold buttons. "I thought the ladies would like the Victorian look."

"They would like you in a potato sack," Ramon smirked. "Even so, I appreciate the fact that you integrate items from your personal wardrobe so cleverly into your show."

Xavier beamed. "These clothes do hold great meaning for me, and I'm pleased to share them with the ladies. And speaking of the ladies," his voice softened, and he regarded Ramon with assessing eyes, "Rainyn told me he subbed for you last night. He didn't mind, of course. In fact, he enjoyed servicing Blythe very much. We just wanted to make sure that you weren't experiencing..." he paused, shifting uncomfortably, "problems."

Ramon shook his head. "I have never suffered from impotence." He raised a proud finger for emphasis. "Never, Xavier. You know that—all three of us thrive on the sexual energies of women." With this Ramon's head bowed, and he clasped his hands tightly before him. "It's just that, lately, my thoughts and fantasies have focused on one particular woman."

"Just one?" Xavier's ebony eyes widened in unmitigated wonder. "No offense, Ramon, but the three of us—while having both a great love and an ultimate respect for women—are not particularly revered for our monogamous ways." He shrugged. "Who is she, Ramon?"

"Carlotta." Ramon pronounced her name like it was the sweetest poetry.

"Carlotta Wilkes?" Xavier stroked his chin thoughtfully. "She is a very kind woman, and always makes us laugh. Good tipper, too." Yet with this he shifted uneasily. "Isn't she married, Ramon?"

Ramon snorted. "Since when has a woman's marital status ever stopped you from seducing her?"

"It doesn't." Xavier folded his arms firmly before him. "It might, however, stop me from falling in love with her." He shook his head briskly. "Ramon, Rainyn and I don't want to stand in the way of your happiness. I do admit, though, that we are concerned about sustaining our business and way of life—both of which, you must admit, rely on our ability to seduce and satisfy a wide variety of women."

Ramon waved away his friend's concern with a sturdy, confident hand. "True, if Carlotta and I get serious, I will stop sleeping with other women. For all practical purposes, I've stopped already. Yet regardless of what transpires between us, I will continue to dance and play music for the women who come to our club. I'm certain she would understand."

"Will she understand what you are?" Xavier asked quietly.

"It's difficult to say," Ramon spread his arms in a gesture of sheer frustration, and sighed deeply. "I only know that Carlotta is the kindest, most understanding person I know. She donates often to charities, and even lends some of her tip money to less fortunate customers."

"Really?" Xavier nodded, obviously impressed. "I've seen fistfights break out over Nuit tip money."

"Isn't it true?" Ramon's eyes flew wide. "I've even seen her feed and pet that stray cat that roams around outside the club at night."

Xavier nodded. "It's a good thing we take care of that cat. The poor little fellow doesn't seem to have a home." He stroked his chin reflectively. "In a fashion, Ramon, we were once stray cats ourselves."

Stepping forward Ramon engaged his friend in an understanding hug. "We've come a long way, and from some very humble beginnings," he agreed. "Don't you think it's time that one of us fell in love?"

Xavier patted his back. "I agree. And who knows, maybe someday it will happen for me as well." He grinned broadly. "In the meantime, Rainyn and I will have to double up our evening dates, to compensate for your loss." He smacked his lips saucily as he considered this idea. "Woe be unto us, huh?"

Chapter Four

The next morning found Carlotta in a markedly distracted state, unable to free her mind from the sweet words and seductive image of Ramon Montague.

And while a cold shower couldn't break the erotic spell that seized her, body, heart and soul, the sight of a nondescript paper bag briefly did the trick.

Drat it to blazes. Neil forgot his lunch. Groaning, Carlotta seized the offending bag and set it beside the front door. Then, after running a brush through her unruly brown hair and fixing it back into a serviceable ponytail, she grabbed Neil's lunch bag and headed out the door.

As her green compact made its way slowly through the streets of downtown Clearview, she tuned her radio to the relaxing smooth jazz station that – in times like this – always managed to calm and soothe her.

Yet today the jazzy chords of a leisurely instrumental only heightened her sensual angst. And when she came to a quiet side street marked Magnolia Avenue, she broke out in a full-bodied sweat.

Club Nuit stood dangerously close, situated as it was on the tree-lined corner of Magnolia and Vine.

I wonder if he's up yet. She felt her car turn almost instinctively toward the source of her temptation.

Of course, according to her husband's know-it-all best friend, none of the Nuit boys came out during the day.

And if they do, they probably have better things to do than hang out around a closed nightclub. Soon she pulled up in the circular driveway that fronted Club Nuit, a two-story Victorian-style structure with broad balconies and a columned front porch. Lush stands of red roses and ivory white orchids dotted the front lawn, as did classically molded sculptures that flanked the club's front entrance.

Soon Carlotta found herself standing at this entrance, knocking softly at the door. Her summons was answered by Nikolai, the club's handsome blond waiter.

"*Bon matin*, Miss Carlotta." He bowed regally. "How can I help you?"

"Hi Nikolai," she beamed. "Is Ramon around?"

"He's asleep," came the clipped reply.

A long, cool silence followed these words.

"Oh well, I wouldn't want to disturb him," she chuckled nervously. "I just came by to retrieve my library book. Please tell him I called."

"I will." With a strained smile and a polite nod, the waiter closed the door between them.

Soon she was back in her car, headed for the downtown office building that housed Neil's accounting firm.

Well I'd say that visit was awkward enough. She nodded in mock satisfaction. *Good work, Carlotta.*

Even so, she had been pleased to see a 'Nuit boy' in the clear light of day.

And he wasn't reduced to toast in the process. She raised a triumphant fist. Bonus! There goes the vampire theory.

She grinned slightly as she arrived at her second destination. Grasping Neil's lunch bag, she walked into the multilevel office building and approached the first-floor elevator that would take her to his workspace.

Before she could press the elevator button the doors slid smoothly open before her, revealing a spacious, well-kept elevator and a harsh truth.

Neil stood at the center of the car, his arms wrapped around the raven-haired young secretary he had hired last month. The two kissed passionately, oblivious to their surroundings and her presence.

Carlotta drew their attention by clearing her throat, then thrusting Neil's lunch bag in his direction.

"You forgot your lunch, Neil." She grinned wickedly at the wide-eyed accountant. "And it looks like you need some energy fuel." Her smile widened. "You'll need even more tomorrow, when I call my lawyer."

She shifted her gaze to the quivering Lori, Neil's petite young secretary. "I wondered why my husband would hire someone whose intelligence quotient, in a manner of speaking, is like the proverbial box of rocks." She nodded toward Lori's open shirt, which revealed a lacy black bra and ample endowments. "Now I see you have other, equally valuable qualifications. Thanks for clearing up the mystery."

Turning on her heel, she made her way quickly toward the front of the building.

"Carlie!" Finally finding his voice, Neil called weakly after his wife.

"I'm Carlotta." She didn't turn around, and refused to look over her shoulder. "And you're an asshole."

Chapter Five

Carlotta made a quick stop at her suburban homestead, throwing some clothes and toiletries in an overnight bag and tossing them in the back of her car.

She supposed she would come back later this week, to retrieve the rest of her things. Now, though, she felt smothered and strangled by these four walls; walls erected by a man who had stolen her life.

Perhaps 'bought' is a better word, she mused. Neil couldn't 'erect' a toothpick house.

She didn't mourn her marriage; suddenly she realized that she hadn't loved her husband for a very long time. Yet she mourned the college scholarship she'd given up because Neil disliked 'the brainy types.' She mourned the job she never took because he didn't want a wife who worked. She missed the children she never gave birth to, because he couldn't stand kids.

Beyond the major issues, Carlotta missed the good food she never ate, because her husband wanted a thin wife. *Thanks to my sturdy frame and less than stellar metabolism, he never got her,* she grinned in a moment of triumph. She also mourned all the fun 'chick flicks' she never saw, because Neil insisted on dictating the course of their rare evenings out.

And lest we forget, the sex. Carlotta slammed the door behind her as she deserted her prison of a home. *I think I've set some sort of globally revered record for 'most orgasms faked.'*

Through all these years, her saving grace had been her love of good books. She had sought an escape through reading, and, more recently, through her weekly trips to Club Nuit. where she could lose herself in a beautiful world of color and sensual feeling.

"Okay, so the three immediate needs I have in my life - beyond, of course, all the good ol' 'food, clothes and shelter' business - are sex, books and Nuit." She counted them off on her fingers. "Ramon, I'm pretty sure, can provide all three." She steered her car hard toward Magnolia Avenue. "We must find Ramon."

Night fell on Club Nuit with its usual fanfare, and its halls were lined with the usual assortment of leering females.

Yet instead of starting off tonight's show with the usual striptease acts, the Nuit trio took to the stage with a musical revue.

As all three were skilled in various forms of musical expression, they sometimes charmed the ladies with an original song composed for their pleasure.

Ramon shone on lead vocals and played the violin. Xavier resembled an angel on harp. Rainyn played the flute. Blythe applauded his 'blowing techniques' with some hearty cheers offstage.

Soon the halls of Nuit rang sweetly forth with a rich, seamless melody; a love song for the ladies.

One audience member in particular enjoyed the show.

After spending the afternoon laying waste to Neil's credit card, Carlotta arrived at Nuit dressed in an elegant knee-length frock of red velvet, and ebony high heels. She had combed her hair until it shone and piled it atop her head, then applied a delicate touch of rarely worn red lipstick.

In another dramatic change, Carlotta refused her usual seat at the back of the club; opting instead to approach the stage and dance recklessly before everyone's eyes.

Okay, one thing hasn't changed since my younger days. She noted the bemused, sometimes frightened stares of the people around her. *I still can't dance.*

Her smile dissolved, and she stood stock still, as her gaze collided with Ramon's.

Far from being disturbed by her unusual, decidedly individualistic dance moves, Ramon scorched her with a smoky gaze that bespoke sheer, unbridled desire.

Just as entrancing were the poetic words that flowed sweetly through his sensual lips, lyrics of love that sent chills down her spine.

As the trio's song ebbed gracefully in the strains of its final refrain, Ramon stepped forward and extended his hand to her; inviting her to join him onstage.

"Cool beans! This is just like the Bruce Springsteen video." She grinned girlishly as Ramon swept her up in his arms and melted her with a sweltering kiss; burying his sexy lips deep into hers and sliding his tongue in her mouth.

Okay, this didn't happen in the Bruce Springsteen video. She sighed deeply and ran her hands through his long ebony hair.

Slowly the couple parted, though Ramon maintained a loving hold around Carlotta's waist.

"Hope you enjoyed the show, ladies." He flashed the audience a quick smile. "But I'm afraid it's come to a close." He nodded to acknowledge their disappointed sighs. "Hold tight, though, because Rainyn is about to take to the stage with his signature sexy striptease."

As the ladies cheered their approval, Rainyn put aside his flute with a long, heavy sigh.

"I've been filling in a lot for you lately." He gave Ramon a playful nudge as he passed him onstage.

Rainyn's eyes narrowed to sultry slits, and his lips formed into a perfect pout, as he stepped forth confidently onto the stage.

As the lights dimmed, the dancer was illuminated, and Rainyn's lithely muscular form swayed gracefully onstage. The crowd roared as Rainyn's agile hips gyrated suggestively, and he flipped his long, silky hair easily over one shoulder.

Ramon pinned the crowd with a cursory glance, to ensure they were properly wide-eyed and hopelessly transfixed.

Assured of both, he turned his full attention to Carlotta.

Chapter Six

Moments later Carlotta found herself immersed in a place of color and tranquility; a dramatic change in scenery that lulled her senses.

Her body, by contrast, was on fire.

A lush tropical garden formed the southern border of Club Nuit; a picturesque resting place in which lavender lilacs grew gracefully beside dew-glistened hibiscus.

Statuesque palms hung with long sheets of lacy Spanish moss, and oversaw both delicate violets and hearty, emerald-leaved ferns.

A marble fountain marked the center of this nature-made mecca; its waters poured forth from the carved likeness of a marble vase, held by the statue of a tall, slender woman with flowing hair and delicate features.

"Who is she?" Seated on a cast iron bench, Carlotta turned to face the man who had brought her to the garden.

She trembled as Ramon swept her up in his arms and pulled her into his lap.

"Never mind that." He cupped Carlotta's cheeks and kissed her lips fiercely. "Something has changed, love. What is it?"

With a slight smile Carlotta raised her left hand, revealing a ring finger that was newly bare. "I caught Neil with his secretary. It's over, Ramon," her voice cracked in spite of itself. "A whole, very substantial part of my life is just over."

"And a new chapter, dearest, has just begun." Pulling her closer to him, Ramon plied Carlotta's lips with a strong, full-bodied kiss. Melting against him, she wrapped her arms around his sturdy shoulders and leaned fully into him.

Soon their hands and mouths both merged in a show of mutual understanding, and Carlotta's breath quickened as Ramon plied her mouth with a thick, wet tongue.

Then his fingers worked their own delicious magic, rubbing and massaging her neck and back until Carlotta purred her delight.

"I can't believe we're out here, necking in a public place," she giggled. "I feel like I'm back in high school."

"With one important difference, of course." Ramon nibbled her ear.

"And what would that be, pray tell?" She arched a caustic eyebrow.

"Just this, love."

In a quick, impulsive move Ramon slipped his fingers beneath Carlotta's skirts, dipping them daringly into the slick, wet depths of her tight pussy. She gasped as his fingertips sent electric shocks through every fiber of her being; his lips, meanwhile, planted sweet baby kisses across the surface of her face and neck.

"Ramon, people are watching." Looking over Ramon's shoulder, Carlotta stared sheepishly at the people who passed them on the sidewalk.

"I don't give a damn." Eager to prove his point, Ramon intensified his strokes; immersing Carlotta in an impenetrable haze of raw, sheer ecstasy.

Finally Ramon's fingers hit the spot, most literally. Carlotta doubled over as her g-spot ignited, setting her body afire.

Throwing her head back she screamed a strong release; even so, she wanted more.

"I want you, here and now." She lowered herself onto the bulging erection that strained the fabric of Ramon's pants.

The two continued to kiss heatedly as they made quick work of their clothes, then tumbled recklessly across a soft bed of ivy that lined the garden floor.

Looking upward, Carlotta noticed that several people still watched them from the side.

And, as her lover so articulately phrased it, she didn't give a damn.

Opening her arms wide, she hungrily enclosed the flawless form of her strong, ardent lover. She ran her hands all over his body, relishing the feel of his chest, his shoulders, his hair, and finally his cock.

She brazenly grabbed her lover's shaft, wrapping her legs around his waist as she kissed his lips fiercely.

Apparently eager to match her fervor, Ramon reached downward and clenched Carlotta's clit, grinning as she gushed freely all over his fingers.

"I see you're ready for me, baby." His voice was raspy with passion.

"So take me already." Carlotta's tones rang with the hint of impatience. "Don't you think it's about time?"

Apparently agreeing, Roman swept her body beneath his and pressed his hard, sweaty form thrillingly into hers. Then he drove his long, erect shaft into her slick wet channel.

His hips flowed gracefully forward as he probed and penetrated her, finally joining them as one. His hands, meanwhile, rubbed and cradled her back as his lips canvassed her sweat-glistened chest.

Carlotta took in her breath as Ramon surged beautifully within her, and she dragged her fingernails lightly down the surface of his back. Her own delicate mouth grazed his massive chest as her tongue tickled his nipples.

The couple's lips joined as they clung to one another, their legs entangling tightly as their hips swayed in a timeless rhythm.

Finally, and with a mighty thrust, Ramon surged into Carlotta, sending them over the edge. Soon their bodies soared with the effects of an invigorating mutual climax.

They just barely noticed the hearty round of applause elicited by their actions; a reaction that arose from the small crowd of people who had witnessed their encounter.

"Sounds like we were a hit." Carlotta grinned sheepishly.

"Feels like it, too." Ramon trembled as a gust of outdoor air tickled his bare body with a light, refreshing breeze.

The couple spent the remainder of the evening inside Club Nuit, where Ramon issued strictly spoken orders to his guest.

"Eat and drink as much as you want." He affected a stern, commanding tone, and pointed an authoritative finger in Carlotta's direction. "Dance and enjoy the music."

And be sure to tell me when you want to make love again." His gaze and tone softened considerably. "For you, sweetheart, I'm always ready."

Carlotta followed these orders to the letter; she also wore out the Nuit karaoke machine, and sampled the club's in-house collection of Playgirl DVDs.

"Do you think you can do that?" she asked Ramon, pointing out a complex sexual position demonstrated in a particularly heated scene.

"Baby love, I invented that." Ramon pinched her playfully.

"Oh boy." Carlotta shook her head, dazed by this assertion.

Near dawn Ramon swept Carlotta up in his arms and carried her up the staircase, where his luxurious bedroom awaited them.

Swinging the door open, Ramon showed her a room decorated in tender accents of ivory and brass; and she delighted at the sight of a four-poster bed with a lovely lace canopy.

Ramon tossed her body into the cushiony depths of a layered satin comforter; then he plopped down happily beside her.

"Thank you for making my dream come true, Carlotta," he whispered softly against her ear. "Thank you for coming to me."

She turned to him, again prepared to seize his full lips in a wet, ardent kiss.

Yet as the light suffused the heavy silk draperies that lined his broad bay window, Roman's head fell jarringly against his pillow as sleep overcame him.

"It has been a long night." Carlotta curled up happily beside him and rested her head on his shoulder. "The first, I suspect, of many."

Chapter Seven

Neil Wilkes stared with hard, cold eyes at a photo of his wife, Carlotta, the only family photo to be found in his sparsely decorated office.

"I should loan you one of my old modeling shots, so you can stop ogling that pathetic hag." He jumped at the sound of these harshly spoken words, issued by the smirking young woman who stood in his office doorway.

"Get out." He regarded her with a stern, unyielding gaze.

Lori Melvin, Neil's striking young secretary, gaped openly at this command. "You're still in love with her, aren't you?"

Neil nodded. "Of course I love her. She's my wife." He pointed an accusing finger in Lori's direction. "And if you hadn't seduced me, you brazen little slut, I swear she'd still be mine."

Lori waved away this assertion with a slender, casual hand. "A big fan of revisionist history, are we?" she scoffed. "You seduced me, Neil, with the offer of a new car and a substantial raise. Neither of which you delivered, by the way."

Neil shrugged. "Sometimes people don't keep their promises, babe. Now all I can offer you is a letter of reference and a few weeks severance pay. You're fired."

Lori's delicate nostrils flared as she considered these words. "Fine!" She squared her slender shoulders. "Make no mistake though, Neil. Sending me away will not bring your wife back. As a matter of fact, nothing will."

"Meaning?" Neil shook his head confusedly.

"Carlotta hasn't been sitting in a lonely motel room, pining away for you," Lori snorted. "A friend of mine saw her just last night at Club Nuit, that male strip club on Magnolia Avenue."

Neil shrugged. "She goes there quite a bit, just to blow off steam."

Lori guffawed outright. "I hear she's been blowing off quite a bit of steam with Ramon Montague, one of the lead dancers at Nuit. My friend spotted them in the garden behind the club, putting on a live sex show for everyone's enjoyment."

Neil balled his fists on the desk before him, and shook his head firmly. "I'm going to put a stop to this," he glowered. "That woman is my wife."

"Maybe not so much." Lori sniffed dismissively as she turned toward the door.

Neil's next words, however, stopped her dead in her tracks.

"That gigolo had better keep his hands off my wife. If not, Carlotta may be the last thing he ever does."

Carlotta awoke that evening to the exquisite feel of a lover between her legs.

Ramon's sumptuous lips fixed surely around her clit, and his agile hands raised her hips to his face to devour her thoroughly.

As his tongue flicked heatedly against her newly aroused nub, his hands massaged her most delicate areas, intensifying her arousal.

She moaned softly as the feather soft feel of Ramon's satin sheets matched the press of his velvety lips; yet there was nothing soft about the culminating orgasm elicited by both.

She still reeled as he kissed his way slowly up her body, licking her bellybutton, rubbing her nipples, and resting his head on her neck.

Seizing her lips in a passionate kiss, Ramon cupped Carlotta's face in two loving hands.

He thrust his tongue deep into her mouth, pressing his slick, sweaty body deliciously into hers.

Wrapping her arms around his muscular shoulders, Carlotta kissed him deeply, savoring his taste as she opened herself to him.

She purred as he nipped and licked her neck, and her legs firmly braced his lean, bronzed hips—encompassing them in a perfect circle.

The couple's gazes also locked as their faces gently parted, and they stared intensely into one another's eyes.

Holding Carlotta's gaze, Ramon rotated his perfect hips smoothly against hers.

"So many times I've danced for you, dreaming of this moment," he whispered hotly against her lips. "Now please allow me to dance within you."

With this his cock rose dramatically between them, and surged beautifully into the depths of her soaking femininity.

"I can't believe you're here." His breath heaved as he moved smoothly within her, his rock hard cock massaging her hungry insides with gentleness and precision.

His hands continued to probe and stroke every inch of her body, tickling the sensitive skin of her womanly hips and stroking the small of her back.

"I can't believe you're real!" Carlotta stared with wide eyes at the perfection that was Ramon. Her fingers sculpted the flawless planes of his bronzed, smiling face, then swept lightly through the strands of his silky dark hair. Finally she rested them on his toned pectorals, bracing herself for the raw wave of unbridled ecstasy that threatened to overcome her.

They tilted their heads together, sharing a secret smile as Ramon deepened his sinful penetration.

In that moment the couple soared together toward an incredible new high, solidifying their bond; growing closer than even they thought possible.

"Ramon." Carlotta's eyes widened further still as Ramon swept her up in his arms. Joining with her fully, his shaft reached forth to her deepest essence as his lips pressed heatedly into hers.

Carlotta screamed outright, and relished the sound of Ramon's heated moans as he joined her in a duet.

Moments later they rested easily in one another's arms.

"Well good evening to you too." Carlotta stroked his dark, silky hair with affectionate hands. "What, pray tell, was that for?"

Instantly he hovered above her, staring deeply into her eyes. "That, love, was my apology for falling asleep on you this morning."

Carlotta guffawed outright.

"It was my own fault for wearing you out." She kissed his lips kindly. "So are you ready to catch some dinner before your show?"

Nodding, Ramon retrieved a gold-plated bell from a bedside table and rang it loudly. Suddenly his door opened to reveal Rainyn and Xavier, who carried a large tray between them.

Soon Carlotta enjoyed a bountiful supper of roast duck and mashed potatoes, followed by a hearty serving of chocolate soufflé.

Her evening's entertainment, much to her delight, was supplied by the Nuit trio. Rainyn retrieved his trusty flute for a soothing serenade; one supplemented by Xavier's ethereal vocals. And Ramon, bless him, perched himself at the foot of their bed and suckled her toes.

"Thank you so much, all of you." Carlotta nodded graciously as she savored her last bite of soufflé. "I feel so much more at home here than I do at, well, my real home. You're all so kind to me, and make me feel so comfortable." She winked in Ramon's direction. "Especially you, babe."

"You deserve to be treated as a queen." Ramon kissed her cheeks and cradled her lightly in his arms. "And that, my dear, is the kind of treatment you can expect from this day forward."

Grinning, Carlotta wiggled sweetly in Ramon's arms and exhaled; breathing easily for the first time in years.

"I can relax around you, Ramon." She kissed his cheek. "I can eat without having my plate yanked away from me. I can talk and laugh without being hushed." With this she nodded affirmingly. "I can live."

Yet with this her tone softened, and she shrugged uneasily. "Even so, I realize that I don't 'live' here, at least not on a full-time basis." She paused, reddening slightly. "I promise I'll be out of here soon."

"Nonsense!" Ramon came quickly to her side and hugged her closely to him. "You're staying right here."

"You mean for good?" She blinked rapidly.

"For good." Ramon graced her nose with an adorable kiss. "The boys and I have talked it over, and it turns out we have an opening for a 'Carlotta' at our club." He gave her a devastating smile. "And you, my dear, will fit the bill just fine."

"Well, I do have a fair amount of experience to bring to the table," she winked, adding with a shrug, "I've been thinking you might need a P.R. person at this place; someone to help Nikolai field daytime phone calls, as you all seem to be late sleepers, and maybe net you an occasional interview or some discreetly placed advertising."

"Could I pose naked for our print ads?" Rainyn's eyes widened in apparent interest.

"The lady said 'discreet,' Rainyn." Ramon rolled his eyes, sobering as he faced a beaming Carlotta. "I think it's a wonderful idea, love. You do have a great love of

words, and a definite way with them." Carlotta glowed as the other two gentlemen nodded their concurrence. "You're hired."

The group spent this night much as they had their last, dancing, singing, and enjoying good food and wine in the company of Nuit patrons.

And while Ramon fell asleep at the first light of day, Carlotta threw on some jeans and a sweater and - with Nikolai's help - located her overdue library book; the volume of Dickens Ramon had borrowed weeks earlier.

In all the excitement I forgot about this. Her light steps canvassed the lowly lit back staircase of Club Nuit. *And no matter how hopeless I am for that dude, he's still reimbursing my fine.*

Soon Carlotta climbed another set of steps, this one leading to the Clearview Public Library. And as she left her book with the striking young librarian who worked diligently at the counter, she gestured toward the set of black and white photos that occupied the girl's desk.

"Good shots." She nodded approvingly.

The librarian grinned. "Aren't they? Those came from our library archives. I'm putting together a pictorial timeline of Clearview history." She proudly presented the largest photo for Carlotta's inspection. "This is a chamber of commerce luncheon, circa 1945."

Squinting thoughtfully, Carlotta appraised the elegantly dressed group pictured in the photo.

She recognized a younger version of Clarice Bloomall, a societal matron well-known around Clearview.

"She looks so lovely," she told the librarian. "And so does the Nuit trio."

She froze as she considered these last words, and the image that had prompted them.

Standing at the back of the group were, unmistakably, Ramon, Xavier and Rainyn. Granted they were dressed differently, in the ties, hats and suspenders that distinguished the dress code of the 1940s.

Yet historically speaking, no other man has remotely approached their level of hotness. Chills assailed Carlotta's spine as she faced a shocking truth.

"Are you okay?" The librarian's forehead wrinkled worriedly. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

Tearing her gaze away from the photo, Carlotta met the woman's words with a short, solemn nod. "A ghost, ma'am? Maybe."

A vampire? She added silently. *Almost definitely.*

Hours later Carlotta garnered the courage to return to Club Nuit; but this time she regarded the building and its occupants with unmistakable caution.

Did Ramon truly want her, she wondered? Or did he only want her blood? She found the prospect both terrifying and infuriating.

And while her husband's betrayal angered her deeply, it hadn't cut through to her heart.

That's because Neil no longer has my heart. She trudged up the back staircase, back to Ramon's room. *Ramon does.*

She didn't know just what he planned to do with that heart; or with the woman who owned it.

Ah, but she intended to find out.

"Ramon!" Bursting into his bedroom, she shook him briskly awake. "We have to talk. Now."

Ramon stirred, but only slightly.

"Must...sleep," he murmured, tossing restlessly in his sheets.

"You must own up and explain your sorry ass!" Carlotta planted her hands firmly on her hips.

Slowly Ramon opened his eyes, and he struggled to sit upward. "You're angry with me." He regarded her vaguely through a sad, sleepy gaze.

"And why would that be, I wonder?" She scratched her head. "How is a woman supposed to react when she finds out her boyfriend has lied about his age, and by about - oh, say - a few centuries or so, perhaps?"

With this she flung the black and white photo squarely in Ramon's face.

"Please lower your voice. You'll wake the others." Ramon raised an imploring hand in Carlotta's direction. "And whatever you do, please don't open any draperies or blinds."

Carlotta's anger abruptly dissolved; only to be replaced by a deeper, darker feeling she couldn't quite name.

"It's true, isn't it?" her voice was barely above a whisper. "You. Rainyn. Xavier. You're all vampires."

"We prefer to think of ourselves as living impaired," Ramon grinned slightly as he perused the old photo. "Those were good times. Back then Nuit was a private club that catered to the wives of politicians, businessmen, and, or so we suspected, a gangster or two." He looked up at her, his gaze unwavering and his tone matter of fact. "In the Old West we ran a saloon for women. A lot of the guys didn't bathe back then, so we proved to be popular lads. In the '70s we ran a trendy disco, just for the gals - you should have seen Xavier in his purple bellbottoms."

"How can you be so casual about this?" Carlotta interrupted, gesturing wildly in his direction. "And more importantly, how many lives have you claimed to stay so young, so long?"

Ramon shook his head. "None. I'm not that kind of vamp, babe." He motioned for her to sit beside him in bed. "Though if you ever want me to bite your neck, I'd be more than pleased to do so."

Sighing, Carlotta took the offered seat and tapped her foot expectantly. "Okay, I'm listening."

Ramon took a deep, fortifying breath and looked her directly in the eyes.

"The first and most important thing I want you to know, Carlotta, is that I am not a killer." He raised a single finger for emphasis. "Rainyn, Xavier and I are what you call incubus vampires. We feed from the sexual energies of women."

"Well you're certainly in the right profession for that," Carlotta snorted.

Ramon nodded, and regarded her thoughtfully. "And I must admit, Carlotta, I was afraid that you would feel my fangs the first time we made love. Sexual arousal is the prime trigger for the growth and enlargement of my fangs," he actually blushed, "among other things."

"Yeah, well, I guess I was a mite distracted." She rolled her eyes heavenward. "Even so, I have heard urban legends about the infamous Nuit fangs." She regarded him skeptically. "And about the bloody rare steaks you serve at the club."

"We do have a taste for blood." Ramon shrugged. "That's just the way of the vampire. And, as the old legends dictate, we can't go out in the sun."

"Nikolai can." Carlotta shrugged. "Isn't he one of you?"

Ramon shook his head. "Nikolai is a squire; a mortal human who protects and serves us. Like his father and grandfathers before him, he is a sympathetic human who guards us during the day, and works at our club after dark." He folded his arms before him. "Make no mistake, love. Rainyn, Xavier and I are far more than 'gentlemen of the evening.' We are all creatures of the night."

Carlotta stilled, as if struck by a disturbing thought.

"Ramon." Her voice barely above a whisper. "When we made love, did you turn me?" She trembled in spite of herself. "Am I like you now?"

"No love," he chuckled her chin reassuringly. "In order for that to happen, I would have to bite your neck."

"Just like in the old movies." Carlotta shrugged, and smiled slightly. "I always thought vampire flicks were hot." She grinned devilishly. "And making love with a vampire? That's hotter still, as I now can attest wholeheartedly."

"That's my Carlotta." Ramon took Carlotta's hands gently in his and kissed them reassuringly. "My love, I'd gladly use my fangs to give you pleasure - or, in another way, to defend you or my brethren. Even so, I never thirst for blood. And I don't kill for it."

Her gaze softening, Carlotta cradled his clasped hands tenderly against her cheek.

"This can't be an easy way to live." She raised an inquisitive eyebrow. "Who did this to you, Ramon?"

"Nothing was done to me, Carlotta." Ramon shook his head briskly. "I became a vampire willingly, at the hands of my dearest lover." He leaned forward to grace her lips with a reassuring kiss. "Until I met you, that is."

"Good save." Carlotta snorted.

Ramon chuckled. "The same woman turned Rainyn and Xavier. She made us brothers, in a way."

"Didn't you already have families?" Carlotta arched her eyebrows.

"Not really," Ramon sighed. "Carlotta, the three of us came from upper class families; conservative types who ruled various regions of Europe during the Victorian age." With this his tone lowered noticeably. "Rejecting our free spirits and artistic natures, our parents cast us aside."

"They rejected your free spirits and artistic natures." Carlotta repeated dryly. "Okay, Ramon, whose wife were you caught with?"

Her lover guffawed outright.

"All right, I'll admit freely that none of us were angels. All three of us possessed romantic, sensual natures," he admitted. "And the very qualities that repulsed our elders attracted Contessa; a centuries old vampire in search of fresh energy." He beamed broadly at her memory. "She trained us in all the gentlemanly arts. She made us connoisseurs of fine art and classic music, skilled equestrians and swordsmen, good readers, stylish dressers, and expert lovers."

"I'm liking this Contessa chicksta more and more by the minute." Carlotta tweaked his nose playfully. "So what happened to her?"

His smile dissolving, Ramon clenched his hands tightly before him and sighed deeply.

"Contessa lived openly, both as a vampire and a libertine." His voice grew noticeably strained. "During the Victorian era in which we were made, her actions and viewpoints were rejected." He winced sharply. "She was killed one night by an angry mob. Staked to our front door."

Surging forward, Carlotta enveloped her sad lover in a warm, encompassing hug.

"I'm so sorry, baby." She kissed his forehead and cradled him closely. "The statue in the garden. Is she Contessa?"

Nodding, Ramon pulled her closer to him.

"It's beautiful enough, still, it's not her." A telltale tear descended the planes of his bronzed, sculpted cheek. "We still miss her, so much."

The couple sat quietly for a moment, finding momentary peace in their embrace. Then Ramon cupped Carlotta's cheeks in firm, loving hands.

"Don't leave me, Carlotta." He planted desperate kisses across her face and neck. "Say you'll stay."

Carlotta braced her arms across Ramon's broad shoulders and lowered him onto his bed.

"Of course I'll stay, Ramon. I love you." She impulsively covered his massive bare chest with a rain of lustful kisses. "Make love to me."

The couple fell silent as Ramon undressed Carlotta, slowly and reverently. Then they faced one another on the bed, kissing deeply as he caressed her breasts and teasingly tickled her nipples.

Carlotta's hands molded Ramon's hips before boldly grasping his cock, and she kissed the smile this move elicited. She moaned as he grasped and aroused her clit, and smiled herself as he rolled gracefully atop her.

Their chests and thighs seemed to mold as their legs entangled tightly, and their kisses deepened until the outside world dissolved into a distant nuisance.

Almost.

It barely registered in Carlotta's psyche when Ramon's bedroom door swung suddenly open. When she saw Neil's face, her only response was a hearty, heartfelt "Ugh."

This feeling intensified when she saw his gun.

"I'm so sorry, Ramon." Nikolai stood beside Neil, his fists balled in suppressed fury. "He forced his way into the club. I tried to stop him."

Bolting upright, Ramon wrapped his arms protectively around Carlotta's naked shoulders.

"What do you want?" He singled Neil with a hateful glare.

"My wife," was Neil's short, clipped reply. "I know you freaks have taken advantage of her sad emotional state." With this he pointed an accusing finger in Ramon's direction. "You're the son of the devil, and you've enchanted my wife."

"Ramon is the son of the devil? Well welcome home, 'Dad.'" Carlotta snorted, then, shot a quick look toward Ramon, "And there doesn't seem to be a family resemblance, fates be thanked." She shook her head. "You, dear Neil, were my 'enchanter.' You're the one who convinced an impressionable, insecure young girl to give up her dreams - to give up herself. You bastard," she seethed. "I'm so glad to be rid of you. And even more glad to find a real man."

"Thank you, my darling." Ramon kissed her fiercely, then crinkled his nose in Neil's direction. "This loser enchanted you?"

"Let's not forget the fact that 'the loser' has a gun." Neil aimed his small black pistol directly at Ramon.

"You can't shoot a vampire," Ramon reported coolly.

Shrugging, Neil shifted his gun smoothly in Carlotta's direction. "She's not a vampire. And if I can't have her, you certainly won't either."

"No!" Ramon opened his mouth to reveal a newly minted set of hard, sharp fangs. "I'll rip you to pieces, I swear it."

Her lips drawn and her chin held high, Carlotta turned silently to face Ramon.

"Turn me," she whispered.

All eyes in the room turned toward her, and widened substantially.

"What?" A chorus of male voices greeted her command with a consensus of disbelief.

Yet Carlotta addressed only Ramon.

"I now know why I've always felt so comfortable at Club Nuit," she told him.

"The naked men?" He shrugged, lips pursed curiously.

"No, you dope." She slapped his shoulder playfully. "I'm a creature of the night. And so is my mate."

Ramon grasped Carlotta's hand and kissed it, firmly and with meaning. "Thank you, love. The gift of your love is one I vow eternally to protect and return. Even so," he bit his lip uneasily, "if I bite you, Carlotta, you can't turn back."

"Now why would I want to turn back?" Carlotta smirked. "I get to spend the rest of eternity alive and perpetually frisky. I get to party all the time in the company of gorgeous men, and won't have to age any more noticeably than I have already. Bye-bye Botox!" She wagged her eyebrows playfully at a smiling Ramon. "Works for me."

"Sorry, dear. It doesn't work for me." Cocking his pistol, Neil aimed the loaded weapon squarely at Carlotta's chest. "Goodbye Carlotta."

Without further hesitation, Ramon sank his fangs deep into Carlotta's neck. With a groan of ecstasy he drank of her energy, and sipped just enough of his lover's blood to unite their essences. To render them as one.

"Ramon." Carlotta's eyes rolled back in her head as heat suffused her cheeks. With a gentle smile she fell into Ramon's arms and clenched her hands on his shoulders.

Correspondingly, Neil's eyes also rolled back in his head. He swayed unsteadily and dropped his gun, finally, and with a tortured moan, he fainted dead to the ground.

With a rough curse Nikolai grabbed the man's feet and started to drag him down the hallway, in the direction of the back stairs.

"Take out the trash Nikolai." Ramon waved to his friend, then turned his attention to Carlotta.

"Are you all right, love?"

Carlotta beamed as her heart pounded thrillingly, and her skin suffused with a radiant light.

"I'm beautiful," she breathed.

"You are, dearest," Ramon nodded, and drew her up against him. "You realize, though, that you'll never see the sun."

Shrugging, Carlotta giggled as Ramon swept her beneath him. "My complexion is fair anyway. I can stop wasting money on sunscreen." She wrapped her arms and legs possessively around his body. "And now we get to spend all day, every day, in bed."

"Starting today," Ramon growled, driving his hard cock smoothly into her soaking wet pussy. Again nibbling her neck, though this time more softly, he rubbed and massaged her back as his hungry shaft drove repeatedly into her.

Reaching his free hand down to intensify her pleasure, he pumped and rubbed her into a state of unbridled euphoria. His lips kissed her cheeks in a gallant fashion, before joining lovingly with hers.

Their hips and tongues soon danced the same tango, setting a smooth, graceful rhythm mirrored by their exploring hands. Their bodies merged in an unbreakable cocoon, and they savored the medley of heated sighs and words of tender love that filled the air above them.

The couple's faces parted slightly, allowing them to share a gaze that bespoke mutual understanding. Their ensuing kiss reflected this bond, as did the passionate urgency with which their hands clasped and his penetration intensified. Soon they came as one, solidifying their bond and mating eternally.

"I love you," Ramon whispered, clutching her to him.

“I love you too.” Carlotta tried out her new fangs gently across Ramon’s neck. Then she kissed him softly and sweetly – just like the first time.

So a gentleman of the evening found his lady. And it was just another day at Nuit.